THE

MADDEST MARRIAGE

EVER WAS.

BY MRS. JENNIE DAVIS BURTON.

NEW YORK:
BEADLE AND ADAMS, PUBLISHERS,
98 WILLIAM STREET.
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CHAPTER I.
FAIREST OF THE FAIR.

Music faint and sweet as the wail of the dying swan was upon the air. Colored globes, crimson, purple, and amber, dotted the greenhouse; there was the breath of orange-flowers and magnolias, and the trickle of a fountain somewhere near—all together that merging of the real and the ideal, that glow of warmth, and taste and subtle fragrance, that make the atmosphere of aristocratic life, and turn the head of any novice who may possess a spark of impulse, a grain of imaginative nature.

It was March, but for that one night as mild as May. A window was open beheld a screen of glossy leaves and starry blossoms, and beside it the two young people without whom this scene would certainly never be complete.

Music and flowers and colored lights, and trickling waters, and great calm stars looking down from a purple sky, and love and lovers—surely the acme of all perfection had been reached here.

"Nice, isn’t it?" Berenice Lawrence sunk with a sigh into a seat, just large enough for one but with lounging room beside it, and a twisted rail, where the round, bare arm, perfect enough for a model, "marble faintly flushed," rested in tempting proximity to her companion’s broadcloth, and a high dark back which brought out to its clearest the fair face and crimped gold of the graceful little head.

A petite blonde was Miss Lawrence, a belle for three seasons already, with as many conquests at her finger ends as she could have told at one counting. A dangerous little piece of femininity, as witness the confiding glance of appeal she sent up into her escort’s eyes, which started the boy’s heart throbbling, and brought the blood to his smooth cheek in a dash of red which should have been natural but was too seldom seen there.

"It is like Eden," he answered, in his artist enthusiasm. "Like in more ways than one, since, when my hour is over, I shall be banished from it. Is it possible that anything on earth can induce you to give up this sort of life, Miss Lawrence? I begin to comprehend that it must be a fearful ordeal to go voluntarily outside the roses and honey where one has fed on them all one’s life."

"But roses and honey don’t belong here, you know. They are the accompaniments of love in a cottage, where people dine under the trees on berries and cream and go wandering in print dresses that never need doing up a la Watteau. It is tempting in novels and pictures, but for real life, don’t you think a little less moonshine and a little more baker’s bread might be preferable?"

"And yet you have let me think that you might dare love in a cottage. You aren’t going to regret it, Berenice? Oh, my darling, it is asking so much from you, you who can have your choice among the highest and best. Are you very, very sure you will not tire waiting while even the cottage is an uncertainty yet?"

"If I do know what to expect. No promises and consequently no broken vows, that was the agreement, I believe."

"You take pains to keep me in remembrance of it. I am quite reconciled to the agreement now that I can look into your eyes, but oh, Berenice! back there in the rooms, with Mr. Trelawney more constant than your shadow, and I feeling the world of disparity between us, it seemed like madness to believe that you ever could belong to me. Tell me again, as you did once, that you are mine—mine!"

What could be more enchanting! The boy was so thoroughly in earnest, his hazel eyes had softened and darkened and were shining their liquid light in such unutterable devotion down upon her, his auburn hair worn long and waved in true artist style caught its richest tint, and the unusual color come into his pale face beautified it wondrously. Flirting under such circumstances was delicious, and Berenice Lawrence in her native element. She could twist him about her taper little finger, move him to happiness or despair with a word or a look, and on earth she would not ask for any more delightful consumption.

"I never told you so; you assumed that, you know. And you are trying to be jealous; don’t deny it, Cecil. That was ruled out of our bargain, too. Whatever may be my supreme pleasure, remember there are to be no green eyes cast in my direction."
"I wouldn't be worthy if I couldn't trust you. But still I have my own misgivings; I almost doubt if I have the right to take you from your velvet-lined, wax-lit world, and give you, instead, poverty and print gowns, and besides only—love. But no one else could give you so much of that. It means all that I am, all that I ever will be, my very life given to you, Berenice. Does none of it frighten you?"

"So much that I think I must decline so great a gift. That is what you want of me, I see."

"And you are really not afraid to be poor?"

"I believe I have a talent for poverty. It's so poetical, and brings out all sorts of unsuspected qualities, and I haven't a doubt but I'm quite clever in my own way and only the opportunity wanting to make the fact known. And now, Mr. Cecil Bertram, if you're done star-gazing, I am sure that I hear my sister's voice making anxious inquiry in the distance."

"Already? If this time would only last forever."

"It can't, fortunately; and you wouldn't wish it if it were your second ball after the opera."

A minute later, and the nook was vacant. Mrs. Athol, the married sister, gave a sigh of relief as Berenice floated into sight, her finger-tips on the young artist's arm, her face unconscious as a pearl under his lingering gaze.

"At last, my dear. The carriage is waiting, and Mr. Athol quite impatient with the delay. Are you accountable for the truancy, Mr. Bertram? You artists, as a class, have no idea of the value of time, I believe."

Miss Lawrence, fairly under her protecting wing, was whisked away without ceremony, and five minutes after Cecil Bertram, watching for a parting word, missed it, but had the felicity of seeing Mr. Trelawney lift her into the carriage, and himself follow when the ladies were seated.

"Out of sight, let it also be out of mind, my dear fellow," said a voice behind him.

"The cat may look at the king without any particular objection offered, but woe to the mouse that plays unwarily within the reach of the cat all the same."

"Complimentary, if you are reducing me to the station of the mouse. Don't preach, Goldwood. Pity the world if such cynicisms were to shake its faith."

"So young to fall a victim, but there's where your salvation lies. Rub off your romance in these callow days and there's hope for your heart. Just now, let's go home."

A Madison avenue portal opened its portal to the party returned from the ball. The ladies swept together up the broad stairway, and Berenice half paused with her hand upon a door.

"Edmonia, can't you spare me Clotide for a couple of minutes? I'm tired to death, and want nothing in the world for the next six hours but nightclothes and pillows. How sweetly does one sleep on cider-down, to be sure!"

"I shall not detain you very long from your pillow, Berenice, but I am going in for a moment now. A good conscience is said to insure sweet sleep, but you don't find it necessary to reconcile the two."

"And you envy me—is that it? Poor Edmonia! And yet one wouldn't suppose you need to quarrel with fate. Sit down and be sociable as long as you like, only don't ask me to talk after the fatigues of the evening."

Miss Lawrence sunk into the depths of a Sleepy-Hollow chair, loosing her hat-strings and dropping her hands with a sigh after the accomplishment of this herculean task. But Mrs. Athol was not to be put aside from her serious vein.

"I want to say a plain word to you, Berenice. You are acting as good as promised to marry Mr. Trelawney. Do you think you are doing exactly right by him and others in giving as much encouragement to any one or a half-dozen besides?"

"Well, dear, go on."

"I asked you a question, Berenice."

"Oh! I thought you were only wanting to moralize, and no one has a better right, of course. What was it?"

"Are you deliberately turning poor Cecil Bertram's head, only amusing yourself with what must be severe earnest to him? I don't like to think of it you."

"Pray, when did you develop so much humanity, Mrs. Athol? How can I help it if 'poor Cecil' is so foolish?"

"It is foolish to suppose there is any truth left in woman. And I was speaking for you, half-fearing and half-hoping for you, sister. I am worldly enough to understand fully all your various vacillations, in giving up Mr. Trelawney for Bertram; but, if you care most for him, do be brave enough to stand by your own heart. A mistake now will be a regret for all your life; think of it, and be true to yourself. I will send Clotide to you immediately. Good night!"

She leaned over to kiss the fair cheek fondly, and left the room more hurriedly than was wont with calm, deliberate Mrs. Athol. Berenice's blue eyes opened wide to follow her and the brows arched over them.

"Has Edmonia's ghost come to light?" she mused. "Who would ever have accused her of romance? For the advice, who ever did take advice, or who ever failed to say on so broad a chance, 'Physician, heal thyself.'? But, despite the worldly-wise reflection, Miss Lawrence a little later pressed her bright head upon cider-down and went to sleep with the softest of soft smiles dimpling her lips.
CHAPTER II.

A HEART OR A DIAMOND?

"These home affairs are the stupidest of all affairs, but they are to be classed as necessary evils, and endured with the best grace we can call up, I suppose. Who is it we are to have this evening, Edmonia?"

Miss Lawrence opened her sleepy eyes and doubled a cushion under her fair head. She was in morning dishebbled, stretched at length upon a lounge in her sister's room, where she had been dozing over a half-dozen pages of the latest novel for the past two hours.

"A few of Mr. Athol's friends—the Mortimers, the Eatons, and, of course, Mr. Trelawney."

"Of course," very serenely. "Just as I said, the stupidest of all stupids. It's not worth while getting one's self up for such a lot, always excepting Mr. Trelawney, of course! Nobody else, my dear?"

"Mr. Goldwood and his friend."

"Ah! The ejaculation, softly breathed, saying in itself unmistakably—"That quite alters the aspect of affairs," seemed to invite some further remark, but Mrs. Athol, quietly assorting laces, gave no response. She had volunteered her word a week before and she was not a person to often repeat herself or to force her opinions before another's judgment. "Think of it, and be true to yourself," she had said that night, after the ball, and in spite of herself, Berenice had thought of it more than was quite agreeable to her general equable state of mind, thought of it with a question coming up which she had never seriously entertained before. Could she put aside all the lessons of her life to be true to herself, or had she been so thoroughly imbued with selfishness that being true to herself would be false to truth? The blue eyes watched furtively from the screen of the half-fallen lids while she waited, but a minute tipt a way, the silence was unbroken, until she put forth a questioning voice.

"Edmonia?"

"Yes, my dear."

"I have been thinking"—a little pause, which still elicited no expression of curiosity—"thinking as you've always been fond of me, though you've had little enough reason, goodness knows, perhaps, that it might—be rather probable"—slowly, contemplatively—"you would like to have a portrait of me painted. You are apt to lose me soon, in the course of natural events, you know, and just how 'in the spring-time of youth, the bloom of the flower,' I shouldn't object to having my own best looks perpetuated. We belong to a fast fading family, unfortunately; even you who have done remarkably well for one of us, are not quite proof against the progress of time. It would be almost a charity, besides the joy, to have the portrait painted in the way of Cecil Bertram. I don't believe he has had a single commission in all the time we have known him here."

"Notwithstanding which, I fancy Mr. Bertram would object to receiving charity. Under the circumstances, Berenice, no consideration would induce me to have your portrait painted by him."

"Oh, very well, then," with an air of injured dignity, resenting the grave tone. "It was preposterous to suppose you could possibly care for such a reminder, and as to gratifying me, of course that is not to be taken into consideration at all. The inevitable result of being a helpless burden, and for your sake I shall endeavor to change my condition soon. If the worst comes to the worst I can develop a genius for something, I daresay, nursery-governess or making wax flowers in an attic, though I know I'd die after the fashion of the poor sewing-girl."

"I am sure you will not do me the injustice to misunderstand me, sister," said Mrs. Athol gently, a little flush staining her usually pale face at the uncalled-for reproach. "It is my happiness to be able to shield you from such cares until you can find some nearer and dearer protector. The portrait shall be painted if you desire it, but by any other artist than Cecil Bertram. If your own peace of mind is in no danger, don't tempt the destruction of his."

"What a fragile bit of china that same Mr. Cecil Bertram must be in your estimation, Edmonia! I always supposed we were the susceptible half of humanity, the ones to be kept in glass cases until the favored owner in futuro chances along. I really don't suppose he would be complimented by your opinion of him."

"That boy has a fresh heart yet, Berenice. He is not accustomed to the ways of the world as you are. The love of coquetry was born in you; in the main it has done no particular injury, but that young artist is different from the lovers you have thrown over."

"And those who have thrown me over. Don't neglect that part while you are about it, Edmonia. You are quite right, my coquetry has done no injury in the main. Your men of the world have very acute distinguishing powers, ready enough to flirt with any decidedly pretty little paner, but always steering wide of the shafts and quicksands that might run them into matrimony. Who would have thought I should have to wait three years for my first eligible? Is it any wonder, after all, that I like Cecil Bertram all the better for the difference you speak of between him and those other men?"

"And yet, Berenice—"

"And yet, my dear, there is Mr. Trelawney. Well, and what of it? It isn't settled yet that I'm to be Mrs. Trelawney."

"It depends upon you. It is quite time you know your own mind."

"The hour draws nigh; I haven't forgot-
Far too dainty to find her place in such a practical sphere Miss Lawrence looked in the gaslight of the drawing-room that night. She wore pink glass, with touches of richest face here and there that shimmered about her like a rosy cloud. Cecil Bertram's eyes dwelt upon her as something too rare and beautiful for earth, something to be approached reverently, to be placed upon a summit and worshiped as quite "too fair and good for human nature's daily food." He had much to learn yet, this poetic dreamer, this beardless youth whose ambition soared to the skies, whose expectations annihilating the base day but that the next might see us stripped of them all and turned out from the very roof that sheltered us, duns on every side, harassed by the "butcher, baker, and candlestick-maker" at every turn, straining every nerve to keep up appearances, and praying only for the bubble to last until some one of sufficient means was taken in by it. It held out; you paid the price and took the better lot when it was offered, and now that it is my time, I can not do better than to profit by your example."

That pale red flush was yet in Mrs. Athol's face, but, whatever its cause, she was not moved from the calm earnestness with which she had previously spoken.

"I can only urge as I have done before, that you be true to yourself, Berry. It is not safe to trust to another's example, because you are never sure of reading aright another's motives. Come in! Ah, something for you, my dear."

"He begs that Miss Lawrence will wear the one of a suit if his suit is accepted, and will do himself the favor of receiving her answer at the time appointed." How sure he is of his prey! and oh! what a beautiful solitaire! What would be the use of quarreling with destiny, Edmonia? I was made to enjoy diamonds, not to sully my daintiness hands in manipulating broom and brush and cooking my lord's dinners."
held her now while he chose to linger by her side. It subdued her, it checked all those pretty arts with which she was wont to draw on her admirers. It was he at last glancing up who caught Cecil Bertram's jealous, wishful gaze upon them.

"A reminder that I have not yet the privilege of complete monopoly," he smiled. "I acknowledge it, and withdraw."

"How very sure he is of me," thought Berenice again, bitterly. "Suppose I should find the courage to reject him; suppose—"

The remainder of the reflection was lost in the beaming look with which she greeted her artist devotee.

It chased the moody frown from her brow as a cloud rolling itself away before the sun.

"Sir Malcomer," she reproved. "Do you suppose I did not detect you glowing from your solitary corner? There must be no more suiking to yourself, do you hear? No, nor so much brightening all at once; you must be made to do penance for your sins."

"It is either Heaven or Hades for me; my creed will not admit of a purgatory. I am in heaven now to know that you did observe me when I supposed you had eyes for no one but Mr. Trelawney."

"What an exacting mortal! You deserve heaven, Cecil; you are too good for earth. I don't suppose there is a particle of dissimulation about you?"

"Not with you, at least."

"Poor boy!" thought Berenice. "I am really afraid disappointment will go hard with him. He will need to be broken to it by degrees."

Mr. Trelawney had failed to distinguish the solitary diamond upon her hand, but it was there, the stone turned in. Her vanity had tempted her to wear it, her rebellion and coquetry to conceal the fact. An imperceptible motion turned it now, and the brilliant flashed a gleam up into Bertram's eyes.

"You wear a new ring," he said, quick suspicion invading his heaven. "Berenice, does it have any significance?"

"Everything has significance of its own."

He had been tortured a little time before, and, though soothed, was yet awake to the fact.

"It is what I should like to give you for an engagement ring, but I shall never be able. Is it an engagement ring, Miss Lawrence?"

"What if it were?"

"I should think as Goldwood says, no woman is worth a man's honest thought. I would rather die than know you to be false, Berenice; it would be better. A youth's extravagance delivered with a youth's earnestness, and accustomed as she was to such, it impressed her. She dropped her hand into shadow, and again turned the ring.

"Be consoled, you impulsive boy. It is not an engagement ring. To herself she added—If it were, when ever it may be soon. I am like the child of the story, with an orange in each hand and crying for the third. I can't have them all, and the trouble is which one to discard where all are so dear."

Miss Lawrence could have found no great difficulty in solving the trouble. When Mr. Trelawney called for his answer next morning, the appointed time arrived, she came down to meet him a trifle worn and ennuied, her diamond sparkling upon her finger with no attempt now at concealment.

CHAPTER III.

A MODERN ROMEO.

A NEST little cottage on the Harlem road, with everything new about it, the cottage itself of shining red brick, the flight of steps at the entrance of the whitest stone, porphyry vases at the sides, with dwarf evergreens holding their own against the March weather, which was boisterous as it drew near its close, the light iron railing encircling the tiniest of yards, and meeting the steps with a curve—all the neat, precise belongings which pertained to a model cottage on a small scale. There was nothing incongruous within. Tiny rooms, plain furnishings, plenty of light, and an intensity of quietness reigning throughout, neutral colors for the most part, but in the parlor a touch of crimson in the carpet and tea-rose blossoming in the window gave a pleasing impression like the finding of the first violet bursting its bud in some sheltered spot while winter snows yet hold their sway, or like the flame of the last chrysanthemum, not yet burned to dust after leaves have fallen and cold rains and hard frosts have faded out all other bloom. The touch of brightness and the yellow roses were a relief, all else was too precise, too methodical, too suggestive of the

Dull and somber gray
Of lonely life as it wears away.

And the surroundings spoke truthfully. The mistress of the cottage, in her little parlor that blustering March afternoon, lighted up and gray as they hinted at. A straight, spare, angular form, a long, thin face, sharp gray eyes, thin lips, and rather scant black hair, quite uncompromising and quite self-reliant, one might find in Miss Juliet Bell at first sight as much as was apt to be discovered in years of such acquaintance as might be formed with her.

She had not been young at sixteen and she was not old at thirty-six. There was a ring at the bell as she sat sewing in the glow of the sea-coal fire, and instantly a rival glow sprang into her thin sallow cheeks. She put out her hand to break one of a cluster from the tea-rose, holding it against her black hair and noting the effect in a mirror inclined above the mantel. It was not unpleasant at that particular moment, but Miss Bell was scarcely at ease with the unwonted adornment and dropped it upon the little side table at her elbow. Her whole life had been
hard and neutral as herself with the exception of one late ray of sunlight which had crept into it, to the softening influence of which was accountable the dash of crimson and the bloom of the rose. We all have our romance at some time, and who can say that Miss Bell's was less sweet in its existence at thirty-six than it would have been in coming a score of years before?

The color still was in her cheeks as the visitor, evidently well accustomed to the house, let himself in a moment later. She looked up with a nod and a word, with a wave of her hand indicating a chair. It was accepted, and leaning back in the fire-glow, Mr. Trelawney took a leisurely survey of the room.

"How particularly comfortable you seem, Juliet. Not a bad investment of a couple of years to insure you this, was it? The old man's disposition was not of the sweetest but a clever woman is a match for any man."

"I am glad you think so"—pointedly, "and that you are satisfied with the result of those two years. I might have done as much for my own gain, but not with the same heart as in work for a dear friend."

Mr. Trelawney laughed, a softly sarcastic laugh, with a glance at the broken flower and another at the thin, sallow face.

"I wonder how many with the pleasure of knowing you have gone to the depth of finding your heart, Juliet? Not many. I'll be bound, and not one to find it ahead of the caution that feathered your own nest first. I am not the one to blame you for that, however."

The glow in her cheeks deepened, one might almost have thought angrily, but there was not the slightest change in the even inflection of her words.

"You speak as if I did not always put your interest ahead of my own, Alfred. I doubt if you will ever know all I have done for you."

"At any rate I know it well enough to be appreciative. I have been considering how much more the way of gratitude I ought to add to your annuity. Some men would fancy it enough as it stands, but I hope I am not one who makes light of the service of a friend."

The long, thin fingers, that had plied the needle steadily, stopped. Her work dropped into her lap and Miss Bell looked across at him, her lips closing in a firm line for a second before she spoke, her searching gaze seeing further beneath the mask of his immoveable face than perhaps any other gaze could have done.

"What is it you have come to say?" she asked, coldly. "I thought you knew me well enough to be honest with me whatever you may be with the rest of the world."

If it were not out of the question for Mr. Trelawney to be embarrassed at any thing, one might have suspected him of embarrassment then. It was not shown in his look or his manner, though it was a full minute before he met her gaze or answered her question. Then his look was mastering, threatening; his words unequivocal and to the point.

"You are a sensible creature, Juliet, and will see the advisability of following my suggestions. I am to to be married in May, and in lieu of any expectations you may have entertained, I propose to make a handsome addition to the annuity you now enjoy, possibly to double it if you are reasonable, as I expect you to be for the first."

The flush, pleased or angry, died quite from the face of Miss Juliet Bell now. A gray shade crept up in its place; a stony, awful calm fell upon her as she sat.

"To be married in May, Alfred—you are to be married in May," she repeated. "Did you say, you would object to that? I have waited through two Mays, as no one knows better than you."

"Don't make the pretense of misunderstanding; between you and I it isn't worth while," he said, roughly. "If you supposed I ever really entertained the idea of marrying, say, you did not look for that absurdity at last. You served me a good turn and I am willing to recognize it. Let us come to terms and spare such amusement in the line of recrimination as we might indulge in, but which will not alter facts as I tell you they stand. You have a temper under all your quietness as I chance to know, Miss Bell, but it isn't worth while getting it up for the present occasion."

He stood up, his back to the fire, his white face and gleaming black eyes bent upon her. Subtle and crafty as he was he had not been able to fathom how her subtle and crafty nature would meet and resist his. He expected a burst of futile passion, violence and threats perhaps, but he did not look for that subdued, stony calm and was not satisfied with it.

"Then you never meant one of the promises you made me?" she asked. "From the very first you meant some such end as this, from the very first you lied to me and meant to show me off sooner or later. Is that what you wish to tell me?"

"It is written, 'a man shall not marry his grandmother,' you know. I never contemplated that idiozy, my charming Juliet. There was not even much amusement in the little play of which this is the finale, but you and I were well enough paid for our parts in it. It was one of the things to be that we should play it together; it is over and this is the last of it."

"Not quite the last of it," she said, in that same still voice. "I should like to review it with you. It began with my situation as nurse to old Miles Trelawney. There wasn't much between you except the name, unless it might be the recognition which one rogue has for another."

"A kindred bond uniting us there, perhaps, Miss Bell."
The old man was tottering into second childhood, not to be relied upon," she pursed, ignoring his interruption. "You hadn't a shadow of claim upon him in reality; there was a granddaughter somewhere who should have come in for the fortune, and would have done so but for the influence you brought to bear and the watch you kept over him through me."

"To cut the story short, the fortune was left to me, an annuity to you, my faithful ally, and the granddaughter somewhere remained out in the cold, quite a deserving fate since the sins of the father are to descend to the children. And now, what bearing may all this have upon the matter in hand?"

"You won me to your purpose—"

"Readily enough, Miss Bell."

"Through professions which you have just declared false from the first. For you I was no better than a slave to that exacting, petty old man's will. You held out the promise that we should enjoy his wealth together, and I have not been insensible to your covert taunts and sneers since, though I have never resented them. I never would have resented them had you been true to your vows; I would not even have pressed you to a fulfillment of them while you showed yourself true. Do you not believe that, Alfred? Do you not believe more, that, had you even made me your wife and slighted me as you would have done, as I always knew you would do when it came to that, do you not believe that I would have been faithful to you and loved you through all the abuse you might have heaped upon me?"

"The old girl be dashed! What is she driving at, and what devil has possession for her to take it so?" thought Mr. Trelawney, quite irritably.

"I haven't the least doubt of it, Juliet," he said, with the utmost sang froid. "It is a pity to deprive myself of so much devotion, but taking into consideration age and appearance and adaptability and all that, the admission does not shake me from my position. Is that all, and do we come to terms at last?"

"Not quite all. I never shirked the disagreeable duties you imposed upon me; I would have been patient and contented with my lot joined to yours—"

"Patient and contented, Miss Bell! You might have been even better than that, considering the magnificence that lot represents. I beg pardon! I was not meaning to recall all you have lost—rather, all that you never had a show for."

"Do you believe now that for the sake of having revenge for the slights put upon me, to repay the insult of having another put before and above me, I would throw away what I have gained? That to see you stripped of the wealth which my efforts alone could have brought you, I would go back to my old hard life, all the harder for this interval of comfort and ease? Do you believe that, hating, I could work to ruin you as loving, I worked to raise you where you are to-day?" All said in that passionless, stony way which could mean nothing but strong passion most strongly repressed.

"Upon my soul, Juliet, I can't say. You women are riddles at the best, I believe. It would be bad policy if you would, providing you could; as you can't, it is a phase not worth while pursuing. The worst in your power to do would be to raise a senseless muss. Be sensible instead. I will make immediate arrangements for having your annuity doubled, and we cut adrift from this time out."

"How well you understand human nature, Mr. Trelawney. Let it be so then. And now, before we cut quite adrift, will you tell me who has the happiness of superseding me in your affection?"

There was no reason why he should not tell her; the engagement would be made public in a few days at furthest, but it was with a feeling of reluctance that he gave the name.

"Miss Berenice Lawrence," she repeated after him. "A belle whose reputation is so extensive that it has even reached me; a mercenary flirt who has broken hearts and dazzled eyes and turned heads by the scores. What are you going to marry her for, Alfred?"

"What for? Why do men marry in general?"

"Are you very much in love with her? Am I sacrificed for you or for her?"

"I am very well satisfied, Juliet," there was some stiffness and some reserve in the short reply. "Say good-bye, now. I have overstayed my welcome. Don't be irreconcilable, my dear. Remember—"

"There was a smoke so gray, But someti me noon or late, An honest看见 came that way, And took her for his mate."

Farewell, Juliet. Your Romeo will come yet, never fear. You won't shake hands? Well then I must go without!"

Miss Bell, with her face set immovably, rose up, stiff and angular, from her chair as she watched him out of the room. She heard the outer door clang, she knew that he was gone, but her aspect did not change. At last her glance fell upon the tea-rose blooming in the window, and putting forth her hand she plucked the flowers one by one, dropping them upon the glowing coals, and at last flung the pot and rifled shrub beneath the grate, all without a single mark of passion breaking the stony calm.

Her late romance had faded out of the life of Juliet Bell swiftly as the roses shriveled, and what manner of Phenix was to arise from the ashes no one might have guessed.

The vague uneasiness which Mr. Trelawney experienced very soon dwindled out.
THE MADDEST MARRIAGE EVER WAS.

"I wouldn't doubt the sincerity of the fair Juliet's intentions if she had the power to injure me," he reflected on his homeward way. "Not having the power she gave more evidence of common sense than I expected."

Days and weeks wore away. Stormy March lapsed into showery April, April melted into May. Wonders in the way of mantua-making and millinery had transpired in that time. Bundles came and went, dressmakers invaded the Athol mansion at all hours, and a seamstress newly employed in the house stitched steadily upon the shimmering silks, altered and added to and followed the caprices of the fair creature whose outfit they were, with a patience which at last drew the languid approval of the bride-elect.

What a mercy we don't have to marry more than once in our lives," said Bertram one morning sitting down in midst of the precious litter of the workroom. "That is, of course, provided no special dispensation of providence makes it necessary. Dear me, Miss Brown, it is not mere frugality to go upon that blue. Only three more days of this worry, thank goodness."

"Only three days," echoed Mrs. Athol with a sigh. She was thinking how lonely the great house would seem with her spoiled and petted sister gone out of it.

"You couldn't look more lugubrious if it were a funeral in prospective instead of a wedding, Edmund. By the way, what a useless amount of sentiment people waste over these affairs. One's friends may be excused for sounding the chant 'come out and be married' as though it were 'come out and be buried,' but to flatter over one's own marriage is all fudge. Something might happen of course, but something never does happen when one is half inclined to pray for it. I don't hope for anything worse than to see Cecil at the wedding, or look for anything better than the tiresome time to come after it. That is better, Miss Brown. Come to me when I'm settled in Trelawney palace and you shall have a permanent situation there."

"Thank you. I shall not fail to come," answered Miss Brown, lifting her eyes for one second from her work.

"A clever creature," said Berenice, as she followed her sister from the room, "but peculiar. Did you observe what a strange look she gave me?"

She might not have dismissed that look from her mind so casually had she known all this chapter contains; but she knew further that to all outward appearance Miss Brown was the double of Juliet Bell.

CHAPTER IV.

THE OLD HOUSE BY THE SEA.

"What do you intend to do with yourself, Cecil?" Goldwood asked, with his cool eyes resting upon it.

"Put in the morning here, with your kind permission. Was that what you meant?"

"By no means. What do you intend to do with yourself in the days and years ahead of you? I am safe in assuming you have some dreams of glory and fame. How do you propose to follow them up, how to catch these two fickle goddesses, Fame and Fortune, that are somewhere set in your prospective?"

"By hard work, if I ever do reach them. Is it so very preposterous for one to hope it?"

"Possibly not, my dear boy, if the ques-
tion of daily needs were only dispensed of.
If struggling artists could live on air and
go on painting divine inspirations without
money and without price, the world might
be figured into finding out one in a hundred
of them, perhaps. As affairs stand it is a
hard matter to turn the divine inspirations
into three meals a day, a bed at night, and
a coat that is more shabby than genteel.
Happy young fellow if you can find the
pleasantness in such a prospect ahead."
the hymeneal state. It’s the regular proceeding; she marries him for his money, he marries her for her face,” and such accompanying graces as may lend greater dignity to the house of Treawney. The 15th of May witnesses the event, as I remember from having it sounded in my ears at every turn.”

The paper crushed beneath his hand, and Cecil Bertram stood white and still, scarcely comprehending yet all that these lines conveyed. Berenice to marry another! Berenice false to him! True, he had claimed no promise in words, but the spirit of the undertaker had not recognized was no less binding. He could not, would not, believe it. Great heavens! to do so would be to brand her as worse than fickle, to declare her the heartless, mercenary flirt the world had judged her, misjudged her, he believed firmly until this hour.

He went out into the open air with the whirl of tumult in his mind, the dread and despair and deadly pain of his own shock of awakening from the bright sweet glamour which she had cast about him, an oppressive nightmare kind of weight which it seemed a strong effort of his own must shake off. It was a faceless day, the heavy grey sky lowering, the earth cheerless, a dismal day in unison with the dreariness he felt. He grew more collected as he walked on aimlessly, and his own pain sharpened as he realized it better.

He was young; life had been more a daydream than reality with him even at its hardest, and he had poured out all the richness of a boy’s romantic passion at her feet. Another might have been cured by knowing her as she was, a creature of selfishness and vanity, but he had raised an ideal, to crush which was to crush all the chivalrous faith and better sentiment of his heart. More practical natures might pass such a trial lightly, but to him it was one of those crises which fortunately come seldom in a human life. He saw the future as he hoped to make it with her to inspire him, a fair picture already slipped from his grasp, and instead dark chaos and hopeless confusion stared him in the face.

“Tell you I hate it! Tell you I would rather be dead, dead, at the bottom of the sea, than buried alive here!”

A sharp, vibrant voice cut through the air and into his hopelessness suddenly. He looked up to find himself without a high, half-raised voice, the rain lying gray and flat in the distance beyond the marshes, and bare cliffs shutting away the little town and the picturesque stretches of point and summit and shore beyond. He had wandered three good miles out of the way, but was only convinced of it by remembering a previous observation that he had taken the solitary place. A great raked building, grim and black, with only a cone of roof and two dormer windows like staring cold eyes visible from

where he stood, was shut in by the wall, and a tangle of bare branches that rattled in the wind rose higher than the one and less high than the other, like a pricky guard between the two.

“Madelon!” said another voice. “Madelon, come in out of the damp. Your aunt would be displeased if she knew.”

“That is it—she never does know. I might as well be dead for all any one on earth either knows or cares about me. It is dreadful to think of killing myself, but I do believe it will come to that yet with the horrible fancies I brood over night and day.”

“Madelon!”

“If any one ever went mad from lonely terror, I shall go mad yet. Oh, it is bitter, bitter! Think, to have never heard a tender word, to have never seen a loving face, to be kept apart from all the world as though one was a curse upon me.”

“It is wicked and ungrateful to complain,” said the other monotonous voice, wide contrast to the passion and despair of the first.

“You have no right to question what has been chosen as best for you.”

“Why do you always tell me that and no more?”

“You will want me, Madelon, and she may ask for you. You had better come in alone.”

Footsteps moved away, unchecked by the call sent despairingly after—

“Esther, Esther!” Then a sound of passioned sobbing and muttered unintelligible words.

A moment before Cecil Bertram would have declared his the greatest misery on earth, but here had come the revelation of a deeper misery like a sharp reproof. There was a break in the wall very near, a heap of fallen bricks and rubbish upon which he stepped and with his hands upon the top he raised himself to look over into the wild space below.

He had but a single glimpse of a girl’s bowed form and then the decaying structure upon which he leaned toppled, he had a sense of falling forward, a cloud of dust stifling him, a jagged pain crushing into his arm, and then sudden blackness and oblivion.

CHAPTER V.

CAMILLA BRAND.

He came to himself with big, heavy raindrops beating into his face and a weight like the weight of a mountain crushing him down.

“Quick, Esther, quick! See, he is coming to himself. Oh, if only a man were here now!”

It was but a wavering sight he had of a face bending over him, at hands tearing fiercely at a pile of bricks under which he was lying; then another agony wrenched
him and blackness came down. Consciousness again, and the mountain was removed, the rain pattered on some shelter close above his head, and a blanket had been thrown over him where he lay upon the ground. It was growing dusk, and the shadows lay thick under the creaking branches of the inclosure. A form so still that he thought it one of the shadows first was close beside him, and the same face he had seen vaguely before appearing vaguely still in the dimness bent closer as he moved.

"Are you sitting out in the rain for me? I suppose I hurt myself in that awkward tumble, but it wasn't worth all this kindness."

He made an effort to lift himself, groaned, and was slipping into space when her voice called him back.

"You are not able to move; don't try it. You are badly hurt; I'm afraid your arm is broken, and you must be dreadfully bruised.

Esther has gone for help, and you will be moved when it comes. I have wine here; take some and be still. I was told not to let you move."

He obeyed willingly, with that faintness floating him away, expanding the umbrella she held over him into a great dark dome, the rain pattering upon it swelling to the rush of mighty waters, out of which he was brought again by the flash of a light before his eyes and other forms about him.

"I am not afraid to give trouble, Madelon," said the woman, Esther, who had brought help in the shape of a brawny fellow, to whom the young artist's weight was nothing.

Within a bed had been prepared, and a fire smouldering upon the hearth was putting out tongues of flame that lapped more and more strongly about fuel which had been lately added to it. There was nothing to be done, and she went through the dusk of the long passage to the further end, and stood there listening to the sound of their coming steps and the little stir afterward.

A gleam of light shot out from above; some one held a candle over the balustrade of a winding stair to reflect uncertainty in the hall below.

"Esther?" said a voice, inquiringly.

"Madelon, is it you? What is that noise? Come up here and tell me."

The light disappeared again, and the girl went slowly up through darkness until a yellow thread fell through a door left ajar opening into a room, somber and funeral in all its appointments, which a low fire and the candle but imperfectly lighted.

A woman's tall form stood upon the hearth, a long, loose robe of black trailing about her, her hands clasped and hung listlessly as she looked down into the coal fire. An imposing form, stately, though wasted, and a face strongly marked and deeply lined. Her hair, thickly gray, was wound in a great careless twist about her head, her eyes were black and preternaturally large under heavy brows, her cheeks hollow and colorless. She gave no evidence of attention as the girl entered, but glancing up presently to see her standing opposite, her brows lowered, and an expression of aversion swept into the bleak face. It was an expression Madelon had seen there often before, and never saw without a thrill of terror and despair.

"What are you doing there? Where is Esther?" she asked, brusquely.

"You called me, aunt. Esther is below. There was an accident; a gentleman hurt who has just been brought in."

"He should have been taken on; I want no one brought here. Esther should know that. What have you got there?"

Her eyes fixed upon a bit of paper Madelon was twisting between her fingers. The hands themselves were bruised and bleeding, but she seemed not to observe that. Madelon glanced down at the wisp. She had been unconscious of it, but remembered now having taken it from the ground as she sat beside the wounded youth. She smoothed it out, an ordinary visiting-card with the name partially effaced but still discernible—Ernest Goldwood.

"A pretty name," thought Madelon, as she held the card. "His, I presume," and the white, handsome, boyish face was before her eyes as she had watched it through the dusk. Then she uttered a sudden frightened cry.

"Aunt, aunt Camilla, what is the matter? Esther, Esther!" The sharp call rang and was echoed through the big, bare house.

Little wonder the girl screamed out in a fright. Such a ghastly, stricken look had come into the woman's face. She put out her gaunt hands blindly, waved, tottered, and then sunk down all of a limp, senseless heap.

A moment, and the call was answered. Esther appearing upon the threshold glided forward to the side of her mistress, turning her eyes upon Madelon where she stood, so repressed always, so repelled by her strange aunt, that even now she did not offer her assistance.

"What gave her such a turn?" asked the woman, angrily, as she lifted the gray head and caught a bottle of smelling-salts from a table near. "What made you come to her? You'll be the death of her yet, I do believe. Don't stare so, and tell me what took her now?"

"How do I know? She heard the strange steps and called me to know what was the matter. I told her, and showed her a card with the gentleman's name I picked up beside him. I don't suppose it was that; but she fainted and fell, as you see," an expressive expression.

"It couldn't be that," said the woman, rubbing the cold hands. "I never heard his name as he gave it, and it isn't like she
should have. Go away; she'll not be want-
ing to see you when she comes to. Go below
and watch till the doctor comes. I've sent
for him to take the young man away. There
ago!" A twitching of the colorless face, and a
gasp for breath told of returning conscious-
ness. Madelon stole out noiselessly, down to
the room where Cecil Bertram lay, very
white and still, as they had placed him. She
sat down in the shadow at the bed's head and
watched him—all that she could do. She
felt herself very helpless, very useless in that
hour. In all her life she had never been
taught helplessness to herself or others, the
morbid atmosphere she had always breathed
made her shrink into herself, timid of any
contact. He looked deathly, he might be
dying, and she could do nothing. A flush
ran over his face and a moan wrenched itself
from between his lips. It was one of the
feverish agonies that shot through him from
time to time. Madelon laid her hand softly
upon the broad, fair brow with the damp
auburn hair falling back from it. She had
never seen so perfect a face, such beautiful
hair, and something new to her life stirred
within her as she waited. His eyes opened,
but he had not been unconscious as she thought.
"Thank you," he said. "Your hand is
very soft and cool. Then lay still as before.
He cared little for what was to be done
with him; even above his physical anguish
was the anguish of the knowledge which
had come to him that Berenice was false.
The dull despair that had been with him
through his walk was with him still, but cut-
ting into it as the episode had done came
the remembrance of the interruption which
had led to his being there. This girl near
him suffered too, and he glanced toward her
with a passing thrill of interest, but she had
withdrawn again into the shadow. With his
eyes closed he recalled her face as he had
seen it unobservantly a moment before, dark,
pale, with eyes and mouth too large for the
thick complexion and dull, disordered
hair falling about her neck. Not at all a pretty
face, he thought, and then another so differ-
cent, so rare in its fair loveliness was forced
into his mind, and Madelon was forgotten.
Very slowly went the time. Esther came
in presently for a moment, glanced at Cecil,
and spoke in an aside to Madelon.
"I can't stay down for a time yet. Miss
Brand has come better but I can't make out
what took her, and I wouldn't feel safe at
leaving her long. I'm going to make her
tea now. Call me when the doctor comes if
I'm not back before." She was gone but a moment when Made-
lon looked up with a start and the impres-
sion of another presence. She had not heard
a sound, but upon the threshold stood Miss
Brand. The light fell full upon her color-
less face, showing it drawn with what seem-
ed an awfully eager and fearful expectancy
upon it. Her eyes were on the bed and the
still form outlined there; she either did not
heed the girl wrapped in by shadow. Slow-
ly, silently, she moved forward, step by
step. It was as if she were drawn against
her will, as if she struggled in vain against
the power leading her, until she saw dis-
tinctly the boyish head cut against the pil-
low, and then the eagerness, the intensity
faded away, and a ghastly relief came to
their place. She went with the same gilding
silence as she came, and a new wonder crept
into Madelon's mind.
On the old house, on her aunt Camilla
Brand, on herself, and the one attendant,
the old woman, Esther who was more com-
passion than servant to them, some dreadful
evil mystery had always seemed to rest. A
mystery which cursed her, ignorant of its
nature, which had blighted and hardened
Camilla Brand and turned her prematurely
old, which had closed Esther's lips so firmly
that a syllable was never wrenched from
them regarding it.
What stirring of the mystery had that night
so strongly moved Camilla Brand?

CHAPTER VI.

THE WEDDING-DAY.

It was the eve before the wedding. It had
been a long, busy day. The latest packages
coming home and presents flowing in stead-
ily had kept the bride-elect in a flutter since
her early rising. It was a most unusual
circumstance for Miss Lawrence to be astir
early, but on this morning sleep was not to
be woved, and she had arisen shivering as
"the gray dawn grew rose-flushed" while
all the house was silent, and the outer stir
of the world getting into daily motion had
not yet penetrated to that aristocratic sec-
tion.

Drawing on a quilted dressing robe and
thrusting her feet into soft plush-lined slip-
ers, she went wandering disconsolately about,
sparking in her cabinet, opening drawers
and wardrobes, taking an inventory, it would
seem, of the rich and dainty contents.
"What in the world more than all this
need I wish?" thought Berenice, folding back
a silver paper and feasting her eyes upon
the greatest marvel of all the marvels stored
around the satin and lace of her bridal dress.
"It isn't so very long since the thought of
all this would have set me wild with joy.
In those days of miserable struggling against
poverty before mamma died, when every
thing depended upon Edmonia making a
wealthy match, and her obstinacy came near
turning the balance the wrong way, I was
bitterly envious and wishful that my time
might come, as well could be. It has come,
all that I ever hoped for then, and odd as it
seems, I am not so very much elated over
it.

She surely looked any thing but elated in
THE MADDEST MARRIAGE EVER WAS.

And the sun shone the bright and the sun shone the bright and the sun shone the bright sun that day and the sun shone the bright sun that day and the sun shone the bright sun that day and the sun shone the bright sun that day and the sun shone the bright sun that day and... Slowly the days and nights told a story of gay dissipation, as against the Lawrence family, whose motto was "Square Deal." The pike was the symbol of the family's integrity, and the thick red carpet covered the room with its glistening sheen.

The early light. It is possible that her third season of gay dissipation had told upon her; for the Lawrence family had a fast-fading family, as she had said, and the weariness in her hair and face movement may have been the result of the days and nights told almost unbrokenly in the succession of metropolitan diversions. She threw herself into a chair before a great square chival glass, and looked critically at the reflection it gave back.

"Turning yellow, with blue rings under my eyes; next will be wrinkles and gray hairs and enamel and rouge and all the other disguises to which we women have to take. Time I was making my market sure, and yet I am only twenty, and if one mayn't indulge in some foolishness at twenty, one surely never need in all one's life. At least I needn't moan over and take a cold on the very day before my wedding. That would be an ill of consequence indeed."

And there Miss Lawrence gave her bell a pull which stirred her maid, and brought her in haste, wondering what unusual occurrence had roused the young lady at that unholy hour.

