





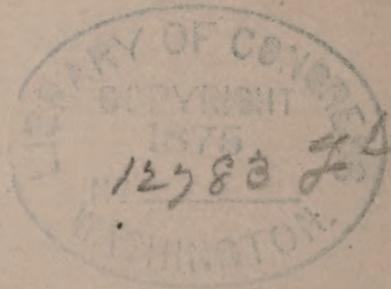
O'ER MOOR AND FEN.

O'ER MOOR AND FEN.

A Novel.

BY
CHARLOTTE WALSINGHAM,
AUTHOR OF "ANNETTE, OR THE CHRONICLES OF BELLEVUE."

35
—
"O'er moor and fen,
O'er crag and torrent till
The night is gone."
—



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BOOK FIRST.

O'ER MOOR AND FEN.

CHAPTER I.

UNCLE AND NEPHEW.

“Oh, my heart is sick with longing,
Longing to escape from study,
To the young face fair and ruddy
To the summer's day.”

IT was the month of August, in the year 1869, and the city of New York lay baking beneath a fervid summer sun. Not a cloud was in the sky to intervene between its rays and suffering humanity. Horses fell in their tracks overwhelmed by the heat; dogs lay panting on the sidewalks and in the gutters, disputing every inch of shade with *les gamins*, and even the bootblacks, that most wiry and untiring portion of the human race, had collapsed, and lay curled up on vacant doorsteps, regardless of all “shine” save that of the sun.

The fashionable parts of the city seemed deserted, so profound a silence reigned thereabout. No more rolling of handsome equipages along the paved streets; no prancing of fiery horses; no sounds of revelry issuing from the stately mansions, which stood sombre and gray, with closed windows and doors, on either side of the way.

A foreigner might have supposed Fifth Avenue to be depopulated, but a New Yorker would at once have exclaimed, "Every one is out of town, and, according to custom, the houses have gone into mourning—linen covers within, dust and ashes without!"

In the business portion of the city, however, life was not yet extinct, for Wall Street does not recognize either heat or fashion, but, like the sun, remains "in town" all summer; and here, in close offices, chafing like caged animals, were to be found unfortunate wretches, who, bound for life to the "Bulls" and "Bears" of the stock market, bore all the miseries of incarceration during the long hot days, without the air and comparative freedom of a zoölogical garden.

In one of these dens, on the day on which my story opens, sat a young man of prepossessing appearance, but who was nevertheless one of the most miserable specimens of the class I have just mentioned.

Most young men in his position had homes to return to when the business hours were over, and the afternoon trains bore them from heat and dust to domestic comfort and social enjoyment; but Robert Weston had neither home nor parents, and his evenings were not much more enjoyable than his days.

Left an orphan at an early age, he had been adopted by his uncle, Mr. John Roderick Von Decker, to whom he was indebted for his education, and in fact everything, even to his present position in the office in Wall Street.

Hitherto his summers and holidays had been passed with his cousins, but this year, unfortunately, he had displeased his uncle, and in consequence had been forbidden the house until such time as he should see the error of his ways.

Business was dull, and many were the impatient glances turned upon the clock by those favored ones who looked for a

happy release when the hour-hand indicated four; but Robert, or Roy, as he was commonly called, took no note of time, save to congratulate himself when the sun left his window, and the ghost of a breeze fluttered into the room.

Coat, vest, collar, cuffs, had one by one been discarded as the heat increased, and now, partly baring his breast, he turned his face towards the window, pushing back a mass of glossy black hair from a broad white forehead, with a careless, easy grace, and fell to work industriously filling in an outline sketch of a young girl drawn on a piece of waste paper.

His straight brows were drawn slightly together over an aquiline nose, and lashes long and silky as a girl's shaded a pair of large black eyes, as they followed the motion of his fingers, whilst from under a slight moustache issued a melancholy whistle, a fit accompaniment to his dismal reflections.

On the opposite side of the room sat Mr. Von Decker, too completely absorbed over his books and papers to pay much attention to his nephew's moods, and on whom the lugubrious music acted only as a gentle irritant, preventing him from lapsing altogether out of life, and becoming one with his ledger.

He was a man of about sixty years of age, hale and well preserved in all respects save his hair, which was as white as snow, and formed a vivid contrast to his keen bright eyes and florid complexion.

Whilst at his office, he was heart and soul absorbed in his business, and nothing short of personal violence ever aroused him when engaged with his books, yet, once at home, his cares were all forgotten, and no one was lighter-hearted, or more enthusiastic in the pursuit of enjoyment than himself.

Devoted to his wife and his family, which consisted of two daughters and three sons, he still found a place in his home and

heart for his sister's orphaned boy, and up to the present time, Roy had received nothing but unvaried kindness from his uncle, nor had he ever heard from him a harsh word.

The remembrance of his past happiness was ever present with the young man, and as he sat idly at his desk this hot morning, he could not but deeply deplore the circumstances that had caused him to offend so true a friend.

A vision of Beechcroft, his uncle's country-seat, and all its attendant pleasures, passed before him, and with a sigh of impatience at his weary exile, he dropped his pencil, and, rising, crossed the room to replace some books upon their proper shelves.

So accustomed was he to his uncle's automaton-like silence during business hours, that he was sometimes scarcely aware of his presence, and it was, therefore, with a start of surprise, that he heard his name called, as he passed his uncle's desk.

“ Roy ! ”

“ Sir ? ” and he paused beside the speaker, who, he now noticed, had closed his all-absorbing books, and, leaning back in his chair, was thoughtfully regarding his nephew.

“ Where are you going ? ” said Mr. Von Decker.

“ To put these books in their places, sir, ” replied the young man, bewildered at so unusual a demonstration of interest on the part of his uncle.

“ Ah, yes ; so I see, ” replied Mr. Von Decker ; “ but I was not speaking of the present moment. I intended to ask where you were going to pass your holidays. You have been at the office every day during all this warm weather, and if you have made arrangements with your friends to take a trip, I can let you go now, at any time, and that lazy boy, Jack, shall supply your place. ”

“ You are very kind, sir, ” replied the young man, hastily,

“but I have no plans for the summer. I do not care to leave the city — indeed, I cannot very well afford to.”

“I will advance you any sum you may require,” said his uncle, slowly; “or, rather, I will give it to you;” he added, “I owe you as much for exiling you from Beechcroft.”

“I would rather not increase my obligations, sir,” replied the young man, flushing deeply. “I already owe you more than I shall ever be able to repay. Let Jack enjoy himself,” he added, with a sigh of resignation; “a summer in the city will do me no harm — I am not at all delicate,” and he unconsciously straightened his symmetrical form, and expanded his chest as if to corroborate his words.

His uncle looked at him wistfully. “I wish,” he said, at length, “that you could put all this foolishness in regard to Elsie out of your head, and let me send you home again. Why will you stand thus in your own light? Come, act like a reasonable fellow; give me your word not to speak on forbidden subjects, and go to Beechcroft by the next boat. The girls will give you a hearty welcome.”

“I dare not promise, sir,” replied the young man, with feeling; “I have never yet broken my word, and have no desire to begin now. I cannot trust myself to see Elsie if I may not tell her that I love her.”

“Such folly!” said Mr. Von Decker, in a vexed tone. “The idea of a young man of your age, with the world before him, bowing down at the shrine of a child, a baby, not yet sixteen years old.”

“Sixteen last month, sir,” said Roy, with a smile.

“Ah, indeed,” said his uncle, sarcastically; “is she really so old as that? No wonder that you think it necessary for her to marry immediately. She will be gray-headed, doubtless, if she wait much longer. Come, Roy, you must see how pre-

posterous this is. If you must marry, pray find some one else. Surely there are plenty of attractive girls in the world, much better suited to be your wife than my little Elsie."

"Do you think there are many like her, sir?" replied Roy, pushing towards his uncle a paper-weight, in which was enclosed a photograph of a child of twelve or fourteen years of age, with small, regular features, delicately pencilled eyebrows, large hazel eyes, and a low, broad forehead, shaded by a perfect halo of curling golden hair.

Mr. Von Decker looked with a father's pride at the pretty picture before him, and a tender smile played over his face as he replied:

"No, Roy, no; she is a peerless girl, and quite as beautiful now as she gave promise of being when this was taken. She ought to marry well, with her many advantages," he continued, musingly.

"And is it not marrying well to marry the one she loves, and who would give his life to secure her happiness?" asked the young man, eagerly.

"Love is a very good foundation for happiness," replied Mr. Von Decker, with a smile; "but, alas, in these degenerate days, my boy, money is absolutely necessary for its completion."

"Is my poverty all that you object to in me, sir?" inquired Roy.

"That is all, Roy," replied his uncle, kindly, "but it is a great deal. Personally, my dear sister's child is very near my heart, and to no one would I so gladly resign my treasure as yourself, were you only in a position to support her; but look at it, you are penniless, and Elsie but sixteen years old. Educated as she has been, she is utterly unfit to be a poor man's wife, and young as she is, she is incapable of comprehending the fact; did I not, therefore, stand between you two foolish

children, you would exchange vows of everlasting fidelity, and end by making each other miserable for life."

"I will be very patient, sir," continued Roy, in a pleading tone. "I will bind her by no promise; only let me tell her how dearly I love her, and then I will bid her good-bye until such time as you see fit to recall me."

Mr. Von Decker answered by a negative shake of the head, and resting his head upon his hand, sighed deeply.

Roy stood silent also for a few moments, and then taking from his pocket a small box, he handed it to his uncle, saying:

"Then if I may not see her, sir, will you be so kind as to give her this? She has never returned to school since she was a very small child without some remembrance from me, and I would not have her think that I had forgotten her."

"No, no," exclaimed his uncle, hastily, "you must not waste your money on her, Roy. It is ridiculous. She has already more trinkets than she can wear," and he put his hands resolutely behind him, refusing most positively to accept the box that his nephew extended to him.

"It is such a trifle," said Roy, imploringly; and opening the box he disclosed to view a small gold chain, scarcely thicker than a golden thread, but Mr. Von Decker remained motionless, with his eyes fixed upon it, as though seeking some fresh pretext for refusing it.

Another silence ensued, during which the elder gentleman reviewed the subject in all its bearings. He felt assured that Elsie reciprocated her cousin's attachment, and had deeply resented his prolonged estrangement, being entirely ignorant of the cause, and attributing his absence to neglect. Should he leave matters as they stood, the chances were that she would treat the whole affair as a dream, and fix her heart on some one more suited to her; but at the same time her father felt that

he was practising deception towards her in regard to Roy's feelings, and his open nature revolted at it. She would be leaving home very soon on her way to school, he argued, and Roy promised not to bind her with any engagement. A week of "fool's paradise" could not do any great harm. And then a vision of Elsie's wistful face, should he return home this evening still companionless, completed his defeat, and, thoroughly routed, he gave up his last defence, saying sharply:

"There! Be off with you! Take it to her yourself."

"And the conditions, sir?" inquired the astonished young man.

"Make a fool of yourself, if you choose," growled his uncle; "but understand that I will have no formal engagement."

"All right, sir," said Roy, springing with alacrity into his clothes. "I do not wish to bind her for a dozen years to come. I only ask to be allowed to love her, and to tell her so."

"Go ahead," said his uncle, smiling at his enthusiasm; "but keep a firm hand on the helm, and a sharp lookout for breakers."

"Aye, aye, sir," replied the young man, as he hastened down the stairs, his heart beating with anticipated happiness.

CHAPTER II.

BEEHCROFT.

“A handsome house to lodge a friend,
A river at my garden's end.”

ALAS! when and where shall poor humanity be certain of finding happiness? Often our brightest hours are those of anticipation of that which in reality falls far short of our hopes. Yet it is as true as it is strange, that all mankind still believe in the existence of something better than they possess, and pass most of their lives in a hopeless pursuit of happiness, convinced that they know the secret of its hiding-place.

Men of all ages have sought it, and left behind them records of experience; but still the world groaneth and travaileth, and still the burden of its song is, “Where may happiness be found?”

Who is there of us that is willing to accept the experience of another? None; no, not one. We must each of us work out the problem of life for ourselves. “Though one rose from the dead,” yet would we not believe him.

“Happiness,” saith the shade of Epicurus, “is to be found in pleasure; not such as arises from sensual gratification or from vice, but from the enjoyment of the mind and the sweets of virtue.”

Epicurus, retire. Perchance in Hades thou mayest be listened to, but not on this earth wilt thou find many disciples. Thou art old fashioned, my friend, retire.

“Get out of my sunshine,” growled Diogenes to Alexander. His happiness was in a tub.

“Happiness?” exclaim those worthy literal gentlemen, Messrs. Webster, Walker, Reid, and others. “Is it not in our dictionaries? Look under the head of H.”

Coming down to a still later date, we have Mr. Robert Weston's opinion, as he makes his way to the water's edge this hot August day.

“Take the Staten Island steamer!” he exclaims, with a blissful smile. “Beechcroft is the abode of happiness.” And truly, of all these varied opinions, I am most inclined to accept his, for certain it is that the dwellers at that scene of fairy beauty seemed to bask in perpetual sunshine.

Most of my readers are probably familiar with the general character of Staten Island, and to those who are not, it is sufficient to state that it is nearly oval shaped, fourteen miles in length and eight in breadth. Its shores, along the bay of New York, are dotted with lively villages, and all over the broad range of hills that extend from the Narrows across the Island, are superb country-seats and neat farm-houses.

On one of these heights, and commanding a fine view of the bay, stood Beechcroft, with its grassy slopes as smooth and even as a piece of velvet; its parterres of flowers, its fountains, its miniature lake, looking not unlike a huge mirror in its glassy stillness, and over and above all its magnificent woodland.

About three-quarters of a mile from the shore stood the house, a handsome modern residence, replete with all that art, taste, and wealth could furnish.

A “*porte-cochère*,” composed of massive blocks of stone, stood before the principal entrance, which opened on a large hall, tiled with variegated marbles. On the right of this hall stood a long saloon-parlor, furnished as became its grand proportions.

The large windows, opening to the ground, were gracefully

draped with rose-colored tapestry and lace curtains. Luxurious chairs and low divans abounded. Statues, pictures, and various objects of *vertu* were placed here and there with artistic taste, whilst the large mirrors that covered the walls reflected and magnified the whole, so as to bewilder a stranger with all this repeated grandeur, and lead him to suppose himself in a suite of apartments all furnished precisely alike.

The corresponding space on the left was divided into two rooms, one of which was a dining-room and the other a library. Around the walls of the former, which were painted a neutral tint to form an effective background, were hung the family portraits.

From thence looked down Von Deckers of all ages, from the sere and yellow likeness of old Ulric Von Decker, the original purchaser of the Staten Island property, to the present proprietor's eldest son, Jack, whose fashionable attire and general air "*de bon ton*" seemed to be continually putting his worthy ancestor to the blush.

The room beyond this was, as I have said, the library, and here everything was beautifully *dis*-arranged. All the disorder of the household reigned in this apartment. It seemed as though the animal spirits of the family had here revenged themselves for their continual restraint in other parts of the well-ordered establishment.

Elsie's piano stood at one end of the room, and beside it hung Maude's guitar, whilst the music for both instruments lay around and about, upon chairs and tables, in hopeless confusion.

Then, again, a large easel struck the eye, with a half-finished picture thereon, begun by Maude, assisted by Elsie, with some master touches here and there by Messrs. Jack, Ned, and Alfred, or, as they were better known, "the boys."

