The Missing Bride

by E.D.E.N. Southworth

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THE MISSING BRIDE

A Novel

by

MRS. E. D. E. N. SOUTHWORTH

Author of Self-Raised, Ishmael, Retribution, The Bridal Eve, The Bride's Fate, Mother-in-Law, The Haunted Homestead, The Bride's Dowry, Victor's Triumph, A Fortune Seeker, etc.

CHAPTER I.

LUCKENOUGH.

Deep in the primeval forest of St. Mary's, lying between the Patuxent and the Wicomico Rivers, stands the ancient manor house of Luckenough.

The traditions of the neighborhood assert the origin of the manor and its quaint, happy and not unmusical name to have been—briefly this:

That the founder of Luckenough was Alexander Kalouga, a Polish soldier of fortune, some time in the service of Cecilius Calvert, Baron of Baltimore, first Lord Proprietary of Maryland. This man had, previous to his final emigration to the New World, passed through a life of the most wonderful vicissitudes—wonderful even for those days of romance and adventure. It was said that he was born in one quarter of the globe, educated in another, initiated into warfare in the third and buried in the fourth. In his boyhood he was the friend and pupil of Guy Fawkes; he engaged in the Gunpowder Plot, and after witnessing the terrible fate of his master, he escaped to Spanish America, where he led for years a sort of buccaneer life. He afterwards returned to Europe, and then followed years of military service wherever his hireling sword was needed. But the soldier of fortune was ill-paid by his mistress. His misfortunes were as proverbial as his bravery, or as his energetic complaints of "ill luck" could make them. He had drawn his sword in almost every quarrel of his time, on every battlefield in Europe, to find himself, at the end of his military career, no richer than he was at its beginning—save in wounds and scars, honor and glory, and a wife and son. It was at this point of his life that he met with Leonard Calvert, and embarked with him for Maryland, where he afterwards received from the Lord

Proprietary the grant of the manor "aforesaid." It is stated that when the old soldier went with some companions to take a look at his new possessions, he was so pleased with the beauty, grandeur, richness and promise of the place that a glad smile broke over his dark, storm-beaten, battle-scarred face, and he remained still "smiling as in delighted visions," until one of his friends spoke and said:

"Well, comrade! Is this luck enough?"

"Yaw, mine frient!" answered the new lord of the manor in his broken English, cordially grasping the hand of his companion, "dish ish loke enough!"

Different constructions have been put upon this simple answer—first, that Lukkinnuf was the original Indian name of the tract; secondly, that Alexander Kalouga christened his manor in honor of Loekenoff, the native village of his wife, the heroic Marie Zelenski, the companion of all his campaigns and voyages, and the first lady of his manor; thirdly, that the grateful and happy soldier had only meant to express his perfect satisfaction with his fortune, and to say:

"Yes, this is luck enough! luck enough to repay me for all the past!" Be it as it may, from time immemorial the place has been "Luckenough."

The owner in 1814 was Commodore Nickolas Waugh, who inherited the property in right of his mother, the only child and heiress of Peter Kalouga.

This man had the constitution and character, not of his mother's, but of his father's family—a hardy, rigorous, energetic Montgomery race, full of fire, spirit and enterprise. At the age of twelve Nickolas lost his father.

At fifteen he began to weary of the tedium of Luckenough, varied only by the restraint of the academy during term. And at sixteen he rebelled against the rule of his indolent lymphatic mamma, broke through the reins of domestic government, escaped to Baltimore and shipped as cabin boy in a merchantman.

Nickolas Waugh went through many adventures, served on board merchantmen, privateers and haply pirates, too, sailed to every part of the known world, and led a

wild, reckless and sinful life, until the breaking out of the Revolutionary War, when he took service with Paul Jones, the American Sea King, and turned the brighter part of his character up to the light. He performed miracles of valor—achieved for himself a name and a post-captain's rank in the infant navy and finally was permitted to retire with a bullet lodged under his shoulder blade, a piece of silver trepanned in the top of his skull, a deep sword-cut across his face from the right temple over his nose to the left cheek—and with the honorary title of commodore.

He was a perfect beauty about this time, no doubt, but that did not prevent him from receiving the hand of his cousin Henrietta Kalouga, who had waited for him many a weary year.

No children blessed his late marriage, and as year after year passed, until himself and his wife were well stricken in years, people, who never lost interest in the great estate, began to wonder to which among his tribe of impoverished relations Nickolas Waugh would bequeath the manor of Luckenough.

His choice fell at length upon his orphan grandniece, the beautiful Edith Lance, whom he took from the Catholic Orphan Asylum, where she had found refuge since the death of her parents and placed in one of the best convent schools in the South.

At the age of seventeen Edith was brought home from school and established at Luckenough as the adopted daughter and acknowledged heiress of her uncle.

Delicate, dreamy and retiring, and tinged with a certain pensiveness, the effect of too much early sorrow and seclusion upon a very sensitive temperament, Edith better loved the solitude of the grand old forest of St. Mary's or the loneliness of her own shaded rooms at Luckenough than any society the humdrum neighborhood could offer her. And when at the call of social duty she did go into company, she exercised a refining and subduing influence, involuntary as it was potent.

Yet in that lovely, fragile form, in that dreaming, poetical soul, lay undeveloped a latent power of heroism soon to be aroused into action. "Darling of all hearts and

eyes," Edith had been at home a year when the War of 1812 broke out.

Maryland, as usual, contributed her large proportion of volunteers to the defense of the country. All men capable of bearing arms rapidly mustered into companies and hastened to put themselves at the disposal of the government.

The lower counties of Maryland were left comparatively unprotected. Old men, women, children and negroes were all that remained in charge of the farms and plantations. Yet remote from the scenes of conflict and hitherto undisturbed by the convulsions of the great world, they reposed in fancied safety and never thought of such unprecedented misfortunes as the evils of the war penetrating to their quiet homes.

But their rest of security was broken by a tremendous shock. The British fleet under Admiral Sir A. Cockburn suddenly entered the Chesapeake. And the quiet, lonely shores of the bay became the scene of a warfare scarcely paralleled in atrocity in ancient or modern times.

If among the marauding band of licensed pirates and assassins there was one name more dreaded, more loathed and accursed than the rest, it was that of the brutal and ferocious Thorg—the frequent leader of foraging parties, the unsparing destroyer of womanhood, infancy and age, the jackal and purveyor of Admiral Cockburn. If anywhere there was a beautiful woman unprotected, or a rich plantation house ill-defended, this jackal was sure to scent out "the game" for his master, the lion. And many were the comely maidens and youthful wives seized and carried off by this monster.

The Patuxent and the Wicomico, with the coast between them, offered no strong temptation to a rapacious foe, and the inhabitants reposed in the fancied security of their isolation and unimportance. The business of life went on, faintly and sorrowfully, to be sure, but still went on. The village shops at B—— and C—— were kept open, though tended chiefly by women and boys. The academicians at the

little college pursued their studies or played at forming juvenile military companies. The farms and plantations were cultivated chiefly under the direction of ladies whose husbands, sons and brothers were absent with the army. No one thought of danger to St. Mary's.

Most terrible was the awakening from this dream of safety, when, on the morning of the 17th of August, the division under the command of Admiral Cockburn—the most dreaded and abhorred of all—was seen to enter the mouth of the Patuxent in full sail for Benedict. Nearly all the able-bodied men were absent with the army at the time when the combined military and naval forces tinder Admiral Cockburn and General Ross landed at that place. None remained to guard the homes but aged men, women, infants and negroes. A universal panic seized the neighborhood and nothing occurred to the defenseless people but instant flight. Females and children were hastily put into carriages, the most valuable items of plate or money hastily packed up, negroes mustered and the whole caravan put upon a hurried march for Prince George's, Montgomery or other upper counties of the State. With very few exceptions, the farms and plantations were evacuated and left to the mercy of the invaders.

At sunrise all was noise, bustle and confusion at Luckenough.

The lawn was filled with baggage wagons, horses, mules, cows, oxen, sheep, swine, baskets of poultry, barrels of provisions, boxes of property, and men and maid servants hurrying wildly about among them, carrying trunks and parcels, loading carts, tackling harness, marshaling cattle and making other preparations for a rapid retreat toward Commodore Waugh's patrimonial estate in Montgomery County.

Edith was placed upon her pony and attended by her old maid Jenny and her old groom Oliver.

Commodore and Mrs. Waugh entered the family carriage, which they pretty well filled up. Mrs. Waugh's woman sat upon the box behind and the Commodore's man

drove the coach.

And the whole family party set forward on their journey. They went in advance of the caravan so as not to be hindered and inconvenienced by its slow and cumbrous movements. A ride of three miles through the old forest brought them to the open, hilly country. Here the road forked. And here the family were to separate.

It had been arranged that as Edith was too delicate to bear the forced march of days' and nights' continuance before they could reach Montgomery, she should proceed to Hay Hill, a plantation near the line of Charles County, owned by Colonel Fairlie, whose young daughter Fanny, recently made a bride, had been the schoolmate of Edith.

Here, at the fork, the party halted to take leave.

Commodore Waugh called his niece to ride up to the carriage window and gave her many messages for Colonel Fairlie, for Fanny and for Fanny's young bridegroom, and many charges to be careful and prudent, and not to ride out unattended, etc.

And then he called up the two old negroes and charged them to see their young mistress safely at Hay Hill and then to return to Luckenough and take care of the house and such things as were felt behind in case the British should not visit it, and to shut up the house after them in case they should come and rob it and leave it standing. Two wretched old negroes would be in little personal danger from the soldiers.

So argued Commodore Waugh as he took leave of them and gave orders for the carriage to move on up the main branch of the road leading north toward Prince George's and Montgomery.

But so argued not the poor old negroes, as they followed Edith up the west branch of the road that led to Charles County.

This pleasant road ran along the side of a purling brook under the shadow of the great trees that skirted the forest, and Edith ambled leisurely along, low humming to

herself some pretty song or listening to the merry carols of the birds or noticing the speckled fish that gamboled through the dark, glimmering stream or reverting to the subject of her last reading.

But beneath all this childish play of fancy, one grave, sorrowful thought lay heavy upon Edith's tender heart. It was the thought of poor old Luckenough "deserted at its utmost need" to the ravages of the foe. Then came the question if it were not possible, in case of the house being attacked, to save it—even for her to save it. While these things were brewing in Edith's mind, she rode slowly and more slowly, until at length her pony stopped. Then she noticed for the first time the heavy, downcast looks of her attendants.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

"Oh! Miss Edith, don't ask me, honey—don't! Ain't we-dem got to go back to de house and stay dar by our two selves arter we see you safe?" said Jenny, crying.

"No! what? you two alone!" exclaimed Edith, looking from one to the other.

"Yes, Miss Edith, 'deed we has, chile—but you needn't look so 'stonish and 'mazed. You can't help of it, chile. An' if de British do come dar and burn de house and heave we-dem into de fire jes' out of wanton, it'll only be two poor, ole, unvaluable niggers burned up. Ole marse know dat well enough—dat's de reason he resks we."

"But for what purpose have you to return?" asked Edith, wondering.

"Oh! to feed de cattle and de poultry? and take care o' de things dat's lef behine," sobbed Jenny, now completely broken down by her terrors. "I know—I jis does—how dem white niggers o' Co'bu'ns 'ill set de house o' fire, an' heave we-dem two poor old innocen's into de flames out'n pure debblish wanton!"

Edith passed her slender fingers through her curls, stringing them out as was her way when absent in thought. She was turning the whole matter over in her mind. She might possibly save the mansion, though these two old people were not likely to be able to do so—on the contrary, their ludicrous terrors would tend to stimulate the

wanton cruelty of the marauders to destroy them with the house. Edith suddenly took her resolution, and turned her horse's head, directing her attendants to follow.

"But where are you going to go, Miss Edith?" asked her groom, Oliver, now speaking for the first time.

"Back to Luckenough."

"What for, Miss Edith, for goodness sake?"

"Back to Luckenough to guard the dear old house, and take care of you two."

"But oh, Miss Edy! Miss Edy! for Marster in heaven's sake what'll come o' you?"

"What the Master in heaven wills!"

"Lord, Lord, Miss Edy! ole marse 'ill kill we-dem. What 'ill old marse say? What 'ill everybody say to a young gal a-doin' of anything like dat dar? Oh, dear! dear! what will everybody say?"

"They will say," said Edith, "if I meet the enemy and save the house—they will say that Edith Lance is a heroine, and her name will be probably preserved in the memory of the neighborhood. But if I fail and lose my life, they will say that Edith was a cracked-brained girl who deserved her fate, and that they had always predicted she would come to a bad end."

"Better go on to Hay Hill, Miss Edy! 'Deed, 'fore marster, better go to Hay Hill."

"No," said the young girl, "my resolution is taken—we will return to Luckenough."

The arguments of the old negroes waxed fainter and fewer. They felt a vague but potent confidence in Edith and her abilities, and a sense of protection in her presence, from which they were loth to part.

The sun was high when they entered the forest shades again.

"See," said Edith to her companions, "everything is so fresh and beautiful and joyous here! I cannot even imagine danger."

Edith on reaching Luckenough retired to bed, and addressed herself to sleep. It was

in vain—her nerves were fearfully excited. In vain she tried to combat her terrors—they completely overmastered her. She was violently shocked out of a fitful doze.

Old Jenny stood over her, lifting her up, shaking her, and shouting in her ears:

"Miss Edith! Miss Edith! They are here! They are here! We shall be murdered in our beds!"

In the room stood old Oliver, gray with terror, while all the dogs on the premises were barking madly, and a noisy party at the front was trying to force an entrance.

Violent knocking and shaking at the outer door and the sound of voices.

"Open! open! let us in! for God's sake, let us in!"

"Those are fugitives—not foes—listen—they plead—they do not threaten—go and unbar the door, Oliver," said Edith.

Reluctantly and cautiously the old man obeyed.

"Light another candle, Jenny—that is dying in its socket—it will be out in a minute."

Trembling all over, Jenny essayed to do as she was bid, but only succeeded in putting out the expiring light. The sound of the unbarring of the door had deprived her of the last remnant of self-control. Edith struck a light, while the sound of footsteps and voices in the hall warned her that several persons had entered.

"It's Nell, and Liddy, and Sol, from Hay Hill! Oh, Miss Edy! Thorg and his men are up dar a 'stroyin' everything! Oh, Miss Edy! an' us thought it was so safe an' out'n de way up dar! Oh, what a 'scape! what a 'scape we-dem has had!"

CHAPTER II.

THE ATTACK.

That summer day was so holy in its beauty, so bright, so clear, so cool; that rural scene was so soothing in its influences, so calm, so fresh, so harmonious; it was

almost impossible to associate with that lovely day and scene thoughts of wrong and violence and cruelty. So felt Edith as she sometimes lifted her eyes from her work to the beauty and glory of nature around her. And if now her heart ached it was more with grief for Fanny's fate than dread of her own. There comes, borne upon the breeze that lifts her dark tresses, and fans her pearly cheeks, the music of many rural voices—of rippling streams and rustling leaves and twittering birds and humming bees.

But mingled with these, at length, there comes to her attentive ear a sound, or the suspicion of a sound, of distant horse hoofs falling upon the forest leaves—it draws nearer—it becomes distinct—she knows it now—it is—it is a troop of British soldiers approaching the house!

They rode in a totally undisciplined and disorderly manner; reeling in their saddles, drunken with debauchery, red-hot, reeking from some scene of fire and blood!

And in no condition to be operated upon by Edith's beautiful and holy influences.

They galloped into the yard—they galloped up to the house—their leader threw himself heavily from his horse and advanced to the door.

It was the terrible and remorseless Thorg! No one could doubt the identity for a single instant. The low, square-built, thick-set body, the huge head, the bull neck, heavy jowl, coarse, sensual lips, bloodshot eyes, and fiery visage surrounded with coarse red hair—the whole brutalized, demonized aspect could belong to no monster in the universe but that cross between the fiend and the beast called Thorg! And now he came, intoxicated, inflamed, burning with fierce passions from some fell scene of recent violence!

Pale as death, and nearly as calm, Edith awaited his coming. She could not hope to influence this man or his associates. She knew her fate now—it was death!—death by her own hand, before that man's foot should profane her threshold! She knew her fate, and knowing it, grew calm and strong. There were no more hopes or fears or

doubts or trepidations. Over the weakness of the flesh the spirit ruled victorious, and Edith stood revealed to herself richly endowed with that heroism she had so worshiped in others—in that supreme moment mistress of herself and of her fate. To die by her own hand! but not rashly—not till a trial should be made—not till the last moment. And how beautiful in this last fateful moment she looked! The death pallor had passed from her countenance—the summer breeze was lifting the light black curls—soft shadows were playing upon the pearly brow—a strange elevation irradiated her face, and it "shone as it had been the face of an angel."

"By George! boys, what a pretty wench! Keep back, you d——d rascals!" (for the men had dismounted and were pressing behind him) "keep back, I say, you drunken ——! Let rank have precedence in love as in other things! Your turn may come afterward! Ho! pretty mistress, has your larder the material to supply my men with a meal?"

Edith glanced around for her attendants. Jenny lay upon the hall floor, fallen forward upon her face, in a deep swoon. Oliver stood out upon the lawn, his teeth chattering, and his knees knocking together with terror, yet faintly meditating a desperate onslaught to the rescue with his wooden rake.

"No matter! for first of all we must have a taste of those dainty lips; stand back, bl—t you," he vociferated with a volley of appalling oaths, that sent the disorderly men, who were again crowding behind him, back into the rear; "we would be alone, d—— you; do you hear?"

The drunken soldiers fell back, and he advanced toward Edith, who stood calm in desperate resolution. She raised her hand to supplicate or wave him off, he did not care which—her other hand, hanging down by her side, grasped the pistol, which she concealed in the folds of her dress.

"Hear me," she said, "one moment, I beseech you!"

The miscreant paused.

"Proceed, my beauty! Only don't let the grace before meat be too long."

"I am a soldier's child," said Edith; her sweet, clear voice slightly quavering like the strings of a lute over which the wind has passed; "I am a soldier's child—my father died gallantly on the field of battle. You are soldiers, and will not hurt a soldier's orphan daughter."

"Not for the universe, my angel; bl——t 'em! let any of 'em hurt a hair of your head! I only want to love you a little, my beauty! that's all!—only want to pet you to your heart's content;" and the brute made a step toward her.

"Hear me!" exclaimed Edith, raising her hand.

"Well, well, go on, my dear, only don't be too long!—for my men want something to eat and drink, and I have sworn not to break my fast until I know the flavor of those ripe lips."

Edith's fingers closed convulsively upon the pistol still held bidden.

"I am alone and defenseless," she said; "I remained here, voluntarily, to protect our home, because I had faith in the better feelings of men when they should be appealed to. I had heard dreadful tales of the ravages of the enemy through neighboring sections of the country. I did not fully believe them. I thought them the exaggerations of terror, and knew how such stories grow in the telling. I could not credit the worst, believing, as I did, the British nation to be an upright and honorable enemy—British soldiers to be men—and British officers gentlemen. Sir, have I trusted in vain? Will you not let me and my servants retire in peace? All that the cellars and storehouses of Luckenough contain is at your disposal. You will leave myself and attendants unmolested. I have not trusted in the honor of British soldiers to my own destruction!"

"A pretty speech, my dear, and prettily spoken—but not half so persuasive as the sweet wench that uttered it," said Thorg, springing toward her.

Edith suddenly raised the pistol—an expression of deadly determination upon her

face.

Thorg as suddenly fell back. He was an abominable coward in addition to his other qualities.

"Seize that girl! Seize and disarm her! What mean you, rascals? Are you to be foiled by a girl? Seize and disarm her, I say! Are you men?"

Yes, they were men, and therefore, drunken and brutal as they were, they hesitated to close upon one helpless girl.

"H—l fire and furies! surround! disarm her, I say!" vociferated Thorg.

Edith stood, her hand still grasping the pistol—her other one raised in desperate entreaty.

"Oh! one moment! for heaven's sake, one moment! Still hear me! I would not have fired upon your captain! Nor would I fire upon one of you, who close upon me only at your captain's order. There is something within me that shrinks from taking life! even the life of an enemy—any life but my own, and that only in such a desperate strait as this. Oh! by the mercy that is in my own heart, show mercy to me! You are men! You have mothers, or sisters, or wives at home, whom you hope to meet again, when war and its insanities are over. Oh! for their sakes, show mercy to the defenseless girl who stands here in your power! Do not compel her to shed her own blood! for, sure as you advance one step toward me, I pull this trigger, and fall dead at your feet." And Edith raised the pistol and placed the muzzle to her own temple—her finger against the trigger.

The men stood still—the captain swore.

"H—l fire and flames! Do you intend to stand there all day, to hear the wench declaim? Seize her, curse you! Wrench that weapon from her hand."

"Not so quick as I can pull the trigger!" said Edith—her eyes blazing with the sense of having fate—the worst of fate in her own hands; it was but a pressure of the

finger, to be made quick as lightning, and she was beyond their power! Her finger was on the trigger—the muzzle of the pistol, a cold ring of steel, pressed her burning temple! She felt it kindly—protective as a friend's kiss!

"Seize her! Seize her, curse you!" cried the brutal Thorg, "what care I whether she pull the trigger or not? Before the blood cools in her body, I will have had my satisfaction! Seize her, you infernal—"

"Captain, countermand your order! I beg, I entreat you, countermand your order! You yourself will greatly regret having given it, when you are calmer," said a young officer, riding hastily forward, and now, for the first time, taking a part in the scene.

An honorable youth in a band of licensed military marauders.

"'Sdeath, sir! Don't interfere with me! Seize her, rascals!"

"One step more, and I pull the trigger!" said Edith.

"Captain Thorg! This must not be!" persisted the young officer.

"D—n, sir! Do you oppose me? Do you dare? Fall back, sir, I command you! Scoundrels! close upon that wench and bind her!"

"Captain Thorg! This shall not be! Do you hear? Do you understand? I say this violence shall not be perpetrated!" said the young officer, firmly.

"D—n, sir! Are you drunk, or mad? You are under arrest, sir! Corporal Truman, take Ensign Shields' sword!"

The young man was quickly disarmed, and once more the captain vociferated:

"Knock down and disarm that vixen! Obey your orders, villains! Or by h—l, and all its fiends, I'll have you all court-martialed, and shot before to-morrow noon!"

The soldiers closed around the unprotected girl.

"Lord, all merciful! forgive my sins," she prayed, and with a firm hand pulled the trigger!

It did not respond to her touch—it failed! it failed!

Casting the traitorous weapon from her, she sunk upon her knees, murmuring:

"Lost—lost—all is lost!" remained crushed, overwhelmed, awaiting her fate!

"Ha! ha! ha! as pretty a little make-believe as ever I saw!" laughed the brutal Thorg, now perfectly at his ease, and gloating over her beauty, and helplessness, and, deadly terror. "As pretty a little sham as ever I saw!"

"It was no sham! She couldn't sham! I drawed out the shot unbeknownst to her! I wish, I does, my fingers had shriveled and dropped off afore they ever did it!" exclaimed Oliver, in a passion of remorse, as he ran forward, rake in hand.

He was quickly thrown down and disarmed—no one had any hesitation in dealing with him.

"Now then, my fair!" said Thorg, moving toward his victim.

Edith was now wild with desperation—her eyes flew wildly around in search of help, where help there seemed none. Then she turned with the frenzied impulse of flying.

But the men surrounded to cut off her retreat.

"Nay, nay, let her run! Let her run! Give her a fair start, and do you give chase! It will be the rarest sport! Fox-hunting is a good thing, but girl-chasing must be the very h—l of sport, when I tell you—mind, I tell you, men—she shall be the exclusive prize of him who catches her!" swore the remorseless Thorg.

Edith had gained the back door.

They started in pursuit.

"Now, by the living Lord that made me, the first man that lays hands on her shall die!" suddenly exclaimed the young ensign, wresting his sword from the hand of the corporal, springing between Edith and her pursuers, flashing out the blade, and brandishing it in the faces of the foremost.

He was but a stripling, scarcely older than Edith's self—the arm that wielded that

slender blade scarcely stronger than Edith's own—but the fire that flashed from the eagle eye showed a spirit to rescue or die in her defense.

Thorg threw himself into the most frantic fury—a volley of the most horrible oaths was discharged from his lips.

"Upon that villain, men! Beat him down! Slay him! Pin him to the ground with your bayonets! And then! do your will with the girl!"

But before this fiendish order could be executed, ay, before it was half spoken, whirled into the yard a body or about thirty horsemen, galloping fiercely to the rescue with drawn swords and shouting voices.

They were nearly three times the number of the foraging soldiers.

CHAPTER III.

YOUNG AMERICA IN 1814.

Young students of the neighboring academy—mere boys of from thirteen to eighteen years of age, but brave, spirited, vigorous lads, well mounted, well armed, and led on by the redoubtable college hero, Cloudesley Mornington. They rushed forward, they surrounded, they fell upon the marauders with an absolute shower of blows.

"Give it to them, men! This for Fanny! This for Edith! And this! and this! and this for both of them!" shouted Cloudesley, as he vigorously laid about him. "Strike for Hay Hill and vengeance! Let them have it, my men! And you, little fellows! Small young gentlemen, with the souls of heroes, and the bodies of elves, who can't strike a very hard blow, aim where your blows will tell! Aim at their faces. This for Fanny! This for Edith!" shouted Cloudesley, raining his strokes right and left, but never at random.

He fought his way through to the miscreant Thorg.

Thorg was still on foot, armed with a sword, and laying about him savagely among the crowd of foes that had surrounded him.

Cloudesley was still on horseback—he had caught up an ax that lay carelessly upon the lawn, and now he rushed upon Thorg from behind.

He had no scruple in taking this advantage of the enemy—no scruple with an unscrupulous monster—an outlawed wretch—a wild beast to be destroyed, when and where and how it was possible!

And so Cloudesley came on behind, and elevating this formidable weapon in both hands, raising himself in his stirrups and throwing his whole weight with the stroke, he dealt a blow upon the head of Thorg that brought him to the earth stunned. From the impetus Cloudesley himself had received, he had nearly lost his saddle, but had recovered.

"They fly! They fly! By the bones of Caesar, the miscreants fly! After them, my men! After them! Pursue! pursue!" shouted Cloudesley, wheeling his horse around to follow.

But just then, the young British officer standing near Edith, resting on his sword, breathing, as it were, after a severe conflict, caught Cloudesley's eyes. Intoxicated with victory, Cloudesley sprang from his horse, and raising his ax, rushed up the stairs upon the youth!

Edith sprang and threw herself before the stripling, impulsively clasping her arms around him to shield him, and then throwing up one arm to ward off a blow, looked up and exclaimed:

"He is my preserver—my preserver, Cloudesley!"

And what did the young ensign do? Clasped Edith quietly but closely to his breast.

It was a beautiful, beautiful picture!

Nay, any one might understand how it was—that not years upon years of ordinary

acquaintance could have so drawn, so knitted these young hearts together as those few hours of supreme danger.

"My preserver, Cloudesley! My preserver!"

Cloudesley grounded his ax.

"I don't understand that, Edith! He is a British officer."

"He is my deliverer! When Thorg set his men on me to hunt me, he cast himself before me, and kept them at bay until you came!"

"Mutinied!" exclaimed Cloudesley, in astonishment, and a sort of horror.

"Yes, I suppose it was mutiny," said the young ensign, speaking for the first time and blushing as he withdrew his arm from Edith's waist.

"Whe-ew! here's a go!" Cloudesley was about to exclaim, but remembering himself he amended his phraseology, and said, "A very embarrassing situation, yours, sir."

"I cannot regret it!"

"Certainly not! There are laws of God and humanity above all military law, and such you obeyed, sir! I thank you on the part of my young countrywoman," said Cloudesley, who imagined that he could talk about as well as he could fight.

"If the occasion could recur, I would do it again! Yes, a thousand times!" the young man's eyes added to Edith—only to her.

"But oh! perdition! while I am talking here that serpent! that copperhead! that cobra capella! is coming round again! How astonishingly tenacious of life all foul, venomous creatures are!" exclaimed Cloudesley, as he happened to espy Throg moving slightly where he lay, and rushed out to dispatch him.

The other two young people were left alone in the hall.

"I am afraid you have placed yourself in a very, very dangerous situation, by what you did to save me."

"But do you know—oh, do you know how happy it has made me? Can you divine

how my heart—yes, my soul—burns with the joy it has given me? When I saw you standing there before your enemies so beautiful! so calm! so constant—I felt that I could die for you—that I would die for you. And when I sprang between you and your pursuers, I had resolved to die for you. But first to set your soul free. Edith, you should not have fallen into the hands of the soldiers! Yes! I had determined to die for and with you! You are safe. And whatever befalls me, Edith, will you remember that?"

"You are faint! You are wounded! Indeed you are wounded! Oh, where! Oh! did any of our people strike you?"

"No—it was one of our men, Edith! I do not know your other name, sweet lady!"

"Never mind my name—it is Edith—that will do; but your wound—your wound—oh! you are very pale—here! lie down upon this settee. Oh, it is too hard!—come into my room, it opens here upon the hall—there is a comfortable lounge there—come in and lie down—let me get you something?"

"Thanks—thanks, dearest lady, but I must get upon my horse and go!"

"Go?"

"Yes, Edith—don't you understand, that after what I have done—after what I have had the joy of doing—the only honorable course left open to me, is to go and give myself up to answer the charges that may be brought against me?"

"Oh, heaven! I know! I know what you have incurred by defending me! I know the awful penalty laid upon a military officer who lifts his hand against his superior. Don't go! oh, don't go!"

"And do you really take so much interest in my fate, sweetest lady?" said the youth, gazing at her with the deepest and most delightful emotions.

"'Take an interest' in my generous protector! How should I help it? Oh! don't go! Don't think of going. You will not—will you? Say that you will not!"

"You will not advise me to anything dishonorable, I am sure."

"No—no—but oh! at such a fearful cost you have saved me. Oh! when I think of it, I wish you had not interfered to defend me. I wish it had not been done!"

"And I would not for the whole world that it had not been done! Do not fear for me, sweetest Edith! I run little risk in voluntarily placing myself in the hands of a court-martial—for British officers are gentlemen, Edith!—you must not judge them by those you have seen—and when they hear all the circumstances, I have little doubt that my act will be justified—besides, my fate will rest with Ross, General Ross—one of the most gallant and noble spirits ever created, Edith! And now you must let me go, fairest lady." And he raised her hand respectfully to his lips, bowed reverently, and left the hall to find his horse.

Just then Cloudesley was seen approaching, crying out that they had escaped.

"You are not going to leave us, sir?" he asked Cloudesley, catching sight of the ensign.

"I am under the necessity of doing so."

"But you are not able to travel—you can scarcely sit your horse. Pray do not think of leaving us."

"You are a soldier—at least an amateur one, and you will understand that after what has occurred, I must not seem to hide myself like a fugitive from justice! In short, I must go and answer for that which I have done."

"I understand, but really, sir, you look very ill—you—"

But here the young officer held out his hand smilingly, took leave of Cloudesley, and bowing low to Edith, rode off.

Cloudesley and Edith followed the gallant fellow with their eyes. He had nearly reached the gate, the old green gate at the farthest end of the semi-circular avenue, when the horse stopped, the rider reeled and fell from his saddle. Cloudesley and

Edith ran toward him—reached him. Cloudesley disentangled his foot from the stirrup, and raised him in his arms. Edith stood pale and breathless by.

"He has fainted! I knew he was suffering extreme pain. Edith! fly and get some water! Or rather here! sit down and hold up his head while I go."

Edith was quickly down by the side of her preserver, supporting his head upon her breast. Cloudesley sped toward the house for water and assistance. When he procured what he wanted and returned, he met the troop of collegians on their return from the chase of the retreating marauders. They reported that they had scattered the fugitives in every direction and lost them in the labyrinths of the forest.

Several of them dismounted and gathered around the young ensign.

But Cloudesley was now upon the spot, and while he bathed the face of the fainting man, explained to them how it was, and requested some one to ride immediately to the village and procure a physician. Thurston Willcoxen, the next in command under him, and his chosen brother-in-arms, mounted his horse and galloped off.

In the meantime the wounded man was carried to the mansion house and laid upon a cot in one of the parlors.

Presently Edith heard wheels roll up to the door and stop. She looked up. It was the carriage of the surgeon, whom she saw alight and walk up the steps. She went to meet him, composedly as she could, and conducted him to the door of the sick-room, which he entered. Edith remained in the hall, softly walking up and down, and sometimes pausing to listen.

After a little, the door opened. It was only Solomon Weismann, who asked for warm water, lint, and a quantity of old linen. These Edith quickly supplied, and then remained alone in the hall, walking up and down, and pausing to listen as before; once she heard a deep shuddering groan, as of one in mortal extremity, and her own heart and frame thrilled to the sound, and then all was still as before.

An hour, two hours, passed, and then the door opened again, and Edith caught a

glimpse of the surgeon, with his shirt sleeves pushed above his elbows, and a pair of bloody hands. It was Solomon who opened the door to ask for a basin of water, towels and soap, for the doctor to wash. Edith furnished these also.

Half an hour passed, and the door opened a third time, and the doctor himself came out, fresh and smiling. His countenance and his manner were in every respect encouraging.

"Come into the drawing-room a moment, if you please, Miss Edith, I want to speak with you."

Edith desired nothing more earnestly just at that moment.

"Well, doctor—your patient?" she inquired, anxiously.

"Will do very well! Will do very well! That is, if he be properly attended to, and that is what I wished to speak to you about, Miss Edith. I have seen you near sick-beds before this, my dear, and know that I can better trust you than any one to whom I could at present apply. I intend to install you as his nurse, my dear. When a life depends upon your care, you will waive any scruples you might otherwise feel, Miss Edith, I am sure! You will have your old maid, Jenny, to assist you, and Solomon at hand, in case of an emergency. But I intend to delegate my authority, and leave my directions with you."

"Yes, doctor, I will do my very best for your patient."

"I am sure of that. I am sure of that."

Edith watched by his cot through all the night, fanning him softly, keeping his chest covered from the air, giving him his medicine at the proper intervals, and putting drink to his lips when he needed it. But never trusted her eyelids to close for a moment. Jenny shared her vigil by nodding in an easy chair; and Solomon Weismann, a young medical student, by sleeping soundly on the wooden settee in the hall. So passed the night. After midnight, to Edith's great relief, his fever began to abate, and he sank into a sweet sleep. In the morning Solomon roused himself,

and came in and relieved Edith's watch, and attended to the wants of the patient, while she went to her room to bathe her face and weary eyes.

But instead of growing better the patient grew worse, and for days life was despaired of. The most skillful medical treatment, and the most careful nursing scarcely saved his life. And even after the imminent danger was over, it was weeks before he was able to be lifted from the bed to the sofa.

In the meantime, Throg, who was also treated by the doctor, recovered. He took quite an affectionate leave of the young ensign, and with an appearance of great friendliness and honesty, promised to interest himself at headquarters in behalf of the young officer. This somehow filled Edith with a vague distrust, and dark foreboding, for which she could neither account, nor excuse herself, nor yet shake off. Thorg had been exchanged, and he joined his regiment after its return from Washington City, and before it sailed from the shores of America.

Weeks passed, during which the invalid occupied the sofa in his room—and Edith was his sole nurse. And then Commodore Waugh, with his wife, servants and caravan returned to Luckenough.

The old soldier had been "posted up," he said, relative to all that had transpired in his absence.

There were no words, he declared, to express his admiration of Edith's "heroism."

It was in vain that Edith assured him that she had not been heroic at all—that the preservation of Luckenough had been due rather to the timely succor of the college boys than to her own imprudent resolution. It did no good—the old man was determined to look upon his niece as a heroine worthy to stand by the side of Joan of Arc.

"For," said he, "was it not the soul of a heroine that enabled her to stay and guard the house; and would the college company ever have come to the rescue of these old walls if they had not heard that she had resolutely remained to guard them and was

almost alone in the house? Don't tell me! Edith is the star maiden of old St. Mary's, and I'm proud of her! She is worthy to be my niece and heiress! A true descendant of Marie Zelenski, is she! And I'll tell you what I'll do, Edith!" he said, turning to her, "I'll reward you, my dear! I will. I'll marry you to Professor Grimshaw! That's what I'll do, my dear! And you both shall have Luckenough; that you shall!"

Months passed—the war was over—peace was proclaimed, and still the young ensign, an invalid, unable to travel, lingered at Luckenough. Regularly he received his pay; twice he received an extension of leave of absence; and all through the instrumentality of—Thorg. Yet all this filled Edith with the greatest uneasiness and foreboding—ungrateful, incomprehensible, yet impossible to be delivered from.

CHAPTER IV.

EDITH'S TROUBLES.

Late in the spring Ensign Michael Shields received orders to join his regiment in Canada, and upon their reception he had an explanation with Edith, and with her permission, had requested her hand of her uncle, Commodore Waugh. This threw the veteran into a towering passion, and nearly drove him from his proprieties as host. The young ensign was unacceptable to him upon every account. First and foremost, he wasn't "Grim," Then he was an Israelite. And, lastly! horror of horrors! he was a British officer, and dared to aspire to the hand of Edith. It was in vain that his wife, the good Henrietta, tried to mollify him; the storm raged for several days—raged, till it had expended all its strength, and subsided from exhaustion. Then he called Edith and tried to talk the matter over calmly with her.

"Now all I have to say to you, Edith, is this," he concluded, "that if you will have the good sense to marry Mr. Grimshaw, these intentions shall be more than fulfilled—they shall be anticipated. Upon your marriage with Grimshaw, I will give you a conveyance of Luckenough—only reserving to myself and Old Hen a house,

and a life-support in the place; but if you will persist in your foolish preference for that young scamp, I will give you—nothing. That is all, Edith."

During the speech Edith remained standing, with her eyes fixed upon the floor. Now, she spoke in a tremulous voice:

"That is all—is it not, uncle? You will not deprive me of any portion of your love; will you, uncle?"

"I do not know, Edith! I cannot tell; when you have deliberately chosen one of your own fancy, in preference to one of mine—the man I care most for in the world, and whom I chose especially for you; why, you've speared me right through a very tender part; however, as I said before, what you do, do quickly! I cannot bear to be kept upon the tenter hooks!"

"I will talk with Michael, uncle," said Edith, meekly.

She went out, and found him pacing the lawn at the back of the house.

He turned toward her with a glad smile, took her hand as she approached him, and pressed it to his lips.

"Dearest Edith, where have you been so long?"

"With my uncle, Michael. I have my uncle's 'ultimatum,' as he calls it."

"What is it, Edith?"

"Ah! how shall I tell you without offense? But, dearest Michael you will not mind—you will forgive an old man's childish prejudices, especially when you know they are not personal—but circumstantial, national, bigoted."

"Well, Edith! well?"

"Michael, he says—he says that I may give you my hand—"

"Said he so! Bless that fair hand, and bless him who bestows it!" he exclaimed, clasping her fingers and pressing them to his lips.

"Yes, Michael, but—"

"But what! there is no but; he permits you to give me your hand; there is then no but—'a jailer to bring forth some monstrous malefactor.'"

"Yet listen! You know I was to have been his heiress!"

"No, indeed I did not know it! never heard it! never suspected it! never even thought of it! How did I know but that he had sons and daughters, or nephews away at school!"

"Well, I was to have been his heiress. Now he disinherits me, unless I consent to be married to his friend and favorite, Dr. Grimshaw."

"You put the case gently and delicately, dear Edith, but the hard truth is this—is it not—that he will disinherit you, if you consent to be mine? You need not answer me, dearest Edith, if you do not wish to; but listen—I have nothing but my sword, and beyond my boundless love nothing to offer you but the wayward fate of a soldier's wife. Your eyes are full of tears. Speak, Edith Lance! Can you share the soldier's wandering life? Speak, Edith, or lay your hand in mine. Yet, no! no! no! I am selfish and unjust. Take time, love, to think of all you abandon, all that you may encounter in joining your fate to mine. God knows what it has cost me to say it—but—take time, Edith," and he pressed and dropped her hand.

"I do not need to do so. My answer to-day, to-morrow, and forever, must be the same," she answered, in a very low voice; and her eyes sought the ground, and the blush deepened on her cheek, as she laid her hand in his. How he pressed that white hand, to his lips, to his heart! How he clasped her to his breast! How he vowed to love and cherish her as the dearest treasure of his life need not here be told.

Edith said:

"Now take me in to uncle, and tell him, for he asked me not to keep him in suspense."

Michael led her into the hall, where the commodore strode up and down, making the old rafters tremble and quake with every tread—puffing—blowing over his fallen

hopes, like a nor'-wester over the dead leaves.

Michael advanced, holding the hand of his affianced, and modestly announced their engagement.

"Humph! So the precious business is concluded, is it?"

"Yes, sir," said Michael, with a bow.

"Well, I hope you may be as happy as you deserve! When is the proceeding to come off?"

"What, sir?"

"The marriage, young gentleman?"

"When shall I say, dearest Edith?" asked Michael, stooping to her ear.

"When uncle pleases," murmured the girl.

"Uncle pleases nothing, and will have nothing to do with it, except to advise as early a day as possible," he blurted out; "what says the bride?"

"Answer, dearest Edith," entreated Michael Shields.

"Then let it be at New Year," said Edith, falteringly.

"Whew!—six months ahead! Entirely too far off!" exclaimed the commodore.

"And so it really is, beloved," whispered Michael.

"Let it be next week," abruptly broke in the commodore. "What's the use of putting it off? Tuesdays and Thursdays are the marrying days, I believe; let it then be Tuesday or Thursday."

"Tuesday," pleaded Michael.

"Thursday," murmured Edith.

"The deuce!—if you can't decide, I must decide for you," growled Old Nick, storming down toward the extremity of the hall, and roaring—"Old Hen! Old Hen! These fools are to be spliced on Sunday! Now bring me my pipe;" and the

commodore withdrew to his sanctum.

Good Henrietta came in, took the hand of the young ensign, and pressed it warmly, saying that he would have a good wife, and wishing them both much happiness in their union. She drew Edith to her bosom, and kissed her fondly, but in silence.

As this was Friday evening, little preparations could be made for the solemnity to take place on Sunday. Yet Mrs. Henrietta exerted herself to do all possible honor to the occasion. That very evening she sent out a few invitations to the dinner and ball, that in those days invariably celebrated a country wedding. She even invited a few particular friends to meet the bridal pair at dinner, on their return from church.

The little interval between this and Sunday morning was passed by Edith and Shields in making arrangements for their future course.

Sunday came.

A young lady of the neighborhood officiated as bridesmaid, and Cloudesley Mornington as groomsman. The ceremony was to be performed at the Episcopal Church at Charlotte Hall. The bridal party set forward in two carriages. They were attended by the commodore and Mrs. Waugh. They reached the church at an early hour, and the marriage was solemnized before the morning service. When the entries had been made, and the usual congratulations passed, the party returned to the carriages. Before entering his own, Commodore Waugh approached that in which the bride and bridegroom were already seated, and into which the groomsman was about to hand the bridesmaid.

"Stay, you two, you need not enter just yet," said the old man, "I want to speak with Mr. Shields and his wife, Edith!"

Edith put her head forward, eagerly.

"I have nothing against you; but after what has occurred, I don't want to see you at Luckenough again. Good-by!" Then, turning to Shields, he said, "I will have your own and your wife's goods forwarded to the hotel, here," and nodding gruffly, he

strode away.

Cloudesley stormed, Edith begged that the carriage might be delayed yet a little while. Vain Edith's hope, and vain Mrs. Waugh's expostulations, Old Nick was not to be mollified. He said that "those who pleased to remain with the new-married couple, might do so—he should go home! They did as they liked, and he should do as he liked." Mrs. Waugh, Cloudesley, and the bridesmaid determined to stay.

The commodore entered his carriage, and was driven toward home.

The party then adjourned to the hotel. Mrs. Waugh comforting Edith, and declaring her intention to stay with her as long as she should remain in the neighborhood—for Henrietta always did as she pleased, notwithstanding the opposition of her stormy husband. The young bridesmaid and Cloudesley also expressed their determination to stand by their friends to the last.

Their patience was not put to a very long test. In a few days a packet was to sail from Benedict to Baltimore, and the young couple took advantage of the opportunity, and departed, with the good wishes of their few devoted friends.

Their destination was Toronto, in Canada, where the young ensign's regiment was quartered.

CHAPTER V.

SANS SOUCI.

Several miles from the manor of Luckenough, upon a hill not far from the seacoast, stood the cottage of the Old Fields.

The property was an appendage to the Manor of Luckenoug—, and was at this time occupied by a poor relation of Commodore Waugh, his niece, Mary L'Oiseau, the widow of a Frenchman. Mrs. L'Oiseau had but one child, a little girl, Jacquelina, now about eight or nine years of age.

Commodore Waugh had given them the cottage to live in, permission to make a living, if they could, out of the poor land attached to it. This was all the help he had afforded his poor niece, and all, as she said, that she could reasonably expect from one who had so many dependents. For several years past the little property had afforded her a bare subsistence.

And now this year the long drought had parched up her garden and corn-field, and her cows had failed in their yield of milk for the want of grass.

It was upon a dry and burning day, near the last of August, that Mary L'Oiseau and her daughter sat down to their frugal breakfast. And such a frugal breakfast! The cheapest tea, with brown sugar, and a corn cake baked upon the griddle, and a little butter—that was all! It was spread upon a plain pine table without a tablecloth.

The furniture of the room was in keeping—a sanded floor, a chest of drawers, with a small looking-glass, ornamented by a sprig of asparagus, a dresser of rough pine shelves on the right of the fireplace, and a cupboard on the left, a half-dozen chip-bottomed chairs, a spinning-wheel, and a reel and jack, completed the appointments.

Mrs. L'Oiseau was devouring the contents of a letter, which ran thus:

"MARY, MY DEAR! I feel as if I had somewhat neglected you, but, the truth is, my arm is not long enough to stretch from Luckenough to Old Fields. That being the case, and myself and Old Hen being rather lonesome since Edith's ungrateful desertion, we beg you to take little Jacko, and come live with us as long as we may live—and of what may come after that we will talk at some time. If you will be ready I will send the carriage for you on Saturday.

"YOUR UNCLE NICK."

Mrs. L'Oiseau read this letter with a changing cheek—when she finished it she folded and laid it aside in silence.

Then she called to her side her child—her Jacquelina—her Sans Souci—as for her

gay, thoughtless temper she was called. I should here describe the mother and daughter to you. The mother needs little description—a pale, black-haired, black-eyed woman, who should have been blooming and sprightly, but that care had damped her spirits, and cankered the roses in her cheeks.

But Jacquelina—Sans Souci—merits a better portrait. She was small and slight for her years, and, though really near nine, would have been taken for six or seven. She was fair-skinned, blue-eyed and golden-haired. And her countenance, full of spirit, courage and audacity. As she would dart her face upward toward the sun, her round, smooth, highly polished white forehead would seem to laugh in light between its clustering curls of burnished gold, that, together with the little, slightly turned-up nose, and short, slightly protruded upper lip, gave the charm of inexpressible archness to the most mischievous countenance alive. In fact her whole form, features, expression and gestures seemed instinct with mischief—mischief lurked in the kinked tendrils of her bright hair; mischief looked out and laughed in the merry, malicious blue eyes; mischief crept slyly over the bows of her curbed and ruby lips, and mischief played at hide and seek among the rosy dimples of her blooming cheeks.

"Now, Jacquelina," said Mrs. L'Oiseau, "you must cure yourself of these hoydenish tricks of yours before you expose them to your uncle—remember how whimsical and eccentric he is."

"So am I! Just as whimsical! I'll do him dirt," said the young lady.

"Good heaven! Where did you ever pick up such a phrase, and what upon earth does doing any one 'dirt' mean?" asked the very much shocked lady.

"I mean I'll grind his nose on the ground, I'll hurry him and worry him, and upset him, and cross him, and make him run his head against the wall, and butt his blundering brains out. What did he turn Fair Edith away for? Oh! I'll pay him off! I'll settle with him! Fair Edith shan't be in his debt for her injuries very long."

From her pearly brow and pearly cheeks, "Fair Edith" was the name by which the child had heard her cousin once called, and she had called her thus ever since.

Mrs. L'Oiseau answered gravely.

"Your uncle gave Edith a fair choice between his own love and protection, and the great benefits he had in store for her, and the love of a stranger and foreigner, whom he disapproved and hated. Edith deliberately chose the latter. And your uncle had a perfect right to act upon her unwise decision."

"And for my part, I know he hadn't—all of my own thoughts. Oh! I'll do him—"

"Hush! Jacquelina. You shall not use such expressions. So much comes of my letting you have your own way, running down to the beach and watching the boats, and hearing the vulgar talk of the fishermen."

On Saturday, at the hour specified, the carriage came to Old Field Cottage, and conveyed Mrs. L'Oiseau and her child to Luckenough. They were very kindly received by the commodore, and affectionately embraced by Henrietta, who conducted them to a pleasant room, where they could lay off their bonnets, and which they were thenceforth to consider as their own apartment. This was not the one which had been occupied by Edith. Edith's chamber had been left undisturbed and locked up by Mrs. Waugh, and was kept ever after sacred to her memory.

The sojourn of Mrs. L'Oiseau and Jacquelina at Luckenough was an experiment on the part of the commodore. He did not mean to commit himself hastily, as in the case of his sudden choice of Edith as his heiress. He intended to take a good, long time for what he called "mature deliberation"—often one of the greatest enemies to upright, generous, and disinterested action—to hope, faith, and charity, that I know of, by the way. Commodore Waugh also determined to have his own will in all things, this time at least. He had the vantage ground now, and was resolved to keep it. He had caught Sans Souci young, before she could possibly have formed even a childish predilection for one of the opposite sex, and he was determined to raise and

educate a wife for his beloved Grim.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BLIGHTED HEART.

In February the deepest snow storm fell that had fallen during the whole winter. The roads were considered quite impassable by carriages, and the family at Luckenough were blocked up in their old house. Yet one day, in the midst of this "tremendous state of affairs," as the commodore called it, a messenger from Benedict arrived at Luckenough, the bearer of a letter to Mrs. Waugh, which he refused to intrust to any other hands but that lady's own. He was, therefore, shown into the presence of the mistress, to whom he presented the note. Mrs. Waugh took it and looked at it with some curiosity—it was superscribed in a slight feminine hand—quite new to Henrietta; and she opened it, and turned immediately to the signature—Marian Mayfield—a strange name to her; she had never seen or heard it before. She lost no more time in perusing the letter, but as she read, her cheek flushed and paled—her agitation became excessive, she was obliged to ring for a glass of water, and as soon as she had swallowed it she crushed and thrust the letter into her bosom, ordered her mule to be saddled instantly, and her riding pelisse and hood to be brought. In two hours and a half Henrietta reached the village, and alighted at the little hotel. Of the landlord, who came forth respectfully to meet her, she demanded to be shown immediately to the presence of the young lady who had recently arrived from abroad. The host bowed, and inviting the lady to follow him, led the way to the little private parlor, the door of which he opened to let the visitor pass in, and then bowing again, he closed it and retired.

And Mrs. Waugh found herself in a small, half-darkened room, where, reclining in an easy chair, sat—Edith? Was it Edith? Could it be Edith? That fair phantom of a girl to whom the black ringlets and black dress alone seemed to give outline and

personality? Yes, it was Edith! But, oh! so changed! so wan and transparent, with such blue shadows in the hollows of her eyes and temples and cheeks—with such heavy, heavy eyelids, seemingly dragged down by the weight of their long, sleeping lashes—with such anguish in the gaze of the melting, dark eyes!

"Edith, my love! My dearest Edith!" said Mrs. Waugh, going to her.

She half arose, and sank speechless into the kind arms opened to receive her. Mrs. Waugh held her to her bosom a moment in silence, and then said:

"Edith, my dear, I got a note from your friend, Miss Mayfield, saying that you had returned, and wished to see me. But how is this, my child? You have evidently been very ill—you are still. Where is your husband, Edith? Edith, where is your husband?"

A shiver that shook her whole frame—a choking, gasping sob, was all the answer she could make.

"Where is he, Edith? Ordered away somewhere, upon some distant service? That is hard, but never mind! Hope for the best! You will meet him again, dear? But where is he, then?"

She lifted up her poor head, and uttering—"Dead! dead!" dropped it heavily again upon the kind, supporting bosom.

"You do not mean it! My dear, you do not mean it! You do not know what you are saying! Dead! when? how?" asked Mrs. Waugh, in great trouble.

"Shot! shot!" whispered the poor thing, in a tone so hollow, it seemed reverberating through a vault. And then her stricken head sank heavily down—and Henrietta perceived that strength and consciousness had utterly departed. She placed her in the easy chair, and turned around to look for restoratives, when a door leading into an adjoining bedroom opened, and a young girl entered, and came quietly and quickly forward to the side of the sufferer. She greeted Mrs. Waugh politely, and then gave her undivided attention to Edith, whose care she seemed fully competent to

undertake.

This young girl was not over fourteen years of age, yet the most beautiful and blooming creature, Mrs. Waugh thought, that she had ever beheld.

Her presence in the room seemed at once to dispel the gloom and shadow.

She took Edith's hand, and settled her more at ease in the chair—but refused the cologne and the salammoniac that Mrs. Waugh produced, saying, cheerfully:

"She has not fainted, you perceive—she breathes—it is better to leave her to nature for a while—too much attention worries her—she is very weak."

Marian had now settled her comfortably back in the resting chair, and stood by her side, not near enough to incommode her in the least.

"I do not understand all this. She says that her husband is dead, poor child—how came it about? Tell me!" said Mrs. Waugh, in a low voice.

Marian's clear blue eyes filled with tears, but she dropped their white lids and long black lashes over them, and would not let them fall; and her ripe lips quivered, but she firmly compressed them, and remained silent for a moment. Then she said, in a whisper:

"I will tell you by and by," and she glanced at Edith, to intimate that the story must not be rehearsed in her presence, however insensible she might appear to be.

"You are the young lady who wrote to me?"

"Yes, madam."

"You are a friend of my poor girl's?"

"Something more than that, madam—I will tell you by and by," said Marian, and her kind, dear eyes were again turned upon Edith, and observing the latter slightly move, she said, in her pleasant voice:

"Edith, dear, shall I put you to bed—are you able to walk?"

"Yes, yes," murmured the sufferer, turning her head uneasily from side to side.

Marian gave her hand, and assisted the poor girl to rise, and tenderly supported her as she walked to the bedroom.

Mrs. Waugh arose to give her assistance, but Marian shook her head at her, with a kindly look, that seemed to say, "Do not startle her—she is used only to me lately," and bore her out of sight into the bedroom.

Presently she reappeared in the little parlor, opened the blinds, drew back the curtains, and let the sunlight into the dark room. Then she ordered more wood to the fire, and when it was replenished, and the servant had left the room, she invited Mrs. Waugh to draw her chair to the hearth, and then said:

"I am ready now, madam, to tell you anything you wish to know—indeed I had supposed that you were acquainted with everything relating to Edith's marriage, and its fatal results."

"I know absolutely nothing but what I have learned to-day. We never received a single letter, or message, or news of any kind, or in any shape, from Edith or her husband, from the day they left until now."

"Yon did not hear, then, that he was court-martialed, and—sentenced to death!"

"No, no—good heaven, no!"

"He was tried for mutiny or rebellion—I know not which—but it was for raising arms against his superior officers while here in America—the occasion was—but you know the occasion better than I do."

"Yes, yes, it was when he rescued Edith from the violence of Thorg and his men. But oh! heaven, how horrible! that he should have been condemned to death for a noble act! It is incredible—impossible—how could it have happened? He never expected such a fate—none of us did, or we would never have consented to his return. There seemed no prospect of such a thing. How could it have been?"

"There was treachery, and perhaps perjury, too. He had an insidious and

unscrupulous enemy, who assumed the guise of repentance, and candor, and friendship, the better to lure him into his toils—it was the infamous Colonel Thorg, who received the command of the regiment, in reward for his great services in America. And Michael's only powerful friend, who could and would have saved him—was dead. General Ross, you are aware, was killed in the battle of Baltimore."

"God have mercy on poor Edith! How long has it been since, this happened, my dear girl?"

"When they reached Toronto, in Canada West, the regiment commanded by Thorg was about to sail for England. On its arrival at York, in England, a court-martial was formed, and Michael was brought to trial. There was a great deal of personal prejudice, distortion of facts, and even perjury—in short, he was condemned and sentenced one day and led out and shot the next!"

There was silence between them then. Henrietta sat in pale and speechless horror.

"But how long is it since my poor Edith has been so awfully widowed?" at length inquired Mrs. Waugh.

"Nearly four months," replied Marian, in a tremulous voice. "For six weeks succeeding his death, she was not able to rise from her bed. I came from school to nurse her. I found her completely prostrated under the blow. I wonder she had not died. What power of living on some delicate frames seem to have. As soon as she was able to sit up, I began to think that it would be better to remove her from the strange country, the theatre of her dreadful sufferings, and to bring her to her own native land, among her own friends and relatives, where she might resume the life and habits of her girlhood, and where, with nothing to remind her of her loss, she might gradually come to look upon the few wretched months of her marriage, passed in England, as a dark dream. Therefore I have brought her back."

"And you, my dear child," she said, "you were Michael Shields' sister?"

