VIALS OF WRATH;
OR,
THE GRAVE BETWEEN THEM.

BY MRS. MARY REED CROWELL.

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VIALS OF WRATH;

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CHAPTER I.

THE SHADOW ON THE SOUL.

GEORGIA LEXINGTON sat beside the window, whiter than the unfolded letter she held in her rigid fingers; she sat there, motionless as if carved from marble, with her eyes wearied a dull, stony horror in their blue depths, as they seemed riveted on the letter whose seal she had not yet dared break.

An hour ago her maid had tapped on her door and handed her the letter; an hour from the instant she caught a glance of the super- scription she had dropped into the nearest chair, utterly overcome with the agitation it had produced.

It was pitiful, this petrifying influence that had fallen so suddenly, so awfully upon her. The tiny bouquet of tea-roses she had let fall just as she was fastening them in her hair, the rings awaiting their posts of honor on her fair fingers, the lace barbe that she had intended pinning at her throat, but that had now fallen off the bureau.

That fateful letter had come like a two- edged sword into her life, cutting right and left with a quickness that was none the less painful because of its sudden unexpectedness, and it lay in her cold fingers still unread, while the stony horror died slowly from her eyes, and her figure grew less rigid, only to assume such an utter abandonment of woe.

Then, with a little gasp, with a little shiver running over her frame, she slowly opened the elegantly addressed envelope, unfolded the sheet, and read the short, strange communica tion whose coming changed all her life. This was what she read with her blue eyes full of haunting misery:

"Georgia, I am coming home, after seventeen years' separation from kindred and country. I shall expect my wife to receive me on Tuesday.

"T. L."

That was all; but what an "all" it meant to her, this tempest-tossed, heart-sore woman, who had led her quiet, eventless life those long, long years since the day her lord and master had left her, in that very room, after such a terrible interview as they had had.

She had never heard aught from him in all those years; she had never known whether he were living or dead, miserable or content in his self-appointed banishment from the world, the society he was so well calculated to adorn. She had lived on and on, not wholly miserable, because she knew she was perfectly guiltless of the causes of their separation; because, with her great wealth, she was able to enjoy much of life, and with her charms of mind and manner and appearance, had made a large circle of friends, exclusive though she was, and retiring in all her ways. She had guarded her one secret well all those years, when she had been passing from twenty to thirty-eight, the bloom and heyday of woman's life, that had laid magic fingers on Georgia Lexington, and only developed her rare beauty instead of detracting from it.

She was thirty-eight, and looked easily ten years younger in her splendid blonde beauty, that had been so passionately dear to Theo Lexington in early, happy days.

A full-sized woman, of exquisite proportions, and yet whose physique suggested slightness and willowy liveness rather than solidity; a woman whose sweet face, fair as marble, had had set on it its beautiful contour, like a seal, the impress of the subduing, refining fires of trial through which she had passed; in whose dark, violet blue eyes, lingered shadows of tender thoughtfulness, around whose perfect mouth were lines of sweetest gravity. She read her letter only once, then replaced it in its cover, laid it on the bureau, thinking, as with calm, deliberate fingers she arranged her wondrously golden hair, and deftly wound among the loose, flowing braids, a vine of fragrant honeysuckle, she thought how well she had guarded her secret—his and hers—all those years, and a look of satisfaction crept among the shadows in her eyes as she thought
not a soul in all the wide world would know when Theo Lexington came home why he had gone away, or that for so many years his wife had heard no word from him.

They were proud people, both of them, and it would have been worse than death for either of them to know their names were bandied about from one coarse mouth of gossiping scandal to another; and, though they were enemies to each other, the world never knew, and in its ignorance pitied Mrs. Lexington, because her delicate health forbade her accompanying her noble, sacrificing husband on his relentless tour to the far Eastern countries, where, by his famed explorations, he was adding desirable information to a grateful country's stock of knowledge.

Mrs. Lexington had quietly expressed her willingness to add her share to the husband's contribution by remaining alone at Tanglewood, and the months and years went on until it would have been more surprising to see Mr. Lexington than to be without him.

And now—now he was coming home. Now the quiet, monotonous life of seventeen years was broken in upon, and the future held—what? Ah, what?

Georgia asked it of herself with a calm, credulous smile, that was as much pain as contempt, and then opened her jeweled case and from under the cushion that formed a false bottom, took a large, diamond-studded locket, to which was attached a simple piece of blue silk cord.

A swift anguish swept over her beautiful face as she unclasped it and looked eagerly, steadily at the well-impressed face on the porcelain within. She gazed almost passionately, her form perceptibly shivering, as a lily leaf sways under a heavy gale.

It was a man's magnificent face that she saw, whose wide, frank gray eyes met hers so freely. A face that had that about it which was hard to define, yet that could not have failed to have made any woman's heart quicken its throbs at sight of its strength and beauty and repose.

There was a handsome, proudly set head, thrown ever so slightly back in a free, careless way, that was bewitchingly graceful; there were loose, slightly curly waves of sun-shiny brown hair, utterly guiltless of any studied arrangement—hair that mutely seemed to invite a woman's white hand to caress it, that seemed to promise to cling lovingly to some soft-touching, quivering fingers.

The beard matched his hair in hue and loose waviness, and was worn only on either side the face, leaving the round, well-formed chin bare, and as well the mouth. And such a mouth—such a mouth as was Theo Lexington's! No wonder Georgia had to force back the hot tears she felt welling up from her very heart; no wonder she remembered so bitterly how, years and years before she had thought it worth all other earthly bliss to have those perfect lips touch hers—that grand, grave, sweet mouth, that smiled above the beautiful teeth with such rare, enchanting power.

It was there his beauty lay especially, although Georgia knew that, allied with this splendid face and head were equal graces of intellect, ease and refinement of manner, and perfect symmetry of form.

And this was Theo Lexington, her husband—her husband in name only; and he was coming home to her—“his wife.”

She shut the locket softly, as if the metallic click of the catch reminded her of the closing of a coffin-lid; she laid it tenderly down on a pile of letters—faded, worn, yet hearing their address in the same undeniable handwriting in which the letter that had that day come to her was addressed.

She took the letters up as if it hurt them to be touched, as if they were suffering, sensitive creatures, with hearts as sore as hers.

Her fair, jeweled fingers seemed caressing them as they opened one after another, and her well-trained eyes knew just where to alight on the fond, caressing names that were interspersed through these letters written her when she was so perfectly happy, except during her husband's temporary absence of a month.

She saw many a “darling,” and “my own one”; “dearest,” and “sweet wife”; and the shivers over her frame seemed to quicken and increase.

Then—a terrible change came suddenly over her, as her hands took up the last letter of the packet. Her eyes seemed overflowing with anguish that gradually faded, and was followed by a hard, steely glitter that made their beautiful bluneness darken to blackness.

She read this letter—it was short—entirely through; and then put it away with the others, with the hard, firm, almost cruel look still on her mouth.

“*For everything else I would have forgiven him; for that—never—never!* Let him come if he chooses; it is nothing to me. This is his house, his home, and he has the right. Only—*I will never forgive him for that!*”

She turned the little golden key of her jewel-case and hung it on her watch-chain, and then rang the bell for her maid.

Her order was quiet, to the point, and as careless as if no meal were to be sent up.

“*Amber, tell Mrs. Robinson to have the blue suite put in readiness at once.* Your master, Mr. Lexington, will be home on Tuesday.”

Then, with a glance in the dressing-mirror, to see if her toilet was unexceptionable, Mrs. Lexington went down the grand staircase, and out on the veranda, where fresh girlish voices and merry laughter greeted her.
CHAPTER II.

WAITING.

From the moment of Mrs. Lexington's announcement to her maid that Mr. Lexington was expected home on Tuesday, there reigned supreme excitement at Tanglewood, among guests as well as servants, and Georgia found she needed all her skill and courage to answer the numerous questions asked her, in the same spirit of quiet indifference that had characterized her life apart from her husband.

To many of her guests—and she had at Tanglewood quite a company—Mr. Lexington was an entire stranger, while to but one or two gentlemen and part of the servants—the elderly one who had grown up in the Lexington employ—would he return as an old friend.

The young ladies, especially, pried Georgia with all sorts of questions as to his personal appearance, his manner, his address, and, from the vague replies with which Georgia managed to satisfy them, and which they in turn communicated to their gentlemen friends, the inference was drawn, that Mr. Lexington was simply perfection, and congratulations were offered Georgia until her very heart sickened at the unconscious mockery.

The intervening days between the receipt of her husband's letter and the day appointed for his return passed as days will pass, whether freighted with leaden-footed misery or upborne by joy and hope's buoyant wings.

There were dinners to eat, and evenings to dress for; housekeeping accounts to attend to, calls to receive or make; nights of sweet, sad silence, whether passed in weary, wakeful watching, or among the mystical glories of the dream realms; there were days of duties, and charities, and then—Tuesday came.

Georgia almost expected to see a wild, sweeping storm abroad when she parted the silken curtains of her dressing-room that fateful morning; it would have been in keeping, she thought, with the gloomy shadows that had darkened her life at its onset, through Mr. Lexington, this husband of hers, who had left her in wildest wrath, who was coming—how?

But Tanglewood was fairly radiant in the June sunshine, in which it lay as in a bath of liquid gold. There had been a slight shower in the night, and on a million blades of short-shorn grass the tiny points of rain drops glittered in the sunlight like crystals, in whose hearts was prisoned fire. Every leaf was vividly green, and the branches of the grand old trees in the far-spreading park swayed slowly in the breeze that was softly blowing.

On the lawn, that stretched away from the flight of granite steps that led to the grand entrance at Tanglewood, like a sheet of emerald velvet, not a leaf, or stick, or stone, marred its beauty, that was lightened by the social suggestiveness of the upright wickets for croquet, and the brilliant-bud balls and mallets still lying where fair or strong young hands had left them, late in the warm moonlight of the night before.

At one side, in the tangled grove of interlacing trees—from which picturesque spot Tanglewood had taken its unique name—Georgia could see the gleam of statuary among the cool, green shadows; and beyond, between the grove and the blue, undulating hills, the noisy, frothing brook that fairly danced along between banks of deep, turfly moss, and overhanging vines of wild, vivid-hearted roses, and sprawling, sturdy, brown-armed grapevines.

It was a glorious heritage, this home to which she had been brought the happiest bride that ever the sun shone on, in which she had suffered such revelations of sorrow as seldom fall to the lot of woman; and where she had learned the hardest lesson life can teach—a lesson no mortal ever yet learned perfectly—to endure, and when the heart is fairly freezing with tortuous anguish.

A fair home for a travel-worn exile to come to; and Georgia, as she drew a deep breath of pain, turned from the window, and submitted herself to Amber, whose deft, well-trained touch never failed of soothing Georgia, in moods when it seemed she should die if she did not scream or make some moan in token of the accumulated woes of those lonely years, during all whose slow passage she had been her own confidante only.

She was radiant that morning, when she went down to the nine o'clock breakfast, and in her white lawn robe, a marvel of filmy lace frills, and crepe-silk, and buttoned from throat to feet with rare sprays of bright pink coral, she was fairer, more beautiful, younger, for all her troubles, her thirty-eight years, than any of the bevy of pretty, graceful girls who were grouped in the huge bay window.

Ida Wyne was the first to greet her—a brilliant, pettie girl, with cheeks like a wood-rose, and eyes and hair the hue of a ripe chest- nut.

"Mrs. Lexington! to think the eventful day has actually arrived! To think we shall really see, in the flesh, the wonderful Prince Charming we have heard of and read about nearly all our lives. You must be the happiest woman in the world this morning—aren't you?"

A pitiful, almost appealing glance crept into Mrs. Lexington's eyes; she laid her hand caressingly on the girl's round arm and smiled in the eager upturned face.

"I am afraid so many years roughing it abroad has endangered Mr. Lexington's right to the complimentary title you romantic girls have given him."
She evaded the direct question as well as she could, and just then the pompous butler announced the readiness of breakfast, and amid the animated discussion of broiled partridge on toast, the delicious rice-cakes, watercresses and marmalade, even the wonderful event of Mr. Lexington’s return was momentarily forgotten except by Georgia, whose eyes and ears were sharpened to catch the first warning sight and sound.

It came suddenly, after all, the announcement of his name by the footman, in a hushed, suppressed tone of excitement; came as the news of a death always comes to the very watchers at the bedside who count the fading pulse and see the slowly, surely ebbing sounds.

“Mr. Lexington! In the yellow drawing room, madam.”

Georgia’s heart gave a fearful bound; but no eye of the score that instinctively turned to note the effect of the news upon her, would have dreamed how madly the blood was surging through her veins, or how such wildly conflicting emotions were storming at her heart.

She calmly met the man’s half curious glance, and then laid down her spoon with which she was sipping her chocolate.

“I will see him at once; of course you will all excuse me.”

Her voice was modulated to perfection. She arose and walked rapidly from the room, through the long, wide corridor, over whose marble floor lay broad banners of variegated light, reflected by the sunshine that glinted through the stained windows; past niches where huge bronze warriors stood on guard with drawn bow, or Parian nympha with averted faces, held their flowing garments over perfect limbs.

It seemed to Georgia she never would reach him. She seemed to be walking as she had walked in some frightful, half waking dream—a step forward, two backward. But she reached the door at last. It was ajar. She hesitated one last moment, and then, calling all her wonderful resources of energy and will and strength to her command, she went in, to the presence of her husband—after seventeen years.

CHAPTER III.

THE GULF BETWEEN.

A graceful, manly figure stepped from the semi-darkness of the grand saloon—the very form and face, so like a god, that reposed in Georgia’s jewel case, to which time had been as kindly sparing as to her; still so wondrously beautiful, still so wretchedly fair.

“Georgia! Georgia! at last I see you—can it be possible?”

He came rapidly forward, his face alight, his hands extended in almost rapturous greeting.

She had remained just within the threshold, standing like a splendid statue while he spoke. When he advanced, she gestured him back, with a coldness that petrified him to the spot.

Then her low, sweet, icy voice made answer.

“We have met face to face, Mr. Lexington, for the first time since a day neither of us will be likely to forget. Why you have come, remains to be explained.”

His eyes seemed riveted on her face, to her eyes, in whose violet darkness he only saw the well simulated coldness—this that was the result of years of effort; the natural consequence of a passionate love she was determined to crush. She said it so haughtily, the while the sight of his face, the tones of his voice, thrilled her with almost maddening ecstasy.

“Georgia! surely after all these years you do not mean to hurt me thus? Georgia, wife! have you not forgiven me my foolishness, my—my cruelty?”

His voice reminded her of other days when he woed and won her; she would have almost sold her soul to have rushed to his arms and have him kiss her again and again and again.

“Yet—oh! woman’s outraged pride! oh, woman’s bitter memories of a past; she cannot bring herself to forgive.”

She listened as if her heart was steel.

“Forgive you! forgive you your wicked jealousy, when you learned you had married a woman who was perfect in your eyes until you found she had been married once before, and honorably divorced. Forgive you, when you nearly drove her crazy with your jealousy of the man who won her girlish affections and then abused her, and then, a year after the divorce, die and left her doubly free. Forgive you, Theo Lexington! is it likely?”

She drew her figure to its proudest height, and her blue eyes darkened with anger as she recalled her dark memories.

“I worshiped you so, my wife; it is, it was my only excuse for my sin in woundng you so. It came so suddenly, you know, the fact that instead of my wife being only the widow of Carleton Vincy, she was his divorced wife as well. That was a fearful blow to me, Georgia—you know it was, and in my horror, and grief, and anger I was beside myself—it is a poor reason to give, but I have none other, and in these years of absence I have been so lonely, so miserable, so homesick for you, Georgia, that I have repented bitterly our estrangement, our amicable separation that the world might spare us ignominy. Georgia, my wife! my darling! I have traveled thousands of miles to hear you say, ‘Theo, I forgive you!’ Won’t you! won’t you?”

His voice trembled with the passion of a man who pleads his heart’s dearest desire. His splendid face was full of eager entreaty, and his eyes looked into Georgia’s with a love,
an adoration that made her fairly sicken with pitiful pain.

She hesitated a second, then raised her head proudly. "Why should I! For years you have lived without me, doubtless you can survive the remaining days in store. For years I have heard no word from you, for years we have skillfully blinded Argus-eyed society—and so I ask what, by this coming home, do you mean, when we were both better off the wider the distance between us?"

He listened, almost hungrily. "I have said why I came to hear you say you forgive me. I came because I want you to commence life over again with me—commence it as we did years ago, when there was not a cloud between us; as we commenced the day we came to Tanglewood—"

A low, gasping cry came from her lips as he said that. Her eyes dilated almost wildly, her bosom heaved irregularly. "As we came to Tanglewood! Theo Lexington, if we could start afresh as we came to Tanglewood, I would not only forgive you everything, but go down on my knees and kiss the ground your feet trod upon! Give me back my baby-girl, cross the black chasm of death between which you thrust her, my golden-haired darling—go down into the grave and bring her back to me, whom your hands tore from my breast, because she was Carleton Vincy's as well as mine, and then—then I will forgive you!"

Her voice had commenced in tones of anguish; when she finished she was hard and calm again; while Lexington's grand head drooped before her a second. Then he raised a pale, pain-convulsed face.

"You are relentless as the grave itself, and yet, I pray you, listen to me, and have some pity. You remember the terrible night the revelation came to me of the divorce? You re-collect you were not well—that the excitement was too much for you—that the physicians ordered perfect rest and quiet—that your baby-girl, the little two years old Jessamine, made the whole house resound with her lamentations. You knew afterward I took her away to be cared for by a couple up the country, and how—how."

He looked almost deprecatingly at Georgia's pale, stern face. "I remember perfectly." She took up the pitiful story with a precision and stoicism that fairly seared him. "I remember that when I recovered, weeks afterward, and called for my baby, you told me, with fiendish maliciousness, that it would not chance in a punishment for my deception to you. And I remember, Theo Lexington, how, while my heart bled itself empty for her, and my breast ached for her little nestling head, and my hands grew numb for want of their wonted care; while you deliberately saw all this, and thought it no more than I deserved, that God took her, and—and—. Theo! Theo! give me back my baby and I'll forgive you?"

A sudden, melting pathos now flooded her closing words, and she came forward and laid her quivering fingers on his arm. He groaned in very bitterness of soul, and his whole frame trembled under the touch of her light hand.

"God forgive me—I cannot forgive myself! If it were possible, I'd give my life for hers—for Carleton Vincy's child, and think it cheaply bought if it secured you an hour's happiness."

His piteous humility touched her—even her, whose life had been blasted by his hands. "Theo—" she said his musical name so softly, so sweetly—"I will forgive you. I will forgive you, but I never can forget. We can be friends—I will try, at least. Let this suffice.

A great bliss had dawned in his eyes, but it faded before her calm decision. "Georgia! you never could have loved me—never, or you could not repulse me so! Look at me, Georgia, just once; look at me, and tell me if there is no hope? Will you come to me for one, for all, my darling?" He stepped back and opened and extended his arms, his eyes flashing with passionate entreaty, his lips parted in half hopeful expectation.

Georgia's brain whirled as she looked into his eyes, his ardent face. She imagined the touch of his lips to hers in a kiss that she knew would seal their future happiness; her whole soul hungered and thirsted for the close folding of his awaiting arms. Her violet eyes darkened; her mouth parted in swift, half-smiling obedience to the dictates of her half-starving heart. Then she drew back, coolly.

"We can never resume our life where we left off. For the future, if you wish it, we can keep up our pitiful faces."

Lexington's arms drooped swiftly. A compression of his lips that Georgia had never seen on them in all her life before, a gloomy, red gleam in his eyes, and their paths diverged again.

"You have elected wisely, perhaps. I shall live with you here at Tanglewood, and, as you say, no one will be the wiser for the skeleton in our closet. And now, Mrs. Lexington, will you be so kind as to introduce me to your guests?"

One wild, awful pang at her heart, as she realized it was over with at last, and Georgia accepted her husband's arm and went down to introduce "Prince charming."

And so it began—that dreadful life of theirs, compared to which all future sorrows, all those years of silent endurance were as hours of lightest, gayest pleasure.
CHAPTER IV.
A WOMAN'S HEART.

LEAVING on her husband's arm, her beautiful face full of a pride she could not repress, and that was readily mistaken for shy delight and happiness, Georgia Lexington returned to the anxiously expectant party in the breakfast room.

"This is Mr. Lexington—Mr. and Mrs. Hammond—you will remember my husband; Miss Ernest, Miss Reynolds, Mr. Gale, Mr. Raymond—these are strangers, Mr. Lexington, to you, but friends of mine. And this is Miss Wynne—little Ida, who was yourfavorite."

Georgia made her introductions with a graceful cordiality of manner that was peculiarly her own, and that always placed both parties at their perfect ease.

Mr. Lexington was very fascinating in his courteous acceptance of the acquaintance of the friend his wife had made during his absence; he won the young people's hearts with his first words and bow of greeting.

He renewed his former friendship with Mr. and Mrs. Hammond at the very point where it had been left severed by his departure.

And to Ida Wynne he turned with an outstretched arm that drew her closely to his side, as he kissed her forehead, to which the proud, shy, delighted blushes surged in pink waves.

"Can this possibly be the little girl who clamored for a ride on my shoulder, and who invariably rifled my pockets in search of bonbons?"

Ida laughed merrily; a frank, candid laugh, that displayed her beautiful teeth and the dimple in either cheek.

"I think I must be that same girl, Mr. Lexington, from the fact that I still retain an inherent fondness of the bon-bons. Do you happen to have any?"

After the ice had fairly been broken, Georgia ordered an additional cover for Mr. Lexington, and the party finished their pleasantly interrupted breakfast, while a quiet, uneventful conversation flowed around the table, in which Georgia took her part, succeeding admirably in concealing the anguish and pride in her heart, that, not for worlds would she have had covered to the guests around her table.

Breakfast over, Mr. Lexington retired to the library, where he wrote a message and rang for a servant to take it to the telegraph office in the little depot.

It was a dispatch to Frank Havelstock, and read:

"I shall remain at Tanglewood indefinitely. Come down at once for the season."

The servant withdrew, Mr. Lexington began a nervous, restless promenade up and down the long, silent apartment, between rows of shelves that reached from the floor nearly to the ceiling, and which were ornamented on the top by rows of alternate marble and ebony busts. A soft, thick emerald carpet covered the floor, and muffled his footsteps as he walked to and fro past the large oval table, where stood a silver student lamp with its mellow bayed glass globe. His face wore a look of keenest pain; but on his mouth was the decided, almost defiant expression that had come there when his wife had repulsed his passionate overtures an hour before.

"And this is coming home—this the forgiveness I cheated myself for years with believing I would meet. This the tender, delicate reception of the humbling of my manhood at the feet of the woman I worship as madly as man ever worshiped—who cares for me—nothing! Well, I'm at home, and I shall not leave it again; thanks to Mrs. Lexington, our infelicity is our secret, and there remains to me only a barren, lonely life of it, as shut off as if I were on Africa's arid deserts again. But, I'll have Frank down—Georgia used to hate him so; and I'll make Ida Wynne my friend, and get the most out of my shattered life I can."

He threw back his handsome hair, and walked out of the library, and met Georgia in the hall.

"I was coming to ask you if you preferred the blue suite of rooms. They are in readiness when you wish to go to them."

He bowed coldly.

"Thank you. My luggage will come when Frank does—he so kind as to have rooms prepared for him. You dine at what hour?"

A look of annoyance passed over Georgia's face.

"At seven. Do I understand you Mr. Havelstock is to be a guest at Tanglewood?"

"You understand aright. He has been in Egypt with me these past three years, and I learned to esteem him still more highly than in earlier days. A more noble, unselish, generous-souled man does not exist than my cousin, Frank. As my guest and relative he will receive the hospitality of Tanglewood."

Georgia merely bowed her head slightly in acceptance of her commands, and then retraced her steps to her own boudoir, where she had received the information a few days earlier of her husband's expected arrival.

Her step was slow, almost dragging, as she entered the room; but she resolutely crushed the sigh she felt seeking vent, and smiled cordially at a sweet, upturned face that greeted her from the depths of a white lawn, ruffled, easy chair.

"Do forgive me for intruding, Mrs. Lexington, but I was so anxious to congratulate you on your splendid husband. I am completely fascinated, enchanted, infatuated, everything!"

Ida Wynne's bright face, lighted by her
roguish eyes, was certainly a very fair sight to see; and Georgia thought, as she had before many and many a time, that if her baby had lived, she would have been in age such a girl as this.

"You are enthusiastic, my dear child—nineteen usually is, although I can, with modulation, indorse your estimate of Mr. Lexington's attractions. However, you will be pleased to hear of a new arrival for to-morrow. I presume Mr. Havelstock, who has been out with Mr. Lexington."

"The dark, Spanish-looking gentleman, whose picture is in the musical album, opposite Nell Reynolds! Is he coming? Oh, that is just splendid, Mrs. Lexington!—and a mischievous gravity that struggled hard with smiles around the mouth, covered her face.

"Do you know I have a presentiment that in Mr. Havelstock I shall meet my fate?"

Georgia shivered at the idea—her fair, young friend and Frank Havelstock could not, should not have aught in common!

"He is a man of the world, dear," Georgia replied, caused by gentility—her troubles had made her so tender to her own sex—"and you an unsophisticated girl, who can not read character, as yet. Don't be in a hurry to find your fate in any man, for five years, yet."

"Five years yet! and I nineteen now! did you wait that long?"

The white, agonized look on Mrs. Lexington's face made the young girl spring from her chair.

"Do forgive me—oh please do! I am so stupid, and I am forever forgetting you were married before, and lost your darling little baby. Mrs. Lexington, I will never be so thoughtless again."

She wound her white arms around Georgia's neck.

"You meant nothing, dear. Now isn't it time to dress for lunch? And will you stop in Mrs. Robinson's room, and leave the order for rooms to be prepared at once for Mr. Havelstock?"

Ida readily obeyed, and Georgia locked the door quietly after her.

She was almost suffering to be alone; and since she had met her husband in the early morning she had not had a minute in which to collect her thoughts and arrange her plans of action. She had thought it easy to decide that Theo Lexington's coming and presence should have no effect upon her or her actions. She had but one path in which to tread—the same straightforward path she had followed all her lonely years, when, at times, she had prayed wildly for something—anything to occur to break the horrid monotony. Now, her prayer was being strangely answered—for the monotonous routine was forever disturbed by her husband's coming—and Frank Havelstock's!

And she could not go on in her appointed way. Mr. Lexington's presence stirred her so strangely, made her so conscious of her loneliness, and to so yearningly long for the caresses of his arms—the kisses of his lips.

She loved him—oh! she never had known how much, until the long absence had taught her, and the sudden return had added its proof. She felt in every fiber of her being that he was her lord and master—that his was the only hand which could control her destiny.

He had wronged her, terribly, in earlier days, and she knew, every day of her life, that if he had not been so cruel, that her hands and her heart and her life would not have been so empty; that in all those earlier years she would have had baby hands on her breast, in her hair, and a baby head nestling over her heart, and baby lids to have kissed when she would.

There would have been a tiny girl, a blushing maiden, all her own, and her life would have been full of such sweet, sacred harmonies. For Jessamine would not have died, at home, under her care—she could not have died with such ardent mother love encompassing her to this side the shore.

And Theo Lexington was accountable for all this desolation. She had brooded over it so often that it had become a passion with her—to hold him responsible, and never, never to forgive.

It had been comparatively easy when thousands of miles separated them, to remain stubbornly fixed behind her pride; it had been harder to keep herself to her promise when he stood before her, in all his flush of beauty and proud manhood, pleading his cause, and opening his arms to let her come. But it was harder now, the excitement over, and knowing he was there, under the same roof, and yet a stranger—nay, worse than a stranger. Georgia dreaded this coming of Frank Havelstock, with a vague foreboding she would not accept as fear, simply because she supposed her fate had already accomplished its worst for her; simply because she supposed her capacity for suffering had been filled.

And yet, there hung over her a shadow, even in those impalpable folds she discovered a strange, new dread, and, as Frank Havelstock was coming to Tangeewood, and was so thoroughly disliked and mistrusted by her, and as cordially beloved and confided in by her husband—these facts, together with the chance, girlish remarks of Ida Wynn, had all very naturally pointed to Frank Havelstock as the cause of her forebodings.

She walked to and fro through her suite of rooms, with the shadow and sunshine patches flickering across the velvet carpets as the wind moved the branches of the trees that
grew along the entire side of the mansion, her mind filled with a wilder tumult of emotions than she thought ever could have torn her again—who had almost sworn to be an enemy and a stranger to her husband.

Yet here, at the very onset, her woman's heart was asserting itself, and she was walking though very fires of longing love for the man whose old-time fascination had ever affected her so strongly.

She loved him! there was no use denying the truth to her hungry heart. Above all her pride, her outraged motherhood, her neglected wifehood, arose the triumphant cry—she loved him! and she knew that had Theo Lexington's been the hand that crushed her to death, dying she must have said, "I love him."

This very moment she was within a hundred yards of him; she heard his footstep across the hall, in his own apartments, and occasionally his sweet voice as he addressed his man-servant; Georgia imagined just how he looked, just how he would look if she went to him, with yielding penitence and candid confession of her pride; how his arms would clasp her, his lips kiss hers. A soft, sweet light gathered in her blue eyes; a tremulous smile flitted around her exquisite mouth, as she stood one moment in silent indecision—then, mighty love conquered years of coldness.

"I will go to him—not now, oh! I dare not go now; but to-morrow, to-morrow!"

The glad tears overflowed her eyes, and streamed in a crystal tide over her face. She let them come as they would, laughing in very ecstasy of hear, that such a sudden, blissful change had come over her—that there was promise yet of happiness even for her!

That moment she heard the footman tap on her door.

"Mr. Havelstock, madam."

CHAPTER V.

LUCIFER.

FRANK HAVELSTOCK had received Mr. Lexington's telegram in a few minutes after the messenger had left Tanglewood with it. His valise had been ready packed, as he confi-
dently expected such a summons from his cousin; while the cart-load of trunks in the baggage-room of the hotel were in perfect readiness to be forwarded without delay.

A smile illuminated his face as he read it, carelessly, after handing the hall-boy a quar-
ter for his services.

"And so I am wanted at Tanglewood! for what, I wonder! to congratulate the noble pair on the final bridging of the chasm that has yawned between them so many years! or to still occupy my position of nearest friend and confidant of my cousin?"

He rolled the dispatch into a taper, stuck it into the gas jet that burned constantly for such a purpose, and lit his cigar.

He called a carriage, and gave the order—to the 23rd street pier, that he reached in time for the boat.

It was a pleasant trip up the Hudson to Tanglewood, and in the couple of hours or longer that Havelstock sat in his camp chair on the after deck, with his handsome feet crossed on the railing of the guard, and his Panama hat jammed over his forehead, he had ample time to arrange his intentions and marshal them in fighting array. His impression was correct—that Georgia and Mr. Lexington were still unreconciled, and being as he had been, so long on confidential terms with his cousin, consequently knowing his state of mind regard-
ing his wife, Havelstock was aware of the fault in the case being Georgia's.

Such being the state of affairs—and he guessed it exactly—he was perfectly satisfied, for such a condition at Tanglewood was the very one he most wanted. It was his grand object in life to keep Theo and Georgia apart, by any means in his power, now that they had created a gulf between themselves. He knew his chances of succcession to the wealth and position he coveted depended entirely on the fact of Lexington's dying childless, and while there was a flaw in the nature of either of Mr. Lexington or his wife, on which he could work, by which infame one against the other, the while maintaining his inno-
cence in the matter by pretending friendship to them both, Frank Havelstock made up his mind to devote all his energies to his treacherous task—for Tanglewood at the end.

If the two had become reconciled—they, his chances had collapsed suddenly; but he would not believe so.

He sprung from the boat to the rustic land-
ing, built for the private use of Tanglewood and its guests, with a speed that betrayed to himself his eagerness for the scene of action. He only slackened his pace, and appeared, as he generally did, the elegant gentleman of leisure, when he was fairly in range of the facade of windows, with their gay awnings outside and floating lace curtains within.

It was second nature to him. This con-
stantly acting as if some one's eyes were on him—that is, when there was the slightest probability of such being the case. Of course there were times when Frank Havelstock would have liked no eyes on his conduct—but now, conscious of his good appearance, his polished ease, his undoubted position in the house whither he was going, he sauntered to-
ward the grand entrance, without so much as a glance toward one of the dozen windows, yet feeling that, in nine chances out of ten, there were bright eyes watching him come.

Not Georgia's—he knew her too well for that; but he took it for granted there were guests at Tanglewood, young lady guests, who had, perhaps, been apprised of his coming.
He went on, therefore, rung the bell, gave his card to the hall porter, and for the first time in several years crossed the threshold at Tanglewood, on which he had such a cautious eye, for whose inmates he entertained such sinister designs.

It was a stroke of his peculiar policy to inquire for Georgia, and the footman brought back her answer.

"Mrs. Lexington would see him in a few moments."

Possibly five minutes passed before he heard the rustle of her skirts on the stairs as she descended, and swept over the mosaic inlaid flooring of the large, imposing hall, out of which all the grand saloons on the lower floor opened.

He arose to greet her with an undemonstrative, candid warmth that was best suited to disarm Georgia of the prejudices she knew existed.

"My dear Mrs. Lexington—the first familiar face I have seen since my return to America. I wonder how the years have dealt with you—you are well and happy. Thank God for that."

He had taken her hand and pressed it a moment warmly. His voice was frank, ardent; his language unexceptionable; but when he had caught a glimpse of her radiant face, that he had never seen but in gloomy shadows for so long a time, his heart misgave him, and while he inwardly cursed the probability that her happiness arose from the fact of her friendship with her husband, his false lips framed the thankfulness they made almost profane by uttering.

But, it somewhat disarmed Georgia; she smiled—a little sadly, as she answered:

"You are very kind, Frank, and I will confess I am surprised to hear such good wishes from you. Yes, I am well, and—am pleased to see you."

She hesitated; her natural candor forbidding her to utter the fashionable falsehood of welcome. She glided stealthily Havelstock's face, and saw his well-imitated expression of considerate anxiety. His bold eyes looked more honest, more frank than she ever had seen them, and there was a little womanly pity in her heart for the man who had no living relative save her husband to welcome him from a perilous journey. He had been a faithful follower of her husband's, too, amid all sorts of danger and privations, and had been a companion in loneliness, if not a friend—her heart was already softening and widening under the influence of the love she was going to offer her husband on the morrow—and so, excusing any misgivings she experienced on the grounds that she had no real, tangible reason to distrust Frank Havelstock, and smothering those fine instincts that warn every sensitive nature of coming dooms, Georgia, with her own hands, helped to forge the very first link in the chain of events that was to bind in most pitiful servitude.

He met her critical, intense gaze with quiet, grave patience.

"Mrs. Lexington, I believe you mean what you say, when, after a second's consideration, you tell me you are glad to see me. I thank you for it; I will endeavor to be worthy of your friendly welcome."

"I think I mean it, Frank," she returned, slowly. "To be more candid still, I was sorry I learned you were coming, because—because—with such trouble between my husband and I—and fearing you were not a friend of mine, I— I—"

She paused, in shy silence. Havelstock's heart gave a wild thrill of delight at her chance words; then, after all, they were yet reconciled! he was in time! and, more fathfully wonderful still, he was winning Georgia Lexington to his side!

What more could men ask? But with all this wild elation of thought, not a vestige of his triumph was visible on his face, or in his black eyes.

"You do not mean to tell me I must retract my congratulations on your reconciliation to your husband? Mrs. Lexington, surely you will not pain me with such unwelcome news? You know, I— I—"

She bent a grave, questioning face to hers. Her eyes met his a moment, eyes in which all the ardor of her passion shone, then they vailed themselves under the fringing lashed lids.

"It is my fault, Frank—all my fault. I was so proud and relentless and hardened by his absence. But—I am sorry now!"

It was exquisite—her girlish confession, uttered with a shy, proud fondness that made Havelstock wonder if mortal man could resist such persistence. Certainly not Theo Lexington, and he resolved to be doubly on the alert.

"You will forgive me if I speak very plainly, Mrs. Lexington, and tell you, if you have repulsed your husband's overtures, you have done a cruel deed. If you had heard all he said to me, seen his impatience to get home, known his positive certainty that you would receive him as his heart craved, then you could appreciate the force of your act."

Georgia's face was averted, but he saw the quiver of her scarlet lips.

"You are his friend, Frank—do you think he will overlook my harshness, and—and—take me back?"

Her voice fell to a delicious murmur; Havelstock could hardly believe this was the harsh, imperious woman he had known for years.

"Certainly he will—assuredly he will—if
you are prepared to go humbly and acknowledg-your fault. Lexington is as proud as you are."

"I know it, and I am afraid he is angry, and will refuse me."

She lifted her pleading face, so fair, so eloquent, and Havelstock swore an oath that it should not stand between him and Tanglewood—if he could annul its pure influence.

He looked at her a little gravely and troubled, and drew his hand thoughtfully across his forehead.

"It is just possible that Lexington—barely possible—that he will resent your reception of him. Suppose I see him, and use my influence in your behalf? In either issue of the event, I will not be responsible, however, for in one case, your love will conquer, in the other, his own pride triumph."

It sounded very manly, very sensible, and Georgia wondered why she had ever suffered herself to think so ill of this man, why she had wronged him so deeply.

She stole a look at his face while he was speaking, and marveled that she never before had discovered such an expression of calm steadfastness and honesty on his countenance. Her conscience accused her of her biased judgment, her severe decision against him—this loyal friend of her husband's, who had followed her through part of a dangerous journey simply and only because of the ties that bound them. She had heard of strong friendships between men, but this was simply poetical in its disinterested faithfulness.

She reproved herself that, in all those early years when she so needed a friend, and Frank Havelstock had been available, she had treated him so coldly that his self-respect had forbidden him to intrude upon her oftener than cold courtesy demanded. She remembered now that, like a true gentleman, he had never resented her conduct, but endured it patiently, as an unjustly accused man, strong in his own truth, would do. She had regarded him as an enemy, without the least evidence of his treachery, except the instincts of her own heart—her poor, torn, tempest-tossed heart.

But now, she saw such bliss ahead, that in its contemplation she could have forgiven her greatest enemy, much less this man whom she had misjudged, whom she now had the chance of appreciating as he deserved.

He broke the thread of her reverie, that he had followed by the mirrored expressions on her face.

"If you will send me up to Lexington's rooms, now?"

She rung for a servant, to escort him, and retired to her own apartments.

While Havelstock followed his lead, with a perfectly Satanic expression on his features, that would have petrified Georgia with horror had she seen it.
appliances of luxurious wealth, and up the velvet-covered stairs, with a wild thrill of excitement as he thought it was decidedly within the range of possibility that it would all be his one day, if he kept his own counsel and wrought his own plans.

He liked it—his taste was aesthetic in many respects, and it gave him keen delight to be surrounded by just such things; and as he tapped at his cousin's door he recorded his oath to leave no stone unturned, to stem undaunted every adverse storm and tide, to stop at nothing that would help him secure his ends.

Lexington's servant opened the door—a faithful, devoted man, with a head of white hairs, a man who had followed his master's fortune during all those years of exile.

"Good afternoon, Robbins. This is better than camping out, after all, ain't it? Lexington, I'm here to report."

Mr. Lexington gave him his hand with a cordiality that denoted the warmth of his affection.

"Welcome to Tanglewood, although I did not hope to be so agreeably surprised to-day, Robbins, just attend to Mr. Havelstock's valse, and see if his room is in readiness. You may tell Mrs. Lex—"

Frank interrupted him.

"He need not take that trouble. I have paid my respects to your wife already."

His voice was bitter, and Havelstock was not slow to perceive the weary, disappointed expression on his face.

"It is good always to make the best of everything. You are certainly very comfortable."

He glanced around the room in which they sat, the front room of the suite, that opened upon a second story balcony at both sides. The windows were partly open, and the sweet, fresh breath of the summer afternoon was gently swaying the fluted lawn curtains.

It was a delightful "den" for a luxurious gentleman, like Lexington or Havelstock, with its lounging chairs, its sofa, its elegant desk, and tables for chess, cards, or possibly a tele-a-tete lunch. A dark, bright carpet covered the floor, a crimson velvet swayed the ceiling, and a cigar-case, a small dressing-case, and a match-safe ornamented the marble mantelpiece.

Looking over his shoulder, Havelstock saw the central room of the suite was the bath and dressing-room, and beyond he saw the dainty appointments of the bed-room, with its walnut suit, mounted with gilt, its snow-white toilet appurtenances, its fancy lace curtains.

"Very comfortable, but, somehow, I don't see any signs of a woman's presence."

Havelstock looked inquiringly at Lexington, over whose face darkened the shadow already on it.

"These are my rooms; Georgia's are opposite. We are not reconciled, Frank."

There was woe enough in his simple lament to have touched any heart less callous than Havelstock's; his fairly leaped with joy.

"Not reconciled, after all! Lexington, from my soul I pity you."

He gave him his hand, that the husband grasped and pressed tightly, as if there was sympathy in the touch.

"You know how I felt, Frank, as well as I do. How I came thousands of miles for but one purpose—to beg her forgiveness and commence my life again. I implored her by every tie we had known to forgive, forget and come to me; but—but she rejected me in scorn, in coldness, in contempt."

His tones were mournful, and he dropped Havelstock's hand and pressed his own over his eyes.

"It has unmanned me, I must admit, Frank. It was such a shock, and—in she perfectly glorious! I never loved her so madly in all my life as in that one moment when I pleaded with all my heart. Love her? I love her as no lover ever worshiped before. I love her with a passion that shames my boyish affection in infancy."

Havelstock's face wore an expression of deepest concern.

"I wonder where the trouble lies! Lexington, if Georgia should come to you, and ask you to forgive her, and beg for your love and favor, what would you do?"

It was his fear, this question, that would further decide his plans. He put it cautiously, with the air of a man who yearned to do his friend the favor suggested.

A perfect glory leaped to Lexington's eyes.

"Can you ask me what I would do? Why, I would let her say all she would, because it would fairly intoxicate my senses to listen; and then I would take her in my arms and seal my pardon with kisses, and no one should ever come between us again."

His voice fairly trembled with eagerness. Havelstock felt a possibility, for the instant, of defeat, but he kept his ground well.

"You are the most generous man I ever knew. You love well, Lexington."

"Generous? You call an act of justice generous? You think you measure my love by an act like that? If you do, Frank, you haven't the remotest idea of how I worship my beautiful wife. Do you know, if I thought there was one chance in a thousand I'd cross that corridor to her room and go down on my knees to her and beseech her to love me?"

Lexington's splendid face was all aglow, and
Havelstock had difficult work to effectually sustain his wrath, his fear.

"I admire such devotion; the woman is fortunate, indeed, who can inspire such. But, Lexington, I am sorry to feel it my duty to remind you of it; but you can hardly expect that, after years of silence, after the terrible way you wronged her regarding her first marriage, after the curt way you announced your arrival, you could hardly expect a woman of Georgia's spirit to act otherwise than she did. She is proud enough to resent what she regards an insult; and, Lexington, for the honor of the family name, for the sake of your peace of mind, don't allow her pride to exceed yours. Resent her insult to you, humble her if ever she gives you a chance, and, my word for it, when once she finds you are not the humble suppliant at her feet, she will yield readily. Is it possible you have made woman a study and do not know this?"

Lexington smiled faintly.

"I have not made woman my study, Frank, except Georgia. I have thought, at times, perhaps it would be the true way to win her, but—"

"It is the only way. I have studied woman closely, and I venture to wager the successful end of this war between you will depend upon your generalship."

"If I thought it—if I knew it," Lexington said, slowly.

"Granted you don't know, will you tell me what you hope to gain by going on in this way? I desire greatly to see you and your wife on the right terms. I will use all my influence on both of you to bring about the desirable consummation, for your sake particularly."

He was so earnest, so kindly interested, and Lexington trusted him implicitly.

"I feel that I need advice," he went on, just a little sadly, "and you are the one to give it. I want you to answer me one question—one question, Frank, as truly as you know how, regardless of the pain the answer may give me. Will you?"

Havelstock started in half suspicious alarm.

What could Lexington mean?

"You may depend upon a truthful answer from me," he said, quietly.

"It is this—only this. Honestly, Frank, do you think Georgia cares for me—or or—is her heart buried with her former husband, Carlton Vincy, the father of her little dead baby?"

Havelstock drew a long breath of positive relief; then, with a perfectly simulated shadow of pain on his face, averted it slightly, then, arose from his chair, and crossed the room, to the window, where he remained standing silently, with his back to his cousin.

The effect was produced precisely as Havelstock had hoped. His silence, his trying to hide his true feelings, made an impression of vague anguish on Lexington.

"Speak out, Frank; I know what you want to keep me from hearing—say it; I can stand it."

Then Havelstock turned sadly around.

"I would have given a thousand dollars had you left that question unasked. I promised my answer, and I am a man of truth, whatever pain the truth costs me. Lexington, I know Georgia has ceased to care for you. I had it from her lips not an hour ago. Do you wonder now at my advice? Oh, I dare not speak further. I can not, and Mrs. Lexington my hostess. Let me off, Lexington, I beg."

He seemed terribly agitated, but Lexington caught his arm, imperiously.

"What is it? probe deep, Frank; I will live to thank you yet."

His eyes fairly commanded the answer. His face was ashen, and there was a shadow of a great woe on his splendid mouth.

"She is coming to you, soon, to make false protestations of penitence and affection. I could hardly understand her, in my horror of her duplicity, but she hopes to gain some end she has in view. I think she intends to work on your one weak point, your passion for her—and then, to have her revenge at length. It sickens me, Lexington, I will not speak further."

He looked so pitifully, resolutely at the man whom he had so smitten.

Lexington bowed his grand head, and staggered heavily to the nearest chair, while Havelstock's eyes glowed evilly on him.

He raised his face, presently, handsome, haggard, proud and stony, as if bawn from marlone.

"I thank you for placing me where I can defend myself. I am proud, Frank, and I shall not forget who reminded me of it. Let her come, I will meet her as she deserves. Will you go to your room now, and dress? There are some young people here who would be happy to have you join them at croquet, at five o'clock. I want to be alone, Frank, to accustom myself to regard Georgia as the false, designing creature I had learned her to be, from your lips, that I can trust, if no one else."

And Havelstock went to his room, content with his first move.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SCORNED SACRIFICE.

That day at dinner, Havelstock was introduced to the guests at Tanglewood, by Mr. Lexington, making, as he fully intended to make, a favorable impression on every one of them, and being himself par tic u larly pleased with Ida Wynne, whose arch, merry eyes met his at the first glance, with a world of wonderment in their depths.
VIALS OF WRATH.

He was tenfold handsome than his picture; and she noticed at the very first look she gave him, how perfectly he was dressed, how courteous and unobtrusive his elegant manner was; and, with a half shy glance at Georgia, thought the chances had increased, that, possibly, this was her fate.

Not that she was unwomanly, or reckless in her unbounded admiration of the man whose Spanish eyes had haunted her in his picture, ever since she and the other girls had seen it in the album; only, she was an impressionable, ardent, heart-whole girl, and Frank Havelstock, with her prejudices in his favor, beforehand, was a shrewd, gallant, lady’s man, who had learned to perfection his art of captivating hearts.

They were a merry party that played croquet, or danced in the parlor, or promenaded in the park, that sweet summer night. Mr. Lexington was in a new mood, since his interview with Frank, and he had come down to dinner, firmly decided as to the course he intended to follow, not to let Georgia imagine, for a moment longer, that the refusal of her love had power to make him miserable. So he laughed and talked, now with one, now with another; he played chess with Mrs. Hammond for his partner, turned the pages while Miss Reynolds played an opéra, and then, when Ida Wynne declared Miss Reynolds was not to let the music for a redowa, he went over to Georgia, who was quietly chatting with Mr. Hammond, and asked her to dance with him, with as much elaborate, hollow-hearted politeness as the stranger of half an hour’s acquaintance would have solicited the honor.

A second of dizzy, rapturous delight, when her eyes glanced timidly in his, that were simply raised in courteous expectation, and Georgia gave him her hand, warm, trembling.

He felt the slight thrill in her fingers, as his hand closed lightly, indifferently, over them; he noticed the slight shrinking of the second, of her form as his arm touched her waist, and he thought, bitterly, what a deep woman she was, thus to preface her later dramatic performances with these little touches that she intended, doubtless, should strengthen her position.

While Georgia, trembling with ecstasy, excused him for not pressing her hand, or resting his arm more familiarly around her waist, because she had been so cruel, so cruel to him. It was right that she should sue to him, as she had promised herself to do, on the morrow.

So the night went on, every hour of which was further separating the husband and wife; every moment of which was bringing pinkest blushes of happiness to Ida Wynne’s cheeks as she met the undisguised admiration in Havelstock’s eyes. At eleven, the little party broke and Havelstock bade Ida “good-night, and pleasant dreams of”—in such a way that her foolish, girlish heart bounded for an hour after she had gone to her room.

Every one had gone up-stairs but Georgia, and she, in the rush of her thoughts, was walking to and fro on the gleaming marble balcony, feeling that sleep would never visit her that night.

She had looked wondrously fair that evening—she was saintly now, in the bright moonlight that fell, in one unbroken sheet of silver radiance, the full length of the piazza.

Her dress was of black—a silken tissue, of thick, heavy threads, that were lustrous and rich in texture. At the wide sleeves that fell back from the beautiful arm, were ruchings of snow-white blonde; at the neck, that was cut a trifle low in front, another flimsy quilling, beneath which was a heavy golden chain of long, massive links, from which depended a large cross of diamonds—that matched the small crosses in her ears. Narrow gold bracelets clasped her arms; a wide, gold-colored sash was artistically draped from her waist; and in her splendid hair nestled a tiny blue lace bow, pinned fast to the lustrous braids by a round, button-like hair-pin of gold.

She had looked well, and she had wondered, more than once, if Theo had thought so. Now, he had gone to his room, and she—she was waiting for the morrow with an impatient eagerness that lent a strange, love-wit glory to her blue eyes.

She walked slowly to the furthest end of the long piazza, her hands clasped before her, her head drooped on her breast. She passed the barred windows of the silent, darkened parlors, and then, just as she came abreast the open door, Mr. Lexington stepped out. He retreated a step in surprise, then laughed.

“I had no idea I should see any one. It is so warm, and I am not used to such early hours.”

How grand he was! How sweet a charm he lent the simplest words he uttered! Georgia stood where she was, listening to his voice, almost hungrily.

“We have become accustomed to so little dissipation at Tanglewood that eleven seems late. But I was indisposed to sleep to-night.”

She looked at him, shyly, as she said it.

“I hope you are not ill, Mrs. Lexington.”

He said it with an elaborate courtesy that would have chilled her had her own heart been less ardent.

“I am not ill, Mr. Lexington; I am only—only—”

She had almost made her confession, then paused, with a sudden shiver of doubting fear. Should she? dare she? why shouldn’t she tell him, now—here—in the soft moonlight—in the silence of the summer night, whose influences might be so favorable?

A wild thrill of her passionate, yearning
heart; a catching of her breath, and then—then—she cast the die that settled her fate!

"Theo!"

She uttered his name for the first time since his return; her voice was tremulously sweet, with a shy timidity in its low tones, blended with tenderest entreaty. Her fair face was turned to his own, and he saw a lovely, yet proud, imperiousness on its perfect features. A gust of sharp pain crossed his own face, so white and impassive in the moonlight; a heart-pang accompanied it, as he thought how fair and yet how false she was. The soft tones of her voice lingered almost pitifully on his ears; the only answer he gave was a slight inclination of his head, then a straight, steady look at her marvelously lovely face, with the thought how true a friend Frank Havelstock was always proving himself to be!

Georgia crossed the short distance that separated them, and laid her hand on his—her warm, vitalizing touch thrilling him from head to foot.

A sudden luminous light of passionate love beamed on her face so plainly that it heralded her words. He saw it, and above the stern, sharp discipline of himself, there leaped into his eyes such a heart-hungry, weary pain, that Georgia told herself she might unbare her very soul to him.

"Theo! Theo! I have been so wicked, and I am so sorry! I am come to you, in such penitence, to ask you to forgive me and take me home to your heart! Oh, my husband, if you knew of all the pride I have conquered to take this step! If you dreamed, only, of how I love you, more, infinitely more this moment than even in our happiest days."

She was standing closely beside him now, her yearning eyes meeting his in an eloquence of passionate beseeching; her red lips parted, through which the tide of words had flowed; her fair white throat beating, her breast heaving with the agitation of the moment.

"Georgia—"

All he said was the one word, her name, but the tone struck the deathly chill to her heart. Was it among the possibilities that he would deny her? The thought agonized her—this woman, who had endured silently for years and years; this woman to whom her husband's love was her very existence, late as the revelation had come.

She suddenly released her hold of his hand, and, with a low, piteous cry, slid down on her knees at his feet, her glorious head bowed on her bosom, her hands clasped in mute humility.

"See—see, Theo Lexington, how I, your innocent wife, humble myself before you, craving the love I never should ask for! I tell you, I am suffering in spirit because I was so cruel to you—I tell you I am repentant—when I tell you—oh, Theo! I love you! I love you so I can think of nothing else! I would die here, at your feet, to give you a moment's happiness! Won't you take me back again, and let us begin a new, blessed life?"

Lexington stood like a statue while she spoke, while she poured at his feet the libation of her woman's love. His eyes took in her rare beauty, his heart throbbed in answer to all she had said. He could barely restrain himself; it demanded the strongest power of self-control he ever had combated with, to refuse himself the bliss of taking her in his arms for once, forever, nevermore to be parted.

But, Frank Havelstock had predicted this; Frank, in his purely disinterested kindness, had shown him the way to walk to avoid being made a silly dupe of by the woman to whom he had humbled himself, and been spurned. The memory of that scene would have faded forever in the glory of Georgia's eyes had not he been so sure of Georgia's acting, in this instance— in such perfect, accordant harmony with what Frank had led him to expect.

So, with an overbrimming chalice of happiness presented to his panting lips by Georgia's own hand, he turned away, in quiet, proud refusal.

"You do right to sue for my pardon, and I accord it freely, fully. Rise, Georgia, I beg. The floor is chilly."

Georgia heard his reply in a strange, vague trance of amazed horror and despair.

Had he really spurned her—her?

She arose, quivering with excitement; her eyes dilated in bewildered anguish, her hands clenched in bodily pain; from her face all its beautiful enthusiasm had faded, leaving her pallid to ghastliness.

"You—you refuse—me?"

She grasped the words as if the full force of his conduct could hardly be believed.

"As you rejected me, I reject you. You have asked my pardon for spurning me this morning; you say nothing of your penitence for the treachery that, years ago, you committed. You need not rave of love—that is dead and buried—a grave is between us of a verity. Not the grave of Carleton Vincy's child—but the tomb of slaughtered affection."

Her head was proudly erect now; her nostrils faintly quivered in the heat of her wounded pride, her mortified womanhood. When she retorted, it was in a voice so icy clear and composed as to startle him, for the instant, by its contrast to her previous emotion.

"I never shall forget this insult, never. You are right; there is a grave between us, and each of us will live and die on opposite sides. But remember—remember, Mr. Lexington, it is all over between us forever. When you repent of this hour—and repent you will—may a hundredfold of my anguish overwhelm you, and may you know what I
know this moment—the despair of a broken heart!"

She tottered away, leaning on every chair or pillar she passed, until she gained the hall, and went wearily to her room.

CHAPTER VIII.

SUB ROSA.

The moment Frank Havelstock met the household in the breakfast-parlor, the morning after Georgia’s interview with her husband, that had resulted with such pitiful fatefulness, he saw at a first glance that the event had transpired upon which he had builted his plans, the event he had caused to transpire by his far-sighted, quiet treachery.

It was done, exactly as he hoped it would be done, although when he could not decide and cared less to know. All he wanted to know and see was known and seen by him, as he sauntered among the gay little party that was grouped in one end of the apartment.

Ida Wynne met his low, half-confidential greeting with a flush of frank delight, he had such a way of making all women believe he existed but for them.

"You surely enjoyed the pleasant dreams? I wished you last night, Miss Wynne, for you have come from the sacred realms of slumber as fresh as a rose."

His cool, critical eyes were taking in every detail of her fascinating toilet, from the light-blue knot of ribbon in her flowing hair to the pearl buttons in her white lawn wrapper. He thought what a pretty, graceful little thing she was; hardly enough fire in her to suit him, but certainly very sweet, girlish, and appreciative. He mentally decided that, and the while made a certain tender light radiate from his eyes; it was second nature to him to please women.

And Ida, with a thrill of her foolish heart, thought—well, wild, vague thoughts, that she herself scarcely understood, except that she was very happy, and was so glad Mr. Havelstock was come to Tanglewood.

He sauntered leisurely from Ida’s side, and exchanged greetings with the other guests, and then found himself at Georgia’s side, looking with evilly triumphant eyes that did not betray themselves in her still, marble-calm face, that showed traces, to his and her husband’s notice alone, of the awful storm of passion she had weathered. She was pleasantly, reservedly affable, as she always was—the quiet, polished hostess, the fair, noble, undemonstrative woman. Havelstock bowed, then gave her his hand.

She did not hesitate to lay her own in it, although, as she raised her blue eyes one instant to his face, Havelstock saw a peculiar expression in them—a half wistful look, as if mutely begging his sympathy; a half reproachful one, as if, all unconsciously, her fine womanly perception recognized him as the destroyer of her happiness; as if she felt as she touched his hand—and felt without accepting the intuition—that his was the hand that had driven the iron into her very soul.

Havelstock understood the subtle influence that affected her, and he knew, as well, that her vague unrest would not unpleasantly affect him; and so he smiled, gravely, and with a frank, honest courtesy that seemed strangely acceptable to her—that added fresh proof to Lexington, who saw it, that Havelstock was a choice friend indeed.

"You are not looking so well as I would wish, Mrs. Lexington. You were up too late last night, I fear. May I prophecy that a happy event to-day will restore your temporarily vanished bloom?"

She could not misunderstand him, and a wild, pain-leap leaped into her eyes; a weary, heart-sick expression whitened around her lips.

"Do not forecast for me, Frank, for there remains nothing now. That is all over with."

Her wailing complaint smote him, a moment, as he dropped her hand. Then Lexington’s clear, cheery voice dispelled his regret.

"Come, Havelstock, you know you monopolizing Georgia’s attention entirely too much, considering the state of our appetites. Suppose you give an arm to Ida, and we’ll have breakfast? Mrs. Lexington."

He offered her his arm with a gallantry that perfectly deceived every one who needed to be deceived; and even Havelstock could not but admire the splendid ease with which poor Georgia accepted the situation.

After that the days went on one very much as another. There were drives, boating, delightful flirtations, long days a-picnicking, when Havelstock read Tennyson to Ida Wynne under the cool shades of forest-trees; there were croquet and billiards, dancing and promenades, in all of which Lexington and Georgia joined, apparently on exactly the right terms, really drifting further and further apart as the golden summer went on and away.

Then came the greatest event of Frank Havelstock’s life—an episode that he marveled at as he never had marveled before; when he wondered until amazement was exhausted, how it had happened that he, the adamant-hearted—he, the invulnerable—he, the pet of dozens of eligible girls, had succumbed, at once, hopefully, to a poor, unknown girl, with a quenched air, a witching face, a pair of rarest brown-bean eyes, that kindled so at his coming.

He had met Ethel Maryl in a very unromantic, matter-of-fact way, but her grace, her manner, had conquered him almost before
some friend at the rustic croquet party had presented him.

Then had followed the race between him and young Leslie Verne, another suitor for the girl's hand; then had come those delicious three or four weeks of watching Ethel and learning how he swayed her with his merest word. And now, a month after he had been at Tanglewood, he had made up his mind to marry her—bright, peerless Ethel.

CHAPTER IX.

ETHEL.

A small, Gothic cottage, of light lavender color, with closely-shut green shutters, between whose slats occasionally shone a black, gloomy crepe weeper; with the wide front entrance closed against the joyous June sunshine, and brooding over the entire homestead the dismal shadow of the late visitation of the grim reaper.

Suggestively mournful as the outward appearance of the snug, homelike little place was, nearly all tokens of death's presence had vanished from within, especially in a large, airy bedroom at the head of the stairs, through whose partly open door one passing by could see Mrs. Lawrence, the six-week's widow, lolling in a wide easy chair, a novel lying on her lap, and on the little marble table near her a box of candy, with which she had evidently been trying to assuage her lonely grief.

She was faded, with just sufficient relics of beauty to explain the irritation of manner in which she always indulged when speaking of other days when she was younger, and fresher, and more graceful.

It was very bitter to Mrs. Lawrence to think other women could fascinate where she was overlooked. She could not accustom herself to the fact that she was hollow-eyed and bony and beautyQA to—she who, at twenty, had been the praise of so many lips for her perfect beauty.

She had lost her taste in dressing, too, and persisted in adorning herself in attire only suitable to fresh, glowing girls. She wore her thin hair crepe over her wrinkled forehead, and never omitted the long curl of false hair that she thought “set off her style,” as they hung limply over her sharp shoulder blades. She wore thin, tissue dresses, and wondered why she was not as graceful as Ethel Maryl was, in her muslin wrapper, trimmed with linen braid.

Ethel Maryl! how she had hated and envied that girl from the moment she set her eyes upon her, five years ago, when she came a bride to Mr. Lawrence's cottage—a bride of thirty, who, like many another pretty, vain girl, had refused eligible offers in their halcyon days, in the fond hope and certainty of something grander, and then, in the end, had taken up with what they would have scorned a few years earlier.

Not that John Lawrence was to be scorned; he was a thousand fold nobler man than she was a woman, and his only fault was that he loved her at all, the sober, staid, middle-aged widower, who asked Gertrude Fairham to be his wife, and a mother to his little adopted daughter, Ethel Maryl, whom he and his first wife had taken, in their childlessness, and loved as their own. Ethel's life had been one dream of happiness since she could remember. Her babyhood had been beyond her memory, and her earliest recollections were of herself and Mrs. Lawrence gathering flowers in the same dear old-fashioned garden, through which for nearly sixteen years she had walked daily.

She never had known a want, or a care. She had had the carefulllest training, physically, morally, and intellectually.

Her foster-parents had given her every advantage of education, been lavishly liberal of money, as far as their means permitted, dressed her equally with any young girl around, and loved her rapturously.

Under such advantageous surroundings, Ethel Maryl grew to be a most charming girl; her natural disposition found full vent, her dainty, high-bred temperament met ample, approved her, and led her to the odd, piquant beauty, made her a splendid woman.

She was just eighteen now; with the rare combination of gravity and joyous sweetness; of a frank, spirited, sunny disposition, truthful and honorable to a fault, quick to make friends, capable of retaining them; proud as a duchess, with an infold scorn of meanness and smallness, and a horror of fawning dependence, that deepened and strengthened with every successive day of her life.

Her physical charms were in perfect accord with her mental and moral attributes; and Mrs. Lawrence's were not the only eyes that had been dazzled and enchanted, by her rare, graceful, beautiful beauty.

She was very slightly under woman's medium size; not enough to suggest timidity, but rather of a hight and build that conveyed the idea of womanly dependence and pettiness.

She was inclined to slenderness, with exquisitely rounded limbs, and dazzlingly fair skin, with not the least vestige of color, except in her beautiful, scarlet lips.

Her eyes were intensely dark; large, of a hue of deepest, richest brown, with dark heavy brows, and curling lashes. Then, to finish the portrait, precisely as an artist would have created the head of his ideal, was Ethel's hair; her splendid, surprising hair, of perfect golden hue. Not yellow; there was no hint of yellow in those long, waving tresses, but as vividly golden as if plunged in a bath of liquid sunshine.
The rare combination of dark eyes and golden hair, is peculiarly beautiful under any circumstances, but in Ethel Maryl, added to her other charms, it simply made her glorious.

And Mrs. Lawrence fairly hated her; hated her as she stood just in front of her, her hair brushed carelessly off her low, full forehead, and tied with a narrow band of black ribbon, that matched in hue the muslin morning dress, Ethel wore.

Have you known why I have sent for you this morning. You may as well sit down, for there are several subjects I wish to bring before you.

Ethel rolled a low carpet chair near the window, and leaned her elbow on the sill, her grave, sweet eyes bent in respectful attention on Mrs. Lawrence's face.