Maude not unfrequently found it necessary to explain the

original design of this picture to visitors, so many were the changes it had undergone in the hands of these various artists, and she always pathetically alluded, at the same time, to the impossibility of prosecuting the study of art in a house where there were "boys," whilst they, on their part, demanded to know whether "boys" were to be expected to resist touching a picture when left continually upon an easel, with all the paints, pallettes, brushes, etc., within easy reach, inviting them constantly to their use.

Jack, of course, smoked and hunted; he added, therefore, as his contribution to this museum, numberless pipes, cigar-cases, and smoking-caps, not to speak of breech-loaders and pistols.

Edwin and Alfred, respectively eight and twelve years of age, had a taste for natural history, and supplied to the *omnium gatherum*, aquariums, large black beetles with pins run through them, snakes preserved in alcohol, and several other interesting subjects for natural science.

In this curiosity shop, which was indeed their favorite resort, were the family assembled on the morning when Roy Weston left New York, another victim to the search for happiness, and whilst we are awaiting his arrival, I may as well introduce the reader personally to the occupants of the room.

First, there is Maude, the eldest, aged twenty-three, and already considered by her younger brethren to be past the bloom of her youth.

As she sits in the recess of the large bow window, sorting her Berlin wool, or working with her small deft fingers, remarkable roses and lilies, as much unlike nature as possible, she might pass for a beautiful woman, with her yellow hair, her pale sweet face, and gentle languid motions; but, one glance at bright Elsie as she sits just now at the piano, with a ray of sunshine, which has stolen in through the half-closed shutters,

crowning her head with a diadem of light, and Maude ceases to be an object of attraction. In fact, she always seemed like a pale reflection of her sister, who glowed with life, light, and coloring.

Next in order comes Master Jack. This young gentleman has just reached his twenty-first birthday, but he passes for at least twenty-five. Of medium height, with eyes not unlike Elsie's, and a quantity of wavy hair two or three shades darker than hers, it was his lazy composure on ordinary occasions, more than his appearance, that gave him the air of a much older man.

Last, though not least, in his own estimation, stands Mr. Leonard Strathmore, the heir to all the Strathmores, and proprietor of Strathmore Park — the owner, also, of a house in town, a shooting-box (on the Hudson), a drag, fast horses, and, in fact, all the luxuries of life.

It is well that he was thus endowed with artificial attractions, for personally he was utterly insignificant, and without his broad acres and their attendant revenues, he would have met with but small success in society.

At the present time he was devoting himself to Elsie; hence his appearance in the family room, and, according to his established rule of courtship, he had been singing feeble love-songs to his idol all the morning, to the secret discomfiture of Maude, and the openly expressed dissatisfaction of Master Jack, who, regardless of manners, had thrown himself upon the sofa, and from thence criticised this vocal entertainment.

Duets succeeded solos, and Elsie was straining her voice to the utmost extent, in a dismal "adieu," Strathmore was howling a lamentable acquiescence, and Jack was groaning a double bass, when a quick, light step was heard in the hall, with a merry whistling accompaniment.

“Thank the Lord,” exclaimed Jack, *sotto voce*, “here comes Bob,” and he stretched himself out at full length with a sigh of satisfaction.

The step approaches, the door opens, and enter Bob. Not a man, nor even a lad, as the reader might suppose, only a slender girl.

The loose folds of a riding-skirt hung gracefully about her, a jaunty little cap rested upon her smooth dark hair, and her sparkling blue eyes flashing with mischievous daring, slightly *retroussé* nose, and brilliant complexion, completed a piquant picture, which answered well to the name of “Bob.”

She ceased whistling on the threshold as her rapid glance took in the tableau at the piano, and, with an expressive look at Jack, she pointed towards it with the end of her whip, then making a little “*moue*,” endeavored to steal unobserved into the room.

But Elsie had already noticed her entrance, and advanced, followed by the attentive Strathmore, to greet her.

“Good-morning, Bob,” she said, whilst Maude simply nodded a welcome from her seat. “How good of you to ride over in the heat. Will you go up to my room and change your dress before luncheon?”

“No, thanks,” replied Bob, advancing towards Jack; “I shall do very well as I am. I only came over to make this lazy fellow get up from his sofa, where my prophetic soul told me I should find him. Go back to your seat; do not let me interrupt the music, I beseech you. I do not think I know your young man,” she continued, in a low voice.

“Oh, I beg your pardon,” said Elsie, in confusion; “Mr. Strathmore, Miss Stevenson.”

The parties thus introduced bowed formally, but without much apparent interest in each other, and the young gentleman, after

a prolonged stare of surprise at the young lady, returned with alacrity to the piano, and the duets recommenced.

Bob, or rather, Roberta Stevenson, for such was the name given her by her "sponsors in baptism," looked about her for a moment, hesitating as to where she should sit down, and then, as Maude took no further notice of her, and Elsie was engaged, she dropped into a chair beside the still recumbent Jack.

Maude highly disapproved of Bob's manners, or rather her want of manners, and her general freedom of speech and action; she, therefore, took pains to be only coldly civil to her on all occasions, lest any warmer reception should be construed by her as encouragement of her lawless ways, and her increasing intimacy with Jack, which was a cause of great uneasiness to his sister.

Although Bob was too independent to care much for her opinion, her quick intelligence led her to perceive that for some reason her company was not acceptable to Maude; she was, therefore, very chary of intruding upon her.

But Jack had always a ready welcome for her, and thus she had accustomed herself to turn to him on occasions like the present, when there seemed no particular place assigned for her in the family.

"How long has this been going on?" she inquired of Jack, as she seated herself at his side, nodding her head, as she spoke, towards Elsie.

"They have been at it since nine o'clock this morning," groaned Jack, "and if they continue much longer, they will have an opportunity of singing my requiem."

"Has it come to such a pass as that?" said Bob, laughing, and disclosing thereby two rows of pretty white pearls.

"Alas, yes," replied Jack, "I am sinking rapidly; I shall hardly last through the next half-hour."

“Is it the music or the love-making that has brought my noble boy so low?” asked Bob.

“It is the frightful combination,” replied Jack, in a sepulchral tone. “Either might have been borne alone, but the continuous braying of that ass Strathmore, added to the lachrymose expression of his gooseberry eyes, are rather more than even my Christian fortitude can stand.”

“Thus then we part,”

sang Elsie, in a sweet treble voice.

“Thou hast my heart,”

replied Leonard's shrill tenor.

“Just listen to them!” exclaimed the exasperated Jack.

“My precious pet,” said Bob, unable to repress her merriment at his discomfiture, “let me take you away from here. Your brain will assuredly suffer if you continue to contemplate this interesting tableau much longer. Come with me at once, if you would preserve your reason.”

“Where will you take me?” grumbled Jack; “I would have gone away long ago, had I known where to take refuge, but their din can be heard all over the house, and I cannot make up my mind to go out while it is so confoundedly hot.”

“Was it afraid of its complexion?” said Bob, saucily. “Ah, well, it would be a pity to burn its dear nose. Borrow a veil from Maude, or, see, I have a sunshade on the end of my whip — you shall have that to hold over your pretty face.”

“Stop your nonsense, Bob,” replied Jack, with a grim smile. “I wish you would try the other end of that whip on Strathmore's shoulders,” he added, as she unfurled a pretty little sunshade, which was ingeniously attached to the whip-handle, and held it up for his inspection.

“I would much rather use it on you,” said Bob, playfully threatening him with it. “Get up, you lazy, good-for-nothing scamp, and come out with me, ‘Across the fields of barley O’.”

“Not if I know myself, and I think I do,” replied Jack. “Nothing but yourself or a salamander could stand the heat of the sun to-day, without being thoroughly cooked.”

“Yet there seems to be another human being who has survived the ordeal,” said Bob, “for, if I am not mistaken, I hear footsteps on the river-path.”

“By Jove!” said Jack, after listening attentively, “I believe there is some idiot ringing the door-bell; but it remains to be seen whether or not he be baked brown. Girls,” he added, “visitors.”

“Visitors!” exclaimed Maude, springing to her feet. “Oh, Elsie! There is some one at the hall-door, and you are still in your morning dress. What will you do?”

“Stay where I am, dear,” said Elsie, caressingly; “you are beautifully dressed, and look so lovely that no one who sees you will think of me, or ask to see any one but yourself.”

“I do not think the visitor is asking for any one,” said Bob; “he seems to be piloting himself here, without waiting for an invitation.” And true enough, as they paused to listen, they could hear a firm quick step approaching along the tiled floor.

Open the door once more, dear reader, and admit Mr. Robert Weston to the abode of happiness.

CHAPTER III.

THE ABODE OF HAPPINESS.

“Inconstant as the passing wind,
As winter's dreary frost unkind ;
To fix her were a task as vain
To count the April drops of rain.”

ROY!” exclaimed Maude, turning to greet the new comer with a smile ; “how long it is since we have seen you.”

“Welcome, little stranger,” said Jack, kissing his hand to him dramatically.

“My lord, I pray you be seated,” said Roberta, following suit, and rising she pushed a chair towards the young man, making at the same time a low obeisance.

“Really, I am overcome by your reception,” said Roy, but his eyes wandered eagerly to Elsie, who, to his surprise, gave him but a stately greeting from her throne, the music-stool, and then immediately turned to her music-book, on which she fixed her attention, although with heightened color and beating heart.

She was angry with Roy, and had determined to treat him coldly, but her heart rebelled at the task she had set it, and the chords became dis-cords under her trembling hands.

“Heavens and earth!” cried Jack, at this new grievance ; “your music is bad enough, Elsie, without the addition of false notes. What is it that you are trying to play?”

“Did I strike a false note?” said Elsie, stopping in confusion ; “how very stupid of me. I must try your patience sadly, Mr. Strathmore. The piece is called ‘The Widow's Last Lament,’”

she continued, turning to Jack, "it is new, and considered very pretty."

"It is to be hoped that it was her last," said Jack.

"Translated into English, Elsie, it means 'The tune the old cow died on!'" said Bob; "without doubt, that cow and your widow were one and the same."

"I think Miss Elsie confused the sharps with the flats," said Mr. Strathmore, politely. "It is difficult to avoid doing so, when reading a piece of music for the first time."

"I doubt if she knows a 'flat' when she sees one," muttered Jack, with a significant look at the last speaker.

"Fie! for shame!" said Bob, struggling with inward laughter. "If Annida were present, she would say you ought to be sent to the nursery."

"By the way, where is Miss De Luce?" inquired Roy, endeavoring to turn the conversation into a less personal channel, on perceiving that Elsie's cheeks were as red as roses; "she has not left you, I hope?"

"No such good fortune has befallen us," replied Jack. "In the words of the immortal poet,

"Miss Ann, Miss Ann, she sits in the sun,
As fair as a lily, as brown as a bun!"

"She is outside in the arbor, engaged in the Christian work of civilizing Arthur Leighton. But I say, Roy," he added, with animation, "if you have any influence with my sister Elsie, do persuade her to stop 'miauing,' before we are all reduced to a state of idiocy."

"I am not aware that I have any influence," said Roy, casting a reproachful look towards his fair cousin; "but even if I had, I should not use it in that way, for I am very fond of music, and your sister has a remarkably sweet voice."

“Oh, it is sweet, without doubt,” replied Jack, “but you see the present is a case of ‘lingering sweetness long drawn out,’ (namely, from nine o’clock A. M. to one o’clock P. M.,) and it is too great a stretch for one day. Too much sugar at a time destroys the digestion. I am on the verge of ‘musical cholera.’”

“I noticed that you were *choleric*,” said Bob, “but I thought it was owing to the love-making more than the music. Stop the duet, Mr. Weston, and I think we shall find a change for the better in our patient.”

“The love-making!” echoed Roy, looking anxiously from one to the other; “who is making love, and to whom?”

“Oh, the innocent babe, hear how he prattles!” exclaimed Jack. “He asks, forsooth, *who* is making love, when right before him stands ‘Coddled Gooseberries’ reducing himself to a syrup by the warmth of his feelings, and simmering away delightfully. Yield to the dictates of your heart, old fellow, and pitch him out of the window.”

“As long as your sister does not object to his company,” replied Roy, “I do not think any of us have a right to complain. He certainly does not intrude himself upon us”—but as he spoke he cast a threatening glance upon the young man, who was just then bending over his idol, not for the apparent purpose of being able to read the music, but, as Roy felt assured, now that his eyes had been opened, for the real purpose of being nearer the fair songstress, and enabled now and then to graze with his cheek that glorious shining hair.

“I believe they are going to sing again,” said Bob, with a hearty laugh at Jack’s discomfiture. “Come, my boy, let us retreat to the billiard-room. There we may knock about the balls, and make a noise ourselves.”

“Agreed,” said Jack, rising slowly to his feet; “let us go at

once. Give me your arm, Bob; you are a jewel of high price. Bless you, my child, for your suggestion." And thus they walked out of the room together, leaving Roy alone with the lovers, for Maude had gone to seek her mother.

For a few moments the young man hesitated as to what course he should pursue. Should he also leave the room, or, following his heart's desire, walk boldly up to the piano and address his cousin.

He at last decided to do the latter, and sauntering across the room, he picked up a piece of music which had fallen upon the floor and replaced it upon the music-stand. As he did so, the name caught his eye, "Oh, wert thou in the cauld, cauld blast." It was a duet that he had himself given Elsie when he was last with her.

"Have you learned this yet?" he asked.

"No," she replied coldly, "the contralto part is too low for my voice."

"That is easily remedied," said Roy; "we will transpose it. A tone or a half tone higher will make it all right."

"I do not think that would improve it," said Elsie. "It would then be as much too high for the tenor as my part is now too low for me."

"Not at all," replied Roy, eagerly; "my voice can easily compass the high notes. Let us try it."

"It is hardly worth while," replied Elsie, carelessly. "Even if you could sing it after the transposition, no one else could, and it is too much trouble to learn a song which can only be sung with one person. Do you not think so, Mr. Strathmore?"

"I object seriously, Miss Elsie, to your learning any song that I cannot sing," replied the gentleman addressed; "and I agree with you that the transposition would place the tenor part

entirely beyond the compass of any voice save that of a professional singer."

Roy felt no inclination to pronounce an eulogium upon his own voice; he therefore dropped the subject, merely saying:

"I yield to Mr. Strathmore's superior knowledge. Let the song remain as it is; perhaps I may be fortunate enough some day to find a voice to which it is adapted, and, meanwhile, as it is of no use to you, cousin, I may as well take possession of it."

He rolled up the music as he spoke, looking anxiously at Elsie, hoping to see an expression of regret upon her countenance, but she only bowed her acquiescence, and said:

"Certainly, it is your own; do with it what you please."

Roy's heart sank within him; alas, how changed was his cousin, and in so short a space of time.

"What is the subject under discussion, and why do you all look so cross?" said a rich, full voice from the open window, and Annida De Luce entered from the garden, followed by Mr. Arthur Leighton.

"Ah! Miss De Luce," said Roy, advancing towards her; "I am glad to meet you again; you have come upon us at an opportune moment, if you know how to sing, for Elsie, Mr. Strathmore, and myself are disputing as to whether or not this song is set too low."

"Oh, of course I sing," replied Annida, with a sweet smile, "every one sings, or think they do, which is all the same. Let me try the song. If Bob Stevenson were here, she would tell you that nothing was ever '*too low*' for me."

There was nothing for Elsie to do under these circumstances but to relinquish her seat to Annida, which she did with a pang of unreasonable jealousy, and retired to Jack's sofa, whither she was followed by Mr. Strathmore, who felt vaguely that some-

thing had disturbed her serenity, but was at a loss to imagine what it could be.