Mr. Trelawney came to dinner on that day and to pass the evening with his betrothed.

"My bridal gift," he said to Berenice, putting a case into her hand. It opened to disclose a complete set of Oriental pearls, globes of cloudy splendor, sight of which almost took away her breath.

"Oh!" she breathed, in ecstatic delight, and thanked him with a glance of those lovely brown eyes, clear and confiding as any child's.

"The fittest adornment I could find for my own pearl," he murmured, tenderly.

"And I do so love to be valued that I shan't pretend they are too good for me. Come, you must see my other presents. Mr. Athol's wedding home an hour ago-a service of solid plate-magnificent!"

She led the way into a boudoir opening from the drawing-rooms, itself like a casket with blue silken hangings, a cluster of drop-lights reflecting dazzlingly a hundred times from the table where the presents were arranged. A figure that had been bending over it started at their approach, and withdrew swiftly behind the draperies of a window. Mr. Trelawney's eyes followed the flitting shape, which had something forcibly familiar about it, but came back to the brilliant display.

"Miss Brown," said Berenice, "come here, Miss Brown! I am dying to try on my lovely pearls, the latest and greatest of all my gifts. Come and clasp them for me."

"Don't deny me the pleasure!" Mr. Trelawney gallantly lifted the necklace and circled the fair throat with its milky splendor. Forth from the shadow of the curtains gilded Miss Brown, straight, angular, looking thinner, more sallow, under those bright lights and blue drappings and contrasted with the other wonderful fair young beauty, subdued and with downcast eyes, standing before them.

"There, like any man, you have missed the fastening," laughed Berenice. "Good intentions and poor execution is the rule of your sex when you infringe upon our sphere, Mr. Trelawney. Did you ever see any thing half so exquisite, Miss Brown? The coronet, please, and do, like a good creature, name the donors of these things while I go to exhibit myself to Edoniana. Permit me-Mr. Trelawney, my seamstress, Miss Brown."

Having thus delivered herself of the introduction and her recognition of their different stations in giving his name the preference, Miss Lawrence walked away, her silken robe trailing, her bright head held as a princess, crowned by those luscious gems. After her, from under the drooping lashes of the seamstress shot a contemptuous and malignant light. Upon the seamstress a pair of black orbs gleamed fiercely.

"Juliet! In the name of all the fiends, what are you doing here? What do you mean by gaining admittance here on a false pretense?"

The drooping lashes slowly raised, and Miss Bell looked steadily back at him, noway abashed, as she stood confessed in her assumed character, saying not a word.

"What do you mean by it? It will not be well for you, Miss Bell, if you are meditating mischief."

"It is such good taste to threaten a lady, Alfred; one whom you have already insulted, and whom you know to be totally unprotected."

"Upon my word, I don't know any one standing less in need of protection. You do so well to remind me of the fact that you are a lady, Juliet; some might throw back a doubt of it, but I stand reproved. Without the threat, then, what is it that you have in mind now?"

"Miss Lawrence has just told you I am the seamstress here. With my prospects changed, I have gone back to my habits of industry."

"A lame excuse; I can only wonder you present it, I warn you it will be time and words wasted if you try to injure me with the family here."

"I am not intending to try. You are very confident, but I might injure you even here if I were so disposed. Rest assured that I am not."

He wound a finger in his glossy black whisker, and looked at her a moment in contemplative quietness.

"For the curiosity of the thing, then, you'll favor me immeasurably by telling me what you are up to, Miss Bell. Something, I know. You are not the style of woman to beat about the bush for nothing."

"Is it so strange I should wish to see your
betrothed, Alfred, that I should want to see what charms won you from me? I came, I saw.”

“And you didn’t conquer; was clever enough to see you couldn’t, and gave up the attempt. Very creditable of you, Miss Bell, and what you might have expected from such a piece of threadbare ingenuity as this masquerade. It isn’t the first time your cleverness has overreached itself.”

Something in the seamstress’ steady eyes gave Mr. Trelawney the same uncomfortable impression he had experienced in her presence, once before. “ Luckily she has the sense to see it would be no use,” he thought, “but she takes her disappointment, deucedly cool.” She read the half-distrust in his mind. If the truth were told, there was better rapport between these two than was ever apt to exist between Mr. Trelawney and his fiancée.

If I were first inclined to envy either her or your fortune, it was so—I am certainly not inclined now. I wish you all the joy you will ever find in your wedded life with the vain doll you have chosen, Alfred. A creature without a thought beyond herself, who cares so little for you that she wouldn’t turn over her hand between your legs. Indeed, I long as she gained the wealth and position of your bride, who would not despise you one iota more if I were to tell all I know of you. I wish you much joy of the bride who loves another man with all the heart she has for any one outside herself. You are unwise enough to care for her—I saw that in your face as I came upon you two here—nay, if I want revenge, I shall have it in knowing what green jealousy you will be prey to. The choice for pity between you is very slight, but I can almost afford to pity her. This picture and the bronzes are from Mrs. Athol, and I believe that is all, sir.”

She slipped into her character of expositor as the ladies’ voices sounded in the room beyond, bowed slightly, and in the quiet, submissive manner of the seamstress, passed out. Mr. Trelawney stood for a moment before joining the little group in the drawing-room. A moodiness knit itself into his brow, or dark shade was upon his face. Miss Bell, proving herself a sharp observer, had told him a most disagreeable truth. He did care for Berenice, and he knew well that Berenice cared nothing individually for him.

It proved a most stupid evening. The bride-elect had exhausted all her enthusiasm over her bridal gift and had none left to bestow upon the giver. A couple of the bridesmaids arrived that day, and to remain in the house, were shy of the happy pair, one of them tying closely to Mrs. Athol, the other playing sonatas in a minor key at the grand piano and wondering if such brilliant auspices as favored Berenice would fall to her portion by-and-by.

Mr. Athol, a grave man of sixty, was undemonstrative in his great chair and solitary corner. An attentive observer might have seen that he looked now and then at his wife’s fair young sister with something like concern and disquiet. Once, when Mrs. Athol, in passing, laid her hand upon her sister’s shoulder and looked lovingly down into her face, a sigh passed his lips and he closed his eyes, moving his head further from the light. So the last evening passed for those most nearly concerned.

Next morning broke sunny and serene. Not a cloud anywhere marred the whole expanse of deep azure sky. Soft spring breezes stirred; there was a smell of country fragrance, of wild violets and sweet-williams and lilacs in the streets; the city birds twittered joyously as their brothers out in the free green woods were doing at that very hour. A most auspicious bridal-day.

A most beautiful bride in her satin and lace was there not alone. A pink roses, a pink lilies, pink cheeks, a light bright enough to be a happy one in her wide blue eyes. After all, was she not happy? She was very nearly believing it in the bustle about her, in the excitement of her own dressing and that of the bridesmaids, in the deep admiration of these ladies in their elegant trousseau, in total forgetfulness amid these engrossing affairs of the bridgroom-expectant. He was brought to her mind when her sister folded an affectionate arm about her, whispering: “Heaven bless you and your choice, dearest Berenice!”

“There, you will crush my vail, Edmonia,” said the bride shortly. “How absurd of you. Of course I shall be blessed after the same fashion you were and are. Given money, given everything, and neither of us need care to boast of any higher sentiment than that.”

The vail was in no further danger from Mrs. Athol. All the emotion her face had exhibited was a second. She summoned the bridesmaids; the party floated by twos down the wide stairs, were handed into the carriages and rolled through the streets to Grace Church, decked with flowers, filled with an expectant throng.

The bridgroom with his attendants met them at the door; the cortège swept in under the fire of a thousand eyes; the impressive ceremony sounding more impressive, it is probable, to all others assembled than to the two joining hands before the altar was pronounced, the brilliant pageant briefly over as the party passed out on the return.

One of the lookers-on in a central pew leaned forward, his good-natured eyes fixed upon the bride. It was Cecil Bertram, white as a ghost from his recent sick bed, his arm in a sling, the stamp of suffering physical and mental plainly upon him, and in his pallor, his melancholy, the wild, careless air about him, more boyishly handsome than ever before.
He had been very ill in the great decaying house of Miss Camilla Brand. All of that first long night had dragged through, and the latter half of it had been lost to him in the torturous fancies of a rising delirium before the physician came. He had been absent when the messenger called, and the latter waiting returned with him in the dawn of the damp, chill morning. It was impossible then to remove the patient. Esther had done what she could to mitigate his sufferings, but his broken arm was swollen and inflamed, the difficulty and pain of setting it aggravated by the time which had elapsed. Afterward the feverish anxiety he had displayed to be well and up again seriously retarded his recovery from actual sickness; a much longer time would be required to heal the fracture.

"I must be in New York by the fifteenth of May," he declared as the doctor set his flat against such restlessness. "Promise me that I shall be, and I'll try to be quiet though it is done."

"You'll stand more chance of being in your grave if you are not quiet," said the gruff disciple of Esculapius. "From that bed you will not move for one month at least."

"I shall be in New York on the fifteenth," said Cecil dejectedly. And in New York he was, one of the throng in Grace Church to witness the wedding on the morning of the fifteenth of May.

What he hoped to gain by it heaven only knows. Some lingering, unacknowledged thought of finding her less false than she seemed, a fancy that he should see her worn as he had been, forced against her will by some resistless combination he could not guess at into this marriage, the selfish comfort of knowing her misery insured. And he saw her radiant, fair, peaceful as the happiest bride.

The bride was advanced on her new-made husband's arm she lifted her eyes and saw him. She had a sensitive face, that fair sea-shell tint of coloring that comes and goes almost at will. It changed to a sympathetic pallor now. Her blue eyes grew deep and appealing, in that look of a second she disarmed what anger he had felt and left his hopeless misery to live upon.

Mr. Trelawney, too, caught sight of the young artist's haggard face, and saw the look exchanged. The moody knitting of his brows was a black scowl, but recollecting himself quickly, it passed away so that no one saw it.

The wedding breakfast was gathered about by a goodly company. Serene contentment sat upon the smiling countenance of the bride, unclouded felicity was conveyed in the air of the bridal room. Toasts were pledged to the happy pair, the Merriment was at its height, when one of the decorous gentlemen in waiting whispered a few words in Mr. Athol's ear. He went out quietly with the evident desire to avoid observation, and though a few questioning looks were exchanged his absence was covered by the general good-will of the company. But, even good-breeding was not temptation-proof when he came back, after a brief interval, seeming disconcerted, and almost immediately the same messenger conveyed his mystery to the ear of Mr. Trelawney. The latter hesitated, glanced down the board, and drew a breath of relief as at that moment the bride rose to withdraw. In another moment he followed out in the wake of the decorous serving-man.

"What is the important person whom even Athol couldn't satisfy?" he asked impatiently.

"In the library and name of Fitz-George, sir. Business so important he would have forced himself in upon the company if I hadn't promised to see you, sir."

Into the library Mr. Trelawney stalked, indignant and resentful at this un[a]rtult demand upon the occasion. Minutes lengthened into a half hour; inquisitive speculation went around. Above, the bride had changed her snowy robes for a traveling dress; the carriage was at the door; the time for their departure on the wedding trip was close at hand.

What could engross the bridegroom at such a time as this?

Mr. Athol, manifestly annoyed, gave a low-voiced order to the messenger: "Inform Mr. Trelawney that less than five minutes more will lose him the train."

At that moment however, the library door opened and Mr. Trelawney came out alone. His face was always white, colorless, but now there was a bluish ghastliness in it which struck all seeing him.

Nothing was said, however. The bride floated down; a hasty farewell was uttered; he lifted her into the carriage; himself followed, and the "happy pair" were whirled away.

CHAPTER VII.

IN MARBLE HALLS.

"You will be pleased to remember that you are my wife, madam."

"I might be pleased to forget the fact if left to my own choice, sir."

"By heaven! you have shown little enough remembrance of it, of late. I tell you my leniency has arrived at its limit, Mrs. Trelawney. I will be master in my own house— master of you in it out of it, hereafter. I will not tolerate such conduct as yours has been. I will not have my wife's name banded as the most notorious married flirt in the city."

This fragment of nunnubial dialogue transpiring at the Trelawney breakfast-table six months after that May bridal-day, will con-
very more accurately than a detailed description the degree of felicity carried through the honeymoon into the subsequent more settled state. The pair had very lately returned from an extended Northern and Western tour. Trelawney palace opened its fair portal to receive them; all the splendor of the place was redeemed from the dusk shroud it had worn the summer through and the envied mistress lost no time in entering upon the gay career she had marked out for herself.

This palace was opened in a grand reception of the elite to whom the Trelawneys belonged. Afterward Berenice went everywhere, eluding the escort of her lord when she conveniently could—not an easy matter as she soon found—and making no secret of her preference for other devotees. It was not part of her intention to turn staid matron and exemplary wife. She had sold herself for a price and she would take a full benefit of the purchase-money. Under the path of roses lurked the unsuspected thorn which became painfully apparent at the first pressure of her dainty foot aside from the straight and narrow way. The green-eyed monster was on the alert, Mr. Trelawney, watchfully jealous, made his voice heard, and the result was daily bickerings, the persistency of the lady in her course, the strengthening of the gentleman in his, until this morning a more violent rupture occurred than any one preceding.

This was the way it had come about: Naturally, among the many admirers, old and new, hesitating in the light of her gracious smile, Cecil Bertram was the one whom Mr. Trelawney in his heart of hearts raged against with his most ferocious jealousy. His craftiness preserved him from the blunder of making this fact known at the very first. In the manner of real love for his wife he had not so much. He was not the kind of man to lose head and heart through love or hate. The one shrine he worshipped was self, and he had married her as an addition to his own importance; a necessary piece of furniture in his great, grand house; a fair, graceful, and costly article, which he had chosen as he would have chosen a picture, or a statue, or any other elegant adornment. She stabbed his self-love deeply when she showed herself indifferent to him and gave the benefit of her smiles and graces to any other before himself, and, above all other companions, Cecil Bertram.

The young artist saw but dimly what was apparent to the husband's eye, that Berenice was holding him by her own will under the old spell. He had loved and he had lost her, but the ideal wearing her face had not been torn from the consecrated niche where he had placed it; he found at once his greatest pleasure and his greatest pain in watching her, in now and then touching her hand and hearing her voice, and looking into her eyes that never failed to grow pathetic and appealing before his.

All that was not so bad, except for Cecil himself, but Berenice was piqued by the barrier which the boy's chivalrous sentiment had raised, which repressed those signs she wished to complete her triumph. Not that Mrs. Trelawney would be guilty of breaking the proprieties, les convenances, but she would stretch their elastic band to the further limit. Her liberal reading of the social text resulted in a rose-tinted, perfumed note addressed to Cecil, begging, as a favor, that he would undertake the commission of her own portrait, mentioning the hour she could devote to sitting. The step was taken without any consultation with her husband; Mrs. Trelawney was careful to spare him all participation in her plans, great or small, and to avoid his watchfulness was growing to be her nemesis. He was not of the fashion. A speedy answer was returned. The young artist, thrilled with delight at the thought of so near an approach to his divinity, confided his rapturous pleasure to a commonplace acceptance of the work, and appointing Goldwood's studio for the sittings. It occurred to him, after he had dispatched the letter, that he had obtained special permission of his friend, but the studio had been placed freely at his service and he had acted without forethought and with perfect confidence. Nevertheless, he was a true anxious as he mentioned the matter to his friend, and the end justified his演艺.

"Object? Yes, I do object," said Goldwood, emphatically. "You have never got over making a fool of yourself for that woman, Cecil. I shall not lend my if a party to your senseless infatuation. No door of mine shall open to gratify her caprice, or conduce to your idiotic tendency."

Bertram indulged in a high dudgeon of injured dignity at that; with due thanks for past favors he would not hear dictation, even from him. Paint Mrs. Trelawney he would, in her own home if agreeable, if not, an apartment to serve the purpose could be found and fitted up. Cecil, for himself, had only an attic, which was living-room and painting-room in one. Seeing how useless it would be to gainsay him, Goldwood let the subject drop, and attacked Mrs. Trelawney on the next available occasion. It was at the opera, and he unmoored into their private box to pay his respects, leaning over her chair because the young artist was present.

"Bertram has told me of your proposition, and I have refused him the use of my studio," he said, pointedly. "Mrs. Trelawney, you are not excusable for trifling with my young friend's weakness. I am earnestly enough his friend to ask you to spare him the excuse for leaving the portrait undone, and discourage his romantic folly."

The lady lifted her eyes in cool displeasure.
Mr. Goldwood may be pardoned his solicitude—uncalled-for. I am sure—on the part of his friend, but to tax me with a share of his folly, whatever it may be, is an honor I must disclaim.

I comprehend what a very small matter it is to you, what an exceedingly vital one to him. Bertram has genius; he is capable of great things, and his disappointment through you has given him a wrong turn. He is bound to make either a notable success or a deplorable failure, and you will be accountable for which in the greatest measure. Mrs. Trelawney, I beg of you to do what you can to set him right. Charge me with a message retracting your commission.

"Thanks: but I decline to retract it."

"Then you will force me to resort to a less pleasant alternative," said Goldwood, a trifle grizzly. "I fancy Mr. Trelawney may be less favorably disposed toward the move. I have heard that he is jealous, and I will trust that he may see some cause for preventing such close association of his wife with a younger lover.

With Bertram's interest at heart he had carried his implied threat into execution; hence the breakfast scene which opens the chapter.

"I will not have my wife's name bandied as the most notorious married flirt in the city," said Mr. Trelawney, with something more than his usual heat.

The lady trifling over a chicken wing curled her red lips in a slight contemptuous smile.

"Help yourself if you can," was its plain interpretation.

"You hear me, madam?" He cooled immediately before that evidence of her disdain.

"This portrait-business—I have learned of that you see—shall be dropped. I have not been very hard in my demands of you, up to this time, but I will have my own way in this and all similar matters for the future. I expect my wife to do credit to me and my position rather than bring disgrace upon both."

In her heart of hearts Mrs. Trelawney feared her husband; in her heart of hearts knew she would not dare to openly defy him. But she had yet to learn the grace of submission; she was inclined to rebel against the curb he was bringing to bear upon her.

"People who are faultless themselves may be excused for expecting much. Your infinite trust in me certainly reflects great credit upon yourself, sir—honi soit qui mal y pense! Living in a glass house you shouldn't throw stones, Mr. Trelawney."

"You choose to prevaricate, madam!"

"I choose to show you that I am not so totally ignorant of your affairs as you doubtless would prefer. Your exactions are absurd and tyrannical! I disgrace you! If all facts were as you fancy that might be found out of the question!"

That blue ghastliness which had come into his face upon her wedding-day came into it again now. He gave her a strange intent look that impressed her most unpleasantly, and put out a hand to check her as she rose and would have rung for the servants who had been sent away.

"One moment, Berenie. Be kind enough to explain what you have taken it upon yourself to imply."

She sunk back into her chair, meeting his eyes scornfully and defiantly.

"The explanation shall rest with you, sir, if you choose to make it. For my part, I have not the curiosity to ask it."

She drew a slip of folded paper from her belt and tossed it disdainfully across the table. He glanced at and recognized it instantly. A note in a sloping feminine hand which he had received upon the previous day, over which he had been disturbed and undecided to an unusual degree. It read:

"Mr. Alfred Trelawney."

"My dear sir: Even you must confess that I have waited with exemplary patience for your return, and settlement to domestic felicity. Now that you are settled, I quite long to witness the joy which must be yours; so pray consider me invited beneath your hospitable roof, and prepare your charming wife to receive me as a guest and friend. I have her assurance of being welcome there given months ago. Expect me to-morrow morning, and fancy what my sensations must be in going as an interloper where I should now be reigning, if not by right at least by might. Once more expect me, and believe me sincerely, JULIET BELL."

He had no need to glance at the contents; they were firmly enough impressed upon his mind. He looked across at his wife instead, unmoved, the bluish tint changing slowly to his natural color.

"If you have read it, you will spare me the request I was about to prefer, that you should make arrangements to receive my friend."

"Do you mean that such a person shall be introduced here, sir?"

"Pray, be moderate, Berenie. The person is in every way eminently respectable. You will receive her and entertain her as you would any other guest. Just one thing more, madam!" His black brows lowered upon her menacingly. "You appear to have been emulating the weakness of Bluebeard's wives, looking for a secret, and it might be well to take warning by their fate."

"You left the note upon your dressing-table openly enough."

"The note is of not the slightest consequence. You will acknowledge that when the lady comes."

"If she comes," was on Berenie's tongue to retort, but her liege lord's glance upon her decided the question. Mr. Trelawney, feeling it would be awkward to explain the identity of the expected visitor with the seamstress Miss Brown, left the fact to speak for itself. The first subject merged into this of her coming was presumed, but that same morning Cecil Bertram received a line where
Bereneice announced, through her husband, that certain changes in her plans would prevent the sittings she had proposed. And Mr. Trelawney, triumphant in thus easily mastering the situation, looked forward to the coming of Miss Bell with less disinclination than he had before experienced.

The carriage containing her rattled up to the door of the mansion at precisely six that afternoon. Her luggage, so slight as to elicit a contemptuous glance from the footman, was taken at once to the apartment awaiting her, but the lady herself was shown into a side reception-room until her involuntary host was apprised of her arrival. He made an appearance without delay and advanced to face her where she was standing, her vail thrown back, her sharp gray eyes coldly regarding him as he came.

"Well," he demanded, "what new freak is this you are possessed of, Juliet? It has pleased me to be compliant this once, but if you think I am to be frightened into doing more, you are very much mistaken. You are apt to find your mistake. If you have anything to say to me say it now, and understand it as my wish that your stay in my house shall be a brief one."

He was so accustomed to treating her slightly in the past that he had lost sight of the change which was in their relations now. His own confident glance was met by one as confident, and he bit his lips sharply as a slight chill smile flitted across her bleak visage.

"How I have overrated your friendship, Alfred, not to say gratitude. I was so sure you would open your house willingly to me, such a great, fine house, too. What immeasurable satisfaction it must give you! And the property, all that you gained through me, how much it must content you!"

There was mockery in the face and tone that cut him to the quick. For once in his life, the Trelawney squire, which had been as a plate of brass before it had received its gilding through her aid, failed him. His black eyes gleamed impotent rage, and his utterance was choked to difficulty.

"Why, in the name of all that is diabolical, did you deceive me? You kept precisely quiet for two years, and it is to your advantage as much as mine to keep quiet still. Why do you come taunting now any more than before?"

"Perhaps because it is so pleasant to know my power, and such a temptation to exercise it. I wonder if you can imagine how pleasant it is for me, the despised tool, the 'goose so gray' that she was cast away, the one-time nurse and housekeeper retired on an annuity of a thousand a year, to have such a hold as I possess upon you, a dweller in 'marble halls,' the envied of all? And you are neither as careless nor contented as you might be, my pretty Alfred. I can see that, though the world may not have detected it, and I doubt if even the wife of your choice has noted the change in you. Are you quite sure that was not a mistake of yours, Alfred? I am half inclined to believe you would feel more secure and better at ease if I were mistress here, instead of your pretty, painted doll. I believe if my messenger had gone to you in the hour before that ceremony in Grace Church, instead of the hour after it, and if I had demanded it, that I should be mistress here instead of her."

He was breathing heavily through his clenched teeth, glowering upon her darkly. They stood there face to face, more like two combatants braced for battle than allies whose union had won a victory. Their warlike aspect dropped as the door swung back and Bereneice appeared upon the threshold, looking from one to the other in cold surprise.

"Miss Brown, you? I understood quite a different person was in waiting."

"Miss Bell," her husband amended, "the guest we were expecting."

"As the latter I hope to claim the welcome you promised the former," smiled Miss Bell, as softly affable as it was possible for her to be. "Of course you are mystified by that whim of mine, Mrs. Trelawney, but your husband will tell you I am one of his oldest and closest friends."

And further than that the explanation for which Bereneice looked was not offered.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE S U R T E L V O I C E.

There was a small, select party to dinner that day, music and conversation and cards in the drawing-room during the evening. Never before had Bereneice, in her role of hostess, been more brilliant and gay. She was dressed in pale pink silk, which took the light wonderfully well, her ornaments fairy roses and pearls—not the bridal pearls, they would have been too marked for this costume, and Mrs. Trelawney had a very correct idea of perfect taste. If she had wanted a striking offset to her style no better could have been presented than in the thin, neutral person of Miss Juliet Belle. Dressed in silk also, one of those thin, rustling, abominable grays, intensely respectable and distastefully plain, the lady looked not her character of "oldest and closest friend," but far more the poor relation or paid dependent, companion, or something of the kind.

The gentlemen present gave her one look and dropped her from all further notice; the ladies gave her suspicious and arrogant glances, and Miss Bell remained sublimely indifferent to either.

"What does it mean, Berry?" asked Mrs. Athol in an aside, during the evening. "How is it that Miss Brown comes out in a new set when here?"

"Precisely what I can't tell you, Edmonia-
I have nothing to do with it, you may be sure. Such a dowdy scarecrow! do you suppose I would set a figure like that in my drawing-room?"

"But I don't understand. Who is she? Half a dozen have been asking me."

"One of Mr. Trelawney's earlier loves, I fancy. I am no more enlightened than you are, my dear, and I really don't care to take the trouble of going to the bottom of the mystery. Either: the seamstress affair was or this is a masquerade, which probably the lovely Miss Bell has her own reasons for undertaking. You look scandalized, Edith, but if I am not inclined to quarrel with the creature's choice of amusement, surely you need not. Here, Mr. Mortimer, answer for your delinquency, sir. You have not been near me for—how many ages is it?"

Mr. Mortimer, one of those pattern young men of society, "well blessed, well dressed, and well caressed," whom passion on earth seems to be fond of to found a fluffy mustache and flirt with every pretty woman who cared for that sort of entertainment, answered the call.

"An immense number, a whole eternity to me, I assure you. You can't imagine how I've languished. Quite lost my appetite: couldn't touch even a fricassee or an omelet for breakfast with the prospect of felicity so close at hand after your invitation broke like a rosy gleam of hope upon my dulled horizon."

"I do hope a champagne supper over night had nothing to do with it. You masquerades are such fickle beings that it is a wonder we are ever persuaded to believe you at all."

"Oh, now, 'pon honor, you know! You ought to be kinder to the lot of us who have been made to feel what"

"Endless torments dwell about them, too, and too wonderful, and too about them."

"That means the little we can have after loving and losing, the poor comfort of seeing what is our loss another's gain. That makes me think of poor Bertram now, who I see hasn't the luxury of that pain on the present occasion."

"Has he gone into retirement? Being won to misanthropy, I presume, by that terrible ogerish friend of his, though he doesn't refuse to favor us." Mrs. Trelawney shot anything but a friendly glance at Goldwood, on the opposite side of the room.

"Something of the kind, and who can blame him? Not I, who have felt the pangs—but of that no more. Bertram has a different way of taking disappointment, that is all. So cut up as he was when he got your message this morning. I had just dropped into Goldwood's atelier, and found him there superintending the removal of his effects. Really, I don't know just how much you are responsible for in the way of reckless extravagance on the part of that enthusiastic youth. For the opening of a studio of his own I can vouch, and a stock of extra colors laid in; fancy his despair over the 'disarrangement of your plans, which would not permit,' etc., etc. I'm not selfish, Mrs. Trelawney; I'm quite willing to have my misery shared by another; but when that other falls from favor and from grace, my heart bleeds for him."

The light badinage went on, but while "nonsense light as air" fell from her red lips, her rebellion of the morning was stirring again. She had received what she very bitterly resented, an interference with her own sweet will. Her husband was a jealous tyrant. If she began by being brought to time for small provocation as that, how was she to know what other preposterous actions he would be making next? He didn't make particular love to her himself—that goodness!—and people nowadays expected to stop such silly twaddle between themselves. Simple as they were married, but it was ridiculous for him to deprive her of such entertainment as she might get out of the masculine world at large. To do her justice, her somewhat giddy brain never took Cecil's danger into consideration. Any very great depth of feeling was beyond her comprehension; deeply as she could like any one she liked him, but a fine establishment and good living and plenty of gayety were the first things in her existence, and these she had to gain by taking the less pleasant fixture of a husband along. In being bought like a Circassian slave—the simile was hardly appropriate, insomuch as her voice had concluded the barter—she had never bargained to be treated as one. She would not submit to it; if one way would not answer to gain her point, another should. She was not even premitted to act upon his expectations of her, and she very assuredly would not be driven."

And as to demonstrate her determination, Mrs. Trelawney flirted most desperately with every available masculine of the party, and toied up the wide staid at an hour past midnight, with the unsatisfactory reaction of so much exertion upon her.

Mr. Trelawney, in no very enviable frame of mind, had shut himself into the library, with a dim light and a smoke-colored bottle for company. There he was gloomier into the shadows as his wife sunk into the easiest chair in her dressing-room, and submitted herself to the nimble fingers of her maid. The pink silk exchanged for a laced and ruffled undress, her hair brushed in a rippling golden vail over her shoulders, Berenice dismissed the girl and sat looking at the reflection of her own fair face, from which the sparkle had departed. She had the trait of most shallow natures, the love of admiring herself. She didn't want a tap at the door, without moving from her place, supposing some afterthought had caused her maid's return. It opened to Miss Bell coming confi-
dently forward as one who had a perfect right, and seating herself unasked under the cool stare the mistress of the mansion brought to bear upon her.

"Your maid said you had not retired yet, Mrs. Trelawney, and I yielded to the temptation of asking for a seldom little chat. So long since we have seen each other, and you were always very friendly, though we didn't meet then on such equal ground as now. You can't think what pleasure it gives me to remember your kind treatment of them, now that we are to be better acquainted still.

"Really, I haven't the inclination to think of it, Miss Bell, if that is what you choose to be called, and I am not in the habit of receiving guests in my dressing-room after one o'clock at night."

"Time and matrimony are apt to change one's habits, I suppose. I have had the pleasure of sharing your dressing-room at quite an earlier hour than this, if you remember. You were both condescending and confidential then, and though I'm past the age of romance myself, I can appreciate all those frank divulgences of yours. How very happy you must be with all gained you were expecting then! I suppose you find your new position quite as pleasant as you did expect, Mrs. Trelawney?"

"Your memory is so good, you should be assured of it. I certainly have all I counted on then, unless I might except the choice of my company."

Miss Bell was quite impervious to the point.

"Two people bound to live together can't always expect to be agreeable. One will weary of one's husband; I have always found it the case under my observation. And you had none of the school-girl sentiment to wear off. No one can know better than I that Mr. Trelawney is no more exempt from faults than other men. I could have told you that, beforehand, and it sometimes is well to take the man into consideration along with the rest. Not that I suppose it would have made any difference in your case."

"Of course it would not. I have some intention of retiring, Miss Bell, but if you prefer my dressing room to your own apartment, you are at liberty to remain here. Such an old friend of Mr. Trelawney may be pardoned any impertinence."

"Must I beg that the fact may not prevent our being friends? A judicious third party is invaluable sometimes, and nothing would give me greater pleasure than to be permitted to serve you. You don't ask me anything regarding my previous knowledge of your husband, and it is but natural you should have some curiosity."

"I assure you I haven't the slightest. My husband is an odious brute, and if your friend will promise you to carry him, that opinion from me, I have not an objection to offer."

Mrs. Trelawney swept up from her chair scornfully. Miss Bell, her wintry smile just touching her face, put out her hand to check her, and leaning forward, spoke swiftly and earnestly.

"Won't you let me come to an understanding with you Mrs. Trelawney? There is no love lost between your husband and you, certainly none between him and me. He treated me detestably once. I don't mind telling you that he made a fool of me, and of all fools there's none like an old fool, you know. I admit to being old enough to have known better, but for my purpose of his own he made believe he meant to marry me; and afterward, besides jilting, taunted me shamefully. I am woman enough to want some revenge on him. Nothing would suit me better than to give him back like for like, than to play upon his credulity underhand, and blacken the face of his jealous tyrant if you let him. If you care to keep your independence and have your own way in spite of him, I both can and will be of use to you."

Berenciee checked at her first step, hearing the beginning haughtily, clasped her white hand to her breast, and stood back of the chair she had occupied and looked distastefully and searchingly into Miss Bell's face as she progressed. In her capacity of seamstress she had not given her a thought beyond her work; as the self-invited guest she had disliked her cordially, and that dislike fluttered in a warning not to trust her too far. But Berenciee had also known better, but for my purpose of his own he made believe he meant to marry me. I am afraid he has a horrible temper; I feel in my marrow that it's as much as my life is worth on the chance of his discovering I haven't regarded him. I don't know; if he hadn't made himself so very officious and disagreeable I would be tempted to give up my purpose yet."
CHAPTER IX.

"THERE IS A SPOT!"

Dreamer than ever the old house outing Rockpoint stood against the gray November sky. All the tints there were gray, reaches of marshes fading into the flat of the sea gray in the misty heavy atmosphere, even the deadened leaves yet clinging to the parent stems that elsewhere had a Rembrandt tint of red or brown among them were of one uniform dullness.

It was not a cheering scene, and a foot-passenger pursuing his way leisurely over the road which led out from the town paused to take it all in at a glance. The grim, dark, ugly outlines of the house lost at the base in the tangle surrounding it, the weather stained wall crumbling into decay but serving yet to shut the little gloomy world within from the great gloomy world without. The sun struggled behind the mist but only succeeded in marking his majestic position by an unblinking, yellowish glimmer half-way down the west.

"The very ideal of a haunted house," soliloquized the "solitary traveler," "if only ghosts walked and fetters clanked and blue flames danced in this prosaic age. Faith, but it's the dullest sort of a lady's casket to show off in a kid-glove. It might be, though it might be under some 'prodigious ban!' and yet it is known that flesh and blood instead of unearthly shapes inhabit it; it is even probable that the common routine of sleeping and waking and eating goes on within those walls. No state is proof against adversity, and for opposite even that relic of darker ages can be penetrated by prosperous innovation. A world of ups and downs this, and there is food for speculation in the action of the see-saw that is bringing one to yonder Castle of Despond?"

With a shrug of his shoulders he moved heavily on, breaking into a trot in a far-reaching tender voice that rang over the dead flat most incongruously. A shabby man in rusty black was this lone traveler. A man with a devil-may-care recklessness about him, a swaggering bravado manifesting itself in his swing and look. In the days of Robin Hood and his "merrie men" this man would have been an outlaw through sheer deviltry and lawlessness; as it was he bore the stamp of the well-to-do vagabond. Five minutes' walk brought him to the one solid gate in the firmest part of the wall. It was locked; it was kept always locked, indeed. If it had borne an inscription it should have been "Thus far shalt thou come and no further."

Of visitors Miss Camilla Brand had none, and those necessary evils, the butcher, the baker, and the grocer's boy, never came beyond this ungracious barrier and old Esther's gate, waiting form. The gate was tall and spiked at the top, the heavy posts a good eight feet high. The stranger knocking loudly upon it with the cane he carried, fell back and eyed it leisurely while he waited. Minutes passed and no answer came; all the racket he might make there was not apt to reach the inmates of the house, as he apparently concluded, for he did not repeat his summons.

"Not a hospitable set, I take it," he mused. "Well, that for common politeness sake, and now for a less ceremonious way of gaining entrance."

An ordinary man would have found the barrier difficult to scale, but the stranger drew back a pace, with a run and spring swung himself to the top, avoiding the spikes and dropping to the other side nimbly as a squirrel. It was the simplest of feats to him, with supple joints and gymnastic training.

Esther was knitting before the kitchen fire, with no sound for a long hour in the room except the steady clicking of her needles, and the occasional cracking of the sticks as they burned. Miss Brand was taking her afternoon doze in her chamber above, Madelon was somewhere out in the desolate prison-yard.

Suddenly a thunderous knocking fell upon the door, continued blows that threatened the demolishment of a panel if not speedily answered.

"As well be positive about it," the shabby stranger said to himself as he applied his stick in that unqualified summons. "That might raise the dead I fancy; the living hereabouts must be precisely blessed to withstand it long."

The door was opened so suddenly in the midst of the belaborment he was giving it, he was precipitated forward almost into the very arms of Esther, but adroitly changed the involuntary motion into the profoundest salaam.

"Who may you be that you should bring the house down about our ears in this way?" she asked, sharply.

"I haven't the convenience of a card about me unfortunately, but you'll oblige me very much by taking in my name, George Fitz-George, if you please. I wish to see Miss Trelawney."

"The door was all but violently slammed in his face, but Mr. George Fitz-George skilfully inserted a leg into the aperture, following it by a shoulder and in that agreeable position put forth a protest.

"See here now, my lovely creature! never had one of your gentle sex treat me quite so jammingly before, 'pon my word. If you wouldn't squeeze so tight by just a morsel—that's better, thank you. Now if you'll be so kind as to deliver my message—"

"No such person here," cut in Esther, shortly.

"With the very greatest consideration for so fair a lady's word I chance to know bet-
ter. See here, my good woman! A decided change came into Mr. Fitz-George's manner which, sorely against the woman's will, made her hear and heed him. "I have come for the purpose of making some inquiries regarding Miss Tretheway; if the result be as I anticipate, to make known a possibly surprising piece of good fortune. Will you oblige me by taking my message to either the young lady herself or Miss Camilla Brand."

"My mistress sees no one," she demurred, hesitatingly. "Tell your business to me if you like, and I'll know better what to try to do for you." In her second's indecision Esther gave way, and the visitor with a turn of his shoulder set against the door forced himself bodily past her into the long dim hall.

"I'll not trouble you for anything further than a hint of where I may find Miss Brand," he said, coolly. "Come, just look sharp, will you; and--" If you will you will, I suppose," grumbled the woman, sourly. "You aren't apt to get much good from it I tell you."

"Some one else may, however. How would it be if I were to tell you that there is a fortune in the affair, the Tretheway fortune if you ever heard of that."

"I spoke that name before, Mr. Fritz-Gregor."

"Fitz-George, ma'am."

"It hasn't been mentioned under this roof for a matter of years and years. It won't gain you anything in the way of welcome to bring it up now; I tell you it must not be brought up before my mistress. I'll take your message to her but there isn't the chance of you seeing her any the more. Go in there and wait." She pushed open the door and then went slowly up the winding stair.

Miss Brand sat in her chair before a smoldering fire in the chamber she very rarely left, a morbid invalid who had been doing penance for seventeen long years by shutting herself away from the world, by glooming her surroundings as her life was gloomed, and forever brooding over that dark past. She spoke without looking around.

"You haven't been letting any one in again, Esther, don't tell me so. Haven't I suffered enough to be left in peace? I don't want to look upon any human face but yours. I depend upon you to see to it."

"I don't let you be annoyed when I can help, Miss Brand. I wouldn't disturb you now but there's a person who has forced his way in below and insists on seeing you. Wait for a minute, mistress. I think you had better hear what he has to say. I think it is something which will be for the benefit of Madelon."

"Don't talk to me of her! Is it not enough that my roof covers her, that I have sheltered and protected her? Let me forget her further than that, if I can. Keep her and every one away. I will see no one."

"You will see me, Miss Brand," insinuated a voice. "Sorry to intrude, I assure you, against any lady's will; but necessity knows no law, and business is business. Truth to tell if it were pleasure I'd go a different way for it."

"Send the man away, Esther," interrupted Miss Brand, turning her white face and hollow eyes upon him for an instant.

"There's no accounting for tastes," he proceeded, discursively ignoring the interruption, "but if this style of living funeral is your fancy for amusement, ma'am, it's not so very wonder the place has picked up a bad name. And such a waste of dramatic force too! Without flattery, you would make such a sleep-walking Lady Macbeth as the boards have seldom seen, provided that's an expression at will. Nothing could go better with--out, damned spot! out, I say! and again the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand! and yet, all this has nothing to do with Tretheway."

Mr. George Fitz-George cast a disappointing eye about the black-draped room, and struck a position to declaim his latter clause.

"Send the man away, Esther," Miss Brand had murmured almost inaudibly again, but with that change to a chills-lace tone of quick horror sprung into her eyes as they were dropped involuntarily to her own wasted hands. Then she threw up her arms with a gurgling, terrified cry.

That name, those words! Oh, God of Heaven! The fierce convulsion of her features was terrible to behold.

"I hope I didn't come it too strong," thought Mr. Fitz-George a little remorsefully. "Hope the old lady isn't subject to fits or anything of that kind; might make a hitch in this affair on hand if she was to collapse--end her career on this mundane stage at this present moment."

"Now are you satisfied with what you've done?" demanded Esther, harshly. "I knew it would be so--I knew it."

"I see; troubled with nerves, poor creature! She wouldn't make a Lady Macbeth, after all. Bring her round, my beauty, and I'll go below and wait. I think she'll see me yet."

Nineteen years before, the sisters Camilla and Madelon Brand had lived together in this old house by the sea. I have described Camilla Brand as time had left her changed. Even then, with the first flush of youth yet upon her, she had been unlike other girls. She was not beautiful; she had a moody, strong and somewhat masculine face; she was tall, raw-boned, ungraceful; and she felt all her lack of outward attractions in her deep, morbid nature with an intensity made more menacing by her suspection. One year younger, differed from her as calm, rosy
morning differs from tempestuous midnight. She was a creature of dimples and smiles, open-hearted and all convivial, and for this her sister hated her. A hate which, lying dormant for years, or only feebly and occasionally stirring, blazed into a consuming passion, nineteen years before.

It is a story old as the hills, pitiful and sorrowful and sinful.

A lover came to Madelon, young, fair, and debonair; an impetuous, romantic, dreaming lover, who saw nothing but sunshine in the world; whose happy confidence speeded his wooing; who gained her promise and found heaven in her presence as only a dreamer might do.

Seeing and knowing it, the dark, secretive spirit of Camilla Brand suffered torments. This lover of her sister was as a young god to her sight; she loved him with a misguided fervor, a misery thrown back to feed upon itself, while her pride hid her secret from all but one. That one was Esther, who had been the child of a broken home; later, when they were doubt, orphaned, abandoned, friendless, or in one. Strangely, Camilla had been her favorite. She had been jealous of the younger sister's beauty, of the notice and favors lavished upon her while the elder was slighted or unobserved.

The bridal day was set; the bridal robe was ready; the bridegroom came down to claim the bride. And, at the last moment, the bride was missing. Wonder and conjecture and suspense were all set at rest soon. Madelon had repented of her bargain; she had found another who suited her better.

"Ower the border and awa' W'll Jock o' Hazardean."

Her Jock was young Miles Trelawney, a Lara-looking man, the handsomest, wildest, and most desperate of manhood at twenty-seven that injudicious indulgence in boyhood ever spoiled, that the maddest could sink him and folly ever ruined. He had plunged into his marriage unhappily as he did everything. Old Miles, the father, who had forgiven him everything up to that, refused to forgive this latest folly. His son he received again on stated terms; the young, pretty and helpless bride he would neither see nor have mentioned in his hearing. Young Trelawney was not willing to quite cut loose from his father's favor; what passing tenderness he had for Madelon was not sufficient to break one link in the chain of evil habit with which he had bound himself. He found her a quiet lodging; for a few months was, by turns, attentive and forgetful; next, with him one course was inevitable—passion, safety, disgust.

At last one day Madelon found herself shelterless in the streets. Sick and footsore and suffering she found her way back to the old home. It was not closed against her. Deadly bitter was the elder sister through all. A blow struck at her own life would not have steadied as did that fatal one which the only man she ever loved, who had never once thought of her in return. He faded from her knowledge when Madelon was lost to him; in all the time since he had never faded from her heart.