"No, madam, no kin to him—and yet more than kin—for he loved me, and I loved

him more than any one else in the world, as I now love his poor young widow. This was the way of it, Mrs. Waugh: Michael's father and my mother had both been married before, and we were children of the first marriages; when Michael was fourteen years old, and I was seven, our parents were united, and we grew up together. About two years ago, Michael's father died. My mother survived him only five months, and departed, leaving me in charge of her stepson. We had no friends but each other. Our parents, since their union, had been isolated beings, for this reason—his father was a Jew—my mother a Christian—therefore the friends and relatives on either side were everlastingly offended by their marriage. Therefore we had no one but each other. The little property that was left was sold, and the proceeds enabled Michael to purchase a commission in the regiment about to sail for America, and also to place me at a good boarding school, where I remained until his return, and the catastrophe that followed it.

"Lady, all passed so suddenly, that I knew no word of his return, much less of his trial or execution, until I received a visit from the chaplain who had attended his last moments, and who brought me his farewell letter, and his last informal will, in which the poor fellow consigned me to the care of his wife, soon to be a widow, and enjoined me to leave school and seek her at once, and inclosed a check for the little balance he had in bank. I went immediately, found her insensible through grief, as I said—and, lady, I told you the rest."

Henrietta was weeping softly behind the handkerchief she held at her eyes. At last she repeated:

"You say he left you in his widow's charge?"

"Yes, madam."

"Left his widow in yours, rather, you good and faithful sister."

"It was the same thing, lady; we were to live together, and to support each other."

"But what was your thought, my dear girl, in bringing her here?"

"I told you, lady, that in her own native land, among her own kinsfolk, she might be comforted, and might resume her girlhood's thoughts and habits, and learn to forget the strange, dark passages of her short married life, passed in a foreign country."

"But, my dear girl, did you not know, had you never heard that her uncle disowned her for marrying against his will?"

"Something of that I certainly heard from Edith, lady, when I first proposed to her to come home. But she was very weak, and her thoughts very rambling, poor thing—she could not stick to a point long, and I overruled and guided her—I could not believe but that her friends would take her poor widowed heart to their homes again. But if it should be otherwise, still—"

"Well?—still?"

"Why, I cannot regret having brought her to her native soil—for, if we find no friends in America, we have left none in England—a place besides full of the most harrowing recollections, from which this place is happily free. America also offers a wider field for labor than England does, and if her friends behave badly, why I will work for her, and—for her child if it should live."

"Dear Marian, you must not think by what I said just now, that I am not a friend of Edith. I am, indeed. I love her almost as if she were my own daughter. I incurred my husband's anger by remaining with her after her marriage until she sailed. I will not fail her now, be sure. Personally, I will do my utmost for her. I will also try to influence her uncle in her favor. And now, my dear, it is getting very late, and there is a long ride, and a dreadful road before me. The commodore is already anxious for me, I know, and if I keep him waiting much longer, he will be in no mood to be persuaded by me. So I must go. To-morrow, my dear, a better home shall be found for you and Edith. That I promise upon my own responsibility. And, now, my dear, excellent girl, good-by. I will see you again in the morning."

And Mrs. Waugh took leave.

"No," thundered Commodore Waugh, thrusting his head forward and bringing his stick down heavily upon the floor. "No, I say! I will not be bothered with her or her troubles. Don't talk to me! I care nothing about them! What should her trials be to me? The precious affair has turned out just as I expected it would! Only what I did not expect was that we should have her back upon our hands! I wonder at Edith! I thought she had more pride than to come back to me for comfort after leaving as she did!"

This was all the satisfaction Mrs. Waugh got from Old Nick, when she had related to him the sorrowful story of Edith's widowhood and return, and had appealed to his generosity in her behalf. But he unbent so far as to allow Edith and Marian to be installed at Mrs. L'Oiseau's cottage, and even grudgingly permitted Henrietta to settle a pension upon her.

CHAPTER VII.

WANDERING FANNY.

It was a jocund morning in early summer—some five years after the events related in the last chapter.

Old Field Cottage was a perfect gem of rural beauty. The Old Fields themselves no longer deserved the name—the repose of years had restored them to fertility, and now they were blooming in pristine youth—far as the eye could reach between the cottage and the forest, and the cottage and the sea-beach, the fields were covered with a fine growth of sweet clover, whose verdure was most refreshing to the sight. The young trees planted by Marian, had grown up, forming a pleasant grove around the house. The sweet honeysuckle and fragrant white jasmine, and the rich, aromatic, climbing rose, had run all over the walls and windows of the house, embowering it in verdure, bloom and perfume.

While Marian stood enjoying for a few moments the morning hour, she was startled

by the sound of rapid footsteps, and then by the sight of a young woman in wild attire, issuing from the grove at the right of the cottage, and flying like a hunted hare toward the house.

Marian impulsively opened the gate, and the creature fled in, frantically clapped to the gate, and stood leaning with her back against it, and panting with haste and terror.

She was a young and pretty woman—pretty, notwithstanding the wildness of her staring black eyes and the disorder of her long black hair that hung in tangled tresses to her waist. Her head and feet were bare, and her white gown was spotted with green stains of the grass, and torn by briars, as were also her bleeding feet and arms. Marian felt for her the deepest compassion; a mere glance had assured her that the poor, panting, pretty creature was insane. Marian took her hand and gently pressing it, said:

"You look very tired and faint—come in and rest yourself and take breakfast with us."

The stranger drew away her hand and looked at Marian from head to foot. But in the midst of her scrutiny, she suddenly sprang, glanced around, and trembling violently, grasped the gate for support. It was but the tramping of a colt through the clover that had startled her.

"Do not be frightened; there is nothing that can hurt you; you are safe here."

"And won't he come?"

"Who, poor girl?"

"The Destroyer!"

"No, poor one, no destroyer comes near us here; see how quiet and peaceable everything is here!"

The wanderer slowly shook her head with a cunning, bitter smile, that looked

stranger on her fair face than the madness itself had looked, and:

"So it was there," she said, "but the Destroyer was at hand, and the thunder of terror and destruction burst upon our quiet—but I forgot—the fair spirit said I was not to think of that—such thoughts would invoke the fiend again," added the poor creature, smoothing her forehead with both hands, and then flinging them wide, as if to dispel and cast away some painful concentration there.

"But now come in and lie down on the sofa, and rest, while I make you a cup of coffee," said Marian.

But the same expression of cunning came again into the poor creature's face, as she said:

"In the house? No, no—no, no! Fanny has learned something. Fanny knows better than to go under roofs—they are traps to catch rabbits! 'Twas in the house the Destroyer found us, and we couldn't get out! No, no! a fair field and no favor and Fanny will outfly the fleetest of them! But not in a house, not in a house!"

"Well, then I will bring an easy chair out here for you to rest in—you can sit under the shade, and have a little stand by your side, to eat your breakfast. Come; come nearer to the house," said Marian, taking poor Fanny's hand, and leading her up the walk.

They were at the threshold.

"Are you Marian?" poor Fanny asked, abruptly.

"Yes, that is my name."

"Oh, I oughtn't to have come here! I oughtn't to have come here!"

"Why? What is the matter? Come, be calm! Nothing can hurt you or us here!"

"Don't love! Marian, don't love! Be a nun, or drown yourself, but never love!" said the woman, seizing the young girl's hands, gazing on her beautiful face, and speaking with intense and painful earnestness.

"Why? Love is life. You had as well tell me not to live as not to love. Poor sister! I have not known you an hour, yet your sorrows so touch me, that my heart goes out toward you, and I want to bring you in to our home, and take care of you," said Marian, gently.

"You do?" asked the wanderer, incredulously.

"Heaven knows I do! I wish to nurse you back to health and calmness."

"Then I would not for the world bring so much evil to you! Yet it is a lovelier place to die in, with loving faces around."

"But it is a better place to live in! I do not let people die where I am, unless the Lord has especially called them. I wish to make you well! Come, drive away all these evil fancies and let me take you into the cottage," said Marian, taking her hand.

Yielding to the influence of the young girl, poor Fanny suffered herself to be led a few steps toward the cottage; then, with a piercing shriek, she suddenly snatched her hand away, crying:

"I should draw the lightning down upon your head! I am doomed! I must not enter!" And she turned and fled out of the gate.

Marian gazed after her in the deepest compassion, the tears filling her kind blue eyes.

"Weep not for me, beautiful and loving Marian, but for yourself—yourself!"

Marian hesitated. It were vain to follow and try to draw the wanderer into the house; yet she could not bear the thought of leaving her. In the meantime the sound of the shriek had brought Edith out. She came, leading her little daughter Miriam, now five years old, by the hand.

Edith was scarcely changed in these five years—a life without excitement or privation or toil—a life of moderation and regularity—of easy household duties, and quiet family affections, had restored and preserved her maiden beauty. And now her

pretty hair had its own will, and fell in slight, flossy black ringlets down each side the pearly brow and cheeks; and nothing could have been more in keeping with the style of her beauty than the simple, close-fitting black gown, her habitual dress.

But lovely as the young mother was, you would scarcely have looked at her a second time while she held that child by her hand—so marvelous was the fascination of that little creature's countenance. It was a face to attract, to charm, to delight, to draw you in, and rivet your whole attention, until you became absorbed and lost in the study of its mysterious spell—a witching face, whose nameless charm it were impossible to tell, I might describe the fine dark Jewish features, the glorious eyes, the brilliant complexion, and the fall of long, glossy, black ringlets that veiled the proud little head; but the spell lay not in them, any more than in the perfect symmetry of her form, or the harmonious grace of her motion, or the melodious intonations of her voice.

Edith, still leading the little girl, advanced to Marian's side, where the latter stood at the yard gate.

"I heard a scream, Marian, dear—what was it?"

Marian pointed to the old elm tree outside the cottage fence, under the shade of which stood the poor stroller, pressing her side, and panting for breath.

"Edith, do you see that young woman? She it was."

"Good heaven!" exclaimed Edith, turning a shade paler, and beginning, with trembling fingers, to unfasten the gate.

"Why, do you know her, Edith?"

"Yes! yes! My soul, it is Fanny Laurie! I thought she was in some asylum at the North!" said Edith, passing the gate, and going up to the wanderer. "Fanny! Fanny! Dearest Fanny!" she said, taking her thin hand, and looking in her crazed eyes and lastly, putting both arms around her neck and kissing her.

"Do you kiss me?" asked the poor creature, in amazement.

"Yes, dear Fanny! Don't you know me?"

"Yes, yes, you are—I know you—you are—let's see, now—"

"Edith Lance, you know—your old playmate!"

"Ah! yes, I know—you had another name."

"Edith Shields, since I was married, but I am widowed now, Fanny."

"Yes, I know—Fanny has heard them talk!"

She swept her hands across her brow several times, as if to clear her mental vision, and gazing upon Edith, said:

"Ah! old playmate! Did the palms lie? The ravaged tome, the blood-stained hearth, and the burning roof for me—the fated nuptials, the murdered bridegroom, and the fatherless child for you. Did the palms lie, Edith? You were ever incredulous! Answer, did the palms lie?"

"The prediction was partly fulfilled, as it was very likely to be at the time our neighborhood was overrun by a ruthless foe. It happened so, poor Fanny! You did not know the future, any more than I did—no one on earth knows the mysteries of the future, 'not the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.'"

This seemed to annoy the poor creature—soothsaying, by palmistry, had been her weakness in her brighter days, and now the strange propensity clung to her through the dark night of her sorrows, and received strength from her insanity.

"Come in, dear Fanny," said Edith, "come in and stay with us."

"No, no!" she almost shrieked again. "I should bring a curse upon your house! Oh! I could tell you if you would hear! I could warn you, if you would be warned! But you will not! you will not!" she continued, wringing her hands in great trouble.

"You shall predict my fate and Miriam's," said Marian, smiling, as she opened the gate, and came out leading the child. "And I know," she continued, holding out her

palm, "that it will be such a fair fate, as to brighten up your spirits for sympathy with it."

"No! I will not look at your hand!" cried Fanny, turning away. Then, suddenly changing her mood, she snatched Marian's palm, and gazed upon it long and intently; gradually her features became disturbed—dark shadows seemed to sweep, as a funereal train, across her face—her bosom heaved—she dropped the maiden's hand.

"Why, Fanny, you have told me nothing! What do you see in my future?" asked Marian.

The maniac looked up, and breaking, as she sometimes did, into improvisation, chanted, in the most mournful of tones, these words:

"Darkly, deadly, lowers the shadow, Quickly, thickly, comes the crowd— From death's bosom creeps the adder, Trailing slime upon the shroud!"

Marian grew pale, so much, at the moment, was she infected with the words and manner of this sybil; but then, "Nonsense!" she thought, and, with a smile, roused herself to shake off the chill that was creeping upon her.

"Feel! the air! the air!" said Fanny, lifting her hand.

"Yes, it is going to rain," said Edith. "Come in, dear Fanny."

But Fanny did not hear—the fitful, uncertain creature had seized the hand of the child Miriam, and was gazing alternately upon the lines in the palm and upon her fervid, eloquent face.

"What is this? Oh! what is this?" she said, sweeping the black tresses back from her bending brow, and fastening her eyes upon Miriam's palm. "What can it mean? A deep cross from the Mount of Venus crosses the line of life, and forks into the line of death! a great sun in the plain of Mars—a cloud in the vale of Mercury! and where the lines of life and death meet, a sanguine spot and a great star! I cannot read

it! In a boy's hand, that would betoken a hero's career, and a glorious death in a victorious field; but in a girl's! What can it mean when found in a girl's? Stop!" And she peered into the hand for a few moments in deep silence, and then her face lighted up, her eyes burned intensely, and once more she broke forth in improvisation:

"Thou shalt be bless'd as maiden fair was never bless'd before, And the heart of thy belov'd shall be most gentle, kind and pure; But thy red hand shall be lifted at duty's stern behest, And give to fell destruction the head thou lov'st the best.

"Feel! the air! the air!" she exclaimed, suddenly dropping the child's hand, and lifting her own toward the sky.

"Yes, I told you it was going to rain, but there will not be much, only a light shower from the cloud just over our heads."

"It is going to weep! Nature mourns for her darling child! Hark! I hear the step of him that cometh! Fly, fair one! fly! Stay not here to listen to the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely!" cried the wild creature, as she dashed off toward the forest.

Marian and Edith looked after her, in the utmost compassion.

"Who is the poor, dear creature, Edith, and what has reduced her to this state?"

"She was an old playmate of my own, Marian. I never mentioned her to you—I never could bear to do so. She was one of the victims of the war. She was the child of Colonel Fairlie and the bride of Henry Laurie, one of the most accomplished and promising young men in the State. In one night their house was attacked, and Fanny saw her father and her husband massacred, and her home burned before her face! She—fell into the hands of the soldiers! She went mad from that night!"

"Most horrible!" ejaculated Marian.

"She was sent to one of the best Northern asylums, and the property she inherited

was placed in the hands of a trustee—old Mr. Hughes, who died last week, you know; and now that he is dead and she is out, I don't know what will be done, I don't understand it at all."

"Has she no friends, no relatives? She must not be allowed to wander in this way," said the kind girl, with the tears swimming in her eyes.

"I shall always be her friend, Marian. She has no others that I know of now; and no relative, except her young cousin, Thurston Willcoxen, who has been abroad at a German University these five years past, and who, in event of Fanny's death, would inherit her property. We must get her here, if possible. I will go in and send Jenny after her. She will probably overtake her in the forest, and may be able to persuade her to come back. At least, I shall tell Jenny to keep her in sight, until she is in some place of safety."

"Do, dear Edith!"

"Are you not coming?" said Edith, as she led her little girl toward the house.

"In one moment, dear; I wish only to bind up this morning-glory, that poor Fanny chanced to pull down as she ran through."

Edith disappeared in the cottage.

Marian stood with both her rosy arms raised, in the act of binding up the vine, that with its wealth of splendid azure-hued, vase-shaped flowers, over-canopied her beautiful head like a triumphal arch. She stood there, as I said, like a radiant, blooming goddess of life and health, summer sunshine and blushing flowers.

The light tramp of horse's feet fell upon her ear. She looked up, and with surprise lighting her dark-blue eyes, beheld a gentleman mounted on a fine black Arabian courser, that curveted gracefully and capriciously before the cottage gate.

Smilingly the gentleman soothed and subdued the coquettish mood of his willful steed, and then dismounted and bowing with matchless grace and much deference,

addressed Marian.

The maiden was thinking that she had never seen a gentleman with a presence and a manner so graceful, courteous and princely in her life. He was a tall, finely proportioned, handsome man, with a superb head, an aquiline profile, and fair hair and fair complexion. The great charm, however, was in the broad, sunny forehead, in the smile of ineffable sweetness, in the low and singularly mellifluous voice, and the manner, gentle and graceful as any woman's.

"Pardon me, my name is Willcoxen, young lady, and I have the honor of addressing—"

"Miss Mayfield," said Marian.

"Thank you," said the gentleman, with one involuntary gaze of enthusiastic admiration that called all the roses out in full bloom upon the maiden's cheeks; then governing himself, he bent his eyes to the ground, and said, with great deference: "You will pardon the liberty I have taken in calling here, Miss Mayfield, when I tell you that I am in search of an unhappy young relative, who, I am informed, passed here not long since."

"She left us not ten minutes ago, sir, much against our wishes. My sister has just sent a servant to the forest in search of her, to bring her back, if possible. Will you enter, and wait till she returns?"

With a beaming smile and graceful bend, and in the same sweet tones, he thanked her, and declined the invitation. Then he remounted his horse, and bowing deeply, rode off in the direction Fanny had taken.

This was certainly a day of arrivals at Old Fields. Usually weeks would pass without any one passing to or from the cottage, except Marian, whose cheerful, kindly, social disposition, was the sole connecting link between the cottage and the neighborhood around it. But this day seemed to be an exception.

While yet the little party lingered at the breakfast-table, Edith looked up, and saw

the tall, thin figure of a woman in a nankeen riding-shirt, and a nankeen corded sun-bonnet, in the act of dismounting from her great, raw-boned white horse,

"If there isn't Miss Nancy Skamp!" exclaimed Edith, in no very hospitable tone—"and I wonder how she can leave the post-office."

"Oh! this is not mail day!" replied Marian, laughing, "notwithstanding which we shall have news enough." And Marian who, for her part, was really glad to see the old lady, arose to meet and welcome her.

Miss Nancy was little changed; the small, tall, thin, narrow-chested, stooping figure—the same long, fair, freckled, sharp set face—the same prim cap, and clean, scant, faded gown, or one of the same sort—made up her personal individuality. Miss Nancy now had charge of the village post-office; and her early and accurate information respecting all neighborhood affairs, was obtained, it was whispered, by an official breach of trust; if so, however, no creature except Miss Nancy, her black boy, and her white cat, knew it. She was a great news carrier, it is true, yet she was not especially addicted to scandal. To her, news was news, whether good or bad, and so she took almost as much pleasure in exciting the wonder of her listeners by recounting the good action or good fortune of her neighbors or the reverse.

And so, after having dropped her riding-skirt, and given that and her bonnet to Marian to carry up-stairs, and seated herself in the chair that Edith offered her at the table, she said, sipping her coffee, and glancing between the white curtains and the green vines of the open window out upon the bay:

"You have the sweetest place, and the finest sea view here, my dear Mrs. Shields; but that is not what I was a-going to say. I was going to tell you that I hadn't hearn from you so long, that I thought I must take an early ride this morning, and spend the day with you. And I thought you'd like to hear about your old partner at the dancing-school, young Mr. Thurston Willcoxen, a-coming back—la, yes! to be sure! we had almost all of us forgotten him, leastwise I had. And then, Miss Marian," she

said, as our blooming girl returned to her place at the table, "I just thought I would bring over that muslin for the collars and caps you were so good as to say you'd make for me."

"Yes, I am glad you brought them, Miss Nancy," said Marian, in her cheerful tone, as she helped herself to another roll.

"I hope you are not busy now, my dear."

"Oh, I'm always busy, thank Heaven! but that makes no difference, Miss Nancy; I shall find time to do your work this week and next."

"I am sure it is very good of you, Miss Marian, to sew for me for nothing; when—"

"Oh, pray, don't speak of it, Miss Nancy."

"But indeed, my dear, I must say I never saw anybody like you! If anybody's too old to sew, and too poor to put it out, it is 'Miss Marian' who will do it for kindness; and if anybody is sick, it is 'Miss Marian' who is sent for to nurse them; and if any poor negro, or ignorant white person, has friends off at a distance they want to hear from, it is 'Miss Marian' who writes all their letters!"

When they arose from breakfast, and the room was tidied up, and Edith, and Marian, and their guest, were seated at their work, with all the cottage windows open to admit the fresh and fragrant air, and the rural landscape on one side, and the sea view on the other, and while little Miriam sat at their feet dressing a nun doll, and old Jenny betook herself to the garden to gather vegetables for the day, Miss Nancy opened her budget, and gave them all the news of the month. But in that which concerned Thurston Willcoxen alone was Edith interested, and of him she learned the following facts: Of the five years which Mr. Willcoxen had been absent in the eastern hemisphere, three had been spent at the German University, where he graduated with the highest honors; eighteen months had been passed in travel through Europe, Asia, and Africa; and the last year had been spent in the best circles in the city of Paris. He had been back to his native place about three weeks. Since

the death of Fanny Laurie's old guardian, the judge of the Orphans' Court had appointed him sole trustee of her property, and guardian of her person. As soon as he had received this power, he had gone to the asylum, where the poor creature was confined, and hearing her pronounced incurable, though harmless, he had set her at liberty, brought her home to his own house, and had hired a skillful, attentive nurse to wait upon her.

"And you never saw such kindness and compassion, Miss Marian, except in yourself. I do declare to you, that his manner to that poor unfortunate is as delicate and reverential and devoted as if she were the most accomplished and enviable lady in the land, and more so, Miss Marian, more so!"

"I can well believe it! He looks like that!" said the beautiful girl, her face flushing and her eyes filling with generous sympathy. But Marian was rather averse to sentimentality, so dashing the sparkling drops from her blushing cheeks, she looked up and said: "Miss Nancy, we are going to have chickens for dinner. How do you like them cooked? It don't matter a bit to Edith and me."

"Stewed, then, if you please, Miss Marian! or stop—no—I think baked in a pie!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE FOREST FAIRY.

On the afternoon of the same day spent by Miss Nancy Skamp at Old Field Cottage, the family at Luckenough were assembled in that broad, central passage, their favorite resort in warm weather.

Five years had made very little alteration here, excepting in the case of Jacquelina, who had grown up to be the most enchanting sprite that ever bewitched the hearts, or turned the heads of men. She was petite, slight, agile, graceful; clustering curls of shining gold encircled a round, white forehead, laughing in light; springs under springs of fun and frolic sparkled up from the bright, blue eyes, whose flashing light

flew bird-like everywhere, but rested nowhere. She seemed even less human and irresponsible than when a child—verily a being of the air, a fairy, without human thoughtfulness, or sympathy, or affections! She only seemed so—under all that fay-like levity there was a heart. Poor heart! little food or cultivation had it had in all its life.

For who had been Jacquelina's educators?

First, there was the commodore, with his alternations of blustering wrath and foolish fondness, giving way to his anger, or indulging his love, without the slightest regard to the effect produced upon his young ward—too often abusing her for something really admirable in her nature—and full as frequently praising her for something proportionately reprehensible in her conduct.

Next, there was the dark, and solemn, and fanatical Dr. Grimshaw, her destined bridegroom, who really and truly loved the child to fatuity, and conscientiously did the very best he could for her mental and moral welfare, according to his light. Alas! "when the light that is in one is darkness, how great is that darkness!" Jacquelina rewarded his serious efforts with laughter, and flattered him with the pet names of Hobgoblin, Ghoul, Gnome, Ogre, etc. Yet she did not dislike her solemn suitor—she never had taken the matter so seriously as that! And he on his part bore the eccentricities of the elf with matchless patience, for he loved her, as I said, to fatuity—doted on her with a passion that increased with ripening years, and of late consumed him like a fever.

And then there was her mother, last named because, whatever she should have been, she really was the least important of Jacquelina's teachers. Fear was the key-note of Mrs. L'Oiseau's character—the key-stone in the arch of her religious faith—she feared everything—the opinion of the world, the unfaithfulness of friends, changes in the weather, reverses of fortune, pain, sickness, sorrow, want, labor!

Now the time had not yet come for this proposed marriage to shock the merry

maiden. She was "ower young to marry yet."

So thought not the commodore; for a year past, since his niece had attained the age of fourteen, he had been worrying himself and the elders of the family to have the marriage solemnized, "before the little devil shall have time to get some other notion into her erratic head," he said. All were opposed to him, holding over his head the only rod he dreaded, the opinion of the world.

"What would people say if you were to marry your niece of fourteen to a man of thirty-four?" they urged.

"But I tell you, young men are beginning to pay attention to her now, and I can't take her to church that some jackanapes don't come capering around her, and the minx will get some whim in her head like Edith did—I know she will! Just see how Edith disappointed me! ungrateful huzzy! after my bringing her up and educating her, for her to do so! While, if she had married Grim when I wanted her to do it, by this time I'd have had my grandchil—! I mean nieces and nephews climbing about my knees. But by ——! I won't be frustrated this time!"

And so Jacquelina was kept more secluded than ever. Secluded from society, but not from nature. The forest became her haunt. And a chance traveler passing through it, and meeting her fay-like form, might well suppose he was deceived with the vision of a wood-nymph.

The effervescent spirits of the elf had to expend themselves in the same way. As a child she had ever been as remarkable for surprising feats of agility as for fun, frolic, mischief, and diablerie. And every one of these traits augmented with her growth. Feats of agility became a passion with her—her airy spirit seemed only to find its full freedom in rapid motion in daring flights, in difficult achievements, and in hair-breadth escapes. Everything that she read of in that way, which could possibly be imitated, was attempted. She had her bows and arrows, and by original fitness, as well as by constant practice, she became an excellent markswoman. She had her

well-trained horse, and her vaulting bars, and made nothing of flying over a high fence or a wide ditch. But her last whim was the most eccentric of all. She had her lance. And, her favorite pastime was to have a small ring suspended from a crossbeam, and while riding at full speed, with her light lance balanced in her hand, to catch this ring and bear it off upon the point of that lance. In feats of agility alone she excelled, not in those of strength—that airy, fragile form was well fitted for swiftness and sureness of action, yet not for muscular force. Her uncle and Grim indulged her in all these frolics—her uncle in great delight; Grim, under the protest that they were unworthy of an immortal being with eternity to prepare for.

In these five past years, Cloudesley had been at sea, and had only returned home once—namely, at the end of the stated three years. He had been received with unbounded joy by his child-friend; had brought her his outgrown suit of uniform; had spent several months at Luckenough, and renewed his old delightful intimacy with its little heiress presumptive, and at length had gone to sea again for another three years' voyage. And it must be confessed that Jacquelina had found the second parting more grievous than the first. And this time Cloudesley had fully shared her sorrow. He had been absent a year, when, upon one night the old mansion, that had withstood the storms of more than two hundred winters, was burned to the ground!

The fire broke out in the kitchen. How, no one knew exactly.

Be the cause as it may, upon the evening of the fire Jacquelina had gone to her room—she had an apartment to herself now—and feeling for the first time in her life some little uneasiness about her uncle's "whim" of wedding her to Grim, she had walked about the floor for some time in much disquietude of mind and body; then she went to a wardrobe, and took out Cloudy's treasured first uniform, and held it up before her. How small it looked now; why, it was scarcely too large for herself! And how much Cloudy had outgrown it! It had fitted him nicely at sixteen, now he was twenty-one, and in two years more he would be home again! Smiling to herself, and

tossing her charming head, as at some invisible foe, she said:

"Yes, indeed. I should so like to see them marry me to that ogre Grim!"

She pressed the cloth up to her face, and put it away, and, still smiling to herself, retired to rest, to dream of her dear playmate.

She dreamed of being in his ship on the open sea, the scene idealized to supernatural beauty and sublimity, as all such scenes are in dreams; and then she thought the ship took fire, and she saw, and heard, and felt the great panic and horror that ensued.

She woke in a terrible fright. A part of her dream was true! Her chamber was filled with smoke, and the house was chaotic with noise and confusion, and resounded with cries of "Fire! Fire!" everywhere. What happened next passed with the swiftness of lightning. She jumped out of bed, seized a woolen shawl, and wrapped it around her head, and even in that imminent danger not forgetting her most cherished treasure—Cloudy's suit of uniform—snatched it from the wardrobe and fled out of the room. Her swift and dipping motion that had gained her the name of "Lapwing" now served her well. Shooting her bright head forward and downward, she fled through all the passages and down all the stairs and out by the great hall, that was all in flames, until she reached the lawn, where the panic-stricken and nearly idiotic household were assembled, weeping, moaning and wringing their hands, while they gazed upon the work of destruction before them in impotent despair!

Jacquelina looked all around the group, each figure of which glared redly in the light of the flames. All were present—all but the commodore! Where could the commodore be?

Jacquelina ran through the crowd looking for him in all directions. He was nowhere visible, though the whole area was lighted up, even to the edge of the forest, every tree and branch and twig and leaf of which was distinctly revealed in the strong, red glare.

"Where is uncle? Oh! where is uncle?" she exclaimed, running wildly about, and finally going up to Mrs. Waugh, who stood looking, the statue of consternation.

Jacquelina shook her by the arm.

"Aunty! aunty! Where is uncle? Are you bewitched? Where is uncle?"

"Where? Here, somewhere. I saw him run out before me."

"No, you didn't! You mistook somebody else for him. Oh, my Lord! he is in the burning house! he is in the house!"

"Oh, he is in the house! he is in the house!" echoed Henrietta, now roused from her panic, and wringing her hands in the most acute distress. "Oh! will nobody save him! will nobody save him!"

It was too late! Commodore Waugh was in the burning mansion, in his bedchamber, near the top of the house, fast asleep!

"Good heaven! will no one attempt to save him?" screamed Henrietta, running wildly from one to the other.

They all gazed on each other, and then in consternation upon the burning building, every window of which was belching flame, while the sound of some falling rafter, or the explosion of some combustible substance, was continually heard! To venture into that blazing house, with its sinking roof and falling rafters, seemed certain death.

"Oh! my God! my God! will none even try to save him?" cried Henrietta, wringing her hands in extreme anguish.

Suddenly:

"Pray for me, aunty!" exclaimed Jacquelina, and she darted like a bird toward the house, into the passage, and seemed lost in the smoke and flame!

Wrapping her woolen shawl closely about her, and keeping near the floor, she glided swiftly up the stairs, flight after flight, and through the suffocating passages, until

she reached her uncle's door. It was open, and his room was clearer of smoke than any other, from the wind blowing through the open window.

There he lay in a deep sleep! She sprang to the bedside, seized and shook the arm of the sleeper.

"Uncle! uncle! wake, for God's sake, wake! the house is on fire!"

"Hum-m-m-e!" muttered the old man, giving a great heave and plunge, and turning over into a heavier sleep than before.

"Uncle! uncle! You will be burned to death if you don't wake up!" cried Jacquelina, shaking him violently.

"Humph! Yes, Jacquelina! um—um—um—Grim! um—um—Luckenough!" muttered the dreamer, flinging about his great arms.

"Luckenough is in flames! Uncle! wake! wake!" she cried, shaking him frantically.

"Ah! ha! yes! d—d little rascal is at her tricks again!" he said, laughing in his sleep.

At that moment there was the sound of a falling rafter in the adjoining room. Every instant was worth a life, and there he lay in a sodden, hopeless sleep.

Suddenly Sans Souci ran to the ewer; it was empty. There was no time to be lost! every second was invaluable! He must be instantly roused, and Jacquelina was not fastidious as to the means in doing so!

Leaping upon the bolster behind his great, stupid head, she reached over, and, seizing the mass of his gray, grizzly beard, she pulled up the wrong way with all her might, until, roaring with pain, he started up in a fury, and, seeing her, exclaimed:

"Oh! you abominable little vixen! is that you: Do you dare! Are you frantic, then? Oh, you outrageous little dare-devil! Won't I send you to a mad-house, and have you put in a strait-jacket, till you know how to behave yourself! You infernal little wretch, you!"

A sudden thought struck Sans Souci to move him by his affection for herself.

"Uncle, look around you! The house is burning! if you do not rouse yourself and save your poor little 'wretch,' she must perish in the flames!"

This effectually brought him to his senses; he understood everything! he leaped from his bed, seized a blanket, enveloped her in it, raised her in his arms, and, forgetting gout, lameness, leg and all, bore her down the creaking, heated stairs, flight after flight, and through the burning passages out of the house in safety.

A shout of joy greeted the commodore as he appeared with Jacquelina in the yard.

But heeding nothing but the burden he bore in his arms, the old sailor strode on until he reached a convenient spot, where he threw the blanket off her face to give her air.

She had fainted—the terror and excitement had been too great—the reaction was too powerful—it had overwhelmed her, and she lay insensible across his arms, her fair head hanging back, her white garments streaming in the air, her golden locks floating, her witching eyes closed, and her blue lips apart and rigid on her glistening teeth—so she lay like dead Cordelia in the arms of old Lear.

Henrietta and Mrs. L'Oiseau, followed by all the household, crowded around them with water, the only restorative at hand.

At length she recovered and looked up, a little bewildered, but soon memory and understanding returned and, gazing at her uncle, she suddenly threw her arms around his neck and burst into tears.

She was then carried away into one of the best negro quarters and laid upon a bed, and attended by her mother and her maid Maria.

The commodore, with his wife, found shelter in another quarter. And the few remaining members of the household were accommodated in a similar manner elsewhere.

It was near noon before they were all ready to set forth from the scene of disaster, and it was the middle of the afternoon when they found themselves temporarily

settled at the little hotel at Benedict in the very apartments formerly occupied by Edith and Marian.

Here Jacquelina suffered a long and severe spell of illness, during which her bright hair was cut off.

And here beautiful Marian came, with her gift of tender nursing, and devoted herself day and night to the service of the young invalid. And all the leisure time she found while sitting by the sick bed she busily employed in making up clothing for the almost denuded family. And never had the dear girl's nimble fingers flown so fast or so willingly.

Every day the commodore, accompanied by Dr. Grimshaw, rode over to Luckenough to superintend the labors of the workmen in pulling down and clearing away the ruins of the old mansion and preparing the site for a new building.

Six weeks passed and brought the first of August, before Jacquelina was able to sit up, and then the physicians recommended change of air and the waters of Bentley Springs for the re-establishment of her health.

During her illness, Jacquelina had become passionately attached to Marian, as all persons did who came under the daily influence of the beautiful girl. Dr. Grimshaw was to accompany the family to Bentley. Jacquelina insisted that Marian should be asked to make one of the party. Accordingly, the commodore and Mrs. Waugh, nothing loth, invited and pressed the kind maiden to go with them. But Marian declined the journey, and Commodore Waugh, with his wife, his niece and his Grim set out in the family carriage for Bentley Springs. Jacquelina rapidly regained health and rushed again to her mad breaks. After a stormy scene with the commodore, the latter vowed she should either marry Dr. Grimshaw or be sent to a nunnery. To the convent of St. Serena she went, but within a week she was home in disgrace.

CHAPTER IX.

CLIPPING A BIRD'S WINGS.

The clouds were fast gathering over poor San Souci's heavens.

The commodore had quite recovered for the time being, and he began to urge the marriage of his niece with his favorite. Dr. Grimshaw's importunities were also becoming very tiresome. They were no longer a jest. She could no longer divert herself with them. She felt them as a real persecution, and expressed herself accordingly. To Grim she said:

"Once I used to laugh at you. But now I do hate you more than anything in the universe! And I wish—I do wish that you were in heaven! for I do detest the very sight of you—there!"

And to the commodore's furious threats she would answer:

"Uncle, the time has passed by centuries ago for forcing girls into wedlock, thanks be to Christianity and civilization. You can't force me to have Grim, and you had as well give up the wicked purpose," or words to that effect.

One day when she had said something of the sort, the commodore answered, cruelly:

"Very well, miss! I force no one, please to understand! But I afford my protection and support only upon certain conditions, and withdraw them when those conditions are not fulfilled! Neither you nor your mother had any legal claim upon me. I was not in any way bound to feed and clothe and house you for so many years. I did it with the tacit understanding that you were to marry to please me, and all your life you have understood, as well as any of us, that you were to wed Dr. Grimshaw."

"If such an understanding existed, it was without my consent, and was originated in my infancy, and I do not feel and I will not be in the least degree bound by it! For the expense of my support and education, uncle! I am truly sorry that you risked it upon the hazardous chance of my liking or disliking the man of your choice! But as I had no hand in your venture, I do not feel the least responsible for your losses. Yours is the fate of a gambler in human hearts who has staked and lost—that is the

worst!"

"And by all the fiends in fire, Minion! you shall find that it is not the worst. I know how to make you knuckle under, and I shall do it!" exclaimed the commodore in a rage, as he rose up and strode off toward the room occupied by Mary L'Oiseau. Without the ceremony of knocking, he burst the door open with one blow of his foot, and entered where the poor, feverish, frightened creature was lying down to take a nap. Throwing himself into a chair by her bedside, he commenced a furious attack upon the trembling invalid. He recounted, with much exaggeration, the scene that had just transpired between himself and Jacquelina—repeated with additions her undutiful words, bitterly reproached Mary for encouraging and fostering that rebellious and refractory temper in her daughter, warned her to bring the headstrong girl to a sense of her position and duty, or to prepare to leave his roof; for he swore he "wouldn't be hectored over and trodden down by her nor her daughter any longer!" And so having overwhelmed the timid, nervous woman with undeserved reproaches and threats, he arose and left the room.

And can any one be surprised that her illness was increased, and her fever arose and her senses wandered all night? When her mother was ill, Jacquelina could not sleep. Now she sat by her bedside sponging her hot hands and keeping ice to her head and giving drink to slake her burning thirst and listening, alas! to her sad and rambling talk about their being turned adrift in the world to starve to death, or to perish in the snow—calling on her daughter to save them both by yielding to her uncle's will! And Jacquelina heard and understood, and wept and sighed—a new experience to the poor girl, who was

"Not used to tears at night Instead of slumber!"

All through the night she nursed her with unremitting care. And in the morning, when the fever waned, and the patient was wakeful, though exhausted, she left her only to bring the refreshing cup of tea and plate of toast prepared by her own hands.

But when she brought it to the bedside the pale invalid waved it away. She felt as if she could not eat. Fear had clutched her throat and would not relax its hold.

"I want to talk to you, Jacquelina," she said.

"Eat and drink first, Mimmy, and then you and I will have such another good talk!" said Jacquelina, coaxingly.

"I can't! Oh! I can't swallow a mouthful, I am choking now!"

"Oh! that is nothing but the hysterics, Mimmy! 'high strikes,' as Jenny calls them! I feel like I should have them myself sometimes! Come! cheer up, Mimmy! Your fever is off and your head is cool! Come, take this consoling cup of tea and bit of toast, and you will feel so much stronger and cheerfuler."

"Tea! Oh! everything I eat and drink in this unhappy house is bitter—the bitter cup and bitter bread of dependence!"

"Put more sugar into it, then, Mimmy, and sweeten it! Come! Things are not yet desperate! Cheer up!"

"What do you mean, my love? Have you consented to be married to Dr. Grimshaw?"

"No! St. Mary! Heaven forbid!" exclaimed Jacquelina, shuddering for the first time.

"Now, why 'heaven forbid?' Oh! my child, why are you so perverse? Why won't you take him, since your uncle has set his heart upon the match?"

"Oh, mother!"

"I know you are very young to be married—too young! far too young! Only sixteen, gracious heaven! But then you know we have no alternative but that, or starvation; and it is not as if you were to be married to a youth of your own age—this gentleman is of grave years and character, which makes a great difference."

"I should think it did."

"What makes you shiver and shake so, my dear? Are you cold or nervous? Poor child, you got no sleep last night. Do you drink that cup of tea, my dear. You need it

more than I do."

"No, no."

"Why, what is the matter with my fairy?"

"Oh, mother, mother, don't take sides against me! don't! or you will drive me to my ruin. Who will take a child's part, if her mother don't? I love you best of all the world, mother. Do not takes sides against me! take my part! help me to be true! to be true!"

"True to whom, Jacquelina? What are you talking about?"

"True to this heart—to this heart, mother! to all that is honest and good in my nature."

"I don't understand you at all."

"Oh, mother, the thought of marrying anybody is unwelcome to me now; and the idea of being married to Grim is abhorrent; is like that of being sold to a master that I hate, or sent to prison for life; it is full of terror and despair. Oh! oh!—"

"Don't talk so wildly, Jacquelina, you make me ill."

"Do I, Mimmy? Oh, I didn't mean to worry you. Bear up, Mimmy; do try to bear up; don't fear; suppose he does turn me out. I am but a little girl, and food and clothing are cheap enough in the country, and any of our neighbors will take me in just for the fun I'll make them. La! yes, that they will, just as gladly as they will let in the sunshine."

"Oh, child, how little you know of the world. Yes, for a day or two, or a week or two, scarcely longer. And even if you could find a home, who would give shelter to your poor, sick mother for the rest of her life?"

"Mother! uncle would never deny you shelter upon my account!" exclaimed Jacquelina, growing very pale.

"Indeed he will, my child; he has; he came in here last night and warned me to pack

up and leave the house."

"He will not dare—even he, so to outrage humanity and public opinion and everything he ought to respect."

"My child, he will. He has set his heart upon making Nace Grimshaw his successor at Luckenough, that if you disappoint him in this darling purpose, there will be no limit to his rage and his revenge. And he will not only send us from his roof, but he will seek to justify himself and further ruin us by blackening our names. Your wildness and eccentricity will be turned against us and so distorted and misrepresented as to ruin us forever."

"Mother! mother! he is not so wicked as that."

"He is furious in his temper and violent in his impulses—he will do all that under the influence of disappointment and passion, however he may afterwards repent his injustice. You must not disappoint him, Jacquelina."

"I disappoint him? Why, Mimmy, Luckenough does not belong to me. And if he wants Grim to be his successor, why, as I have heard aunty ask him, does he not make him his heir?"

"There are reasons, I suspect, my dear, why he cannot do so. I think he holds the property by such a tenure, that he cannot alienate it from the family. And the only manner in which he can bestow it upon Dr. Grimshaw, will be through his wife, if the doctor should marry some relative."

"That is it, hey? Well! I will not be made a sumpter-mule to carry this rich gift over to Dr. Grimshaw—even if there is no other way of conveyance. Mother! what is the reason the professor is such a favorite with uncle?"

"My dear, I don't know, but I have often had my suspicions."

"Of what, Mimmy?"

"Of a very near, though unacknowledged relationship; don't question me any further

upon that particular point, my dear, for I really know nothing whatever about it. Oh, dear." And the invalid groaned and turned over.

"Mother, you are very weak; mother, please to take some tea; let me go get you some hot."

"Tell me, Jacquelina; will you do as the old man wishes you?"

"I will tell you after you take some refreshments," said Jacquelina.

"Well! go bring me some."

The girl went and brought more hot tea and toast, and waited until her mother had drunk the former and partaken of a morsel of the latter. When, in answer to the eager, inquiring look, she said:

"Mother, if I alone were concerned, I would leave this house this moment, though I should never have another roof over my head. But for your sake, mother, I will still fight the battle. I will try to turn uncle from his purpose. I will try to awaken Grim's generosity, if he has any, and get him to withdraw his suit. I will get aunty to use her influence with both of them, and see what can be done. But as for marrying Dr. Grimshaw, mother—I know what I am saying—I would rather die!"

"And see me die, my child?"

"Oh, mother! it will not be so bad as that."

"Jacquelina, it will. Do you know what is the meaning of these afternoon fevers and night sweats and this cough?"

"I know it means that you are very much out of health, Mimmy, but I hope you will be well in the spring."

"Jacquelina, it means death."

"Oh, no! No, no! No, no! Not so! There's Miss Nancy Skamp has had a cough every winter ever since I knew her, and she's not dead nor likely to die, and you will be well in the spring," said the girl, changing color; and faltering in spite of herself.

"I shall never see another spring, my child—"

"Oh, mother! don't! don't say so. You—"

"Hear me out, my dear; I shall never live to see another spring unless I can have a quiet life with peace of mind. These symptoms, my child, mean death, sooner or later. My life may be protracted for many years, if I can live in peace and comfort; but if I must suffer privation, want and anxiety, I cannot survive many months, Jacquelina."

The poor girl was deadly pale; she started up and walked the floor in a distracted manner, crying:

"What shall I do! Oh! what shall I do?"

"It is very plain what you shall do, my child. You must marry Dr. Grimshaw. Come, my dear, be reasonable. If I did not think it best for your happiness and prosperity, I would not urge it."

"Mimmy, don't talk any longer, dear!" Jacquelina interrupted. "There's a bright spot on your cheek now, and your fever will rise again, even this morning. I will see what can be done to bring everybody to reason! I will not believe but that if I remain firm and faithful to my heart's integrity there will be some way of escape made between these two alternatives."

But could Sans Souci do this? Had the frolicsome fairy sufficient integral strength and self-balance to resist the powerful influences gathering around her?

CHAPTER X.

A GRIM MARRIAGE.

As the decisive day approached, Jacquelina certainly acted like one distraught—now in wild defiance, now in paleness and tears, and anon in fitful mirth, or taunting threats. She rapidly lost flesh and color, and in hysterical laughter accounted for it

by saying that she believed in her soul Grim was a spiritual vampire, who preyed upon her life! She avoided him as much as she could. And if sometimes, when she was about to escape from him, he would seize her wrist and detain her, she would suddenly lose her breath and turn so pale that in the fear of her fainting, he would release her. So he got no opportunity to press his claims.

One morning, however—it was about a week before Christmas—she voluntarily sought his presence. She entered the parlor where he sat alone. Excitement had flushed her cheeks with a vivid crimson and lighted her eyes with sparkling fire—she did not know that her beauty was enhanced a thousand fold—she did not know that never in her life had her presence kindled such a flame in the heart of her lover as it did at that moment. And if he restrained himself from going to meet her, it was the dread lest she should fade away from him as he had seen her do so often. But she advanced and stood before him.

"Dr. Grimshaw!" she said, "I have come to make a last appeal to you! I have come to beg, to supplicate you, for my sake, for honor, for truth and for mercy's sake, yes! for heaven's sake, to withdraw your pretensions to my poor hand. For, sir, I do not and cannot like you! I do not say but that you are far too good and wise, and every way too worthy for such a girl as I am—and that you do me the very greatest honor by your preference, but still no one can account for tastes—and, sir, I cannot like you—pray, pardon me! indeed, I cannot help it."

Although her words were so humble, her color was still heightened, and her eyes had a threatening, defiant sparkle in them, so contradictory, so piquant and fascinating in contrast with the little, fragile, graceful, helpless form, that his head was almost turned. It was with difficulty he could keep from snatching the fluttering, half-defiant, half-frightened, bird-like creature to his bosom. But he contented himself with saying:

"My fairy! we are commanded to love those that hate us; and should you hate me

more than ever, I should only continue to love you!"

"Love me at a distance, then! and the greater the distance, the more grateful I shall be!"

He could no longer quite restrain himself. He seized her hand and drew her towards him, exclaiming in an eager, breathless, half-whisper:

"No! closer and closer shall my love draw us, beautiful one! until it compasses your hate and unites us forever!"

With a half-suppressed cry she wrung her hand from his grasp and answered, wildly:

"I sought your presence to entreat you—and to warn you! I have supplicated you, and you have turned a deaf ear to my prayer! Now I warn you! and disregard my warning, if you dare! despise it at your peril! I am going out of my wits, I think! I warn you that I may consent to become your wife! I have no persevering resistance in my nature. I cannot hold out forever against those I love. But I warn you, that if ever I consent, it will be under the undue influence of others!"

"Put your consent upon any ground you please, you delightful, you enchanting little creature. We will spare your blushes, charming as they are!" he exclaimed, surprised out of self-control and seizing both her hands.

Angrily she snatched them from him.

"What have I said? Oh! what have I said? I believe I am going crazy! I tell you, Dr. Grimshaw, that if I ever yield, it will be only to the overwhelming force brought to bear upon me; and even then it will be only during a temporary fit of insanity! And I warn you—I warn you not to dare to take me at my word!"

"Will I not? You bewitching little sprite! do you do this to make me love you ten thousand times more than I do?"

Passionately she broke forth in reply:

"You do not believe me! You do not see that I am in terrible earnest! I tell you, Dr.

Grimshaw, that were I induced to consent to be your wife, you had better not take advantage of such a consent! It would be the most fatal day's work you ever did for yourself in this world! You think I'm only a spoiled, petulant child! You do not know me! I do not know myself! I am full of evil! I feel it sensibly, when I am near you! You develop the worst of me! Should you marry me, the very demon would rise in my bosom! I should drive you to distraction!"

"You drive me to distraction now, you intoxicating little witch!" he exclaimed, laughing and darting towards her.

She started and escaped his hand, crying:

"Saints in heaven! What infatuation! What madness! It must be fate! Avert the fate, man! Avert it! while there is yet time! Go get a mill-stone and tie it around your neck and cast yourself into the uttermost depths of the sea before ever you dare to marry me!" Her cheeks were blazing with color and her eyes with light! He saw only her transcendant beauty.

"Why, you little tragi-comic enchantress, you!—what do you mean? Come to my arms! Come, wild, bright bird! come to my bosom!" he said, stepping towards her and throwing his arms around her.

"Vampire!" she exclaimed, struggling to free herself for a moment; and then as his lips sought hers the color faded from her face and the light died in her eyes, and he hastily released her and set her in a chair lest she should swoon in his hated arms.

"Now, how am I expected to live with such a wife as this girl would make me? If it were not for the estate I should be tempted to give her up, and travel to forget her! How shall I overcome her repugnance? Not by courting her; that's demonstrated. Only by being kind to her, and letting her alone." Such was the tenor of his thoughts as he stood a little behind her chair out of her sight.

But Jacquelina, when she found herself free, soon recovered, and arose and left the room.

Until a day or two before Christmas, when, in the evening, she glided in to her uncle's room and sunk down by his side—so unlike herself; so like a spirit—that the old sinner impulsively shrank away from her, and put out his hand to ring for lights.

"No; don't send for candles, uncle! Such a wretch as I am should tell her errand in the dark."

"What do you mean now, minx?"

"Uncle, in all your voyages around the world did you ever stop at Constantinople? And did you ever visit a slave mart there?"

"Yes; of course I have! What then? What the deuce are you dreaming of?"

"How much would such a girl as myself bring in the slave market of the Sultan's city?"

"Are you crazy?" asked the commodore, opening his eyes to their widest extent.

"I don't know. If I am, it can make little difference in your plans. But as there is method in my madness, please to answer my question. How much would I sell for in Constantinople?"

"You are mad; that's certain! How do I know—where beauties sell for from five hundred to many thousand zechins. But you wouldn't sell for much; you're too small and too thin."

"Beauty sells by the weight, does it? Well, uncle, I see that you have been accustomed to the mart, for you know how to cheapen the merchandise! Save yourself the trouble, uncle! I shall not live long, and therefore I shall not have the conscience to ask a high price for myself!"

"Mad! Mad as a March hare! As sure as shooting she is!" said the commodore in dismay, staring at her until his great, fat eyes seemed bursting from their sockets.

"Not so mad as you think, uncle, either. I have come to make a bargain with you."

"What the foul fiend do you mean now? Do you want me to send you to

Constantinople, pray?"

Jacquelina laughed, something like her old silvery laugh, as she answered:

"No, uncle; though if it were not for Mimmy, I really should prefer it to marrying Grim!"

"What do you mean, then? Speak!"

"This, then, uncle: By what I have heard, and what I have seen, and what I have surmised, I am already as deep in your secrets respecting Grim as you are yourself."

"You speak falsely, you little ——! No one knows anything about it but myself!" exclaimed the commodore, betraying himself through astonishment and indignation.

Without heeding the contradiction, except by a sly smile, Jacquelina went calmly on:

"And I know that you wish to make me a stalking-horse, to convey the estate to Grimshaw, only because you cannot give it to him in any other way but through his wife."

"What do you mean, you little diabolical ——! It is my own—why can I not give it to whom I please, I should like to know?"

"You can give it to any one in the world, uncle, except Dr. Grimshaw, or to one who bears the same relationship to you that he does; for to such a one you may not legally bequeath your landed estate, or—"

"You shocking, impudent little vixen! How dare you talk so?"

"Hear me out, uncle. I say, knowing such to be the case, I also know my own importance as a 'stalking-horse,' or sumpter-mule, or something of the sort, to bear upon my own shoulders the burden of this estate, which you wish to give by me to Dr. Grimshaw. Therefore, I shall not give myself away for nothing. I intend to sell myself for a price! Nothing on earth would induce me to consent to marry Dr. Grimshaw, were it not to secure peace and comfort to my mother's latter days. Your threat of turning me out of doors would not compel me into such a marriage, for

well I know that you would not venture to put that threat into execution. But I cannot bear to see my poor mother suffer so much as she does while here, dependent upon your uncertain protection. You terrify and distress her beyond her powers of endurance. You make the bread of dependence very, very bitter to her, indeed! And well I know that she will certainly die if she remains subjected to your powers of tormenting. I speak plainly to you, uncle, having nothing to conceal; to proceed, I assure you I will not meet your views in marrying Dr. Grimshaw, unless it be to purchase for my poor mother a deliverance from bondage, and an independence for life. Therefore, I demand that you shall buy this place, 'Locust Hill,' which I hear can be bought for five thousand dollars, and settle it upon my mother; in return for which I will bestow my hand in marriage upon Dr. Grimshaw. And, mind, I do not promise with it either love, or esteem, or service—only my hand in civil marriage, and the estate it has the power of carrying with it! And the documents that shall make my mother independent of the world must be drawn up or examined by a lawyer that she shall appoint, and must be placed in her hands on the same hour that gives my hand to Dr. Grimshaw. Do you understand? Now, uncle, that is my ultimatum! For, please the heavens above us! come what may! do what you will! turn me and my mother out of doors, to freeze and starve—I will die, and see her die, before I will sell my hand for a less price than will make her independent and at ease for life! For, look you, I would rather see her dead, than leave her in your power! Think of this, uncle! There is time enough to-morrow and next day to make all the arrangements; only be sure I am in earnest! Look in my face! Am I not in earnest?"

"I think you are, you little wretch! I could shake the life out of you!"

"That would be easy, uncle! There is not much to shake out. Only, in that case, you would have no stalking-horse to take the estate over to Dr. Grimshaw." And so saying, Jacquelina arose to leave the room.

"Come back here—you little vixen, you!"

Sans Souci returned.

"It's well to 'strike while the iron's hot,' and to bind you while you're willing to be bound, for you are an uncertain little villain. Though I don't believe you'd break a solemn pledge once given—hey?"

"No, sir!"

"Pledge me your word of honor, now, that if I buy this little farm of Locust Hill, and settle it upon your mother, you will marry Dr. Grimshaw on this coming Christmas Eve?"

"I pledge you my word of honor that I will"

"Without mental reservation?"

"Without mental reservation!"

"Stop! it is safer to seal such a pledge! Climb up on the stand, and hand me that Bible down off the top shelf. Brush the cobwebs off it, and don't let the spiders come with it."

Jacquelina did as she was bid, with a half indifferent, half disdainful air.

"There! Now lay your hand upon this book, and swear by the Holy Evangelists of Almighty God that you will do as you have pledged yourself to do."

"I swear," said Jacquelina.

"Very well! Now, confound you! you may put the book back again, and go about your business."

Sans Souci very willingly complied. And then, as she left the room and closed the door after her, her quick ear caught the sound of the commodore's voice, chuckling:

"So! I've trapped you! Ten minutes more, and it would have been impossible."

Full of wonder as to what his words might mean, doubting also whether she had

heard them aright, Jacquelina was hastening on toward her mother's room, when she met her Aunt Henrietta hurrying toward her, and speaking impetuously.

"Oh, my little Lapwing! where have you been? I have been looking for you all over the house! Good news, dear Lapwing! Good news! Deliverance is at hand for you! Who do you think has come?"

"Who? Who?" questioned Sans Souci, eagerly.

"Cloudy!"

"Lost! lost!" cried the wretched girl; and, with a wild shriek that rang through all the house, she threw up her arms and fell forward to the ground.

The marriage was appointed to take place Christmas Day. Jacquelina suffered her mother to dress her in bridal array. Dr. Grimshaw was waiting for her in the hall.

As soon as she reached the foot of the stairs, he took her hand; and, pressing it, whispered:

"Sweet girl, forgive me this persistence!"

"May God never forgive me if I do!" she fiercely exclaimed, transfixing him with a flashing glance.

Never lover uttered a deeper sigh than that which Dr. Grimshaw gave forth as he led his unwilling bride to the carriage. The groomsman followed with the bridesmaid. The commodore and Mary L'Oiseau accompanied the party in a gig. Henrietta, true to her word, refused to be present at the marriage.

When the wedding party arrived at the chapel, all the pews were filled to suffocation with the crowd that the rumor of the approaching marriage had drawn together. And the bridal party were the cynosure of many hundred eyes as they passed up the aisle and stood before the altar.

The ceremony proceeded. But not one response, either verbally or mentally, did Jacquelina make. The priest passed over her silence, naturally ascribing it to

bashfulness, and honestly taking her consent for granted.