Annida possessed a rich contralto voice, with a good ear for music, and the duet was a complete success, which did not conduce to relieve Elsie's discomfort. She was angry with Roy for asking Annida to sing with him, although she had refused to do so herself; she was angry with Annida for singing, although there was no reason whatever why she should not have done so; she was angry at Strathmore on account of his assiduous attention to her, when he ought to know that she wished to be left to herself. Altogether, poor little Elsie was very unhappy.

Annida De Luce was a handsome brunette, large, flashing, black eyes, a quantity of coal-black hair, regular features, full pouting lips, and a clear, dark skin, lit up by crimson cheeks, made a *tout ensemble* at which a man would turn to gaze a second time.

She was a niece of Mrs. Von Decker, whose sister had married Monsieur De Luce in New Orleans, where he was engaged in business, and there Annida had been born and had passed the better part of her life.

Being very proud of her French descent, Annida had, at an early age, perfected herself in that language, which she spoke with the ease and grace of a Parisian, and having been her father's constant companion during his lifetime, she had gained so many little French ways and actions, that she not unfrequently passed for a native of that country.

The eldest of a large and not very wealthy family, she soon learned that she had only herself to look to for support, and when, the two years of mourning over after her father's death, her aunt had invited her to visit her cousins and be introduced into New York society, the invitation had been joyfully ac-

cepted, and the ambitious girl had left home with the determination to carve out her future during this visit.

The style of living at the Von Deckers' exceeded Annida's brightest dreams, and each succeeding day made the thought of returning to the penury of her former life unendurable, and determined her to leave no means untried by which she might make all these pleasures her own forever.

She had therefore tried her powers of fascination upon her cousin Jack, although two years his senior, and with such success that the boy would certainly have married her had it not been for the intervention of Bob Stevenson, who, coming to the rescue just in time, had routed the enemy by a counter movement.

Bob was not actuated by any selfish motive in this engagement, for she well knew that even were Jack free and in love with herself, she could never marry him. The only girl among six motherless children, how would it be possible for her to leave home until the youngest nestling was fledged, and Spencer was but six years and a half old.

Bob had, therefore, set her face against matrimony, and if Jack, who was her especial "chum," had seen fit to fall in love with one who could have made him happy, she would never have interfered, but her natural instinct warned her that Annida wished to marry Jack's money more than the boy himself, so she threw herself into the breach, and, as was her custom, fought valiantly for that which she deemed the weaker cause.

CHAPTER IV.

SHADOWS.

“As I have seen a boat go down
In quiet waters suddenly,
When not a wave was in the sea
Nor in the sky a frown.”

WHILST this musical entertainment was proceeding in the library, a duet of a different sort was taking place above stairs, whither Maude had gone in search of her mother, who rarely emerged from her apartments before the hour for luncheon, and sometimes even not until dinner was announced.

Mrs. Von Decker was an only child, and had been used to rule those around her from her early childhood, beginning with her parents when she was very small, and then taking in their order the numerous satellites which always surround a beauty and an heiress in society, her husband and her children.

She had become so accustomed to the homage rendered her that she ceased to think of it as anything remarkable, but received it with a gentle, placid smile, and the graciousness of a queen, whose position is so well assured that she can afford to acknowledge courtesies without compromising her high estate.

Her husband adored her, treating her always as a delicate exotic, and striving forever to shield her from annoyance of any description; whilst her children, following instinctively their father's example, avoided troubling her as much as possible, and, bringing themselves up “according to their light,” reversed the usual order of nature, and, so to speak, took their maternal parent “under their wing.”

Her affection for them was sincere, but unfortunately it partook of her own dreamy, unreal existence; and although she listened with tranquil interest to all that they voluntarily told her of themselves, she took no pains to make herself acquainted with their individual characters, or their actual daily life.

She passed the better part of her time in her own room, perusing works of fiction, and even when she emerged from thence, it was only to create for herself another romance in following out in her mind the future of one or other of her children, seldom with any regard to probability, and often beyond the bounds of possibility.

Scores of times had she married her daughters to counts, dukes, princes, and Jack to some one equally superior; and yet she never wearied of the farce, but when she had come to the last page, began it all over again with unflagging interest, wholly unconscious that meanwhile her heroes and heroines were actually growing up around her, and seeking their future for themselves, without any sort of guidance save that of their own impulsive hearts.

As Maude tapped gently at her mother's door, she received a summons to enter, but the absent tone of the voice that spoke told her the speaker was far away in the land of day-dreams, and she was therefore prepared for the apparition which greeted her eyes as she unclosed the door, of a still handsome woman, with small delicate features and transparent complexion, seated in a low easy chair, with her feet on a cushion, absorbed in a romance, whilst her maid softly smoothed the still luxuriant fair hair which floated over her shoulders.

Maude found it simply impossible to attract her mother's attention to herself at first, but being a very persistent young lady, she took a seat and calmly awaited the extrication of the heroine from a perilous situation, and the completion of her

mother's hair dressing, which fortunately took place about the same time; and then, as the maid retired, she seated herself on the cushion at her mother's feet, and taking hold of her book, gently drew it from her, saying, with a coaxing smile:

"There, now, mamma dearest, since you are looking as pretty as a rose, and your sigh of relief tells me that your heroine is out of danger, let me put the book aside for a few moments, and persuade you to make a heroine of me, and listen attentively whilst I pour out the history of my woes."

Thus appealed to, Mrs. Von Decker relinquished her book with a sigh, and turned her attention to her daughter.

"What is it that you wish to tell me, my dear?" she inquired.

"I have nothing startling to relate," replied Maude, with a smile. "I have not murdered any one, neither am I dying of a broken heart. I only want to talk to you of Jack."

"Well, dear, what of him?" said her mother, as she paused.

"I am very uneasy about him," replied Maude, in a serious tone.

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Von Decker, now fully aroused to interest. "What is the matter with him? It must be a very sudden attack; his health is usually very good."

"His health is now good, but his behavior is bad," replied Maude, smiling again to relieve her mother's anxiety, but the remark had the effect of bringing a still more anxious expression to her countenance, as she exclaimed:

"Your last speech is more incomprehensible than the first. Jack is assuredly a gentleman, both in manners and morals. How can he have offended?"

"Roberta Stevenson is here again," was Maude's only response.

"Well, my dear, I fail to see the significance of your re-

mark," replied her mother. "What has her presence here to do with Jack?"

"Just this," exclaimed Maude, with animation, "that she comes to see Jack, and no one else."

"That is very improper conduct on her part, without doubt," said Mrs. Von Decker, "but I do not see that Jack is to blame; he could not very well tell her that she must not come; it would be ungentlemanly in him to do so."

"And everything must be given up to the 'code' of gentleman, of course," replied Maude.

"Certainly, dear," said Mrs. Von Decker placidly, not perceiving the sarcasm of her daughter's remark. "I trust that *my* son would never, under any circumstances, be guilty of conduct unbecoming a gentleman."

"But surely, mamma, a girl that behaves as Roberta does, should not expect to be treated with respect?" said Maude. "She is entirely unlike other girls of her age, and prides herself upon her independence."

"Independence is a very good trait, dear," replied Mrs. Von Decker, "especially when a girl is motherless, and the eldest of a large family."

"You will not think so highly of it, dear mother," said Maude, earnestly, "when this 'independent' young lady marries your son and casts upon him the burden of five unruly boys."

"But Mr. Stevenson is still alive; why, then, should his boys trouble any one but himself?" inquired Mrs. Von Decker, in surprise.

"He still continues to walk upon the earth and to eat and drink all that he can get," replied Maude, contemptuously; "but as for the use that he is to his family, he might as well be laid on the shelf beside his precious antiquities. He is writing

another book, you know, and his children are simply machines to hunt up references."

"Ah! a man of science," said Mrs. Von Decker, quickly sketching a romantic view of the Stevensons, as was her wont. "Passing his days among old folios, and his nights in laborious work. And his fair young daughter assists him in his researches, did you say? Charming creature."

It was plain to be seen by these words that Mrs. Von Decker had entirely forgotten the real subject of conversation, and was once more ambling along on her hobby, but Maude, in no way disconcerted, came once more "to the front" and renewed the attack.

"Roberta would make a very charming 'private secretary,' without doubt," she said; "but how will it please you to see the future mistress of Beechcroft walking about whistling with her hands in her pockets, and her hat on the side of her head, calling the young men of her acquaintance by their first names, talking slang, riding wild horses, driving tandem or four-in-hand with equal ease, and, in fact, drawing the eyes of the world upon her by every word and action?"

As Maude delivered this eloquent address, her mother gazed at her in speechless horror. All romance died out of her mind in regard to Roberta Stevenson, as she mentally compared Maude's graphic description of her with the Dorotheas and Amelias of her ideal world. Assuredly this girl was no wife for Jack.

"My dear," she said, "you must put a stop to this at once. I will not have Jack marry her."

"I must put a stop to it," exclaimed Maude, "and pray how am I to do it? Jack never listens to my advice on any subject. No, papa is the proper one to speak to him, only he is so unfortunately short-sighted in these matters."

“Do you think so?” said Mrs. Von Decker. “I have always thought him remarkably far-sighted. I remember that before I was married he was always worrying about my admirers, imagining that every one I spoke to was in love with me.”

“Oh, but that was so long ago,” said Maude.

“Not so long as you seem to think,” replied her mother, with a little natural indignation, “and even if it was, your father has certainly shown perspicuity enough to save him from his daughter’s reproaches in this affair of Roy Weston’s. He has forbidden him to come to the house.”

“Roy Weston,” repeated Maude, in surprise; “why he is down-stairs now.”

“You don’t say so,” said her mother. “It is very extraordinary; your father repeated only this morning that he was to come here no more until Elsie had gone to school.”

“Why not?” said Maude, with rapidly changing color; “what has Roy to do with Elsie?”

“He wishes to marry her,” said her mother, “and of course your father could not allow it. Elsie must look higher.”

Maude made no response; she was trying to grasp the meaning of her mother’s words. Roy, her friend and companion ever since he had entered her father’s house a homesick boy, in love with Elsie, whom he had always treated as a little child.

“Is it possible that it is two o’clock already?” exclaimed Mrs. Von Decker, rising and proceeding to complete her toilet. “Come, Maude, dear, let us go down-stairs; luncheon is ready.”

“It cannot be possible,” murmured Maude, answering her own thoughts, and still retaining her lowly position, scarcely noticing that her mother had left her seat.

“Oh, yes it is, my dear,” said Mrs. Von Decker, supposing her daughter’s incredulity was on the subject of luncheon. “I heard the bell; did not you?”

Maude still remained silent and motionless, lost in a troubled retrospection. Alas! could her mother have read her heart, she would have found more to interest her there than all her cherished volumes could afford her; but it was to her a sealed book, and she never dreamed the suffering her words had caused.

In vain Maude struggled to remember how and when it was that she had first learned to think that Roy loved her, but she had felt assured that such was the case, and could not so suddenly face the possibility of mistake. Had she not always participated in his hopes and fears, wept over his sorrows, rejoiced in his successes? Was she not the repository of his most cherished secrets? Could Elsie ever love him as she did? Alas! had he really conquered both their hearts. Then assuredly one must suffer the pangs of disappointment, and could the other be happy in the knowledge that she had robbed her sister's existence of all happiness?

"Maude, dear, which of these shall I put on?" asked her mother, holding in either hand a gossamer cap for her daughter's inspection; but Maude could not sufficiently recover herself to answer this sudden demand upon her taste, and gazing vacantly before her, she murmured:

"Both; both must suffer."

"Both!" exclaimed Mrs. Von Decker, gazing at her in consternation. "Good gracious, Maude, how little taste you have. Just imagine my wearing two caps at once, each one trimmed with a different color. It is preposterous."

Aroused at last by her mother's excitement, Maude became suddenly aware of her ill-advised answers, and rising hastily, she selected a cap, which she placed with tender hands upon her mother's head, saying, as she did so:

"Forgive me, mamma dearest, I did not hear what you

said. There! now you look beautiful. Shall we go downstairs?"

And winding her arm around her waist, she drew her gently from the room.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

“For never now as in the sweet, past time,
Does my devotion meet with a reward;
Those eyes that once met mine with true accord,
Look lovingly in other eyes than mine.”

AS Mrs. Von Decker and her daughter descended the stairs, they came upon the rest of the family gathered in the hall below, awaiting their appearance before proceeding to the dining-room, whence sundry agreeable and savory odors issued, announcing to the hungry a delightful repast.

Perhaps the hungriest of the party was poor Bob, for the home fare of the Stevensons was meagre enough, yet she paused at the door, and, instead of entering with the others, uttered a melancholy “Good-bye,” feeling that she ought not, uninvited, partake of the Von Deckers’ hospitality, and being undecided as to whether her hostess had intended to include her in her general invitation to enter.

Jack was the only one, apparently, who noticed her hesitation.

“Good-bye!” he exclaimed; “nonsense; come along, and ‘take the goods the gods provide.’”

“Thank you; no, I must go home,” faltered Bob, the tempting viands making her feel hungrier than before. “Father will be expecting me, and then the boys, you know.”

“No, I don't know,” replied Jack, impatiently; “I do not see the least reason why you should always be a slave to an old man and a parcel of brats; cannot they take care of themselves for a few hours?”

“But I have not ordered dinner,” said Bob; “they will have nothing to eat.”

“I venture to assert that they will not starve,” said Jack.

“Perhaps not,” replied Bob, smiling, “but they may eat each other for want of something better.”

“'T is a consummation devoutly to be wished,” quoted Jack; “but,” he added, “I should not care to be the fellow who had to dine off of your father; he would be a precious tough old subject for a meal.”

“Jack, you ought to be ashamed of yourself,” exclaimed Bob, trying to assume an expression of righteous indignation; but the sparkle of her laughing eyes belied the gravity of her firmly set lips, and in no way disconcerted Jack.

“You brought the remark upon yourself,” he said, “by putting the old gentleman forward as an excuse for not being jolly. He is a regular old man of the mountain, marring everything like innocent enjoyment.”

“You are very much mistaken,” said Bob, quickly. “Father is always pleased to have me enjoy myself.”

“No doubt, provided you do not interfere with his comfort,” replied Jack; “but come in and take some grub, and I will forgive him all his sins.”

“Oh, Jack, how very vulgar you are,” exclaimed Maude, with a disgusted expression, as her brother's last words fell upon her sensitive ears.

“My dear boy, you forget yourself,” said his mother.

“This aggravating girl is enough to make a fellow swear,” said Jack. “Here she stands, starving, at the entrance of a

hall of plenty, refusing to enter and satisfy her appetite, because her father may need her in his smoky library to find the pedigree of some antediluvian rock."

This allusion to Bob's researches into mouldy volumes immediately recalled to Mrs. Von Decker's mind her first romantic impressions, and entirely forgetting all Maude's remonstrances, she smiled sweetly on the blushing girl, and said :

"I am sure Roberta would not think of treating us so rudely as to leave the house without breaking bread with us. Her refusal must be owing to your uncouth invitation ; ask her again more politely, and I think she must accept."

Jack turned towards Roberta, his eyes sparkling with mischief, and laying a hand upon his heart, and slightly inclining his body, he exclaimed :

"Adored Miss Stevenson, may your humble slave aspire to the honor of escorting you to the banqueting-hall, where a smoking feast awaits us wherewith to restore your too delicate organization, now suffering from long-continued abstinence?"