In this cold refuge, then, the wanderer crept, and here, not a week later, when Miles Trelawney followed her. The finale, long withheld, had come at last; his father had utterly repudiated so disreputable a son, and upon Madelon's submissive head the fury of the latter fell. To his marriage with her he attributed the well-deserved result of his own evil course.

Unasked he installed himself at the house. He carried his orgies into it; he abused his wife, and treated Camilla with indifferent civility or open contempt.

The latter never lifted her hand in trying to make peace or spare the wretched wife. As she had made her bed she must lie in it, she said bitterly. But she found the heart of revenging herself upon the miserable wretch; she reproached and taunted and maddened him in a hundred ways. One night he came rushing into the presence of the two, disheveled, wild with drink, with a devil that had long looked out of his eyes there at his height. Camilla stood a volley of vituperation from his tongue, and flung back her retort as bitterly.

"Visit your ruin upon yourself and upon yonder poor cowardly creature of your will," she said. "Miserable dependents upon my bounty, you had better both be dead than the living disgrace you are to me." I wish you were, from my heart I wish you were.

He swore an oath too terrible to write, as he shouted, "You shall have your wish." A wicked-looking blade flashed in his hand, she saw him with his throat bare and a deep broad gash in it fall forward at her feet; his life-blood spurted in great accusing stains upon her garments.

That night little Madelon came into the world, and suffering Madelon passed out, and from that moment began the expiation of Camilla Brand.

Had Mr. George Fitz-George known the whole story he could not have chosen words better suited to his purpose. An hour passed during which he aired his impatience and toasted his heels in the bare room below. Then Esther appeared.

"She'll see you now, and see you to being more careful another time. She'll die in some such spell as that yet. Follow! Miss Brand and sit in her chair as before. Her eyes on the door dwelt upon him as he entered.

"You had something to say regarding my niece who is known as Madelon Brand," she said quietly and at once. "What is it?"

With a little stumbling at being brought
so immediately to time, Mr. Fitz-George delivered himself of his mission. If this Madeleon was the granddaughter of old Miles Trelawney there was a fortune waiting to be proved to her.

"If the money is to come it can't be helped, I suppose," said Miss Brand, coldly.

"It is through papers as belonged to Madeleon's father."

"Upon my life," reflected the messenger, "unless the girl has the spirit to slip that sphinx's thumb the fortune might as well go to the bottom of the sea."

CHAPTER X.

THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM.

ERNEST GOLDWOOD, in some unusual perturbation, walked up and down the Athol drawing-room. He had taken the subject of Bertram's welfare very deeply to heart. As had been seen, he had warm hopes of the young man; he had a sincere affection for him; he saw much of himself as he had been at Bertram's age in the boy, and he would have spared him if he might the result which must come sooner or later of this folly which had possession of him.

"I've set myself the task of bringing him to his senses by some means, and I'll not give up till I accomplish it," said Mr. Goldwood to himself, "though such foolhardiness is enough to provoke a saint, which I don't lay any claim to being. Like those fellows of old who comforted themselves by putting on hair-cloth shirts, I daresay he has some idea of purifying the immortal flame by scouring the flesh."

Mrs. Athol, not given to the delays which ladies of fashion so generally claim as their prerogative, came in immediately on receiving his name. He turned with his usual placidity, smoothing the anxiety out of his face.

"At the risk of being considered an unwarranted meddler, I have come to make an appeal to you," he said, their first greetings over. "You may guess something of its nature when I tell you it regards Bertram. I am solicitous about my friend, Mrs. Athol. He is one of those intense and romantic natures that overshadows our plainer common sense and is hardly to be judged by rules that would apply to us."

Mrs. Athol inclined her head with a look mingling surprise and inquiry.

"You know how the boy was infatuated with your sister; possibly you may know that he is still, he has infatuated, notwithstanding the fact that she has chosen and settled for herself. To tell the plain truth, the fault is more hers than his. You'll pardon me for saying that she has never tried to discourage him, that she has put forward her efforts to win him back when, left to himself, he might have broken from the influence which she exerted over him."

A little color swept into Mrs. Athol's cheek.

"Berenice is young; she is fond of admiration, but she would never be guilty of any impropriety, Mr. Goldwood."

"All the worse for him, madam. Cecil has the old spirit of chivalry in him; she is sacred as the angles in his sight, and while his sighs are all over a dream that is ended, he is wasting his talents and doing an uncommon quantity of needless penance.

"Will you kindly tell me what I may be able to do, Mr. Goldwood? Berenice may be thoughtless, but I am sure you do her injustice in supposing she would wilfully be the cause of suffering to your friend."

"Unfortunately, that is what I have to complain of. Did you know she is sitting to him for her portrait—that, too, I have reason to believe, in direct opposition to the wishes of her husband, and without his knowledge. If I were you and I confessed to you that I tried to stop the matter when I first heard of it. I remonstrated with Cecil, with Mrs. Trelawney herself, and when I failed with both, gave the lady's husband an inkling of the state of affairs. It was a piece of unwarrantable interference on my part, but you understand my excuse for it. Mr. Trelawney sent a note to my friend annuling the arrangement previously made by his wife, and I supposed all ended there. I have just learned, quite accidentally, that the subject revived almost immediately, and that the portrait is now being painted sub rosa by Mrs. Trelawney's desire. Bertram is less by supposing is perceivable you think. He has no idea that Mr. Trelawney does him the honor of being inordinately jealous, and that this matter of the picture is under forbidden bans. I haven't an idea what the end will be when the facts come to light, but something unpleasant in the matrimonial hemispheres. I am afraid that I can have influence with your sister, Mrs. Athol, it is you. I confess I have no sympathy for her myself; I came to plead through my liking for Bertram, but for her sake, too, it may be well to dissuade her from carrying on this deception of her husband, which I am sure he will not readily forgive."

Mrs. Athol heard him silently. She was a high-toned woman, but whatever mortification she may have experienced at having her sister's shallow vanity thus exposed and denounced, it was not made apparent. She sat lost in thought for a moment before she spoke:

"You say your friend is not aware of Mr. Trelawney's objection. If I have not mistaken him, he would not act in the face of it, I think it more than probable that the opposition brought to bear against Berenice in what has appeared a trivial matter to her has led to her persistence in it. Why not tell Mr. Bertram the truth as it stands, and trust to his generosity to discontinue the portrait?"
"I told you I had remonstrated with him

"But not to spare her unpleasant conse-
quenccs. Trust me, that will make all the
difference in the world to him. Now that this
subject has been broached between us, Mr. Goldwood, I shall offer the portrait
more—something I scarcely know how to
put. You have hopes of your friend's genius,
and I have thought if he had the advantage
open to other young men—say if he could go
to Europe, to Germany, Italy and France for
a couple of years or more, the benefit might
be inestimable to him. Could he be induced
to do it if friends interested would defray the
expense of his travel—advance it to be repaid
when it shall suit his own convenience?"

He understood her—the wish to repair in
some measure what he had suffered at her
sister's hands.

"He has the pride of a nabob on a beggar's
patience, a pride innocuous as the hills when
he chooses. It would be the very thing for
him, the making of him, but there's no an-
swering for what foolish scruples he may
take into his head. If it can be done you
shall not be taxed with the expense."

"But, I ask it as a pleasure, a favor to me. Remember, it's your

"I do believe you are right. A woman's
head is the cleverest. I broke out on him
for his folly and tried to reason him from
standing in his own light, as though any one
ever did take good advice kindly. I will act
on your hint without delay."

"If you will permit, I will order the carri-
age and you shall accompany me to call
upon Mr. Bertram."

"Most gladly, Mrs. Athol."

At the very hour these two were planning
most generously to spare them any ill conse-
quence of that unlucky enterprise, Cecil and
Berencie were drinking their cup of pleasure
down. "Tis very honest business, "The happy
is a dangerous thing," says my Lord Sterling,
and never was a walker upon the verge of a
moral precipice more unconscious of his
danger than Cecil Bertram then. This hour
was his, into it he was intent upon pressing
all that would be lost to him in all time to
come.

Next morning after the understanding in
Mrs. Trelawney's dressing-room, after the
subtle prompting of Miss Bell taking ready
effect had been strengthened into a resolve in
Berencie's mind, the two ladies drove out
together. "We were done at all, twere bet-
ter be quickly done," Opportunity favored the
rebellion which was brewing. In an old cur-
iosity-shop of prints and paintings and man-
uscripts and books out of date, perhaps not
visited purely by accident, they chanced
upon their artist, with pale cheeks and great
 Gloomy eyes brightening at sight of the cir-
cum, fair face smiling surprise and pleasure
at the meeting.

"Cecill what a happy chance," said Mrs.
Trelawney, touching his hand with her little
glove, thrilling fingers. "What you must
think of me, and what you are to think still.
That I am the most fickle and changeable
creature in the world, I suppose. Will you
lose all patience with me if I tell you I have
done away with the portraits of other plans?
and if you are inclined to be obliging still
our compact shall be considered never
broken?"

"Even the assurance which is so unexpect-
ed a pleasure to me shall not prevent me from
refuting that charge as applied to yourself—
fickle, changeable. Is it not a lady's prerog-
ative never to know her own mind?"

"You growing sarcastic, Cecil! Ah, if we
could all be true to our minds as we know
them." The softened, saddened tone, the
upward appealing glance, spoke volumes. A
flush wavered over his face, but he never
took advantage of such moments by words,
and Berencie half turned from him as though
she would have recalled her own words if she
could.

The color went out of her cheeks, the
breath was caught in a gasp upon her lips.
A man was standing near her, his back
turned, studying a cracked and blackened
canvas with a label attached declairing it a
genuine Murillo, and for one terrible, blood-
curdling moment, she thought she beheld
her husband's back. Then the unconscious
figure changed position, her color came back
and she breathed again at finding him a per-
fet stranger.

From a window Mr. Trelawney witnessed
the carriage return, saw his wife and Miss
Bell descend and enter the mansion in the
most amicable manner imaginable. Beren-
iece's brilliant cheeks and gay laugh drew a
partly wondering, partly suspicious glance
from him.

"I am pleased to see you have so well
reconciled yourself to your guest," he remark-
ed to her, though his look was any thing but

"Such an old and close friend of yours,
Mr. Trelawney, must receive due considera-
tion. After all, she is a good, clever creature,
Brown or Bell."

The concession was rather gratifying to
the gentleman.

"She has concluded it would be no use to
make a muss; by all means her wisest plan," thought he.

"Such a lovely woman; such a dutiful
and considerate wife," spoke Miss Bell, gild-
ing to his elbow as Berencie moved away.
"Of all gems in the mortal diadem there is
none like wifely obedience."

That sneer was the first approach of a
revelation to him. He kept his senses more
apparently dull, more readily alert for it in
the week which followed. Every morning
the two ladies drove out together; every
morning found Berencie punctual in giving
an hour to the sitting; every morning found
Cecil watching for her coming, restless, finding that pleasure which was a pain in her presence, living on the remembrance of her words and looks during the remainder of the day.

Very little was said during these golden hours. Berenice was having what she had risked much to have, her own way; Bertram was content to look upon her and to see her other self growing under his hand; Miss Bell, sometimes present, as often finding occupation in runnacking the contents of shops in the vicinity, sharp as she was, under, she said, pausing in her art of being deaf and dumb when occasion demanded.

That particular morning she had made her apology and taken herself out of the way. As she put her foot in the street she cast one scrutinizing glance at a hack drawn close to the curb, and that wintry smile made her back face bleaker as she dropped her veil and walked away. That hack had followed the carriage over the devious route which Berenice's caution never neglected to take, and she knew it.

Cecil Bertram's studio was a very different affair from that of his friend, Goldwood; a bare room in a fourth story, the neighborhood quite respectable and very obscure. He was painting busily in more than his usual silence. Berenice, in a chair, her golden hair falling in loose curls, a royal purple scarf drawn about her white shoulders, watched him beneath half-drooping lids.

"What a hurry you are in to have it done," she said, pausing. "At that unconscionable rate how soon do you propose to rid yourself of me?"

He dropped his brush and looked lovingly, not at her but at his work, not answering her question but speaking from the thought which had been with him at the moment.

"If I could paint like that always I would not despair of fame. I never shall again."

"Dear me, why not, silly Cecil?"

The blue eyes opened upon him roundly and wonderfully, as though she did not fully understand and delight in the reason.

"Because I shall never have the chance of painting another—Mrs. Trelawney." He set his lips at the name, and Berenice pouted at having the compliment end by that assurance of his never forgetting her changed position.

"Of course it's very fortunate that he does remember," she said to herself. "I'd have to check him at once if he was anything but naturally kind."

"He could only talk sentiment and turn speeches like Gustave Mortimer now, but this boy is so ridiculously earnest and—what's that?"

That was a rap upon the door followed by its immediate opening and the entrance of Mrs. Athol attended by Goldwood. "Mr. Athol!" Edmonia! You look fagged out, and no wonder after those four flights of stairs. I'm just in position; you'll par-
THE MADDEST MARRIAGE EVER WAS.

spoke his name apprehensively. "Henry! something is the matter. You are ill; you look deathly. What is the matter?"

"Nothing, Edmonia—at least nothing ailing me. I am over-fatigued, worried, that is all. You were saying something of Berenice, and I have just come from seeing Trelawney. I got the impression of something being amiss between them, but no clear understanding what. Go on with what you meant to say."

He placed a chair for her, but as she remained standing, put his hands upon its back with more dependence on its support than she at that moment observed.

Berenice is in fault; I am forced to admit that, from the first. I cannot be hard with her, remembering what her youth was, what the one end and aim of both her life and mine was as it was taught; but Mr. Trelawney is less likely to be merciful in his judgment."

She told him then, briefly as she could, of Cecil, and of the second one which had taken place in the studio. Her first intimation of Trelawney’s presence had been the sight of him in his awful white wordless rage as he tore his knife through the canvas of the portrait, his eyes fixed in blazing menace upon his wife, shrieking and fainting away upon the spot. He had not spoken one word, he had turned his face full of fierce threatening upon Cecil; who stood bewildered, stunned for the brief instant it required for this to pass, had raised his hand still clutching the knife and hurled it with a force which buried the blade in the floor at the artist’s feet. Then he had rushed from among them abruptly as he came.

Berenice had regained consciousness to relapse into a deplorable state of hysterical weakness.

"Has he gone?" she asked, wildly clinging to her sister’s arm. "Oh, such terrible events! He will murder me, I know he will. He will murder me and Cecil too. Don’t let him, don’t let him!"

She had been so terrified, so wholly unreasonable and unmanageable that Mrs. Athol had her carried down to her own carriage and had driven her home. Her terror of meeting her husband was quite as exaggerated still. Mrs. Athol herself was apprehensive and uncertain how to act. She could not justify herself in coming so far between husband and wife as to sanction Berenice’s remaining there; her sister had been the offending party, and it was but right she should make an advance to a reconciliation, should explain away such misapprehension as her husband must entertain. But to no such course would Berenice be persuaded to listen. Under the circumstances what was to be done?

"Simply wait," said Mr. Athol. "I told you I had been to see Mr. Trelawney, Edmonia. There is even a worse matter on hand than this you have been telling me—if worse can be—worse for her and for all of us. Trelawney has lost every cent of his property; he never had any right to it, it seems. A later will has been brought forward than the one which gave him possession—an authentic one beyond question?"

For one moment Mrs. Athol looked straight before her, into his face, but without seeing him, blindly, blankly.

"That will surely end it; Berenice must stay with us," she said, infinite pity and tenderness drawing in her eyes. "Poor Berry—poor, poor Berry!" That pitying sigh was not for the departed wealth; it was for the irremediable mistake her willful sister had made, for the weak, selfish spirit that had sold itself, that was now to find the worthlessness of the bargain; but it seemed the first to the man, haggard, worn, and old, eagerly and mournfully watching her.

His head dropped forward on his breast, the light shone down upon his gray hairs, seeming to have grown grayer in these last few hours, a groan fell from his quivering lips.

"Henry, Henry! you have not told me all. There is something more—something more terrible still. Don’t keep it from me."

"How can I tell you, how can I bear to destroy all the happiness of your life?"

She was instantly calm, instantly prepared for what was to come.

"It is not simply that Trelawney must give up everything. We have been engaged together in enterprises on Wall street. I endorsed for him freely; all would have been perfectly safe but for this which takes the bulk of capital at the last critical moment, and now—" He groaned again, putting a trembling hand before his eyes.

"What is the worst you have to expect now, Henry?"

He uncovered his face to her, gray and despairing, and set with a noble pride appearing in it for the instant.

"Ruin to myself only. At the worst no man will be defrauded of one penny through me. I could bear it without a murmur, but you—I can’t hope you will ever pardon me."

"I pardon you!"

"For ever risking all, for leaving you unprovided for in an emergency like this. How can you endure to give up high life and fine living? I am too old and broken a man to redeem what I shall lose. What comfort will you have when all is gone that ever linked your life with mine?" He was shrinking back from her, not daring to look at her. From fear of the reproach of him, the self-pity he thought must be upon her face.

"Henry!" In all his life he had never heard his name so tenderly, pleadingly uttered. Wonderingly, he looked, wonderingly saw the passionate, joyful, tearful change come upon the still familiar face. The next instant she threw herself on her knees before
him, clasping his hand, beseeching it with those gushing tears. He was moved, distressed immeasurably.

"Edmonia, rise, I beg, I entreat you. You kneeling to me—to me who can be nothing but an object of aversion and reproach to your sight."

"To you, my husband. Let me kneel—I should while I confess all my pride and wickedness. You, the noblest of men, to think only of me now when I have deserved so much less of you."

"Not to me; there is One to whom we kneel who shall know our hearts." She let him raise her then, let his arm encircle her, and dropping her head to his shoulder, made her confession there.

"I have never deserved so much from you, Henry. I have been proud, cold, haughty, unmindful of you; I have never shown heart for any thing but the hollow vanities of the world. I don't need to remonstrate with you as to your early life was, what my teachings were. People said I married you for your money; you believed it, so did Berenice, and I determined to live as I had been judged. You had heard of another lover I had, poor and young; you urged upon me not to choose hastily; you did not even claim the promise of love from me; you always believed that in my heart I had cared most for him. If it had been so I never would have wedded you. All those years we have lived together I have hidden my love for you as though it had been a crime; I have put my own happiness from me. I do believe woman never lived such a life before."

"My wife, my wife!" was all he could murmur, a happiness more beautiful to her eyes than any youth coming into his aged, wearied face, blotting out all the care and gloom and despair which had been there.

Truly, such an incident in human life is remembered with more affection, with more feeling beneath one roof for years, "respectably as man and wife," so near in heart and so widely separated in their manner of thought and life, could bliss the reverse which revealed them to each other, could and did utterly forget for the time everything but the peace and understanding gained.

Two hours went by. An ormolu clock in Berenice's chamber had just struck eight silver chimes. Berenice herself had gone through many degrees of injured reflection in that time. She had been all but frightened out of her life; she turned cold with dread to think of that scene of the morning even now; she was horribly afraid; to herself she was a persecuted martyr, and Edmonia, who had never failed before in provoking indulgent to her lightest whims, had turned against her. Edmonia had advised a most repugnant course, had urged her to make a speedy apology and attempt at peace with her husband, and now Edmonia had apparently forgotten, certainly neglected her for two full hours. She was quite alone. Corinne, who should have been in attendance, was finding more agreeable recreation in chattering to the footman below stairs. All in all, Berenice felt herself dreadfully aggrieved.

She was lying on a couch drawn before an open fire, for the Athol mansion clung to the old-fashioned comfort of open fires here and there. She was really wretchedly ill and unnerved; the dressing-robe she wore, borrowed from her sister, scarcely whiter than her cheeks, deep-blue rings under her eyes, very miserably different from the radiant semblance she had presented that morning.

The door opened and closed, and she lifted her languid eyes to see a gray veiled shape turn the key in the lock and then flit forward, noiseless as any ghost. The vail was thrown back and Miss Bell stood beside her, an expression on her gray face and in her gray eyes which struck Berenice most unpleasantly.

"Have you seen him—Mr. Trelawney?" she asked, quickly and fearfully. "Oh, the monster! the horrible, cruel, murderous wretch! If you knew what took place this morning, Miss Bell, you must know what I have suffered since.""I do know," answered Miss Bell, quietly helping herself to a chair. "I learned it after you had left the studio, and I have seen your husband—the monster! the horrible, cruel, murderous wretch!"

"Why do you look at me so strangely?" cried Berenice, sharply, with an inclination toward the hysterical, yet held back by those cold yet mocking eyes. "He is very furious, awfully enraged, I know. I wouldn't see him so again, not for a kingdom. I expected nothing but he should murder me, just then and there, and I am terribly afraid for Corinne. You could not make him how it was, Miss Bell. You might even soften some of his anger."

"I have seen him. What do you suppose he did when I attempted to intercede for you, Mrs. Trelawney? Absolutely turned me out of the house, sent my baggage after me, and shut the door in my face. Think of that, after all I have done for him, all I sacrificed for him. I have the mind to tell you just now that little history more explicitly than I have yet done."

"Don't," groaned Berenice, closing her eyes. "I am too wretched to listen, too miserable to think of any thing."

"I came for the purpose of telling you, Mrs. Trelawney. I am sure you will find it so interesting that you will listen. In the first place, it is something unusual for a circus-actor to come into a fortune of a half million, that fact alone is striking enough to warrant attention. Is it possible that you do not know your husband was a circus-actor once? True, nevertheless. And the pro-
party which he inherited by a will from old Miles Trelawney came to him more through chance of name than real relationship, and by my representations in his behalf. You did not even know of that? See how your husband’s confidence has been withheld from you."

Berence was really listening, though incredulously.

"That same will left a pitiful thousand a year to me, no more than you would lay out on a single party dress, Mrs. Trelawney, and you are not likely to understand how rich it made me. Fancy, if you can, how disappoint- ed I was to find that the old gentleman had changed his mind, made another will cutting out that clause as well as all mention of Alfred. You can appreciate my feeling better by putting yourself in a similar situation, by supposing that other will had turned up now to take every cent of the fortune you married."

"What are you telling me; what do you mean? It is not true!" Miss Bell’s scarcely concealed triumph was anticipating her history. Berence started up on her couch, cheeks and eyes on fire now.

"So true that I kept the will in my possession until very recently; so true that on your wedding-day your husband would have deeded you the fortune away to have secured that will; so true that to see you two cultivate the domestic virtues in a situation most calculated to call them forth, I have renounced my legacy; so true that at this very moment key and seal are set on your palace and all it contains. Don’t go off for another minute, Mrs. Trelawney; I want to congratul- ate you on your prospect. And, one thing more, don’t be too apprehensive of your hus- band’s rage. He won’t murder you; he isn’t the kind of man to take one’s life when he can lengthen out one’s torture. I would have managed him if I had married him, but you didn’t take that chance.

Berence, falling back, lost sight of Miss Bell’s face and hearing of Miss Bell’s words—"went off" in the shrieks and convulsions and immoderate mirth of violent hysteria.

Corinne, first upon the spot, found her thus and alone. Miss Bell had glued away again, a gray specter whom no one saw come or go.

In the midst of the confusion which followed a potent presence came upon the scene in Mr. Trelawney.

"I have come for my wife," he announced to Mrs. Athol. "Be kind enough to let me have a word with her alone."

She is too ill to be further excited; too ill to be removed for days, if it should be her wish to go. It will be a kindness to us—Mr. Athol and me—if you will not urge it, Mr. Trelawney."

Mr. Trelawney, however, did urge his first request so decidedly that he gained it at once. What passed in that interview between hus-
"I never wronged you! I have such terrible thoughts. I remember that if you were dead I should be free from you, and I almost wish it sometimes. I can't be grateful for the shelter and the bread you have given me, when I hunger so for the brightness of youth, of which you have robbed me. As a little child I never knew a child's joys, and now I am not like other girls. I see them sometimes happy and gay, and the difference between them and me makes me wicked—frightens me at myself."

"Stop her, Esther. I want to be left alone; take her away with you."

"It is your fault, I am here. This life was terrible when I was dependent upon you, and it is unbearable now. Of what good is money to me? I would rather be a beggar in the streets; I would give the fortune you say is mine, be a beggar, to be some use in the world, and loved by some one."

"This passion broke me into violent sobbing; she flung herself down in the abandon of an untutored, impetuous nature, breaking all bounds of self-control. Great throes shook her; bitter tears forced themselves through her fingers, behind which her face was hidden."

Miss Brand looked at her, some change stealing into her face. Did she detect some of her own dark moodiness here, some of the strong characteristics of her youthful days repeated again?

"What is it she wants?" she questioned of Esther, in a suppressed tone.

"Change," the woman answered, also softly.

"Change," the sobbing girl. "Young blood isn't water. She'll never be contented here, seeing but you and me. I've watched her day by day chafing like that, and other days brooding and still, and looking far away at the sea, as though she'd like to be under it. It can't last so; it isn't right to put on her mother's clothes and bear it. It's all the worse for her, now she knows there's no end of money her own."

"Go on, Esther." The woman had paused, reading her face as if for a sign of her relenting.

"There was another letter thrown over the gate. You read it yesterday, this one for her. I have got it here, and she knows nothing of it yet."

"Tell me what it is." Between her mistress and all outer influences Esther was a medium, and she went on now without reference to the letter, the contents of which she already knew:

"The woman is in Rockpoint, and asks again to be allowed to come here for a time. She says almost word for word as before:"

"'I have no claim upon you, but I trust to your generosity not to refuse me. Remember that the fortune which is now yours until a few days ago was my husband's and mine; I remember that we are left worse than penniless by the change which gives so much to you. I only ask a shelter for a little time until our affairs are settled. I will pay for it in any way I can—as instructress, companion—in any way I can be of use.'"

"She says, further, she will come herself to-morrow if no reply is given. I advise you to let her come, mistress."

"'Not here, Esther; not to have a stranger here.'"

"'If you mean to keep Madelon, it will take more to hold her after this. And it almost seems like owing the woman a refuge.'"

"'Why don't she stay with her husband? Why should she come here at all?'

"'Nobody of what blood he comes. We know nothing of him, but we know what manner of husband another of his name once made. Think of it, Miss Brand. Say something new to quiet Madelon, and take time for the rest.'"

Madelon's sobs had died down while they had your little talking together. She lifted her face as Esther bent over and touched her shoulder, her passion, fierce while it lasted, relapsing into the hopelessness which followed such bursts. Miss Brand was lying back in her chair, her eyes on the low fire again, apparently unconscious of her and of any mortal weakness and desire which could exist out of that somber, penitential chamber.

"Come away," said Esther, not a hint of such sympathy as she had implied to the mistress in her manner toward the girl.

"You'll only disturb her again, and do yourself no good. There'll be a change sometime; continue to wait for it."

"When aunt Camilla dies," thought Madelon, darkly. "And before that I shall be either dead or mad."

The change was coming in a subtle and treacherous guise. Three miles away on the Rockpoint beach two men were walking, thoughtfully, after the affair, and I may be tracing out a plot against the lonely, dreary-hearted girl. They had met there unexpected to both, and had faced each other not in the least after the manner of friends and confidants. There were dislike and distrust of each other in the first glance, quickly repressed on both sides, cool disdain coming to one a swaggering air of affected unconcern to the other.

"Who the duse would have thought of seeing you here, Trelawney? With the devil of a miss I understand you had on hand, this is the last hole in the world I would have looked to see you in."

"I should like to be as sure of my business here as that I know yours. And that recalls you had a hand in what you are pleased to call my 'devil of a miss.' You are not deep enough to deceive me, Mr. George Fitz-George. Come, I don't bear you any ill-will for what you did me. It was all part of the affair, and I may be able to make it worth your while letting me into your secret. We were good enough
friends once, why not drop hostilities and be the same again?"

Mr. Fitz-George kicked the gravel, discon- certed and indignant.

"You have such a dashed habit of using your friends and then abusing them," he growled, vindictively.

"My dear fellow, you are expending some vital force and unmistakably doing injury to your boot-soles," remarked Mr. Trelawney, in stave tones. "Don't, I beg of you! Possibly you can better afford the reckless expenditure of leather than in the time past, but this unfortunate example of mine should induce you to be provident against the rainy day. You haven't the best reason for liking me; that little affair of Pauline Lovelace was calculated to go down hard, and I don't hold you responsible for my bitter pill in return. Let us cry quits and shake hands over the buried tomahawk."

The little affair of Pauline Lovelace was that commonest of old stories, the story of a frivol woman, of a false friend, of the broken heart that ensued. She had loved Fitz-George's love, his affianced bride, and in his heart he never had and never would forgive Alfred Trelawney the perfidy of her betrayal. There are more ways than one of carrying enmity, however.

"With all my heart," answered Mr. Fitz-George, airily. "It brings me to that Christian consummation of being at peace with all mankind. Going a step further to reliable Christian forbearance, would you have given that old Bell-cat credit for such a spirit of renunciation? Every one to his own taste, but in her shoes I should have held fast to the thousand a year." "And bled me into the bargain. I shouldn't have split a hair over such philosophy as yours. Juliet worsted me, and I own to the corn with the best grace that I can muster."

"Hanged if it isn't a fair specimen," said Mr. Fitz-George, in involuntary tribute. "If I expected anything it was that the fair Juliet wouldn't stand in need of a sleeping-powder after her work was done."

"Juliet's poison is off the same lot as mine, my charming Fitz. She has gone into obscurity, and I am willing to let her rest there in the enjoyment of a tranquil conscience. What designs are you harboring against my happy successor, the female Trelawney thus lately unearthed and brought to light? You are not difficult to read, Fitz; you have a design, and you may as well unbosom it. Confess that, like little Jack Horner in his corner, you meant to have a plum out of the pie."

Mr. Fitz-George glared at him in defiant sulkiness.

"You are determined not to take me into confidence? Generous of you to conclude to throw yourself away upon the heiress, clever of you to rush down to rescue her from the Gorgon aunt whom no doubt she will be happy to escape. A clever plan, Fitz, with but one formidable obstacle in the way, and that is I."

Mr. Fitz-George glared in defiant helplessness now. How very transparent he must be that the man could so readily ferret out his thoughts! And he had prided himself upon his cleverness; it was galling to be always over-ridden by a man to whom he owed no good-will of any sort, or respect for his land and sea.

"It won't do, my friend," said Mr. Trelawney, decidedly. "You haven't the shadow of a chance with me against you. Take a cigar and a turn with me, and let us see if we can't strike a compromise."

The cigar went out after a few whiffs, the discussion lengthened into the murky gloom that crept up the opposite wrist and sea.

It was deep dusk without, lamps were slight within, when Mr. Trelawney rejoined his wife. They were stopping at the one hotel in Rockpoint, the Stormy Petrel. Two miserably dull and contracted apartments here succeeded the up-town palace where Berenice had reigned so briefly; in place of a world at her feet she was fain now to acknowledge the presence of her master. It was shown in the startled glance she threw at him as he entered, in the attention with which she watched his slightest motion. He stood upon the hearth, winding his slim white fingers in the sleepy black of his whiskers, quite silent for a time. Seeing him thus, Berenice relapsed into whatever train of thought had occupied her previous to his entrance, and in its intent and vindictive expression that fair face had changed very decidedly for the worse."

"Mrs. Trelawney!" she turned to him on the instant.

"I am listening."

"There has been no message, I presume."

"None."

"Then it is settled you must go and demand an entrance in person to-morrow. You must manage by some means to see the girl. You understand fully what is required of you?"

"I understand."

"There must be no failure on your part. I trust you have no inclination to evade any part of the duty I expect from you." Purtively the finger of her right hand closed upon the handle of the door, and she shivered as if with a chill. There was unshrinking bitterness, however, in her return of the glance he bent upon her.

"I am not likely to evade it. There is no chance of my relenting toward her if that is what you mean. I have not been dealt with so kindly myself that I should care to spare her."

Apparently satisfied, he turned his back upon her, and Berenice, pushing up her sleeve, looked upon a deep purple stain, the imprint of no gentle clasp. By a hard les-
son she had learned the beauty of wifely submission.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TEMPTER'S COIL.

PASSIVE had been Miss Camilla Brand for years, passive was she now when a word from her might have turned the whole course of the girl whose life she gloomed, might have spared her infinite uncertainty and pain in the time to come, might have left this story unwritten, the after-train of incidents unknown.

Whatever softening she had experienced passed briefly. She made no recurrence to the scene, or to the question of granting or refusing that request of the letter until Esther broached the subject again on the following morning.

"Shall I let the woman in when she comes, Miss Brand?" she asked, lingering over her duties in the room.

"Why do you vex me with these things, why do you keep reminding me of the world I would forget? Let no one in. Leave me in the peace I have found for the remainder of my days. No, don't talk to me of the girl. What is she that she should be spared where I have suffered? It is best for her you know as well as I. What is her discontentment by the side of the dangers she would encounter out in the world? Let things be as they are while I live. On no condition speak to me of any change again, Esther; I will not have it."

Draggingly Esther's steps went down the winding stairs. At the bottom Madelon was waiting her, neither eagerness nor hopeful- ness in her dark young clouded face, yet the shade on it deepened before the other had opportunity for a word.

"Don't tell me, Esther. She has refused, she always will refuse everything which might help me or save me. If spirits ever come back to earth mine will come to haunt her when she has killed me as she did my mother."

"A thing impossible, a threat idle, because youth, however hopeless, is strong; because more than simple unrest and unsatisfied, scarcely understood longings are required to wear out the vital force. But, the utter despairing fierceness of the words, the utter dying of even the spark which had not been had was pitiful to see in her.

"Come back, Madelon," called Esther after her as she moved away. "You'll take your death of cold going out like that. There's snow in the air, and the wind cuts to the bone."

But, Madelon was already gone, her head bare and without a wrap, out into the chill and dreaminess of the garden waste. Esther with a shawl over her arm was following her, muttering at youth's heedlessness, when borne upon the breeze came the sound of loud and continued knocking upon the locked gate. She stood hesitating, undecided for one instant, then changed her course for the path leading to it.

"The girl shall have the sight of some other human face this once, at any rate," she thought. "It can't do her any harm."

Without the gate stood a man's form muffled, a woman's in cloth and furs which could defy the sharp blast.

"You, Mr. Fitz-Grog? You can't come in," she declared, grimly, interposing herself in his way. "You would be sending my mistress into fits, and she isn't to be disturbed again. The lady is not to stay; I may as well tell you that at once."

The man nodded to his companion. "I'll wait," he said, shortly, and Esther stared; looking closer, she saw she had mistaken him. It was not the shabby man with a swagger and a vulgar familiarity, toward whom she had entertained no good-will either for the entrance he had forced or the news he had brought a fortnight before.

She locked the gate after the la New-master entered, returning the key to her pocket and taking glum observance of the visitor. A beautiful face, winning and wreathed in smiles, disclosed as Berenice threw back her veil, had no effect in softening Miss Brand's faithful servitor toward her.

"Madelon's yonder. Go you on before, and I'll call her."

"Yonder—ah, I see!" Berenice caught an imperfect glimpse of her through the matted branches. "Never mind; I will go to her there. I am not to stay, you said. Is it her decision or Miss Brand's?"

"Miss Brand is the mistress here."

"And a hard one, I have heard. Don't be vexed, there's a good creature; I don't say it for myself. I am sure you must be fond of your young mistress, this fortunate Miss Madelon. Can't you persuade her to intercede for me?"

"Much good would it do. She stands more in need for herself, poor thing! Go and make the most of your time; I can't let it be long."

"Is that for her? asked Berenice, observing the shawl. "Let me take it then."

Esther looked after the graceful form in its plain dark robe and rich wrappings, following the dreary path.

"I've seen as far as come to grief before," she muttered, still inquiring her gray head. "Ay, and bring others to grief along. I'm almost sorry I let her in—almost sorry I let her in."

A tall, uniformed shape, not ungainly, but looking it in her dress of serge made after no particular pattern, straight, scent and plain, dull hair blown about her neck, a face wholly unlike the dark moodiness resting upon it—that was Madelon as she appeared to Berenice, passing at a turn to take a first critical observation.

"Plain and awkward and an heiress," she
thought, in half-pitying, half-envious contempt. "Bound to fall a prey to some fortune-hunter sooner or later, I need have no compunctions indeed."

Next moment the heavy shawl was folded with gentle touch about Madelon's shoulders, a little gloved hand stole to her neck, and red, fragrant lips brushed her cheek in the first evidence of love that she could remember.

"I hope I didn't startle you, Madelon. Will you let me call you that? I am Mrs. Trelawney, you know—Berenice to you."

A constrained shyness came over Madelon, and she did not return the caress.

"How did you get in?" she asked. "I thought you were not to come; Esther meant it, I am sure."

"Then I suppose it was Esther who was so ungracious back there. She let me in under protest and warned me out in ever so short a time. What a dreary old place this is! Are you happy here, Madelon?"

"I am happy, but—I hate and abhor every thing, every one, myself most of all. You would never wish to come here if you knew how dreadful the life is."

"You poor, poor child! I can imagine it has been so to you from what I have heard of your aunt and from what I have seen in this brief time. I wish you would tell me, and make me your friend in sympathy, if nothing more. If you are not chilled, let us sit here; I would rather have you to myself out from under the Argus eyes of your keeper."

Madelon, repressed and denied sympathy all her life long, was not insensible to the kindness of the tone, was not ungrateful for what seemed to her unselfish interest, but she could not all in a moment break her natural reserve.

They seated themselves on a dry bank close under the high old wall.

"There is nothing to tell, nothing more than that, and that," she said. "Nothing but that I would rather be dead and buried than alive and buried here."

Little by little Berenice drew from her the complete measure of her hopelessness—a comprehension of the restless spirit beating itself to death against her prison bars.

No better state of preparation could be wished," she thought, while her false, fair face and azure eyes won the confidence she was to betray. "She is ready for the maddest freak, the wildest folly girl ever indulged."

"Why don't you make a change for yourself?" she asked. "Don't suppose that I will counsel disobedience in even such an extreme case as yours but, since you feel your deprivation of all that should be yours by right, hope, pleasure, happiness, I can only wonder that you do not assert yourself."

"What could I do?"

"Nothing, indeed, until of late. Very much now. My dear, money will do almost any thing, and you have money almost without limit."

"I might as well be the most wretched beggar that lives."

"While your aunt has charge of it, as at present. There is no method in her madness, at least, nothing it lies for the moth and rust to corrupt. But your inheritance of the property was unconditional."

"I am only seventeen—four interminable years that I shall never see through before it will be mine in reality."

"What a little innocent it is," said Berenice, with a merry laugh oddly at variance with all about. "There is one chief aim for all women—matrimony. Once married, your fortune is your own, or, what amounts to the same thing, will devolve to the management of your husband."

"You don't know what you are talking about," said Madelon, in all serious earnestness. "Who will marry me? How can I ever have a chance here to marry?"

Again Berenice laughed musically.

"You innocent child! I know dozens of young men, eminently respectable, wholly unexceptionable young men at that, who would jump at such a chance. I repeat, money will do anything, and they will marry you if you are so disposed, at an hour's notice."

Madelon's eyes were upon the ground, her face neither expressing shock nor pleasure at such an assertion.

In her hidden heart a tremendous thrill quivered for one instant, and then was still again. For that one instant rose a vision of a handsome, pallid, boyish face, of the twilight playing on it, of auburn hair tossed back from the wide brow, of hazel eyes unclosing to look languidly back into hers. A vision come and gone as he had come and gone. He had been feverishly anxious to see her; she had heard from or of him no more after the fortnight he had unwillingly passed in the old house. The world would go on to its end, and most probably she never would know more of him. Berenice, watching her face furtively, gained no hint from it.

"Every one marries for money nowadays," she proceeded, in an utterly practical tone. "I did, and I assure you I would do the same over again with the greatest of pleasure."

In the abstract, yes, Mrs. Trelawney. The same motives would have been strong as ever, the same prospect as irresistible, but with Alfred Trelawney as you know him now in the other scale, they would go to the beam!

"If you aren't troubled with romantic sentiment, you would find it an accessible and easy way of cutting your Gordian knot."

"For you, perhaps, but not for me. If it could be so, I would not be free, even then.
Nothing could be worse than this, but a change such as that might not be much better. When wealth be worse, aunt Camilla or a husband, I haven’t the choice left me.

“You speak so sensibly, Madelon, I think I shall tell you what I would do in your case. I would marry a man, any man, making him sign a bond never to lay claim to or molest me, pay him his price for that much of his protection, and be my own mistress forever after.”

“But how—how if you were I? It is so different with you who know the world, but you are only mocking my misery when you hint at any escape for me.”

“Do you mean you would really take such a step? Those blue eyes looked upon her encouragingly.

“I would do anything. I would marry any man, provided I need never see him or know him—provided he would leave me free. I wish you had never spoken of such a thing to me; you never should when such a chance will not come.”

“I don’t believe she’s been out of my sight before,” muttered Esther, in a habit she had of talking to herself. “She’s safer yonder than in her long tramps down to the sea, and yet I’d rather the fortune had never come than for her to be out from under the old roof to-night.”

Such an intuitive sense, prophetic warning, whispering, finding such imperfect expression when set to words!

CHAPTER XIV.

WAS IT THE END?

The church of St. Stephen’s stood a dense black shadow in the black night in an obscure part of the City of Churches. It was situated at the back of a lonely square where the tumult of the surging city streets came in deadening echoes. It was far out of the line of street lamps that burned yellow and clear in the frosty air, out of the line of all good persons turning their feet homeward at half-past eleven p.m., the moderate hour of moderate people who give their days to work, their evenings to enjoyment, and their nights to the “beauty sleep” of sound consciences and healthy bodies.

Two forms walked up and down before St. Stephen’s. They had been walking there ten minutes or more in a silence broken by an occasional word from one, but the other had displayed no inclination to pursue a conversation, and the first gave up the attempt and solaced himself with a cigar, the red point of which cast the only gleam on a face so muffled in coat-collar, and low-drawn cap that it would have required sharp eyes to have recognized him by a much brighter light. The point burned close under his nose and he tossed the stump away, turning again to his silent companion.

“Time they were coming if they mean to

with her new friend in Rockpoint. Esther had been obdurate, had yielded inch by inch, had yielded wholly at last only because she saw full well that, with her consent or without it, Madelon had determined to go. Prison-like, as the place was, it had not all the fortifications of a prison. It had been no better than one to the girl because until now there had never been an association to draw her out of it, to show her the attractions of a girl’s first love-dream!

Mrs. Trelawney herself had promised to come for Madelon, and at the appointed day and hour drove to the gate. Esther, balancing the key upon her hand, looked after discontentedly. There was little danger that the roll of wheels would reach Miss Brand’s closed chamber, there was less danger that Miss Brand herself would make any inquiry for her niece, and yet some impending sense of danger or evil whispered to her.

“I don’t believe she’s been out of my sight before,” muttered Esther, in a habit she had of talking to herself. “She’s safer yonder than in her long tramps down to the sea, and yet I’d rather the fortune had never come than for her to be out from under the old roof to-night.”

Such an intuitive sense, prophetic warning, whispering, finding such imperfect expression when set to words!
come. With the train due at eleven they are due here now, and faith! unless they are close on time our friend the rector in yonder will be carrying his cooled arbor and frosted toes in search of repair."

"Hist, there is the sound of wheels. They are punctual to the minute."

"You are blessedly calm over the circumstance. It is not usual for me to be in a tremor myself, but you might have the heart of a cucumber fried in snow for all excitement you show. Alons! here they are, and Fitz-George to the rescue!"