The rites were finished, the benediction bestowed, and friends and acquaintances left their pews, and crowded around with congratulations.

Among the foremost was Thurston Willcoxen, whose suave and stately courtesy, and graceful bearing, and gracious words, so pleased Commodore Waugh that, knowing Jacquelina to be married and safe, he invited and urged the accomplished young "Parisian," as he was often called, to return and partake of the Christmas wedding breakfast.

"Nace, do you take your bride home in the gig, as you will want her company to yourself, and we will go in the carriage," said the commodore, good-naturedly. In fact, the old man had not been in such a fine humor for many a day.

Dr. Grimshaw, "nothing loth," led his fair bride to the gig, handed her in, and took the place beside her.

"Now, then, fairest and dearest, you are at last, indeed, my own!" he said, seeking her eyes.

"Thank Heaven, I am not! I never foreswore myself. I never opened my lips, or formed a vow in my head. I never promised you anything," said Jacquelina, turning away; and the rest of the journey was made in silence.

CHAPTER XI.

DELL-DELIGHT

It should have been an enchanting home to which Thurston Willcoxen returned after his long sojourn in Europe. The place, Dell-Delight, might once have deserved its euphonious and charming name; now, however, its delightfulness was as purely traditional as the royal lineage claimed by its owners.

Mr. Willcoxen was one of those whose god is Mammon. He had inherited money,

married a half-sister of Commodore Waugh for money, and made money. Year by year, from youth to age, adding thousands to thousands, acres to acres; until now, at the age of ninety-five, he was the master of incalculable riches.

He had outlived his wife and their three children; and his nearest of kin were Thurston Willcoxen, the son of his eldest son; Cloudesley Mornington, the son of his eldest daughter, and poor Fanny Laurie, the child of his youngest daughter.

Thurston and Fanny had each inherited a small property independent of their grandfather.

But poor Cloudy had been left an orphan in the worst sense of the word—destitute and dependent on the "cold charity of the world," or the colder and bitterer alms of unloving rich relatives.

The oldest and nearest kinsman and natural guardian of the boys—old Mr. Willcoxen—had, of course, received them into his house to be reared and educated; but no education would he afford the lads beyond that dispensed by the village schoolmaster, who could very well teach them that ten dimes make a dollar, and ten dollars an eagle; and who could also instruct them how to write their own names—for instance, at the foot of receipts of so many hundred dollars for so many hogsheads of tobacco; or to read other men's signatures, to wit, upon the backs of notes of hand, payable at such a time, or on such a day. This was just knowledge enough, he said, to teach the boys how to make and save money, yet not enough to tempt them to spend it foolishly in travel, libraries, pictures, statues, arbors, fountains, and such costly trumpery and expensive tomfoolery.

To Thurston, who was his favorite, probably because he bore the family name and inherited some independent property, Mr. Willcoxen would, however, have afforded a more liberal and gentlemanly education, could he have done so and at the same time decently withheld from going to some expense in giving his penniless grandson, Cloudy, the same privilege. As it was, he sought to veil his parsimony by

conservative principle.

It was a great humiliation to the boys to see that, while all the youths of their own rank and neighborhood were entered pensioners at the local college, they two alone were taken from the little day-school to be put to agricultural labor—a thing unprecedented in that locality at that time.

When this matter was brought to the knowledge of Commodore Waugh, as he strode up and down his hall, the indignant old sailor thumped his heavy stick upon the ground, thrust forward his great head, and swore furiously by the whole Pandemonial Hierarchy that his grandnephews should not be brought up like clodhoppers.

And straightway he ordered his carriage, threw himself into it, and rode over to Charlotte Hall, where he entered the name of his two young relatives as pensioners at his own proper cost.

This done, he ordered his coachman to take the road to Dell-Delight, where he had an interview with Mr. Willcoxen.

And as he met little opposition from the old man, who seemed to think that it was no more than fair that the boys' uncle should share the expense of educating them, he sought out the youths, whom he found in the field, and bade them leave the plough, and go and prepare themselves to go to C—— and get educated, as befitted the grandnephews of a gentleman!

The lads were at that time far too simple-minded and too clannish to feel their pride piqued at this offer, or to take offense at the rude manner in which it was made. Commodore Waugh was their grand-uncle, and therefore had a right to educate them, and to be short with them, too, if he pleased. That was the way in which they both looked at the matter. And very much delighted and very grateful they were for the opening for education thus made for them.

And very zealously they entered upon their academical studies. They boarded at the

college and roomed together. But their vacations were spent apart, Thurston spending his at Dell-Delight, and Cloudy his at Luckenough.

When the academical course was completed, Commodore Waugh, as has been seen, was at some pains to give Cloudy a fair start in life, and for the first time condescended to use his influence with "the Department" to procure a favor in the shape of a midshipman's warrant for Cloudesley Mornington.

In the meantime old Mr. Willcoxen was very gradually sinking into the imbecility natural to his advanced age; and his fascinating grandson was gaining some ascendancy over his mind. Year by year this influence increased, though it must be admitted that Thurston's conquest over his grandfather's whims was as slow as that of the Hollanders in winning the land from the sea.

However, the old man—now that Cloudy was provided for and off his hands—lent a more willing ear to the petition of Thurston to be permitted to continue his education by a course of studies at a German university, and afterward by a tour of the Eastern continent.

Thurston's absence was prolonged much beyond the original intention, as has been related; he spent two years at the university, two in travel, and nearly two in the city of Paris.

His grandfather would certainly never have consented to this prolonged absence, had it been at his own cost; but the expenses were met by advances upon Thurston's own small patrimony.

And, in fact, when at last the young gentleman returned to his native country, it was because his property was nearly exhausted, and his remittances were small, few and far between, grudgingly sent, and about to be stopped. Therefore nearly penniless, but perfectly free from the smallest debt or degradation—elegant, accomplished, fastidious, yet truthful, generous, gallant and aspiring—Thurston left the elegant salons and exciting scenes of Paris for the comparative dullness and dreariness of his

native place and his grandfather's house.

He had reached his legal majority just before leaving Paris, and soon after his arrival at home he was appointed trustee of poor Fanny Laurie's property.

His first act was to visit Fanny in the distant asylum in which she was confined, and ascertain her real condition. And having heard her pronounced incurable, though perfectly harmless, he determined to release her from the confinement of the asylum, and to bring her home to her native county, where, among the woods and hills and streams, she might find at once that freedom, space and solitude so desired by the heart-sick or brain-sick, and where also his own care might avail her.

Old Mr. Willcoxen, far from offering opposition to this plan, actually favored it—though from the less worthy motive of economy. What was the use of spending money to pay her board, and nursing, and medical attendance, in the asylum, when she might be boarded and nursed and doctored so much cheaper at home? For the old man confidently looked forward to the time when the poor, fragile, failing creature would sink into the grave, and Thurston would become her heir. And he calculated that every dollar they could save of her income would be so much added to the inheritance when Thurston should come into it.

Very soon after Thurston's return home his grandfather gave him to understand the conditions upon which he intended to make him his heir. They were two in number, viz., first, that Thurston should never leave him again while he lived; and, secondly, that he should never marry without his consent. "For I don't wish to be left alone in my old age, my dear boy; nor do I wish to see you throw yourself away upon any girl whose fortune is less than the estate I intend to bequeath entire to yourself."

CHAPTER XII.

MARIAN, THE INSPIRER.

It was not fortunate for old Mr. Willcoxen's plans that his grandson should have met

Marian Mayfield. For, on the morning of Thurston's first meeting with the charming girl, when he turned his horse's head from the arched gateway of Old Field Cottage and galloped off, "a haunting shape and image gay" attended him.

It was that of beautiful Marian, with her blooming face and sunny hair, and rounded roseate neck and bosom and arms, all softly, delicately flushed with the pure glow of rich, luxuriant vitality, as she stood in the sunlight, under the arch of azure morning-glories, with her graceful arms raised in the act of binding up the vines.

At first this "image fair" was almost unthought of; he was scarcely conscious of the haunting presence, or the life and light it gradually diffused through his whole being. And when the revelation dawned upon his intellect, he smiled to himself and wondered if, for the first time, he was falling in love; and then he grew grave, and tried to banish the dangerous thought. But when, day after day, amid all the business and the pleasures of his life, the "shape" still pursued him, instead of getting angry with it or growing weary of it, he opened his heart and took it in, and made it at home, and set it upon a throne, where it reigned supreme, diffusing delight over all his nature. But soon, too soon, this bosom's sovereign became the despot, and stung, goaded and urged him to see again this living, breathing, glowing, most beautiful original. To seek her? For what? He did not even try to answer the question.

Thus passed one week.

And then, had he been disposed to forget the beautiful girl, he could not have done so. For everywhere where the business of his grandfather took him—around among the neighboring planters, to the villages of B—— or of C——, everywhere he heard of Marian, and frequently he saw her, though at a distance, or under circumstances that made it impossible for him, without rudeness, to address her. He both saw and heard of her in scenes and society where he could hardly have expected to find a young girl of her insignificant position.

Marian was a regular attendant of the Protestant church at Benedict, where, before

the morning service, she taught in the Sunday-school, and before the afternoon service she received a class of colored children.

And Thurston, who had been a very careless and desultory attendant, sometimes upon the Catholic chapel, sometimes upon the Protestant church, now became a very regular frequenter of the latter place of worship; the object of his worship being not the Creator, but the creature, whom, if he missed from her accustomed seat, the singing, and praying, and preaching for him lost all of its meaning, power and spirituality. In the churchyard he sometimes tried to catch her eye and bow to her; but he was always completely baffled in his aspirations after a nearer communion. She was always attended from the church and assisted into her saddle by Judge Provost, Colonel Thornton, or some other "potent, grave and reverend seignors," who "hedged her about with a divinity" that it was impossible, without rudeness and intrusion, to break through. The more he was baffled and perplexed, the more eager became his desire to cultivate her acquaintance. Had his course been clear to woo her for his wife, it would have been easy to ask permission of Edith to visit her at her house; but such was not the case, and Thurston, tampering with his own integrity of purpose, rather wished that this much coveted acquaintance should be incidental, and their interviews seem accidental, so that he should not commit himself, or in any way lead her to form expectations which he had no surety of being able to meet. How long this cool and cautious foresight might avail him, if once he were brought in close companionship with Marian, remains to be seen. It happened one Sunday afternoon in October that he saw Marian take leave of her venerable escort, Colonel Thornton, at the churchyard gate, and gayly and alone turn into the forest road that led to her own home. He immediately threw himself into his saddle and followed her, with the assumed air of an indifferent gentleman pursuing his own path. He overtook her near one of those gates that frequently intersect the road. Bowing, he passed her, opened the gate, and held it open for her passage. Marian smiled, and nodded with a pleasant:

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Willcoxen," as she went through,

Thurston closed the gate and rode on after her.

"This is glorious weather, Miss Mayfield."

"Glorious, indeed!" replied Marian.

"And the country, too, is perfectly beautiful at this season. I never could sympathize with the poets who call autumnal days 'the melancholy days—the saddest of the year.'"

"Nor I," said Marian; "for to me, autumn, with its refulgent skies, and gorgeous woods, and rich harvest, and its prospect of Christmas cheer and wintry repose has ever seemed a gay and festive season. The year's great work is done, the harvest is gathered, enjoyment is present, and repose at hand."

"In the world of society," said Thurston, "it is in the evening, after the labor or the business of the day is over, that the gayest scenes of festivity occur, just preceding the repose of sleep. So I receive your thought of the autumn—the evening of the year, preceding the rest of winter. Nature's year's work is done; she puts on her most gorgeous robes, and holds a festival before she sinks to her winter's sleep."

Marian smiled brightly upon him.

"Yes; my meaning, I believe, only more pointedly expressed."

That smile—that smile! It lightened through all his nature with electric, life-giving, spirit-realizing power, elevating and inspiring his whole being. His face, too, was radiant with life as he answered the maiden's smile.

But something in his eyes caused Marian's glances to fall, and the rosy clouds to roll up over her cheeks and brow.

Then Thurston governed his countenance—let no ardent or admiring glance escape, and when he spoke again his manner and words were more deferential.

"We spoke of the world of nature, Miss Mayfield; but how is it with the world of

man? To many—nay, to most of the human race—autumn is the herald of a season not of festivity and repose, but of continued labor, and increased want and privation and suffering."

"That is because society is not in harmony with nature; man has wandered as far from nature as from God," said Marian.

"And as much needs a Saviour to lead him back to the one as to the other," replied Thurston.

"You know that—you feel it?" asked Marian, turning upon him one of her soul-thrilling glances.

Thurston trembled with delicious pleasure through all his frame; but, guarding his eyes, lest again they should frighten off her inspiring glances, he answered, fervently:

"I know and feel it most profoundly."

And Thurston thought he spoke the very truth, though in sober fact he had never thought or felt anything about the subject until now that Marian, his inspirer, poured her life-giving spirit into his soul.

She spoke again, earnestly, ardently.

"You know and feel it most profoundly! That deep knowledge and that deep feeling is the chrism oil that has anointed you a messenger and a laborer in the cause of humanity. 'Called and chosen,' be thou also faithful. There are many inspired, many anointed; but few are faithful!"

"Thou, then, art the high priestess that hast poured the consecrated oil on my head. I will be faithful!"

He spoke with such sudden enthusiasm, such abandon, that it had the effect of bringing Marian back to the moderation and retenue of her usual manner. He saw it in the changed expression of her countenance; and what light or shade of feeling

passed over that beautiful face unmarked of him? When he spoke again it was composedly.

"You speak as the preachers and teachers preach and teach—in general terms. Be explicit; what would you have me to do, Miss Mayfield? Only indicate my work, and tell me how to set about the accomplishment of it, and never knight served liege lady as I will serve you!"

Marian smiled.

"How? Oh, you must make yourself a position from which to influence people! I do not know that I can advise you how; but you will find a way, as—were I a man, I should!"

"Being a woman, you have done wonders!"

"For a woman," said Marian, with a glance full of archness and merriment.

"No, no; for any one, man or woman! But your method, Marian? I beg your pardon, Miss Mayfield," he added, with a blush of ingenuous embarrassment.

"Nay, now," said the frank girl; "do call me Marian if that name springs more readily from your lips than the other. Almost all persons call me Marian, and I like it."

A rush of pleasure thrilled all through his veins; he gave her words a meaning and a value for himself that they did not certainly possess; he forgot that the grace extended to him was extended to all—nay, that she had even said as much in the very words that gave it. He answered:

"And if I do, fairest Marian, shall I, too, hear my own Christian name in music from your lips?"

"Oh, I do not know," said the beautiful girl, laughing and blushing. "If it ever comes naturally, perhaps; certainly not now. Why, the venerable Colonel Thornton calls me 'Marian,' but it never comes to me to call him 'John!'"

CHAPTER XIII.

LOVE.

This was but one of many such meetings, Thurston growing more and more infatuated each time, while Marian scarcely tried to hide the pleasure which his society gave her.

One day when riding through the forest he met Marian returning from the village and on foot. She was radiant with health and beauty, and blushing and smiling with joy as she met him. A little basket hung upon her arm. To dismount and join her, to take the basket from her arm, and to look in her face and declare in broken exclamations his delight at seeing her, were the words and the work of an instant.

"And whither away this morning, fairest Marian?" he inquired, when unrebuked he had pressed her hand to his lips, and drawn it through his arm.

"I have been to the village, and am now going home," said the maiden.

"It is a long walk through the forest."

"Yes; but my pony has cast a shoe and lamed himself slightly, and I fear I shall have to dispense with his services for a few days."

"Thank God!" fervently ejaculated Thurston to himself.

"But it is beautiful weather, and I enjoy walking," said the young girl.

"Marian—dearest Marian, will you let me attend you home? The walk is lonely, and it may not be quite safe for a fair woman to take it unattended."

"I have no fear of interruption," said Marian.

"Yet you will not refuse to let me attend you? Do not, Marian!" he pleaded, earnestly, fervently, clasping her hand, and pouring the whole strength of his soul in the gaze that he fastened on her face.

"I thank you; but you were riding the other way."

"It was merely an idle saunter, to help to kill the time between this and Sunday, dearest girl. Now, rest you, my queen! my queen! upon this mossy rock, as on a throne, while I ride forward and leave my horse. I will be with you again in fifteen minutes; in the meantime here is something for you to look at," he said, drawing from his pocket an elegant little volume bound in purple and gold, and laying it in her lap. He then smiled, sprang into his saddle, bowed, and galloped away, leaving Marian to examine her book. It was a London copy of Spenser's Fairy Queen, superbly illustrated, one of the rarest books to be found in the whole country at that day. On the fly-leaf the name of Marian was written, in the hand of Thurston.

Some minutes passed in the pleasing examination of the volume; and Marian was still turning the leaves with unmixed pleasure—pleasure in the gift, and pleasure in the giver—when Thurston, even before the appointed time, suddenly rejoined her.

"So absorbed in Spenser that you did not even hear or see me!" said the young man, half reproachfully.

"I was indeed far gone in Fairy Land! Oh, I thank you so much for your beautiful present! It is indeed a treasure. I shall prize it greatly," said Marian, in unfeigned delight.

"Do you know that Fairy Land is not obsolete, dearest Marian?" he said, fixing his eyes upon her charming face with an ardor and earnestness that caused hers to sink.

"Come," she said, in a low voice, and rising from the rock; "let us leave this place and go forward."

They walked on, speaking softly of many things—of the vision of Spenser, of the beautiful autumnal weather, of anything except the one interest that now occupied both hearts. The fear of startling her bashful trust, and banishing those bewitching glances that sometimes lightened on his face, made him cautious, and restrained his eagerness; while excessive consciousness kept her cheeks dyed with blushes, and her nerves vibrating sweet, wild music, like the strings of some aeolian harp when

swept by the swift south wind.

He determined, during the walk, to plead his love, and ascertain his fate. Ay! but how approach the subject when, at every ardent glance or tone, her face, her heart, shrank and closed up, like the leaves of the sensitive plant.

So they rambled on, discovering new beauties in nature; now it would be merely an oak leaf of rare richness of coloring; now some tiny insect with finished elegance of form; now a piece of the dried branch of a tree that Thurston picked up, to bid her note the delicately blending shades in its gray hue, or the curves and lines of grace in its twisted form—the beauty of its slow return to dust; and now perhaps it would be the mingled colors in the heaps of dried leaves drifted at the foot of some great tree.

And then from the minute loveliness of nature's sweet, small things, their eyes would wander to the great glory of the autumnal sky, or the variegated array of the gorgeous forest.

Thurston knew a beautiful glade, not far distant, to the left of their path, from which there was a very fine view that he wished to show his companion. And he led Marian thither by a little moss-bordered, descending path.

It was a natural opening in the forest, from which, down a still, descending vista, between the trees, could be seen the distant bay, and the open country near it, all glowing under a refulgent sky, and hazy with the golden mist of Indian Summer. Before them the upper branches of the nearest trees formed a natural arch above the picture.

Marian stood and gazed upon the wondrous beauty of the scene with soft, steady eyes, with lips breathlessly severed, in perfect silence and growing emotion.

"This pleases you," said Thurston.

She nodded, without removing her gaze.

"You find it charming?"

She nodded again, and smiled.

"You were never here before?"

"Never."

"Marian, you are a lover of nature."

"I do not know," she said, softly, "whether it be love, or worship, or both; but some pictures spell-bind me. I stand amidst a scene like this, enchanted, until my soul has absorbed as much of its beauty and glory and wisdom as it can absorb. As the Ancient Mariner held with his 'glittering eye' the wedding guest, so such a picture holds me enthralled until I have heard the story and learned the lesson it has to tell and teach me. Did you ever, in the midst of nature's liberal ministrations, feel your spirit absorbing, assimilating, growing? Or is it only a fantastic action of mine that beauty is the food of soul?"

She turned her eloquent eyes full upon him.

He forgot his prudence, forgot her claims, forgot everything, and caught and strained her to his bosom, pressing passionate kisses upon her lips, and the next instant he was kneeling at her feet, imploring her to forgive him—to hear him.

Marian stood with her face bowed and hidden in her hands; but above the tips of her fingers, her forehead, crimsoned, might be seen. One half her auburn hair had escaped and rippled down in glittering disorder. And so she stood a few moments. But soon, removing her hands and turning away, she said, in a troubled tone:

"Rise. Never kneel to any creature; that homage is due the Creator alone. Oh, rise!"

"First pardon me—first hear me, beloved girl!"

"Oh, rise—rise, I beg you! I cannot bear to see a man on his knee, except in prayer to God!" she said, walking away.

He sprang up and followed her, took her hand, and, with gentle compulsion, made her sit down upon a bank; and then he sank beside her, exclaiming eagerly,

vehemently, yet in a low, half-smothered tone:

"Marian, I love you! I never spoke these words to woman before, for I never loved before. Marian, the first moment that I saw you I loved you, without knowing what new life it was that had kindled in my nature. I have loved you more and more every day! I love you more than words can tell or heart conceive! I only live in your presence! Marian! not one word or glance for me? Oh, speak! Turn your dear face toward me," he said, putting his hand gently around her head. "Speak to me, Marian, for I adore—I worship you!"

"I do not deserve to be loved in that way. I do not wish it, for it is wrong—idolatrous," she said, in a low, trembling voice.

"Oh! what do you mean? Is the love upon which my life seems to hang so offensive to you? Say, Marian! Oh! you are compassionate by nature; how can you keep me in the torture of suspense?"

"I do not keep you so."

"You will let me love you?"

Marian slipped her hand in his; that was her reply.

"You will love me?"

For all answer she gently pressed his fingers. He pressed her hand to his heart, to his lips, covering it with kisses.

"Yet, oh! speak to me, dearest; let me hear from your lips that you love me—a little—but better than I deserve. Will you? Say, Marian! Speak, dearest girl!"

"I cannot tell you now," she said, in a low, thrilling tone. "I am disturbed; I wish to grow quiet; and I must go home. Let us return."

One more passionate kiss of the hand he clasped, and then he helped her to her feet, drew her arm within his own, and led her up the moss-covered rocks that formed the natural steps of the ascent that led to the homeward path.

They were now near the verge of the forest, which, when they reached, Marian drew her arm from his, and, extending her hand, said:

"This is the place our roads part."

"But you will let me attend you home?"

"No; it would make the return walk too long."

"That can be no consideration, I beg you will let me go with you, Marian."

"No; it would not be convenient to Edith to-day," said Marian, quickly drawing her hand from his detaining grasp, waving him adieu, and walking swiftly away across the meadow.

Thurston gazed after her, strongly tempted to follow her; yet withal admitting that it was best that she had declined his escort to the cottage, and thanking Heaven that the opportunity would again be afforded to take an "incidental" stroll with her, as she should walk to church on Sunday morning; and so, forming the resolution to haunt the forest-path from seven o'clock that next Sabbath morning until he should see her, Thurston hurried home.

And how was it with Marian? She hastened to the cottage, laid off her bonnet and shawl, and set herself at work as diligently as usual; but a higher bloom glowed on her cheek, a softer, brighter light beamed in her eye, a warmer, sweeter smile hovered around her lips, a deeper, richer tone thrilled in her voice.

On Sunday morning the lovers "chanced" to meet again—for so Thurston would still have had it appear as he permitted Marian to overtake him in the forest on her way to the Sunday-school.

She was blooming and beautiful as the morning itself as she approached. He turned with a radiant smile to greet her.

"Welcome! thrice welcome, dearest one! Your coming is more joyous than that of day. Welcome, my own, dear Marian! May I now call you mine? Have I read that

angel-smile aright? Is it the blessed herald of a happy answer to my prayer?" he whispered, as he took her hand and passed his arm around her head and brought it down upon his bosom. "Speak, my Marian! Speak, my beloved! Are you my own, as I am yours?"

Her answer was so low-toned that he had to bend his head down close to her lips to hear her murmur:

"I love you dearly. But I love you too well to ruin your prospects. You must not bind yourself to me just yet, dear Thurston," and meekly and gently she sought to slip from his embrace.

But he slid his arm around her lightly, bending his head and whispering eagerly:

"What mean you, Marian? Your words are incomprehensible."

"Dear Thurston," she answered, in a tremulous and thrilling voice, "I have known your grandfather long by report, and I am well aware of his character and disposition and habits. But only yesterday I chanced to learn from one who was well informed that old Mr. Willcoxen had sworn to make you his heir only upon condition of your finding a bride of equal or superior fortunes. If now you were to engage yourself to me, your grandfather would disinherit you. I love you too well," she murmured very low, "to ruin your fortunes. You must not bind yourself to me just now, Thurston."

And this loving, frank and generous creature was the woman, he thought, whose good name he would have periled in a clandestine courtship in preference to losing his inheritance by an open betrothal. A stab of compunction pierced his bosom; he felt that he loved her more than ever, but passion was stronger than affection, stronger than conscience, stronger than anything in nature, except pride and ambition. He lightened his clasp about her waist—he bent and whispered:

"Beloved Marian, is it to bind me only that you hesitate?"

"Only that," she answered, softly.

"Now hear me, Marian. I swear before Heaven, and in thy sight—that—as I have never loved woman before you—that—as I love you only of all women—I will be faithful to you while I live upon this earth! as your husband, if you will accept me; as your exclusive lover, whether you will or not! I hold myself pledged to you as long as we both shall live! There, Marian! I am bound to you as tight as vows can bind! I am pledged to you whether you accept my pledge or not. You cannot even release, for I am pledged to Heaven as well. There, Marian, you see I am bound, while you only are free. Come! be generous! You have said that you loved me! Pledge yourself to me in like manner. We are both young, dear Marian, and we can wait. Only let me have your promise to be my wife—only let me have that blessed assurance for the future, and I can endure the present. Speak, dear Marian."

"Your grandfather—"

"He has no grudge against you, personally, sweet girl; he knows nothing, suspects nothing of my preferences—how should he? No, dearest girl—his notion that I must have a moneyed bride is the merest whim of dotage; we must forgive the whims of ninety-five. That great age also augurs for us a short engagement and a speedy union!"

"Oh! never let us dream of that! It would be sinful, and draw down upon us the displeasure of Heaven. Long may the old man yet live to prepare for a better life."

"Amen; so be it; God forbid that I should grudge the aged patriarch his few remaining days upon earth—days, too, upon which his soul's immortal welfare may depend," said Thurston. "But, dearest girl, it is more difficult to get a reply from you than from a prime minister. Answer, now, once for all, sweet girl! since I am forever bound to you; will you pledge yourself to become my own dear wife?"

"Yes," whispered Marian, very lowly.

"And will you," he asked, gathering her form closer to his bosom, "will you redeem that pledge when I demand it?"

"Yes," she murmured sweetly, "so that it is not to harm you, or bring you into trouble or poverty; for that I would not consent to do!"

"God bless you; you are an angel! Oh! Marian! I find it in my heart to sigh because I am so unworthy of you!"

And this was spoken most sincerely.

"You think too well of me. I fear—I fear for the consequences."

"Why, dearest Marian?"

"Oh, I fear that when you know me better you may love me less," she answered, in a trembling voice.

"Why should I?"

"Oh! because your love may have been attracted by ideal qualities, with which you yourself have invested me; and when your eyes are opened you may love me less."

"May my soul forever perish the day that I cease to love you!" said Thurston, passionately pressing her to his heart, and sealing his fearful oath upon her pure brow and guileless lips. "And now, beloved! this compact is sealed! Our fates are united forever! Henceforth nothing shall dissever us!"

They were now drawing near the village.

Marian suddenly stopped.

"Dear Thurston," she said, "if you are seen waiting upon me to church do you know what the people will say? They will say that Marian has a new admirer in Mr. Willcoxen—and that will reach your grandfather's ears, and give you trouble."

"Stay! one moment, beautiful Marian! When shall we meet again?"

"When Heaven wills."

"And when will that be, fairest?"

"I do not know; but do not visit me at the cottage, dear Thurston, it would be

indiscreet."

"Marian! I must see you often. Will you meet me on the beach to-morrow afternoon?"

"No," answered Marian, gravely, "in this single instance, I must not meet you, though my heart pleads like a sick child with me to do it, Thurston, dear Thurston."

She raised her eyes to his as she spoke, and giving way to a sudden impulse, dropped her head upon his shoulder, put her arms around his neck, and embraced him. And then his better angel rose above the storm of passion that was surging through his veins, and calmed the tumult, and spoke through his lips.

"You are right, Marian—fairest and dearest, you are right. And I not only love you best of all women, but honor you more than all men. It shall be as you have said. I will not seek you anywhere. As the mother, dying of plague, denies herself the parting embrace of her 'unstricken' child—so, for your sake, will I refrain from the heaven of your presence."

"And, dear Thurston," she said, raising her head, "it will not be so hard to bear, as you now think. We shall see each other every Sunday in the church, and every Monday in the lecture-room. We shall often be of the same invited company at neighbors' houses. Remember, also, that Christmas is coming, with its protracted festivities, when we shall see each other almost every evening, at some little neighborhood gathering. And now I must really hurry; oh! how late I am this morning! Good-by, dearest Thurston!"

"Good-by, my own Marian."

Blushingly she received, his parting kiss, and hurried along the little foot-path leading to the village.

Thurston had been perfectly sincere in his resolution not to seek a private interview with Marian; and he kept it faithfully all the week, with less temptation to break it, because he did not know where to watch for her.

But Sunday came again—and Thurston, with a little bit of human self-deception and finesse, avoided the forest path, where he had met her the preceding Sabbath, and saying to himself that he would not waylay her, took the river road, refusing to confess even to himself that he acted upon the calculation that she also would take the same road, in order to avoid meeting him in the forest.

His "calculus of probabilities" had not failed him. He had not walked far upon the forest-shaded banks of the river before he saw Marian walking before him. He hastened and overtook her.

At first seeing him her face flushed radiant with surprise and joy. She seemed to think that nothing short of necromancy could have conjured him to that spot. She had no reproaches for him, because she had no suspicion that he had trifled with his promise not to seek her. But she expressed her astonishment.

"I did not know you ever came this way," she said.

"Nor did I ever before, love; but I remembered my pledge, not to follow or to seek you, and so I avoided the woodland path where we met last Sunday," said Thurston, persuading himself that he spoke the precise truth.

It is not necessary to pursue with them this walk; lovers scarcely thank us for such intrusions. It is sufficient to say that this was not the last one.

Blinded by passion and self-deception, and acting upon the same astute calculus of probabilities, Thurston often contrived to meet Marian in places where his presence might be least expected, and most often in paths that she had taken for the express purpose of keeping out of his way.

Thus it fell that many forest walks and seashore strolls were taken, all through the lovely Indian summer weather. And these seemed so much the result of pure accident that Marian never dreamed of complaining that his pledge had been tampered with.

But Thurston began to urge her consent to a private marriage.

From a secret engagement to a secret marriage, the transition seemed to him very easy.

"And, dearest Marian, we are both of age, both free—we should neither displease God nor wrong man, by such a step—while it would at the same time secure our union, and save us from injustice and oppression! do you not see?"

Such was his argument, which he pleaded and enforced with all the powers of passion and eloquence. In vain. Though every interview increased his power over the maiden—though her affections and her will were both subjected, the domain of conscience was unconquered. And Marian still answered:

"Though a secret marriage would break no law of God or man, nor positively wrong any human creature, yet it might be the cause of misunderstanding and suspicion—and perhaps calumny, causing much distress to those who love and respect me. Therefore it would be wrong. And I must do no wrong, even for your dear sake."

CHAPTER XIV.

CLOUDY.

It was Christmas Eve and a fierce snow-storm was raging.

Old Mr. Willcoxen sat half doubled up in his leather-covered elbow chair, in the chimney corner of his bedroom, occupied with smoking his clay pipe, and thinking about his money bags.

Fanny was in the cold, bleak upper rooms of the house, looking out of the windows upon the wide desolation of winter, the waste of snow, the bare forest, the cold, dark waters of the bay—listening to the driving tempest, and singing, full of glee as she always was when the elements were in an uproar.

Thurston was the sole and surly occupant of the sitting-room, where he had thrown

himself at full length upon the sofa, to lie and yawn over the newspaper, which he vowed was as stale as last year's almanac.

Suddenly the front door was thrown open, and some one came, followed by the driving wind and snow, into the hall.

Thurston threw aside his paper, started up, and went out.

What was his surprise to see Cloudesley Mornington standing there, with a face so haggard, with eyes so wild and despairing, that, in alarm, he exclaimed:

"Good heaven, Cloudesley. What is the matter? Has anything happened at home?"

"Home! home! What home? I have no home upon this earth now, and never shall have!" exclaimed the poor youth, distractedly.

"My dear fellow, never speak so despondently. What is it now? a difficulty with the commodore?"

"God's judgment light upon him!" cried Cloudy, pushing past and hurrying up the stairs.

Thurston could not resume his former composure; something in Cloudy's face had left a feeling of uneasiness in his mind, and the oftener he recalled the expression the more troubled he became.

Until at length he could bear the anxiety no longer, and quietly leaving his room, he went up-stairs in search of the youth, and paused before the boy's door. By the clicking, metallic sounds within, he suspected him to be engaged in loading a pistol; for what purpose! Not an instant was to be risked in rapping or questioning.

With one vigorous blow of his heel Thurston burst open the door, and sprung forward and dashed the fatal weapon from his hand, and then confronted him, exclaiming:

"Good God, Cloudy! What does this mean?"

Cloudy looked at him wildly for a minute, and when Thurston repeated the question,

he answered with a hollow laugh:

"That I am crazy, I guess! don't you think so?"

"Cloudy, my dear fellow, we have been like brothers all our lives; now won't you tell me what has brought you to this pass? What troubles you so much? Perhaps I can aid you in some way. Come, what is it now?"

"And you really don't know what it is? Don't you know that there is a wedding on hand?"

"A wedding!"

"Aye, man alive! A wedding! They are going to marry the child Jacquelina to old Grimshaw."

"Oh, yes, I know that; but, my dear boy, what of it? Surely you were never in love with little Jacko?"

"In love with her! ha! ha! no, not as you understand it! who take it to be that fantastical passion that may be inspired by the first sight of a pretty face. No! I am not in love with her, unless I could be in love with myself. For Lina was my other self. Oh, you who can talk so glibly of being 'in love,' little know that strength of attachment when two hearts have grown together from childhood."

"It is like a brother's and a sister's."

"Never! brothers and sisters cannot love so. What brother ever loved a sister as I have loved Lina from our infancy? What brother ever would have done and suffered as much for his sister as I have for Lina?"

"You! done and suffered for Lina!" said Thurston, beginning to think he was really mad.

"Yes! how many faults as a boy I have shouldered for her. How many floggings I have taken. How many shames I have borne for her, which she never knew. Oh! how I have spent my night watches at sea, dreaming of her. For years I have been

saving up all my money to buy a pretty cottage for her and her mother that she loves so well. I meant to have bought or built one this very year. And after having made the pretty nest, to have wooed my pretty bird to come and occupy it. I meant to have been such a good boy to her mother, too! I pleased myself with fancying how the poor, little timorous woman would rest in so much peace and confidence in our home—with me and Lina. I have saved so much that I am richer than any one knows, and I meant to have accomplished all that this very time of coming home. I hurried home. I reached the house. I ran in like a wild boy as I was. Her voice called me. I followed its sound—ran up-stairs to her room. I found her in bed. I thought she was sick. But she sprang up, and threw herself upon my bosom, and with her arms clasped about my neck, wept as if her heart would break. And while I wondered what the matter could be, her mother interfered and told me. God's judgment light upon them all, I say! Oh! it was worse than murder. It was a horrid, horrid crime, that has no name because there is none heinous enough for it. Thurston! I acted like a very brute! God help me, I was both stunned and maddened, as it seems to me now. For I could not speak. I tore her little, fragile, clinging arms from off my neck, and thrust her from me. And here I am. Don't ask me how I loved her! I have no words to tell you!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE FAIRY BRIDE.

Since the morning of her ill-starred marriage, Sans Souci had waned like a waning moon; and the bridegroom saw, with dismay, his fairy bride slowly fading, passing, vanishing from his sight. There was no very marked disorder, no visible or tangible symptoms to guide the physicians, who were in succession summoned to her relief. Very obscure is the pathology of a wasting heart, very occult the scientific knowledge that can search out the secret sickness, which, the further it is sought,

shrinks the deeper from sight.

Once, indeed, while she was sitting with her aunt and uncle, the latter suddenly and rudely mentioned Cloudy's name, saying that "the fool" was sulking over at Dell-Delight; that he believed he would have blown his brains out if it had not been for Thurston, and for his own part, he almost wished that he had been permitted to do so, because he thought none but a fool would ever commit suicide, and the fewer fools there were in the world the better, etc., etc. His monologue was suddenly arrested by Henrietta's rushing forward to lift up Sans Souci, who had turned very pale, and dropped from her seat to the floor, where she lay silently quivering and gasping, like some poor wounded and dying bird.

They tacitly resolved, from this time forth, never to name Cloudy in her presence again.

And the commodore struck his heavy stick upon the floor, and emphatically thanked God that Nace Grimshaw had not been present to witness her agitation and its cause.

And Jacquelina waned and waned. And the physicians, wearied out with her case, prescribed "Change of air and scene—pleasant company—cheerful amusement—excitement," etc. A winter in Washington was suggested. And the little invalid was consulted as to her wishes upon the subject. "Yes," Jacquelina said she would go—anywhere, if only her aunty and Marian would go with her—she wanted Marian.

Mrs. Waugh readily consented to accompany her favorite, and also to try to induce "Hebe," as she called blooming Marian, to make one of their party.

And the very first day that the weather and the roads would admit of traveling, Mrs. Waugh rode over to Old Fields to see Marian, and talk with her about the contemplated journey.

The proposition took the young lady by surprise; there were several little lets and hindrances to her immediate acceptance of the invitation, which might, however, be

disposed of; and finally, Marian begged a day to consider about it. With this answer, Mrs. Waugh was forced to be content, and she took her leave, saying:

"Remember, Hebe! that I think your society and conversation more needful, and likely to be more beneficial to poor Lapwing, than anything else we can procure for her; therefore, pray decide to go with us, if possible."

Marian deprecated such reliance upon her imperfect abilities, but expressed her strong desire to do all the good she possibly could effect for the invalid, and made little doubt but that she should at least be able to attend her. So, with this hope, Mrs. Waugh kissed her and departed.

The very truth was, that Marian wished to see and consult her bethrothed before consenting to leave home for what seemed to her to be so long a journey, and for so long a period. In fact, Marian was not now a free agent; she had suffered her free will to slip from her own possession into that of Thurston.

She had not seen him all the wretched weather, and her heart now yearned for his presence. And that very afternoon Marian had a most pressing errand to Charlotte Hall, to purchase groceries, which the little family had got entirely out of during the continuance of the snow.

There was no certainty that she should see Thurston; still she hoped to do so, nor was her hope disappointed.

He overtook her a short distance from the village, on her road home.

Their meeting was a very glad one—heart sprang to heart and hand to hand—and neither affected to conceal the pleasure that it gave them. After the first joyous greetings, and the first earnest and affectionate inquiries about each other's health and welfare, both became grave and silent for a little while. Marian was reflecting how to propose to leave him for a three-months' visit to the gay capital, little thinking that Thurston himself was perplexed with the question of how to break to her the news of the necessity of his own immediate departure to England for an

absence of at least six or eight months. Marian spoke first.

"Dear Thurston, I have something to propose to you, that I fear you will not like very well; but if you do not, speak freely; for I am not bound."

"I—I do not understand you, love! Pray explain at once," said he, quick to take alarm where she was concerned.

"You know poor little Jacquelina has fallen into very bad health and spirits? Well, her physicians recommend change of air and scene, and her friends have decided to take her to Washington to pass the remainder of the winter. And the little creature has set her sickly fancy upon having me to go with her. Now, I think it is some sort a duty to go, and I would not willingly refuse. Nevertheless, dear Thurston, I dread to leave you, and if you think you will be very lonesome this winter without me—if you are likely to miss me one-half as much as I have missed you these last three weeks, I will not leave you at all."

He put his hand out and took hers, and pressed it, and would have carried it to his lips, but her wicked little pony suddenly jerked away.

"My own dearest Marian," he said; "my frank, generous love! if I were going to remain in this neighborhood this winter, no consideration, I fear, for others' good, would induce me to consent to part with you."

It was now Marian's turn to change color, and falter in her tones, as she asked:

"You—you are not going away?"

"Sweet Marian, yes! A duty—a necessity too imperative to be denied, summons me."

She kept her eyes fixed on his face in painful anxiety.

"I will explain. You have heard, dear Marian, that after my father's death my mother married a second time?"

"No—I never heard of it."

"She did, however—her second husband was a Scotchman. She lived with him seven years, and then died, leaving him one child, a boy six years of age. After my mother's death, my stepfather returned to Scotland, taking with him my half-brother, and leaving me with my grandfather. And all communication gradually ceased between us. Within this week, however, I have received letters from Edinburgh, informing me of the death of my stepfather, and the perfect destitution of my half-brother, now a lad of twelve years of age. He is at present staying with the clergyman who attended his father in his last illness, and who has written me the letters giving me the information that I now give you. Thus, you see, my dearest love, how urgent the duty is that takes me from your side. Yet—What! tears, my Marian! Ah, if so! let my dearest one but say the word, and I will not leave her. I will send money over to the lad instead."

"No, no! Ah! no, never trust your mother's orphan boy to strangers, or to his own guidance. Go for the poor, desolate lad, and never leave him, or suffer him to leave you. I know what orphanage in childhood is, dear Thurston, and so must you. Bring the boy home. And if he lives with you, I will do all I can to supply his mother's place."

"Dear girl! dear, dear Marian, my heart so longs to press you to itself. A plague upon these horses that keep us so far apart! I wish we were on foot!"

"Do you?" smiled Marian, directing his attention to the sloppy path down which they were riding.

Thurston smiled ruefully, and then sighed.

"When do you set out on your long journey, dear Thurston?"

"I have not fixed the time, my Marian! I have not the courage to name the day that shall part us for so long."

He looked at her with a heavy sigh, and then added:

"I shrink from appointing the time of going, as a criminal might shrink from giving

the signal for his own execution."

"Then let some other agent do it," said Marian, smiling at his earnestness. Then she added—"I shall go to Washington with Jacquelina. Her party will set out on Wednesday next. And, dear Thurston, I shall not like to leave you here, at all. I shall go with more content, if I knew that you set out the same day for your journey."

"But fairest Marian, never believe but that if you go to Washington, I shall take that city in on my way. There is a vessel to sail on the first of February, from Baltimore, for Liverpool. I shall probably go by her. I shall pass through Washington City on my way to Baltimore. Nay, indeed! what should hinder me from joining your party and traveling with you, since we are friends and neighbors, and go at the same time, from the same neighborhood, by the same road, to the same place?" he asked, eagerly.

A smile of joy illumined Marian's face.

"Truly," she answered, after a short pause. "I see no objection to that plan. And, oh! Thurston," she said, holding out her hand, and looking at him with her face holy and beaming with affection, "do you know what fullness of life and comfort—what sweetness of rest and contentment I feel in your presence, when I can have that rightly?"

"My own dear Marian! Heaven hasten the day when we shall be forever united."

And he suddenly sprang from his horse—lifted her from her saddle, and holding her carefully above the sloppy path, folded her fondly to his bosom, pressed kisses on her lips, and then replaced her, saying:

"Dear Marian, forgive me! My heart was half breaking with its need to press you to itself! Now then, dearest, I shall consider it settled that I join your party to Washington. I shall call at Locust Hill and see Mrs. Waugh, inform her of my destination, and ask her permission to accompany her. By the way—when do you give your answer to that lady?"

"I shall ride over to the Hill to-morrow morning for that purpose."

"Very well, dearest. In that case I will also appoint the morning as my time of calling; so that I may have the joy of meeting you there."

They had by this time reached the verge of the forest and the cross-road where their paths divided. And here they bade a loving, lingering adieu to each other, and separated.

That evening Marian announced to Edith her decision to accompany Jacquelina to Washington City.

Edith approved the plan.

The next morning Marian left the house to go to Locust Hill, where, besides the family, she found Thurston already awaiting her.

Thurston was seated by Jacquelina, endeavoring, by his gay and brilliant sallies of wit and humor, to charm away the sullen sadness of the pale and petulant little beauty.

And, truth to tell, soon fitful, fleeting smiles broke over the little wan face—smiles that grew brighter and more frequent as she noticed the surly anxiety they gave to Dr. Grimshaw, who sat, like the dog in the manger, watching Thurston sunning himself in the light of eyes that never, by any chance, shone upon him, their rightful proprietor!

Never! for though Jacquelina had paled and waned, failed and faded, until she seemed more like a moonlight phantom than a form of flesh and blood—her spirit was unbowed, unbroken, and she had kept her oath of uncompromising enmity with fearful perseverance. Petitions, expostulations, prayers, threats, had been all in vain to procure one smile, one word, one glance of compliance or forgiveness. And the fate of Dr. Grimshaw, with his unwon bride, was like that of Tantalus. And now the inconceivable tortures of jealousy were about to be added to his other torments, for this man now sitting by his side, and basking in the sunshine of her smiles, was the

all-praised Adonis who had won her maiden admiration months ago.

But Thurston soon put an end to his sufferings—not in consideration of his feelings, but because the young gentleman could not afford to lose or risk the chance of making one of the party which was to number Marian among its members. Therefore, with a light smile and careless bow, he left the side of Jacquelina and crossed over to Mrs. Waugh, with whom, also, he entered into a gay and bantering conversation, in the course of which Mrs. Waugh mentioned to him their purpose of going to Washington for a month or two.

It was then that, with an air of impromptu, Thurston informed her of his own contemplated journey and voyage, and of his intention to go to Baltimore by way of Washington.

"And when do you leave here?" asked Mrs. Waugh.

"I thought of starting on Wednesday morning."

"The very day that we shall set out—why can't we travel in company?" asked Henrietta, socially.

"I should be charmed, indeed—delighted! And nothing shall prevent me having that honor and pleasure, if Mrs. Waugh will permit my attendance."

"Why, my dear Thurston, to be sure I will—but don't waste fine speeches on your uncle's old wife. How do you travel?"

"As far as Washington I shall go on horseback, with a mounted groom to bring back the horses, when I proceed on my journey by stage to Baltimore."

"On horseback! Now that is excellent—that is really providential, as it falls out—for here is my Hebe, whom I have coaxed to be of the party, and who will have to perform the journey also on horseback, and you will make an admirable cavalier for her!"

Thurston turned and bowed to Marian, and expressed, in courtly terms, the honor

she would confer, and the pleasure she would give, in permitting him to serve her. And no one, to have seen him, would have dreamed that the subject had ever before been mentioned between them.

Marian blushed and smiled, and expressing her thanks, accepted his offered escort.

These preliminaries being settled, Thurston soon after arose and took leave.

Marian remained some time longer to arrange some little preparatory matters with Mrs. Waugh, and then bade them good-by, and hastened homeward.

But she saw Thurston walking his horse up and down the forest-path, and impatiently waiting for her.

* * * * *

Dr. Grimshaw was very much dissatisfied; and no sooner had Marian left the home, and left him alone with Mrs. Waugh and Jacquelina, than he turned to the elder lady, and said, with some asperity:

"I think it would have been well, Mrs. Waugh, if you had consulted the other members of your party before making so important an addition to it."

"And I think it would be better, Dr. Grimshaw, if you would occupy your valuable time and attention with affairs that fall more immediately within your own province," said Henrietta, loftily, as she would sometimes speak.

Dr. Grimshaw deigned no reply. He closed his mouth with a spasmodic snap, and sat ruminating—the very picture of wretchedness. He was, indeed, to be pitied! For no patience, no kindness, no wooing could win from his bride one smile. That very afternoon, under the combined goadings of exasperated self-love and poignant jealousy, Dr. Grimshaw sought an interview with Mrs. L'Oiseau, and urged her, in the most strenuous manner, to exert her maternal influence in bringing her daughter to terms.

And Mrs. L'Oiseau sent for Jacquelina, to have a talk with her. But not all her

arguments, entreaties, or even tears, could prevail with the obstinate bride to relax one single degree of her unforgiving antagonism to her detested bridegroom.

"Mother," she said, with sorrowful bitterness, "you are well now; indeed, you never were so ill as I was led to believe; and you are independent. I parted with my only hope of happiness in life to render you so; I sold myself in a formal marriage to be the legal medium of endowing Dr. Grimshaw with a certain landed estate. Even into that measure I was deceived—no more of that! it crazes me! The conditions are all fulfilled; he will have the property, and you are independent. And now he has no further claim upon me, and no power over me!"

"He has, Jacquelina; and it is only Dr. Grimshaw's forbearance that permits you to indulge in this wicked whim."

"His forbearance! Oh! hasn't he been forbearing, though!" she exclaimed, with a mocking laugh.

"Yes; he has, little as you are disposed to acknowledge it. You do not seem to know that he can compel your submission!"

"Can he!" she hissed, drawing her breath sharply through her clenched teeth, and clutching her fingers convulsively, while a white ring gleamed around the blue iris of her dilated eyes. "Let him try! let him drive me to desperation, and then learn how spirits dare to escape! But he will not do that. Mimmy! he reads me better than you do; he knows that he must not urge me beyond my powers of endurance. No, mother! Let him take my uncle into his counsels again, if he pleases; let them combine all their ingenuity, and wickedness, and power, and bring them all to bear on me at once; let them do their worst—they shall not gain one concession from me; not one smile, not one word, not one single look of tolerance—so help me heaven! And they know it, mother!—they know it! And why? You are secured from their malice; now they can turn no screws upon my heart-strings!—and I am free! They know it, mother—they know it, if you do not."

"But, Jacquelina, this is a very, very wicked life to lead! You are living in a state of mortal sin while you persist in this shocking rebellion against the authority and just rights of your husband."

"He is not my husband! that I utterly deny! I have never made him such! There was nothing in our nominal marriage to give him that claim. It was a mere legal form, for a mercenary purpose. It was a wicked and shameful subterfuge; a sacrilegious desecration of God's holy altar! but in its wickedness heaven knows I had little will! I was deluded and disturbed; facts were misrepresented to me, threats were made that could never have been executed; my fears were excited for your life; my affections were wrought upon; I was driven out of my senses even before I did consent to be his nominal wife—the legal sumpter-mule to carry him an estate. I promised nothing more, and I have kept all my promises. It is over! it is over! it is done! and it cannot be undone! But I never—never will forgive that man for the part he played in the drama!"

"Ave Maria, Mater Dolorosa! Was ever a mother so sorrowful as I? Holy saints and angels! how you shock me. Don't you know, wretched child, that you are committing deadly sin? Don't you know, alas! the holy church would refuse you its communion?"

"Let it! I will be excommunicated before I will give Dr. Grimshaw one tolerant glance! I will risk the eternal rather than fall into the nearer perdition!"

"Holy Mary save her! Don't you know, most miserable child! that such is your condition, that if you were to die now your soul would go to burning flames?"

"Ha! ha! Where do you think it is now, Mimmy?"

"You are mad! You don't know what you're talking about! And, alas! you are half an infidel, I know, for you don't believe in hell!"

"Yes, I do, Mimmy! Oh! yes, indeed I do! If ever my faith was shaken in that article of belief, it is firm enough now! It is more than re-established, for, look you,

Mimmy! I believe in heaven, but I know of hell!"

"I'm very glad you do, my dear. And I hope you will meditate much upon it, and it may lead you to change your course in regard to Dr. Grimshaw."

"Mimmy!" she said, with a wild laugh, "is there a deeper pit in perdition than that to which you urge me now?"

* * * * *

Fortune certainly favored the lovers that day; for when Thurston reached home in the evening, his grandfather said to him:

"Well, Mr. Jackanapes, since you are to sail from the port of Baltimore, I think it altogether best that you should take a private conveyance, and go by way of Washington."

"That will be a very lonesome manner of traveling, sir," answered the young man, demurely.

"It will be a very cheap one, you mean, and, therefore, will not befit you, Sir Millionaire! It will cost nothing, and, therefore, lose its only charm for you, my Lord Spendthrift," cried the miser, sharply.

"On the contrary, sir, I only object to the loneliness of the long journey."

"No one to chatter to, eh, Mr. Magpie! Well, it need not be so! There's Nace Grimshaw, and his set—extravagant fools!—going up to the city to flaunt among the fashionables. You can go as they go, and chatter to the other monkey, Jacquelina—and make Old Nace mad with jealousy, so that he shall go and hang himself, and leave you the widow and her fortune! Come! is there mischief enough to amuse you? But I know you won't do it! I know it! I know it! I know it! just because I wish you to!"

"What, sir? drive Dr. Grimshaw to hang himself?"

"No, sir! I mean you won't join the party."

"You mistake, sir. I will certainly do so, if you wish it," said Thurston, gravely.

"Humph! Well, that is something better than I expected. You can take the new gig, you know, and take Melchisedek to drive you, and to bring it back."

"Just as you say, sir," said the young gentleman, with filial compliance.

"And mind, take care that you are not led into any waste of money."

"I shall take care, sir."

And here Thurston's heart was gladdened within him. He profoundly thanked his stars. The new gig! What an opportunity to save Marian the fatigue of an equestrian journey—offer her an easy seat, and have the blessing of her near companionship for the whole trip! While his servant, Melchisedek, could ride Marian's pony. And this arrangement would be so natural, so necessary, so inevitable, that not even the jealous, suspicious miser could make the least question of its perfect propriety. For, under the circumstances, what gentleman could leave a lady of his party to travel wearily on horseback, while himself and his servant rode cosily at ease in a gig? What gentleman would not rather give the lady his seat in the gig—take the reins himself and drive her, while his servant took her saddle-horse. So thought Thurston. Yet he did not hint the subject to his grandfather—the method of their traveling should seem the impromptu effect of chance. The next morning being Sunday, he threw himself in Marian's path, waited for her, and rode with her a part of the way to church. And while they were in company, he told her of the new arrangement in the manner of traveling, that good fortune had enabled him to make—that if she would so honor and delight him, he should have her in the gig by his side for the whole journey. He was so happy, so very happy in the thought, he said.

"And so am I, dearest Thurston! very, very happy in the idea of being with you. Thank God!" said the warm-hearted girl, offering her hand, which he took and covered with kisses.

Thurston's good fortune was not over. His star was still in the ascendant, for after the

morning service, while the congregation were leaving the church, he saw Mrs. Waugh beckon him to her side. He quickly obeyed the summons. And then, the lady said:

"I may not see you again soon, Thurston, and, therefore, I tell you now—that if you intend to join our party to Washington, you must make all your arrangements to come ever to Locust Hill on Tuesday evening, and spend the night with us; as we start at a very early hour on Wednesday morning, and should not like to be kept waiting. My Hebe is also coming on Tuesday evening, to stay all night. Now, not a word, Thurston, I know what dilatory folks young people are. And I know very well that if I don't make sure of you on Tuesday evening, you will keep us a full hour beyond our time on Wednesday morning—you know you will."

Thurston was secretly delighted. To spend the evening with Marian! to spend the night under the same roof with her—preparatory to their social journey in the morning. Thurston began to think that he was born under a lucky planet. He laughingly assured Mrs. Waugh that he had not the slightest intention or wish to dispute her commands, and that on Tuesday evening he should present himself punctually at the supper-table at Locust Hill. He further informed her that as his grandfather had most arbitrarily forced upon him the use of his new gig, he should bring it, and offer Miss Mayfield a seat.

It was now Mrs. Waugh's turn to be delighted, and to declare that she was very glad—that it would be so much easier and pleasanter to her Hebe, than the cold, exposed, and fatiguing equestrian manner of traveling. "But mind, young gentleman, you are not to make love to my Hebe! for we all think her far too good for mortal man!" laughed Mrs. Waugh.

Thurston gravely promised that he would not—if he could help it. And so, with mutual good feeling, they shook hands and separated.

On Monday evening, at his farewell lecture, Thurston met Marian again, and

joyfully announced to her the invitation that Mrs. Waugh had extended to him. And the maiden's delightful smile assured him of her full sympathy with his gladness.

And on Tuesday evening, the whole party for Washington was assembled around the tea-table at Locust Hill. The evening passed very cheerily. The commodore, Mrs. Waugh, Marian and Thurston, were all in excellent spirits. And Thurston, out of pure good nature, sought to cheer and enliven the pretty, peevish bride, Jacquelina, who, out of caprice, affected a pleasure in his attentions that she was very far from feeling. This gave so much umbrage to Dr. Grimshaw that Mrs. Waugh really feared some unpleasant demonstration from the grim bridegroom, and seized the first quiet opportunity of saying to the young gentleman:

"Do, Thurston, leave Lapwing alone! Don't you see that that maniac is as jealous as a Turk?"

"Oh! he is!" thought Thurston, benevolently. "Very well! in that case his jealousy shall not starve for want of ailment;" and he devoted himself to the capricious bride with more impressement than before—consoling himself for his discreet neglect of Marian by reflecting on the blessed morrow that should place her at his side for the whole day.

And so the evening passed; and at an early hour the party separated to get a good long night's rest, preparatory to their early start in the morning.

But Thurston, for one, was too happy to sleep for some time; too happy in the novel blessedness of resting under the same roof with his own beautiful and dearest Marian.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BRIDE OF AN HOUR.