The attitude was perfection; and Mrs. Lawrence boiled with jealous rage, as she noted the small, white hand, the round wrist, and the gradual, symmetrical swell of the dazzling white arm; whiter from the contrast with the jet sleeve that fell away to the elbow. And she preened; she doesn't know how irresistible she is! A week more, and she never will gull me like wormwood, again, with her high-bred ways, and her quiet, aristocratic independence! Let John Lawrence turn over in his coffin, if he wants to, because I shall deliberately disobey his dying request, to care for Ethel as he would have done, had the man been me; I'm more afraid of her living beauty, than any dead man's eyes!

She thought it, in a vague, fierce, defiant way, as she watched the girl a moment, and then folded her hands on her book, with her furious eyes riveted on Ethel's sweet, sad face, over which the shadow of Azrael's passing wing had left its pitiful mark. She had dearly loved Mr. Lawrence, although she knew she was not his child.

"I presume you have been expecting to be summoned to me for some time, but my nerves have been in such a state that I have felt positively unequal to the task. Now, however, I think the time has come for you to decide upon your plans."

Ethel looked wonderingly at her before she replied.

"My plans! for what, Mrs. Lawrence?"

There was such perfect guileless innocence in the questions, that Mrs. Lawrence could have stricken her, it enraged her so.

"You are remarkably angelic, in your ignorance; or what is much more likely, skilled in deceiving! You know perfectly well to what I refer; your plans for your future. What do you intend doing for a living when you leave this house, which, since my husband's death, is, of course, no longer a home for you. With you high-headed ideas, you won't expect me to carry on and continue any romantic affair of his."

Ethel sat quietly, though her heart was pulsing fast, and her head whirled with the suddenness of the position. All that Mrs. Lawrence could detect, was a darkening of the eyes, and a slight quivering, for one second, of the proud, sensitive mouth.

"You take me so entirely by surprise, Mrs. Lawrence, that I can not answer you at once. I never dreamed of such a thing as leaving the only home I ever have known, where I was always so happy until—"

Mrs. Lawrence caught the sentence savagely from her lips.

"Until I came here, you were going to say, I suppose. Well, there hasn't been much love lost between us."

Her quick, excited tones were in sharp contrast to Ethel's low, refined ones.

"I would have said, Mrs. Lawrence, if you had not interrupted me, that I had been very happy here until papa died; although, as you acknowledge, there has been no sentiment wasted between us."

"Papa!" sneered Mrs. Lawrence; "if you knew how disgustedly it sounded, when you are perfectly aware of the fact that he was no relation to you."

"He was my dearest earthly friend—a father in deed, word, and truth. I shall always speak of him as such. However, this has no bearing upon the question you introduced."

"You are right. What I wish to say, once for all, is this—that you have had from the Lawrence estate all you ever will have—and what you have cost, in education, in dress, in keeping, is a fortune in itself. Mr. Lawrence saw fit to make a lady of you, who may be, for all any one knows, the child of basest born people."

Ethel flushed at that—only a second, for her temper was well under control as it was spirited.

"You display your ignorance of human laws when you say that, Mrs. Lawrence. You know I never could be the daughter of low, ignorant people, poor though they probably were, to have given me to strangers, if they didn't do so. You know I am a lady, Mrs. Lawrence, by instinct, by taste, by feeling."

She made her defense bravely, proudly, and although Mrs. Lawrence realized the girl as infinitely her superior, she could not resist the impulse to add a new thong to the scourge of her tormenting tongue.

"You certainly have no small estimate of yourself, Miss Ethel Maryl. Perhaps you consider yourself the daughter of a millionaire, the heiress of untold gold? Don't you really think now, you might, by some possibility, be—well, for example, Mr. Lexington's child, over there at Tanglewood?"

She fairly leered in Ethel's pale, contemptuous face.
"Or if you deride that modest idea, suppose you make up your mind to earn your undeniable right and title to wealth and position by marrying Mr. Leslie Verne? He is crazy after you, they say."

"Mrs. Lawrence" and Ethel arose quietly, with a self-conscious hauteur that became her well, as her dark, bright eyes calmly met the widow's restless ones. "It can be but simply a matter of courtesy in me, which I unhesitatingly pay to my father's widow, regardless of the sentiments you have yourself inspired in me toward you, that I tell you I have no designs on Mr. Verne's heart. He is only a dear friend, and as such I suppose he will remain."

"A moment longer—since I shall not resume this subject again, and since on a week from to-day I expect you to vacate this place—I will advise you, since you declare you will not marry Mr. Verne, that you do not refuse Frank Havelstock— if he asks you."

A faint anger crept in Ethel's eyes, and she moved toward the door.

"I am safe in obeying the dictates of my own judgment, I assure you. Neither Mr. Verne, or Mr. Havelstock will influence me in my decision to leave this house—not next week, but at once."

Mrs. Lawrence saw her leave the room, heard the gentle rustle of her skirts as she descended to the floor below, and smiled contentedly as she opened her novel, and helped herself to a chocolate caramel.

CHAPTER X.

A TRUE MAN'S LOVE.

Ethel stopped in the lower hall just long enough to take her little straw hat from the rack, which she put on over her floating hair as she let herself out the front entrance.

She descended the steps of the veranda, and went down across the smooth-shaven lawn toward the road, where the large rustic gates were closed and locked.

She unfastened them, and then once out on the shaded path, with the flickering shadows falling over her bowed head, and the fresh crisp grass making cool paths for her hurrying feet, she slackened her pace, that was the result of her pent-up emotion, and went slowly, thoughtfully along, revolving over and over the sudden changes that had come into her young life.

It would be hard, in a degree, to leave the dear little cottage where plenty and content had reigned so many years—until the second Mrs. Lawrence came—where every article of furniture was like an old friend, and the big rose-bushes on the lawn border had grown with her, summer after summer.

Ethel remembered so well the day Mr. Lawrence had planted the pear trees, years and years before, and she had helped hold them with her wee, white hands while he shoveled in the rich dirt. It had been a moonlight night, and they three, Ethel and Mr. Lawrence and his wife, had laughed because they were sufficiently superstitious to plant them then, rather than in the matter-of-fact daytime.

Ethel could see the trees from where she was, in all their leafy panoply—tall, sturdy trees, with promise of a beautiful crop of luscious, golden skinned pears—that neither of the three who planted them would ever again eat.

And, when Ethel had supposed she was as deep-rooted for life as they, to be thus torn up, and cast adrift!

A little, fleeting look of wrath crossed her face, then vanished, leaving her full of high, strong, proud self assurance.

"I would not wish to remain on sufferance even in papa's house; I would not remain even had he bade me, and know that Mrs. Lawrence despised me as she does. The world is wide; I have health, courage, ambition; I am not afraid to face it!"

There was on her face a very inspiration as she made her decision—it made her more beautiful than ever, and at that very moment there came galloping down the road a young man, who caught only a glimpse of her brave, radiant face—and it was all sufficient to induce him to alight at once.

A well-built young fellow, tall, with an indolent gracefulness about every movement that accorded well with his fair, tawny hair, darker and yellower than Ethel's, and his blue eyes, with their full, drooping lids.

A handsome, stylish young man, whose face flushed as he sprung from his horse, ungloved his gauntleted hand, and extended it to Ethel.

She had heard him coming, and watched him alight with her calm eyes.

"You seemed in a hurry to reach somewhere, Mr. Verne; you have ridden Comet too hard."

He bent his blue eyes earnestly on her face, and his cheeks flushed—not with embarrassment, but with some excitement.

"It seemed to me I was creeping at a snail's pace; but, Ethel, I understood 'Mr. Verne' was a thing of the past."

She smiled, faintly.

"I do remember our friendly compact, Leslie, but I forgot it among other graver thoughts. I am in a straight, Leslie."

She raised her beautiful eyes frankly, half-appealingly, to him.

"In a straight,—you, my—" he checked himself sharply. "Tell me all about it, Ethel, after I have told you the errand on which I was in such hot haste. Can you guess it?"

His voice was exquisitely sweet, and there was an eager ardor in his eyes as he looked at
her, that sent a sudden conviction home to her heart.

"You were going to Mrs. Lawrence's, to see me?"

She said it so honestly, so gently, and Verne's love overflowed like a torrent.

"To see you, Ethel—Ethel, dear! I have been waiting and watching, and hoping against hope to see if I saw any signs that my great love for you was returned. I can see no token—forgive me, darling! and this morning I was going to tell you frankly how I am dying for your love. Ethel, do love me! Oh, don't say no! I cannot stand it!"

His fair, honest face was eloquent with his heart's passion; his lips were just parted a trifle, in the excitement of the moment; his hair was tossing in the fresh summer wind, and Ethel felt the awful force of the moment, yet shrunk within herself at the answer she knew must be given.

He must have seen the gathering gloom on her face, the pity in her eyes, for he cried out, suddenly:

"No! it isn't to be no! oh, Ethel, my darling!"

Her lips quivered, the tears gathered in her glorious eyes, and her voice was so soft and sympathetic.

"Leslie, I am so grieved. You know it cannot be as you wish; you know you have been to me a dear friend—a brother. Oh, Leslie, don't look so; you will be glad one day when you look back, and thank me that I said no!"

He bowed his head, resting his forehead on the pommel of his saddle. Ethel saw his mouth twitching convulsively under the heavy, tawny mustache, and then he lifted his face, so wan and haggard, she involuntarily uttered an ejaculation.

"It has been an awful blow, little Ethel, but you will not deny me the privilege of being your friend, as before? It is such a little, when I had dreamed such dreams of seeing you at Meadowbrook, where everything is so grand, and stately, and lonely. I will not complain any more—only—Ethel—do you think you ever can love me?"

A sudden averting of her head hid her face from him, but the action stung him to the soul.

"Ethel, I beg you to forgive me, but—do you love any one else?"

He seemed so heart-stricken, he asked it so piteously that Ethel's heart ached for him; but she turned her face—so fair, so wondrously beautiful in its witchery—frankly to him.

"You are my friend, Leslie, you said; do you want me to make you my confidante and tell you—I—think, I don't know—I have thought—"

She grew confused, and her sweet, girlish hesitancy went like barbed arrows to his heart.

"I know what you mean. I was afraid of it, because, Ethel, I know Frank Havelstock is not worthy of you."

She blushed then—a delicious wood-rose tint, that surged over her white cheeks like a sunset glow over a snow-capped peak.

"He must be worthy, Leslie, else how could I—care?"

He touched him, her simple faith in herself, and be answered, very gently:

"I see it hurts you to have me disparage him; God grant he may love you as I would have done—as I do! There, Ethel, I never shall annoy you again on the subject. Now, what is your trouble?"

She told him all, without reservation, and as he stood beside her, listening to her proud, hopeful courage, and seeing the brave determination in her soulful eyes, his warm, loving heart could hardly be restrained in its passionate yearning to take the delicate, friendless, homeless girl in his strong arms, and make her nestle there forever. He would be so good to her—this golden-haired darling of his who had won all his affections, who was as an angel among women to him. He was so lonely down at his large, elegant house, from where mother and sisters, and father and brothers had all been carried out, never to return again. And Ethel was lonely—dear little Ethel—and yet, while he had the home, and the love, and the money, she had no home, no money, no love for him.

He watched the play of her expressive features, and the faint smile on her red lips he never had dared touch—that Frank Havelstock would kiss, as often as he chose, in all probability. It maddened him; he could not have borne it longer, and he sprang on Comet's glossy back so suddenly that Ethel started.

"I must go—I must fight myself a little longer, I see. Good-by, Ethel, little friend! I will see you again before you go, at your house."

He touched his hat courteously, and dashed off at breakneck speed.

She watched him out of sight, a pitiful sorrow creeping into her eyes.

"Dear Leslie! If I could have said yes, and been true to my own heart! Dear friend—the best woman ever had!"

She paced to and fro under the wide shade of the maple trees, arranging her plans for her immediate departure, and thinking, with a pang at her heart, that the world would be wondrously bright to her if only Mr. Havelstock had pleaded for her love as Leslie had done.

But she was determined to go forth from home and shelter with an undaunted heart, and the way to begin was not to worry for love's sake; and so she resolutely put Frank..."
CHAPTER XI.

WALKING INTO SUNSHINE.

It was time for luncheon when Ethel entered the doors of Mrs. Lawrence's house again, weary with her long walk, and worn by the conflicting emotions through which she had passed.

Her step lagged a little, and her face was somewhat whiter than its usual pallid fairness, but her head was carried as proudly erect as ever, and her eyes denoted the decision at which she had arrived.

She passed the open dining-room, where Mrs. Lawrence, despite her candy-nibbling, was making a substantial meal of cold roast lamb, green peas, and new potatoes, without glancing in, until Mrs. Lawrence's voice obliged her attention.

"There's no use of your being sulky, Ethel, and refusing your meals. You'd better come in and eat enough to keep you till dinner." A curl of Ethel's lips enraged Mrs. Lawrence more than the courteous answer.

"I am not sulky—unless that is what you would call a lack of appetite. I have my packing to complete to until six o'clock. I will be down to dinner." Ethel went up-stairs then, slowly, leaving Mrs. Lawrence to rave because Ethel Maryl, under all circumstances, was always the refined, high-bred lady, as she never was herself, and would have given all her possessions to be.

Ethel set immediately to work to arrange and pack her plentiful wardrobe. She folded her dainty linen undergarments and laid them carefully in the lower trays of her two trunks, and then her few simple mourning dresses, above them, with her shawl, her sashes, her lingerie, her jewelry—one especially elegant set of surprise and pearl that Mr. Lawrence had given her on her seventeenth birthday.

From her dressing-bureau drawers she removed her handkerchiefs, some laces, her gloves, and a few little trinkets—and among them a tiny square box, whose contents she had dreamed over many a time, with vague yearnings of heart over the days and the times she could not remember—the babyhood days before she came to the Lawrences.

It was not particularly handsome, or very appropriate as a guide to her parentage, but she had kept it sacredly, and now, when she was about to go forth into the wide world, she resolved to never part with it—she only link that bound her to her mysterious past.

Her past was mysterious, even to her kind foster-parents, who had never given her their name, or attempted to deceive her as to her origin, but who frankly told her how she was left at their door, one stormy night, alone—a frightened, helpless child of a year and a half, who could barely be comforted, and who gave as her name some unintelligible, melodious sound, that was translatable only as "Ethel Maryl"—and Ethel Maryl she had been, and was still.

She had been very simply dressed—meanly, in fact, in a blue cotton slip, and a red flannel skirt, with her hair cut in haggled lengths on her neck, and her dark eyes overlooking a decidedly dirty face.

There had been no romantic note pinned to her clothing, no costly jewel to serve her use of such things. Nothing that could serve any such purpose beside the odd little scarlet circle on her left arm below her elbow, that she had grown so used to she never thought of, and a small gold button—an ordinary-looking button, that would have passed among a hundred others for brass, and that was the only button on her clothing—pins doing duty otherwise.

Mrs. Lawrence had her attention called to the solitary button by the fact that it was solitary, and as well that it was evidently sewed on by a bungling hand, and the button-hole was simply cut, and not finished.

She had quietly removed it, taken it to the housekeeper's, been assured it was solid, and then put it away in the little box Ethel held in her hands now.

She removed it, fastened it to her watch-chain, removed her wrapper, and put on her black alpaca traveling-suit, ready for the morning's early departure.

She counted over her money; the money her father—she must call him so—had given her at different times.

She was prudent, saving, and her reward was her own, when she found she was possessed, of nearly two hundred dollars—enough to supply amply all her needs until her future was assured.

She secured about her person, and then realized she was prepared to go from the roof, though it had sheltered her long years, was no longer her home.

She stood leaning on one corner of the bureau, looking out into the soft summer day, with something very like a tug of pain at her heart, when the housemaid rapped on her door, with a message to deliver.

"Mr. Havelstock's compliments, Miss Ethel, and he is waiting in the parlor." A tenderness came to Ethel's eyes as his name greeted her—the name of the man to whom she had given, unsolicited, all her young affections.

"I will come down at once," she returned, with that free, pleasant way that endeared
her inferiors to her so strongly, however com-
monplace the language might be.
A moment later, Mr. Havelstock heard the
light sound of her advancing footsteps, and as
she crossed the threshold, met her with ex-
tended hand.
"Miss Mary, I hoped to surprise you when
you came down to dinner, but Mrs. Lawrence
insisted on sending for you. You are glad to
see me?"
He linked her arm through his, crossed the
floor, and seated her beside him on the sofa.
"Oh, yes, I am glad to see you," and by the
shy, downcast eyes he knew she had expressed
only half the truth.
He had a persuasive voice—low, womanly
in its well-modulated cadence, and to Ethel it
was the sweetest music in the world. His
bearing was that of a gentleman of society—
polished, refined, graceful, with an ease that
was the result of more years of shrewd obser-
vation than Frank Havelstock would have liked to
admit.
He dressed elegantly—and tastefully, avoid-
ing all flashy styles, and wearing his clothes
like a man who seldom thought of them.
His face was one well calculated to attract
an innocent, guileless girl, as Ethel was; and
Ethel had been attracted by the jet-black hair,
the black, olive complexion, the dark, intense
Spanish eyes that seemed brooding with un-
spoken affection whenever they met Ethel's—
the dark, curling whiskers, and heavy musta-
tache.
A handsome man externally—at heart, the
veriest villain that ever breathed. A man
whom ladies liked, whom society called a dar-
ing, whom the world voted "a perfect
gentleman," whom Theo Lexington, as we
know, regarded as unequalled in judgment,
principles, and sympathy; whom Georgia had
always, until so very lately, instinctively dis-
liked; whom Leslie Verne distrusted; the man
who had won Ethel Mary's heart, who had
fallen in love with her sweet face.
He had laughed at himself, time and again,
that he, who had flirted with dukes' daugh-
ters, and held a princess' fan, who had kissed
the tips of many aristocratic fingers, and
wounded many a fair woman's heart, had
come down into the country and actually
fallen in love with a nameless girl, with only
her beauty to recommend her.
But—he was touched as he never had been.
He loved her, and Ethel knew it, when he
raised his eyes as she answered him.
"You are glad to see me, and I to see you,
little one, and I suppose we both can return
thanks to my cousin for coming home from
abroad, and thus giving us these delightful op-
portunities of acquaintance. Only a month
since we first met; only a month since Mr.
Lexington and I returned to Tanglewood; and
I feel as though I had known you for years."
"You were not away all those years with
your cousin, were you, Mr. Havelstock?"
"Oh, no; I only was away three years, but
it was enough, I assure you. And now—no
inducement would get me far from here
again."
Ethel felt his ardent eyes on her face, but
she skilfully kept the conversation up.
"I should think Mrs. Lexington would be
so delighted at her husband's return, after so
long an absence. Shall you remain at Tang-
lewood long, Mr. Havelstock?"
He smiled down in her shyly-raised eyes.
"That depends—upon circumstances. My
cousin Theo insists upon my giving up my
room at my hotel and living at Tanglewood;
it would be pleasant, doubly so if a certain
little girl who lives on the edge of the Tang-
lewood estate would bid me accept the offer."
She could not misunderstand him; but she
met his glance with her pure, sweet, honest
eyes, that somehow made him despise himself.
"You must not let me decide for you,
because to-morrow I leave this house, forever."
She said it almost solemnly, and was a little
surprised to hear his laughing answer.
"So Mrs. Lawrence has told me; she says
your Quixotic ideas will not permit you to be
a burden to her since her husband's death, and
as she cannot induce you to remain, the next
best duty she can perform is to see you safely
off."
Ethel's eyes were a marvel to see, while
Havelstock repeated Mrs. Lawrence's specious
lie. Her mouth quivered, but she made no at-
ttempt to disguise him, beyond a vague
answer.
"Mrs. Lawrence can perform that duty most
admirably, I suppose. She is very kind to
volunteer you so much information."
"But you must not go—you shall not go,
Ethel—alone. You shall go with me—my
own precious little wife. Ethel, look up and
say you will obey me."
A wild, exquisite rapture thrilled through
her heart. An Eden suddenly opened before
her—life with Frank Havelstock! a husband
for her companion, his protection instead of
lonely self guidance!
Her whole soul shone in her eyes as she lifted
them solemnly to his, with a truthfulness in
their dark depths that smote him as light does
darkness.
"Oh, Mr. Havelstock, how can I thank you?
It is so sweet—so much more than I deserve!"
He drew her head to his shoulder and kissed
her lips tenderly.
"You love me, then, darling? say so if you
do."
She struggled to avert her face, but he held
her chin firmly, caressingly.
"Say it, Ethel. Say 'Frank, I love you.'"
She repeated the words with a passionate
adoration that surprised him.
Then consider yourself engaged to be married at once to me—say the day after to-morrow. There, don't be alarmed, little one, at the suddenness of my proposal, because, you see, it will be best, so that instead of your going off alone on that dismal hunt after something to do to earn your living, you will take a short, delightful wedding trip with me—with me, sweet one."

He lowered his voice to a gentle, caressing whisper that swayed the girl, strangely.

"I will go, Frank. I will be your wife when you propose, and I will be a good wife, so loving and obedient that you never shall regret the day you married me."

"As if there was a possibility of my regretting it! Rather you may be sorry you linked your fortunes with so miserable a fellow as I."

Her rapturous eyes smiled a fond denial.

"I am a poor man, darling, and we must live on a thousand or so a year. But I think we can manage a little cottage somewhere, can't we?"

How sweet it was to her, this lonely, loving girl, who had such a true, fond heart, and willing hands, and proud, brave courage to fight the world at Frank Havelstock's side.

"I shall be perfectly content anywhere with you."

"Then will you be at the chapel at ten on the morning after to-morrow, my darling—never to go from me again?"

He held her cheeks between his hands and looked in her eyes.

"I will be there—would I fail, think you?"

And then he kissed her and went his way up the miles of road between there and Tanglewood.

While Ethel went dinnerless to her room with only one thought in her head, one bliss in her heart—

She was to be his bride!

CHAPTER XII.

THE LIVING DEAD.

Frank Havelstock walked slowly, thoughtfully, away from his interview with Ethel, switching off the daisy-stars with his light cane, his bold, sinister eyes bent downward, as if to hide the emotion he knew must be mirrored there.

He didn't look like a lover who has just claimed the assurance of the affection of the one dearest to him of all on earth, and proud, sensitive Ethel would have shrunk from him in utter, pained horror, could she have read his thoughts as he walked from Mrs. Lawrence's cottage to Tanglewood—a long walk, but very pleasant, that breezy summer late-afternoon.

"I can't, for the life of me, tell what has possessed me, to actually fall in love sufficiently with anyone to propose marriage. I, the nearest of kin to Theo Lexington, to whom all the magnificent estate will come, if I still keep myself in my haughty cousin's good graces. And my sweetheart, only a Queenly girl with a face like an angel's, and as pure as a snowdrop! I don't wonder I have succumbed when I recall her wondrous beauty, that, in all probability, will one day grace Tanglewood's aristocratic halls. She's poor—poor as poverty, I know, as well as that her impecuniosity is only equalled by her pride and high-toned principles: but she comes of good stock, I suppose, as Mrs. Lawrence says she is related, somehow, she believed, to the family of her husband. She instanced, very disgustingly—ought the cat—that Ethel was really Mr. Lawrence's own child, born previous to his first marriage."

Havelstock's thoughts ran about in this direction the entire distance of his walk. He had met no one, or been passed by no one, until just now, as he came in sight of the porter's lodge at Tanglewood.

A gentleman in a traveling suit, whose duster and general disorder denoted a long journey, had checked his horse at the closed bronze gates, and was holding a parley with the non-communicative porter—a rather rusty old fellow, who fully appreciated the dignity of his position as porter at Tanglewood gates, and who felt the high honor of serving such an exclusive, aristocratic family as the Lexing-

Havelstock was still too far off to perfectly scan the features of the stranger, but he saw the fine figure, the bold, upright bearing, the independent style that verged on recklessness. He saw the animal the horseman rode was proud-spirited, almost ungoevernable, of handsome build and stylish air, which, together with the carelessly firm hand with which the riter held him in, was an evidence, in Havelstock's estimation, of the stranger's right to the title of gentleman.

He heard his voice before he approached sufficiently near to discover the features, that were partially disguised by the slouched hat over the brows. He heard a clear, attractive voice, that uttered bold, straightforward sentences; a voice that was strangely familiar, yet wholly unrecognizable.

He quickened his pace just as the horseman touched his whip to the glossy flank, and in a second they met—one in pale, passionate wrath, the other in a surprise almost a terror, that momentarily struck him speechless.

The stranger brought his horse suddenly to its haunches as he caught a glimpse of Havelstock's astonished countenance, and a lurid smile made the hot passion in his face the more awful by contrast.

"Well, old fellow, you seem surprised to see me—strange, too, that you recognize me. No one else has."

"Good heavens, surprised! you ask if I am
surprised to see a man everybody has thought dead and buried these seventeen years or more. How real you, Vincy? Good heavens, what will Georgia do?

A dark frown shadowed the man's face.

"It is really I, Carleton Vincy, who, as you remark, has been, to all intents and purposes, dead—and with good effect, it seems, since Enoch Arden like, I come home to find my wife married to another husband."

His eyes darkened ominously, and he glanced menacingly in the direction of Tanglewood, whose large, dome-like observatory was reflecting the rays of the setting sun.

Havelstock was watching Vincy closely, strange, wild thoughts running rampant through his brain, that lent almost satanic brightness to his bold black eyes. He remained perfectly composed, however, while he measured his man critically.

"You have not seen Georgia—you have not been at Tanglewood?"

"I have been nowhere since I landed this morning. I look like making a call on Mrs. Lexington, don't you think?

His voice was so fraught with bitterness that even Havelstock thought what a terrible enemy this man would make.

"It is delightful, isn't it," Vincy went on, "to leave a wife and baby and go off to mend one's fortunes, and then, the object accomplished, return home to—"

He policed his hand at the gleaming tower again, in a gesture of rage.

Havelstock's eyes began to gleam—it would take so little effort to further inflame this jealous, wrathful man. And away down the future, with his sinister eyes of prophecy, he saw the results of the work he would do—all his own way.

"You remember, Vincy, that you were never very good to Georgia. You remember you neglected her after your marriage, and for several months neglected to support her and her child."

He watched the result of his words. Vincy flushed darkly.

"I know it—she was such a poor, miserable, sickly thing, always complaining, and the young one in a chronic state of squall. Besides, between you and I, Havelstock, you know how ugly and thin she was. I got tired of her."

"I know it," said Havelstock, quietly.

"And after you had left her unprovided for, for a long while after your departure—no one knew whither or why—Mrs. Vincy instituted a suit for divorce, and received her liberty, with full permission to marry again."

Vincy dug his spurs into his horse's side in a sudden impulse of passion, that made him plunge wildly. Havelstock stepped back, enjoying with all his bad heart the havoc his information made, the passions the news aroused.

"Divorced? She dared get a divorce from me?—to marry Theodore Lexington! I hated her when she had supposed herself a widow and free to marry again; but now, when I know she deliberately severed her allegiance to me—Havelstock, it's lucky she doesn't stand where you do—I'd shoot her in her tracks!"

His face worked convulsively, his eyes seemed to radiate fire.

"You wouldn't hate her if you saw her now, Vincy. She has developed into the most exquisitely beautiful woman you ever saw—slender, yet of perfectly symmetrical proportions, and as proud and haughty as ever."

"I presume Lexington idolizes her, then—"

"He worships her; but there is some sort of trouble between them. I believe, about the child, I think—your child, you remember. It died while it was little, and since then—"

He hesitated, as if he was loath to uncover family secrets. He meant to inspire Vincy with more jealousy and rage, and then make him an eager, willing, unconscious instrument in his hands.

"It died, did it? Well, it might as well have done so as to have lived to see to day. I didn't care that for the child?—he snapped the lash of his whip—"but I'll have a reckoning with Georgia."

"It will be the death of her; I warn you, Vincy. Lexington never dreamed she was a divorced woman, and it nearly drove him crazy when he discovered her deceit. He supposed her merely an honorable widow. Your unexpected appearance will put the finishing touch to his already wounded, mortified pride."

A gleam of satisfaction lighted Vincy's eyes. He bent over his saddle and peered closely into Havelstock's face.

"You are his cousin—you are intimate at Tanglewood, at least I suppose so, judging from past precedence; you know exactly how the land lies—how Georgia is circumstanced; how justly I hate her and her husband; how willingly I would torment them to death as part payment for my position in the affair. Will you strike hands?"

There was a hundred-fold more meaning in his eyes and voice, than even in his unmistakable language, and Havelstock's heart throbbed with an elation he could scarcely conceal.

"I will think of it. You and I were intimate friends twenty years ago, when we were young and foolish, Vincy; and then we shared secrets with each other we scarcely care to recall, even now. I can trust you, I know; and you can trust me, fully. I can be a safe ally, and render you such assistance as no one else can."

"And if I remember aright, there never has been any particular affection between you and my wife—Mr. Lexington's wife, begging
your pardon! You disliked Mrs. Vincy, I remember."

"No more than I detest Mrs. Lexington, even while I know her to be as pure, as beautiful, as thoroughly noble a woman as ever lived. I dislike her because our natures are so exactly dissimilar, because she seems to shrink from me with an instinctive dread; because she makes me feel as I don’t like to feel—every way her inferior, morally."

Vincy smiled, darkly.

"You are candid, Havelstock, and I will admit as much. When she lived with me, it seemed as if every look of her eyes, every act of her hands—even when she rocked her baby on her breast—reproved me, dumbly. And yet, Havelstock, she is a wife that any man might be proud of, if she has added such beauty to her mental attractions."

He said it eagerly, and Havelstock saw the working of the heaven.

"My only fear is, that when you see her, you will worship her as madly as her husband does. You will also have to contend against the galling fact that you once possessed her, while she is now forever beyond your reach."

His artful words had their desired effect. Vincy pressed his lips tightly.

"I’ll see her to-morrow, and the result remains to be known. Where can I see you to-morrow?"

Havelstock laughed, lightly.

"Nowhere to-morrow, or for a fortnight. I shall be married in the morning to the prettiest little girl you ever came across, down yonder."

He pointed his came over the way he had come.

"Married! you, an old bird, caught with such poor chaff as a girl’s face! Havelstock, you’re a fool! Why, man, you are losing the good sense that distinguished you at twenty-three, when that blue-eyed little actress—"

Havelstock frowned.

"Hold on, Vincy! Don’t mention that girl’s name in the same day with my betrothed wife. Miss Mary is a lady."

"Oh, all right—I only hope you won’t turn out as big a blank as I have in the lottery. She is rich, I dare say, or you wouldn’t put your head in the noose."

Havelstock flushed, and shrugged his shoulders.

"She hasn’t a cent in the world. It’s a clear case of infatuation, you see—and I—not as young as I was once. By George, though, Vincy, I believe I do love her better than any woman I ever saw. And I didn’t know her a month ago."

Vincy’s eyes widened, incredulously.

"You’d have been wise to have waited until you were sure you wouldn’t tire of her. Tomorrow it is sudden, Havelstock. What will Lexington say to your bringing a wife to Tanglewood?"

Havelstock’s lip curled.

"Do you suppose I shall take my wife there? I shall hire a cottage in Harlem, I think, and I can ram down to Tanglewood as easily from there as from New York."

"Then you are not staying here?"

"I have been, and shall still consider it headquarters. There are several pretty girls there now, which makes it pleasant."

"Why didn’t you marry one of them, you foolish man?"

"Heiresses of several hundred thousand don’t generally condescend to a thousand-a-year husband, do they?"

Vincy laughed.

"Well, you know your own business. See me when you can, at the St. Nicholas."

He rode away, Havelstock’s eyes watching him with evil satisfaction.

CHAPTER XIII.

BLOODWINKING SHARP EYES.

Or mightier import to him than even the anticipated change in Havelstock’s life, was the astonishing, exciting fact of Carleton Vincy’s sudden, fateful appearance, at a time when it only needed a sight of him, a knowledge of his existence, to set in executive order all the scheming propensities of this man.

He had hitherto worked alone in his plans of treachery for the overthrow of his cousin’s happiness, and the eventual reward such an overthrow would bring; but now—and he thought, with a snarer of triumph, that Satan never deserted his own—Carleton Vincy, Georgia’s first husband, with his anger, his jealousy, his hatred toward the man who had usurped his place—Carleton Vincy called it usurpation—with his raving love for the beautiful woman who was once his wife, and the revenge he felt like heaping upon her for her treatment of him in his absence—this combination of evil passions was certainly sent to his hand for use—and use them he would.

Tanglewood had never looked so fair, or seemed so entirely in Havelstock’s power, as when he walked through the lodge-gates, after his interview with Vincy. He saw the whole of the course he intended to pursue regarding Tanglewood, and Tanglewood’s wealth, from beginning to end, as if a map were spread before him, with every step marked.

He went over his plans concerning Ethel—pretty, loving Ethel, the very thought of whom made his wicked heart throb with the purest emotion it ever had known.

He thought of Ida Wynne, and wondered what sort of a look would flash over her face if she knew he was so deeply interested in another besides herself. Nor that he cared—Ida Wynne would never be anything to him—only he thought it best that neither she nor
any one at Tanglewood should know of his private affairs. To theLexingtons, to the world, except to Carleton Vincy, he would be the same man as he had been.

So his marriage was disposed of, to his entire satisfaction, and he walked up the marble steps to Ida Wynne, who was waiting at the head of the flight, in her riding-habits, her dark-blue skirt gathered in one hand, one of her little plump feet patting the Persian rug in pretty impatience.

"You promised to have Flirt and Comet at the mount ten minutes ago, Mr. Havelstock. I have a half-idea of not going at all, now." "I beg ten thousand pards, Miss Wynne, but I was detained beyond my intentions. I'll order the horses at once."

He looked so penitent, and so handsome, "If you were detained longer than you expected, there has been a lady in the case."

She said it purposely; she was a trifle jealous; and Havelstock, with an inward thrill as he remembered his interview with Ethel, thoroughly enjoyed tormenting her.

"A lady—a lady; and Miss Wynne awaiting me! I thought you were a better friend than to do me such injustice."

"I am not unjust, am I? I know I am just dying to be on Flirt's back—and that's all the emotion I am at present capable of."

Somewhere, he had succeeded in making her feel piqued; somehow, she believed her premise was correct, and there was a lady in the case.

Well, who cared—not she! and with a mighty effort to feel as indifferent as she managed to appear, and in which she ignominiously failed, and Havelstock secretly exulted over it, Ida waited until the horses were brought around, and they were off.

It was not as delightful as she had anticipated—this tete-a-tete horseback ride with Mr. Havelstock. Until now, Ida had imagined he cared, if only a little, for her; and now, there had suddenly come a suspicion and a doubt into her heart. A suspicion that there was a "lady in the case" who was not Ida Wynne; a doubt that—oh! the shooting pain of that thought!—that perhaps her sweet dream, vague as sweet, was, after all, an illusion.

So Ida was reserved, contrary, contradicting, as the two galloped over the macadamized roads—the one torn with curious, jealous unrest, the other on the eve of his wedding-day.

They rode along four or five miles on the straight road leading in the direction of the village, at whose straggling suburb it diverged, one, the left, leading exactly past Mrs. Lawrence's cottage, the other out into the more open country, and ultimately joining the river road, that ran for miles along the Hudson.

This last was decidedly the pleasantest, and was one most generally used; and at the con-
had before done that she loved him, hopelessly, it seemed.

Her mood changed suddenly, after they had ridden a dozen yards away. Her cheeks flushed, her eyes fairly scintillated with excitement, as she laughed and talked vehemently.

On the whole, it rather pleased Havelstock. His was such an insuperably selfish nature that it was very essential to his happiness to know that some one—anv one, for that matter—suffered, as Ida certainly did, on his account.

So he watched her with a keen relish, and while he purposely added fuel to the flames of her passionate disappointment by speaking in a low, caressing voice, or meeting her eyes with peculiar meaning in his own, he was all the time thinking how immeasurably superior Ethel Maryl was to this girl, bright, fiery, witching though she was.

And the two rode along, whose life-threads were fated to almost inextricable entanglement, who little dreamed of their future doom, who never, unless the association of golden-haired, dark-eyed Ethel with their own combined intricacies.

Of the three Ethel was decidedly the happiest, not even excepting her betrothed lover. The shadow of death had indeed darkened over her, and she was almost friendless in the wide world; and yet she was so frightfully happy as she watched her lover away, beside Ida Wynne's side, that she wondered if it was not wicked of her. She loved him so; she was so confident of him—that true trustfulness that is the groundwork of a true woman's love, that, once destroyed, is as surely followed by the death of affection as cause is followed by effect.

As yet, Ethel believed Frank Havelstock to be all a lover, a gentleman, could be. As yet, brightest skies beamed over her head. Ah! if she had but seen even the edge of the shadow of the darkness that was doomed to engulf her!

But she was so happy as she watched Frank Havelstock ride away, his splendid figure set off to its best advantage on horseback, his impassioned eyes turned once back to her with a world of eloquent meaning in them.

So handsome, so polished, so loving—and, her own betrothed husband, whose name and fortune she would share before many more suns had lowered so far as to-day's had done—and its almost level rays were shining in her sweet face, as if in glad congratulation.

Within the cottage dinner was over, and Mrs. Lawrence had felt able to indulge in a melancholy gossip with an intruding neighbor. And Ethel, standing with uncovered head in the warm, soft June sunsetting, felt that she had, of a verity, come to the very threshold of her life, and was only waiting to cross—to the other side, to Frank Havelstock.

She was mentally casting her own horoscope as she stood there, absently tearing a pink-petaled rose into perfumed fragments, with the dying day all around her, the early, serious twilight creeping on and on.

She was bound to be happy. She loved him so dearly; she was so proud of him; she would be such a good, thoughtful wife, with such quick care for her husband's comfort, such earnest desire for his welfare, that he would love her better every day.

She drew her modest plans of their home—a small, cozy house, with a parlor where vines and flowers and mosses and canary-birds should make summer all the year round; with a dining-room, with the table spread te-ta-a-te-te, with always a tiny bouquet of flowers for Frank's place, or a bunch of cool, green foliage.

Then there should be such a convenient kitchen—and she gloried in the prospect of being its sole presiding genius. Such miracles of desserts as she would make—cheap, delicious; such marvelous cakes and jellies for Frank and herself. No superfluous amounts of the inevitable dish-washing, oil-clot flanneling, and back-yard sweeping annoyed her, because every such duty would be gilded with the one sweet thought—for Frank; and so, this brave, sweet, loving girl went on to the crisis of her life.

The sky was glittering with stars when Ethel, almost reluctantly, went up to her room; for the first time since she had an accepted lover, she thought to herself, with a soft flush on her cheeks, and a darkening of the deep shadows in her eyes.

The starlight was very brilliant, and Ethel did not feel in the mood for a more brilliant light; so she threw open the green Venetian shutters and drew a low rocking-chair to the window, and with a white zephyr shawl around her shoulders, over which she let her beautiful golden hair down, in all its lustrous luxuriance, Ethel sat, and thought, and dreamed, and joyed, all the short, fragrant summer night. And when the latest stars that had helped keep her vigil faded and paled before the coming dawn, the morning found her fresh as a lark, and filled with an intense, solemn joy. All that day she busied herself in her delightful preparations; quietly acquainted Mrs. Lawrence with the fact of her marriage on the morrow—and then—waited for the morning to come—her wedding morning. It dawned bright and sunny; and she was up betimes.

Her simple toilette was readily made—a black silk, with blonde ruchings at neck and wrists, and a white crepe tie—so becoming to her face and figure, so very suitable for a bride who was in mourning still. She smiled at her reflection in the mirror—smiled at the idea of there being a suspicious presentiment connected with the color of her wedding-gress.

She did not fear future ill, certainly not be-
cause her dress was black; a love, she thought, that could presage evil from so foolish a cause, was a love that bore no resemblance to hers, that was so tender, devoted, so trustful.

She was down in the dining-room before Mrs. Lawrence, who came in trailing an elaborate breakfast wrapper of white lawn, and innumerable black ribbon streamers flying around her.

She came up to the girl with a smile on her face, with both hands outstretched in a gushing welcome, that made Ethel instinctively recoil in disgust.

"Good-morning, and a host of good wishes, Ethel, for I have found to-day is your wedding-day. I am so glad that you considered and acted upon my advice in accepting Mr. Havelstock, although whatever Mr. Verne will do I can't see."

Ethel's lip curled a little at Mrs. Lawrence's suggestion, but she withdrew her hand that had been grasped in the lady's as gently as she could. She had no intention of any final scene.

"I suppose I should thank you for your congratulations, although I must be permitted to disabuse your mind of the idea that I acted upon any one's advice in promising to marry Mr. Havelstock."

There was a ring of contemptuous pride in Ethel's voice that galled the lady considerably, but she had determined to attempt to obliterate the remembrance of months of studied neglect and harshness by the attention of an hour, not understanding, in her selfish narrowness of soul, how supremely impossible such an attempt would be, to any one, particularly a girl of Ethel's temperament.

So, swallowing her ire, and consoling herself with the thought that it would soon be over—this irksome necessity:

"I did not know what hour you had agreed upon for the ceremony, consequently was obliged to order breakfast at the usual hour, delighted as I would have been to have postponed it in order to have enjoyed Mr. Havelstock's company."

She walked pompously to the speaking-tube, and ordered the dishes up at once, then returned to Ethel's side.

"There was one thing I wanted to speak of before we separate, Ethel, and that is—I was rather harsh the other day—yesterday—when I got fairly talking to you. But when you've had all the trouble I've had, and seen what I've seen, we'll see if your temper is as even as it is now, without a thing in the world to annoy you."

A faint smile crept to Ethel's lip at that concluding remark, and then a natural desire to triumph over her enemy seized her; a desire that she instantly spurned as unworthy herself.

"I have seen trouble already, Mrs. Law-
down the box-bordered path side by side to the coach in waiting. Havelstock assisted her in, and the wheels, in their first revolution, began the doom of that day for more persons than bonny Ethel Maryl.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SERPENT'S GuILE.

It was a quiet, uneventful wedding—Ethel Maryl's and Frank Havelstock's. The little parish chapel that bore no trace of bridal favors, only the glad sunshine that streamed in at the small chancel window; the unpretending, unromantic curate, who read the service in his dull monotone; the rows of empty seats, and four or five straggling worshippers who were surprised at the ceremony.

They were the only witnesses; for Mr. Havelstock had not wanted to invite Ethel's enemy—Mrs. Lawrence; and of them only one was requested to sign her name beneath the officiating clergyman's.

The ceremony was soon over—so fatefully short, so fearfully binding; and Ethel realized, without one thrill of prescient dread, that she was never more Ethel Maryl, but Ethel Havelstock. She was very grave, with a sweet, shy sincerity in her manner, and a tender, thoughtful joy in her deep eyes, as with fingers that would tremble, spite of herself, she signed the marriage register.

They walked down the aisle, Ethel on her husband's arm, and entered the carriage as quietly and unostentatiously as they had come—only there was such an awful difference—I say awful; perhaps, rather, aweful—only Ethel did not realize it; and, perhaps, it was as well that she did not—perhaps, in view of all that she would be called upon to suffer and endure, her fate was kind to her in thus permitting her to crowd into a brief space such exquisite content.

They were driven direct to the little rustic station that accommodated Tanglewood; and Havelstock hung out the scarlet signal for the train already in sight.

He had arranged it well with his shrewd forethought and the knowledge that none of the family at Tanglewood, or arriving or departing guests, ever used this early train. He knew that at the very moment he was assisting his bride in the car, in all probability breakfast was just over at Tanglewood, and that Mrs. Lexington and Ida Wynne, in their morning wrappers, were lounging in their own rooms; possibly in the conservatory.

He had left word for Georgia that unexpected business, which he explained to Mr. Lexington, called him away for an indefinite time. He had commissioned Mr. Lexington—to whom he gave as his reason some reasonable business engagement—to convey his regards and regrets to Miss Wynne and the other guests, and then—he went for Ethel Maryl.

A couple of hours' ride brought them to New York, where Havelstock brought his bride to the Brevoort for dinner. After dinner, first, a drive through Central Park, that was radiant with all the splendor of June glory, and then to the Pall River steamer, on which they were to take passage to Boston for a short, quiet wedding tour.

The weather was just perfection, and in its sweetness in accord with Ethel's sunny face and lightsome heart. It was a delightful trip—a very ideal of complete happiness, and the fair bride found herself asking of herself every hour of every one of those swift-passing, bliss-laden days, when she and Havelstock leisurely traveled wherever his inclination led him, if she were really herself—really Ethel Maryl, whom Mrs. Lawrence had ordered from her roof?

Her 'happiness dizzled her with its intoxicating sweetness and rare newness, and by a thousand charming, graceful wiles, that sprung from her contented heart, from her affectionate gratitude, Ethel taught her husband to love her more and more.

He really did love her as deeply as was consistent with his nature and his principles. He admired her most unfeignedly, and respected her as he did no one else. He knew her to be of purest principle; a girl who would not scorn to suffer in the right rather than permit the wrong; and he knew, too, with a curious realization of his own demerits, that if Ethel could read some of the hidden pages of his eventful life, her love, ardent though it was, would barely have forgiven him.

Another peculiarity about Ethel had particularly attracted Havelstock's notice, and that was the unconscious influence she exerted over him for the better. He felt condemned, self-reproached, penitent for his misdemeanors the more intimately he was admitted to her confidence, and the result was, when their wedding trip was over, and they had taken possession of the snug little house in 123d street, that an agent had secured for Havelstock during their tour, he never was nearer purity, peace and happiness in all his life.

One day, a month after their marriage it was, they were standing together in their delightfully cozy little parlor, Havelstock suddenly told Ethel so—told her in an ardent, earnest manner that delighted her beyond expression.

"I believe you are my good angel, darling," he said, caressing her face as he drew her head down to his shoulder, and looked down in her frank, sweet eyes. "You are my north star of purity, goodness, peace, toward which I am magnetically attracted with all my faults, wickedness, shortcomings. I haven't been the best man in the world, little wife, but I hardly realized the true facts of the case until I met you; and now I promise to make myself more
worthy of you, my little darling. We will be so happy, won’t we?" "I am perfectly happy, Frank," she corrected, gently. "I sometimes think my heart must burst for very bliss when I realize solemnly, gladly, that I am your wife—your wife, Frank, never to be parted from you until death comes between us."

"Ethel, darling! my wife! and my strange, mysterious past does not trouble you at all?"
She lifted her head from his shoulder, then, and stood before him in all the queenliness of her wifehood.

"Before I knew you, dear, you were not accountable to me; surely, since I have known you, you have been perfection to me. Besides—her face lost its tender gravity, and a bright smile, so arch and roguish, dimpled around her mouth—"besides, you see I don’t quite believe you have been so frightfully wicked—I don’t think you have another wife living."

She said it as if she meant it, and yet only said so to prove to her husband her implicit confidence in him.
Havelstock laughed more joyously than Ethel had ever heard him do before.

"You can rest perfectly content on that score, dear, and let us dismiss the conversation on this subject and introduce another more to the point. Did you know I must leave you here, by myself, for a fortnight?" Ethel’s face clouded for a second, then she smiled bravely.

"I have only been waiting for that. Of course, I knew you would wish to visit Tanglewood often. Are you going at once, Frank?"

"I am not particular to a day or two, although I must admit I am somewhat impatient to return to Mr. Lexington’s family, if only for the briefest visit. Tanglewood is charming."

A hurried thought of Ida Wynne’s fair face crossed his mind, as he spoke, and a memory of Georgia’s calm, despairing life, that had approached no nearer its desired happiness during his absence—he knew that from tri-weekly letters of warmest confidence from Lexington—this memory occurred to him with an intensity that made his black eyes flash with a sudden brilliancy that did not escape Ethel’s loving observation. And she felt, rather than thought, that Frank, much as he loved her, devoted as he had been, pined after his customary habits and companions; and a sharp regret that she had permitted him to remain away from them so long, rose to her lips.

"You must go at once—to-day," she said, resolutely: "we can be ready—"
She had not abruptly as she had begun, the hot crimson rushing to her cheeks in thin, telltale tide.
She turned away from him, pretending to be busy arranging music on the piano, merely to conceal the mortification she experienced because she had let pass her lips the intimation she had intended never should pass them.
She was proud—this Ethel Havelstock, as proud as a duchess of bluest blood, and until her husband said to her he was ready to take her among his relations, Ethel was determined never to hint such was her own desire.

Of course, she expected nothing less—what else would? Of course, she had supposed when her husband went to Tanglewood, she would accompany him, although neither of them had ever mentioned the subject. Now, when he had said he must go, and leave her alone a fortnight, It had struck Ethel with a sensation not altogether pleasing, but she had at once convinced herself that she either misunderstood him, or that he had feasible reasons for going without her.

Then, in her sweet unselfishness, she had momentarily forgotten herself, her own wishes in her eagerness for his happiness, that she saw would be augmented by a visit to his accustomed place; and so had spoken, in her thoughtlessness, words that shamed her to have said.
As she turned her back to him, Havelstock’s face gloomed, and he, too, turned on his heel, and looked out of the window, wondering how on earth he was to manage it—this leaving Ethel, and at the same time, not hurting her feelings.

To take her with him was so ridiculously out of all manner of reason, that he never had given it the most trivial thought. That the Lexingtons, or any one at Tanglewood should know of him as a married man was not to be thought of, for a moment—"at present, at least, delightful as it was personal feel himself the proprietor of the little cottage in 123d street.

Why he desired to cover the track of this marriage, he himself could give no reason for—it was the innate badness of the man, whose heart was a serpent’s nest of all that was designing, treacherous, sinister; it was the devilish cautiousness that Satan’s own always excels in.
To him, Ethel Maryl had been nearly his salvation. She had influenced as no other human soul could do, and under her influence he had approached as near goodness and reform as he ever was to be permitted to come; he had his moment of superficial penitence, and then—crossed the dead line, that from the moment of that conversation in their parlor, that bright, sunny June day, divided their steps forever and ever.

"My dearest, I am sorry if you expected to accompany me, but in my judgment it is not practicable—just now. For reasons of my own, I desire our marriage to be kept very quiet—unknown even to my cousin Theodore."

VIALS OF WRATH.
There was intense authority in his gentle words; an authority Ethel felt in every nerve of her body as she left the music half arranged, and marched over to his side—her face pallid, her eyes glowing like stars.

"Frank! you mean to tell me you are ashamed of our marriage?"

He saw the uprising indignation all over her face, and he deemed discretion the better part of valor, for the nonce.

"Ashamed? ashamed? what can you be thinking of, my darling? A thousand times no! My reasons would satisfy even you, if you knew them, and understood financial arrangements. Can't you trust me, Ethel?"

He raised her face to his; she looked into his eyes; full of well-simulated emotion—and only remembered how she loved him.

"I trust you—my husband."

And that was the way Frank Havelstock bade his wife adieu, and went to Tanglewood.

CHAPTER XVI.

A BLOW ON THE HEART.

Affairs at Tanglewood were in precisely the same condition that Lexington had represented to Havelstock in his correspondence. The days had come and gone, full of heart-sickening grief to Georgia—a grief she was forced to hide under the cover of quiet content, the horrid working of which was corroding her very soul with its agonies.

To Lexington, in his pride, his anger, his passionate love that he kept constantly crushing with all the strength of his grand nature, life at Tanglewood was little short of torment; and yet, he stubbornly refused to leave it, and as doggedly determined to keep his wife at her proper distance. It was a fearfull condition of affairs, and nothing short of almost superhuman pride and sensitiveness on both his and Georgia's part would have sufficed to keep their ghastly secret hidden.

And so the weary days went on; the guests, except Ida Wynne, departed, and others filled their places—they themselves to depart, until in midsummer, Tanglewood was left to the fated two, and Ida.

They had missed Havelstock very greatly—even Georgia, who since his well-simulated interest in her welfare, had learned to regret her prejudice against him, and desired to atone for it.

It was very quiet—and Georgia liked it so best—but to-day, when her husband had gone down to the city, and Ida was off with a party, picnicking, Georgia was strangely unrestful, with a foreboding of some calamity weighing heavily on her mind.

She had been in her own rooms since lunch-on, of which she had partaken alone, with so little appetite for food as to render eating a task.

She had locked her doors on the inside, and dismissed her maid, who had previously prepared her mistress' dinner toilet, and then, in cool, comfortable undress, began the attempt to pass the intervening hours until dinner, that would bring not only her husband home, but Ida Wynne, and Frank Havelstock.

Mr. Lexington had that morning, at breakfast, made the announcement that Frank's long absence was at an end, and that he would be at Tanglewood at six that night.

Georgia had replied she was glad, that she would see that his rooms were in readiness, and then asked Mr. Lexington if his coffee-cup needed replenishing.

An hour after Ida had gone with the wood-party, and later, Mr. Lexington had taken an early train.

They had been entirely alone in the breakfast parlor when he went out—Georgia's heart was fluttering wildly as it always did when, by any mischance, they two were by themselves, and she knew all her torn, tempest-tossed soul looked out of her wistful eyes, cold, calm, unconcerned as she forced her manner to appear.

Lexington had read his paper, whistled to the canaries in the bay window, and then consulted his watch, and rung for a servant to order the phaeton in ten minutes. After everything else was arranged, he turned to his wife.

"Have you any commands? I shall be back in time for dinner."

He was very courteous, very solicitous.

"None, thank you, to-day."

She gave her answer in her sweet, cheery way, that was so perfectly at variance with her feelings. "Any commands?" she thought of it now, as she walked slowly to and fro in her dressing-room—any commands for him? when she would have knelt at his feet and implored him to take her to his heart again.

She was suffering terribly for her cruelty—her harshness to him that day he returned; and her soul sickened with deathly faintness as she realized how wide a gulf was yawning between her and happiness.

Facing to and fro, amid all the elegance of her surroundings, the tears dropped slowly from her eyes, then fell faster and faster, until it seemed as if the very floodgates of her sorrow were loosened, and, in utter desolation and abandon of anguish, she threw herself on the floor, and let the storm rage as it would.

It seemed to her as if some terrible crisis were coming in her life; as if some cloud of pent-up wrath were about to burst on her head, against whose fierce wrath she knew herself to be perfectly powerless.

The first violence of her agitation spent, Georgia was disposed to look at this singular presentation in a calmer, less fevered mood; and, in so looking and examining, came to the
rational conclusion that her morbid impulses had wrought the shadow on her spirit, that would disappear under the influence of less lonely hours.

Gradually she became calmer, until, in place of her wild agitation, she resumed her usual weary, patient woe, pitiful to behold, so infinitely piteous to endure.

Very slowly the time seemed in passing that afternoon, and more times than Georgia would have dared confessed, had she gone to the windows overlooking the road to the Tanglewood station, in a forlorn, vague expectancy of seeing her husband approaching, although she was perfectly aware there was no possible way for him to reach home until the hour appointed.

It was after three when she raged for her maid to begin her toilet for dinner—anything was preferable to those dragging, leaden-footed moments.

She took unusual interest in her dress that afternoon—she could not account for it then, except that she so thirsted and hungered for favor in her husband’s eyes. Afterward, she thought it must have been doom itself that helped her to look so wondrously fair, so perfectly radiant.

She wore a light silk—very nearly white, with a shade of pale green that caught the light in certain directions. It was made very plainly, and the absence of trimming at the waist only seemed to reveal more perfectly the exquisite outlines of her faultless figure; the sleeves were wide, and had a narrow frill of lace at the wrist, that fell away to the very elbow, displaying her arms, so white, round, firm, with wide link bracelets.

She allowed her maid to dress her hair in a style she seldom affected, but that was vastly becoming—rolled up from her forehead in a rich, half-waving mass, and tied at the crown of her head, and then left to ripple down over her shoulders in all its length and lustrous beauty.

It was the way Mr. Lexington had liked to see her hair arranged in those early, happy days, and a style she had positively refused to adopt since his return—until to-day. And, too, with her heart so overwhelmed with yearning love for him that pride was almost smothered, she allowed herself the sweet indulgence, little recking who should see her.

“I will go down the walk toward the gates,” she thought, with a sudden resolution, as she swept down the grand staircase and out on the piazza. “He will be coming soon—no, I will not be so childish, only to be sneered at by him. Will it never, never cease, this death in life?”

She retraced her steps warily, halting, undetermined, by the wide open door of the music-room; then she consulted her watch almost nervously.

“There remains an hour yet—a whole weary hour.”

She crossed the floor to the grand piano that stood open, as Ida Wynne had left it, with several new classical pieces strewn carelessly upon it, and on the rack that sweetest, most pathetic of ballads that never will grow old, that never has, and never will fail of touching the heart of the listener, be he ever so unromantic or callous-hearted—“Then you’ll remember me.”

Almost mechanically Georgia sat down and touched the sweet chords, then glided off into the melodious accompaniment so quaintly tender, that unconsciously urged her voice to sing the wail in the words. She was absorbed for the first time in weeks—for the first time since Mr. Lexington had returned; she did not hear the summons at the door, or note the entrance of the footman, who respectfully laid the card on his tiny silver salver beside her, on the music stand, on the pile of music, not presuming to interrupt her song.

But she was unaware of it all; those heart-toucing words, so perfect an echo of her own feelings—

“When hollow hearts shall wear a mask,
’Twill break your own to see,
In such an hour I only ask
That you’ll remember me,
That you’ll remember me.”

The pathos in her tone was indescribable; the wail was as straight from her poor, torn heart as though the words had been born there. The tears gathered in her eyes, her fingers trembled and lost their skill, and came crashing on the pearl keys in a shriek of horror and discord.

She whirled around on the stool, half in an agony of pain, half actuated by a thrill of proud impatience, and, faced a man who stood at the end of the instrument in quiet, respectful silence, with a red glow in his eyes, a malicious smile on his lips.

She stopped as sharply as if she had instantly been petrified to stone. Not a sound escaped her, as she stared at him, in frozen, voiceless horror, her hands hanging powerless at his side, whither they had fled, seemingly in fear, from the pursuing shriek of her last discordant sounds.

He bowed with a cool courtesy that was the quintessence of demonism.

“I beg to apologize for the shock I have given you, but I preferred to break the ice at one blow.”

Then, at sound of his voice, life, volition, motion rushed back to her again, in one whirling, maddening, horrifying torrent.

“Carleton Vincy! My God—can it be you?”

Her voice sounded hollow, and full of unuttered woe; she fairly gasped for her breath, and her heart was beating like a trip-hammer.

It certainly was an awful minute, whose
portentous meaning rushed upon Georgia with full, realizing force; her first husband alive, in her presence, and she the wife— alas, only in name! yet lawfully the wife of another man.

What wonder was it that she grew sick with deadly illness, as she glanced into his face—merciless as death, with its basilisk eyes, its defiantly-triumphant smile on the firm, stubborn lips.

"Alive! alive!"
She muttered the words in moaning terror, wringing her hands piteously.

"Evidently you did not expect me, Mrs.—what is the name? I have overcome you with surprise, and I fear I am not very welcome here as a guest. But as I came after my wife and child, whom I left safe and well when I went away, I am of course pardonable in seeking them wherever I might hear of them."

He laughed with malicious glee, as he seated himself on a dainty damask chair and glanced with cool criticism around the room.

"You're very nicely, Georgia—better than I left you. Please explain the change of circumstances."

If he had been violent; if he had been reproachful; if he had been sorrow-stricken; anything but this chilling, smiling serenity of manner! It fairly crazed her, this peerless, heart-sore woman, on whose head another, new vial of wrath was so suddenly poured. This man she hated—of whom her husband was so terribly jealous, supposing him dead—what would he be when he learned his supposed rival was living? this man, whose child Theo Lexington was obliged to answer for, under Theo Lexington's roof, and he returning, on his way, perhaps at the very door!

Georgia sprang suddenly from the ottoman on which she had sunk, in that moment of terrible fright.

"You must go—at once! do you hear me? Mr. Lexington will be here soon, and he must not find you here, in this house."

Vincey never moved a muscle; only surveyed her with his dark, villanous eyes.

"You mean you do not care to witness a meeting between your two husbands? I see, Mrs.—what is the name?—that you are very much afraid of the gentleman with whom you are living so luxuriously here at Tanglewood. I am glad of it, very."

Georgia was too desperately in earnest to resent the insult in his words.

"For God's sake, go! I will see you again—anywhere, at any time—only go!"

He arose, then, with alacrity.

"That will suit me perfectly well. I will be at the little summer-house I passed as I came in, at nine to-night. If you fail me—"

His eyes made the threat his lips had no need to utter.

"I'll be there—I swear it. Only go!"

She pushed his heavy figure with her frail, fair hands, in an impulse of wild impatience.

"I can afford to be treated, thus, Georgia— for the present."

He bowed, with a satyr-like smile in his bold eyes, as he leisurely went out the room, past the hall-porter, and out into the fresh sunshine.

Georgia watched him away, with wild, haunting eyes, her cold hands pressed tightly over her throbbing heart, her head whirling with mad dizziness.

Then she dragged herself to her room, and sunk down on her lounge, faint, cold, deathly ill, just as she heard, before she swooned into merciful unconsciousness, the gay voices of Ida Wynne, Frank Havelstock and her husband, as they entered the door together.

CHAPTER XVII.
A MAGNIFICENT OFFER.

It was not long that Georgia lay in that deadly faint, looking like a figure carved from marble, so white and motionless she was. Her resp to from suffering was very brief, and she found, when in wondering surprise she opened her woeful eyes, that not fifteen minutes' alleviation had been granted her.

It recurred to her, the instant she recovered consciousness; she remembered it all, with painfully minute correctness, and as she slowly, wearily arose from the low couch, and smoothed the silken drapery of her dress, she wondered if heaven would be denied her if she took her own barren, wasted life in her hands, and ended it, then and there.

A shade of whiter pallor crossed her face, as she tottered across the room to her dressing-bureau, and leaned her elbows heavily on the cool marble surface.

"There is a bottle of laudanum within reach of my fingers; one moment of steady courage—and then, blessed, blessed sleep that will end all these tumults forever. Nobody will care—not even he; I've no one this side the grave who would weep one tear for me, and, beyond, is my baby to welcome me. Shall I say?"

Her white, quivering fingers stole out toward a little dark bottle marked plainly, Poison. She removed the dark-stained cork, and, with dilated eyes, and parted lips, raised it to her mouth. One brief second of fateful indecision; one little space of time, when she lived an age of doubting anguish—and then, with a fierce, passionate gesture, she dashed the dark temptation on the floor; the sullen, red liquid pouring its tide over the white carpet, telling its own mute story of dire anguish, merciful release. Georgia fell on her knees, burying her face in the linen cushions of the easy-chair; the tears streaming over her cheeks in hot torrents.

"My God, forgive!—forgive and stay me in my hour of woe! Send strength to bear
the dropping of her eyelids, the fleeting emotions that chased across her countenance like alternate shade and sunshine; he enjoyed it as an officer of the Inquisition might have enjoyed the torments of the victims on the rack.

But keener than any feeling Georgia might cause him was the satisfaction he took in keeping Lexington just where he wanted him, holding him, like a hound in leash, by means of subtle play on the passions that make a man blind, deaf, and blind. It was no hard task for Havelstock to keep the fire fanned into an impassable flame—the fire that separated the two, like a fiercely hot channel; not difficult, because in Lexington was just the material for the fuel—not jealousy, fiercest pride, stubbornest willfulness, qualities that, under judicious management, would have been only warm, ardent love and pardonable self-satisfaction. Equally not difficult because Havelstock was a master rogue, who had long ago considered himself graduated in deceit, treachery, devilish tact, which he himself, however, called by no such outspoken names—rather, far-sightness, cleverness, diplomacy.

So, while they ate, Havelstock took mental note, and satisfied himself it was time for Vincy to appear on the scene; and while he determined that found opportunity to flirt with Ida, whose delight at his return was evident, to his disgust. And yet—he smiled, looked meaningly at her, set her heart all aflutter with exquisite elation, as she and Mrs. Lexington retired from the room, leaving the gentlemen to their wine. The instant the door was closed on the ladies, Lexington spoke to the butler.

"You may go, Evans." Then, turning to Havelstock, pushed the bottle of Johannisburg and a tiny Bohemian goblet.

"Pour your wine, Frank, and drink to the success of a plan I shall suggest to you." Havelstock tossed his glass to Lexington's laughingly.

"I'll go it blind," he said, gaily.

"You will not object, I am sure of that; rather, when you learn how anxiously I desire to repay you for your disinterested kindness to me in my unhappy domestic affairs, you will thank me—at least for the motive."