A close carriage rattled into the square and drew up before the edifice. A man leaped down from the box and opened the door. Then a rustle of women's garments, a second's pause, and the little group just alighted came forward to meet the two men waiting by the porch. They all went together into the edifice. It was unlighted save for a single dim lamp. A tall young man waited them there—the pale, studious rector of St. Stephen's. All was in perfect readiness for this, the maddest marriage that ever was. Madelon turned deathly faint as she found herself the center of the little group closed about the altar. Like a dream had been the night journey from Rockpoint, the jostle of the anxious crowd about the waiting-rooms, the rapid ride through the noisy thoroughfares left behind them soon, the still darkness of this lonely nook. Like a dream now was the sound of a monotonous and droneing voice that went over the marriage ceremony like a schoolboy's chant. Through it all Madelon saw nothing but a yellowish blur in the midst of darkness; she was conscious of Berenice's presence at her side, of clasping hands with the man she married, of hearing his response, of bowing hers when a pause in the monotonous utterance told her it was expected, and then George Fitz George and Madelon Trelawney were pronounced man and wife. There was a paper signed afterward and with this was handed to the bride the rest—a bond in which George Fitz-George in consideration of a sum of money named, renounced all title and claim to his wedded bride, by which he bound himself never in all time to come to assert a husband's right of control. This was retained by the bridegroom, her marriage certificate was given into the hand of the bride, and through it all Madelon had not once raised her eyes to the face of the man who was now her husband.

Berenice had looked at him and at the other two, all drawn close, all muffled to the very eyes, all enough alike in the dim light to have defied even the eyes of love to distinguish them one from the other. Who could the third be, and what was he doing there? she wondered. All details over, the clergyman watched the party out, and looked doubtfully down upon the fee he still retained in his hand, quadruple that usually received for such a service. The ladies were handed again into the carriage which waited, and Mr. Trelawney turned back to say a few words to that one of the muffled forms nearest him.

"You have done your part nobly, and that is all, I believe. Come, Fitz-George, you go down with us."

"Stay, if you please," said the mysterious third. "Mr. Fitz-George does not go down. I borrowed his place as I already have borrowed his name."

"What the devil, man—" began Mr. Trelawney, roughly.

"Don't be energetic, Trelawney," continued Mr. Fitz-George from behind. "My namesake for the occasion and I agree upon that. Take my advice and don't get the feminine curiosity aroused. These women, sweet creatures, would make a derrick of a row at finding anything sub rosa from them."

"What it means is this," said the other quiet voice. "I have promised that girl protection, and she shall have it! Will you proceed, Mr. Trelawney?"

With a stifled oath Mr. Trelawney followed into the carriage, and the other mounted to the vacant place in the box. Mr. Fitz-George from the pavement looked after the carriage as it rolled away.

"Neglected even the little courtesy of thanks to me," he mused. "Some might say I have killed my goose who was to have laid the golden egg, but I know Trelawney; I have wiped out scores with him if nothing more, and I can wait.

The same confused dream was repeated again in the ride through the quieter streets, in the crowd scarcely thinned surging about the station. In the midst of it she was separated from Berenice to whom she had clung closely; she was whirled about by the human eddy, startled and bewildered in her total inexperience of such scenes. Then her hand was clasped with an arm; she was shielded from the pressure, guided through it, and with the touch, the gentle watchfulness, stole in a sensation of peace through the apathy which had been upon her.

A black monster with a fiery eye rushed up as they reached the platform where the other two were waiting; other black monsters with fiery eyes rushed and puffed, and backed and raced past; then the outer confusion changed for the glow of lamps shining down on them, Berenice for her eyes—a-glis—mis, and that presence withdrawn, after seeing her comfortably seated.

Berenice had looked at him with interest in the gloomy hollow of St. Stephen's; she had looked again, intent and puzzled, as he rescued Madelon from the crowd; now she followed the vanishing shape with a sudden strong suspicion deepening into certainty. Her husband was at her side, and to him
she turned while the force of it was fresh upon her.
"Alfred, who was that man?"
"There are many men about, Mrs. Trelawney."
"There is but one for us, for her. Who was that man with Madelon, who was it she married to-night?"
"Are you taking leave of your senses, Berenice?" he asked sharply, but suppressing his voice for her ear alone. "Who—who but Fitz George?"
She said no more, drawing her veil close and resting back in her corner. Those gleaming black eyes had her well under control, and in the brief instant they were turned upon her she had read that whatever doubts might have risen in her mind it would be well to suppress.
On through the black night rushed the train. On through chaotic spaces Madelon was borne. The godless restlessness of her life had left her, and in its place had settled a dead numb calm; spectral fancies rose and fell in fantastic vividness like pictures before her mind's wandering eye and anon out of her control, going far away beyond herself, and all the while that dreadful stillness sat upon her, held her down by its weight, clogged the blood in her veins until it crept like slow lead, a beat in her heart and head like muffled death-marches.
All at once a terrible agonizing shriek broke through the vague unconsciousness which still set in glimpses of things about her; a swaying, toppling, falling down, down; a crash like the demolishment of a world; a great shock ending in nothingness.
Out from the wreck of one of those common disasters—a rear car gone over an embankment—were taken Alfred Trelawney, temporarily stunned; Berenice, injured but not mortally; Madelon, without a scratch or bruise, white as the dead, as still, as cold. Not one flutter of breath or heart to speak of life, not one trace of life's unrest now upon her marble face. Was this the end?
In the early gloaming of a December day, Ernest Goldwood was put down before the gate of the old house of the Brands. It had never looked more desolate, more forbidding, more drearily forlorn than as he dismissed the hack in which he had been driven from the Rockpoint station and turned within. The gate, no longer locked, fell into place behind him with a dull thud, and the sharp December wind cut into his face with a dash of the sleet which had been falling at intervals during the day.
"Woefully changed," thought Mr. Goldwood, with a pensive glance about him.
"When I saw it first, nineteen years ago, this wilderness was a garden of flowers, and the sweetest flower of all in the midst. I can see her now"—he was looking straight before him, as though the vision was embodied there—her face all dimples and smiles and kissed by the sunshine, her arms running over with the roses she had gathered—fair Madelon! Well, the roses of memory have this advantage over the Persian flower, that they can be stripped of their thorns!
The house door opened and a face looked out at him, the last light from the west paling upon it so in keeping with the bleak and wintry scene.
"Gone gray with the walls," mused Mr. Goldwood, and came forward. "Surely this is Esther, and not altogether forgetful of an old friend."
"The years have gone lightly with you, sir. They've worn heavily here—heavily indeed." The words were a sigh that found some echo in his heart.
"Miss Brand—how is she?" he asked, following her into the hall where a candle flared in the draft sweeping through.
"Low, sir; 'most worn out, I much fear."
More nearly worn out was Camilla Brand than the old woman thought, seeing her from day to day in the feebleness that had grown upon her, holding out against it to the last with that stern spirit which had borne her through seventeen torturous years. She was in her old place before the hearth when Ernest Goldwood followed his guide into her presence, but the great chair was changed for a couch, and a little table with vials upon it was drawn close to her hand. It was hardly possible for the gaunt form to have become more wasted, the face more pallid, the eyes more sunken or preternaturally bright, but the expression there was in some vague way different.
"She's surely better," thought Esther, observing it, but Goldwood, passing his first pitting shock at the sight, said to himself, "She will not live the night through."
"Leave me in peace, Esther. Why can't you leave me in peace?" she said, in the old monotonous way, as the sense of their quiet presence dried away. Then her eyes turned in remembrance toward them, fixed in mournful eagerness upon Goldwood, and she put out a thin hand.
"It was kind of you to come," she said; "greater kindness than is deserved from you."
"A sad pleasure to me if my coming can be of service, or in any way comfort you, Camilla. That we should meet thus is the greatest pain."
Her great eyes dwelt upon him wonderingly.
"You look as if you had forgiven," she whispered.
"If I ever had any thing to forgive. I do not think I had. I never cherished one hard thought toward Madelon. Her memory has been something mournfully sweet and pleasant, staying with me all my life."
Sweet and pleasant was the involuntary softening and lingering of his tone, but it
stirred up the bitterness which was never at rest in her. Hard as gray stone grew her face, harsh the voice whose slower, more labored utterance gave evidence of how pitifully weak she was that even this wearied her.

"Are the rest come, Esther?" she asked, querulously, "I want to get it over. I want to be left in peace."

"Not yet, mistress. They will be here at six; it lacks near the half hour yet."

"Then tell him—tell him what's wanted." But without waiting for the woman to comply, raised her eyes again to where he stood near her.

"I would have died without seeing you," she said, drearily. "I never would have sent but I promised—I promised for Madelon's girl."

He bent his head waiting. That very morning a telegram had come to him that Camilla Brand was dying, asking him, in aid of one reparation she might make, to come to her at once. It came to him in a passing thought that Camilla Brand herself had never worded that message as she put to him briefly the favor she had to ask.

Would he be guardian to Madelon's daughter? He had a hard sacrifice to make. Would she, too, have a sacrifice to make, of herself the girl might be left to such a fate as her mother had brought upon herself, rather than the chance of repeating her mother's falsity.

Madelon's daughter! The thought thrilled that sweet and pleasant memory he had always kept of her. Looking into the space beyond her, he answered:

"I accept the guardianship, Camilla. I suppose you know I never settled to domestic life, but I have a sister, a widow, whom I am sure can induce to preside over my home. I accept the trust and I will be faithful in my duty to Madelon's daughter."

"Where is she?" he asked of Esther, as he followed her below.

"Madelon?" Something like a wail broke into the woman's voice, though her eyes were dry. "She's lying more like death itself than my mistress now. She was on the train when the accident happened; it, two nights ago; she was brought on to Rock-Point along with others. She's at the doctor's house there, with a better hold on the next world than this one now."

At six the physician came, and with him the lawyer for whom Miss Brand had sent to arrange her few last worldly affairs. Some papers were made out and signed, one or two minor instructions were given by the dying woman.

Before the morning broke Camilla Brand had found the peace she vainly sought on earth.

Goldwood remained to pay the last tributes of sympathy to the dead. By the side of that other Madelon she was laid, with but one mourner among all who witnessed the obsequies, that one her old faithful friend and servitor.

Meantime Goldwood paid daily visits to the physician's house. He was admitted once to see Madelon where she lay, marble still and fairer than she had ever been in her strong, young life, so like death that it seemed he would never be called upon to execute her trust.

It was not the result of any injury received, the doctor replied in answer to his inquiries. She had been scarcely bruised in the accident. This was a state of coma, an exceedingly interesting and extraordinary case, the result of some great previous strain upon her mind, he should say, and, indeed, as such information unwillingly wrung from Esther would denote. That she was under most excellent care her guardian could see, but when day after day passed with no change to her, he returned to New York, and shut down by the very first train afterward two of the most eminent physicians the city afforded.

Late that evening he sat a little more subdued and thoughtful than was his wont, telling the story of his absence and the charge assumed to Cecil Bertram.

"It will be a terrible sacrifice to set up a woman's kingdom under my bachelor roof," he said, with a smile merging into sudden gravity, "but I tell you, Cecil, if that poor girl is granted life I shall have a solemn duty at hand to make it a brighter existence than any she has known yet. That bleak house and mortal woman were enough to chill the soul out of a man, let alone a young creature like that."

Cecil's answer was a glance affectionate and earnest, for whatever misunderstanding had been between the friends was passed now. He broke a moment's silence that fell afterward.

"I have been waiting your return to signify my acceptance of your generous proposition, Goldwood. I am ready to turn my back on my native shore, and, for the sake of your faith in me, if nothing else, bring all the energy I possess to bear upon making the mark you have set for me."

"And I haven't a fear of disappointment in you, my dear fellow. I am rejoiced more than I can say at the risk of having you suppose I shall not find a void here."

"I can never repay such kindness as yours has been, Goldwood—"

"There, Cecil, don't overwhelm me. I beg! I am a trifle out of wood to-night, and prophetic enough to foresee 'footprints in the sands of time' that are to blot out my careless impress." A suspicious moisture was glistening in his eyes. If those two had been women, they would have fallen sobbing and protesting into each other's arms; being men, they wrung hands and stood up, passing a few last words upon indifferent things.
While they stood the door opened to an unceremonious visitor. Mr. Gustave Mortimer, ever the pink of cool audacity, let himself into the apartment.

"Glad to find you two invisibles again, not vanished into thin air, as seemed to be the fate of both of you. Gad, that man of yours is an unreasonable fellow, Goldwood. A vered he was to refuse everybody, so just to oblige him I classed myself among the nobodies and threatened to punch him in the head if he made any further objections. Going, Bertram? Tragic ending of the Tre lawney drama, isn't it?"

Bertram gave a start, and Goldwood dropped his hand upon his shoulder.

"What? I am just back to town after a ten days' absence. I have not heard."

"Not heard? Is it possible? It's only a short chapter, after the will affair—most sensational winding up. Some whisper of conjugal misunderstanding, short retirement, a smash-up somewhere down the shore road, return of the pair in a more or less damaged state to town, and the dutiful wife's reconsignment to the Athols, and Trelawney himself flushed out from among the docks not half a dozen hours ago. Suicide, of course; shocking, the body somewhat the worse for no knowing how many days under water, four or five at least, but quite recognizable. Sic transit, and that is the end."
PART II.

CHAPTER I.

TWO BELLES OF GOTHAM.

A fashionable suite of rooms in a fashionable hotel in a fashionable up-town quarter. There was semi-gloom, slumberous quiet in the long parlor attaching to the suite. What wonder hotel life presents an ever-growing charm when, as here, all the refinements, all the luxuries, all the freedom of home life are presented, with none of its cares.

Some such satisfied reflection was floating lazily through the mind of the one occupant of the room, when the dreamy atmosphere was agitated, a door opened and shut with as much of a clang as a well-regulated door on plated hinges was capable of, a springy step alighted, a man as we get through the long, dim apartment. Draperies went back and shades up with a jerk, and the full glory of late spring sunshine flooded it.

"Ralph, you drone! Don't you know life was made for more than such indulgence in the dolses fariente as you seem to have made the chief aim of your existence? Don't pretend to be asleep, sir! Come out of that state of chronic imbecility! Let the laziness, so far as to give attention to the usual morning lecture, if you please."Thus commanded, a form stretched at length on the softest of sofas stirred, yawned, and lifted a head to the support of a shapely, well-rounded hand.

"Wait a moment, Nell. Give me time to prepare for the storm. Pass me that hand-screen and your smelling-salts, please, and I think I can compose my nerves to endure."

"Smelling-salts, indeed! As though I ever had use for such an accomplishment."

"If you knew the pleasure I would experience in beholding such a necessity. Truth to say, my dear Nell, your redundancy of animal spirits is positively fatiguing to witness, not to speak of being out of place in one of your age. At thirty-two one expects a woman to have gained some tone, some mellow dignity—"

"Oh, you wretch! Thirty-two! Where is your regard for truth? I am not ashamed of my age. I glory in it; I rejoice at having passed the honey-dew and rose-leaf state of sentiment; but thirty-two! Ralph, Ralph! that is the last straw on the camel's back."

"It wasn't me? Somebody is thirty-two, I know, for it is not recorded in that antiquated volume which came to you in addition to our respected aunt Hepzibah's legacy, to be faithfully preserved; take it up tenderly, lift it with care, treasure it under key, our ages are there, and all that sort of thing? If it weren't such an exertion to cudgel my memory, I would prove it by date, but considering the existing state of the weather I couldn't possibly aver whether Elmira Hepzibah Mowbray was born in 1843 or 1438."

"If I laid claim to the honor of either I would put on a gray wig and proclaim the fact. And I positively would make a holo-caust of that family Bible if it were not for aunt Hepsy's condition imposed. Somebody is thirty-two—you, Ralph Mowbray, and at such maturity it would be advisable to tack the four full years difference between your age and mine upon the wrong side. I am not ashamed of being twenty-eight on my next birthday, but there's no need of your recalling what antiques we are growing to be."

"'It's oh for the sunny stream
That leaps by the daisied tea,
And it's oh for a cot by the wood,
And a good man to take me.'"

"Whether to look back or to look forward is the question, get up off that invention of the drowsy god's devoted subject, and prepare to be in the park precisely one hour from this."

"My dear Nell, I forgive your turning from what must be a disagreeable contemplation with that 'cot by the wood' at such a hopeless distance yet; but there's really no need of pitching into a fellow at that vigorous rate. Do find some other mode of relief for your overcharged feelings, and leave me to the enjoyment of gentle fancies."

"I have lately come to the conclusion that you have been too much indulged in gentle fancies, Ralph. I constitute myself a com mittee of one to spur you up, to turn over a new leaf for you if you are too persistently indolent to turn it over for yourself."

"What on earth have you been doing for the last ten years but spurring me up, I should like to know? Don't waste your ammunition on such a hopeless subject, Nell; half the amount you have thrown away on me would have brought a better bird to your feet. Think the matter over, my dear, and if you're going, be kind enough to pull the curtain close again."

"I am not going, though. There, don't
settle back again. I tell you I have something in view for you."

"So you said—the park. What comfort you expect me to find there, all dust and crowd and summer bonnets, I can't imagine, though there is something in the bonnets for you, I suppose. Spare me; don't insist, or, if you do, give me my own time and way of putting in an appearance."

"I do believe you make harder work of your indolence than many another man would of climbing the ladder of fame. What will you do when it comes to putting out your shingle, building your own office fires and a practice—the first easier than the last, I'm afraid—instead of lounging your mornings through on velvet couches."

"It won't come to that, you know. Do stop nagging, Elinor. It was bad enough when aunt Hepsy insisted on putting me through a course of reading, but to cut me off. That was execrable. Fortunately a rather good sort of institution in the shape of a sister had her sense of duty up to the scratch, agreed to pay my cigar and tailor bills and keep me up, as a necessary luxury. You couldn't do without me, you know, Nell, if you were ever so much disposed, with you, woman."

"Could I and am I not? You will learn better, very soon, Mr. Ralph Mowbray. I give you warning that you are left to your own resources from this time out. Now, sir!"

"Then I renounce the park. What's the use of putting one's self out for nothing?"

"Open your eyes and talk sense, for once in your life. I have made up my mind it's time you are getting married."

Ralph Mowbray arched his brows critically.

"Getting married! Where did you pick up such a provincialism, Nell?"

"I always was grammatical when I am earnest, believe, That don't alter my meaning, however. I've made up my mind you shall marry if you like the form of expression better, and I have an exceptionable part laid out for you."

"Qualifications, my love?" put Mr. Mowbray, lapsing back and losing apparent interest.

"First, of course, an heiress."

"Of course."

"A rival belle I want to get out of the way."

"Do it with a poisoned bodkin, that's a good creature, Nell. Save me a life of trouble."

"Nonsense. A beauty, or considered such; being 'my enemy and no quarter' I don't pretend to say."

"Generous girl!"

"For the present, that's all. Stop murmuring absurdities and tell me what you think of the plan."

"Excellent as a plan, decidedly ingenu-ous; an incumbent and a rival put out of the way by one bold stroke; but for the matter of execution I don't precisely see how you are going to manage that."

"You are provoking beyond measure, sir. You are to manage it, you are to buckle on your armor and go forth to conquer like the knights of old. You can't expect a prize of the first magnitude to fall at your feet unasked."

"That means any quantity of tiresome attendance. Obliged for your kindness, but I don't think I can avail myself of it. A beauty and an heiress is so apt to be capricious and exacting, and there's sure to be any amount of opposition in the field. It's a bore to be obliged to play the devoted when occasion demands it, now and then, but to run against a dozen other fellows in a doubtful race is out of the question entirely."

"You'll say differently in less than a dozen hours from now."

"Wager you a set of new curls against any small article you choose to mention."

"Thanks, but curls aren't becoming to my style of countenance, and as nature supplied me plentifully I haven't yet adopted the plan of changing any part to suit my dress."

"Complexion, you mean."

"I mean nothing of the sort, as you very well know, sir."

"You forgot to give me the name of the paragon who can rival you."

"I don't intend to give it. I have piqued your curiosity now and you shall find her out for yourself. Don't miss the park, Ralph; she's sure to be there. Mrs. Lyndal is to call for me, and oh, by the way, can you tell me who was that gentleman appeared opposite us at the breakfast table?"

"Sets the tide in that quarter? Don't let your affections fix upon him, Nell, an adventurer with a wife for each of the four quarters of the globe, I daresay. These handsome fellows who strike your eye at first sight usually do turn out so. Was it love at first sight, Nell?"

"Nonsense, I had a fancy I had seen him somewhere. For me—"

"'Tattle my bones over the stones, I'm only a lone woman nobody owns.'"

"Are you off, Elinor?"

"Off? I should think so. Time I was if I mean to have my bonnet on when Mrs. Lyndal calls."

It was a well-balanced, elastic form carrying itself from his sight. Elinor Mowbray was what is known in masculine parlance as a "fine woman," a "splendid creature." Lovely hair was her crowning glory, reddish; a face so fair and fresh that a sight of it did away with the wonder she should hold a belleship still at twenty-eight. Strong points of resemblance were there between brother and sister, but his features were more definitely aquiline, his complexion
paler, his forehead higher and retreating, his hair light, sandy, without any of the redeeming glint of hers. There were some who considered Ralph Mowbray a handsome man, his sister among them, but his was a face which was apt to inspire a feeling the reverse of confidence; it had a latent selfishness in it, which, if developed, would have been both crafty and wariness, declaring that indolence of his an affectation. A very ordinary man, but Elinor Mowbray had considered him a little higher than the gods.

There was music in the park that day, and all New York turned out in a brilliant medley. Leaning back in the carriage, giving smiling attention to Mrs. Lyndal, a pleasant, plain, elderly lady, Miss Mowbray acknowledged the doffing of hats and low bows right and left.

"How mistaken I must have been in imagining you a comparative stranger in the city," remarked Mrs. Lyndal.

"If I could be transported at once from here to Egypt I would not expect to find myself a stranger in a strange land," Miss Mowbray laughed. "We are thorough cosmopolitans, my brother and I. It is our fate to know everybody everywhere. That Mr. Mortimer who passed just now I knew first at the German spas when he had a good deal less whisker and a very trifling more brain than at this present day. Mr. Goldwood was a fellow-tourist with my brother through Switzerland and Italy, seven long years ago, although my own acquaintance with him was reserved for this later date. Ah, here is Ralph himself. I have been telling Mrs. Lyndal, Ralph, that you knew her brother among totally different scenes from this."

Mr. Mowbray, conscious of appearing at his best in the saddle, bowed low and rode forward timing the pace of his steed to their progress.

"Goldwood—oh, yes. Nell gave me an ecstatic chapter over the discovery of the round friendship, yours and hers, his and mine, a night or so ago. I haven’t seen him yet, however. Is he here?"

He lost the answer in the distraction of a passing sight as an equestrian pair, splendidly mounted, swept a neighboring curve.

"Speak of angels and you hear the rustle of their wings," said Elinor, returning their recognition. "Is it possible you failed to discover that that was Mr. Goldwood, Ralph?"

"Mr. Mowbray drew his gaze slowly from the direction they had gone.

"Sure enough. I did not observe him for the second. Who was that superb creature in his company, Mrs. Lyndal? From my one glimpse I should say she is blessed with the most glorious eyes it was ever my lot to behold."

"Is it possible you have not met her? That is Madelon Brand, my brother’s ward. You meet us at the club reception to-night I presume, Mr. Mowbray?"

"Without fail. Elinor would break her heart if she missed it." And Mr. Mowbray touching his heel to his horse’s side took himself away. Elinor smiled to herself as she looked proudly after him. This was certainly the first enthusiasm he had displayed over the prospect of the club reception.

She smiled again as she moved through the crowded rooms on her brother’s arm that night, as she saw his gaze wander in evident search of something not yet found.

"Come and let me present you to the paragon who can rival me, Ralph. I have her permission."

"Bother the paragon," thought Mr. Mowbray intent upon his own object, repressing his inclination to put the thought in audible words.

"This way; what a crush it is. Madelon!" touching with her fan a shoulder that gleamed like marble through a web of frosty lace.

"Miss Brand, my brother, Mr. Mowbray; anxious like all his sex to pay tribute to your cause."

"If I were a hero of a hundred battles I could not boast of ever having enlisted in a fairer cause," murmured Mr. Mowbray gallantly.

With beauty on every side, with gaslights flashing, and bright eyes glancing, and rich robes and rare gems striving each to outshine and outvie the rest, he enjoyed the felicity of looking into those glorious eyes, of looking and rushing straight forward to the fate which received him open-armed, which had stood aloof through his thirty-two years to vanquish him in a moment now. Ralph Mowbray was in love at sight with Madelon Brand.

A tall, willowy shape, an oval face, complexion pale clear olive, eyes dark, deep, and with shadowed lights, hair bronze black and rippling—words cannot do justice to Madelon Brand as she appeared before him. Her dress was gold tissue over white, like a blaze of summer sunshine it waved about her as she moved.

"Loveliest thing under the sun—the Brand; moon and stars additional if that assertion needs more emphasis," declared Mr. Mortimer from his distance. "And Mowbray is going in strong, from the first, struck as any one may see; but that’s only the general fate. He’s in luck, too, absolutely carrying her off to dance; but who in thunder could have supposed there was a vacant waltz on her list?"

"Now, what do you say to my plan?" asked his sister as they whirled away from the scene of the night’s gayety under the puling morning stars. "Will you marry my rival out of my way, Ralph, always providing you can secure the chance?"

"Eh, what, Nell?" Mr. Mowbray started
out of his reverie. "I forgot to discover that bugaboo you flourished before me. Who was she, did you say? Very presumptuous of any one to enter the lists against you, and unprudent to get your rancor up."

At least there was no malice in Elinor's ringing laugh.

"Pretty women are privileged to hate each other on no greater earthly provocation than that they are pretty, you know, Ralph. And the name of my enemy is Madelon Brand."

"Madelon Brand—Madelon Brand!" The name rung like a maddening chorus even into his later dreams.

CHAPTER II.

OLD FRIENDS.

"Are you busy, Ernest?"

Mr. Goldwood, brush in hand, turned to greet Mrs. Lyndal's pleasant face and portly form in the doorway.

"I thought you knew I never was busy, Lucy. Come in. I am only making a pretense of work for lack of any thing better in hand. At your service now or any time, if you require me."

Thus assured, Mrs. Lyndal came forward to take possession of an easy-chair, smoothing down her morning-dress of gray cashmere with plump, complacent hand.

"It was a decided improvement, to my mind, on other young ladies of her station, and if your last clause was intended to bring me to a sense of my duty regarding this summer's campaign, by all means let us have her voice in our conclave." He touched the bell and sent a message to Miss Brand, requesting her to join them there.

"I came at once, posing daintily upon the threshold, with a laughing glance at the pair."

"Is it a treaty of peace or a party of war? Something portentous in the air speaks of the last, and I give fair warning I shall fly the battle."

Five years have passed over the head of Madelon Brand since we saw her first; five years and a little more since she flung herself down in bitter rebellion against her fate in that deserted garden waste. So wonderfully improved, so wonderfully changed, it would be hard to recognize now, in her, that dark, despairing, tempted girl—that torture-wrung, sullen and restless spirit which had possessed her in those days of gloom and unhappiness.

"A treaty, by all means, then. Lucy shall state the case, you shall make such suggestions as you like, and I will reserve the decision for myself. I suppose, like her, you would be horrified at the proposition to spend the next three months in town. Is it not so?"

"With country roses blooming, and country strawberries waiting, and a new wardrobe that deserves a better fate than dust and lack of envious eyes, most certainly I should. If that is Sepilla's let me stand upon Charybdis. What do you say, Mrs. Lyndal? Newport, or Saratoga, or Long Branch, or the River Lawrence and Canada? My dear guardian, I forgive that suggestion, propositive as it was. We have been at all these
places, done them to death, as the saying is."

"Then do originate something yourself, Madelon. I have racked my brain to a fever and I am not even finding it at a loss to find."

"Say on, Madelon. "Greenland's icy mountains or India's coral strand,' which shall it be?"

"Don't you suppose we might find an intermediate point? What would you say to
sailing out to a certain place on the
Huntingdon, which I remember hearing in a thing to
as possessed by Mr. Goldwood, following
ourselves with a select company of all the
pleasant people we know?"

"Riverbank! Sure enough; why couldn't
I have thought of that? Used to belong to the
Athols, you know, Lucy; I got it at a
bargain after that said affair."

"But, dear! Madelon, my dear, I
chance to have heard it was the only thing
saved out of the wreck of their fortune, saved by Ernest's efforts and taken off his
hands by him for an amount which will keep them
comfortably all their lives. If Riverbank is
decided upon, I positively must have my
favourite place. Myself and the
May cause among the first in-
itivited there. So agreeable and clever, she
will be a host in the way of entertaining the
rest."

"That will include her brother then, of
course. Ralph wasn't more than half a bad
fellow in that way himself, as I remember him;
when he had any interest in a thing to
keep himself awake. The main point set-
tled, when will you ladies be prepared to
"Riverbank!"

"There's nothing now to keep us here, and
I think all arrangements can be made for
during the four days from this. My dear, we are due
for Madame Bellini's exhibition of costumes this
week. Eng, aren't we? There is no more
time than to dress left us."

They rustled away, and Mr. Goldwood be-
took himself to his pretense of work again.
A broad bar of sunshine lying upon the
floor, slowly changed position; the carriage
had been gone an hour, when a shadow
crossed his light and he glanced back over
his shoulder at the intruder.

"Helloa, take a chair for a minute, will
you?" Then, as the impression of a glance
was borne to his mind, Mr. Goldwood whirled
about; brush and palette went heiter-
skelter, and his two hands grasped the new-
comer's in buoyancy.

"Bertram, true as I live! When did you
come, how long have you been here? My
dear boy, this unexpected sight of you has
almost upset me."

Cecil Bertram, taller, broader, browner
from the effect of foreign suns, scarcely less
demonstrative in his pleasure, gave back the
pursuit.

"Landed barely thirty-six hours ago, and
would have been here even sooner but for
having my luggage unconsciously detained.

And you, Goldwood, don't look a day older
than when I parted from you, four years and
a half ago."

"But you do, and decidedly the better for it.
And all my predictions of you came true.
The story of your success was wafted back
across the Atlantic ahead of the modest ap-
raisal you gave me of it, and your haste to
acquire yourself of what you chose to con-
sider an obligation. I never had a prouder
moment in my life than when I heard it."

"All due to the place, I fancy. You have
been holding to the old way, I see," letting his glance wander about the
apartment. "I fancied I might find a great-
er change with a feminine element introduced here."

"My sister and ward hold my crannies sacred. They are both out, unfortunately, or
fortunately, as it will be time enough to pre-
ent you to them at luncheon, for which you
must stay. Don't demur, I beg!"

"I must, unwillingly. I have a pressure
of important affairs on hand, and am invisi-
ble except to you. Come to my quarters,
hotel, early as you have the inclina-
tion."

"Must you rush off in this unsatisfactory
manner? Can't I report you for dinner to-
day, to-morrow? Sorry we go out of town
almost immediately."

"And it would be unpardonable for me to
accept on the very eve of your leaving town.
Besides, I want the whole of你的 acquaintance of civilities before being brought into
ladies' society. Exiled for so long, I expect to
have retrograded almost to the state of the
original savage."

"Then don't tell me you have already
made arrangements for the summer. We
go to Riverbank, Athol's place on the Hud-
son that was, and I will not be reconciled if
you refuse us at least the greater portion of
your time there."

"With pleasure, Goldwood. Are the Athols
still here?"

"They have a cottage near Jersey City,
and live in perfect seclusion. They were
left in straitened circumstances, you remem-
ber."

Cecil had his head turned and was studying
a picture upon the wall.

"Mrs. Trelawney remained with them I
presume?"

"No. I believe she couldn't endure the
stupidity of such a narrow sphere. She
traveled as companion to a lady going to
Europe, and after that I lost sight of her.
My dear boy, does any of the old glamour
linger still?"

Cecil's frank smile chased the clouding
anxiety from his eyes.

"None, Goldwood. That fancy received
its deathblow before I left America; there
isn't the shadow of a weakness left."

Very superb were the costumes Madame
Bellini exhibited that day, and Mrs. Lyndal
who had not overcome the ruling feminine weakness, fluttered in her obesity and sober tints between the wonders in silk and sunshine, and lace and rainbow hues, with as delighted admiration as any there.

"Look at this piece of perfection, Madelon. So simple and so exquisite, Swiss muslin and lace, just what you will need at Riverbank."

"It is charming for a young lady, admirably suited to Miss Brand," madame herself paused to say as she was passing. "If it will oblige such a patron as Mrs. Lyndal it shall be withdrawn from display at once."

A little woman in a purple moire that had seen better days, a shabby bonnet and a cheap veil, who was taking notes near, turned abruptly and took a survey of the little group.

"Only one of those women-reporters," commented madame as she moved on. "They do so massacre us in their descriptions, but we are all obliged to open our doors to them. Ma foi! we all have our trials."

CHAPTER III.

AT RIVERBANK.

Riverbank did not see its occupant at the end of that brief four days' time. After-thoughts came in full force, dozens of necessary improvements to be made upon the place that had not suggested themselves at first. Started into unequivocal demand, and it was two weeks later than the early date named which actually witnessed the arrival of the little procession upon the bank of the Hudson. Miss Mowbray came out with the family, and it was by Miss Mowbray's counsel that their delay had been extended in the city after other lingerers at last had winged their flight.

"Nothing could be more delightful," said Miss Mowbray, when their intention and her own invitation were delivered in a breath by Mrs. Lyndal. "I answer for myself and Ralph, with a hundred thanks for the compliment you have given us. "All the agreeable people you know," and I really derive a world of comfort in contemplating what a limited circle that will comprise. Promise me the creme of our set in two or three galant, and an extra feminine or two to absorb their superfluous attentions if you like, and I shall ask no more from June to November than your country place and its unlimited freedom, its sails and its rides and its drives, its exemption from all the tribulations the flesh is heir to in the shape of railway journeys, and miserable little ten-by-twelve rooms in fifth stories, with pokey old women and frowzy younger ones, and the pattern beau of the period in attendance, all friggedly demoralized by dust and mud, water—detestable stuff!—and the thermometer at ninety-seven, and hops, and humble-pie of which one is obliged to take their share in places like Saratoga, where we had concluded to martyrize ourselves for the coming month or two. The true value of having friends is proved by the use to which we can put them, and you shall surely be promoted to the head of my list for this, Mrs. Lyndal."

"You only repeat my sentiment," laughed the latter. "I said to Madelon that I should find you invaluable in warding off dullness and discontent after the first novelty of the change is over."

"But you can't expect me to counteract the effects of damp and mildew and general mustiness, you know. The house has been closed for five years, you say, and those are some of the inevitable results of disuse. It will certainly require more time for its renovation than you have allowed. I don't object to minor inconveniences on occasions, I don't expect anything but great inconveniences when I pay for my entertainment, but furnished gratuitously by my friends I must enter protest against consigning myself to damp sheets and moldy walls."

"How inconsiderate of us not to have remembered," cried Mrs. Lyndal, agast at such a prospect. "Ernest sent word to have it thoroughly opened and aired, but it never occurred to me until this moment that the upholsterers must do their work there before it will answer for a human habitation. How I wish you were always at hand to advise us. The place was really an artistic spot under the supervision of its previous owner, but I daresay we shall find it very much out of repair."

Thus it was late June when all completed the ladies were set down in a body at their destination. Mr. Goldwood had preceded them by a couple of days.

And Riverbank! It broke upon their sight like some fair work of the genii. A stone villa standing upon a raise that overlooked the country for miles about, a spacious lawn sloping to the river's verge, parterres one blaze of vivid colors in the light of the setting sun, a terrace where a large fountain sent up a volume that broke and fell in spray every drop of which was a prism of rainbow-rays. The river lay a broad blue sheet where ships with white sails "floated like doves of peace," a range of low-lying hills bounded the horizon on the one side, the white cottages of two or three villages peeped from the midst of green like birds' eye view, and away at the back the rugged outline of the Dunderberg was wrapped by the blue haze of distance.

Down from the terrace by a dozen broad and shallow granite steps came Mr. Goldwood, smiling at the unqualified pleasure and surprise that they expressed.

"Welcome to Riverbank. How do you like it, ladies fair? Will you be able to en-
dure its quietude without ennui, nor sigh envy after the birds of passage you forsok’d?

"Lovely. If we are not satisfied here you should turn us all out for base ingratitude. I think I could feast on flowers and be contented here all my life. Have you come into possession of Aladdin’s lamp, or the Sorcerer’s Wand, guardian—which?"

"Something as potent as either—knowledge of what is due to my charge. And you, Miss Mowbray, could you too be contented here all your life?"

"I never make rash assertions, Mr. Goldwood. Having a corporeal being which requires something more substantial than Miss Brand’s diet of flowers, and as I always change my mind with the fashion of my bonnet, I fear even the attractions of Riverbank would not be sufficient to hold my ‘fickle fancy’ for such an indefinite period."

"How did you ever accomplish so much in a single time, Ernest?" I have been questioning the wisdom of the move since second-thoughts suggested draughts and night-dews and all kinds of disagreeable things in a place gone to rack through disuse, and I find it perfect as if never out of the best of cars."

"But that as a personal imputation, and reflect that a prophet is not without honor except in his own country. It never has been out of the best of care, Lucy. I have quite a taste for horticulture, which I have taken especial pains to gratify by proxy. I had landscape gardeners here a year ago, while the permanent gardener and fruiterer, with his wife, have taken excellent charge of the villa. Come, let me show you through the house while daylight lasts. I have a couple of friends invited to dine with us who will be putting in an appearance soon."

"After all, there is much more satisfaction in coming quietly as we did, than with such a crowd as we first proposed. With the Eaton’s and Miss Marchmont, who are to come next week, we will be a decidedly comfortable and home-like party. Don’t you think so, Madelon?"

"Quite so, Mrs. Lyndal," Madelon, dressed for dinner, turned to the elderly lady, pausing at her door. "Enough is enough, and I almost dread to have our present coziness broken by any more."

"I don’t know what I should have done without Elinar in making any limit. I never knew what a thoroughly provident and helpless lot we are until taught by the experience of the past two weeks. Who did Ernest say he was expecting?"

"He did not say, I believe. None of our people yet, of course."

A couple of "our people" in the sense Madelon had designated they proved, however, for Mr. Mowbray and Gustave Mortimer, together with their host, made a little knot upon the terrace that turned indoors to appear in the drawing-rooms simultaneously with the advent of the ladies. Ralph Mowbray, cool-headed in all ordinary matters, had lost his customary caution, now that Cupid’s arrow was ranking in his breast.

"In common decency, I couldn’t act on Goldwood’s invitation, and locate at What’s-it-name-bank for such a week or so," he had reflected, dissatisfiedly. "At any rate, Nell has given me to understand as much, though I believe it was done out of pique after the last approach to a tiff we managed to indulge in. If I should chance to anticipate them with a round or two of fishing tackle as explanatory evidence, it will be an easy matter to transfer myself to the village on the urging they will be in duty bound to bring to bear; and something may be gained in the way of getting ahead of whatever other presumptuous puppies may lift their aspirations as high as Madelon.

"It was never Mr. Mowbray’s purpose to include himself among the "presumptuous puppies" aforesaid. It never had been his weakness to depreciate himself, and he accounted for his unlooked for presence now with the calmness of conscious integrity.

"Odd that I should have stumbled across your precise location all unknowingly. Up the Hudson" is such a vague term, I give you my word for it I never expected, when I started out in search of Mortimer here with the intention of persuading him to a run up among the Catskills, that I should drop upon Goldwood first of the two. ‘Man proposes,’ you know. Of course I shall not think of intruding until my designated time, but you ladies will pardon the anxiety to discover how you have endured the fatigues and ravages of the week past, which is my plea for so early an appearance."

"Did you expect to find us crushed and turned gray, Ralph? Even grief over your absence couldn’t accomplish that.

"Weight of years very soon will Nelly,” he answered in an aside.

"And oh, what a bungler! As if any one could be deceived in regard to your motive."

"Since chance has done so much for us I have insisted that Mowbray shall not put us off to the last minute. Time is not so precious with him that he need let it out by contract. Miss Mowbray, do lay your commands upon him, as a dutiful brother, to send for whatever traps he may have in the vicinity, and depart no more from such hospitality as we can give him."

"It will surely require more effective authority than mine, Mr. Goldwood. Ask Madelon to interfere, her commands are never questioned I believe."

"I owe Nell a good turn for that. I vow I won’t mention her age to her for a month," mentally quoth Mr. Mowbray as he met the smiling inquiry of those glorious eyes.

"Why not, when all unite in the request?"
Pray do, at any consequence short of a broken promise and reproving conscience.

"How well you measure men's weaknesses. A dozen promises should not stand in the way when you ask, Miss Brand."

"And Mr. Mortimer! Are you also one of us, or did you stumble upon the spot by luck?"

"Never was a victim of lucky chance in my life, Miss Mowbray, I give you my word for it. I'm like that fellow somebody has strung into rhyme—Poe, you know—an unhappy master, whom unmerciful disaster, followed fast and followed faster, and all the rest of it. I'm staying with my grandfather, one of your neighbors here, from whom I have expectations, though the prospect of ever realizing them is quite another thing. The old gentleman remains healthy out of all conscience, and cranky and unreasonable till I shouldn't be surprised if held in by marrying some gentle creature of 'sweet sixteen' and leaving me in the lurch. That's what gratitude amounts to in the generality of cases. I expect nothing but that the antiquated youth will yet drive me a victim of lengthened disappointment to my grave."

"Guard him then, carefully; don't let him be included in our number here," laughed Miss Mowbray. "I should fall in love with him at first sight, I know I should, and to have your death laid at my door would be too great a penalty."

They went in to dinner, a laughing, careless company. The table all in a glitter with silver and crystal, the chairs with plush, and an aperoqne running over with crimson roses in the center. Favorites of fortune these to whom Sevres china and gold-lined goblets, and men in waiting were every day matters, who might "wreathe the bowl" of pleasure with fairest flowers and quaff from its exhaustless draught at will. If all these had not the power to strain it from its bitter dregs who on earth might?

The repast was no more than half over when a cab from the station drove up to deposit a lone passenger at the door.

"There's only my trunk, driver, and my reticule which I have charge of myself, Ring, will you, and get help for that. They were not expecting me—no."

With a grin and a muttered "Guess it's not any of their fashionable folk," the Jehu shouldered the trunk and deposited it upon the topmost step.

There you are, ma'am. Three dollars if you please."

"It's too much, quite too much for one lone woman and a single box. Well, there it is then, but it's robbery outright. I would write up the instance as one of the atrocious swindles put on defenseless woman if I hadn't a better prospect of something ahead than penny-a-lining."

In from the odorous dusk and the sound of falling waters to the hall aglow with bright light, to a glimpse of spacious rooms through doors standing wide, to the faint sound of dishes clattering and voices and laughter, and an easy comprehension of the scene those sounds indicated, into the presence of a suspicious servant, an importation from the city mansion, the latter arrival came.

"The family are at dinner, are they? Oh, well, I can wait. No, you needn't take my name to your master, my man. Show me somewhere to wait and tell Miss Brand, in private if you like, that a lady wishes to speak with her at her own convenience."

With an air of unwillingness evident to the sharp eyes of the lady, the man led the way into a morning-room remote from those lighted drawing-rooms. A single lamp burned dimly upon the mantel-piece. He turned it up to a full blaze, and with a word, a sweeping glance about the apartment as if to take note of all the priceless articles of value it contained, left her there.