It was a clear, cold, sharp, invigorating winter morning. The snow was crusted over

with hoar frost, and the bare forest trees were hung with icicles. The cunning fox, the 'possum and the 'coon, crept shivering from their dens; but the shy, gray rabbit, and the tiny, brown wood-mouse, still nestled in their holes. And none of nature's small children ventured from their nests, save the hardy and courageous little snow-birds that came to seek their food even at the very threshold of their natural enemy—man.

The approaching sun had scarcely as yet reddened the eastern horizon, or flushed the snow, when at Locust Hill our travelers assembled in the dining-room, to partake of their last meal previous to setting forth.

Commodore Waugh, and Mrs. L'Oiseau, who were fated to remain at home and keep house, were also there to see the travelers off.

The fine, vitalizing air of the winter morning, the cheerful bustle preparatory to their departure, the novelty of the breakfast eaten by candle-light, all combined to raise and exhilarate the spirits of the party.

After the merry, hasty meal was over, Mrs. Waugh, in her voluminous cloth cloak, fur tippet, muff, and wadded hood; Jacquelina, enveloped in several fine, soft shawls, and wearing a warm, chinchilla bonnet; and Dr. Grimshaw, in his dreadnaught overcoat and cloak, and long-eared fur cap, all entered the large family carriage, where, with the additional provision of foot-stoves and hot bricks, they had every prospect of a comfortable mode of conveyance.

Old Oliver, in his many-caped drab overcoat, and fox-skin cap and gloves, sat upon the coachman's box with the proud air of a king upon his throne. And why not? It was Oliver's very first visit to the city, and the suit of clothes he wore was brand new!

Thurston's new gig was furnished with two fine buffalo robes—one laid down on the seats and the floor as a carpet, and the other laid over as a coverlet. His forethought had also provided a foot-stove for Marian. And never was a happier man than he

when he handed his smiling companion into the gig, settled her comfortably in her seat, placed the foot-stove under her feet, sprang in and seated himself beside her, tucked the buffalo robe carefully in, and took the reins, and waited the signal to move on.

Melchisedek, or as he was commonly called, Cheesy, mounted upon Marian's pony, rode on in advance, to open the gates for the party. Mrs. Waugh's carriage followed. And Thurston's gig brought up the rear. And thus the travelers set forth.

The sun had now risen in cloudless splendor, and was striking long lines of crimson light across the snow, and piercing through the forest aisles. Flocks of saucy little snow-birds alighted fearlessly in their path; but the cunning little gray rabbits just peeped with their round, bright eyes, and then quickly hopped away.

I need not describe their merry journey at length. My readers will readily imagine how delightful was the trip to at least two of the party. And those two were not Dr. Grimshaw and Jacquelina.

Thurston pleaded so hard for a private marriage when they got to Washington that at last Marian consented.

So one day they drove out to the Navy Yard Hill, and there in the remotest and quietest suburb of the city, in a little Methodist chapel, without witnesses, Thurston and Marian were married.

Thurston and Marian found an opportunity to be alone in the drawing-room for the few moments preceding his departure. In those last moments she could not find it in her heart to withhold one word whose utterance would cheer his soul, and give him hope and joy and confidence in departing. Marian had naturally a fine, healthful, high-toned organization—a happy, hopeful, joyous temperament, an inclination always to look upon the sunny side of life and events. And so, when he drew her gently and tenderly to his bosom, and whispered:

"You have made me the happiest and most grateful man on earth, dear, lovely

Marian! dear, lovely wife! but are you satisfied, beloved—oh! are you satisfied? Do I leave you at ease?"

She spoke the very truth when she confessed to him—her head being on his shoulder, and her low tones flowing softly to his listening ear:

"More than satisfied, Thurston—more than satisfied, I am inexpressibly happy now. Yes, though you are going away; for, see! the pain of parting for a few months, is lost in the joy of knowing that we are united, though separated—and in anticipating the time not long hence, when we shall meet again. God bless you, dearest Thurston."

"God forever bless and love you, sweet wife." And so they parted.

CHAPTER XVII.

SPRING AND LOVE.

It was late in February before the party reached home. Thurston's business finished he also hastened back and sought out Marian. One memorable episode must be related. Thurston had met Marian not many yards down the lonely forest foot-path, leading from the village school to Old Fields one evening.

After a walk of about a quarter of a mile through the bushes they descended by the natural staircase of moss-covered rocks, and sat down together upon a bed of violets at its foot.

Before them, through the canopy of over-arching trees, was seen, like a picture in its frame of foliage, a fine view of the open country and the bay now bathed in purple haze of evening.

But the fairest prospect that ever opened had no more attraction for Thurston than if it had been a view of chimney tops from a back attic window. He passed his right hand around Marian's shoulders, and drew her closer to his side, and with the other

hand began to untie her bonnet strings.

"Lay off this little bonnet. Let me see your beauteous head uncovered. There!" he said, putting it aside, and smoothing her bright locks. "Oh, Marian! my love! my queen! when I see only the top of your head, I think your rippling, sunny tresses your chief beauty; but soon my eyes fall to the blooming cheek—there never was such a cheek—so vivid, yet so delicate, so glowing, yet so cool and fresh—like the damask rose bathed in morning dew—so when I gaze on it I think the blushing cheek your sweetest charm—ah! but near by breathe the rich, ripe lips, fragrant as nectarines; and which I should swear to be the very buds of love, were not my gaze caught up to meet your eyes—stars!—and then I know that I have found the very soul of beauty! Oh! priceless pearl! By what rare fortune was it that I ever found you in these Maryland woods? Love! Angel! Marian! for that means all!" he exclaimed, in a sort of ecstasy, straining her to his side.

And Marian dropped her blushing face upon his shoulder—she was blushing not from bashful love alone—with it mingled a feeling of shame, regret, and mistrust, because he praised so much her form and face; because he seemed to love her only for her superficial good looks. She would have spoken if she could have done so; she would have told what was on her heart as earnest as a prayer by saying:

"Oh, do not think so much of this perishable, outward beauty; accident may ruin it, sickness may injure it, time will certainly impair it. Do not love me for that which I have no power over, and which may be taken from me at any time—which I shall be sure to lose at last—love me for something better and more lasting than that. I have a heart in this bosom worth all the rest, a heart that in itself is an inner world—a kingdom worthy of your rule—a heart that neither time, fortune, nor casualty can ever change—a heart that loves you now in your strong and beautiful youth, and will love you when you are old and gray, and when you are one of the redeemed of heaven. Love me for this heart."

But to have saved her own soul or his, Marian could not then have spoken those words.

So he continued to caress her—every moment growing more and more enchanted with her loveliness. There was more of passion than affection in his manner, and Marian felt and regretted this, though her feeling was not a very clearly defined one—it was rather an instinct than a thought, and it was latent, and quite subservient to her love for him.

"Love! angel! how enchanting you are," he exclaimed, catching her in his arms and pressing kisses on her cheek and lips and neck.

Glowing with color, Marian strove to release herself. "Let me go—let us leave this place, dear Thurston," she pleaded, attempting to rise.

"Why? Why are you in such a hurry? Why do you wish to leave me?" he asked, without releasing his hold.

"It is late! Dear Thurston, it is late," she said, in vague alarm.

"That does not matter—I am with you."

"They will be anxious about me, pray let us go! They will be so anxious!" she said, with increasing distress, trying to get away. "Thurston! Thurston! You distress me beyond measure," she exclaimed in great trouble.

But he stopped her breath with kisses.

Marian suddenly ceased to struggle, and by a strong effort of will she became perfectly calm. And looking in his eyes, with her clear, steady gaze, she said:

"Thurston, I have ceased to strive. But if you are a man of honor, you will release me."

His arms dropped from around her as if he had been struck dead.

Glad to be free, Marian arose to depart. Thurston sat still—his fine countenance overclouded with mortification and anger. Marian hesitated; she knew not how to

proceed. He did not offer to rise and attend her. At length she spoke.

"Will you see me safely through the woods, Thurston?"

He did not answer.

"Thurston, it is nearly dark—there are several runaway negroes in the forest now, and the road will not be safe for me."

"Good-night, then," she said.

"Good-night, Marian."

She turned away and ascended the steps with her heart filled nearly to bursting with grief, indignation and fear. That he should let her take that long, dark, dangerous walk alone! it was incredible! she could scarcely realize it, or believe it! Her unusually excited feelings lent wings to her feet, and she walked swiftly for about a quarter of a mile, and then was forced to pause and take breath. And then every feeling of indignation and fear was lost in that of sorrow, that she had wounded his feelings, and left him in anger. And Marian dropped her face into her open hands and wept. A step breaking through the brushwood made her start and tremble. She raised her head with the attitude of one prepared for a spring and flight. It was so dark she could scarcely see her hands before her, but as the step approached, a voice said:

"Fear nothing, Marian, I have not lost sight of you since you left me," and Thurston came up to her side.

With a glad smile of surprise Marian turned to greet him, holding out her hand, expecting him to draw it through his arm and lead her on. But no, he would not touch her hand. Lifting his hat slightly, he said:

"Go forward if you please to do so, Marian. I attend you."

Marian went on, and he followed closely. They proceeded in silence for some time. Now that she knew that he had not left her a moment alone in the woods, she felt

more deeply grieved at having so mortified and offended him. At last she spoke:

"Pray, do not be angry with me, dear Thurston."

"I am not angry that I know of, fair one; and you do me too much honor to care about my mood. Understand me once for all. I am not a Dr. Grimshaw, in any phase of that gentleman's character. I am neither the tyrant who will persecute you to exact your attention, nor yet the slave who will follow and coax and whine and wheedle for your favor. In either character I should despise myself too much," he answered, coolly.

"Thurston, you are deeply displeased, or you would not speak so, and I am very, very sorry," said Marian in a tremulous voice.

"Do not distress yourself about me, fair saint! I shall trouble you no more after this evening!"

What did he mean? What could Thurston mean? Trouble her no more after this evening! She did not understand the words, but they went through her bosom like a sword. She did not reply—she could not. She wished to say:

"Oh, Thurston, if you could read my heart—how singly it is devoted to you—how its thoughts by day, and dreams by night are filled with histories and images of what I would be, and do or suffer for you—of how faithfully I mean to love and serve you in all our coming years—you would not mistake me, and get angry, because you would know my heart." But these words Marian could not have uttered had her life depended on it.

"Go on, Marian, the moor is no safer than the forest; I shall attend you across it."

And they went on until the light from Old Field Cottage was visible. Then Marian said:

"You had better leave me now. They are sitting up and watching for me."

"No! go on, the night is very dark. I must see you to the gate."

They walked rapidly, and just as they approached the house Marian saw a little figure wandering about on the moor, and which suddenly sprang toward her with an articulate cry of joy! It was Miriam, who threw herself upon Marian with such earnestness of welcome that she did not notice Thurston, who now raised his hat slightly from his head, with a slight nod, and walked rapidly away.

"Here she is, mother! Oh! here she is!" cried Miriam, pulling at Marian's dress and drawing her in the house.

"Oh! Marian, how anxious you have made us! Where have you been?" asked Edith, in a tone half of love, half of vexation.

"I have been detained," said Marian, in a low voice.

The cottage room was very inviting. The evening was just chilly enough to make the bright little wood fire agreeable. On the clean hearth before it sat the tea-pot and a covered plate of toast waiting for Marian. And old Jenny got up and sat out a little stand, covered it with a white napkin, and put the tea and toast, with the addition of a piece of cold chicken and a saucer of preserves, upon it. And Marian laid off her straw bonnet and muslin scarf and sat down and tried to eat, for affectionate eyes had already noticed the trouble of her countenance, and were watching her now with anxiety.

"You do not seem to have an appetite, dear; what is the matter?" asked Edith.

"I am not very well," said Marian, rising and leaving the table, and refraining with difficulty from bursting into tears.

"It's dat ar cussed infunnelly party at Lockemup—last Toosday!" said Jenny, as she cleared away the tea service—"a-screwin' up tight in cusseds an' ball-dresses! an' a-dancing all night till broad daylight! 'sides heavin' of ever so much unwholesome 'fectionery trash down her t'roat—de constitution ob de United States hisself couldn't stan' sich! much less a delicy young gall! I 'vises ov you, honey, to go to bed."

"Indeed, Marian, it was too much for you to lose your rest all night, and then have to

get up early to go to school. You should have had a good sleep this morning. And then to be detained so late this evening. Did you have to keep any of the girls in, or was it a visit from the trustees that detained you?"

"Neither," said Marian, nervously, "but I think I must take Jenny's advice and go to bed."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THAT NIGHT.

From that miserable night, Marian saw no more of Thurston, except occasionally at church, when he came at irregular intervals, and maintained the same coolness and distance of manner toward her, and with matchless self-command, too, since often his heart yearned toward her with almost irresistible force.

Cold and calm as was his exterior, he was suffering not less than Marian; self-tossed with passion, the strong currents and counter-currents of his soul whirled as a moral maelstrom, in which both reason and conscience threatened to be engulfed.

And in these mental conflicts judgment and understanding were often obscured and bewildered, and the very boundaries of right and wrong lost.

His appreciation of Marian wavered with his moods.

When very angry he would mentally denounce her as a cold, prudent, calculating woman, who had entrapped him into a secret marriage, and having secured his hand, would now risk nothing for his love, and himself as a weak, fond fool, the tool of the beautiful, proud diplomat, whom it would be justifiable to circumvent, to defeat, and to humble in some way.

At such times he felt a desire, amounting to a strong temptation, to abduct her—to get her into his power, and make her feel that power. No law could protect her or punish him—for they were married.

But here was the extreme point at which reaction generally commenced, for Thurston could not contemplate himself in that character—playing such a part, for an instant.

And then when a furtive glance would show him Marian's angel face, fairer and paler and more pensive than ever before—a strong counter-current of love and admiration approaching to worship, would set in, and he would look upon her as a fair saint worthy of translation to heaven, and upon himself as a designing but foiled conspirator, scarcely one degree above the most atrocious villain. "Currents and counter-currents" of stormy passion, where is the pilot that shall guide the understanding safely through them? It is no wonder, that once in a while, a mind is wrecked.

Marian, sitting in her pew, saw nothing in his face or manner to indicate that inward storm. She only saw the sullen, freezing exterior. Even in his softened moods of penitence, Thurston dared not seek her society.

For Marian had begun to recover from the first abject prostration of her sorrow, and her fair, resolute brow and sad, firm lips mutely assured him that she never would consent to be his own until their marriage could be proclaimed.

And he durst not trust himself in her tempting presence, lest there should be a renewal of those humiliating scenes he had endured.

Thus passing a greater portion of the summer; during which Thurston gradually dropped off from the church, and from all other haunts where he was likely to encounter Marian, and as gradually began to frequent the Catholic chapel, and to visit Luckenough, and to throw himself as much as possible into the distracting company of the pretty elf Jacquelina. But this—while it threw Dr. Grimshaw almost into frenzy, did not help Thurston to forget the good and beautiful Marian. Indeed, by contrast, it seemed to make her more excellent and lovely.

And thus, while Jacquelina fancied she had a new admirer, Dr. Grimshaw feared that

he had a new rival, and the holy fathers hoped they had a new convert—Thurston laughed at the vanity of the elf, the jealousy of the Ogre, and the gullibility of the priests—and sought only escape from the haunting memory of Marian, and found it not. And finally, bored and ennuied beyond endurance, he cast about for a plan by which to hasten his union with Marian. Perhaps it was only that neighborhood she was afraid of, he thought—perhaps in some other place she would be less scrupulous. Satan had no sooner whispered this thought to Thurston's ear than he conceived the design of spending the ensuing autumn in Paris—and of making Marian his companion while there. Fired with this new idea and this new hope, he sat down and wrote her a few lines—without address or signature—as follows:

"Dearest, forgive all the past. I was mad and blind. I have a plan to secure at once our happiness. Meet me in the Mossy dell this evening, and let me explain it at your feet."

Having written this note, Thurston scarcely knew how to get it at once into Marian's hands. To put it into the village post-office was to expose it to the prying eyes of Miss Nancy Skamp. To send it to Old Fields, by a messenger, was still more hazardous. To slip it into Marian's own hand, he would have to wait the whole week until Sunday—and then might not be able to do so unobserved.

Finally, after much thought, he determined, without admitting the elf into his full confidence, to entrust the delivery of the note to Jacquelina.

He therefore copied it into the smallest space, rolled it up tightly, and took it with him when he went to Luckenough.

He spent the whole afternoon at the mansion house, without having an opportunity to slip it into the hands of Jacquelina.

It is true that Mrs. Waugh was not present, that good woman being in the back parlor, sitting at one end of the sofa and making a pillow of her lap for the commodore's head, which she combed soporifically, while, stretched at full length,

he took his afternoon nap. But Mary L'Oiseau was there, quietly knotting a toilet cover, and Professor Grimshaw was there, scowling behind a book that he was pretending to read, and losing no word or look or tone or gesture of Thurston or Jacquelina, who talked and laughed and flirted and jested, as if there was no one else in the world but themselves.

At last a little negro appeared at the door to summon Mrs. L'Oiseau to give out supper, and Mary arose and left the room.

The professor scowled at Jacquelina from the top of his book for a little while, and then, muttering an excuse, got up and went out and left them alone together.

That was a very common trick of the doctor's lately, and no one could imagine why he did it.

"It is a ruse, a trap, the grim idiot! to see what we will say to each other behind his back. Oh, I'd dose him! I just wish Thurston would kiss me! I do so!" thought Jacquelina. "Thurston," and the elf leaned toward her companion, and began to be as bewitching as she knew how.

But Thurston was not thinking of Jacquelina's mischief, though without intending it he played directly into her hands.

Rising he took his hat, and saying that his witching little cousin had beguiled him into breaking one engagement already, advanced to take leave of her.

"Jacquelina." he said, lowering his voice, and slipping the note for Marian into her hand, "may I ask you to deliver this to Miss Mayfield, when no one is by?"

A look of surprise and perplexity, followed by a nod of intelligence, was her answer.

And Thurston, with a grateful smile, raised her hand to his lips, took leave and departed.

"I wonder what it is all about? I could easily untwist and seal it, but I would not do so for a kingdom!" said Jacko to herself as she turned the tiny note about in her

fingers.

"Hand me that note, madam!" said Dr. Grimshaw, in curt and husky tones, as, with stern brow, he stood before her.

"No, sir! it was not intended for you," she said, mockingly.

"By the demons, I know that! Hand it here!"

"Don't swear nor get angry! Both are unbecoming professor!" said the elf, with mocking gravity.

"Perdition! will you give it up?" stamped the doctor, in fury.

"'Perdition,' no;" mocked the fairy.

"Hand it here, I command you, madam!" cried the professor, trying to compose himself and recover his dignity.

"Command away—I like to hear you. Command a regiment, if you like!" said the elf.

"Give it up!" thundered the professor, losing his slight hold upon self-control.

"Couldn't do it, sir," said Jacko, gravely.

"It is an appointment, you impudent ——! Hand it here."

"Not as you know of!" laughed Jacko, tauntingly shaking it over her head.

He made a rush to catch it.

She sprang nimbly away, and clapped the paper into her mouth.

He overtook and caught her by the arm, and shaking her roughly, exclaimed, under his breath:

"Where is it? What have you done with it? You exasperating, unprincipled little wretch, where is it?"

"'Echo anfers fere?'" mumbled the imp, chewing up the paper, and keeping her lips tight.

"Give it me! give it me! or I'll be the death of you, you diabolical little ——!" he exclaimed, hoarsely, shaking her as if he would have shaken her breath out.

But Jacko had finished chewing up the paper, and she swallowed the pulp with an effort that nearly choked her, and then opening her mouth, and inflating her chest, gave voice in a succession of piercing shrieks, that brought the whole family rushing into the room, and obliged the professor to relax his hold, and stand like a detected culprit.

For there was the commodore roused up from his sleep, with his gray hair and beard standing out all ways, like the picture of the sun in an almanac. And there was Mrs. Waugh, with the great-tooth comb in her hand. And Mary L'Osieau, with the pantry keys. And the maid, Maria, with the wooden tray of flour on her head. And Festus, with a bag of meal in his hands. And all with their eyes and ears and mouths agape with amazement and inquiry.

"In the fiend's name, what's the matter? What the d——l's broke loose? Is the house on fire again?" vociferated the commodore, seeing that no one else spoke; "what's all this about, Nace Grimshaw?"

"Ask your pretty niece, sir!" said the professor, sternly, turning away.

"Oh, it's you, is it, you little termagant you? Oh, you're a honey-cooler. What have you been doing now, Imp?" cried the old man, turning fiercely to Jacquelina. "Answer me, you little vixen!—what does all this mean?"

"Better ask 'the gentlemanly professor' why he seized and nearly shook the head off my shoulders and the breath out of my bosom!" said Jacquelina, half-crying, half-laughing.

The commodore turned furiously toward Grim. Shaking a woman's head off her shoulders, and breath out of her body, in his house, did not suit his ideas of gallantry at all, rough as he was.

"By heaven! are you mad, sir? What have you been doing? I never laid the weight of

my hand on Jacquelina in all my life, wild as she has driven me at times. Explain your brutality, sir."

"It was to force from her hand a paper which she has swallowed," said Dr. Grimshaw, with stern coldness regarding the group.

"Swallowed! swallowed!" shrieked Mrs. Waugh, rushing toward Jacquelina, and seizing one of her arms, and gazing in her face, thinking only of poisons and of Jacko's frequent threats of suicide. "Swallowed! swallowed! Where did she get it? Who procured it for her? What was it? Oh, run for the doctor, somebody. What are you all standing like you were thunderstruck for? Dr. Grimshaw, start a boy on horseback immediately for a physician. Tell him to tell the doctor to bring a stomach pump with him. You had better go yourself. Oh, hasten; not a single moment is to be lost. Jacquelina, my dear, do you begin to feel sick? Do you feel a burning in your throat and stomach? Oh, my dear child! how came you to do such a rash act?"

Jacko broke into a loud laugh.

"Oh! crazy! crazy! it is something that affects her brain she has taken. Oh! Dr. Grimshaw, how can you have the heart to stand there and not go? Probably opium."

Jacko laughed till the tears ran down her cheeks—never, since her marriage, had Jacko laughed so much.

"Oh, Dr. Grimshaw! Don't you see she is getting worse and worse. How can you have the heart to stand there and not go for a physician?" said Mrs. Waugh, while Mary L'Oiseau looked on, mute with terror, and the commodore stood with his fat eyes protruding nearly to bursting.

"Go, oh, go, Dr. Grimshaw!" insisted Mrs. Waugh.

"I assure you it is not necessary, madam," said the professor, with stern scorn.

"There is no danger, aunty. I haven't taken any poison since I took a dose of Grim before the altar!" said Jacko, through her tears and laughter.

"What have you taken, then, unfortunate child?"

"I have swallowed an assignation," said the elf, as grave as a judge.

"A what?" exclaimed all, in a breath,

"An assignation," repeated Jacko, with owl-like calmness and solemnity.

"What in the name of common sense do you mean, my dear?" inquired Mrs. Waugh, while the commodore and Mary L'Oiseau looked the astonishment they did not speak. "Pray explain yourself, my love."

"He—says—I—swallowed—an—assignation—whole!" repeated Jacquelina, with distinct emphasis. Her auditors looked from one to another in perplexity.

"I see that I shall have to explain the disagreeable affair," said the professor, coming forward, and addressing himself to the commodore. "Mr. Thurston Willcoxen was here this afternoon on a visit to your niece, sir. In taking leave he slipped into her hand a small note, which, when I demanded, she refused to let me see."

"And very properly, too. What right had you to make such a 'demand?'" said Mrs. Waugh, indignantly.

"I was not addressing my remarks to you, madam," retorted the professor.

"That will not keep me from making a running commentary upon them, however," responded the lady.

"Hold your tongue, Henrietta. Go on, Nace. I swear you are enough to drive a peaceable man mad between you," said the commodore, bringing his stick down emphatically. "Well what next?"

"On my attempting to take it from her she put it in her mouth and swallowed it."

"Yes! and then he seized me and shook me, as if I had been a fine-bearing little plum tree in harvest time."

"And served you right, I begin to think, you little limb, you. What was it you had, you little hussy?"

"An assignation, he says, and he ought to know—being a professor."

"Don't mock us, Minx! Tell us instantly what were the contents of that note?"

"As if I would tell you even if I could. But I couldn't tell you even if I would. Haven't the least idea what sort of a note it was, from a note of music to a 'note of hand,' because I had to swallow it as I swallowed the Ogre at the church—without looking at it. And it is just as indigestible! I feel it like a bullet in my throat yet!" And that was all the satisfaction they could get out of Jacko.

"I should not wonder if you had been making a fool of yourself, Nace," said the commodore, who seemed inclined to blow up both parties.

"I hope, sir," said the professor, with great assumption of dignity, "that you now see the necessity of forbidding that impertinent young coxcomb the house."

"Shall do nothing of the sort, Grim. Thurston has no more idea of falling in love with little Jacko than he has with her mother or Henrietta, not a bit more." And then the commodore happening to turn his attention to the two gaping negroes, with a flourish of his stick sent them about their business, and left the room.

The next evening Thurston repaired to the mossy dell in the expectation of seeing Marian, who, of course, did not make her appearance.

The morning after, filled with disappointment and mortifying conjecture as to the cause of her non-appearance, Thurston presented himself before Jacquelina at Luckenough. He happened to find her alone. With all her playfulness of character, the poor fairy had too much self-respect to relate the scene to which she had been exposed the day before. So she contented herself with saying:

"I found no opportunity of delivering your note, Thurston, and so I thought it best to destroy it."

"I thank you. Under the circumstances that was best," replied the young man, much relieved. When he reached home, he sat down and wrote a long and eloquent epistle,

imploring Marian's forgiveness for his rashness and folly, assuring her of his continued love and admiration; speaking of the impossibility of living longer without her society—informing her of his intention to go to Paris, and proposing that she should either precede or follow him thither, and join him in that city. It was her duty, he urged, to follow her husband.

The following Sunday, after church, Marian placed her answer in his hands. The letter was characteristic of her—clear, firm, frank and truthful. It concluded thus:

"Were I to do as you desire me—leave home clandestinely, precede or follow you to Paris and join you there, suspicion and calumny would pursue me—obloquy would rest upon my memory. All these things I could bear, were it necessary in a good cause; but here it is not necessary, and would be wrong. But I speak not of myself—I ought not, indeed, to do so—nor of Edith, whose head would be bowed in humiliation and sorrow—nor of little Miriam, whose passionate heart would be half broken by such a desertion. But I speak for the cause of morality and religion here in this neighborhood, where we find ourselves placed by heaven, and where we must exercise much influence for good or evil. Wait patiently for those happy years, that the flying days are speeding on toward us—those happy years, when you shall look back to this trying time, and thank God for trials and temptations passed safely through. Do not urge me again upon this subject. Be excellent, Thurston, be noble, be god-like, as you can be, if you will; it is in you. Be true to your highest ideal, and you will be all these. Oh! if you knew how your Marian's heart craves to bow itself before true god-like excellence!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE INTERCEPTED LETTER.

"No! The mail isn't come yet! leastways it isn't opened yet! Fan that fire, you little black imp, you! and make that kittle bile; if you don't, I shall never git this wafer

soft! and then I'll turn you up, and give you sich a switching as ye never had in your born days! for I won't be trampled on by you any longer! you little black willyan, you! 'Scat! you hussy! get out o' my way, before I twist your neck for you!"

The first part of this oration was delivered by Miss Nancy Skamp, to some half-dozen negro grooms who were cooling their shins while waiting for the mail, before she closed the doors and windows of the post-office; the second part was addressed to Chizzle, her little negro waiter—and the third concluding sentence, emphasized by a smart kick, was bestowed upon poor Molly, the mottled cat. The village post-office was kept in the lower front room of the little lonely house on the hill, occupied by the solitary spinster.

The mail-bags were stuffed remarkably full, and there were several wonderful letters, that she felt it her duty to open and read before sending to their owners.

"Let's see," said the worthy postmistress, as she sorted the letters in her hand. "What's this? oh! a double letter for Colonel Thornton—pshaw! that's all about political stuff! Who cares about reading that? I don't! He may have it to-night if he wants it! Stop! what's this? Lors! it's a thribble letter for—for Marian Mayfield! And from furrin parts, too! Now I wonder—(Can't you stop that caterwauling out there?" she said, raising her voice. "Sposen you niggers were to wait till I open the office. I reckon you'd get your letters just as soon.) Who can be writing from furrin parts to Marian Mayfield? Ah! I'll keep this and read it before Miss Marian gets it."

When Miss Nancy had closed up for the night she took out the letter directed to Marian, opened, and began to read it. And as she read her eyes and mouth grew wider and wider with astonishment, and her wonder broke forth in frequent exclamations of: "M—y conscience! Well now! Who'd a dreamt of it! Pity but I'd a let Solomon court her when he wanted to—but Lors! how did I ever know that she'd—M—y conscience!" etc., etc.

Her fit of abstraction was at last broken by a smart rap at the door.

She started and turned pale, like the guilty creature that she was.

The rap was repeated sharply.

She jumped up, hustled the purloined letters and papers out of sight, and stood waiting.

The rap was reiterated loudly and authoritatively.

"Who's that?" she asked, trembling violently.

"It's me, Aunt Nancy! Do for goodness' sake don't keep a fellow out here in the storm till he's nearly perished. It's coming on to hail and snow like the last judgment!"

"Oh! it's you, is it, Sol? I didn't know but what it was—Do, for mercy's sake don't be talking about the last judgment, and such awful things—I declare to man, you put me all of a trimble," said Miss Nancy, by way of accounting for her palpitations, as she unbarred the door, and admitted her learned nephew. Dr. Solomon Weismann seemed dreadfully downhearted as he entered. He slowly stamped the snow from his boots, shook it off his clothes, took off his hat and his overcoat, and hung them up, and spoke—never a word! Then he drew his chair right up in front of the fire, placed a foot on each andiron, stooped over, spread his palms over the kindly blaze, and still spoke—never a word!

"Well! I'd like to know what's the matter with you to-night," said Miss Nancy, as she went about the room looking for her knitting.

But the doctor stared silently at the fire.

"It's the latest improvement in politeness—I shouldn't wonder—not to answer your elders when they speak to you."

"Were you saying anything to me, Aunt Nancy?"

"'Was I saying anything to you, Aunt Nancy?' Yes I was! I was asking you what's the matter?"

"Oh! I never was so dreadfully low-spirited in my life, Aunt Nancy."

"And what should a young man like you have to make him feel low-spirited, I should like to know? Moping about Marian, I shouldn't wonder. The girl is a good girl enough, if she'd only mind her own business, and not let people spoil her. And if you do like her, and must have her, why I shan't make no further objections."

Here the young doctor turned shortly around and stared at his aunt in astonishment!

"Hem!" said Miss Nancy, looking confused, "well, yes, I did oppose it once, certainly, but that was because you were both poor."

"And we are both poor still, for aught that I can see, and likely to continue so."

"Hish-ish! no you're not! leastways, she's not. I've got something very strange to tell you," said Miss Nancy, mysteriously drawing her chair up close to her nephew, and putting her lips to his ear, and whispering—"Hish-ish!"

"'Hish-ish!' What are you 'hish-ish'ing for, Aunt Nancy, I'm not saying anything, and your breath spins into a fellow's ear enough to give him an ear-ache!" said Dr. Solomon, jerking his head away.

"Now then listen—Marian Mayfield has got a fortune left to her."

Miss Nancy paused to see the effect of this startling piece of news upon her companion.

But the doctor was not sulky, and upon his guard; so after an involuntary slight start, he remained perfectly still. Miss Nancy was disappointed by the calm way in which he took this marvelous revelation. However, she went on to say:

"Yes! a fortune left her, by a grand-uncle, a bachelor, who died intestate in Wiltshire, England. Now, what do you think of that!"

"Why, I think if she wouldn't have me when she was poor, she won't be apt to do it now she's rich."

"Ah! but you see, she don't know a word of it!"

"How do you know it, then?"

"Hish-ish! I'll tell you if you will never tell. Oh, Lord, no, you mustn't indeed! You wouldn't, I know, 'cause it would ruin us! Listen—"

"Now, Aunt Nancy, don't be letting me into any of your capital crimes and hanging secrets—don't, because I don't want to hear them, and I won't neither! I ain't used to such! and I'm afraid of them, too!"

"'Fraid o' what? Nobody can prove it," answered Miss Nancy, a little incoherently.

"You know what better than I do, Aunt Nancy; and let me tell you, you'd better be careful. The eyes of the community are upon you."

"Let 'em prove it! Let 'em prove it! They ain't got no witnesses! Chizzle and the cat ain't no witnesses," said Miss Nancy, obscurely; "let 'em do their worse! I reckon I know something about law as well as they do! if I am a lone 'oman!"

"They can procure your removal from office without proving anything against you except unpopularity."

"That's Commodore Waugh's plan! the ugly, wicked, old buggaboo! 'Tain't such great shakes of an office neither, the dear knows!"

"Never mind, Aunt Nancy, mend your ways, and maybe they'll not disturb you. And don't tell me any of your capital secrets, because I might be summoned as a witness against you, which would not be so agreeable to my feelings—yon understand! And now tell me, if you are absolutely certain that Miss Mayfield has had that fortune left her. But stop! don't tell me how you found it out!"

"Well, yes, I am certain—sure, she has a great fortune left her. I have the positive proofs of it. And, moreover, nobody in this country don't know it but myself—and you. And now I tell you, don't hint the matter to a soul. Be spry! dress yourself up jam! and go a courting before anybody else finds it out!"

"But that would scarcely be honorable either," demurred the doctor.

"You're mighty particular! Yes, it would, too! Jest you listen to me! Now if so be we were to go and publish about Marian's fortune, we'd have a whole herd of fortune hunters, who don't care a cent for anything but fortune, running after and worrying the life out of her, and maybe one of them marrying of her, and spending of her money, and bringing of her to poverty, and breaking of her heart. Whereas, if we keep the secret of the estate to ourselves, you, who desarve her, because you 'counted her all the same when she was poor, and who'd take good care of her property, and her, too—would have her all to yourself, and nobody to interfere. Don't you see?"

"Well, to be sure—when one looks at the thing in this light," deliberated the sorely-tempted lover.

"Of course! And that's the only light to look at it in! Don't you see? Why, by gracious! it seems to me as if we were doing Marian the greatest favor."

CHAPTER XX.

AS A LAST RESORT.

In the meantime Marian's heart was weighed down by a new cause of sorrow and anxiety. Thurston never approached her now, either in person or by letter. She never saw him, except at the church, the lecture-room, or in mixed companies, where he kept himself aloof from her and devoted himself to the beautiful and accomplished heiress Angelica Le Roy, to whom rumor gave him as an accepted suitor.

So free was Marian's pure heart from jealousy or suspicion that these attentions bestowed by Thurston, and these rumors circulated in the neighborhood, gave her no uneasiness. For though she had, for herself, discovered him to be passionate and impetuous, she believed him to be sound in principle. But when again and again she saw them together, at church, at lecture, at dinner parties, at evening dances; when at all the Christmas and New Year festivities she saw her escorted by him; when she

saw him ever at her side with a devotion as earnest and ardent as it was perfectly respectful; when she saw him bend and whisper to the witching girl and hang delighted on her "low replies," her own confidence was shaken. What could he mean? Was it possible that instead of being merely impulsive and erring, he was deliberately wicked? No, no, never! Yet, what could be his intentions? Did he really wish to win Angelica's heart? Alas! whether he wished so or not, it was but too evident to all that he had gained her preference. In her blushing cheek and downcast eyes, and tremulous voice and embarrassed manner, when he was present, in her abstracted mind, and restless air of wandering glances when he was absent, the truth was but too clear.

Marian was far too practical to speculate when she should act. It was clearly her duty to speak to Thurston on the subject, and, repugnant as the task was, she resolved to perform it. It was some time before she had the opportunity.

But at last, one afternoon in February, she chanced to meet Thurston on the sea beach. After greeting him, she candidly opened the subject. She spoke gently and delicately, but firmly and plainly—more so, perhaps, than another woman in the same position would have done, for Marian was eminently frank and fearless, especially where conscience was concerned.

And Thurston met her arguments with a graceful nonchalance, as seemingly polite and good-humored as it was really ironical and insulting.

Marian gave him time—she was patient as firm—and firm as sorrowful. And until every argument and persuasion had failed, she said:

"As a last resort, it may be necessary for me to warn Miss Le Roy—not for my own sake. Were I alone involved, you know how much I would endure rather than grieve you. But this young lady must not suffer wrong."

"You will write her an anonymous letter, possibly?"

"No—I never take an indirect road to an object."

"What, then, can you do, fair saint?"

"See Miss Le Roy, personally."

"Ha! ha! ha! What apology could you possibly make for such an unwarrantable interference?"

"The Lord knoweth! I do not now. But I trust to be able to save her without—revealing you."

"Do you imagine that vague warnings would have any effect upon her?"

"Coming from me they would."

"Heavens! What a self-worshiper! But selfishness is your normal state, Marian! Self-love is your only affection—self-adulation your only enthusiasm—self-worship your only religion! You do not desire to be loved—you wish only to be honored! The love I offered you, you trampled underfoot! You have no heart, you have only a brain! You cannot love, you only think! Nor have you any need of love, but only of power! Applause is your vital breath, your native air! To hear your name and praise on every tongue—that is your highest ambition! Such a woman should be a gorgon of ugliness that men might not waste their hearts' wealth upon her!" exclaimed Thurston, bitterly, gazing with murky eyes, that smoldered with suppressed passion, upon the beautiful girl before him.

Marian was standing with her eyes fixed abstractedly upon a distant sail. Now the tears swelled under the large white eyelids and hung glittering on the level lashes, and her lip quivered and her voice faltered slightly as she answered:

"You see me through a false medium, dear Thurston, but the time will come when you will know me as I am."

"I fancy the time has come. It has also come for me to enlighten you a little. And in the first place, fair queen of minds, if not of hearts, let me assure you that there is a limit even to your almost universal influence. And that limit may be found in Miss

Le Roy. You, who know the power of thought only, cannot weigh nor measure the power of love. Upon Miss Le Roy your warnings would have no effect whatever. I tell you that in the face of them (were I so disposed), I might lead that girl to the altar to-morrow."

Marian was silent, not deeming an answer called for.

"And now, I ask you, how you could prevent it?"

"I shall not be required to prevent such an act, Thurston, as such a one never can take place. You speak so only to try your Marian's faith or temper—both are proof against jests, I think. Hitherto you have trifled with the young lady's affections for mere ennui and thoughtlessness, I do believe! but, now that some of the evil consequences have been suggested to your mind, you will abandon such perilous pastime. You are going to France soon—that will be a favorable opportunity of breaking off the acquaintance."

"And breaking her heart—who knows? But suppose now that I should prefer to marry her and take her with me?"

"Nay, of course, I cannot for an instant suppose such a thing."

"But in spite of all your warnings, were such an event about to take place?"

"In such an exigency I should divulge our marriage."

"You would?"

"Assuredly! How can you possibly doubt it? Such an event would abrogate my obligations to silence, and would impose upon me the opposite duty of speaking."

"I judged you would reason so," he said, bitterly.

"But, dear Thurston, of what are you talking? Of the event of your doing an unprincipled act! Impossible, dear Thurston! and forever impossible!"

"And equally impossible, fair saint, that you should divulge our marriage with any chance of proving it. Marian, the minister that married us has sailed as a missionary

to Farther India. And I only have the certificate of our marriage. You cannot prove it."

"I shall not need to prove it, Thurston. Now that I have awakened your thoughts, I know that you will not further risk the peace of that confiding girl. Come! take my hand and let us return. We must hasten, too, for there is rain in that cloud."

Thurston—piqued that he could not trouble her more—for under her calm and unruffled face he could not see the bleeding heart—arose sullenly, drew her hand within his arm and led her forth.

And as they went the wind arose, and the storm clouds drove over the sky and lowered and darkened around them.

Marian urged him to walk fast on account of the approaching tempest, and the anxiety the family at the cottage would feel upon her account.

They hurried onward, but just as they reached the neighborhood of Old Fields a terrible storm of hail and snow burst upon the earth.

It was as much as they could do to make any progress forward, or even to keep themselves upon their feet. While struggling and plunging blindly through the storm, amid the rushing of the wind and the rattling of the hail, and the crackling and creaking of the dry trees in the forest, and the rush of waters, and all the din of the tempest, Marian's ear caught the sound of a child wailing and sobbing. A pang shot through her heart. She listened breathlessly—and then in the pauses of the storm she heard a child crying, "Marian, Marian! Oh! where are you, Marian?"

It was Miriam's voice! It was Miriam wandering in night and storm in search of her beloved nurse.

Marian dropped Thurston's arm and plunged blindly forward through the snow, in the direction of the voice, crying, "Here I am, my darling, my treasure—here I am. What brought my baby out this bitter night?" she asked, as she found the child half perishing with cold and wet, and caught and strained her to her bosom.

"Oh, the hail and snow came down so fast, and the wind shook the house so hard, and I could not sleep in the warm bed while you were out in the storm. So I stole softly down to find you. Don't go again, Marian. I love you so—oh! I love you so!"

At this moment the child caught sight of Thurston standing with his face half muffled in his cloak. A figure to be strangely recognized under similar circumstances in after years. Then she did not know him, but inquired:

"Who is that, Marian?"

"A friend, dear, who came home with me. Good-night, sir."

And so dismissing Thurston, he walked rapidly away. She hurried with Miriam to the house.

CHAPTER XXI.

ONE OF SANS SOUCI'S TRICKS.

Sans Souci stood before the parlor mirror, gazing into it, seeing—not the reflected image of her own elfish figure, or pretty, witching face, with its round, polished forehead, its mocking eyes, its sunny, dancing curls, its piquant little nose, or petulant little lips—but contemplating, as through a magic glass, far down the vista of her childhood—childhood scarcely past, yet in its strong contrast to the present, seeming so distant, dim, and unreal, that her reminiscence of its days resembled more a vague dream of a pre-existence, than a rational recollection of a part of her actual life on earth. Poor Jacko was wondering "If I be I?"

Grim sat in a leathern chair, at the farthest extremity of the room, occupied with holding a book, but reading Jacquelina. Suddenly he broke into her brown study by exclaiming:

"I should like to know what you are doing, and how long you intend to remain standing before that glass."

"Oh, indeed! should you?" mocked Jacko, startled out of her reverie, yet instantly remembering to be provoking.

"What were you doing, and—"

"Looking at myself in the glass, to be sure."

"Don't cut off my question, if you please. I was going on to inquire of what you were thinking so profoundly. And madam, or miss—"

"Madam, if you please! the dear knows, I paid heavy enough for my new dignity, and don't intend to abate one degree of it. So if you call me miss again, I'll get some one who loves me to call you 'out!' Besides, I'd have you to know, I'm very proud of it. Ain't you, too? Say, Grim! ain't you a proud and happy man to be married?" asked Jacko, tauntingly.

"You jibe! You do so with a purpose. But it shall not avail you. I demand to know the subject of your thoughts as you stood before that mirror."

Now, none but a half madman like Grim would have gravely made such a demand, or exposed himself to such a rebuff as it deserved. Jacko looked at him quizzically.

"Hem!" she answered, demurely. "I'm sure I'm so awestricken, your worship, that I can scarcely find the use of my tongue to obey your reverence. I hope your excellency won't be offended with me. But I was wondering in general, whether the Lord really did make all the people upon earth, and in particular, whether He made you, and if so, for what inscrutable reason He did it."

"You are an impertinent minion. But, by the saints, I will have an answer to my question, and know what you were thinking of while gazing in that mirror."

"Sorry the first explanation didn't please your eminence. But now, 'honor bright!' I'll tell you truly what I was thinking of. I was thinking—thinking how excessively pretty I am. Now, tell the truth, and shame the old gentleman. Did you ever, in all your life, see such a beautiful, bewitching, tantalizing, ensnaring face as mine is?"

"I think I never saw such a fool!"

"Really? Then your holiness never looked at yourself in a mirror! never beheld 'your natural face in a glass!' never saw 'what manner of man' you are."

"By St. Peter! I will not be insulted, and dishonored, and defied in this outrageous manner. I swear I will have your thoughts, if I have to pluck them from your heart."

"Whe-ew! Well, if I didn't always think thought was free, may I never be an interesting young widow, and captivate Thurston Willcoxen."

"You impudent, audacious, abandoned—"

"Ching a ring a ring chum choo! And a hio ring tum larky!"

sang the elf, dancing about, seizing the bellows and flourishing it over her head like a tambourine, as she danced.

"Be still, you termagant. Be still, you lunatic, or I'll have you put in a strait-jacket!" cried the exasperated professor.

"Poor fellow!" said Jacko, dropping the bellows and sidling up to him in a wheedling, mock-sympathetic manner. "P-o-o-r f-e-l-l-o-w! don't get excited and go into the highstrikes. You can't help it if you're ugly and repulsive as Time in the Primer, any more than Thurston Willcoxen can help being handsome and attractive as Magnus Apollo."

"It was of him, then, you were thinking, minion? I knew it! I knew it!" exclaimed the professor, starting up, throwing down his book, and pacing the floor.

"Bear it like a man!" said Jacko, with solemnity.

"You admit it, then. You—you—you—"

"'Unprincipled female.' There! I have helped you to the words. And now, if you will be melo-dramatic, you should grip up your hair with both hands, and stride up and down the floor and vociferate, 'Confusion! distraction! perdition! or any other awful words you can think of. That's the way they do it in the plays."

"Madam, your impertinence is growing beyond sufferance. I cannot endure it."

"That's a mighty great pity, now, for you can't cure it."

"St. Mary! I will bear this no longer."

"Then I'm afraid you'll have to emigrate!"

"I'll commit suicide."

"That's you! Do! I should like very well to wear bombazine this cold weather. Please do it at once, too, if you're going to, for I should rather be out of deep mourning by midsummer!"

"By heaven, I will pay you for this."

"Any time at your convenience, Dr. Grimshaw! And I shall be ready to give you a receipt in full upon the spot!" said the elf, rising. "Anything else in my line this morning, Dr. Grimshaw? Give me a call when you come my way! I shall be much obliged for your patronage," she continued, curtseying and dancing off toward the door. "By the way, my dear sir, there is a lecture to be delivered this evening by our gifted young fellow-citizen, Mr. Thurston Willcoxen. Going to hear him? I am! Good-day!" she said, and kissed her hand and vanished.

Grim was going crazy! Everybody said it, and what everybody says has ever been universally received as indisputable testimony. Many people, indeed, averred that Grim never had been quite right—that he always had been queer, and that since his mad marriage with that flighty bit of a child, Jacquelina, he had been queerer than ever.

He would have been glad to prevent Jacquelina from going to the lecture upon the evening in question; but there was no reasonable excuse for doing so. Everybody went to the lectures, which were very popular. Mrs. Waugh made a point of being punctually present at every one. And she took charge of Jacquelina, whenever the whim of the latter induced her to go, which was as often as she secretly wished to

"annoy Grim." And, in fact, "to plague the Ogre" was her only motive in being present, for, truth to tell, the elf cared very little either for the lecturer or his subjects, and usually spent the whole evening in yawning behind her pocket handkerchief. Upon this evening, however, the lecture fixed even the flighty fancy of Jacquelina, as she sat upon the front seat between Mrs. Waugh and Dr. Grimshaw.

Jacquelina was magnetized, and scarcely took her eyes from the speaker during the whole of the discourse. Mrs. Waugh was also too much interested to notice her companions. Grim was agonized. The result of the whole of which was—that after they all got home, Dr. Grimshaw—to use a common but graphic phrase—"put his foot down" upon the resolution to prevent Jacquelina's future attendance at the lectures. Whether he would have succeeded in keeping her away is very doubtful, had not a remarkably inclement season of weather set in, and lasted a fortnight, leaving the roads nearly impassable for two other weeks. And just as traveling was getting to be possible, Thurston Willcoxen was called to Baltimore, on his grandfather's business, and was absent a fortnight. So, altogether, six weeks had passed without Jacquelina's finding an opportunity to defy Dr. Grimshaw by attending the lectures against his consent.

At the end of that time, on Sunday morning, it was announced in the church that Mr. Willcoxen having returned to the county, would resume his lectures on the Wednesday evening following. Dr. Grimshaw looked at Jacquelina, to note how she would receive this news. Poor Jacko had been under Marian's good influences for the week previous, and was, in her fitful and uncertain way, "trying to be good." "As an experiment to please you, Marian," she said, "and to see how it will answer." Poor elf! So she called up no false, provoking smile of joy, to drive Grim frantic, but heard the news of Thurston's arrival with the outward calmness that was perfectly true to the perfect inward indifference.

"She has grown guarded—that is a very bad sign—I shall watch her closer,"

muttered Grim behind his closed teeth. And when the professor went home that day, his keen, pallid face was frightful to look upon. And many were the comments made by the dispersing congregation.

From that Sunday to the following Wednesday, not one word was spoken of Thurston Willcoxen or his lecture. But on Wednesday morning Dr. Grimshaw entered the parlor, where Jacquelina lingered alone, gazing out of the window, and going up to her side, astonished her beyond measure by speaking in a calm, kind tone, and saying:

"Jacquelina, you have been too much confined to the house lately. You are languid. You must go out more. Mr. Willcoxen lectures this evening. Perhaps you would like to hear him. If so, I withdraw my former prohibition, which was, perhaps, too harsh, and I beg you will follow your own inclinations, if they lead you to go."

You should have seen Jacko's eyes and eyebrows! the former were dilated to their utmost capacity, while the latter were elevated to their highest altitude. The professor's eyebrows were knotted together, and his eyes sought the ground, as he continued:

"I myself have an engagement at Leonardtown this afternoon, which will detain me all night, and therefore shall not be able to escort you; but Mrs. Waugh, who is going, will doubtless take you under her charge. Would you like to go?"

"I had already intended to go," replied Jacquelina, without relaxing a muscle of her face.

The professor nodded and left the room.

Soon after, Jacquelina sought her aunty, whom she found in the pantry, mixing mince-meat.

"I say, aunty—"

"Well, Lapwing?"

"When Satan turns saint, suspicion is safe, is it not?"

"What do you mean, Lapwing?"

"Why, just now the professor came to me, politely apologized for his late rudeness, and proposed that I should go with you to hear Mr. Willcoxen's lecture, while he, the professor, goes to Leonardtown to fulfill an engagement. I say, aunty, I sniff a plot, don't you?"

"I don't know what to make of it, Lapwing. Are you going?"

"Of course I am; I always intended to."

No more was said at the time.

Immediately after dinner Dr. Grimshaw ordered his horse, and saying that he was going to Leonardtown and should not be back till the next day, set forth.

And after an early tea, Mrs. Waugh and Jacquelina set out in the family sleigh. A swift run over the hard, frozen snow brought them to Old Fields, where they stopped a moment to pick up Marian, and then shooting forward at the same rate of speed, they reached the lecture-room in full time.

Jacquelina was perhaps the very least enchanted of all his hearers—she was, in fact, an exception, and found the discourse so entirely uninteresting that it was with difficulty she could refrain from yawning in the face of the orator. Mrs. Waugh also, perhaps, was but half mesmerized, for her eyes would cautiously wander from the lecturer's pulpit to the side window on her right hand. At length she stooped and whispered to Jacquelina:

"Child, be cautious; Dr. Grimshaw is on the ground—I have seen his face rise up to that lower pane of glass at the corner of that window, several times. He must be crouched down on the outside."

Jacquelina gave a little start of surprise—her face underwent many phases of expression; she glanced furtively at the indicated window, and there she saw a pale,

wild face gleam for an instant against the glass, and then drop. She nodded her head quickly, muttering:

"Oh, I'll pay him!"

"Don't child! don't do anything imprudent, for gracious' sake! That man is crazy—any one can see he is!"

"Oh, aunty, I'll be sure to pay him! He shan't be in my debt much longer. Soft, aunty! Don't look toward the window again! Don't let him perceive that we see him or suspect him—and then, you'll see what you'll see. I have a counter plot."

This last sentence was muttered to herself by Jacquelina, who thereupon straightened herself up—looked the lecturer in the eyes—and gave her undevoted attention to him during the rest of the evening. There was not a more appreciating and admiring hearer in the room than Jacquelina affected to be. Her face was radiant, her eyes starry, her cheeks flushed, her pretty lips glowing breathlessly apart—her whole form instinct with enthusiasm. Any one might have thought the little creature bewitched. But the fascinating orator need not have flattered himself—had he but known it—Jacquelina neither saw his face nor heard his words; she was seeing pictures of Grim's bitter jealousy, mortification and rage, as he beheld her from his covert; she was rehearsing scenes of what she meant to do to him. And when at last she forgot herself, and clapped her hand enthusiastically, it was not at the glorious peroration of the orator—but at the perfection of her own little plot!

When the lecturer had finished, and as usual announced the subject and the time of the next lecture, Jacquelina, instead of rising with the mass of the audience, showed a disposition to retain her seat.

"Come, my dear, I am going," said Mrs. Waugh.

"Wait, aunty, I don't like to go in a crowd."

Mrs. Waugh waited while the people pressed toward the outer doors.

"I wonder whether the professor will wait and join us when we return home?" said Mrs. Waugh.

"We shall see," said Jacquelina. "I wish he may. I believe he will. I am prepared for such an emergency."

In the meantime, Thurston Willcoxen had descended from the platform, and was shaking hands right and left with the few people who had lingered to speak to him. Then he approached Mrs. Waugh's party, bowed, and afterward shook hands with each member of it, only retaining Marian's hand the fraction of a minute longest, and giving it an earnest pressure in relinquishing it. Then he inquired after the health of the family at Luckenough, commented upon the weather, the state of the crops, etc., and with a valedictory bow withdrew, and followed the retreating crowd.

"I think we can also go now," said Mrs. Waugh.

"Yes," said Jacquelina, rising.

Upon reaching the outside, they found old Oliver, with the sleigh drawn up to receive them. Jacquelina looked all around, to see if she could discover Thurston Willcoxen on the grounds; and not seeing him anywhere, she persuaded herself that he must have hastened home. But she saw Dr. Grimshaw, recognized him, and at the same time could but notice the strong resemblance in form and manner that he bore to Thurston Willcoxen, when it was too dark to notice the striking difference in complexion and expression. Dr. Grimshaw approached her, keeping his cloak partially lifted to his face, as if to defend it from the wind, but probably to conceal it. Then the evil spirit entered Jacquelina, and tempted her to sidle cautiously up to the professor, slip her arm through his arm, and whisper:

"Thurston! Come! Jump in the sleigh and go home with us. We shall have such a nice time! Old Grim has gone to Leonardtown, and won't be home till to-morrow!"

"Has he, minion? By St. Judas! you are discovered now! I have now full evidence of your turpitude. By all the saints! you shall answer for it fearfully," said the

professor, between his clenched teeth, as he closed his arm upon Jacquelina's arm and dragged her toward the sleigh.

"Ha! ha! ha! Oh! well, I don't care! If I mistook you for Thurston, it is not the first mistake I ever made about you. I mistook you once before for a man!" said Jacko, defiantly.

He thrust her into the sleigh already occupied by Mrs. Waugh and Marian, jumped in after her, and took the seat by her side.

"Why, I thought that you set out for Leonardtown this afternoon, Dr. Grimshaw!" said Mrs. Waugh, coldly.

"You may have jumped to other conclusions equally false and dangerous, madam!"

"What do you mean, sir?"

"I mean, madam, that in conniving at the perfidy of this unprincipled girl, your niece, you imagined that you were safe. It was an error. You are both discovered!" said the professor, doggedly.

Henrietta was almost enraged.

"Dr. Grimshaw," she said, "nothing but self-respect prevents me from ordering you from this sleigh!"

"I advise you to let self-respect, or any other motive you please, still restrain you, madam. I remain here as the warden of this pretty creature's person, until she is safely secured."

"You will at least be kind enough to explain to us the causes of your present words and actions, sir!" said Mrs. Waugh, severely.

"Undoubtedly, madam! Having, as I judged, just reasons for doubting the integrity of your niece, and more than suspecting her attachment to Mr. Willcoxen, I was determined to test both. Therefore, instead of going to Leonardtown, to be absent till to-morrow, I came here, posted myself at a favorable point for observation, and took

notes. While here, I saw enough to convince me of Jacquelina's indiscretions. Afterward leaving the spot with lacerated feelings I drew near her. She mistook me for her lover, thrust her arm through mine, and said, 'Dear Thurston, come home with me—'"

"Oh! you shocking old fye-for-shame! I said no such thing! I said, Thurston! Come! Jump in the sleigh and go home with us.'"

"It makes little difference, madam! The meaning was the same. I will not be responsible for a literal report. You are discovered."

"What does that mean? If it means you have discovered that I mistook you for Thurston Willcoxen, you ought to 'walk on thrones' the rest of your life! You never got such a compliment before, and never will again!"

"Aye! go on, madam! You and your conniving aunt—"

"Dr. Grimshaw, if you dare to say or hint such impertinence to me again, you shall leave your seat much more quickly than you took it," said Mrs. Waugh.

"We shall see, madam!" said the professor, and he lapsed into sullenness for the remainder of the drive.

But, oh! there was one in that sleigh upon whose heart the words of wild Jacko had fallen with cruel weight-Marian!

CHAPTER XXII.

PETTICOAT DISCIPLINE.