Havelstock regarded his cousin with an air of wonderment. What could he mean?

"I do not desire to discuss the subject fully now. I only intend to give you a statement for you to think upon at your leisure. It is this, my dear fellow. You know my peculiarly painful position; you know I shall, in all probability, die as I lived, worse than widowed, and childless. You know my pride in our name and family, and, consequently, can appreciate the sorrow I feel to know that, with me, the name of Lexington perishes. Therefore, Havelstock, my friend, my almost
brother, if you will do me this inestimable fa-
vor—marry Georgia’s dearest friend and
heiress in her own right, little Ida Wynne,
and take, as a gift from me, the Lexington
name and half of all the estate!

He spoke eagerly, ardently, as a man does
when in thorough earnest; when he finished
his concise, business-like statement, he arose,
laid his hands on Havelstock’s shoulders, and
looked him in the eyes: his own so shadowed
with gloom, so imploring; Havelstock’s so
glowing with well-concealed fires—fires of astonish-
ment, chagrin, dumb wrath. Lexington waited
a moment, expectantly.

“You don’t refuse! Surely you will not
disappoint me?”

Havelstock did not answer for another
second; awful struggles were going on in his
heart.

Refuse! refuse the wealth, the grandeur,
the position he coveted above all things. He
brought his lips together with a silent curse
under his heavy mustache.

“Havelstock—it has only this instant oc-
curred to me—you are not in any way en-
tangled? You are not engaged—married?”

An instant of surging, seething emotion.
One thought of Ethel, in her sweet, pure inno-
cence—then a light laugh burst from his lips.

“My dear Lexington, I married! No, thank
you! I was only stipulated at the magnificent
mansion you offered me. Give me till to-
morrow to decide, will you!”

He lit a cigar and strolled out to the cro-
quet lawn, just in time to catch a glimpse of
Georgia’s silken skirts as she entered the little
summer-house.

CHAPTER XVIII.
A MAN’S CURSE.

It had not been a difficult task for Georgia
to free herself from Ida Wynne’s society,
after the two had gone to the parlor, leaving
the gentlemen to discuss their wine. Ida
was all impatience for Havelstock to join
them, and while Georgia was wondering what
she should invent as an excuse for leaving the
party at so unusual an hour as nine, Ida was
trying to think of a way whereby she might
have Mr. Havelstock to herself for a tele-
tele promenade.

It seemed an endless while, the hour from
just before eight, when they left the dining-
room, and Ida fretted restlessly, from the
piano to the window, then to the piano again.

“It seems to me the gentlemen have an
uncommon amount of interesting subject mat-
ter, to-night. It is nearly nine, and they are
over their wine yet.”

Nearly nine! the words smote Georgia’s
cars as they left Ida’s unconscious lips, like
cells of molten lead. Nine—and what then?

She was very quiet, so that her demeanor
was oddly in contrast with Ida’s, who bright-
ened wonderfully when footsteps, unmistak-
ably Mr. Lexington’s and Mr. Havelstock’s,
neared the door. Some one passed out, leav-
ing a faint odor of cigar behind them; then
Mr. Lexington entered alone.

“Frank desires me to excuse him to the
ladies, and I am sure you will grant him the
request. Miss Ida—you are merciful?”

Her eyes were full of disappointment, that
she took no special pains to conceal.

“I think Mr. Havelstock is very ungallant,
indeed. We have been awfully stupid, have-
we, cousin Georgia?”

Mr. Lexington smiled at her frowning fore-
head.

“I cannot imagine stupidity and you ladies
in the same connection; but if such is the
case, I fear you are doomed for to-night, as I
have imperative business in the library that
will detain me till midnight.”

Georgia’s heart gave a sudden bound of re-
lief.

“Then I shall use the opportunity to write
up my correspondence. Good-night.”

Ida was off at once, in one of her impulses,
leaving the husband and wife alone.

He did not speak to her, but crossed the
room to a favorite lounging-chair, into which
he dropped, in an attitude of fatigue and
weariness that touched the woman who
watched him so closely, every fiber of her
being burning to comfort, to care for him.

“You are tired—Mr. Lexington!”

She ventured the remark in a timid sort of
way that was ineffably sweet—even to him.

“Very. My head aches frightfully.”

She took several steps nearer him, then
drew a chair beside him, strangely tender
and pitiful.

“May I smooth your hair? You—you used
to like it.”

She seemed ashamed to offer her services;
yet, when she spoke, she would not have un-
said it. He shivered as her fingers touched his
hair; she felt the tremor, and, in a sharp thrill
of penitent love, laid her hand on his forehead,
and drew back his head until he was forced to
look in her eyes, that dropped toward him—
intense, soulful.

“Theo—can this breach not be bridged?
Look at me, only a moment, and answer me.
Is it my fault? am I not penitent, willing to
suffer anything rather than this living death?”

Her sweet, wistful voice, fraught with wife-
ly love, almost maddened him; and yet—she
knew she was not in earnest; he was sure she
had some object in view; had not faithful
Havelstock warned him of this very thing?
Was not now the time to show his authori-
ty, his injured pride?

“Theo—you know how I love you; you
know I am willing to forgive everything, if
you will only take me back. Will you?”
A moment of desperate resolve.

"No. It is I who need to forgive you. When I wrong you as you wrong me—then I will converse with you on this topic."

Georgia's face convulsed with sharp pain.

"Theo, darling, I have done you no wrong—you cannot think it, surely. You know I love you, dearly, dearly, for all there is my baby's grave between us. But, see, my husband, I stretch my hands across it, and ask you to let me take you in their longing embrace?"

She reached her beautiful arms out toward him, her beseeching eyes meeting his.

He turned his head away, after a cold, cruel look at her.

"That is all very well, in its place, although I am not an admirer of private theatricals."

His voice was husky, and she noted a tremor in it. Would he be conquered yet by her love? "I do not mean it—you think that? Ah, Theo, prove me; only let me love you; only let me live for you!"

"Her lovely eyes thrilled him through and through, as he turned his handsome head again to look at her. Then, he arose deliberately from his chair, and looked in her face.

"Georgia, I am proof against all such attempts on your part to install yourself in my affections. What your object is, I cannot pretend to say; this I can say: I believe your professions to be a sham and a fraud. You do not love me, or you would never have wounded my pride, hurt my feelings, and insulted my manhood as you did that never-to-be-forgotten day."

She listened in breathless silence, the old, cold horror gathering around her heart, the old woe returning to her eyes that, for one little moment, had been so lighted with love's pleading.

Then she bowed her head, with a quiet scorn, that he felt meant how deeply he had wronged her, and swept from his presence with the air of an insulted duchess.

The same pitiful story over and over; two natures, prone to misfortune, continually at war—two passionate souls who loved each other madly, idiotously, ever repelled by the evil genius their love evoked; fire and ice; oil and water—no commingling, no uniting.

In the hall Georgia paused to take a shawl from the rack, and then went out—to the ill-starred tryst with Carleton Vincy.

She had made such a desperate effort to be reconciled to her husband before she came here; she had actually humbled herself to him, and been repulsed, just as she expected would be the case—forever.

She was feeling miserably dejected and full of keen bitterness when she entered the little summer-house, where she found Carleton Vincy before her, pacing impatiently to and fro, with a dark frown on his coarse features.

"So you've actually put in an appearance, have you? It is nearly half-past nine, and in ten minutes more I should have sent in my card."

Georgia made no immediate answer, as she dropped wearily into a rustic chair near the door.

"I came as soon as I could. Now, Mr. Vincy, tell me what it is you want me for? I cannot possibly remain here longer than a few minutes."

She tried to speak with a brave indifference she was far from feeling, and as a natural consequence failed, and Vincy noted both attempt and non-success.

He laughed softly, as he pushed, his hat off his forehead, and flung himself heavily on a light iron settle.

"Is it then so wonderful that a man desires an interview with his wife whom he has not seen for years and years? I will confess, however, it is not the meeting I expected."

His eyes glowed redly as he looked critically with an admiring gaze that made Georgia shiver with repellant disgust.

When he spoke again, a second after, his voice was like it had been, years and years ago, when it had held such a witchery for the girl whom he had won so easily.

"I can hardly realize you are Georgia—you, this magnificent woman, with the cold pride of a duchess, with the grace of a fairy queen. What can have wrought the marvelous change in you, whom I remember as a thin, fretful woman?"

Georgia's eyes darkened, and her lips curled.

"I am not able to return the oblique flattery. Time and years have not improved you, Mr. Vincy. I remember a handsome, gentlemanly appearing man, whose personal beauty was a mask for his deep-dyed rascality and treacherousness. I see now, the mask removed, and the man as he is."

He scowled under her stinging words, even while he knew what she averred was perfectly true. He had changed, wonderfully; he had grown much stouter in figure, and heavy, and coarse featured. His eyes wore a dim, blurred expression, and the lids had a suspiciously red edging to them. His face was bloated, and had a purplish tint like that of a man predisposed to plethora, like a man who was no stranger to the wine-cup.

His hair had grown scant, and he altogether repudiated the razor, so that his beard and moustache were long, rambling. He did not especially enjoy the scornfully scrutinizing gaze she bestowed upon him, and he frowned angrily.

"Well, which have you finally decided upon—Satyr or Seraph? Whichever I am, remember this—I am your husband. By Heaven, you shall remember that!"
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His face wore a mocking, Satanic smile, and he bent his head nearer her.

"Mr. Vincey, you were my husband once; you are the father of my only child—as such I never can quite despise you, thoroughly as your conduct taught me to dislike and distrust you. You wooed and won me, and married me when I was a foolish, ignorant child, who could form no possible opinion of what sort of husband you would make. Your perfect beauty fascinated me, and I went to my fate, led by you."

He listened attentively to her low, bell-like voice, whose sweetness stirred him strangely; he watched her beautiful face with a wild thrill at his wicked heart that had known a hundred loves; that, for the first time, was actually aroused by passion as sudden as absorbing; as fierce as hopeless.

"Then I did please you once, Georgia? in those olden days, when I was so cruelly wicked, of which I so repent me? For the sake of those days, forgive me."

He was not lounging on the settee now; his dull apathy was gone, and an intense excitement made his blood rush with unwonted force through his veins. He had arisen from the seat, and was standing before her, in an attitude of entreaty, his eyes filled with emotion, his voice as sweet as in bygone days.

Georgia drew her chair several inches backward, with no token of softness or pity on her face.

"It is easy to forgive—" she sighed, as she thought of Lexington, and Vincey thought his triumph was coming.

"I can forgive you all the misery you have caused me—misery you know nothing of, and never will. But of what avail is my forgiveness? You are a stranger to me. I am Theodore Lexington's wife."

She held her head up proudly, as she claimed the empty title of her darling's name, and in the surging tenderness that illumined her eyes, and in the ineffable sadness of her red lips, Vincey only saw a beauty that maddened him.

"By all that is eternal you are not his wife! You know it, as well as I do; you know your marriage is unlawful since I am alive; you are my own, and even were you not by any law in the calendar, you still should be, for I am a law unto myself."

Mingled with the passion in his face and eyes was a fierce exultation, almost savage in its defiance. He half smiled as he watched her, evidently expecting to see her shrink under his words.

She met his gaze quietly, with a conscious strength that made him feel he could not touch her heart. The thought lent new malignancy to his countenance as he listened to her answer.

"I have said we are henceforth nothing to each other. Even if I were not Mr. Lexington's wife, you would be as little to me. Even the tie our child would have been, is broken; she is dead."

A quivering of her lips told of that blow to her—a double blow, dealt by the hand of the best beloved on earth; Vincey saw the agitation, and sneered.

"It is a good thing. Babies ought to die when they are as snarling and as puny as I remember ours was. Let that pass."

His heartlessness stung her to the quick.

"Yes, let it pass, while I, her mother, tell you, her unworthy father, whom thou imitate, I would rather know dead—when I tell you, you have no possible claim on me. The laws of New York State granted me a full, free divorce a year after you deserted me. I have the document safe in my possession."

She looked at him with eyes full of conscious power, her magnificent figure proudly erect, one hand lying on the rustic oak table, displaying its perfect beauty and firmness.

A horrible oath burst from Vincey's lips.

"I heard it before; you need not think you tell me news, as you seem to delight in doing. Such I not just tell you I am a law unto myself! I swear it—that, though freed by your wonderful document, you are as much in my power as though you never owned it. Beautiful Georgia, do you think I shall stand calmly by and see your witchery, your charming fascination, and allow Lexington to be benefited by it?"

She shrank before the devil in his eye; then, arose from her chair, and drew her shawl over her shoulders.

"There is no need to prolong this useless interview, or to repeat it. I have shown you my position, which I never shall abandon. From the present moment, during which our paths have temporarily converged, they divide again, forever. From this moment our acquaintance ceases, and to me you are as you were twenty fours hours ago—dead."

The quiet dismissal goaded him into a perfect frenzy. He grasped her dainty wrist with a hard, iron grip, and fairly hissed in her ear, so fearful was his furious rage.

"I swear it shall not be so! By every hope you regard as sacred, I swear you shall repent this! I came to you, back from the dead, disposed to be conciliatory even after I had learned your falsity. I offer you my forgiveness, my affection—and you spurn me as if I was unfit the society of Mrs. Lexington, of Tanglewood! Now, I repudiate my offers, and in their place, I swear eternal vengeance. Instead of the friendship you reject, you shall accept my unsleeping hatred, you shall receive ten thousand curses! Go—go to your luxury, your aristocratic friends—and bear in your ears this undying echo—curse you!"
A little gasp of terror burst from her, so passionate was his fury, and she fled from the summer house in a sudden impulse of fear.

Vincy watched her up the startled path, his bloodshot eyes full of impotent fury.

"I'll compass heaven and earth before I'll let her go!"

The half-muttered words had just left his lips, when a dark figure entered the vine-covered doorway.

"Hello, Vincy! I'm just the man you want to see."

It was Frank Havelstock's voice, clear, joyous, yet full of subtle meaning.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CONSPIRATORS' COMPACT.

When Mr. Havelstock had lighted his cigar, and passed out the grand entrance, and into the quiet, starlighted grounds, there was an expression on his face that was different from any that had ever characterized it.

Every trace of his customary conscious solemnity of countenance was gone. There was no gladness, no light-heartedness, not even a trace of his bold, scheming looks in either face or eyes. Instead, was a malignancy, a perfect fury of rage, a wild, impotent powerlessness that made him look like a very Satyr.

He was paler than a corpse—he, whom no current passion had ever yet caused to pale, whose countenance habitually afforded a ruddy flush.

It was particularly striking—this dead-white pallor, by contrast with his jetty beard, his heavy eyebrows, his raven hair; while his eyes, usually bright, piercing, questioning in their expressive darkness, seemed fairly radiating a white light.

He walked down the high flight of marble steps, with his knees so trembling that he hardly was able to steady himself; his lips were quivering so convulsively that he flung away his newly-lighted cigar, a frightful oath coming from his mouth, as he fairly grit his teeth in a speechless rage. He struck off from the main path, plunging into a copse of thick, dark evergreens, that would have completely hidden him at noonday; arrived at the center, amid the deep gloom, the ghostly stillness, the intense loneliness, he flung himself on the cool, green grass, at full length, his face buried in his hands, his figure as motionless as if he were dead.

That was a strange vigil he kept, alone with the night, while he gave full vent to all his mad imaginations; while he thought of Ethel, in the sweet, wifely trustfulness, who was waiting for him in the home where she had been so happy.

To the memory of her pure, high bred face, her dainty refined ways, cut him like a knife; and at the same instant a wild tremor of brutal wrath seized him as he realized what he had lost simply for that—

Half of Tanglewood! half of heaven, it seemed to him, as he lay there, fairly writhing in mad disappointment as he thought what he had lost. Wealth, position, ease, luxury beyond measure; the very thing he had set himself to win, but so differently.

The tedious waiting, the subtle plotting all dispensed with, and, instead, such a prize held out to him, for him to take.

"Was ever man so cursed as I? Have all the fends of the pit been let loose to draw me into this infernal net? Oh! the blessed fool I have made myself; all for a girl's pretty face—curse her!"

His voice was husky as he uttered the malediction, that no ears heard but his own. Then he sprang up, like a tiger disturbed in his lair, and paced restlessly to and fro on the cool, green grass that he trampled so recklessly over.

"Half of it all!—owner of all I can see when I stand in the door and look from zenith to horizon! and just lost! barely lost! curse her!"

The hissing words were fearful to hear; he clenched his hands till the long, almond nails made pruple dents in the palms; he muttered terrible imprecations, pacing to and fro with hasty, aimless strides; his eyes burning with a deep glow; his lips almost foaming with the uncontrollable fury that had taken possession of him.

"Lose it? Give it up, the one chance of my life-time. I'd sell my soul first. A thousand maledictions on my foolish stupidness for being inveigled into a marriage by a pair of dark eyes! Married? Not a soul in this world knows that but Ethel and the clergyman!"

His reason, his intellect began to emerge from the dense cloud of wrath that had enveloped them, and as a consequence he grew calmer, and was able to gather together his scheming wits.

He walked to and fro more calmly, for another half-hour, and at length, still pale, still bearing distinct traces of his inward tempest, he emerged from the copse, and walked slowly down the path Georgia had taken. As he neared the summer-house he heard voices, and it instantly recurred to him that he had seen Georgia when he left the house, so that in all probability it was she who was in the summer-house.

But with whom? He trod softly as he neared the vine-covered casement at the rear; he stepped lightly over the loose twigs until he gained a position where he commanded both sight and hearing; where he listened with keen relish to the interview between Carleton Vincy and his divorced wife; and from which spot he had suddenly appeared to Vincy after Georgia's departure.

The brilliant starlight was sufficient to en-
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He spoke with an air of conscious assurance that fairly thrilled Havelstock.

Vincent went on, "If you will help me get Georgia Lexington in my power again—if you will assist me to wreak my revenge on her—I will point out your way, step by step, till you reach the very topmost rung of the ladder you want to climb."

"I swear I will," returned Havelstock, quickly. "Now, the plan?"

So, sitting there in the silent, solemn noon of night, the two men laid their devilish plot to destroy Ethel Havelstock's happiness—sweet, innocent Ethel, who that very moment lay sleeping with one hand under her pink cheek, dreaming of the time when her husband should return.

CHAPTER XX.
A DASTARD'S ACT.

The cool summer afternoon was nearly over, and already fresh, lifeful breezes were blowing refreshing, even in New York, where the day had been remarkably pleasant and invigorating. Up in Harlem the little children, freshly bathed and dressed in their white, cool suits, were playing in the different door-yards, and Ethel Havelstock, her own pleasant duties completed, and herself dressed in a newly-launched blue lawn, stood in the side window of her house, watching the frolic of the children, and laughing with them, in the fullness of the joy in her heart.

She looked so passing fair in her sweet, half-bride-like, half-maturely dignified, pale, refined face lighted with such beaming radiance, her dark, glowing eyes wearing a perfect happiness in their brave, proud glances.

Everything was so pleasant to her; her charming little home, over which she presided with a quiet grace that could not have been equaled by a duchess in her castle. Frank had been so lavish of all the little dainties and luxuries that suited her fine nature so well, and as she looked around her little parlor, as neat as hands could render it, and bearing in every detail, from the position of the gay Persian ottomans, to the hanging-baskets between the gracefully-flapped lace curtains, the impress of a woman's artistic touch, Ethel's heart gave great bounds of rapturous delight as she thought Frank had done it all—Frank, her lover, her husband, her lord and master.

This afternoon she was expecting a letter, without doubt. Her husband had been at Tanglewood a week, and although he had sent no word as yet, Ethel had found a thousand excuses for his tardiness. Until today: just a week from the day of his departure, when she certainly did look for her letter.

The thought had had But gossamer wings to the hours of that bright sunshine day. She had risen early and taken her customary walk.
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before she prepared her lonely, tasty breakfast; after which she had put her house in exquisite order, and then sat down to her music for a long practice.

There were many new songs—Danks', Milbands', and others, that Frank seemed to have ordered with an especial admiration for the subject discussed in them all—love; and Ethel sung them in her sweet, pure voice, with an earnestness that made her cheeks glow.

As yet, she had not allowed herself to be lonesome, and not once had she permitted herself to recall the reproach she had felt the day her husband had gone away, leaving her at home.

She was very happy, because of perfect trust and content, and in her trust and content she stood in the lace-draped bay window watching the little children at play, and waiting for the approach of the letter-carrier, whose gray uniform was already distinguishable a block off, as, with his satchel slung over his shoulder, and a pile of letters in his hand, he called at house after house, nearing her at every call. She was very impatient, in her own dainty way, that she manifested by quick tapping of her slipped foot, and by the light and eagerness that leaped to her wistful eyes. Ethel knew he would never reach her door—and she in such delicious unrest to get the letter from his hands that little knew the preciousness of the burden they carried so carelessly.

It was her first love-letter—this doubly-dear missive from her lover-husband; it would be so full of affectionate utterances and assurances of faith and loyalty that would brighten the afternoon as if an electric light had suddenly come into a dark place.

Her silent, loving theories had absorbed her for one little moment of time; then, she looked up, certainly expecting to see the postman with hand extended, bearing precious freight.

Instead—she started with a thrill of positive physical pain as she saw, with eyes that almost refused to believe, that he had passed her house, and was already in the next side-yard handing a yellow-enveloped missive to a burly, blushing Irish cook, who, like dainty Ethel, had been waiting.

She turned from the window, a sick pain at her heart, her lips quivering, her eyes filling with tears, and sat down, almost wearily, in her sewing-chair, and took up a garment she was making.

She was so disappointed, and as she told herself, half-indignantly, over such a trifle as failing to receive a letter by a certain delivery, when there were two a day, too.

Frank had written, in all probability, and perhaps missed the first mail after, so that the next would bring it with more assured certainty. Ethel determined to wait patiently until the morning mail, and then wondered why she did not resume her wonted quiet happiness of feeling, as she sat and sewed; wondered that so small a disappointment had power to weigh her spirits down, as they certainly were bowed.

She didn't know it was not the fulfilling of her fond expectations that depressed her; she had no idea that her sadness arose from the foreshadowing of an inevitable fate whose first gloom was gathering at her feet—whose first unconscious blow was this very disappointment.

She sat for an hour, perhaps, sewing with thoughtful, yet mechanical industry, feeling just a little lonely and homesick for the sound of Frank's voice, the presence of his dear face. She was in no mood for the delightful little supper of strawberry short-cake she had prepared that morning; and so she sat there and waited for the swift, oncoming doom. And it came, just at the sunsetting in a very ordinary way—as all of life's tragedies come, in the beginning—and was only heralded by the ringing of the door-bell.

Ethel laid down her work and went to the door, quiet, unexpectant, fair as a lily in her proud, pure sweetness—so soon to be a lily with bowed petals and storm-tossed leaves, and wind-torn stalk.

A rather stout man bowed very courteously as he raised his straw hat; a man whose appearance bore indications of intelligence and worldly ease, whose manner was rather possessing than otherwise, despite his deeply-flushed face, a flush that seemed habitual, and the evident admiration that looked from his deep-set eyes.

"Have I the honor of addressing Mrs. Frank Havelstock?"

It was a voice that made a curious impression upon Ethel, and in the instant that elapsed before she answered, she thought how pleasant a voice his must be to any one whom he knew who cared to listen to it. Then natural wonderment at his presence usurped every other feeling.

"I am Mrs. Havelstock. You—"

She paused, in courteous questioning, her sweet, grave eyes watching him.

"I am Carleton Vincy, madam, a friend of—of—your—husband."

He hesitated strangely, this man who did not look to be aught but fluent in his language. A vague uneasiness instantly crept over Ethel.

"He is not at home, or I presume he would be pleased to see a friend of his. If you have a message I will convey it to him where he is visiting."

Vincy's face was growing more and more pitifully grave. He looked at the young girl with eyes that expressed tenderest commiseration.
"My dear Mrs. Havelstock, I am awkward, I fear, but I am the bearer of news I dread to break, and—" Ethen suddenly shivered from crown to foot-sole; her dark eyes dilated with vague, piteous horror.

"Come in, quickly. I think I am at a loss to understand your meaning."

She preceded him to the pretty little parlor, and motioned him to a seat, she remaining standing, just before him.

He gently declined the proffered chair, and remained standing, as did she, his hat in his hand, his face grave, his attitude that of a man who is burdened with a bitter trouble, who dreads to communicate what he knows he can not avoid.

All gladness, almost all youthfulness seemed to have fled from Ethel's white face as she stood and waited.

"You come from Frank? He is ill, hurt, perhaps dying? Don't spare me, Mr. Vincy, I beg of you. I can be brave and strong."

He leant so pitifully down on her trembling figure, her face paled with the insupportable horror of suspense.

"I came direct from Mr. Havelstock, my dear child; he is not ill, or suffering from an accident. Can you bear it?"

He paused again, as if in a pitifulness too deep for utterance. Ethel stepped near him, in a gesture of sharp, almost angry impatience.

"I command you to tell me—the worst."

Her voice was almost inaudible as she whispered the last words.

"It is the worst—Frank is dead, my poor, widowed young friend."

He extended his hands as if he feared Ethel would fall; but there only ensued a moment of frightful silence, when all her crushing agony rolled its billows over her young head; when she stood, as if turned to stone, staring with whitening lips and appalled eyes straight into Carlston Vincy's face—all her horror, all her grief plainly photographed on her sweet, anguished face.

Then a low, sepulchral sound issued from her lips that did not move as she said the awful word.

"Dead!"

No tears, no outcry, no moan—only this stony, horrid petrifaction of grief.

"It was very sudden—very pitiful, considering the circumstance of his recent marriage. I assure you every effort was made to save him; you can rely on my own word for that. I was with him when the melancholy accident occurred—"

"Accident? you did not say that. He was killed—my darling?"

She gazed at him in a bewildered way as she spoke, in low, wearied tones, still standing erect as a marble statue, before him.

"It was while bathing, last Tuesday. We met, very accidentally, and Frank proposed a run down to the shore for a few hours. In the surf he must have been seized with cramps, for he suddenly shrieked for help, and sunk before any one, even myself, could give him any assistance."

Ethen crept across the floor with lagging steps, and fell prone on the sofa, her face buried in her hands.

"Do I harrow your feelings too much, my dear madam? I will gladly spare you the recital."

"Go on."

Her low command was full of painful courage. Vincy smiled oddly at her bowed head, then went on, in his low, sympathetic voice.

"All our efforts proved futile; we even failed to secure the body until late last night—"

A scream burst from Ethel's lips, and she raised her wild, haggard face.

"And I was looking for a letter! and he lying under the waves! Oh, Frank, Frank, my darling, what business have I to be here, in this dear home where you placed me, and you—dead—dead—drowned?"

"It is an inscrutable Providence, madam, as difficult to understand as painful to contemplate. It is particularly painful, since you must be denied even the poor privilege of seeing his remains. They were in the water so long, that on my own responsibility, I ordered them conveyed to Greenwood at once. You will pardon me, madam, when you calmly think of it."

A shudder crept over Ethel's frame as she crouched on the sofa. Awful visions arose before her, and she realized at once, the delicacy and kindness of Mr. Vincy's office.

"At Tanglewood they are in deep sorrow—he was a very dear friend and relative of Mr. Lexington, as you, of course, know. Even they were deprived of the same privilege of paying the last tribute to his memory."

Vincy had taken a seat by this time, and was regarding Ethel with an interest unusual with him. He scrutinized her beautiful head, bowed like a broken flower; her floating, luxuriant hair, on which a stray sunset beam slanted, as if in silent benediction; at her dainty hands, wet now, with freely flowing tears, at the short, round arm, perfect as a Venus."

There was a curious red gleam in his eyes, and under his mustache an expression of grim satisfaction as he waited several minutes for Ethel to speak.

"You are very kind. I thank you, for—for his sake."

She arose from the low, crouching position into which his news had seemed to literally crush her, her face wearing an expression of utter desolation; her great, dark eyes burn-
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ing like smouldering coals of fire, whose haun-
ing wistfulness troubled Carleton Vincy for many a day after that one. And on
"I have simply done my duty—as I would
expect a friend of mine to do for me under sim-
ilar circumstances."

A little smile fled across his face as he
thought of circumstances as they actually ex-
ested; then he drew several papers from his
pocket—copies of the Herald, World, Sun,
Tribune, and laid them gently on her lap.
"You will find accounts of the accident
there, Mrs. Havelstock, of course, strictly ex-
aggerated in some particulars, somewhat in-
correct in one or two trifling instances. As a
specimen of the fallibility of a news report,
you will see in every paper, your husband's
name is differently announced, while in none
is it precisely correct. However, since poor
Frank sleeps in peace, it makes no material
difference."

She took the papers, mechanically, and read
the marked notices he showed her, in one of
which to her heart's expense, her Havel-
estow, in another "Frank Havelstock," while
another, in eloquent imagery, portrayed the
untimely death "of the talented young Ger-
man Havelfrank."

Vincy watched her closely as she read them
all—those notices that proved her widowhood.
She folded the papers wearily, when she con-
cluded.
"I would like to keep them all. It is
strange they are so incongruous, but I suppose
that is the way with all news, if we had the
opportunity of knowing the actual facts."

Vincy's eyes glowed delightedly, but his
voice was low and unexcited as he replied.
"There was no Associated Press reporter on
hand, I presume, or the papers would have
published the same report. As it is, it is really
of little consequence. And now, my dear
young lady, that my painful business is over,
allow me to ask you, in Frank's name, what
you shall do? Can I be of use? Do not hesi-
tate to confide to me the fullest extent of
your necessity, or my ability."

She bowed with a grave dignity that was
more touching from her very desolation.
"I thank you, Mr. Vincy, with all my
heart. I shall have to think upon my future be-
fore I decide what I shall do. For the pre-
sent, I am provided for, as this house is ren-
sped for a month yet, and was paid for in ad-
vance. I have about three hundred dollars of
my own money that I had when I was mar-
rried."

She gave him the pitiful particulars with an
unshrinking courage he could not but admire.
"There were only fifty or so dollars in
Frank's pock money, we have secured that, and
here it is. You will need it, poor child."
Her lips quivered; she essayed to smile, but
it was more touching than grief.

"Please don't pity me, Mr. Vincy, I must
get used to this sorrow the best I can. I am
young, healthy and brave, and I shall not die
of a broken heart, keenly as I feel the blow.
People must endure, you know?"
"You are right; you are a sensible woman,
and I see you can manage your own affairs."
He laid the roll of bills on her lap beside
the papers, then took his hat, as if to go.
Very gently, Ethel handed him back the
money.
"This must go toward the expenses in-
curred in—"
She could not finish the sentence, but began
freshly.
"It must have at least that much money—please let me feel he was no expense
to any one."

Vincy looked at her a moment, an honest ad-
mirations in his eyes—perhaps the purest, most
manly emotion he had ever been conscious of.
As he looked at her in all the sacredness of her
grief, all the bravery of her womanhood, all
the high honor of her perfect nature, there
came to him an impulse almost too strong
for even him to resist; an impulse to bring
back the gladsomeness to her beautiful young
face, the smiles to her sad, drooping mouth,
evem at the expense of his own character, and
the oath he had sworn to Ethel's husband.
Only a second of the utmost uncertainty of
the whole thing occurred to him—the almost impossibility of retracting a step he had
taken. He remembered all he had at stake,
in return for this very act, and others—and
the one good impulse died a very natural
death.
He took back the money silently and bade
Ethel good-by, in a gravely cheerful way, and
left her to her sorrow—the lone girl, who had
not a breast in the wide world to weep on; be-
tween whom and the dismal future no arm
was extended.

CHAPTER XXI.
A CONFEERENCE ON THE WAY.
As the door closed behind Carleton Vincy—
the door of the house to which he had brought
such utter desolation, a smile of positive re-
lief crossed his face. He lifted his hat, and
wiped the big drops of sweat from his fore-
head with the manner of a man who has suc-
cessfully made a tremendous effort.
He walked rapidly to the corner where he
hired a car, and as he hurried further away
every second, realized perfectly that he had ac-
complished his part of the business with won-
derful ease and haste; that there was only left
deftly a congenial task of dealing with
Georgia Lexington just as pleased him.
That ride was a memorable one to Carleton
Vincy. One is never so much alone as when
in a crowd, and he realized it to be so, as he
saw none but strange faces around him, all the
way down to the pier from which the boat left for Tanglewood. Somehow Ethel's face haun-
ted him—so overflowing with anguish, so per-
fect in its pitiful bravery. Her wistful eyes were haunting him like ghosts—those beau-
tiful eyes to which he had called tears that flowed until they drained the very fountain of

grief. Was it because his vile touch had uns-
alred that spring of tears, because even his
calloused conscience throbbed under her
womanly honor and mingled sorrow and cour-
age, or, was there some other reason, whose
very inexplicability puzzled him, that would
not let him banish her from his thoughts.

Even now and alone his gloating delight
that Georgia was still more surely in his power
on account of his alliance with Havelstock
whom he knew was a potent friend was the
memory of the girl's face, the sweet gravity of
her manner, the tender dignity with which
she refused his assistance.

So he rode along, his hat drawn over his
eyes, his hands thrust in his pockets—this man
whom people had heard of as dead and buried,
years ago, whom people had forgotten even
the memory of—this fiend incarnate, whose
sole mission in life was to torment and make
bitter as wormwood the already bitter life
of one fair woman.

* At the slip, Vincy left the car, and went
directly aboard the boat, that was just with-
drawing her gang-plank as he stepped on deck
—to meet Frank Havelstock, leaning lazily
over the guards smoking a cigar with as keen
a relish as though he had not been waiting for
his agent in as deliberate and devilish a sin as
man ever committed before committed.

"Well—safety back?"
Havelstock put the significant question,
looking Vincy keenly in the face.

"Safely back"—an answer slightly empha-
sized, and fully as significant. It conveyed
the whole story, and none of a dozen by-
standers who heard it would have guessed all
those few, apparently careless words implied.

Havelstock took out his cigar-case—a dainty,
bronze velvet affair, with his monogram em-
broidered in brown silk upon it—the loving
handiwork of Ethel, who had made it during
the peaceful time when he was nearer good-
ness than he ever would be again; Vincy ac-
cepted a cigar, lighted it, and the two strolled
leisurely through the boat, to the after deck,
that was comparatively deserted.

They drew a couple of camp-stools near
the guards, on which they sat themselves; the
cool breezes blowing freshly over them, the
lowering sun sending slanting red gleams over
their heads—these two leagued in such unholy
compact.

"And now—tell me all. What did she say
—how did she take it?"

Havelstock knocked off a pile of foamy
ashes as he put the question, whose very in-
tent coldness, eager curiosity betrayed thor-
oughly the depraved nature he was so apt at
hiding under the specious garb of his personal
attraction, society-polish of manner, and an
intelligence and aesthetic refinement that was
all the more terrible because of the power it
gave him to commit his wickedness.

"Well?"—and Vincy settled himself more
comfortably against the network of the guard,
and crossed his feet on the camp-stool in front
of him—"she's a little brick. Upon my word,
Frank, I never came so near making a fool of
myself in all my life. Such eyes!—I can for-
give you for forgetting everything else in the
world."

Havelstock smiled serenely.

"Yes, Ethel's eyes are very handsome—they
conquered me without any terms of mercy.
Poor little girl! I know it half-killed her."

"It did that. For a moment, when I an-
nounced the awful news, I thought she was
dying, standing straight up, too. I could see
nothing but eyes—big, shiny fires, that seemed
to me would sear the me through. I tell you I
felt uneasy, Frank, that's a fact. I never saw
anything like it, except once, when I struck
Georgia's young one, to stop its squalling; I
remember she gave me about such a look, that
I've thought of since more than once."

"What did you tell her?—the story we
agreed upon? And you showed her the news-
paper accounts?"

"I told her in a very few well-chosen words
the sad story of your death by drowning, and the
fact of your interment at Greenwood. I
showed her the Herald, Tribune and Sun, each
of which contained the accounts I myself wrote,
the discrepancies of which reports I explained
on strictly scientific principles."

"And she never suspected anything by the
slight differences of name?"

"Nothing—nothing at all. Of course, there
was the greatest difficulty in our way, as your
real name in print would have alarmed your
friends. Happily, that danger is averted over."

"And now for Ida Wynne, and half of the
kingdom. By the by, you told her Tangle-
wood deployed my untimely demise?"

"Of course, although I have wondered since
if that was a cautious move. I told her to
keep her from going to the Lexingtons for
further information. The fact of their being
in mourning would deter her, you know. But
it occurs to me later, will not the effect be
contrariwise? will not Mrs. Havelstock return
home because she will be nearer your relations
—or from a romantic idea of living near where
you were known last in the flesh?"

Havelstock's lips curled in a sneer.

"You are not so good a judge of character
as I supposed you if you think for a moment
that Ethel Maryl would stoop to such a mea-
sure. She will stand up for herself in joy or
trouble, and never descend to return home, or
ask the smallest favor at the hands of my people. She would starve before she would do that or return to Mrs. Lawrence."

"There is one assurance you can rest in, and that is that she is fully competent to take care of herself. Have you any idea what she will do?"

Havelstock threw his cigar-stump into the waves, and looked carefully at it before he replied.

"Frankly, I do not have the slightest idea. I know she could teach music, or sew, or take a position in a store in almost any capacity."

"It need not concern you. The bond is effectually severed between you, and the chances are that your paths in life will never run counter. She will be a poor, struggling girl, working hard for her own living, wearing her robe of black mockery, until, in time, she consents to be comforted again; and you, even your name lost in that of Lexington, the corner of the magnificent estate of Tanglewood, that nest of the rich and charming Miss Wymne, with your summers divided between Saratoga, Newport and your estate, and your winters between receptions, dinners, operas—is it in the bounds of probability that you will ever meet?"

There was a sarcastic pitifulness in Carleton Vincy's words and tone, as he drew the true picture of their two lives—Havelstock's and the innocent, wronged girl he had so wickedly deserted—that made Frank regard him with honest surprise.

"You are not yourself; has anything happened to sour your temper?"

Vincy laughed, harshly.

"Nothing, I assure you. Only, I declare I can't forget those pitious, tearful eyes."

"You're a fool, Vincy. If I, whom she loved with an intensity you may imagine, can throw her over without any particular qualms, I think you might spare me any dramatic conscientiousness."

There was a contemptuous severity in Havelstock's voice, and a cynical sneer in his eyes that effectually silenced Vincy, who, for ten thousand worlds would not have lost Havelstock's powerful assistance regarding his affairs. So he answered, prefacing his words with a half laugh:

"You're right, Havelstock; I am a fool; but not the first who has been made so by a woman's eyes."

A long, thoughtful silence fell on them. Around them were merry voices, gay laughter, and the innocent mirth of glad-hearted children. The diamond spray dashed against the sides of the steamboat; the peaceful green banks seemed gliding by, in a silent, phantom march, overhead the sky was one speckless arch of vividdest blue, and as the evening gathered softly, slowly, and occasional lights sparkled from elegant residences along the river, it seemed as if the very hush of the sweet summer night thundered its disapproval on those two men's heads, as they hurried along, to forge other links in the chain of fate with which they should essay to bind their victims.

At the little dock near Tanglewood they found the Lexington carriage waiting. Frank jumped in, bidding Vincy a hearty good-night; while Vincy walked along toward the tavern, filled with bitter thoughts of Georgia, nestled amid all the luxury and pomp of Tanglewood—Georgia, his wife.

"Curses on her proud head, that I will bring to the very dust!"

He muttered the words as he glanced toward the spacious building, majestic in its massive splendor, that covered her threatened head.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE DISMANTLED HOME.

At the time when Carleton Vincy and Frank Havelstock were smoking their cigars on the after-deck of the "Queen of the Twilight," Ethel was sitting in her little parlor, precisely as her guest had left her, with the papers lying at her feet, whither they had slidden from her trembling hands. Her head was leaned against the cushioned back of the ›te-tete‹, and her upturned face was whitely still. Her great, dark eyes burned like twin coals of sorrow, and sharp, sudden pain; her golden hair clung lovingly to her neck and shoulders as she sat there, so white, so still, in the darkness that lowered over the city streets.

Outside, the street-lamps glowed like evil eyes through the gloom; she saw the one near, and opposite her door, and thought, with a thrill of numbing pain, that it never again would light his footsteps home. She heard the tread of occasional passers-by, and realized there was no one, in all the wide world, to come to her—the only one she ever had cared for was lying so still, so far away.

Her feet seemed chained to the floor, her body pinned to the sofa, so utterly powerless to move she was; and so she sat there—rather crouched there—hour after hour, with her cold hands lying limply on her lap, her dazed brain trying to comprehend all the strength of her affliction.

The little French clock struck nine, and ten, and eleven; the whole house was in total darkness; a dreary silence was brooding over the deserted streets and locked-in houses; and yet she sat there, in all the pangs of her widowhood, the victim of a man's foulest conspiracy; as truly a sufferer as if her dead lay at her feet.

Finally she arose, totteringly, and with her trembling fingers lighted a lamp, that seemed only to make the darkness more visible. She went mechanically around the house, as was her custom, closing and fastening windows,
and seeing that every thing was in perfect or-der, and in readiness for morning.

Then she dragged herself up-stairs to her bed-room, put the little night-lamp on the mantelpiece, and sat down again, in the large bamboo chair Frank liked to lounge in before he retired.

So desolate!—oh, so desolate! She drooped her head on her hands, and commenced another weary, heart-rending vigil—this young girl, with not a friend in the world to go to, to sympathize with her, or to advise, or to ass-ist her.

All that lonely night Ethel never thought of undressing or retiring; all those long, awfully-lonesome hours she sat there, staring her heart full in the face, and making up her mind what to do—since weeping and moaning were not the ways in which she manifested her grief.

With dawn, she was weary, haggard, unre-freshed; but she bravely took up the burden of life again, although her feet tottered at every step, and her head ached with a dumb sickness that was the very essence of intensity.

She bathed, and made a fresh, simple toilet, then went quietly down-stairs, and prepared her breakfast; and if her heart bounded fiercely at sight of the vacant place never more to be occupied, she made no outward sign beyond a compressing of her lips, or a look of keener anguish in her sad eyes.

She had resolved to waste not a moment—for two reasons. One, she felt the necessity of immediate action in order to save, if possi-ble, her little hoard intact; the other, she knew that sorrow preyed most cruelly on un-employed minds, and she felt she never could bear her burden in the silence and desolation of her own home.

Her first act, after clearing away the scarce tasted meal, and leaving her house in perfect order, was to collect her money, her few little valuables: and secure them in her trunk—her sole worldly possessions could be contained therein. Then, she changed her dress for a black one—she had so many of them, that she had only laid aside at her husband's earnest request—put on her modest little cashmere sacque, her black straw hat, trimmed with plain net, and a jaunty, glossy-black wing, and started on her first walk into the ways of the world.

Her first walk, and all alone! It occurred to her, with a sharp thrill of pain that made her heart throb, her lips quiver, as she turned the key in the front door after she left it, and walked down the street.

She took a car that carried her to a street far down-town, to a number she wanted—an auc-tioneer's shop, where she made arrange-ment for disposing of several articles of furniture Frank had bought, in addition to that hired with the house. Afterward, she walked to the office of the real estate agent who rented the house, and gave it up, promising the keys in a day or so, the rent of the unexpired month serving instead of a notice.

Then her immediate business was done, and she returned to the forlornly-lonely house that had been such a paradise to her, to be in readiness when the second-hand dealer came to carry away her few goods; that tore her heart so freshily to part from, and yet, that judge-ment told her would be useless for her to at-tempt to afford to keep.

She went out in the small back flower-gar-den, over which she had spent many happy half-hours, and gathered all the flowers that were in bloom—great creamy roses, fragrant as Arabby's spice-laden zephyrs; double-leaved carnations, pink as a coral; sprays of dainty, lemon-hued woodbine, and leaves off her thifty geranium trees.

She tied them into a loose nosegay, then took them up-stairs and put them in her trunk, crushing them among the delicate linen and lace until their sweetness stole out in a perfect burden of perfume.

It was all she could take—the only token of her idyl that had been so short, so blissful. It was all that was left her—a bunch of flowers, crushed, bruised, like she was herself; and, like the flowers, although she was unconscious of it, she was giving out rarest perfumes of courage, womanly dignity, and piteous resigna-tion.

She turned to leave the scene—so sacred to her, because of its associations; she looked slowly around, with a sort of yearning fond-ness in her eyes, as if saying a mute good-bye to the familiar objects. Then, as her glance rested on the pillow Frank's head had pressed so often—his handsome head, with its curling black hair—she darted forward, with a low, inarticulate cry of pain, and threw herself, in a perfect abandon of uncontrollable anguish, on the low, white-draped bed.

She laid her golden head on his pillow, with a touch that of itself was fondest caressing. She kissed it over and over, between sobbing calls of his name, and frantic prayers for his return. She strained it to her breast, in a tight, fierce grasp, as she would have done her darling himself if he could only have come back to her; and the while her hot face flushing, her scalding tears welling faster and fast-er, until in a perfect tempest of uncontrollable agony, she sunk exhausted to her knees, her head bowed, drooping, where he had lain.

And at that very time, he for whom she wept and suffered was driving through Tan-glewood's fairest places, looking into Ida Wynne's eyes with an intensity that made her blood tingle as it pulsed through her veins!

CHAPTER XXIII.

LUCIFER EXPLODES HIS MINE.

If ever man had opportunity for proving
the truth of the adage that "Satan never de-
terts his own," that man was Frank Havel-
stock, whose evil designs had flourished even
beyond his expectations, and whose pathway
was through flower-sown sweetness every
step of the way, from the moment he had
turned the balance in favor of his wicked-
ness, and deliberately decided upon his future,
until now, a week after the day Carleton Vinc-
ey had declared her widowhood to Ethel, when
Havelstock was playing the ardent suitor to
Ida Wynne in a manner that left no doubt
in every one's mind that they would very
shortly assume the relation of a betrothed
pair.
Ida was very happy—as much so as a girl
of her rather shallow capacity could be. She
adored her handsome, stylish, graceful, well-
dressed lover because he was handsome, stylist,
graceful, and well-dressed.
She did not measure him intellectually, be-
cause her own resources in that direction were
vastly inferior to his; she never dreamed of
criticizing him morally, because her own mo-
rnal character was so perfectly unimpeachable
she gave no particular heed to his. Ida, there-
fore, with her little vanities, her very faults,
herself, her winning ways, her medium
intellectuality, glossed gracefully over by her
society manners, her elegant indifference that
not one person in a hundred would have ac-
cepted for the ignorance it really was—was
easily won by a man like Frank Havelstock,
who, aside from personal qualities that could
attract Ethel Maryl, had bent all the
mighty force of his bold, unscrupu-
lous nature to secure her.
He had been so wonderfully successful so
far. Carleton Vincy had proved himself an
invaluable ally, who had accomplished the
grand task of severing the ties between himself
and his wife.
At Tanglewood, not a soul suspected the
double game he was playing. Lexington was
still the same ardent, enthusiastic friend, de-
lighted with the success of Frank with Ida,
and making the approaching engagement the
one object of his life.
Georgia was a silent observer of the exis-
ting state of affairs, and the confidante, per-
force, of Ida. Only once had she attempted to
dissuade the girl from her strong infatuation,
and was met with such a torrent of passionate
reply that she had inwardly vowed never to
repeat the offense.
She had done it so kindly, too, with a per-
fect disinterestedness for the hot-headed girl's
welfare—a pitiful affection that sprang out of
her own bitter experiences; and the result had
been fatal to her own self in a degree she nev-
er dreamed of—for Ida had repeated Mrs.
Lexington's sweet persuasions, in her own em-
bellished way, to her lover, and he, in his
quiet, forcible manner, had spoken very casu-
ally of it to Mr. Lexington, with such addi-
tions as he thought necessary.
As usual, he contrived to inflame Theodore
anew against Georgia, while he conveyed the
impression that he was the mutual friend of
both; and at the same time, rejoiced only as
he saw the gradual widening and deepening
of the gulf between them, that his own hands
might have bridged so easily.
All this while, while Lexington between his
passionate love for Georgia, that refused to be
subjugated, his overweening pride, that could
not admit of forgiveness on his part—while
Georgia was enduring torments compared to
which, her previous misery had been intensest
pleasure—while she was living in daily, hour-
ly horror of Carleton Vincy's sudden appear-
ance, thereby aggravating affairs beyond pos-
sible hope of repair; while Ida Wynne was
dreaming her bright, girlish visions of a bliss-
ful future as Frank Havelstock's wife; while
Ethel was bravely, almost stubbornly fight-
ing the somber fate that hit her so hard, and
was living entirely on the memory of a few
weeks of Heaven on earth—all this the
prime mover in all these affairs, the fiend In-
carnate who was bringing such desolation
wherever his unhallowed presence came, was
resting in the security of his own strength and
power, feeling assured that the victory
would be his, because of the master he
served.
It was one of the peculiarities of this man,
that he had no conscience. By a series of
abuse, he had so seared and calloused all his
perceptions of right and wrong that the time
had come when he never felt regrets. He had
crossed the "dead line," beyond which there
was no moral recovery from the disease of sin.
He had come to that point in his destiny that
we, every one of us, reach one time or anot-
er, that is the turning point; where we have
given us the last, solemn choice between good-
ness and evil, between purity and wickedness,
between hope and despair eternal. He had
come with deliberate feet to the spot that
marked his destiny, and—crossed the dead
line, over which there was no returning; over
which, one's feet were urged downward, down-
ward to eternal ruin, as surely and fatefullty
as Doom itself.
So he felt no remorse when he thought of
Ethel, as he frequently did; he never pictured
her inevitable anguish of mind, the terrible
slaughter of her intense affections. Or, if he
did casually think of such a state of affairs, it
was with a selfish satisfaction in his own abil-
ity to produce such keen emotions.
He found himself occasionally making com-
parison between Ethel and Ida—never favor-
able to Miss Wynne; and once or twice, for a
brief second, there occurred to him a longing
for Ethel's kisses, the sound of her voice, the
clinging embrace of her arms. That was all
VIALS OF WRATH.

—an almost impalpable tie to what had been his good angel, but whose influence, that would have been his salvation, he had destroyed forever.

He had resolved to at once commence his courtship of the girl who would be the means of giving such a grudging prize in his hands; and, although with his usual prudence and shrewdness he had no intention of acting precipitately, he was equally determined to let no grass grow beneath his feet.

He rather enjoyed his position at Tanglewood. He knew by Lexington's own admission that everything was in readiness regarding the transfer of a portion of the estate, only awaiting signature to render Frank Havelstock an independent moneymaker. He knew that Ida was to be had for the asking, consequently enjoyed disappointing her until he was entirely ready to be accepted; so, while his own personal affairs were precisely as he desired them, and needed no supervision of his own, he took advantage of the opportunity to further his designs on Georgia's happiness, by keeping his promise to Carlston Vincy, in return for favors well done.

Havelstock knew the proposed tactics of Vincy to the letter. He knew that Vincy, while he had been obliged to admit the truth of the fact that Georgia Lexington was as legally Lexington's wife as though he had himself been dead, and that therefore he had not the faintest shadow of a claim upon her; still the sight of her in all that magnificent beauty had fired anew whatever feeble admiration he had once entertained for her; while added to the fact that she had been his own, separable from him by his own hand, fully explained the motives that urged Vincy in his base attempts on the happiness of the woman he could reach in no other way. Havelstock knew that Vincy would be actuated by his unwarrantable admiration for Georgia fully as much as for the sake of passionate revenge through Georgia on the head of the man who was more fortunate than himself, and Havelstock, with his knowledge of all Vincy's intended movements, and by virtue of his position in the very heart of the fated family, had no difficulty in paving the way to still greater complications, still more yawning chasms.

For two or three days Havelstock had been biding his time with the wary patience of a tiger making ready to pounce on his unsuspecting victim. For the several days he had been sojourning at Tanglewood, he had been, by a series of thoughtful kindnesses and confidences, preparing Lexington's mind for the reception of the firebrand he intended to cast; and it seemed of a verity that Satan himself arranged matters convenient for Havelstock to improve.

One of those perfect afternoons it was, late in summer, when there is a delicious forecast of autumn days in the air, mingled with midsummer's delicious, ardent intoxication, and spring's fresh, bloomy coolness, the afternoon that Ethel left her dear old home for the last time, oppressed with such a sense of loneliness as almost crushed her—that Frank Havelstock and Mr. Lexington were sitting in the library, smoking friendly cigars, and enjoying to the full the exquisite beauty of the day that lent new charms to the landscape they could see for miles from the open windows.

Upon the long oval table that stood in the center of the room were the documents upon which Lexington had been so intently engaged since the day Frank had signified his assent to the terms offered; to the papers he had subscribed his name in full, flowing characters, so significant of his big heart, his grand nature, whose faults of pride, and jealousy and obstinacy were tiny blots when compared with the large generosity and staunch principles that governed him.

He had written his name and then threw down his pen with a half sigh that made Havelstock glance quickly at him.

"Don't misconstrue that, Frank," he explained, half warily. "I do not grudge a foot of ground or a cent of money I have relinquished by that one line; you know that. But I can't help it sometimes, I am so heart-sick, so utterly de-pairing when I realize what a blank my life is."

There came to his eyes a wistfulness Frank well understood; he reached his hand across the table and grasped Lexington's as if in perfect, pitiful sympathy.

"And you can yet forget yourself so far as to make another as happy as you have me! How strange it is that Georgia does not appreciate all your nobility of soul."

"And yet I am her inferior, Frank. She is perfect—perfect as an angel. Does it not seem strange to you that I feel so, while yet we are so terribly divided? I love her to distraction, and she must know it, and yet she is as cold as an iceberg."

"It is wrong—fearfully wrong. I have often thought of it, and much more than once decided to see her, and plead your cause with an eloquence the subject would lend. It kills me to see you so isolated, so ignored, while I am so happy through you."

Havelstock's tone was full of sympathy that touched Lexington to the heart.

"I am not utterly forsook while I have such a friend as you, Frank. You, and you only, know our pitiful secret, and to you only can I come for comfort, sympathy, advice. And advice I want, just here and now."

Frank gave him a sharp, questioning look. Was Lexington playing straight into his hands? He subdued the triumph that sprung to his sinister eyes, and awaited the question that came, in a half-hesitating voice, that betrayed Lexington's reluctance in asking it.
"Do you think, really think, Frank, that if I go to Georgia again, humbly, and offer her my love, my pardon, and beg hers, she will repulse me? Tell me honestly, Frank; hurt me if necessary."

Havelstock averted his face as if he wanted to hide the emotion he simulated to perfection; he made no answer for a moment; then, when he turned his face around again, Lexington saw signs of pity and sorrow, and stern decision on it.

"You have forced me to a position I hoped never to have occupied. Before heaven, Lexington, rather than tell you what I know—well, I will not!"

Lexington started up in his chair, his eyes shining with sudden passion under his contracted brows.

"Go on, Frank! I demand your meaning. What you have to say is not your fault or mine. Go on!"

His voice was strangely intense, and Havelstock saw the time was come to cast the firebrand that should make the flames of maddest jealousy burst into an unquenchable fire.

"Forgive me, then, when I tell you I have seen your wife meet her lover, at nearly midnight, in the summer-house yonder; I have heard words of passionate endearment; I have heard other appointments for the future. And that is why there is a gulf between you."

His low, tender, yet ringing words had only left his lips when Lexington’s head drooped to the table, a groan of anguish on his lips, his frame shivering like an aspen.

For a second there was deadly silence while Havelstock gazed over the stricken man in mute, well-concealed satisfaction. Then Lexington raised his head feebly.

"Frank, it has nearly killed me! Georgia false—Georgia false, when I would have staked my soul on her loyalty. I am, indeed, desolate! Frank—her lover—who is he?"

The positive torment in his soul failed to touch Havelstock; and yet he answered so earnestly, so kindly.

"That I do not know. I only caught a glimpse of a large, well-bearded man, dressed like a gentleman, with a voice denoting education and society usage. I remember his tones were very sweet. But, Lexington, I fear I have done an unwise thing. Are you sure I am forgiven? If you knew how I am pained to confess this terrible thing to you, you would wonder how I dared tell you."

"It is best for me to know, and I thank you for placing me where I can defend myself. Only leave me alone a little while."

He pressed Havelstock’s extended hand warmly, and then watched him leave the room with eyes that seemed dazzled with the scorching fires of jealousy, outraged, insulted love, and just indignation that blazed high and hot in his tortured heart.

And Havelstock walked leisurely down to the croquet ground, where Miss Wynne was practicing her strokes.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ADDING INSULT TO INJURY.

For hours after Havelstock left him alone in the library, Lexington walked the floor in an agony too great for motionless endurance. The suddenness of the blow, and coming as it did from the hand he knew so well, and trusted so implicitly, nearly drove him mad; his passionate worship of the woman who had blighted his life, was only equaled by the blinding horror with which he learned of her perfidy.

His heart was cut to its very core; he was attacked in every salient point by this astonishing news of Havelstock. His deep love was wounded to death; his fierce, unyielding pride outraged and insulted; his jealousy fired frightfully by the knowledge that Georgia vouched for another the favors he had begged in vain. It was not strange that he felt nearly insane as he paced the room, with quick, excited footsteps, as one phase of the affair presented itself; then, with lagging tread and bowed head as he realized the disgraceful shame that had come upon him.

An hour passed; two; three; Lexington heard Ida Wynne’s merry, girlish voice in laughing conversation; he heard the click of the croquet balls; and the grave, gentlemanly tones of Havelstock, who, conscious of the probability of scrutiny from the eyes in the library, preserved a half-sad demeanor, that was admirably intended to continue the impression his words had given.

Then there came a gentle rustle of skirts on the stairs, over the marble floor of the grand entrance hall, a heraldry of a presence by a faint perfume of wood violets—and then Mrs. Lexington passed the door of the library, that was partly ajar.

A bitter gloom darkened in Lexington’s eyes as she halted, half-hesitatingly, and looked in, her pure, sweet face wearing an expression of such wistful pleading, that was partly negated by the cold, quiet curl of her red lips.

She was dressed with her usual elegance of attire, and Lexington wondered if she ever had looked so fair as now in the dress of unrelied black lace, without ribbon or flower to lend brightness or color. Even her jewelry was of dull, dead gold, and yet she was radiant in her full flush of beauty; an angel in face and form; a devil at heart, Lexington said, as she bowed frigidly, and crossed the threshold.

A gentleman by instinct as well as by education, Lexington returned her salutation.

"Come in—you will find a seat by this window very pleasant."

He made an honest effort to appear courte-
ous, but there was an awful turmoil in his heart as he watched her sweep over the green carpet and then sink gracefully in the chair he had designated.

When she had seated herself he walked over to her and stood just before her, his grand face pale as death, his eyes glittering, and looking her full in the face.

For a moment their eyes met, a deep, ominous silence reigning; then, a groan, the very essence of the anguish of his spirit, came from Lexington's lips.

Georgia raised her brows in quick questioning.

"Mr. Lexington, you are not ill—in pain? You are, surely; let me assist you to a seat."

She seemed to just appreciate the deathly pallor of his face, and her own grew white with apprehension as she rose from her chair and reached her hand to his arm.

He waved her off with a gesture of almost impulsive impatience.

"Sit down, I am not sick. I wish to God I was, even to death. Sit down."

She obeyed, mechanically, while the hoarseness in his voice alarmed her more and more.

"Something is the matter. I beg you tell me."

He suddenly lowered his head so that their eyes were on a level, hers, half frightened, half pleading, in their lovely darkness, his lurid with the storm gathering over their heads.

"Something is the matter; something I would give all my worldly possessions to know is only a dream—a horrid dream. You know, Georgia, how awfully true it is."

He meant her perjury; she thought he meant the pitiful misunderstanding between them; and his strange words sent a new thrill of hope through every fiber of her being. Was a reconciliation coming at last, in God's mercy?

"Yes, I know it has been, as you say, awfully true; but let us regard this past as a dream, and let us awaken and begin anew. Theo, I am penitent to day—I, who vowed never to forgive you again, because you repulsed me so."

She stepped nearer him, her eyes flashing with a delicious expectancy, a half-trembling smile on her pleading lips. He gazed at her as if drinking in every feature of her wonderful beauty; stared at her with his gloomy eyes until she dropped her own in sheer confusion.

"So your own lips condemn you—your own fair lips pronounce your falseness; and you stand here, tempting me to madness with your beauty, and daring to ask me to regard it all a dream—daring to ask me to begin anew with you—"you!"

She retreated again nearer her chair, her face pale, her expression rapidly changing from expectation to disappointment, then to curious amazement, then to indignation.

"I am utterly at a loss to comprehend your meaning. Of what do my own lips convict me, save that I love you through all your neglect of me?"

Her words seemed to add fuel to the fire.

"Love—love! How dare you take the word on your lips—you, as false as fraility itself. You talk of "love" for me—of my "neglect" of you, and ask, in your excellent imitation of innocence, of what our own words accuse you. 'Love' for me, whom you repulsed only to go, un molested, to the arms of a lover at your charming rendezvous! You dare mention my 'neglect,' when you have been well entertained during my absence. And then say 'regard it as a dream, and begin anew!'"

Georgia listened to his seething words in an amazement so astounding that she was powerless to move or speak. Her face, was white with emotion, her hands were fairly rigid with surprise. In all her spotless purity, all her panoply of highest principle, her speckless virtue, her perfect womanhood, she stood before her husband, listening to words that froze her with fear and horror. At first she could form not the slightest idea of what he meant; her whole soul uprose in honest wrath at the unjust imputation; and then, like a flash of light, came the knowledge that her husband had learned, somehow, of Carleton Vincy's presence at Tanglewood.

The truth fairly crushed her; she sunk down into the chair with a weary, hunted horror over her face and in her eyes; and Lexington saw the sudden change, and interpreted it to her incapability to deny his charge.

Then, with her powerless, her piteous sinking under his own hand, came a transient tenderness for the creature he had hurt. A kinder light shone in his eyes, and there was a spice of sweetness in his voice.

"Confess, Georgia, that you have disgraced me, and brought confusion on your own head. Tell me all—everything—the worst, and if, in my judgment, you are honest and penitent, and sincere in your protestations to leave your lover and return to the only paths wherein a woman can walk with safety, then I may possibly overlook your sin in memory of days when we were so briefly happy."

Georgia had called on all the forces of her mind during the moment her husband was speaking, in order to come to a decision. Should she tell him Carleton Vincy was alive, and thus make him despise her even more than when he first learned she was a divorced woman? Should she show his overweening pride on the subject; she knew there was no hope of a final reconciliation if Lexington knew her former husband lived. She knew that Vincy might be bought off, and so, because she loved Theo Lexington so, because she yearned so for his love and confidence again, Georgia made another terrible mistake, was again made the
plaything of the Furies, who seemed forever presiding over her affairs.

Lexington waited a moment, wondering at her silence, little dreaming that, to shield his dear head from a blow she knew would nearly kill him, she accepted, in a measure, all the blighting scorn he had heaped upon her.

He waited, a gathering contempt and wrath plainly visible on his countenance and in his eyes.

"You have had ample time in which to word your denial, and thereby ward off your lover's head the storm of vengeance which I swear shall be hurled upon it. Perhaps, however, you intend confessing your vileness, since denial seems useless."

She looked at him with great, anguishful eyes, her lips trembling; her eyes scintillant with a gleam he could barely meet.

She arose from her chair, with a slow, stately motion, and swept over to the side of the table.

She looked strangely unreal, standing with one marble-white hand resting heavily over the cover, her jet-black dress falling in curving gracefulness around her motionless figure, her face as white as if hewn from marble, her eyes so intensely dark and expressive.

Lexington looked at her with sharp pangs of mingling love and hatred, as she spoke in a low, hopeless, anguished voice.

"There is nothing to deny or confess; I am judged and condemned before I am heard. This is not the first time you have wounded me to my heart's core. For such pain I have forgiven you. But this is the first time—and you are the first and only man who ever dared insult me, Mr. Lexington—from this hour everything is eternally over between us."

Her voice faltered at the last words, and yet, above the wail in her tones was a ring of defiance that told him it was true; there was no hope of peace between them now, whatever there may have been previously.

And so the Fate-ordained play went on.

CHAPTER XXV.
LEADING HAND.