Left alone, the new-comer dropped into a chair, laughing to herself as she took a deliberate survey of her surroundings.

"How are the mighty fallen? The man absolutely is afraid I may steal something. Let me see; two insignificant bronzes on the mantel of the insignificant Clytie yonder, a couple of Bohemian vases and a mother-of-pearl paper knife, every earthly thing excepting the chairs and the tables and the curtains and the carpet and a few odd tags of garniture, none of which the worst victim of kleptomania extant would be apt to capture. It would irk ax his might to plant an apartment in the house, and this very minute doubtless that exemplary serving-man is fidgeting lest I 'fold my tent like the Arabs, and as silently steal away,' with some one or all of these inducements. And yonder, somewhere, they are feasting 'off gold and silver, of the garments of the land.' To think that ever I was a dweller in 'marble halls,' to think that ever I knew not what it was to hunger for their rich viands and to thirst for their wines, and long for their ease, come and vanished 'like the baseless fabric of a vision'—heigho!"

"A person to see me," repeated Madelon, as the same servant dextrously intercepted her as she was leaving the dining-hall. "Are you not mistaken? Who could desire to see me here?"

"A person asking to see Miss Brand—I am not mistaken, Miss Madelon. His distinguishing emphasis seemed to imply that the person must be. "She is waiting in the morning-room to the left, Miss."

The sweep of her silken skirts, the silent swinging of the door, and Madelon stood upon the threshold. A little woman in a shabby purple mohire, and rusty black lace mantle, and a cheap bonnet and flimsy veil, with a face that was haggard and jaded under a suspicious bloom, resting back in a
great dark chair, looked up at her as she stood there, with sharp, blue, speculative eyes.

Madelon took a step forward in doubt, incredulity and surprise struggling to a certainty.

"Surely I am not mistaken. Surely this is Mrs. Trelawney."

CHAPTER IV.

FROM BOHEMIA TO ARCADIA.

MRS. TRELAWNEY swept up from her chair with a bow which was not devoid of all her old grace, but with a hint of something sarcastic and mocking in the profound obsequity.

"You have not forgotten me, my dear Miss Brand. It is a new sensation to find myself not forgotten by one who knew me in my better days. You were an affectionate, impulsive, tender sort of little creature in those days; they always are to me. I never realized that I did not mislead myself in clinging to the belief that you would not turn your back on an old friend."

"I slumber at remembrance of what I must have been then, Mrs. Trelawney. I can scarcely believe that wild, morose, terribly desperate creature you knew in Rockpoin nearly five years ago was really I. I never have forgotten you, however; I have wondered often what became of you after we were separated that dreadful night, after I knew you were out in the world and alone."

"It wasn't pleasant, Madelon. It has been miserably, awfully hard at times since then. I have been a wanderer and an outcast all over the civilized world, and I have known what it is to want good food, and shelter, and clothes for my back, oftener than I have known what it is to have them. You thought yours was a hard lot once, my dear; but you never knew dreary poverty and fear of the future and heartless landladies, who would take one's soul, if they could, when once was so unfortunate as to fall into arrears, but, as they couldn't, took the next thing to it, one's baggage, and yet—and yet there never was one moment I would have exchanged it for the time gone just before."

The haggardness was increased threefold in her face for a moment, a cold, hard light came in the blue eyes, where never more was seen the soft, illusive candor which had been their chiefest charm. Adversity will refine some natures, will purify them, as gold, through fire, is purified of dross, but it had done the opposite for Berenice Trelawney. Her refinement had been of the surface, not of the soul; all that was coarse and selfish and supercilious in her had been intensified; all the germs of good in her never more than imperfectly developed at best, had been crushed out by the hardships she had encountered in the nomadic course she deprecated.

And yet it had not been without its fascination. A Gipsy instinct had been aroused in her, and to be free, even after so brief a service as hers had been to an unyielding master, was a boon that went far in smoothing the devious paths she trod.

Madelon looked for meaning. She thought she referred to her loss of husband and wealth as heart-sorrow and misfortune, and her own face softened in sympathy as she moved a step nearer her.

"I had my guardian make inquiry after you, but you were then gone to Europe, it was said; and again later, when the lady with whom you traveled had returned. She could give me no information after she had parted from you."

"We quarreled furiously. Did she tell you that? It is my fate always to quarrel with people who have the goodness to employ me, overbearing and supercilious and disagreeable, as they always are to me. And I may get on together, Madelon; we did so well once that I have pleasant anticipations for the future. You have improved wonderfully, my dear. It really gave me a start when I chanced across you in Bellini's the other day, but I knew you in spite of with them like a pretty, demure cat, without a particle of mercy for the torments they are ordained to suffer—it amazes me!"

Mrs. Trelawney leaned back in her chair, laughing shrilly. The laugh and the words grated upon Madelon.

"I do not like to think of that time, Mrs. Trelawney. You may know that I never speak of it, scarcely ever of the lonely girlhood which preceded it, which drove me to taking that mad and useless step. Doubtless you know how useless it was, how unnecessary. My aunt died within three days after, and her last wish consigned me to the care of my present guardian... One thing I have never been able to understand: I agreed to pay money to that man—to the gentleman..." she hesitated; the name had for her that repugnance which made it hard to utter.

"To the man you honored so highly by marrying on rather extraordinary terms. The name—it was Fitz-George, I believe."
"Yes. From that night to this I have never heard of him; he never claimed the half of my life in which he was entitled. He has kept his part of the bond without claiming the fulfillment of mine. I would rather he had—I would rather know he had been benefited by an act which must keep him from forming domestic ties all his life. It was through you and your husband that the agreement was brought about. I have thought it possible that you might be able to explain his unaccountable silence, perhaps some way of conveying to him still the money which is rightfully his."

"What a queer girl you are, Madelon! I should say you were wonderfully fortunate by being so easily rid of him, and saved you a fortune by his odd taste. I never knew anything regarding Mr. George Fitz-George further than yourself—never beyond seeing him once or twice in company with Mr. Trelawney. They had some previous acquaintance, I believe, but for all I have heard of him since he might have gone up into the air or down into the earth, after that eventful night."

A pensive shade crept into Madelon's face and she stood looking down, pulling to pieces a rosebud she had worn in her belt.

"You saw him, Mrs. Trelawney. I wish you could remember and tell me what he was like. Won't you be a tall man, with eyes like rich golden wine?"

"Eyes like rich golden wine?" Mrs. Trelawney echoed her words with that shrill, discordant laugh jarring through the room.

"Whoever heard of eyes like that? I never knew any one to have them—certainly not Fitz-George."

"What was he like then, Mrs. Trelawney?"

"Only an ordinarily tall man, my dear, and dark. Dark eyes and hair and a slow complexion, and not a day less than thirty-five then, I should say. Have you a notion of hunting him up, of acknowledging that romantic midnight marriage, and ending the chapter in the usual way? Pity to cloud so fair a finale, especially the 'eyes like golden wine,' but I know Fitz-George drank beer and smoked a Dutch pipe, and sang comic songs in the bar-room of the Stormy Petrel. Fancy such a figure in the drawing-rooms at Riverbank."

A flush swept up into those clear olive cheeks. The lack of delicacy displayed by this woman was grating upon her at every turn.

"You know I could never contemplate that; nothing I could dread more than to be brought face to face with the man and retain the remembrance of that rash folly. But something, which must have been a delusion of the long sickness I had afterward, has always lingered with me—a faint remembrance of a crowd and confusion, of having my arm drawn within his, and for one second meeting such eyes as I have described, as he led me away. It was only an impression, but I must be one. And I am forgetting you—pardon me! You will be my guest here, of course."

"With great happiness, my dear child. I knew I could not be mistaken in that generous heart of yours; I felt sure you would welcome me. Such a lonely little woman as I have been, so friendless, so buffeted about in the battle of life, I can appreciate such kind remembrance. If you will only give me a corner somewhere, and let my trunk be sent there—ah!"

"Madelon, my dear—" Mr. Goldwood stopped stock still upon the threshold and looked hard at the faded, painted, smiling appearance confronting him.

"You surely haven't forgotten me, Mr. Goldwood? And you will not deny me a welcome since our dear Madelon here has already extended one? You know from her what friends we were once, of course, and I came out from the city with perfect confidence that you were not misplaced, of finding her unchanged."

He only bowed stiffly, and Madelon hastened to say:

"I was about to have Mrs. Trelawney shown to the apartment which is intended for Miss Marchmont, guardian. Other arrangements can be made better if you come. You will have no other suggestion, I presume."

Mr. Goldwood himself turned back to give the order, and in grave courtesy held the door for Mrs. Trelawney to pass.

"Such memories as the place calls up," she breathed, softly. "You know it is not new to me, Madelon. Make the most of your youth and your beauty and your lovely surroundings, my dear, though to be sure you needn't fear any grisly death's-head starting up."

"Easy to see that my lord of the castle is anything but pleased; I never was a favorite with him;" thought Mrs. Trelawney, as she followed up the wide stairway. "Fortunate for me that I have a hold in his dominion. And Madelon, so sweetly unconscious and so liberally gracious, as though I did not have her in my power! I came prepared to wring just such attention from her, and it's all the better being her own voluntary offer. 'Eyes like golden wine!' Is there anything in that idea, I wonder? One thing is plain: she does not suspect that another except Fitz-George had a part in that night's ceremony."

Mr. Goldwood, left alone with his ward, glanced at her dubiously.

"What does that woman's being here mean, Madelon?"

"What she told you, guardian; she had faith enough to believe I shouldn't be changed because the world has gone hard with her. You know I have always wanted
to do something for her. It is a pitiful change for one born and bred a lady, and you must let me do what I can to have her forget it, for a time at least."

"Hum! What you want to do for her is to give her money, I presume. I remember a request of that sort once before from you. It's a false idea, that of owing it to her because you very properly were the one to step into the rich man's shoes. It would have been long, I warrant, before she would have hunted you up to have shared with you. Your desire speaks well for your heart, Madelon, whatever it may do for your head. I don't object to buying her out of the way at a reasonable price, and having done with her. She's not the kind of woman I like to see about, Maddy."

The first I ever knew you to be unreasonable was when I said I should have to give her money, but it must be done in a delicate way, not to wound any sensitive feeling she may possess."

"Wound that piece of tinsel! A paper pawn for all the amity her sensitive feelings will require, take my word."

"But take the money, and I insist upon that, guardian. She showed me kindness once such as I could have had from no one else, and I should like to repay it in equal measure."

Perceiving her earnestness, Mr. Goldwood repressed his own disinclination to receive this unexpected gift.

"She is here and I will not turn her out of the house, but I tell you plainly I don't like her, Madelon. I never did like her. A heartless flirt, a mercenary husband-hunter, served her no more than right in the end. A faded, worn out, shallow, mercenary creature still, with the face set plainly on her face, she is more apt to repay your generosity by malice than gratitude. There! I have had my say, and you shall have your own way in the matter. Now, shall I escort you back to the drawing-room, Miss Brand?"

Mrs. Trelawney made no appearance below that night. She had secured her point, she had gained a foothold there, and to court favor with the ruling power she could be submissive and retiring just at first. She made her appearance at the breakfast-table therefore, a trifle depressed, a trifle more faded with the garish morning light dealing unmercifully with powder and rouge, showing these blue eyes heavy and dull.

"And the creature was absolutely a marvel of pink-and-white prettiness only a little time ago," thought Mr. Goldwood, slightly relenting. "She's not set to do much harm in her old line at any rate. I've promised that Madelon shall be indulged, but for my own comfort I hope and trust Mrs. Trelawney will cut short her sojourn at Riverbank."

With some idea of shortening it by meeting the object she might have in coming there at all, he requested the pleasure of her presence in his study during the morning. From that interview Mrs. Trelawney came forth radiant, a fresh rustling cheek in her hand, a deferent smile curling her lip the moment she was out of his view.

"This is a part of my object here, Mr. Ernest Goldwood, and very considerate of you, sir, to come to the mark so speedily. But it isn't all. I haven't forgotten that I owe you something for that interference of yours of years agone, and I shall take out satisfaction in being a plague before your eyes for so long a time as my pleasure shall specify. This piece of lucky fortune is by our dear Madelon's desire; therefore my first duty must be to return thanks for such past remembrance."

She tapped at Madelon's door and entered with the check still in her hand, the light of triumph still lingering upon her countenance.

"You dear thoughtful child, how can I ever acknowledge such kindness as this! I shan't attempt it, words fall me, and I shall show my appreciation by accepting this little token in the same free spirit it was given."

Madelon smiled. The little token was for five hundred dollars, and Mr. Goldwood had delicately insinuated that double the sum should await her time of departure.

"Of course you know I hadn't a thing suitable to wear here, and of course again you weren't going to have me disgrace you all. I don't mind it dear; I am not hypersensitive over a favor from you. I shall send certain orders of mine into town this very morning, and take a day by the first of the week to go in myself. You have all my shopping done. I have no hope of your companionship, I suppose."

"I have no idea of going into the city for weeks if not months, Mrs. Trelawney."

"Ah well, I have learned to depend upon myself. One good result of such a life as mine has been, at the top of the heap one day, at the bottom another, and that's a wanderer of Bohemia, to-day snuggly ensconced in the Arcadia of Riverbank. My coming here all unasked reminds me of an unceremonious visitor I had when I was as young and fair, as much a daughter of Fortune as you, Madelon. I don't take any credit to myself for having received her well; I didn't care enough for her one way or the other to treat her ill, and what return do you suppose the wretch gave me after she had won upon my confidence and hospitality? The basest; she was plotting my ruin all the while she was most fawning, and came afterward to triumph over me in the misery of my downfall. It's a Christian duty to forgive our enemies so I have forgiven her, but who is to know what fatality may follow such a coincidence as this present experience of mine?"
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"I am not a fatalist, Mrs. Trelawney, and I should be sorry to admit any possible similarity between such a case and this."
"And I don't know what come over me to be thinking of Miss Bell and drawing comparisons now," thought the other. "If I had the approach to such an intention as hers—which I haven't—and was wanting revenge on that cool girl, I should need to take another lesson from her and bridle my tongue."

CHAPTER V.

A GLEAM OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE.

"Bravely hot and confoundedly dull! What everlasting days these are. I wonder how the ladies manage to put them in and keep themselves invisible, and seem so well satisfied through it all as they do. Spend their time over their dresses and the fashion-platers' pages on earth—a table so completely absorb the feminine mind, and they don't appear to remember that I am left to myself all these interminable mornings. Goldwood is good enough, but eternally at his daubs up in that excrable tower, or poring over miserable books, and leaving me the inestimable blessing of liberty which is only another word for ennui!"

Mr. Ralph Mowbray shook himself up from the grass where he had been lying, turning himself about to observe the course of the sun. He had come out of a doze to find oblique rays penetrating the shadowed nook where he had stretched himself a couple of hours before, upon his back, with his straw hat tipped over his eyes. Now, his nose felt burned to a blister, he was limp and generally demoralized in crumpled linen and shirt-front, but a mournful hint of its pristine glory. Yawning and in an ill-temper he mopped the moisture from his forehead, and sauntered toward the villa.

Through the interstices of oaks arching the avenue below he could see his host's blooded horses champing their bits and pawing up the gravel of the drive, and across the lawn came Mr. Goldwood himself, at that self-same moment.

"Want to drive into the station with me, Mowbray? You have a fair chance of walking back in that case. I calculate on it myself, provided our expected party make their expected appearance all together."

"And you can ask one in the face of such a plight? Thanks, no; and I object to walking beside Pedestrianism requires an energetic frame of mind out of accordance with this weather. I wonder you should contemplate the exercise."

"I have an incentive—expect a particular crony of mine, Bertram. Do you know him?"

" Haven't the honor. And yet there's something dusky familiar in the name, now I think of it. I may be able to recall him from my somewhat extensive circle of acquaintances, but just now the effort of memory is too great."

Half an hour later in fresh apparel and with the happy consciousness of the evening near at hand which was to have Madeleon under his eyes, Mr. Mowbray sauntered out upon the terrace to find the two young ladies already there.

They had brought chairs out into the shade, a breeze was rustling the leaves over their heads, some points of red sunshine fell through in tremulous flecks.

How refreshing you look. As though you had kept yourselves in the vicinity of the refrigerator or the thermometer at ninety was powerless of effect. Aurora and Hesperia, sweet contrasts side by side, and in comparison—"

"Don't, Ralph. Comparisons are odious, and compliments not to be endured. You must learn to praise a thing as a useful child, and not interrupt us. There, pick up Madeleon's book for her."

"Tennyson, Miss Brant? Ladies never fail in liking poetry do they? I like it myself on occasions with all the concomitants of appreciation, shady nook, surrounding flowers, a rain sparkling in the sun, and a fair reader, for instance."

"Poor Tennyson, how much you would exact for him. More than you will receive unless your sister will oblige you. I must disclaim being at all a fair reader."

"Permit me for once the impertinence of contradicting a lady—fair at least, whatever else." Mr. Mowbray sunk gracefully upon the grass at her feet, appropriating Tennyson despaired as a rest for his elbow. He could have applied his adjective to either most properly. The two were admirable fools. Miss Mowbray in her cour de viel dress and lace ruffles with white roses in her bonnet, bright hair, had never looked better. Madeleon wore some thin black fabric shot with a scarlet thread, a unique fancy, but becoming her as everything did.

"Nell is a sister to be proud of," reflected Mr. Mowbray complacently, "and beauty in the family reflects a fellow's own self-importance. Comparisons are odious, not to be made where Madeleon is concerned."

"What have you been doing with yourself, Ralph? You are the color of a wild Indian, and your nose—my dear boy, brass was always a favorite feature of yours, but the exchange for copper that locality is a pity explored. Not to be complimentary, you are hideously tanned."

"Through being a sacrifice to the cruelty of you fair. If you will banish me until four of the afternoon what can you expect better than disfigurement, the result of hopeless wantonness. By the way, have we ever know any one whose patronymic was Bertram? Strikes me I ought to recall."
"It strikes me that brotherly love must be at a discount if you fail. Is it possible you have forgotten my adventure in Venice and my gallant rescuer? A poet, or an artist, or something, modest as he was brave, for we never succeeded in penetrating his retirement, though we tried out of gratitude to the deliverer. Cecil Bertram—why, Ralph!"

"What overpowering inspiration has possession of you now, my dear?"

"My unknown of the breakfast table, don't you remember? No wonder I thought I had seen him before. It was my gallant rescuer, without a doubt—I am positive. How vexatious, twice so near and not once to have cried, 'Bless you, my deliverer!'"

"Don't be disconsolate. This same Bertram—I presume it is the same—is among the elect."

"One of our expected guests," explained Madelon. "Pray, tell me your adventure, Miss Mowbray. I thought romantic adventures had gone out with the past age—it was our fate to travel abroad in such complete security."

"Nell's is a harrowing tale, Miss Brand, suitable to the manner of Miss Mowbray and a catastrophe. The old, old story newly told, and with a variation. Chapter the first: Lustrous moonlight, silver bright; scene, the Grand Canal, tenor-voiced gondolier, and fate burst upon him maddeningly in a lovely presence—Elinor, you understand?"

"Ralph, be quiet! What an idea you convey! I assure you it was most entrancing, the water and the music and the beautiful evening and the dark-eyed Donnas and myself floating to the spell which makes destruction please, and my handsome gondolier trolling his liquid notes—glorious! The change was too abrupt to be quite agreeable when one is not to yield to the unparallelled attractions of the fair Inglese—why must modesty be one's ruling weakness, it so mars the effect in telling one's own story. This Venetian noble, a beardless youth not out of his teens, by the way, had taken this very romantic, threadbare method of making his passion known. I'm afraid I scrawled. I have no need to confess it, but visions of daggers and bloody knives were in my mind. By some means the boat overturned, there in that rayless channel two beings were plunged, and the poor little Venetian, who couldn't swim in the least, clutching blindly after a straw, succeeded in gripping me instead of the boat. Imagine the following agonies, please, muddy water gurgling over our heads, that money little beast dragging me down, and then a light, 'beacon of hope,' breaking through, the gallant rescuer fishing us out like drowning rats and putting matters straight by his interpretation of my adorer's jargon. He took me home, gave his name to Ralph the gondolier; I do drowse to appreciate the circumstance at the time, while I was left to the miseries of a cold in the head for a week afterward."

"While the adoring fand that single bath as efficacious as a whole course of hygiene, never was inclined to repeat the experiment, was he, Nell? And the knight of the lessons has not to be found, and the romance came to an untimely end, and now, 'behold, the conquering hero comes,' is to come, and there's the chance of a sequel."

"I come! I come! You have called me long," cried Mrs. Trelawney, tripping down the broad steps and forth to join them. "Did you mean me, Mr. Mowbray? What terrify ing theme is that you are all absorbed in?"

"One old as the hills and new as the dawn—loved. 'There's nothing half so sweet,' you know. And you who possess the winning power, whose praises might be sung in 'none knew her but to lovel her,' you will not be unkind to one whose misfortune has been to love not at all."

"Never meaning yourself—oh, fie!" with her shrill laugh and a little blow upon his shoulder with her perfumed fan. "Such a miscreant on your own confession; turn from the evil of your ways, my son; take lessons in love and wise. Miss Mowbray, is this brother of yours actually so impervious to Cupid's darts? We must convert him!"

"I am brought to a knowledge of my transgression, and vow devotion to the Three Graces as presented before me in slight atonement for past neglect."

"Admiration is for all, but devotion must belong to one. Madelon, my love, do you suppose there is a grain of truth in this young man's assertions? Quick come, quick go; I question such speedy conversion."

"And I fail to perceive the necessity for it. Where are you going, Elinor?"

"To retrieve the field. A cloud in the distance bespeaks the carriage, and Mrs. Lyndal is all alone."

Retreat was cut off by the appearance of three gentlemen, come by a short route and approaching unnoticed across the lawn. Messrs. Goldwood and Mortimer and one other whom all three recognized in spite of changes—Cecil Bertram.

"Madelon, you will remember a friend of old. Permit me—Miss Mowbray, Mr. Bertram. What! not strangers? Mrs. Trelaw-
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ney you already know—and Mowbray, too? You cosmopolitans are never taken at a loss, it appears, and this is ‘well met, good friends,’

Mr. Bertram has a claim upon my gratitude as well as remembrance, Mr. Goldwood. He conferred a lasting benefit upon the world by saving my life once. I have just been telling the story, with Miss Brand for an appreciative audience.”

“Let me hope, then, some glory attached to the repetition. Picking a young lady out of a still canal is a feat which deserves to be perpetuated. And to Miss Brand I owe more than remembrance; it is a gratification I scarcely expected, to find she retains such for me.”

“I do not readily forget, Mr. Bertram, and with my guar dia to sound your praises, my memory has had no lack of cultivation.”

“An apt reproach. I was preposterous in expecting recognition on score of that brief acquaintance when I was successful in besieging a certain fortress down upon the coast.”

“And were prison-bound there. I should have remembered from even that, though time and climate and well-earned fame have all vanquished their effects, a word which conveys more than simple disappointment.

Mrs. Goldwood went forward to meet the carriage. There were more greetings; the new-comers were ushered within, and the other group scattered.

“We can almost class Mr. Mortimer in the list of arrivals,” said Elinor Mowbray, turning to him, disconsolate and unnoticed, among the rest. “An entire week without an appearance from you. What plea can pardon such neglect?”

“The same unconscionable flatterer. Time has not altered you, Mr. Mortimer, unless for the better in the matter of whiskers, and the worse in gallantries you never mean. You gentlemen are all willing to swear devotion a dozen times a day.”

“Awww—to be sure, if you would give us the opportunity. You can’t doubt my constancy, Mrs. Trelawney, proved as it is by years, and—disencouragements, you know. The first love lingers still.”

“There’s a saying that we all return to our first love, but I was your twenty-first, wasn’t I? And my successors have been legion in the ages since, I haven’t a doubt.”

“Wonderful transformation in the little widow, Nell, I say,” commented Mr. Mowbray, left apart with his sister, and lingering for a moment. “She looked forty up to this; now she’s knocked off ten years at least.”

“She is only twenty-five, Ralph.”

“Her word for it?—no. Such light goods don’t wash well. She’s in high feather; captured little Mortimer, hasn’t she? Another arrival in the field for you, eh, Nell?”

“You are all blind, I believe. In high feather! That woman is in a dudgeon over something, Ralph. Don’t you see she is talking beyond the innocent whiskerando beside her? I wonder if she didn’t come here to marry Mr. Goldwood?”

“Charitable creatures, your sex, to each other. I don’t suppose she could do it, now.”

“I don’t suppose you are quite a fool, Ralph,” retorted Miss Mowbray with unusual acerbity, as she moved away.

She had been right. Mrs. Trelawney was in a bit of a scrape, a scrape which conveys more than simple disappointment.

The week past had been well employed by her. She had made out orders, studied expenditure on economical principles, and made a couple of flying trips into the city and back. The result was manifested in boxes and bundles that hinted important additions to her limited and impoverished wardrobe, but it had been reserved for this evening for the butterfly to burst forth from its chrysalis in transcendental colors. She had a double object in coming to Riverbank—first, to gain a sop from Corterham; second, the hope of meeting Cecil Bertram.

In her narrow, selfish soul, one spark of tenderness remained, burned more brightly and steadily for the crushing out of all else that was true and womanly. She knew of Bertram’s return, and what more natural than that Bertram should give a part of his time to his friend at Riverbank? She could hold her own standing there; she would see him, and for the rest—who knew?

She had seen him now, and he had passed her over with a word and bow, less than he had given any one there. It was unintentional on his part, she knew that, and the knowledge stung her furious. A woman can pardon willful neglect, she may find comfort in believing it a result of pique or cunning artifice, but the growth of utter indifference—never.

She swept her silken train up the terrace walk, having dropped her complacent attendance by the way, and an arched window of the drawing-room Madelon was framed, the scarlet thread in her dress lit to a burning flame in the last red rays of sunset, the bronze of her hair at its brightest, the clear
THE MADDEST MARRIAGE EVER WAS.

The maddest marriage ever was. The bride was a commoner, but she was a woman of exceptional beauty and grace. Her face was pale and fragile, but her eyes were bright and full of life. She wore a simple white dress, and her hair was pulled back in a soft chignon.

Her groom was a man of wealth and status, but his temper was often short and his manners were rude. Despite this, he adored his bride and was always by her side.

The wedding was a grand affair, held in a large hall decorated with flowers and candles. The guests were dressed in their finest, and the atmosphere was one of joy and celebration.

As the newlyweds cut the cake, a gust of wind blew through the open window, causing the flames of the candles to flicker. The groom took one look at his bride and smiled. "That's a good sign," he said, "it means we'll have a long and happy life together."

The newlyweds went on to lead a happy and successful life, with the groom rising to great heights of power and influence. And yet, despite all their success, their love for each other remained strong, and they continued to be one of the most adored couples of their time.
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all attracted by her, as much to be compared with Madelon or Miss Mowbray now as a few scraps of gaudy French muslin and wrapped wire may compare with two blooming white roses upon the stem. And there— with almost a groan— 'she's got hold of Cecil, at last. Such transparent arts as hers should cure him if he were not already cured. I have his word for her spell being broken, but confound the woman! I'd rather she was anywhere a thousand leagues away.'

Mrs. Trelawney had held her court and waited, wondering impatiently, consciously at her best, that stone of the old influence could reach or draw him.

"The boy was so earnest once he can't have forgotten me," she argued, ignoring or forgetting at that moment that "the boy" had merged into the bronzed, bearded, travelled and famous man, that the boy's undisciplined heart and ardent fancy might have changed in keeping. "If the mountain won't come to Mahomet, Mahomet must go to the mountain. He shall show some remembrance more than he has done yet."

It was an easy matter to put herself in his way, to turn with beaming smile and extended hand.

"Aren't you going to give me one little word for the sake of old times, Mr. Bertram? Don't tell me that new friends have effaced the memory of the old. It is harrowing to reflect that among the many only I should be forgotten."

"Not forgotten, Mrs. Trelawney. If I have seemed remiss it has been through believing you better entertained than through such poor medium as mine."

"I shall not credit that if you leave me all in a moment. You are not to escape at once now that I know you were not really avoiding me. So like yesterday it seems that you and I and pleading of the face were real. We don't seem possible that years are between, and that your genius has blossomed from its happy promise. I always predicted you a great success, please to remember. I hope flattery and worldly adulation haven't spoiled you, Cecil."

"Mrs. Trelawney flatters in supposing me the recipient of such."

"So formal. Do you mean to be cruel, Mr. Bertram, to remind me that while you have not forgotten you have likewise not forgiven?" The blue eyes were upturned to him; if the complexion was false, the softening and pleading of the face were real. Her voice quivered and lost the shrillness which underlay its usual tone. "If you knew how I have suffered for that mistake, Cecil—if you knew how bitterly I have atoned it. Surely you can understand now how it was I was driven into that hateful marriage, how it was I was educated as I was, taught to consider a wealthy marriage the one ambition of existence, would have been driven into it. Say that you do forgive me, Cecil—that you are not going to hold hard feeling against me now because of that other time."

Her fingers locked nervously. He stooped to recover her bouquet, which had fallen, with a sharp glance to the right and left to note if they were observed.

"Don't distress yourself, Mrs. Trelawney. I can and do understand perfectly. If any assurance is needed from me you have it freely; I don't hold the slightest ill-will—gratitude rather for that salutary lesson. First love is inevitable as the measles, and like some other diseases the harder the attack the more complete the cure. Will you accept my arm to the scene of yonder conference?—something of importance from the general interest it excites I imagine."

Pleading and softening died from Mrs. Trelawney's face; down dropped the lids over eyes with a gleam in them not pleasant to see.

"We all outlive sentiment to be sure and we don't carry scars—they only follow 'it might have been' in poetry, 'had we never met or parted, we had ne'er been broken-hearted,' and the like." She took his proffered arm and swept across to the group gathered about Mrs. Lyndal's sofa.

"Ernest" called his sister. "Ernest, we are discussing an excursion to the mountain. Mr. Eaton fancies there is a ruin of some sort worth visiting, at any rate a picnic dinner and a drive home by moonlight. It's dreadfully imprudent I'm afraid with the mountain fogs and heavy dews, but these young people insist so strongly that I am tempted to risk neuralgia and undertake it."

"So fatigueing," murmured Miss Marchmont. "Mr. Eaton, how could you suggest it?"

"Consider me the prime mover; Mr. Eaton only seconded the motion. I am fairly dying for one of those glorious rides we were promised over hill and down vale a dozen miles or so."

"The baker's dozen, Miss Mowbray, thirteen."

"Not one too many. I would propose to-morrow, but our travelers here must have a day to recuperate, I suppose."

"Not to speak of hampers to be ordered, and the occupants of the stables looked after."

"Then as a host is for use not ornament let us consign all the practical details to Mr. Goldwood's care. How many have we all told—ten, is it?"

"Don't count me in. I'm sure to be a disappointment. Haven't the fortunate accomplishment of being able to ride, you see, and I do place some value on my neck if nobody else does."

"Easily remedied, Mortimer. Some must go in the carriages and I know you can drive."
"Without you, Mr. Mortimer, I shall not consent to stir."

"Hold out to the last then, Mortimer. No one but Neil would have originated a proposition so monstrous. Miss Marchmont and I have entered a league against it."

"There's the old gent, you know, sure to have a fit of spleen for a week because I cut stick and left him this time," Mr. Mortimer admitted, ingenuously. "You don't know what care is, any of you, or won't until you have a grandfather and expectations on your hands. You see, he won't have a servant near him when I'm in the house, or out of it either for that matter, and he's gouty from high living, poor old chap—was a captain in the merchant service in his time—and was seized with premonitory twinge this morning. Courage of desperation, etc., broke the bonds to-night, but I might as well hang my chances as take a day's leave of the sort."

"Find a substitute. Such devotion will surely send you into a decline."

"It's a settled matter?" questioned Miss Marchmont, who had an excellent heart under any surface foibles. "There's my maid, a capital nurse, and I can spare her any time. You, young French girl can manage for us two, Della? Della, otherwise Miss Eaton, acquiesced."

"Thanks, but it wouldn't do, you know! Not if she's young and pretty and clever—why, he'd like as not marry her out of pure contrariness."

"But Miss Marchmont's maid is old and ugly," laughed Miss Eaton. "Clever, to be sure, but a victim of blighted hopes, I've heard. Octogenarians never take to useful people over forty, do they?"

"Oh, in that case—"

"In that case consider it settled. Miss Marchmont, you are a jewel, and entitled to the rank of the name. You have saved the breaking of our rank and file, a misfortune not to be endured with equanimity."

The clocks in the villa were chiming the half-hour after eleven when the guests dispersed to their various chambers. Later still, Goldwood, who had been walking the plazas, smoking and watching the midnight stars burn their white flame against the deep-blue arch above, tossed the fragment of cigar away, the spark of which had died out minutes before, and with something very like a sigh, turned to go in.

"I couldn't bring myself to disturb such a gentle soul, but if you are fairly out of it, my dear fellow, I should like a word."

Tall and serene, leaning against the doorway was Bertram. Was it fancy, or did Goldwood fairly color under his quizzical glance? If only stars might tell what thoughts they inspire, what mazy dreams are drawn out under them!"

"With me? certainly Cecil. You took me by surprise. I thought you were abed before this."

"You didn't tell me you expected Mrs. Trelawney, Ernest. No, don't take me up, pray, before I begin. I beg you will believe my assurance that I can smile over my boyish infatuation for the lady in question. Knowing your sentiments, however, I am surprised to find her here. Have you any objections to telling me how it happens?"

"Not the slightest. She came unasked, but remains by my ward's request."

"Ah-h! By Miss Brand's request."

"Precisely. I fancy you see as I do that Mrs. Trelawney is trading upon her generosity. Madelon has some far-fetched notions of duty and honor, and they include an obligation to the widow of the man who held the Trelawney fortune previous to its coming into her possession. Nonsense, but a harmless whim as long as it is not too costly. I shall look out that she's not victimized."

"And her presence here—forced, I could see—you think is not disagreeable to your ward? Do you not think it possible that her request may have proceeded, not willingly, through the claim she concedes to Mrs. Trelawney?"

"I have just told you that it proceeded from a mistaken idea, but Madelon does not see it as such. There's nothing in common between them, so it isn't to be expected she derives a great deal of pleasure from the gay widow's society, but fancy her begging me to spare the latter's sensitiveness when I was the medium of a donation to her! I shouldn't like to trust my purse to such sensitiveness unless it was otherwise well guarded."

"You have anticipated what I might have suggested," said Bertram, drawing his contemplative gaze from the starry, lovely night.

"If he would take to Madelon now," thought Goldwood, as he sauntered up the stairs. "Looks like an interest astir, and I couldn't wish any thing better than for it to prove so."

And in the room which had been assigned her, smaller and plainer than the one which had been hers for the first night, the one Miss Marchmont occupied now, Mrs. Trelawney stood at her window looking out upon the night. She heard the two as they passed, heard them bid each other good-night as they separated, and set her teeth, breathing hard as she looked back at those peaceful stars under which all should have been peace. She turned from the contemplation soon; there was nothing soothing in the clear, odorous outer midnight to her senses, turned from it to another contemplation not so pleasant now as it had been years before. She turned up the lamp that had been burning dimly, and standing before her.
dressing-glass, looked long and critically at
the reflection it presented.
"Faded," she said to herself. "There's
no concealing it; I never can make myself
what I was again. I have grown older in five
years than most women would in fifteen; I
have lost more in that time than all the
cosmetics and French arts in the world can
replace. I never can rule queen of hearts
again; it would be worse than folly to fancy
it. But the flesh-pots of Egypt are in my
power still; the gold and the purple and the
dear delights of high life may still be mine
—shall be, through that girl whom I hate.
But not here—not here! her guardian is too
watchful and too suspicious. He would bat-
tle down even such a hold upon her as I pos-
sess. Let me think, let me think!"

Trailing her shimmering silk after her up
and down the steps, she passed her hands
locked behind her, her eyes upon the floor,
the bloom upon her cheeks unmistakably
foreign to the set and haggard face, Mrs.
Trelawney thought long and deeply and to
her purpose before the snowily draped bed
in a corner received its occupant.

CHAPTER VII.

UPON THE RIVER.

The dew was still upon the flowers next
morning, the air "sweet as a breath from
Cytherea," as Madelon, all in white, with a
flaming scarlet rose just bursting from the
bud fastened in her dusky hair, stood by the
marble basin of the fountain.

Ralph Mowbray, looking from his win-
dow, saw her there. It was still half an
hour before the dressing-bell, postero-
erously early for a civilized being and a man
of the world to have left his pillow, but either Mr.
Mowbray's digestion was wrong or he had
fallen prey to some other cause for trou-
blous fancies. He had been visited by bad
dreams; he had waked and yawned and
turned over in bed, trying in vain to catch a
last brief nap, and in thorough impatience
sprung from the couch where the feathers
seemed turned to stone, opened his window
with a jerk, and at the burst of sunshine, the
breath of flowers, the song of birds, and
more than all, that glimpse of Madelon, had
the anathema trembling there changed to a
blessing upon his lips. Mrs. Trelawney,
looking from her window a few moments
later, saw him lean in the white graceful shape
lingering upon the terrace walk.

"Let us gather our rosies,
For time is a-dying."

Is this where you pilfer their sweetness, Miss
Brand? It has been a question of specula-
tion with me; in that case you must not ex-

* print "abhor it all."

So far from it that you shall be left to
the enjoyment of a clear field. I am going
in to arrange the bouquets for the break-fast-
table."
close hers, moist and cool, as she had withdrawn from the water, his burning with the hot blood throbbing through his veins as surely it had never throbbed before. For the instant Mr. Mowbray might have been pardoned strong hope; blushes and confusion are solid causes for fear. Then she glanced up, read the assured expectancy in his eyes, and instantly recovered her self-possession.

"Release me, Mr. Mowbray. It grieves me to be obliged to cause you disappointment even in the slightest. I can only thank you. If the honor you have conferred upon me by your choice, and beg to decline it." He released her hand and retreated a step. His hope had reflected itself in his face, but his chagrin and disappointment were not betrayed there.

"Let me hope that your decision is hasty, Mrs. Trelawney—that it is not irrevocable. Let me beg you to take time to consider it."

"It would be useless, Mr. Mowbray. Pray accept my answer as final; it is impossible that it should be ever altered."

"Don't deny me the hope of winning your love, if I do not possess it now. I would never despise and slighting you a place as that love would be. I would serve as long as Jacob did for the certainty of gaining it at last."

"It would be false kindness to permit you to hope that my decision shall be ever revoked. Believe me, it never can be. I trust to your generosity not to prolong this interview. With an inclination of her head, she cannot fail to see that it is painful to me."

"I don't ask you now to marry me, Madelon, but to think kindly of me and if it is possible to learn to care for me more in time. Not so hard, unless—jealous suspicion shot its first sharp pang through him—unless you were sure that I would have permitted me to ask, Miss Brand, do you love another?"

"You have no right to ask it, but I do not object to telling you. I do not; I have no intention of marrying, ever. I beg that you will spare me further importunity, that you will not recur to this subject again."

"With an inclination of her head, she gathered her white skirts daintily from contact with the dewy border and walked away. Mr. Mowbray's eyes followed her. He was not one to yield to the first discouragement, but he was piqued; that self-pride of his had received a stab in being rejected at all."

"You haven't said that to tell one's love is to win half a return," he soliloquized, "and one must begin somewhere. It would be a faint heart indeed that would give up the race at the very start."

"You have come to the general fate, as Gustave Mortimer would say, Mr. Mowbray. You haven't tried convincing it and you absolutely don't appear overwhelmed by having fair expectations crushed. Sympathy never comes amiss; those who don't already need it are sure to sooner or later, and I hasten to offer mine."

Out from behind a clump of syringas Mrs. Trelawney had glided, stood now confronting him with a smile upon her lip, a keen glance upon him. He looked back at her, not pleasantly. A man may bear a rejection with tolerable equanimity, but he does not like having all the world know of it.

"I shall not claim your sympathy until I feel greater need of it, Mrs. Trelawney. If you have been—overhearing—" he paused at the word—"you will see that I am not denied all ground for hope."

"I have been overhearing—eaves-dropping was the word on your tongue, wasn't it? And you cling to the delusion that you have grounds for hope—do tell me, what grounds? Don't draw your brows so, Mr. Mowbray; it gives you a positively sinister appearance. And do wait a moment before you speak your mind as you would like, and say that you consider me frightfully impertinent."

"To speak one's mind would be a breach of civility no gentleman would commit in a case like this, Mrs. Trelawney. And for what grounds, young ladies who avow an intention of never marrying, are you so eager now before you retract it. A favored rival in the field would be another and much more serious matter."

"Tell how I might surprise the man. No rival!" Her shrill laugh rang out upon the summer air, tauntingly. Her gleaming eyes mocked him with the secret in her possession.

"And if I were to tell him he has a rival—such a rival!—he would leave the contest, sneak away like a whipped hound."

He flushed up to the temples, part in anger, part in quick comprehension that some revelation lay behind her words, something which it would not be quite honorable for him to hear. Vera Antonia Mowbray's attentions to Ralph Mowbray could the something be turned to his own advantage, and Mrs. Trelawney was quick to see it through his affected unconcern.

"Don't tell me then, please. I shouldn't care to recognize myself in your picture."

"I wonder to what you would give me for the sake of holding Madelon Brand's secret. I wonder if you would make it worth my while by half in telling, what she would give me for keeping it?"

"Probably not, madame. You have come with your wares to the wrong market if you ask a price for them."

"And you don't care to know it—what a pity. It wasn't worth my time wasting words then."

"Don't go, Mrs. Trelawney. You came to tell me something and you may as well out with it without fencing. A man who hasn't a dollar to his name isn't apt to pay fancy prices for invisible goods—any goods for that matter."

"Your sister is very liberal with you, I
have heard. You need not be at a loss for any small sum. If I should tell you Made-
lon Brand's secret, a secret she would give
half her fortune rather than it should be told,
if I put it in your way to claim half her for-
tune, would you divide fairly with me? Would
you do that and give me a thousand
dollars for telling you how?"
"You are talking riddles, Mrs. Trelawney.
I will promise to give you a thousand dollars
on my wedding-day if you will tell me a secret
which will enable me to marry Made-
lon Brand?"
"If I tell you you never can marry her."
"Then I think we are beating about sepa-
rate bushes—wasting time which might be
better employed. How on earth could I
claim half her fortune if I didn't marry her?
She got it herself by some hocus-pocus of a
will I've heard, and if I am not mistaken,
you were one of the losers thereby, but such
bits of private history don't often repeat
themselves. Suppose it is a rival and of a
contested field. Are you quite sure some
envy or malice of your own hasn't turned
your head a little, Mrs. Trelawney?"
"Not so much turned, but I have been able
to read you, Mr. Ralph Mowbray. Money is
the universal need, and you want money. Love
is the universal luxury from king to
peasant, and you haven't the mind to deny
yourself a luxury. I suppose now if you
saw a chance of getting possession of Made-
lon Brand that an angel from heaven wouldn't
turn you from pursuing it."
"You suppose very correctly. Will you please
have the goodness to inform me if there is
anything behind that homily? If not I
must really ask to be pardoned. Prosing
before breakfast is one of the luxuries I do
not indulge in."
"Will you sign a bond promising to pay
me ten thousand dollars when you get pos-
session of Madeon's fortune, with her
or without her, through this secret I shall
tell you? You see I am not hard with you
Mr. Mowbray. I might as easily ask a half
of the half, and you might afford to give it."
"I grow skeptical regarding the impor-
tance of your knowledge, Mrs. Trelawney. I
wonder you should come to me with such
potent power in your own hands. I wonder
you don't secure that easily managed half to
yourself without division—so monstrously
unequal at that."
"You believe that I have the power
though it doesn't suit you to confess it. If
I could claim it do you suppose I would
come to you? Madeon would feed and
clothe me all my life if I asked it of her, but
I choose the money and my own satisfac-
tion. Will you give me the bond? on second
thought I don't ask anything down. Ten
thousand dollars payable to me when you
come into possession of half the Tre-
lawney fortune through information furnished
by me."