When the sulky sleighing party reached Luckenough they found Commodore Waugh not only up and waiting, but in the highest state of self-satisfaction, a blessing of which they received their full share of benefit, for the old man, in the overflowing of his joy, had ordered an oyster supper, which was now all ready to be served smoking hot to the chilled and hungry sleigh-riders.

"I wonder what's out now?" said Jacquelina, as she threw off her wrappings, scattering them heedlessly on the chairs and floor of the hall. "Some awful calamity has overtaken some of Uncle Nick's enemies. Nothing on earth but that ever puts him into such a jolly humor. Now we'll see! I wonder if it is a 'crowner's 'quest' case? Wish it was Grim."

Mrs. Henrietta blessed her stars for the good weather, without inquiring very closely where it came from, as she conducted Marian to a bedroom to lay off her bonnet and mantle.

It was only at the foot of his own table, after ladling out and serving around the stewed oysters "hot and hot," that the commodore, rubbing his hands, and smiling until his great face was as grotesque as a nutcracker's, announced that Miss Nancy Skamp was turned out of office—yea, discrowned, unsceptred, dethroned, and that Harry Barnwell reigned in her stead. The news had come in that evening's mail! All present breathed more freely—all felt an inexpressible relief in knowing that the post-office would henceforth be above suspicion, and their letters and papers safe from, desecration. Only Marian said:

"What will become of the poor old creature?"

"By St. Judas Iscariot, that's her business."

"No, indeed, I think it is ours; some provision should be made for her, Commodore Waugh."

"I'll recommend her to the trustees of the almshouse, Miss Mayfield."

Marian thought it best not to pursue the subject then, but resolved to embrace the first opportunity of appealing to the commodore's smothered chivalry in behalf of a woman, old, poor, feeble, and friendless.

During the supper Dr. Grimshaw sat up as stiff and solemn—Jacquelina said—"as if he'd swallowed the poker and couldn't digest it." When they rose from the table, and were about leaving the dining-room, Dr. Grimshaw glided in a funereal manner to

the side of the commodore, and demanded a private interview with him.

"Not to-night, Nace! Not to-night! I know by your looks what it is! It is some new deviltry of Jacquelina's. That can wait! I'm as sleepy as a whole cargo of opium! I would not stop to talk now to Paul Jones, if he was to rise from the dead and visit me!"

And the professor had to be content with that, for almost immediately the family separated for the night.

Marian, attended by the maid Maria, sought the chamber assigned to herself. When she had changed her tight-fitting day-dress for a wrapper, she dismissed the girl, locked the door behind her, and then drew her chair up before the little fire, and fell into deep thought. Many causes of anxiety pressed heavily upon Marian. That Thurston had repented his hasty marriage with herself she had every reason to believe.

She had confidently hoped that her explanation with Thurston would have resulted in good—but, alas! it seemed to have had little effect. His attentions to Miss Le Roy were still unremitted—the young lady's partiality was too evident to all—and people already reported them to be engaged.

And now, as Marian sat by her little wood-fire in her chamber at Luckenough, bitter, sorrowful questions, arose in her mind. Would he persist in his present course? No, no, it could not be! This was probably done only to pique herself; but then it was carried too far; it was ruining the peace of a good, confiding girl. And Jacquelina—she had evidently mistaken Dr. Grimshaw for Thurston, and addressed to him words arguing a familiarity very improper, to say the least of it. Could he be trifling with poor Jacquelina, too? Jacko's words when believing herself addressing Thurston, certainly denoted some such "foregone conclusions." Marian resolved to see Thurston once more—once more to expostulate with him, if happily it might have some good effect. And having formed this resolution, she knelt and offered up

her evening prayers, and retired to bed.

The next day being Holy Thursday, there was, by order of the trustees, a holiday at Miss Mayfield's school. And so Marian arose with the prospect of spending the day with Jacquelina. When she descended to the breakfast-room, what was her surprise to find Thurston Willcoxen, at that early hour, the sole occupant of the room. He wore a green shooting jacket, belted around his waist. He stood upon the hearth with his back to the fire, his gun leaned against the corner of the mantle-piece, and his game-bag dropped at his feet. Marian's heart bounded, and her cheek and eye kindled when she saw him, and, for the instant, all her doubts vanished—she could not believe that guilt lurked behind a countenance so frank, noble and calm as his. He stepped forward to meet her, extending his hand. She placed her own in it, saying:

"I am very glad to see you this morning, dear Thurston, for I have something to say to you which I hope you will take kindly from your Marian, who has no dearer interest in the world than your welfare."

"Marian, if it is anything relating to our old subject of dispute—Miss Le Roy—let me warn you that I will hear nothing about it."

"Thurston, the subjects of a neighborhood's gossip are always the very last to hear it! You do not, perhaps, know that it is commonly reported that you and Miss Le Roy are engaged to be married!"

"And you give a ready ear and ready belief to such injurious slanders!"

"No! Heaven knows that I do not! I will not say that my heart has not been tortured—fully as much as your own would have been, dear Thurston, had the case been reversed, and had I stooped to receive from another such attentions as you have bestowed upon Miss Le Roy. But, upon calm reflection, I fully believe that you could never give that young lady my place in your heart, that having known and loved me—"

Marian paused, but the soul rose like a day-star behind her beautiful face, lighting serenely under her white eyelids, glowing softly on the parted lips and blooming cheeks.

"Ay! 'having known and loved me!' There again spoke the very enthusiasm of self-worship! But how know you, Marian, that I do not find such regnant superiority wearisome?—that I do not find it refreshing to sit down quietly beside a lower, humbler nature, whose greatest faculty is to love, whose greatest need to be loved!"

"How do I know it? By knowing that higher nature of yours, which you now ignore. Yet it is not of myself that I wish to speak, but of her. Thurston, you pursue that girl for mere pastime, I am sure—with no ulterior evil purpose, I am certain; yet, Thurston!" she said, involuntarily pressing her hand tightly upon her own bosom, "I know how a woman may love you, and that may be death or madness to Angelica, which is only whim and amusement to you. And, Thurston, you must go no further with this culpable trifling—you must promise me to see her no more!"

"'Must!' Upon my soul! you take state upon yourself, fair queen!"

"Thurston, a higher authority than mine speaks by my lips—it is the voice of Right! You will regard it. You will give me that promise!"

"And if I do not—"

"Oh! there is no time to argue with you longer—some one is coming—I must be quick. It is two weeks, Thurston, since I first urged this upon you; I have hesitated already too long, and now I tell you, though my heart bleeds to say it, that unless you promise to see Angelica no more, I will see and have an explanation with her to-morrow!"

"You will!"

"You can prevent it, dearest Thurston, by yourself doing what you know to be right."

"And if I do not?"

"I will see Miss Le Roy, to-morrow!"

"By heaven, then—"

His words were suddenly cut short by the entrance of Mrs. Waugh. In an instant his countenance changed, and taking up his bag of game, he went to meet the smiling, good humored woman, saying with a gay laugh:

"Good-morning, Mrs. Waugh! You see I have been shooting in the woods of Luckenough this morning, and I could not leave the premises without offering this tribute to their honored mistress."

And Thurston gayly laid the trophy at her feet.

"Hebe! will you please to see that a cup of hot coffee is sent up to Mrs. L'Oiseau; she is unwell this morning, as I knew she would be, from her excitement last night; or go with it yourself, Hebe! The presence of the goddess of health at her bedside is surely needed."

Marian left the room, and then Mrs. Waugh, turning to the young gentleman, said:

"Thurston, I am glad to have this opportunity of speaking to you, for I have something very particular to say, which you must hear without taking offense at your old aunty!"

"Humph! I am in for petticoat discipline this morning, beyond a doubt," thought the young man; but he only bowed, and placed a chair for Mrs. Waugh.

"I shall speak very plainly, Thurston."

"Oh! by all means! As plainly as you please, Mrs. Waugh," said Thurston, with an odd grimace; "I am growing accustomed to have ladies speak very plainly to me."

"Well! it won't do you any harm, Thurston. And now to the point! I told you before, that you must not show any civility to Jacquelina. And now I repeat it! And I warn you that if you do, you will cause some frightful misfortune that you will have to repent all the days of your life—if it be not fatal first of all to yourself. I do assure

you that old Grimshaw is mad with jealousy. He can no longer be held responsible for his actions. And in short, you must see Jacquelina no more!"

"Whe-ew! a second time this morning! Come! I'm getting up quite the reputation of a lady-killer!" thought the young man. Then with a light laugh, he looked up to Mrs. Waugh, and said:

"My dear madam, do you take me for a man who would willingly disturb the peace or honor of a family?"

"Pshaw! By no means, my dear Thurston. Of course I know it's all the most ridiculous nonsense!"

"Well! By the patience of Job, I do think—"

Again Thurston's words were suddenly cut short, by the entrance of—the commodore, who planted his cane down with his usual emphatic force, and said:

"Oh, sir! You here! I am very glad of it! There is a little matter to be discussed between you and me! Old Hen! leave us! vanish! evaporate!"

Henrietta was well pleased to do so. And as she closed the door the commodore turned to Thurston, and with another emphatic thump of his cane, said:

"Well, sir! a small craft is soon rigged, and a short speech soon made. In two words, how dare you, sir! make love to Jacquelina?"

"My dear uncle—"

"By Neptune, sir; don't 'uncle' me. I ask you how you dared to make love to my niece?"

"Sir, you mistake, she made love to me."

"You impudent, impertinent, unprincipled jackanape."

"Come," said Thurston to himself, "I have got into a hornet's nest this morning."

"I shall take very good care, sir, to have Major Le Roy informed what sort of a gentleman it is who is paying his addresses to his daughter."

"Miss Le Roy will be likely to form a high opinion of me before this week is out," said Thurston, laughing.

"You—you—you graceless villain, you," cried the commodore in a rage—"to think that I had such confidence in you, sir; defended you upon all occasions, sir; refused to believe in your villainy, sir; refused to close my doors against you, sir. Yes, sir; and should have continued to do so, but for last night's affair."

"Last night's affair! I protest, sir, I do not in the least understand you?"

"Oh! you don't. You don't understand that after the lecture last evening, in leaving the place, Jacquelina thrust her arm through yours—no; I mean through Grim's, mistaking him for you, and said—what she never would have said, had there not been an understanding between you."

Thurston's face was now the picture of astonishment and perplexity. The commodore seemed to mistake it for a look of consternation and detected guilt, for he continued:

"And now, sir, I suppose you understand what is to follow. Do you see that door? It leads straight into the hall, which leads directly through the front portal out into the lawn, and on to the highway—that is your road, sir. Good-morning."

And the commodore thumped down his stick and left the room—the image of righteous indignation.

Thurston nodded, smiled slightly, drew his tablets from his pocket, tore a leaf out, took his pencil, laid the paper upon the corner of the mantel-piece, wrote a few lines, folded the note, and concealed it in his hand as the door opened, and admitted Mrs. Waugh, Marian and Jacquelina. There was a telegraphic glance between the elder lady and the young man.

That of Mrs. Waugh said:

"Do have pity on the fools, and go, Thurston."

That of Thurston said:

"I am going, Mrs. Waugh, and without laughing, if I can help it."

Then he picked up his shooting cap, bowed to Jacquelina, shook hands with Mrs. Waugh, and pressing Marian's palm, left within it the note that he had written, took up his game bag and gun, and departed.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SANS SOUCI'S LAST FUN.

"The inconceivable idiots!" said Thurston, as he strode on through the park of Luckenough, "to fancy that any one with eyes, heart and brain, could possibly fall in love with the 'Will-o'-the-wisp' Jacquelina, or worse, that giglet, Angelica; when he sees Marian! Marian, whose least sunny tress is dearer to me than are all the living creatures in the world besides. Marian, for whose possession I am now about to risk everything, even her own esteem. Yet, she will forgive me; I will earn her forgiveness by such devoted love."

He hurried on until he reached an outer gate, through which old Oliver was driving a cart loaded with wood. As if to disencumber himself, he threw his game bag and valuable fowling piece to the old man, saying:

"There, uncle; there's a present for you," and without waiting to hear his thanks, hurried on, leaping hedges and ditches, until he came to the spot where he had left his horse tied since the morning. Throwing himself into his saddle, he put spurs to his horse, and galloped away toward the village, nor drew rein until he reached a little tavern on the water side. He threw his bridle to an hostler in waiting, and hurrying in, demanded to be shown into a private room. The little parlor was placed at his disposal. Here, for form's sake, he called for the newspaper, cigars and a bottle of wine (none of which he discussed, however), dismissed the attendant, and sat waiting.

Presently the odor of tar, bilge water, tobacco and rum warned him that his expected visitor was approaching. And an instant after the door was opened, and a short, stout, dark man in a weather-proof jacket, duck trousers, cow-hide shoes, and tarpaulin hat entered.

"Well, Miles, I've been waiting for you here more than an hour," said Thurston, impatiently.

"Ay, ay, sir—all right. I've been cruising round, reconnoitering the enemy's coast," replied the man, removing the quid of tobacco from his mouth, and reluctantly casting it into the fire.

"You are sure you know the spot?"

"Ay, ay? sir—the beach just below the Old Fields farmhouse."

"And south of the Pine Bluff."

"Ay, ay, sir. I know the port—that ain't the head wind!" said Jack Miles, pushing up the side of his hat, and scratching his head with a look of doubt and hesitation.

"What is, then, you blockhead?" asked Thurston, impatiently; "is your hire insufficient?"

"N-n-n—yes—I dunno! You see, cap'n, if I wer' cock sure, as that 'ere little craft you want carried of wer' yourn."

"Hush! don't talk so loud. You're not at sea in a gale, you fool. Well, go on. Speak quickly and speak lower."

"I wer' gwine to say, if so be I wer' sure you wer' the cap'n of her, why then it should be plain sailing, with no fog around, and no breakers ahead."

"Well! I am, you fool. She is mine—my wife."

"Well, but, cap'n," said the speaker, still hesitating, "if so be that's the case, why don't she strike her colors to her rightful owner? Why don't you take command in open daylight, with the drums a-beating, and the flags a-flying? What must you

board her like a pirate in this way fur? I've been a-thinkin' on it, and I think it's dangerous steering along this coast. You see it's all in a fog; I can't make out the land nowhere, and I'm afraid I shall be on the rocks afore I knows it. You see, cap'n, I never wer' in such a thick mist since I first went to sea. No offense to you, cap'n!"

"Oh, none in the world! No skillful pilot will risk his vessel in a fog. But I have a certain golden telescope of magic powers. It enables you to see clearly through the thickest mist, the darkest night that ever fell. I will give it to you. In other words, I promised you five hundred dollars for this job. Come, accomplish it to-night, and you shall have a thousand. Is the mist lifting?"

"I think it is, cap'n! I begin to see land."

"Very well! now, is your memory as good as your sight? Do you recollect the plan?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Just let me hear you go over it."

"I'm to bring the vessel round, and lay to about a quarter of a mile o' the coast. At dusk I'm to put off in a skiff and row to Pine Bluff, and lay under its shadow till I hear your signal. Then I'm to put to shore and take in the—the—"

"The cargo."

"Ay, ay, sir, the cargo."

Leaving the two conspirators to improve and perfect their plot, we must return to the breakfast parlor at Luckenough. The family were assembled around the table. Dr. Grimshaw's dark, sombre and lowering looks, enough to have spread a gloom over any circle, effectually banished cheerfulness from the board. Marian had had no opportunity of reading her note—she had slipped it into her pocket But as soon as breakfast was over, amid the bustle of rising from the table, Marian withdrew to a window and glanced over the lines.

"My own dearest one, forgive my haste this morning. I regret the necessity of

leaving so abruptly. I earnestly implore you to see me once more—upon the beach, near the Pine Bluffs, this evening at dusk. I have something of the utmost importance to say to you."

She hastily crumpled the note, and thrust it into her pocket just as Jacquelina's quizzical face looked over her shoulder.

"You're going to stay all day with me, Marian?"

"Yes, love—that is, till after dinner. Then I shall have to beg of Mrs. Waugh the use of the carriage to go home."

"Well, then, I will ride with you, Marian, and return in the carriage."

All the company, with the exception of Mrs. Waugh, Marian and Jacquelina, had left the breakfast-room.

Mrs. Waugh was locking her china closet, and when she had done, she took her bunch of keys, and turning to Marian, said:

"Hebe, dear, I want you to go with me and see poor old Cracked Nell. She is staying in one of our quarters. I think she has not long to live, and I want you to talk to her."

"Now?"

"Yes, dear, I am going to carry her some breakfast. So, come along, and get your mantle," said the good woman, passing out through the door.

Marian followed, drawing out her pocket handkerchief to tie over her head; and as she did so, the note, unperceived by her, fluttered out, and fell upon the carpet.

Jacquelina impulsively darted upon it, picked it up, opened, and read it. Had Jacquelina first paused to reflect, she would never have done so. But when did the elf ever stop to think? As she read, her eyes began to twinkle, and her feet to patter up and down, and her head to sway from side to side, as if she could scarcely keep from singing and dancing for glee.

"Well, now, who'd a thought it! Thurston making love to Marian! And keeping the

courtship close, too, for fear of the old miser. Lord, but look here! This was not right of me? Am I a pocket edition of Miss Nancy Skamp! Forbid it, Titania, Queen of the Fairies! But I didn't steal it—I found it! And I must, oh! must plague Grim a little with this! Forgive me, Marian, but for the life and soul of me, I can't help keeping this to plague Grim! You see, I promised to pay him when he charged me with swallowing an assignation, and now if I don't pay him, if I don't make him perspire till he faints, my name is not Mrs. Professor Grimshaw! Let's see! What shall I do! Oh! Why, can't I pretend to lose it, just as Marian lost it, and drop it where he'll find it? I have it! Eureka!" soliloquized the dancing elf, as she placed her handkerchief in the bottom of her pocket, and the note on top of it, and passed on to the drawing-room to "bide her time."

That soon came. She found the professor and the commodore standing in the middle of the room, in an earnest conversation, which, however, seemed near its close, for as she took her seat, the commodore said:

"Very well—I'll attend to it, Nace," and clapped his hat upon his head, and went out, while the professor dropped himself into a chair, and took up a book.

"Oh, stop, I want to speak to you a minute, uncle." cried Jacquelina, starting up and flying after him, and as she flew, pulling out her handkerchief and letting the note drop upon the floor. A swift, sly, backward glance showed that Grim had pounced upon it like a panther on its prey.

"What in the d——l's name are you running after me for?" burst forth the old man as Jacko overtook him.

"Why, uncle, I want to know if you'll please to give orders in the stable to have the carriage wheels washed off nicely? They neglect it. And I and Marian want to use it this afternoon."

"Go to the deuce! Is that my business?"

Jacquelina laughed; and, quivering through every fibre of her frame with mischief,

went back into the drawing-room to see the state of Grim.

To Jacquelina's surprise she found the note lying upon the same spot where she had dropped it. Dr. Grimshaw was standing with his back toward her, looking out of the window. She could not see the expression of his countenance. She stooped and picked up the note, but had scarcely replaced it in her pocket before Dr. Grimshaw abruptly turned, walked up and stood before her and looked in her face. Jacquelina could scarcely suppress a scream; it was as if a ghost had come before her, so blanched was his color, so ghastly his features. An instant he gazed into her eyes, and then passed out and went up-stairs. Jacquelina turned slowly around, looking after him like one magnetized. Then recovering herself, with a deep breath she said:

"Now I ask of all the 'powers that be' generally, what's the meaning of that? He picked up the note and he read it; that's certain. And he dropped it there again to make me believe he had never seen it; that's certain, too. I wonder what he means to do! There'll be fun of some sort, anyway! Stop! here comes Marian from the quarters. I shouldn't wonder if she has missed her note, and hurried back in search of it. Come! I'll take a hint from Grim, and drop it where I found it, and say nothing."

And so soliloquizing, the fairy glided back into the breakfast-room, let the note fall, and turned away just in time to allow Marian to enter, glance around, and pick up her lost treasure. Then joining Marian, she invited her up-stairs to look at some new finery just come from the city.

The forenoon passed heavily at Luckenough. When the dinner hour approached, and the family collected in the dining-room, Dr. Grimshaw was missing; and when a messenger was sent to call him to dinner, an answer was returned that the professor was unwell, and preferred to keep his room.

Jacquelina was quivering between fun and fear—vague, unaccountable fear, that hung over her like a cloud, darkening her bright frolic spirit with a woeful presentiment.

After dinner Marian asked for the carriage, and Mrs. Waugh gave orders that it should be brought around for her use. Jacquelina prepared to accompany Marian home, and in an hour they were ready, and set forth.

"You may tell Grim, if he asks after me, that I am gone home with Marian to Old Fields, and that I am not certain whether I shall return to-night or not," said Jacquelina, as she took leave of Mrs. Waugh.

"My dear Lapwing, if you love your old aunty, come immediately back in the carriage. And, by the way, my dear, I wish you would, either in going or coming, take the post-office, and get the letters and papers," said Mrs. Waugh.

"Let it be in going, then, Mrs. Waugh, for I have not been to the post-office for two days, and there may be something there for us also," said Marian.

"Very well, bright Hebe; as you please, of course," replied good Henrietta.

And so they parted. Did either dream how many suns would rise and set, how many seasons come and go, how many years roll by, before the two should meet again?

The carriage was driven rapidly on to the village, and drawn up at the post-office. Old Oliver jumped down, and went in to make the necessary inquiries. They waited impatiently until he reappeared, bringing one large letter. There was nothing for Luckenough.

The great double letter was for Marian. She took it, and as the carriage was started again, and drawn toward Old Fields, she examined the post-mark and superscription. It was a foreign letter, mailed from London, and superscribed in the handwriting of her oldest living friend, the pastor who had attended her brother in his prison and at the scene of his death.

Marian, with tearful eyes and eager hands, broke the seal and read, while Jacquelina watched her. For more than half an hour Jacko watched her, and then impatience overcame discretion in the bosom of the fairy, and she suddenly exclaimed:

"Well, Marian! I do wonder what can ail you? You grow pale, and then you grow red; your bosom heaves, the tears come in your eyes, you clasp your hands tightly together as in prayer, then you smile and raise your eyes as in thanksgiving! Now, I do wonder what it all means?"

"It means, dear Jacquelina, that I am the most grateful creature upon the face of the earth, just now; and to-morrow I will tell you why I am so," said Marian, with a rosy smile. And well she might be most grateful and most happy, for that letter had brought her assurance of fortune beyond her greatest desires. On reading the news, her very first thought had been of Thurston. Now the great objection of the miser to their marriage would be removed—the great obstacle to their immediate union overcome. Thurston would be delivered from temptation; she would be saved anxiety and suspense. "Yes; I will meet him this evening; I cannot keep this blessed news from him a day longer than necessary, for this fortune that has come to me will all be his own! Oh, how rejoiced I am to be the means of enriching him! How much good we can both do!"

These were the tumultuous, generous thoughts that sent the flush to Marian's cheeks, the smiles to her lips, and the tears to her eyes; that caused those white fingers to clasp, and those clear eyes to rise to Heaven in thankfulness, as she folded up her treasured letter and placed it in her bosom.

An hour's ride brought them to Old Field Cottage. The sun had not yet set, but the sky was dark with clouds that threatened rain or snow; and therefore Jacquelina only took time to jump out and speak to Edith, shake hands with old Jenny, kiss Miriam, and bid adieu to Marian; and then, saying that she believed she would hurry back on her aunty's account, and that she was afraid she would not get to Luckenough before ten o'clock, anyhow, she jumped into the carriage and drove off.

And Marian, guarding her happy secret, entered the cottage to make preparations for keeping her appointment with Thurston.

* * * * *

Meanwhile, at Luckenough, Dr. Grimshaw kept his room until late in the afternoon. Then, descending the stairs, and meeting the maid Maria, who almost shrieked aloud at the ghastly face that confronted her, he asked:

"Where is Mrs. Grimshaw?"

"Lord, sir!" cried the girl, half paralyzed by the sound of his sepulchral voice, "she's done gone home 'long o' Miss Marian."

"When will she be back, do you know?"

"Lord, sir!" cried Maria, shuddering, "I heerd her tell old Mis', how she didn't think she'd be back to-night."

"Ah!" said the unhappy man, in a hollow tone, that seemed to come from a tomb, as he passed down.

And Maria, glad to escape him, fled up-stairs, and never paused until she had found refuge in Mrs. L'Oiseau's room.

One hour after that, Professor Grimshaw, closely enveloped in an ample cloak, left Luckenough, and took the road to the beach.

CHAPTER XXIV.

NIGHT AND STORM.

The heavens were growing very dark; the wind was rising and driving black clouds athwart the sky; the atmosphere was becoming piercingly cold; the snow, that during the middle of the day had thawed, was freezing hard. Yet Marian hurried fearlessly and gayly on over the rugged and slippery stubble fields that lay between the cottage and the beach. A rapid walk of fifteen minutes brought her down to the water's edge. But it was now quite dark. Nothing could be more deserted, lonely and desolate than the aspect of this place. From her feet the black waters spread outward, till their

utmost boundaries were lost among the blacker vapors of the distant horizon. Afar off a sail, dimly seen or guessed at, glided ghost-like through the shadows. Landward, the boundaries of field and forest, hill and vale, were all blended, fused, in murky obscurity. Heavenward, the lowering sky was darkened by wild, scudding, black clouds, driven by the wind, through which the young moon seemed plunging and hiding as in terror. The tide was coming in, and the waves surged heavily with a deep moan upon the beach. Not a sound was heard except the dull, monotonous moan of the sea, and the fitful, hollow wail of the wind. The character of the scene was in the last degree wild, dreary, gloomy and fearful. Not so, however, it seemed to Marian, who, filled with happy, generous and tumultuous thoughts, was scarcely conscious of the gathering darkness and the lowering storm, as she walked up and down upon the beach, listening and waiting. She wondered that Thurston had not been there ready to receive her; but this thought gave her little uneasiness; it was nearly lost, as the storm and darkness also were, in the brightness and gladness of her own loving, generous emotions. There was no room in her heart for doubt or trouble. If the thought of the morning's conversation and of Angelica entered her mind, it was only to be soon dismissed with fair construction and cheerful hope. And then she pictured to herself the surprise, the pleasure of Thurston, when he should hear of the accession of fortune which should set them both free to pursue their inclinations and plans for their own happiness and for the benefit of others. And she sought in her bosom if the letters were safe. Yes; there they were; she felt them. Her happiness had seemed a dream without that proof of its reality. For once she gave way to imagination, and allowed that magician to build castles in the air at will. Thurston and herself must go to England immediately to take possession of the estate; that was certain. Then they must return. But ere that she would confide to him her darling project; one that she had never breathed to any, because to have done so would have been vain; one that she had longingly dreamed of, but never, as now, hoped to realize. And Edith—she would make Edith so comfortable! Edith

should be again surrounded with the elegancies and refinements of life. And Miriam—Miriam should have every advantage of education that wealth could possibly secure for her, either in this country or in Europe. If Edith would spare Miriam, the little girl should go with her to England. But Thurston—above all, Thurston! A heavy drop of rain struck Marian in the face, and, for an instant, woke her from her blissful reverie.

She looked up. Why did not Thurston come? The storm would soon burst forth upon the earth; where was Thurston? Were he by her side there would be nothing formidable in the storm, for he would shelter her with his cloak and umbrella, as they should scud along over the fields to the cottage, and reach the fireside before the rain could overtake them. Where was he? What could detain him at such a time? She peered through the darkness up and down the beach. To her accustomed eye, the features of the landscape were dimly visible. That black form looming like a shadowy giant before her was the headland of Pine Bluff, with its base washed by the sullen waves. It was the only object that broke the dark, dull monotony of the shore. She listened; the moan of the sea, the wail of the wind, were blended in mournful chorus. It was the only sound that broke the dreary silence of the hour.

Hark! No; there was another sound. Amid the moaning and the wailing of winds and waves, and the groaning of the coming storm, was heard the regular fall of oars, soon followed by the slow, grating sound of a boat pushed up upon the frozen strand. Marian paused and strained her eyes through the darkness in the direction of the sound, but could see nothing save the deeper, denser darkness around Pine Bluff. She turned, and, under cover of the darkness, moved swiftly and silently from the locality. The storm was coming on very fast. The rain was falling and the wind rising and driving it into her face. She pulled her hood closely about her face, and wrapped her shawl tightly about her as she met the blast.

Oh! where was Thurston, and why did he not come? She blamed herself for having

ventured out; yet could she have foreseen this? No; for she had confidently trusted in his keeping his appointment. She had never known him to fail before. What could have caused the failure now? Had he kept his tryste they would now have been safely housed at Old Field Cottage. Perhaps Thurston, seeing the clouds, had taken for granted that she would not come, and he had therefore stayed away. Yet, no; she could not for an instant entertain that thought. Well she knew that had a storm risen, and raged as never a storm did before, Thurston, upon the bare possibility of her presence there, would keep his appointment. No; something beyond his control had delayed him. And, unless he should now very soon appear, something very serious had happened to him. The storm was increasing in violence; her shawl was already wet, and she resolved to hurry home.

She had just turned to go when the sound of a man's heavy, measured footsteps, approaching from the opposite direction, fell upon her ear. She looked up half in dread, and strained her eyes out into the blackness of the night. It was too dark to see anything but the outline of a man's figure wrapped in a large cloak, coming slowly on toward her. As the man drew near she recognized the well-known figure, air and gait; she had of the identity. She hastened to meet him, exclaiming in a low, eager tone:

"Thurston! dear Thurston!"

The man paused, folded his cloak about him, drew up, and stood perfectly still.

Why did he not answer her? Why did he not speak to her? Why did he stand so motionless, and look so strange? She could not have seen the expression of his countenance, even if a flap of his cloak had not been folded across his face; but his whole form shook as with an ague fit.

"Thurston! dear Thurston!" she exclaimed once more, under her breath, as she pressed toward him.

But he suddenly stretched out his hand to repulse her, gasping, as it were,

breathlessly, "Not yet—not yet!" and again his whole frame shook with an inward storm. What could be the reason of his strange behavior? Oh, some misfortune had happened to him—that was evident! Would it were only of a nature that her own good news might be able to cure. And it might be so. Full of this thought, she was again pressing toward him, when a violent flurry of rain and wind whistled before her and drove into her face, concealing him from her view. When the sudden gust as suddenly passed, she saw that he remained in the same spot, his breast heaving, his whole form shaking. She could bear it no longer. She started forward and put her arms around his neck, and dropped her head upon his bosom, and whispered in suppressed tones:

"Dearest Thurston, what is the matter? Tell me, for I love you more than life!"

The man clasped his left arm fiercely around her waist, lifted his right hand, and, hissing sharply through his clenched teeth:

"You have drawn on your own doom—die, wretched girl!" plunged a dagger in her bosom, and pushed her from him.

One sudden, piercing shriek, and she dropped at his feet, grasping at the ground, and writhing in agony. Her soul seemed striving to recover the shock, and recollect its faculties. She half arose upon her elbow, supported her head upon her hand, and with her other hand drew the steel out from her bosom, and laid it down. The blood followed, and with the life-stream her strength flowed away. The hand that supported her head suddenly dropped, and she fell back. The man had been standing over her, speechless, motionless, breathless, like some wretched somnambulist, suddenly awakened in the commission of a crime, and gazing in horror, amazement, and unbelief upon the work of his sleep.

Suddenly he dropped upon his knees by her side, put his arm under her head and shoulders and raised her up; but her chin fell forward upon her bosom, and her eyes fixed and glazed. He laid her down gently, groaning in a tone of unspeakable

anguish:

"Miss Mayfield! My God! what have I done?" And with an awful cry, between a shriek and a groan, the wretched man cast himself upon the ground by the side of the fallen body.

The storm was beating wildly upon the assassin and his victim; but the one felt it no more than the other. At length the sound of footsteps was heard approaching fast and near. In the very anguish of remorse the instinct of self-preservation seized the wretched man, and he started up and fled as from the face of the avenger of blood.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE STRUGGLE ENDED.

In the meantime Jacquelina had reached home sooner than she had expected. It was just dark, and the rain was beginning to fall as she sprang from the carriage and darted into the house.

Mrs. Waugh met her in the hall, took her hand, and said:

"Oh, my dear Lapwing! I'm so glad you have come back, bad as the weather is; for indeed the professor gives me a great deal of anxiety, and if you had stayed away to-night I could not have been answerable for the consequences. There, now; hurry up-stairs and change your dress, and come down to tea. It is all ready, and we have a pair of canvasback ducks roasted."

"Very well, aunty! But—is Grim in the house?"

"I don't know, my love. You hurry."

Jacquelina tripped up the stairs to her own room, which she found lighted, warmed, and attended by her maid, Maria. She took off her bonnet and mantle, and laid them aside, and began to smooth her hair, dancing all the time, and quivering with suppressed laughter in anticipation of her "fun." When she had arranged her dress,

she went down-stairs and passed into the dining-room, where the supper table was set.

"See if Nace Grimshaw is in his room, and if he is not, we will wait no longer!" said the hungry commodore, thumping his heavy stick down upon the floor.

Festus sprang to do his bidding, and after an absence of a few minutes returned with the information that the professor was not there.

Jacquelina shrugged her shoulders, and shook with inward laughter.

They all sat down, and amid the commodore's growls at Grim's irregular hours, and Jacquelina's shrugs and smiles and sidelong glances and ill-repressed laughter, the meal passed. And when it was over, the commodore, leaning on Mrs. Waugh's arm, went to his own particular sofa in the back parlor; Mrs. L'Oiseau remained, to superintend the clearing away of the supper-table; and Jacquelina danced on to the front parlor, where she found no one but the maid, who was mending the fire.

"Say! did you see anything of the professor while I was gone?" she inquired.

"Lors, honey, I wish I hadn't! I knows how de thought of it will give me 'liriums nex' time I has a fever."

"Why? What did he do? When was it?"

"Why, chile, jes afore sundown, as I was a carryin' an armful of wood up-stairs, for Miss Mary's room, I meets de 'fessor a comin' down. I like to 'a' screamed! I like to 'a' let de wood drap! I like to 'a' drapped right down myself! It made my heart beat in de back o' my head—he look so awful, horrid gashly! Arter speakin' in a voice hollow as an empty coffin, an' skeerin' me out'n my seventeen sensibles axin arter you, he jes tuk hisself off summers, an' I ain't seen him sence."

"What did he ask you? What did you tell him?"

"He jes ax where you was. I telled him how you were gone home 'long o' Miss Marian; he ax when you were comin' back; I telled him I believed not till to-morrow

mornin'; then his face turned all sorts of awful dark colors, an' seemed like it crushed right in, an' he nodded and said 'Ah!' but it sounded jes like a hollow groan; and he tuk hisself off, and I ain't seen him sence."

The elf danced about the room, unable to restrain her glee. And the longer Dr. Grimshaw remained away, the more excited she grew. She skipped about like the very sprite of mischief, exclaiming to herself:

"Oh, shan't we have fun presently! Oh, shan't we, though! The Grim maniac! he has gone to detect me! And he'll break in upon Thurston and Marian's interview. Won't there be an explosion! Oh, Jupiter! Oh, Puck! Oh, Mercury! What fun—what delicious fun! Wr-r-r-r! I can scarcely contain myself! Begone, Maria! Vanish! I want all the space in this room to myself! Oh, fun alive! What a row there'll be! Me-thinks I hear the din of battle!

"Oh clanga a rang! a rang! clang! clash! Whoop!"

sang the elf, springing and dancing, and spinning, and whirling, around and around the room in the very ecstasy of mischief. Her dance was brought to a sudden and an awful close.

The hall door was thrown violently open, hurried and irregular steps were heard approaching, the parlor door was pushed open, and Dr. Grimshaw staggered forward and paused before her!

Yes; her frolic was brought to an eternal end. She saw at a glance that something fatal, irreparable, had happened. There was blood upon his hands and wrist-bands! Oh, more—far more! There was the unmistakable mark of Cain upon his writhen brow! Before now she had seen him look pale and wild and haggard, and had known neither fear nor pity for him. But now! An exhumed corpse galvanized into a horrid semblance of life might look as he did—with just such sunken cheeks and ashen lips and frozen eyes; with just such a collapsed and shuddering form; yet, withal, could not have shown that terrific look of utter, incurable despair! His fingers, talon-like in

their horny paleness and rigidity, clutched his breast, as if to tear some mortal anguish thence, and his glassy eyes were fixed in unutterable reproach upon her face! Thrice he essayed to speak, but a gurgling noise in his throat was the only result. With a last great effort to articulate, the blood suddenly filled his throat and gushed from his mouth! For a moment he sought to stay the hemorrhage by pressing a handkerchief to his lips; but soon his hand dropped powerless to his side; he reeled and fell upon the floor!

Jacquelina gazed in horror on her work.

And then her screams of terror filled the house!

The family came rushing in. Foremost entered the commodore, shaking his stick in a towering passion, and exclaiming at the top of his voice:

"What the devil is all this? What's broke loose now? What are you raising all this row for, you infernal little hurricane?"

"Oh, uncle! aunty! mother! look—look!" exclaimed Jacquelina, wringing her pale fingers, and pointing to the fallen man.

The sight arrested all eyes.

The miserable man lay over on his side, ghastly pale, and breathing laboriously, every breath pumping out the life-blood, that had made a little pool beside his face.

Mrs. Waugh and Mary L'Oiseau hastened to stoop and raise the sufferer. The commodore drew near, half stupefied, as he always was in a crisis.

"What—what—what's all this? Who did it? How did it happen?" he asked, with a look of dull amazement.

"Give me a sofa cushion, Maria, to place under his head. Mary L'Oiseau, hurry as fast as you can, and send a boy for Dr. Brightwell; tell him to take the swiftest horse in the stable, and ride for life and death, and bring the physician instantly, for Dr. Grimshaw is dying! Hurry!"

"Dying? Eh! what did you say, Henrietta?" inquired the commodore, in a sort of stupid, blind anxiety; for he was unable to comprehend what had happened.

"Speak to me, Henrietta! What is the matter? What ails Grim?"

"He has ruptured an artery," said Mrs. Waugh, gravely, as she laid the sufferer gently back upon the carpet and placed the sofa pillow under his head.

"Ruptured an artery? How did it happen? Grim! Nace! speak to me! How do you feel? Oh, Heaven! he doesn't speak—he doesn't hear me! Oh, Henrietta! he is very ill—he is very ill! He must be put to bed at once, and the doctor sent for! Come here, Maria! Help me to lift your young master," said the old man, waking up to anxiety.

"Stay! The doctor has been sent for; but he must not be moved; it would be fatal to him. Indeed, I fear that he is beyond human help," said Henrietta, as she wiped the gushing stream from the lips of the dying man.

"Beyond human help! Eh! what? Nace! No! no! no! no! It can't be!" said the old man, kneeling down, and bending over him in helpless trouble.

"Attend Dr. Grimshaw, while I hurry out and see what can be done, Mary," said Mrs. Waugh, resigning her charge, and then hastening from the room. She soon returned, bringing with her such remedies as her limited knowledge suggested. And she and Mary L'Oiseau applied them; but in vain! Every effort for his relief seemed but to hasten his death. The hemorrhage was subsiding; so also was his breath. "It is too late; he is dying!" said Henrietta, solemnly.

"Dying! No, no, Nace! Nace! speak to me! Nace! you're not dying! I've lost more blood than that in my time! Nace! Nace! speak to your old—speak, Nace!" cried the commodore, stooping down and raising the sufferer in his arms, and gazing, half wildly, half stupidly, at the congealing face.

He continued thus for some moments, until Mrs. Waugh, putting her hand upon his shoulder, said gravely and kindly:

"Lay him down, Commodore Waugh; he is gone."

"Gone! gone!" echoed the old man, in his imbecile distraction, and dropped his gray head upon the corpse, and groaned aloud.

Mrs. Waugh came and laid her hand affectionately on his shoulder. He looked up in such hopeless, helpless trouble, and cried out:

"Oh, Henrietta! he was my son—my only, only son! My poor, unowned boy! Oh, Henrietta! is he dead? Are you sure? Is he quite gone?"

"He is gone, Commodore Waugh; lay him down; come away to your room," said Henrietta, gently taking his hand.

Jacquelina, white with horror, was kneeling with clasped hands and dilated eyes, gazing at the ruin. The old man's glance fell upon her there, and his passion changed from grief to fury. Fiercely he broke forth:

"It was you! You are the murderess—you! Heaven's vengeance light upon you!"

"Oh, I never meant it! I never meant it! I am very wretched! I wish I'd never been born!" cried Jacquelina, wringing her pale fingers.

"Out of my sight, you curse! Out of my sight—and may Heaven's wrath pursue you!" thundered the commodore, shaking with grief and rage.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE BODY ON THE BEACH.

In the meanwhile, where was he whose headlong passions had precipitated this catastrophe? where was Thurston? After having parted with his confederate, he hurried home, for a very busy day lay before him. To account for his sudden departure, and long absence, and to cover his retreat, it was necessary to have some excuse, such as a peremptory summons to Baltimore upon the most important business. Once in that city, he would have leisure to find some further apology for

proceeding directly to France without first returning home. Now, strange as it may appear, though his purposed treachery to Marian wrung his bosom with remorse whenever he paused to think of it, yet it was the remorse without humiliation; for he persuaded himself that stratagem was fair in love as in war, especially in his case with Marian, who had already given him her hand; but now the unforseen necessity of these subterfuges made his cheek burn. He hastened to Dell-Delight, and showing the old man a letter he had that morning received from the city, informed him that he was obliged to depart immediately, upon affairs of the most urgent moment to him, and then, to escape the sharp stings of self-scorn, he busied himself with arranging his papers, packing his trunks and ordering his servants. His baggage was packed into and behind the old family carriage, and having completed his preparations about one o'clock, he entered it, and was driven rapidly to the village.

The schooner was already at the wharf and waiting for him. Thurston met many of his friends in the village, and in an off-hand manner explained to them the ostensible cause of his journey. And thus, in open daylight, gayly chatting with his friends, Thurston superintended the embarkation of his baggage. And it was not until one by one they had shaken hands with him, wished him a good voyage and departed, that Thurston found himself alone with the captain in the cabin.

"Now you know, Miles, that I have not come on board to remain. When the coast is clear I shall go on shore, get in the carriage, and return to Dell-Delight. I must meet my wife on the beach. I must remain with her through all. I must take her on board. You will be off Pine Bluff just at dusk, captain?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"You will not be a moment behind hand?"

"Trust me for that, Cap'n."

"See if the people have left."

The skipper went on deck and returned to report the coast clear.

Thurston then went on shore, entered the carriage, and was driven homeward.

It was nearly four o'clock when he reached Dell-Delight, and there he found the whole premises in a state of confusion. Several negroes were on the lookout for him; and as soon as they saw him ran to the house.

"What is the meaning of all this?" he inquired, detaining one of the hindmost.

"Oh, Marse Thuster, sir! oh, sir!" exclaimed the boy, rolling his eyes quite wildly.

"What is the matter with the fool?"

"Oh, sir; my poor ole marse! my poor ole marse!"

"What has happened to your master? Can't you be plain, sir?"

"Oh, Marse Thuster, sir! he done fell down inter a fit, an had to be toted off to bed."

"A fit! good heavens! has a doctor been summoned?" exclaimed Thurston, springing from his seat.

"Oh, yes, sir! Jase be done gone arter de doctor."

Thurston stopped to inquire no farther, but ran into the house and up into his grandfather's chamber.

There a distressing scene met his eyes. The old man, with his limbs distorted, and his face swollen and discolored, lay in a state of insensibility upon the bed. Two or three negro women were gathered around him, variously occupied with rubbing his hands, chafing his temples and wiping the oozing foam from his lips. At the foot of the bed stood poor daft Fanny, with disheveled hair and dilated eyes, chanting a grotesque monologue, and keeping time with a see-saw motion from side to side. The first thing Thurston did, was to take the hand of this poor crazed, but docile creature, and lead her from the sick-room up into her own. He bade her remain there, and then returned to his grandfather's bedside. In reply to his anxious questioning, he was informed that the old man had fallen into a fit about an hour before—that a boy had been instantly sent for the doctor, and the patient carried to bed; but that he had

not spoken since they laid him there. It would yet be an hour before the doctor could possibly arrive, and the state of the patient demanded instant attention.

And withal Thurston was growing very anxious upon Marian's account. The sun was now sinking under a dark bank of clouds. The hour of his appointed meeting with her was approaching. He felt, of course, that his scheme must for the present be deferred—even if its accomplishment should again seem necessary, which was scarcely possible. But Marian would expect him. And how should he prevent her coming to the beach and waiting for him there? He did not know where a message would most likely now to find her, whether at Luckenough, at Old Fields or at Colonel Thornton's. But he momentarily expected the arrival of Dr. Brightwell, and he resolved to leave that good man in attendance at the sick bed, while he himself should escape for a few hours; and hurry to the beach to meet and have an explanation with his wife.

But an hour passed, and the doctor did not come.

Thurston's eyes wandered anxiously from the distorted face of the dying man before him, to the window that commanded the approach to the house. But no sign of the doctor was to be seen.

The sun was on the very edge of the horizon. The sufferer before him was evidently approaching his end. Marian he knew must be on her way to the beach. And a dreadful storm was rising.

His anxiety reached fever heat.

He could not leave the bedside of his dying relative, yet Marian must not be permitted to wait upon the beach, exposed to the fierceness of the storm, or worse the rudeness of his own confederates.

He took a sudden resolution, and wondered that he had not done so before. He resolved to summon Marian as his wife to his home.

Full of this thought, he hastened down stairs and ordered Melchizedek to put the

horse to the gig and get ready to go an errand. And while the boy was obeying his directions, Thurston penned the following lines to Marian:

"My dear Marian—my dear, generous, long-suffering wife—come to my aid. My grandfather has been suddenly stricken down with apoplexy, and is dying. The physician has not yet arrived, and I cannot leave his bedside. Return with my messenger, to assist me in taking care of the dying man. You, who are the angel of the sick and suffering, will not refuse me your aid. Come, never to leave me more! Our marriage shall be acknowledged to-morrow, to-night, any time, that you in your nicer judgment, shall approve. Come! let nothing hinder you. I will send a message to Edith to set her anxiety at rest, or I will send for her to be with you here. Come to me, beloved Marian. Dictate your own conditions if you will—only come."

He had scarcely sealed this note, when the boy, hat in hand, appeared at the door.

"Take this note, sir, jump in the gig and drive as fast as possible to the beach below Pine Bluffs. You will see Miss Mayfield waiting there, give her this note, and then—await her orders. Be quicker than you ever were before," said Thurston, hurrying his messenger off.

Then, much relieved of anxiety upon Marian's account, he returned to the sick-room and renewed his endeavors to relieve the patient.

Ah! he was far past relief now; he was stricken with death. And with Thurston all thoughts, all feelings, all interests, even those connected with Marian, were soon lost in that awful presence. It was the first time he had ever looked upon death, and now, in the rushing tide of his sinful passions and impetuous will, he was brought face to face with this last, dread, all-conquering power! What if it were not in his own person? What if it were in the person of an old man, very infirm, and over-ripe for the great reaper? It was death—the final earthly end of every living creature—death, the demolition of the human form, the breaking up of the vital functions, the dissolution between soul and body, the one great event that "happeneth to all;" the

doom certain, the hour uncertain; coming in infancy, youth, maturity, as often or oftener than in age. These were the thoughts that filled Thurston's mind as he stood and wiped the clammy dews from the brow of the dying man.

Thurston might have remained much longer, too deeply and painfully absorbed in thought to notice the darkening of the night or the beating of the storm, had not a gust of the rain and wind, of unusual violence, shaken the windows.

This recalled Marian to his mind; it was nearly time for her to arrive; he hoped that she was near the house; that she would soon be there; he arose and went to the window to look forth into the night; but the deep darkness prevented his seeing, as the noise of the storm prevented his hearing the approach of any vehicle that might be near. He went back to the bedside; the old man was breathing his life away without a struggle. Thurston called the mulatto housekeeper to take his place, and then went down stairs and out of the hall door, and gazed and listened for the coming of the gig, in vain. He was just about to re-enter the hall and close the door when the sound of wheels, dashing violently, helter-skelter, and with break-neck speed into the yard, arrested his attention.

"Marian! it is my dear Marian at last; but the fellow need not risk her life to save her from the storm by driving at that rate. My own Marian!" he exclaimed, as he hurried out, expecting to meet her.

Melchizedek alone sprang from the gig, and sank trembling and quaking at his master's feet.

Thurston blindly pushed past him, and peered and felt in the gig. It was empty.

"Where is the lady, sirrah? What ails you? Why don't you answer me?" exclaimed Thurston, anxiously returning to the spot where the boy crouched. But the latter remained speechless, trembling, groaning, and wringing his hands. "Will you speak, idiot? I ask you where is the lady? Was she not upon the beach? What has frightened you so? Did the horse run away?" inquired Thurston, hurriedly, in great alarm.

"Oh, sir, marster! I 'spects she's killed!"

"Killed! Oh, my God! she has been thrown from the gig!" cried the young man, in a piercing voice, as he reeled under this blow. In another instant he sprang upon the poor boy and shaking him furiously, cried in a voice of mingled grief, rage and anxiety: "Where was she thrown? Where is she? How did it happen? Oh! villain! villain! you shall pay for this with your life! Come and show me the spot! instantly! instantly!"

"Oh, marster, have mercy, sir! 'Twasn't along o' me an' the gig it happened of! She wur 'parted when I got there!"

"Where? Where? Good heavens, where?" asked Thurston, nearly beside himself.

"On de beach, sir. Jes' as I got down there, I jumped out'n de gig, and walked along, and then I couldn't see my way, an' I turned de bull-eye ob de lantern on de sand afore me, an' oh, marse—"

"Go, on! go on!"

"I seen de lady lying like dead, and a man jump up and run away, and when I went nigh, I seen her all welkering in her blood, an' dis yer lying by her," and the boy handed a small poignard to his master.

It was Thurston's own weapon, that he had lost some months previous in the woods of Luckenough. It was a costly and curious specimen of French taste and ingenuity. The handle was of pearl, carved in imitation of the sword-fish, and the blade corresponded to the long pointed beak that gives the fish that name.

Thurston scarcely noticed that it was his dagger, but pushing the boy aside, he ran to the stables, saddled a horse with the swiftness of thought, threw himself into his stirrups, and galloped furiously away towards the beach.

The rain was now falling in torrents, and the wind driving it in fierce gusts against his face. The tempest was at its very height, and it seemed at times impossible to

breast the blast—it seemed as though steed and rider must be overthrown! Yet he lashed and spurred his horse, and struggled desperately on, thinking with fierce anguish of Marian, his Marian, lying wounded, helpless, alone and dying, exposed to all the fury of the winds and waves upon that tempestuous coast, and dreading with horror, lest before he should be able to reach her, her helpless form, still living, might be washed off by the advancing waves. Thus he spurred and lashed his horse, and drove him against rain and wind, and through the darkness of the night.

With all his desperate haste, it was two hours before he approached the beach. And as he drew near the heavy cannonading of the waves upon the shore admonished him that the tide was at its highest point. He pressed rapidly onward, threw himself from his horse, and ran forward to the edge of the bank above the beach. It was only to meet the confirmation of his worst fears! The waters were thundering against the bank upon which he stood. The tide had come in and overswept the whole beach, and now, lashed and driven by the wind, the waves tossed and raved and roared with appalling fury.

Marian was gone, lost, swept away by the waves! that was the thought that wrung from him a cry of fierce agony, piercing through all the discord of the storm, as he ran up and down the shore, hoping nothing, expecting nothing, yet totally unable to tear himself from the fatal spot.

And so he wildly walked and raved, until his garments were drenched through with the rain; until the storm exhausted its fury and subsided; until the changing atmosphere, the still, severe cold, froze all his clothing stiff around him; so he walked, groaning and crying and calling despairingly upon the name of Marian, until the night waned and the morning dawned, and the eastern horizon grew golden, then crimson, then fiery with the coming sun.

The sky was clear, the waters calm, the sands bare and glistening in the early sunbeams; no vestige of the storm or of the bloody outrage of the night

remained—all was peace and beauty. In the distance was a single snow-white sail, floating swan-like on the bosom of the blue waters. All around was beauty and peace, yet from the young man's tortured bosom peace had fled, and remorse, vulture-like, had struck its talons deep into his heart. He called himself a murderer, the destroyer of Marian; he said it was his selfishness, his willfulness, his treachery, that had exposed her to this danger, and brought her to this fate! Some outlaw, some waterman, or fugitive negro had robbed and murdered her. Marian usually wore a very valuable watch; probably, also, she had money about her person—enough to have tempted the cupidity of some lawless wretch. He shrank in horror from pursuing conjecture—it was worse than torture, worse than madness to him. Oh, blindness and frenzy; why had he not thought of these dangers so likely to beset her solitary path? Why had he so recklessly exposed her to them? Vain questions, alas! vain as was his self-reproach, his anguish and despair!

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE MISSING MARIAN.

In the meantime, how had the morning broken upon Dell-Delight? How upon Luckenough? and how at Old Field Cottage?

At Dell-Delight the old man had expired just before the sun arose. The two physicians that had been summoned the night previous, but had been delayed by the storm, arrived in the morning only to see the patient die. Many inquiries were made and much conjecture formed as to the cause of Thurston Willcoxen's improper and unaccountable absence at such a juncture. But Melchizedek, poor, faithful fellow, having followed his master's steps, did not appear, and no one else upon the premises could give any explanation relative to the movements of their young master. He had left the bedside of his dying relative at nine o'clock the night before, and he had not since returned—his saddle-horse was gone from the stable—that was

all that could be ascertained. Dr. Brightwell took his departure, to answer other pressing calls. But Dr. Weismann, seeing that there was no responsible person in charge, and having elsewhere no urgent demands upon his time and attention, kindly volunteered to stay and superintend affairs at Dell-Delight, until the reappearance of the young master.

* * * * *

At Old Field Cottage, Edith had sat up late the night before waiting for Marian; but, seeing that she did not return, had taken it for granted that she had remained all night with Miss Thornton, and so, without the least uneasiness at her prolonged absence, had retired to rest. And in the morning she arose with the same impression on her mind, gayly looking forward to Marian's return with the visitor, and the certain happy revelation she had promised.

She had breakfast over early, made the room very tidy, dressed Miriam in her holiday clothes, put on her own Sunday gown, and sat down to wait for Marian and the visitor. The morning passed slowly, in momentary expectation of an arrival.

It was near eleven o'clock when she looked up and saw Colonel Thornton's carriage approaching the cottage.

"There! I said so! I knew Marian had remained with Miss Thornton, and that they would bring her home this morning. I suppose Colonel Thornton and his sister are both with her! And now for the revelation! I wonder what it is," said Edith, smiling to herself, as she arose and stroked down her dress, and smoothed her ringlets, preparatory to meeting her guests.

By this time the carriage had drawn up before the cottage gate. Edith went out just in time to see the door opened, and Miss Thornton alight. The lady was alone—that Edith saw at the first glance.

"What can be the meaning of this?" she asked herself, as she went forward to welcome her visitor.

But Miss Thornton was very pale and tremulous, and she acted altogether strangely.

"How do you do, Miss Thornton? I am very glad to see you," said Edith, cordially offering her hand.

But the lady seized it, and drew her forcibly towards the door, saying in a husky voice:

"Come in—come in!"

Full of surprise, Edith followed her.

"Sit down," she continued, sinking into a chair, and pointing to a vacant one by her side.

Edith took the seat, and waited in wonder for her further speech.

"Where is Marian?" asked Miss Thornton, in an agitated voice.

"Where? Why, I believed her to be at your house!" answered Edith, in surprise and vague fear.

"Good heaven!" exclaimed the lady, growing very pale, and trembling in every limb. Edith started up in alarm.

"Miss Thornton, what do you mean? For mercy's sake, tell me, has anything happened?"

"I do not know—I am not sure—I trust not—tell me! when did you see her last? When did she leave home? this morning?"

"No! last evening, about sundown."

"And she has not returned? You have not seen her since?"

"No!"

"Did she tell you where she was going?"

"No!"

"Did she promise to come back? and when?"

"She promised to return before dark! She did not do so! I judged the storm had detained her, and that she was with you, and I felt easy."

"Oh, God!" cried the lady, in a voice of deep distress,

"Miss Thornton! for Heaven's sake! tell me what has occurred!"

"Oh, Edith!"

"In mercy, explain yourself—Marian! what of Marian?"

"Oh, God, sustain you, Edith! what can I say to you? my own heart is lacerated!"

"Marian! Marian! oh! what has happened to Marian! Oh! where is Marian?"

"I had hoped to find her here after all! else I had not found courage to come!"

"Miss Thornton, this is cruel—"

"Ah! poor Edith! what you required to be told is far more cruel. Oh, Edith! pray Heaven for fortitude?"

"I have fortitude for anything but suspense. Oh, Heaven, Miss Thornton, relieve this suspense, or I shall suffocate!"

"Edith! Edith!" said the lady, going up and putting her arms around the fragile form of the young widow, as to shield and support her. "Oh, Edith! I heard a report this morning—and it may be but a report—I pray Heaven, that it is no more—"

"Oh, go on! what was it?"

"That, that last evening on the beach during the storm, Marian Mayfield—" Miss Thornton's voice choked.

"Oh, speak; for mercy speak! What of Marian?"

"That Marian Mayfield had been waylaid, and—"

"Murdered! Oh, God!" cried Edith, as her over-strained nerves relaxed, and she sank in the arms of Miss Thornton.