True to her brave determination, Ethel Havelstock had made her few arrangements to leave her home, once so happy, now so desolate, at once; and the afternoon of the day that saw her husband dancing attendance upon Ida Wynne, amid the elegant retirement of Tanglewood, witnessed her lonely departure from the little cottage in Harlem. The expressman had come for her trunk, and received his orders to allow it to remain in the office until sent for; the windows had all been carefully closed, and the last sobbing farewell had been taken; and then Ethel walked out the front door and locked it after her.

She did not glance back once, or even look to see if any of her strange neighbors were watching her away. If they did she never knew it; or that perhaps some of them gave her a sneering glance and curled thin lips to see her and her trunks leaving the house whose handsome master had gone some time before.

Or if any eyes looked kindly, pityingly after her young, black-robed form, and wondered who or what their sweet-faced, ladylike, reserved neighbor was—she never knew.

And it did not matter. Sympathy and sneers were alike unavailable to lift the heavy burden from her young life; alike powerless to alter the entire friendlessness that crushed her so as she walked along the busy streets.

Not a roof in all the whole world to which she might flee for even one night's shelter; not a woman friend to go to, to whom she might unbosom herself, and on whose affection rely. No one—not one between her and the hard, bitter, relentless world.

The thoughts were brooding darkly over her as she went slowly on; she felt her eyes growing hot and staring; her steps lagging and spiritless, her very heart sinking with some awful nervous foreboding that naturally frightened her, brave, noble as she was.

"This will not do. My brief dream is over, and sighing and bemoaning will never recall it. Frank is dead, and there is only one way left for me. I must work for my own support at whatever I can find to do. Let me begin by exorcising these demons of despair and regret whose influences are so baleful. I will not succumb to them."

She said it to herself, almost defiantly, and clenched her hands tightly as if to give power to her brave endeavor. She compelled herself to step along more quickly, less spiritlessly, and with a prayer in her heart for courage, and assistance and comfort, went more cheerfully on.

It was only a pleasantly long distance to the office of the real estate agent, to whom she delivered the key of the house, realizing as she turned to leave the place, that she had severed the very last tie that bound her to the past.

She felt the same old, unendurable agony rising up as the thought took rise, but she determinedly crushed it down, almost obstinately vowing she would not permit herself to dwell ever again upon what, while inevitable, could not fall of making her miserable. Then commenced her first real battle with the world; and, armed only with her womanly sweetness, her high-bred, dainty reserve, her courage and decision, she set forth alone, on foot, with a column of the New York Herald in her hand, to hunt for work, a home, and food.

It was heart-wearying—that afternoon's work, when Ethel rang bell and bell, to learn the "place" had been filled before nine o'clock that morning; when she was obliged to endure
interviews whose rude curiosity was only
exulted by contemptuous dismissal on account
of her astounding ignorance on matters con-
sidered vitally important—such as proficiency
in the noble arts of wax-work, hair-dressing,
embroidering, or lace making.
It was just before sunset when Ethel turned
discouragingly away from an imposing brown
stone front, whose address was about half-way
down her list. She dropped her vail as she
descended the steps of the high stoop, and
turned toward a quiet side street, leading into
Union Square, where she had caught sight of
a sign announcing a restaurant for ladies.
She was not hungry, but weak from fasting
and nervous exhaustion, and she knew she must
eat, or become ill.
She quietly entered, and sat down at one of
the tables and gave her simple order for a cup
of tea and bread and butter—very simple and
frugal, but the most she dare afford until
something more substantial than the little roll
of money in her pocket-book stood between
her and the world.
There was no one in the saloon but herself,
and she was very glad of it. She removed
her little black kid gloves, and then her vail
off her face—so fair, and spirited, with her
great, wood-brown eyes, with the golden
lashes and brows—and her vivid red lips,
whose expression was one of such wistfulness.
She was a lady, every inch, and even the
flippant waiting-girls, used to every class of
society, subdued into respectful attention de-
spite the trilling order she gave, that, when it
came, she ate with a graceful ease that was re-
finement itself.
Her frugal lunch disposed of, she was draw-
ing on her gloves over her white hands, when
a shadow as of one standing in the doorway,
fell darkly over her. She raised her eyes cas-
ually and saw, looking at her with all the
greatness and goodness of his soul kindling in
his face and eyes, Leslie Vernon.
Like a glimpse of sunshine in the gloom of
a dungeon, was the sudden, grateful joy his
presence brought her. She sprung almost
eagerly from her seat, her hands extended.
"Oh, Leslie!"
Her greeting was a pitiful commingling of
welcome, of sharp remembrance, of wailing
pain, of beseeching pity—and in her face and
in her eyes, the young man read that some-
thing had happened—something terrible to
this young girl he loved so dearly. He took
her hands in his firm grasp and reseated her,
drawing a chair to the same table.
"Ethel, what can be the matter? Your—
your husband—"
He hesitated and winced at the word that
his lips formed.
"Oh, Leslie—I am all alone now. He is
dead!"
Her piteous, simple complaint touched his
very heart core; a simple, solemn look spread
over his bright, handsome face.
"Dead! my poor little girl! my poor little
girl!
His voice was inexpressibly tender, and his
splendid blue eyes seemed almost caressing in
their glances on Ethel’s black-robed figure.
"Tell me, Ethel, all about it. Remember,
I am your friend."
She thanked him from the depths of her
heart for that, although her eyes only said so.
"There is so little to tell, Leslie, but it is so
too hard to bear. He was drowned, bathing—
and he is buried in Greenwood. That is all."
She lifted her white, pain-sharpened face
to his, looking at him with such eager, pitiful
eyes that it almost unmanned him. Ethel,
whom he worshiped so madly, breaking her
heart for another, who was dead!
"I am sorry for you, Ethel," he said, sim-
ply. And he was, to know she suffered so
deeply; and as he watched her in her fair,
lovely beauty, so lone, so lorn, it seemed to
him if he only dared take her in his strong
arms, and cradle her there forever, he would
ask no higher boon on earth. It was hard for
him—that ardent, eager lover, who loved
Ethel with an intensity before which Frank
Havelstock’s regard was as the flicker of a
rushing light against the blazing midday sun—al-
most undearable to be obliged to sit there
and to listen to her sorrow, and to know she
had no thought for him more than on the
day she refused his love for the man who
now was dead.
Yet there was a wild elation of soul at the
idea that Ethel was free again—free to be
wood and won when time should have healed
her sorrow, although such thoughts were en-
tirely premature at present. But in his great
love, he vowed that Ethel should have him for
the truest friend, the dearest brother that wo-
man ever had. While he lived the world
should use her very gently; and then—then—
perhaps in time to come— The precious hope
that bloomed in his big heart of some such fu-
ture as he had dreamed of before, when Ethel
should be his bride, and Meadowbrook their
home, never faded from that moment.
"But, what shall you do, Ethel? I know
you will never return to Mrs. Lawrence’s."
"Never! Her house can never be my home
again! But you know I am young, and strong,
and able to work my way. Besides, Leslie, I
seem to have new, fresh courage since I have so
provocatively met you. I feel I am no
longer utterly friendless.
Her dark eyes were full of trust and grati-
tude as she looked at him, and young Vernon
smiled joyously in the fullness of happiness
that Ethel trusted him, that Ethel depended
on him, even for so little.
"Thank you," he returned, simply; "our
meeting was ordered by Providence, I believe,
and I am glad to know I can serve you in any way.

"I have been looking all the afternoon for employment, but found none as yet; I hope to be more successful to morrow."

"But if not—"

A gloom gathered over her sweet face for a moment; then she smiled bravely.

"Then I will try again. Surely, in all New York, there is something for me to do."

"Poor child! poor innocent child!"

His love and pity were too deep for other words, as he looked at her, so nobly and bravely defying fate.

"Can you not advise me, Leslie? I will do as you say, if you think my plans are feasible."

Her childish trust in him was exquisitely sweet, and he felt his face flushing under her frank gaze.

He suddenly reached his hands across the table to her, and took her own in them.

"Ethel, you may trust me—none the less that you are the dearest one on earth to me this moment, even as you were the day you so kindly refused my love. I will not wound you by another hint of that; or take unfair advantage of your position to renew my suit. I will only swear to you that I will be your dear friend, your older brother, on whom you may rely with the most implicit confidence. Ethel, friend, sister, will you agree to the compact?"

She lifted her eyes, all aight with thankfulness, and infinite trust, to his eager face.

"I accept your kindness, Leslie; and God will reward you for your heap and comfort to me in my great distress."

A second's solemn silence followed, then Verne arose from his seat.

"You had better go now, Ethel, and we will walk through the Square, just below here, while we arrange a little business affair that has occurred to me."

Ethel took up her check, that Leslie had not offered to touch, and paid its value.

Then, side by side, the two went leisurely down the thronged street, into a quieter block, and then into the leafy, pleasant square where dozens of people were enjoying the walks, the seats, the fountain.

"I have not told you how doubly Providential our meeting was, Ethel. What will you think when I tell you I only came to the city this morning and shall return to Meadowbrook by the evening boat? you might have chosen a hundred other days for your sad task, and not have seen me."

He looked so tenderly down on the slight figure on his arm, so graceful, so ladylike.

"Yes," she answered, almost reverently,

"I think God arranged it for me; and I know He will not desert me after He has permitted me to receive such a blow."

"You are so good, Ethel—teach me to be, won't you?"

For answer, a faint, deprecating smile fluttered around her mouth—the very first since her sorrow. Brief as it was, it lighted Verne's pathway as if with liquid gold.

"But, to the 'business affair,' Ethel. My whole, sole and chief errand in New York to-day was to visit my aunt, Mrs. Argelyne—my dear dead mother's sister. I had not seen her since her return from a seven years' tour through Europe and the Holy Land, and ran down to-day in obedience to a telegram announcing her safe return several days ago. She lives on Fifth Avenue, in the house where my mother died."

There was a sadness in his voice, for which Ethel felt a sympathy; she pressed his arm softly to mutely express it, and although the gentle contact thrilled him to the very soul, he did not manifest his feelings.

"You wonder what all this has to do with you, Ethel? Shall I tell you?"

She assented, wonderingly.

"Just this. I found Mrs. Argelyne almost inconsolable over the loss of her friend and companion, a young lady, whose name I did not charge my memory with. My aunt declares there never will occur another to fill the vacant place—a position only a lady could fill, and of whom only pleasant, congenial duties would be expected, in turn for a delightful home, sympathy, and my aunt's large affection. Does Ethel know of any one who can console Mrs. Argelyne?"

The tears rushed to her eyes in the depth of her gratitude.

"Oh, Leslie! if it could only be, I never would be able to repay you. Do you think she would be suited with me? Oh, I would try so hard to please her—and you, too, Leslie."

Her frank, girlish eagerness was charming; and Verne laughed, joyously.

"I will vouch for your adaptability, and her satisfaction. Shall I call a carriage and take you at once? I would go home to Meadowbrook a happy man if I knew you slept under my aunt's roof to-night."

His earnest care for her welfare was so sweet to her; she felt rested in body and soul as she had not been for so many weary days.

"I will go at once, Leslie. She can only say no; and I would rather know at once."

Verne smiled, assuredly.

"She will not say 'no.' I want you to tell her your whole history—will you?"

Without waiting for a literal answer, Verne hailed a passing coupe, and gave the coachman the order:

"No.—Fifth avenue."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER'S WORK.

After Georgia left the library Lexington
also went out into the fresh, cool afternoon air, that seemed especially grateful to him after his fevered interview.

His wife’s words haunted him strangely—

“T confess or deny nothing.” What did they mean? Did they intend to cover the guilt she was brave enough to admit, thus tacitly, by non-denial, or did she mean to taunt him with her indiffERENCE? Whichever way she intended, she had certainly succeeded in mak-

ing Lexington more angry and jealous than ever, and as he descended the steps and strolleled out among the flower-bordered walks, it was with a revengeful determination to find out who this secret lover of Georgia’s was, who was so much more successful than he in winning her affections.

He walked on, with his head dropped on his breast, indulging in his gloomiest reflections, almost wishing he were back again among the jungles and deserts of Africa he had left only to satisfy the cravings of a nature that refused to be satisfied with anything else than the affection which Georgia could bestow upon him.

Her first refusal to receive him in his peni- tent tenderness was a sharp blow upon which he had not counted; but he had imputed it to her impulses, that he knew were strong, and, away down in his heart, forgave her even while his manhood’s pride still bled under the wound she had dealt with un-parring hand.

But this last revelation—this accusation that Havelstock was so loath to make, on ac-

count of his earnest friendship—this charge so terrible that was true, partly on the strength of the informant who would never have made it had he not been in full possession of its pitiful positiveness; partly, and still more credibly, by re-

ason of his wife’s singular conduct when he had first accused, and then, in the greatness of his love, given her a loop-hole of escape that she utterly ignored—of course, because she preferred her lover to her husband.

They were not pleasant reflections that filled his mind as he walked mechanically, and fur-

ther and further from the house, into a still-

ness and loneliness that was infinitely restful to him, and from which calming influence he was angrily startled by the appearance of a small boy, evidently no stranger in the grounds, judging by the easy speed of his gait, and the direct paths he chose in order to reach the entrance of the house.

Lexington eyed him sharply—suspiciously.

“Well, what do you want? These are pri-

vate grounds, inside which no strangers have any business.”

His curt tones had its effect on the young-

ster; he instantly fell back, attempting an awkward bow, but never making an effort to retrace his steps, and, it seemed to Lexington, glancing with anxious scrutiny to the house.

Who do you want? have you any message for any one at Tanglewood? If so, I will de-

liver it.”

His keen eyes evidently intimidated the boy, who stammered and hesitated in his answers.

“It hasn’t no message, nor nothin’;” and then paused, stubbornly digging his toes into the loose gravel walk.

“Then clear out whichever way you came! And in the future, if you have business at Tanglewood, come in at the servants’ entrance. Don’t let me find you prowling about my yards an—”

He stopped suddenly, as if paralysis had seized his tongue, for from the crown of the boy’s loose straw hat there slipped down a narrow piece of paper, that fluttered to the ground, one side of which was covered with pencil writing.

A dark flush shot over the boy’s face as he saw it, and he instinctively made a dive for it; but Lexington was quicker than he, and as he picked it up, it was, without a word, the boy took to his heels in terror, evidently having been previ-

ously impressed with the necessity of keep-

ing in Lexington in ignorance of his errand.

Lexington read the message, standing like a statue; a message to Georgia, his wife, from Carleton Vincy, begging her to meet him at the time and place of the last interview, that same evening.

There was no name subscribed by which Lexington might know that its supposed un-

known rival was his wife’s first husband; and he laughed bitterly to himself as he thought the handwriting was sufficiently well known to Georgia that no name was needed to tell her who wanted her at the “same time and place.”

“Since her lover has appointed another inter-

view at the summerhouse, where Frank saw them. And she will go—this fair, false wo-

man, who is at once my curse and happiness—

this wife—ha! ha!—this beautiful wife of mine, on whose honor I would have staked my soul’s eternal welfare.”

He crushed the paper in his hands with a force he would have used had its writer been in his power instead; then he resumed his walk, with wild, restless eyes, and nervous, uncertain steps.

“She would neither deny or confess, eh? and yet, at the very moment when she as-

sumed her high-tragedy airs of innocence beyond reproach, she was expecting this ap-

pointment—on her way to the grounds, in all probability, to receive personally what I have so unluckily intercepted.”

He fairly gnashed his teeth in the awful fury of his blazing jealousy—this man who worshiped the ground his wife spurned with her foot.

“Shall I give it to her with my own hands, and see her writhe under the tortures of her discovered secret? Or shall I meet him—
VIALS OF WRATH.

curse him!—myself, when he comes to take her in his arms and receive the kisses she chooses to withhold from me! Shall I let them meet in their pretended secrecy, and then hear them with their disgrace, and strike them dead at my feet?

He was fairly beside himself in his mad passion; his eyes were bloodshot, and glared fiercely at the offensive paper in his hot, trembling hands.

"Somehow, I cannot realize it, even with this damming evidence in my possession. How can it be possible that Georgia, my Georgia, is so false—so false! I have worshiped her, as men do their God, and even when lowest coldness or stubbornest pride has intervened between us, I have always had for my one anchor the blessed thought that the time would come when she would love me, by sheer force of my own undying love for her. But now—now—I would give ten years of my miserable life if I could only despire her as she deserves; if I could only root out this deathless passion for her that I feel over and above the anguish her perfidy gives me."

His footsteps became slower and slower, until at last he sank down on the grassy sward, almost feebly; he covered his haggard face with his hands, shutting out the mocking brightness of the sunlight.

It was the very spot where Frank Havelstock, the man Lexington loved and trusted implicitly, had thrown himself in such a transport of passion the night he had resolved to secure Ida Wynne and part of Tanglewood; but Lexington could not have known of that circumstance, and the mute ground told no secrets; nor did the soft, low summer sounds whisper what they knew.

It was nearly the dinner hour when Lexington returned to the house. He went up the flight of marble steps and entered the hall, passing directly up the grand staircase to his own private rooms.

He did not as much as glance toward Georgia’s sitting-room door, which, directly opposite his, stood ajar; he was too bitterly angry, too thoroughly outraged in every feeling of his nature to vouchsafe a sign of her existence, by merely admitting that he remembered her private apartments were there.

He passed through the door of his sitting-room, and closed it after him, deposited his hat on the marble table, and then, halted suddenly in extremest surprise.

For there, at his desk, in an attitude of deepest despair, with her head buried in her folded arms, her whole figure convulsed with the heartbreakings sobs that shook her severely, was his wife.

"This is an unwarrantable intrusion. May I ask to what I am indebted for the rare pleasure of your company?"

His voice fairly stung her; she sprang from her crouching attitude, with her pale, tear-stained face toward him, her beseeching eyes fairly wild with anguish.

"Don’t—at least, I have come to tell you all—all I—" He interrupted her with a sneer.

"Indeed! Allow me to forestall any confessions and playing upon my weaknesses by informing you that I am aware of what you would say—" I know all!"

He was watching her keenly as he spoke; his voice harsh, yet husky with some powerful emotion. She was so fair, if false; so wicked, and yet—he loved her madly!

She started slightly at his positive language; then a ray of hope radiated on her face. She clasped her beautiful hands across her breast in humblest imploration, and stepped so near him he might have counted her heart-beats.

"You know all, Theodore? and you will forgive me? forgive me for the innocent cheat I practiced upon you; forgive me that I did not tell you sooner?"

She made her plea, then waited for the answer, hope and fear agonizing on her sweet face.

He made no answer beyond a grim, steady stare at her, while his fingers clutched the fatal note of which she had no knowledge.

"I know I have been wicked, Theo—proud, and obstinate, and haughty. I have been unwisely in my repellant anger, unjust in my cruel thoughts. But I have loved you through it all—I always have loved you with all my heart, and soul, and strength! Even to-day, when I said those awfully cruel words, I loved you more than ever! Theo! Theo! take me back!"

She fell on her knees before him, at his very feet; her arms clinging around his knees, her upturned face eloquent with earnestness, her eyes darkly passionate—waiting for the answer that came, like a knell of doom.

Slowly he brought his hands from behind him—that the note fairly scorched as Georgia knelt before him; that made his rage and anger burn the hotter as he thought how she was daring to confess and beg his favor in the same breath.

"Georgia, such a tirade is useless. Get up, and I will answer you, false, cruel, vile, though—"

She was on her feet in a second, a wild, moaning cry on her pale lips.

"Theo—no—no! Unsay—" He interrupted her with a move of his hands.

"Listen, madam. I say I know all. Your stolen interview, your secret lover; your subsequent agitation—everything, everything! You stand before me, this minute, a fair, beautiful woman, but stripped of the mask you have worn, and appearing as you are—a wife false to her marriage vows."
A scream of terrible anguish burst from her lips; she reached her hand toward him, in a piteous gesture, but he curled his lips and stepped further away.

"I do not admire amateur theatrical performances, so please spare me. Perhaps this will serve to compose your thoughts."

He thrust the note in her hands, with an expression of fierce glee on his face.

She took it mechanically, and read it; a slow scarlet flush staining her cheek.

"Well, shall you go?"

She stared at him in stolid amazement, her hands and the paper falling limply to her sides.

"I ask, shall you meet this lover of yours, or will you, thinking to hoodwink me further, pretend to be indignant, and allow him to miss his chance while you remain at home to prove your charming innocence?"

Georgia dashed the paper to the floor in a transport of emotion.

"Listen, for God's sake! if you only knew bow I fear, hate him—if—"

"You can not impose upon me by such fimsy excuses. Women never 'fear and hate' men whom they consent to see as you have this one. Save yourself further repentance by adding no more falsehood to your long catalogue of sins."

He made an elaborate bow, and passed into his dressing-room, closing and locking the door after him.

The silent insult was enough for Georgia; she turned quickly around, a low, heartrending moan on her quivering lips, and went from the room to her own.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A HUSBAND'S ANGER.

Georgia had not been in her room more than fifteen minutes when the bell rung for dinner, breaking in upon the deathly silence that was unbroken even by a sob or moan, so terribly intense was the spasm of agony that held her in a grasp of iron.

She had not locked her door after her, but had walked over the threshold to her dressing-bureau and leaned her elbows on its cool marble surface, with her face buried in her hands, her figure as motionless as if she were a statue.

She felt so strangely—as she never had felt before in all her singularly eventful heart-life. She was conscious of a dull, lethargic sensation that had struck her numbly the moment her husband had seemed his awful accusation at her; she wondered, as she stood there, just where she had stood a few weeks since, when his letter had come to her, breaking the silence of years, if her heart was not dead within her, if her capabilities for suffering and enjoying were forever blunted?

But, by the same old ache that hurt her when she recalled, regretfully, her reception of her husband; by the thrill of bitter pain that she certainly experienced as she remembered, what she had momentarily forgotten in the great grief of her wronged innocence—the life and near proximity of the man who could, if he chose, work her such havoc by these signs, Georgia knew she had yet to suffer and endure.

But how long—oh! how much longer? forever?

It seemed ages since Lexington had come home to Tanglewood, so many things had happened to mark the days since the one she had received his note, and, in one of her strange, strong impulses read over his early letters, and feasted her eyes on the picture of his face—his handsome, godlike face, that smiled at her from its ivory bed—the same face that not a half-hour ago had been malignant with wrath and anger.

She gave a little sob as she came fully back to suffering and endurance again, as she took her arms off the bureau, and in a yearning impulse of inestimable tenderness, unclasped the drawer that held her treasures, and took therefrom his picture—the same ineffably sweet face, with the frank, loving eyes, the firmly-closed, proudly-curved mouth. And those eyes had burned with rage, and that splendid mouth had uttered such words—such words that she shivered even now to recall.

But, despite it all, she loved him so! She had forgiven him the one injury of early years, one she thought was perfectly unpardonable in the height and depth of its cruelty. She had forgiven him the death of her one darling, her little flossy-haired baby; and, in the magnitude of her love for him, even had come to think it was best that there was no one, not even her child, to come between them if ever a reconciliation took place.

Now, she was doubly thankful that her baby was dead; now, that its father was alive she was almost grateful that there was no child to unite them, in the least degree.

But, looking down in her husband's face, meeting his eyes that pierced to her very soul, Georgia had no thought for anything, save that she loved him—loved him over and above all things, even his harsh unjustness.

She pressed it to her lips in passionate eagerness, low, murmuring caresses in her voice: she heard the second summons to dinner, but heard as in a dream; she knew some one had rung at the entrance of the house, but whether a guest were for her or no, she gave no thought. Then, several minutes later, she heard footsteps, and had only time to thrust her picture inside the drawer, when she saw Lexington standing in her room, cool, scornful, smiling with a contempt that was the very essence of sneering sarcasm.

"What—why—is it possible you are here?"

She felt a hot flush on her cheeks as she
turned toward him, almost speechless from the unprecedented presence.

"Possible; shall I beg pardon for forcing myself into such a delightfully dramatic scene?"

"Better beg pardon for intruding into my apartments. May I beg to know what right you have to disturb my privacy?"

She had frozen to ice again, this woman of fire, under the withering scorn in her husband's face.

He smiled, and bowed profoundly.

"I am most happy to answer that I came into my wife's apartments by virtue of my authority as a husband. Do you dispute the right?"

She made no answer; her only wish was to get away from him, so shamed and fearful lest her full heart should betray itself again, only to be insulted and wounded. She started for the door, but he courteously motioned her back.

"If you intend a return of the rather doubtful compliment I paid you when I locked my dressing-room door upon you, a half-hour ago, spare yourself the unnecessary trouble."

She paused just where she was, and sat down in her large lounging-chair; her face white enough now at the sound of his cool, sarcastic tones, her heart throbbing in vague fear of the mission that had brought him.

She looked so fair sitting there, with her long lashes sweeping her cheeks in a dark shadow; her hands lying wearily in her lap, her beautiful head bent slightly forward in a tired, deprecating droop.

"Understand at once I did not come to repeat or renew the subject we discussed in my rooms. I have not come either to retract any thing I said, or to offer any addition to my words. I was on my way to the dining-room when a messenger rung the hall-bell, with a sealed letter for Mrs. Lexington, in a handwriting I have learned to recognize. I volunteered to turn page to my lady for the nonce, and gave orders to the butler that dinner be delayed a half-hour in order that you might be afforded ample time to read it."

His voice was stern, and his eyes glowed darkly, and Georgia felt her heart sink like lead, as she realized how she was in the toils.

She reached forth her trembling fingers for the letter, never once raising her eyes; then, when Carleton Vinney's handwriting met her gaze, started in a tremor of agitation.

Lexington surveyed her coolly, his face growing darker and more ominous.

"You are surprised? I am not. Be quick and read it."

She looked up in piteous imploration at his stern, forbidding face.

"Oh, not now, not now! Oh, what shall I do?"

She crushed the letter in her hand, fearful of reading it, lest by some unlucky chance, Lexington should learn who was its author.

"Open it, I command. Your refusal does not affect me as you hope it will. Read it, I say, and let us see what my wife's lover has to say for himself upon learning from his messenger that his former note fell so unluckily in my awkward possession."

Georgia sat, still trembling like a leaf, while Lexington waited with horrid patience that he broke at last, in a tone so quiet, so low, that it struck new terror to her overburdened heart.

"I will read it. Give it to me."

His hand touched hers as he reached for the letter. The contact thrilled her to a sense of her most suitable course if any course could rightly be called suitable that could only bring misery to her, whichever way it was continued.

"No—no," she whispered, huskily; "I will read it myself."

Lexington retreated again while he watched her tear open the envelope, and read the few lines it contained; while every word fairly scorched itself into Georgia's brain.

"Georgia," it said, "I just learn the undesirable fate of a note sent you an hour ago, requesting an interview at the same hour and place as our last. As I have no intention of being refused by you, I send this, openly and above-board, demanding to see you—you know when and where—to-night. If you refuse, for any reason, I shall call on the gentleman tomorrow, with whom you live, and who shares with me the delightful privilege of the right to subscribe himself, Your husband."

A little gasping sigh told the horror Georgia experienced at the diabolical threats Carleton Vinney had dared write her—threats that she would have died, rather than have had Lexington know.

A feeling of righteous anger at the bastardly villain who dared do this; a feeling of just indignation at his vile boldness; a sensation of utter powerlessness at his hands—all tended to lend an expression to her pallid face that Lexington instantly set down to far different causes; while, over and above all these emotions, was the one fear, great and agonizing; lest Lexington should learn of Vinney's presence, knowing as she did of her husband's mad jealousy and peculiar tenderness on the subject—and the one hope that she might possibly succeed in buying Vinney off, and thus secure peace again.

What should she do, under the circumstances?

She stole one glance at Lexington's dark, unforgiving, contemptuous face, that smiled luridly as it caught her timid gaze; and she saw there was no mercy there, then.

She dared not show him the letter; she dared not brave more of his anger, when so
much of it as he had already wreaked upon her had nearly killed her.

She twisted the paper around her fingers with the decision that he should not know, yet, God grant never. 

But—what would her refusal to show it indicate? That she was everything her husband accused her of. Could she bear the burden imposed upon her a little longer, in the one hope of relief from Carleton Vincy's absence?

How could she know his devilish pertinacity, his deep laid plans to harden her very soul, his sworn oath to avenge himself on his successor, or the unlawful admiration and love her own beauty had inflamed in his breast?

So—clinging to the one straw she thought possibly might bear her up, Georgia made the final choice, her heart pulsing fast.

She lifted her face bravely to his, in all the glorious beauty suffering lent to it—and her sweet eyes sent a thrill to his very heart.

"I have read it, Theodore."

She merely announced the fact, in quiet, tranquil tones, that surprised herself.

"Yes—I see you have. Now, I will read it."

Her eyes flashed alertly as she clutched the letter more tightly in her grasp.

She made no immediate response, but her eyes thrilled Lexington to his very soul's core; and in a sudden pain of tenderness, he yearned over her—this fair woman, whom he loved despite even this letter she pressed to her heaving breast.

"It is our last chance, Georgia, and I, I, in all my justly outraged pride, stoop to beg you to establish your innocence. Show me the letter, Georgia; show me that this man has insulted you, presumed upon you—and—and— I will forgive you—everything!"

His voice sunk to an exquisite tenderness that brought tears to Georgia's eyes, that made her heart sicken with regretful anguish.

"Theo—I can not—I can not!"

Something like a sob of pain burst from Lexington's lips; then he laughed a low, harsh laugh, little dreaming of the despair in Georgia's heart as she realized the position into which she was driven.

"I'm a double-distilled fool to think my overtures would be accepted from the woman whom I found kissing her paramour's picture, as I brought her a letter from him. I was a greater fool to respect the seal I ought to have broken and learned without your permission the contents of the love-letters some man writes to my wife without my permission."

Georgia cowered a moment under his strangely-altered manner; then, seeing the blaze of determination on every feature of his face, suddenly confronted him, tearing Carleton Vincy's letter to fragments as she did so.

"I decline to continue this interview. You have said the most to me you can say; you have wounded me to the quick; you are powerless to hurt me more. Only, I shall keep my own counsel in the future, and rest assured there will be no attempt on my part to repeat any romantic scenes."

Lexington caught her wrist in his grip as she essayed to pass him.

"You insist on denying to me the name of your lover!"

She smiled at the blaze of wrath in his eyes—smiled, from very stoniness of despair;

"I would, indeed, be lacking in all the disgraceful finesse you have so freely accused me of if I divulged the name of the writer of that letter."

Lexington muttered an indistinct impression as he relaxed his hold.

"Guard your infamous secret as well as you can, Mrs. Lexington; remember I shall be eternally on guard over you; and, when I find who he is—this lover whose name you so loyally hide from me—you will hear from me. Be so good—" and he bowed so profoundly that the salutation was the very embodiment of scorn, "as to excuse my absence from dinner."

He went out, into his own apartments.

Georgia sat silent, her face whitening, her hands pressed firmly over her heart. Then—the delayed dinner was announced, and she was forced to go down, in horrid mockery, and do the honors.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A G L I M P S E  O F  A R C A D Y.

The ride from Union square to Fifth avenue, though short and accomplished in a very few minutes, was an eventful one to both Ethel Havelstock and Leslie Verne, who said very little to each other, being engrossed with their own thoughts, so entirely different in each instance.

Over Ethel had come a feeling of nervous anxiety, entirely different from the quiet satisfaction that had taken possession of her when Verne had first announced his intentions; and as the carriage stopped in front of a large, imposing house, and Verne sprung out to assist her to alight, Ethel felt her limbs tremble so that she could scarcely walk.

What if Leslie had overrated Mrs. Argyle's need of such services as Ethel knew she could offer? What if some one else was in view for the position?

Leslie saw the sudden, anxious pallor that was all over her sweet, sad face; and actually smiled at it.

"I hope you are not nervous, Ethel? You need have no fears on the score of your reception—you will love aunt Helen as soon as you see her."
They ascended the flight of stone steps, after Leslie had discharged the carriage, and in a moment after the summons of the bell a tall, liveried footman opened the inner door of the large marble-floored vestibule.

Leslie nodded pleasantly.

"Will you tell Mrs. Argelyne I would like to see her again, alone, Waugh? If she will permit me to come to her room I would prefer it. This way, Ethel."  

His easy, gentlemanly manners were so pleasant to the nervous, anxious girl; she followed him with a quick, willing step into a tiny reception-room on the right of the hall; a square room, with one large window fronting the avenue, that was hung with rich, yellow-brown satin, that matched the somber, elegant carpet on the floor, and the tete-a-tete and solitary chair.

In the center of the room was an upright card-basket, with bronze pedestal and silver receiver, that was nearly filled with cards—Leslie’s the uppermost one.

"No one has been in since I left, I see. Now, Ethel, I want you to remain here a moment or so, while I see aunt Helen up-stairs; will you, like a good, brave little woman? And keep this in mind—you are in your own home as much as you will be when I bring Mrs. Argelyne down to welcome you, and assure you of the fact."  

A little smile, almost joyous, flitted over her face, as she looked at him with her earnest eyes.

"You almost inspire me with your own sunshine, Leslie. And I want you to keep this in mind, that whatever Mrs. Argelyne decides I am feasible for the vacancy or not, I shall thank you the same for your friendliness. Remember, Leslie, if the result be what you seem so sure it will not be, I know it will not be your fault."  

Waugh entered the little room at that instant with a summons above, and as Leslie immediately went into the hall, Ethel had no opportunity to see the tender, pitiful, half-amused smile on his face.

He went silently up the velvet-piled stairs, and through the upper hall, wide, spacious, and dim with softly-toned lights, into the room he had left so shortly before.

It was a large, front room, furnished most regally for Mrs. Argelyne’s boudoir, and displayed to perfection both the lavish wealth and refined taste of the occupant.

A square room, whose lofty ceiling was tinted a sky-blue and studded with silver stars. The walls of the room were hung in lighter blue silk, fluted in large folds, edged with heavy silver fringe, to which corresponded the drapery of the three French windows. A white, velvet carpet, medallion, with center and corner pieces of blue morning glories, and border of silvery gray stars.

The boudoir set was upholstered part in blue velvet, with silver-gray pullings, part in bright gray satin, with blue silk up-trimings.

Mrs. Argelyne’s cottage piano, her pearl-mounted sewing machine, her massive desk, her exquisite library of choice volumes, her canaries, all served to make this apartment one of the most delightful in the house.

Just off the boudoir, to the right, opened her bedroom suite, the sleeping-room, in simple, unostentatious black walnut and marble, with white drappings of lace and linen, and a toilet set of snowy china; with a thick, milk-white Persian draguet on the floor, and white lace curtains heavily draped over the inside shutters.

It was the very abode of peace and purity, and as Leslie tapped at the half-open boudoir door, and saw Mrs. Argelyne come out of the darkened, quiet chamber, he thought that on her placid, intellectual face, the very seals of its peace and purity were set.

She met him with a quiet, tender smile, as he came in, a little nervously, and closed the door carefully behind him.

"Aunt Helen, can you spare me half an hour longer? I have something very important to tell you—something no one must hear but yourself."  

"As long as you want me, Leslie. Sit in my big arm chair, and I will bring this rocker beside you so I may listen comfortably."

Her voice was very sweet, low, sympathetic, and full of womanly refinement; a voice that matched her pale, thin face, with its soft blue eyes and waving gray hair. She had such perfect hands, too, and they say hands are unrivaled indices of character. They were slender without being thin, tapering from the delicate, rounded wrist to well formed, straight-jointed, almond-nailed fingers—fairy, firm, womanly hands, that one would have liked to grasp when dire trouble threatened.

She drew a low wicker rocking-chair close beside Leslie’s knee, and laid one of her hands—the one with the wedding-ring on, on the arm of his chair, and looked questioningly upon his flushed, eager, handsome face.

"It surely is something of importance. I do not remember having seen you so agitated for a long while."

She smiled reassuringly, and her smile inspired such wonderful courage, and hope, and confidence.

"I am not sure that I know how to begin—I want to tell you all at once—she’s downstairs waiting, and I want you to know most of all that I just worship her—oh, auntie, I’d die for her!"

His eyes were sparkling, his cheeks flush; and he laid his hot palm on her hand, in an eager pressure of beseeching earnestness.
Mrs. Argelyne raised her brows in a mute little inquiry of surprise.

"Who is here, my dear boy?"

Leslie laughed.

"I might take a premium for awkwardness, mightn't I? Let me commence again, and try to make you understand."

Then he began at the beginning—the days when he loved Ethel Maryl before Frank Havelstock came and won her fresh young heart; he told her with all the eloquence of love's agony, of the awful disappointment he underwent; how he never blamed his darling, but kept on loving her in silence and despair; how it had all ended—Ethel's pitiful widowhood, their Providential meeting, his own hopes, his never-ending love, her sweet, rare beauty, her matchless charms of mind and soul.

Then he told her what he told Ethel—of Mrs. Argelyne's need of a companion, and begged her, with all the eager ardor of a lover, to take his darling, and keep her where she would be happy, where he might see her when he chose, and watch the tokens of fading grief for her husband and win her for himself.

When he finished, standing before her in all the perfect beauty and strength of his young manhood, the tears were in Mrs. Argelyne's sweet eyes.

"I want to see her, Leslie. You would not love a girl so well if she were unworthy; and she cannot be anything but pure and sweet and lovely, to have thus inspired you. 'Ethel'—What an exquisite name. And no mother or father, poor darling! and no husband—oh, Leslie!"

She pointed to her own black dress, the garb of widowhood she had worn for a half score of years, that she never intended to lay aside.

From her chair in the reception room Ethel heard the two descending the stairs; nearer was a faint, sweet perfume of 'Cream Spray,' that always heralded Mrs. Argelyne, and then she arose, with the instinctive courtesy of a lady, and waited, in sweet, depressing pride, the presentation.

To her surprise, Leslie did not speak a word. She caught a glimpse of his handsome, happy face, that made her heart throb with momentary certainty of his success; then the sweetest voice she had ever heard addressed her, as Mrs. Argelyne came swiftly, gracefully across the carpet to her.

"This is Ethel? My child, Leslie has enlisted all my heart's sympathies. I am his aunt Helen."

She extended her warm, clinging hands, and took one of Ethel's between them, and pressed them tenderly, while her eyes took in every atom of Ethel's rare beauty, and read at a glance her intelligence, refinement, culture. Ethel's lips quivered despite the smile Mrs. Argelyne's soulful welcome inspired.

"I am Ethel Havelstock—Mrs. Ethel Havel- stock. Leslie has been so kind to me—and you—you are very kind to—"

Her sweet, brave voice suddenly faltered, and both Verne and Mrs. Argelyne saw her fighting back the tears from her glorious eyes.

"I have seen trouble myself, dear—that is all, and women's hearts ought to be very sympathetic. To-morrow you shall tell me all you will, because, if I can persuade you to remain with me, I assure you I shall try very hard. Is there any hope?"

She smiled so brightly that Ethel's heart fairly throbbed with content.

"May I stay? I know how different I must be from the young lady whom Leslie says married and left you—but, indeed, I will exert myself to the utmost to please you, if I may only try?"

Her brown eyes were radiant with pleading; her whole countenance was a revelation of intensest earnestness, and as Mrs. Argelyne locked her in her embrace, she thought it was little wonder that Leslie Verne worshiped her. Her own arms ached to take the girl in their embrace, and hold her closely to her childless heart.

She turned to Leslie, quietly.

"Ethel is my protegee—from this moment. For your sake, boy, with your mother's eyes—for my darling dead Jo's sake—and none the less for your own sweet sake, Ethel, I ask you—nay, beg you to be my friend, my companion, my daughter."

It seemed like a dream to the friendless, homeless, girl-widow. She listened intently, her golden head slightly bent to one side, in speechless surprise; her vivid red lips quivering with gratitude, her hands tightly clasped in the bewildement of the moment.

Could it be possible—this sudden change from loneliness, utter companionlessness to such warmth of welcoming friendship, such tender solicitude?

She looked at Leslie with her eyes burning with tears; it was to him she owed it all. In one of her rare impulses, she walked rapidly to him, caught both his hands, and pressed them passionately to her throbbing lips.

"Oh, Leslie—can I ever repay you—can I ever do half enough for you for this?"

He fairly swayed under her ardent eagerness—the lover of her who worshiped even the hem of her dress.

Mrs. Argelyne knew and pitied his embarrassment, momentary though it was, and with rare tact, relieved him.

"Leslie knows how to be a dear friend as well as a dear nephew. And that reminds me of one more favor, Ethel—call me aunt Helen, I haven't a niece in the world since Leslie's sister Aggie died."

A little flush reddened on Ethel's face when Mrs. Argelyne commenced; but the conclusion of the remark seemed to dissipate the vague, startling surprise.
"I will do whatever you wish, Aunt Helen."

The name made Leslie's heart bound in mad ecstasy, but he made no sign, save a tender radiance that lighted his eyes, that Mrs. Argeleyne saw and noted.

That night, after Leslie had gone and Mrs. Argeleyne had taken Ethel to the rooms dedicated to her own private use, and kissed her a tender good night, Ethel sat down, almost dazed with surprise, trying to accept the reality of her position. It was nearly incomprehensible to her—the fact of her being established in such elegance in the family of a lady of whom she never had heard twenty hours before.

She walked bewilderedly through her rooms—a delightful sitting-room, looking out on a well-kept flower-garden at the rear of the mansion, furnished in delicate pink silk and white lace, with a rose-tinted rug in the center of the polished inlaid floor; with great deep, self-conditioned, pink damask chairs, and a pair of short settees, with warm, zephyr-affluous in white and light-blue thrown over the backs; with all the accessories to comfort and luxurious enjoyment in form of footrests, books, flowers, writing material—even to a drop jet of gas over a little ebony-topped table, with its sea-shell pink porcelain shade.

It was all so much more elegant than anything she ever had seen or imagined, and yet, she was not awed by it, nor oppressed. It seemed to her as if it were only what she had always been accustomed to.

But—was it really true that she was the forlorn woman who went into the restaurant on Union square, disheartened and discouraged, that same day?

She went into her bedroom—dim from the lowered gas glowing through an opaque glass globe, and knelt beside the low, cottage bed—white as an angel's wing, from the high-carved headboard of rare, ivory-white wood, where a dove, with outspread wings, guarded the sleeper, to the thick, soft coverlet of satin damask.

She buried her face in her hands in silent, heartfelt thanksgiving to Him who had brought it all about; of whom she had besought succor in her darkest hour, and who had so wondrously sent light into her darkness.

So her new, strange, beautiful life began—with loyal, genuine yearnings for her dead darling, it was true, but very content, continually wondering.

It was to be only a phase of her singular destiny; it was only a blessed refreshment for a while, ere the cruel relentlessness of her inevitable fate scourged her on and on through hottest fire again.

Only a respite—but Ethel did not know that.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE WIFE'S RESOLVE.

If Frank Havelstock noticed the pitiful, heart-weary pallor on Georgia's face as she sat at dinner, in all her calm, sweet dignity, filling her position with the courtesy of a highbred lady, the probabilities were that he drew his inferences pretty nearly the truth, knowing as he did, that Vincy had sent Georgia the threatening letter commanding her to meet him that night. Would she go or remain at home? He amused himself with speculations on the subject. To go, would be to play directly in his hand, because he intended to contrive some way to have Lexington learn of it, and at the same time to prevent him from knowing the whole truth.

To go, therefore, would be fatal to Georgia.

To disappoint Vincy, by refusing the interview he requested, would be calling down on her head a storm of danger that he knew Georgia would preferably avert; to remain, therefore, would be as fatal as to go. Consequently, of two evils, which would the harassed, tempest-tossed woman choose?

The very same thoughts were filling Georgia's mind, as she sat behind the coffee-urn, toying with her ortolan and occasionally, for appearances' sake, actually tasting her egg-plant. If she had but known of the Mephistopheles who was eating of her salt; or if she had dreamed she was as a willow-witch in his relentless hands!

Should she go? She had asked herself over and over, until her head ached, and the words fairly buzzed in her ears. It was coming slowly to her—her decision; she must go—this once, only this once, and use every effort in her power to buy Vincy off from his malicious intent. If only Lexington did not know the place of meeting—then, like an inspiration, came the determination to save both Lexington and herself—Lexington from learning who his hated rival was, herself from being followed to an interview which could do no good.

Her sudden, though subdued excitement, aroused all the suspicious attention of Havelstock; and when Georgia asked to be excused from waiting for Ida Wynne, he was as sure her reason was connected with Vincy as if she had told him.

She hastened to her own room, where the lights burned brightly, and her faithful maid awaited orders.

"Bring my desk, Amber, at once; and while I am writing a note, I want you to go for your boy, and bring him here. Tell him to say nothing to any one."

Amber acknowledged her commands by a respectful bow, and while she was on her commission, Georgia wrote a line, in pencil, in a hurried, trembling hand.

"I will see you to-night at the hour you mention ed, but not at the same place. Be at the 'Willow Cope.'"
She thrust it into a blank envelope, just as Amber and her boy came quietly into the room. Georgia's cheeks were burning as she handed the lad the letter.

"I want you to go to the tavern—you know—and inquire for a gentleman staying there from New York. You—you don't know his name, but you can say he is stout, and heavily bearded; see such a person yourself, Philo, and give him this letter, and bring me an answer—not a written one. Don't give this to any one else, if you fail of seeing this—this person."

She gave the boy the letter, feeling her whole nature degraded—feeling, with the first thrill of shame her whole life had ever experienced, the quiet, surprised, questioning eyes of the respectful colored woman fixed on her face. She maintained her usual dignity and composure, however, until Philo had made his bow, and departed; and then, with an abandon of grief very usual with her, threw herself on her sofa, and cried as if her very heart were an unsealed fountain of tears.

Amber closed the door and locked it, with her usual quiet prudence; then she busied herself in little attentions around the room, while Georgia's sobs smote piteously on the still air.

Then, she took a stool—a soft, velvet ottoman—and placed it where Georgia's feet might rest on it; she threw a gorgeous-hued sofa afghan over her—with such unobtrusive kindness and thoughtfulness, that Georgia sobbed afresh at the acts.

"You are the only friend I have left, Amber—good, dear, faithful Amber!"

The servant-woman silently smoothed her lustrous hair, with a gentle, magnetic touch, that was positive balm to the overburdened woman.

"Sometimes I think if you only knew all I endure—Amber, you have known me ever since I came to Tanglewood a bride. You know when—when they took my baby out of your arms, Amber, to put it to nurse in the country; you never knew why that was done, did you? or, have you ceased to remember or care for my baby?"

She raised her bright, tear-pearled eyes, that were unduly radiant, to Amber's peaceful face.

"Forget little Miss Jessamine—my own little nurseling! Mrs. Lexington, I would forget my own-born boy as soon!"

Georgia caught the deft, black hand in her own favored fingers.

"I wouldn't wound you, my good old Amber; you have been too faithful, too true, these long, lonely years. I am yearning for somebody—oh! some one to listen to me, to pity me, to comfort me, to believe me! Amber! Amber! don't people go crazy sometimes from trouble?"

She threw off the afghan in an impulse of feverish excitement, and sprung to her feet in restless eagerness. Amber gave a quick, anxious look in her face.

"You can trust me—you know that; you know no one will trust you more freely than I will and do—even with that letter Philo took, against you."

She was so honest, so fearless, so truthful, this woman of forty, whom long association with Georgia had made a refined woman, had developed all her better nature.

Georgia's face paled, but her eyes never dropped as she met Amber's.

"Sit here, and let me tell you all—everything; I must speak, or I shall die."

Then and there, she made of Amber her sole confidante; she told her why Mr. Lexington had taken her baby Jessamine and given it to nurse to the woman who had let it die; she went on, in her pathetic, truthful story to the time when Lexington had left her all alone, for years and years; and how he returned; and the greeting she gave him; of her suspicions of Havelstock that were at times quieted by his perfect kindness and apparent honesty of purpose; of the frightful fact that Carleton Vincy was not dead, but came back to annoy and terrify her—that to him, after the meetings they had already had, the note was written that Philo had taken.

It did her infinite good—that unburdening herself to the faithful, discreet woman who had served her so many years, and Georgia felt a lightening of her gloomy skies when Amber laid her finger respectfully on her shoulder, as if to lend impressiveness to her reply.

"It will all come right one of these days, Mrs. Lexington, and you will be the happier—you and your husband—for these seas you have waded through. But if you will permit me a word of advice, it is this—be very careful of what you say or do before Miss Wynne or her lover—if you want to keep your secret. Miss Ida, innocently, I think, would babble to Mr. Frank, and he—he is a snake in the grass, Mrs. Lexington. His eyes are all I want to see to convince me."

Georgia shivered as Amber thus verified her own deepest convictions.

"I believe you; I would not have him dream of Carleton Vincy's existence for a thousand fortunes. But, tell me, Amber, am I not right to see him to-night and for my husband's sake seek to further avert the knowledge of Vincy's existence from coming to him?"

Amber's grave, serene face was turned toward the floor, in thoughtful decision, for which Georgia patiently waited. In a moment Amber lifted her eyes.

"I think you are right in making one more effort to induce Mr. Vincy to leave this locality, dangerous as the attempt might possibly be. But, when you consider that you may
succeed, when you know, in your own heart, the motive that governs you—the end surely justifies the means. Let me help you, Mrs. Lexington. Let me be your tried, true servant, through dangers and difficulties."

The tears sprung fresh to Georgia’s eyes, and she grasped the firm, sable hand that was waiting to lift her along.

"If you know how your calm, sensible courage comforted me! I accept your advice; I will depend entirely on you and I will come to you when I feel I need you."

It was a strange compact—this ally between the proud, high-bred woman, the envied wife of Theodore Lexington, the elegant hostess of Tanglewood, and the unknown, unhonored colored woman who, through years of faithfulness, and prudence and forethought, had proved herself worthy the friendship of the heart-sore woman who had not another friend in all the wide world.

A silence followed Georgia’s words, while both were plunged in thought, broken by a low rap on the door, that Amber answered promptly, while Georgia, quaking with nervous, undefined fear, shrink back to the lounge. It was, as Amber suspected, her son Pillo, returned from his commission. She brought him inside the door, which she carefully closed.

"Well, my lad?"
Georgia raised on one elbow, in intent eagerness.
I saw him, misses, and he laughed and said ‘all right,’ and gave me this for coming.”
He displayed a twenty-five cent stamp, with an air of satisfaction.

"And no one saw you or stopped you?"
Georgia felt the hot blood rush to her face to thus be obliged to speak before the child.

"No, nobody, ma’am."

"Give him some money, Amber—there are small bills in my portemoumme. You are a faithful boy, Philo. Now go—and speak of your errand to no one."

The instant the door closed on him Georgia sprung to her feet, excitedly.

"Now, Amber, help me at once. I have not a moment to spare. First, hand me my little safe, and then lay out my dark blue serge suit. Only be quick, Amber."

She took the little iron safe on her lap—it was too heavy for her to hold comfortably, but her limbs were trembling as she felt she could not stand.

"If money will buy him off he shall have no cause to complain," she said to herself, as she hurriedly counted out the crisp bills that were folded neatly away; there were rolls of tens and twenties, beside several heavy checks that she had no need as yet for requiring to be cashed.

She took out five hundred dollars and made it into a neat packet; then, in another parcel, she put five hundred more, with her hot, trembling fingers.

"If five hundred dollars will not induce him to leave me, forever, surely a thousand will. A thousand dollars only to let me alone! And Theodore Lexington would give a hundred times that much if I was where he believes Vinzy to be—under the sod!"

In silence she permitted Amber to change her dress, and then she slipped the rolls of money in the pocket.

"Get my blue waterproof, and after I am gone lock both doors and admit no one—not that there is any danger of any one’s troubling me, only I wish it. If Ida comes tell her I am sick. I am, heart-sick, nearly unto death."

Her great, woeful eyes looked almost unnatural as she glanced from under the hood of her waterproof; her hands trembled as she essayed to open the door, that Amber instantly fastened behind her.

She went silently down the side flight of stairs—one that no one used except on such rare occasions that discovery was almost impossible; she opened the heavy caken door that was only fastened with a bolt, parted the vines of smilax that crept luxuriously across a trellis in front of the door, and hurried along in the dense shadow of the house, until she was completely out of reach of detection from any of the doors or windows. Then she took to the lonely path, and in a moment entered the little kiosk that marked the entrance to the Willow Copse.

CHAPTER XXX.
THE DOUBLE DECEIVER.

Although, as has before been stated, Frank Havelstock had fully made up his mind to offer himself to Ida Wynne when the moment came in which he should find himself in the right humor; and while he had every reason to suppose that the girl whom he intended honoring with the name Theodore Lexington would give him, with the big slice of Tanglewood, still, there were moments when he actually wondered if there was a possibility of Ida’s failing him. If she should, through any girlish freak, reject him—the very thought made Havelstock’s eyes blaze with wrath, as he looked across the table at her, after Mrs. Lexington had taken her rather abrupt departure, prior to sending her note of warning to Vinzy.

Ida was looking well that night—unusually well, in her white alpaca dress, with its vivid scarlet sash and the scarlet ivy berries in her glossy brown hair; a costume that seemed particularly appropriate for the cool October evening that had already drawn its dusk over the outside world.

She was pretty, stylish, graceful—and the means of great good luck to him; and yet, as he watched her fair, insipid face, so unlike...
Ethel Maryl's, in all the fire of pride, and intelligence, and sweetness, he was conscious of a strange homesickness somewhere about his heart, that make him angry at himself for the weakness.

"A precious fool! I am to suffer my thoughts to run on after a pretty face—even if it is the face of the only woman on earth who ever really touched my heart—and women always idolize me."

He could not banish the vivid memories that came rushing over him with a suddenness of force that surprised him. He could not shut out the picture of Ethel's beauty; the memory of her perfect trust in him, her wild worship of him, the grand, womanly purity and nobleness of her nature; and as he remembered it all—the blissful days when he and his bride had been all the world to each other—as he watched the face opposite him, that would soon be invested with the right to remain opposite his as long as they both lived—he felt a deathly faintness seize him—a positive physical agony, caused by the brief yearning of his soul for what he had put forever from his hands.

Ida was busy with her ice-cream, and did not look up, else she would have seen a haggard face, on which stood beads of cold sweat; and Havelstock glared on her bowed head, almost diabolically.

"I believe I fairly loathe her? I believe I worship my bright-eyed Ethel this moment more madly than I ever did before! And yet—what a disgusting burlesque it all is!"

The mood did not last long—Ida dispelled it by laying down her spoon and napkin, and speaking to him, as she arose:

"Were you waiting for me to go? Or—may I pour your wine for you?"

She said it half timidly, in the fullness of her affection for him.

He could barely restrain an expression of hatred that sprang to his lips.

"Thank you—but I shall take no wine tonight. Will you go to the drawing-room?"

He gave her his arm, and she accepted it, little knowing the raging tumult within his breast, or the cold-blooded, heartless vow he registered to secure her plighted troth that hour, and have done with romancing.

But, he was not done with "romancing," if by that he meant the clashing thoughts, the divided wishes that swayed to and fro in his heart like angry billows driven by the lash of the winds. He could not help thinking; he was utterly powerless before the temporary rebellion of his thoughts.

"It is a desperate game—it has been so from the moment when I instructed Vincy to carry Ethel the news of my accidental death by drowning. If I marry Ida Wyme, I run a terrible risk. If ever my marriage with Ethel Maryl is discovered, there will be no alternativ but twenty years at Sing Sing. Dare I take the chance?"

He was absent-mindedly turning the leaves of some new music on the piano rack, that Ida was playing, carelessly. His face was pale, careworn, and his eyes full of anxious fear. He suddenly left the piano, followed by Ida's wondering eyes; he stepped through the French window, into the cool October night, that came refreshingly to his burning temples.

He took several turns up and down the marble-floored porch, with quick, hurrying footsteps, as if pursued by some unseen, avenging foe.

"It is impossible! There is no danger of my being found out—no possible danger! I shall lose my identity as Ethel's husband by assuming the name of Lexington, and to make assurance doubly sure, I shall drop my Christian name, and use my middle name—one that Ethel never heard of. As plain 'John Lexington,' I would have dreamed of the Frank Havelstock, particularly when not one of my dozen or five hundred friends ever for a moment associated me with the unfortunate fellow whose death they may have casually glanced over in their papers at their breakfast-tables? Found out! There is not a chance in a thousand! What odd spell of nervousness could have so wrought upon me?"

He smiled now, triumphantly, his haggardness disappearing by magic, his black eyes all aglow again with exultation.

"I'll go in again to Miss Wyme, and make her the offer she will be so delighted to receive; and then, a speedy marriage and a long tour in Europe. Hello! What's up now?"

He added the astonished question suddenly, as he turned for a final promenade up the porch, before re-entering.

Hastening from the back entrance through the grounds, he recognized Philo, the son of Mrs. Lexington's waiting-maid—a bright little fellow he had often employed himself to run of errands. He distinctly saw the envelope in the boy's hand, and he knew as well as if he had read it, that it was for Carleton Vincy. A sinister smile was in his eyes, as he watched the rapid footsteps of the boy; then, he suddenly turned from the drawing-room window, at which he had purposed to enter, and passed quickly up the staircase, to the front room of Lexington's suite.

He entered without announcing himself, and found Lexington pacing the floor, white and haggard, as he had done since he left Georgia's presence, an hour before.

He paused abruptly as Havelstock came in, with his face full of pity, and his manner that of a man who performs, perforce, a disagreeable duty.

"Look out the end window, Lexington. Do you see? Forgive me, I beg; but it is not my duty, as your nearest, truest friend, to
put you on your guard, even at risk of your displeasure?"

He locked his arm affectionately in Lexington's, and stood with him, while they both looked after the still distinguishable figure of Georgia's messenger. Lexington turned his blasing eyes on Havelstock.

"Is it Philo? He conveys a message to Mrs. Lexington's lover?"

His voice was husky as he spoke; and Havelstock distinctly heard the heavy, rapid strokes of his heart.

"It is Philo, I fear. He has a letter—I saw it plainly; but do not judge Georgia too harshly, I beg. Remember, there is the possibility of a mistake; remember, if the boy is Philo, without a doubt, and even if he does carry a letter, it may be to Georgia's seamstress, or to the druggist."

Lexington laid his hand on Havelstock's shoulder.

"You are so charitable, Frank, so ready to look on the bright side of everything, and so anxious to bridge this chasm between me and the woman who has disgraced me. You are the truest friend man ever had, and may God reward you as you served me."

Havelstock felt a silent contempt for his victim—the grand, noble heart whose fountain of nature he was poisoning so foully. But he experienced no thrill of awe or fear at Lexington's invocation on his head.

"However—peacemaking will not avail now, Frank," he went on, bitterly. "I have—every reason to know that Georgia is a guilty, depraved—"

Havelstock interrupted him vehemently.

"I can't listen to that—I never will believe it of Georgia. She may be imprudent—in deepest pain and pity I am obliged to think she is—but the sinful woman you make her can never, never! Yet—that letter tonight—Lexington, for Heaven's sake don't ask me a question ever again on this subject."

His countenance wore a look of indignant, yet sorrowful compassion, and Lexington thought what a nobleman he was—what a friend he was to even poor, poor Georgia.

"Was I harsh, Lexington?" he asked, after a second's pause, gently. "I did not mean to be, you must know. I was thinking how strangely the facts in the case conflict. You must not forget, Lexington, before you pass judgment, that Georgia has been very lonely at Tanglewood, all the past year; that she is as beautiful as a painter's dream ideal, and that it is not the most unnatural result in the world that her lover should worship her madly, that—"

Lexington was falling headlong into the trap so warmly set for him. His rage and jealousy were all afire again, just as Havelstock intended they should be, while no blame attached to himself.

Now, Lexington interrupted him with a hoarse cry.

"Worship her—you think he worships her? Frank, I'd give a thousand dollars this minute for her lover's name—whose picture I saw her kissing so passionately an hour ago! By all that's sacred, his life wouldn't be worth that in my hands."

He snapped in two a match, as he spoke.

"How could he help it—whoever it is whom Georgia favors—if she favors any one? Lexington, prove what I have said to be true! Prove your wife's innocence, by watching this once and finding that she does not meet her lover, having none to meet."

Havelstock was all earnest emotion as he rose to rejoin Ida, and Lexington clasped his hand warmly.

"Your kind advice is opportune—as it always is. I will give her a last chance—and you will be the happiest man in the world if your noble vindication is true."

"You are right; nothing will give me as much pleasure as to know this awful chasm is bridged—and that my feeble efforts aided."

Havelstock smiled pityingly, yet cheerfully, and went back to Ida, with a thoughtful gravity on his face that effectually deterred her from joking him on his certainties in deserting her.

"I have been out of doors, listening to your sweet music, and making up my mind how to tell you something I want you to know. Take my arm, Ida, and let us walk up and down the room. Did you miss me the few minutes I was gone?"

Her flushed face was turned slightly away, but he felt her frame tremble beside him.

"A few minutes only, was it? It seemed much longer to me."

He pressed her arm with his, as she said that.

"Then you must care for my society, Ida? Surely you would not find time hang on your hands in my absence if you did not care a little for me. Do you?"

He was not at all ardent; there was nothing eager in his voice, but Ida's heart was leaping exultantly, and her voice quivered with genuine happiness as she answered, lowly:

"I do care for your society, Mr. Havelstock. I think most women would."

A smile of complacency gleamed a moment in his eyes; he fully agreed with her, and thought, at the same time, what a flat, stale love-making this was. But he was in for it, and he went on, very credibly.

"I don't care for such a confession—you know I don't. I want you to look at me and say, 'Frank, I love you,' because, Ida, I love you dearly, and want you to promise to be my little wife soon—very soon."

Ida paused in a silent ecstasy of delight; then raised her pleased, blushing face.
"I do love you, Frank. I never cared for any one before; did you?"

"Never, my darling. You are the only woman I ever saw to whom I was in the least attracted. Kiss me, Ida—a sign and seal of our betrothal."

Her lips met his freely, fully, and as an exquisite magnetic thrill quivered over Ida from head to foot at that first, sweet caress, Frank Havelstock experienced a feeling of shrinking coldness, as he remembered the kisses of Ethel Maryl, warm, clinging, soulful, as she nestled to him, and looked all her passionate love out of her dusky eyes.

So his new life began—fair enough to see, promising enough in the bud; but oh! the fruit that was to turn to gall on his lip!

CHAPTER XXXI.

A BLOW IN THE FACE.

A single step after Georgia crossed the threshold of the kiosk, brought her face to face with Carleton Vincy, who emerged from the shadows and confronted her in sullen, wrathful silence.

His slouched hat was jammed over his forehead in attempt at disguise, if by chance any one should see him, by whom he did not care to be recognized.

His eyes were full of decisive mercilessness, as they glowed redly, as they looked on Georgia's graceful figure, clad in the dark-blue cloak; as they took in every detail of her pure, fair, worried face, with its somber, picturesque eyes of dusk, its glorious hair, that seemed caressing the shapely head and intellectual temples, from which Georgia had pushed back the hood of her waterproof.

"I thought it was best to come—for Lexington's sake as well as my own. I have brought you money—a great deal, to buy my peace by your absence."

His eyes lighted greedily.

"Money! oh! a couple of hundred dollars, maybe? You're a sensible woman, Georgia, but I'm not to be caught by such small bait as that. Money? did you ever know a fellow to refuse to close with a bargain if he was well paid for doing it?"

Georgia shrunk a step further back, as Vincy approached a step nearer; his brandy-flavored breath warming her face as he hurriedly expired.

"Will you swear to go away from Tangle-wood and never be seen in its vicinity again? Will you swear to make no future attempt to see me, or my husband, so long as you live? For God's sake—swear it, Carleton Vincy."

She spoke in an intensely passionate way that lent new beauty to her eloquent face. Vincy watched the play of her perfect features, with a sinister, tigerish delight on his own countenance; then, after a moment of apparent deepest consideration, he answered:

"I will swear to all you have said—for a thousand dollars, cash down. Does that suit you? If my demand seems large, remember you have plenty of money wherewith to buy your caprices, while I—am a poor devil who lives on my wife."

Georgia assented calmly, with a thrill of thankfulness that she had that exact amount in her pocket; although, had Vincy demanded more as the price of her safety, she would have stripped off her watch, her chain, her diamonds that hung like prisoned suns in ice, from her dainty ears, and glittered at her throat. Her hand trembled as she laid the two rolls of bills on the table beside her, and pushed them silently across to him.

He took them with a low, satisfactory laugh, and thrust them in his pocket.

"You always were truthful, Georgia, so that I need not count these notes to see if there are the thousand dollars you say there are."

She drew up her hand over her hair hurriedly.