"With Madeon."
"Or without her, Mr. Mowbray."
"Confound it then, yes. Easy enough to
give, and may you get more good out of it
than I have any present idea you will. Now
will you tell me how I am to marry Made-
on? the one means the other, however you
choose to disguise the fact."
"You shall judge. My secret is that Made-
on Brand was married this coming Decem-
ber five years ago."

It never entered his head to doubt her
word. He looked at her simply and knew
that she spoke the truth. A gray ghastli-
ness crept up into his face. He felt the truth
of every word as she went on speaking rapi-
dly.

"She had an aunt, a crazy Puritan of a
woman, who kept her close as a prisoner all
her life in a Castle Rackrent beside the
sea. She was seventeen when the fortune
fell to her, old Miss Brand was her guardian,
and she was a wildest freak on earth, so it
should release her from her aunt's
authority. It doesn't matter now what part
I or any one beside had in the affair. She
married a man calling himself George Fitz-
George, in St. Stephen's church, Brooklyn,
on the night of December 14th, 1898. With
in five minutes after she was pronounced his
wife he signed a bond never to urge a hus-
band's claim, never to intrude his presence
upon her or in any way assert his right, and
in return she bound herself to pay to him
one-half of her fortune. The strange part
of the affair is she never claimed it, from that
time to this she has never been seen, never
heard of."

She paused, and he broke the spell which
had held him for the moment. His voice
was husky, his eyes fierce with impotent
wrath.

"You take pains to mock at my misery, Madeon. If she has a husband, what chance
have I?"
"A lawyer and not clever enough to see
—a lover whom an angel from heaven would-
't turn from the pursuit, and he does not
behold his chance! Let me ask, where were
you, five years ago this coming Decem-
ber?"

There was more than the simple question
in the words, there was that which sent a
flash like an electric shock through him from
head to foot. He turned his face away. He
was silent for a full minute, two minutes,
then the dressing-bell cut the air with its
sharp summons. She spoke again.

"I see you understand, and I can answer
my own question. I chance to have heard
your sister say you passed that winter in
New York, while she spent it with friends
in the West. Haven't you a word to say for
yourself, Mr. Mowbray?"

"But the imposture, Mrs. Trelawney?
Let us call things by their proper names.
How can you expect to deceive her? How
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can you be sure the other man may not turn up any day?"

"You put too many queries in a breath.
She never saw him before or since; she did not even look at him then. I know it. And a man who has been silent as the dead for a man all that a miserable speck of dust on a breath. Do as you like, Mr. Mowbray. Go forward if you have the spirit, or back if you are more the coward than I have taken you to be."

"There is more to tell," he said, slowly, more like a man in a dream than one awake to craft and scheming.

"There is more, much more, to tell, but not one word more until I hold your promise in black and white for that ten thousand dollars. Will you come into the library and write it out now, Mr. Mowbray?"

"Others were early astir within the villa that morning. Delia, Miss Marchmont, Miss Mowbray and Madelon all met in the parlor before the bell had ceased its peal.

"Come here, Elinor," called the former, a chattering, school-girlish creature, from the perch she had taken in a window. "Do see what desperate love that Mrs. Trelawney is making to your brother. I thought her eyes were all for that adorable Cecil Bertram last night. Such eyes as he has. Did you observe them, Madelon? Gold-brown and bright as stars—heavenly!"

"Aren't you enthusiastic, Delia? Next we may expect to hear of a nose angelic, and smile sarcastic, and whiskers a la celestia.

"Don't be sarcastic, Miss Mowbray. No one would ever think of crediting you with finding immortal excellence in a man. Such a Britomarte as you are, but who knows how close the conquering hero may be for even you."

"How many among you ladies care for boating? There's the sail-boat for parties in order now, and a couple of skiffs at your service. Did I frighten you, Miss Eaton?"

It was Mr. Goldwood's voice, and he appeared at the window looking over the young lady's head into the room.

"Lo, I should think so. Why, you gave Elinor a start, and I never supposed before that she knew the use of nerves. Boating? —horrid. Spoil our complexion utterly. You needn't laugh, sir. We all have complexion to be spoiled, unless it's the lady coming yonder, Mrs. Trelawney. She might compare to the man in triumph."

One point of Miss Eaton's objections having been duly considered, sunset saw the boats all out upon the river. Mr. Mowbray, as an excellent oarsman, steaded one of the skiffs by the landing, and with some discontent found the companions allotted to him in Miss Marchmont and Mrs. Trelawney.

"I knew Madelon preferred the larger boat so I offered to exchange with her," remarked the heiress. "How this one rocks. Is it safe, do you think?"

"Perfectly so if you keep the center. I won't answer for consequences if you lean over the side, Mrs. Trelawney."

Out over the blue tide shot the little craft. With long pulls and strong pulls it flew "like a thing of life" over the breeze-ruffled surface. As the crimson and gold of the sunset deepened, the river caught a rosy glow. Other boats were out, sailing-craft like white-winged birds, a steamer with music aboard pouched up the spray as it swept past, a little row-boat with a single occupant crept up the stream, as Mr. Mowbray, dipping an oar now and then, permitted theirs to float down. The solitary oarsman lifted his hat to the little party, and Mrs. Trelawney, turning her head to glance at him, had the glance by which was upon her lips frozen there. Pale as ashes grew her face, her eyes staring and starting. It was done so quickly not one of them could tell how it was done, but with a scream she had sprung up from her place, and over went the uncertain boat. Mr. Mowbray could swim, the lad, but not, and he threw his arm in a firm clutch about the nearest one, Miss Marchmont as it happened, and struck out for the other boat, which had put about. Mrs. Trelawney had sunk like lead, without a struggle, but rose again in a moment, and the stranger, leaning far out, caught and held the floating summery garments, lifted her over the side into the bottom of the boat. Then, giving his hand, helped in the other two.

"An awkward accident, and might have been serious," he remarked. "The lady has fainted."

"Oh, poor thing, how white she is!" and down went Miss Marchmont upon her knees, forgetful alike of her own plight, and her languor and helplessness in the drawing-rooms, drawing the unconscious head to her breast, and rubbing the cold hands vigorously.

The boat was turned to the shore and landed them all. For Mrs. Trelawney came out from that dead faint. She opened her eyes with a wild, scared looked about.

"Where is he?" she whispered, shudderingly.

"Mr. Mowbray?—here. He would have carried you to the villa, but you showed signs of recovery, and Mr. Goldwood is coming in. Oh, be there in the boat! Gone again the moment he landed us."

Shivering, the lids dropped again. If it were possible for the dead to rise, for the grave to give back its victim, she had seen Alfred Trelawney before her in that glow of red sunset, had seen him and chilled to the heart with such a horrible heart! Gone by the end of her days she never heard the soft swish of dipping water in the balminess of
June twilight without living that sickening moment over again.

CHAPTER VIII.

MISS MARCHMONT'S MAID.

Breakfast was served an hour earlier than the customary time next morning. At nine the horses "all saddled and bridled and ready to ride" were led to the door. The barouche and the pony phaeton had both been ordered around when a slight hitch occurred which threatened to injure more than one young lady's temper, and cloud the bright prospects of the day. Mrs. Trelawney did not appear at the breakfast-table. A cup of coffee was sent to her room, and she was forgotten in the business of preparation until it transpired in a message to Mrs. Lyndal that she was too ill to join the pleasure-party that day.

"Don't suppose, of course, I cannot think of going," Mrs. Lyndal announced. "I don't suppose you'll miss me much, my dears, and I fear Mrs. Trelawney must be seriously indisposed; I know she counted strongly upon the excursion. I incline to blame myself that I did not foresee that last night's accident would result in this way."

"Go without you!" cried Della Eaton, with a little scream of horror which Miss Marchmont echoed. "Impossible! Why, there wouldn't be a married lady in the party. We must have a Dame Propriety. We can't do without you, Mrs. Lyndal. It's horridly inconsiderate of the Mrs. Trelawney to fall ill at this particular time, but if she will insist upon it there's no one to blame but herself, and she can't expect us to disarrange all our plans on her account. Miss Marchmont didn't fall sick from her bath in the river, and I'm sure she needn't have, though it's less wonder considering the fright she looked with her complexion washed off, and her dress all in a string. Take my word for it, the creature is only mortified at having the secrets of her toilet exposed, as though we didn't all know she was made up of Blanc de Porle and fairy pink."

"Don't be uncharitable, Della dear," murmured her prospective sister-in-law. "Of course we can give up the excursion if it is necessary. The gentlemen may be disappointed, perhaps."

"And that is a consequence not to be entertained for a moment," said Miss Mowbray, which decided the question. "Equally certain that Mrs. Lyndal must go along. I don't want to appear hard-hearted, but I incline to Della's view of the case. There's no denying that she did seem shocked fairly ill, and if any one is required to stay behind consider me the volunteer."

"You, the prime mover of the occasion, Elinor! Not to be thought of."

"If my maid were not engaged to relieve Mr. Mortimer, now, but I shouldn't like to break my promise to him."

"And little Morty is by far the most important. I am to drive him in the phaeton, you know," laughed Miss Eaton.

Mrs. Trelawney herself smoothed the difficulty. She didn't expect any change in their plans for the day on her account; she wanted nothing on earth but to be left alone. She had a nervous headache, and to have any mortal fussing about her would be sure to set her wild. This to Mrs. Lyndal, whose qualms of conscience were more easily lulled after the ungracious reception her advances met.

Miss Mowbray and Madelon appeared in riding habits respectively of blue and green. At the last moment Mr. Mowbray decided to take the vacant place in the barouche which already held Mrs. Lyndal, Miss Marchmont, and Mr. Eaton, leaving them attended by Mr. Gobineau and Cecily Bertram.

"Why did you do it, Ralph?" his sister asked after the party met upon the mountain.

"And after I brought about the affair with an eye purely to your advantage. I counted without doubt upon you attending Madelon."

"My dear Nell, we may propagate the gods by offerings, but the goddesses by withholding you. You shouldn't need telling that your sex may be won as often by a judicious observance of distance as an excess of devotion."

"And while you keep your judicious distance that handsome artist will cut you out. No fear of it, I fancy. If he resumes upon short acquaintance, believe me, Miss Brand will give him his congé as she did me."

"Ralph, you don't mean—"

"A rejection? precisely. Don't turn into a statue of blank despair, Nell; the rose is excellent, but the expression too bleak for my complexion. I am not hopeless, 'if at first you don't succeed, try, try again,' but you will perceive the discretion of holding myself a trifle aloof for the present time."

"Ralph."

"Miss Mowbray's hand was laid upon her brother's shoulder, her fair face turned to him affectionate and serious. "Ralph dear, I set my heart on your marrying Madelon before you had ever seen her. I was glad to see from the first how deeply she had impressed you, and I never can forgive myself if you come to lasting sorrow through her. I shall never be able to forget that I was the means of bringing you together. You and I have been all in all to each other for many years; brother; it is not too late for us to remain so; no one has come between us too utterly yet for that. Shall we go away together, leave Riverbank at once and forget this time, go back to each other, to our old free happy life, with no thought of ever changing it?"

Those loving clear eyes upon his face dis
concerted him. He shook off her hand, but drew it within his arm the same instant with a light laugh.

"My dear girl, how tenderly melodramatic! Come, you see we have been left completely in the rear. And we won't be out of sight from Riverbank just yet. I was a little hasty, that is all, and I don't imagine I have lost anything by my premature declaration. With thanks for your good intentions and due appreciation of this rather nice little sister of mine, never the old roving life for me again. It is too late for that, Nell. If you want to aid the good cause and at the same time add another to the mountain-weight of obligations I am under, you might take Bertram in hand, see that he doesn't engross too much attention in that quarter. I don't imagine you'll find it hard a matter."

Like a dutiful sister Miss Mowbray proceeded to take Bertram's hand shortly after they came up with the remainder of the party. He apparently was not averse to the arrangement. Madelon had been whisked away from him by the Etonos and Mr. Mortimer a moment before, but his easy consolation left her a nearer approach to her brother's light appreciation of his rivalry than she had previously been inclined to entertain.

It was one of those glorious golden days never so perfect as in June. Down in the valleys the heat must have been oppressive. There was but the faintest breath of air aslant even there upon the mountain, but it was fresh with a woody odor and the suggestion of shaded-streamlets borne upon it.

Mrs. Lyndal and Miss Marchmont had settled in quiet comfort under the unbreachable foliage of a kingly oak, the former with a piece of the interminable worsted-work with which she always kept herself down in duty to always occupy her hands, the latter in the languid idleness which was her normal condition. Mr. Eaton had drawn near with the intention of rendering himself a willing sacrifice by being devoted to his betrothed, but Miss Marchmont if too inert to exert herself was also too good-natured to restrict her liberty.

"Don't expect me to climb to your picturesque ruin, I shall feel it a duty unless you go with the rest," she had said. "There is Miss Brand with Delia now; she won't object to your escort, I am sure." And nothing less he had availed himself of them. It was a duty to always occupy their hands, the latter in the languid idleness which was her normal condition. Mr. Goldwood had settled himself at a little distance and was busy with sketch-book and pencils.

"Don't consider me a hindrance, please, if you are wishing to follow your friend's example, Mr. Bertram. I suppose you are.

This old form must possess interest to your artist eye sufficient to arouseth your desire for a sketch of it."

"Thanks; I shall surely take advantage of your kindness presently. Just now I have a pilgrimage in view. I behold a Mecca yonder which rouses my curiosity considerably more than my professional interest. Can you climb, Miss Mowbray? Will you take my arm and risk the ascent of yonder towering peak? I despise such white object up there, a flag of truce or a signal of distress, or a decoy to unknown dangers, who can tell? I warn you that the exploit may prove a test of your courage as well as endurance."

"If you mean that for a challenge I am ready. If for a dare to my zeal it is proof against such discouragement."

Up they went leisurely over the steep way. Most agreeable companions they were to each other. They had both traveled, they had seen the same places, they knew the same people, they had many tastes in common, and the distance was achieved after an unconscionable nap. Mr. Bertram led the way, and a half hour occupied at one point where Cecili availed himself of the permission given, to make a rough sketch of the scene opening below them. Gaining the top at last they met the other party of four arrived at almost the same moment by a more winding, less rugged way.

"Provoking!" laughed Elinor. "It takes away the honor of the achievement to have it shared. And behold to what base use nature is perverted."

"What is the object of your attraction, Miss Mowbray? Aw—I see. Cirrus advertisement, immense canvas, grand display, opens with a tight-rope performance free to all, wonderful inducements—aw, to be sure!—in the village below to-day, unparalleled rate for admission, etc., etc. Truly, roam the wide world where we will, there's no escape from the printer's bill."

"And a bill of fare would be very much more to my taste at present," laughed Cecili. "Ladies and gentlemen, an intuition assisted perhaps by a knowledge of the hour assures me that the hampers are being unpacked below. Miss Mowbray, as we were first upon the scene let us be first to leave it."

"Envy," said Mr. Eaton, leisurely adjusting his field-glass. "The grapes are sour because they are out of reach. Now, I shall have the pleasure of a two-fold entertainment. By means of this useful little instrument I am happy to state that the village with the immense canvas and crowd of expectant country folks upon the green are brought within my field of view into an attitude and proceeded in a declamatory manner. "Now, ladies and gentlemen, I have the delightful privilege of introducing to your notice Monsieur Lightfoot De Lightfoot, at present engaged nearly as I can distinguish in executing a pas seul in mid-air, over the heads of the expectant audience. Now he appears to change the step for—oh, the poor devil!" He cut himself short, catching his ejacutation in an
undertone just in time as he remembered his companions.

"What is it?" asked Miss Eaton, who had thrown back her hat and was engaged in pulling out her crimp. "You are white as a sheet, Jack. Come back from that ledge or you'll go over to a dead certainty. Looking down from high places always does make you dizzy. What are you staring at, Madelon? Come, I am going to follow the praise-worthy example of those other two, going down to luncheon."

"The poor wretch lost his balance and fell," explained Mr. Eaton in an aside to Mortimer. "Dreadful! What most of them come to, sooner or later. It turned me sick; I fairly imagined I could hear the horrified yells of the people as he came down. No need of giving the ladies a shock, however."

For one instant as he turned to approach her he thought that Madelon must have overheard him. Her eyes were upon the placard posted high upon a rock, her face seemed white and agitated. He supposed it must have been the shade as she started at him. "Come, Jack," and he turned to glance back at the bill.

"Who was the wretched creature?" he thought. "Let me see; Leroy, celebrated clown—not that. Gymnast and performer upon tight-rope, George Fitz-George. A man might be hanged for such a name, but crushed to jelly—ugh!"

The afternoon wore on. The picnic party dispersed here and there, exhausted the resources of wandering about, exploring pathways, clambering over rocks, and similar diversions. They tired of all this as the mid-afternoon sun poured down fervently, and dropped mostly in pairs into the shade to wait for the coolness of the evening, and with it their return.

"How well Elinor has been entertaining Mr. Bertram!" said Miss Marchmont, turning her eyes toward the pair as they strolled in. "And what a fine-looking couple they make! Do you suppose he is in love with her, Mrs. Lyndal?"

"In love with Elinor? Oh, dear, no. At least I hope not." Mrs. Lyndal cast a disturbed look at her brother, stretched at length upon the ground near them.

"But why?" persisted the heiress, who, having settled her own love affair, could afford to give her attention to the similar affair of another. "She may be a year or two the oldest, but that is nothing, and they really seem admirably adapted to each other. Come here, Miss Mowbray; we were just discussing you."

"Charitably, I hope. I dare say immeasurable blessings are being showered upon my head for having suggested this excursion. For my part I'm tired to death of it, and baked into the bargain. Be so kind as to lend me your fan, Miss Marchmont—thanks!—I hope I shall revive by the time the moon rises, but just now I find myself in that state when to move an eyelid is an exertion not to be contemplated." And lying back against the trunk of one giant oak, languidly waving the fan, her words coming in a softened, melifluous flow, Elinor looked the picture of supreme and indolent contentment, rather than expiring fatigue.

"I was noting your vivacity only a moment ago, and remarking that Mr. Bertram appeared admirably satisfied; yourself, too, for that matter. I was half inclined to fancy you two had resolved yourselves into a mutual admiration society."

"For Satan puts mischievous thoughts in idle ladies' brains! Reflect what harm you may be doing, Miss Marchmont; what budding hopes may spring up in my mind, doomed, alas! never to be fulfilled. Are you asleep, Mr. Goldwood? Do come here and smoke the calumet of peace. I foresee that it will require a masculine element to tranquilize troubled waters. Two women may amuse themselves by gossiping, but three either grow quarrelsome between themselves or quarrel with other friends or with the world."

"If it is put as a matter of duty, I can't refuse, though I should like to know which of you, should your premise by correct, would send the thrust of animosity at me."

"Do you know, sir, it is bad taste for a gentleman to fish for a compliment? You couldn't expect the truth to be told you. I hope you have enjoyed the day."

"Not having arrived at the state of utter exhaustion, nor attempted to rival the fame of a salamander, I confine myself to the comparative degree and reply that I have, tolerably. To sum up the situation, I rode three miles, made a couple of speeches which I don't value in the least, swallowed probably a hundred earwigs with my dinner, have been the uncomplaining prey of gnats and mosquitoes, and yet—I am not—actually—sorry that I came." So very slowly was the latter part of the sentence delivered, one might have been pardoned supposing him very close to being sorry he was there. His eyes upon Miss Mowbray's fair face, however, did not betray discontentment. He lit his cigar and smoked it through, and retained his place there, alternately taking his part in the conversation, or listening to the ladies chatter, while the sun went down, and the full yellow moon came up in the silvery dusk.

And all through the day Mr. Mowbray had lingered near Madelon, without intruding himself directly upon her notice. He had shown a watchful regard for her comfort, had exhibited his thoughtfulness in a dozen quiet ways, and gained her gratitude by expressing any word or look which would have tended to recall their interview of the previous day. He had given himself heart and soul to the expectation of gaining her at
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fair hands. It was your will to unfold your scheme to me, it is mine to follow it out. You traded upon your secret and you shall have your price according to the conditions of the bond you hold. And you will not dare fail in your part now.”

“Can you do nothing?”

“I can expose you for a designing adventurer; I can make known the clever plot with which you sought to corrupt me. What a strong tenure it will be when her guardian once knows the story, how much you are apt to gain through her when he takes the matter in hand and goes to the bottom of it. He will scarcely credit the disinterested zeal which found an unknown, mystery-enveloped husband for his ward.”

“You would never tell—”

“Would I not? try me if you are inclined to doubt it, Mrs. Trelawney. I think I could forgive a deliberate injury sooner than the deliberate supposition that I am a fool. I should show myself one if I give up the undertaking which I have fairly entered upon.”

She stood looking at him helplessly, beseechingly, and he looked back at her hard as a rock and as unwavering.

“Make a virtue of necessity, Mrs. Trelawney. You can’t go back. Therefore go forward and earn your ten thousand dollars like the woman of pluck I took you to be. You will tell Madelon as we agreed, at the first opportunity, and you will make that opportunity to-morrow.”

That calm assertive tone had its influence over her. She had been terribly shaken, she had suffered untold agonies all that day. At one moment that occurrence of the night before seemed like the figment of her disordered fancy, then the scene would repeat itself before her. Longingly, the river, the sunset glow upon it and the man’s face, that she could not entertain a doubt. The fear which had been upon her lost half its force now, and her own prompting stifled for the time gained again in Mowbray’s presence. It was as he said, she could not go back, and realizing it she lost the wish to do so.

“I will tell her then to-morrow. But whatever comes, remember that you urged me to it.”

“I will not forget. Permit me to remind you that this night air is not good for you in your present state. Let me offer my arm back to the house.”

She let him draw her hand within it; together they turned toward the steps. Then her fingers closed upon his sleeve like a vise, she stood stock still; she did not scream, but it was because the power to scream was frozen within her.

And the cause of this was a gray, tall form standing with downcast eyes not half-a-dozen paces away. With two long strides Mr. Mowbray confronted the shape.

“Who are you, and what are you doing last, to do which he had taken up the role he felt it would be most expedient to assume.

There was the ride home under the moonlit, star-gemmed sky. A glorious June night, a night which stood out separate and distinct in Madelon’s memory from all nights she had ever known before, from all which should ever come to her again. And yet there was no single incident to mark it such. She had found a cause for restlessness throughout the day; she had been disturbed and distressed all the afternoon, but she forgot cause and effect together during that long, almost silent homeward ride. Cecil was beside her again, but seeming no more inclined to conversation than herself; a calm peacefulness was upon her, leaving her nothing to wish for beyond this present time. It was the treacherous calm, the perfect null before the storm.

A ten o’clock supper awaited them at the villa, and there was no meeting in the drawing-rooms afterward. The ladies, completely fagged out after the day, retired to their own rooms. The gentlemen strolled out for the smoke which is dessert to every masculine repast, and strolled in again one by one to follow the example of their fair companions.

At last only Ralph Mowbray lingered, sauntering slowly in, that silvery light which lay upon the lawn, aimlessly it appeared beyond the mere enjoyment of the lovely night until a small, light-robed shape came out from the villa and down the terrace steps to his side. Mrs. Trelawney, looking wretched, haggard and ill, nervous to a degree which excited even his pity.

“I waited hoping that you might come, but I should not have expected it had I known how really indisposed you are. I can see that your headache has not worn away with the day. I will not detain you except to ask have you told her yet?”

“No; I have come to tell you that I never shall tell her, Mr. Mowbray. I have changed my mind since yesterday morning. I shall have nothing to do with the scheme; it must be dropped, dropped at once.” She spoke with a feverish decision and earnestness, and yet with a visible shrinking before his eyes. “Eyes that caught an instantaneous cold gleam like to that of others she had known before. Was it her fate that she was to always yield before harsh and cruel natures in men? Was it retribution for having once betrayed a generous and trustful nature?

You are not yourself, Mrs. Trelawney. If you reflect you will doubtless perceive it is rather late in the day to dictate to me. Quite too late for you to withdraw from the letter of our covenant.”

“I tell you it must be dropped. I have had a warning—I feel that something terrible will happen if we attempt what we plan.”

“And I tell you, madame, that I have no idea of playing the part of a puppet, even in
here? Have you been listening? Speak, woman! Don't you see that you have frightened this lady?"

"I am very sorry to have frightened any one," answered the woman, in a subdued voice, not even raising her downcast eyes.

"I did not intend it, and I have not been listening. I am Miss Marchmont's maid. I had a close day attending on an old gentleman near here, and I came out for a mouthful of air after my mistress was through with me. I came through the trees yonder, a moment ago, and was only waiting for you to pass.

She dropped a courtesy and glided away before he could speak again had he so desired, noiseless as a gray wraith.

"I don't really think she heard anything," said Mr. Mowbray, looking after her. "Come, Mrs. Trelawney. The state of your nerves renders it indispensable that you find quiet and rest and take this chair, my dear. I will tell you all about yesterday—take off the keen edge of my disappointment in missing the pleasure."

"Glad I touched up my cheeks in sao de nuit," she added mentally. "That girl's eyes on one wouldn't be the pleasantest accompaniment to that little opening. I'll taunt her. I'm horribly sallow now beside her. Not that it matters much, and the lovelier the neck the greater satisfaction it will be to set my heel upon it."

The fire of spite was in her own dull eyes. Even then she might have found it difficult to have answered to herself why she hated Madelon Brand, but hate she did, and never more than as she looked upon the pale pure face beside which her own lost so visibly. Madelon did not choose to sit. She crossed to a window draped with rose-silk under a cobweb of lace. As she stood there, her fingers plucking nervously at the tassel of her morning wrapper, the rosy light filtering over her, she looked fair and pure enough for a representation of the Madonna, but alas! it was not perfect worshipful peace in the depths of those dark eyes.

"Mrs. Trelawney, I have come to ask if you never knew more than you told me about that Mr. Fitz-George." She winked at the name, she never spoke it or thought it without a qualm of repugnance. It had always seemed to her in such ill-accordance with the memory, fever-dream or whatever it might have been, which had clung to her after that momentous night. Her head went up and those passionate eyes fixed upon the other's face. "Who was he—what was he?"

"My dear child?—began her companion, soothingly.

"Tell me. You kept it back from me; you knew. I can see that by your face. I can tell you now. A circus-actor, a man whose life is spent in tumblings and contortions and foolish risks for the amusement of a gaping

CHAPTER IX.

HOW THE VETO WAS PRONOUNCED.

SLEEPING that night Madelon dreamed a dream. She was standing on the bank of a golden river, the air full of a rosy delicious warmth and tremulous with sweetest music. A boat lay at her feet and in it Cecil Bertram was standing. He held out his hands inviting her.

"Come," he said. "This river is love. Here is safety and here is peace—come!"

She strove to take the step which divided them, but her feet seemed chained to the land. Sweeter grew the music in the air; bolder the flash of the golden river; his face was transfigured with the glory upon it; his eyes were glowing like stars and fixed on her their beaming light.

"Come," he said again, opening his arms to enfold her. "Hold fast the rope, Madelon, and trust to me. Now, come!"

Glancing down she saw that she held a slender cord which alone secured the boat in place, and it came to her in a thought that it was sirens music tempting her, that he was there to lure her to destruction. She cast the rope away, she waved him from her, she saw the little boat float out upon the tide, and he looked back at her, oh, so sadly! oh, so tenderly! oh, so piteingly!

The wind rose with an angry sound; beautiful river and warm rosy atmosphere were borne away before her eyes; a rushing black shadow closed about and wrapped her in; from the midst of it an exultant demoniac face was brought close to hers; a triumphant voice mocked the horror chilling her to the heart.

"You cast away your only safeguard," it said. "I am George Fitz-George, and you are mine." Long serpentine arms wrapped about her; she strove to shriek aloud but her breath was frozen; then she was lost to all in the thick blackness.

She woke sitting up in her bed, faint and cold with that vivid terror. The gray of early dawn was struggling into her chamber, and though it was hours yet before any of the household were astir, Madelon slept no more.

A clock with a slivery chime was striking the quarter to nine when she tapped at Mrs. Trelawney's door. That lady was no more than up, her toilet showing evidence of most hasty arrangement as she looked out cautiously after a short interval.

"Oh, you, Madelon! Come in then. You won't mind if I go on with my dressing. You were brought up to dressing yourself, but I had a hard task to go through before I could make you understand it. Take this chair, my dear. Tell me all about yesterday—take off the keen edge of my disappointment in missing the pleasure."

"Glad I touched up my cheeks in sao de nuit," she added mentally. "That girl's eyes on one wouldn't be the pleasantest accompaniment to that little opening. I'll taunt her. I'm horribly sallow now beside her. Not that it matters much, and the lovelier the neck the greater satisfaction it will be to set my heel upon it."

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vulgar crowd, all of whom thank heaven that they are not such as he. A man who myself, acquired over so remotely to such a man! A burning tide swept up over the sensitive face and she clapped her hands over it as if thus she might shut out the humiliating knowledge.

The woman who hated her looked upon the bowed head and form suddenly relaxed, her own face turned bitterly hard.

"A-a-h!" she breathed between set teeth.

"She is not unconscious of herself any longer. Her own heart has waked to something, in response to some one. Ten days ago she would have cared nothing whether the man was a circus-actor or a governor of state. Now the difference between him and some one stings her to the quick. And that some one—who?"

Was there need for your jealous heart to ask, Berenice Trelawney? Was there a doubt in it? Surely not, or why did those sharp claws sheathed in velvet so ache to scratch? They remained sheathed however, and only the soft purr was heard.

"Why should you distress yourself, Madelon? There is the bond which is protection to you. Why need you care what the man is?"

"You think it foolish, and the very thought has been torture to me. I read the name in an advertisement yesterday, and while I felt it could be no one but him, I still clung to a hope it might not be so. And your manner tells me the hope was a false one."

For one moment her jealousy had clouded Mrs. Trelawney's mind. Now as it cleared, an idea, hurrying form, reared itself to a sudden mountain of conviction and relief.

"Fitz-Geoge, you saw his name? Do you mean he is somewhere near, Madelon? Will you not tell me what has occurred that you should reproach me?—unjustly I must claim."

Madelon conquered her agitation in a moment. She dropped her hands and spoke quietly, but it was with the quietness of despairing pain.

"I saw his name in a notice that he was to perform with the circus in the village at the foot of the mountain yesterday. That was all. I do not reproach you, Mrs. Trelawney. I can visit the result of that one mad act of my life upon nobody's head but my own. To know him so near and to know him that, gave me a shock. I clung to a hope, as I told you, that there might be a mistake. I am satisfied there is none."

She turned to go. In Mrs. Trelawney's mind while she was speaking the relief had grown, the conviction deepened. How ludicrous she had been, how superstitious, frightened at a shadow, ready to give up her plot against the girl for a delusion frail as a spider's web! Fitz-Georgie was near, so of course it was Fitz-George she had seen upon the river. Ghosts do not visit the earth, neither do the dead come back to life. She remembered how much they had been alike, Fitz-George and her husband—alike in form and complexion and general contour only it was true, but it was her own startled imagination that seemed to give him the very features of Alfred Trelawney. She drew one long breath of relief and was her subtle self again.

"Wait, Madelon. The time has come when I believe it is my duty to tell you what I really do know of the man you married, my dear. You have strong nerves and are capable of enduring a surprise, I think. Whoever you married that December night, it was not Fitz-George."

"Not—Mrs. Trelawney?"

"You are taken by surprise of course. And incredulous now as you recall the incidents of the time, but I know perfectly well what I am talking about. I am not subject to looney attacks, your marriage lines and the name to the contrary. For the name, it was a borrowed one; for the man—"

She broke off abruptly. Madelon's face had blanched; eager, doubting and yet believing, she was drinking in every word.

"Go on! 'For the man'—if he were not Fitz-George who was he?"

"Compose yourself, my dear. He was a gentleman, poor and proud. He knew the need of money, but that would not have tempted him into the marriage. The more fool he, I would say now, but I did not have my own hard experience then." She was looking away into space in a softened abstraction as though the hardest experience of all was not reflected in her own memory of that time.

"He was interested in your story, he was romantic enough then to play the role of mysterious bridegroom in a scene from real life which might rival the grand sensation of one of Miss Braddon's novels. I admit that Mr. Trelawney and I had first selected the song fide Fitz-George. He was what you have discovered him to be, not a bad sort of man, considering his station, and ready to do anything for money. The affair had been broached to him when this other one, a friend of Mr. Trelawney as I told you, occurred to his mind as a much more suitable party. Not to be telling us, the first was put off and the second elected to the enviable position of bridegroom in fact. He made one stipulation, that his own name should not appear, and what one better than that of the rejected candidate? He had a reason which appears in due time even beyond his state of pride and poverty. No need of going over all that appertained to that night marriage. It was Pride overruled poverty which was not stringent and not without a willing reliever. The bridegroom, a la sensation novel, still refused to claim one penny
of the fortune made his by the bond; he faded from sight and knowledge from that hour, as per agreement, and there the first volume ended."

Again Mrs. Trelawney paused. She glanced once at the face of the girl, intense in its expectancy, but not a word passed the lips of Mrs. Trelawney with which to satisfy her heart thrilling with tremulous, though unacknowledged hope. Poor and proud and with an interest in her story, the bridegroom had been, but to how many might such a wide limitation apply?

And the second volume, my dear—I fancy the solicitor now is abreast of that, if not of the whole. It isn’t quite the old hackneyed romance, since it is bound to end in two volumes; I can’t see a possible chance of the stereotyped third. Let me shadow this one, Lapse of years gone by. The bond-bound husband of nearly five years ago has treasured a vague fancy which chance quieted and became a reality more than fancy. Chance throws him into daily meeting with the bride, his romantic idea is to win her love in his own proper person and in scrupulous observance of that unlucky bond if may be; they are beneath the same roof, they are on equal footing except for the little Trelawney dot and the lucky one, or at least this is more than fancy. Chance should not the course of true love run smooth for once, the happy finale be reached without the long course of trials and tribulations which the novelist throws in as a matter of conscience to balance the living happily together forever afterward?"

"Under this roof and here, my love. I am not violating a confidence in telling you of it, but I should have been had I told it a day sooner. The chivalrous knight who came so nobly to your rescue then of his own accord has begged me to tell you the truth. They were dying with impatience to hear his name? Or have the good fairies whispered it in your ear while you slept? Guess, Madelon, guess!"

A delicate rose-bloom was in Madelon’s face, the dark eyes were tender and dreamy, but recalled to herself from a somnolent and vague and pleasant, but not resolved to a definite dream of the future, she shook her head. The coarse artificiality jarred upon her, there was a shrill ring of discordance under the light tone which recalled the voice of her dream.

"Tell me, please, Mrs. Trelawney."

"How would you like it to be—say—your guardian, Mr. Goldwood? Well, not so much wonder you smile. The idea alone would be preposterous, and it was not he, Cecily Bertram, then?" Piercingly sharp was the glance upon her, throbbing with a fierce passion the girl could not suspect was every pulse, rendering itself upon thorns was that she was writing her spirit where all good had turned to bitterness long ago. The jealous eyes saw what they expected to see, the flush deepen over that fair face; if she had needed one last assurance of that shy plant of tender growth which had sprung up unwares in Madelon’s heart, Mrs. Trelawney had it then.

"It was, it is, I know it, I felt it."

"It was not and it is not," said Mrs. Trelawney, sharply. "Not to boast over a conquest and a truth, Cecily Bertram was breaking his heart over having lost me this time and later five years ago. It was and it is—Ralph Mowbray."

There was stillness in the room for a moment painfully intense. Madelon had turned her face away. She was looking upon the outer world, upon the broad blue arch of sky dimmed by even a speck, upon the brilliant patches of roses and geraniums and wide-eyed pansies and flaming stock of the parterres, hearing a burst of wonderful melody they were singing, perhaps, and the notes had swayed and swung himself upon a twig just outside the window. Saw and heard, and thought what a little thing is mortal life when it can be compassed by such bleakness as fell upon her, and all the rest of the world remain unchanged! Silence for a moment, she was to the soul of a woman to be grasped and held with her arm, upset a bottle of some fragrant essence. To her dying day Madelon never could endure that perfume.

"Have you been stricken suddenly dumb, Miss Brand? Happiness so perfect and a prospect so serene are not necessarily powers to bereave you of speech. Do turn about and let me congratulate you."

Madelon turned about slowly. Her eyes deep and dark and despairing, searched her tormentor’s face.

"Is that the truth you have told me? As you hope mercy of Heaven, tell me nothing but the truth now." Mowbray is the man you married. I haven’t a Bible, but I’m ready to swear to it. May I be dealt with hereafter as I deal with you in this, Madelon."

Mrs. Trelawney realized the necessity of a strong assertion and gave it. What retribution she was invoking upon her own head, she little recked. Besides, she had little faith in retribution for evil visited in this world, and as for the next—well, "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," and the next world had no share in Mrs. Trelawney’s calculations.

"Unkind of you to stand as if turned to stone after the pleasantest of surprises which my revelation must have given you. A Mowbray for a Fitz-George, there can be no comparison. Le bon Dieu! there is the bell and I am not yet dressed, and I am hungry, ravenous. Going, Madelon? Don’t forget breakfast, my dear. Sentiment and romance are very well in their place but they need the sustaining power of rolls and chocolate to balance them rightly."
Madelon went down. She would have been inquired after, troubled with messages and invasions otherwise more intolerable than passing unnoticed in the general company. She never once lifted her eyes from her plate. She trifled with its contents, one morsel of which would have choked her, and succeeded in covering the fact that she had eaten nothing, and made her escape again after what was to her a torturous age.

"No need to ask if she's been told," soliloquized Mr. Mowbray as he strolled away from the breakfast-room. "Takes it quietly, pale and depressed, and didn't give me the chance of catching her eyes, but I fancy the potion will work. No show of fight in her, and plenty of room for hope."

All that day she kept herself by herself in her own room. She had rebelled against the fate she had chosen. Her name that had stared down at her from the placard yesterday, the fate of being linked in her own knowledge to one so obscure, to one so allied with coarse and vulgar associations, but by a bond which was to all the world unknown. But this was a worse fate shadowing her now, threatening her; a horror other could never have had a nearer approach. And the day wore through, long in going, short when gone, and her respite was gone along with it.

She dressed and went down at the very last moment, in a lusterless white silk, which might have been a shroud, a spray of white roses in her hair. Mr. Mowbray took her in to dinner, and in his touch, in the respectful and solicitous glance she encountered whenever she lifted her eyes, in the watchfulness which anticipated every wish of hers, she read the soft sense of possession which would assert itself sooner or later. Dinner over, she watched her opportunity and escaped him. The drawing-rooms were unlighted save by the full moon coming up. The young people were drawn out into the balmy open air, Mrs. Lyndal had settled in her chair and was comfortably napping. Miss Mowbray had seated herself at the piano in a full fold of that silvery light, and was practicing some new music which had come to her that day.

"Moonlight, operatic selections, and ruined eyes! What a conjunction, Miss Mowbray. Permit me to remove the temptation to the possibility of the second, and recommend something more in harmony with the first. It has been my misfortune never to have heard you sing. Favor me now, please."

Mr. Goldwood suntering up deliberately took away the music sheets and placed himself so that her tentative listening or complacent study of that lily fair countenance.

"I am the vera aviis that doesn't sing. Which is it, a parrot or a Bird of Paradise?"

"The last I think." And then Miss Mowbray played softly, and appeared unconscious of his eyes upon her, but at last folded her white hands upon the scarcely whiter keys, and gave him a glance back in laughing defiance.

"You should have mercy! The magnetic power of the human eye is a wonderfully disconcerting force. You were trying an experiment in animal magnetism, I presume, sir! an 'I will that thou shalt succumb to my will,' but we are antagonistic natures and the spell fails to work."

"Are we antagonistic, Elinor?" He leaned over her; his hand fell softly upon her two folded ones; there was that grave and earnest in his face she had never seen plainly there before. "I would like to know—" What she was destined not to learn. A shadow fell across them, a form stepped in through the open window and a voice said:

"Is that you, Goldwood? I beg pardon for disturbing you, Miss Mowbray. I am looking for Miss Brand; your brother was asking for her. Is she here?"

"Madelon? I haven't seen her for an hour."

Bertram, it was he, caught the glimmer of something white at the further end of the long apartment, and walked down the vista of light and shade. Whatever had been upon Mr. Goldwood's tongue, the interruption had served to change his mind in regard to uttering it. Instead he offered his arm, and led her out to the other guests.

"Miss Brand?" The something white proved as Cecil had conjectured, and Madelon, sunk upon the cushions of a divan within the deep-arched recess of the last window, looked up with a start. "Madelon!" Quick solicitude was in his tone. "You are ill. You are ill. I thought so when I observed you at dinner. I am sure of it now. You are chilling and sitting here in the draught. Permit me to close the window."

"No, pray do not. I am not chilled and I am not ill; do not unnecessarily alarm yourself. You know the nature of blue vapors, I presume, and I believe I have given myself up a prey to them."

"You were a prey to blue vapors when I first had the happiness of becoming aware of your existence, Miss Brand." There was a smile upon his lips, but tone and eyes were gravely tender. "Pardon me for recalling it, but it would require much to tempt me to relinquish the remembrance of the kindling of the kindness you showed me then will you not permit me to speak, to say what may appear uncalled for, but I believe may prove the slightest return of that? Mrs. Trelawney is here by your wish, your guardian has told me. She holds her place here by some power at a distance. For the sake over you, Miss Brand." Madelon gave a sudden start. "I am no conjurer, and the discovery was not a hard one to make. There is no congeniality between you. I know her,
and I assure you she is more than shallow, frivolous and artificial. I believe her to be a bold and artful schemer. This is harsh language to use regarding a lady and to a lady, but pardon it, and be persuaded to take it. Ask Mr. Goldwood to give her conge. It will be a happy riddance to him, now. How to any one here, and certainly not to yourself. There is Mrs. Lyndal awake and crying for lights. Will you think of what I have been bold in saying?"

It had been said opportunely. Madelon had known in her mind all that he put into words, had known it since that first evening when Mrs. Trelawney became a guest at the villa. More and more the aversion she had not admitted then had grown upon her, struggle against it generously as she might. She yielded now to her own impulse and his advice.

"I will do more than think of it—I will act upon your suggestion. I thank you, too, for the kindness which prompted you to make it. Let me say good-night, Mr. Bertram. I am not in a mood that would chime with those gay people coming, and I shall take myself out of the way rather than inflict my vapors upon them."

She gave him her hand with a smile; he retained it for half a moment, and watched her as she walked away.

"With Mrs. Trelawney out of the way I shall go," he said to himself. "It has been pleasant here—too pleasant. I am not an anchorite, and the wine of life is very tempting; therefore, I must conquer temptation by putting it behind me."

CHAPTER X.

WHEN SHALL WE THREE MEET AGAIN?