A child's wild, frenzied shriek resounded through the house. It was the voice of

Miriam.

* * * * *

At Luckenough that morning, the remains of the unfortunate Dr. Grimshaw were laid out preparatory to burial. Jacquelina, in a bewildered stupor of remorse, wandered vaguely from room to room, seeking rest and finding none. "I have caused a fellow creature's death!" That was the envenomed thought that corroded her heart's centre. From her bosom, too, peace had fled. It was near noon when the news of Marian's fate reached Luckenough, and overwhelmed the family with consternation and grief.

But Jacquelina! the effect of the tragic tale on her was nearly fatal. She understood the catastrophe, as no one else could! She knew who struck the fatal blow, and when and why, and under what mistake it was struck! She felt that another crime, another death lay heavy on her soul! It was too much! oh! it was too much! No human heart nor brain could sustain the crushing burden, and the poor lost elf fell into convulsions that threatened soon to terminate in death. There was no raving, no talking; in all her frenzy, the fatal secret weighing on her bosom did not then transpire.

* * * * *

Before the day was out the whole county was in an uproar. Never had any event of the neighborhood created so high an excitement or so profound a sympathy. Great horror and amazement filled every bosom. A county meeting spontaneously convened, and handbills were printed, large rewards offered, and every means taken to secure the discovery of the criminal. In the deep, absorbing sympathy for Marian's fate, the sudden death of Professor Grimshaw, and the reasonably-to-be-expected demise of old Mr. Cloudesley Willcoxen, passed nearly unnoticed, and were soon forgotten. Among the most zealous in the pursuit of the unknown murderer was Thurston Willcoxen; but the ghastly pallor of his countenance, the wildness of his

eyes, and the distraction of his manner, often varied by fits of deep and sullen despair, excited the surprise and conjecture of all who looked upon him.

Days passed and still no light was thrown upon the mystery. About a fortnight after the catastrophe, however, information was brought to the neighborhood that the corpse of a woman, answering to the description of Marian, had been washed ashore some miles down the coast, but had been interred by the fishermen, the day after its discovery. Many gentlemen hurried down to the spot, and further investigation confirmed the general opinion that the body was that of the martyred girl.

* * * * *

Three weeks after this, Edith lay upon her deathbed. Her delicate frame never recovered this last great shock. A few days before her death she called Miriam to her bedside. The child approached; she was sadly altered within the last few weeks; incessant weeping had dimmed her splendid eyes, and paled her brilliant cheeks.

"Sit down upon the bed by me, my daughter," said Edith.

The child climbed up and took the indicated seat. Something of that long-smothered fire, which had once braved the fury of the British soldiers, kindled in the dying woman's eyes.

"Miriam, you are nearly nine years old in time, and much older than that in thought and feeling. Miriam, your mother has not many days to live; but in dying, she leaves you a sacred trust to be fulfilled. My child, do you follow and understand me?"

"Yes, mamma."

"Do not weep; tears are vain and idle. There was an injured queen once whose tears were turned to sparks of fire. So I would have yours to turn! She came among us a young stranger girl, without fortune or position, or any of the usual stepping-stones to social consideration. Yet see what influence, what power she soon obtained, and what reforms and improvements she soon effected. The county is rich in the monuments of her young wisdom and angelic goodness. All are indebted to her; but

none so deeply as you and I. All are bound to seek out and punish her destroyer; but none so strongly as you and I. Others have pursued the search for the murderer with great zeal for a while; we must make that search the one great object of our lives. Upon us devolve the right and the duty to avenge her death by bringing her destroyer to the scaffold. Miriam, do you hear—do you hear and understand me?"

"Yes, mamma; yes."

"Child, listen to me! I have a clue to Marian's murderer!"

Miriam started, and attended breathlessly.

"My love, it was no poor waterman or fugitive negro, tempted by want or cupidity. It was a gentleman, Miriam."

"A gentleman?"

"Yes; one that she must have become acquainted with during her visit to Washington three years ago. Oh, I remember her unaccountable distress in the months that followed that visit! His name, or his assumed name, was—attend, Miriam!—Thomas Truman."

"Thomas Truman!"

"Yes; and while you live, remember that name, until its owner hangs upon the gallows!"

Miriam shuddered, and hid her pale face in her hands.

"Here," said Edith, taking a small packet of letters from under her pillow. "Here, Miriam, is a portion of her correspondence with this man, Thomas Truman—I found it in the secret drawer of her bureau. There are several notes entreating her to give him a meeting, on the beach, at Mossy Dell, and at other points. From the tenor of these notes, I am led to believe that she refused these meetings; and, more than that, from the style of one in particular I am induced to suppose that she might have been privately married to that man. Why he should have enticed her to that spot to destroy

her life, I do not know. But this, at least, I know: that our dearest Marian has been basely assassinated. I see reason to suppose the assassin to have been her lover, or her husband, and that his real or assumed name was Thomas Truman. These facts, and this little packet of notes and letters, are all that I have to offer as testimony. But by following a slight clue, we are sometimes led to great discoveries."

"Why didn't you show them to the gentlemen, dear mamma? They might have found out something by them."

"I showed them to Thurston Willcoxen, who has been so energetic in the pursuit of the unknown murderer; but Thurston became so violently agitated that I thought he must have fallen. And he wished very much to retain those letters, but I would not permit them to be carried out of my sight. When he became calmer, however, he assured me that there could be no possible connection between the writer of these notes and the murderer of the unfortunate girl. I, however, think differently. I think there is a connection, and even an identity; and I think this packet may be the means of bringing the criminal to justice; and I leave it—a sacred trust—in your charge, Miriam. Guard it well; guard it as your only treasure, until it has served its destined purpose. And now, Miriam, do you know the nature of a vow?"

"Yes, mamma."

"Do you understand its solemnity—its obligation, its inviolability?"

"I think I do, mamma."

"Do you know that in the performance of your vow, if necessary, no toil, no privation, no suffering of mind or body, no dearest interest of your life, no strongest affection of your soul, but must be sacrificed; do you comprehend all this?"

"Yes, mamma; I knew it before, and I have read of Jeptha and his daughter."

"Now, Miriam, kneel down, fold your hands, and give them to me between my own. Look into my eyes. I want you to make a vow to God and to your dying mother, to avenge the death of Marian. Will you bind your soul by such an obligation?"

The child was magnetized by the thrilling eyes that gazed deep into her own. She answered:

"Yes, mamma."

"You vow in the sight of God and all his holy angels, that, as you hope for salvation, you will devote your life with all your faculties of mind and body, to the discovery and punishment of Marian's murderer; and also that you will live a maiden until you become and avenger."

"I vow."

"Swear that no afterthoughts shall tempt you to falter; that happen what may in the changing years, you will not hesitate; that though your interests and affections should intervene, you will not suffer them to retard you in your purpose; that no effort, no sacrifice, no privation, no suffering of mind or body shall be spared, if needful, to the accomplishment of your vow."

"I swear."

"You will do it! You are certain to discover the murderer, and clear up the mystery."

The mental excitement that had carried Edith through this scene subsided, and left her very weak, so that when Thurston Willcoxen soon after called to see her, she was unable to receive him.

The next morning, however, Thurston repeated his visit, and was brought to the bedside of the invalid.

Thurston was frightfully changed, the sufferings of the last month seemed to have made him old—his countenance was worn, his voice hollow, and his manner abstracted and uncertain.

"Edith," he asked, as he took the chair near her head, "do you feel stronger this morning?"

"Yes—I always do in the forenoon"

"Do you feel well enough to talk of Miriam and her future?"

"Oh, yes."

"What do you propose to do with her?"

"I shall leave her to Aunt Henrietta—she will never let the child want."

"But Mrs. Waugh is quite an old lady now. Jacquelina is insane, the commodore and Mrs. L'Oiseau scarcely competent to take care of themselves—and Luckenough a sad, unpromising home for a little girl."

"I know it—oh! I know it; why do you speak of it, since I can do no otherwise?"

"To point out how you may do otherwise, dear Edith. It would have been cruel to mention it else."

She looked up at him with surprise and inquiry.

"Edith, you have known me from my boyhood. You know what I am. Will you leave your orphan daughter to me? You look at me in wonder; but listen, dear Edith, and then decide. Marian—dear martyred saint! loved that child as her own. And I loved Marian—loved her as I had never dreamed it possible for heart to love—I cannot speak of this! it deprives me of reason," he said, suddenly covering his eyes with his hands, while a spasm agitated his worn face. In a few minutes he resumed.

"Look at me, Edith! the death of Marian has brought me to what you see! My youth has melted away like a morning mist. I have not an object in life except to carry out purposes which were dear to her benevolent heart, and which her sudden death has left incomplete. I have not an affection in the world except that which comes through her. I should love this child dearly, and cherish her devotedly for Marian's sake. I shall never change my bachelor life—but I should like to legally adopt little Miriam. I should give her the best educational advantages, and make her the co-heir with my young brother, Paul Douglass, of all I possess. Say, Edith, can you trust your child to me?" He spoke earnestly, fervently, taking her hand and pressing it,

and gazing pleadingly into her eyes.

"So you loved Marian—I even judged so when I saw you labor hardest of all for the apprehension of the criminal. Oh, many loved her as much as you! Colonel Thornton, Dr. Weismann, Judge Gordon, Mr. Barnwell, all adored her! Ah! she was worthy of it."

"No more of that, dear Edith, it will overcome us both; but tell me if you will give me your little girl?"

"Dear Thurston, your proposal is as strange and unusual as it is generous. I thank you most sincerely, but you must give me time to look at it and think of it. You are sincere, you are in earnest, you mean all you say. I see that in your face; but I must reflect and take counsel upon such an important step. Go now, dear Thurston, and return to me at this hour to-morrow morning."

Thurston pressed her hand and departed.

The same day Edith had a visit from Mrs. Waugh, Miss Thornton and other friends. And after consulting with them upon the proposal that had been made her, she decided to leave Miriam in the joint guardianship of Mrs. Waugh and Thurston Willcoxen.

And this decision was made known to Thurston when he called the next morning.

A few days after this Edith passed to the world of spirits. And Thurston took the orphan child to his own heart and home.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN MERRY ENGLAND.

When Marian recovered consciousness she found herself on board ship and a lady attending to her wants. When she was at last able to ask how she came there the lady nurse told the following story:

"On the evening of Holy Thursday, about the time the storm arose, our vessel lay to opposite a place on St. Mary's coast, called Pine Bluff, and the mate put off in a boat to land a passenger; as they neared the shore they met another boat rowed by two men, who seemed so anxious to escape observation, as to row away as fast as they could without answering our boat's salute. Our mate thought very strange of it at the time; but the mysterious boat was swiftly hid in the darkness, and our boat reached the land. The mate and his man had to help to carry the passenger's trunks up to the top of the bluff, and a short distance beyond, where a carriage was kept waiting for him, and after they had parted from him, they returned down the bluff by a shorter though steeper way; and just as they reached the beach, in the momentary lull of the storm, they heard groans. Immediately the men connected those sounds with the strange boat they had seen row away, and they raised the wick in the lantern, and threw its light around, and soon discovered you upon the sands, moaning, though nearly insensible. They naturally concluded that you had been the victim of the men in the boat, who were probably pirates. Their first impulse was to pursue the carriage, and get you placed within it, and taken to some farmhouse for assistance; but a moment's reflection convinced them that such a plan was futile, as it was impossible to overtake the carriage. There was also no house near the coast. They thought it likely that you were a stranger to that part of the country. And in the hurry and agitation of the moment, they could devise nothing better than to put you in the boat, and bring you on board this vessel. That is the way you came here."

The grateful gaze of Marian thanked the lady, and she asked:

"Tell me the name of my angel nurse."

"Rachel Holmes," answered the lady, blushing gently. "My husband is a surgeon in the United States army. He is on leave of absence now for the purpose of taking me home to see my father and mother—they live in London. I am of English parentage."

Marian feebly pressed her hand, and then said:

"You are very good to ask me no questions, and I thank you with all my heart; for, dear lady, I can tell you nothing."

The next day the vessel which had put into New York Harbor on call, sailed for Liverpool.

Marian slowly improved. Her purposes were not very clear or strong yet—mental and physical suffering and exhaustion had temporarily weakened and obscured her mind. Her one strong impulse was to escape, to get away from the scenes of such painful associations and memories, and to go home, to take refuge in her own native land. The thought of returning to Maryland, to meet the astonishment, the wonder, the conjectures, the inquiries, and perhaps the legal investigation that might lead to the exposure and punishment of Thurston, was insupportable to her heart. No, no! rather let the width of the ocean divide her from all those horrors. Undoubtedly her friends believed her dead—let it be so—let her remain as dead to them. She should leave no kindred behind her, to suffer by her loss—should wrong no human being. True, there were Miriam and Edith! But that her heart was exhausted by its one great, all-consuming grief, it must have bled for them! Yet they had already suffered all they could possibly suffer from the supposition of her death—it was now three weeks since they had reason to believe her dead, and doubtless kind Nature had already nursed them into resignation and calmness, that would in time become cheerfulness. If she should go back, there would be the shock, the amazement, the questions, the prosecutions, perhaps the conviction, and the sentence, and the horrors of a state prison for one the least hair of whose head she could not willingly hurt; and then her own early death, or should she survive, her blighted life. Could these consequences console or benefit Edith or Miriam? No, no, they would augment grief. It was better to leave things as they were—better to remain dead to them—a dead sorrow might be forgotten—living one never! For herself, it was better to take fate as she found it—to go home to England, and devote her newly restored life, and her newly acquired fortune, to those benevolent objects that had so

lately occupied so large a share of her heart. Some means also should be found—when she should grow stronger, and her poor head should be clearer, so that she should be able to think—to make Edith and Miriam the recipients of all the benefit her wealth could possibly confer upon them. And so in recollecting, meditating, planning, and trying to reason correctly, and to understand her embarrassed position, and her difficult duty, passed the days of her convalescence. As her mind cleared, the thought of Angelica began to give her uneasiness—she could not bear to think of leaving that young lady exposed to the misfortune of becoming Thurston's wife—and her mind toiled with the difficult problem of how to shield Angelica without exposing Thurston.

A few days after this, Marian related to her kind friends all of her personal history that she could impart, without compromising the safety of others: and she required and received from them the promise of their future silence in regard to her fate.

As they approached the shores of England, Marian improved so fast as to be able to go on deck. And though extremely pale and thin, she could no longer be considered an invalid, when, on the thirtieth day out, their ship entered the mouth of the Mersey. Upon their arrival at Liverpool, it had been the intention of Dr. Holmes and his wife to proceed to London; but now they decided to delay a few hours until they should see Marian safe in the house of her friends. The Rev. Theodore Burney was a retired dissenting clergyman, living on his modest patrimony in a country house a few miles out of Liverpool, and now at eighty years enjoying a hale old age. Dr. Holmes took a chaise and carried Marian and Rachel out to the place. The house was nearly overgrown with climbing vines, and the grounds were beautiful with the early spring verdure and flowers. The old man was overjoyed to meet Marian, and he received her with a father's welcome. He thanked her friends for their care and attention, and pressed them to come and stay several days or weeks. But Dr. Holmes and Rachel simply explained that their visit was to their parents in London, which city they were anxious to reach as soon as possible, and, thanking their host, they

took leave of him, of his old wife, and Marian, and departed.

The old minister looked hard at Marian.

"You are pale, my dear. Well, I always heard that our fresh island roses withered in the dry heat of the American climate, and now I know it! But come! we shall soon see a change and what wonders native air and native manners and morning walks will work in the way of restoring bloom."

Marian did not feel bound to reply, and her ill health remained charged to the account of our unlucky atmosphere.

The next morning, the old gentleman took Marian into his library, told her once more how very little surprised, and how very glad he was that instead of writing, she had come in person. He then made her acquainted with certain documents, and informed her that it would be necessary she should go up to London, and advised her to do so just as soon as she should feel herself sufficiently rested. Marian declared herself to be already recovered of fatigue, and anxious to proceed with the business of settlement. Their journey was thereupon fixed for the second day from that time. And upon the appointed morning Marian, attended by the old clergyman, set out for the mammoth capital, where, in due season, they arrived. A few days were busily occupied amid the lumber of law documents, before Marian felt sufficiently at ease to advise her friends, the Holmeses, of her presence in town. Only a few hours had elapsed, after reading her note and address, before she received a call from Mrs. Holmes and her father, Dr. Coleman, a clergyman of high standing in the Church of England. Friendliness and a beautiful simplicity characterized the manners of both father and daughter. Rachel entreated Marian to return with her and make her father's house her home while in London. She spoke with an affectionate sincerity that Marian could neither doubt nor resist, and when Dr. Coleman cordially seconded his daughter's invitation, Marian gratefully accepted the proffered hospitality. And the same day Mr. Burney bade a temporary farewell to his favorite,

and departed for Liverpool, and Marian accompanied her friend Rachel Holmes to the house of Dr. Coleman.

* * * * *

We may not pause to trace minutely the labors of love in which Marian sought at once to forget her own existence and to bless that of others.

A few events only it will be necessary to record.

In the very first packet of Baltimore papers received by Dr. Holmes, Marian saw announced the marriage of Angelica Le Roy to Henry Barnwell. She knew by the date, that it took place within two weeks after she sailed from the shores of America. And her anxiety on that young lady's account was set at rest.

After a visit of two months, Dr. Holmes and his lovely wife prepared to return to the United States. And the little fortune that Marian intended to settle upon Edith and Miriam, was intrusted to the care of the worthy surgeon, to be invested in bank stock for their benefit, as soon as he should reach Baltimore. It was arranged that the donor should remain anonymous, or be known only as a friend of Miriam's father.

In the course of a few months, Marian's institution, "The Children's Home," was commenced, and before the end of the first year, it was completed and filled with inmates.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THURSTON.

After a stormy passage in life comes a long calm, preceding, perhaps, another storm. I must pass rapidly over several years.

Thurston was a new being. He resolved to devote his time, talents and means, first of all to carrying on and perfecting those works of education and reform started by Marian in his own neighborhood.

But this was a very mournful consolation, for in every thought and act of the whole work, the memory of Marian was so intimately woven, that her loss was felt with double keenness. Every effort was doubly difficult; every obstacle was doubly great; every discouragement doubly hopeless, because she was not there with her very presence inspiring hope and energy—and every success was robbed of its joy, because she was not there to rejoice with him. He missed her in all things; he missed her everywhere. Solitude had fallen upon all the earth from which she had passed away. Because her face was gone, all other faces were repulsive to his sight; because her voice was silent, all other voices were discordant to his ear; because her love was impossible, all other friendships and affections were repugnant to his heart; and Thurston, young, handsome, accomplished and wealthy, became a silent and lonely man.

The estate left by old Cloudesley Willcoxen had exceeded even the reports of his hoarded wealth. The whole estate, real and personal, was bequeathed to his eldest grandson, Thurston Willcoxen, upon the sole condition that it should not be divided.

Dell-Delight, with its natural beauties, was a home that wealth could convert into a material paradise. Once it had been one of Thurston's happiest dreams to adorn and beautify the matchless spot, and make it worthy of Marian, its intended mistress. Now he could not bear to think of those plans of home-beauty and happiness so interwoven with fond thoughts of her. So poignant were the wounds of association, that he could scarcely endure to remain in a neighborhood so filled with reminiscences of her; and he must have fled the scene, and taken refuge from memory in foreign travel, had he suffered from bereavement and sorrow only; but he was tortured by remorse, and remorse demands to suffer and to atone for sin. And, therefore, though it spiritually seemed like being bound to a wheel and broken by its every turn, he was true to his resolution to remain in the county and devote his time, wealth, and abilities to the completion of Marian's unfinished works of benevolence.

Dell-Delight remained unaltered. He could not bear to make it beautiful, since Marian could not enjoy its beauty. Only such changes were made as were absolutely necessary in organizing his little household. A distant relative, a middle-aged lady of exemplary piety, but of reduced fortune, was engaged to come and preside at his table, and take charge of Miriam's education, for Miriam was established at Dell-Delight. It is true that Mrs. Waugh would have wished this arrangement otherwise. She would have preferred to have the orphan girl with herself, but Commodore Waugh would not even hear of Miriam's coming to Luckenough with any patience—"For if her mother had married 'Grim,' none of these misfortunes would have happened," he said.

Even Jacquelina had been forced to fly from Luckenough; no one knew wither; some said that she had run away; some knew that she had retired to a convent; some said only to escape the din and turmoil of the world, and find rest to her soul in a few months or years of quiet and silence, and some said she had withdrawn for the purpose of taking the vows and becoming a nun. Mrs. Waugh knew all about it, but she said nothing, except to discourage inquiry upon the subject. In the midst of the speculation following Jacquelina's disappearance, Cloudesley Mornington had come home. He staid a day or two at Luckenough, a week at Dell-Delight, and then took himself, with his broken heart, off from the neighborhood, and got ordered upon a distant and active service.

There were also other considerations that rendered it desirable for Miriam to reside at Dell-Delight, rather than at Luckenough: Commodore Waugh would have made a terrible guardian to a child so lately used to the blessedness of a home with her mother—and withal, so shy and sensitive as to breathe freely only in an atmosphere of peace and affection, and Luckenough would have supplied a dark, and dreary home for her whose melancholy temperament and recent bereavements rendered change of scene and the companionship of other children, absolute necessities. It was for these several reasons that Mrs. Waugh was forced to consent that Thurston

should carry his little adopted daughter to his own home. Thurston's household consisted now of himself, Mrs. Morris, his housekeeper; Alice Morris, her daughter; Paul Douglass, his own half-brother; poor Fanny, and lastly, Miriam.

Mrs. Morris was a lady of good family, but decayed fortune, of sober years and exemplary piety. In closing her terms with Mr. Willcoxen, her one great stipulation had been that she should bring her daughter, whom she declared to be too "young and giddy" to be trusted out of her own sight, even to a good boarding school.

Mr. Willcoxen expressed himself rather pleased than otherwise at the prospect of Miriam's having a companion, and so the engagement was closed.

Alice Morris was a hearty, cordial, blooming hoyden, really about ten or eleven years of age, but seeming from her fine growth and proportions, at least thirteen or fourteen.

Paul Douglass was a fine, handsome, well-grown boy of fourteen, with an open, manly forehead, shaded with clustering, yellow curls, as soft and silky as a girl's, and a full, beaming, merry blue eye, whose flashing glances were the most mirth-provoking to all upon whom they chanced to light. Paul was, and ever since his first arrival in the house had been, "the life of the family." His merry laugh and shout were the pleasantest sounds in all the precincts of Dell-Delight. When Paul first heard that there was to be an invasion of "women and girls" into Dell-Delight, he declared he had rather there had been an irruption of the Goths and Vandals at once—for if there were any folks he could not get along with, they were "the gals." Besides which, he was sure now to have the coldest seat around the fire, the darkest place at the table, the backward ride in the carriage, and to get the necks of chickens and the tails of fishes for his share of the dinner. Boys were always put upon by the girls, and sorry enough he was, he said, that any were coming to the house. And he vowed a boyish vow—"by thunder and lightning"—that he would torment the girls to the very best of his ability.

Girls, forsooth! girls coming to live there day and night, and eat, and drink, and sleep, and sit, and sew, and walk up and down through the halls, and parlors, and chambers of Dell-Delight—girls, with their airs, and affectations, and pretensions, and exactions—girls—pah! the idea was perfectly disgusting and offensive. He really did wonder at "Brother," but then he already considered "Brother" something of an old bachelor, and old bachelors would be queer.

But Thurston well knew how to smite the rock, and open the fountain of sympathy in the lad's heart. He said nothing in reply to the boy's saucy objections, but on the evening that little Miriam arrived, he beckoned Paul into the parlor, where the child sat, alone, and pointing her out to him, said in a low tone:

"Look at her; she has lost all her friends—she has just come from her mother's grave—she is strange, and sad, and lonesome. Go, try to amuse her."

"I'm going to her, though I hardly know how," replied the lad, moving toward the spot where the abstracted child sat deeply musing.

"Miriam! Is that your name," he asked, by way of opening the conversation.

"Yes," replied the child, very softly and shyly.

"It's a very heathenish—oh, Lord!—I mean it's a very pretty name is Miriam, it's a Bible name, too. I don't know but what it's a saint's name also."

The little girl made no reply, and the boy felt at a loss what to say next. After fidgeting from one foot to the other he began again.

"Miriam, shall I show you my books—Scott's poems, and the Waverley novels, and Milton's Paradise, and—"

"No, I thank you," interrupted the girl, uneasily.

"Well, would you like to see my pictures—two volumes of engravings, and a portfolio full of sketches?"

"No, thank you."

"Shall I bring you my drawer full of minerals? I have got—"

"I don't want them, please."

"Well, then, would you like the dried bugs? I've got whole cards of them under a glass case, and—"

"I don't want them either, please."

"Dear me! I have not got anything else to amuse you with. What do you want?" exclaimed Paul, and he walked off in high dudgeon.

The next day fortune favored Paul in his efforts to please Miriam. He had a tame white rabbit, and he thought that the child would like it for a pet—so he got up very early in the morning, and washed the rabbit "clean as a new penny," and put it under a new box to get dry while he rode to C—— and bought a blue ribbon to tie around its neck. This jaunt made Paul very late at breakfast, but he felt rewarded when afterward he gave the rabbit to old Jenny, and asked her to give it to the little girl—and when he heard the latter say—"Oh, what a pretty little thing! tell Paul, thanky!" After this, by slow degrees, he was enabled to approach "the little blackbird" without alarming her. And after a while he coaxed her to take a row in his little boat, and a ride on his little pony—always qualifying his attentions by saying that he did not like girls as a general thing, but that she was different from others. And Mr. Willcoxen witnessed, with much satisfaction, the growing friendship between the girl and boy, for they were the two creatures in the world who divided all the interest he felt in life. The mutual effect of the children upon each other's characters was very beneficent; the gay and joyous spirits of Paul continually charmed Miriam away from those fits of melancholy, to which she was by temperament and circumstances a prey, while the little girl's shyness and timidity taught Paul to tame his own boisterous manners for her sake.

* * * * *

Mrs. Waugh had not forgotten her young protége. She came as often as possible to

Dell-Delight, to inquire after the health and progress of the little girl.

It is not to be supposed, in any neighborhood where there existed managing mammas and unmarried daughters, that a young gentleman, handsome, accomplished, wealthy, and of good repute, should remain unmolested in his bachelorhood. Indeed, the matrons and maidens of his own circle seemed to think themselves individually aggrieved by the young heir's mode of life. And many were the dinners and evening parties got up for his sake, in vain, for to their infinite disgust, Thurston always returned an excuse instead of an acceptance.

At length the wounded self-esteem of the community received a healing salve, in the form of a report that Mr. Willcoxen had withdrawn from the gay world, in order the better to prepare himself for the Christian ministry. A report that, in twelve months, received its confirmation in the well established fact that Thurston Willcoxen was a candidate for holy orders.

And in the meantime the young guardian did not neglect his youthful charge, but in strict interpretation of his assumed duties of guardianship, he had taken the education of the girl and boy under his own personal charge.

"Many hard-working ministers of the Gospel have received pupils to educate for hire. Why may not I, with more time at my command, reserve the privilege of educating my own adopted son and daughter," he said, and acting upon that thought, had fitted up a little school-room adjoining his library, where, in the presence of Mrs. Morris, Miriam and Paul pursued their studies, Mrs. Morris hearing such recitations as lay within her province, and Mr. Willcoxen attending to the classical and mathematical branches. Thus passed many months, and every month the hearts of the children were knitted closer to each other and to their guardian.

And Thurston Willcoxen "grew in favor, with God and man." His name became the synonym for integrity, probity and philanthropy. He built a church and a free-school, and supported both at his own expense. In the third year after entering upon his

inheritance, he was received into holy orders; and two years after, he was elected pastor of his native parish. Thus time went by, and brought at length the next eventful epoch of our domestic history—that upon which Miriam completed her sixteenth year.

CHAPTER XXX.

MIRIAM.

Six years had passed away. Thurston Willcoxen was the most beloved and honored man, as well as the most distinguished clergyman of his day and state. His church was always crowded, except when he changed with some brother minister, whose pulpit was within reach—in which case, a great portion of his congregation followed him. Many flattering "calls" had the gifted and eloquent country parson received to metropolitan parishes; but he remained the faithful shepherd of his own flock as long as they would hear his voice.

As Miriam grew into womanhood prudence kept her silent on the subject of her strange vow. She, however, preserved in her memory the slight indexes that she already had in possession—namely, beginning with Marian's return after her visit to Washington—her changed manner, her fits of reverie, her melancholy when she returned empty-handed from the post-office, her joy when she received letters, which she would read in secret and in silence, or when questioned concerning them, would gently but firmly decline to tell from whom or whence they came; the house-warming at Luckenough, where Marian suddenly became so bright and gay, and the evening succeeding, when she returned home through night and storm, and in such anguish of mind, that she wept all night; and the weeks of unexplained, unaccountable distress that followed this! All these things Miriam recalled, and studied if by any means they might direct her in the discovery of the guilty.

And her faithful study had ended in her assurance of one or two facts—or one or two

links, perhaps, we should say, in the chain of evidence. The first was, that Marian's mysterious lover had been present in the neighborhood, and perhaps, in the mansion at the time of the house-warming at Luckenough—that he had met her once or more, and that his name was not Thomas Truman—that the latter was an assumed name, for, with all her observation and astute investigation, she had not been able to find that any one of the name of Truman had ever been seen or heard of in the county.

She was sure, also, that she had seen the man twice, both times in night and storm, when she had wandered forth in search of Marian.

She remembered well the strange figure of that man—the tall form shrouded in the black cloak—the hat drawn over the eyes—the faint spectral gleam of the clear-cut profile—the peculiar fall of light and shade, the decided individuality of air and gait—all was distinct as a picture in her memory, and she felt sure that she would be able to identify that man again.

Up to this time, the thought of her secret vow, and her life's mission, had afforded only a romantic and heroic excitement; but the day was fast approaching when these indexes she retained, should point to a clue that should lead through a train of damning circumstantial evidence destined to test her soul by an unexampled trial.

Paul Douglass had grown up to be a tall and handsome youth, of a very noble, frank, attractive countenance and manners. To say that he loved Miriam is only to say that he loved himself. She mingled with every thought, and feeling, and purpose of his heart.

And when, at last, the time came that Paul had to leave home for Baltimore, to remain absent all winter, for the purpose of attending the course of lectures at the medical college, Miriam learned the pain of parting, and understood how impossible happiness would be for her, with Paul away, on naval or military duty, more than half their lives, and for periods of two, three, or five years; and after that she never said another word in favor of his wearing Uncle Sam's livery, although she had often

expressed a wish that he should enter the army.

Miriam's affection for Paul was so profound and quiet, that she did not know its depth or strength. As she had not believed that parting from him would be painful until the event had taught her, so even now she did not know how intertwined with every chord and fibre of her heart and how identical with her life, was her love for Paul. She was occupied by a more enthusiastic devotion to her "brother," as she called her guardian.

The mysterious sorrow, the incurable melancholy of a man like Thurston Willcoxen, could not but invest him with peculiar interest and even strange fascination for one of Miriam's enthusiastic, earnest temperament. She loved him with more than a daughter's love; she loved him with all the impassioned earnestness of her nature; her heart yearned as it would break with its wild, intense longing to do him some good, to cure his sorrow, to make him happy. There were moments when but for the sweet shyness that is ever the attendant and conservator of such pure feeling, this wild desire was strong enough to cast her at his feet, to embrace his knees, and with tears beseech him to let her into that dark, sorrowful bosom, to see if she could make any light and joy there. She feared that he had sinned, that his incurable sorrow was the gnawing tooth of that worm that never dieth, preying on his heart; but she doubted, too, for what could he have done to plunge his soul in such a hell of remorse? He commit a crime? Impossible! the thought was treason; a sin to be repented of and expiated. His fame was fairest of the fair, his name most honored among the, honorable. If not remorse, what then was the nature of his life-long sorrow? Many, many times she revolved this question in her mind. And as she matured in thought and affection, the question grew more earnest and importunate. Oh, that he would unburden his heart to her; oh! that she might share and alleviate his griefs. If "all earnest desires are prayers," then prayer was Miriam's "vital breath and native air" indeed; her soul earnestly desired, prayed, to be able to give her sorrowing brother peace.

CHAPTER XXXI.

DREAMS AND VISIONS.

Winter waned. Mrs. Waugh had attended the commodore to the South, for the benefit of his health, and they had not yet returned.

Mrs. Morris and Alice were absent on a long visit to a relative in Washington City, and were not expected back for a month. Paul remained in Baltimore, attending the medical lectures.

The house at Dell-Delight was very sad and lonely. The family consisted of only Thurston, Fanny and Miriam.

A change had also passed over poor Fanny's malady. She was no longer the quaint, fantastical creature, half-lunatic, half-seeress, singing snatches of wild songs through the house—now here, now there—now everywhere, awaking smiles and merriment in spite of pity, and keeping every one alive about her. Her bodily health had failed, her animal spirits departed; she never sang nor smiled, but sat all day in her eyrie chamber, lost in deep and concentrated study, her face having the care-worn look of one striving to recall the past, to gather up and reunite the broken links of thought, memory and understanding.

At last, one day, Miriam received a letter from Paul, announcing the termination, of the winter's course of lectures, the conclusion of the examination of medical candidates, the successful issue of his own trial, in the acquisition of his diploma, and finally his speedy return home.

Miriam's impulsive nature rebounded from all depressing thoughts, and she looked forward with gladness to the arrival of Paul.

He came toward the last of the week.

Mr. Willcoxen, roused for a moment from his sad abstraction, gave the youth a warm welcome.

Miriam received him with a bashful, blushing joy.

He had passed through Washington City on his way home, and had spent a day with Mrs. Morris and her friends, and he had brought away strange news of them.

Alice, he said, had an accepted suitor, and would probably be a bride soon.

A few days after his return, Paul found Miriam in the old wainscoted parlor seated by the fire. She appeared to be in deep and painful thought. Her elbow rested on the circular work-table, her head was bowed upon her hand, and her face was concealed by the drooping black ringlets.

"What is the matter, dear, sister?" he asked, in that tender, familiar tone, with which he sometimes spoke to her.

"Oh, Paul, I am thinking of our brother! Can nothing soothe or cheer him, Paul? Can nothing help him? Can we do him no good at all? Oh, Paul! I brood so much over his trouble! I long so much to comfort him, that I do believe it is beginning to affect my reason, and make me 'see visions and dream dreams.' Tell me—do you think anything can be done for him?"

"Ah, I do not know! I have just left his study, dear Miriam, where I have had a long and serious conversation with him."

"And what was it about? May I know?"

"You must know, dearest Miriam, it concerned yourself and—me!" said Paul, and he took a seat by her side, and told her how much he loved her, and that he had Thurston's consent to asking her hand in marriage.

Miriam replied:

"Paul, there is one secret that I have never imparted to you—not that I wished to keep it from you, but that nothing has occurred to call it out—"

She paused, while Paul regarded her in much curiosity.

"What is it, Miriam?" he at last inquired.

"I promised my dying mother, and sealed the promise with an oath, never to be a bride until I shall have been—"

"What, Miriam?"

"An avenger of blood!"

"Miriam!"

It was all he said, and then he remained gazing at her, as if he doubted her perfect sanity.

"I am not mad, dear Paul, though you look as if you thought so."

"Explain yourself, dear Miriam."

"I am going to do so. You remember Marian Mayfield?" she said, her face beginning to quiver with emotion.

"Yes! yes! well?"

"You remember the time and manner of her death?"

"Yes—yes!"

"Oh, Paul! that stormy night death fell like scattering lightning, and struck three places at once! But, oh, Paul! such was the consternation and grief excited by the discovery of Marian's assassination, that the two other sudden deaths passed almost unnoticed, except by the respective families of the deceased. Child as I then was, Paul, I think it was the tremendous shock of her sudden and dreadful death, that threw me entirely out of my center, so that I have been erratic ever since. She was more than a mother to me, Paul; and if I had been born hers, I could not have loved her better—I loved her beyond all things in life. In my dispassionate, reflective moments. I am inclined to believe that I have never been quite right since the loss of Marian. Not but that I am reconciled to it—knowing that she must be happy—only, Paul, I often feel that something is wrong here and here," said Miriam, placing her hand upon her forehead and upon her heart.

"But your promise, Miriam—your promise," questioned Paul, with increased anxiety.

"Ay, true! Well, Paul, I promised to devote my whole life to the pursuit and apprehension of her murderer; and never to give room in my bosom to any thought of love or marriage until that murderer should hang from n gallows; and I sealed that promise with a solemn oath."

"That was all very strange, dear Miriam."

"Paul, yes it was—and it weighs upon me like lead. Paul, if two things could be lifted off my heart, I should be happy. I should be happy as a freed bird."

"And what are they, dear Miriam? What weights are they that I have not power to lift from your heart?"

"Surely you may surmise—the first is our brother's sadness that oppresses my spirits all the time; the second is the memory of that unaccomplished vow; so equally do these two anxieties divide my thoughts, that they seem connected—seem to be parts of the same responsibility—and I even dreamed that the one could be accomplished only with the other."

"Dearest Miriam, let me assure you, that such dreams and visions are but the effect of your isolated life—they come from an over-heated brain and over-strained nerves. And you must consent to throw off those self-imposed weights, and be happy and joyous as a young creature should."

"Alas, how can I throw them off, dear Paul?"

"In this way—first, for my brother's life-long sorrow, since you can neither cure nor alleviate it, turn your thoughts away from it. As for your vow, two circumstances combine to absolve you from it; the first is this—that you were an irresponsible infant, when you were required to make it—the second is, that it is impossible to perform it; these two considerations fairly release you from its obligations. Look upon these matters in this rational light, and all your dark and morbid dreams and

visions will disappear; and we shall have you joyous as any young bird, sure enough. And I assure you, that your cheerfulness will be one of the very best medicines for our brother. Will you follow my advice?"

"No, no, Paul! I cannot follow it in either instance! I cannot, Paul! it is impossible! I cannot steel my heart against sympathy with his sorrows, nor can I so ignore the requirements of my solemn vow. I do not by any means think its accomplishment an impossibility, nor was it in ignorance of its nature that I made it. No, Paul! I knew what I promised, and I know that its performance is possible. Therefore I can not feel absolved! I must accomplish my work; and you, Paul, if you love me, must help me to do it."

"I would serve you with my life, Miriam, in anything reasonable and possible. But how can I help you? How can you discharge such an obligation? You have not even a clue!"

"Yes, I have a clue, Paul."

"You have? What is it? Why have you never spoken of it before?"

"Because of its seeming unimportance. The clue is so slight, that it would be considered none at all, by others less interested than myself."

"What is it, then? At least allow me the privilege of knowing, and judging of its importance."

"I am about to do so," said Miriam, and she commenced and told him all she knew, and also all she suspected of the circumstances that preceded the assassination on the beach. In conclusion, she informed him of the letters in her possession.

"And where are now those letters, Miriam? What are they like? What is their purport? It seems to me that they would not only give a hint, but afford direct evidence against that demoniac assassin. And it seems strange to me that they were not examined, with a view to that end."

"Paul, they were; but they did not point out the writer, even. There was a note among them—a note soliciting a meeting with Marian, upon the very evening, and upon the very spot when and where the murder was committed! But that note contains nothing to indicate the identity of its author. There are, besides, a number of foreign letters written in French, and signed 'Thomas Truman,' no French name, by-the-bye, a circumstance which leads me to believe that it must have been an assumed one."

"And those French letters give no indication of the writer, either?"

"I am not sufficiently acquainted with that language to read it in manuscript, which, you know, is much more difficult than print. But I presume they point to nothing definitely, for my dear mother showed them to Mr. Willcoxen, who took the greatest interest in the discovery of the murderer, and he told her that those letters afforded not the slightest clue to the perpetrator of the crime, and that whoever might have been the assassin, it certainly could not have been the author of those letters. He wished to take them with him, but mother declined to give them up; she thought it would be disrespect to Marian's memory to give her private correspondence up to a stranger, and so she told him. He then said that of all men, certainly he had the least right to claim them, and so the matter rested. But mother always believed they held the key to the discovery of the guilty party; and afterward she left them to me, with the charge that I should never suffer them to pass from my possession until they had fulfilled their destiny of witnessing against the murderer—for whatever Mr. Willcoxen might think, mother felt convinced that the writer of those letters and the murderer of Marian was the same person."

"Tell me more about those letters."

"Dear Paul, I know nothing more about them; I told you that I was not sufficiently familiar with the French language to read them."

"But it is strange that you never made yourself acquainted with their contents by

getting some one else to read them for you."

"Dear Paul, you know that I was a mere child when they first came into my possession, accompanied with the charge that I should never part with them until they had done their office. I felt bound by my promise, I was afraid of losing them, and of those persons that I could trust none knew French, except our brother, and he had already pronounced them irrelevant to the question. Besides, for many reasons, I was shy of intruding upon brother."

"Does he know that you have the packet?"

"I suppose he does not even know that."

"I confess," said Paul, "that if Thurston believed them to have no connection with the murder, I have so much confidence in his excellent judgment, that I am inclined to reverse my hasty opinion, and to think as he does, at least until I see the letters. I remember, too, that the universal opinion at the time was that the poor young lady had fallen a victim to some marauding waterman—the most likely thing to have happened. But, to satisfy you, Miriam, if you will trust me with those letters, I will give them a thorough and impartial study, and then, if I find no clue to the perpetrator of that diabolical deed, I hope, Miriam, that you will feel yourself free from the responsibility of pursuing the unknown demon—a pursuit which I consider worse than a wild-goose chase."

They were interrupted by the entrance of the boy with the mail bag. Paul emptied the contents of it upon the table. There were letters for Mr. Willcoxen, for Miriam, and for Paul himself. Those for Mr. Willcoxen were sent up to him by the boy. Miriam's letter was from Alice Morris, announcing her approaching marriage with Olive Murray, a young lawyer of Washington, and inviting and entreating Miriam to come to the city and be her bridesmaid. Paul's letters were from some of his medical classmates. By the time they had read and discussed the contents of their epistles, a servant came in to replenish the fire and lay the cloth for tea.

When Mr. Willcoxen joined them at supper, he laid a letter on Miriam's lap, informing her that it was from Mrs. Morris, who advised them of her daughter's intended marriage, and prayed them to be present at the ceremony. Miriam replied that she had received a communication to the same effect.

"Then, my dear, we will go up to Washington and pass a few weeks, and attend this wedding, and see the inauguration of Gen. ——. You lead too lonely a life for one of your years, love. I see it affects your health and spirits. I have been too selfish and oblivious of you, in my abstraction, dear child; but it shall be so no longer. You shall enter upon the life better suited to your age."

Miriam's eyes thanked his care. For many a day Thurston had not come thus far out of himself, and his doing so now was hailed as a happy omen by the young people.

Their few preparations were soon completed, and on the first of March they went to Washington City.

CHAPTER XXXII.

DISCOVERIES.

On arriving at Washington, our party drove immediately to the Mansion House, where they had previously secured rooms.

The city was full of strangers from all parts of the country, drawn together by the approaching inauguration of one of the most popular Presidents that ever occupied the White House.

As soon as our party made known their arrival to their friends, they were inundated with calls and invitations. Brother clergymen called upon Mr. Willcoxen, and pressed upon him the freedom of their houses. Alice Morris and Mrs. Moulton, the relative with whom she was staying, called upon Miriam, and insisted that she should go home with them, to remain until after the wedding. But these offers of

hospitality were gratefully declined by the little set, who preferred to remain together at their hotel.

The whole scene of metropolitan life, in its most stirring aspect, was entirely new and highly interesting to our rustic beauty. Amusements of every description were rife. The theatres, exhibition halls, saloons and concert rooms held out their most attractive temptations, and night after night were crowded with the gay votaries of fashion and of pleasure. While the churches, and lyceums, and lecture-rooms had greater charms for the more seriously inclined. The old and the young, the grave and the gay, found no lack of occupation, amusement and instruction to suit their several tastes or varying moods. The second week of their visit, the marriage of Alice Morris and Oliver Murray came off, Miriam serving as bridesmaid, Dr. Douglass as groomsman, and Mr. Willcoxen as officiating minister.

But it is not with these marriage festivities that we have to do, but with the scenes that immediately succeed them.

From the time of Mr. Willcoxen's arrival in the city, he had not ceased to exercise his sacred calling. His fame had long before preceded him to the capital, and since his coming he had been frequently solicited to preach and to lecture.

Not from love of notoriety—not from any such ill-placed, vain glory, but from the wish to relieve some overtasked brother of the heat and burden of at least one day; and possibly by presenting truth in a newer and stronger light to do some good, did Thurston Willcoxen, Sabbath after Sabbath, and evening after evening, preach in the churches or lecture before the lyceum. Crowds flocked to hear him, the press spoke highly of his talents and his eloquence, the people warmly echoed the opinion, and Mr. Willcoxen, against his inclination, became the clerical celebrity of the day.

But from all this unsought world-worship he turned away a weary, sickened, sorrowing man.

There was but one thing in all "the world outside" that strongly interested him—it

was a "still small voice," a low-toned, sweet music, keeping near the dear mother earth and her humble children, yet echoed and re-echoed from sphere to sphere—it was the name of a lady, young, lovely, accomplished and wealthy, who devoted herself, her time, her talents and her fortune, to the cause of suffering humanity.

This young lady, whose beauty, goodness, wisdom, eloquence and powers of persuasion were rumored to be almost miraculous, had founded schools and asylums, and had collected by subscription a large amount of money, with which she was coming to America, to select and purchase a tract of land to settle a colony of the London poor. This angel girl's name and fame was a low, sweet echo, as I said before—never noisy, never rising high—keeping near the ground. People spoke of her in quiet places, and dropped their voices to gentle tones in mentioning her and her works. Such was the spell it exercised over them. This lady's name possessed the strangest fascination for Thurston Willcoxen; he read eagerly whatever was written of her; he listened with interest to whatever was spoken of her. Her name! it was that of his loved and lost Marian!—that in itself was a spell, but that was not the greatest charm—her character resembled that of his Marian!

"How like my Marian?" would often be the language of his heart, when hearing of her deeds. "Even so would my Marian have done—had she been born to fortune, as this lady was."

The name was certainly common enough, yet the similarity of both names and natures inclined him to the opinion that this angel-woman must be some distant and more fortunate relative of his own lost Marian. He felt drawn toward the unknown lady by a strong and almost irresistible attraction; and he secretly resolved to see and know her, and pondered in his heart ways and means by which he might, with propriety, seek her acquaintance.

While thus he lived two lives—the outer life of work and usefulness, and the inner life of thought and suffering—the young people of his party, hoping and believing

him to be enjoying the honors heaped upon him, yielded themselves up to the attractions of society.

Miriam spent much of her time with her friend, Alice Murray.

One morning, when she called on Alice, the latter invited her visitor up into her own chamber, and seating her there, said, with a mysterious air:

"Do you know, Miriam, that I have something—the strangest thing that ever was—that I have been wanting to tell you for three or four days, only I never got an opportunity to do so, because Olly or some one was always present? But now Olly has gone to court, and mother has gone to market, and you and I can have a cozy chat to ourselves."

She stopped to stir the fire, and Miriam quietly waited for her to proceed.

"Now, why in the world don't you ask me for my secret? I declare you take so little interest, and show so little curiosity, that it is not a bit of fun to hint a mystery to you. Do you want to hear, or don't you? I assure you it is a tremendous revelation, and it concerns you, too!"

"What is it, then? I am anxious to hear?"

"Oh! you do begin to show a little interest; and now, to punish you, I have a great mind not to tell you; however, I will take pity upon your suspense; but first, you must promise never, never, n-e-v-e-r to mention it again—will you promise?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, listen. Stop! get a good place to faint first, and then listen. Are you ready? One, two, three, fire. The Rev. Thurston Willcoxen is a married man!"

"What!"

"Mr. Thurston Willcoxen has been married for eight years past."

"Pshaw!"

"Mr. Willcoxen was married eight years ago this spring at a little Methodist chapel

near the navy yard of this city, and by an old Methodist preacher, of the name of John Berry."

"You are certainly mad!"

"I am not mad, most noble 'doubter,' but speak the words of truth and soberness. Mr. Willcoxen was married privately, when and where I said, to a beautiful, fair-haired lady, whose name heard in the ritual was Marian. And my husband, Olly Murray, was the secret witness of that private marriage."

A wild scream, that seemed to split the heart from whence it arose, broke from the lips of Miriam; springing forward, she grasped the wrist of Alice, and with her wild eyes starting, straining from their sockets, gazed into he face, crying:

"Tell me! tell me! that you have jested! tell me that you have lied? Speak! speak!"

"I told you the Lord's blessed truth, and Oily knows it. But Miriam, for goodness sake don't look that way—you scare me almost to death! And, whatever you do, never let anybody know that I told you this; because, if you did, Olly would be very much grieved at me; for he confided it to me as a dead secret, and bound me up to secrecy, too; but I thought as it concerned you so much, it would be no harm to tell you, if you would not tell it again; and so when I was promising, I made a mental reservation in favor of yourself. And so I have told you; and now you mustn't betray me, Miriam."

"It is false! all that you have told me is false! say that It is false! tell me so! speak! speak!" cried Miriam, wildly.

"It is not false—it is true as Gospel, every word of it—nor is it any mistake. Because Olly saw the whole thing, and told me all about it. The way of it was, that Olly overheard them in the Congressional Library arranging the marriage—the gentleman was going to depart for Europe, and wished to secure the lady's hand before he went—and at the same time, for some reason or other, he wished the marriage to be kept secret. Olly owns that it was none of his business, but that curiosity got the

upper hand of him, so he listened, and he heard them call each other 'Thurston' and 'Marian'—and when they left the library, he followed them—and so, unseen, he witnessed the private marriage ceremony, at which they still answered to the names of 'Thurston' and 'Marian.' He did not hear their surnames. He never saw the bride again; and he never saw the bridegroom until he saw Mr. Willcoxen at our wedding. The moment Olly saw him he knew that he had seen him before, but could not call to mind when or where; and the oftener he looked at him, the more convinced he became that he had seen him first under some very singular circumstances. And when at last lie heard his first name called 'Thurston,' the whole truth flashed on him at once. He remembered everything connected with the mysterious marriage. I wonder what Mr. Willcoxen has done with his Marian? or whether she died or whether she lives? or where he hides her? Well, some men are a mystery—don't you think so, Miriam?"

But only deep and shuddering groans, upheaving from the poor girl's bosom, answered her.

"Miriam! Oh, don't go on so! what do you mean? Indeed you alarm me! oh, don't take it so to heart! indeed, I wouldn't, if I were you! I should think it the funniest kind of fun? Miriam, I say!"

She answered not—she had sunk down on the floor, utterly crushed by the weight of misery that had fallen upon her.

"Miriam! now what in the world do you mean by this? Why do you yield so? I would not do it. I know it is bad to be disappointed of an expected inheritance, and to find out that some one else has a greater claim, but, indeed, I would not take it to heart so, if I were you. Why, if he is married, he may not have a family, and even if he has, he may not utterly disinherit you, and even if he should, I would not grieve myself to death about it if I were you! Miriam, look up, I say!"

But the hapless girl replied not, heard not, heeded not; deaf, blind, insensible was

she to all—everything but to that sharp, mental grief, that seemed so like physical pain; that fierce anguish of the breast, that, like an iron band, seemed to clutch and close upon her heart, tighter, tighter, tighter, until it stopped the current of her blood, and arrested her breath, and threw her into convulsions.

Alice sprang to raise her, then ran down-stairs to procure restoratives and assistance. In the front hall she met Dr. Douglass, who had just been admitted by the waiter. To his pleasant greeting, she replied hastily, breathlessly:

"Oh, Paul! come—come quickly up stairs! Miriam has fallen into convulsions, and I am frightened out of my senses!"

"What caused her illness?" asked Paul, in alarm and anxiety, as he ran up stairs, preceded by Alice.

"Oh, I don't know!" answered Alice, but thought to herself: "It could not have been what I said to her, and if it was, I must not tell."

The details of sickness are never interesting. I shall not dwell upon Miriam's illness of several weeks; the doctors pronounced it to be angina pectoris—a fearful and often fatal complaint, brought on in those constitutionally predisposed to it, by any sudden shock to mind or body. What could have caused its attack upon Miriam, they could not imagine. And Alice Murray, in fear and doubt, held her tongue and kept her own counsel. In all her illness, Miriam's reason was not for a moment clouded—it seemed preternaturally awake; but she spoke not, and it was observed that if Mr. Willcoxen, who was overwhelmed with distress by her dreadful illness, approached her bedside and touched her person, she instantly fell into spasms. In grief and dismay, Thurston's eyes asked of all around an explanation of this strange and painful phenomenon; but none could tell him, except the doctor, who pronounced it the natural effect of the excessive nervous irritability attending her disease, and urged Mr. Willcoxen to keep away from her chamber. And Thurston sadly complied.

Youth, and an elastic constitution, prevailed over disease, and Miriam was raised from the bed of death; but so changed in person and in manner, that you would scarcely have recognized her. She was thinner, but not paler—an intense consuming fire burned in and out upon her cheek, and smouldered and flashed from her eye. Self-concentrated and reserved, she replied not at all, or only in monosyllables, to the words addressed to her, and withdrew more into herself.

At length, Dr. Douglass advised their return home. And therefore they set out, and upon the last of March, approached Dell-Delight.

The sky was overcast, the ground was covered with snow, the weather was damp, and very cold for the last of March. As evening drew on, and the leaden sky lowered, and the chill damp penetrated the comfortable carriage in which they traveled, Mr. Willcoxen redoubled his attentions to Miriam, carefully wrapping her cloak and furs about her, and letting down the leathern blinds and the damask hangings, to exclude the cold; but Miriam shrank from his touch, and shivered more than before, and drew closely into her own corner.

"Poor child, the cold nips and shrivels her as it does a tropical flower," said Thurston, desisting from his efforts after he had tucked a woolen shawl around her feet.

"It is really very unseasonable weather—there is snow in the atmosphere. I don't wonder it pinches Miriam," said Paul Douglass.

Ah! they did not either of them know that it was a spiritual fever and ague alternately burning and freezing her very heart's blood—hope and fear, love and loathing, pity and horror, that striving together made a pandemonium of her young bosom. Like a flight of fiery arrows came the coincidences of the tale she had heard, and the facts she knew. That spring, eight years before, Mr. Murray said he had, unseen, witnessed the marriage of Thurston Willcoxen and Marian. That spring, eight years before, she knew Mr. Willcoxen and Miss Mayfield had been together on

a visit to the capital. Thurston had gone to Europe, Marian had returned home, but had never seemed the same since her visit to the city. The very evening of the house-warming at Luckenough, where Marian had betrayed so much emotion, Thurston had suddenly returned, and presented himself at that mansion. Yet in all the months that followed she had never seen Thurston and Marian together, Thurston was paying marked and constant attention to Miss Le Roy, while Marian's heart was consuming with a secret sorrow and anxiety that she refused to communicate even to Edith. How distinctly came back to her mind those nights when, lying by Marian's side, she had put her hand over upon her face and felt the tears on her cheeks. Those tears! The recollection of them now, and in this connection, filled her heart with indescribable emotion. Her mother, too, had died in the belief that Marian had fallen by the hands of her lover or her husband. Lastly, upon the same night of Marian's murder, Thurston Willcoxen had been unaccountably absent, during the whole night, from the deathbed of his grandfather. And then his incurable melancholy from that day to this—his melancholy augmented to anguish at the annual return of this season.

And then rising, in refutation of all this evidence, was his own irreproachable life and elevated character.

Ah! but she had, young, as she was, heard of such cases before—how in some insanity of selfishness or frenzy of passion, a crime had been perpetrated by one previously and afterward irreproachable in conduct. Piercing wound after wound smote these thoughts like swift coming arrows.

A young, immature woman, a girl of seventeen, in whose warm nature passion and imagination so largely predominated over intellect, was but too liable to have her reason shaken from its seat by the ordeal through which she was forced to go.

As night descended, and they drew near Dell-Delight, the storm that had been lowering all the afternoon came upon them. The wind, the hail, and the snow, and

the snow-drifts continually forming, rendered the roads, that were never very good, now nearly impassable.

More and more obstructed, difficult and unrecognizable became their way, until at last, when within an eighth of a mile from the house, the horses stepped off the road into a covered gully, and the carriage was over-turned and broken.

"Miriam! dear Miriam! dear child, are you hurt?" was the first anxious exclamation of both gentlemen.

No one was injured; the coach lay upon its left side, and the right side door was over their heads. Paul climbed out first, and then gave his hand to Miriam, whom Mr. Willcoxen assisted up to the window. Lastly followed Thurston. The horses had kicked themselves free of the carriage and stood kicking yet.

"Two wheels and the pole are broken—nothing can be done to remove the carriage to-night. You had better leave the horses where they are, Paul, and let us hurry on to get Miriam under shelter first, then we can send some one to fetch them home."

They were near the park gate, and the road from there to the mansion was very good. Paul was busy in bundling Miriam up in her cloak, shawls and furs. And then Mr. Willcoxen approached to raise her in his arms, and take her through the snow; but—

"No! no!" said Miriam, shuddering and crouching closely to Paul. Little knowing her thoughts, Mr. Willcoxen slightly smiled, and pulling his hat low over his eyes, and turning up his fur collar and wrapping his cloak closely around him, he strode on rapidly before them. The snow was blowing in their faces, but drawing Miriam fondly to his side, Paul hurried after him.