A shout of merry laughter greeted Jack's rhetorical effort, and Bob, drooping the long lashes over her eyes, and curtsying low, replied :

"Ah, sir, you do me too much honor. The clock had but just chimed six when I partook of my matutinal meal, and although my nature is undeniably ethereal, yet whilst we tread this sublunary sphere, we must masticate to preserve the spark of life within our frail bodies, and exhausted nature calls to me for nourishment ; how, then, can I refuse your invitation?"

"Let us hence at once, then, dear lady," said Jack. "To the banqueting-hall ! to the banqueting-hall !"

"Enter hero and heroine to slow music," said Roy, as Jack led Roberta to a seat at the table. "What can I help you to, Miss Stevenson ; the wing of a fly?"

"Allow me to suggest," said Jack, with imperturbable gravity, "would not the — a-hem — the *limb* of a musquito be more nutritious?"

"'Tis what my poetical soul longs for," ejaculated Bob, rolling up her eyes to the ceiling with so unpoetical an expression on her round, rosy face, that every one laughed heartily, with the exception of Maude, who never saw anything amusing or witty in speeches coming from that quarter, and who was, besides, absorbed in a furtive contemplation of Roy Weston, who was seated on her right hand.

"Why so pensive?" asked Roy, when, the tumult having subsided, he noticed the sad expression of her face.

"I have a headache," she replied, "and do not care much for nonsense at any time."

"And yet, when taken in moderate doses, it is refreshing," said Roy; "I have had so little of it lately, that the effect is delightful."

"It has been your own fault, if you have felt the want of it," said Maude; "for there is always enough and to spare at Beechcroft, when Roberta Stevenson and Jack are together."

"But I have not been at Beechcroft for nearly two months," said Roy, gently; "and I assure you that life in Wall Street at this season is anything but a joke."

"And why have you not been here?" asked Maude, glancing reproachfully at him, whilst her heart beat quickly with anxiety as to his answer.

"It has not been my fault, I assure you," replied Roy, coloring beneath her earnest look. "I cannot exactly explain matters to you now; we must wait for a more convenient season."

"And when will that be?" said Maude, eagerly determined to know the worst as soon as possible; but Roy did not answer,

his attention having been arrested by Leonard Strathmore, who was saying to Elsie, in a low voice :

“At what time, then, will you be ready to go out sailing with me this afternoon? that is, provided a little breeze springs up between this and night.”

“At any hour you name, if it is not too hot,” Elsie replied ; and Roy felt his heart burn with indignation, as he heard her promising herself for the afternoon to the man that had stood in his way all the morning. Why had he been at so much trouble to come and see this little flirt, who, despite the favor she had lavished on him formerly, had not waited quite three weeks after he had been forced to leave her, before she had supplied his place in her affections.

“When did you say you would tell me about yourself?” said Maude, a faint blush mantling her cheek, as she noticed the direction of his eyes and the wandering of his attention.

“I beg pardon,” said Roy, confusedly, trying to recover the thread of the conversation. “What was it you wished me to do? Oh, yes, I recollect,” he added, hurriedly. “I will tell you everything the first time I see you alone ;” and then all conversation was put an end to for the time, by a general rising from the table.

“Just look at that boy !” exclaimed Jack, calling attention to poor Alfred, who was endeavoring in great haste to finish the banana he was eating. “He is bolting the fruit whole. Faugh, child, you might as well be a boa constrictor.”

“Oh, no,” said Bob, quickly. “Don't be too hard on him, he is only a *bananaconda*.”

During the laughter which followed this sally, Leonard Strathmore steadily regarded Roberta with very much the expression he would have worn had he suddenly encountered a South Sea Islander. He did not understand her at all, and an

uneasy suspicion seized him that she was laughing at him in some covert way. He repeated the word "bananaconda," but without any appreciation of the joke, as he silently followed her out of the room.

"Strathmore looks as if he thought you were going to eat him," whispered Jack in Roberta's ear.

"I am harmless now," she replied, "I have just been fed. What has happened to you, Mr. Weston?" she continued, as Roy stood suddenly before her with a countenance black as night.

"Miss Stevenson, I have a favor to ask of you," replied Roy.

"You have only to mention it to have it granted," replied Bob, with a bright smile.

"Thank you," said Roy; "would you be so kind, then, as to engage Mr. Strathmore in conversation for a few moments, that I may say a few words to my cousin?"

"Certainly," said Bob; "but you must tell me what to talk about, for I have only just made his acquaintance."

"I think horses are a safe topic," said Roy, smiling, "and one of mutual interest, I suspect, for he has just purchased, for a fabulous sum, Lord Ullan, a winner at the Long Branch races."

"Ah! then we shall be at no loss for conversation, as I am intimately acquainted with the animal, if not with its master," replied Bob, as she took her way across the room to join Elsie and her admirer.

"Mr. Strathmore," she said, as she approached, "Mr. Weston tells me that you know a friend of mine, and I have come to ask after him. How is Lord Ullan?"

Leonard Strathmore was immediately interested. His new horse was to him an all-absorbing theme, and nothing pleased

him better than to be allowed to descant upon his merits to an intelligent listener, which, to his delight, Roberta proved to be. Her appreciative mind, her knowledge of horses, and above all the deference she adroitly expressed to his opinions, combined to fascinate him, and he, for the moment, became oblivious of his other companion, speaking in stable terms, that were as incomprehensible to her as Greek text.

Slightly disgusted at this defalcation of her admirer, Elsie turned away, and in a moment Roy was at her side.

"Elsie," he said, in a low voice, "I have something very important to tell you; will you give me the pleasure of your society this afternoon?"

"You speak too late," she replied, coldly; "I am already engaged to go out with Mr. Strathmore."

"I could not speak sooner," said Roy, sadly; "you have given me no opportunity; so, be generous, and when I tell you how very much I wish to see you, break your engagement and come with me. The time is very short, you know, before you leave the country, and how many things may happen before you return."

"I am particularly fond of sailing," said Elsie, perversely.

"Then let me take you out," said Roy, eagerly.

"I was not aware that you owned a yacht," replied Elsie.

Stung to the quick by this unkind reference to his poverty, Roy hesitated a moment before he answered, and then said, in a low, grave voice:

"No, Elsie, I have no yacht, no horses, no worldly goods worth mentioning; but I have youth, strength, and unsullied honor, and a pure, true heart, which I will take to some one who will have less scorn and more love for them than you."

He turned on his heel as he spoke, and left her standing alone by the window opening on the verandah at the back of

the house, whence she could see Leonard Strathmore assisting Roberta Stevenson to mount her horse, and hear Roy's voice on the lawn, almost immediately after, saying:

“Well, Maude, shall we have our private interview this afternoon? Will you go boating with me?”

Elsie turned abruptly from the window, and sought the shelter of her own room, running against Leonard Strathmore, who had hurried back, hat in hand, to complete the arrangements for the sailing party, before escorting Roberta home, as he had suddenly determined to do.

“I don't know anything about it,” said Elsie, pettishly, as he asked her opinion of the weather and the probability of a breeze arising from the south. “I don't want to go at all; it is dreadfully hot, and I hate yachting at any time.”

Poor Leonard stood aghast; only a short half-hour before she had professed herself delighted at the prospect of a sail in the “Saunterer.”

“You will not go, then?” he said.

“No,” she said, “I think not. That is, not on the yacht with a party; but if we might go together—in a little boat, you know, that would be delightful,” and she gave him a glance and a smile that would have melted a heart of adamant.

“Why certainly we can do that, if you prefer it,” he replied, his face aglow with pleasure. “I will tell the captain to get me a nice little boat, and break up the yachting party with the excuse of no breeze,” and away he rushed, his little vain heart swelling with pleasurable emotions, from the presence of one entrancing girl, who yearned for his society alone, to another equally bewitching in her way, who sat on horseback in the shade of a large oak-tree, awaiting his leisure to see her home. Happily, he did not hear what she was saying to her companion as he mounted his horse.

“I am very much obliged to you for the service you rendered me,” said Roy, patting her horse and arranging the bridle.

“You ought to be,” groaned Bob, “for see what you have entailed upon me. The idiot is going to ride home with me.”

“That is your own fault for being so attractive,” said Roy; “I only asked you to hold him in conversation for a moment, and you made him fall in love with you.”

“Alas!” said Bob, smiling, “I have a powerful rival; he is already in love with — *himself*,” and she rode laughingly away with her companion, who joined her at that moment.

“Now he will not think I refused to go with him on account of the yacht,” exclaimed Elsie, as she shut herself up in her room. “It was so mean of him to say such horrid things. Let him go to some one else if he wishes to. I shall not break my heart. I hate him! Yes, I really do! Oh! oh! oh! I’m so miserable,” and covering her face with her hands, she sobbed and cried until, overcome by her unusual emotion and the heat, she fell fast asleep in her rocking-chair.

CHAPTER VI.

FRIENDS AND COUSINS.

“ Oh, she had yet the task to learn,
How often woman's heart must burn,
To feed upon its own excess,
Of deep yet passionate tenderness.”

HOW long she had thus slept Elsie did not know, when she was brought back to life by the touch of a pair of soft lips upon her forehead, eyes, and mouth, and on awakening to full consciousness, she encountered the gentle, loving glance of a tall, slender girl, who was bending over her.

“ Why, Nellie ! ” she exclaimed, springing to her feet in delighted surprise ; “ how did you get here ? Where did you come from, and why did you not come before ? ” and she immediately subjected the new comer to one of those enthusiastic embraces common among school-girls, and partaking very much of the nature of a “ bear's hug.”

“ Why don't you answer me at once ? ” she continued, between her kisses ; “ don't you know that I am dying to hear all about you ? ”

“ How can I speak when you are smothering me ? ” laughed her friend. “ Give me an opportunity, and I will tell you everything.”

“ Do, that's a dear,” said Elsie, giving her another squeeze. “ Oh, I have been so worried about you. First I thought you must be sick ; then I thought, perhaps, that you would not be here in time to go with me next week ; and lastly, I came to the conclusion that you would at least have written, had you

not forgotten all about me, and taken some one else for a friend."

"Naughty girl," replied Nellie, shaking her head at her, "did you think that I could be so fickle? Come here and let me scold you," and seating herself, as she spoke, in a large easy chair, she drew her friend down upon her lap.

It would have been hard to find a greater contrast than these two girls exhibited, seated thus with arms lovingly entwined about each other—the one calm, pale, and with an expression of self-reliance which made her appear at first sight much older than she really was; the other with glowing cheeks, a passionate face, and a soft-yielding rosebud of a mouth, clinging to her friend with the careless, easy grace of a child, and with apparently not much more force of character.

Nellie was not strictly beautiful, and might have been easily overlooked in a crowded assembly; nevertheless, there was a nameless charm about her to those who knew her well, and at times she looked positively lovely. Her face was a pure oval, her complexion clear though colorless, unless, indeed, some sudden emotion sent the blood rushing to her cheeks, when a faint pink blush appeared thereon, like the warmer tint of a tea rose, but only to fade away as quickly as it had come. A pair of large, thoughtful, gray eyes completes the picture, and if the reader will frame it in a wreath of soft brown hair, he will have before him Eleanor Marston at the age of eighteen.

How Elsie and herself had ever become friends was a mystery to all who knew them, for they were as unlike in character as in appearance, and had grown up in an entirely different atmosphere.

Eleanor, an only child, had been educated at home, without other companionship than that of her parents and instructors, and in this quiet life the natural thoughtfulness of her disposition

had been fostered into a gravity unusual in one of her years ; but her exclusion from youthful pleasures, and intercourse with girls of her own age, had given rise to a painful embarrassment on her part, when thrown on her own resources in society. Thus, to a casual observer, Elsie seemed always to be the leading power, owing to her protecting manner towards her friend when they were together in company, but none knew how the positions were reversed when the two girls found themselves alone, and the vast superiority which Eleanor really possessed over her more versatile friend, owing to her habit of reflecting seriously on all subjects, asserted itself.

Dr. and Mrs. Marston had seen too late the ill effects of their exclusive principles upon their daughter, and had welcomed with delight her friendship with Elsie as a "sign of promise," hoping that her lively companionship would draw Nellie out of her usual reserved habits ; and when Mr. Von Decker had proposed that she should accompany his daughter to a French *pension* for a term, before she was introduced into society, her parents accepted the suggestion at once, and it had been decided that they should sail together, under Mr. Von Decker's care, the latter part of August ; hence Elsie's anxiety, as the time for departure drew near, at the non-appearance of her friend, who had left the Island a few weeks previous to visit some relatives at the sea-side.

"And now, dear," said Nellie, "let me explain why I did not come home before, and also my silence respecting our plans."

"Oh, it is of no consequence," replied Elsie ; "I am quite satisfied now that you have really come ; but, my dear, I did get dreadfully frightened. Just suppose that you had arrived too late, and I had been obliged to go alone. Think of having to face a parcel of French girls all by oneself. I should have died, I am quite sure."

“Don't say that,” exclaimed Nellie, in a distressed tone, “or I shall never have courage to tell you that which I ought to. I am sure that it cannot make much difference to you whether I go or stay,” she continued, “you are so entirely independent of me among strangers. Pray tell me it is so, dearest, for papa has concluded that I had better remain at home.”

Elsie looked at her in great surprise. “Nonsense!” she exclaimed. “He gave his word to papa that you should go with me, and it is too late now for him to retract it. You must tell him so, Nellie,” she continued, in a tone of decision. “He never refused you anything you really desired.”

“He says that he finds, now that the time for separation draws near, he cannot make up his mind to let me go so far away,” said Nellie, with a sigh, “and indeed, dear, when I saw how much the plan distressed both himself and mamma, I had not the heart to urge it. They are getting old, you know, and I am their ‘ewe lamb.’”

“And after promising faithfully to go with me, you have come here at the last moment to tell me that you have changed your mind,” exclaimed Elsie, vehemently. “I think it is really too bad. I don't believe you care anything at all about me. Do you suppose that I would treat you so for any number of fathers and mothers? You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Nellie Marston,” and Elsie slid from her friend's lap down upon the floor, hiding her face in her hands and giving herself up to unrestrained weeping.

“Please do not cry, dear,” said Nellie, gently; “I do love you very dearly, and there is no personal sacrifice that I would not make for you; but, Elsie darling, one must consider one's duty to one's parents before everything; and I feel assured that I ought to stay with them, now that they need my care, when they have so often sacrificed their wishes to my comfort and

pleasure. Look up, dear, and tell me I am right," and she tried to raise her friend's head.

"No, you are *not* right," replied Elsie, repulsing her caresses; "you are altogether wrong and very cruel. Your father and mother will have each other even if you do go, and *I*—I will have *no one*, if you do not. Alone, all alone in a foreign land," moaned Elsie, weeping floods of tears as she thought of her sad position.

"You will soon make friends, dear," said Nellie, soothingly; "you are so beautiful and lovable, that you cannot help but win hearts wherever you may go," and she tenderly stroked the golden head bent so low in grief. "Now, if the cases were reversed," she continued, "and I were the one who was obliged to 'launch her craft on foreign seas,' there would be great need of the prayers of all good people, for my plain face wins me but few friends, and my shy, awkward manners lose me the few I gain."

"That is not true," said Elsie, quickly aroused to her better self by the tone of her friend's voice. "You are far lovelier than any one I know, and papa says that he never saw such a pair of eyes as yours out of a picture-frame."

"That may be so," said Nellie, blushing slightly at the compliment, "and, in fact, I believe my eyes are good; but, my dear, of what use are they, when, at the first word addressed me by a stranger, I always shut them up tight, in my embarrassment?"