"Remember I have sworn the word that I am never to be molested again—I, or my family; so that this is a final farewell."

She turned hastily to leave the kiosk, but he had been expecting such a move, and very effectually prevented her egress by stepping exactly in the doorway.

"Don't be in a hurry, Georgia. You must think I am a stock or a stone to let you go with only this brief business interview to remember you by. Suppose you sit down, and give me a little insight into your life."

He motioned toward the ornamented bronze settee opposite the door, with a smile that curdled her blood.

"I cannot remain a moment longer. They will miss me at the house, and then—"

He interrupted her promptly.

"And then, my fortunate successor would hurl all the vials of his wrath on your pretty head. He would vent all his rage and jealousy at you until your life would be a worse horror than it is now. He would hate you ten thousand times more than he does now if he learned that his supposed rival was your first divorced husband."

Georgia listened in dumb surprise at his information.

"He is all fire and intensity—isn't he—this handsome Apollo of yours? He never quite forgave you for palming yourself off as an honorable widow when you were really a divorced woman; and you never quite forgave him for tearing my child from your arms and letting it die the awful death it must have suffered by neglect and starvation."

Georgia's face whitened with mortal anguish and she clasped her hands in imploring mercy.

"Oh, don't! don't! My baby has been an
angel for years and years while I have been enduring such terrible pangs—let her memory rest. I loved her, if she was your child."

The contempt that was inferred more plainly than expressed in her words, galloped him to the very core.

"And I love you, if you are what you say you are, and the man’s wife. Do you hear that, my proud beauty! Can you reconcile this confession with the curses I hurled on you when I saw you last? Can you appreciate the paradox, that, though we are sworn foes to each other, I am more madly in love with you than ever I was before?"

Georgia stood motionless, as if turned suddenly to stone; but her brain seemed whirling with a horrible fear as she looked, listened, dumbly.

"I cannot forget that your proud head has lain on my breast, that my lips have kissed yours often. I cannot forget, nor can you, that I am the father of your first-born, only child; and by the memories of all these truths, I swear to you that I love you. Let me kiss you again, Georgia! let me take you in my arms and feel that heart I won, in early days, throbb against my own."

He stepped to her side, his eyes full of his wicked passion, his breath coming in quick, irregular inspirations. He threw his arm around her waist, and with the other essayed to raise her face to his own.

Georgia’s momentary peroration was gone now. Every muscle in her body steeled in just wrath, and she struggled with a strength that surprised even Vincy.

"How dare you—how dare you, you villain—how dare you? Take your arms from off me, or you shall suffer as you never suffered before for this vile insult to the wife of Theodore Lexington!"

She wrenched one hand from his, and struck him in the face—a ringing, stinging blow that made every nerve in his body tingle with rage, even as the flash on his cheek smarted with the sudden infliction.

"By the gods, what a little tiger she is! A beautiful cat, with claws that know how to scratch, for all the sheaths of velvet under which they are hidden. No woman ever struck me before, my beautiful Georgia, and I shall take revenge in my own way."

He suddenly let go her wrist and caught her wrists in his cruel, viselike grip, so that she was powerless to attack him, or resent his insults. For a moment he looked down in her eyes—her pure, indignant eyes that flashed like a sword-blade in the sun; he laughed in a low, triumphant, mocking way, and then caught his head and kissed her again and again, on her quivering lips, her scarlet cheeks; on her forehead—quick, fierce kisses that made her whole frame throb with mortified anger.

Then he deliberately released her, and looked after her as she fled like a frightened fawn through the starlit gloom.

"I am not so sure I shall keep my word with my tiger beauty; in fact, I am very sure I shall not. What a fascinating creature she is, and how I humbled her fiery soul to the very dust! How I worship her—despite that blow that was not her fault that it was not my death; she would have murdered me, I verily believe! No, my haughty Georgia, the excitement of the chase has just begun; and if between the fire of my love and persecution, and your liege lord’s distrust and jealousy, and your own unrequited affection, you don’t get burned—why, it will be singular."

He thrust his hands in his pockets, and felt the money that he had temporarily forgotten.

"A good night’s work! and I am mistaken if others as successful do not follow. I have struck a gold mine, I verily believe, and Georgia shall pay dearly for her secret, or I am mistaken."

He slouched his hat lower over his gleaming, basilisk eyes, and shrank quietly out of the kiosk, just at the moment when Georgia, pale with excitement and agitation, her eyes smoldering like living coals, gained the smilax-covered door of the unfrequented stairway.

She paused a second, breathless from her flight, before she parted the luxuriant vines. Then she stepped through—to meet her husband, face to face!

He stood in the very doorway, as if in grim patience awaiting her return. His face was white with wrath, and in his eyes that seemed to pierce her through and through was something that looked like murder.

Georgia gave a little gasping cry of horror. Were the Fates forever against her? Then she leaned against the trellis, heavily, in mute, trembling expectation.

"Well, may I inquire what this means?" Lexington’s voice was hoarse with a rage he could barely restrain.

There was no huff but utter soul-weariness in Georgia’s face as he looked at him; only a hunted, despairing expression, that would have touched him had he not been blinded with the jealous rage that fairly shook his frame.

"I will tell you, Theodore, only you will not believe me. Will you hear me?"

Her face was exquisite in its pleading pathos; her eyes liquid with melting sorrow in her heart.

A sound like a hiss burst sharply from Lexington’s lips.

"Hear what? a woman’s defense to hide the lover she meets by stealth! the false denials you would make in endeavoring to further hoodwink me, regardless of the awful perjuries you must utter! What, listen to words of falsehood, that your very act, your very
position this moment gives the lie to before they are spoken?"

His tone had settled in one of stern, implacable coldness, and Georgia saw that he was deathly haggard. If she could only keep the knowledge of Vincy's life from him just this once, such a contredemp would never occur again; for Vincy was going; he had sworn it. Why—why could there not be peace, reconciliation? Her whole heart, and soul, and nature arose in one last, desperate attempt.

"You wrong me awfully, Theodore—most awfully; and even in face of what you choose to construe into indisputable evidence of guilt, I swear before high Heaven that I am innocent; that you have wronged me most terribly. Now do you believe?"

She raised her beautiful hand in solemn oath; her beseeching eyes eloquent with truth.

His lips curled.

"I do not. I have seen too much. I have seen you kissing his picture; I saw you read his letter; I watched your messenger take your love epistle; I meet you on your way home from your secret interview—and you dare ask me to believe you an innocent, wronged woman!"

His tone rung clear and intense; and Georgia's face convulsed with pain. How could she answer, save by confessing the awful truth?

He watched the woe on her face, almost excusing in it.

"You have nothing to say? I have proved you false—false to the core. I know you are not fit to sit at the table with my servants; I know you are at this moment rejoicing over your good luck in hiding your lover from my vengeance; yet, knowing all, despising you as I do, distrusting you as I do—do you know, fair, false woman, that I worship you—madly, hopelessly?"

In his strange words was a frightful passion of emphasis; he stood, with folded arms, looking into her glowing eyes, his own gloomy, eager.

A low, ecstatic cry arose to her lips, as they parted in a smile so sweet that his very blood boiled at sight of it—the first smile he had seen on her face for years.

She crossed the narrow distance between them and laid her quivering fingers on his sleeve, a slow carnation glowing in her cheeks, a perfect radiance in her eyes.

"Oh, Theodore! say those blessed words again, and I will kiss your very feet in rapturous thanksgiving. You love me! You do love me!"

She repeated the words caressingly, in tones of ravishing tenderness, from the overflowing ecstasy of a heart that fondly believed the time had come at last.

Lenington only smiled incredulously, then there came into his gloomy eyes such a flood of hard, bitter scorn, that she felt dizzy and faint.

"You cannot succeed in that charming way. I said I loved you—madly, hopelessly. My unfortunate affection is hopeless, for think you I would allow myself to be deceived! Hopeless, since it never shall be lavished on you beyond the thoughts that sometimes madden me."

Georgia clasped her hands over her heart, as if in a spasm of breathlessness; then, when the brief agony had passed, she passed him, without a word, and went slowly, weakly to her room.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE NEW LIFE.

If Mrs. Argylene had been charmed upon the first forming of Ethel's acquaintance, the admiration deepened and grew into the fondest regard, as the days went on, and she noted the quiet, high-bred ways, the elegant self-possession of manner, the gentle spirit of tenderness, gentleness, and delicacy of her disposition.

She found, too, that Ethel was well educated; that she played almost perfectly, and could sing with a tender, pathetic voice that instinctively made one listen in silent admiration. Her beauty, too, developed under the tender care Mrs. Argylene bestowed upon her; not that she had been ever aught else but wondrously fair, but her late troubles had impaired it somewhat; so that when her cheeks lost their waxen pallor, and assumed their wonted tender paleness, and the heavy black circles disappeared from under her eyes, and into her steps came the old, graceful springiness, Mrs. Argylene was enchanted, and congratulated herself daily on the good fortune that had brought Ethel to her roof.

For the first few days, Mrs. Argylene had stubbornly refused to make any business arrangements with Ethel; and the girl was so tired, so thankful for the repose that she did not urge it. But, when a fortnight had gone, Mrs. Argylene found that under all Ethel's sweetness and gentleness was a decision of character not to be trifled with.

"I cannot think of being a loiterer in the world, Mrs. Argylene, nor would I respect myself if I allowed myself to remain a dependent on your kind bounty. I can and must earn my own living, and I would rather do it here than anywhere in the world."

And when Mrs. Argylene listened to her patient, firm words, she loved her the more, and yielded the point at once.

"You are right, Ethel. You shall enter upon your duties to-day, at a stated salary of six hundred dollars a year, payable quarterly in advance."
ficiently large. With no expenses, and the good stock of clothes on hand, together with her little hoard of cash, she felt rich, with a thankfulness that shone all over her face.

"Mrs. Argyle! you are generous beyond my most sanguine expectations. How can I thank you?"

Mrs. Argyle laughed, softly.

"I fear you will recant when you learn what a host of duties I shall impose upon you. You will have to see that my rooms are always cozy and tastefully arranged; you will have all my toilets to invent—and you know mourning is capable of so few originalities. Then there will be my morning and evening hours to listen to reading and music; there will be such tiresome tours of shopping and the dreary rounds of calls—both of which miseries I am disposed to make you share with me."

Ethel took up the delightful list, and went on enthusiastically.

"You must not neglect to add my duties as hairdresser, and seamstress, and general maid. I am determined to earn my salary, dear Mrs. Argyle."

She looked so frank, so brave, so earnest.

"And I assure you I am equally determined to get the worth of my money," returned Mrs. Argyle, playfully; and so the contract was made, and Ethel commenced her duties that same evening, by reading to Mrs. Argyle, after she had undressed, and was tucked in her dainty bed.

Life sped on featherly wings; Ethel's duties were those that a daughter might have performed for a mother; there were delightful people constantly visiting Mrs. Argyle, although she went out comparatively little, so that Ethel had every opportunity of seeing the fashionable phase of society.

There were long, confidential talks, in which Ethel opened her heart freely to Mrs. Argyle, receiving in turn friendly sympathy and womanly advice; and during which, Mrs. Argyle learned that there was not the remotest idea of any feeling in Ethel's heart toward Leslie Verne, warmer than a frank, truthful friendship.

She learned that all of Ethel's affections had been centered on her dead husband—or at least Ethel herself thought so, and expressed herself so very decidedly, even when in "the customary events of time," the first keen edge of her grief wore off, and she took new, fresh interests in everything about her.

Her life was so happy. Mrs. Argyle was the best of friends and counselors, who, while she never permitted Ethel to suspect there were plans afoot for her, still continually cheered and encouraged Leslie, and even feigned the flame of his love by her own tender compliments.

He had changed considerably—Leslie had; and Ethel saw the change with a silent surprise and admiration, for his graver, more thoughtful ways tallied better with hers.

His patient waiting now, his scathing disappointment before, had left their marks upon him—rain although he felt his love was, at times, even now. His love for Ethel was quiet, strong, unyielding; and it permeated his entire character, making it rich and fruitful in all the qualities which would help make a happier woman of the one he called his wife.

He saw Ethel often, and in his heart he was sore and sick to learn she had no thought for him beyond that of a true, sincere friend—that she still dwelt with unyielding fidelity upon the memory of her dead. Their frequent interviews, when they utterly ignored the light, frivolous gossip most young people of their age would have indulged in—when they talked over Ethel's troubles, were full of unsatisfied misery to Leslie, that he never dreamed were fulfilling their mission in a manner most conducive to the end he always had in prospect. But it was so; Ethel's free, frank memories, and Leslie's cheery, unselfish sympathy were daily binding them in cords of regard and fervent friendship, that was the surest foundation for love to build upon—that united them in interest tenfold nearer and dearer than any other possible circumstances could have done.

So the wheels of Time rolled slowly, evenly on to Ethel, daily regaining her wonted cheerfulness, and hourly making herself more and more indispensable in her new home, where her deep mourning dresses were gradually losing their unbroken somberness by means of dainty lavender ribbons, a white lace edging, her hair, and snowly frills of lace at her throat and wrists; while Leslie Verne, in all the brave, patient tenderness of waiting, silently watched and bided his time; while Frank Havelstock saw on Ida Wynne's finger the gleam of the diamond he had placed there in sign and seal of their engagement, and the bride-elect dreamed her girlish dreams, and enjoyed with a woman's pardonable vanity the eclat of her position; while Carleton Vincy planned, and schemed, and enjoyed the money Georgi Lexington had given him as the price of his lying silence and absence, while the pair at Tanglewood drifted further and further apart into darker glooms and more dangerous chasms.

It was one of the curiosities of this life-drama that involved so many destinies, that wounded so many existences, that each actor and his part was unknown to the one most concerned. It was one of its odd peculiarities—this strange tendency to secrecy, that no one purposely caused, or could have hindered.

It was like wheels within wheels inclosed in a night of starless darkness; yet, the wheels went round and round with unerring precision, impelled by a force no human power could withstand—a force, against which neither light nor darkness could avail; which would accom-
plish its work with tireless zeal, regardless of woman's tears, a strong man's silent moans; careless of the breaking hearts that crushed surely, slowly under its relentless iron strength.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE FATEFUL NAME.

Preparations for Ida Wynne's approaching wedding were progressing rapidly, under her own competent directions as well as Mrs. Lexington's advice and suggestions.

At the first announcement of the engagement Georgia had manifested her disapproval in her quiet, effective way, to Lexington, who had taken upon himself the responsibility of acquainting her with the fact. He knew it would not occasion her any particular satisfaction, owing to her prejudices against Frank Havelstock, which, of course, he repudiated stoutly.

Full of misery as his life was, tortured by fires of anger, outraged pride, jealousy, and mad worship for the woman he regarded as so utterly unworthy; pitiful was the condition of Georgia's inner life, desolate, blighted though the frequent misunderstandings had left her; yet outwardly, courtesy, dignity and attention marked their intercourse, so that at this time of approaching gayety consultations and questions were of frequent occurrence.

Lexington and his wife had been to New York with Ida, several times on shopping tours to Stewart's, and Lord & Taylor's, where being made to order the magnificent trousseaux for the bride of Ethel Havelstock's husband.

On these occasions the groom elect had positively refused to accompany them, greatly to Ida's displeasure; and when he laughed and declared he was totally unequal to playing the role of assayer of point-laces and moire antiques, Ida believed him, despite her disappointment, little knowing that the true reason was he hardly felt bold enough, as yet, to trust to the chances of meeting his injured, deserted wife face to face.

At this time, while vigorous preparations were making in the feminine department of the household, Theodore Lexington had presented the necessary petition to the Legislature, then just convened at Albany, in which John Franklin Havelstock prayed to have his name changed, for good reasons, which were stated, to John Lexington; and when, consequently, on account of the high social status of the family of Lexington, the change was speedily effected, there remained just enough time to get out the elaborate wedding-cards for December 1st, at which time Mr. and Mrs. Theo. Lexington announced themselves "at home" to the five hundred people whom they honored with an invitation to the ceremony at 12 M., and the reception from 2 until 5.

It seemed strange at first, the change in Frank Havelstock's name; and Ida pouted considerably because her lover insisted upon her dropping the old and assuming the new name at once. He was very determined about it, and enforced the new regime with a quiet positiveness that commanded even Georgia's admiration.

So by the stroke of a pen Frank Havelstock disappeared from sound, and Mr. John Lexington, of Tanglewood, made his bow to the world as the proud, happy, fortunate possessor of Miss Ida Wynne's heart and hand.

He was jubilant, this man who did not believe in eternal justice; who thought, because his path was so far unobstructed, there never would come dark, tortuous windings, which should lead him into positions of horror and danger, from which he could not return; who refused to believe that the coming night would bring storm clouds and tempestuous gusts that would beat on his head, simply because in the morning of his venturesome wickedness there was calm and blue sky and sunshine.

The complete sinking of his identity so far as his name was concerned did not satisfy him, at least for the present. So he sacrificed his personal appearance, for a time, by shaving his splendid mustache off, and his allowing a tuft of beard to grow on his chin. It impaired his looks to a considerable extent, and Ida cried more than once over his changed appearance; but her passionate exclamation more than repaid him for the sacrifice, for it assured him he had succeeded in his attempt to foil any possibly inquisitive person.

"If you know how hideous you looked! Your own mother never would recognize you in that horrid way you have deformed yourself. I think it is too mean for anything—when I was so proud of you and wanted all the girls to see how handsome you were."

He comforted her with the assurance that his mustache should grow again, and then distracted her critical attention by offering to direct the envelopes containing the invitations.

They went to the library together, Ida hanging affectionately on his arm, and pouring her light gossip ceaselessly in his ears.

"I don't know half of them—do you? But I don't care. I know my dress will attract the attention of strangers as well as friends. If only you hadn't cut off your—"

He interrupted her, coolly.

"No more of that, pleas Where, is the list Mrs. Lexington made out? Give it to me—there it is."

Ida ran her eyes down the long, dauntingly written list, exclamations of delight or surprise or vexation escaping her as she commented.

"If cousin Georgia isn't too bad, I particularly requested that Nellie Myer should be asked, and her name 's not among the Ms.
There's only the Mordaunts and Wallace Mul's sisters, and Judge Merle's family."

"Possibly Mrs. Lexington forgot Miss Nellie."

Ida curled her lip.

"She never forgets anything. Oh! the Courtlands are coming—isn't that—"

"Invited, you mean," he interrupted, amusedly.

"Oh, they'll come, I know. Gustie Courtland wouldn't miss the opportunity of parading her diamonds for half the value of them. I do detest those Courtland girls."

"Very pretty, stylish young ladies, I understand. Have you any other exception to take to the list?"

She went on again, critically.

"Mr. and Mrs. Ross, Dr. Sefton and family, the Tunisons (I hope Rolfe will come, he was a beau of mine once); then there is old Miss Urman, and the Uphams, and Mr. Verne. I won't have him. Fr.—John! if Leslie Verne is coming to my wedding—I—I won't be married."

The name sounded in his ears like a doom. He felt a quickened pulsation of his heart, and then—laughed at Ida's energetic words.

"What if Leslie Verne? It seems to me I have heard the name before. What's the cause of innegligibility in his case?"

"Simply because I don't like him. He gave a grand reception at Meadowbrook, a year ago, and left me entirely out. He's a conceited, good-looking fellow, not very fond of ladies' society, and lives all alone at Meadowbrook, with a perfect retinue of servants—keeps up all the style of an English family of rank. But I am determined he shan't see me married. Give me a pencil. I'll cross it off and explain to cousin Georgia."

She drew the pencil heavily across the name, while her lover watched her curiously.

"I don't envy Mr. Verne's estimation in your opinion, my dear; it must have been a psychological effect that made me think I was connected with him, somehow, though at such wide variance."

"I don't think it could have been that."

Ida looked coolly in his eyes, feeling the superiority of her argument. "I am quite sure the reason you remembered Mr. Verne is that he was a very devoted suitor to a Miss Ethel Maryl—whom you admired so at the time."

She watched him intently; he knew such to be the case, and, as usual in times of pressing importance, he was perfectly master of the situation.

"And of whom you were unwarrantably jealous, little girl. Confess you were—as a punishment for what has been proven so untrue."

The warm color rushed into Ida's cheeks.

"I will confess, because I was awfully jealous of her. Don't you remember the day we rode into the village and when we passed Mrs. Lawrence's you bowed and called her 'Miss Ethel'? I hated her then, because I thought she had won you; I didn't know you must have loved me then."

"You see how foolish you were, don't you? I certainly did admire Miss Maryl very much; but, when it comes to loving—why, my darling, you know where my preferences are."

Not a quaver of his voice, not a tremor of a muscle, as he looked Ida Wynne in the eyes and uttered his precious lie.

"I know now, of course. But if you had suspected how I felt that day you went from Tanglewood and stayed so long. The day after our ride—do you remember?"

It was the quintessence of mockery. That unconscious, guileless question. Did he remember? Could he forget? And the memory of those days of his life that had been the best, the purest, the truest he ever had passed, surged over him with terrific force. He felt a diminishment in his eyes and a trembling in every limb as he realized that Ethel's influence was not yet gone from his heart. He drew the long list of names to him, almost savagely.

"I might as well begin. Read them, Ida, as I write."

She leaned carelessly against his chair, flushed and happy.

"Mrs. Argylene. You don't know her, do you? Neither do I, and cousin Georgia told me she did not. But cousin Theo requested an invitation for her especially. She is a very he is in Europe and whom he greatly admires for her culture and refinement. She moves in the most exclusive circles in New York, and very probably you and I will visit her, some day, cousin Theo says."

He wrote the name, all unconscious of its fateful implication with his own.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ASSAILING THE CITADEL.

Ethel's life at Mrs. Argylene's was still running in the same grooves of quiet restfulness, content and deepening happiness. Her round of duties, well performed, and executed promptly, left her hours of her own time, which she improved by a course of instructive reading, and attending to her music and singing. She thus kept pace with the outside world, while its gayeties and dissipations had no charms for her, and did not interfere with her little world at home. She went out occasionally; when Mrs. Argylene insisted, and Leslie Verne particularly requested. She was always elegantly though simply attired, after Mrs. Argylene's style, and her quiet refinement of manner, her sweet, unobtrusive, highbred ways, her capability of both entertaining and being entertained, made her a favorite
among the more intelligent, exclusive men and women whom she met.

It was known that she was a widow, although she had removed her mourning—her deep mourning—at the end of six months; and the black silks, and cashmeres, and lace she wore were scarcely distinguishable from other fashionable toilettes.

Had Ethel consulted her own tastes she would hardly have left off her garb of sorrow so soon, so promptly; but her friend, her benefactor, had asked her if she would not—and Leslie had said, more than once, that it oppressed him strangely to see her so gravely attired; and, somehow, she liked to please Leslie—and Mrs. Argelyne; they had both been so good to her.

So, the somber, crêpe-trimmed dresses were laid aside, and Ethel wore dainty jets and all the elegant adornments sanctioned in second mourning, while away down in her heart she found that the keen, piercing grief was gone—merging daily into a quiet, grave memory, dearly though she had loved her husband—truly, fondly as she ever would respect his memory.

They saw a great deal of Leslie—Ethel and Mrs. Argelyne, and the natural consequence was an intimacy between the two young people that never would have been engendered by less homelike social intercourse.

Day by day added to the all-absorbing love of Leslie for Ethel. At his home, among all the silent splendor, all the pompous array of a good old English pride—her sweet face continually haunted him, and he knew with a certainty, that his judgment approved strongly, that the one, only thing needful to the perfect completion of his earthly happiness, was the love and presence of Ethel Havelstock.

He watched her from time to time with an eagerness he could barely restrain; watched, waited for a sign that his love had compelled hers.

He had made up his mind never to give up; he was determined to woo and win her for his wife, if human power, aided by a Divine blessing he did not fail daily to implore on his hopes and aspirations, could accomplish the result.

It was plain enough to Mrs. Argelyne—the truth of her nephew's love for the girl she already hoped would be her kinswoman, even if Leslie's lips had not confessed it. She saw how his fair face flushed at the sound of Ethel's footsteps; how his blue eyes lighted with a worshipping tenderness as he listened to her low tones or her sweet, girlish laughter. As yet, Ethel was blind and deaf; but the magic torch was close at hand—and it came in a curiously fateful way, although how very intimately it concerned her, Ethel did not know at the time.

It had been a perfect day—an Indian sum-
velope, square in form, and with a monogram that at first Ethel could not decipher, on the reverse side.

He drew a chair near the low grate fire for Ethel, then remained standing himself, leaning an elbow on the low marble mantel, and feasting his eyes on the girl who was carelessly endeavoring to trace the individual letters of the monogram.

"Mrs. Argylene declines so many invitations that I feel quite assured she will not honor this wedding unless the parties are very intimate friends. I have not heard her speak of any forthcoming wedding."

She took the cards out and ran her eyes over them.

"Mr. John Lexington and Miss Ida Wynne. I have seen Miss Wynne, I think; she was a friend of Frank's."

She was grave, but Leslie observed, with a thrill of satisfaction, that she did not seem agitated.

"I have met the lady once or twice, I think. She is a very pretty, insipid little girl, with a large fortune—a relative, I think, of Mrs. Theodore Lexington, of Tanglewood, where she has resided for several months."

"She has a beautiful home; I hope she will be happy with her choice. John Lexington; a relative of Mrs. Lexington, evidently. I never have heard of him before."

It was so strange—that quiet, indifferent conversation about her own living husband, the villain who had so deliberately wrecked her life; so strange to be reading his wedding cards, and never to know, by any delicate intuition, that it was so.

"I hope they will be happy— as happy as I was. I could ask no higher favor for any one."

She placed the cards in their envelopes again and laid them on the table, Leslie looking at her with eager, wistful eyes.

"Happy as you were, Ethel, do you despair of ever enjoying life as well again?"

"I have never thought of it. I am very contented, and consequently measurably happy now."

Her face was grave, quiet, serene; and Verne thought he never saw so pure, so sweet a one.

"Your position here is certainly desirable—unt Helen has the enviable faculty of making every one happier with whom she comes in contact. But, Ethel, have you no intention of ever changing this mode of life?"

She looked up quickly, her brown eyes full of wonderment.

"Change? is not Mrs. Argylene satis—" Verne interrupted her passionately.

"Mrs. Argylene is out of the question. I am talking of yourself, Ethel. Surely, surely you must know what I mean; I have waited so long, so long to ask you to come to me; to tell you I love you better and better every day—that I never gave you up. Ethel, I want you. I can offer you all the wealth you will grace so perfectly; I will make your life one long, sunny day—God helping me, if you will only let me. Ethel, my darling, will you be my own precious wife?"

His fair face was full of intensest beseeching. His eyes glowed with the feeling that could no longer be forbidden utterance; his firm, white, strong hands caught Ethel's in their grasp, with a tight hold that showed his earnestness.

A puzzled look came into the girl's eyes, then, a momentary expression of regretful pain. Last and permanent was a pitying, tender glow.

"Oh, Leslie! I thought you had forgotten all that. I did not know you were so loyal, so patient, so true."

"But I am—you see I am, my darling. And I want my reward from your sweet lips this moment. Tell me you are my promised bride."

Her hands fluttered in his firm hold; then, over her face surged a scarlet wave, and she averted her head.

"Oh, no! I cannot, indeed I cannot. Not that I am indifferent to the honor you pay me—"

He interrupted her sharply.

"Don't speak of any honor I pay you, Ethel! All I ask is to have you tell me to accept the blessing of your love. Speak, Ethel!"

But she did not answer, and the doubt in his eyes deepened into positive anguish.

"Can it be possible that I am distasteful to you? You don't hate me?"

She turned her face suddenly at that.

"How can you imagine such a dreadful thing?"

He came a step nearer; she heard his quick, eager breathing.

"Then tell me this. Can you ever, do you think, learn to love me?"

She dropped her eyes under the piercing light of his and again the delicious tide of carnation rushed under her thin, fair skin.

"I—cannot say. You are a dear friend, and I—think—that—I am sure I am not indifferent to you, but—but—"

Her sweet confusion intoxicated him like a draught of wine; a smile of unspeakable tenderness illumined his noble countenance.

"Thank you, my darling, for so much encouragement. Only do not dampen me with that wretched alternative your word suggests. What was it? 'But—what, Ethel?' " If you knew how it hurts me to say it, Leslie! I meant to say I could not—so soon—"

He never had seen her so confused before and from it he argued success.

"I know it is soon to you," he said, gently.
"but think how long it has been to me! Think again, Ethel, and see if there isn't a 'yes!' for me, away down in your heart."

She felt his strong hands quiver over her own; she knew his eager eyes were two exponents of his honest, earnest, pleading heart; and his patient waiting, his manly wooing was in his favor.

She raised her eyes, grave, sweet, with a trembling, uncertain glory in them.

"Give me until to-morrow. To-morrow I will tell you positively."

"May God incline your heart toward me?"

And his simple reverence touched her to the very soul.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE WOVEN WEB.

The wedding at Tanglewood was the social event of the season, the preparations being of the most elaborate character.

The ceremony was performed in the chapel connected with the Lexington estates, and according to the solemnly impressive and beautiful ritual of the Episcopal church. The altar was decorated with exquisite flowers, and the officiating clergymen were in full canonsals. After the ceremony, carriages in waiting, with footmen and coachmen in the Tanglewood livery, and ornamented with bridal favors, conveyed the guests to the mansion, where the reception was held, from one until three o'clock.

Tanglewood had never looked so passing fair as on the day when Ida Wynne went forth from its roof the bride of Ethel Havelstock's husband. Although winter-time, with leafless trees and brown frozen earth, the state apartments were blooming with flowers, that were arranged wherever flowers could be placed. The bay windows were banks of solid carnations of brightest pink, with the bridal pair's initials in tube roses. Festoons of double violets, smilax and perfumery woodbine reached around the room. Wreaths of jasmine, heliotrope and mignonne were trimmed around the costly statuary and the paintings, and among the crystal and glass chandeliers, which were brilliantly lighted, the heavy damask curtains being drawn, and the outside shutters closed, thus effectually shutting out a glimpse of daylight.

The bride wore the regulation dress of white satin, point lace and orange flowers. She was radiant with happiness, and the delightful excitement lent an added beauty to her bright eyes and woodrose complexion.

The groom, in stereotyped black and white, was himself, to a demonstration; cool, courteous, self-possessed; the admiration of all the women present, with a solitary exception; and the exception was Mrs. Argelyne.

The hostess, charming Mrs. Lexington, had never been so beautiful, her husband thought, with throbbing heart and pulsing veins, as she leaned on his arm, so near, so awfully divided, and received congratulations for Ida and her husband, also on his own redoubled happiness.

Georgia had disapproved of this marriage, and had said so at the first. Then, seeing that her opinion could make no difference, she decided, in her prudent, sensible way, to have everything as pleasant as possible, since it was an inevitable affair. Of her husband's generosity to Havelstock she had cared nothing; Tanglewood was his own, and the half of it was an ample fortune. She was not of a selfish disposition, and had she been, such selfishness would have been overcome by the great trials of her life, by the one great yearning want of her existence—her husband's affection.

She had dressed for this wedding with more earnest desire to commend herself to Lexington's eye than the bride had felt toward her husband; and when Theodore knocked at her dressing room door to escort her to the carriage, she looked deprecatingly at him, with a wistfulness in her eyes that was touching.

And while her beauty, her grace, enhanced by her magnificent toilet of pearl-gray silk, thick, heavy, lustrous, with an overdress of almost priceless lace, with fire-hearted rubies and scintillating diamonds glowing at her round, white throat, on her dainty wrists, in her hair, while this splendid beauty smote him in an agony of mad passion, and made him shiver with pain that so horrible a gulf divided them, while Georgia stood a second in mute waiting for a possible ray of hope, he only bowed, and offered his arm courteously.

It was a terrible trial for her—that entire day. Compelled to attend to her guests; obliged to appear pleasant and smiling, the while her heart was bearing a woe whose bitter burden only herself knew.

Yet she realized that the weight of misery was lighter than it had been. She was positively conscious that the knowledge of Carleton Vincy's absence from the vicinity had lightened her sorrows. She believed, with the perfect trustfulness of a woman who was incapable of lying and treachery, that Carleton Vincy was as good as his word; that the three weeks' absence that had already taken place was proof positive of her theory.

This knowledge, and the horror it removed from her, and the restfulness it afforded her, was visible in her manner, her countenance, unconscious though she was of it; while Lexington wondered if, at last, she was growing repentant and subdued.

All that busy, bustling day, Georgia filled her position admirably, warming every heart toward her in profound admiration, and winning more than one friendship that lasted all through her after life.
It was very grateful to her—these earnest, quiet friendships that came straight from warm, loving women's hearts, straight to her own, so discrete, so pitifully capable of developing affection.

And her husband saw this, with fierce, sharp distress—saw that Georgia charmed every one as she fascinated him, unconsciously. He noted the affinity that sprung up in a moment when he personally presented Mrs. Argylene and his wife, and left them conversing in the delightful way both were so well versed in.

Georgia was charmed with her husband's friend; perhaps not less on account of Mrs. Argylene's sweetness and unaffected simplicity of manner than that she was the friend of her husband, and thus was invested with a pitiful sacredness on Lexington's account.

At the close of the festivities, when the bride and groom had been an hour or so off on their tour, and nearly all the guests had been conveyed to the little rustic station, Mrs. Argylene came to Georgia as she stood in the reception-room, at her post, to receive the adieux of the guests.

Mr. Lexington had just escorted a party of ladies to their barouche, and he re-entered the room at the same second as did Mrs. Argylene.

"I have to thank you for the pleasure you have permitted me to enjoy, Mrs. Lexington. I think you know I am unusually in earnest when I ask for a speedy reciprocation of visits. Mr. Lexington, may I have your promise to bring your wife to see me very soon?"

She was so simple, so frank in her invitation, Lexington bowed as he answered:

"Mrs. Lexington and I visit very little, but if we go anywhere your house shall be the first."

Georgia's heart gave a bound of exquisite happiness as she caught a glance from her husband's eyes—a peculiarly expressive glance, that was freer from distrust, coldness, contempt than she had seen of late weeks.

Her own eyes lighted gloriously in answer, and a genuinely happy smile parted her lips. Mrs. Argylene went up to her and kissed her affectionately, and Lexington felt a curious thrill of jealousy, that a woman even ders take what he dared not, yet what was his own.

Then she departed, and while Lexington, disturbed by strong feelings for which he could scarcely account, retired to his room to think of nothing but Georgia, she, disappointed, weary, yet hopeful in spirit to a measure, went by herself into the conservatory, where the dim, soft lights burning in their ground glass globes, the delicate perfume of living, blooming flowers, the soft splash of the fountains, the gleam of the emerald foliage, were restful and grateful alike to mind and sense, after the noise, the glare, the excitement.

She closed the glass-door after her, through which she saw the servants, under Mrs. Robin-

son's direction, dismantling the drawing-rooms of their bridal array. Then, to more effectually shut all the sound out, she dropped the light green silk curtains, and returned to her seat under a wide-spreading orange-tree.

She made a picture as she sat there, so quietly, so gracefully, her silvery silk dress gleaming lightly in the mellow gaslight, the exquisitely filmy lace of her overdress looking like cobwebs of white spun silk.

She had seated herself in an attitude of careless, unconscious grace, with her eyes bent to the mossy sward around the fountain, in thoughtful, not wholly hopeless meditation, and the subject was a possible reunion some time or other with her husband.

So there she sat, half reclining, wholly absorbed in her sweet, pure, wifely thoughts, all unconscious of a pair of gleaming eyes glaring fiercely upon her with the glare of unblurred admiration, all unconscious of the presence of Carleton Viney, who, at Havelstock's—we shall call him Havelstock to the end— suggestion had easily gained ingress to the conservatory during the absence of the bridal party in the dining saloons. He had secreted himself among the tall, tropical plants, waiting patiently for the departure of the guests, and at the same time, through the glass door, keeping an eye to Georgia's movements.

While she had been bidding Mrs. Argylene adieu in the reception-room, he had been tempted to leave his place of concealment for another, nearer the grand drawing room, where he thought she would go, if only for a moment. But Havelstock's positive assurance that the conservatory, and especially the low divan by the orange bower, was Georgia's favorite and customary resort every evening, had induced him to remain—to be rewarded beyond his expectations.

He had seen her enter, and sit wearily down. He had seen her draw the curtains between her and the dining-room; and he had seen her reseat herself in the full, restful belief that she was entirely alone.

His bold eyes took a sinister gleam as he stepped silently forward—straight in front of her.

She started, looked up, and whitened to the very lips.

"Carleton Viney! you told me I never should see you again!"

"I know it—but I was obliged to alter my intentions. If I have alarmed you, I am sincerely sorry."

He spoke in a low voice, that had in it that which smote her with a vague sense of impending evil.

"You have broken your oath. You have committed a perjury that can be excused on no possible grounds. But you have secured my money, and it is to be presumed that is all you wanted."
She arose from her seat, as if her remaining seated conferred too much honor upon him. Her face was white, not with absolute fear, so much as the foreboding of awe his lying presence caused her.

"That is not all I want, Georgia. You know as well as I do that I cannot leave you, when I love you so. Those kisses from your sweet lips that night have whetted my appetite for more—and I came to night to urge my suit anew, to assure you I shall never give you up."

He took a step nearer her; she drew her haughty figure to its fullest height.

"Be careful how you insult me again. Remember I am under my own roof—that servants are within the sound of my voice, that my husband needs but an alarm from my voice to come instantly to me."

He smiled coolly.

"Allow me to correct you by assuring you that I took the liberty of cutting your bel-rope several hours ago—and while you were at dinner. Consequently your large retinue of servants are inaccessible."

Georgia glanced at the bell-rope—it was swaying, tasselless, far above her head. A sudden horror leaped into her eyes, and Vincy saw 4, triumphantly.

"As to your summoning Mr. Lexington—that I do not apprehend. It would be confirmation of his worst suspicions if he found me here, which I swear he shall do, unless you promise me to revoke your cruel decision, and give me the opportunities I shall demand, of seeing you."

There was no mistaking the evil glare of his eyes—eyes that made him handsome once, that were repellent now with all the unfeathered lawlessness of his nature.

Georgia felt the deathly faintness increase, and leaned heavily against the trunk of the orange tree for support.

"I swear it—and you shall learn that I can keep an oath with a vengeance! Tell me you love me—give me a word of encouragement—or by all the powers of Satan I will crush you in Lexington's estimation forever! He half-believes you guilty now, in his senseless jealousy, which you know is causeless as far as you are concerned; and he shall know it, in ten minutes now, if you spurn me again!"

A sudden strength flashed over Georgia; her eyes glowed like stars; she stepped clear of the orange tree, and stood before her vile persecutor like a queen of tragedy.

"You call yourself a gentleman, and dare address an honorable woman in such monstrous language. You, so vile, so depraved, dare take my husband's name on your polluted lips. You dare offer insult upon insult to me—an impertinent woman in my own house!"

Her voice was full of scorn, and her eyes gleamed and sparkled with the cold brilliance of steel in the moonlight.

Vincy gazed in keen admiration, his face slowly flushing.

"Heavens! Georgia, that was simply superb. My beautiful pyromance, I love you more than ever now—"

The sound of a door somewhere on the second floor was distinctly heard, followed by rapidly-advancing, firmly-treading footsteps.

Vincy listened attentively, a grim smile gathering on his face. Georgia inclined her head a second, and then, as their eyes met, a moan of terror burst from her white lips.

"It is Lexington, and I should not be surprised if he were coming here. Lights are out in the other rooms, so that if he seeks you he will very naturally come here."

Georgia listened, dumbly, clasping and unclasping her cold, trembling hands.

"For God's sake, go! if there is a spark of manly honor left in you, leave me!"

"Say the word—just one word! tell me you love me, and I will be out of sight and hearing when your lord and master comes."

He laid his hand on her shoulder heavily, threateningly, and she shuddered at the devil in his eyes.

"Remove your hand!"

She gave the order in a tone a despot might use to a rascal. He laughed malignantly.

"I will not—unless you accept my protestation. He shall see me here with you, my arms around you; he shall find us alone together—his worst fears realized. Hark! it is he, and he has descended the stairs."

His arm dropped to her waist, and he felt her figure sway like a young tree before a blast. He saw the helpless agony in her face, the piteous, hunted glare in her eyes, as she listened intently, as a stag would to the pursuing hoofs of the hunters' horses.

"Say yes—only yes, my own beautiful Georgia—and you are alone in a second! Say no, and—"

He dropped on one knee, his arm still supporting her waist, the other grasping her powerless hand with a grip of iron.

Everything seemed fading in a sickly green dimmer from her vision. She heard Lexington's unmistakable footsteps approaching them through the marble corridor; she heard his hand on the knob of the door; she saw the door swing just as Vincy's voice, loud, imploring, passionate, spoke.

"Georgia, my own darling, how happy you have made me?"

And then—

Lexington paused just within the threshold.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE SELF-STRUGGLE.

The promise that Ethel gave Leslie Verne regarding her answer to his offer of marriage, and which was due him the morning after his proposal, was to Ethel of more than ordinary
importance, and when she had retired to her room that night, after an evening of unusually quiet thoughtfulness, that did not escape Mrs. Argelyne's shrewd observation, it was with emotions difficult to be described.

The entire truth lay in a nut-shell. A plain question required an equally plain answer, and the problem was solved. Ethel knew the question—did she love Leslie Verne as a woman should love a man if she intends to marry him?

She knew the question perfectly, but the answer— Ethel confessed to herself, with frank shame, that she did not know it.

She did know that Leslie loved her. She was as confident of that fact as she was of her own existence; and coequal with the assurance was a proud satisfaction that through all her dark, all her glorious past, Verne had been singed eheard.

Again, he knew her so well; all her faults, all her good qualities; and she realized with a little fault of pride that it was no hasty, hurried compliment he had offered her when he gave himself to her, but the patient result of a patient decision and waiting.

He was able to place her in a position that would be very congenial to her; her life would be one long, beautiful compensation for the ills she had already undergone, and she had not a doubt of Leslie's devotion.

These were her arguments in his favor; and she made them with delicious graces, stealing slowly from chin to brow as she paced to and fro, with deliberate, even steps.

But—now came the solemn part of her self-communings—did she love him?

If it were possible for her to love him—desirable, lovable though she knew he was—when six months ago she had loved her husband with her whole heart? when only six short months ago she had parted with him forever? Was it right? was it womanly? was it worthy of her to be able to so soon fill his place?

These were the self-queries that hurt her to the very core in answering; and yet, above, around, through all the misery her thoughts occasioned her, was one sweet comfort—Leslie was truly a friend, the dearest, best, woman had ever had.

And so Ethel passed an hour or two, walking unreadily up and down, her light, springing football coming to Mrs. Argelyne's ears, as she sat in her own rooms, with a smile of pitiful tenderness in her fine face.

She sat and listened a long while, then arose and walked to Ethel's door, and tapped lightly. “May I come in? Somehow I am not sleepy to-night, and I knew you were awake yet.”

Ethel smiled faintly, not meaning an unwelcome by the lack of ardor in her greeting; and Mrs. Argelyne understood at once that the girl was in the very heart of the battle she was fighting.

So she went quietly across the room and seated herself in Ethel's low rocking-chair, watching the girl walk disquietedly to and fro. Then, after perhaps ten minutes of silence, she spoke—very tenderly, very sympathetically: “Can I help you, dear?”

Her words told Ethel she knew all; one glance at the kind, benignant face was enough to break down any scruples Ethel might have foolishly entertained regarding consulting Mrs. Argelyne on the subject of Leslie Verne's offer.

Now, Mrs. Argelyne's simple, direct question touched Ethel to the core, and she walked swiftly over to the low chair in which Mrs. Argelyne sat, and knelt on the rug beside her, with her beautiful, splendidly great head on her knees.

“You can help me by listening to me, dear Mrs. Argelyne. I do not think, however, any one can decide for me.”

“You are right,” Mrs. Argelyne returned, quietly, as she softly stroked the girl's hair.

“No one should decide such a momentous question for you, and yet, dear, I am strongly inclined to plead in my boy's favor. He loves you very dearly.”

She felt Ethel shrink slightly at the plain words; then she waited a moment to see if any answer was coming to her remarks before she continued: “None of us doubt for a moment, Ethel, that you truly, really loved your husband; even Leslie honors you the more that you did. But, child, he is dead; with him your past is buried forever; why not suffer it to remain so, since by no possible contingency can it be restored to you? You are only a girl yet—not twenty. You have a long life ahead of you, in all human probability; are you going to sacrifice the future for the sake of the past, and walk forever in the shadows that are ever now lifting? Or, dear, will you glorify Leslie's life, and secure perfect peace to your own by dwelling in his love?”

Ethel seemed listening intently, and Mrs. Argelyne went on, in increased zealous enthusiasm: “I have thought, sometimes, you had recovered from your misfortune, and I have been so happy, for my own sake as well as for Leslie's. Again, this is one of the times, it has seemed to me, you are Cleeding your heart against any tender influences that seek an entrance. Forgive me, Ethel, darling, but are you not, this very moment, using all the tremendous will-power you possess to crush every spark of affection that Leslie may have possessed?”

She raised Ethel's face with her hands, and met the sad, sweet eyes, the quivering, wistful
mouth, the tear-flushed cheeks, over which fled
alternate pallor and blush.
Still Ethel did not answer; her heart was so
full she dreaded to trust her voice. She lifted
her eyes, however, frankly, silently, to Mrs.
Argelyne's face, that was full of solicitous
yearning.
"Answer me this question, dear. Do you
care at all for Leslie?"
A deeper carnation on the girl's cheeks, a
sudden rush of puzzled tenderness to her eyes,
preceded her answer.
"I don't know. Yes, I do care for him
very, very much; he has been so good, so kind,
and he loves me, I know. I do care, Mrs. Ar-
gelyne."
An expression of pain passed over Mrs. Ar-
gelyne's face.
"I am afraid you do not love him, poor,
poor boy! He never would accept gratitude,
Ethel, never. You don't know Leslie if you
think that."
"I would not give him gratitude for love,
Mrs. Argelyne; it would be as unjust to my-
self as to Leslie. I know he is far too good
and noble and great for such as I: I know the
woman he makes his wife will never know a
cloud in her sky; yet—yet—how can I tell
him I will accept such happiness when I am
conscious of an unhealed wound in my heart;
when I am not sure I can marry again, even
when only the scar remains to show where the
sure has been?
Her low, pitiful voice carried its own appeal,
and in her dusky, eloquent eyes, Mrs. Ar-
gelyne read the nobility of the nature that was
so true to itself. Her arms suddenly closed
round Ethel's neck in a warm embrace.
"I will not urge you more, my darling, nor
shall I forget that you shall always be my own
child, if you are not my boy's wife, or the
mother of the little children I hoped to see
playing in the big, lonely house your presence
would so have brightened. Forgive me if I
have pressed my pleading too closely home—
will you, dear?"
"Forgive me that I am unable to add to
your happiness. If I could—"
Ethel rose from her knees, and looked down
in the lovely face, so placid, yet expressive of
keenest disappointment.
"If I can—I will change my mind. I will
try, indeed I will, to profit by your counsel—
for you know I would not purposefully or willing-
ly grieve or disappoint you or poor Leslie.
Kiss me good-night, please, now."

After Mrs. Argelyne had gone, Ethel sat be-
side her fire, crouched in the low chair, motion-
less, till the first gray streaks heralded the
coming dawn.

CHAPTER XXXVII.
MAN TO MAN.
Mr. LEXINGTON had hidden Georgia good-
night, and retired to his own rooms, that night
after the wedding at Tanglewood, with such
strong, strangely conflicting feelings, that he
was completely overcome by them. He enter-
ed his apartments, closed and locked the doors,
and then, in a very impatience of restlessness,
commenced a promenade through the entire
suite.
The day had been of peculiarly trying in-
terest to him, so far as Georgia was concerned.
It seemed to him he never had come so com-
pletely under her fascinating influence since
the brief, blissful while years ago. It seemed
he never had seen her look so passingly fair as
she had done that day, and there had been
times when the sudden glance of her eyes, as
his by some magnetic compulsion, met hers,
held a power that thrilled him from head to
foot.
She had been so queenly in her hospitality;
he had seen how women loved her, how men
admired her; and he had known, with a per-
fect barb of agony, that he loved her more than
them all.
As he paced to and fro, his hands locked be-
hind him, his head dropped on his breast, his
whole soul went out in one wild, uncontroll-
able, fierce surging of love for this peerless
woman, between whom and himself loomed
the shadow of a baby's grave; between whom
and him had arisen such fateful differences
that seemed to defy reconciliation.
As he walked to and fro, while the woman
he worshiped so madly sat alone in the frag-
grant dusk of the conservatory, thinking of
him alone, there came to Lexington the full
fruition of suffering. He realized, as he never
had realized before, what a desolate wreck his
life was, and was in prospect. He realized,
keenly, that Georgia's beautiful face was the
one haunting ghost that never would be laid.
He accepted the fact of his worship of her,
even while, with a pain-contraction of his brows,
he admitted the seething truth that he had been
deceived, spurred, cajoled, and defied by her
in turn. He remembered, with increased
throbings of his heart, everything that had
transpired, and so terribly in her disfavor, and
yet, despite all the black list he saw looming
opposite her name, his soul thrilled with the
overwhelming, overpowering love that he
knew was deathless.
His splendid constancy was convulsed with
the fierceness of his emotions; his eyes were
full of an awful bitterness of despair as he
paused, trembling in sheer exhaustion,
"My own—my own! in the face of it all! My
wife! my Georgia, despite her falsity, her
treachery! My darling, whom I love with a
love unending; for whom I would die to hear
whisper once, 'Theo, I love you!'"
He resumed his restless walk again, a fire
dawning in his eyes, that grew to a very
blaze.
"I wonder if she would give me another chance? If I should offer her full, free forgiveness of all the past, and beg my pardon of her, and exchange mutual promises to bury this fearful past forever—would she—would she spurn me?"

He stopped abruptly beside the mantelpiece, gazing into the fire with his piercing eyes, while over his face chased expressions of hopelessness, followed by a sudden gleam of hope; anxiety, followed by a proud assurance that bent a perfect radiance to his features.

Then, he drew his handsome head proudly up, a tender, almost womanly smile on his mouth.

"The die is cast. I have forgiven her everything—the very worst. And I am going to her, to see, as never lover sued before. My darling! My precious one! everything bows before the weight of my deathless love for you!"

He was handsome as a god as he walked quickly, firmly from the room. His eyes were radiant with the proud hope in his heart; yet his face was pale almost to deathliness from the subdued force of his feelings.

He tapped at her door, but learned from Amber, who opened it instantly, that Mrs. Lexington had not retired to her bedroom yet, and in all probability he would find her in her favorite spot—in the conservatory.

So he went down stairs, with a thrill of bliss in his heart, thanking the Fates that Georgia was alone in a place so favorable for his suit.

He walked firmly, quickly along the marble ball, his footsteps echoing to the glad music of his tread. He passed the open doors of the deserted rooms, where lights burned dimly, and all the wedding favors had vanished, thinking, with an eagerness that increased with every step that brought him nearer Georgia, that like the vanished flowers and bridal appointments, so was fleeting the mists and clouds that never more should separate him and the only woman he ever loved.

He paused one second on the threshold, his hand on the door knob; hesitated to regain his self-possession ere he went in, through the orange aisles, past the cactus green, and to the mossy seat, where he knew she would be.

He knew the route perfectly. He knew the lights were glowing like moons, in their ground-glass globes, leading soft enchantment to the scene. He knew he would hear the splash of the cascade, the play of the fountains, the instant he opened the door. He knew he would walk softly up to Georgia, take her in his arms, close her mouth with such kisses that she would not be able to express surprise or anger. Then, he turned the handle, and stepped in full view of Carleton Vincy and his wife.

If a council of the Furies had arranged and perfected it, the scene that met his eyes could not have been more astonishingly fearful, or more peculiarly terrible.

A silence, more awesome than that which comes when a watcher by the bedside says, "He's dead!" seemed to petrify the three for an endlessly long second; then, with a strange, low, hissing noise, Lexington advanced several paces, his face working in a fearful fury of suddenly blistered hopes, indignation, jealousy, towering wrath.

It was appalling—the tableau they made—Lexington, the very impersonation of undisguised, outraged wrath. Vincy, in perfectly acted mortification and guilt, with his arm still around Georgia's waist, her hand still to his lips, as if he was petrified with the horror of the sudden exposure. Georgia, whiter than the filmy lace ruffles she wore, nearly fainting with horror, her woeful eyes fixed on Lexington's face in an imploring pitty, that he so readily interpreted fright at the unexpected intrusion.

It seemed as if her tongue were glued to the roof of her mouth. She tried to speak, but the horror of the situation held her in a speechless, helpless thrall, rendered all the more terrible by the sight of Lexington's blazing eyes, and the horribly suggestive pressure of Vincy's hand on her, as he slowly regained his feet, and released her with a gentle carefulness that did not escape the fierce, wrathful eyes for which it was intended.

Then his voice broke the strange silence.

"It is not Georgia's fault. I am the one on whom all blame must fall—if blame there is.

The quick, hissing sound issued sharply from Lexington's lips; then, before he could speak, Georgia staggered from her seat, with her white, haggard face, her agonized eyes, her trembling mouth. She walked with difficulty—it seemed as if her limbs were getting spell-bound—but she managed to reach the floor in front of him, and fell on her knees in a supplication of agony.

"Theo—Theo! don't look so terribly at me! For God's sake, believe me when I swear I am innocent! don't, don't look at me so!"

She clasped her arms around his knees in passionately earnest entreaty, but he recoiled, as if her touch was pollution.

A slow smile crept over his features, so slowly, so grimly, that it was as awful as a smile on the face of a dead man.

"Innocent! Allow me to believe the evidences of my senses, madam, and inform you that if you are innocent, your opinion differs from mine."

His terrible coldness was infinitely worse to endure than the wildest rage would have been; and a stony, hopeless horror seized her as she crouched on the floor.

"You must believe her—she is innocent, I swear it, too."

Again that icy smile curled Lexington's lips as he raised his haughty eyes to Vincy's face,
that was a perfect panorama of bogus quiet, fright, terror, shame.

"How far would the oath of a man go with the husband of the woman he makes love to? I beg to differ from both of you."

A gleeful malignity flared over Vincy's face—he was succeeding admirably. He had aroused the jealousy doubting he hoped to arouse, and it made his vile heart throb with delight to see the unmistakable anguish on Lexington's face—cover it as he would with the iron mask of cold contempt. Lexington bowed mockingly to Georgia.

"As I have not the honor of your friend's acquaintance, suppose I beg an introduction?"

It was a moment of supreme suspense. Vincy waited, in fiendish glee, to see how Lexington would receive the blow to be thrust at him; while Georgia, in panting terror, glanced first at one, then the other.

"He is a villain, a rogue, who has come here to-night only to insult and hurt me in your estimation. They have him ordered from the premises!—have him horsewhipped!—anything to relieve me forever of his hateful presence!"

Her honest eyes were fixed on Lexington's marble face, her perfect lips quivered with intense emotion, and she waited for his answer.

Vincy's voice broke the momentary silence. "Yes, you are right. I deserve to be horsewhipped. I will gladly be horsewhipped for her sake."

His pretended humility only seemed to strengthen Lexington's suspicions, and to urge him into hostile rage, which he could conceal a very little longer under the icy restraint he imposed upon himself.

He utterly ignored both Georgia's and Vincy's remarks.

"Your visitor's name, if you please, Mrs. Lexington?"

He said it with a quiet, compelling demand that was the death-knell of every hope of Georgia's to keep the secret from him. She caught a gleam of triumph from Vincy's eyes, she saw the cold, steely patience in Lexington's; and then, in a faint, constrained tone, he made the announcement, feeling as if the very world sunk from under her feet.

"It is Carleton Vincy."

Lexington started as if a cannon had been fired in his ear. His countenance paled to the hue of ashes, and grew as rigid as if heawn from marble. His blazing eyes turned from Georgia's face to Vincy's with a slow movement, that was the essence of intense bewilderment. A haughty, repellant curl curved his lips, a sternness, an indignation, a horror as keen as a knife-blade was written on every line of his face as he stared uninfluencingly in his rival's face.

Vincy smiled with the cool deviltry of a man who has the advantage for the moment.

"I told you she was innocent—as all the world would utter no voice against a husband making love to his own wife. Do you still approve of horsewhipping me?"

A sudden fury leaped from Lexington's eyes, that had darkened until they were black as moonless midnight.

"Silence—you seem of earth! How dare you call her your wife—you—you—"

Vincy laughed this time, a low, satirical laugh.

"Words fail you? Permit me to finish the sentence by assuring you I still regard her as my wife, no matter what your claims are; that we love each other very dearly—"

A gasping sob from Georgia interrupted him.

"Theo! no!—no, I never loved him, never, and he knows how lying his words are. He knows how he has persecuted me, and how I have paid him to let me alone in peace. He knows I love you with all—"

A disdainful gesture from Lexington suddenly silenced her.

"That will do, sir—will you leave the premises at once, or put me to the trouble of ejecting you?"

Lexington's temper was getting the best of him now every moment. Hitherto he had been desperately calm, cool, contemplative, but now there came in his eyes a red glow that made Georgia shiver lest he struck her foe dead between them. Vincy saw the ominous gleam, but not with dread. Rather, he actually smiled in the full fruition of his success—smiled in Lexington's deadly pale face.

"I will go unassisted, when I have hidden my wife good-night. Georgia!" and he turned to her with a malignant smile on his sensual lips, that escaped Lexington's eyes by the turn of Vincy's head; "Georgia, my darling, be assured I will—"

He never finished the sentence, for with a howl of un Governable fury, Lexington sprang toward him, collarng him with the grip of an iron vise.

"Silence! silence, or I will choke your vile life out of you! Now, march!"

He pushed him violently along through the leafy aisles, and when they reached the door, Lexington gave him a tremendous kick that sent Vincy clear to the foot of the steps. Then, not waiting to learn the result, Lexington closed and locked the door, and returned to Georgia with a set, stern rage on his face that seemed imprinted for all eternity.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.
THE OPENING ROSE.

The extended tour of the bridal pair, occupying six weeks of time, and covering thousands of miles of travel, was over at last, and "Mr. and Mrs. John Lexington" established in their elegant residence on Madison avenue.
Ethel smiled gravely.

"Not this one, Mrs. Argyle; nothing can alter the fact that I am not the social equal of Leslie Verne, a descendant of one of the proudest families in England. I have never told you, or any one living, that I do not know my parentage; that I may be the child of some degraded, despised people. Certainly I am all but to poverty and—and, perhaps—disgrace."

Her cheeks burned as she said that last word. Then she told her story, so far as she knew, as she had learned it from the Lawrences.

There was a mysterious twinkle in Mrs. Argyle's eyes when Ethel had finished—very suspicious of unshed tears.

"My little girl! As if Leslie would care for a word of what you have said. As if all the mystery of your young life could even reconcile to us the fact that you are the child of low-born, low-bred parents! You are a lady "a much by birth and instincts as by education, whether you come from the ranks of what we call aristocracy or not. A woman with gentle, gracious ways, refined instincts, reserved, womanly modesty, high-bred, high-principled tendencies, as you have, Ethel, is a true lady—one of Nature's own aristocrats."

The grateful tears sprung to Ethel's eyes, and she pressed the white, motherly hand expressively to her own.

"Cast your ultra-conscientiousness to the winds, only tell me first why you dared marry Mr. Havestock in the face of all these terrible things!"

She spoke with loving sarcasm, and Ethel flushed redly, but answered bravely:

"You know, I think, such things never troubled me then; and somehow, I think Leslie is deserving of more consideration than any man I ever saw. He is so good, so patient! he is just the best, kindest, dear—"

Mrs. Argyle's quiet, happy smile, shrewd yet encouraging, caused her to pause suddenly in a perfect glow of blushed gratitude.

"Tell Leslie what you have told me. And as a special favor to me I want you to entrust that little gold button to me, will you?"

Without a word Ethel removed it from her watch chain and gave it to her.

Mrs. Argyle transferred it to her arm, where it hung like a golden globe.

"It shall be the object of my life, next to seeing you married to my boy, to discover your parents. With this little talisman, I shall begin to-day; and God send I may end by leading you to your mother's arms; a mother, I know, must have been worthy to have given such a daughter to the world."

She kissed the girl tenderly, almost solemnly, then whispered:

"Stay here. I am going to send you the happiest man in all the wide world."

And in a strangely quiet trance of bliss and content, Ethel sat down on the hassock by the grate fire, to wait for her lover to come and take the reward for his patience.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A MAN'S WRATH.

The moment occupied by Mr. Lexington in so forcibly assisting the egress of Carleton Vincy, was more like an hour to Georgie, as she waited, motionless as a statue, for the fury of the tempest she knew Lexington would pour relentlessly upon her.

She felt singularly as she stood there waiting. She was conscious of a calmness that was nothing short of despair. She dreaded nothing now, because there was no more left for which to hope. The worst had come—Lexington knew her first husband was living, which fact alone was enough to craze any man, much more a man of Lexington's peculiar temperament; while, infinitely worse than even the appalling fact, was the terrible darkness of suspicion Vincy had effectually encompassed her in, by making himself appear in the character of an encouraged lover.

But, there remained so little to her now. Would Lexington drive her from his house, or hurl her from his presence as he had Vincy, believing her as vile as Vincy had represented her?

She asked herself the question in a hopeless, apathetic way; and for answer, Lexington stood before her, his brows contracted in a frown of undisguised fury, his eyes gleaming with savage hatred and jealously, his lips compressed in an awful sneer.

He stood, rigid as marble, looking directly in her eyes—her horrified and make-up eyes, that any one not beseech himself, as Lexington was, could have seen were full of suffering purity and a proud consciousness of honesty.

Under his scathing glance, she seemed to wither. She swayed like a storm-beaten flower; then, as if the inward burden she bore was more than mortal strength could endure, she stretched forward both her arms toward him, in wild imploration.

"Theo, my husband! hear—"

A hissing laugh interrupted her sharply.

"If I may presume—which husband do you mean? Me—the more unfortunate of the honored twin, or Mr. Vinky, whose society you so prize, whose cares you seem quite accustomed to?"

"Oh, Theo! how can you! Only let me speak and—"

He fairly caught her breath by the fiercely savage way he interrupted her.

"Not a word! not a syllable of your defense will I listen to, not a sound in vindication of what my own eyes have seen, my own ears heard. My God! is it possible, can it be possible that it has come to this?"

He seemed to have lost all power of control.
His eyes were actually bloodshot with his anger, his lips were ashen. He suddenly whirled on his heel, and paced in mad, reckless speed up and down the dim, spacy aisles, where drooping branches of the fragrant Madeira vine swept his hair, and blush-lined rosebuds leaned caressingly toward him as if offering their beauty and sweetness as a balm.

Georgia followed him several steps, calling in piteous words.

"Theo, only listen—for God's sake! My husband—"

He turned on her like a madman.

"Never dare call me by that name again. Your husband? You sicken me."

"Will you not listen? Will you not let me tell you how I fear him and despise him? He is my worst enemy, who has wrought all the mischief of between you and I. Theo! I swear——"

His lips curled in a sneer of utter contempt that cut her to the quick.

"What do you suppose your oath is worth to me, woman? Will you swear you detest and hate the man in whose arms I found you? I despise the cowardice that leads you to deny him after you have——"

"But he did it for effect! A moment before you entered, he vowed to ruin me in your regard if I did not yield willingly to his offered insult. Believe me—for sweet mercy's sake! I swear I speak the truth, by the memory of little dead babe!"

She would have fallen at his feet, but that he recalled in a gesture of intensest contempt and repulsion.

"Your defense is plausible, very, but I decline to accept it. Now, listen to what I have to say."

He folded his arms, and held up his splendid head, his perfect face turned fully to her—that face with its grand mouth, its flashing gray eyes, that made Georgia's heart ache with its perfection of beauty.

She leaned her head forward, with her lips slightly parted, her nostrils quivering. Her hands were clasped—clenched in the excitement of the moment; her whole figure, graceful, willowy, was poised in an attitude of nervous anxiety. And so they met the moment of their lives, that of all moments, was the crowning one of cruel misconception.

"To-day, for the first time since the hour you repulsed me in the drawing-room, on the day of my return, I resolved to come to you once again, and sue for your love, your——"

A low, gasping cry came from Georgia's lips. Had it been possible that at last the love he had come too late? She took a step forward—he waved her back, in cold disdain.