When they reached the park gate, Thurston was laboring to open it against the drifted snow. He succeeded, and pushed the gate back to let them pass. Miriam, as she went through, raised her eyes to his form.

There he stood, in night and storm, his tall form shrouded in the long black cloak—the hat drawn over his eyes, the faint spectral gleam of the snow striking

upward to his clear-cut profile, the peculiar fall of ghostly light and shade, the strong individuality of air and attitude.

With a half-stifled shriek, Miriam recognized the distinct picture of the man she had seen twice before with Marian.

"What is the matter, love? Were you near falling? Give me your arm, Miriam—you need us both to help you through this storm," said Thurston, approaching her.

But with a shiver that ran through all her frame, Miriam shrank closer to Paul, who, with affectionate pride, renewed his care, and promised that she should not slip again.

So link after link of the fearful evidence wound itself around her consciousness, which struggled against it, like Laocoon in the fatal folds of the serpent.

Now cold as if the blood were turned to ice in her veins, now burning as if they ran fire, she was hurried on into the house.

They were expected home, and old Jenny had fires in all the occupied rooms, and supper ready to go on the table, that was prepared in the parlor.

But Miriam refused all refreshment, and hurried to her room. It was warmed and lighted by old Jenny's care, and the good creature followed her young mistress with affectionate proffers of aid.

"Wouldn't she have a strong cup of tea? Wouldn't she have a hot bath? Wouldn't she have her bed warmed? Wouldn't she have a bowl of nice hot mulled wine? Dear, dear! she was so sorry, but it would have frightened herself to death if the carriage had upset with her, and no wonder Miss Miriam was knocked up entirely."

"No, no, no!"

Miriam would have nothing, and old Jenny reluctantly left her—to repose? Ah, no! with fever in her veins, to walk up and down and up and down the floor of her room with fearful unrest. Up and down, until the candle burned low, and sunk drowned in

its socket; until the fire on the hearth smouldered and went out; until the stars in the sky waned with the coming day; until the rising sun kindled all the eastern horizon; and then, attired as she was, she sank upon the outside of her bed and fell into a heavy sleep of exhaustion.

She arose unrefreshed, and after a hasty toilet descended to the breakfast-parlor, where she knew the little family awaited her.

"The journey and the fright have been too much for you, love; you look very weary; you should have rested longer this morning," said Mr. Willcoxen, affectionately, as he arose and met her and led her to the most comfortable seat near the fire.

His fine countenance, elevated, grave and gentle in expression, his kind and loving manner, smote all the tender chords of Miriam's heart.

Could that man be guilty of the crime she had dared to suspect him of?

Oh, no, no, no! never! Every lineament of his face, every inflection of his voice, as well as every act of his life, and every trait of his character, forbade the dreadful imputation!

But then the evidence—the damning evidence! Her reeled with the doubt as she sank into the seat he offered her.

"Ring for breakfast, Paul! Our little housekeeper will feel better when she gets a cup of coffee."

But Miriam sprang up to anticipate him, and drew her chair to the table, and nervously began to arrange the cups and put sugar and cream into them, with the vague feeling that she must act as usual to avoid calling observation upon herself, for if questioned, how could she answer inquiries, and whom could she make a confidant in her terrible suspicions?

And so through the breakfast scene, and so through the whole day she sought to exercise self-control. But could her distress escape the anxious, penetrating eyes of

affection? That evening after tea, when Mr. Willcoxen had retired to his own apartments and the waiter had replenished the fire and trimmed the lamps and retired, leaving the young couple alone in the parlor—Miriam sitting on one side of the circular work-table bending over her sewing, and Paul on the other side with a book in his hand, he suddenly laid the volume down, and went round and drew a chair to Miriam's side and began to tell her how much he loved her, how dear her happiness was to him, and so entreat her to tell him the cause of her evident distress. As he spoke, she became paler than death, and suddenly and passionately exclaimed:

"Oh, Paul! Paul! do not question me! You know not what you ask."

"My own Miriam, what mean you? I ought to know."

"Oh, Paul! Paul! I am one foredoomed to bring misery and destruction upon all who love me; upon all whom I love."

"My own dearest, you are ill, and need change, and you shall have it, Miriam," he said, attempting to soothe her with that gentle, tender, loving manner he ever used toward her.

But shuddering sighs convulsed her bosom, and—

"Oh, Paul! Paul!" was all she said.

"Is it that promise that weighs upon your mind, Miriam? Cast it out; you cannot fulfill it; impossibilities are not duties."

"Oh, Paul! would Heaven it were impossible! or that I were dead."

"Miriam! where are those letters you wished to show me?"

"Oh! do not ask me, Paul! not yet! not yet! I dread to see them. And yet—who knows? they may relieve this dreadful suspicion! they may point to another probability," she said, incoherently.

"Just get me those letters, dear Miriam," he urged, gently.

She arose, tottering, and left the room, and after an absence of fifteen minutes

returned with the packet in her hand.

"These seals have not been broken since my mother closed them," said Miriam, as she proceeded to open the parcel.

The first she came to was the bit of a note, without date or signature, making the fatal appointment.

"This, Paul," she said, mournfully, "was found in the pocket of the dress Marian wore at Luckenough, but changed at home before she went out to walk the evening of her death. Mother always believed that she went out to meet the appointment made in that note."

Paul took the paper with eager curiosity to examine it. He looked at it, started slightly, turned pale, shuddered, passed his hand once or twice across his eyes, as if to clear his vision, looked again, and then his cheeks blanched, his lips gradually whitened and separated, his eyes started, and his whole countenance betrayed consternation and horror.

Miriam gazed upon him in a sort of hushed terror—then exclaimed:

"Paul! Paul! what is the matter? You look as if you had been turned to stone by gazing on the Gorgon's head; Paul! Paul!"

"Miriam, did your mother know this handwriting?" he asked, in a husky, almost inaudible voice.

"No!"

"Did she suspect it?"

"No!"

"Did you know or suspect it?"

"No! I was a child when I received it, remember. I have never seen it since."

"Not when you put it in my hand, just now?"

"No, I never looked at the writing?"

"That was most strange that you should not have glanced at the handwriting when you handed it to me. Why didn't you? Were you afraid to look at it? Miram! why do you turn away your head? Miriam! answer me—do you know the handwriting?"

"No, Paul, I do not know it—do you?"

"No! no! how should I? But Miriam, your head is still averted. Your very voice is changed. Miriam! what mean you? Tell me once for all. Do you suspect the handwriting?"

"How should I? Do you, Paul?"

"No! no! I don't suspect it."

They seemed afraid to look each other in the face; and well they might be, for the written agony on either brow; they seemed afraid to hear the sound of each other's words; and well they might be, for the hollow, unnatural sound of either voice.

"It cannot be! I am crazy, I believe. Let me clear my—oh, Heaven! Miriam! did—was—do you know whether there was any one in particular on familiar terms with Miss Mayfield?"

"No one out of the family, except Miss Thornton."

"'Out of the family'—out of what family?"

"Ours, at the cottage."

"Was—did—I wonder if my brother knew her intimately?"

"I do not know; I never saw them in each other's company but twice in my life."

The youth breathed a little freer.

"Why did you ask, Paul?"

"No matter, Miriam. Oh! I was a wretch, a beast to think—"

"What, Paul?"

"There are such strange resemblances in—in—in—What are you looking at me so

for, Miriam?"

"To find your meaning. In what, Paul—strange resemblances in what?"

"Why, in faces."

"Why, then, so there are—and in persons, also; and sometimes in fates; but we were talking of handwritings, Paul."

"Were we? Oh, true. I am not quite right, Miriam. I believe I have confined myself too much, and studied too hard. I am really out of sorts; never mind me! Please hand me those foreign letters, love."

Miriam was unfolding and examining them; but all in a cold, stony, unnatural way.

"Paul," she asked, "wasn't it just eight years this spring since your brother went to Scotland to fetch you?"

"Yes; why?"

"Wasn't it to Glasgow that he went?"

"Yes; why?"

"Were not you there together in March and April, 182-?"

"Once more, yes! Why do you inquire?"

"Because all these foreign letters directed to Marian are postmarked Glasgow, and dated March or April, 182-."

With a low, stifled cry, and a sudden spring, he snatched the packet from her hand, tore open the first letter that presented itself, and ran his strained, bloodshot eyes down the lines. Half-suppressed, deep groans like those wrung by torture from a strong man's heart, burst from his pale lips, and great drops of sweat gathered on his agonized forehead. Then he crushed the letters together in his hand and held them tightly, unconsciously, while his starting eyes were fixed on vacancy and his frozen lips muttered:

"In a fit of frantic passion, anger, jealousy—even he might have been maddened to

the pitch of doing such a thing! But as an act of base policy, as an act of forethought, oh! never, never, never!"

"Paul! Paul! speak to me, Paul. Tell me what you think. I have had foreshadowings long. I can bear silence and uncertainty no longer. What find you in those letters? Oh, speak, or my heart will burst, Paul."

He gave no heed to her or her words, but remained like one impaled; still, fixed, yet writhing, his features, his whole form and expression discolored, distorted with inward agony.

"Paul! Paul!" cried Miriam, starting up, standing before him, gazing on him. "Paul! speak to me. Your looks kill me. Speak, Paul! even though you can tell me little new. I know it all, Paul; or nearly all. Weeks ago I received the shock! it overwhelmed me for the time; but I survived it! But you, Paul—you! Oh! how you look! Speak to your sister, Paul! Speak to your promised wife."

But he gave no heed to her. She was not strong or assured—she felt herself tottering on the very verge of death or madness. But she could not bear to see him looking so. Once more she essayed to engage his attention.

"Give me those letters, Paul—I can perhaps make out the meaning."

As he did not reply, she gently sought to take them from his hand. But at her touch he suddenly started up and threw the packet into the fire. With a quick spring, Miriam darted forward, thrust her hand into the fire and rescued the packet, scorched and burning, but not destroyed.

She began to put it out, regardless of the pain to her hands. He looked as if he were tempted to snatch it from her, but she exclaimed:

"No, Paul! no! You will not use force to deprive me of this that I must guard as a sacred trust."

Still Paul hesitated, and eyed the packet with a gloomy glance.

"Remember honor, Paul, even in this trying moment," said Miriam; "let honor be saved, if all else be lost."

"What do you mean to do with that parcel?" he asked in a hollow voice.

"Keep them securely for the present."

"And afterward?"

"I know not."

"Miriam, you evade my questions. Will you promise me one thing?"

"What is that?"

"Promise me to do nothing with those letters until you have further evidence."

"I promise you that."

Then Paul took up a candle and left the room, as if to go to his sleeping apartment; but on reaching the hall, he threw down and extinguished the light and rushed as if for breath out into the open air.

The night was keen and frosty, the cold, slaty sky was thickly studded with sparkling stars, the snow was crusted over—it was a fine, fresh, clear, wintry night; at another time it would have invigorated and inspired him; now the air seemed stifling, the scene hateful.

The horrible suspicion of his brother's criminality had entered his heart for the first time, and it had come with the shock of certainty. The sudden recognition of the handwriting, the strange revelations of the foreign letters, had not only in themselves been a terrible disclosure, but had struck the whole "electric chain" of memory and association, and called up in living force many an incident and circumstance heretofore strange and incomprehensible; but now only too plain and indicative. The whole of Thurston's manner the fatal day of the assassination—his abstraction, his anxious haste to get away on the plea of most urgent business in Baltimore—business that never was afterward heard of; his mysterious absence of

the whole night from his grandfather's deathbed—provoking conjecture at the time, and unaccounted for to this day; his haggard and distracted looks upon returning late the next morning; his incurable sorrow; his habit of secluding himself upon the anniversary of that crime—and now the damning evidence in these letters! Among them, and the first he looked at, was the letter Thurston had written Marian to persuade her to accompany him to France, in the course of which his marriage with her was repeatedly acknowledged, being incidentally introduced as an argument in favor of her compliance with his wishes.

Yet Paul could not believe the crime ever premeditated—it was sudden, unintentional, consummated in a lover's quarrel, in a fit of jealousy, rage, disappointment, madness! Stumbling upon half the truth, he said to himself:

"Perhaps failing to persuade her to fly with him to France, he had attempted to carry her off, and being foiled, had temporarily lost his self-control, his very sanity. That would account for all that had seemed so strange in his conduct the day and night of the assassination and the morning after."

There was agony—there was madness in the pursuit of the investigation. Oh, pitying Heaven! how thought and grief surged and seethed in aching heart and burning brain!

And Miriam's promise to her dying mother—Miriam's promise to bring the criminal to justice! Would she—could she now abide by its obligations? Could she prosecute her benefactor, her adopted brother, for murder? Could her hand be raised to hurl him down from his pride of place to shame and death? No, no, no, no! the vow must be broken, must be evaded; the right, even if it were the right, must be transgressed, heaven offended—anything! anything! anything but the exposure and sacrifice of their brother! If he had sinned, had he not repented? Did he not suffer? What right had she, his ward, his protégé, his child, to punish him? "Vengeance is mine—I will repay, saith the Lord." No, Miriam must not keep her vow! She must! she must! she

must, responded the moral sense, slow, measured, dispassionate, as the regular fall of a clock's hammer. "I will myself prevent her; I will find means, arguments and persuasions to act upon her. I will so appeal to her affections, her gratitude, her compassion, her pride, her fears, her love for me—I will so work upon her heart that she will not find courage to keep her vow." She will! she will! responded the deliberate conscience.

And so he walked up and down; vainly the fresh wind fanned his fevered brow; vainly the sparkling stars glanced down from holy heights upon him; he found no coolness for his fever in the air, no sedative for his anxiety in the stillness, no comfort for his soul in the heavens; he knew not whether he were indoors or out, whether it were night or day, summer or winter, he knew not, wrapped as he was in the mantle of his own sad thoughts, suffering as he was in the purgatory of his inner life.

While Paul walked up and down, like a maniac, Miriam returned to her room to pace the floor until nearly morning, when she threw herself, exhausted, upon the bed, fell into a heavy sleep, and a third time, doubtless from nervous excitement or prostration, suffered a repetition of her singular vision, and awoke late in the morning, with the words, "perform thy vow," ringing in her ears.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE AVENGER.

Several days passed in the gloomy mansion misnamed Dell-Delight. Miriam and Paul avoided each other like death. Both dreaded like death any illusion to the awful subject that lay so heavy upon the heart of each. Paul, unacquainted with her thoughts, and relying upon her promise to do nothing with the letters without further evidence, contented himself with watching her motions, feeling comparatively at ease as long as she should remain in the house; and being resolved to prevent her

from going forth, or to accompany her if she persisted in leaving home.

With Miriam, the shock, the anguish, the struggle had well-nigh passed; she was at once subdued and resolved, like one into whom some spirit had entered and bound her own spirit, and acted through her. So strange did all appear to her, so strange the impassiveness of her own will, of her habits and affections, that should have rebelled and warred against her purpose that she sometimes thought herself not herself, or insane, or the subject of a monomania, or some strange hallucination, a dreamer, a somnambulist, perhaps. And yet with matchless tact and discretion, she went about her deadly work. She had prepared her plan of action, and now waited only for a day very near at hand, the fourth of April, the anniversary of Marian's assassination, to put Thurston to a final test before proceeding further.

The day came at last—it was cold and wintry for the season. Toward evening the sky became overcast with leaden clouds, and the chill dampness penetrated into all the rooms of the old mansion. Poor Fanny was muttering and moaning to herself and her "spirits" over the wood fire in her distant room.

Mr. Willcoxen had not appeared since breakfast time. Miriam remained in her own chamber; and Paul wandered restlessly from place to place through all the rooms of the house, or threw himself wearily into his chair before the parlor fire. Inclement as the weather was, he would have gone forth, but that he too remembered the anniversary, and a nameless anxiety connected with Miriam confined him to the house.

In the kitchen, the colored folk gathered around the fire, grumbling at the unseasonable coldness of the weather, and predicting a hail-storm, and telling each other that they never "'sperienced" such weather this time o' year, 'cept 'twas that spring Old Marse died—when no wonder, "'siderin' how he lived long o' Sam all his life."

Only old Jenny went in and out from house to kitchen, Old Jenny had enough to do

to carry wood to the various fires. She had never "seed it so cold for de season nyther, 'cept 'twas de spring Miss Marian went to hebben, and not a bit o' wonder de yeth was cole arter she war gone—de dear, lovin' heart warm angel; 'deed I wondered how it ever come summer again, an' thought it was right down onsensible in her morning-glories to bloom out jest de same as ever, arter she was gone! An' what minds me to speak o' Miss Marian now, it war jes' seven years this night, since she 'parted dis life," said Jenny, as she stood leaning her head upon the mantel-piece, and toasting her toes at the kitchen fire, previous to carrying another armful of wood into the parlor.

Night and the storm descended together—such a tempest! such a wild outbreaking of the elements! rain and hail, and snow and wind, all warring upon the earth together! The old house shook, the doors and windows rattled, the timbers cracked, the shingles were torn off and whirled aloft, the trees were swayed and snapped; and as the storm increased in violence and roused to fury, the forest beat before its might, and the waves rose and overflowed the low land.

Still old Jenny went in and out of the house to kitchen and kitchen to house, carrying wood, water, meat, bread, sauce, sweetmeats, arranging the table for supper, replenishing the fire, lighting the candles, letting down the curtains—and trying to make everything cozy and comfortable for the reassembling of the fireside circle. Poor old Jenny had passed so much of her life in the family with "the white folks," that all her sympathies went with them—and on the state of their spiritual atmosphere depended all her cheerfulness and comfort; and now the cool, distant, sorrowful condition of the members of the little family circle—"ebery single mudder's son and darter ob 'em, superamblated off to derself like pris'ners in a jailhouse"—as she said—depressed her spirits very much. Jenny's reaction from depression was always quite querulous. And toward the height of the storm, there was a reaction and she grew very quarrelsome.

"Sam's waystin'[A] roun' in dere," said Jenny, as she thrust her feet into the kitchen fire, before carrying in the urn; "Sam's waystin', I tells you all good! all werry quiet dough—no noise, no fallin' out, no 'sputin' nor nothin'—all quiet as de yeth jest afore a debbil ob a storm—nobody in de parlor 'cept 'tis Marse Paul, settin' right afore de parlor fire, wid one long leg poked east and toder west, wid the boots on de andirons like a spread-eagle! lookin' as glum as if I owed him a year's sarvice, an' nebber so much as a-sayin', 'Jenny, you poor old debbil, ain't you a-cold?' an' me coming in ebery minnit wid the icicles a-jinglin' 'roun' my linsey-woolsey skurts, like de diamonds on de Wirgin Mary's Sunday gown. But Sam's waystin' now, I tells you all good. Lors Gemini, what a storm!

[Footnote A: Waysting—Going up and down.]

"I 'members of no sich since dat same storm as de debbil come in to fetch ole marse's soul—dis berry night seven year past, an' he carried of him off all in a suddint whiff! jist like a puff of win'. An' no wonder, seein' how he done traded his soul to him for money!

"An' Sam's here ag'in to-night! dunno who he's come arter! but he's here, now, I tells you all good!" said Jenny, as she took up the urn to carry it into the parlor.

When she got there she could scarcely get to the fire; Paul took up the front. His immobility and unconsciousness irritated Jenny beyond silent endurance.

"I tell you all what," she said, "I means to 'sign my sitewation! 'deed me! I can't kill myself for dem as wouldn't even care 'nough for me to have a mass said for de 'pose o' my soul."

"What do you mean?" asked Paul, angrily, for confinement, solitude, bad weather, and anxiety, had combined, to make him querulous, too.

"I means how ef yer doesn't have a kivered way made from de house to de kitchen an' back ag'in, I gwine give up waitin' on de table, now min' I tell yer, 'deed me! an' now ef you likes, yer may jes' go an' tell Marse Rooster."

"'Marse Rooster!' Will you ever give up that horrid nonsense. Why, you old—! Is my brother—is your master a barn-door chicken-cock, that you call him 'Rooster?'" asked the young man, snappishly.

"Well, Shrooster, den, ef you wants me to wring my tongue in two. Ef people's sponsors in baptism will gib der chillun such heathen names, how de debbil any Christian 'oman gwine to twis' her tongue roun' it? I thanks my 'Vine Marster dat my sponsors in baptism named me arter de bressed an' holy S'int Jane—who has 'stained an' s'ported me all my days; an' 'ill detect now, dough you do try to break my poor ole heart long wid onkindness at my ole ages o' life! But what's de use o' talkin'—Sam's waystin'!" And so saying, Jenny gave the finishing touches to the arrangement of the table, and then seized the bell, and rang it with rather needless vigor and violence, to bring the scattered members of the family together.

They came, slowly and singly, and drew around the table more like ghosts than living persons, a few remarks upon the storm, and then they sunk into silence—and as soon as the gloomy meal was over, one by one they dropped away from the room—first went poor Fanny, then Mr. Willcoxen, then Miriam.

"Where are you going, Miriam?" asked Paul, as the latter was leaving the room.

"To my chamber."

And before he could farther question, or longer detain her, she pressed his hand and went out. And Paul, with a deep sigh and a strangely foreboding heart, sank back into his seat.

When Miriam reached her bedroom, she carefully closed and locked the door, went to her bureau, opened the top-drawer, and took from it a small oblong mahogany glove-box. She unlocked the latter, and took out a small parcel, which she unwrapped and laid before her upon the bureau.

It was the xyphias poniard.

The weapon had come into her possession some time before in the following

manner: During the first winter of Paul Douglass' absence from home, Mr. Willcoxen had emancipated several of his slaves and provided means for their emigration to Liberia. They were to sail early in March. Among the number was Melchisedek. A few days previous to their departure, this man had come to the house, and sought the presence of his youthful mistress, when he knew her to be alone in the parlor, and with a good deal of mystery and hesitation had laid before her a dagger which he said he should rather have given to "Marster Paul," if the latter had been at home. He had picked it up near the water's edge on the sands the night of Miss Mayfield's death, which "Marster" had taken so to heart, that he was afraid to harrow up his feelings by bringing it to him a second time—but that as it was an article of value, he did not like to take it away with him. And he begged Miss Miriam to take charge of it. And Miriam had taken it, and with surprise, but without the slightest suspicion, had read the name of "Thurston Willcoxen" carved upon its handle. To all her questions, Melchisedek had given evasive answers, or remained obstinately silent, being determined not to betray his master's confidence by revealing his share in the events of that fatal night. Miriam had taken the little instrument, wrapped it carefully in paper, and locked it in her old-fashioned long glove-box. And from that day to this she had not opened it.

Now, however, she had taken it out with a fixed purpose, and she stood and gazed upon it. Presently she took it up, rolled it in the paper, took her lamp, and slowly left her room, and passed along the passages leading to Mr. Willcoxen's library.

The storm howled and raved as she went, and the strong blast, driving through the dilapidated window-sashes, nearly extinguished her light before she reached the study door.

She blew out the light and set down the lamp, and rapped at the door. Again and again she rapped, without awakening any response from within.

Then she turned the latch, opened the door, and entered. No wonder she had

received no answer.

The abstracted man before her seemed dead to every sight and sound around him. He sat before the table in the middle of the room, his elbow on the mahogany; his face bowed upon his hand, his haggard countenance revealing a still, speechless despair as awful as it was profound.

Miriam approached and stood by him, her breath went by his cheek, so near she stood, and yet her presence was unheeded. She stooped to see the object upon which he gazed—the object that now shut out all the world from his sight—it was a long bright tress of golden auburn hair.

"Mr. Willcoxen!"

He did not hear her—how should he hear her low tones, when he heard not the cannonading of the storm that shook the house to its foundations?

"Mr. Willcoxen!" she said once more.

But he moved not a muscle.

"Mr. Willcoxen!" she repeated, laying her hand upon his arm.

He looked up. The expression of haggard despair softened out of his countenance.

"Is it you, my dear?" he said. "What has brought you here, Miriam? Were you afraid of the storm? There is no danger, dear child—it has nearly expended its force, and will soon be over—but sit down."

"Oh, no! it is not the storm that has brought me here, though I scarcely remember a storm so violent at this season of the year, except one—this night seven years ago—the night that Marian Mayfield was murdered!"

He started—it is true that he had been thinking of the same dread tragedy—but to hear it suddenly mentioned pierced him like an unexpected sword thrust.

Miriam proceeded, speaking in a strange, level monotone, as if unwilling or afraid to trust her voice far:

"I came this evening to restore a small but costly article of virtu, belonging to you, and left in my care some time ago by the boy Melchisedek. It is an antique dagger—somewhat rusty and spotted. Here it is."

And she laid the poniard down upon the tress of hair before him.

He sprang up as if it had been a viper—his whole frame shook, and the perspiration started from his livid forehead.

Miriam, keeping her eye upon him, took the dagger up.

"It is very rusty, and very much streaked," she said. "I wonder what these dark streaks can be? They run along the edge, from the extreme point of the blade, upwards toward the handle; they look to me like the stains of blood—as if a murderer had stabbed his victim with it, and in his haste to escape had forgotten to wipe the blade, but had left the blood upon it, to curdle and corrode the steel. See! don't it look so to you?" she said, approaching him, and holding the weapon up to his view.

"Girl! girl! what do you mean?" he exclaimed, throwing his hand across his eyes, and hurrying across the room.

Miriam flung down the weapon with a force that made its metal ring upon the floor, and hastening after him, she stood before him; her dark eyes fixed upon his, streaming with insufferable and consuming fire, that seemed to burn through into his brain. She said:

"I have heard of fiends in the human shape, nay, I have heard of Satan in the guise of an angel of light! Are you such that stand before me now?"

"Miriam, what do you mean?" he asked, in sorrowful astonishment.

"This is what I mean! That the mystery of Marian Mayfield's fate, the secret of your long remorse, is no longer hidden! I charge you with the murder of Marian Mayfield!"

"Miriam, you are mad!"

"Oh! well for me, and better still for you, if I were mad!"

He was tremendously shaken, more by the vivid memories she recalled than by the astounding charge she made.

"In the name of Heaven, what leads you to imagine such impossible guilt!"

"Good knowledge of the facts—that this month, eight years ago, in the little Methodist chapel of the navy yard, in Washington City, you made Marian Mayfield your wife—that this night seven years since, in just such a storm as this, on the beach below Pine Bluff, you met and murdered Marian Willcoxen! And, moreover, I as sure you, that these facts which I tell you now, to-morrow I will lay before a magistrate, together with all the corroborating proof in my possession!"

"And what proof can you have?"

"A gentleman who, unknown and unsuspected, witnessed the private ceremony between yourself and Marian; a packet of French letters, written by yourself from Glasgow, to Marian, in St. Mary's, in the spring of 1823; a note found in the pocket of her dress, appointing the fatal meeting on the beach where she perished. Two physicians, who can testify to your unaccountable absence from the deathbed of your parent on the night of the murder, and also to the distraction of your manner when you returned late the next morning."

"And this," said Thurston, gazing in mournful amazement upon her; "this is the child that I have nourished and brought up in my house! She can believe me guilty of such atrocious crime—she can aim at my honor and my life such a deadly blow?"

"Alas! alas! it is my duty! it is my fate! I cannot escape it! I have bound my soul by a fearful oath! I cannot evade it! I shall not survive it! Oh, all the heaven is black with doom, and all the earth tainted with blood!" cried Miriam, wildly.

"You are insane, poor girl! you are insane!" said Thurston, pityingly.

"Would Heaven I were! would Heaven I were! but I am not! I am not! Too well I remember I have bound my soul by an oath to seek out Marian's destroyer, and deliver him up to death! And I must do it! I must do it! though my heart break—as it will break in the act!"

"And you believe me to be guilty of this awful crime!"

"There stands the fearful evidence! Would Heaven it did not exist! oh! would Heaven it did not!"

"Listen to me, dear Miriam," he said, calmly, for he had now recovered his self-possession. "Listen to me—I am perfectly guiltless of the crime you impute to me. How is it possible that I could be otherwise than guiltless. Hear me explain the circumstances that have come to your knowledge," and he attempted to take her hand to lead her to a seat. But with a slight scream, she snatched her hand away, saying wildly:

"Touch me not! Your touch thrills me to sickness! to faintness! curdles—turns back the current of blood in my veins!"

"You think this hand a blood-stained one?"

"The evidence! the evidence!"

"I can explain that evidence. Miriam, my child, sit down—at any distance from me you please—only let it be near enough for you to hear. Did I believe you quite sane, Miriam, grief and anger might possibly seal my lips upon this subject—but believing you partially deranged—from illness and other causes—I will defend myself to you. Sit down and hear me."

Miriam dropped into the nearest chair.

Mr. Willcoxen took another, and commenced:

"You have received some truth, Miriam. How it has been presented to you, I will not ask now. I may presently. I was married, as you have somehow ascertained, to

Marian Mayfield, just before going to Europe. I corresponded with her from Glasgow. I did appoint a meeting with her on the beach, upon the fatal evening in question—for what purpose that meeting was appointed, it is bootless to tell you, since the meeting never took place—for some hours before I should have set out to keep my appointment, my grandfather was stricken with apoplexy. I did not wish to leave his bedside until the arrival of the doctor. But when the evening wore on, and the storm approached, I grew uneasy upon Marian's account, and sent Melchisedek in the gig to fetch her from the beach to this house—never to leave it. Miriam, the boy reached the sands only to find her dying. Terrified half out of his senses, he hurried back and told me this story. I forgot my dying relative—forgot everything, but that my wife lay wounded and exposed on the beach. I sprung upon horseback, and galloped with all possible haste to the spot. By the time I had got there the storm had reached its height, and the beach was completely covered with the boiling waves. My Marian had been carried away. I spent the wretched night in wandering up and down the bluff above the beach, and calling on her name. In the morning I returned home to find my grandfather dead, and the family and physicians wondering at my strange absence at such a time. That, Miriam, is the story."

Miriam made no comment whatever. Mr. Willcoxen seemed surprised and grieved at her silence.

"What have you now to say, Miriam?"

"Nothing."

"'Nothing?' What do you think of my explanation?"

"I think nothing. My mind is in an agony of doubt and conjecture. I must be governed by stern facts—not by my own prepossessions. I must act upon the evidences in my possession—not upon your explanation of them," said Miriam, distractedly, as she arose to leave the room.

"And you will denounce me, Miriam?"

"It is my insupportable duty! it is my fate! my doom! for it will kill me!"

"Yet you will do it!"

"I will."

"Yet turn, dear Miriam! Look on me once more! take my hand! since you act from necessity, do nothing from anger—turn and take my hand."

She turned and stood—such a picture of tearless agony! She met his gentle, compassionate glance—it melted—it subdued her.

"Oh, would Heaven that I might die, rather than do this thing! Would Heaven I might die! for my heart turns to you; it turns, and I love you so—oh! I love you so! never, never so much as now! my brother! my brother!" and she sunk down and seized his hands and wept over them.

"What, Miriam! do you love me, believing me to be guilty?"

"To have been guilty—not to be guilty—you have suffered remorse—you have repented, these many long and wretched years. Oh! surely repentance washes out guilt!"

"And you can now caress and weep over my hands, believing them to have been crimsoned with the life-stream of your first and best friend?"

"Yes! yes! yes! yes! Oh! would these tears, my very heart sobs forth, might wash them pure again! Yes! yes! whether you be guilty or not, my brother! the more I listen to my heart, the more I love you, and I cannot help it!"

"It is because your heart is so much wiser than your head, dear Miriam! Your heart divines the guiltlessness that your reason refuses to credit! Do what you feel that you must, dear Miriam—but, in the meantime, let us still be brother and sister—embrace me once more."

With anguish bordering on insanity, she threw herself into his arms for a moment—was pressed to his heart, and then breaking away, she escaped from the

room to her own chamber. And there, with her half-crazed brain and breaking heart—like one acting or forced to act in a ghastly dream, she began to arrange her evidence—collect the letters, the list of witnesses and all, preparatory to setting forth upon her fatal mission in the morning.

With the earliest dawn of morning, Miriam left her room. In passing the door of Mr. Willcoxen's chamber, she suddenly stopped—a spasm seized her heart, and convulsed her features—she clasped her hands to pray, then, as if there were wild mockery in the thought, flung them fiercely apart, and hurried on her way. She felt that she was leaving the house never to return; she thought that she should depart without encountering any of its inmates. She was surprised, therefore, to meet Paul in the front passage. He came up and intercepted her:

"Where are you going so early, Miriam?"

"To Colonel Thornton's."

"What? Before breakfast?"

"Yes."

He took both of her hands, and looked into her face—her pallid face—with all the color concentrated in a dark crimson spot upon either cheek—with all the life burning deep down in the contracted pupils of the eyes.

"Miriam, you are not well—come, go into the parlor," he said, and attempted to draw her toward the door.

"No, Paul, no! I must go out," she said, resisting his efforts.

"But why?"

"What is it to you? Let me go."

"It is everything to me, Miriam, because I suspect your errand. Come into the parlor. This madness must not go on."

"Well, perhaps I am mad, and my words and acts may go for nothing. I hope it may

be so."

"Miriam, I must talk with you—not here—for we are liable to be interrupted every instant. Come into the parlor, at least for a few moments."

She no longer resisted that slight plea, but suffered him to lead her in. He gave her a seat, and took one beside her, and took her hand in his, and began to urge her to give up her fatal purpose. He appealed to her, through reason, through religion, through all the strongest passions and affections of her soul—through her devotion to her guardian—through the gratitude she owed him—through their mutual love, that must be sacrificed, if her insane purpose should be carried out. To all this she answered:

"I think of nothing concerning myself, Paul—I think only of him; there is the anguish."

"You are insane, Miriam; yet, crazy as you are, you may do a great deal of harm—much to Thurston, but much more to yourself. It is not probable that the evidence you think you have will be considered by any magistrate of sufficient importance to be acted upon against a man of Mr. Willcoxen's life and character."

"Heaven grant that such may be the case."

"Attend! collect your thoughts—the evidence you produce will probably be considered unimportant and quite unworthy of attention; but what will be thought of you who volunteer to offer it?"

"I had not reflected upon that—and now you mention it, I do not care."

"And if, on the other hand, the testimony which you have to offer be considered ground for indictment, and Thurston is brought to trial, and acquitted, as he surely would be—"

"Ay! Heaven send it!"

"And the whole affair blown all over the country—how would you appear?"

"I know not, and care not, so he is cleared; Heaven grant I may be the only sufferer! I am willing to take the infamy."

"You would be held up before the world as an ingrate, a domestic traitress, and unnatural monster. You would be hated of all—your name and history become a tradition of almost impossible wickedness."

"Ha! why, do you think that in such an hour as this I care for myself? No, no! no, no! Heaven grant that it may be as you say—that my brother be acquitted, and I only may suffer! I am willing to suffer shame and death for him whom I denounce! Let me go, Paul; I have lost too much time here."

"Will nothing induce you to abandon this wicked purpose?"

"Nothing on earth, Paul!"

"Nothing?"

"No! so help me Heaven! Give way—let me go, Paul."

"You must not go, Miriam."

"I must and will—and that directly. Stand aside."

"Then you shall not go."

"Shall not?"

"I said 'shall not.'"

"Who will prevent me?"

"I will! You are a maniac, Miriam, and must be restrained from going abroad, and setting the county in a conflagration."

"You will have to guard me very close for the whole of my life, then."

At that moment the door was quietly opened, and Mr. Willcoxen entered.

Miriam's countenance changed fearfully, but she wrung her hand from the clasp of Paul's, and hastened toward the door.

Paul sprang forward and intercepted her.

"What does this mean?" asked Mr. Willcoxen, stepping up to them.

"It means that she is mad, and will do herself or somebody else much mischief," cried Paul, sharply.

"For shame, Paul! Release her instantly," said Thurston, authoritatively.

"Would you release a lunatic, bent upon setting the house on fire?" expostulated the young man, still holding her.

"She is no lunatic; let her go instantly, sir."

Paul, with a groan, complied.

Miriam hastened onward, cast one look of anguish back to Thurston's face, rushed back, and threw herself upon her knees at his feet, clasped his hands, and cried:

"I do not ask you to pardon me—I dare not! But God deliver you! if it brand me and my accusation with infamy! and God forever bless you!" Then rising, she fled from the room.

The brothers looked at each other.

"Thurston, do you know where she has gone? what she intends to do?"

"Yes."

"You do?"

"Assuredly."

"And you would not prevent her?"

"Most certainly not."

Paul was gazing into his brother's eyes, and, as he gazed, every vestige of doubt and suspicion vanished from his mind; it was like the sudden clearing up of the sky, and shining forth of the sun; he grasped his brother's hands with cordial joy.

"God bless you, Thurston! I echo her prayer. God forever bless you! But, Thurston,

would it not have been wiser to prevent her going out?"

"How? Would you have used force with Miriam—restrained her personal liberty?"

"Yes! I would have done so!"

"That would have been not only wrong, but useless; for if her strong affections for us were powerless to restrain her, be sure that physical means would fail; she would make herself heard in some way, and thus make our cause much worse. Besides, I should loathe, for myself, to resort to any such expedients."

"But she may do so much harm. And you?"

"I am prepared to meet what comes!"

"Strange infatuation! that she should believe you to be—I will not wrong you by finishing the sentence."

"She does not at heart believe me guilty—her mind is in a storm. She is bound by her oath to act upon the evidence rather than upon her own feelings, and that evidence is much stronger against me, Paul, than you have any idea of. Come into my study, and I will tell you the whole story."

And Paul followed him thither.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

UPON CHARGE OF MURDER.

Some hours later in that day Colonel Thornton was sitting, in his capacity of police magistrate, in his office at C——. The room was occupied by about a dozen persons, men and women, black and white. He had just got through with one or two petty cases of debt or theft, and had up before him a poor, half-starved "White Herring," charged with sheep-stealing, when the door opened and a young girl, closely veiled, entered and took a seat in the farthest corner from the crowd. The case of the poor man was soon disposed of—the evidence was not positive—the

compassionate magistrate leaned to the side of mercy, and the man was discharged, and went home most probably to dine upon mutton. This being the last case, the magistrate arose and ordered the room to be cleared of all who had no further business with him.

When the loungers had left the police office the young girl came forward, stood before the magistrate, and raised her veil, revealing the features of Miriam.

"Good-morning, Miss Shields," said Colonel Thornton; and neither the countenance nor manner of this suave and stately gentleman of the old school revealed the astonishment he really felt on seeing the young lady in such a place. He arose and courteously placed her a chair, reseated himself, and turned toward her and respectfully awaited her communication.

"Colonel Thornton, you remember Miss Mayfield, and the manner of her death, that made some stir here about seven years ago?"

The face of the old gentleman suddenly grew darkened and slightly convulsed, as the face of the sea when clouds and wind pass over it.

"Yes, young lady, I remember."

"I have come to denounce her murderer."

Colonel Thornton took up his pen, and drew toward him a blank form of a writ, and sat looking toward her; and waiting for her further words.

Her bosom heaved, her face worked, her voice was choked and unnatural, as she said:

"You will please to issue a warrant for the arrest of Thurston Willcoxen."

Colonel Thornton laid down his pen, arose from his seat, and took her hand and gazed upon her with an expression of blended surprise and compassion.

"My dear young lady, you are not very well. May I inquire—are your friends in town, or are you here alone?"

"I am here alone. Nay, I am not mad, Colonel Thornton, although your looks betray that you think me so."

"No, no, not mad, only indisposed," said the colonel, in no degree modifying his opinion.

"Colonel Thornton, if there is anything strange and eccentric in my looks and manner, you must set it down to the strangeness of the position in which I am placed."

"My dear young lady, Miss Thornton is at the hotel to-day. Will you permit me to take you to her?"

"You will do as you please, Colonel Thornton, after you shall have heard my testimony and examined the proofs I have to lay before you. Then I shall permit you to judge of my soundness of mind as you will, premising, however, that my sanity or insanity can have no possible effect upon the proofs that I submit," she said, laying a packet upon the table between them.

Something in her manner now compelled the magistrate to give her words an attention for which he blamed himself, as for a gross wrong, toward his favorite clergyman.

"Do I understand you to charge Mr. Willcoxen with the death of Miss Mayfield?"

"Yes," said Miriam, bowing her head.

"What cause, young lady, can you possibly have for making such a monstrous and astounding accusation?"

"I came here for the purpose of telling you, if you will permit me. Nor do I, since you doubt my reason, ask you to believe my statement, unsupported by proof."

"Go on, young lady; I am all attention."

"Will you administer the usual oath?"

"No, Miss Shields; I will hear your story first in the capacity of friend."

"And you think that the only capacity in which you will be called upon to act? Well, may Heaven grant it," said Miriam, and she began and told him all the facts that had recently come to her knowledge, ending by placing the packet of letters in his hands.

While she spoke, Colonel Thornton's pen was busy making minutes of her statements; when she had concluded, he laid down the pen, and turning to her, asked:

"You believe, then, that Mr. Willcoxen committed this murder?"

"I know not—I act only upon the evidence."

"Circumstantial evidence, often as delusive as it is fatal! Do you think it possible that Mr. Willcoxen could have meditated such a crime?"

"No, no, no, no! never meditated it! If he committed it, it was unpremeditated, unintentional; the accident of some lover's quarrel, some frenzy of passion, jealousy—I know not what!"

"Let me ask you, then, why you volunteer to prosecute?"

"Because I must do so. But tell me, do you think what I have advanced trivial and unimportant?" asked Miriam, in a hopeful tone, for little she thought of herself, if only her obligation were discharged, and her brother still unharmed.

"On the contrary, I think it so important as to constrain my instant attention, and oblige me to issue a warrant for the apprehension of Mr. Thurston Willcoxen," said Colonel Thornton, as he wrote rapidly, filling out several blank documents. Then he rang a bell, that was answered by the entrance of several police officers. To the first he gave a warrant, saying:

"You will serve this immediately upon Mr. Willcoxen." And to another he gave some half dozen subpoenas, saying: "You will serve all these between this time and twelve to-morrow."

When these functionaries were all discharged, Miriam arose and went to the

magistrate.

"What do you think of the testimony?"

"It is more than sufficient to commit Mr. Willcoxen for trial; it may cost him his life."

A sudden paleness passed over her face; she turned to leave the office, but the hand of death seemed to clutch her heart, arresting its pulsations, stopping the current of her blood, smothering her breath, and she fell to the floor.

* * * * *

Wearily passed the day at Dell-Delight. Thurston, as usual, sitting reading or writing at his library table; Paul rambling uneasily about the house, now taking up a book and attempting to read, now throwing it down in disgust; sometimes almost irresistibly impelled to spring upon his horse and gallop to Charlotte Hall, then restraining his strong impulse lest something important should transpire at home during his absence. So passed the day until the middle of the afternoon.

Paul was walking up and down the long piazza, indifferent for the first time in his life to the loveliness of the soft April atmosphere, that seemed to blend, raise and idealize the features of the landscape until earth, water and sky were harmonized into celestial beauty. Paul was growing very anxious for the reappearance of Miriam, or for some news of her or her errand, yet dreading every moment an arrival of another sort. "Where could the distracted girl be? Would her report be received and acted upon by the magistrate? If so, what would be done? How would it all end? Would Thurston sleep in his own house or in a prison that night? When would Miriam return? Would she ever return, after having assumed such a task as she had taken upon herself?"

These and other questions presented themselves every moment, as he walked up and down the piazza, keeping an eye upon the distant road.

Presently a cloud of dust in the distance arrested both his attention and his

promenade, and brought his anxiety to a crisis. He soon perceived a single horseman galloping rapidly down the road, and never removed his eyes until the horseman turned into the gate and galloped swiftly up to the house.

Then with joy Paul recognized the rider, and ran eagerly down the stairs to give him welcome, and reached the paved walk just as Cloudy drew rein and threw himself from the saddle.

The meeting was a cordial, joyous one—with Cloudy it was sincere, unmixed joy; with Paul it was only a pleasant surprise and a transient forgetfulness. Rapid questions were asked and answered, as they hurried into the house.

Cloudy's ship had been ordered home sooner than had been expected; he had reached Norfolk a week before, B—— that afternoon, and had immediately procured a horse and hurried on home. Hence his unlooked-for arrival.

"How is Thurston? How is Miriam? How are they all at Luckenough?"

"All are well; the family at Luckenough are absent in the South, but are expected home every week."

"And where is Miriam?"

"At the village."

"And Thurston?"

"In his library, as usual," said Paul, and touched the bell to summon a messenger to send to Mr. Willcoxen.

"Have you dined, Cloudy?"

"Yes, no—I ate some bread and cheese at the village; don't fuss; I'd rather wait till supper-time."

The door opened, and Mr. Willcoxen entered.

Whatever secret anxiety might have weighed upon the minister's heart, no sign of it was suffered to appear upon his countenance, as, smiling cordially, he came in

holding out his hand to welcome his cousin and early playmate, expressing equal surprise and pleasure at seeing him.

Cloudy had to go over the ground of explanation of his sudden arrival, and by the time he had finished, old Jenny came in, laughing and wriggling with joy to see him. But Jenny did not remain long in the parlor; she hurried out into the kitchen to express her feelings professionally by preparing a welcome feast.

"And you are not married yet, Thurston, as great a favorite as you are with the ladies! How is that? Every time I come home I expect to be presented to a Mrs. Willcoxen, and never am gratified; why is that?"

"Perhaps I believe in the celibacy of the clergy."

"Perhaps you have never recovered the disappointment of losing Miss Le Roy?"

"Ah! Cloudy, people who live in glass houses should not throw stones; I suspect you judge me by yourself. How is it with you, Cloudy? Has no fair maiden been able to teach you to forget your boy-love for Jacquelina?"

Cloudy winced, but tried to cover his embarrassment with a laugh.

"Oh! I have been in love forty dozen times. I'm always in love; my heart is continually going through a circle from one fit to another, like the sun through the signs of the zodiac; only it never comes to anything."

"Well, at least little Jacko is forgotten, which is one congratulatory circumstance."

"No, she is not forgotten; I will not wrong her by saying that she is, or could be! All other loves are merely the foreign ports, which my heart visits transiently now and then. Lina is its native home. I don't know how it is. With most cases of disappointment, such as yours with Miss Le Roy, I suppose the regret may be short-lived enough; but when an affection has been part and parcel of one's being from infancy up; why, it is in one's soul and heart and blood, so to speak—is identical with one's consciousness, and inseparable from one's life."

"Do you ever see her?"

"See her! yes; but how?—at each return from a voyage. I may see her once, with an iron grating between us; she disguised with her black shrouding robe and veil, and thinking that she must suffer here to expiate the fate of Dr. Grimshaw, who, scorpion-like, stung himself to death with the venom of his own bad passions. She is a Sister of Mercy, devoted to good works, and leaves her convent only in times of war, plague, pestilence or famine, to minister to the suffering. She nursed me through the yellow fever, when I lay in the hospital at New Orleans, but when I got well enough to recognize her she vanished—evaporated—made herself 'thin air,' and another Sister served in her place."

"Have you ever seen her since?"

"Yes, once; I sought out her convent, and went with the fixed determination to reason with her, and to persuade her not to renew her vows for another year—you know, the Sisters only take vows for a year at a time."

"Did you make any impression on her mind?" inquired Thurston, with more interest than he had yet shown m any part of the story.

"'Make any impression on her mind!' No! I—I did not even attempt to. How could I, when I only saw her behind a grate, with the prioress on one side of her and the portress on the other? My visit was silent enough, and short enough, and sad enough. Why can't she come out of that? What have I done to deserve to be made miserable? I don't deserve it. I am the most ill-used man in the United States service."

While Cloudy spoke, old Jenny was hurrying in and out between the house and the kitchen, and busying herself with setting the table, laying the cloth and arranging the service. But presently she came in, throwing wide the door, and announcing:

"Two gemmun, axin to see marster."

Thurston arose and turned to confront them, while Paul became suddenly pale on

recognizing two police officers.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Willcoxen—good-afternoon, gentlemen," said the foremost and most respectable-looking of the two, lifting his hat and bowing to the fireside party. Then replacing it, he said: "Mr. Willcoxen, will you be kind enough to step this way and give me your attention, sir." He walked to the window, and Thurston followed him.

Paul stood with a pale face and firmly compressed lip, and gazed after them.

And Cloudy—unsuspicious Cloudy, arose and stood with his back to the fire and whistled a sea air.

"Mr. Willcoxen, you can see for yourself the import of this paper," said the officer, handing the warrant.

Thurston read it and returned it.

"Mr. Willcoxen," added the policeman, "myself and my comrade came hither on horseback. Let me suggest to you to order your carriage. One of us will accompany you in the drive, and all remarks will be avoided."

"I thank you for the hint, Mr. Jenkins; I had, how ever, intended to do as you advise," said Thurston, beckoning his brother to approach.

"Paul! I am a prisoner. Say nothing at present to Cloudy; permit him to assume that business takes me away, and go now quietly and order horses put to the carriage."

"Dr. Douglass, we shall want your company also," said the officer, serving Paul with a subpoena.

Paul ground his teeth together and rushed out of the door.

"Keep an eye on that young man," said the policeman to his comrade, and the latter followed Paul into the yard and on to the stables.

The haste and passion of Paul's manner had attracted Cloudy's attention, and now he stood looking on with surprise and inquiry.

"Cloudy," said Thurston, approaching him, "a most pressing affair demands my presence at C—— this afternoon. Paul must also attend me. I may not return to-night. Paul, however, certainly will. In the meantime, Cloudy, my boy, make yourself as much at home and as happy as you possibly can."

"Oh! don't mind me! Never make a stranger of me. Go, by all means. I wouldn't detain you for the world; hope it is nothing of a painful nature that calls you from home, however. Any parishioner ill, dying and wanting your ghostly consolations?"

"Oh, no," said Thurston, smiling.

"Glad of it! Go, by all means. I will make myself jolly until you return," said Cloudy, walking up and down the floor whistling a love ditty, and thinking of little Jacko. He always thought of her with tenfold intensity whenever he returned home and came into her neighborhood.

"Mr. Jenkins, will you follow me to my library?" said Thurston.

The officer bowed assent and Mr. Willcoxen proceeded thither for the purpose of securing his valuable papers and locking his secretary and writing-desk.

After an absence of some fifteen minutes they returned to the parlor to find Paul and the constable awaiting them.

"Is the carriage ready?" asked Mr. Willcoxen.

"Yes, sir," replied the constable.

"Then, I believe, we also are—is it not so?"

The police officer bowed, and Mr. Willcoxen walked up to Cloudy and held out his hand.

"Good-by, Cloudy, for the present. Paul will probably be home by nightfall, even if I should be detained."

"Oh, don't hurry yourself upon my account. I shall do very well. Jenny can take care of me," said Cloudy, jovially, as he shook the offered hand of Thurston.

Paul could not trust himself to look Cloudy in the face and say "Good-by." He averted his head, and so followed Mr. Willcoxen and the officer into the yard.

Mr. Willcoxen, the senior officer and Paul Douglass entered the carriage, and the second constable attended on horseback, and so the party set out for Charlotte Hall.

Hour after hour passed. Old Jenny came in and put the supper on the table, and stood presiding over the urn and tea-pot while Cloudy ate his supper. Old Jenny's tongue ran as if she felt obliged to make up in conversation for the absence of the rest of the family.

"Lord knows, I'se glad 'nough you'se comed back," she said; "dis yer place is bad 'nough. Sam's been waystin' here eber since de fam'ly come from de city—dey must o' fetch him long o' dem. Now I do 'spose sumtin is happen long o' Miss Miriam as went heyin' off to de willidge dis mornin' afore she got her brekfas, nobody on de yeth could tell what fur. Now de od-er two is gone, an' nobody lef here to mine de house, 'cept 'tis you an' me! Sam's waystin'!"

Cloudy laughed and tried to cheer her spirits by a gay reply, and then they kept up between them a lively badinage of repartee, in which old Jenny acquitted herself quite as wittily as her young master.

And after supper she cleared away the service, and went to prepare a bed and light a fire in the room appropriated to Cloudy.

And so the evening wore away.

It grew late, yet neither Thurston nor Paul appeared. Cloudy began to think their return unseasonably delayed, and at eleven o'clock he took up his lamp to retire to his chamber, when he was startled and arrested by the barking of dogs, and by the rolling of the carriage into the yard, and in a few minutes the door was thrown violently open, and Paul Douglass, pale, haggard, convulsed and despairing, burst suddenly into the room.

"Paul! Paul! what in the name of Heaven has happened?" cried Cloudy, starting up,

surprised and alarmed by his appearance.

"Oh, it has ended in his committal!—it has ended in his committal!—he is fully committed for trial!—he was sent off to-night to the county jail at Leonardtown, in the custody of two officers!"

"Who is committed? What are you talking about, Paul?" said Cloudy, taking his hand kindly and looking in his face.

These words and actions brought Paul somewhat to his senses.

"Oh! you do not know!—you do not even guess anything about it, Cloudy! Oh, it is a terrible misfortune! Let me sit down and I will tell you!"

And Paul Douglass threw himself into a chair, and in an agitated, nearly incoherent manner, related the circumstances that led to the arrest of Thurston Willcoxen for the murder of Marian Mayfield.

When he had concluded the strange story, Cloudy started up, took his hat, and was about to leave the room,

"Where are you going, Cloudy?"

"To the stables to saddle my horse, to ride to Leonardtown this night!"

"It is nearly twelve o'clock."

"I know it, but by hard riding I can reach Leonardtown by morning, and be with Thurston as soon as the prison doors are opened. And I will ask you, Paul, to be kind enough to forward my trunks from the tavern at Benedict to Leonardtown, where I shall remain to be near Thurston as long as he needs my services."

"God bless you, Cloudy! I myself wished to accompany him, but he would not for a moment hear of my doing so—he entreated me to return hither to take care of poor Fanny and the homestead."

Cloudy scarcely waited to hear this benediction, but hurried to the stables, found and saddled his horse, threw himself into the stirrups, and in five minutes was dashing

rapidly through the thick, low-lying forest stretching inland from the coast.

Eight hours of hard riding brought him to the county seat.

Just stopping long enough to have his horse put up at the best hotel and to inquire his way to the prison, he hurried thither.

It was nearly nine o'clock, and the street corners were thronged with loungers conversing in low, eager tones upon the present all-absorbing topic of discourse—the astounding event of the arrest of the great preacher, the Rev. Thurston Willcoxen, upon the charge of murder.

Hurrying past all these, Cloudy reached the jail. He readily gained admittance, and was conducted to the cell of the prisoner. He found Thurston attired as when he left home, sitting at a small wooden stand, and calmly occupied with his pen.

He arose, and smilingly extended his hand, saying:

"This is very kind as well as very prompt, Cloudy. You must have ridden fast."

"I did. Leave us alone, if you please, my friend," said Cloudy, turning to the jailor.

The latter went out and locked the door upon the friends.

"This seems a sad event to greet you on your return home. Cloudy; but never mind, it will all be well!"

"Sad? It's a farce! I have not an instant's misgiving about the result; but the present indignity! Oh! oh! I could—"

"Be calm, my dear Cloudy. Have you heard anything of the circumstances that led to this?"

"Yes! Paul told me; but he is as crazy and incoherent as a Bedlamite! I want you, if you please, Thurston, if you have no objection, to go over the whole story for me, that I may see if I can make anything of it for your defense."

"Poor Paul! he takes this matter far too deeply to heart. Sit down. I have not a second chair to offer, but take this or the foot of the cot, as you prefer."

Cloudy took the foot of the cot.

"Certainly, Cloudy, I will tell you everything," said Thurston, and forthwith commenced his explanation.

Thurston's narrative was clear and to the point. When it was finished Cloudy asked a number of questions, chiefly referring to the day of the tragedy. When these were answered he sat with his brows gathered down in astute thought. Presently he asked:

"Thurston, have you engaged counsel?"

"Yes; Mr. Romford has been with me this morning."

"Is he fully competent?"

"The best lawyer in the State."

"When does the court sit?"

"On Monday week."

"Have you any idea whether your trial will come on early in the session?"

"I presume it will come on very soon, as Mr. Romford informs me there are but few cases on the docket."

"Thank Heaven for that, as your confinement here promises to be of very short duration. However, the limited time makes it the more necessary for me to act with the greater promptitude. I came here with the full intention of remaining in town as long as you should be detained in this infernal place, but I shall have to leave you within the hour."

"Of course, Cloudy, my dear boy, I could not expect you to restrict yourself to this town so soon after escaping from the confinement of your ship!"

"Oh! you don't understand me at all! Do you think I am going away on my own business, or amusement, while you are here? To the devil with the thought!—begging your reverence's pardon. No, I am going in search of Jacquelina. Since hearing your explanation, particularly that part of it relating to your visit to

Luckenough, upon the morning of the day of Marian's death, and the various scenes that occurred there—certain vague ideas of my own have taken form and color, and I feel convinced that Jacquelina could throw some light upon this affair."

"Indeed! why should you think so?"

"Oh! from many small indexes, which I have neither the time nor inclination to tell you; for, taken apart from collateral circumstances and associations, they would appear visionary. Each in itself is really trivial enough, but in the mass they are very indicative. At least, I think so, and I must seek Jacquelina out immediately. And to do so, Thurston, I must leave you this moment, for there is a boat to leave the wharf for Baltimore this morning if it has not already gone. It will take me two days to reach Baltimore, another day to get to her convent, and it will altogether be five or six days before I can get back here. Good-by, Thurston! Heaven keep you, and give you a speedy deliverance from this black hole!"