"I have noticed that bad habit of yours," said Elsie, raising her head to look her friend in the face. "And others have noticed it also. Do you remember that evening Mr. Law was introduced to you at our house? Well, he came over to me afterwards, saying, 'Am I a very stupid fellow, Miss Elsie? or why is it that, in the midst of what was to me a very interest-

ing conversation, your friend Miss Marston suddenly went to sleep? ” ”

At this story Nellie burst into a merry laugh, which was so infectious that Elsie also laughed despite herself.

“There comes the sunshine at last,” said Nellie, gayly, adding, with a loving kiss, “you ought never to cry, dear, you look so lovely when you smile.”

“Flatterer!” said Elsie, nestling close to her friend, a feeling of penitence creeping over her for the way she had treated her. “Why do you pet me so?” she added; “I am such a cross old thing that you would do better to box my ears.”

“You are a precious pet when you are good,” said Nellie, fondling her, “but you are a trifle impatient when anything goes contrary to your wishes. Your anger is short-lived, however, so I have learned not to heed it, but wait for the revulsion of feeling which is certain to follow, sooner or later. You think I acted for the best now, dear, don't you?”

“You were, as you always are, quite right,” replied Elsie; “I am a wicked wretch to abuse you as I do sometimes, for I always feel that I am in the wrong, but cannot bear to acknowledge it.”

“There! let us say no more about it,” said Nellie. “We are wasting precious time by such idle conversation, and our hours together will, alas! be too few. What shall I do, dear, without you? You will find me a confirmed misanthrope when you return. I shall creep so far into my shell, that it will be impossible to find me again.”

“No, you shall not,” said Elsie; “I will not let you; for I expect to have two letters a week from you, regularly, during my absence, and shall scold you fearfully if I detect in them any such tendency. I must rely on you for home news, for Maude is a wretched correspondent.”

"I will write you everything, you may depend upon it," said Nellie, "even to the shade of *le beau cousin's* neck-tie, and how the green and yellow melancholy caused by your absence becomes him."

"Nonsense," said Elsie, blushing, however, a very rosy red. "What is *le beau cousin* to me?"

"A great deal, if I may judge from your letters," replied Nellie, "every one of which made honorable mention of him."

"Oh, those were written over two months ago," said Elsie, in confusion, "and affairs stand very differently with us now from what they did then," and she heaved a deep sigh.

"Indeed!" said Nellie. "Is two months such a very long time for you to remain constant to one man?"

"I am not the inconstant one," said Elsie.

"Then I am to infer that *he* is, am I?" said Nellie. "Excuse my frankness, but I do not believe a word of it. No man *could* be such a fool. Let me hear all about the trouble, for I am sure there must be some mistake."

Thus urged, Elsie told her tale without reservation, and finishing with a repetition of Roy's last speech to her, awaited anxiously her friend's opinion of the case. Nellie remained silent for some moments, and then said slowly:

"I never heard anything so outrageous."

"As his treatment of me?" said Elsie, eagerly; "was it not unmanly?"

"As your treatment of him, my dear," quietly replied her friend.

"Nellie! what can you mean?" exclaimed Elsie, in surprise.

"Just this," she replied gravely, "that you have, as usual, jumped to a conclusion in regard to your cousin's behavior without giving the subject any reflection, and treated him as a culprit before you knew whether or not he was really to blame."

“Why did he shun me, if he cared anything about me?” said Elsie; “actions speak louder than words.”

“Why did you not ask him that question?” said Nellie; “he would doubtless have given you a satisfactory answer, in that case, and a great deal of pain have been saved you both.”

“Do you suppose that I would stoop to question him?” said Elsie, indignantly; “let him take himself elsewhere if he will. Who cares? I should like to know.”

“You do,” said Nellie, quietly.

“I *don't*,” cried Elsie, now thoroughly angry again.

“Come, come,” said Nellie, “you must keep your temper, my dear, if I am to be of any use. I did not insinuate that you would die of a broken heart if your cousin transferred his affections; I only intended to say that I did not believe that such was the case, and to suggest that you had acted hastily in repelling his confidence, which might have set everything straight. You must have tried his patience very severely, when he answered you so quickly, and probably he now thinks of you as a ridiculous, hasty child.”

“I should not like that,” said Elsie, quickly; “I do not wish him to think ill of me.”

“Then you will confess to him that you have been hasty, dearest, will you not?” said Nellie, earnestly; “and give him an opportunity to explain matters. So much trouble might be saved in this world if people would only confess when they are in the wrong, and ask explanations of enigmatical actions on the part of their friends.”

“Your advice comes too late,” said Elsie, in a tone of regret; “he is too angry with me now to explain anything.”

“I do not know him personally, it is true,” said Nellie, reflectively; “but he is not worth much if he does not meet

you half-way, and pour out a torrent of explanations as soon as you give him a word of encouragement."

"You take a great deal of trouble to plead his cause," said Elsie, sharply; "perhaps he has employed you to act as peace-maker."

"When I do not even know him by sight," exclaimed Nellie, flushing at this unworthy suspicion. "Come, Elsie," she continued, "I think we had better postpone this subject for another time; you are evidently in a quarrelsome mood, and I do not choose that you should quarrel with me on the eve of our separation. Let us go down-stairs," and so saying she rose from her seat, and, undetained by Elsie, left the room.

Elsie remained out of sorts for the rest of the afternoon and evening, which passed drearily enough for every one, as nature, sympathizing with Elsie's mood, opened her floodgates upon the earth, inundating it with tears, and uttering her complaints in angry growls of thunder.

The sailing party had of course been broken up by the storm, and a general gloom had settled over the company assembled in the parlor after dinner, so that they were quite ready to disperse to their rooms at an early hour, and were all gone by ten o'clock with the exception of Maude, who still sat and watched beside the window for the return of her cousin, who had been missing since the morning. A fever of anxiety had oppressed her all the evening, owing to his enigmatical words during luncheon, and she felt that it would be useless to attempt to sleep before she had seen him again and had her heart set at rest, or her hopes destroyed, as the case might be.

At a little after eleven, Roy's step sounded on the gravel walk, and then, although she had been waiting for him for so long a time, and had repeated to herself a thousand times that which she wished to say when he arrived, yet, now he had

come, her courage failed her — the words died upon her lips — and shrinking back into the shadow, she endeavored to escape observation.

But Roy had seen her, or rather had seen some one, and in the indistinct light mistook her for her sister. His heart throbbed with pleasure as he hastened into the parlor, under the impression that Elsie, repentant for her rude behavior, had remained up after the others to give him the desired interview.

“Elsie!” he exclaimed, in a tone of suppressed delight, which sent a pang to poor Maude’s waiting heart.

“It is not Elsie,” she exclaimed, bitterly, “it is only I, Maude. I am sorry for your disappointment, but as Elsie has been comfortably asleep for an hour or more, I fear you must put up with me for a substitute.”

“I mistook you for her in the dark,” said Roy, in confusion. “Has every one gone to bed? What kept you up, dear? I hope you were not waiting for me?” and he endeavored to distract her attention from himself by an extra show of affection.

“You appear to have forgotten that you had something to tell me,” she said, in a dreary voice, hope dying fast within her heart.

“No,” he said, gently, “I have not forgotten, Maude. Indeed, I have thought of nothing else all the afternoon, but I doubt if I ought to tell you what I had intended; on mature reflection, it seems to me that it would be better not to offer you any explanation, as I cannot be perfectly open with you.”

“And why can you not be frank with me as you always have been heretofore?” asked Maude. “You used to tell me everything until Elsie took my place.”

For a moment Roy remained speechless, almost stunned by the suddenness of the attack; and then, collecting himself hastily, he said:

“Elsie has not taken your place, Maude, nor ever can. Have I ever confided in her as I have in you? Have you not been my friend always? You must not mistake the motive of my reticence; it is not because I no longer trust you, for there is no woman in the world in whom I would sooner confide anything concerning myself; but the explanation you seek could not be made without implicating others, and that I feel I have no right to do. Will you not excuse me then, dear, from any confession on the subject, and treat the whole affair as though it had not occurred? It is asking a great deal of you, I know, but is it too much?” and taking her two hands in his, he looked down at her with one of his most winning smiles.

“No,” murmured Maude, yielding without an effort to the influence he exercised over her. “Nothing that you ask can be too much; my friendship for you can stand any test.”

“I believe it can,” said Roy, with deep feeling. “You are a true friend, Maude; may I always prove worthy of you, dear,” and stooping, he pressed a brother’s kiss upon her forehead.

For a moment or two they remained in silence, and then Maude, collecting her scattered senses, rose to retire, and uttering a faint good-night, left the room in a dream, all suspicions set at rest by the touch of Roy’s lips, for the kiss, which had been given so lightly, and meant with him so little, had seemed to her a solemn pledge of love, which should be hers, and hers only, whilst life should last.

She had but reached the staircase on the way to her room, when Roy again stood beside her.

“Maude,” he said, in a low voice, “do not allow any one to poison your mind against me. You are the only friend I have in the world; do not desert me.”

“I will not,” she replied, calmly.

“Here,” he said, suddenly taking something from his pocket,

“wear this always to remember this night by, and the promise you have just made me,” and as he spoke he threw around her neck the chain purchased in the morning for Elsie. “Remember!” he said, “my friend, through good and evil report.”

“Your friend forever,” she whispered, as she hurried away to hide her agitation.

CHAPTER VII.

A SPIDER BEGINS TO SPIN.

“Love is a torment of the mind,
 A temper everlasting,
 And Jove hath made it of a kind
 Not well, nor full, nor lasting.”

A WEEK passed away. The next day but one before Elsie's departure had arrived, and the family were gathered together upon the grassy lawn, making the most of her who was to leave them so soon, when “Mr. Strathmore” was announced, and immediately appeared upon the scene, accompanied by Miss De Luce, who, encountering him in the hall, had volunteered to be his guide hither.

“I have not come to pay a visit at this unseasonable hour, ladies,” he said, after the usual morning greetings had been exchanged; “but I wished to secure your approbation of a scheme that has suggested itself to my mind, for honoring Miss Elsie's last day among us, and feared that I should not find you all at home if I waited until the proper hour for visiting.”

“Oh, you are not too early for us,” replied Elsie, smiling; “we breakfasted two hours ago, at least.”

“Ah, so much the better for me then,” said Strathmore; “for after breakfast one is much more inclined to give a favorable answer to a suitor than before. To the point, therefore. Ladies, you behold before you an audacious man, who hopes to induce you all to accept for to-morrow the homely hospitality of a poor bachelor, and honor Strathmore Park with your presence. I propose to give a garden party in honor of Miss Elsie, and as I know little or nothing of such things, I must throw myself on your mercy and ask your assistance in my arrangements.”

“Oh, how perfectly charming,” exclaimed the girls, with one accord, and, clapping her hands, Elsie danced about like a pleased child.

“We must have tables on the lawn, Mr. Strathmore,” cried one.

“We must have some music to dance to,” exclaimed another.

“You shall have everything you desire,” said Strathmore, courteously; “if you will only be good enough to suggest, I will see that your plans are fully carried out.”

“We must see the place first,” said Annida, “or we cannot judge of its resources.”

“Exactly what I thought myself on my way here,” replied Strathmore; “I therefore took the liberty of bringing my yacht, in the hope that you would all sail home with me, and survey the scene of your labors.”

“Nothing could be better,” they cried in a breath, and a few moments later they stood at the water's edge awaiting the boat from the yacht to take them on board.

The embarkation was easily accomplished, and soon a careless, merry party was floating down the stream.

“And now for the invitations,” said Elsie, gleefully, as the white sails of the “Saunterer” filled with the morning breeze,

and she swept over the water like a bird. "We can make out a list as we sail, and save a great deal of valuable time."

"I have noted down a few persons besides those of your own party," said Leonard; "and if they meet with your approval, you have only to add any friends of your own whom you wish to invite," and he handed Elsie a slip of paper, on which were written a number of names, which she rapidly ran over, in a low voice, to herself.

"But, Mr. Strathmore," she said, when she had come to the end, "you have no married lady on the list; mamma will not let us come without a chaperon."

Mr. Strathmore looked blank.

"Will not your mother herself take charge of the party?" he said, at length.

"Poor, darling mamma," said Elsie, laughing, "what would she do with herself at a garden party?"

"She might come, though," said Maude, reflectively, "if there was any literary 'lion' to be seen. Mr. Strathmore, have you no poet or romance writer that you could offer as an inducement?"

"None that I can call to mind just at present," said the young man, looking crestfallen at this huge hillock in the way of his success.

"I have it," exclaimed Elsie, clapping her hands: "you are going to invite Bob Stevenson, are you not?"

"I shall be very happy to see Miss Bob," said Strathmore.

"Well, then, tell her father to bring her," said Elsie, triumphantly, "and thus 'kill ever so many birds with one stone.'"

"But will he come, do you think?" asked Leonard, doubtfully.

"He is certain to, if you mention that you are going to

have anything to eat," said Jack, laughing. "By Jove," he added, "mother and old Stevenson! What a jolly team they will make!" and no one could resist a smile at the suggestion.

This difficulty being surmounted, they soon made out the list of invitations, and so merrily passed the time that they could scarcely believe they had arrived at "Strathmore," when the yacht anchored, and the little boat was once more let down to convey them to the shore.

It was a half-hour's sail to the Park, and it had proved so charming, that it was unanimously voted, as they left the "Saunterer's" side, that the guests should be transported thither in her the following day, instead of driving over in carriages, as had at first been suggested.

Leonard Strathmore welcomed his guests to his homestead with the air of a "prince of the blood" receiving ambassadors in his ancestral halls, and watched eagerly for the effect upon Elsie of all his grandeur. But he strove in vain to detect the slightest admiration in her words or looks, for, so accustomed was she to elegance, and so absorbed in the projected garden party, that she simply looked upon the Park as she might have upon any public garden under the same circumstances, with the sole view of adapting it to suit the purpose.

He took her to the summit of a high hill which commanded the finest view on the island, and she simply pronounced it a fine situation from which to send up a balloon, or set off fireworks. The lake, on which floated stately swans, was deeply bewailed as being very much in the way of the croquet ground; and when at last he conducted her to the most beautiful spot on the place, a natural bower formed of leafy trees and climbing vines, on a rock overhanging the river, and, seating her on a rustic seat, threw himself on the grass at her feet, she remarked that it was exactly the position to suit the "band," and eagerly

inquired the number of musicians he would have. He became disgusted at her want of appreciation, and grew sulkily silent, only speaking when politeness required, and at the first opportunity escaped altogether from her society, feeling both indignant and aggrieved that the attractions of the party should be so superior to his own, and half tempted to believe that Elsie had been flirting with him.

“If she has been trifling with me all this time,” he muttered to himself, “she shall repent it, as sure as my name is Leonard Strathmore.”

He walked on hurriedly towards the house, intending to order some refreshments for his guests, but his attention was suddenly arrested by a graceful figure standing upon the terrace, and apparently lost in admiration of the surrounding scene.