The blaze of lights sprung up in the room. The party came in from the lawn through the open windows and laughed and merrily. Neither did Cecil's mood chime with theirs just then. He stepped out into the moonlight just in time to catch the quick sweep of silk, and the flitting of a shape into the shadow of the nearest foliage.

"A listener!" With a few swift forward strides he cut off the retreat. "Mrs. Trelawney—I supposed so! I am not absolutely surprised to find you rank the accomplishment of eavesdropping along with your variety of other accomplishments."

"Bold and artful scheming among them! You have a higher appreciation of my poor abilities than I ever supposed, Mr. Bertram." Brought fairly to bay, Mrs. Trelawney faced about. Lost to all shame, indeed, since she could face him of all men without a blush.

"I was listening, and, of course, heard no good of myself. I don't know that it excuses you for adding insult to injury, however. If people will talk beside open windows, they may expect to be overheard. It might have been any one of those other people as readily as I, and no blame to them. But because I chanced to be the subject of discussion and dissection I am to be taken to task. How flattered I am, and how honored! That Cecil Bertram, 'friend of my brighter days,' the one lean heart and true in the time gone by, that he, who was forgiving when I desired it less, should set himself the task of persecuting a poor, friendless, lonely little woman now! It's the way of the world. Let a person get started down the hill and every one feels it a duty to give him a kick. How you must glory in it—so in keeping with your manly strength. But Cecil, Cecil! That you should be the one to take my last hope from me!"

The sudden change from defiance to reproach was not all acting. Had there been one trace of his old-time weakness lingering in the young artist then he must have relented toward her. There was none. What might otherwise have been inclined to show her was put aside as he remembered Madelon.

"I confess that I do not discover the application, Mrs. Trelawney. What hope have you here more than elsewhere—what, except to wring from Miss Brand that which only her proximity has lent upon her? Otherwise, what is it but a wandering and an outcast, fighting the battle of life alone; such a bitter fight for me, who never knew what it was to wait upon myself even?"

"I pity your misfortunes, Mrs. Trelawney. But I cannot find an excuse when you bring yourself upon me as a misunderstood and desolate-hearted girl, or when you would take undue advantage of generous if misappplied liberality."

"Oh, yes; I remember that you knew her in her inexperience and desolation. She played the part of ministering angel or something of that sort, didn't she? Played it to perfection if she caught your heart in the rebound and has held it ever since. You have been saying hard things to me, Cecil, but I forgive you as a good Christian should. I don't hear you any malice; I even find it in my heart to return good for evil and give you a warning. And for the second time in your life my heart is my truest, my only guide. One would suppose you might have learned wisdom; women are proverbially false as fair the world over. You are in love with Madelon, and if you were the Apollo Belvidere for beauty and a Lord Chesterfield for politeness, and a representation of all the virtues great and good merged in one, you never could win her. There is that between you and...
THE MADDEST MARRIAGE EVER WAS.

Madelon Brand which must separate you always widely as though eternal seas rolled between.

There was a flame in her cheeks outspreading and outburning the rouge upon them. A woman will forgive a man for deserting her but she will not forgive him for loving her rival. Quite unmoved was the handsome face, the hazel eyes bent upward upon her in the moonlight.

"Does it need you to tell me that, Mrs. Trelawney? Think and say what you like of me, I have not even the inclination to dispute you. Receive my warning now! Don't attempt to trade upon the secret you hold. Wait to receive your dismissal from the villa or go of your own accord, but be assured that you shall go. With one lingering spark of a true woman's delicacy you never would have intruded yourself upon her.

"The secret I hold—you said something of that to her. What did you mean by it?

"I mean no forgetfulness, madame. And I know nothing of you, if that is what you would ask, since the December night we met last, previous to our meeting again here at Riverbank. There is no need of concealment between you and I, Mrs. Trelawney. Understand. I knew then, then and now, I think you have not wholly failed in comprehending mine. I found excuses for the part you took in that scheme, I believed you were not of your own accord willingly betraying the confidence of a helpless girl; I believed you the tool of a stronger and more unscrupulous will. I can not so readily pardon your presence here, and the use to which you would turn your knowledge. I was happy in being able to protect Miss Brand from those mercenary designs; I am happy in being able to protect her from you now. More words between us are surely superfluous."

He lifted his last with a courteous gesture. There was not a fluctuation of those chiseled features, nothing but one more stern glance bent upon her, then he turned and walked away. And Mrs. Trelawney stood there still, as if changed to stone. Her eyes followed him; her hands clenched until the nails cut deep into the palms and the purple blood settled about them seemed ready to burst forth, but she never felt the pain. Whether it was a moment or an hour she stood thus she never could have told. It was like breaking some deep nightmare spell, when at last she drew a long, tremulous breath. She knew now who it was had married Madelon Brand!

Music and lights and voices and laughter floated out upon the still air, but there was nothing in the drawing-room to entice her now. That flush which raved the rouge was again in her cheek when she tapped at Madelon's door. A few minutes later, and in answer to her word of permission admitted herself.

"Why thus sad and lonely? At your age, my dear, with your beauty and your wealth and your prospects, there isn't a possible reason that life should be a fleeting show for your illusion. You ought to be dancing through the hours, gathering fair flowers in pleasure's perfect bowers, living poetry that is all sweet rhythm instead of giving yourself up a prey to solitude."

Madelon was sitting by her window, the pale moonlight streaming in over her. There was none of the vivacity of youth and happiness in her face, none of the brightness belonging to it in the listless glance she turned upon her visitor.

"I am not quite well, Mrs. Trelawney. You will pardon me for saying I would rather be left alone."

"Pardon you, of course, my dear child. What is there I wouldn't pardon you? It's a disappointment; but no matter, I am used to disappointment! My last night at Riverbank too, the last lingering in my Arcadia, but I can forego the pleasure of one more charming hour with you, my sweet Madelon. You are surprised of course, but there's no accounting for the fittings of such a Bohemianized creature as I am. You don't seem well; you look absolutely ghostly in that moonshine. That dead silk gives you a horrid color; take my advice and don't wear the sort again. If you feel like rewarding faithful friendship, my dear, you might speak to your guardian in the morning, mention that a check for a few thousands will be a most acceptable gift at parting. He spoke of—what do you suppose?—a paltry thousand when he gave me that first trifle, and I know that you who have so much would never wish me to go away with so little. Or you might write me out the check yourself, my dear; I think I should like to trust to your generosity."

"Mr. Goldwood has always relied upon me at my own request from the responsibility attending money affairs. I will speak to him."

"I knew I could rely upon you. And you will miss me a little when I am gone, I am sure of it. So sudden, but there is nothing truer than that we can't foresee our own movements. And I do grieve that I am denied the pleasure of watching through the play, following the 'course of true love,' and coming in with congratulations when 'Finis' is written to the second volume. But we won't anticipate. Good-night, my dear; it isn't good-by yet, but that will come soon, all too soon for you and me."

"Are you going? Good-night, Mrs. Trelawney."

Mrs. Trelawney was not showing a sign of going. She was standing, a derisive smile upon her lips, a mocking light in her cold blue eyes. She was not a pleasant sight with that expression upon her sedate, artificial face. Madelon had dropped her eyes away after her first glance.
"And you are sorry to have me go though you don't say it. I will never forget you, my dear, never, should we meet no more life's dreary pathway through. But we shall meet and we shall be friends again, and let me predict that you shall then have reached the summit of every woman's earthly ambition, 'loving and being loved.' Your experience isn't such a novel one, after all, Madelon. There have been plenty of courtships after marriage before yours, my dear."

The full dark eyes raised themselves and looked at her steadily.

"You are going to leave Riverbank, but if you were going to stay I should ask you never to speak in that manner to me again. I don't believe in your friendship for me, Mrs. Trelawney. I hope you don't wish me any real harm and I know you have never wished me any good. I do ask you, should we meet again, not to refer as you have done to the past. You know the conditions of that marriage and you know, though Ralph Mowbray's bride I may have been Ralph Mowbray's wife I never shall be. Never mention the subject to me again, now or hereafter."

Her voice broke into sudden passionate emotion and the last. In spite of herself Mrs. Trelawney was impressed, shaken for a second from her usual airly composure.

"How do you do flare up! and I didn't imagine that these conditions were of such uncompromising weight yet. As you please, of course, though I might tell you a pertinent truth in regard to husbands being matters, and such a bond as one we are not of standing void. Oh, by the way, my dear"—she was really going now, but paused to shoot a malicious glance at the still white form—"did I ever chance to mention to you who was the mysterious third gentleman of our party the 6th December night? This, by way of breaking the letter of your command and forever after holding my peace. It was our lion of the day there, that handsome Cecil Bertram. There was something in that fancy of yours about 'eyes like golden wine,' only such a pity they didn't belong to your pseudo Fitz-George."

She went at that, leaving her last concealed shaft to ramble. And Madelon sat there where she left her, for hours, until the round white moon, riding high in the azure heavens, drew her pale light from the room, long after the house was still and the clocks chiming the 'wee six' hours of the morn.' He had been kind, those piercing eyes had looked upon her more than once in a way that set her pulses thrilling and her sensitive cheeks aflame, he had been tender and reverential and distant ever, and she owed it all to his knowledge of that maid folly into which she had so desperately rushed.

"The hardest of all," she thought, with a long, moaning sigh as she stirred at last, numbed, it seemed, to her very soul. "I could endure my own humiliation, but how can I bear that he should know it?"

She was astir early next morning, notwithstanding her sleepless vigil. She was down in time to intercept her guardian and have a word with him before the first of the guests put in an appearance.

"So Mrs. Trelawney is going, is she?" repeated Mr. Goldwood. "A good riddance of bad luggage, my dear. I hope these pale cheeks aren't on account of it"—playfully pinching one of them. "And the money—oh, yes! My lady came out with her plain colors dying and set her price, did she? No matter what her own valuation was, what is she worth to you, Madelon?"

"Guardian," she looked at him startled. Had he penetrated her secret? No, surely there was no consciousness of it in those laughing eyes.

She desired to discover what degree of impatience the young lady of fortune possesses to fling the vile dress to the winds. I understand your laudable desire, but, believe me, it would be no kindness to Mrs. Trelawney to put money into her hands. It's like pouring water into a sieve. If the whole world would go into accent retirement, agree to stay with her sister now—a good, true woman she is—I wouldn't object to you settling a reasonable sum on her, and I'll make her the proposition. To give her more than I've already promised for the style of dissipation and extravagance she indulges in I shall not consent."

Very willingly Mrs. Trelawney answered his message to her, at a later hour; very willingly went down to the interview he had requested. She ended it neither frowning nor discontented; she had one perpetual smile for all moods and changes, but the suggestion of a broken heart.

"Bury myself in a novel and repent my sins on a yearly pittance? No, thank you, Mr. Goldwood. Edmonia was bad enough with her puritanical notions before she went into a drivel over that cracked old husband of hers. Between them both I would be driven to distraction in a week's time. I take what you give me and am accordingly grateful, but more on those terms I assuredly decline."

All that part of the house seemed still as she left the library, but at the head of the stairs lounging in an oriel window and looking out upon the similitude landscape she came upon Mr. Mowbray.

"I didn't suppose one of you fair creatures was visible," he said languidly. "Isn't this the witching hour when you are supposed to be coming over your wardrobes and deciding the momentous question of what you shall wear in the afternoon?"

"The question doesn't affect me. I've had my coat, a hint of it rather, and so am going without the positive notice to quit."
"I thought our genial host was uncommonly joyful. Where are you going if I may ask, Mrs. Trelawney? I may have occasion to consult you again."

"You will have to think Mentally" — At least, I mean to keep my eye on you."

"I shall stop at the hotel in the village. Shib row, you understand; all here must think me strolling in the deserted heart of New York. Take my advice, Mr. Mowbray. Give up your idea of winning Madelon. Secure half the fortune, that will be easy enough if you are clever and work quietly. She don't manage her own pecuniary affairs; I took the trouble to ascertain that, but of course she can and of course she will at the first intimation from you. Get the money first, her afterward if you can. It will be better for me to take another name, so I'll call Miss Delia Eaton, and you will see me."

He had glanced out again, but turned his face now and lifted his eyebrows inquiringly. He thought she had been about to add something more, but she was already moving away in the direction of her room.

"I came nearly telling him," she thought. "but I mean worth more than man's wisdom."

A somnambulist will walk in safety on a precipice, but wake him up and he is sure to break his neck at the bottom."

Her trunks had been already packed and conveyed below; the carriage was ordered to the door for her; her bonnet and mantle were laid out ready to don. A short task one might suppose, but it required Mrs. Trelawney close upon half an hour to accomplish it. She had made no leave-taking of the guests. If they experienced anything at her absence it would be relief, and that would come to them quite soon enough after she was fairly out of sight. Mr. Mowbray was still lounging in the window as she came out fully equipped, at last, and she paused for another word.

"You must keep me informed of all that transpires here. Like most of men you may be inclined to despise caution, and woman's wit is often worth more than man's wisdom. Don't forget that it is Mrs. Lawrence you are to ask for."

A light step was upon the stairs, the sweep of a trailing robe, and Madelon came upon the two quite unawares.

"I was just on my way to you," said Mrs. Trelawney with a smile. "I have been saying good-by to Mr. Mowbray here, but the hardest task remains to bid it to you. And bitter to rend the heart, with the sad word that we must part. But it's one of the trials of life that we must endure, so good-by, Madelon. If you could know how it wrings my heart to leave you, my love; but console myself, looking forward to a bright time coming. I take it that there's hopeful anxiety in my parting from you two together. No, my child; I wouldn't break the spirit of that command of yours, not for worlds, but the question that suggests itself is — When shall we three meet again?"

Then with a last glint of her deriding glance and her mocking tones, Mrs. Trelawney was gone.

CHAPTER XI.

A THUNDER-STORM.

"Are you ready to go down, Madelon? Mr. Mortimer has come, and our engaged people are being pokey in a corner, and Mr. Mowbray has disappeared, and that lovely Cecil Bertram is talking sweet to Elinor, and Mr. Goldwood is making owl's eyes at them, and the whole lot aren't to be endured until they are stirred up to a realization of the duties of the day. And you — and you are not ashamed to be caught poring over a stupid book here all alone, and I don't believe you were reading either. We are all turning insufferably mopish it appears to me. We didn't all lose our hearts with that Mrs. Trelawney, I suppose, but one might think she was so grateful to him. But since she was so gracious as to take her departure. You are all right, Madelon; no need of any last touches, and I can't imagine how you do manage to always keep yourself in apple-pie order. I can't with Felice to do me over half a dozen times a day."

Miss Delia Eaton stood on tip-toe and twirled about before the mirror to take a general survey of herself, twisting her short little neck unmercifully for a view of her back hair, and at last shaking out her sea-green muslin, turned to link her arm through Madelon's, and float down the wide stairway, conscious that her dimpled apple-blossom face and flaxen braids never appeared to better advantage than in close contrast to the other's style.

There was croquet that afternoon upon the lawn. Sunshine lay goldenly upon the close turf. There was not a breath of air to stir the leaves of the towering oaks and maples, not a cloud to break the dazzling expanse of sky with the sun hung half-way down the west like a burning globe. In its gleam the white walls of the villa shone like silver, the windows reflected the rays in ruby and amber and topaz tints like sheets of crystal inhaid with precious gems.

"All that's bright must fade, and this day is too lovely not to end in a storm," said Miss Mowbray, as she stood tapping her mallet against her coquetish high-heeled boot and waiting her time to play. "The premonition is in the air. Are you afraid of thunder-storms, Mr. Mortimer? I predict one for the time of your home-going."

"Then I'll throw myself upon Goldwood's mercy and not go home till morning. I'm too courageous to be afraid, Miss Mowbray. Jove's thunderbolts and the forked light-
ning's lurid flash and the tempestuous war-
ing of the elements are nice, de-cidedly
nice, in Byron's poetry or D'are's pictures,
but I'd keep 'em there if it depended with
me. No, I'll never admit to being afraid,
but I have a—ah—particular aversion to thun-
der-storms."

"Afraid of nothing—oh, Mortimer?—ex-
cept the juvenile grandfather and those
great expectations," laughed Mr. Eaton, paus-
ing near them. "How do the two come on?"

"Serene as the day. 'Pon honor, the old
gent is too sunny, by half. Never knew him
in a bad mood, and the one thing that
made them bears of me all the pleasures of my memory about
him. And he's clear of his gout, thanks
to the good nursing of Miss Marchmont's clever
maid. If I could only make him an out-
and-out present of her, buy her up like a
Circassian slave, you know, I'd feel my ex-
pressiveness, the goodness in him, and much goodness in
him is charming of course, but strikes me as
—what did you call it, Miss Mowbray?—a
premonition. You don't suppose Miss
Marchmont could be induced to part with
that exemplary maid, as a votive offering
now?"

"I really don't, Mortimer. If there's one
person on earth I'm inclined to regard with
a ferociously jealous eye it is that fascina-
ing maid. I am sure she is the only rival I
have ever had in Miss Marchmont's affec-
tions. A good stroke that, Goldwood, but
makes things dark for our side. The play
awaits you I believe, Miss Mowbray, and our
defeat or victory rests with you."

Mr. Mowbray had not been among the
players, but he strolled out from a neighbor-
ing shade and stood looking on at the con-
clusion of the game. An entire week had
gone by since Mrs. Treilsway's departure
from the villa. A cloud had seemed to fol-
low her certainly not considered a sorrowful event by any one there. Mr. Gold-
wood had shut himself for much of the time
into his tower, where some glowing fancy
was growing into execution. Bertram had
been much absent, taking long solitary ex-
cursions into the surrounding country, mak-
ings studies for future elaboration. Mr. Ea-
ton and his betrothed in the absence of other
excitement, fell to billing and cooing after
the fashion of such mating doves. Miss Eaton had done her best to amuse herself
by flirting alternately with Mowbray and
Mortimer, but the first was provokingly un-
impressive, the last equally devoted to her-
selv and Elnor, and like any other young
lady Miss Eaton objected to sharing her vic-
tories.

And during all this week Madelon had
moved about the house like one in a dream.
"Like a ghost of yourself," Della said pet-
tiugly, "it because you know
ensive abstraction is the fitting expression for
dark and liquid orbs that you in-
dulge in it, Miss Brand? If it hadn't been
that lovely Cecil Bertram was Elnor's
conquest from the first I should suppose you
were letting concealment prey on your da-
mask cheek, but I don't suppose you were
foolish enough to fall in love with him un-
der such circumstances. I didn't, and my
head turns over so much more easily than
yours if it's any consolation for you to know
it."

And all that week Ralph Mowbray had
kept himself very near to her. It was al-
ways he who met her in her walks, always
he who kept by her side through the even-
ings, always he who took her to dinner, who
turned her music, who was her partner at
chess or cards, who was growing to her more
terrible than the Death's-head of the feast.
Not by a word yet had he intimated that
sense of possession she had discovered in
him first a week ago. He had been reserved,
watchful, watchful. It was not until he
heard it in his voice, she saw it in his
eyes, sooner or later it would find expres-
ion. The time had been coming closer with
every day, and now, as she threw down her
mallet when the game was done, and found
his haunting eyes upon her, she felt that it
was time indeed.

She fled away from it and him, escaped,
as she supposed, unperceived through the
trees. She found the most solitary and ob-
scure nook in all those wide, clear grounds.
A screen of drooping branches was at her
back. The broad, blue tide of the river was
before her dotted with a white sail here and
there, the surface scarcely broken by a ripp-
le. Oh, why could not life be such a mirror
of peace!

"I have come to ask the favor of a word,
Miss Brand." With a start she turned, with
a sense of suffocation in the still golden air,
with a terrible oppression upon her heart,
that the threatened blow was in his hand
and not to be averted. Turned and saw
Ralph Mowbray standing there, his hand
sweeping aside that screen of boughs, his
face set and hard with an unwavering re-
solve. Useless to appeal to him, unless to
attempt to stay the tide—nothing could spare
her now. He took a few steps forward and
stood by her side.

"You must know what I have come to
say before I utter one word, Madelon. You
must know how I have struggled with my-
self not to have spoken this before. Made-
lon, my bride, my wife! don't reproach me.
That hateful bond is broken in spirit, and in
letter it shall not divide us. Let us go as
though it never had been. No one need ever
be the wiser for that midnight marriage in
St. Stephen's. If you will, come to me as
though you were not already mine in truth,
only come!"

He spread his arms and stretched them
to her. There was eagerness, intense
and pleading, in his face. And in his eyes
a steely glitter that made her shrink away, that recalled to her mind Mrs. Trellawney's words. Husbands are masters, and this man was her husband through that one rash, unnecessary act of hers. Hers by her own will, and she knew now what an impotent thing in law that bond would appear, and she never thought of questioning the truth of what had been told her. She put up her hands, keeping him back, herself shrinking away, her imploring eyes upon him, herself speechless. His arms dropped, the resolve showed itself plainer as the sudden softness which had come into his face died away.

"I have always looked vaguely forward to this time, Madelon. You were represented to me as a crushed and despairing child. It is hard to give my own reasons for consenting to the proposition which was made to me. I cannot fully explain my share in that consent. I can only be thankful now that I did give it. Let me leave that time and speak of this later when I saw you, knew you, loved you. Fate surely ordained we should be brought together. I accepted your guardian's invitation here, I strove hard to gain your heart before I should give you even a hint of the truth. I neither wished to break your command by intruding upon you in the character I was bound to disavow, nor to influence you through the power once avowed, that it gave me."

She found her voice, and broke his steady, quiet speech.

"I thank you for having spared me until now, Mr. Mowbray. But is this generous? Is this kind? You honored me ten days ago by asking me to be your wife—asking it with no attempt to influence me by this knowledge, or the fact that you yet hold that miserable bond. I told you then what I tell you now, that I do not, can not love you. You never called upon me to fulfill my part of that contract. I am willing, eager to do so now. One half of my fortune is yours if you will go away and never come near me again."

"Money never could repay me for the loss of you. No, Madelon. I could not claim your money then, how do you suppose I could accept it now? I want you—"

"But you need money," she interrupted him in a quick, feverish way. "Don't interrupt me, please. I know you have none except what your sister gives you. What you really need can be—never! Have pity on me, have mercy! I was mad with a girl's sullen, lonely despair. I surely must have been mad to have freed myself from even my hard fate by such a means. You say you love me. Then do me the greatest kindness that you can—the only one—take me to my world, and I will have never assumed the responsibility, and even be need never know now. That is all that need be said. I think, Mr. Mowbray."
“All. When I claim the money you shall have the bond.”

“That will be when?”

“When I leave Riverbank most probably. You are anxious to have me go, and I will not trespass for very long.” That hard cold glitter had been in his eyes while his voice was a lingering sadness. He had not relinquished her hand at her asking but he did so now, and with it seemed to relinquish the secret knowledge which was his power.

“Are you aware that it rains, Miss Brand? Let me give you my arm and across the lawn. A big drop plashed down through the leaves. A sudden rushing shadow came between the sun and earth; a cloud that had risen was spreading with incredible rapidity, a black rolling mass out of which came low thunderous mutterings. Together they hurried out beneath their shelter and across the lawn. More big plashing drops fell, there was a moment’s lull during which they reached the villa, then a strong wind rocked the great trees, forked lightning danced, there was the sharp crash and long roll of “heaven’s dread artillery,” and the tempest of the east blew in. In the midst of it all Madelon escaped within.

Mr. Mowbray sauntered into a covered porch and lighting a cigar stood there smoking and looking out upon the warring elements. It was one of those fierce, short-lived storms that come in midsummer, that break at a moment’s notice and clear away with almost as brief warning. There was something in its fury admirably in accordance with Mr. Mowbray’s frame of mind.

“Man as a rational being doesn’t rejuvenate himself through his furies,” he soliloquized, “but there is relief in a sight like that after one has been holding himself powerfully in check. The first step, yes and the second and the third have been taken. She believes me what I profess. If I were, all the bonds on earth should not keep her from me. But she believes it, the silence has been broken between us, and she has done me a favor. There’s no surer way open to kindly feeling than through a favor extended. I could scarcely have asked a better beginning.”

The clouds broke and rolled away while he still walked there, and the glowing red sunset was left exposed.

Madelon was watching it from the window of that little morning-room where she had met Mrs. Trelawney on the night of their arrival at Riverbank. She had come here as the least likely spot for meeting any one within the house. In the gloom she did not observe that the room already held an occupant.

“Permit me, Miss Brand. That sill you are leaning against is dripping, and your dress is too thin for this damp breeze.”

It was Cecil Bertram speaking. A wide cashmere scarf lay across a chair where one of the ladies had tossed it. He wrapped it about her now with a reverential touch.

“I was not aware any one was here. I did not observe you come in, Mr. Bertram.”

“I watched you come in. Miss Marchmont and Mr. Eaton had possession of the library, and I came in here to write a letter instead. I must confess that I fell into a reverie and the storm overtook me before I had even begun my task. Not a serious task either, one might think, a half-dozen lines, more or less, and yet I found it hard to contemplate.”

She was looking fair and sweet in the sunset light. There was a nearer approach to a flush in her cheeks than had been there for days, a softer, happier light in those starry eyes.

“Isn’t letter-writing the confessed bête noir of all people? I don’t know any single privilege more generally abused.”

“I wish I dared say that it depends upon you whether this one of mine be ever written or not. I do say it. The letter will contain an appointment to meet a friend for a tour of the northern woods and lakes, to keep which I must leave Riverbank before the household is at stir to-morrow. That will leave me barely three days in town before I am off for the ‘north countries.’ Shall I go, Madelon?”

Commonplace and ordinary words, but his eyes and face were saying more than could have been put in words most eloquent, saying that which sent all the blood in her veins rushing to her heart, clogging and stilling it for a second, leaving her giddy and faint. All that, but she could say quietly:

“How can I presume to dictate to Mr. Bertram? I can answer that your friends here will all be disappointed at losing you, my guardian, Miss Mowbray—all.”

“Your guardian and Miss Mowbray have been good enough to say it, and you offer me less than they. It is quite right, Miss Brand.” A quivering chord thrilled in his voice, and then his words came broken and fast, a torrent that would not be stayed.

“Forgive me, Madelon! I can not leave you this way forever without a word, and it must be forever if you bid me go. I know it is madness to hope you will even pardon me. I break every bond of honor which should hold me silent—ask of you to think of me kindly as you can—for oh! Madelon, Madelon will all be disappointed at losing you, with all my heart and soul.”

She could have broken her heart over the sob in those words of his; it was wrung cruelly under those imploring eyes, and yet he did not offer to touch her. To him she was sacred and distant as an angel might have been.

“Don’t fret. You terrify me!” she cried sharply and sharply. “How can you speak so to me—how dare you—you who know—you frighten me!”

“I never meant that—pardon me if you
THE MADDEST MARRIAGE EVER WAS.

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ribboned head. "He's been a handsome man, that Mr. Fitz-George. I wouldn't mind watching for a spell myself, but Marier's gone out and I've got her table to look after well as my own."

"Did I understand you to say a sick gentleman needs attendance?" Mistress and maid with one accord turned to survey the tall, thin shape appearing in the open door. "I came in here to wait while the rain lasts, and I can sit with him until it is over if I may be of use."

"Well, you might be," said the landlady, leisurely concluding her survey. "But he's flyghty, and you might be afraid."

"I think not. I have been a professional nurse in my time. And I once knew a gentleman of that name—Fitz-George."

"You'll be apt to know if you've ever seen him. He ain't the sort of man one forgets. A circus man, a rope-dancer, this one was. Here with the company a fortnight ago, and when he got his accident at the fair back, they fetched him in the dark for good care. Not that it's to be much account; he's got no chance of tidin' over, poor creeper. That's his room to the right; 'other one is a lady's."

Accompanying her far enough to point it out the rubicund hostess walked away, and Miss Bell, without the formality of rapping, swung back the door and entered. The clouds were already breaking and the first gleam of light between streaming through the curtainless windows fell full upon the sick man's face. For one instant Miss Bell stood gazing, her breath taken away, a gray er shade creeping into her gray visage. But she was not one to see a ghost in a breathing form, not even in such a shattered wreck as this. That first instant past she glided for ward to take up her position as Good Samaritan at the bedside.

CHAPTER XII.

WHAT HE HEARD.

"I have a favor to ask, guardian."

Mr. Goldwood, slowly sameting up and down the long piazza, unclasped his hands from his back, tossed away his half-consumed cigar, and turned his gaze upon the tall, willowy shape passing for an instant in the open door, the bright blaze of hall lights at her back, the face woefully white and the eyes woefully wistful it appeared to him. Then she came out, slipping her hand within his arm, walking up and down beside him. The hour was after dinner and all the guests had collected in the drawing-rooms and eng aged themselves for amusement in numerous ways, seeing which she had stolen out here.

"Yes, my dear. I was thinking of you just now, thinking that you are not looking well in the least. We must be having Dr. Grimsliaw out here if these pale looks and
morbid humors continue. I haven't failed
to observe how you have taken to moping if
all the rest did. "The greatest favor I can do
you will be to prescribe quinine and bonestem
on my own account until we can induce that
always busy physician to leave his town
practice for a day. I am persuaded it was to
him we owed your perfect recovery from
that illness in Rockpoint, and such a constitu-
tion as he built you up that you have never
been sick a day since. I'd never trust any
one so soon as Grimshawe after that."

"But I'm not sick now, guardian. I am
afraid I have moped since you are not the
first one to tell me of it. I want something
more to occupy my mind. The favor I want
is to be allowed to manage my own affairs
after this. There will be books to go over,
I suppose, and figures and calculations
enough to shake any morbid inclination I
have fallen into. You made me go over
them last year when I came of age, and I
think the distraction is just what I need now."

"Quite right, Madelon. What I would
advise by all means. You know I told you
that a young lady of your possessions should
be taught to look out for herself. There
must be no more Mrs. Trelawney affairs
however. There are plenty such adventu-
resses to make prey of such good-hearted
creatures as you, my dear girl. I'll have
the books brought out and the matter
attended to, this very week yet. Nothing
more! Thanking me for indulging your
whim, but I don't stand the least in need of
thanks. In fact I've neglected a duty in not
insisting upon it before."

She was going but he detained her with a
question.

"You know Bertram leaves us in the morn-
ing, Madelon?"

"Yes, guardian." Very low the tone, and
she hid her face away toward the shadowy
night.

"I have been thinking—in conjunction
with your ill looks, my dear, and Bertram's
sudden move suggested it—how would it be
to take our party and make a flying trip to
those same Northern woods and lakes? Peo-
ple would weary of Paradise I suppose if it
were re-established on earth and they con-
fin'd in it, so I need not find fault with you
ladies for beginning to weary of Riverbank.
What do you think of it as a change?"

"Oh, guardian, no!" in quick fear at the
suggestion. "Indeed I am sure none of our
guests are discontented here, and no change
does but an improvement upon beautiful
Riverbank. Don't speak of it please!"

"Oh, very well. I confess to being best
suited here myself." Though he spoke will-
ingly there was lingering anxiety in his
voice. She was very near and dear to him,
the daughter of the Madelon who had been
sleeping under the daisies for twenty-two
long years, whom he had never forgotten or
closed to remembering loving. He laid his
hand upon the girl's dusky head and turned
the pale face to the light, trying to speak
playfully. "You are neither sick nor in
need of change, Madelon. Then it must be
some secret trouble preying here, for all is
not right with you. Is it a mind diseased?
I have heard of such things as my expec-
tations in my time when a word of expla-
nation from some such fatherly friend as I
might have put everything straight. Is there
anything of the sort in your case, my dear—
any young lover who may have a far-fetched
notion of discretion in fortune, and because
of that would fear youth's golden hours
away in waiting?"

She laughed at that hystERICALLY. These
last few hours had tried not simply heart
and soul, but nerves as well.

"No, indeed, nothing of the kind. Don't
think it or anything else so absurd. As if I
could have a mind diseased, with so watchful
a guardian, yeas and noes guard over my
heart.

"And I am not one particle more assured,"
mused Mr. Goldwood, looking after her as she
moved away. "If there is a hidden trouble, it can't be reached, I suppose, and I can't
divest myself of the idea, quite. Put-
ting two and two together, Cecil's rushing
away and this, it seems an end to my hope.
If people could only see what would be best
for them. Something has gone wrong in the
house, too, and the more I try to discover
what, the more I am hopelessly confused.
The only thing I can resolve out of the med-
ley is that, if there's one riddle on earth har-
er to read than anything else, it's a woman's
mind. With that reflection, Mr. Goldwood
fell again to pacing back and forth, and
watching the first stars make their tremendous
appearance in the opal evening sky. While
occupied thus, a gray girding form came up
the steps and passed him.

"One of them," he said to himself.

"Odd, but I never see that much in-demand
maid to Miss Marchmont but I seem to have
a recollection of having met and known her
before. Ah!—did you speak to me?"

The gray shape had looked back, turned,
and was standing seemingly irresolute.

"I had not spoken, but I should like to
with your permission. You haven't appear-
ed to remember me, sir, but you probably
will when I tell you I am the same Juliet
Bell who was concerned with that affair of
the Trelawney will."

"To be sure. Miss Bell! I should have
remembered had I heard your name here
which is familiar, I never did. You had
something to do with the discovery of the
will, I believe." Struggling recollection
revealed to him in the same instant that
the something had not been to the unblemished
credit of Miss Bell, and he stood gravely
waiting for anything more she might have to
say.
"With the resurrection of it," she remarked, dryly. "It isn't about that I have to speak, however, but of something which concerns Miss Brand. I've just come from seeing Alfred Trelawney."

Mr. Goldwood looked at her in simple amaze. There was nothing in the woman's quiet manner to declare her mad, but the assertion had been made with such an appearance of good faith that for the moment it confounded him.

"You don't receive visitors from the supernatural regions, do you, Miss Bell? I couldn't have misunderstood you, I suppose, but that is simply impossible. Alfred Trelawney is dead and buried, six feet of earth in Greenwoods on top of him, and has been for close upon five years. You rather startled me for the instant, and your declaration was calculated to be startling."

"Alfred Trelawney is not dead. I don't wonder you scarcely believe me. I always thought myself until to-night, and I have seen him, as I have told you. He lies at the Clarendon House in the village, at the very point of death now, I think. You may have heard of the accident to one of the circus men who went through here; that man is he."

"I heard of the accident, yes! Eaton mentioned it first. But Trelawney—good heavens! The thing is out of all reason."

"In reason or out of it, it is as I say. He is known by another name, that of Fitz-George. No, I have not made any mistake. I couldn't. I should have known if it had been forty years instead of four."

"You mentioned my ward, Miss Bell." Mr. Goldwood, recovered from his first surprise, was not inclined to go into desultory conjectures. "If this astonishing piece of news be true, if you have not been mistaken, what has it to do with Miss Brand?"

"He has her name on his lip constantly. There's something on his mind that concerns her. Something much more as to the change of fortune. Some secret, I should say, with a plot to it; something that seems to bear a hearing on him now, and that he keeps a-planning—he's delirious, sir, and has been from the first—but so cautious, even with all his wildness, that he tells nothing positive. He's been so, they say, all through, and they don't attach importance to his wanderings, but I'm sure there's something in them."

"Delirious fancies."

"More than that. I am accustomed to sick people, and I know the difference. I beg pardon for free speaking, but it appeared to me Mrs. Trelawney held some secret over Miss Brand when she was here. I've heard her say as much myself."

"It is well not to hear too much, Miss Bell, even when there is basis for assertion. There could be none in this case. Mr. Goldwood's tone was severe. Such floating recollections as were in his mind did not tend to possess him in favor of Miss Marchmont's maid. "You have been kind enough to acquaint me with this, for what reason may I ask?"

She had been standing in the shadow. She took a step forward into the bright glow from the inner lights. The angular form, the thin, shallow features, were cut sharply against it. Standing thus, she turned her scornful face and steady eyes upon him with an expression which commanded more of his respect before she had spoken a word.

"You are a gentleman, and you ought to understand such a thing as an act of duty without any further object, Mr. Goldwood. I can see that you are remembering things to my disadvantage, as though any one ever went through the world without sinning once in a lifetime. It's the way of people to cast stones, not at the sin but at the avowal of it. If you have interest enough to wish to follow what seems so clear to me, that Alfred Trelawney holds some secret which very closely affects Miss Brand, you can surely determine what is best to be done. It is a matter which is of no importance to me, one way or the other."

Dropping a courtesy, the gray shape glided away. In that speech Juliet Bell had revealed herself. Her sin had been the concealment of the will. No matter how her motive in restoring it had been the ignoble one of revenge, the act itself had pardoned her in her own eyes. Her revenge had been to her full and complete, and with it she had ended all feeling for the man who had trifled wantonly with her virgin affections, who had derided her for her belief in him when he was done using her as a tool. The news of his death had brought her neither regret nor remorse. She took up her own lowly way in life again, her greatest pride in her humility, her single claim upon humanity through her cleverness and usefulness."

There are others, good-will, sympathy, tenderness to human error, that are needed as much, but part in them Miss Bell had none. A gray phantom gliding through life, with water for blood, a cucumber for a heart, and hoar-frost for affections—this is all intents and purposes had Juliet Bell become.

"Whether her fancy means any thing or nothing I'll go and see the man," Mr. Goldwood decided, buttoning his coat across his broad chest. "As well now as any time."

It was early yet, still silverly dusk without. The air was refreshingly sweet and cool after the shower. It was no more than ten minutes' walk to the village at his long, rapid man's strides. A flaring light burned over the door of the Clarendon, other lights flared in the principal rooms within, but above for the most part the windows were dark, shut in the staring-white structure. Mr. Gold-
wood was well known to mine host of the Clarendon, but mine host had evidently a proclivity for being out of the way when he was wanted. To this fact he was indebted for falling into the hands of that blundering small boy, Billy.

“Some one wants to see Number Eleven,” announced that youth, poking his head into feminine regions while he left Mr. Goldwood waltzing at the foot of the inn stairs. “It’s a man, Susan, but he’s after Mrs. Lawrence’s sort, not yours.”

“The doctor’s tending on Eleven,” answered the landlady’s sharp voice. “Show the man into the next room if he likes to wait, and tell Mr. Goodwin when he turns up. Look sharp there now, you Billy.”

The next room meant that same little bare parlor in which Miss Bell had waited, but Billy who was generally unfortunate in his comprehensions construed it differently. Following his lead, Mr. Goldwood was ushered into the room which adjoined Number Eleven. Also a parlor, also bare and small, imperfectly lighted by a lamp, turned low, which stood upon the mantelshelf. No one was there. Cheap curtains were drawn before the window recesses, and sweeping one back Mr. Goldwood pushed open the casement and leaned out into the night.

“What pains people who frequent places like this to take to shut out the air,” he thought. “This room is close as a pit and hot as an oven; where I!”

The river was dimly visible from his station. Distant music struck upon his ear, then a blaze of light reflected from the water, shot into view about a curve, glowing up the surface as it came, a brave and brilliant sight, the night steamer rounded in at the little wharf and was off again after its momentary pause. In that moment he had lost the sound of the opening door and of incoming steps. A voice, the last he might have expected to hear there, was speaking in the room at his back.

“I thought you had given me up, and that after the sacrifice I am making for you, mon ami, burying myself alive in this stupid hole, would be execrable. Tell me how all goes at Riverbank. The gentle creatures there manage to exist without me, and our two painters devote themselves to nothing more alluring than their art—you told me that before. But Madelon, heiress of half a million, happy bride of a mysterious bridegroom, how does she take to the aspirant who elects himself to the place of the much-to-be-envied Unknown? Mon Dieu! that cough of mine will be the death of me yet. Never mind. Of course you have something to tell me now that you are here.”

Mrs. Trelawney had thrown herself into the one wooden rocker in the room, and leaning back, looked up at Ralph Mowbray, smiling tall and still beside the mantel.

“I have little more to tell than you can readily guess, Mrs. Trelawney. I have spoken and I have made terms. Half of the fortune will await me whenever I choose to claim it.”

“Good!” she clapped her hands applaudingly with a shrill laugh of approval. “Don’t let it wait long, if from no other reason than pity for poor little me. Such horrors as this place holds—there is one of them now. A beast of an invalid next door whose moans and groans have all but set me wild. And so you give up the bride and take the portion according to my advice—sensible man!”

“I neither do one nor the other!” said Mr. Mowbray, coolly.

“Then you’ll end by cutting yourself out of both yet, mark my words! If she really was your wife and you could prove it in a court of law, she would fight you to the death before she would give up to you. She hates you and for no other earthly reason than because you were so idiotic as to fall desperately in love with her. Permit me to ask you what you propose, Mr. Mowbray?”

“To win her yet, not such a hopeless task surely. But I have one horrible fear of that man—cure him!—whoever it was she really married turning up to balk me. She spoke of the written bond, too, but that may be reproduced and a counterfeit imposed upon her.”

“I told you she wasn’t in her senses that night. Anything with the same drift can be palmed off on her.”

“But the real bond and the man who holds it are in existence somewhere. Is there no method of finding them? Think, Mrs. Trelawney; is there no clue? I shall never rest until I have discovered who is her husband in reality.”

If he had seen the mocking light in those blue hard eyes change fierce and threatening, before the lids went down to veil them, he might have doubted the assurance she had shown him before and which she repeated.

“I know no more than the dead. I doubt if there was ever more than one in the world besides the man himself who could have told you. Such a pity I didn’t hold the confidence of the dear departed—meaning Mr. Trelawney of course—more fully; I don’t mind telling you that we weren’t cengenial spirits; he was a brute and he treated me cruelly, cruelly! It gives me the old horror to think of him, even yet. But I wait one little spark of gratitude to his memory for having never told me. You would be for treating him to arsenic or cold steel if you knew and the result mightn’t be pleasant. You weren’t born to be hanged were you, Mr. Mowbray? Take my advice and don’t be hanged, at least for such a little cause as a girl’s love. For the fortune it would be a different thing and worth risking.”

She had coughed sharply twice before and now again more protractedly. She presse
her handkerchief to her lips and as it dropped his keen eyes detected a tiny stain upon it.

"You can't tell me the one thing I wish to know," he said, staring from his position.

"Don't be impatient, Mrs. Trelawney! You shall have your ten thousand dollars yet, but I must have more time. You ought to look after that cough of yours, by the way—sounds ominous. Not much wonder, you as I found you in the damp with those thin shoes. I have brought you the hundred dollars I promised you last time, begged it of Nelly, and I tell you plainly it is all I shall ever ask from her for this purpose."

"Then positively you must claim the fortune by the time it is gone, mon cher. Otherwise I shall be forced to go back to Madelon. I say it now if she would give me her hundred and dollars for telling her the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth regarding what I know of that affaire de mariage of five years ago." "You had better meet ten thousand devils than me if you ever should tell her," Ralph Mowbray's eyes flashed. "You don't frighten me, however. You have some reason of your own for hating Madelon, and, complimentary as the knowledge is, are taking your revenge by throwing her to me. I am well enough content with the fact not to question the motive. Au revoir, madame!"

Neither of them was aware of the walking out upon them from the parting of the curtains, Ernest Goldwood's face, out of which all expression had vanished save that of intense observance. Here was a secret and a plot given into his possession by the merest chance, the revelation of which left him stunned. Every look and word of this interview which had passed were stamped upon his mind, but the mind itself refused to act. He might have been a man of stone for all the power to act which was left him for motion or thought.