"My life has been a perfect haven of unrest. My days have been spent in covertly watching your beauty, your sweet witchery; my nights have been passed walking my floor, fighting the love for you that would assert itself over, above, beyond all. You know what I mean—that I made up my mind to overlook everything, forgive everything. The struggle over pride and outraged feelings was terrible, but I conquered. I pictured the blessed meeting when I should take you in my arms—ha! ha! in my arms! and kiss your lips, and hear you say we would begin all over again—as the bride and groom begin to-day. My impatience would scarcely permit me to walk kith'er; I would have flown to you. My whole heart was on my lips; the whole happiness of my future lay beyond the closed door between us. I opened it——"

He laughed as he finished, a harsh, sarcastic laugh that thrilled her with horror.

"You would not look so if you only knew! you would not talk so terribly if you would let me tell——"

"I will not let you tell me anything. Of what avail would any words be to disprove the fact that I saw you in your first husband's embrace? to obliterate the words I heard him utter? Save yourself the sin of lying. A woman who would descend to the depths to which you have descended, would and could invent any story."

Georgia pressed her hand over her eyes as his cruel blow thrust home. Was it possible that any more suffering could come to her?

She stood there, mute, dazed, crushed into speechlessness, with those hard, faultless eyes sneering in her face. Then a low, heartrending moan came from her lips.

"How can I bear it? you are so cruel, so pitiless! I could explain everything if you would only listen."

"Which I decline to do, notwithstanding the fact that I shall doubtless miss hearing a very interesting, elaborate romance. What I have seen and heard can never be explained away by human tongue. What I have seen and heard has blighted my life beyond hope of reparation, but I shall endure it."

She was wringing her hands in her misery. Any one less than a jealous, blind man would have pitied her.

"And what of my life—if you say yours is blighted? what will my future be? shall I remain here, a curse to your eyes, or go, where——"

He took up her words with sardonic promptness.

"Where you will be better appreciated, you mean? I am free to say I think you prefer to remain here, amid the luxury, in the position I have given you. I have an idea you think I shall drive you out, at dead of night, as they do in yellow-covered novels; and considering that, in all probability, your first husband is skulking somewhere around, if he hasn't broken his neck by his hurried exit, you would not seriously object?"

He was fairly beside himself with rage. His
During their absence, the house which Havelstock had purchased a few weeks prior to his marriage, was fitted up regardless of expense; a corps of servants had been engaged, and at the very latest date a supply of provisions ordered, so that when Havelstock telegraphed by what train they might be expected, his stylish turnout with footman and coachman in olive brown livery, met the couple at the Pennsylvania railroad depot; and at their new home, they found a sumptuous repast, delightfully warmed and illuminated rooms awaiting them.

It was very bright—the looks ahead Havelstock so enjoyed taking. There seemed no end to the money; he had an entree into the very best society; he could dispose of his time exactly as he chose; he had his fast horses, his wine cellar, his yacht, his pretty little wife, who dressed well, danced well, and made an impression of agreeableness, if nothing better. He had fully made up his mind as to his course, and he intended that no human power should intervene. He was determined to be master in his house, and to be obeyed implicitly by his wife. He wanted her to be occupied with all the foolish nothings that please women of her caliber—and Ida was merely a representative of the grand majority that find their soul's delight in shopping and gossiping; with their dressmakers and poodles; at matinees, operas, and receptions.

It was necessary that Ida should be thus employed, he argued, so that she would have no time, consequently no inclination, to learn of his movements; or, possibly, by some awkward contretemps, stumble upon his husband's past.

They were not the happiest two in the world—Havelstock and Ida. Already—even before they had been a fortnight married, Ida had learned the tyrannical disposition of her husband, that would brook no opposition. She had attempted to go contrary to a decision of his on some trifling subject; had flared up, with her customary short-tempered independence; attempted, vainly, to assert her rights as she declared she always would; and had ended most gloriously, in a fit of passionate weeping, red, swollen eyes—and silent, sullen obedience.

Since then she had been very particular not to run counter to her lord's will; and Havelstock gave her credit for her shrewdness, and held the reins as relentlessly as ever.

But the little episode had not made Ida any happier; and, we must confess, not especially miserable. She loved Havelstock as much as her nature would permit, and was so proud of him that she felt she could afford to yield.

As regarded him—he endured Ida very patiently for he knew he owed everything to her, even his interests at Tanglewood. He was coolly attentive, quietly kind; he took her wherever he wanted to take her, and went alone when he didn't want her; he ordered her visiting lists and regulated her entertainments; and all, with a consciousness of the gnawing, aching something somewhere about him, this never ceased, night or day. Of course it was the memory of Ethel—not the memory of regret, or sorrow for the anguish he knew he had caused her, upon no provocation of hers. It was not a pity for her desolation, an anxiety for her welfare; it was no such honest, feeling as any of these—for his wicked, selfish, callous heart had long ago steeled against such influences.

But—it was the love he still felt for her; the selfish sorrow he experienced because he was forever shut out from seeing her sweet face, feeling her clinging arms around his neck, her warm kisses on his mouth.

He had no one but himself to express—he knew that. He had sat down and deliberately counted the cost. He had thought there would be more than compensation in the price he sold her for—and there was not. Her eyes haunted him with their grave wistfulness; he was forever seeing her sweet sunny smile, always hearing her low, passionate calling of his name. And, what with the remembering, the seeing, the hearing, among all the gods the gods had given him, he was perfectly miserable for the love of his pure, discarded wife.

Where she was, of course he had not the remotest idea. That she lived under a roof not half a mile away would have been the most astonishing news he could have heard; and had he but known that when he and Ida one day bowed to Mrs. Argylene as their carriages passed in the Park, that Ethel sat in the corner of the back seat, with her eyes downcast and her head averted, as she was seriously meditating on the subject of Leslie Verne's offer, he would have quaked with horror.

Had Ida but known, or Ethel, or Mrs. Argylene, or any one!

But, so far he was safe, to all appearances; and yet, he was rapidly nearing the very edge of the precipice, over which he was doomed to be hurled.

Since her conversation with Mrs. Argylene that night in her own room, affairs had progressed very pleasantly, yet quietly. Ethel had told Leslie frankly the decision, or rather, the undecision she had come to; she had told him, as she had told Mrs. Argylene, all her reasons, and her intense wish to change her mind, if possible.

It had been a keen disappointment to the patient, adoring lover, and Ethel fairly shrank in affright at the way he received his fate.

It seemed to positively stun him. He was unnaturally calm as he listened to her deprecating rejection, tempered with such winsome consideration for his feelings, and her very refusal fired him the more with the heart-sick longing to have her for his own.
Then, when she had told him all her heart, thus proving her devoted friendship by her unrestricted confidence, she waited for his acceptance of her refusal—stood like a bended lily, with her golden head slightly drooped, her hands pressing the back of the chair that stood before her.

When Leslie had spoken it had been with an intensity of tone, a restrained strength of feeling, a patient, determined endurance, a nobility of principle that in after days Ethel remembered as the very beginning of everything.

"I do not blame you, Ethel. I know you have acted exactly as I would have the woman act whom I want for my wife. But, remember this one thing, this promise, oath—anything you may call it: that, although you are free as the air to bestow your precious affections where you will, I am bound to you in solemn betrothal, for life and death, as I have been since I first knew and loved you." It had touched her, deeply; somehow, from that very hour she found herself listening for his footsteps, she kept her cheeks burn at mention of his name, and her heart would throb as in earlier days, when his deep, grave, intense eyes met hers with that patient questioning, that positive worship in them she always saw.

Mrs. Argelynne watched Ethel with silent satisfaction those days while she was becoming shy of Leslie's presence; while Leslie quietly seemed compelling her love by the potency of his own. Odd smiles were sometimes caught fleeting across her face, and one day when Ethel had been reading to her, something—that curious magnetism we all have experienced—made her look suddenly up, to catch that amused, sage smile, with Mrs. Argelynne's eyes fully fixed on hers.

A vivid rush of scarlet over Ethel's face made her more uneasy.

"What is it, Mrs. Argelynne? I was not reading incorrectly, was I?"

"You read exquisitely, but I want to hear you talk. Put 'Katrina' away, and let's have one of our old-fashioned chats. Do you know it has been a month, nearly, since you took me so briefly into your confidence?"

Ethel understood the graceful insinuation. Her cheeks were glowing, and she averted her face.

"A month! It seems impossible. How the time has flown!"

"From which I argue most favorably—even on the case in question. I want to talk about Leslie. May I?"

She was watching Ethel closely.

"If you wish, certainly."

The answer came in her sweetest tones.

"Then I shall commence by asking you if you have not succeeded in changing your mind? You do love him, at last?"

Lower drooped the girl's bright head, but no answer came.

"I do not wish to intrude into your most sacred feelings, Ethel, but it seemed to me the time had come for me to mention my boy's cause again. But when you do not answer, am I to infer you don't care for him—don't love him?"

Ethel's dusky eyes gleamed suddenly at Mrs. Argelynne, then down again.

"Did—did you infer—that? I—didn't mean—"

She hesitated bewitchingly, and Mrs. Argelynne smiled in delighted satisfaction.

"I know it—I know it! Say it in plain words to me, Ethel. Say 'I do love Leslie.'"

But Ethel was laughingly refractory. She stubbornly refused to repeat the words.

"Say them to Leslie, then, when he asks you again, as I heard him say he would very soon. Now, dear child, may I name the day for the wedding?"

At that all the sunshine died out of the girl's blossomy face. She said "Katrina" down in her lap, and clasped her hands on the dark brown and gold cover.

"I dare not marry him, Mrs. Argelynne. You will counsel me not to when I have told you my scruples."

Mrs. Argelynne made a little impatient gesture.

"Another mountain to climb! Tell me your objections, child, and if I am sure you love him I will reduce the most appalling peaks to molehills."

But, somehow, with Ethel's earnest eyes on her, she realized that the girl meant decidedly what she said. She listened intently.

"You know I refused him once before I married Frank? I know you do know it, and that the reason was I—I thought I loved Frank better. Do you not think it would be very wrong in me to bestow on him a heart with all the bloom and freshness brushed off; the remains, so to speak, of an earlier regard?"

A perfectly triumphant smile fairly illuminated Mrs. Argelynne's face.

"How easily I can make void such a ridiculously flimsy objection! Why, child, your idea is romantic in the extreme, and as foolish as unnatural. The very fact of Leslie's having begged, the second time, for the love you denied him first, goes to prove he thinks you more desirable than ever. And as to wasted bloom and the waning freshness—darling, I don't think you have the remotest idea of how lovely you are."

Her genuine flattery was sweet to the girl, who sat there earnest, eager, half-converted already from her conscientious scruples.

"What else?" demanded Mrs. Argelynne, briskly. "Tell me frankly, for I feel sure I can prove your objections to be as flimsy as air."
shame at the suddenness, newness of her relations to Leslie.

She nodded sagaciously at him.

"Ethel and I will arrange that. I think I can persuade her that Meadowbrook sadly needs a mistress part of the time, for of course I shall not permit her to leave me entirely."

And so, it came to pass—the arrangements for Ethel Mary's second marriage, almost without volition of her own, yet only in accordance with her approval. She yielded the subject of the date to the persuasions and playful commands of her lover, and the gentle advice of Mrs. Argelyne; and when, late that night, after the household had retired, after Leslie had kissed her good-night and good by for several days, Ethel stood alone in her rooms, with the soft glow of the lamp shining on the solitaire diamond ring she had worn an hour, in token of her new vows, a peculiarly sad feeling took possession of her, that was strangely at variance with her feelings of two hours before.

She felt as if she had wrenched herself from her bitter-sweet past, irretrievably; and yet, while conscious of a pang of homesick regret, knew she had done nothing wrong, nothing she would ever be sorry she had done; and she knew she loved Leslie Verne truly, wholly.

It was just that very fact that troubled her. She had such exalted ideas of loyalty and honor, and somehow she reproached herself because she found it possible for her to be capable of loving another as well as the man who had won all her young affections. She knew she loved him as well, yet it was a very different love from that she had bestowed on Frank Havelstock. That had been a wild, blissful, passionate, fevered love, so short that she never had really proved its strength; this, a quiet, absorbing affection, whose very calmness was better proof of its genuineness.

She twirled her ring round and round, with a pain and a pleasure tugging together at her heart.

"Have I been hasty? would it not have been better to have waited longer? I wonder why, if I have done only what was perfectly right, I feel this strange presentiment of evil clouding me?"

Her wishful eyes searched the glowing coal as if for an answer to the burden on her young heart; she stood, leaning against the low marble mantelpiece, grave, silent, motionless, until the fatigue of the position forced her to relinquish it.

With a little sigh, she began her preparations for retiring, performing all her duties in a quiet, thoughtful way, with the same wishful, half-troubled look in her brown eyes.

In her long white night-robe she knelt at the side of her low bed—a perfect picture in her graceful abandon of attitude, with her hands clasped in devotion, her upturned face in its sweet purity, her lashes sweeping darkly over her white cheeks. Her unconfined hair floated in a ripple of golden glory over her shoulders, down her back, clear to the scarlet rug on which she knelt, in prayer such as only they know who, having heart-pains, know where to go for comfort.

She arose, with a great peace shining on her face, a grave, reverent awe in her eyes; she extinguished her light, threw open her shutters to lie in the vivid moonlight, and then laid her down, to sleep till the morrow.

In all her innocence, all her beauty; with all her anxieties, all her unrest temporarily banished.

It was not strange—this shadow that loomed over her. It was only the first faint herald of the utter darkness that was to encompass her path—only the distant sign of the swift-coming storm.

She slept, peacefully, quietly, with Leslie Verne's ring on her finger; his name on her lips as she dreamed and smiled; while her guardian angel must have drooped its wings because of the inevitable future.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE NEW SEARCH.

For a moment after the vigorous ejection he had received at the hands of Mr. Lexington, Carleton Vincy lay stupefied and prostrate at the foot of the flight of stairs, whither he had fallen.

To say he was astonished at the sudden turn that affairs had taken is to use language entirely inadequate. To declare he was in a perfect fury of rage and mortification was proved by the stream of curses that came from his lips as he struggled to his feet, bruised, lame and sore.

"How you shall suffer for this, my lady! for every pain I feel that your husband's hands have caused me, you shall endure a heart-wrench! I'll be even with you, for all your haughty, high-born ways!"

He limped painfully along, hatless and canelees, uttering smothered oaths as every step gave his bruised knee a twinge.

"It's some satisfaction, though, to know the mischief I have made. When I recall her fear, her anguish, I am almost content to bear these scratches that will heal, while her wounds will only fester more and more as the days go on. It will not be my fault if they don't."

He walked along the wide avenue until he came to a road that diverged from the main one, leading past the porter's lodge. Knowing there was no possibility of getting through the massive bronze gate, that had been locked for an hour or more, without arousing the porter, which he had no intention of doing, he took the narrower side road, that he knew led to the highway, from which the grounds were separated by a low, rustic fence he could easily
climb, for by using his legs in walking as far as he had done he had limbered them considerably.

He had a disagreeable smile on his face as he walked leisurely on through the starlit midnight, that augured no good to whoever he was thinking of.

Then he began his low, muttering soliloquy again.

"By George, wasn't my gentleman furious? He evidently is of a high-strung, haughty temperament, and what his own eyes saw and his own ears heard he was quick to believe. He's a handsom fellow. I don't wonder Georgia worships him, when, under the peculiar circumstances of my first meeting with him, I felt his fascination—and his fix!"

He stopped to rub his knee before he climbed the fence; then, on the outside, he turned and glared fiercely at the lights in the upper floor of the mansion.

"I wonder who is the happiest of all there? Certainly not the contestant of my right and title of the utterly wretched, heart-sick woman whose married life is a mockery, whose punishment is just commenced for the way she threw me over. Oh, my beauty, you cannot escape my hands for all your fiery hatred, your contemptuous disdain! I shall pour all the vials of my wrath upon you, because I hate the man you love, because he does love you, in spite of all! I will crush you to the ground yet, and teach you to remember you are my wife, the mother of my child!"

He nodded vindictively, then returned to his "hotel," the quiet little inn where he had a permanent room.

He found a cheery wood fire burning in the open fire-place of his room, and a sleepy boy of fifteen dozing in his chair, who awoke for any chance directions from this guest who had the house at his disposal—thanks to Georgia Lexington's money. Vincy ordered hot brandy and water, and a bottle of liniment, if the house contained such an article; then, his wants supplied, the boy gone, his door locked, his bruises bathed, and the warming potion disposed of, Vincy sat down in the easy chair before the fire, preparatory to undressing and retiring.

His eyes were shining with unnatural luster; perhaps the reflection of the leaping flames, possibly the result of the liquor, but they certainly were brilliant with an odd, repulsive radiance, especially when he leaned his head heavily back in the chair, thrust his hands in his pockets and stretched his legs toward the fire at full length.

"I'll give a thousand dollars for the information, and thank my lucky stars for the blessed inspiration that suggested the idea to me! Bless me, if I don't think I am a master-hand at planning and scheming! I wonder if Havelstock would know? He ought to, if any one does. He has always been a friend of Lexington's, and would know all about the affair."

For a half-hour he sat looking reflectively at the ceiling; then he jumped suddenly from his chair with a great satisfaction on his face.

"By Jupiter, I can do it! I'll find out by Frank who Lexington gave the child to, and I'll search out the party, and when I've learned the story of its illness and death I'll go to Georgia, and harass her very soul with an exaggerated account of its fearful sufferings and awful death! The little nuisance is better off under the ground, but Georgia shall be led to think her precious baby was most inhumanly used, and actually murdered alive. I'll do it."

He laughed in savage glee at the mental picture of how he should wring her heart, and stab the undying mother-love in her already bleeding heart—that, denied all else, dwelt with her constant yearning on the memory of little Jessamine.

He pulled off his boots, removed his necktie, threw his suspenders over his hips, then stood before the fire again while he wound his watch.

"I'd better vacate this vicinity, for a while," he thought; "I have plenty of funds, thanks to my lady's generosity, which she shall repeat at my pleasure, or I am not the man I am proud to be. I will take a little respite from my arduous duties; I will take a little run up to New York for a fortnight, or so, call on the bridal couple when they return, have a private conversation with Frank, and bark it generally. I wish my good fortune would assist me in one other respect—I wish I would come across the pretty dark-eyed little girl Havelstock used so devilishly mean."

He put his watch under his pillow, beside his pocket-book, and a revolver; disrobed, and retired with his last waking thoughts of his revenge on the woman who had been his wife.

The next morning he paid his bills and took an early train for New York, arriving before noon, and secured a room in an up-town hotel—not ten minutes' drive from the house where Ethel lived, and as near the palatial residence of Havelstock and his bride.

After dinner he drove to the house agent in whose charge Havelstock had placed the preparations for his return home, and learned when the bridal pair were to be expected—just six weeks later.

He made a memorandum in his tablet, and decided to employ that time in hunting up the deserted wife that Havelstock had left—the girlish-faced, dark-eyed wife whose sad face haunted him eternally.

Horse-racing on pleasant afternoons, sleigh-rides, theaters, and other amusements less eminent, that need no mention, filled up the time until the day he knew he should and
eyes seemed fires of lurid red, they flamed so terribly; his lips were compressed in a tense
frenzieseness, and one hand and arm was extended
as if to strike her dead at his feet.

She moaned in agony, the direct she had
ever yet known.

"It shall be as you wish," she said, hol-
lowly.

"Thank you," he retorted, smirking.

"I had no intention of consulting you in the least.

My purposes are not to create a scandal that
shall feast the nation as we have been feasted
lately. You know my pride—you know I
would die by slow torture before I would per-
mit an expose of this disgusting affair. You
shall remain at Tanglewood, and spend the re-
mainder of your miserable life in one long
endeavor to expiate the past. You shall fight
with the unbalanced love you entertain for
the man who shares with me the honor of hav-
ing been your husband, and the world shall
never know, for pride's sake.

"His passionately angry voice sounded like
doom to her; she felt strangely weak and
faint, so excessive had been the emotional
storm through which she had passed. Her
whole heart and soul seemed crushed to inani-
tion, that even Lexington's anger failed to
further hurt.

As he finished she bowed her royal head
slowly, as if even the effort cost her suffering.

"Then for the future there is no hope of
anything?"

Her gloomy dark eyes were raised to his in
an appeal that ought to have broken adamant.

He simply sneered with awfully contemptuous
disdain, and his answer came fairly thunder-
ing in her ears.

"Hope of what? That I shall forgive you?

Never! That you intend exercising your fascina-
tions on me, in the hope of bringing me a
slave to your feet? Fool, fool that I was, to
dream there was happiness for me in your
love."

There seemed a despair in his last sentence
that roused Georgia from her apathy. She
humiliated her outraged womanly pride, called
all her nobility of nature to one grand, final
effort for the explanation of this terribly sus-
picious affair.

"You were no fool, Theodore, in believing
your only happiness lay in my love, which is
as true and pure—"

He laughed in her face, then turned on his
heel and left her presence—divided from her
by a deeper chasm than ever before.

CHAPTER XL

THE NEW LOVE.

Ethel had not long to wait in Mrs. Arge-
layne's sitting-room. In five minutes after the
door had closed, leaving her alone, in a state
of uncertain delight, which she hardly dare
dare admit was delight, she heard Leslie Vern's

footsteps on the stairs—not the firm, deliber-
tate tread with which his presence was custom-
arily heralded, but quick, springy steps, that
cleared more than one step at a time.

Ethel knew the impatience that prompted
his haste; she had known and seen his quiet
waiting for months, and knew he was of a
disposition not easily aroused, so that his very
headlong speed in seeking her presence, on the
strength of what Mrs. Argelyne had told him,
was, but added proof of the strength and en-
tirety of his devotion to her.

He threw the door open, and closed it again
after him with an impetuosity he seldom in-
dulged in. He crossed the floor rapidly, and
came closely up to Ethel, who sat with down-
cast eyes and carnation-hued cheeks, silent
and trembling.

He drew a low chair beside her, and after
he had sat down took her hands, cold and ner-
vous, in his warm, clinging fingers.

"Look up, Ethel, and let me see if it is
really true? I dare not say word until I
know—another disappointment would kill me.

Look up, Ethel; I can tell by your eyes."

His voice was thrillingly sweet, and Ethel
noticed the quiver in it, as if the dawning of a
great bliss was at hand for him.

For a second she did not raise her eyes—she
could not, much as she wished. The crisis of
her life was come, and, although she did not
know it, its shadow fell over her that instant.

Leslie did not repeat his question, but waited,
while he gently pressed her little fluttering
hands.

A second, a minute, while the soft, scarlet
blushes glowed, then paled, and then the long,
curling lashes slowly raised, and the full glory
of her dusky eyes beamed upon him, a tender,
beseeching, beseeching expression in them.

Leslie fairly held his breath as she looked at
him as she never had done before; then, in a
voice into which was condensed all the mighty
joy that so long had been smothered in his
brave heart, he answered her eloquent silence.

"Thank God! Oh, my own little darling;
is it possible I dare speak so, after so long?
can it be that I dare take you in my arms and
kiss you over and over?"

His eyes were devouring her sweet face as
he spoke, hurriedly; then he gathered her in
his strong arms, as if she had been a little
child, and strained her to his breast in a very
passion of thankfulness, the fruition of patient
waiting.

He kissed her over and over, on cheeks, eyes,
lips and hair. He caressed her white fore-
head, smoothed her golden tresses, patted her
round, dainty chin, in such utter tenderness of
devotion, with such winsome sweetness, that
Ethel never had believed any man capable of

"Now, tell me, my darling—how I like to
say that aloud, Ethel—my darling! I have


been saying it to myself so long—tell me, Ethel, my own darling, in your own way, with your own words, that you love me. I can hardly believe it yet. Is it a blessed truth, or am I dreaming, as I so often have done?"

She smiled in his earnest, eager face, nestling her head contentedly on his breast.

"I think I am as surprised as you are, Leslie. But—I do love you, dearly, dearly."

A look of ineffable rest and peace was on her face as she said the words, and Leslie knew she meant what she said.

"I know I was awkward, perhaps cruel, in urging my suit so soon after—you know—"

Ethel interrupted him, gently.

"Do not be afraid to refer to Frank’s death, Leslie. The sting of that will never come to me again, because your love has filled completely the void his death made. I shall not love you less, Leslie, because I first loved Frank."

He kissed her lips lovingly.

"I believe you, dear, and it will not be my fault if I do not teach you to forget you ever loved any one. My wife shall be the happiest woman husband ever had."

He coiled and uncoiled a long, thick tress of her brilliant, golden hair, while a silence too blissful for language fell upon them, that Leslie, after a while, dissipated.

"You will find I am not a patient man any longer, Ethel. Now that I know you love me, I cannot wait long for you to become wholly mine. When will you come to me, darling, as my wife?"

He bent his ardent, passionate face closely to hers, one of his tenderest, most winsome smiles on his mouth. She flushed brightly, but did not answer.

"Does silence give consent? May I telegraph to my steward at Meadowbrook to be in readiness to receive Mr. and Mrs. Verno—say a fortnight from to-day?"

Ethel gave a little cry of surprise.

"Oh, no, no! Oh, that is so very soon. I have not had time to think of marriage yet. I had no idea you would want me under a year or so—"

Leslie laughed, joyously.

"A year! you don’t begin to know me, little girlie, if you suppose I shall wait a year. No, nor the quarter, nor the half-quarter of a year. Don’t you see what a tyrant I am going to be?"

He put both arms around her waist, laughing as he saw the sunshine in her expressive face; then he suddenly dropped his gayety, spoke in a low, gentle tone.

"Don’t think that I meant any disrespect to your mourning, my darling; but, surely, the year and a half, nearly, you have given to his memory, is sufficient."

"That is not what I meant. I was thinking—"

She hesitated in a bewitching way that was very sweet.

"Oh, I know! you mean you cannot make the necessary arrangements for the grand wedding aunt Helen will be sure to give us. You were thinking of all the mysteries of the bridal trousseau, the cards of invitation?"

Ethel shook her head, decidedly.

"No, I have not given a moment of thought to any of these things, nor do I intend to. Because, Leslie, I cannot permit Mrs. Argelyne to give me a wedding, nor would it be to my personal taste if I was willing."

Leslie opened his eyes widely.

"Not a grand wedding, nor a reception, nor a home-coming at Meadowbrook, with the place all lighted with lanterns, and a band of music playing ‘See, the conquering hero comes?""

Ethel looked curiously at him, wondering whether he were really in earnest, then laughed.

"You cannot tempt me, my ‘conquering hero,’ do not like imposing weddings, and I wonder that any one does."

Leslie laid his hand carelessly on her forehead.

"I was joking, darling. Neither do I—and I am glad you think as you do. Let us have a quiet wedding in St. Ile’s, with one or two intimate friends, a family breakfast here with aunt Helen, and then go direct to Meadowbrook—if that suits you."

"That is just what I would like—when the year is up, Leslie."

She was in earnest, but Leslie laughed, laying his hand over her mouth.

"No more of that nonsense, Ethel. Unless you promise to marry me in two weeks from to-day, I am determined to—"

He frowned at her, savagely. Ethel’s lips parted in a merry laugh—just as Mrs. Argelyne came in, unannounced, her face positively radiant.

"I was so impatient to congratulate you—Ethel—Leslie."

There were suspicious traces of recent weeping in her eyes, and Ethel saw her lips quiver as she stooped to kiss her; but her voice fairly rung with happy satisfaction.

"I knew it would end just so! Only Ethel deserves a good scolding for cheating us all of our happiness so long."

She looked fondly on the girl’s resolute face.

"I have arranged the punishment, aunt Helen," Leslie said, gravely; "and very naturally Ethel rebels. I count upon your influence in subjugating her, by insisting that we celebrate a quiet family wedding two weeks from to-day, at St. Ile’s."

Mrs. Argelyne watched Ethel’s face closely. She saw with her quick, womanly intuition, the only objection Ethel entertained—a shy
fastened by a spray of white carnations, and over her forehead were two or three more.
She looked surprisingly sweet, and none the less so that she was very quiet and serious. Leslie was awaiting her, and met her at the door with all his heart in his eyes.

"Kiss me, darling—for the last time before—"

He paused, playfully, lifting her chin in his hand, so that he could look down directly in her eyes.

She gave a little exclamation of pain.

"Oh, Leslie, how terrible that sounds! The last! What if it should become literally fulfilled."

Her eyes were full of horror, her cheeks glistening, and Leslie looked at her in undefined astonishment.

"Why, Ethel, you surprise me beyond expression by your unwonted superstitious dread. Surely, darling, you do not for a moment dream I never shall kiss you again, do you?"

He drew her head to his breast, and kissed her lips tenderly, gently.

"Let me finish the sentence—the last before you are my darling wife. Laugh, Ethel, won't you?"

She smiled at his joyous, careful face; how could she help it?

"That is right. Aunt Helen, we are ready.

Mrs. Argyle came in in a toilet of black and gold dress, her India shawl over her arm, and a carriage bonnet of velvet and jet on her gray braids.

"I am ready. Have you your shawl, Ethel, and your cloud for your head?"

Leslie tenderly folded Ethel's Paisley around her shoulders, while Mrs. Argyle threw the snowy veil over the golden hair, stealing kisses between from the girl's cool cheeks.

It was just eleven when the uno-tentations bridal party drove from Mrs. Argyle's residence, and ten minutes past when the single coach drew up in front of St. Ilewe—an ivy-covered, solemn-looking place, that even amid the surging tides of fashion and thoughtlessness that flowed continually by its silent walls, bore on every stone the mute sign "sanctuary." A quiet, solemn place, filled with the "dim, religious light" Ethel so loved and revered, and which struck her with a peculiar awe as she went up the wide aisle, leaning on Leslie's arm.

There were a half-dozen strangers or so scattered among the pews, possibly who had incidentally heard of a wedding, and Mrs. Argyle involuntarily smiled at the utter absence of anything like pomp or ceremony at Ethel's wedding.

To her, who had attended so many bridal ceremonies, it certainly did seem strange; to Leslie, who only thought of the possession the hour would bring him, it was well enough; and to Ethel, the bonny, grave-eyed bide, it was in perfect unison with every feeling of her nature. The quiet matter-of-factness, that comparative privacy, were inexpressibly befitting the sadness of the occasion. For a second, as the low, solemn tones of the gray-haired clergyman smote her ears, a dizzy, heart-sick sensation swept over Ethel; it was so strange—so strangely soon to be listening again to her marriage service. It was only such a little while since she had given herself to another, and here she was waiting to respond to the solemn questions that would bind her forever, dissolve the slightest tie that bound her to Frank Havelock or her memory. She listened, at first in a dazed sort of way, that dispelled itself into a quiet sort of calmness, as she heard the beautiful words of the service; and when she looked up once, half shyly, in Leslie's face, and saw the perfect love in his face, the tender pride, as if by magic the last strange, vague presentiment vanished—vanished under the touch of the hand in which she laid her own, promptly, trustfully, as the words were said in slow, emphatic, solemn way, that made her the wife of Leslie Vernie.

With an ardent caress, her husband stooped his head to kiss her.

"At last—little one—little darling, little wife!"

The proud protectiveness in his words, the conscious rightfulness of his kiss and embrace, were very precious to her, and she was happy—as she had dreaded she never would be.

Mrs. Argyle's eyes were moist with happy tears as she greeted Ethel.

"I need not wish 'may you be happy,' dear. There's no doubt about it—you will be. My boy's wife couldn't fail to be—only love him—it is all he asks."

Ethel caressed the hand that had grasped hers, affectionately.

"You don't know how dearly I do love—my—my husband."

She glanced timidly at Leslie, who heard her sweet words, saw her shy, blushing pride.

"Thank you," he said, simply, but there was such perfect content in the words that went right to Ethel's heart.

"We will go home now, auntie; my wife and I are ready, if you are."

"I—oh, yes. Your shawl, dear—here it is."

She handed it to Leslie, who laid it over Ethel's shoulders.

"Turn a little while I fasten it—just a little."

Ethel turned—just a little. Turned, so that her back was to the chancel, and her beautiful flushed face toward her husband; turned so that she could see the unembellished guests at her marriage as they went slowly out the door, nodding and conversing in low, curious, gossiping tones; and saw, what neither her husband saw, for his back was to the door, as he
fastened her shawl, nor Mrs. Argelyne, who was speaking to the clergyman.
A terrible sight it must have been, for Leslie gave a sharp cry of alarm at the sudden blanching of her face, the swift relaxing of her figure, that fell as if smitten by a lightning stroke prone at his very feet.
Mrs. Argelyne gave an echo to Leslie's terror, and they essayed to raise her.
"The excitement has made her faint—that is all. Don't look so terrified, Leslie; brides quite frequently faint. She will recover in a moment; fan her."
But the shadow on the young husband's face did not lighten then, nor for many weary days and weeks and months thereafter; he looked anxiously, gloomily at the deathly face, with its ashen lips, its part-closed eyes that looked as if a Medusa head had turned them into their gaze of horror and fear, so strong was their soulless glare.
For several minutes they waited anxiously for the sign of returning life that did not come; and then, as Leslie read in Mrs. Argelyne's face a dawning uneasiness, he became nearly frenzied with fear and sorrow.
"It is not an ordinary faint, aunt Helen; I am sure of it. Feel her hands—they are colder than death and as clammy as a corpse. Oh, aunt Helen, is she dead? My God—is she dead?"
He knelt on the floor beside her, rubbing her limp hands, and kissing her unconscious lips with a frenzied eagerness that seemed enough, of its own sufficiency, to call her absent spirit back. He smoothed her hair off her deathly cold forehead, white as marble, and called on her to speak, for the sake of all the deathless love he bore her.
It was touching—his great agony, his great love, and the clergyman winked hard to keep his tears back.
"Send the footman for Dr. Charlton—"
He began the command just as Dr. Charlton came up the aisle, and Mrs. Argelyne hurriedly replied she had sent at the first.
He felt of Ethel's pulse, of her heart; listened at her chest and at her lips; then frowned, puzzledly.
"She is in an unusually deep swoon—that is all, and will revive all right without doubt. There must have been an unusual predisposing cause—have you the least suspicion?"
But no one knew anything of it—except the senseless girl, who had met Frank Havelstock's eyes, as he went out of the church, where Fate had led him, to see his deserted wife married to Leslie Verne.

CHAPTER XLIII.
COMING BACK TO HER SORROW.
It seemed an eternity to the frightened, anguish-stricken husband—the minutes that intervened between the decision of Dr. Charlton and the sharp, sudden resumption of sense and consciousness that came to Ethel as suddenly as they had forsaken her.
They were all standing around her as she lay on the scarlet-cushioned seat, her head pillowed on her shawl and Mrs. Argelyne's.
Leslie stood by her head, eagerly watching the signs of returning life that gave no fore-shadow of its coming; Mrs. Argelyne stood by her feet, as anxious, and alternately looking at Ethel's white face and Dr. Charlton's, as he held the limp wrist in one hand, his watch in the other, while the clergyman, after thoughtfully directing the closing of the doors, stood at a little distance, watchful and silent.
On this group, Ethel opened her eyes, as she gave a little shiver, and a sobbing sigh, with the taking up of the burden again.
Leslie caught her hand eagerly.
"Ethel, darling, don't move or speak! Thank God for a sight of your sweet eyes again!"
She looked up in his face with an expression of intensest dread and fear; then glanced quickly at Mrs. Argelyne's, then at the strange face of the physician, as if expecting yet mortally fearing to see some one else.
"Ethel! do you feel better? do you remember feeling ill or dizzy?"
She only answered by a vaguely painful look in her terrified eyes, that made Leslie's heart sink again in a new, terrible fear.
"Darling, you have been very ill. Won't you whisper to me and say you are better?"
He slipped an arm softly under her neck as he spoke, in a tone of low, tender softness. She essayed to shrink from his encircling arm, with a still deeper look of hunted horror freezing in her eyes.
Leslie felt the shrinking of her slight figure, and drew his arm quietly away.
They waited a second for an answer, then, very gravely, Dr. Charlton seated himself in a chair from the chancel that the clergyman had quietly handed him.
"If you are able, Mrs. Verne, I wish you would answer a few questions. I will not weary you."
She shivered as if drenched with ice-water as he spoke her new name—the first time she had heard it—oh, horrible mockery!
Dr. Charlton saw the flitting horror cross her face, but he said nothing regarding it, and went on in professional questioning.
"You were well—apparently, in the early part of the day, Mrs. Verne?"
Again that strange tremor trembled perceptibly over her, but she answered him in such a strange, unnatural tone that Mrs. Argelyne and Leslie involuntarily exchanged troubled glances.
"Perfectly well."
It was all she said, and Dr. Charlton nodded slowly.
Havelstock at an address he had mailed to him immediately before his departure on his wedding tour.

It was not the address of his residence, but of an office he had taken, down town, and had luxuriantly fitted up, ostensibly for the convenience of transacting business with his clients—insurance, real-estate broker, house steward; really, where he could meet any friend he chose without danger of detection from Ida’s sharp eyes.

Somehow, Ida was curiously watchful. She seemed to have a distrust that there was something on her husband’s mind, which, while it did not exactly trouble him, made him suspiciously discreet and cautious.

So “his office” was just the place for the interview Vincy wanted; and in the sumptuous room, adorned like a drawing-room, he found Havelstock yawning wearily over the monthly household accounts. Havelstock greeted him with unusual warmth. He felt glad for the unexpected opportunity for relieving himself by talking with some one who knew everything as well as he himself did.

“I’m glad to see you, uncommonly glad. Bring up a chair to the fire—it’s cold enough for an Icelander, to day, considering it is nearly the first of April. Have a cigar.”

Vincy shook hands warmly, drew up the cushioned chair, lit the cigar, and leaned comfortably back.

“I needn’t ask how things are going. Prosperously, I know.”

Vincy glanced around the elegantly-furnished room, at which Havelstock smiled almost cynically.

“Outwardly—well enough. How do you flourish?”

Vincy removed his cigar and looked full in Frank’s face a moment, before he answered, as if to give emphasis to what he was to say.

“That is just what I came to talk to you about. Ask a man who has been kicked down fourteen granite steps how he feels. In other words, ask me.”

Frank frowned, questioningly.

“Not at Tanglewood? not by my cousin?” Vincy nodded, coolly.

“By your cousin, at Tanglewood, the night of your wedding.”

“I see,” returned Havelstock, slowly, with angry emphasis. “You followed my advice in securing an interview with Georgia in the conservatory, where I told you you would find her, in all probability. I feel as if I was partly responsible, Vincy.”

“Not at all, old fellow. Even if it were your fault entirely, I would not resent it. I rather like to think the man who calls himself the husband of my wife has made me hate him by kicking me out of his house. I rather like to know he was sufficiently jealous of me to attempt such an outrage.”

He smiled, caustically.

“And how did you succeed with Georgia? how came my cousin to suspect your presence?”

Vincy related all the circumstances with revengeful minuteness, his face darkening with malignant exultation as he referred to Georgia.

“I shall conquer her, or kill her—depend upon it, Havelstock; not with bullet or steel, of course, but by cruelty and torment. I have had my first installment of the revenge of rejected addresses, and jealous indignation, and my taste is whetted. I have a glorious plan on foot, which will not only be a power in my hands to subjugate my lady, but which will take me to her presence so often that she will gladly support me in good style, for a temporary riddance.”

“But, Micawber-like, you will be sure to turn up, I have no doubt.”

Frank smiled as he said it.

“You may depend upon me for that. I want your help, Frank, before I commence my proposed siege. Simply answer me one question.”

“All you ask, if I can. What is the question on which so much hinges?”

Vincy laid his cigar on the little stand, and straightened up in his chair.

“Do you remember the name of the people to whom your cousin took my daughter when he removed her from her mother?”

He asked it slowly, with undisguised earnestness.

“Perfectly. It was Myrl—I remember it for its oddness. Why do you wish to know?”

Vincy wrote the curious Welsh name in his tablets, M-y-r-l, in distinct letters.

“Thank you,” he said, with a quietness of tone that betrayed his deep exultation. “I have sworn to track that family, and learn my child’s fate—not that I care if it died of starvation, or small-pox; but to harrow Georgia as nothing else will.”

Havelstock smiled, incredulously.

“Do you suppose she will care, after seventeen years?”

Vincy curled his lip.

“You can’t know her nature very well, if you think that of her. I know as well as I am a living man, that, with the wretched misery of her life with your cousin, her one pitiful comfort is the thought of her baby. She never has gotten over it, and never will.”

“And you will tear even that from her, by allowing her to suffer anew in the knowledge of her baby’s suffering!”

Vincy nodded, with a cruel gleam in his eyes.

“Would it be worse than the way you struck a blow at a girl who shall be nameless?”

Havelstock’s eyes flashed defiance for a moment, then he paled perceptibly.
"It was awful, wasn’t it? By Heaven, Vin-
cy, I’d almost sell my soul to find her—to see
her once more, to hear her voice—hadn’t she the
sweetest voice you ever heard?"

Vincy raised his brows in perfect astonish-
ment.

"Is it possible! You pining for the girl
you—"

Havelstock stopped him, fiercely.

"Don’t! you have no idea of how I suffer.
I am not sorry—mind you,” he added, half-
spitefully.

Vincy nodded, sagaciously.

"I understand. Not sorry, but wouldn’t
mind having her again, for all. Not exactly
sorry, but scared and—well, in love with her
as much as ever. Well, Frank, she was a lit-
tle trump, and I was in hopes I’d come across
her. Have you any idea where she is?"

Frank frowned darkly. Vincy’s words did
not quite please him.

"I have no idea. She might be dead, for
all I know of her. Come out to lunch, will
you?"

And so the subject dropped, suddenly.

CHAPTER XLII.

STRICKEN AT THE ALTAR.

The two weeks that Leslie Verne had ap-
pointed as the limit of his patience were gone,
except a single day. They had been spent by
Ethel in arduous preparations for her mar-
riage, so many little needful duties requiring
the performance that she would delegate to no
one.

She had insisted upon following her daily
routine as companion, as she was accustomed
to; and all of Mrs. Argelyne’s and Leslie’s
combined efforts did not dissuade.

In the evenings of the last week of the pre-
scribed two, Leslie was with her, talking of
his plans, purposes and arrangements with a
perfectly satisfied way that more than once
gave Ethel a strange, piling pain.

She seemed almost beside himself with hap-
iness; he would look at Ethel for minutes to
gather, as if drinking in the sweetness of her
grace, wistful face, and kiss her red lips with
a passionate ardor that made the girl tremble
for his happiness, it so depended on her.

There was about her, although neither Mrs.
Argelyne nor Leslie had observed it, a partic-
ularly grave thoughtfulness, that lent deeper
shadows to her eyes, and made her smile the
sweeter, because the rarer. She never men-
tioned the strange, impalpable dread that had
taken vague possession of her. She tried to
reason it away on the grounds of her haste in
so soon changing her condition, but the reason-
ing did not suffice. The shadow enveloped
her, and, what seemed so curious, she was not
unhappy.

She had satisfied herself, beyond a doubt,
that she did not love Leslie as well as she ever
had loved Frank Havelstock, although the
quality of the affection was very different;
and she knew, with a quiet positiveness that
nothing could have shaken, that she would be
such a good wife to her husband as to justify
his expectation of her.

Her simple preparations were in waiting
readiness that last night of her widowhood.
Her bridal dress of soft, silver-gray silk, as
neat as wax, with the lisse ruffles at the neck
and wrists; her traveling suit, comprising hat
of a French gray felt, trimmed with garnet
velvet, a garnet ostrich plume, and a tiny
velvet-breasted humming bird, gray kids, and
a quiet gray cloth skirt and polonaise, all lay
on the lounge, in readiness for the morrow.

Her trunks were packed, strapped, and la-
abeled, "Mrs. Verne, Meadowbrook." It had
been the last task of the evening, and Leslie
had insisted upon writing the directions him-
self and tacking them on.

There were no signs of confusion or bustle or
merry-making anywhere in the house; every-
thing, at Ethel’s earnest request, went on as
usual.

And now the last night had come, when
Ethel’s home would be under Mrs. Argelyne’s
roof, and the tears would come to her eyes as
she looked around the pleasant room where she
had known so much of sorrow, gratitude, joy
and pain; and when she prayed that night she
prayed as she never had done before for the
choicest blessings to follow the steps of her
true, tried friend.

The wedding morning dawned in all the
perfection of a late winter’s day. The sky
was cloudless as sapphire, with an air that
was balmy without a suggestion of warmth,
and cold enough to make one’s blood fairly
riot in the delight of merely living to inhale
it.

Early in the morning Mrs. Argelyne, Ethel
and Leslie met in the dining-room, where they
were served with coffee, toast, eggs and broiled
chicken; after which Ethel made a leisurely
toilet. Mrs. Argelyne gave a few last or-
ders regarding the wedding-breakfast after the
ceremony, and Leslie saw that the close clare-
ence would be at the door at the proper time—
eleven o’clock—after which he retired to the
room known as "Mr. Verne’s," and donned
his wedding-clothes.

At five minutes of eleven Ethel came down
stairs, attired in her dainty dress, that well set
off her big dark eyes, her colorless complexion,
and glorious golden hair, that she wore in her
old way on this occasion, because Leslie had
begged her to. And so it slipped and waved
from where it was brushed high off her fore-
head, except a few short, stray tendrils, that
curled irregularly over her low, white fore-
head, "way down over her shoulders and be-
low her waist.

The flimsy lisse ruche at her throat was
He ground his teeth as he asked himself the questions; then a still more tigerish expression flowered in his bold, black eyes.

"I’ve played with a steady hand for high stakes, and won, and I’ll hold the trump card to the last. I’ll not yield again to this babyish fear of Ethel’s bringing me to my deserts. Let her! Let her bring her accusations if she dare, when she learns I’m married again, and I’ll answer her with a counter charge. If I have two living wives, assuredly she has two living husbands."

He made a poor attempt at laughing at his solution of the affair; but away down in the depths of his heart he knew he was as foully guilty of crime as Ethel was purely innocent.

He walked to and fro until he was positively fatigued, and then sat moodily down in a large, cushioned chair.

"Such a look as she gave me; it makes my blood curdle to recall it! If I had been a veritable ghost she could not have been more terrified. I wonder what her impressions are! Does she suppose, I wonder, that I am the villain I am, or would she decide there had been some terrible mistake?"

He stretched his legs at full length, and stared at his boots almost challengingly.

"Whether she supposes me a demon or an angel, I know what I think of her—the only woman I ever loved, despite all I have done to hurt her. She is as beautiful as ever, with those wonderful eyes of hers, and, by all the powers of darkness, I love her more madly than ever I did!"

His face was flushing now with the dominance of unlawful passion, and a slow, sinister smile dawned on his handsome, wicked face.

"I’ll do as I wish not. What could be easier—provided I can keep rid of Leslie Verne. He’d be an enemy I’d prefer at a distance, with his ridiculous ideas of chivalrous devotion to women, and his stilted views of morals and duties. But once steer clear of him—curses on him that he is her husband a thousand times more legally than Ida Wyne is my wife—once arrange my plans, and then—why not conciliate Ethel? She loved me once, as no one will love me again, and I can influence her to any extent. Why not conciliate her, plead my own cause as I can plead, and thus keep them both?"

Bad, depraved as his instincts were, Havelstock involuntarily hesitated and lowered his voice as he put the question to himself.

Then, with the same boldly defiant smile on his face, he sat there, an hour, perhaps longer, waiting for Vincy, who should tell him all of Ethel that he would want to know, to set him on the right tack.

His patience was exhausted when, at the expiration of two hours, Vincy came in, as cool and careless as if Havelstock had not been suffering tortures during his absence.

"Well, the news?"

He demanded it in a way a tyrant might use toward a slave, and Vincy raised his eyebrows in silent, sarcastic questioning.

"You know what I mean well enough. Tell me about my wife."

Vincy smiled at that; he was resentful at Havelstock’s domineering manner; but, aside from that there was a pain in his head that made him more indifferent than he generally was.

"Your wife? I know nothing of her, save that I presume she must be anxiously expecting you to dinner. It is after six."

He consulted his watch with a cool innocence that fired Havelstock.

"You know what I mean! Give me Ethel’s address, or—"

He paused, in angry threatening.

"Or what?" retorted Vincy, coolly.

Havelstock returned the impudent stare with interest.

"Is it your intention to quarrel, or are you so smitten, with the charms of pretty Ethel that, for obvious reasons, you prefer to keep her whereabouts a secret?"

It was a random shot, but it hit the mark, and Havelstock knew, and Vincy knew, that from that moment their evil compact of agreement was forever severed.

"Just so," Vincy returned, walking toward the door. "I will confess I have a deep personal interest in the young lady, which effectually forbids my permitting you to enter the lists again. Take a parting word of advice—don’t let Mrs. Ida get wind of this. If she should—"

A peculiar look accompanying the words made Havelstock feel, as plainly as though the words had been added, that Vincy knew the power in his own hands.

And Havelstock realized, with a silent curse, that his star was visible in the descendent.

CHAPTER XLV.

BATTING WITH THE UNSEEN.

The moment Mrs. Argylene closed the door of the bedroom after her, and thus relieved Ethel of the restraint of human presence and human watchfulness, the full tide of the girl’s awful misery surged over her with a force she neither attempted to resist or accept passively.

She sprang from between the blankets in a perfect frenzy of unrestrained panic. She locked her door with trembling, nervous hands, and then, forgetting prudence or the demands of her heart, began a nervous, restless promenade that kept time to the one Frank Havelstock was performing in his luxurious office.

Her little, bare feet were colder than ice, yet she never experienced the physical discomfort; her face was growing more and more waxen and corporeal in pallor, and from out
her eyes looked a weird, horrified fear, that was pitifully appalling; that showed to what a fearful tension her nerves were strung.

She clasped her hands to her temples as if they were bursting with agony; and all the while her restless, frightened eyes seemed for ever watching for the object that had wrought all the havoc of her life.

Up and down she walked until thoroughly exhausted; then, by a great effort, she unlocked her door and crept into the bed again, weak and faint in body, but suffering with supernatural mental torture.

She lay as still as a statue, with only her dark, anguished eyes giving token of the life and the agony within.

She looked all around the room; at the careful preparations she had made for her journey to her new, beautiful home; she saw, with a stony calmness of expression on her face, the little, tender remembrances of her happy life in the house where she lay, broken and crushed now, and then all her exquisite torture welled to her lips in one comprehensive word: "Alive! Alive!"

Her voice terrified her, so ghostly it seemed, so sepulchral; and she moved her head on the pillow, as if to get away from herself.

That one word told it all. It portrayed all the different stages of horror, surprise, anguish and fear through which she had passed in the past fateful hours; it explained, to her perfect satisfaction, the dark presentiments that had clouded her over with this gloom so many times.

To her own mind, as she lay there helpless, passive under the successive billows of suffering that rolled in continuous floods over her, everything was confused, dark, inexplicably intermingled. She had only comprehended the indubitable facts of Frank Havelstock's existence, and the knowledge that she was the wife of two husbands.

For a time only those two ideas stared her in the face, and the consequences of her position, an innocent woman who had unconsciously broken the laws of her country, and brought odium and disgrace on the only friends she had in the world.

Gradually she found herself inquiring how it could have happened—the supposed death of Frank Havelstock. Had he really been so near death that everyone thought he was dead? But, granting such to be the case, why the long, long silence he had maintained toward her? Had he been glad of the opportunity to get rid of her? Was it possible he had ceased loving her? Could he—

With a little gasping cry of horrified anguish the whole truth occurred to her, with one of those undeniable intuitions that come to us, sometimes, that take hold of us with a grip of awful truthfulness, that will admit of no possible misconstruction; that will not be denied, dismissed, or quieted into forgetfulness.

So it came to her—as perfect a knowledge of the actual facts of the case, as far as she was personally concerned, as if she had witnessed the entire course of the vile affair.

She knew it had been a hoax, despite the apparently indisputable evidence Mr. Vincy—she recalled his name without an effort, so keenly sharpened by suffering were her mental faculties—that Frank's friend, Mr. Vincy, had shown her. He, too, had been deceived, else why his kindness to her and the trouble he had taken?

She knew Frank had been living all this while, that she had seen his living face that day; but what mystery lay at the bottom of it all? Why had he deserted her, under such a specious cause—she, who had loved him so?

It had been well done. Havelstock had rid himself of her, for what she could form no idea; and she, emerging from her sorrow and trouble, had just learned to be happy again, only to meet, face to face, a horror she never had imagined befall people in real life.

As a nightmare there, gradually yielding to the draught of salinan Mrs. Argelyne had bade her take, she knew, with a feeling that was a strange commingling of pleasure and pain, that this unknown, intangible fate of hers was the reason she found herself forgetting so a vow after her husband's supposed death. She comprehended now the rebellion of her nature against the injustice she had been unconscious suffering; and, with a throb of gasping, almost deathly agony, as she took in, in one comprehensive sweep of thought, the depth, heinousness and malignance of the wrong Frank Havelstock had done her, without cause or provocation, every tender memory of the man who had been to her, once, all and in all, forever died in her, and in its place sprung up a repellant horror that time only increased as the days went on.

But, with all these tumults raging in her, she gave no outward sign, made not a moan beyond that one gasp of mortal pain when she severed the last bond to her other life. She lay in among the pillows, like a crushed flower, with wide open eyes, stony with desperate despair; with firm closed lips, on which no prayer formed, from which no complaint came.

She seemed paralyzed with a pain too acutely awful for any mode of expression; she just took all the content of the vials of wrath that her fate poured for her to drink, and in silence she drained to the bottom of the drop.

Very gradually the quieting draught gained ascendancy over her; her eyes lost their debatable, despairing stare, her lids drooped slowly, until the dark, golden lashes lay motionless on her marble-white cheek, her hands lost their rigid clutches of the white lace ruffle that fell over her wrists, and the sharp lines
"You have never had any attacks of heart complaint—not in the habit of fainting?"
"No—"

The doctor knits his brows reflectively.
"I really cannot see what reason there is for the lady's sudden indisposition! There see, no predisposing cause, physically, for the certainly remarkable nervous prostration from which she is suffering. However—and he rose briskly, cheerfully—'a little care and a few hours' perfect rest will work such wonders that Mrs. Verne will be able to receive all the congratulations due her."

He smiled down in Ethel's tired, pitiful face, as if to inspire her with his views; but she only dropped her lids wearily over her eyes, and turned her head slightly away.

After the physician had gone, Mrs. Argelyne and Leslie assisted her to arise, and wrapped her in the shawls that seemed incapable of warming her, judging from the continuous shiver she was in.

"Lean on me, little wife; don't be afraid of your slight weight. Lean heavily, dear."

She was so solicitously tender, and Mrs. Argelyne hovered around her, with cheery, hopeful encouragement, as Ethel walked tremblingly down the aisle, leaning on Leslie's arm, yet shrinking from his touch; trying to hasten from the place, yet peering into the corners and before her, with wild, frightened eyes, as if dreading to go. They escorted her safely to the carriage, between them, and she was driven rapidly home, sitting beside Leslie in a dazed, silent, helpless way, that nearly drove him wild.

They did not question her; in her condition it was keenest cruelty to attempt such a thing, but Leslie held her hand in his, in a warm, ardent, gentle pressure that was sympathy itself.

Arrived at home, orders were at once given for blankets and bottles of warm water for Mrs. Verne, in her old room; and between the swift, careful ministrations of Mrs. Argelyne and her housekeeper, Ethel was put to bed in her quiet, darkened room, to obtain the needful repose which should restore her nerves to their proper condition. All through the process of disrobing her of her wedding attire Ethel had spoken but once, unsolicited. She had briefly answered questions, but only this once did she manifest the slightest volition of her own.

It was when Mrs. Argelyne had dismissed the housekeeper, and gently refused Leslie permission to come in; she had covered Ethel closely with the heated blankets, and surrounded her icy feet and limbs with the water bottles, and then knelt beside the low, French bed with a tiny crystal glass containing a well-known and harmless soothing draught.

"Drink this, dear. It will quiet your nerves and help you to fall asleep. I want you to awaken at two, sharp, remember, ready for your journey home."

She smiled as she lifted the glass to Ethel's lips with one hand, and with the other under her head partly raised her so she could swallow it.

Ethel obeyed, unquestioningly; then, when Mrs. Argelyne gently wiped her lips, and bent to kiss her forehead, Ethel looked up at her with her sad, haunting eyes, that Mrs. Argelyne never forgot till the day of her death.

"Will you leave me alone, please?"

She asked it deprecatingly, as if she requested a great favor she had no possible right to.

"Certainly, dear, and I'll put your call-bell on this stand, so if you need any one you will only have to ring. Try to sleep, will you, for my sake, and for your husband's?"

She meant it so lovingly, and as her strongest persuasion, but the great, awful pang of agony it caused in Ethel's heart almost took her breath.

Mrs. Argelyne went quietly out, shutting the door closely after her—and left the wretched woman—not girl, not widow, not wife—to the prey of her thoughts.

CHAPTER XLIV.
A GUILTY CONSCIENCE.

If Ethel had received such a terrible blow at sight of the man she supposed was dead and buried, the effect of their rendezvous had been only less powerful on Havelstock from the fact that he was constantly on the lookout for her, much as he hoped she never would see him.

Although her appearance did not shock him as his must naturally have done her, nevertheless, the position in which he found her, the bride of the man who had been his vanquished rival in earlier days, was not one calculated to cause the most satisfactory sensation. Then, the abruptness with which the affair took place added to the force of the effect; while, over and above all, was the alarming fact that Ethel had seen and recognized him; he knew that, the instant he caught sight of her horrified face, the moment he saw her willowy figure sway and fall.

As he saw Leslie catch her, Havelstock turned, with a face as white as chalk, to his companion, with whom he had strolled in St. Ile's from apparently idle curiosity, that had been aroused by hearing a lounger at the door remarking to another on the rare beauty of the bride within.

But it was all fate-ordained; Havelstock and Vincy were powerless in the Unseen Hands that pointed their way to the very altar-foot, where Ethel Verne, not bride, nor wife, nor yet a widow, was plighting her troth.

Neither Havelstock nor Vincy had recognized any of the party, the church being large, dim, and the backs of the bridal couple toward
them. They had not even seated themselves, but stood, a yard or so from the door, hats in hand, waiting for a glimpse of the graceful, queenly girl who stood with drooping head awaiting the benediction.

There had not been the remotest suspicion in the minds of the fated guests who came unbidden to the marriage, and yet, though neither said a word, or hinted by a conscious act or look, there was an instantaneous suggestion of Havelstock's wronged young wife to both of them, the moment they saw the glorious, golden hair, so like Ethel's own. But then, so many women had yellow hair, and Havelstock glanced half-curiously at the graceful head and shoulders, as any man would have done, merely wondering if the fair face filled the promises the hair and figure seemed to give, and lastly, carelessly waiting for a glimpse of the stranger bride.

Then—the transforming of a casual glance into a stony, staring terror and astonishment; the blanching of his countenance to the pallor of chalk; the suddenly-compressed mouth, and spell-bound manner—all of which were lost on Vincy, who had impatiently turned to leave. Havelstock's hand falling so heavily on his shoulder made him look at him, and as he caught sight of the haggard, wretched face that was looking at him, an oath of intensest surprise issued from his lips.

"For heaven's sake, man! have you seen a ghost? are you ill—in pain! what's the matter?" Havelstock was fairly gasping for his breath, and Vincy's alarm seemed by no means unwarranted.

"It's she—it's she, herself—married—marriage...."

He jerked out the words as if a spasm of the glottis intervened between every syllable; and in an instant it flashed over Vincy.

"Not by Jupiter, man, if she should see you! hurry out of this, or you're ruined forever."

He cast a glance backward, but failed to see Ethel, as she had that instant sunk to the floor.

He caught Havelstock's arm, hurried him out, and hailed the first coach he saw, with orders to lose no time in reaching the office.

"I'll meet you as soon as I can; stay at the office, and when I've learned where she lives, and all about it, I'll come to you with the news."

The carriage started off with Havelstock, trembling and agitated as he never had been before, crouching among the cushions, his face gray with fear and pain, his eyes full of a defiance that compared strangely with the uncertain, almost pitiful misery on his countenance. He strove to regain his composure, but his nerves were too badly shaken to resume their normal condition simply by an exercise of will-power, and finding he was really in a disturbed condition, physically as well as mentally, he drew his pocket-flask and drank a copious draught of clear brandy—enough to have intoxicated him at another time.

It acted as a speedy exhilarant, and he felt new courage as the weakness of his knees ceased, and less craven fear as the exciting liquor rose to his brain.

What did it all mean, anyhow? He found himself asking the question as he was being driven rapidly along.

Did it mean a discovery of his crime, and a blazoning to all the world his frightful dishonor? Did it mean that Ida Wynne would learn the unenviable position she occupied, or that he himself must pay the penalty of having deliberately broken the laws of the land?

It was an ugly word that stared him relentlessly in the face, then. It had stared at him before, in the vague, dim distance; but now, right beside him, in dancing, red letters, like little grinningimps it faced him—BIGAMY!

The cold sweat broke out on his face in great clammy beads; his teeth chattered, despite his desperate effort to preserve his composure, and when the driver of the coach suddenly drew up in front of his office, he actually shrank back in the corner, with restlessly defiant eyes, as if all the world was in one grand conspiracy against him. He counted the fare out on the man's palm, and dismissed him; then entered the office and locked the door after him, and lowered the shade.

He threw his hat and cane and gloves on the sofa, and began a nervous promenade, that gradually grew less aimless and rapid as the moments went by and he obtained fuller control of his reasoning powers, that had been temporarily crushed by the blow.

He was realizing to the full that the way of the transgressor was hard; it had come to him that there were thorns along the path, however fair and rose-strewn it appeared.

That was an hour or more of keenest suffering to the man who boasted of having no conscience, who proudly declared he was a law unto himself.

As he paced to and fro, his hands thrust in his pockets, his countenance gradually assuming an expression of ferocity, he glanced at the costly furniture, the elegant and artistic surroundings, that would have satisfied the most critical taste. Then he smiled bitterly.

"I have everything I bargained for; wealth, position, and the influence both bring. I have all the pleasure a man can have, and perfect liberty as to my actions. I am what the world calls 'a success'—but is it worth the price I have paid for it? Does it begin to recompense me for this dread of detection that gnaws me unremittingly? Will my grand house, my dinners gotten up regardless of expense, that await me in the home many a man envies me for, repay me for the revelations of this morning?"
of her figure, that had looked like the thrillingly awful shape of a dead body, relaxed into her usual graceful curves and lifeliness.

Her sleep was dreamless, deep and long. Mrs. Argyle had stolen in silently several times; to report to Leslie, who paced the library floor in an impatient suspense, that refused, at length, to be content with his aunt’s reports.

“I am going up myself, aunt Helen. Why should I not when my own darling wife is there, alone with her mysterious illness?”

He went softly up stairs alone, and turned the handle of Ethel’s door with cautious care, and then crossed quickly, noiselessly to the bedside.

He leaned over her in an inexpressibly tender way, with his loving, pitying gaze bent on the sweet, unconscious face in a silent devotion.

He touched her hand as a devotee would touch a shrine, reverently, adoringly. He caressed her hair, that was flowing over the pillow, down one of her beautifully curved shoulders, with a touch so light and soft that the faintest slumber would not have been disturbed by it, much less the deathly deep sleep that held Ethel as in a trance.

“My little darling—my little wife! How she has suffered—just see the purple circles under her eyes, and the white line around her mouth. Poor, precious one!”

He said it to himself in a low, caressing tone, as he looked yearningly at her, while gently patting her hand, that lay lifeless and limp on the silken coverlid.

“I wonder what ailed her? Has she heart disease? God forbid! It will kill me if she suffers like this often. Can it have been occasioned only by the natural excitement of our marriage, as aunt Helen insists? I think not.

—Ethel is a girl of wonderful coolness and control, and surely in our peculiarly quiet wedding there was nothing to create undue nervous excitement.”

His thoughts were visible in the pained anxiety on his fine face as he bent nearer his wife’s still, beautiful figure. Her breathing was so light, even, that he could barely detect it, and he leaned his ears against her lips as if afraid she were not breathing at all.

“If she should die! Oh, my darling!”

He knelt beside her then, in an almost frenzied impulse of sorrow, burying his face on the bedside, while heavy, passionate sobs shook his frame.