It was Annida De Luce, who had been making the most of her time, and had not only been over the grounds, but had also thoroughly investigated the house, and was now standing with eyes fixed on the prospect, to be sure, but with thoughts busy in the effort to discover why it was that Leonard Strathmore's wealth and position had been heretofore concealed from her. No effort had been made to keep her in ignorance, and her want of knowledge was simply owing to accident, but judging others by herself, this she could not believe, and her soul was filled with indignation at the supposition that Elsie had connived at it for her own ends. How provoking it was to think how little attention she had paid the owner of all this grandeur, during his constant visits at Beechcroft, owing to the fact that she had supposed him to be of no importance; and had allowed Elsie to appropriate him without an effort to prevent it, although he had paid his first visits to herself, having made her acquaintance previous to her introduction into her uncle's family, whilst travelling among the mountains some

summers before. Oh, how she longed to call her own, the place where she now stood. How proudly she could fulfil her duties as mistress of Strathmore Park. Who could have dreamed that this insignificant creature had so much in his power to bestow? How artfully Elsie had behaved throughout the whole affair, and what a dupe she had been. Was it too late to be revenged upon her? might she not win the man back again, by a carefully acted part? The game was worth playing, with such a prize to be won; and then her mind went back to her first acquaintance with Leonard, and she carefully coned over every word of his that she could remember complimentary to herself, and every act of attention which she had coldly rejected, when, staff in hand, and with no insignia of wealth about him, she had mistaken him for a common adventurer. Could he be made to forget that, there was still hope for her; and she had set herself to work to map out a plan of action which might accomplish the desired result, when the young man himself appeared before her, and hesitatingly asked if there was anything he could do for her. She returned a gracious negative, adding, with a sweet smile, "I am lost in admiration of your Park, Mr. Strathmore. How beautifully everything is appointed. I never saw a place that captivated me so entirely; you must have a great deal of taste."

Leonard, who had always been rather afraid of Miss De Luce, and who retained a very lively recollection of various snubs that he had received from her, was very much flattered by her remarks, but only replied, with an affectation of indifference, that he believed it was a rather nice place, and then waited for what she should say next, to give him a clue to her thoughts.

"It is more than nice," she exclaimed, "it is perfectly charming. How can you ever bear to leave it? I could be content to pass the rest of my days on this spot where we are standing."

“But it is very lonely,” replied the young man; “I have no family, now, you know. The only brother I had, the one to whom this place belonged, died last year, leaving me his heir, it is true, but alone in the world.”

“But you have friends, have you not?” said Annida.

“Yes,” he replied; “but it is a great bore to entertain much, with no lady to do the honors of the house.”

“Then you must marry,” said Annida, laughing; “that is the best advice I can give you under the circumstances.”

“Certainly,” he replied, with an affected simper, “and you may be sure I will follow it when I can get any one to have me.”

“I should not think you would find much difficulty on that score,” replied Annida, with an arch smile. “Not many girls would refuse to be mistress of Strathmore Park, not to speak of their interest in the owner.”

“Do you really think that?” said Leonard, thinking wistfully of Elsie. “Your fair cousin does not appear to consider either place or proprietor worth consideration, beyond the part they are to perform in to-morrow’s festivities.”

“Oh, Elsie is a spoiled beauty,” replied Annida, “and loves to torment those in her power. She saw that you valued her opinion above every one’s, and therefore she determined not to admire anything.”

“You surprise me,” said Leonard, gravely; “I had no idea that such was her disposition. I have always supposed her to be a pretty, guileless child, whose desire was to please every one.”

“Elsie a guileless child!” said Annida, with a soft laugh; “what discerning creatures you men are! However, you are not to blame,” she added, quickly; “how could you know her any better? If you had happened to be, like myself, one of her

poor relations, then, indeed, you might have had an opportunity of seeing her real character."

These last words were spoken so bitterly that Leonard raised his eyes quickly to the speaker's face, and read thereon such pain and misery, that he immediately became interested in her and tried to draw her out.

"Surely she does not treat *you* unkindly," he said. "Are you not happy at your uncle's?"

"No, I am not treated unkindly in the general acceptance of the term," replied Annida, looking drearily before her, "and they give me plenty to eat and drink, if *that* constitutes happiness, but —" and then she paused, finishing the sentence with a long-drawn sigh.

"But what?" inquired Strathmore, becoming still more interested; "will you not complete your sentence?"

"No; it is of no use complaining," replied Annida; "and why should I weary you with my troubles, or tell tales of my cousin, with whom you are already more than half in love," she added, laughing.

"So much the more reason that I should know the truth concerning her," said Leonard, gravely. "Let me beg of you to continue your remarks."

"Not I," replied Annida, gayly; "I know human nature too well; you would get all the information out of me that you wished, and, if it did not please you, be furiously angry with me afterwards; besides which, before twenty-four hours had passed, you would have confided it all to Elsie, and I should be obliged to pack my trunk and leave by the next train, which would not suit me at all."

"You do me injustice," began Leonard; but he was interrupted by the appearance of the rest of the party coming towards them, accompanied by Roy, who had been sent over

by his uncle in the carriage to bring them home, and with an *au revoir*, he shook hands, and took leave of all his guests, mentally resolving, however, to see Annida again as soon as possible.

CHAPTER VIII.

SCIENCE AT A FÊTE.

“In summer, when the days were long,
 On dainty chicken, snow-white bread,
 We feasted with no grace but song;
 We plucked the strawberries, ripe and red,
 In summer, when the days were long.”

THE next day was all that the most fastidious person could have desired for a pleasure party. A bright, beautiful morning, yet with some clouds in the sky, which softened the heat of the sun's rays, and a charming breeze, not heavy enough to disarrange the pretty toilets of the ladies, but quite sufficient to send the “Saunterer” along at a good rolling pace.

“Is our party all assembled?” inquired Leonard Strathmore, anxiously, as, the hour for departure having arrived, his guests stood upon the beach awaiting the return of the “Dragon Fly,” which had already taken a boat-load to the yacht.

“Did the Stevensons go in the first boat?” asked Jack. “If not, they are just coming, for I see a crazy-looking vehicle bowling down the hill at a frightful rate, which bears a striking resemblance to the old gentleman's ‘one-horse shay.’”

It was ascertained that the Stevensons had not gone in the first boat; the second boat-load, therefore, awaited impatiently the arrival of the remarkable equipage approaching them.

It came at last, and Jack, springing up, blithely opened the door, calling out :

“Look alive there! we're in a hurry,” and received Mr. Stevenson in his arms, who smiled blandly upon him, in return for his civility.

“Where is Bob?” the young man ejaculated, as to his consternation he perceived that Mr. Stevenson was alone.

“Thank you, my boy; very kind, indeed, of you to take so much trouble for an old gentleman,” replied that worthy person, smiling still more graciously than before. “I hope you are not waiting for me?” he added, approaching the boat, and addressing its occupants, with a deprecating inclination of his head.

“For you and your daughter, sir,” said Mr. Strathmore, as he assisted him to get in. “Where is she?”

“My daughter!” exclaimed the old gentleman, pausing with one leg over the side of the boat, and looking as if he had only just become aware that he had a daughter.

“Yes, sir, Miss Bob — Miss Roberta, where is she to-day? Is she not going with us to Strathmore Park?”

Mr. Stevenson deliberately sat down astride of the boat, and taking his chin in his hand, thoughtfully stroked it, saying :

“It is very curious — exceedingly remarkable, in fact — but I cannot recollect anything about her. I have no idea where she is,” and he gave the subject up as an enigma too difficult for him to solve.

“Shall we wait for her?” inquired Leonard, anxiously perplexed. “Do you think she will be here after awhile?”

“Perhaps she will,” said Mr. Stevenson, “who knows? Yes, we had better wait,” and with a face once more beaming he got entirely into the boat, and settled himself to await comfortably his daughter's expected arrival.

“Get in,” said Jack to Leonard, “and I’ll push you off.”

“But Miss Stevenson?” objected Strathmore. “Her father thinks we had better wait for her.”

“Confound the old idiot!” exclaimed Jack, fiercely. “He thinks you had better wait for her to come five miles when he has taken the only horse out of the stable.”

“Do you suppose, then, that she did not intend to come?” inquired Strathmore.

“On the contrary, I know that she had set her heart on coming,” said Jack. “The old fool has forgotten all about her, and driven off without telling her,” he continued, with growing indignation. “I’ll make an even bet with you that she is crying her eyes out at home with disappointment. Poor little Bob! and she has so few sprints. Here, get in and be off with you. I’ll come over by myself when I get in good temper again,” and so saying he assisted to push the boat off, but before it had grazed the sides of the “Saunterer,” “Polly,” and “Dolly,” the two fastest horses in the Von Decker stables, were going at full speed across the country, and Master Jack, the driver, never drew rein until he reached the Stevensons’ door.

Here he paused, and for the good reason that a step farther would have taken horses and carriage over the prostrate form of a lad of fourteen, who was lying stretched out upon the ground, with a bundle of grass under his head for a pillow, and a book in his hand. He was too much absorbed to pay the slightest attention to the dangerous proximity of the horses, and was only aroused by an energetic poke which Jack administered with the whip-handle, saying, as he did so:

“Here! get up, you scamp, and hold my horses for me.”

The boy instantly sprang to his feet with agility, and a sweet, joyous smile played over a remarkably beautiful face, as he answered:

“To be sure I will. You have come for Bob, have n't you? That's jolly! You're a regular fairy godmother,” and he jumped lightly into the wagon.

“Where is Bob!” asked Jack, as he relinquished the reins to the boy.

“Up there,” he replied, nodding his head towards an upper window, “doing penance for her sins. Here, I say, take my book along with you, will you?” he shouted, as Jack turned into the house, “or I shall begin to read again, and forget all about the horses,” and he tossed a well-worn volume of Hans Andersen's tales after Jack's retreating figure.

The house was a forlorn old “tumble-down” affair, and Jack, without difficulty, made his way to the little room where Bob sat miserable and tearful, keeping time with her sobs to the whirring of her sewing-machine.

“Halloo!” he exclaimed, as he entered. “Here's a precious go. Bob Stevenson turned domestic, and giving up the pleasures of a picnic for the more sober delights of a sewing-machine.”

“Why, Jack!” she exclaimed, with a little scream of surprise, “what brought you over here? I thought the party sailed at half-past ten this morning?”

“So they did,” replied Jack, “all but two of them, who are going to drive over. There! hurry up and put your things on, for I left August taking care of the horses, and heaven knows what he may do if left long alone with them.”

With a cry of delight, echoed by three or four little boys lying around loose in the room, Bob sprang towards the door, but returning as quickly she laid her hands on Jack's shoulders, and looking him frankly in the face, exclaimed, with quivering lips and eyes full of moisture:

“Jack, you're the very best fellow that ever lived,” and off

she flew again like a shot out of a gun, leaving Jack a prey to the young Stevensons, who instantly fell upon him, all talking at once.

“Poor old Bob! I'm ever so glad you came for her,” exclaimed one.

“She'd have cried her eyes out before long, if you had n't,” remarked another.

“Was n't it confoundedly mean in the governor to go off and leave her?” interposed a third.

“How did he come to do it?” asked Jack.

“How does he ever come to do anything?” said August, suddenly appearing in the doorway. “He had a big rock on his brain, I suppose, for the old cove drove right out of the gate before our eyes, as we sat on the porch with Bob, all ready dressed waiting for him to appear.”

“Why did n't you call to him?” said Jack.

“*Call to him!*” repeated August. “Why, my dear fellow, we ruined our lung power forever — we shouted in every key, we ran half a mile after the carriage throwing old shoes and brickbats at it, and all the time we could see the old gentleman sitting inside smiling like several May morns, but he never saw or heard anything that was going on around him. Tom's holding the horses,” he added, abruptly, “so please give me my book.”

Bob now appeared, ready dressed, and looking radiantly happy, and they were soon *en route*, flying along at great speed.

An hour's good driving brought them to the Park gates, and soon Bob found herself the centre of an eager questioning group, whose curiosity she found it difficult to satisfy without compromising her father, which she was too loyal and affectionate to do; she therefore endeavored to make her way to him at once, saying:

“I must go to papa and relieve his anxiety concerning me. It was so foolish in me to be out of the way when he left home, was it not? I trust he has not been much worried by my stupidity.”

If one might judge by the placid contentment of his face as she approached, he had not suffered any over-anxious feelings to trouble him, and his expression of mild surprise when she said :

“Here I am at last, papa, all safe and sound,” was inexpressibly amusing to the bystanders, and their merriment was further increased by his saying in reply to this announcement :

“Certainly, my dear ; why should n't you be ?”

“I thought you might have been feeling uneasy as to how I would get here by myself,” said Bob, in confusion.

“Uneasy, my dear, when you came over in the same carriage with me ?” answered her father, giving her a reproachful look. “Now, just think what nonsense you are talking. I never saw such a forgetful child,” he continued, turning to Mrs. Von Decker with a benevolent smile. “Why we made the arrangement last night, and I drove her over only a few hours ago, and yet she has forgotten it.”

The last speech was too much for the self-control of the merry group surrounding him, and with one accord they burst into a hearty laugh, during which poor Bob, overcome with mortification, turned away, and, making good her escape, rushed headlong down the first garden path she saw, stumbling over Jack as she suddenly turned a corner, who was coming back from the stable, whither he had taken the horses.

“Halloo, Bobby,” he exclaimed ; “don't knock the breath out of a fellow's body. Where are you running to in such a hurry ?”

“I don't know, I don't care,” exclaimed the poor child,

raising a pathetic, tear-stained face to his. "Oh, Jack, Jack, it is so dreadfully hard to have nobody who cares what becomes of one! Papa has never given me a thought all the morning, and has even forgotten that he did not bring me with him when he drove over, and they are all laughing about it over there," she continued, passionately. "They think it a good joke that I, who am motherless, should be worse than fatherless, and their mockery is breaking my heart."

And forgetful of everything save the fact that she had found a friend, Bob rested her head against Jack's shoulder, and began to cry bitterly. The young man absolutely trembled with indignation, and a torrent of invectives rose to his lips, but his good sense told him that sympathy would but confirm Bob's unhappiness, so, making a wry face, he swallowed his wrath, and taking her hand in his, said cheerfully :

"There, there, Bobby, you are making a mountain out of a mole-hill. Because a man is absent-minded, it does not follow that he is wanting in natural affection," and seating himself at the foot of a tree, he drew her down on the grass beside him, and deliberately proceeded to prove, to her satisfaction, that, despite appearances, her father was really a devoted and adoring parent, and when his efforts had been crowned with success, and the smiles and dimples had returned to her face, he conducted her back in triumph to the rest of the party, who were just preparing to sit down to luncheon.

The table was very prettily laid out, with shining silver, beautifully cut glass, and superb bunches of flowers, whilst the trees surrounding it were decked with flags and streamers, which gave the whole a very gay appearance.

Mrs. Von Decker, of course, presided at the feast, and on her right hand sat Mr. Stevenson, whilst the young people ranged themselves according to their own fancy — some at the

table, but many more upon the velvety turf, which crowned the summit of the eminence on which they were.

Leonard Strathmore felt it incumbent on him to be attentive to Elsie, as the queen of the feast, but he proved a very stupid companion, for he could not banish from his memory Annida De Luce's mysterious words of the day previous, and his thoughts were centred upon the explanation he hoped to receive from her before the day was over.

Annida guessed very accurately what was passing in his mind, but with native genius she avoided all his approaches, thereby greatly increasing his curiosity and forcing him to an eager pursuit of herself.

Elsie also was *distract*, and conversation between them languished lamentably. She had long since repented her misunderstanding with Roy, and earnestly desired a reconciliation before her departure; but as this, her last day at home, wore away, and so far from seeming to share her feelings, he appeared determined to avoid her, hope gradually faded from her heart, and she became sad and silent.