And Cloudy threw his arms around Thurston in a brotherly embrace, and then knocked at the door to be let out.

In half an hour Cloudy was "once more upon the waters," in full sail for Baltimore.

CHAPTER XXXV.

MARIAN.

Great was the consternation caused by the arrest of a gentleman so high in social rank and scholastic and theological reputation as the Rev. Thurston Willcoxen, and upon a charge, too, so awful as that for which he stood committed! It was the one all-absorbing subject of thought and conversation. People neglected their business, forgetting to work, to bargain, buy or sell. Village shopkeepers, instead of vamping their wares, leaned eagerly over their counters, and with great dilated eyes and dogmatical forefingers, discussed with customers the merits or demerits of the great case. Village mechanics, occupied solely with the subject of the pastor's guilt or

innocence, disappointed with impunity customers who were themselves too deeply interested and too highly excited by the same subject, to remember, far less to rebuke them, for unfulfilled engagements. Even women totally neglected, or badly fulfilled, their domestic avocations; for who in the parish could sit down quietly to the construction of a garment or a pudding while their beloved pastor, the "all praised" Thurston Willcoxen, lay in prison awaiting his trial for a capital crime?

As usual in such cases, there was very little cool reasoning, and very much passionate declamation. The first astonishment had given place to conjecture, which yielded in turn to dogmatic judgments—acquiescing or condemning, as the self-constituted judges happened to be favorable or adverse to the cause of the minister.

When the first Sabbath after the arrest came, and the church was closed because the pulpit was unoccupied, the dispersed congregation, haunted by the vision of the absent pastor in his cell, discussed the matter anew, and differed and disputed, and fell out worse than ever. Parties formed for and against the minister, and party feuds raged high.

Upon the second Sabbath—being the day before the county court should sit—a substitute filled the pulpit of Mr. Willcoxen, and his congregation reassembled to hear an edifying discourse from the text: "I myself have seen the ungodly in great power, and flourishing like a green bay-tree. I went by, and lo! he was gone; I sought him, but his place was nowhere to be found."

This sermon bore rather hard (by pointed allusions) upon the great elevation and sudden downfall of the celebrated minister, and, in consequence, delighted one portion of the audience and enraged the other. The last-mentioned charged the new preacher with envy, hatred and malice, and all uncharitableness, besides the wish to rise on the ruin of his unfortunate predecessor, and they went home in high indignation, resolved not to set foot within the parish church again until the

honorable acquittal of their own beloved pastor should put all his enemies, persecutors and slanderers to shame.

The excitement spread and gained force and fire with space. The press took it up, and went to war as the people had done. And as far as the name of Thurston Willcoxen had been wafted by the breath of fame, it was now blown by the "Blatant Beast." Ay, and farther, too! for those who had never even heard of his great talents, his learning, his eloquence, his zeal and his charity, were made familiar with his imputed crime and shuddered while they denounced. And this was natural and well, so far as it went to prove that great excellence is so much less rare than great evil, as to excite less attention. The news of this signal event spread like wildfire all over the country, from Maine to Louisiana, and from Missouri to Florida, producing everywhere great excitement, but falling in three places with the crushing force of a thunderbolt.

First by Marian's fireside.

In a private parlor of a quiet hotel, in one of the Eastern cities, sat the lady, now nearly thirty years of age, yet still in the bloom of her womanly beauty.

She had lately arrived from Europe, charged with one of those benevolent missions which it was the business and the consolation of her life to fulfill.

It was late in the afternoon, and the low descending sun threw its golden gleam across the round table at which she sat, busily engaged with reading reports, making notes, and writing letters connected with the affair upon which she had come.

Seven years had not changed Marian much—a little less vivid, perhaps, the bloom on cheeks and lips, a shade paler the angel brow, a shade darker the rich and lustrous auburn tresses, softer and calmer, fuller of thought and love the clear blue eyes—sweeter her tones, and gentler all her motions—that was all. Her dress was insignificant in material, make and color, yet the wearer unconsciously imparted a classic and regal grace to every fold and fall of the drapery. No splendor of apparel

could have given such effect to her individual beauty as this quiet costume; I would I were an artist that I might reproduce her image as she was—the glorious face and head, the queenly form, in its plain but graceful robe of I know not what—gray serge, perhaps.

Her whole presence—her countenance, manner and tone revealed the richness, strength and serenity of a faithful, loving, self-denying, God-reliant soul—of one who could recall the past, endure the present, and anticipate the future without regret, complaint or fear.

Sometimes the lady's soft eyes would lift themselves from her work to rest with tenderness upon the form of a little child, so small and still that you would not have noticed her presence but in following the lady's loving glance. She sat in a tiny rocking chair, nursing a little white rabbit on her lap. She was not a beautiful child—she was too diminutive and pale, with hazy blue eyes and faded yellow hair; yet her little face was so demure and sweet, so meek and loving, that it would haunt and soften you more than that of a beautiful child could. The child had been orphaned from her birth, and when but a few days old had been received into the "Children's Home."

Marian never had a favorite among her children, but this little waif was so completely orphaned, so desolate and destitute, and withal so puny, fragile and lifeless that Marian took her to her own heart day and night, imparting from her own fine vital temperament the warmth and vigor that nourished the perishing little human blossom to life and health. If ever a mother's heart lived in a maiden's bosom, it was in Marian's. As she had cherished Miriam, she now cherished Angel, and she was as fondly loved by the one as she had been by the other. And so for five years past Angel had been Marian's inseparable companion. She sat with her little lesson, or her sewing, or her pet rabbit, at Marian's feet while she worked; held her hand when she walked out, sat by her side at the table or in the carriage, and slept nestled

in her arms at night. She was the one earthly blossom that bloomed in Marian's solitary path.

Angel now sat with her rabbit on her knees, waiting demurely till Marian should have time to notice her.

And the lady still worked on, stopping once in a while to smile upon the child. There was a file of the evening papers lying near at hand upon the table where she wrote, but Marian had not yet had time to look at them. Soon, however, she had occasion to refer to one of them for the names of the members of the Committee on Public Lands. In casting her eyes over the paper, her glance suddenly lighted upon a paragraph that sent all the blood from her cheeks to her heart. She dropped the paper, sank back in her chair, and covered her blanched face with both hands, and strove for self-control.

Angel softly put down the rabbit and gently stole to her side and looked up with her little face full of wondering sympathy.

Presently Marian began passing her hands slowly over her forehead, with a sort of unconscious self-mesmerism, and then she dropped them wearily upon her lap, and Angel saw how pallid was her face, how ashen and tremulous her lip, how quivering her hands. But after a few seconds Marian stooped and picked the paper up and read the long, wonder-mongering affair, in which all that had been and all that had seemed, as well as many things could neither be nor seem, were related at length, or conjectured, or suggested. It began by announcing the arrest of the Rev. Thurston Willcoxen upon the charge of murder, and then went back to the beginning and related the whole story, from the first disappearance of Marian Mayfield to the late discoveries that had led to the apprehension of the supposed murderer, with many additions and improvements gathered in the rolling of the ball of falsehood. Among the rest, that the body of the unhappy young lady had been washed ashore several miles below the scene of her dreadful fate, and had been charitably interred by some

poor fisherman. The article concluded by describing the calm demeanor of the accused and the contemptuous manner in which he treated a charge so grave, scorning even to deny it.

"Oh, I do not wonder at the horror and consternation this matter has caused. When the deed was attempted, more than the intended death wound didn't overcome me! And nothing, nothing in the universe but the evidence of my own senses could have convinced me of his purposed guilt! And still I cannot realize it! He must have been insane! But he treats the discovery of his intended and supposed crime with scorn and contempt! Alas! alas! is this the end of years of suffering and probation? Is this the fruit of that long remorse, from which I had hoped so much for his redemption—a remorse without repentance, and barren of reformation! Yet I must save him."

She arose and rang the bell, and gave orders to have two seats secured for her in the coach that would leave in the morning for Baltimore. And then she began to walk up and down the floor, to try and walk off the excitement that was fast gaining upon her.

Before this night and this discovery, not for the world would Marian have made her existence known to him, far less would she have sought his presence. Nay, deeming such a meeting improper as it was impossible, her mind had never contemplated it for an instant. She had watched his course, sent anonymous donations to his charities, hoped much from his repentance and good works, but never hoped in any regard to herself. But now it was absolutely necessary that she should make her existence known to him. She would go to him! She must save him! She should see him, and speak to him—him whom she had never hoped to meet again in life! She would see him again in three days! The thought was too exciting even for her strong heart and frame and calm, self-governing nature! And in defiance of reason and of will, her long-buried youthful love, her pure, earnest, single-hearted love, burst its

secret sepulchre, and rejoiced through all her nature. The darkness of the past was, for the time, forgotten. Memory recalled no picture of unkindness, injustice or inconstancy. Even the scene upon the beach was faded, gone, lost! But the light of the past glowed around her—their seaside strolls and woodland wanderings—

"The still, green places where they met, The moonlit branches dewy wet, The greeting and the parting word, The smile, the embrace, the tone that made An Eden of the forest shade—"

kindling a pure rapture from memory, and a wild longing from hope, that her full heart could scarce contain.

But soon came on another current of thought and feeling opposed to the first—doubt and fear of the meeting. For herself she felt that she could forget all the sorrows of the past; aye! and with fervent glowing soul, and flushed cheeks, and tearful eyes, and clasped hands, she adored the Father in Heaven that He had put no limit to forgiveness—no! in that blessed path of light all space was open to the human will, and the heart might forgive infinitely—and to its own measureless extent.

But how would Thurston meet her? He had suffered such tortures from remorse that doubtless he would rejoice "with exceeding great joy" to find that the deed attempted in some fit of madness had really not been effected. But his sufferings had sprung from remorse of conscience, not from remorse of love. No! except as his deliverer, he would probably not be pleased to see her. As soon as this thought had seized her mind, then, indeed, all the bitterer scenes in the past started up to life, and broke down the defenses reared by love, and faith, and hope, and let in the tide of anguish and despair that rolled over her soul, shaking it as it had not been shaken for many years. And her head fell upon her bosom, and her hands were clasped convulsively, as she walked up and down the floor—striving with herself—striving to subdue the rebel passions of her heart—striving to attain her wonted calmness, and strength, and self-possession, and at last praying earnestly: "Oh, Father! the

rains descend, and the floods come, and the winds blow and beat upon my soul; let not its strength fall as if built upon the sand." And so she walked up and down, striving and praying; nor was the struggle in vain—once more she "conquered a peace" in her own bosom.

She turned her eyes upon little Angel. The infant was drooping over one arm of her rocking-chair like a fading lily, but her soft, hazy eyes, full of vague sympathy, followed the lady wherever she went.

Marian's heart smote her for her temporary forgetfulness of the child's wants. It was now twilight, and Marian rang for lights, and Angel's milk and bread, which were soon brought.

And then with her usual quiet tenderness she undressed the little one, heard her prayers, took her up, and as she rocked, sang a sweet, low evening hymn, that soothed the child to sleep and her own heart to perfect rest. And early the next morning Marian and little Angel set out by the first coach for Baltimore, on their way to St. Mary's County.

* * * * *

The Convent of Bethlehem was not only the sanctuary of professed nuns, the school for girls, the nursery of orphans, but it was also the temporary home of those Sisters of Mercy who go forth into the world only on errands of Christian love and charity, and return to their convent often only to die, worn out by toil among scenes and sufferers near which few but themselves would venture. And as they pass hence to Heaven, their ranks are still filled up from the world—not always by the weary and disappointed. Often young Catholic girls voluntarily leave the untried world that is smiling fair before them to enter upon a life of poverty, self-denial and merciful ministrations; so even in this century the order of the Sisters of Mercy is kept up.

Among the most active and zealous of the order of Bethlehem was the Sister Theresa, the youngest of the band. Youthful as she was, however, this Sister's heart

was no sweet sacrifice of "a flower offered in the bud;" on the contrary, I am afraid that Sister Theresa had trifled with, and pinched, and bruised, and trampled the poor budding heart, until she thought it good for nothing upon earth before she offered it to Heaven. I fear it was nothing higher than that strange revulsion of feeling, world-weariness, disappointment, disgust, remorse, fanaticism—either, any, or all of these, call it what you will, that in past ages and Catholic countries have filled monasteries with the whilom, gay, worldly and ambitious; that has sent many a woman in the prime of her beauty and many a man at the acme of his power into a convent; that transformed the mighty Emperor Charles V. into a cowled and shrouded monk; the reckless swashbuckler, Ignatius Loyola, into a holy saint, and the beautiful Louise de la Valliere into an ascetic nun; which finally metamorphosed the gayest, maddest, merriest elf that ever danced in the moonlight into—Sister Theresa.

Poor Jacquelina! for, of course, you can have no doubt that it is of her we are speaking—she perpetrated her last lugubrious joke on the day that she was to have made her vows, for when asked what patron saint she would select by taking that saint's name in religion, she answered—St. Theresa, because St. Theresa would understand her case the best, having been, like herself, a scamp and a rattle-brain before she took it into her head to astonish her friends by becoming a saint. Poor Jacko said this with the solemnest face and the most serious earnestness; but, with such a reputation as she had had for pertness, of course nobody would believe but that she was making fun of the "Blessed Theresa," and so she was put upon further probation, with the injunction to say the seven penitential Psalms seven times a day, until she was in a holier frame of mind; which she did, though under protest that she didn't think the words composed by David to express his remorse for his own enormous sin exactly suited her case. Sister Theresa, if the least steady and devout, was certainly the most active and zealous and courageous among them all. She yawned horribly over the long litanies and long sermons; but if ever there was a

work of mercy requiring extraordinary labor, privation, exposure and danger, Sister Theresa was the one to face, in the cause, lightning and tempest, plague, pestilence and famine, battle and murder, and sudden death! Happy was she? or content? No; she was moody, hysterical and devotional by turns—sometimes a zeal for good works would possess her; sometimes the old fun and quaintness would break out, and sometimes an overwhelming fit of remorse—each depending upon the accidental cause that would chance to arouse the moods.

Humane creatures are like climates—some of a temperate atmosphere, taking even life-long sorrow serenely—never forgetting, and never exaggerating its cause—never very wretched, if never quite happy. Others of a more torrid nature have long, sunny seasons of bird-like cheerfulness and happy forgetfulness, until some slight cause, striking "the electric chain wherewith we are darkly bound," shall startle up memory—and grief, intensely realized, shall rise to anguish, and a storm shall pass through the soul, shaking it almost to dissolution, and the poor subject thinks, if she can think, that her heart must go to pieces this time! But the storm passes, and nature, instead of being destroyed, is refreshed and ready for the sunshine and the song-birds again. The elastic heart throws off its weight, the spirits revive, and life goes on joyously in harmony with nature.

So it was with Jacquelina, with this sad difference, that as her trouble was more than sorrow—for it was remorse—it was never quite thrown off. It was not that her conscience reproached her for the fate of Dr. Grimshaw, which was brought on by his own wrongdoing, but Marian's fate—that a wild, wanton frolic of her own should have caused the early death of one so young, and beautiful, and good as Marian! that was the thought that nearly drove poor Jacquelina mad with remorse, whenever she realized it. Dr. Grimshaw was forgiven, and—forgotten; but the thought of Marian was the "undying worm," that preyed upon her heart. And so, year after year, despite the arguments and persuasions of nearest friends, and the constancy of poor Cloudy, Jacquelina tearfully turned from love, friendship, wealth

and ease, and renewed her vows of poverty, celibacy, obedience, and the service of the poor, sick and ignorant, in the hope of expiating her offense, soothing the voice of conscience, and gaining peace. Jacquelina would have made her vows perpetual by taking the black veil, but her Superior constantly dissuaded her from it. She was young, and life, with its possibilities, was all before her; she must wait many years before she took the step that could not be retracted without perjury. And so each year she renewed her vow a twelvemonth. The seventh year of her religious life was drawing to its close, and she had notified her superior of her wish now, after so many years of probation, to take the black veil, and make her vows perpetual. And the Abbess had, at length, listened favorably to her expressed wishes.

But a few days after this, as the good old Mother, Martha, the portress, sat dozing over her rosary, behind the hall grating, the outer door was thrown open, and a young man, in a midshipman's undress uniform, entered rather brusquely, and came up to the grating. Touching his hat precisely as if the old lady had been his superior officer, he said, hastily:

"Madam, if you please, I wish to see Mrs. ——; you know who I mean, I presume? my cousin, Jacquelina."

The portress knew well enough, for she had seen Cloudy there several times before, but she replied:

"You mean, young gentleman, that pious daughter, called in the world Mrs. Grimshaw, but in religion Sister Theresa?"

"Fal lal!—that is—I beg your pardon, Mother, but I wish to see the lady immediately. Can I do so?"

"The dear sister Theresa is at present making her retreat, preparatory to taking the black veil."

"The what!" exclaimed Cloudy, with as much horror as if it had been the "black dose" she was going to take.

"The black veil—and so she cannot be seen."

"Madam, I have a very pressing form of invitation here, which people are not very apt to disregard. Did you ever hear of a subpoena, dear Mother?"

The good woman never had, but she thought it evidently something "uncanny," for she said, "I will send for the Abbess;" and she beckoned to a nun within, and sent her on the errand—and soon the Abbess appeared, and Cloudy made known the object of his visit.

"Go into the parlor, sir, and Sister Theresa will attend you," said that lady.

And Cloudy turned to a side door on his right hand, and went into the little receiving-room, three sides of which were like other rooms, but the fourth side was a grating instead of a wall. Behind this grating appeared Jacquelina—so white and thin with confinement, fasting and vigil, and so disguised by her nun's dress as to be unrecognizable to any but a lover's eyes: with her was the Abbess.

Cloudy went up to the grating. Jacquelina put her hand through, and spoke a kind greeting; but Cloudy glanced at the Abbess, looked reproachfully at Jacquelina, and then turning to the former, said:

"Madam, I wish to say a few words in confidence to my cousin here. Can I be permitted to do so?"

"Most certainly, young gentleman; Sister Theresa is not restricted. It was at her own request that I attended her hither."

"Thank you, dear lady—that which I have to say to—Sister Theresa—involves the confidence of others: else I should not have made the request that you have so kindly granted," said Cloudy, considerably mollified.

The Abbess curtsied in the old stately way, and retired.

Cloudy looked at Jacquelina reproachfully.

"Are you going to be a nun, Lina?"

"Yes. Oh, Cloudy, Cloudy! what do you come here to disturb my thoughts so for? Oh, Cloudy! every time you come to see me, you do so upset and confuse my mind! You have no idea how many aves and paters, and psalms and litanies I have to say before I can quiet my mind down again! And now this is worse than all. Dear, dear Cloudy!—St. Mary, forgive me, I never meant that—I meant plain Cloudy—see how you make me sin in words! What did you send Mother Ettienne away for?"

"That I might talk to you alone. Why do you deny me that small consolation, Lina? How have I offended, that you should treat me so?"

"In no way at all have you offended, dearest Cloudy—St. Peter! there it is again—I mean only Cloudy."

"Never mind explaining the distinction. You are going to be a nun, you say! Very well—let that pass, too! But you must leave your convent, and go into the world yet once more, and then I shall have opportunities of talking to you before your return."

"No, no; never will I leave my convent—never will I subject my soul to such a temptation."

"My dear Lina, I have the cabalistic words that must draw you forth—listen! Our cousin, Thurston Willcoxen, is in prison, charged with the murder of Marian Mayfield"—a stifled shriek from Jacquelina—"and there is circumstantial evidence against him strong enough to ruin him forever, if it does not cost him his life. Now, Lina, I cannot be wrong in supposing that you know who struck that death-blow, and that your evidence can thoroughly exonerate Thurston from suspicion! Am I right?"

"Yes! yes! you are right," exclaimed Jacquelina, in great agitation.

"You will go, then?"

"Yes! yes."

"When?"

"In an hour—this moment—with you."

"With me?"

"Yes! I may do so in such a case. I must do so! Oh! Heaven knows, I have occasioned sin enough, without causing more against poor Thurston!"

"You will get ready, then, immediately, dear Lina. Are you sure there will be no opposition?"

"Certainly not. Why, Cloudy, are you one of those who credit 'raw head and bloody bones' fables about convents? I have no jailer but my own conscience, Cloudy. Besides, my year's vows expired yesterday, and I am free for awhile, before renewing them perpetually," said Jacquelina, hurrying away to get ready.

"And may I be swung to the yard-arm if ever I let you renew them," said Cloudy, while he waited for her.

Jacquelina was soon ready, and Cloudy rejoined her in the front entry, behind the grating of which the good old portress, as she watched the handsome middy drive off with her young postulant, devoutly crossed herself, and diligently told her beads.

* * * * *

Commodore Waugh and his family were returning slowly from the South, stopping at all the principal towns for long rests on their way homeward.

The commodore was now a wretched, helpless old man, depending almost for his daily life upon the care and tenderness of Mrs. Waugh.

Good Henrietta, with advancing years, had continued to "wax fat," and now it was about as much as she could do, with many grunts, to get up and down stairs. Since her double bereavement of her "Hebe" and her "Lapwing," her kind, motherly countenance had lost somewhat of its comfortable jollity, and her hearty mellow laugh was seldom heard. Still, good Henrietta was passably happy, as the world goes, for she had the lucky foundation of a happy temper and temperament—she enjoyed the world, her friends and her creature comforts—her sound, innocent

sleep—her ambling pony, or her easy carriage—her hearty meals and her dreamy doze in the soft armchair of an afternoon, while Mrs. L'Oiseau droned, in a dreary voice, long homilies for the good of the commodore's soul.

Mrs. L'Oiseau had got to be one of the saddest and maddest fanatics that ever afflicted a family. And there were hours when, by holding up too graphic, terrific, and exasperating pictures of the veteran's past and present wickedness and impenitence, and his future retribution, in the shape of an external roasting in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone—she drove the old man half frantic with rage and fright! And then she would nearly finish him by asking: "If hell was so horrible to hear of for a little while, what must it be to feel forever and ever?"

They had reached Charleston, on their way home. Mrs. L'Oiseau, too much fatigued to persecute her uncle for his good, had gone to her chamber.

The commodore was put comfortably to bed.

And Mrs. Waugh took the day's paper, and sat down by the old man's side, to read him the news until he should get sleepy. As she turned the paper about, her eyes fell upon the same paragraph that had so agitated Marian. Now, Henrietta was by no means excitable—on the contrary, she was rather hard to be moved; but on seeing this announcement of the arrest of Mr. Willcoxen, for the crime with which he was charged, an exclamation of horror and amazement burst from her lips. In another moment she had controlled herself, and would gladly have kept the exciting news from the sick man until the morning.

But it was too late—the commodore had heard the unwonted cry, and now, raised upon his elbow, lay staring at her with his great fat eyes, and insisting upon knowing what the foul fiend she meant by screeching out in that manner?

It was in vain to evade the question—the commodore would hear the news. And Mrs. Waugh told him.

"And by the bones of Paul Jones, I always believed it!" falsely swore the

commodore; and thereupon he demanded to hear "all about it."

Mrs. Waugh commenced, and in a very unsteady voice read the long account quite through. The commodore made no comment, except an occasional grunt of satisfaction, until she had finished it, when he growled out:

"Knew it!—hope they'll hang him!—d——d rascal! If it hadn't been for him, there'd been no trouble in the family! Now call Festus to help to turn me over, and tuck me up, Henrietta; I want to go to sleep!"

That night Mrs. Waugh said nothing, but the next morning she proposed hurrying homeward with all possible speed.

But the commodore would hear of no such thing. He swore roundly that he would not stir to save the necks of all the scoundrels in the world, much less that of Thurston, who, if he did not kill Marian, deserved richly to be hanged for giving poor Nace so much trouble.

Mrs. Waugh coaxed and urged in vain. The commodore rather liked to hear her do so, and so the longer she pleaded, the more obstinate and dogged he grew, until at last Henrietta desisted—telling him, very well!—justice and humanity alike required her presence near the unhappy man, and so, whether the commodore chose to budge or not, she should surely leave Charleston in that very evening's boat for Baltimore, so as to reach Leonardtown in time for the trial. Upon hearing this, the commodore swore furiously; but knowing of old that nothing could turn Henrietta from the path of duty, and dreading above all things to lose her comfortable attentions, and be left to the doubtful mercies of Mary L'Oiseau, he yielded, though with the worst possible grace, swearing all the time that he hoped the villain would swing for it yet.

And then the trunks were packed, and the travelers resumed their homeward journey.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE TRIAL.

The day of the trial came. It was a bright spring day, and from an early hour in the morning the village was crowded to overflowing with people collected from all parts of the county. The court-room was filled to suffocation. It was with the greatest difficulty that order could be maintained when the prisoner, in the custody of the high sheriff, was brought into court.

The venerable presiding judge was supposed to be unfriendly to the accused, and the State's Attorney was known to be personally, as well as officially, hostile to his interests. So strongly were the minds of the people prejudiced upon one side or the other that it was with much trouble that twelve men could be found who had not made up their opinions as to the prisoner's innocence or guilt. At length, however, a jury was empaneled, and the trial commenced. When the prisoner was placed at the bar, and asked the usual question, "Guilty or not guilty?" some of the old haughtiness curled the lip and flashed from the eye of Thurston Willcoxen, as though he disdained to answer a charge so base; and he replied in a low, scornful tone:

"Not guilty, your honor."

The opening charge of the State's Attorney had been carefully prepared. Mr. Thomson had never in his life had so important a case upon his hands, and he was resolved to make the most of it. His speech was well reasoned, logical, eloquent. To destroy in the minds of the jury every favorable impression left by the late blameless and beneficent life of Mr. Willcoxen, he did not fail to adduce, from olden history, and from later times, every signal instance of depravity, cloaked with hypocrisy, in high places; he enlarged upon wolves in sheeps' clothing—Satan in an angel's garb, and dolefully pointed out how many times the indignant question of—"Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?"—had been answered by results in the affirmative. He raked up David's sin from the ashes of ages. Where was the scene of

that crime, and who was its perpetrator—in the court of Israel, by the King of Israel—a man after God's own heart. Could the gentlemen of the jury be surprised at the appalling discovery so recently made, as if great crimes in high places were impossible or new things under the sun? He did not fail to draw a touching picture of the victim, the beautiful, young stranger-girl, whom they all remembered and loved—who had come, an angel of mercy, on a mission of mercy, to their shores. Was not her beauty, her genius, her goodness—by which all there had at some time been blessed—sufficient to save her from the knife of the assassin? No! as he should shortly prove. Yet all these years her innocent blood had cried to Heaven in vain; her fate was unavenged, her manes unappeased.

All the women, and all the simple-hearted and unworldly among the men, were melted into tears, very unpropitious to the fate of Thurston; tears not called up by the eloquence of the prosecuting attorney, so much as by the mere allusion to the fate of Marian, once so beloved, and still so fresh in the memories of all.

Thurston heard all this—not in the second-hand style with which I have summed it up—but in the first vital freshness, when it was spoken with a logic, force, and fire that carried conviction to many a mind. Thurston looked upon the judge—his face was stern and grave. He looked upon the jury—they were all strangers, from distant parts of the county, drawn by idle curiosity to the scene of trial, and arriving quite unprejudiced. They were not his "peers," but, on the contrary, twelve as stolid-looking brothers as ever decided the fate of a gentleman and scholar. Thence he cast his eyes over the crowd in the court-room.

There were his parishioners! hoary patriarchs and gray-haired matrons, stately men and lovely women, who, from week to week, for many years, had still hung delighted on his discourses, as though his lips had been touched with fire, and all his words inspired! There they were around him again! But oh! how different the relations and the circumstances! There they sat, with stern brows and averted faces,

or downcast eyes, and "lips that scarce their scorn forbore." No eye or lip among them responded kindly to his searching gaze, and Thurston turned his face away again; for an instant his soul sunk under the pall of despair that fell darkening upon it. It was not conviction in the court he thought of—he would probably be acquitted by the court—but what should acquit him in public opinion? The evidence that might not be strong enough to doom him to death would still be sufficient to destroy forever his position and his usefulness. No eye, thenceforth, would meet his own in friendly confidence. No hand grasp his in brotherly fellowship.

The State's Attorney was still proceeding with his speech. He was now stating the case, which he promised to prove by competent witnesses—how the prisoner at the bar had long pursued his beautiful but hapless victim—how he had been united to her by a private marriage—that he had corresponded with her from Europe—that upon his return they had frequently met—that the prisoner, with the treachery that would soon be proved to be a part of his nature, had grown weary of his wife, and transferred his attentions to another and more fortune-favored lady—and finally, that upon the evening of the murder he had decoyed the unhappy young lady to the fatal spot, and then and there effected his purpose. The prosecuting attorney made this statement, not with the brevity with which it is here reported, but with a minuteness of detail and warmth of coloring that harrowed up the hearts of all who heard it. He finished by saying that he should call the witnesses in the order of time corresponding with the facts they came to prove.

"Oliver Murray will take the stand."

This, the first witness called, after the usual oath, deposed that he had first seen the prisoner and the deceased together in the Library of Congress; had overheard their conversation, and suspecting some unfairness on the part of the prisoner, had followed the parties to the navy yard, where he had witnessed their marriage ceremony.

"When was the next occasion upon which you saw the prisoner?"

"On the night of the 8th of April, 182-, on the coast, near Pine Bluff. I had landed from a boat, and was going inland when I passed him. I did not see his face distinctly, but recognized him by his size and form, and peculiar air and gait. He was hurrying away, with every mark of terror and agitation."

This portion of Mr. Murray's testimony was so new to all as to excite the greatest degree of surprise, and in no bosom did it arouse more astonishment than in that of Thurston. The witness was strictly cross-questioned by the counsel for the prisoner, but the cross-examination failed to weaken his testimony, or to elicit anything more favorable to the accused. Oliver Murray was then directed to stand aside.

The next witness was Miriam Shields. Deeply veiled and half fainting, the poor girl was led in between Colonel and Miss Thornton, and allowed to sit while giving evidence. When told to look at the prisoner at the bar, she raised her death-like face, and a deep, gasping sob broke from her bosom. But Thurston fixed his eyes kindly and encouragingly upon her—his look said plainly: "Fear nothing, dear Miriam! Be courageous! Do your stern duty, and trust in God."

Miriam then identified the prisoner as the man she had twice seen alone with Marian at night. She further testified that upon the night of April 8th, 182-, Marian had left home late in the evening to keep an appointment—from which she had never returned. That in the pocket of the dress she had laid off was found the note appointing the meeting upon the beach for the night in question. Here the note was produced. Miriam identified the handwriting as that of Mr. Willcoxen.

Paul Douglass was next called to the stand, and required to give his testimony in regard to the handwriting. Paul looked at the piece of paper that was placed before him, and he was sorely tempted. How could he swear to the handwriting unless he had actually seen the hand write it? he asked himself. He looked at his brother. But Thurston saw the struggle in his mind, and his countenance was stern and high, and

his look authoritative, and commanding—it said: "Paul! do not dare to deceive yourself. You know the handwriting. Speak the truth if it kill me." And Paul did so.

The next witness that took the stand was Dr. Brightwell—the good old physician gave his evidence very reluctantly—it went to prove the fact of the prisoner's absence from the deathbed of his grandfather upon the night of the reputed murder, and his distracted appearance when returning late in the morning.

"Why do you say reputed murder?"

"Because, sir, I never consider the fact of a murder established, until the body of the victim has been found."

"You may stand down."

Dr. Solomon Weismann was next called to the stand, and corroborated the testimony of the last witness.

Several other witnesses were then called in succession, whose testimony being only corroborative, was not very important. And the prisoner was remanded, and the court adjourned until ten o'clock the next morning.

"Life will be saved, but position and usefulness in this neighborhood gone forever, Paul," said Thurston, as they went out.

"Evidence very strong—very conclusive to our minds, yet not sufficient to convict him," said one gentleman to another.

"I am of honest Dr. Brightwell's opinion—that the establishment of a murder needs as a starting point the finding of the body; and, moreover, that the conviction of a murderer requires an eye-witness to the deed. The evidence, so far as we have heard it, is strong enough to ruin the man, but not strong enough to hang him," said a third.

"Ay! but we have not heard all, or the most important part of the testimony. The State's Attorney has not fired his great gun yet," said a fourth, as the crowd elbowed, pushed, and struggled out of the court-room.

Those from distant parts of the county remained in the village all night—those nearer returned home to come back in the morning.

The second day of the trial, the village was more crowded than before. At ten o'clock the court opened, the prisoner was shortly afterward brought in, and the prosecution renewed its examination of witnesses. The next witness that took the stand was a most important one. John Miles, captain of the schooner Plover. He deposed that in the month of April, 182-, he was mate in the schooner Blanch, of which his father was the captain. That in said month the prisoner at the bar had hired his father's vessel to carry off a lady whom the prisoner declared to be his own wife; that they were to take her to the Bermudas. That to effect their object, his father and himself had landed near Pine Bluff; the night was dark, yet he soon discerned the lady walking alone upon the beach. They were bound to wait for the arrival of the prisoner, and a signal from him before approaching the lady. They waited some time, watching from their cover the lady as she paced impatiently up and down the sands. At length they saw the prisoner approaching. He was closely wrapped up in his cloak, and his hat was pulled over his eyes, but they recognized him well by his air and gait. They drew nearer still, keeping in the shadow, waiting for the signal. The lady and the prisoner met—a few words passed between them—of which he, the deponent, only heard "Thurston?" "Yes, Thurston!" and then the prisoner raised his arm and struck, and the lady fell. His father was a cautious man, and when he saw the prisoner rush up the cliff and disappear, when he saw that the lady was dead, and that the storm was beginning to rage violently and the tide was coming in, and fearing, besides, that he should get into trouble, he hurried into the boat and put off and boarded the schooner, and as soon as possible set sail for Bermuda. They had kept away from this coast for years, that is to say, as long as the father lived.

John Miles was cross-examined by Mr. Romford, but without effect.

This testimony bore fatally upon the prisoner's cause—the silence of consternation

reigned through the crowd.

Thurston Willcoxen, when he heard this astounding evidence, first thought that the witness was perjured, but when he looked closely upon his open, honest face, and fearless eye and free bearing, he saw that no consciousness of falsehood was there and he could but grant that the witness, naturally deceived by "foregone conclusions," had inevitably mistaken the real murderer for himself.

Darker and darker lowered the pall of fate over him—the awful stillness of the court was oppressive, was suffocating; a deathly faintness came upon him, for now, for the first time, he fully realized the awful doom that threatened him. Not long his nature bowed under the burden—his spirit rose to throw it off, and once more the fine head was proudly raised, nor did it once sink again. The last witness for the prosecution was called and took the stand, and deposed that he lived ten miles down the coast in an isolated, obscure place; that on the first of May, 182-, the body of a woman had been found at low tide upon the beach, that it had the appearance of having been very long in the water—the clothing was respectable, the dress was dark blue stuff, but was faded in spots—there was a ring on the finger, but the hand was so swollen that it could not be got off. His poor neighbors of the coast assembled. They made an effort to get the coroner, but he could not be found. And the state of the body demanded immediate burial. When cross-questioned by Lawyer Romford, the witness said that they had not then heard of any missing or murdered lady, but had believed the body to be that of a shipwrecked passenger, until they heard of Miss Mayfield's fate.

Miriam was next recalled. She came in as before, supported between Colonel and Miss Thornton. Every one who saw the poor girl, said that she was dying. When examined, she deposed that Marian, when she left home, had worn a blue merino dress—and, yes, she always wore a little locket ring on her finger. Drooping and fainting as she was, Miriam was allowed to leave the court-room. This closed the

evidence of the prosecution.

The defense was taken up and conducted with a great deal of skill. Mr. Romford enlarged upon the noble character his client had ever maintained from childhood to the present time—they all knew him—he had been born and had ever lived among them—what man or woman of them all would have dared to suspect him of such a crime? He spoke warmly of his truth, fidelity, Christian zeal, benevolence, philanthropy and great public benefits.

I have no space nor time to give a fair idea of the logic and eloquence with which Mr. Romford met the charges of the State's Attorney, nor the astute skill with which he tried to break down the force of the evidence for the prosecution. Then he called the witnesses for the defense. They were all warm friends of Mr. Willcoxen, all had known him from boyhood, none would believe that under any possible circumstances he could commit the crime for which he stood indicted. They testified to his well-known kindness, gentleness and benevolence—his habitual forbearance and command of temper, even under the most exasperating provocations—they swore to his generosity, fidelity and truthfulness in all the relations of life. In a word, they did the very best they could to save his life and honor—but the most they could do was very little before the force of such evidence as stood arrayed against him. And all men saw that unless an alibi could be proved, Thurston Willcoxen was lost! Oh! for that alibi. Paul Douglass was again undergoing an awful temptation. Why, he asked himself, why should he not perjure his soul, and lose it, too, to save his brother's life and honor from fatal wrong? And if there had not been in Paul's heart a love of truth greater than his fear of hell, his affection for Thurston would have triumphed, he would have perjured himself.

The defense here closed. The State's Attorney did not even deem it necessary to speak again, and the judge proceeded to charge the jury. They must not, he said, be blinded by the social position, clerical character, youth, talents, accomplishments or

celebrity of the prisoner—with however dazzling a halo these might surround him. They must deliberate coolly upon the evidence that had been laid before them, and after due consideration of the case, if there was a doubt upon their minds, they were to let the prisoner have the full benefit of it—wherever there was the least uncertainty it was right to lean to the side of mercy.

The case was then given to the jury. The jury did not leave their box, but counseled together in a low voice for half an hour, during which a death-like silence, a suffocating atmosphere filled the court-room.

Thurston alone was calm, his soul had collected all its force to meet the shock of whatever fate might come—honor or dishonor, life or death!

Presently the foreman of the jury arose, followed by the others.

Every heart stood still.

"Gentlemen of the jury, have you agreed upon your verdict?" demanded the judge.

"Yes, your honor," responded the foreman, on the part of his colleagues.

"How say you—is the prisoner at the bar 'Guilty or not guilty?'"

"Not guilty!" cried the shrill tones of a girl near the outer door, toward which all eyes, in astonishment and inquiry, were now turned, to see a slight female figure, in the garb of a Sister of Mercy, clinging to the arm of Cloudesley Mornington, and who was now pushing and elbowing his way through the crowd toward the bench.

All gave way—many that were seated arose to their feet, and spoke in eager whispers, or looked over each others' heads.

"Order! silence in the court!" shouted the marshal.

"Your honor—this lady is a vitally important witness for the defense," said Cloudy, pushing his way into the presence of the judge, leaving his female companion standing before the bench and then hurrying to the dock, where he grasped the hand of the prisoner, exclaiming, breathlessly: "Saved—Thurston! Saved!"

"Order! silence!" called out the marshal, by way of making himself agreeable—for there was silence in the court, where all the audience at least were more anxious to hear than to speak.

"Your honor, I move that the new witness be heard," said Mr. Romford.

"The defense is closed—the charge given to the jury, who have decided upon their verdict," answered the State's Attorney.

"The verdict has not been rendered, the jury have the privilege of hearing this new witness," said the judge.

The jury were unanimous in the resolution to withhold their verdict until they had heard.

This being decided, the Sister of Mercy took the stand, threw aside her long, black veil, and revealed the features of Jacquelina; but so pale, weary, anxious and terrified, as to be scarcely recognizable.

The usual oath was administered.

And while Cloudy stood triumphantly by the side of Mr. Willcoxen, Jacquelina prepared to give her evidence.

She was interrupted by a slight disturbance near the door, and the rather noisy entrance of several persons, whom the crowd, on beholding, recognized as Commodore Waugh, his wife, his niece, and his servant. Some among them seemed to insist upon being brought directly into the presence of the judge and jury—but the officer near the door pointed out to them the witness on the stand, waiting to give testimony; and on seeing her they subsided into quietness, and suffered themselves to be set aside for a while.

When this was over—a lady, plainly dressed, and close-veiled, entered, and addressed a few words to the same janitor. But the latter replied as he had to the others, by pointing to the witness on the stand. The veiled lady seemed to acquiesce,

and sat down where the officer directed her.

"Order! silence in the court!" cried the marshal, not to be behindhand.

And order and silence reigned when the Sister gave in her evidence as follows:

"My name is Jacquelina L'Oiseau—not Grimshaw—for I never was the wife of Dr. Grimshaw. I do not like to speak further of myself, yet it is necessary, to make my testimony clear. While yet a child I was contracted to Dr. Grimshaw in a civil marriage, which was never ratified. I was full of mischief in these days, and my greatest pleasure was to torment and provoke my would-be bridegroom; alas! alas! it was to that wanton spirit that all the disaster is owing. Thurston Willcoxen and Marian Mayfield were my intimate friends. On the morning of the 8th of April, 182-, they were both at Luckenough. Thurston left early. After he was gone Marian chanced to drop a note, which I picked up and read. It was in the handwriting of Thurston Willcoxen, and it appointed a meeting with Marian upon the beach, near Pine Bluff, for that evening."

Here Mr. Romford placed in her hands the scrap of paper that had already formed such an important part of the evidence against the prisoner.

"Is that the note of which you speak?"

"Yes—that is the note. And when I picked it up the wanton spirit of mischief inspired me with the wish to use it for the torment of Dr. Grimshaw, who was easily provoked to jealously! Oh! I never thought it would end so fatally! I affected to lose the note, and left it in his way. I saw him pick it up and read it. I felt sure he thought—as I intended he should think—it was for me. There were other circumstances also to lead him to the same conclusion. He dropped the note where he had picked it up and pretended not to have seen it; afterwards I in the same way restored it to Marian. To carry on my fatal jest, I went home in the carriage with Marian, to Old Field Cottage, which stands near the coast. I left Marian there and set out to return to Luckenough—laughing all the time, alas! to think that Dr. Grimshaw

had gone to the coast to intercept what he supposed to be my meeting with Thurston! Oh, God, I never thought such jests could be so dangerous! Alas! alas! he met Marian Mayfield in the dark, and between the storm without and the storm within—the blindness of night and the blindness of rage—he stabbed her before he found out his mistake, and he rushed home with her innocent blood on his hands and clothing—rushed home and into my presence, to reproach me as the cause of his crime, to fill my bosom with undying remorse, and then to die! He had in the crisis of his passion, ruptured an artery and fell—so that the blood found upon his hands and clothing was supposed to be his own. No one knew the secret of his blood guiltiness but myself. In my illness and delirium that followed I believe I dropped some words that made my aunt, Mrs. Waugh, and Mr. Cloudesley Mornington, suspect something; but I never betrayed my knowledge of the dead man's unintentional crime, and would not do so now, but to save the innocent. May I now sit down?"

No! the State's Attorney wanted to take her in hand, and cross-examine her, which he began to do severely, unsparingly. But as she had told the exact truth, though not in the clearest style, the more the lawyer sifted her testimony, the clearer and more evident its truthfulness and point became; until there seemed at length nothing to do but acquit the prisoner. But courts of law are proverbially fussy, and now the State's Attorney was doing his best to invalidate the testimony of the last witness.

Turn we from them to the veiled lady, where she sat in her obscure corner of the room, hearing all this.

Oh! who can conceive, far less portray the joy, the unspeakable joy that filled her heart nearly to breaking! He was guiltless! Thurston, her beloved, was guiltless in intention, as he was in deed! the thought of crime had not been near his heart! his long remorse had been occasioned by what he had unintentionally made her suffer. He was all that he had lately appeared to the world! all that he had at first appeared

to her!—faithful, truthful, constant, noble, generous—her heart was vindicated! her love was not the madness, the folly, the weakness that her intellectual nature had often stamped it to be! Her love was vindicated, for he deserved it all! Oh! joy unspeakable—oh! joy insupportable!

She was a strong, calm, self-governing woman—not wont to be overcome by any event or any emotion—yet now her head, her whole form, drooped forward, and she sank upon the low balustrade in front of her seat—weighed down by excess of happiness—happiness so absorbing that for a time she forgot everything else; but soon she remembered that her presence was required near the bench, to put a stop to the debate between the lawyers, and she strove to quell the tumultuous excitement of her feelings, and to recover self-command before going among them.

In the meantime, near the bench, the counsel for the prisoner had succeeded in establishing the validity of the challenged testimony, and the case was once more about to be recommitted to the jury, when the lady, who had been quietly making her way through the crowd toward the bench, stood immediately in front of the judge, raised her veil, and Marian Mayfield stood revealed.

With a loud cry the prisoner sprang upon his feet; but was immediately captured by two officers, who fancied he was about to escape.

Marian did not speak one word, she could not do so, nor was it necessary—there she stood alive among them—they all knew her—the judge, the officers, the lawyers, the audience—there she stood alive among them—it was enough!

The audience arose in a mass, and "Marian!" "Marian Mayfield!" was the general exclamation, as all pressed toward the newcomer.

Jacquelina, stunned with the too sudden joy, swooned in the arms of Cloudy, who, between surprise and delight, had nearly lost his own senses.

The people pressed around Marian, with exclamations and inquiries.

The marshal forgot to be disorderly with vociferations of "Order!" and stood among

the rest, agape for news.

Marian recovered her voice and spoke:

"I am not here to give any information; what explanation I have to make is due first of all to Mr. Willcoxen, who has the right to claim it of me when he pleases," and turning around she moved toward the dock, raising her eyes to Thurston's face, and offering her hand.

How he met that look—how he clasped that hand—need not be said—their hearts were too full for speech.

The tumult in the court-room was at length subdued by the rising of the judge to make a speech—a very brief one:

"Mr. Willcoxen is discharged, and the court adjourned," and then the judge came down from his seat, and the officers cried, "make way for the court to pass." And the way was made. The judge came up to the group, and shook hands first with Mr. Willcoxen, whom he earnestly congratulated, and then with Marian, who was an old and esteemed acquaintance, and so bowing gravely, he passed out.

Still the crowd pressed on, and among them came Commodore Waugh and his family, for whom way was immediately made.

Mrs. Waugh wept and smiled, and exclaimed: "Oh! Hebe! Oh! Lapwing!"

The commodore growled out certain inarticulate anathemas, which he intended should be taken as congratulations, since the people seemed to expect it of him.

And Mary L'Oiseau pulled down her mouth, cast up her eyes and crossed herself when she saw the consecrated hand of Sister Theresa clasped in that of Cloudy!

But Thurston's high spirit could not brook this scene an instant longer. And love as well as pride required its speedy close. Marian was resting on his arm—he felt the clasp of her dear hand—he saw her living face—the angel brow—the clear eyes—the rich auburn tresses, rippling around the blooming cheek—he heard her

dulcet tones—yet—it seemed too like a dream!—he needed to realize this happiness.

"Friends," he said, "I thank you for the interest you show in us. For those whose faith in me remained unshaken in my darkest hour, I find no words good enough to express what I shall ever feel. But you must all know how exhausting this day has been, and how needful repose is"—his eyes here fell fondly and proudly upon Marian—"to this lady on my arm. After to-morrow we shall be happy to see any of our friends at Dell-Delight." And bowing slightly from right to left, he led his Marian through the opening crowd.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

REUNION.

Who shall follow them, or intrude on the sacredness of their reconciliation, or relate with what broken tones, and frequent stops and tears and smiles, and clinging embraces, their mutual explanations were made?

At last Marian, raising her head from his shoulder, said:

"But I come to you a bankrupt, dear Thurston! I have inherited and expended a large fortune since we parted—and now I am more than penniless, for I stand responsible for large sums of money owed by my 'Orphans Home' and 'Emigrants Help'—money that I had intended to raise by subscription."

"Now, I thank God abundantly for the wealth that He has given me. Your fortune, dearest Marian, has been nobly appropriated—and for the rest, it is my blessed privilege to assume all your responsibilities—and I rejoice that they are great! for, sweetest wife, and fairest lady, I feel that I never can sufficiently prove how much I love and reverence you—how much I would and ought to sacrifice for you!"

"And even now, dear Thurston, I came hither, bound on a mission to the Western prairies, to find a suitable piece of land for a colony of emigrants."

"I know it, fairest and dearest lady, I know it all. I will lift that burden from your shoulders, too, and all liabilities of yours do I assume—oh! my dear Marian! with how much joy! and I will labor with and for you, until all your responsibilities of every sort are discharged, and my liege lady is free to live her own life!"

This scene took place in the private parlor of the hotel, while Paul Douglass was gone to Colonel Thornton's lodgings, to carry the glad tidings to Miriam, and also to procure a carriage for the conveyance of the whole party to Dell-Delight.

He returned at last, accompanied by Miriam, whom he tenderly conducted into the room, and who, passing by all others, tottered forward, and sank, weeping, at the feet of Mr. Willcoxen, and clasping his knees, still wept, as if her heart would break.

Thurston stooped and raised her, pressed the kiss of forgiveness on her young brow, and then whispered:

"Miriam, have you forgotten that there is another here who claims your attention?" took her by the hand and led her to Marian.

The young girl was shy and silent, but Marian drew to her bosom, saying:

"Has my 'baby' forgotten me? And so, you would have been an avenger, Miriam. Remember, all your life, dear child, that such an office is never to be assumed by an erring human creature. 'Vengeance is mine, and I will repay, saith the Lord.'" And kissing Miriam fondly; she resigned her to Paul's care, and turned, and gave her own hand to Thurston, who conducted her to the carriage, and then returned for little Angel, who all this time had sat demurely in a little parlor chair.

They were followed by Paul and Miriam, and so set forth for Dell-Delight.

But little more remains to be told.

Thurston resigned his pastoral charge of the village Church; settled up his business in the neighborhood; procured a discreet woman to keep house at Dell-Delight; left Paul, Miriam and poor Fanny in her care, and set out with Marian on their western

journey, to select the site for the settlement of her emigrant protégés. After successfully accomplishing this mission, they returned East, and embarked for Liverpool, and thence to London, where Marian dissolved her connection with the "Emigrants' Help," and bade adieu to her "Orphans' Home." Thurston made large donations to both these institutions. And Marian saw that her place was well supplied to the "Orphans' Home" by another competent woman. Then they returned to America. Their travels had occupied more than twelve months. And their expenses, of all sorts, had absorbed more than a third of Mr. Willcoxen's princely fortune—yet with what joy was it lavished by his hand, who felt he could not do too much for his priceless Marian.

On their return home a heartfelt gratification met them—it was that the parish had shown their undiminished confidence in Mr. Willcoxen, and their high appreciation of his services, by keeping his pulpit open for him. And a few days after his settlement at home a delegation of the vestry waited upon him to solicit his acceptance of the ministry. And after talking with his "liege lady," as he fondly and proudly termed Marian, Mr. Willcoxen was well pleased to return a favorable answer.

And in a day or two Thurston and Marian were called upon to give decision in another case, to wit:

Jacquelina had not returned to Bethlehem, nor renewed her vows; but had doffed her nun's habit for a young lady's dress, and remained at Luckenough. Cloudy had not failed to push his suit with all his might. But Jacquelina still hesitated—she did not know, she said, but she thought she had no right to be happy, as other people had, she had caused so much trouble in the world, she reckoned she had better go back to her convent.

"And because you unintentionally occasioned some sorrow, now happily over, to some people, you would atone for the fault by adding one more to the list of victims,

and making me miserable. Bad logic, Lina, and worse religion."

Jacquelina did not know—she could not decide—after so many grave errors, she was afraid to trust herself. The matter was then referred—of all men in the world—to the commodore, who graciously replied, that they might go to the demon for him. But as Cloudy and Lina had no especial business with his Satanic Majesty they declined to avail themselves of the permission, and consulted Mrs. Waugh, whose deep, mellow laugh preceded her answer, when she said:

"Take heart, Lapwing! take heart, and all the happiness you can possibly get! I have lived a long time, and seen a great many people, good and bad, and though I have sometimes met people who were not so happy as they merited—yet I never have seen any one happier than they deserved to be! and that they cannot be so, seems to be a law of nature that ought to reconcile us very much to the apparent flourishing of the wicked."

But Mrs. L'Oiseau warned her daughter not to trust to "Aunty," who was so good-natured, and although such a misguided woman, that if she had her will she would do away with all punishment—yes, even with Satan and purgatory! But Jacquelina had much less confidence in Mrs. L'Oiseau than in Mrs. Waugh; and so she told Cloudy, who thought that he had waited already quite long enough, to wait until Marian and Thurston came home, and if they thought it would be right for her to be happy—why—then—maybe—she might be! But the matter must be referred to them.

And now it was referred to them, by the sorely tried Cloudy. And they gave Jacquelina leave to be "happy." And she was happy! And as for Cloudy, poor, constant fellow! he was so overjoyed that he declared he would petition the Legislature to change his name as no longer appropriate, for though his morning had been cloudy enough, his day was going to be a very bright one!

When Mrs. L'Oiseau heard of this engagement, she crossed herself, and told her

beads, and vowed that the world was growing so wicked that she could no longer live in it. And she commenced preparations to retire to a convent, to which in fact she soon after went, and where in strict truth, she was likely to be much happier than her nature would permit her to be elsewhere.

Cloudy and Lina were very quietly married, and took up their abode at the pleasant farmhouse of Locust Hill, which was repaired and refurnished for their reception. But if the leopard cannot change his spots, nor the Ethiope his skin—neither can the fairy permanently change her nature; for no sooner was Jacko's happiness secured, than the elfish spirit, the lightest part of her nature, effervesced to the top—for the torment of Cloudy. Jacko and Cloudy, even, had one quarrel—it was upon the first occasion after their marriage, of his leaving her to join his ship—and when the whilom Sister of Charity drove Cloudy nearly frantic by insisting—whether in jest or earnest no one on earth could tell—upon donning the little middy's uniform and going with him! However, the quarrel happily was never renewed, for before the next time of sailing, there appeared a certain tiny Cloudy at home, that made the land quite as dear as the sea to its mother. And this little imp became Mrs. Waugh's especial pet. And if Jacquelina did not train the little scion very straight, at least she did not twist him awry. And she even tried, in her fitful, capricious way, to reform her own manners, that she might form those of her little children. And Mrs. Waugh and dear Marian aided her and encouraged her in her uncertain efforts.

About this time, Paul and Miriam were united, and went to housekeeping in the pretty villa built for them upon the site of Old Field Cottage by Thurston, and furnished for them by Mrs. Waugh.

And a very pleasant country neighborhood they formed—these three young families—of Dell-Delight, Locust Hill and the villa.

Two other important events occurred in their social circle—first, poor harmless Fanny passed smilingly to her heavenly home, and all thought it very well.

And one night Commodore Waugh, after eating a good, hearty supper, was comfortably tucked up in bed, and went into a sound, deep sleep from which he never more awoke. May he rest in peace. But do you think Mrs. Waugh did not cry about it for two weeks, and ever after speak of him as the poor, dear commodore?

But Henrietta was of too healthful a nature to break her heart for the loss of a very good man, and it was not likely she was going to do so for the missing of a very uncomfortable one; and so in a week or two more her happy spirits returned, and she began to realize to what freedom, ease and cheerfulness she had fallen heir! Now she could live and breathe, and go and come without molestation. Now when she wished to open her generous heart to the claims of affection in the way of helping Lapwing or Miriam, who were neither of them very rich—or to the greater claims of humanity in the relief of the suffering poor, or the pardon of delinquent servants, she could do so to her utmost content, and without having to accompany her kind act with a deep sigh at the anticipation of the parlor storm it would raise at home. And though Mrs. Henrietta still "waxed fat," her good flesh was no longer an incumbrance to her—the leaven of cheerfulness lightened the whole mass.

Mrs. Waugh had brought her old maid Jenny back. Jenny had begged to come home to "old mistress" for she said it was "'stonishin how age-able," she felt, though nobody might believe it, she was "gettin' oler and oler, ebery singly day" of her life, and she wanted to end her days "'long o' ole mistress."

Old mistress was rich and good, and Luckenough was a quiet, comfortable home, where the old maid was very sure of being lodged, boarded, and clothed almost as well as old mistress herself—not that these selfish considerations entered largely into Jenny's mind, for she really loved Mrs. Henrietta.

And old mistress and old maid were never happier than on some fine, clear day, when seated on their two old mules, they ambled along through forest and over field, to spend a day with Lapwing or with Hebe—or perhaps with the "Pigeon Pair," as

they called the new married couple at the villa.

Yes; there was a time when Mrs. Henrietta was happier still! It was, when upon some birthday or other festival, she would gather all the young families—Thurston and Hebe, Cloudy and Lapwing, the Pigeons, and all the babies, in the big parlor of Luckenough, and sit surrounded by a flock of tiny lapwings, hebes and pigeons, forming a group that our fairy saucily called, "The old hen and chickens."

And what shall we say in taking leave of Thurston and Marian? He had had some faults, as you have seen—but the conquering of faults is the noblest conquest, and he had achieved such a victory. He called Marian the angel of his salvation. Year by year their affection deepened and strengthened, and drew them closer in heart and soul and purpose. From their home as from a center emanated a healthful, beneficent and elevating influence, happily felt through all their social circle. A lovely family grew around them—and among the beautiful children none were more tenderly nursed or carefully trained than the little waif, Angel. And in all the pleasant country neighborhood, the sweetest and the happiest home is that of Dell-Delight.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE MISSING BRIDE ***

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