“It would kill me to lose her, when I have only just found her; when I’ve waited so long for her—my own, own darling! Can it be she is dying—she is so still, so white?”

He raised his eyes, that were red with weeping, to look at her, with a yearning, passionate love that showed how completely he had merged his whole happiness in her keeping.

As he watched her he grew calmer; he stood silently beside her with folded arms and sad, wistful eyes.

“There would be but one thing worse than her death—and that is—to learn the cause of all this mysterious illness, this plainly visible suffering of mind and body, was that she regretted our marriage upon realizing she was of a verity my wife. Can that be the reason? Oh! my God—can I have stumbled upon the secret of her indisposition?”

The perspiration started on his forehead and palms at the sudden thought, and a swift horror surged over his face.

But only for a moment; then he smiled tenderly, pityingly upon her.

“I am beside myself—forgive me, my darling! and may God spare you to me, to let me make you so happy and content that I will be all the world to you! God help me to be more worthy of you, my peerless one, my own!”

He stooped and kissed her lips in reverent worship, then went out, quietly, with a prayer in his heart and the touch of her sweet mouth lingering on his lips. Went from Ethel’s presence with no foreboding of the weary, heart-sick days, the sleepless, watchful nights that were doomed to intervene before he saw her sweet suffering face again.

CHAPTER XLVI.

“ONLY A SUGGESTION.”

GEORGIA’s life at Tanglewood had at length settled into that pitiul, dead level existence that crushes every feeling, restraints every emotion, and makes the act of existing a mere monotonous passivity.

She had suffered to the fullest limit of her capacity; she had drained her vials of wrath to their bitterest sediment; she had endured all the force of tempest after tempest, and yet lived.

Because she did not die, Georgia had come to dread nothing. Because she had nothing more to dread, she had nothing to hope; and when there comes into a woman’s life any fatality that is strong enough to quench the fires of hope, to the tiniest smoldering spark, as in Georgia’s case—then God help her to bear the burden of living!

To Georgia, not the least endurable of her burden, was that portion of it caused by the impenetrable calmness and joy courtesy which Lexington never failed to manifest toward her, which would have frustrated her, with its polished hollowness, had she not been blunted by past agonies, until she felt actually past even caring to think.

The rigid etiquette of Tanglewood was maintained with pompous regularity. Dinner was served to Georgia and Lexington alone, with as much style and ceremony as if a dozen guests of the most distinguished character had dined with them.
Lexington dressed with preciee elegance, and expected Georgia to present herself in full dinner toilet. Before the solemn, liveried butler and his corps of well-drilled waiters, the widely-separated pair maintained a light, gossipy chat; and when left to themselves, over their walnuts and Johnnysiberger, not the most sagaciousassever would have found fault with manner or conversation.

It was a pitiful life—a horrid succession of more horrid mockerys; a mere existence that only needed a few weeks longer to culminate in a desperate tragedy—for very misery’s sake.

Occasional guests came, and departed in silent ecstasies over their entertainment and entertainers; occasional calls were made by the handsome reserved pair who carried their family pride and hanteur so becomingly. There were the daily drives, which Lexington politely insisted upon; when he accompanied her, and conversed in his exquisite way on all possible points of interest. All through the winter, since the fateful night of the affair in the conservatory, there had been occasional entertainments in the neighborhood, to which Lexington had escorted his wife, and in turn they had given a series of amateur theatricals, concerts, readings and tableaux.

In those the times Lexington preserved the same perfect courtesy, and Georgia the same quiet, graceful acceptance; while hourly the yawning chasm widened and deepened.

It was the very perfection of fearful mockery—their death-in-life; and the only actual perception Georgia found herself conscious of, was that sooner or later, in the natural course of human events, she would die—and so the end of it all would come.

In those darkest days, Amber was the one comfort of her life. To her alone, of all the wide world, could she pour out her whole heart’s bitterness, and from her she invariably received a fresh courage that enabled her to endure a little longer.

"It must come out all right at last, Mrs. Lexington. I believe there are such happy days ahead for you that when they come you will admit they were cheaply bought, even by this apparently hopeless despair. Cheer up, Mrs. Lexington; remember that no pure, innocent, suffering woman ever could, according to God’s mercy, go down to death under the cloud of suspicion."

In after days, Georgia remembered Amber’s words, and thanked God for giving her her faithful friend and counselor.

Into the midst of all this hopelessness there came a letter—only a few lines on heavy tinted, perfumed, crested paper; only a hurriedly-written note from Ida, asking Georgia and her husband to come to her and her husband for the week promised them, in early April.

Only that—and yet it was the turning-point in more than one destiny; only that, and yet a more powerful influence over several lives could not have been imagined.

Georgia read it at the breakfast table and handed it to her husband, who glanced briefly over it.

"We will go, if we promised. There is Mrs. Argyle also, to whom we are indebted." He always spoke so politely, and distantly, and in all their frigid intercourse since Ida’s wedding night, the name of Carleton Vincy, or the subject of their wide estrangement had never been alluded to however remotely.

Georgia had never seen Vincy or heard of him from December to April. She was perfectly indifferent on the subject, since he had wrought his horror, and in her dull apathy she would not have cared if he had come daily. She had no more to dread now—nothing to hope—these were the words that sung like a knell in her crushed heart—never ceasing night or day.

This proposed visit to New York was powerless to excite the slightest pleasurable anticipation. She made her arrangements mechanically, supposing there would be operas to attend, theaters to visit, drives to take, friends to receive, calls to make—and further, there was nothing. Amber packed her trunks with her elegant garments, while Georgia listlessly watched her; and then, one balmy day in April, when grass was springing greenly, and buds bursting from their calyces in impetuous delight that the bland spring breezes had come to woo them from their hiding-places, Lexington and Georgia went to New York—that strangely contradictory place where wealth and poverty live almost side by side, where misery and happiness sit opposite each other, where quiet heart tragedies are forever enacting, where vilest sin and purest innocence are frightfully close neighbors. And her fate was coming to her, as it had never come before—here in this great busy place, where she was so lonesome, so continually mocked with surface gayety and hollow happiness. Six months before, to have fled from Tanglewood, even to the sands of Sahara—anywhere from the possibility of Carleton Vincy’s presence—would have been almost a satisfaction; while to have gone to the busy, crowded city, where one is more alone and better hidden than anywhere else on earth, would have been positive relief to the hunted, heart-sore woman.

But now—New York and Sahara were equally places of indifference to her, since Carleton Vincy’s comings and goings could not again affect her.

That Vincy was in New York she did not know; that he was so intimately connected with Ida’s husband, in his nefarious plans, she, of course, did not know; so that when Havel-
stock saw, to his satisfaction, the widened breach between Lexington and Georgia, he also saw that neither of the miserable pair for a moment associated him with their troubles. Lexington had not been an hour in Havelstock's company before he discovered that there was something amiss, and as the two sat over their wine and walnuts the first day of the visit, Lexington adverted to the fact of what he had observed.

"You are not ill, Frank! You must be 'Frank' to me to the end of the chapter, notwithstanding the silver door-plate bearing the legend of 'John Lexington.'"

"I am not sick, that I know of; why, do I look out of sorts?"

Havelstock raised his haggard face, with its restless, glistening eyes, to Lexington's, who answered decidedly:

"Yes, you do. You look like a man who had heart-sickness or head-sickness, and yet I suppose I am very foolish to imagine anything troubles you."

He said it very bitterly, as if pointing a contrast between himself and Frank.

Havelstock smiled, gloomily.

"Do you think no one but yourself knows what trouble is? Not that I have any in particular," he added, hastily.

Lexington watched him with affectionate interest, as he spoke.

"Are you disappointed in your wife, Frank? Tell me, frankly, for I feel a responsibility in the matter. If you are not happy I shall never forgive myself."

"Ida is all well enough. Ida is all right; and I doubt if there is a happier couple far or near than we are. You are mistaken, I assure you, in supposing there is any trouble on my mind, at least of more consequence than an unfortunate little investment."

Lexington's brows cleared.

"I am thankful for that." I feel I could not endure to see your life wrecked as mine has been—to see your future blank and hopeless as mine is."

Havelstock's countenance assumed an expression of most intense concern.

"I have been impatient to ask you if the terrible breach between you and Georgia was not narrowing. It seemed to me my marriage would have had a good effect on you both, and perhaps have been the means of a reconciliation. I was very foolish and romantic, I suppose, but I did so hope to find you lovers when I came home."

A deathly pallor was creeping slowly over Lexington's face, and when he answered his voice was husky with genuine pain.

"You were always the best friend I had, and I know how your faithful, loyal heart will ache when I tell you what I dared not write, Frank—her—she has—she—"

"It seemed as if the awful words refused to frame into sentences. He bowed his head on his breast, little seeing that on Havelstock's face was a smile of malignant triumph, of ill-concealed contempt for the man he so successfully hoodwinked; a smile that vanished with marvelous speed, and transformed as it fled, into well simulated pity for the revelation to be made.

It came, presently, the whole pitiful story, from the hour of the marriage-feast to the moment of its recital; and Havelstock listened as if petrified into dumb surprise.

"Carleton Vincy alive!—alive! and you the—and Georgia the wife of two husbands! Great heavens—Lexington, is it true?"

He seemed almost beside himself with grief and astonishment.

"True as fate, pitifully true as doom itself. But it is not the worst, Frank."

He said the words so impetuously, that they brought real, unfeigned wonder into Havelstock's eyes.

"Not the worst? What can be worse than to know the awful position you occupy, to know that your wife is not your wife, to know she prefers the love and caresses of the man you thought was dead?"

If Havelstock meant to harrow Lexington's feelings to their very uttermost depths, he certainly succeeded; for in the words that came for answer, leaping hotly from his anguished lips, was the very essence of mad passion and jealous, bitter pain.

"There is one thing worse than all that—and of that cup of wrath I am daily drinking to the dregs—while she never dreams of the truth. And that worse thing is—this increasing, seething knowledge that I love her, with all the force and strength of my nature, fiery, jealous as it is! I love her with a madness that consumes me; I worship the very dirt she spurns with her dainty feet!—and yet, I feel I could kill her for her falsity!"

"Or Vincy, your fortunate rival."

It was merely a suggestion, quietly said, born of the anger and jealousy in Havelstock's heart as he thought of Vincy's triumph over him in regard to Ethel Verne; only an embodiment in words that conveyed, so matter-of-factly, the wish of his heart, that Vincy were out of his way, so he might have a clear track to run on in his search for, and possession of the only woman in all the world whose touch made his nerves tingle so acutely. For he had determined to find her; he had sworn to see her; he had registered a vow to have her for his own again, despite Vincy, or Verne, or human intervention.

Only a suggestion, and even its real motive unsuspected by Lexington, who little dreamed that Havelstock dreaded Vincy's rivalry as much as he himself had reason to fear it.

But the suggestive hint struck a strange chord in the breast of the man who uttered it,
while to him to whom it was said, it was of no
importance.
If Vicney were dead! Everything would be
hidden, every track covered, every footprint
erased, and Ethel once more his own, which he
knew with a sure certainty would never be if
Vicney willed otherwise.
He had realized, since the day of Ethel's
marriage, and their sudden encounter, with
keen bitterness, how completely he was in
Vicney's power; how very precarious was the
foundation on which he rested—one which
would crumble under his feet at a breath from
Vicney's lips.
It had occurred to him again to-day, with
impressive force, as he listened to Lexington;
but for the first time, to his credit be it record-
ed, had his fear, his distress, his vain regrets for
the confidence he had given, taken tangible
form.
Now, the sudden idea staggered him with its
awfulness—for one single second, during which
the perspiration stood in drops on his chalky-
white face; then, on the instant, he resolved to
use his righteous indignation over his cousin's
foul wrongs, to break a column of steel for his own
wickedness. He sprung excitedly from his
chair, nearly upsetting the tiny wine-glass at
his elbow.
"The man doesn't exist who dare tamper
with your happiness with impunity! I shall
make it my business to hunt this craven cow-
ard to death, and demand the satisfaction of
the family name and the family honor."
He was actually trembling with excitement,
and Lexington's big, honest heart thrilled at
his friend's unselfish love.
"It would be of no avail, Frank. If Geor-
gia loves him—"
His voice failed him, as it often did when he
spoke of his great trouble.
Havelstock suddenly extended his hands, and
Lexington grasped them, warmly.
"It sends me beside myself, Lexington—
forgive me if I was too emphatic. But, as
surely as there is a canopy above us, so surely
shall Carleton Vince rue his day."
He meant one thing, and Lexington supposed
he meant another; but it made little difference,
after all. They were all mere automatons in
the hands of a Fate who was fast gathering in
the far-scattered threads of their sadly raveled
lives.

CHAPTER XLVII.
The Bird and Snake.
As if from some horrifying dream, Ethel
suddenly awoke from her lethargic sleep, with
a suddenness that was fairly a bound into life
and consciousness and suffering.
For an hour after her husband had stolen
softly away, leaving his kisses upon her cold,
white face, and his prayers on her head, she
had lain there, motionless as if carved from
marble, with her breathing so faint and slow it
scarcely heaved the silken coverlet that lay
partly across her chest.
Once or twice Mrs. Argelyne had gone quiet-
ly in, with silent watch-care on her face and
in her manner, and then as softly retired, leav-
ing the girl to the mysteries of her dreamless
sleep. Once Leslie had tip-toed through the
hall, and listened outside the closed door for a
sound that indicated life within, and then crept
back again to the deserted dining-room, where
the wedding-breakfast remained untouched, where the flowers were fading, where the
chairs stood desolately vacant.
When Ethel awakened, it was so sudden, so
abruptly, that one would have been startled
had they seen her great dark eyes open, wide-
ly, startlingly, without a single premonitory
hint of yawn, or stretch, or sigh.
She was alone when she recovered from her
deep, stupid sleep—alone with her agony, that,
though blunted and dulled by the opiate she
had taken, was nevertheless there, in grim, in-
disputable fact. There was not that look of
mortal terror in her eyes that there had been
before she slept; but in its stead was a horrified
surprise, a pitiful despair and desolation that
was repeated by the expression of her face.
For several minutes she lay wide awake, her
big dark eyes fixed on the wall opposite the
foot of the bed, a stony calmness seeming to
creep perceptibly over her, and to inthrall her
in its quiet, lifeless hold.
Then she threw back the covers, in a me-
chanical way, and got slowly out of the bed, as
if her very joints had stiffened in horror.
She gathered up her hair in a large, loose
knot, and pinned it at the top and back of her
head; then she began dressing herself, her
hands trembling so she let pins fall, one after
another, and often missed buttoning her gar-
ments, only to try again with the strangely
stolid patience that seemed part of her.
She did not hurry, or purposely delay; she
went on with her toilet until everything was
complete, and then, with a weary sigh, sunk
down in her little blue-cushioned rocking-
chair besides the fire, shivering with cold,
though the day was balmy as June.
"It is so strange, so passing strange," she
murmured to herself, as she rocked slowly to
and fro, her eyes fixed on the smouldering
coals in the grate. "It seems as if I bring a
blight wherever I go—poor me, who am
always in the wrong place."
She glanced around, as if half expecting to
see Frank Havelstock start from the dim shad-
ows of the recesses.
"It will hurt poor Leslie so much if ever he
learns it all—and Mrs. Argelyne—dear Mrs.
Argelyne, who has been a mother to me. If I
only could undo it all. If I only could. But
I can't—I can't!"
She sprung up from the chair as if the very
idea of her position hurt her. She paced the floor with quick, light footsteps, wringing her hands in helpless misery.

"I did not mean to do wrong—God knows I have been guiltyless—1—the wife of two husbands! How strange is it?"

She paused in her nervous promenade as if to more fully take in the import of her own words. Then she laughed—a low, weird, hysterical laugh, frightfully devoid of mirth.

She twisted her ring on her cold finger—the diamond one Leslie had given her; then she slipped it off, suddenly, with a low, anguished cry.

"How dare I stay here and wear his ring under his aunt's roof?—I, the woman who have committed a crime for which they can put me in prison?"

She was growing strangely excited now. Her eyes glowed unnaturally, her breath came in short, rapid gasps, and she gazed on the gems in her hands.

"It is all such a mystery! It dazes me and bewilders me when I think Frank is still alive. What does it mean? Am I right in my horrid conjectures of the truth that he took this means to rid himself of me? And I his wife—no matter what he is to me. I am his wife in the sight of God and man."

She repeated the last words in a slow way, as if riveting them in her memory.

She was herself now. As fast as her quivering hands would permit her, she changed her dressing-gown for a plain black cashmere that hung in her wardrobe—one of the dresses she had worn when she thought herself a widow. She fastened a cashmere saucer about her, and pinned a veil of double thickness over her little straw hat; she hastily transferred her pocket-book to her pocket, and then, hanging Leslie's ring on a pin in her toilet cushion, with a reverence and affection that was touching.

"To save his name—of which he is so justly proud; and because—oh, God pity me! I am not his wife! and I love him so!"

Her low, passionate wail smote no ears but her own; and no one saw the look of utter desolation in her eyes as she turned them slowly, in a farewell glance, around the familiar room.

"It will kill me, I think, and yet I did not die before, when I thought my heart was breaking. If I can only get away from him—from Leslie, before I see the reproach in his face, and hear the anger in his voice, because I have deceived him—no! I have not deceived him; I am sure I have not! Somehow, I can't quite comprehend."

She drew her hand over her forehead in a thoughtful, puzzled way, then lowered her veil again, and started for the door.

She opened it cautiously, and peeped out in the dim halls, not yet lighted. She heard no voices, as she listened, half frightened, half in a delirium of pain and emotion; then, she sped noiselessly down the steps, and into the lower hall.

She paused a second, seeing the trunks she had packed and Leslie strapped, standing in mute mockery of her situation. She saw no one in the little reception-room, or in the large shadowy parlors, but from the dining-room came the sound of subdued voices in earnest conversation.

Instinctively she strained her ears to catch the farewell sound of the voices she so loved, leaning, as she listened, heavily on the bronze Ceres at the foot of the stairs.

"I will go up in a moment again, aunt Helen, and if she is not awake, I—"

It was Leslie's voice she heard, as she clung with anguish grip to the cold arm of the statue—Leslie's dear voice for the last time!

She heard a movement in the dining-room, as if some one was coming, and in a panic of horror and fear she rushed noiselessly over the thick Persian carpets, and into the little vestibule, where she hastily unlocked the door, and found herself in the early dusk of the cool April night—alone, fleeing from—what to—what?

Half-maddened as she was with all the peculiarities of her unenviable position crowding upon her, it was with scarce less than a superhuman effort that Ethel controlled herself sufficiently to walk along the avenue. She wanted to fly—anywhere—anywhere to get away from the friends she had so nearly involved in her pitiful romance.

She managed to walk several blocks, and then, panting and trembling, paused a second to hail the first passing coach.

She had been waiting only a second, feeling frightfully faint and dizzy, and wondering in a vague sort of way if the best thing that could happen her would not be to die when a gentleman, walking slowly along, half-paused as he passed her with an inquiring, respectful way a gentleman would naturally manifest if he was not sure whether he had met an acquaintance or not.

Ethel merely glanced at him, not so much as observing his appearance or manner; then, in a second after, turned suddenly in a panic of affright at a voice close at her elbow.

"I beg pardon if I am mistaken. But is not this Mrs. Frank Havelstock?"

A low, courteous question, accompanied by a bow, and followed by a respectful silence.

Ethel's heart stood still for an instant. A sick fear crept swiftly over her at the inopportune recognition; then, natural surprise as to the identity of her questioner or follower.

Before she had time to collect her thoughts, the gentleman spoke again.

"I hope you will not regard me as an intruder. I am Carleton Vincy, your husband's friend and your own. You will permit me to inquire of your health?"
Carleton Vincy! Ethel's heart leaped again. What strange coincidence was this, that she should meet the only friend she had known in those other weary days?

"I am well, Mr. Vincy—so far as my body is concerned. But sick with a heart—oh you will be horrified to know. You were a friend of Mr. Havelstock's—as such I want to ask you several questions."

An odd greeting, but to Vincy, who knew all the preceding events, and who had watched Mrs. Argelyne's door all that afternoon for Ethel to pass through it, as he was sure she would, there was nothing curious in it.

"I am going to the Grand Central depot, Mr. Vincy. If you will ride with me I will be much obliged. I must see you at once."

Vincy hailed a passing coupe, smiling at the delightful way in which Fate was playing directly into his hand.

"You make me feel somewhat uncomfortable, Mrs. Havelstock. You act and speak as if something had happened. Was there anything that happened?"

He watched the convulsive working of her features with the same sensation of curious interest he had experienced months before when he had been the bearer of lying news.

"Something has happened."

She was shivering as with an ague fit; her dark eyes were glowing like smouldering fires, and her face was wan and pale. Yet, she was gloriously beautiful, with a sweet, truthful earnestness of manner that perfectly enchanted him.

He looked at her with an expression of wonder on his face, and pity for whatever it was, in his eyes. Ethel saw both, and felt a faint thrill of satisfaction that there was one person in all the world she could talk to on the most pathetic topic.

Almost instinctively, she leaned across the carriage, and he felt her hot, hurried breathing on his face, and saw the anguish of terror in her eyes.

"He is not dead—I saw him face to face this morning."

She said it in a shrill whisper, and Vincy started in amazement.

"What! You can be talking of but one man in the world—you can't be meaning—"

He paused purposely, to make her finish her confession.

She nodded.

"Yes—Frank Havelstock! He is not dead—and you told me—you brought the news and showed me what I believed were the proofs."

She looked in his eyes, and for one instant he wondered if she suspected his complicity in the affair. Her next words reassured him.

"That is why I was glad to meet you, Mr. Vincy; I wanted to ask you if you know what it all means."

Vincy sat as if in a stupor of amazement. Finally he spoke.

"You have petrified me, Mrs. Havelstock. I cannot believe you—Frank alive?"

Ethel sank back with a weary sigh.

"And it is so dreadful that I never want to see him again—never—"

Vincy gave a well-simulated expression of profound astonishment.

"Mrs. Havelstock!"

"It is true—I believe he deserted me, for what reasons only himself knows. I believe the whole story of his death was a well-gotten up farce, that deceived you as well as I. I think I have learned to despise him as much as I loved him."

She spoke with the calmness of despair as she leaned her head against the window, Vincy's eyes fairly devouring her face.

The carriage was passing slowly along among the crowd of vehicles, and at length stopped for one second just abreast of an elegant barouche, driven by a coachman in liver, who held his prancing horses well.

Just as they were abreast of the carriage, and while Vincy never removed his fascinated gaze from Ethel's sweet face, she glanced carelessly at the two elegantly-dressed ladies who sat on the back seat.

They were both looking at her—one, an insipidly pretty girl, whose big gray eyes were full of half jealous contempt; the other, a face of wonderful beauty, with the seal of suffering on the patient face, and a sad smile on the pitiful lips—as if there was suddenly established a mysterious, magnetic link between Ethel's wistful face and the lady's own.

Then, as the barouche moved slowly on, the elderly lady glanced at Vincy, casually; and Ethel saw a deathly pallor surge whitely over the perfect face, and a freezing pain come to the eyes—and Mrs. Ida Lexington and Mrs. Georgia Lexington went on from Ethel's sight. As the coupe drove on, Ethel gave a sigh.

"What a sweet face—what a tender, loving face!"

Vincy glanced out, but did not see Georgia; then took his watch hastily out.

"Mrs. Havelstock, you have completely unnerved me. I cannot comprehend all you have told me, so suddenly, and I cannot listen to more if you desire to catch this train. Can you postpone your trip and give me time to think? May I offer you the hospitality of my house for to-night? My wife and sister will make you welcome, I am sure; while as a friend of your husband, I think I am the most suitable counselor you can have."

He never blushed when he met her honest, truthful, soul-sad eyes. He spoke as pleasantly as frankly as Leslie Verne himself could have spoken, and there was no reason why Ethel should have doubted him. His wife and sister! Ethel felt a pang of almost jealousy of them, happy and content in their quiet home.
"I will go, Mr. Vincy. Until to-morrow I will not materially interfere with any of Mrs. Vincy's plans."

"I am sure you will not; and this evening we will talk over your misfortune, and take my wife into our confidence."

"I was going to the hotel near my old home, in the vicinity of Tanglewood, but to-morrow will do just as well. Or, I may alter my plans to-morrow."

In the gathering darkness she did not see the sinister smile on Vincy's sensual face, but she rode on, feeling a strong calmness pervading her.

The coupe stopped at a plain-looking house, one of a row. A hall-lamp illuminated the entrance, and Ethel thought it looked very cozy and pleasant as she alighted, assisted by Vincy, who opened the door, with his key.

Then, when a tidy colored girl appeared, he turned to Ethel, cordially. "Come, Julia will show you in the drawing room, while I hunt Mrs. V. up, and send her to you."

Ethel, absorbed with her awful grief, felt a quiet thankfulness that there was rest for her so near at hand.

So she entered the plain, pleasant little parlor, and sat down, wearily, while Vincy went out to hunt Mrs. V. up.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE FACE IN THE COUPE.

As the Lexington barouche started slowly on again, Ida turned to Georgia, who sat with a whitened face against the chocolate cushions, her whole nature going out in a painful sense of wondering compassion for the fair, fond girl she had seen riding in the coupe with Carleton Vincy.

Who was she—her lustrous, wistful eyes, her dainty, high-bred face, on which was plainly visible the seal of a terribly hard woe for one so young?

Something like a sigh of pity was on her lips; she was asking herself if Carleton Vincy was this young girl's lover; and then, every faculty of her fine woman's perception aroose in rebellious answer.

Never! She knew it by the one glimpse she had of Ethel's face, so freighted with trouble and anguish, as well as by her own not yet extinguished faith in womankind, by which she reasoned that it was an impossibility for Carleton Vincy to woo and win any girl for his bride.

Then—what was this dusky-eyed, golden-haired girl doing in his company? What possible claims had he—the bold, vile, unprincipled man—on this girl?

Georgia sickened with apprehensive dread as the carriages separated further, so that when Ida turned toward her with a half-sneering curl of her lip, she saw on Georgia's face tokens of the inward distress she was experiencing.

"You couldn't be paler if you had seen a ghost. Are you chilly, cousin Georgia, or is it one of those attacks of palpitation you have so often?"

Ida seemed to say the words unexpectedly; evidently she had intended a far different remark.

"A little chilly, that is all; these spring nights grow cool so soon after sunset. Did you see that lovely girl in the carriage we just passed?"

She had no idea of receiving any information when she asked the question. Her chief object was to draw Ida's attention from her personal agitation.

To her surprise, Ida curled her lips sneeringly.

"I cannot see what every one finds in her to admire. She is an old sweetheart of Frank's—a Miss Ethel—something. I have forgotten."

Georgia repeated the name softly.

"What a sweet name—Ethel! Ethel! I wonder if her mother calls her Ethelie, when she kisses her, or smooths her beautiful golden tresses?"

Ida frowned in astonishment, then laughed.

"Why, you are romantic over the first sight of a girl who has lived near Tanglewood all her life."

A sudden interest flashed over Georgia's face.

"She does! then I shall certainly cultivate her acquaintance. So sweet and pure and brave as her face is, her nature must correspond. I wish you could recall her name."

Ida gave a little toss of her head that set the jets sparkling vividly.

"You will find her forward and port, I'll warrant; all the fellows were crazy over her for a while. Frank, as well as young Morris, and Mr. Verne."

"Of Meadowbrook? Mr. Leslie Verne, you mean that big, splendid young fellow, with the blonde hair and whiskers and the grave, thoughtful eyes? He is the very man I should select to please this dainty little admiration of mine. He—all proud protectiveness; she, all clinging, gentle truthfulness."

A puzzled look came to Ida's eyes; she hardly knew what had taken possession of Georgia.

"If you were a man, cousin Georgia, I should call it a clear case of love at sight, or a suddenly discovered affinity, as it is—"

She paused for want of an explanation that Georgia gave, tenderly.

"As it is, Ida, it only means I have been attracted by a fair young girl, and the strange sorrow and haunting desolation in her eyes touched a chord of sympathy in my heart, and makes me feel that I would like to lighten the burden I saw she was struggling under, as I
would do for you—as I would do if my own daughter had lived to suffer.”

Ida listened with involuntary respect and admiration; then, after a second, remarked flippantly:

“I shouldn’t be surprised if something had happened to Ethel Mary—there, that’s her name—Maryl. Perhaps that was her cross old father opposite her—and he had been scolding her—you saw that fat, beastly-looking man, didn’t you, with the red face?”

Georgia gave a little shiver of horror as she thought of how much worse her own view of the case was; then she returned, very quietly:

“Maryl is not that of the name of the young girl who was adopted by the Lawrences, and who left home when Mr. Lawrence died? I think I remember hearing Amber gossiping about it.”

“Yes, that is so. She left very suddenly and quietly, and no one knew where she went or why she went. Such things don’t look well, to say the least.”

Ida frowned in virtuous indignation, and Georgia smiled faintly; ah, if either of them had known the truth!

“Miss Maryl might have been imprudent, or not, according to circumstances. But there is one thing—and that is: I would stake my life on Ethel Mary’s purity of deed and motive. Her whole soul looks out of those wonderful eyes of hers.”

“You seem particularly interested, anyhow.”

Ida said it; meaning to be very cutting; while Georgia quietly ignored the intention.

“I certainly was affected by her—it may have been her beauty, or her sad, wistful countenance.”

Ida made no reply beyond a curl of her red lips, and they relapsed into a silence that lasted until the footman sprung to let down the step for them to alight at home. As Ida passed the drawing room doors, she glanced in, but her husband was not there, as she evidently expected. She turned almost crossly to Georgia, who was slowly ascending the stairs.

Frank is never here when I come in. It does seem as if he took occasion of my going out to run off somewhere.”

“May he not be in the library with Mr. Lexington? he surely would not be out when it wants ten minutes to dinner time.”

Georgia always spoke very patiently and kindly to Ida; it seemed as if she pitied her, why, she hardly knew, unless it was her secret dislike for her husband.

Ida made no reply, but went into her dressing room, with a sulky expression on her face; and Georgia entered her rooms, where she changed her carriage toilet for full dinner dress.

At just seven they all met in the dining room; courteous, pleasant, affable, as if they were model married people, as if there was no tornado about to burst upon them.

All but Ida; she, more pinned against than sinning, was decidedly cross; partly because of Georgia’s warm admiration of the girl she had always jealously disliked, partly because her husband had been remiss in his attention, according to her code.

Dinner progressed nicely, and conversation flowed genially, despite Ida’s clouded face back of the coffee urn; utterly regardless of her occasionally ominous silences, that she broke, almost suddenly, with words that made Havelstock shiver from head to foot.

“I saw a friend of yours today, Frank. As you never would guess, I will tell you; it was Ethel Maryl, that pretty girl you used to know, who went away suddenly. You remember her, don’t you?”

For one awful instant, Havelstock’s knees knocked violently together; his hand trembled perceptibly, despite the iron effort he made to control his rebellious muscles. His tongue clove to the roof of his mouth in sheer terror and surprise, and it was only by a superhuman effort he contrived to answer.

“Miss Maryl? you saw her? oh, yes, I remember her, although I am not sure I should know her, it has been so long since I saw her. A pretty girl, certainly.”

His self-assurance returned with the sound of his own voice. He glanced around the table, and it was that Georgia was feeling the staffed egg-plant, and Lexington thoughtfully sipping his coffee. The butter did not act as if anything remarkable had happened; the ceiling did not fall, or the flooring open and swallow him up. And Havelstock’s easy assurance returned again, for all he was inwardly quivering like an aspen—until he caught a look direct from Ida’s eyes; and then, a second horrible tremor swayed over him, that made him look actually ghoulish, in his gray, haunted fear.

Only for a second, and then the crisis was past—and he was himself again.

“I will take another cup of coffee, Ida—full strength, please. I wonder if I have caught cold; I feel strangely shivering.”

Ida turned the little ebony faucet, with a quiet, sarcastic smile on her face.

“He thinks he can fool me,” she thought, with a fierce clenching of her hand over her fork handle. “He thinks I have forgotten all about her—but I haven’t; nor has he—else why the agitation he tried to hide? He has a secret from me—and Ethel Maryl is in it, and I’ll know it.”

And so she began tampering with her share of the doom.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE SCARLET SIGN

Several minutes elapsed after Carleton Vin-
cy's disappearance, during which time Ethel remained sitting in weary quiet on the sofa—the first seat that offered itself as she crossed the threshold.

Her thoughts were in a strange whirl; it was so odd, so unusual, this being in the house of a friend of her—she dare not say her husband, fatefully true though she knew the words would be.

Had they discovered her sudden flight yet? She tried to shut out the mental picture of Leslie's despairing search, and Mrs. Argelyne's terror. She knew they would not find her except by the remotest shadow of a chance, and even if such a contingency arose, no human power should persuade her to return; she dare not when she knew she was yet Frank Havelstock's wife.

So she sat there, pale and still, her black dress and sack and hat making a somber picture on which the gaslight in the hall fell in dim relief; sat and waited, with a sort of vague thankfulness, that a haven of rest and retreat had so miraculously offered.

It was better than what she had hastily decided upon, in those moments of bewildering mental torture—to go to Mrs. Lawrence and accept all her contempt and sneers for the sake of shelter until she had time to think more calmly. Now, when she was capable of reasoning more calmly, Ethel was glad that she had not exposed herself to Mrs. Lawrence, glad she had been so fortunate in meeting Mr. Vincy, who, with his wife and sister, would doubtlessly aid her in maturing plans for her hideous future.

A quarter of an hour had elapsed, during which time Ethel had heard, occasionally, the sound of voices. There were opening of doors, and a passing up and down stairs; and then the colored woman, who had opened the door, came into the parlor with a pleasant courtesy.

"Mr. Vincy begs you to pardon him for keeping you waiting so long, but he did not know Mrs. Vincy and Miss Annie were out, and he has been seeing to lunch for you himself—a light lunch until seven o'clock dinner, when Mrs. Vincy, he says, will be in."

Ethel bowed silently.

"Thank you; but I will wait until the ladies return. I am not at all hungry.

"Then please walk up stairs and lay off your hat and sack. You may need to fix your hair, or arrange your dress."

Ethel arose, almost mechanically.

"Very well—and please ask Mrs. Vincy to come to me as soon as she returns."

She followed the woman up stairs and into a large, delightfully-furnished room—half sitting-room, half bedroom, and a peculiar sense of restfulness stole over her as she entered it.

"This is Miss Annie's room, but I know you will be welcome in it. Just make yourself comfortable and I'll bring up a cup of tea."

Ethel laid off her hat and sack and gloves and lace scarf, and drew a large cushioned chair before the fire; she sat down, her face white and worn, her eyes fixed on the dull blaze in a pity of wistfulness.

A few minutes later, the serving woman appeared again with the cup of steaming tea which she set down on a little oval marble-topped stand, and placed near Ethel's elbow; then, as she was retiring, paused near the door.

"There has a message come for Mr. Vincy which will take him away for all the evening, and he told me to ask you if you would allow him a few minutes before he goes."

The same quiet calmness never vanished for a second from Ethel's weary, white face as she assented, indifferently.

"If he particularly wishes to see me—yes."

She leaned her head back among the cushions after the door closed on the girl, and then, for the first time, there came tears in her eyes—grateful, blessed tears that cooled her scorching eyeballs, and seemed to melt the big lump in her throat that had been choking her for hours.

As Vincy's slow, deliberate step sounded on the stairs and neared the door Ethel hastily wiped the tears from her eyes; and when the cup came, there was a quiet, low "come in" for answer.

Vincy opened the door, and partly closed it, leaving it perhaps half open; then he took a chair and seated himself on the opposite side of the fire from Ethel, who had drawn her slight figure up in her chair, in dignity of position.

Vincy took out his watch and consulted it with a grave show of importance.

"I regret exceedingly the unforeseen engagement that will take me from home this evening. I hoped to have the pleasure of introducing you to my wife, but I think you and she will be at no loss to understand each other. I have left a note for her with Julia, however, which will answer, probably."

Ethel raised her eyes slowly.

"You are very kind and thoughtful, Mr. Vincy. I feel at home and restful, already."

"I am glad you have said that, Mrs. Havelstock—it opens the way to the conversation I want with you—a personal one, of necessity. You will allow me to ask you several questions?"

Vincy was looking closely at her, and when she looked at him her beautiful eyes made his evil heart vibrate with a strange sensation.

"As many as you wish. You have befriended me, Mr. Vincy, and you shall find I am not ungrateful."

He glanced sideways at the door that was ajar, then drew his chair a little nearer Ethel's.

"I do not want the servants to gossip," he said, in a low, confiding tone. "If they once learned of your misfortune they would herald
the romance far and wide, and thus most ef-
factually prevent what I suppose you most
carately desire—to find your recreant hus-
band—you see I accept your theory that he is
really alive."

Ethel's eyes began to blaze.

"It is no mere theory—he is alive and was
at St. Ide's church at noon to-day. But, don't
misunderstand me, Mr. Vincy; I never want
to see him again—never! He has used me
most fearfully, most cruelly, and I never could
endure even his presence again.

She spoke almost passionately in the fullness
of her bitterness against him.

Vincy pretended extremest surprise.

"Is it possible you have ceased loving him?
Why, my dear madam! I supposed you never
would have survived his loss, much less so
change in your regard for him."

A bright, red spot burned on Ethel's cheeks
that contrasted widely with the deathly pallor
of her face.

"I was well-nigh crushed. I was inconsola-
ble for a long time, until—until—a dear old
friend—"

She paused in sweet confusion; and Vincy
arose and closed the door.

"Spare yourself the confession, my dear
Mrs. Havelstock; let me guess what you would
have said—that a dear old friend renewed his
early protestations, and you found that your
youth, your heart, your love were not all
buried in the grave at Greenwood?

She shivered, perceptibly.

"And I have wept over that grave so often
thought my heart was breaking, while he was
rejoicing in the success that caused my agony!"

Her lips were compressed in a thin line as
she thought of the dupe she had been, of the
tortures she had suffered, of the torments still
in store.

"I used to wonder why I forgot him so soon,
why I consented to marry again so soon. I
see now—naturally rebelled against such a mockery
of mine."

"Then you were to be married soon—your
words imply that."

A moan of mortal anguish burst from her
lips.

"Soon! Mr. Vincy, it was at the altar of
St. Ide's to-day, where I had just pledged my
vows to Leslie Verne, that I saw his face!"

Vincy sprung from his chair in splendidly
simulated surprise.

"You astound me! You were—you are
married again!"

He had walked rapidly across the room, and
then back to Ethel's chair, where he paused,
just in front of her, with so marked a manner
that she involuntarily started in her chair.

"Do you know what I want of you—why I
brought you here to my house?"

She sprang to her feet, almost beside herself
with sudden fright.

"Mr. Vincy, what do you mean?"

He smiled coldly, sarcastically, as he looked
at her, his arms folded and his demeanor one
of assurance.

"I am as anxious to explain as you can be
to bear the explanation. I have a theory con-
cerning you, Mrs. Havelstock, which I never
even imagined until to-day, when I saw you
at the altar of St. Ide's with—"

She gave a little cry of pain.

"You saw me there, then, and yet professed
to be surprised when you learned the same
fact? Mr. Vincy, you have deceived me—you
are deceiving me now?"

He smiled grimly again.

"Well—yes. I presume you might call it
a deception—the little fiction I invented about
my wife and sister—"

Ethel sprung to her feet in a panic of fear
and alarm.

"No," he continued, coolly, "that was a lit-
tle joke of a remarkably practical character.
'Mrs. Vincy' and 'Sister Annie' are myths,
created for your especial benefit, and the ul-
timate success I intend shall crown my 'the-
ory'."

A cry of agonized pain was wrung from
Ethel's lips.

"And you have inveigled me under your
roof with pretenses of kindness and sympathy,
for some selfish purpose of your own! Mr.
Vincy, I shall leave this house at once. I have
learned enough already to know you are every-
thing but the friend you said you were."

She walked over to the door, her breath
coming in quick respirations, her step rapid,
firm. She laid her hand on the knob just as
Vincy's cool words began again.

"As you say, I offered you the shelter of
this roof—my own—to further my own ends.
The money that pays the rent of this house I
raised by my wits; through you I shall make
my everlasting fortune."

She involuntarily paused—his words were so
strange, so positive.

"I do not understand."

"I don't suppose you do. If you will sit
down again I will explain."

His fiendish satisfaction was so plainly visi-
able on his face that Ethel shivered with horror.
But she answered bravely:

"I have no interest in you or your theory.
You need not think to claim a reward for my
appearance to your friends, which is the only
way you can expect to make a fortune out of
me, because I shall never return to them, for
reasons I regret having allowed you to know."

"If you will only sit down a very few minutes
I think I can prove to my own satisfaction as
well as yours, that you have a better right un-
der my roof than under that of any other man.
All that my beautiful theory needs is the
proof; and I think you can furnish it."

Ethel sent a quick, searching glance at him,
VIALS OF WRATH.

while her soul seemed fairly dying within her. It seemed to her she was born purposely for trouble. She seemed a blight both to herself and to her friends. Had she not already borne enough?

She walked tremblingly back to the chair, and leaned wearily against the high Gothic back, Vincy watching her with an increasing satisfaction in his eyes.

"Every movement, every look, every ges-
ture adds strength to the conviction that flash-
ed over me this morning when I saw the hor-
ror in your eyes when you met Havelstock's glance. Don't be agitated—I am not."

She never took her eyes off his face, or presumed to answer. He went on more eagerly.

"Has it ever been your experience to meet accidentally a person who reminded you so strongly of another that the impression could not be shaken off? That has been my experi-
ence to-day, and so keen, so strong, so positive is the impression, that I have brought you here for the one reason of proving my sus-
picions. If they are correct—my fortune is made. Do you then wonder at my boldness in carrying out my design?"

He approached her.

"All I ask of you is, that you will raise the sleeve of your left arm, and let me see if there is there what I am looking for."

The knowledge of the little scarlet mark was so well known to Ethel that his words elicited no wonder.

"There is a birthmark on my left arm, just below my elbow. A small bright red mark."

"Saints and devils! there is, really? Let me see, girl! the very admission on your part gives me the right to see it."

She hesitated, and Vincy grasped her arm tightly, sweeping the sleeve to her elbow in his hot haste, and revealing the little, irregular mark on her white, rounded arm.

A glow of intense excitement was in his eyes as he gazed on it as if fascinated.

Then he dropped her wrist, and looked exul-
tantly in her indignant, anxious face.

"It is confirmation strong as proof of holy writ. Do you know who you are?"

"Who I am? do you mean to ask me if I know the secret of my parentage?"

A gleam of excitement dawned in her eyes.

"I mean just that. Being Havelstock's friend, I of course knew you were only the adopted child of a party whose name has escaped me. The first time I saw you, your eyes haunted me as being very like some one's; to-day I could have sworn you were her as I saw her once—years and years ago."

Ethel's heart was beating with painful force; she tried to realize she was on the very verge of the knowledge she had prayed for, all her life—the knowledge of her parentage.

"Do you know who I am? Can you tell me—will you?"

She clasped her hands involuntarily in a gesture of eager entreaty, and her dark eyes were full of beseeching entreaty.

He smiled exultantly.

"Yes. I can tell you."

He paused after the curt, positive sentence; and Ethel waited, with wildly-pulsing heart, for the revelation, every second seeming an hour while she waited.

At length Vincy answered; his voice full of the triumphant satisfaction of the moment.

"I told you I would prove you had a better right under my roof than under any other—because you are my own child; because I am your father!"

She started in a tremor of perfect bewilder-
ment.

"Your child! I—your child—!—the daugh-
ter of a man who can deceive as you have done! Oh, God be pitiful! You—my father!"

Vincy quailed under the weight of pitiful contempt in her words.

"It isn't a matter of congratulation, is it? especially to yourself."

She made no answer, but the blankest disap-
pointment, regret, disgust, were plainly to be read in her white face, and wide-open, gloomy eyes.

It made Vincy wince—the speechless ad-
mission of their relationship.

"It can't be helped, that I can see, so that there is no use of wasting time in grieving about it."

"But—but—my mother! who is my mother? where is she?"

She said such unconsciously contrasting em-
phasis on the pronoun that Vincy became sullen.

"That's not in the bargain—find out your-
self. It is enough for you to know you are the very child who was left with the Merrills, to be nursed, and who deserted you, by leav-
ing you at the door of the family who took you."

Ethel's voice rose in piteous entreaty.

"For humanity's sake, tell me if she is dead, or if living, where she is. Give me a chance to find her!"

Vincy smiled grimly.

"What would you say to know your moth-
er was a dainty, high-bred lady, with the face of an angel and the voice of a seraph? would you like to see her—who has mourned you dead these years and years? would you like to meet her, and know her in her home of mag-
ificence and luxury?"

He watched, her pure, wistful face with the relish a cat is supposed to enjoy while it watches the luckless mouse.

He saw her lips move in entreaty, then he answered:

"But you won't. I hate her, and before I'd give her the satisfaction of knowing her baby was alive—I'd see you both killed before my eyes."
He was becoming enraged—with the thoughts of Georgia.

"I might tell you further revelations—that would strike you dumb with horror, but I will reserve them for the future—when I will see you again. Until which time—you are my prisoner."

He walked past her, without a glance at her sweet, piteous face; passed quickly through the door, and locked it on the outside.

Ethel sunk on her knees by the bedside.

CHAPTER I.

THE LOST BIRD.

Less than a minute after Ethel had quietly closed the hall door after her, Mrs. Argelyne and Leslie had arisen from the dining room table where they had been partaking of a cup of coffee—the first food with which they broke the long fast since morning.

Leslie pushed back his chair, as he arose.

"I will see if she is awake, aunt Helen—shall I not? She wouldn't care, would she?"

Mrs. Argelyne shook her head.

"I think I had better go, Leslie. She may be dressing if she has wakened feeling recovered. Be patient a little longer."

She gave him a little motherly caress as she passed him into the hall, and he smiled at her—the last smile on his handsome face for many a weary day.

Mrs. Argelyne went up stairs and tapped on Ethel's door, waiting a second for an answer.

None coming she rapped again a little harder, and then pushed open the door and entered.

Her first glance revealed the fact that Ethel was not in the bed, or even in the room. A second, discovered the marriage ring hanging on the toilet cushion—a mute witness that something out of the ordinary was transpiring in their very midst; then, a hasty glance in the disordered bureau drawer, the absence of Ethel's pocket-book from the little box where she habitually kept it, and whose lid lay on the floor, sent a thrill of vague, mysterious terror through every nerve of her body.

As she stood by the open drawer with her limbs trembling under her, and a great, speechless surprise slowly forming on her face, Mrs. Argelyne thought of the utter improbability of the horrid fear that had flashed over her—the dread that Ethel had arisen in a crazed condition and wandered off.

"I am nervous to-day, to entertain such fancies. Of course Ethel has gone in my room, or some of the spare rooms—perhaps she was too warm here, or she may have gone to the bath-room. What a fool I was to take the alarm so ridiculously soon! How Leslie and Ethel will laugh when I tell them!"

She sunk in Ethel's little blue chair, feeling weak and trembling with the nervous excitement she had undergone, and conscious of a sense of delightful relief.

She sat several minutes, waiting for Ethel's return; then, as she glanced toward the open bureau drawer, she smiled involuntarily.

"To think I should have entertained such childish suspicions for a moment, merely on account of a missing pocket-book, when the most natural thing in the world for Ethel to have done was to have put it in her pocket."

She waited several minutes more, then, went after Ethel, with a tender scolding on her lips for daring to leave her room alone.

She passed the open doors of her own apartments, and saw them vacant of Ethel's presence. She hurried on to the bath-room, a grave anxiety coming into her face, as she pushed open the door, in the confident expectation of seeing Ethel at the toilet stand.

To her surprise, then, instantly in a vague alarm, she saw the bath-room also empty. She sunk helplessly down on a little cushioned chair, her eyes full of terrified amazement.

"Can it be that my first suspicions are true! Is there something below and beyond Ethel's mysterious illness that is so awful it has driven her from home, friends—husband! Poor Leslie—God pity him!"

She arose wearily, as if there was no further need to hasten to find Ethel. She mechanically looked in every room in the house, with a pained fear and bewilderment on her face, that deepened into down-right anguish of spirit.

"What will he say—my patient, loving boy, whose whole soul was wrapped in her, whose human happiness so completely depended on her! How shall I tell him?"

She paused at the head of the stairs, wringing her hands in a very terror of trouble.

"It must be done, at once, and I must do it, at once. How culpably wicked I am to allow any time to elapse, in my imbecile distress, while Ethel—"

She dared not finish the dread sentence. She went on down the stairs, slowly, but unhesitatingly, bearing her burden of woe, and misery to the unconscious husband below.

At the foot of the stairs, Leslie met her—his face full of radiant expectation.

"How long you have been, auntie! I have been—my God! what has happened!"

The joyousness disappeared at the very first glance at Mrs. Argelyne's face, and a swift gray pallor surged over his own.

He reached out his hand and grasped her arm.

"Don't keep me waiting! tell me the worst! I see it on your face—she is dead!"

His voice quivered as he spoke—quivered with mortal pain.

Mrs. Argelyne looked wistfully in his eyes.

"Can you bear the very worst?"
"Only hurry! for heaven's sake put me out of this suspense!"

He looked like a man twenty years older as he waited for the doom in her words.

"She is not dead—I think she has recovered entirely—but be brave, be hopeful, Leslie—she has gone!"

Leslie stood bewildered.

"Gone? Ethel gone? Where—what for?"

"I cannot tell, I do not know—only she has disappeared and left no trace."

Like a flash, Leslie sprang up the staircase and into Ethel's room, Mrs. Argelyne following. He looked around, a pitiful helplessness in his eyes for a moment as he saw the empty bed, with the impress of Ethel's dainty head on the lace-frilled pillow, at the wedding-tress, lying carelessly over a chair, whither it had been thrown in the excitement of the strange coming home; at the traveling-suit of brown silk and cashmere lying so carefully beside the light felt hat, where Ethel herself had left it, preparatory to going to the church.

He dashed away a moisture that gathered in his eyes, then followed Mrs. Argelyne to the bureau, where she pointed silently to the ring hanging to the pin on the cushion.

At sight of that, his face turned ashen pale. He took it off the pin, reverently, as a mother might touch a tress of hair cut from a dead baby's head.

"What can it mean? Oh, aunt Helen, for God's sake wake me up! tell me I am dreaming! tell me it is not true that my wife has gone!"

He dropped his head to Mrs. Argelyne's shoulder, and she felt his frame convulse with sobs.

"She must have had fever, and fled in a delirium, and if so, we will soon find her, and bring her home. Try to bear up, Leslie. Remember there is so much to do—and at once. Every minute passed in vain regret is lengthening the distance between her and ourselves. Be hopeful, my dear boy, and go right to work. Shall I send for Hugh, and have him commence a search immediately?"

Leslie raised his head, and showed a face so wan and baggared that Mrs. Argelyne could scarcely repress a cry of alarm.

"I think it would be best," he said, hollowly. "If I only knew why she had fled from me—it is me she desires to avoid, her leaving the ring I gave her implies that. I wonder if she regrets her marriage? I wonder if she never loved me?"

He began walking the floor, in nervous excitement.

"Not one of your premises are correct, I will venture to positively declare. Ethel loved you, and I believe loves you yet, wherever she may be, whatever her reasons for leaving us."

Leslie bowed his face in his hands, as he paused by the mantel, and Mrs. Argelyne saw the perceptible shaking of his frame.

"There is a terrible mystery somewhere. Her illness was so strange, so uncalled for—and this flight—Aunt Helen—don't let us waste another second. Alarm the servants, and send at once for Hugh!"

A sudden impatience seized him, very different from the paralyzing apathy that had held him almost powerless. He walked rapidly to the speaking-tube, and summoned Johnson, the footman, to whom he gave a decisive message to bring Mr. Allen Hugh, the private detective from a well-known firm, at once, or, in case of his absence, some one equally efficient.

The messenger dispatched, Mrs. Argelyne went quietly down-stairs to supervise certain domestic duties, which, though the skies fell, must go on.

Verne threw himself on Ethel's bed, burying his face on the pillow where she had lain. Twenty minutes or half an hour later, a rap on the door announced the return of Johnson, and with him Allen Hugh, the detective.

Verne arose, excitedly, greeted the officer, and dismissed the footman.

"I am very sorry to be called on such painful business, Mr. Verne. I see it has taken a pretty deep hold of you."

And well he might say; one would hardly have recognized in the drooping head, the white, grayish-hued face, the eager, nervous manner, any trace of Leslie Verne's joyous, debonair self.

Leslie motioned Hugh to a chair beside the smouldering fire, and himself sat down in the little blue-rep rocker.

"If I don't find her before I sleep—it will kill me; it is killing me now, to think she has gone, no one knows where, or why, or how—my own little Ethel!"

His tender, anguished tones could not have failed to touch Mr. Hugh's heart—used though he was to the inside troubles of many a life. He looked compassionately at Verne's pitiful, listless face, in which the eager, restless eyes made such harsh contrast.

"Try and not give up—if Mrs. Verne's alive we will find her, if not before you sleep, surely before long. Let me ask you a few questions—none more than are actually necessary, for Mrs. Argelyne gave me the main points in the case. Have you any reason to think Mrs. Verne would commit suicide?"

Leslie shuddered, but answered promptly.

"No possible reason. I know she would not do such a thing."

Hugh made a brief memorandum on his tablets—huge, ivory ones, already nearly full of mysterious penciling.

"Again—was there anything in the method of her flight that indicated premeditation?"

Leslie pointed to the dresses, the hat and gloves, mute witnesses that there had been no previous thought other than expectation of
wearing them. Hugh looked at them in silent curiosity, turning the dainty bronze-brown kids thoughtfully over, as if the clue to the mystery lay under them.

He carefully noted the open bureau-drawer, the top of the bureau, the toilet-cushion, and—as he saw the ring hanging on the pin, his eyes opened a trifle wider, and he turned suddenly to Leslie.

"Mr. Verne, this looks like an engagement-ring, or a wedding-ring. Am I right?"

The growing enthusiasm in his voice and manner did not escape Leslie, who looked up eagerly.

"That is her wedding-ring, that I placed on her finger this morning at St. Ida's."

Hugh looked at it, interestedly.

"Before she fainted, or after?"

"Before. The ceremony was just concluded as she fainted and fell in my arms."

A long silence followed Leslie's explanation, during which Mr. Hugh replaced the ring, walked up and down the floor several times, and finally seated himself again.

"One question more. Did you ever for a moment think Mrs. Verne did not—I beg pardon—did not really love you? Had she ever another lover?"

A dull flush crawled under Leslie's skin; then he answered, very bravely:

"I believe she loved me. She had another lover—a husband—deceased two years ago, to whom she was deeply attached."

Hugh knelt his brows, thoughtfully, for full fifteen minutes before he answered.

"As you yourself think, there has been no suicide—the fact of her taking her pocketbook proves that. That was no premeditation, the condition of her clothes also proves. The fact of her leaving her wedding-ring, together with the sudden prostration after she was irrevocably your wife, go to establish the fact that she suddenly discovered a reason why she should not remain here, as your wife. My deductions are—something in her past life has suddenly confronted her. Perhaps a memory, a reproach—or, not impossible, a person."

Leslie listened breathlessly.

"I don't care for your theory—only to go to work and find her. Have you ever seen her? would you know her? Here is her picture."

He showed it to Hugh—the piquant, witching face he always carried with him.

Hugh studied it intently.

"Has she any peculiarity of manner? any birth-mark?"

"I think I have heard aunt Helen speak of a little scarlet mark on her arm, just below the elbow. I never saw it myself."

Hugh wrote on his tablets again; then looked at his watch, as he arose.

"Mrs. Verne has an hour's start of us, but I am confident I will have news for you this time to-morrow. Don't give up, Mr. Verne; it'll all turn out right yet—my word for it."

He pressed Leslie's hand cordially, as he bade him good by.

CHAPTER LI.
ARousing the Fires.

If Havelstock congratulated himself that he had escaped comfortably from his sudden, overwhelming surprise caused by Ida's words respecting Ethel, he was most wofully mistaken. Dinner was scarcely over, before the page in Ida's special service tapped at the door of the smoking-room with a verbal message to him to go to Ida's dressing-room.

He tossed his cigar into the receiver, and apologized to Lexington for leaving him so abruptly, then went leisurely up the stairs to Ida's presence. He found her in her dressing-room, still in her dinner dress, sitting beside a table on which a gas-lamp burned mellowly.

As he shut the door, she looked up at him with her brown eyes full of anger, and jealousy, and distrust. "Sit down there, where I can see you. I want to talk to you about Ethel Maryl." She motioned him to a cushioned chair that stood full in the light of the lamp. He gave a start of inward terror—it was undeniably uncomfortable to hear from Ida's lips even the name of the unfortunate girl he had so mercilessly used; yet, as he recovered himself, by an effort, a mighty effort of his stubborn will, and carelessly seated himself in the designated chair, he thought, as he looked at Ida, that she was really more to be pitied than Ethel.

He turned his sarcastically questioning eyes fully toward her.

"You certainly select a most agreeable topic for conversation. I do not know of a young lady far or near I would rather discuss."

Ida's lips fairly quivered with rage.

"You need not think you can bawling me with any such assumed indifference, or interest. You know there is something about Ethel Maryl that you know and I don't."

It was a mere random shot Ida fired—aimed in the groundless jealousy that had gained possession of her since she had the sight of Ethel's face, and listened to Mrs. Lexington's compliments, and remembered that Frank and Ethel knew each other in earlier days. But, random or not, it made Havelstock fairly curse under his breath at the truthfulness of it; as he thought what if Ida should know all?

"Do you hear me?" she went on, imperiously.

"I expect you know more about Ethel Maryl than I do, and I believe I am in New York for no other earthly purpose than to meet you."

Havelstock smiled—from very relief at the "switch." Ida was running off on. "Do you really think so? You pay me a higher compliment than I deserve—although I think Miss Maryl might be inclined to resent it."

He was so easy, and nonchalant that his very attitude stung Ida.
"I really think so; and what is more, I really think you are as much in love with her as she is with you. If not, why did you display such odd agitation when I mentioned her name at dinner? Are gentlemen in the habit of actually turning gray-green when their sweethearts' names are spoken, or, does their emotion mean something even worse?"

She was pitched to the highest key of jealous suspicion, and yet little dreamed how her blows struck home.

This time, however, a lurid glow in his eyes warned her she was trenching on dangerous ground; and the very signal of warning that urged her still further on.

"You admit it, do you! you confess there is something between you two? I see it in your eyes as plainly as if you said it. You needn't think you can deceive me."

He looked at her with a quiet insolence that was peculiarly tantalizing.

"It only needs several such scenes as this to sever the very frail thread of regard that unites me to you. I would advise you, in the future, for your own sake, to avoid such topics of conversation."

There was a perfect devil in his black eyes that made her quail—for a second. Then she took another tack suddenly.

"Well—I only hope the charming young lady is as loyal to you as you are to her. It didn't look much like it, however, seeing her riding along in a coupe with the most disgusting looking man—a big, stout, purple-faced man, with a head shaved like a convict's. A very formidable rival for you, I should say."

The intended taunt he never heard; only the picture she drew of Ethel's escort, who could be no other living man but Carleton Viney.

The thought made him fairly desperate. Ethel, his own wife—he almost laughed at the word—in the company of a man of Viney's principles, Viney's daring. His pure, brave, proud little Ethel, whom he worshiped that moment with a strength that was an agony—she, powerless in Carleton Viney's hands! He needed all his tremendous will-power to remain sitting quietly in his chair with Ida's sneering, angry eyes on him, and allow the raging tempest of emotion to sweep over him.

He sat there, outwardly very calm, cool, indifferent, except for an ominous whiteness on his face, wondering how it had been brought about—the fact of Ethel's riding in the coupe with the man who would not hesitate at any thing.

He remembered Viney's boldly expressed admiration of Ethel; he knew the obvious helplessness of her position, and the trusting innocence of her disposition—and he clenched his hands so hard that the nails made wounds in his palms.

If he only knew where they were going! and Ida saw the light leap to his eyes although he dare not ask the question.

He arose to leave the room, with a coldly negligent air.

"When you send for me again, pray select a better subject, and I will be at command."

He sauntered down-stairs, with a perspiration starting on his forehead and hands. He went into the dining-room, and poured a wineglassful of brandy from a decanter on the sideboard, drinking it almost at a swallow.

"What a narrow escape—curse these long-haired, fox-eyed women! and to think—to think where my dainty little Ethel is! Great heavens! where is she?"

He paced up and down the long room, terribly shaken by his fast coming retribution, whose foreboding shadow had power to completely unman him.

He realized that that was a long lane that had no turning, as he walked to and fro. He knew he had traveled over the flower-lined part of his downward career, and that the rest of the way were only pitfalls and dangers. He knew, as well as if an angel had condescended to tell him, that the swirling vortex was increasing in giddy speed, and that already his feet were off any foundation.

With his hands clasped at his back, he walked up and down, a very picture of fiendish rage, and impotent fury; a sullen, wrathful light in his eyes. It was almost more than he could endure, even with his wonderful, stoical endurance; this galling knowledge that he was a very slave in the chains of deep-rooted, unceasing love, or what he called by so sweet and pure a name, for Ethel. And she—someplace where with Carleton Viney. It was physically impossible for him to control the fast rising fury in his heart. He felt his face burning, his heart thumping, the cords in his neck swelling, and he rushed into the hall for his hat, and out the front door, into the chilly April night. He walked aimlessly, yet hurriedly down the street, and, without a particle of will power of his own, mechanically took his way toward his office.

Block after block he went, feeling the sharp, damp air on his hot cheeks, and not conscious of fatigue when he found himself at his office door, scores of blocks further than he ever dreamed of walking. He unlocked the door, and went in, closing, without fastening it. He lighted the gas in the private sanctum and then turned it down to a mellow twilight; then he sat down in one of the capacious easy-chairs, with his feet on a hassock, and his felt hat slouched over his eyes. He succeeded in defining and analyzing his feelings, as he sat there, an hour or so, in the silent duskness.

All his fierce, raging tumult of passion had subsided to two distinct phases, and of the two, it was a question with him which was the strongest. One was hatred—a jealous hatred
of Carlton Viney, the man who held so many dangerous secrets in his hand; the man who had the insight into Havelstock's movements during those wicked days that seemed ages ago.

Havelstock knew he was in Viney's power, and he knew Viney knew it. It was all very well for Havelstock to try to console himself with the fact that Viney was equally in his hands, but, somehow, Havelstock couldn't appreciate that. While Viney had knowingly tormented Georgia, and persecuted her with his odious attentions, even to the extent of being unceremoniously kicked out of Tanglewood's conservatory, yet, in the eyes of law he wasn't as amenable as Havelstock would be, if his misdemeanors were bruited abroad.

So far, surely, Viney had a decided advantage, and Havelstock ceded it; unyieldingly, as he thought it over. But when he realized another advantage Viney had, and was in all probability enjoying that very minute, then his blood boiled hotly again. He knew he hated the confidant who had turned into the rival, with a murderous hate.

And for the sake of the girl for whom he had sold his soul; for whom, had the opportunity again presented itself, he would not hesitate to barter heaven itself.

A vision of Ethel rose before him, as he sat, half sullen, half passionate, in his easy-chair. He saw her glad, eager face, to which he could summon the delicate blushes, or the happy smile, at his own selfish pleasure. He felt the warm clinging of her arms around his neck, and the weight of her golden-tressed head on his breast. He could remember, so distinctly, the touch of her scarlet lips, that were doomed never to meet his again in kisses that came straight from Ethel's heart.

And he had so easily won such sweetness, such perfection of womanhood, only to blind- ly, foolishly cast it from him—for what?

A vision of Ida's insipidity pretty face came up in contemptuous contrast to that of Ethel's—frank, proud, joyous, spirited; and he groaned in positive envious jealousy.

"By all the powers of earth and air, she shall be mine yet! I'll hunt her, if she be concealed in a dungeon, and she shall listen to me while I make my peace with her, and win her consent to come to me again. She does not love Leslie Verne; she loves me, and she will only be too glad to renew our old relations. But if she doesn't—if she has learned all the truth about me, and consequently despises me, I'll tame her, for she, too, has a little case of bigamy to settle with the courts."

"He rose from his chair—no signs of sullen- ness about him now, but rather every token of the lawless excitement that made every nerve quiver, that made his eyes glow luridly.