Eleanor Marston was no better off in regard to her companion, for Arthur Leighton, her cavalier, was rendered utterly incapable of attending to her conversation, by the "by-play" going on between Annida and Leonard, and in fact the only well-assorted couple of the party was Bob and Jack, who formed the life and centre of a merry group seated on the grass at the head of the table.

The feast was drawing to a close, when Jack's attention was suddenly arrested by a conversation between his mother and Mr. Stevenson, and as he had been anxiously awaiting the effect of the latter's remarkable opinions upon the former, he instantly arose from the recumbent position he had assumed, and hastily whispering in Bob's ear, "Hist! the fun is be-

ginning," they both concentrated their attention upon the dialogue.

"I agree with you entirely," Mrs. Von Decker was saying, but the puzzled expression of her countenance belied her words. "Of course," she continued, "as we were made of the dust of the ground, the dust must be older than we are: Six thousand years ago," she continued, reflectively. "How impossible it is for human thought to bridge the space of time, and accurately determine what manner of man was Adam."

"Adam!" exclaimed Mr. Stevenson, looking in surprise at the lady. "Is it possible, my dear madam, that an enlightened woman like yourself can credit such nursery tales as those written in Genesis? Do you indeed believe that the human race is descended from an original pair, who sprang into existence in a single day, perfect in every part, even as we are? Nature forbids the supposition, madam. She works slowly and by rule, nor performs such sudden miracles. When you watch the growth of a tree or flower, or the gradual rising of a field of grain, does it not strike you as improbable that the world should have become what it now is in six days, when it takes so long for a minute portion of it to come to perfection? There was no first man, madam, any more than there was a first tree, and the creation of the world was not limited to six days."

He brought his hand down forcibly upon the table to emphasize his words, and in doing so swept a delicate wineglass off the board, which, falling to the ground, broke into pieces. In the presence of this misfortune, poor Mr. Stevenson's eloquence was hushed, and, leaning back in his chair, he mopped his face with his handkerchief, and muttered some feeble apologies, looking meanwhile the picture of distress.

Poor Mrs. Von Decker also looked distressed, but from another cause.

“The race must surely have had a beginning,” she murmured, fanning herself violently, and looking sorely perplexed. “I am sure I did not grow like a tree or a flower.”

“You are right, madam, in your first remark,” said Mr. Stevenson, like a war-horse at the sound of a trumpet, forgetting his confusion at the renewal of his favorite subject. “There was certainly a time in the history of the world when man did not exist. There was a time, indeed, when the world did not exist, and there was nothing in space save atoms; and from these did all proceed. Infinite in number, various in form, they struck together, and the lateral motions and whirlings which thus arose were the beginning of worlds. At first the globe was but a molten mass; in time, however, as it cooled, came vegetation, followed by insect life and animal existence, until, from grade to grade, man, nature’s crowning glory, was reached. And was all this accomplished in six days? The beauty and marvels which surround us, are they the growth of six thousand years? Ah, no, madam, æons, embracing untold millions of years, could scarcely have sufficed for this great work. Ages on ages before you or I were in existence, this earth pursued its even course, and for ages on ages after we are gone it will continue to exist; whilst you and I, mingling with our native dust—atoms once more and coalescing with our kind—may rise again in the waving grass, the insect life, for nature repeats herself forever.”

Down came the old gentleman’s hand a second time, and over went another glass, and the fear lest “Stevenson” should emulate “nature” and “repeat himself forever” to the detriment of the crockery, began to take possession of the public mind.

“I beg pardon,” he said, apologetically. “No, don’t bring me another,” he exclaimed, waving the approaching waiter

from him; "they are so easily demolished, I should prefer something stronger if you have it."

"Strathmore," said Jack, seriously, "sweep up the 'atoms,' old fellow. Who knows but you may thus collect the remains of somebody's ancestors, or preserve the souls of future poets, statesmen, or philosophers."

"'The atoms of the soul,' says Democritus, 'are free, smooth, and round, like those of fire,'" exclaimed Mr. Stevenson, once more mounting his hobby. "These are the most mobile of all atoms. They interpenetrate the whole body, and in their motions the phenomena of life arise."

"But this is horrible!" exclaimed Mrs. Von Decker, growing more and more confused; "this mingling of atoms troubles me. If there is no power to guide their combinations, what is to prevent my remains from coalescing with those of my nearest neighbor? in which case I might be buried an innocent woman and rise a murderer."

"There is assuredly some guiding power," said Mr. Stevenson, smiling at her novel suggestion; "and Empedocles, to account for these combinations and separations, has introduced the idea of love and hate among the atoms."

"Bob," said Jack, with preternatural gravity, "let us write a pre-adamite play. Act first, scene first, Chaos. Enter first Atom, *loquitur*. 'Adored of my soul, let us combine.' Enter second Atom, *loquitur*. 'Behold, my beloved, I am here.' Tableau vivant, they coalesce. That ought to produce a sensation in these scientific days."

"Do be quiet," said Bob, "I am dying of 'suppressed emotion,' and if you hasten my last hours my atoms shall haunt you."

"And the soul! my dear Mr. Stevenson, the soul!" continued the bewildered lady; "what becomes of it under your system?"

“Nothing that exists can be destroyed,” said Mr. Stevenson; “if you have a soul, madam, it will follow the universal law.”

“*If* I have a soul!” exclaimed Mrs. Von Decker, aghast at his audacity.

“What is the soul?” said Mr. Stevenson. “Is it more than life? All nature is alive, why therefore should this soul leave its atoms?”

“Ah!” cried Mrs. Von Decker, starting aside with a little shriek, as a “daddy-long-legs” let himself down from the tree, and dropped upon her plate, and she pushed it from her with aversion.

“Wherefore, madam, do you despise this insect?” said Mr. Stevenson, gravely. “Does he not move, has he not life, and if life *be* the soul, how are you and I his superiors? Let us examine the creature.”

As he spoke he stretched out his hand to seize the insect, but it slipped nimbly between his fingers, and then commenced a most undignified “daddy hunt” on the part of the philosopher, who, despite the peals of merriment his performance was exciting, continued to chase it with his long bony fingers, in and out among the plates and dishes, until, seeing it about to escape him by running off the cloth, he sprang up, and leaning over the table brought his hand down forcibly upon it. The victory was his, but the triumph was of short duration, for the slender supports under the board gave way beneath his weight, and over went pursuer and pursued with a crash, carrying with them knives, forks, bottles, glasses, and the remains of the feast.

CHAPTER IX.

LOVE IN AN ARBOR.

“Take, oh, take, those lips away,
 That so sweetly were forsworn;
 And those eyes, the break of day,
 Lights that do mislead the morn;
 But my kisses bring again, bring again,
 Seals of love, but sealed in vain, sealed in vain.”

MR. STEVENSON having been rescued, with much laughter and some concern, from his perilous position, and proving to be unhurt, with the exception of a few scratches from broken crockery, the company with one accord left the scene of the disaster, and adjourned to another part of the grounds, where the band was playing a prelude to one of Weber's waltzes. Leonard Strathmore now made another effort to obtain a private interview with Miss De Luce, but she played with him as a cat does with a mouse, without giving him either freedom from his suspense, or death to his hopes.

Elsie, who was becoming more and more unhappy, owing to a jealous feeling in regard to Maude, which had been gaining ground with her all day, took this opportunity of stealing away unobserved from the party, and, running lightly over the grass, sought an asylum in the arbor to which Leonard had introduced her the day before.

Throwing herself upon the turf, she buried her face in her hands, and tried to think, but the excess of her emotion entirely overpowered all capacity for thought, and she could do nothing but bewail her wretchedness, whilst the salt tears rolled down

her pretty round cheeks. She no longer tried to deceive herself in regard to her feelings for her cousin ; she acknowledged to her heart now that she loved him dearly, and, with a child's unreasoning passion, she raved against the adverse fate which had separated them, and was ready to blame any one, rather than herself, for her present misery.

She wept till she could weep no more, and then sat crouching in the shadow of the bushes, listening sadly to the distant sound of music and revelry, and wondering if she would ever feel light-hearted and happy again.

Then another important matter claimed her attention, and as she dried her tears, she began to think how she could appear again in that gay assembly, with her swollen eyes and red cheeks, and just as she had come to the conclusion, that having no good excuse to offer for them, she must remain where she was until she had recovered her usual appearance, she heard, to her dismay, voices approaching her place of concealment. Starting to her feet she prepared for flight, but retreat was now impossible, for the speakers had already reached the entrance of the arbor, and she had only just time enough to hastily conceal herself behind the rustic seat, when Annida De Luce entered, followed by Arthur Leighton.

The former threw herself upon the seat, and beat an impatient tattoo upon the ground with her foot, whilst the latter continued to pace up and down before her, with an agitated countenance.

He was a young man of remarkable personal beauty, his features being of a pure Grecian type, his hair a rare golden brown, and his eyes a deep blue-gray. He was rather above middle height, his figure powerfully though slightly made, and as he strode backward and forward the quivering of his under lip, and the nervous excitement of his manner, betrayed a disposition at once weak and passionate.

“Well, Annida,” he said, at length, pausing before her, “what am I to understand by all this tirade against tyrants? that you repent your engagement with me, and withdraw my right to comment upon your actions?”

“I never gave you any such right,” exclaimed Annida, “and I will not be dictated to as though I were already your wife. There was an especial agreement between us, if you will remember, that until we were actually married, I should be free to act as I chose.”

“Were you indeed my ‘*wife*,’” said Arthur, with a tender emphasis upon the name, “you would never find me dictatorial. Had I any real claim on you, my darling; were I but certain that you were mine, and mine only, you would find in me the humblest of slaves; but it is this uncertainty of the future that is driving me mad. I well remember the agreement you speak of, and own the injustice of my reproaches. Yet, for the sake of our past love, Annida, have pity on me, and grant as a favor that which you have refused as a right. Ah, tell me that you will not encourage Leonard Strathmore’s attentions,” and throwing himself on the grass at her feet, he took her hand in his, and gazed upward with a look of passionate entreaty.

“You foolish boy,” she said, and her voice softened as she spoke, “how can you be so jealous? What difference can it make whom I encourage, when you know that my heart is all yours? Can you not allow me to revenge myself on the world for my own miseries, by making others suffer? or have you become so philanthropic that you cannot endure the sight of a fellow-creature’s disappointment?”

“The disappointments of my fellow-men give me but small annoyance,” replied the young man, with a smile. “It is their *success*, Annida, that I fear. Alas, should some one steal from

me the one blessing fate has left — your love — what, my darling, could make life endurable?”

“And who is there that can do that?” said Annida, in a low, sweet voice, allowing her hand to stray lovingly over the soft fair hair covering the head now resting against her knee. “Who is there in the world that can compare with you, my own darling? Do you think that Leonard Strathmore is likely to prove a dangerous rival?” and she looked down upon the handsome fellow that lay stretched upon the grass before her with a proud, defiant smile.

Truly, in point of appearance, he had not much to fear from any man, and much less from poor Leonard, who was certainly remarkably plain and unattractive, and feeling this to be the case, a smile of pleasure passed over his face as he answered, with pardonable vanity:

“Leonard is certainly not a beauty; but then he has that to bestow which it will take me years to acquire, even if my brightest dreams are realized, namely, wealth and position, and to a proud woman like yourself, Annida, these are a great deal,” and he sighed deeply.

“But you will have them also some day, darling,” replied Annida, in a voice so full of feeling that Elsie scarcely recognized it; “and it may be, that when that time shall come, your own ambition will have been aroused, and you will look higher than a poor, penniless girl, like myself.”

“Trust me for that,” said Arthur; “my ambition is centred in you alone. Ah, my darling, my darling, but for your sake I have no desire to rise, and without your love, a throne would not suffice for happiness,” and he covered the small fair hands with passionate kisses.

“Hush, hush,” said Annida, softly, as a sudden movement on Elsie's part caused the leaves to crackle behind them. “Some

one is coming, Arthur; you *must* be more prudent," and she endeavored to raise him from his recumbent position.

"Prudent!" he exclaimed, rising to his knees, and fixing a burning glance upon her. "Ah, Annida, cast prudence to the winds, and let us love each other before the world."

"Patience, patience," she whispered, with quivering lips, as she stooped her head to his. "My darling, it is as hard for me as for you, but any other course than that which we are pursuing would be madness. I love you too much to marry you until your fortune is assured."

"And you do really love me still?" said Arthur, earnestly.

"I love you now, as I have always done, with my whole heart," she replied, in full, rich tones; "and thus I shall continue to love until this world's troubles are over for me forever. Whatever may betide, Arthur, believe this one thing, that I have never, and *can* never, love any other but yourself," and stooping lower still, her lips met his in a long, passionate kiss.

"Now go," she exclaimed, suddenly starting to her feet and pushing him from her; "I am sure I hear some one coming."

"I am going," replied the young man, joyously, "and with sunshine in my heart."

"And you will not be jealous any more?" asked Annida, tenderly.

"If I ever distrust you again, I shall deserve to lose you," he replied; "one more embrace, darling; there, good-bye," and he dashed out of the arbor, without trusting himself to look at her again.

For a moment Annida stood where he had left her, and then raising her hands to her head, she pressed them to her throbbing temples, saying, in a low, unsteady voice:

"Good-bye, aye, good-bye *forever*, Arthur Leighton.

Would to God I could crush you from my heart, as I must from my life; oh, why did perverse fortune give to Leonard Strathmore all this wealth, and to you all my love?" and staggering back she fell upon the seat again, covering her face with her hands.

Elsie, very much agitated by the scene she had witnessed, now attempted to retire, but light as her step was, Annida heard it, and starting up, exclaimed:

"Who is there?"

"It is I," replied Elsie, pausing, and regarding her with a curious look.

"And how long have you been here?" inquired Annida, adding, passionately, "could not your dislike find other expression than in acting the spy on me?"

"I have acted the spy upon no one," replied Elsie, indignantly. "I was in the arbor before yourself, and you gave me no opportunity to retire. You should look carefully about you before you indulge in such interesting scenes."

Annida changed color. She saw at once the mistake she had made. It would not do to make Elsie angry; with the information she had gained, she would be too dangerous an enemy.

"Forgive me, dear," she said, gently. "I spoke thoughtlessly; of course there is no one but myself to blame; and, if I had not been mad with misery, I would have known at once that your presence here could do no harm, as you are too honorable to make use of information gained in such a way."

"I do not know that," said Elsie, bluntly. "You seem to be acting a double part, and if there is any good to be done by it, I shall not hesitate to repeat what I have heard."

"But there is nothing to be gained by it," said Annida, quickly, whilst the color receded from her cheeks in her alarm.

“You do not understand the case. Promise me that you will, at least, not speak of what has taken place here until you have heard my explanation.”

“And suppose you never give me one?” said Elsie, coldly.

“But I will; I swear it!” exclaimed Annida, rising to her feet in her excitement. “Oh, here comes the rest of the party,” she continued, grasping Elsie’s arm, as the sound of approaching voices fell upon their ears. “Promise me, oh, for the love of heaven, promise me!”

“I promise,” replied Elsie, “but remember that I must have the explanation before I leave, and that I do not bind myself to keep silence unless I am satisfied;” and then further conversation was prevented by an irruption of merry young people who burst in upon them, exclaiming:

“Here they are! here they are! and both together! What in the world have you two found to talk about that is so interesting? We have been searching all over the grounds for you. The dancing is over, and we are all going to see the balloon ascend. Come along at once, for you are keeping every one waiting,” and they seized upon the girls, bearing them off in triumph.