Mrs. Trelawney sat back in the rocker when left alone, her eyes heavy with bitter circles about them, haggard and worn and old at twenty-five. There were no pleasant memories for her in all those years. A selfish, misguided life hers had been at its best, these later years haunted by sin and poverty, and she was paying the penalty heavily even now. A feverish clock upon the mantelpiece ticked through five long minutes. Then she rose, trailed her silk robe after her across the room and disappeared through a second door leading into her own chamber.

Her movement and the sense of relief from her presence restored him in part. He went out from the room silently. He had utterly forgotten his mission to the house. It never occurred to him until he was half-way home to the villa. The fresh air, the exercise of rapid walking, restored the use of the faculties that had been for a time suspended.

Half-way home he remembered Miss Bell's assertion that Alfred Trelawney lived, and from what he had gathered Alfred Trelawney alone could clear the mystery of Madelon's marriage of which he had learned for the first that night. With the remembrance he turned about and retraced his steps.

There was a flash of moving lights in the upper portion of the house as he neared it, a sharp, blood-curdling scream rang out through that open window from which he had leaned a few moments before. He quickened his pace to a run. Something had happened—what?

CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT HAPPENED AND WHAT FOLLOWED.

Mrs. Trelawney swept the trailing lengths of the bright azure silk she wore up and down her room. There was no elasticity in her step; it was dragging and slow and painful, but a goading restlessness impelled her to motion.

"I feel as if I were haunted to-night," she said to herself. "It's nothing new; I've felt it ever since my fright upon the river. I'm not a coward, and I know my fancy then was only an illusion, but if spirits could come back I should expect his to come and haunt me into my grave. What nonsense people talk about remorse haunting one; I don't believe it ever does. I know he never would trouble me. But fear does; dead as he is, buried as he has been for years, I have never ceased to fear him. There, bah! how morbid I grow. I shall go and talk with the landlady, miserable, coarse creature, but even she is better than being alone in this gloomy hole."

She passed again into the outer room. A draught from that open window struck her, and she was seized with a convulsion of coughing which left her exhausted. She sunk back into the wooden rocker, panting, her hand pressed against her side.

"How that hurts me! I don't like advice—what woman does?—but I will take that of my good friend just gone and look after this troublesome cough. I don't come of a consumptive race and haven't that fear on my mind; but I'm not ready to die yet, even of a fashionable disease, so I'll guard against the possibility of anything worse from this cold I have taken. Ugh! what draughts there are here."

She rose with a shiver, then stood with stony, glaring eyes fixed upon the door. A horrible chill froze her into a statue of ice, white and ghastly. The door swung back silently, and within it stood a shape in long, white garments, ghastly enough in the name of all conscience, spectral in its gauntness, hollow eyes burning in its face, pallid and drawn as that of a corpse. Little wonder that Mrs. Trelawney should believe the grave had really given up
its dead at last. In a fascination of horror she saw it move; saw it draw nearer, step by step; saw the bloodless hand stretched toward her; saw those terrible eyes upon her. Then, with one long, loud, piercing scream something tense within her seemed to snap. She fell back in her chair, a limp heap. The azure silk shimmere in the lamplight; her golden hair, the one reminder of her beautiful youth, glittered at its brightest, but something else was there—a gush of blood, a crimson stream bubbling from between her pallid lips.

There had been no recognition of her, and no consciousness in Alfred Trelawney's fever-burning eyes, but at sight of that red stain some memory struggled in his dazed, wandering brain.

"Blood!" he said, in a hollow whisper, that raised almost to a shriek; "blood, and it is here on my hand! It has been here for ages, and it will never wash off. Blood, blood!"

"Great God! has the man murdered her?" The horrified exclamation came from the doctor appearing at the instant at his patient's back. The gleaming eyes of the latter riveted upon the sight turned glassy; he put up his hands to clasp his brow, then fell like lead into the arms of the physician, outstretched to receive him. A group of frightened faces was already collected about the door, and pushing through these came the fussy landlord of the inn, followed by a gentleman before whom the knot drew back respectfully.

"Here, Goodwin, and some of you men there, bear a hand in getting this poor wretch back to his room. Shut that door and keep the women back; always losing their wits when they need to keep them. It's a case of hemorrhage, not a murder, you fools! Ah, Goldwood, glad to see you. Be kind enough to hold that lamp closer."

Resigning his burden he stooped over the limping-bloodstained form in the chair. His examination was brief. He lifted her hand and let it fall, listened for the pulsation of her heart, and wiping the blood from her lips, held a pocket-mirror to them. The polished surface came away unimpaired.

"There is no need of asking if her condition is critical," said Goldwood, in a low, shocked voice.

"Dead! Dead from fright, I should say. Possibly some previous affection of the heart, and it's evident she's been otherwise in a bad state of health. Worse than appears yet that she should have died outright at sight of a strange man in a bed-robe. It happened in this way: He has been violent, and I have been giving him opiates through the evening. They didn't take full effect, but he grew quieter, and I left him to have Goodwin find some one to stay with him over night in the absence of a regular nurse. The man must have slipped from his bed the moment my back was turned; most wonderful, considering the state he was in. This door was ajar; I noticed the light as I passed, and she took him for a ghost, I suppose."

"Not so strange. He is her husband, whom every one has supposed dead for five years."

"You don't say! I never would have supposed it. She seemed a lady, too, poor thing! and whatever he may have been he fell to no good, long ago." He had lifted the small form as he spoke, carried and placed it upon a couch in the inner room, and stood looking down upon the face more ghastly for the artificial bloom on cheeks and lips. Goldwood turned away from what was to him a heart-sickening sight. He had known her in her best days and had never liked her; at the very last he had discovered her steeped to the lips in blacker crime than he had ever attributed to her; but he could not now sit in judgment upon yonder piece of life-less clay.

He passed out of the room and into the outer one where the sick man had been conveyed. He lay upon the bed as apparently lifeless as that other form. An attendant standing over him withdrew as the doctor followed in, after a moment. Through all there had been no disorderly confusion; some excitement, but it was not now evident above the sounds ordinary to the house. Goldwood had taken a seat at a little distance and watched the medical man as he busied himself for a couple of minutes about the bed, placing the pillows and shading the light, but making no effort to restore the patient.

"It would be of no use," he said, as the other remarked it. "He won't be long behind her, not many hours I should say."

"Will he be conscious? I have reason to believe that the man has a confession to make. Can nothing be done to bring him to himself for ever so short time, Dr. Stearns?"

The latter shook his head.

"He may come to himself at the last, I don't say he will. It is only possible. A confession to make of course, his sort always have, and this one has murder weighing on him if ever man had." He looked at his watch with professional exactitude as to time, and professional unconcern as to crime pertaining to the shattered wreck before him. "This is my hour for a patient just around the corner from here. I'll look in again on my way back. Do you stay?"

"Yes," returned Mr. Goldwood briefly. It seemed ages since he had left the villa, yet it was scarcely two hours' time. A clock somewhere in the house droned out eleven strokes. As the last one sounded a soft tap fell upon the door. Mr. Goldwood opened it and looked in amaze at seeing Miss Bell.

"I wanted you to know that I am close at hand if any thing is needed," she said quietly. "I met Dr. Stearns below and I know
what's happened. I'm going to do what's needful for her, and after that I can watch her. I'm free until four to-morrow afternoon; I have an engagement for then, but he'll hardly last so long:"

"What a matter of common fact she makes of it," he thought as he went back to his place. "I remember I said that she had loved him once, and the resurrection of the will was her revenge for his desertion. If she had any heart then she must have outlived it since."

The doctor called in as he had promised later. Mr. Goldwood took advantage of his presence to write a few lines explaining his absence and dispatch the same to the villa.

"You can send for me if there is any change," said Dr. Stearns. "It won't be of any use; there can only be one change for him."

"I shall remain until all is over then."

The long lonely night wore through and there was no change. In the gray of the early dawn Miss Bell glided in and took up her position by the bedside. Very few words were exchanged between the two watchers. The sun came up rosily, and as it rode higher, streamed into the bare room, lighting and gilding it. Even little incident fixed itself painfully upon Mr. Goldwood's mind—the flies buzzing about the bare window, a brown thrush hopping and twittering without, the sound of steps passing and repassing. And the day wore on as the night had done; the still form upon the bed had never moved or seemed to breathe. And the gray form sitting near seemed as oblivious to all human feeling as he was to outward influences. The night's vigil and his anxiety had left their impress upon Goldwood; his face was set, stern and pale in the daylight, but it had made no change in Miss Bell. She offered once to keep the watch alone while he should take some rest, or the relief of a walk in the open air, but he refused. His duty to Madelon held him rigidly to his post. Thus the hours dragged on until three of the afternoon. Miss Bell glanced up as the clocks struck. Goldwood fancied that she was speculating upon the engagement which would claim her in another hour.

"He stirred his eyelids," she said. "The crisis has come."

Goldwood went over to stand close at the bed's head, and at almost the same instant those heavy dark eyes opened wide, looking up from the rigid face, and the pallid lips moved.

"Blood!" said that hollow, piercing whisper. "On my hand and it won't wash off. Is that him?"

"It is I, Juliet Bell. Who do you mean, Alfred?"

"Fitz-George. We met on the wharf, you know. He had fooled me and he was drunk and quarrelsome. It was his own fault that he was killed and pushed into the river."

"Wandering still," said Goldwood, in a disappointed voice.

"Hush—not! He refers to the man who lies in Greenwood with the name of Alfred Trelawney written over him. This is Mr. Goldwood, Alfred. You have something to say to him about his ward—about Miss Brand."

"Madelon Brand—Madelon Trelawney—Madelon Fitz-George—Madelon—I'm dying or you wouldn't be here, Juliet. I may as well tell the truth. I—I'm choking. Raise me—up." She supported his head and Dr. Stearns coming in at the moment took up his position at the other side of the bed, his watch in his hand and his fingers on the dying pulse.

Goldwood leaned over him.

"About Madelon. She married some one—you alone know who. Tell me only the name."

"She thought she married Fitz-George. It wasn't he—but when I changed to him—after—after that—I meant to get the money when she came of age. I was here to look after it when I got this—this cursed fall." His speech was labored and slow. Miss Bell moistened his lips with some cordial, and he swallowed a few drops.

"I meant she should be punished." His hearers understood it was not Madelon of whom he spoke now. "I didn't blame him so much—but her—her! He seemed to be wandering, and Goldwood spoke again to recall him.

"The man Madelon married—what was his name?"

"Madelon—I'm coming to that. Not Madelon Brand—Madelon Ber—Ber—"

"Not Brand. What?"

"Madelon Ber—" The black glazing eyes fell away from him, the voice died in unintelligible mutterings, the head dropped and lay a dead weight.

"Too late." The case of the doctor's watch snapping shut broke the silence in the room. "He is gone."

Gone without telling. Gone, and with him the simple key to the mystery of that night marriage, the name of Madelon's husband. Gone in time for Miss Bell to keep her four o'clock appointment.

Through the bright late afternoon Mr. Goldwood walked slowly back to the villa. It looked fair and peaceful but very quiet to his eyes as he leaned, for a moment, over the gate, searching the ground with his gaze.

No one was in sight, but through an opening in the trees down by the river he caught the moving glimmer of something white.

"It may be Madelon, and I must see her first of all," he thought, turning that way.

It proved not to be Madelon however. Pacing slowly up and down where flecks of sunshine sifted through, lighting and brightening the red-gold hair into a crowning glory, an open book in her hand but her eyes
stayed away from it looking far over river and field to that boundary line of hills cut against the horizon, was Miss Mowbray. In her shimmering diaphanous dress, a soft thoughtfulness upon her face, a tender curve to her bright ripe lips, past the first bloom of youth but in the brightness and more perfect bloom of her matured womanhood, he saw her thus before him, stood and watched her for full five minutes himself unseen, two almost invisible lines between his brows deepening painfully, a tremor coming about the lips that had been set sternly under his golden beard.

Ralph Mowbray had stood before him, a self-confessed scoundrel; and before him now stood Ralph Mowbray’s sister, the woman who, in these last few weeks, had grown into the place so long left void, once filled by the dead Madelon Brand. He took a few steps forward and stood by her side.

"Mr. Goldwood? Returned, and to find yourself ‘like one who treades alone some banquet hall deserted.” As she spoke she turned to him, read the stern anxiety in his face and eyes, saw his pallor and the trace of agitation under his quiet manner. "Fardon no. Something more than the change at the house has occurred to distress you. What is it what can I do?"

"I have just come from witnessing a most distressing incident. I have not been at the house yet. What has occurred there, Miss Mowbray?"

"Affairs generally have been thrown out of tune. In the first place Miss Marchmont’s invaluable maid went off last evening without so much as an hour’s warning. Persuasions and the offer of increased wages were alike powerless to shake her decision, and her tender-hearted mistress was really attached to her and bitterly disappointed at losing her. The situation came later to the Eatons, some member of their family is lying seriously ill, their presence demanded without delay. They went, in company with Mr. Bertram, by the earliest morning train, all leaving farewells for you. For the rest, Madelon has a headache and has not been out of her room to-day; Mrs. Lyndal ditto to the last with neuralgia, and Ralph has taken himself away in solitary rambling. So you find me left to my own resources."

"While I regret the loss of our friends I am glad to have found you so. Miss Mowbray—Elinor! I have had it on my mind to ask you for weeks past, I ask you now when it may seem strange and out of place, to be my wife. I love you, not with my first love, but with one tender and true and strong as that. I love you, Elinor; will you marry me?"

"The confession did seem strange and out of place, given with that grave tone and face, and yet the deep strong love was there imploring her."

"I almost asked you once before,” he said as for a second she did not speak, “that night when Bertram interrupted us. I felt almost sure—I don’t say it in egotism—that if I had spoken then you would not have refused. Something had been said of Bertram’s fancying you; I thought myself then that he was carrying Madelon, but I determined to wait until assured he was not to win you. Was I mistaken? Don’t fear to speak if I have misled myself with a false hope.”

She was looking at him with sober, searching eyes, doubtfully.

"If you had asked me then I should have said yes. Then, there is no reason I should not speak plainly, Mr. Goldwood; we have understood each other so well, and I honored you the more for your loyalty to your friend though he never could have cared any thing for me. Now—?"

"Now! What can make a change now?"

"I don’t know, I can’t tell. But there is something that I should know first, that you are withholding from me. I don’t know why I should think so, but I am sure there is."

"Do you love me, Elinor?"

"I love you, Ernest; you know that I do."

"Then there is nothing, darling. Believe me, there is nothing which she could come between us, or which should make you hesitate in promising to marry me. You do promise; I want to hear it in your own words, dear, that you will marry me?"

He had taken both her hands; he was looking lovingly into the fair face where a vivid blush had risen. "Would you like to have it written out in black and white, sir? I do promise; I will marry you most gladly since you have asked me, Ernest."

In one second the blushing face was hidden on his shoulder, and surely the heyday of youth could have found no greater bliss in the moment that followed than that excellent moment.

The anxiety and sternness both had vanished from his face as she glanced up into it.

"And the something there is to tell which should not come between us, Ernest,” she said laughingly as she drew herself away from those folding arms. "No more of that, sir. Remember that it is broad day; and yes, positively, we are within sight of the house windows."

"And I shouldn’t object if we were in sight of all the world. There is something, but won’t you believe me, darling, that it doesn’t in any way affect you? Must I play Bluebeard before marriage, lay my command that you are to utterly believe in and trust to me?"

"Do for the sake of reversing that old tale and finding an obedient Mrs. Bluebeard."

"Then receive the command, for I must leave you. I may have something to tell you, Elinor, something painful, but there is not time for it now even if I were willing to cloud these moments, which I am not."
"Can he have lost his fortune or a part of it, I wonder?" mused Elinor, as she watched him with fond, proud eyes after he had left her. "I almost wish that it might prove so and he could find his trust in me not misplaced."

Surely never was afternoon more perfect, sunlight more golden, thoughts more sweet than those that bore her company through the next two hours. She was lingering there yet when a little boat vigorously propelled by its occupant rounded the curve, was turned shoreward and moored at the landing. The curmudgeon springing out approached, and standing before her was disclosed as Mr. Mortimer.

Mr. Mortimer with a most lugubrious look—Mr. Mortimer, flushed, paying his respects truly, but with a preoccupied air and an evident indignation not characteristic of that Adonis.

"The compliments of the day to you, Mr. Mortimer. And really you don't look 'most happy' though you have been kind enough to say it. Surely this must be a day of trying events. It has proved so here, and from that clouded brow I fancy your testimony might also declare it such."

"Ah, no, no, no, Miss Mowbray! I beg pardon, Miss Mowbray, but even that expression don't do justice to my experience of it. Never was so dashed in all my life, by Jove! What do you suppose that old gent of mine has been up and done at last?"" Never such a picture of injured innocence as was then and there portrayed in his remaining.

"Not—Mr. Mortimer, don't tell me that the ungrateful person has changed his will and cut you out of it."

"Worse than that. He has—positively he has done just as I predicted he would—gone and been married. Married an hour ago, and to Miss Marchmont's maid! Dash the Marchmont! But who was to suspect evil designs from such a sphinx as she seemed to be?"

"Who, indeed!" echoed Miss Mowbray, struggling between her sympathy and a very strong inclination to laugh. "Tell me about it. Married an hour ago you said?"

"Yes, and before my very eyes, before I could even get a suspicion of what they were about. And, only think of it! the shameless venerable hoodwinked me into asking the pastor. Had the appointment made for four o'clock this afternoon. At the very minute Miss Bell made her appearance. The clergyman was half an hour late, but there wasn't a word to hint it until they stood up before him with me for a witness. Never was so cut up as when I realized what a guy I'd been."

"What did you do?" asked Miss Mowbray, laughing outright now.

"Looked on and congratulated 'em; there wasn't anything else to be done, you understand. The clergyman took his fee and his departure, and I followed him, leaving the happy pair to their tea-o'clock dinner, and don't I hope they may have good appetites for it? The old gent has his got again, I'm happy to state, and if my respected grannyma-in-law isn't a victim of dyspepsia her countenance belies her. I've come to make my adieux. I'm off to-morrow, to the north, I think, though I haven't precisely decided where."

And offering his arm at that, this victim of Love's LaborLost escorted Miss Mowbray over the sunlit slope toward the villa.

CHAPTER XIV.
A CHOICE BETWEEN TWO.

"MADELON!" Mr. Goldwood tapped at the closed door. "I must speak with you."

There was a stir within and she opened the door to him, so haggard and worn that he could scarcely believe it only a day and a night which had passed.

"Don't come out, child. You look too ill to be up. I can wait for another time."

Her big dark eyes looked up at him, purple encircled, heavy lidded, woefully intense.

"Come in, guardian. Don't go. I couldn't bear the suspense. I was with Mrs. Lyndal when she received your note, and Miss Bell had been in to tell me before she left who that man was who lay dying in the village. Was it—could it be—"

"It was Alfred Trelawney, Madelon."

"And you know of my secret marriage? Oh, guardian, don't blame, don't reproach me! If you could know how I have suffered for that madness."

"I reproach you, my child? I think I understand how you must have been driven into it too well for that. But you have been imposed upon shamefully; you have been the victim of more plots than one. There has been here a villainy at work, Madelon, and I shudder to think how narrowly you may have escaped the toils which were laid for you. If I had known sooner you might have been spared much that you have suffered. Sit here and tell me all now—everything, minutely as you can recall regarding that marriage. It was in the first place Mrs. Trelawney's work, I presume?"

He placed a chair for her and sat down by her side. Madelon leaned back, her face a little turned from him, her hands clasped in a tight strain.

"Mrs. Trelawney suggested it as a means of escape for me. I was ready for any thing; I was wild with the unrest that possessed me. I had been so hampered, so shut off from every thing which seemed to make life worth living. It was worse than death then. Looking back now I shudder at the passions which beset that desolate girl I can scarcely recognize as having ever been myself. I have been preparing myself all day to tell you—it may have been wrong, but I hoped
THE MADDEST MARRIAGE EVER WAS.

I never need tell it to any one." Briefly then she told everything from first to last. The story had been almost clear to him from what he already knew of it.

"You were the victim of more plots than one, my poor little Madelon," he repeated when she was quite through. "Whoever you married, Ralph Mowbray is not the man. I heard it from his own lips. The scheme was between Mrs. Trelawney and him, on his part most, I believe, to gain you in the face of all law and right as it must have been, on hers for the money the plotters failed to secure at the first." In his turn then he related all which had transpired in the day and night past.

"Mrs. Trelawney dead and like that! Oh, guardian, how dreadful! And Ralph Mowbray not my husband? Thank Heaven for that. I have so dreaded and so abhorred that man!"

"And there is not a clue left to trace whom you married. You mentioned a third gentleman of the party that night, he must have been the real Fitz-George. And he is dead; the Trelawneys are dead; the man himself may be dead, for all we know. Little that it will do, if any thing from him, I shall find that rector of St. Stephen's as soon as that sad affair in the village is over. I have telegraphed to the Athenbs and they may be expected on to-night. What a maze you are lost in—it is like it would have been to have looked for Fair Rosamond without the thread. A mystery, but it must be solved."

Madelon lifted her face. He was looking away from her; he did not see the swift change pass over it. That third had been Cecil Bertram, if Mrs. Trelawney had not deceived her, and his own words left her no doubt. But she could never have him appealed to—never.

"Will you do me a great, great kindness, guardian? Will you let it go—never try to solve it? No good could come of it. I only pray for myself that I never shall know whom I married that night. I want nothing but to be left with you and Mrs. Lymelsh in peace all my life. In mercy to me, only send Ralph Mowbray away, and let all else rest?"

No good could come of it. The conviction echoed itself in his thoughts.

"Discovering to whom you are bound would not free you; there is truth in that. But it is not natural you should live all your life alone. Madelon!"—what seemed for one second a dazzling light broke upon Mr. Goldwood—"was it because of that you sent Bertram away? A tie like that marriage can be annulled. The mystery must be unraveled and you must be set free!"

"Oh, guardian, no, no! I should die of shame; the exposure would kill me, I do believe. I never wish to marry. Spare me; let all be as it was before."

"And if I do I may have cause to reproach myself hereafter. I shall not move in the matter yet, at least. You are ill and worn. The trouble is off your mind now, and you must be thoroughly well before we even speak of it again. Mowbray shall be dealt with—shall be."

Up and down the terrace walk Ralph Mowbray was pacing. He had a cigar between his teeth which he was not smoking. A deep scowl of thought had gathered upon his brow. The hopelessness of the task he had set himself was growing more and more apparent to him. In his heart he knew what he was not yet willing to admit to himself, that he would never win Madelon's love, and without it how could he ever hope to win Madelon? There was the money; he could get possession of that, readily enough. Why not take Mrs. Trelawney's advice and cut himself off half the fortune, leave the country and her, throw "dull care" behind him, and live the life of a sybarite to the end of his days?

"I suppose I'm a scoundrel," mused Mr. Mowbray, darkly, "but I doubt if I'm enough a scoundrel for that. It's the girl I want, not the fortune; but I want the two, wish this cursed idea of swindling her out-right hadn't fixed itself in my mind; fight shy of it as I could, it has been with me all this day. I don't like it; it's not what I want. I couldn't look Nell in the eyes again, seriously contemplating it. And yet, confound it! I've a devilish idea that it is what I am drifting to in the end."

He paused in his walk, cutting savagely with his slender cane at the phoenixes of the nearest border.

"Mr. Mowbray!

He flung himself about at that grave, stern tone. He looked into Ernest Goldwood's eyes and turned a greenish, sickly pallor. He knew in that instant, before another word was uttered, well as he knew afterward, that his own villainy had been exposed. He had that bravery of cowardice, however, the nerve to face out any consequence of his own scheming, and the two men stood for one instant as two duellists might have done who were prepared to fight an issue to the bitter death. Then Mr. Goldwood spoke again:

"Mr. Mowbray, I had the pleasure of listening to a conversation between Mrs. Trelawney and yourself, in her room at the Clarendon, last night after dusk. You will perceive the expediency of withdrawing the claim you have presented as Miss Brand's unknown husband. You never would have dared force the claim upon her; and the half of her fortune—I do you the credit of believing it the secondary consideration with you—is quite as secure from you. For your sister's sake, you shall be spared the exposure which the fraud you attempted to practice deserves."
There was no room for battle here, but Ralph Mowbray was capable of braving out even his defeat.

"You do me no more than deserved credit; the fortune was the secondary consideration, Mr. Goldwood. For my sister's sake I must thank you, for what I have yet to learn. The only exposure you can make to affect me will be the exposure of that fraud to Miss Brand. Spare me that, and I may find it in my own spirit to be really thankful."

"This is scarcely a fitting occasion for jesting, sir. My ward already knows she has no cause for future annoyance from you—from any one. Is it necessary that I should add your presence here is no longer desirable? Make any excuse you like, but leave the villa. I am forced to demand this out of consideration for my ward."

"I think I shall be forced to ignore the gentle persuasion out of consideration for my sister," retorted Mr. Mowbray, cooly.

"I haven't been blind to your pretensions, there, Mr. Goldwood. Let me tell you that Nelly has some prudish notions, and moreover the world might sneer a little at hearing that one of its favorites, Ernest Goldwood, pet of fortune and successful artist, found amusement in confessing concealment in the private apartment of a fascinating little widow when les convenances had very recently ruled out of his own house. A charming little morceau of fashionable gossip, but as I don't fear contamination on my own score, I have a fancy not to quit the villa just yet."

A flash of withering scorn leaped into Goldwood's eyes. There was passion in his voice, too, but it was held intensely quiet.

"Your sister stands in the relation to me of my betrothed wife, Mr. Mowbray. If it is your will to remain at the villa after what has passed and your knowledge of my desire, I have not one word more to say. My strongest wish must always be to spare her the pain and the humiliation of knowing you in your true colors. Your taunt and inuendo alike fall harmless. Is it possible you have escaped hearing what terrible retribution has overtaken your accomplice? You have not been in the village or you would know that Mrs. Trelawney died at the Clarendon House last night, within the half-hour after you left her.

The greenish pallor turned to a livid ghastliness now; the mocking light which had been in Ralph Mowbray's eyes changed to a cold stare of horror.

"Died! You don't say! Good God! it can't be possible!"

"You will find it sadly true. Great heavens, Elinor!" Turning with a feeling of inexpressible disgust from the brother he faced her, white as marble and as still, in the roseate sunset glow. Little Mortimer at the foot of the terrace steps, held spellbound and bewildered by the scene they had unexpectedly chanced upon, forgotten utterly by Elinor in the revelation which had burst upon her like a shock, that the idol of her life was only clay, the brother of whom she had been so fond and proud all unworthy of the devotion she had given him, recollected himself far enough to slip unobserved away.

"I have heard every word which has passed between you," she said breathlessly, and then her voice broke in a passionate wall of reproach. "Oh, Ralph, Ralph!"

Ralph, however, starting as if stung at that first sight of her, was already gone.

"I can not express to you how sorry I am that this has occurred to your knowledge, Elinor. Let it pass as though it never had occurred. Let me take you in to Madelon. I know her well enough to be sure that she will condescend the brother's faults for the sister's sake when she knows all."

"As you would do, Mr. Goldwood." She had clasped her hands over her eyes, but dropped them; the bitter reproach there turned upon him now. "You have been forgiving and generous, but not kind to me. I should have trusted my own intuition soonest. I reclaim my promise of this afternoon. I can not now be your wife."

"Elinor, my darling! I shall not give you up for this."

"And I never will give up Ralph. I never could endure to know that you despise and distrust me—my poor brother. I am all he has, and I never will turn against him. Don't tempt me, Ernest. Even you can not come before my duty to him."

She eluded the hand he put out to detain her; with a sob stifled in her last words she fled away from him, fled away from the support of his willing strength to the frail reed who had allowed himself to be upheld by her.

"Ralph, brother?" she tapped at his door.

"Let me in. There was in indistinct growl, an objuration from within, but he opened to her, after a second's delay.

"As well have the storm over and done with. Don't go into heroics if you can help it, Nell. The mischief's out and there isn't any use wasting breath over it. You've come to tell me that I'm a disgrace to you, and that you throw me over for good and all, I suppose. Have it out as soon as you can and let me alone, will you?"

"Don't, Ralph. You break my heart speaking so harshly. I want to ask you what it all means. I don't understand except that you tried to coerce Madelon in some dishonorable way. Oh, Ralph!"

"There, for pity's sake don't blubber! anything but that. It only means that she was married years ago in an incredible manner to a man she knew nothing about, not even his name. Your dearly beloved down yonder can tell you all about it, doubtless.
THE MADDEST MARRIAGE EVER WAS.

As there wasn't any other way of getting her, I tried to pass myself off as the man and I've failed, and that's the whole of it. Now will you go away again without raising a devil of a row all for nothing?"

She came close to him, put her arms about his neck and laid her pallid tear-stained face against his.

"I never will go away from you, Ralph. You are all I have on earth. How you misjudge your sister, dear, to suppose anything could ever induce me to turn against you. We will go away together, and we will be as we have been; we will both forget this miserable time, leave it behind us forever."

The doggedness which had been in his face died out of it. He could not meet those forgiving, affectionate eyes. He was degraded in his own sight, as he had not been before, and touched by her loyal clinging to him.

"I don't deserve it of you, Nell." He choked down a lump that rose in his throat.

"And you shall not sacrifice yourself to me. I'm not worth it. You've got to choose between us—Goldwood or me. Haven't you thought of that?"

"If I have chosen, Ralph." Very quietly she spoke now. "We must go away from Riverbank at once, this very night. Thanks to our nomadic life, I can pack my trunks and be ready in an hour. We will walk into the village together and send back for them. Don't say a word against it. I have fully made up my mind, and you know I'm invincible as the law of the Medes and Persians when my mind is set, Ralph." She smiled wistfully into his face, unclasped her arms and glided away.

"I've been a selfish brute all my life, and Nell shames me into knowing it," said Mr. Mowbray, as the door closed upon her. "And she shall not sacrifice all her life to me, that I vow."

In five minutes' time he had flung his most needful effects into a light valise, and, sitting down to his table, dashed off these hasty lines:

DEAR NELL:
You won't desert me; so, in pure self-defense, you force me to desert you. I'm a coward, and I've been beaten, and I'm ashamed of myself, and I couldn't endure to have you around knowing it. After the fashion of a novel slepmant, don't try to follow or discover me. It will be of no use. I have your check for a thousand, which you gave me to-day, so I will not suffer. If you have a mind to do the generous thing by me, marry Goldwood. In that case I may be induced to reveal myself and set up a practice with the help I know you'll offer me. I never deserved all I've had from you. Not love or money, but make this make bettor use of the future than I did of my past, or never let you see my face again.

R.

He looked out of his room. The corridor and stairs were clear. Taking up his valise he went out silently and unobserved, walking rapidly through the gathering dusk to the village station. Two minutes after he reached it an express train thundered in. He had barely time to secure his ticket and jump aboard. With a series of ear-piercing shrills the train rushed off again; Elinor and Riverbank were left behind.

CHAPTER XV.
BLESS ED MORTIMER!

Three months after October had brightened the whole wide stretch of landscape, visible in that bird's-eye view from Riverbank. The blue mists lay softer and thicker about the distant mountains. The woodlands everywhere were ablaze with crimson and gold. A silver haze was in the air, the bright glory of a mellow autumn day drawing near its close.

Madelon had come out from the villa, a black, filmy mantle over her head, out of which her pale face and starry eyes shone with a wistfulness she had repressed until this moment, when she found herself alone for the first time that day. She passed down the terrace steps and crossed the lawn in the direction of the river, and a gentleman taking his walk leisurely up the avenue stood still and watched the willowy shape out of sight through the foliage which fringed the lawn.

Those three months had passed quietly at Riverbank. Elinor had insisted upon leaving there the morning after her brother had taken his unceremonious departure. He had left her for good, he had gone without reflection, he would find soon that he could not do without her easily, and when he learned that she meant in reality all she had said—that she was prepared to devote all her life to him—Ralph would come back to her. Mr. Goldwood plead in vain. Back to that hotel in the city where we saw her first Miss Mowbray went. There she remained through the notmidsummer months, waiting and watching for the recreant who did not come. Waiting and watching until it dawned upon her that while his money lasted Ralph would be able to console himself admirably outside her society. But he would come, sooner or later. She would be true to her promise to him. Meantime her trial wore upon while it did not shake her.

Mr. Goldwood proved himself an impertunate and unwearying suitor. She was sacrificing herself for a Quixotic principle. She loved him, she had given her promise to marry him, and he had never held her released from it, never would, through such uncalled for and prejudiced motive. Whether she would have held out against his persistency there is no telling. Ralph himself put an end to this state of affairs in a manner most unexpected. One glowing, sultry, mid-September day a missive came to her with his familiar writing upon the back. Her heart throbbed with 

Eagerly, with trembling fingers, she brought forth the inclosure, brief and decidedly characteristic of Mr. Mowbray.
"DEAREST NELL—I hear that you are tormenting the flesh and grilling yourself in that hot-house up-town. I trust that the result of remaining comfortably cool at Riverbank as I supposed your natural good sense would prompt. Really, I rejoice that I didn't have the face to reflect upon during these past two months which I have spent delightfully in the most out-of-the-way nook of all the Jersey coast.

"In 'grief and death' and 'pon honor, Nell, it wasn't a grateful return for the charming disinterestedness of my move, giving myself up to solitude, a prey to melancholy and the chance of Jersey mists, consoling myself with the reflection that you would establish your own Lares and Penates and wind up by being happy forever afterward. However, virtue brings its own reward, and self-sacrifice ditto. Who should turn up in this dismal hole but that blessed sick relation of the Eaton's with the fair Delta in attendance? You've heard the nursery tale of the little boy who walked the moon but was comforted with an orange. I suppose? Well, since for obituary reasons I gathered Madelon I have taken Della. She is a little fool, tolerably pretty, and with some money, and I am consed. We were married this morning and will be off to Europe by this afternoon's steamboat and I write this to beg you will neither go into decline nor do penance any longer for the sins of your affectionate brother.

RALPH."

The paper fluttered down. So selfish, so mercenary, so heartless! For the first time in her life she saw him in all his littleness, and the feeling of contempt that would rise swept away the film of noble sentiment which had surrounded her own sacrifice. A little laugh broke from the corner of her mouth; the visitor was Ernest Goldwood and this time his pleading was not in vain.

There had been the very quietest of weddings in Grace church two weeks before this golden October day. Very prosaic and unfashionable was the programme arranged by the newly married pair. There was no bridal tour. Instead the immediate home party had come out to Riverbank for a few days' dreamy loitering. They were passed now. On the morrow Mr. and Mrs. Goldwood would return to the city mansion prepared and awaiting them. Then would begin the brilliant season, the procession of balls, receptions, operas, and dinner-parties—the same glitter from that hollow globe society as it rolls and rolls on its ceaseless rounds.

Madelon regarded the prospect with eyes quite undazzled by it. She dreaded the ordeal as she had never dreaded it hitherto, the gauntlet stretching out, the line of admirers and flirtations before which no popular belle is ever supposed to flinch. But, pacing the path by the river-side, Madelon's mind was engrossed with some more troublesome problem yet than that offered by the coming season. The weight of that secret must have never, never been the result of it had threatened her with a danger which was no less imminent for being counterfeit.

At her own earnest request her guardian had forborne thus far searching after the identity of her unknown husband. Shrinking from it, dreading it like death itself, she yet was finding herself compassed by a restless desire; she knew now that she would never feel herself safe or at peace again until she should discover who was the man she had married, five years before. There was but one way. Could she ever bring herself to appeal to the one man on earth who might be able to unravel the mystery? It may take no such hard task to unbiased minds. But that proud, morbid, sensitive heart, taught such bitter self-repression once and never quite recovered from the lesson, might chafe and break, but loving Cecil Bertram she could never ask him, "Who is my husband?"—never endure to hear from his lips the words that stumped the seal of her own doom.

"Miss Brand, may I be pardoned the intrusion?"

Her eyes came back from reading the cloudless sky, her heart stood still, her breath died upon her lips. There before her, grave and tall and handsome stood Cecil Bertram himself. A slighter smile, something sad and pleading in it, touched his face, and he offered his hand.

"Won't you give me a word of welcome, Miss Brand? That and a half-hour of your time is all I ask. I have come back from the 'north country' to tell you a story which possibly you should have told me—before which I would have told but for a bond of silence that in all honor I was bound to respect."

Her hand met his; a startled, frightened light dawned in her face. He had come to tell her! And with the revelation at hand came the desire to fly from it, to ward it off, or if it must come, to let it be from other lips than his. Breath and voice came back to her.

"You are most welcome, Mr. Bertram. Let me go to the house with you and receive my guardian's assurance of it. You have heard of his happiness, I presume."

"I have not at this time, and ordered my congratulations to Mr. and Mrs. Goldwood. They are a noble pair; no greater praise can be given than in saying they are worthy of each other. I am here, Madelon, not to plead for myself, but to extenuate if I can the rash act of a poetical dreamer, a hot-headed boy who could not or did not realize what misery might follow it."

She shrunk back; her eyes implored him. The movement and the look gave him a keen pang.

"No wonder you distrust me, Madelon. I deserve nothing but that you should distrust and despise me perhaps, and yet I hoped you might have found me better. When I have told you the story—"

"Oh, not to me. To my guardian. He knows all that I know; he will know best what is proper to be done."

"To you, Madelon. I have told Goldwood; it is with his sanction I am here. This painful story—of a friend of mine let it be—lay, as I said, in his dreamy impulsive
youth, five years ago. He was poor as pov-
erity; he had his aspirations, his hopes of fame and wealth and flowery paths and cloudless skies for his future. He was in love too, madly in love, with a delusion as it proved, but so fair a delusion, that I do not find it in my heart to reproach him much as I look back. It was his first love, and first love never looks deeper than the sur-
face; it takes it for granted that all else must be as fair. But the object of my
friend's love proved false as she was fair. She married another, and yet he found ex-
cuses for her and was her slave as much as ever. And she—it was in her nature to flirt with every man. The boy's devotion grati-
fied her vanity; his earnestness amused her; she might have held him by her silken, siren's thrill but for one thing—her husband was fiercely jealous, and his jealousy was turned against my friend who in reality deserved it equally with perhaps a dozen others—
but he was the last to know it, my friend I mean. I don't want to weary you with the story; there are many details regarding this part of it which I need not relate. Re-
verses came upon them— I must use names I know, it would be too unkind. A friend of Trelawney lost the fortune for which alone his wife had married him. It reverted to you, and Alfred Trelawney formed a scheme to regain possession of a part of it at least. He knew what your earlier life had been; he hoped to find in your inexperience and impetuousness the very elements which might forward his plot.

"As he did," she interrupted him. She was not looking at him. She was leaning against the trunk of the great golden maple under which they stood. She spoke quietly, but it was with the quietness of a strong ex-
citement all merged however into the one theme of listening. "You know how hopeless, how despairing, how desperate I was. Go on." 

"There was one who had been instrumen-
tal in searching you out before the existence of that true will was made public—George Fitz-George. He had anticipated this plot of Trelawney's; he had decided in his own mind, if he could, to marry the heiress. The other however discovered his design and thwarted him in it. Fitz-George was a
dare-devil, a man with no idea of honor; he had been a low comedian in his time, I believe, was a strolling actor then. Fitz-George was clearly not the man for the other's view of listening. He would pitch-
ed upon this friend of mine, in part to avenge himself upon his wife, in part that he under-
stood the boy's nature well. In his poverty he would be independent.

"The proposition was made to him through the strolling actor. Your position was paint-
ed to him— your desire to escape it, your offer of half the fortune to any man who would marry you upon your own terms. They had not mistaken my friend. He had some of that romantic chivalry which is supposed to have gone out with the knights-
errant; he had no thought of ever again loving or ever marrying. Why not come to the relief of such distress on terms which he would never embarrass him? The fortune he refused positively to accept as Trelawney had expected he would. It was explained to him, however, that this term would be in-
corporated in the bond; he could evade it simply, by never claiming the portion, and it was also suggested that he should marry under an assumed name. The plot seems clumsy now, but with those two young im-
pulsive people to work upon, it was easy to execute. That it was not in every point successful was due to Fitz-George. A cer-
tain amount had been promised him for his connivance but he had an interview with Trelaw-
ney meant to outwit him. There was an old grudge between them, too, and to avenge himself for some injury the other had done him in the past Fitz-George was ready to throw up his own chance of gain, and at the last moment he confessed the true plot to his friend. It was this: After the ceremony he should be over and my friend had gone his own way, that he, backed by Trelawney, should present himself to your aunt as your husband, and claim half the fortune which should be equally divided between the three, Trelawney's wife being the third.

"The boy with Fitz-George's aid defeated the plot. He remained the boy and accompanied your party with the intention of re-
leasing you from the guardianship of your stern old aunt. He was on board the train when the accident occurred, upon another car, however, and escaped unhurt. He saw that you were cared for. He carried out his first intention; he had an interview with Miss Camilla Brand, and received her promise to resign you to the guardianship of Ernest Goldwood."

He paused. Her face was white and still, her eyes avoiding his; no expression there which he could read. His own face, grave throughout, received a more tender cast. There was a tremor about his mouth for an instant, but he repressed it and went on.

"I make a great leap; I leave that story behind. A week ago I met Gustave Morti-
mer up among the northern woods. He told me what had occurred here, of Mrs. Trelawney's death, the scheme between her and Mowbray so fortunately defeated. That opened my eyes to the great mistake I had made by permitting you to remain ignorant of whom you had truly married. I lost no time in coming back to repair what I could of the wrong I had done you. You could not love me, Madelon—" his voice quivered, broke, but he recovered it again. I can't forgive me; I scarcely hope that you ever will. I should have found some other way of defeating Trelawney's scheme and re
leaving you. I did not, however. But now
I have brought you back that bond; you
scarcely know you need never fear anything
from me—"

He stopped there. At mention of the
bond he looked up with a great start, a quick
cry.

"What does it mean? Whose story is
this you have been telling me? Your friend
—you—"

"Have you not known throughout, Madel-
on? It was I—I whom you wedded that
night at St. Stephen’s. Don’t hate me.
Don’t fear! I shall not again transgress the
conditions of the bond as I did once. You
can never love me—and I—oh, Madelon, my
love! I would die for you—I wish I could
die for you and free you if it would insure
your happiness.” The passion and despair
would no longer be repressed. Tears of
which he was not ashamed were in his eyes,
etting his cheeks.

"Cecil! Oh, Cecil!"

That breathless cry, that rapt and eager
lovely face! Man must have been blind in-
deed who could have mistaken it. He did not,
incredulous of his own happiness as he was.

"What does it mean, Madelon? Not that
you can forgive so far—not that you ever
can love me—"

"That I can and do and have, or would
have, if I had known long weeks ago. That
I have nothing to forgive, everything to be
thankful for, oh, Cecil, my husband, my
love!"

Down with the curtain, good people! but
let us lift one little corner after the interval
of a half-hour.

"Blessed little Mortimer,” Madelon laughs
with glad, happy tears yet in her eyes, that
cannot draw themselves away from those
other ones holding them “like golden wine.”

"I shall always love him."

“In that case, Mrs. Bertram—how you
blush at the name; it is your own, my love
—in that case you will be happy to learn
that Mortimer and his grandmamma-in-law
have struck most amicable terms, and his
expectations are revived with double force.
Blessed Mortimer!”

And we end with satin and orange blos-
soms, after all. Madelon would have the
ceremony over again; she never could feel
sure he was her own husband without; Gold-
wood sided with her, and Cecil only stipu-
lated that he should not be kept waiting
long. So before November was out mar-
riage-bells rung again, and the story ends as
all good stories should—happily.

THE END.