"I shall lose no time," he said to himself.

"To-morrow morning I'll see old Hugh, the detective, and if he don't ferret her out——"

His muttered words were suddenly cut short by the opening of the office door, and Carlton Viney walked in, with the oddest smile on his face that Havelstock had ever seen there.

CHAPTER LII.
A FATHER'S VILLAINY.

Havelstock could scarcely have been more amazed if Prince Beelzebub had opened the door of his sanctum, and entered, than he was to see Carlton Viney come in, as familiarly and naturally as though they had parted the most intimate friends.

For a moment Havelstock was too astonished to speak. The sudden change from wrathful suspicions and jealousy which he had been indulging in so freely, to a face to face interview, left him entirely at a loss whether his greeting should be that of an enemy or a friend.

Viney was the first to speak.

"Well, old fellow, you don't offer me the hospitalities of your cozy little place. Suppose I take them without?"

He was still wearing that odd smile with which he had parted from Ethel, and which had been on his face all the way to Havelstock's office.

"Make yourself at home—if you can."

Havelstock spoke stiffly; he at once supposed there had occurred a change of base, without knowing how or why. At all events it was infinitely better to know Viney was sitting opposite him than to think he was off somewhere with Ethel, and that fact alone conciliated him.

"'If I can'—was there ever a time when I failed? Have a cigar, Havelstock, and settle down for a revelation that will astonish even you."

He handed his cigar-case for Frank to choose from, and when they had lit the fragrant Resades, Havelstock began to wonder what was coming.

"Well, I've seen your wife—I mean what I say, you know, your wife."

Havelstock frowned, but evidently intended Viney to say his say.

"I met her just as I calculated I should—running away from home and friends because she had caught a glimpse of your face. Of course she supposed I met her very accidental-ly—but you know all about that; suffice it, that I took her under my wing, under pretext of seeing Mrs. V., to my house, where you can see her at any time—if you wish. Don't you consider that an act of disinterested kindness?"

Viney put the question in a tone of dry sarcasm.

"I will confess the kindness minus the dis-interestedness."

Viney blew several smoke wreaths upward before he answered.
VIALS OF WRATH.

"Well, you will have your own opinion no matter what I should say. However, there is one fact that no one's opinion can alter—and that is, you are my son-in-law."

Havelstock stared blankly.

"A poor joke, Vincy."

"No joke at all. I have suspected it since morning, and proved within an hour that your discarded wife is mine and Georgia's daughter."

A dull, reddish, purple tinge crept over Havelstock's face as he thought that Vincy had a still deeper hold on him if this were true.

It was a vague thought, however, and was completely overwhelmed with the force of Vincy's quiet declaration.

"Your child! the little dead daughter Georgia has mourned over so many years! Is it possible?"

He drew his hand confusedly over his forehead as if trying to collect his thoughts.

"Not only possible, but positively true. It is as clear as daylight to me. Let me explain."

But Havelstock was completely unstrung by the sudden news; and, coming as it did, on the very heels of his other agitation, it found him scarcely able to bear it. He went over to a little closet and took a flask of brandy from it, and pouring a portion into a wine-glass, drank it at a gulp.

Vincy watched him curiously, marveling in the changes that the past few weeks had made in him; noting the irregular trembling of the hands that had been firm as iron, the restless anxiety and desolation in the eyes that had been so bold and bright.

Perhaps Vincy thought that Havelstock was reaping his due deserts very soon; perhaps he wondered when his own time should come; but whatever his secret thoughts, there was no token of them in his manner.

"That's the second glass of brandy since dinner, Vincy. A year ago I couldn't have stood that. But I really believe I'm nervous, lately."

"I wouldn't wonder if you were. It all occurred—the proof of the suspicion that flashed over me this morning—along of a little red mark on Ethel's arm. The moment I saw the girl's face, months ago—yes, two years ago, isn't it—you remember I told you I couldn't get rid of her eyes. I had the queer impression renewed this morning, when I caught that one glimpse of her horrified face and anguished eyes. Why, man, it was Georgia over again! In a second it flashed over me—her name before you married her being almost identical with the name of the Welsh family to whom Lexington gave little Jessamine, according to your own account. The name was Maryl or Merrill, and the little Jessamine gave her own first name, in her lisping tongue, as plainly as she could speak—'Essie, or 'Ethie' she must have said, so that the Lawrences naturally thought the name Ethel—Ethel Maryl. Do I make it clear to you?"

Havelstock nodded gloomily.

"Altogether too clear. Good heavens, Vincy, what have I done? actually thrown away the real jewel—the heiress to all Tanglewood, for the miserable little doll up yonder!"

He was quivering like a leaf, and his eyes seemed riveted to Vincy's face in a sort of fascination.

"Aside from that," Vincy went on, easily, "was the proof of the birth-mark. I never saw one like it before or since, nor has any one else, I think. I distinctly remember the cause of it—it happened long before the child was born. Georgia never forgave me for that blow that brought the blood, I fancy."

Havelstock's face was growing livid with the accumulation of regret that Fate was beginning to heap on him. He gnashed his teeth in a gust of rage that he had played his cards so miserably.

"Well," he said, after a pause, "what shall you do with her? To be sure she is my wife, but I cannot, for obvious reasons, assume the control of her."

Vincy smiled, and answered dryly:

"You are right; for very obvious reasons you are powerless to assume control of her, and yet—"

He hesitated, and looked at Havelstock in a peculiarly suggestive way that Havelstock did not lose.

"Yes—and yet what?"

"Just this," and he spoke in a low, slow, confidential way; "just this; Ethel of course has no idea that you are married or that you ever changed your name by special act of legislature. She supposes, doubtless, that she is your legal wife, and, knowing as you do, her acute ideas of honor and principle and duty, no matter how agonizingly they clash with inclination and preference, you have only to abase yourself before her and win her to you—to what she will regard her true position."

Havelstock listened eagerly, every impulse of his being seconding the suggestions so evilly thrown out.

"But she will, necessarily, hate and despise me when she learns I have been alive and neglecting her so long. I could bear anything rather than her lofty, spirited contempt."

Vincy caressed his whiskers in silence several seconds, while Havelstock watched every changing expression that came and went on his face.

"If you have two ideas in your head, Frank, you can manage all that easily enough. Trump up some yarn about your being actually nearly drowned, and being rescued later, and prostrated by a fit of prolonged sickness, and your perfect horror and amazement at finding her
gone from her home where you sought her the very first opportunity you had. Reproach her and make her feel she has wronged you in forgetting you so soon and marrying Leslie Verne."

A gleam of admiration for Vincy's devilish genius lighted Havelstock's eyes for a moment; then a half surprised, half suspicious look came over his face.

"And you—her father, for I accept your theory and its explanatory proofs—deliberately and abet in this new conspiracy against her? What is the cause of your strange offer, your sudden friendliness?"

A mocking laugh, low, sardonic, answered Havelstock, who went on, eagerly.

"You know I fairly worship the girl; and now, when I find she is so much more valuable, I regard her still more highly. Yet, knowing as you do, that all her riches and position can avail me nothing, even though she is my lawful wife—why do you deliberately turn her over into my hands?"

He was speaking in serious earnest, and Vincy recognized the fact. He took his cigar from his lips, and straightened up in his chair with an air of coarse defiance in the very act. He looked at Havelstock with his blessed, dim eyes for a second before he spoke.

"I have a reason—a good reason, too, which I will frankly state to you. You may call it what you please—moonshine and nonsense, or wisdom and sagacity. Undeniably, Ethel is Georgia's child, and as such I hate her; she is too much like her mother, high-toned, aristocratic, refined for my notions. Now, you remember my sole object in coming to the city was to search for positive news of the death of Georgia's child, and for which purpose I have had a detective at work these five weeks back, until a very few days ago, when I found he had not made the slightest progress beyond the unimportant fact that the family with whom Lexington left the child were dead, years ago, when Ethel could not have been five years old. So much for my intentions, then, in that direction, which have been so miraculously accomplished by the discovery and identity of your wife as my child and Georgia's. Now, for my object in 'throwing her into your hands.'"

Vincy crossed his legs at this point, and leaned back in his chair, with an expression of sardonic satisfaction growing over his face.

Havelstock sat still, waiting in silence, and grim patience, for the explanation of Vincy's strange conduct.

"I have said I dislike her, for all her beauty and grace, simply because she is so unfortunate as to be Georgia's child. I hate Georgia with an intensity that is inexpressible, since the night her lordly husband left the impression of his hands on my throat. I have accepted as a fact the truth that Georgia is out of reach of harm by me—I have done my best and worst, and have failed. Her husband knows of my existence and yet their infernal pride keeps them together—or the love they entertain and won't acknowledge. But there remains a new instrument of torture with which to nearly drive Georgia to distraction—and this Ethel is the lever in my unscrupulous hands with which I shall move my grand lady at my pleasure. She shall feel my vengeance now! she shall realize the deep curses I have sworn against her! Her high head shall bow before the tempest I shall invoke, now that I have the trump card in my hand!"

His malignant satisfaction was repulsive to see, but Havelstock actually laughed with delight.

"It is clear as daylight to me. You will deliberately tear her heart, and humble her pride by letting her know her daughter is alive, and—worse than dead. You will offer to let her see her—for a consideration that will keep you in luxury for a year to come. You will do all this, and I will do my share—because we both have an instinctive taste for wickedness and vice. You, her father, can concoct the vile scheme, I, her husband, will help carry it out!"

Havelstock smiled diabolically.

"You are right," retorted Vincy, doggedly. "I sold my soul long ago, and Satan shan't complain of my dereliction in duty so long as the installments of revenge and triumph come regularly. Will you see Ethel now or to-morrow?"

"Give me the address and I will see her in the morning while you will find Georgia up at my house."

After that they separated, Vincy to go to his home, under whose roof Georgia's child was a prisoner, reveling in the promise of good fortune that had so unexpectedly come to him.

Strange that no instinct warned him of the near end—the fated end of the road he had deliberately chosen to travel!

CHAPTER LIII.

AFTEI EIGHTEEN YEARS.

The night succeeding Ethel's flight was one of protracted agony to Leslie Verne and Mrs. Argelyne. Neither of them made a pretense of seeking repose, but remained up and dressed all through the long, weary hours, as if in both their hearts was the hope, however forlorn, that any minute might witness the return of their lost one. Mrs. Argelyne re-frained from expressing any sympathy for her bereaved nephew, but he knew, none the less, that she was deeply sympathetic and most tenderly pitiful for his sake, while on her own account, he knew she was suffering keenly by the wan, weary pallor on her sad face.

All night the lights burned, and the frequent odor of coffee pervaded the lower rooms of
the house. The housekeeper had a side-table spread daintily in momentary expectation of Ethel's return, and one or two of the servants who had been detailed to remain for need, conversed in low, pitying tones of the strange illness of "Mrs. Ethel" that had resulted so sadly. Hour after hour Leslie paced the floor of the library, with his head bent to his breast, and his hands clasped behind, speechless, grief-stricken, heart sick and sore; waiting, with stolen patience, for the return of his darling; or at least, of Mr. Hugh with news.

But the night dragged wearily away, and the chill gray dawn broke on hearts bowed down by such burdens of anguish that even the sunshine was dark to them. An early breakfast was prepared, and Mrs. Argylene tried earnestly to induce Leslie to at least take a cup of coffee, but in vain. He could not eat, his heart was too full of tears, and when she saw the grayness on his face, the misery in his eyes, she went softly away, feeling that such trouble as his could only be left to time to lighten.

After eight o'clock every passing footstep made Leslie's heart beat almost to suffocation. Every halting tread near the front stope made him dizzy with sudden expectation, and then, when neither Ethel or Hugh had come, by noon, he began to grow alarmingly nervous.

He wandered from the library to the room Ethel had occupied in a restless, pitiful way that Mrs. Argylene could barely endure to see, and yet, she knew no persuasions would be of any avail.

At one o'clock dinner was served, but only to Mrs. Argylene—Leslie refused gently as he had done in the morning.

"You will surely be ill if you allow yourself to go on in this way long, Leslie. It seems to me you should partake of nourishing food so that you will be in proper condition to continue the work of searching. Do try something; Mrs. Benson has made some of your favorite oyster-fritters and apple—"

A ring as the door-bell interrupted her, and she glanced at Leslie's face that had flushed eagerly as he started from his seat.

"It is Hugh—or—or—"

"Don't be sauguine, dear. Remember how many persons might happen to call to-day; try not to be disappointed if it isn't Mr. Hugh with our darling, or news of her."

Nevertheless it was a trying moment—the one that intervened between the summoms on the bell and the entrance of the footman with a card on a salver.

A groan first from Leslie's lips—he knew Hugh would send no card.

Mrs. Argylene took it quietly and glanced at it—a little thrill of disappointment in her heart, and yet, a faint glow of satisfaction in her eyes.

"Tell Mrs. Lexington I will see her at once, Ross," she said, and then turned to Leslie as the man withdrew with his message.

"You will not mind my telling Mrs. Lexington, Leslie? She will of course see at once that something has happened, and I know of no woman who would sympathize so tenderly with us. Besides, living so near Ethel's early home as she did, she might suggest a clue to the mystery."

Leslie grasped at the hint with desperation.

"Yes, tell her. Only—I can't see her—or any one."

And so Mrs. Argylene went up into the drawing room, with all the shadow of her recent affliction on her sweet face, and still an unmiss skiable welcome in voice and manner. Georgia ro-e as she entered—her own beautiful face so wistful in the smile of greeting she gave her hostess.

"Have I been tardy in coming to you? I surely meant to see you sooner, and often."

Mrs. Argylene kissed her tenderly, and Georgia wondered, vaguely, at the slight quivering of her lips.

"I would have been glad to see you at any time, and I am glad to-day, although I am under the shadow of a great trouble, a bitter grief and mystery that refuses to be solved. But I should not talk so to one who never has known a care or sorrow."

Georgia's face blanched for a second, and she had to control herself by a mighty effort to keep from crying out in all the bitterness of her soul.

"I have had trouble," she said, after a moment, quietly, "and I think I can sympathize with you. I have known the sharp agony of losing an only, darling child, a little, prattling babe—"

Her voice choked, and Mrs. Argylene pressed her hand gently.

"That has been my pitiful experience three times, dear. And I have followed my husband to his grave, and come home to a lonesome, desolate, childless house. But in all sincerity and truthfulness, I say I am to-day sitting in the shadow of a bitterer grief than either of those."

Georgia's hand nestled still more closely in Mrs. Argylene's, and the mute sympathy was more expressive than language, as she thought there could be no human agony equal to, or to be compared with, her own.

Mrs. Argylene went on with the pitiful story, in low, sad tones.

"I say I was sitting only in the shadow of the trouble. The great grief itself that has come crushing upon us, has fallen with full force on my boy's head—my nephew, Mr. Verne, as dear to me as a son could be. What would you think, Mrs. Lexington, of the agony and despair and horrible mystery in the heart of a happy, hopeful bridegroom to find his bride had flown from his presence,
without word or intimation, no one knows what on earth happened.

"A curious wonder crept among the shadows of Georgia's eyes."

"Has such a terrible thing happened? Why, Mrs. Argelyne, can it be possible?"

"Only too true. Yesterday, at St. Ilde's, there was a quiet, private wedding; my nephew and his bride—the sweetest, fairest woman the sun ever shone on. Without apparent cause or reason, Mrs. Verne suddenly fainted just after the ceremony was concluded, and never fully recovered from its effects until she was left alone in her bed, for quiet and sleep—she arose, dressed, and fled—leaving her wedding-ring behind. Do you wonder I am almost heart-broken, or that Leslie is nearly crazy?"

"Georgia listened in perfect amazement."

"It seems incredible—so awfully strange and pitiful as it is. And you have not the slightest clue to work upon? You have made instant search, of course?"

"Within an hour. But as for a clue, there is not the slightest. Unfortunately, we know so little of her early life—although as much as she did herself."

"Would you mind telling me her history? I am very deeply interested, and I will do all in my power to assist you through Mr. Lexington, who has had occasion to employ a famous English detective several times."

"Thank you, in my name and Leslie's! The poor girl's story is a very short one, but full of pathetic interest, and I think you will feel drawn toward her. She does not know who her parents are. She has every reason to suppose they deserted her when she was a baby, as the only home and friends she knew was a family up the river, somewhere in your vicinity I think, now deceased. She is a lady by birth and instinct, which makes it hard for me to believe her parents could have abused her by discarding her, for I am sure she never came of stock that would do such wickedness. Her appearance, too, is against such a theory; she has a highbred, dainty, aristocratic beauty, of a singular style—dark brown eyes, with golden hair—very much the color of yours, Mrs. Lexington—and a pure, pale face and vivid scarlet lips."

"Georgia looked puzzled. "It seems to me I saw just such a face—I did—I saw just such a face only yesterday evening, and Ida told me her name—Ethel, Ethel Mary—I never shall forget—""

"Mrs. Argelyne sprung to her feet in wild excitement. "It's her name—you saw her yesterday evening! for God's sake, where?"

"If Mrs. Argelyne was thunderstruck, Georgia was no less so.

"Is she Leslie's bride—she, that charming, beautiful girl? I distinctly remember remarking the sadness on her face."

She was trembling now from head to foot, with a deadly suspicion of horror. The girl was with Carlton Vincy. Was this new trouble to roll on her, too?

Mrs. Argelyne was still standing, eagerly waiting for an answer to her question, and Georgia sickened as she decided to keep part of the pitiful truth a secret.

"It was in a coupe, driving across Broad- way into Canal street, last evening at dusk."

"Was she alone?"

"I—I—was I ever so dark, and the carriage just passed for a moment—"

"I see, and I never can thank you enough. Leslee must know this at once."

She rang the little silver call-bell that stood on a tiny ebony pedestal, and sent a message to Leslie to come at once, with an imperative note that commanded him the moment he heard it.

He went immediately, and Georgia arose from her chair, with hands outstretched to him in sorrowful sympathy, the instant he crossed the threshold.

"Mr. Verne! This is an awful visitation. I want you to be assured of my earnest sorrow and pity, and I wish you would command me in whatever way you imagine I could be of service."

Leslie took her hands with a warm grasp, and bowed in hiscourly, gracious way.

"You are kind, very kind, Mrs. Lexington, finding us as you do under such terribly afflicting circumstances, and you would feel all the more for me and aunt Helen if you had known and loved my darling Ethel. Mrs. Lexington, I feel as if it would drive me mad when I think of her—my precious little Ethel!"

Georgia looked at him with her eyes full of tenderest pity, her heart full to bursting of the secret she dared not for her life's sake divulge.

"I just told your aunt, I think I must have passed Mrs. Verne in a carriage last evening—"

"Leslie sprung from his chair with an eager, passionate impatience. "You saw her—saw Ethel—last night? For God's sake, where?"

His eyes glittered with the excitement her words caused.

"About six o'clock, or later, at the corner of Canal and Broadway. My cousin, Mrs. John Lexington, informed me that she was a Miss Ethel Maryl, upon my inquiring who she was—her sweet, pitiful face impressed me so strangely. Even then, when I supposed her a stranger, I felt as if it would be the greatest happiness of my life to gather her beautiful head to my heart and kiss the tears from her eyes."

Leslie groaned in acutest anguish.

"Tears in my darling's eyes—her bonny
brown eyes, and I cannot wipe them away! My God, can I endure this?"

He walked across the room to the window, and leaned his head against the heavy dark-brown curtains, and Mrs. Argylene and Georgia both saw his figure shake like an aspen tree.

Georgia's sweet voice broke the silence.

"Although, in my opinion, you might safely trust the affair in the hands of Mr. Hugh, as Mrs. Argylene tells me you have done, yet I want you to add extra force by allowing one of Mr. Lexington's detectives to assist you—an Englishman from Scotland Yard, at present in this country. He will hear the facts in the case, and form a correct opinion at once. Was there anything peculiar by which to identify Mrs. Verne or have you any hold at all on her earlier life?"

Georgia asked those questions with but one motive—that of aiding her friends who were in such desolate trouble, never dreaming, in the most vague, remote manner, that the moment of asking that question, the crisis of her destiny arrived; that from that moment the tide of her life turned.

She asked it very kindly, very tenderly, as if it must wound them both to refer to such a pitiable theme.

Mrs. Argylene answered her.

"So far as Ethel's personal identity is concerned, if she made any attempt to disguise herself, as for reasons I can not for a moment imagine, even—there is a means of recognition, on her arm, just below the elbow, is a curious little scarlet birth-mark that looks like a fresh bleeding scratch or abrasion of the flesh; I never saw anything like—Mrs. Lexington! you are ill, what is the matter?"

For Georgia had suddenly turned grayish white, even to her lips, uttering a strange, stifled ejaculation, and looking at Mrs. Argylene with eyes dilated with sudden, sharp surprise and bewilderment. Then she smiled faintly with a ghastliness that told that something had touched her strongly.

"Nothing is the matter, only such bitter memories were recalled when you spoke of the curious birth mark on Mrs. Verne's arm. I remember a similar one on my little dead Jessamine's—that is all."

She sighed as she spoke the dear name that so seldom crossed her lips—that was always in her heart.

"Forgive me if I unwittingly opened an old wound," Mrs. Argylene said, softly, "I only intended to put you in possession of all the facts of the case."

"I know you did, and I want to hear the rest—the other straw you have to cling to."

"And it is a straw—in point of positive reliability. It is only a button that fastened little Ethel's shabby dress when she was found at the door of the Lawrences. A curious gold button, that the family sacredly saved as a possible means of future good; here it is, just as Ethel gave it to me, when I promised to help discover her parentage, if possible."

She detached the little glittering globe from her watch-chain and handed it to Georgia, who took it almost reverently and looked at it; then, with a cry that rung through the room and brought both Leslie and Mrs. Argylene to her side, she, herself, sprung to her feet as if electrified, her eyes glowing with supernatural brightness, her nostrils dilating, her breath coming in quick, irregular gasps.

"I am dazed—bewildered—mad, I am afraid. This was on the little golden-haired, brown-eyed foundling! This, on the child with the red mark on her arm! Merciful God—am I dreaming? am I crazy! or, has heaven been kind to me at last? Mrs. Argylene! Mr. Verne! see here! see this; my hands are trembling so I cannot open this button. Open it, quickly! and if there is a little gold chain and loop attached—"

Her voice lowered to a key that was thrillingly intense, and she watched Leslie's strong fingers as with his penknife he turned the shank of the button that had grown rusty in all the long years.

But it moved, as Georgia had said, and before all their eyes, out fell with a tiny chink, a dainty golden chain, three inches long, with a loop attached.

A scream of joy burst from Georgia's lips.

"God has been merciful! that is one of the armlets that was on my baby's arm when—when they took her away! and the mate to it, that must have become unfastened, I found on my bedroom floor, days after, and here it is—where it has lain night and day for eighteen years!"

Almost frantically she dragged it from her bosom—the exact counterpart of the odd ornament, suspended by a white silk cord.

She held it up in triumphant delight.

"You see, you comprehend, she is my baby—my own, own child. My little Jessamine—my baby I thought was dead. And my heart acknowledged her the moment my eyes rested on her—my own, own darling."

She seemed electrified with the discovery, and every sign of sadness or sorrow was banished from her face as she went up to Leslie and put both her arms around his neck.

"You are my son—are you? may I love you—will you love me, for her sake? Don't give me up; I am hopeful! I will find her if—"

Then, like a cloud came the momentarily forgotten fact of Carleton Vincy's being Ethel's companion.

A speechless terror suddenly swept over her; she buried her horrified face on Leslie's arm and no one saw the utter despair, alarm, that convulsed her quivering features.

In a moment she raised her head, and looked at Mrs. Argylene.
"We must lose no time, not another second. We will find her. God help us! and I believe there are happy days ahead—even for me!"

CHAPTER LIV.

OUT OF HADES.

A MOMENT after the door of the bedroom closed and locked on Ethel, she rose from her knees, a moan of pain going up to her lips. She walked wearily to the arm-chair by the fire, an expression of utter woe and despair on her face, and sat down in it, crouching among the cushions, shivering with nervous excitement. Her face was flushed with feverish brightness, and uncomfortable creeping shivers, alternating with flashes of burning heat, kept thrilling through her. Her hands were dry and hot, her lips dry, her eyes glowing with unnatural expression.

"If I should be sick—here! if I only could die—without any illness, without any one knowing it until they found me dead! but to be ill, helpless, powerless. I will not be sick! I will conquer this strange distress that is getting the upper hand of me!"

She got up from her seat and walked rapidly, determinedly around the room, as if defying her feelings to overcome her. "If ever there was a time in my life when I needed a clear head and a brave heart, it is now," she thought, sadly. "My position is a pitiable one, but that fact does not alter the case. I am bewildered at the sudden complications that have arisen, and it seems as if I never can become accustomed to the awful truth that I am still Frank's wife; that poor Leslie believes he is my husband; that I am the child of such a man!"

I know he hates me from the way he answered me when he refused to tell me my mother's name—my mother! my mother! I know she is good, and fair and sweet, even if she is his wife. Every instinct of my nature goes out to my unknown mother, and always has. If she only will love me when I find her, and God will lead me to her! He will help me bear my other woes, and give me a new joy for part compensation!"

Her eyes softened with tender reverence and religious awe.

"I fancy I can see her—this mother of mine," she went on, in her thoughts, as she paced to and fro; "at least I know what my ideal is—low-voiced, dainty and highbred in her manner—just as Mr. Vincy says she is; with tender, loving-eyes, and such a smile as I have dreamed of again and again. Such a face as I never saw but once—the face I saw to-day in a passing carriage."

For an hour she communed with herself, first in calm, hopeful courage, then suddenly breaking into a perfect gust of passionate anguish as she thought of Leslie and Mrs. Argyle; then growing white and cold again at memory of the handsome face that had appeared like a Medusa head at her bridal.

It was a weary, yet necessary vigil Ethel kept, all the long hours of that night, while Leslie walked the floor of the library, and Havelstock could scarcely sleep for wild delight at the prospect in store.

It did Ethel more good than anything else would have done. It forced her to look her position in the face, and review her plans for the future. It called into exercise all the philosophy she possessed, and gradually her natural courage, bravery and undauntedness arose to their wonted supremacy. She realized that, though an enforced prisoner, sighing would avail nothing, while calm thought and cool decision was everything.

There remained the fact that Vincy might return—would return, in all probability, since he said so. But his return gave her no uneasiness, particularly; and she was resolved, by some means or other, to get away—away from everything and everybody, and wait for the inevitable developments of the future.

Gradually both mental and physical disturbances righted themselves, and although there was a heavy, pitiful weight on her young heart, a sad, longing desolation in her soul, Ethel was comparatively content, and, wrapping her shawl around her again, cuddled up in the arm-chair and dropped asleep—worn out by the exciting tumult of that eventful day.

It was broad daylight when she awoke, with a start of bewildered surprise to see her breakfast beside her on a stand—smoking coffee, buttered toast, a soft-boiled egg, and a little mould of quince jelly. There was fresh water in the pitcher, clean towels on the rack, a pearl-backed brush and ivory comb on the bureau, and Ethel wondered that she had slept so soundly that the servant who had been in her room had not wakened her.

She bathed her face, neck and hands, and arranged her hair; then sat down to her breakfast with a relish that was the result of her long fast.

After she had finished, and before she had time to ring for the remains to be removed, there came a step on the stair, a quick, eager, light tread that Ethel thought, casually, belonged to the servant.

She waited almost impatiently for her entrance, her words of urgent entreaty for aid and assistance on her lips, her hand seeking her pocket-book, ready and willing to bestow all its contents for the blessed privilege of passing through the front door.

The key was fitted into the lock; it turned easily; the handle of the door moved, the door opened, and Frank Havelstock entered, shut and locked the door after him!

For one second, Ethel seemed rooted to the floor. Her color turned to an ashen hue and
the features of her countenance seemed to actually petrify with horror, terror, surprise.

Havelstock advanced toward her, a perfectly simulated expression of delight and gladness on his face.

"Ethel! Ethel! have I found you at last? My wife—my—"

She moved her hand with a haughty gesture.

"Your wife? You have the insolence to call me wife after your behavior? Don't say that again! What is it you want of me?"

He skillfully assumed an expression of sorrowful reproach.

"What do I want of you? you can ask me that the first time you see me after my coming to you from the very jaws of death! Ethel—what would I want of you but to find you, and take you to our home again?"

She drew back in shivering loathing.

"Never! you forfeited all right to me by your long-continued neglect. You do not, for a moment, think that you understand all your successful schemes?"

He bit his lip under his mustache, and an unspoken curse was in his heart.

Did she know? had Vincy told her?

It was a rough venture, but he decided at once to see if she really knew anything.

"My schemes! what schemes, Ethel? you call my long absence a cruel neglect when the months were passed tossing in the fever-ward of a French hospital! You call it a scheme—the awful accident that so nearly resulted in my death, that did result in the death of a companion with us; the providential rescue from the waters by a French bark, when I was unconscious and dying? You blame me, do you, Ethel, that, when eighteen months had passed, during which time I was incapable of finding you—that I came to you the moment I heard of you. This is my welcome, Ethel—Ethel, darling, whom I have mourned day and night, who had vanished completely, whom I saw yesterday standing at the altar! Who, think you, has most cause for reproach?" His eyes were very melancholy, and his manner well-suited to add truth to his specious assertions, but Ethel's whole demeanor was untouched by either manner or words. Her slight figure was drawn to its full height, and she stood regarding him with eyes of flashing contempt.

"Tell me why I should not reproach you—if you can! Do you suppose, for a moment, I believe a word you say? Do you not know that some fine, subtle intuition made me positively sure of your pretended death, your deliberate plans to rid yourself of me—why, or for what, I do not know, or want to know. Frank, do not think to impose upon me; do not add insult to injury by daring to call me your wife."

She was radiant in her whole-souled scorn; her splendid brown eyes were flaming with a light that seemed to pierce him to the very heart; and he compressed his lips tightly as he looked at her, in all the fresh, glowing, chastened beauty he had forever put from his reach.

Yet—why forever? and with a deep inward curse against Ida, and Leslie Verne, he swore she should still be his.

"It is terrible to be so distrusted by you, Ethel. Have you forgotten all our glorious past—our happy, blissful life in the dear little home I gave you? Have you forgotten how you loved me, with all the fire of your nature? I never can forget.""

His love was blazing higher every second, fanned to fiercer heat by the apparent hopelessness of its success.

Her voice was thrillingly low and intensely bitter when she answered.

"I have not forgotten—nor how you left me in utter friendlessness, to wrestle alone with my sorrow, to face the world and gain my living single-handed. I did it though."

"Poor little Ethel! you did grieve then, for me! There, hurst the past—and let us begin again, my wife. Make a better man of me, and let me be your shield from the world. I have wealth now, Ethel, and there can be no desire of your heart or eyes that shall be ungratified."

He held out his arms, entertainingly.

"Keep your distance! You know as well as I, that I never will be more to you again than I am this minute. Spare yourself the shame of a refusal, if you have a spark of manhood left."

"How can I help it—when I love you so?"

Her lips curled.

"The word is disgusting from you—I will not hear it."

His eyes flashed hotly at that.

"You shall hear it. You are my wife, and I will claim you if I have to walk over Verne's dead."

He stopped suddenly, biting his lips in rage at his blundering stupidity, in allowing Ethel to know he was cognizant of the actual fact of her marriage. His idea was to make her announce it herself, and his allusion to it before had been for that purpose.

Ethel's face paled with a sudden pain at her heart.

"Don't take the name of the trust, noblest man God ever gave to woman to love, on your false lips. I love him, Frank Havelstock, with a far nobler love than I ever gave you. I have learned I only gave you, in all innocent ignorance, the wild admiration your handsome face elicited. I love him with the strength of an affection purged of its dross, and chastened by suffering. After all, Frank, you unwittingly worked me great good."

As she spoke, looking at him, she shrunk.
from the flashing wickedness of temper in his bold, black eyes.

"Your love for him shall avail you nothing, unless it be a good thing to love one man and be the wife of another! You have committed a State's Prison offense. Ethel, do you know it? What do you think your haughty, high-headed lover, who thinks he is your husband, would say, if he knew that he had married another man's wife—that she was this minute talking to him?"

A pitiful anguish crept into the girl's eyes—a haunting, soul-sick distress.

"It will kill him—when he learns I am not his wife. Remember, Frank Havelstock, I know I am not his wife, and that the crime I committed was done in ignorance. I shall expiate it by a life of suffering such as you never will know."

"Do I not? Do I not suffer every hour, every minute? and I not suffer now when I hear you freely admit you are my wife, and yet, refuse to take me for your husband?"

"You cannot comprehend it," she said, quietly. "Only those who are truly mated can know. I am your lawful wife, Frank, but only in name. He whom I love, and shall love so long as I live, is nothing to me henceforth."

Her voice was husky with emotion, and her pale face, with its starry eyes, did not, by its sad wistfulness, check the hot reply that came to Havelstock's lips.

"I doubt that statement, Ethel. If the man you love anything to you, why are you not with him? Has he discovered so soon your predilection for me, and deserted you from the altar?"

A tempest of almost ungovernable fury flashed to Ethel's eyes. Her figure swayed in the violent anger his words caused. She commanded his silence by a gesture so full of imperious authority that he paused involuntarily.

"Silence! How dare you hint such a suggestion to me—to me! Leave this room at once!"

She pointed to the door with her hand trembling with anger.

Her figure, face, attitude was eloquent with intense scorn, loathing, contempt, and Havelstock realized, for the first time, that his cause was hopeless as despair itself. He felt, with a pang of mingled rage and regret, that his influence over her was forever destroyed—and then he felt a devilish desire to humble her. He laughed aloud as he thought it.

"You are queen of high tragedy—what a treat the boards are missing! I wonder what your mother would say if she saw you here—with me!"

"My mother! you know who my mother is?"

He smiled at the eagerness in her voice.

"I will eat at the same table with her today. Have you any message for her?"

His mocking eyes cut her to the core. She moaned in positive pain at the tantalizing triumph.

"God forgive you for your cruelty—I fear I never can! Will you go?"

He bowed elaborately.

"At once. Our mutual friend, Vincy, will call soon in his charmingly enacted role of paternal relation. I will see you again, Ethel, and then—"

He opened the door and departed, leaving the unfinished sentence to end in an odd smile, little knowing what really would happen when they met again.

After he had gone, Ethel sat down, trembling in every limb, with excitement as well as the fatigue of long standing.

"He knows my mother, and she is in New York! perhaps not five minutes' walk from here; while I, in the midst of trouble, trials and dangers, can only wait and pray. And God will send deliverance! I will not lose my faith and trust in this dark hour when religion ought to shine more brightly than ever before. I will remember that He is a very present help in times of trouble."

A quiet, patient resignation gleamed softly in her eyes, and a firm, courageous look dawned newly in her face.

"Providence helps those who help themselves," she thought. "I will at least make the attempt."

She rang the bell, and then waited quietly for the entrance of the colored woman whom she supposed would be in attendance.

She was correct in her supposition, for in several seconds a key turned in the lock, and the woman who had opened the front door for Vincy entered the room.

She was a courteous, affable, mutato, dressed neatly, and possessing an air of intelligence that impressed Ethel favorably as she bowed and asked her pleasure.

"I rung to have the dishes removed," Ethel said, pleasantly, "and if you have time, I would like to have a few minutes' conversation with you."

"I will see to the fire, and you can tell me what it is while I am busy. I would like to stay as long as you want me, only that Mr. Vincy is very particular and suspicious."

Ethel's heart went up in a swift, agonized prayer before she answered.

"Don't you know what I want? You are a woman—let me get out of this house."

She had arisen, and was standing beside the woman, one dainty white hand laid on the brown arm, her face pale with earnestness, her eyes burning like lamps.

Julie made no reply, but there was an odd expression on her stolid face. Was it stolism or pity? Ethel could not tell, but the simple hope that it might be pity urged her to make her plea the stronger.
"I have five hundred dollars in my purse—I have a watch and chain worth half as much—here is a pearl ring—will you take them all, and leave me free to walk out of the front door?"

Julie still stood motionless, silent with that curious, impenetrable look on her intelligent face. Ethel watched her closely; then, hastily unfastening her elegant brooch, and laid it with its heavy chain, and the tiny blue enameled watch on the table. She spread out the roll of bills in her pocket-book before the woman's eyes, expecting to see them shine with cupidity.

"Will you let me go? Your master is still in his room—surely all this will repay you for his displeasure. Think how you would feel if you were in my position—and let me go!"

In the earnestness of her supplication, Ethel fell on her knees beside the colored woman, her wondrously beautiful hair falling about her like a halo, her glorious eyes lit with purity, innocence, intense earnestness.

Julie averted her face.

"Not to me—oh, don't get on your knees to me. I am not a good woman—but I was once, before I came to this wretched city, and by the remembrance of those days I believe you—even if I did not know your story was true. I listened at the door, both times, for I had a presentiment you ought not to be here. Get up, and put back your money in your purse—for you'll need it. Put on your watch and chain and ring—I wouldn't take them."

Her voice grew husky and she pushed them back, almost as if wounded at the suggestion they implied—that she could be bought for money to such a deed of mercy. I drew back from your lower nature, but I thought it would recompense you in case Mr. Vincy discharged you—until you found another situation. But you will have pity on me?"

Julie turned her large dark eyes on Ethel's fair sweet face.

"I will let you go out of this house if you will take me with you. May I go with you and be your servant? I'll be faithful and true, and you never shall regret your kindness to me."

Julie was the suppliant now, and tears were in her big and eyes, while Ethel laughed softly—the first real joy she had felt or manifested since her trouble had come to her.

"Thank God and you, Julie! Indeed you shall go with me, and I will be your friend as long as I live. Let us hurry, I wouldn't meet that man again for worlds."

She put on her sackque with eager haste; she crammed her money in her purse with nervous haste; and tied on her veil with eager, trembling hands.

"It will be an hour yet before he is down; but I'll be ready in ten minutes, and we'll go out without any trouble. No one ever goes in the halls but me."

She did not stop to remove the dishes, but went immediately to prepare herself, leaving the key on the inside of the door—a delicacy that touched Ethel's very heart.

She smiled faintly yet with a calm peace on her face—a peace that a good conscience gives; that even billows of trouble cannot quite destroy.

And as she and Julie walked out of the room, five minutes later, and down into the hall, into the street, into life and bustle and security—her heart gave a thrill of almost content.

At the nearest corner she called a passing carriage, and directed the driver to take them to a quiet hotel which she designated.

While they were being driven along, she told Julie, frankly, as much of her plans as she deemed necessary.

"It will be best to remain at the hotel a few days, at any rate, while I make efforts to secure some sort of a position. Five hundred dollars is all I have, and it won't last forever; but I am young and well, and I know I can find something that will enable us to hire a cozy little suite of rooms somewhere, and you shall be housekeeper while I am bread winner. I think we can be very comfortable, Julia."

"I would be content in a cellar with you, Mrs. — ."

She paused in respectful inquiry. Ethel's lip trembled a second to think she had no name she could both lawfully and willingly use. She knew she was not Mrs. Verne—because Havelstock lived. She would not assume his name, for obvious reasons; and even her old name of Maryl was not hers; and she never once thought of that of Vincy. Yet she decided for the former.

"Call me Mrs. Maryl," she said, softly.

"That is my name."

The carriage rolled slowly along, and then drew up before a small, quiet hotel. Julie alighted, and respectfully waited while the driver sprang down and opened the door.

Ethel handed him his fees, and turned to ascend the steps to the hotel entrance, her veil thrown back, her sweet, sad face exposed to the passers-by.

Just as a clear, girlish voice saluted her.

"Why, Miss Maryl! is it possible?"

And Ida Wynne—so Ethel knew her—extended her hand familiarly.

CHAPTER LV.

THE HAVEN OF REST.

Ten minutes after Havelstock left his house on his unsuccessful errand to the place where Ethel was a temporary prisoner, Ida discovered his absence, so unwonted and unseasonable, and at once connected it with Ethel, although in a very different way from the pitiful truth
—a truth that would have crushed her to the very dust.

As it was, she was completely under the influence of the jealous, tormenting thought that had taken possession of her; so that when coming into Georgia’s room, on the first floor, front, she accidentally caught a glimpse of Havelstock walking rather eagerly down the avenue, her cheeks began to flame and her eyes to flush.

She gave a little ejaculation of amazement and anger.

“If Frank isn’t out already! I am sure he has no business at this unseemly hour, unless it is a tete-a-tete with that bold-faced Ethel Mary!”

Georgia gave her a look that Ida could not fathom.

How did she know she was talking about the child of the woman before her? Georgia had kept her own counsel since the afternoon before, waiting in patience for the right time to come to make it known.

There had come a new light in her eyes since the day before—a subdued, expectant glory that Lexington had seen the moment he came into her presence after her return from Mrs. Argolyne’s, which he had seen with a passionate bitterness of soul that she was so inexpressibly lovely, so unspeakably dear to him, yet so utterly unworthy of him.

Georgia had told him, as plainly as she dared trust herself to speak, of Leslie Verne’s terrible affliction, and in his whole-souled benevolence he had entered into the investigation of Ethel’s whereabouts, little knowing the blessed truth hidden away in Georgia’s heart.

While in turn, Georgia herself never dreamed of the terrible complications that existed; or that her unknown child was the wife of the man under whose roof she was staying. The Argolyne’s had said nothing of it; simply because Ethel’s widowhood had become a careless thing of the past to them.

Such was the condition of affairs when Ida made her unconscious offensive speech as she watched Frank down the avenue, with a bitterness spreading over her face with every passing instant.

“He’s crazy over that girl with her yellow hair. He used to be, at Tanglewood, and to think she dare carry on her infamous flirtation right in my face.”

Georgia looked very stern and reproachful.

“I am positive you are mistaken, Ida. Miss Maryl, as you call her, is a lady.”

Ida curled her lips.

“You are bewitched in her favor, but I’ll unbelief you. Do you know what I am going to do? I am going to follow that man, and I know I’ll see that creature face to face by only keeping at his heels.”

She left the room in nervous speed, before Georgia could say a word.

Then a sudden light flashed over her face.

“It may be for the best—who knows but there is a fate in all this?”

Ah—what a fate!

Five minutes later, she saw Ida hastening as fast as custom would permit in the direction Frank had taken. At the end of the square she saw Ida hail a coupe, with a few words of conversation with the driver, which evidently meant to keep Havelstock in sight.

Georgia resumed her seat with a sigh of pity for Ida’s hot-headedness.

Five minutes later, there came a peremptory ring of the door-bell, followed in several seconds by the appearance of Ida’s little velvet-lined page, bearing a card on a silver salver.

Georgia took it, eagerly—the possibility of news from her newly-discovered child was paramount to everything else, and read the name

“CARLETON VINCY.”

Underneath the name was penciled:

“I must see you on business of immense importance—at once.”

Her first thought was one of astonishment that Vincy knew of her being there; not being aware of the facts as they were, she was naturally astonished.

Her second thought was one of horror and fear. What would Lexington think when he learned Vincy had seen her again? Would he despise her still more? Was it possible that he could?

Then, above this pitiful pain, rushed the unquenchable desire to hear of her lost one—even through Vincy, who, she knew, would sell his very soul for a price.

She looked weary and white as she smiled at the child awaiting her reply.

“Take the gentleman in the library, Florian, if no one is there, and say I will be down presently.”

She paused before her dressing bureau—not to alter a jot or tittle of her attire, but to see if there were any secrets on her mobile face.

She saw only the haggard look she knew was caused by Vincy’s coming; a white, troubled expression for fear Lexington would hate her the more. There was no knowledge of her discovery in her eyes.

She went slowly down-stairs, so calmly that she was herself surprised; so cool and collected that Vincy started as he caught a glimpse of her.

She merely inclined her head as she entered the library; Vincy bowed with an humble courtesy that astounded her.

“You will pardon this intrusion, Georgia—”

“If you please, Mrs. Lexington, sir.”

He dropped the hand he had extended, looking at her, with mournfulness in his manner and expression.

“You still harbor such feelings toward me?
You still refuse me even the courtesy you be-
stow on an acquaintance!"
Georgia's lip curled.
"I have no time to waste on such a subject. What
matter of littleness importance is it if you
wish to speak of it?"
There was irony in her voice that cut Vincy,
but he maintained his role admirably.
"In such a mood as I find you, I cannot
mention it to you. Georgia, don't look so
coldly at me. Give me a chance to at least
tell you what I know you would give ten
years of your life to hear;"
"It would be wonderful news to be bought
at such a price. I know of nothing that would
induce me to offer such a one, if it were in my
power, than the privilege of purchasing my
remembrance of you."
Vincy's face began to harden.
"You are disposed to still play the unap-
proachable! Allow me to ask if you will per-
sist in forgetting you are my wife?"
A low, haughty laugh, the very essence of
scorn, came from her lips.
"I decline to enter into a discussion of so
useless a subject."
Vincy's eyes began to gleam luridly.
"But, madam, remember I have the right to
demand of you an answer."
"Indeed! what right?"
She was a puzzle to him in this new phase of
cool, calm contumaciousness.
"What right?" he retorted, hotly. "The
right of the husband whose authority you de-
fy; the right of a man who loves you a thou-
sand times more than your hot-headed, jealous,
suspicious hus-
band."
"That will do," she returned, quietly, but
with a flashing gleam in her eyes. "I told
you once before never to presume to pollute
my ears by your vile protestations, and I re-
peat it. Don't dare take my husband's name
on your lips—my good, noble husband, whom
I love with all my heart and soul and life."
She was warming with her defense, and Vincy
showered mockingly.
"You love him with all his devilish suspi-
cions of you? Ha! ha! ha! didn't he scream
that night—bruised him when he assisted me
from the conservatory? If he had suspected
I got up the little tableau for his special ben-
efit?"
Georgia paled at the memory.
"It was a cruel, inhuman, unmanly act of
yours, and you know how the result hurt me.
And yet I will not blame him—he had every
reason to suppose I was guilty."
"If he wasn't as mad as a March hare when
he got one of his jealous rages on, he'd know
you are as immaculate as a snowdrop. By
Heaven, Georgia! you are the only woman I
ever saw in my life that I would pin my soul's
eternal salvation to! And to think your lord
and master suspects you! Well, it is some lit-
tle satisfaction for the disappointment I ex-
perience. To think you never have kissed me,
one, since I came to life again. To think
you scratched my face till it bled, because I
overcame you and stole a kiss that night in the
summer-house, when you gave me money to
preserve your husband's peace of mind!"
Georgia listened coldly, patiently.
"Are you through? Are you ready with
your wonderful news, or have you already
divulged it?"
Vincy bit his lip to keep from cursing at her
imperturbable hauteur.
"By Jupiter, Georgia, I will wring your
stubborn neck, yet! Have I not used every
means in my power to make your life a hell
on earth, so far? Have I not planted a gulf
between you and the man you worship, that
grows wider every day? Are you not both
perfectly miserable, through my machinations?
And there is yet another stroke waiting for
you. Hear, woman, who has scorned and re-
pulsed me—hear that your baby, Jessamine, is
alive to-day, and not ten minutes' drive from
here!"
He said it as if he delivered a prophecy; ex-
pecting, if ever he expected anything in his
life, to see her faint at his feet in sudden emi-
ton; or to hear her scream, or to see her pale
with agitation, and possibly grovel at his feet
in suing for more information.
Georgia heard, calmly.
"I know it. You were riding with her last
evening. I saw you both. Is this your news?"
Vincy's face was a revelation. His mouth
was parted in astonishment at her reception of
his news. His eyes were fixed on her beauti-
ful face, in speechless wonderment.
"Now—our interview is over. I presume
you came for more money in return for your
'immense news,' but you will never receive
another cent of my husband's money. As for
my darling child—detectives are on her track,
and I have no fear of what you can do. Good-
morning."
She bowed coldly—this tried, true woman,
who at last had come to the happiness of her
life.
For, as she inclined her head, forth from one
of the dozen recesses of the library, came Theo
Lexington, his grand face white with agita-
tion, his eyes scintillant with a passionate joy
that made Georgia's heart bound. He sprang
to Georgia's side, and crushed her to her
breast, his arms clinging around her, his lips
raining kiss after kiss on her bewildered face.
"Georgia! darling! darling! wife! Oh, thank
God for this hour—thank God!"
He seemed overcome with his great joy,
and Georgia, with strange quiet, nestled in his
passionate embrace, as if to die there would
repay her for all her years of suffering.
"Theo—dear! the cloud is past—forever?
You trust me, now?"
He kissed her quivering lips, her tearful eyes.

"Pass forever! you will forgive me, and I will make amends for my wicked jealousy by making you so happy you will think it almost worth the price we have paid. My own—my wife!"

Vincy stood, in grim, stolid silence; a spectator to the bliss his own lips had unwittingly wrought. His whole soul was in a tempest of fury, but he felt he had come to the end of his part of the drama, and he accepted his situation with a grace worthy a better man.

"I wish you joy of your wife—only it will be well to remember occasionally she was mine first. I don't think I shall bother you again, unless you call it a bother to be obliged to know your happiness depends, after all, on the man who is the father of your wife's child—the man who played for high stakes and—didn't win."

Lexington never once spoke to him. He listened, half-smilingly, with an arm around Georgia's waist, as if he knew the sight of his and Georgia's reconciliation was a keener blow than he could strike. And he was right.

When Vincy had done, he rung the call-bell on the table.

"Show the gentleman the door."

Then, when the balled, discomfited villain had left the room, left their life forever, and leaves our story, Lexington drew his wife to his arms again, with a passionate ardor that thrilled her from head to foot.

"Georgia, darling—look in my eyes! let me see your sweet face as I have prayed to see it so often. Kiss me, dear one—wife! and with that kiss let us seal the grave of our past, and the vows for our future! And together we will join hearts and hands in finding your little Jesamine—the task you gave me, you remember, with the reward attached? Now, there is no grave between us; no grim ghost of suspicion—nothing—nothing! my darling! my wife!"

And so, through the man who had caused their misery, their great bliss came, never again to be destroyed.

CHAPTER LVI.
AN EXPIATION.

MRS. LEXINGTON'S suspicion, that Ida's short colloquy with the driver had been to instruct him to not lose sight of Havelstock, was correct, and without a moment's loss of time, the coupe started off, a half-block's distance behind the unconscious walker.

Ida sat within, grim, silent, with her valour over her face, her hands tightly locked, her eyes wearing a look of stormy fury in them.

"I'll see what it all means," she muttered to herself; "men are not in the habit of losing all the self-control and command simply at mention of a name whose bearer can have no personal interest in them. Even if she was his sweetheart before I knew him, there is no reason for Frank's queer conduct. There's a secret—and I'll know it! I'll track him to where I verily believe he is going, and I'll bring them face to face. I'll see her, after he has seen her, and under pretense of being so delighted to resume our acquaintance—I never met her but once—I'll have her call on me. She'll never suppose when I speak of my husband—Mr. John Lexington—that he is Frank Havelstock. I'll shame her—I hate her, and I could kill her, I believe!"

The dainty wood-rose color had all died out of her cheeks, leaving her pale and wan; her eyes had great purple rings under them, but they glittered like stars under the edge of a thunder-cloud.

As the driver suddenly reined in his horse, Ida gave a little cry of excitement. Frank had stopped somewhere, then.

It was in a side street, of quiet, homelike appearance, but entirely unfamiliar to Ida. She tapped on the window for the driver.

"Where did the gentleman go? what street is this?"

"This is 22d street, mum, and the gentleman went in just yonder—the house with the open door, and the silver door plate on."

Ida drew a long, sobbing breath. Frank had no friends or acquaintances here, she was sure. Had he gone in to see Ethel? If so, they must be as intimate as she feared, if he knew her address—she was privileged to call at such an early hour.

"Wait," she said, grimly, to the driver, and then settled herself in watchful uprightness to "wait," herself. It was a long half-hour, but Ida's ominous gaze never wandered from Madam Dore's door; and when, at length, she was rewarded by seeing Frank depart, with a frowning scowl on his face, she could hardly repress a scream.

All unconscious of her espionage, Havelstock departed, leisurely, in the direction he had come: while Ida watched him, in bitter, inexpressible jealousy.

It was not her policy to leave her position now. She knew her husband had entered the house, but as yet she was not sure that Ethel was there. She believed such to be the case, but she was determined to settle the matter positively.

"I'll wait and watch all day before she shall slip through my fingers. If she don't pass out in a reasonable time, I will send the driver to inquire for her."

There was a terrible vindictiveness in her eyes, as she sat five, six, ten minutes—

And then, saw Ethel and Julie come out, pass the carriage she was in, and enter one at a lower corner.

Quick as thought she signaled the driver.

"I am ready. Follow that coupe, and tell me when it stops."

An odd grin contracted the man's face as
he started off, rapidly, in the wake of Ethel and Julie. It seemed to Ida they never would stop; but at length the driver halted, and put his lips to the little hole in the front of the coupe. "They're a-going into this here hotel, mum. Shall I wait?"

Ida looked eagerly out, and saw Ethel just descending the steps. "Yes, wait," and she sprung out herself. She walked as quickly as she dared, and reached Ethel's side just as she turned to enter the hotel.

Ida's face was radiant now—with triumph. "Miss Maryl—is it possible?" She extended her hand, and Ethel smiled slightly as she accepted it. "Miss Wynne—I think? It has been so long since I saw you."

"Not Miss Wynne. Didn't you hear of my marriage?"

Ethel looked puzzled a second, then smiled. "I remember. I was very stupid to have forgotten it. You married a Mr. Lexington, I think?"

"Yes. But perhaps I am detaining you on the sidewalk too long. You don't look well, Miss Maryl."

She searched her face so closely, that Ethel felt her cheeks flush. "I am well, thank you. Will you come in with me, Mrs. Lexington? I am about securing rooms here until I can trim myself. I have passed through sore affliction since I saw you."

She said it so gravely, so sweetly, that it almost disarmed Ida. Then the very beauty of her pure face lashed the hounds of jealousy afresh.

"I will go in—while you secure your rooms, and then, while your maid gets them in condition, I am going to take you home with me. I want you to know my husband."

"Thank you," returned Ethel, "you are kind. I hardly know whether it is best to accept or not, but, somehow, the sight of a face I have seen before does me good. I will order the carriage I came in to take us down."

Ida demurred with a ready friendliness that was worthy a nobler purpose than this she had on hand—that of spying out her husband's sweetheart.

"Oh, no! I was riding myself when I saw you, so very accidentally. I will take you home in that."

Ethel was conscious of an odd thrill of pleasurable anticipation that she was at a loss to account for, as she transacted her business with the clerk, and went to look at the rooms assigned her.

It was unusual for her to experience these sudden impulses, and more she wondered at it, the stronger the feeling grew on her that she was more anxious to go with Mrs. Lexington.

Of a sudden it flashed across her—Ida was a Lexington, and the Lexingtoms were allied to Frank Havelstock—and there was the secret reason why she felt urged to go. And yet, she disliked Frank so. Yet, there was the remote possibility of Mrs. Argelyne hearing of her, and Leslie. Despite these remembrances, however, was the silent voice urging her to go—the voice of Fata, that would not be disobeyed, even when it was not recognized.

She gave Julie some directions, promising to be back by six o'clock at furthest, and then, entered the coupe with Ida—Frank Havelstock's two wives, face to face!

Ida watched her keenly—every moment growing more and more heart-hard and pitiless—never dreaming the work she was doing was ordained to her years before.

They conversed pleasantly, and at length came to the large, imposing residence where Ida lived.

They alighted, and entered the house—so unconscious of all that was in store, so ignorant of the bitter cup so soon to be forced to the lips of some of that fated household; equally ignorant of all that occurred since Ida had left it.

Ida ushered her guest into the reception-room, her voice growing harder with every word she said—but Ethel, nothing suspecting, did not observe it.

"I want Mr. Lexington to see you—my husband's cousin and his wife, as well as my husband. I will ring for them at once, if you will allow me, I hope they are in."

There was a steely glimmer in her eyes that made Ethel wonder for a moment what was the matter.

She rang the bell with a jerk, that brought little Florian in a second.

"Tell Mr. Lexington and his wife there is a young lady here from near Tanglewood, Florian—Miss Maryl. Is your master in? I want him, if he is."

Florian delivered his first message to Georgia and Theo, who were still in the library.

"A young lady in the reception-room, please Miss Maryl, from Tan—"

He did not finish the sentence—Georgia was on her feet in a trice; her eyes flashing, her breast heaving at the sound of the name.

"Theo—It is she! It is my own little Jessica! Come—come—I can scarcely wait until I get there. My baby—my child!"

Her face was radiant with an almost unearthly glory, and as her husband smiled tenderly at her, she felt her cup was almost running over. There needed only one drop more—her daughter in her arms!

She was out of the library and in the reception-room like a flash. Usually so staid and deliberate, she seemed fairly vibrating with joyous nervousness. Lexington followed her—carcely less happy than herself.
At the door she paused one short second, her starlike eyes feasting on Ethel's pure, fair beauty. Then, regardless of Ida's presence, or of the ignorance of the girl herself, she flew across the room, and caught Ethel in her arms.

"Oh—my darling! my own darling! my baby! my daughter! my little long-lost child?"

She pressed back Ethel's little straw hat, and kissed her forehead, her cheeks, her hair, her quivering mouth.

Ethel looked at her with a bewildered countenance, then recognized the face of her dreams, the sweet face that had touched her so tenderly lately. Then, a glad smile leaped to her eyes.

"My mother! are you my mother? oh—I feel it in every nerve of my body—this sweet consciousness that I am your child. Mother?"

Sheyielded to Georgia's warm embrace with a sweet sense of peace she had never felt before, and Georgia laughed joyously, though her eyes were full of tears as she turned to explain to Ida.

"Ida, don't you understand it? I can't tell you now—I am too happy. But never fear there is a mistake; she is my own, my dear one, my little baby-girl with the golden hair. She is my little Jessamine—mine forever!"

Ida looked on in mute surprise. Was Georgia beside herself—or—or—was it really her child? She looked from one to the other, and then she saw the faint, fine resemblance that told its own story. Georgia's child! and she had talked so terribly about her; yes, and she believed it now as much as ever.

There was a hard, cross look on her face as she answered.

"Are you sure! Jessamine died, I understood, and it is so easy to be imposed on—a little insignificant cry from Georgia interrupted her; then Lexington, who had looked on in silence and deep emotion, came up to Ethel's side.

"There will be much to explain to you later, my darling, but I am almost sure you will let me call you my child as well as my wife's!"

Ethel was leaning on Georgia's arm, tears dropping slowly from her sweet eyes.

"It is so strange—so blessed—"

She raised her eyes to look at Lexington. just as Havelstock walked into the room in perfect ignorance of what was in store for him.

Ida's face was full of indignant curiosity as she saw him coming—before he reached the door.

Then a scream of horror and surprise burst from Ethel's lips, and she shrieked closer to Georgia's encircling arms.

Havelstock saw her the instant he entered the room, and a change resembling death sped over his features. He staggered into the nearest chair, with a wildly profane oath on his lips, while a silence like a grave followed for a second.

"Ida stood like a transfixed statue, her face darkening with the fury of her anger and jealousy.

"This is Miss Mary!—or rather, cousin Georgia's child—Miss Jessamine Lexington, Frank."

Ida said it with sneering emphasis, her merciless eyes fixed on Frank's gray, livid face. He made no attempt to answer, but sat, or rather crouched, in the chair, his eyes fastened on Ethel's averted head—that Georgia was caressing tenderly.

"What does this mean? Havelstock, can you explain?"

Lexington spoke in a thoroughly decided, displeased manner; but it made little difference to Frank. He seemed paralyzed and speechless. Georgia's low, sweet voice addressed the trembling girl on her arm.

"Will you tell me, daughter, the cause of this strange scene? Do you know this gentleman? have you met him before? has anything unpleasant occurred? Do not be afraid, dear, to speak frankly."

Sobs began to come from Ethel's mouth. Her frame shook so violently that Georgia was alarmed, and turned anxiously to her husband.

"There is something unusual in this. What can it be? Jessamine—Ethel—tell me, for God's sake, has this agitation anything to do with your marriage to Mr. Verne? Theo, please send a messenger for Mr. Verne and Mrs. Argelyne at once—imperatively!"

Suddenly Ethel's sobs ceased; she raised her head from Georgia's arm, and looked across the room at Havelstock, who still sat in an attitude of such despairing hopelessness that even the woman he had so wronged pitied him, as she spoke, in a clear, low, thrilling tone.

"God knows I would have spared you this, but it seems my duty to speak, and tell you that the reason of my flying from Leslie Verne's house yesterday, was the awful truth I learned at the altar—that Frank Havelstock was still alive—the man I married last June—the man who deserted me and never saw me until yesterday at St. Iide's."

Her voice was full of solemn conviction, that went home to every heart; and when she had told her simple story, Georgia's tears were flowing down her face, and Lexington was trying hard to conquer his emotion.

"My poor, suffering child—a wife—yet not a wife! God help you and me, and try to comfort you!"

Havelstock never lifted his eyes. His silent apathy was hideous to see; but Ida—Ida realized it with a terrible personal agony.

"His wife—you his wife? Then, in God's name, what am I?"

Her eyes seemed ready to start from her
head; her cheeks slowly flamed, till the blood pulsed madly in her temples. She stared at Ethel with a prolonged, awful gurgle in her throat; then they saw a vacancy in her glance; they heard a curious, awful gurgle in her throat; there came a thin line of foam, scarce whiter than her lips to them, and she fell to the floor in a writhing convulsion.

It was a moment of never-to-be-forgotten horror—then one of silence, broken by a long sigh from Havelstock, as if he had only wakened to a conscious realization of all that was transpiring.

He looked at Ida, whom Georgia and the maids were seeing to, as they carried her rigid form up to her room; then he looked at Ethel with an expression of smiling ghastliness.

"You are my wife—I'll swear to every word you have said. Are you surprised to find that what you suspected is true? I did desert you to marry Ida Wynne and her money."

Lexington arose in all the stern, terrible majesty of his presence.

"And I am obliged to know my blood flows in your veins! I would drive you forth from this roof, were it mine. But as it is, never do I or mine darken the doors again. Vile, accursed viper that you are—wretch, not fit to live—not fit to die!"

That instant there came a peal at the doorbell, and the footman ushered in Leslie Verne and Mrs. Argylene.

A cry of rapture burst from Leslie's lips the instant he crossed the threshold. He had caught a glimpse of Ethel in the embrace of Georgia's arms.

"My little Ethel! my little wife! Oh, thank God for this!"

She raised her eyes in silent adoration, then shrank away, followed by Leslie's pleading, outstretched arms.

"No, no! I did not mean to have you find me—it is so much better as it was!"

Mrs. Argylene was quietly caressing her hand, kissing it with mute tenderness.

"How better, darling? Are you not my wife?"

A sneering voice interrupted him:

"Look this way, Verne! Do you wonder she ran away from you?"

Leile turned sharply.

"My God! Havelstock! Oh, my little lost darling!"

His moan of agony smote every heart—only Havelstock smiled—a terrible, ghastly smile.

"Yes, I'm her husband, fast and sure. I've committed the crime of bigamy, however, and as the punishment for the act would debar me from enjoying much of my wife's society, I prefer to take the law into my own hands, and earn a reputation for one merciful act at least!"

Quick as a lightning flash he drew his revolver, and, although Verne and Lexington sprang to intercept him, the shot went home, through his scheming brain, and he fell to the floor—a victim of his lawless life, paying the price of the woman's ransom he had so nearly wrecked, with his own life's blood!

The story is done; there remains but little to tell of side issues, and that little is soon told.

Of course, Ethel, or Jossamine, went with her husband to Meadowbrook, and between it and Tanglewood was a continual unity, peace and love.

Mrs. Argylene still lives in her lonely, happy way, and devotes herself to Leslie's and Ethel's happiness.

Vincent—although we have officially dismissed him—left the country, without ever making an effort to see Ethel again, after learning from Georgia there were detectives on his track. He died in less than a year after apoplexy.

Julie, the faithful girl to whom Ethel owed so much, is at Meadowbrook in the capacity of children's nurse to Master Theo and Miss Jemima Verne, a thoroughly reformed, conscientious woman, whom Mrs. Verne never regretted having saved as a brand from the burning.

Saddest of all, Ida, more sinned against than sinning, sleeps her last sleep with her first-born by her side. The terrible convulsions, induced by high mental excitement, brought on a serious, premature illness, and with her and her child ended the last of the story of the tragedy that influenced so many lives.

THE END