And thus the afternoon wore on in revelry and mirth, and as the sun sank below the horizon, and the gray twilight clothed the earth as with a mantle, a light became visible upon a neighboring hillock, and beautiful sky-rockets, Roman candles, carrier pigeons, and all description of fire-works, made the sky once more bright as day.

The eager guests sought the best positions from which to enjoy this unexpected treat, and remained lost in admiration until the end, when, written in letters of fire upon the heavens, they read the word “Elsie,” and as it faded from their sight, immediately below it “*Vale.*”

"*Vale!*" said Elsie, with tears in her eyes, as the last spark died out, and she realized that her last day on Staten Island had come to an end.

"*Vale!*" murmured Roy, covering his face with his hands, lest, despite the darkness, his emotion might be visible to those around him, and they should divine the all-absorbing agony which had assailed him at the combination of those last two words, and the deadly fear which had seized his heart, lest this farewell should be on his part forever. Oh, Elsie, Elsie, why were you so blind that you did not see his heart was breaking with its weight of love? that one word from you had brought him to your feet, a slave forever more? Alas, for that little word of peace, so easily spoken, yet so frequently withheld!

"Ladies and gentlemen," said the host, turning toward his guests, "loath as I am to lose your pleasant company, I must nevertheless remind you that 'time and tide wait for no man,' and, therefore, if you wish to get home before daybreak, you must at once make your preparations to embark."

At this announcement every one hurried back to the house for the wraps that they had brought with them, and thence to the shore, where lay the little "Dragon Fly" in readiness to convey them back to the patient "Saunterer."

With mingled feelings our party prepared to return home. To some the day had brought unequivocal satisfaction, and among these might be numbered Maude, for Roy had never left her side the whole day, and had admitted that but for her he should not have come at all.

How could she guess the silent misery which he had suffered, as he watched Elsie flitting about like a bright butterfly, with a word and a smile for every one but himself; and realized how far he was from the fulfilment of the hopes that had brought him to Beechcroft. Whatever it might have been to others, this day

had been to him one of continuous suffering, and he cared not how soon it should end.

Bob and Jack were perfectly happy, as might have been expected, for they always enjoyed everything, being possessed of those dispositions which cast care to the four winds and live comfortably in a pleasant present, forgetful of past discomforts and regardless of those to come.

Bob had been more than repaid for her mortification early in the day, by the attention afterwards paid to her father, when, being brought to his senses by his fall, he had put his talents and learning to practical use, and made himself agreeable to old and young — amusing them by his quaint phrases, and his courtly, old-fashioned manners, whilst at the same time imparting a great deal of useful information in regard to science and natural history; thus winning for himself the respect and admiration to which he was at all times entitled, but which was often changed into ridicule, owing to his eccentricity and absent-mindedness. On the shore he bade the company “good-bye,” for, fearing exposure to the night air on the river, he had accepted Jack’s offer of his carriage and horses, and concluded to go home by land.

The night was beautiful, the moon, which had now risen, was shedding her effulgent light over hill and dale, and forming a silvery line in the wake of the vessel, which, with its white wings spread, looked like some shadowy spirit of the deep, preparing for flight into a mysterious, moonlit world.

“Annida,” whispered Arthur, as he handed her into the boat, “I dare not trust myself with you to-night. The atmosphere is charged with electricity. My blood seems on fire. I should certainly do some mad thing did I accompany you on this moonlight sail, so I am going to sober myself by driving Mr. Stevenson home. God keep you, my darling, and my memory green within your heart forever. Good-night.”

“Good-night,” murmured Annida, in soft, æolian tones, and turning her glowing eyes upon him, she gave him a glance of passionate love that burned into his heart forever.

Through all the doubt, trouble, and mystery that came in the days that followed, Arthur remembered that glance; and as the vision of his darling, bathed in the white moonlight, her glorious eyes shining with passionate love, came before him in after days, he could not help but struggle with his great despair, and imagine that his misery was all a dream, and reality — Annida, and Annida's love.

CHAPTER X.

CROSS—PURPOSES.

“Trifles, light as air,
Are to the jealous confirmation strong
As proofs of holy writ.”

ONCE fairly launched upon the water, the beauty of the night asserted itself, and the merry laughter and the quick repartee gave way to a thoughtful silence, whilst congenial spirits strove to be placed near each other, that they might uninterruptedly enjoy the pleasure of the scene and the hour.

Roy had instinctively drawn near to Elsie, not with any expectation of conversing with her, but that he might feast his eyes upon her fair face, which would so soon be beyond his gaze; and Leonard Strathmore, who was seated beside her, had taken care that Annida should be placed on his other hand,

determining that she should not again escape him, as she had contrived to do all the afternoon.

With a scornful smile Elsie noticed the arrangement, and wondered silently whether Leonard was trying the same game upon her that Annida was playing with Arthur; but in the midst of these speculations, Roy spoke to her, and she straightway forgot all others but himself.

“Have you had a pleasant day?” was all that he said, but it seemed to Elsie that there was a tremulous eagerness in his voice, and she immediately attributed it to the fact that he imagined she could not have enjoyed herself without him, so she replied quickly:

“Yes, thank you; it has been a day of uninterrupted delight. I am so much obliged to Mr. Strathmore for giving me such a pleasant farewell; it will be something to look back upon when I am far away.”

Roy simply bowed his head in answer to her words, and on turning towards Mr. Strathmore, she found that he had not heard her remark, having moved his chair a little closer to Annida, and being absorbed in a low-toned conversation with her. With another scornful smile, Elsie moved her own still further from his, and entered into an enthusiastic disquisition in favor of all picnics, and of this one in particular.

“And now, Miss De Luce, for your confidence,” Leonard was saying, in a tone little above a whisper; “I hope you have not forgotten I am anxiously waiting to hear all about yourself and your troubles.”

“About myself, or about my cousin?” said Annida, with a soft laugh.

“The one subject includes the other,” he replied; “I wish to hear about you both.”

“You are very kind,” replied Annida, “to take an interest

in me, and I thank you very much for it, but I will not take advantage of you, and be wearisome; I can bear my troubles, such as they are, alone, very well."

"And you have nothing then to tell me?" said Leonard, in a disappointed tone.

"Yes, I have a great deal to tell you," she replied; "and some of it will make you very angry, whilst more of it you will not believe; notwithstanding which, my interest in you is so sincere, that I am going to risk yours in me, valuable as it is, rather than hold my peace, and see you made a dupe of."

"I thank you very much," said Leonard, flushing slightly, "and believe me, your kindness shall not go unrewarded."

"I do not seek reward," replied Annida; "for my experience of life is, that the more you do for a person the sooner he or she forgets you; but I feel that, in common honesty, I must tell you the truth, be the consequences what they may. Are you prepared to hear some sad revelations?"

"Go on," was Leonard's answer, but his breathing became hard, and he cast an anxious look towards Elsie, who, with head inclined to her cousin, was talking rapidly, and with much apparent interest in her subject.

What she said, could he have heard it, would have set Leonard's heart at rest, but all he could comprehend was her glowing cheek, her sparkling eye, and a nameless something in her face which he had never seen there before.

A sudden tremor seized him. Could this handsome cousin have appropriated the heart he thought his own? Had Elsie been trifling with him—Leonard Strathmore, of Strathmore Park, and presumed to use him as a foil to bring this other man into bondage? The very idea was intolerable; why did not Annida speak and put him at ease? He turned abruptly towards her.

"I am listening," he said; "why do you not continue?"

"Because you have divined all that I would say," said Annida, calmly. "You see for yourself that which I would have told you."

"Which is?" said Leonard, interrogatively.

"That this couple understand each other perfectly; are, in fact, affianced lovers; but the young man is poor, and, therefore, not eligible for a *husband*. He will do very well for a *lover*, however, if she only marry some idiot, whom she can deceive with her 'guileless' smiles — some man like Leonard Strathmore, whose broad acres she can command by a show of that affection which in reality belongs to another man. The plan is beautifully arranged. You have slipped your head blindly into the noose. Kick away the props, *mon ami*, and launch yourself into matrimony, with a girl who has given her whole heart to another."

Annida concluded this speech with one of her peculiar laughs, and Leonard sat horror-stricken at the picture she presented to his view.

"I have not put my head in yet," he muttered.

"But will do so at the first opportunity," said Annida, with a slight sneer.

"By heaven, no!" exclaimed Leonard, fiercely. "I am not quite a fool, although you have tried to make me out to be one."

"Here begins my reward," said Annida, laughing again. "You are reviling me already, whilst you are congratulating yourself on an escape to which I helped you."

"Forgive me," said Leonard, earnestly. "Indeed, I had not a thought of being ungrateful. I shall never forget what you have done for me to-night as long as I live, and I will gladly serve you in the future, should the time ever come when you stand in need of a friend."

"I stand in need of one now," said Annida, sadly. "I doubt if a woman ever needed one so sorely: Suspicion and distrust encompass me on all sides. My own kin have turned against me, and by speaking the truth frankly, I have lost even your regard, and am utterly alone in the world."

"You must not say that," exclaimed Leonard, eagerly. "I never thought more of you than I do at present. Your courage and frankness have won my heart forever, and you will never be alone whilst I live, and have the power to befriend you."

The poison instilled into his mind was working well, and a triumphant feeling passed over Annida as she saw how easily her victim was falling into her toils.

"Won't you sing us something, Mr. Strathmore?" asked Elsie's winning voice, as, turning abruptly from her companion, she brought her most beaming smiles to bear upon Leonard.

"Pray, excuse me this evening," he replied, nervously. "I feel quite hoarse, and — the night air — you know. Perhaps Mr. Weston will favor us in my stead."

"Yes, do, Mr. Weston," exclaimed a chorus of young people. "Sing us something romantic and pathetic, in accordance with the beauty of the night." And as Elsie drew back surprised and offended, Roy, stung to the quick by her request to his rival, gave vent to his feelings in the words of the old Scotch song —

"Oh! had I a cave on some far distant shore,
Where the winds howl to the waves' dashing roar,
There would I weep my woes,
There seek my lost repose,
Till death mine eyelids close,
Ne'er to wake more.

"Falsest of womankind, can'st thou declare
All thy fond plighted vows empty as air?"

To thy new lover hie,
 Laugh o'er thy perjury,
 Then in thy bosom try
 What peace is there!"

Thus sang Roy, with his heart in his voice, and his eyes fixed despairingly upon his cousin. Surely these words must bring her to a sense of her own misconduct. She would at least wince at this home thrust, and he continued to gaze at her even after the last cadence of the song had died away, and his friends, loud in its praise, were calling for another.

But there was no look of conscious shame upon Elsie's face; in fact, the poor child never once thought of appropriating the words to herself, but it crossed her mind how suitable they were to Annida, and she could not forbear stealing a glance at her to see the effect produced.

Pale and rigid sat Miss De Luce, with her large eyes fixed and staring. She was like one spell-bound. Over her heart rushed the memory of her lover, in an overwhelming flood. Roy Weston was no longer himself, but an avenging angel, and, to her distempered vision, it was Arthur Leighton whom she saw, and who thus arraigned her before the world for the double game she was playing.

"Then in thy bosom try
 What peace is there!"

The words echoed and re-echoed in her heart, and cold drops of sweat came out upon her brow.

"Annida!" exclaimed Elsie, really alarmed at her appearance, "do you feel ill? can I get you anything? See, she is fainting, Mr. Strathmore;" and as she spoke, Annida swayed back and forth upon her chair, to the distress and alarm of the company generally, and of Leonard Strathmore particularly.

Hastily seizing a light summer cloak which was hanging over the back of his chair, he threw it upon the deck, and, placing his arm around Annida, gently raised her from her seat and deposited her thereon, whilst the others ran right and left, like a parcel of frightened sheep, to find restoratives. But Annida did not entirely lose her consciousness, and, recovering her composure with an effort, she begged that no one would be alarmed, for she was accustomed to these seizures, and would be quite well again in a moment. So saying she closed her eyes, and, seemingly unaware that Leonard was supporting her head upon his breast, remained passively where she was, without making an effort to rise.

“She'll do,” remarked Jack, sententiously, to Bob. “‘Richard is himself again!’ She evidently knows what she is about. The whole scene is as well gotten up as anything I ever saw on the stage. Good Lord! Bob, what did you not save me from when you warned me against that woman?”

“‘Set a thief to catch a thief,’” said Bob, laughing. “You see I knew all about her.”

“Mr. Von Decker,” cried a merry, bright-eyed girl, “this is a good time to write your pre-adamite play. Do begin, we are dying to hear it.”

“I want somebody to help me,” replied Jack. “I'll begin at once, Miss Struthers, if you will lend me your aid.”

“Oh, ask Miss Stevenson,” replied Miss Struthers; “she is much more capable than I am.”

“Do you hear, Bobby?” asked Jack; “are you prepared to act *improvisatore* on so short a notice?”

“‘Lead on, MacDuff!’” replied Bob. “The period is one with which I am well acquainted. Introduce the *dramatis personæ*.”

“They are already upon the stage,” said Jack; “did n't you hear me say: ‘Enter first Atom,’ etc.?”

"Ah, to be sure," said Bob. "Well, let us begin. Is it to be prose or verse?"

"Oh, verse, of course," cried every one in a breath, whilst Jack added, tragically, "Let us *die*, if necessary, but let us be poetical about it."

"Two little Atoms, walking in the sun," began Bob.

"A plagiarism! a plagiarism!" shouted the company.

"A second-hand edition of 'The ten little niggars' won't sell, Bobby," said Jack; "try again."

"Begin it yourself, you ingrate," said Bob, laughing, "and I'll come in with the chorus."

"First Atom, *loquitur*," said Jack gravely.

"Oh, Atom mine,
Wilt thou combine?
Chaos to bless
Let's coalesce.

Go on, Bob, it's your turn."

"And thus give birth
To mother earth;
Then form a man,
On easy plan.

That's four lines; now go on yourself," replied Bob.

"And thus to prove our scheme's no sham,"

said Jack; "no *sham*!" he repeated, reflectively. "Bob, that's a stumper."

"We'll form a race, and call it *A-dam*!"

cried Bob, triumphantly.

"Robert! Robert! my dear fellow!" expostulated Jack, after the laughter caused by the last line of the poem had sub-

sided; "now really, you know, that's swearing. Remember, there are ladies present; pray restrain your profanity."

"Poet's license, Mr. Von Decker, that is all," replied Bob, gravely; "but I am sorry I offended your sensitive nature. Pray, if I may make so bold as to ask, how is it that you read French poetry, when you are so averse to profanity?"

"I may be a dunce," replied Jack, "but I don't see any connection between the two."

"That comes of being unintellectual," replied Bob. "To my mind they are almost similar. French poesy is all '*L'ame*,' and English profanity all '*Damn*.' Very little difference, you will perceive."

"Put some cold water on her head," cried Jack, whilst the tears rolled down his cheeks from laughter. "I never saw such a girl. She has n't the least compunction about the effect of her words on her audience. I'll never go anywhere with her again without an iron band around me to keep me from bursting out laughing."

"You are quite as bad yourself," said Emily Struthers. "Oh, I am so weak from laughter. It is well that we are near home, or my death would lie at your door. Please don't say anything more, Miss Stevenson," she entreated, as Bob opened her mouth to speak; "I really cannot stand it; wait until to-morrow, at least."

"We are nearly opposite Beechcroft," said Leonard Strathmore, bending over his fair burden; "do you feel well enough to land?" and the slight tremor of his voice told Annida that her night's work had not been for nothing.

"Oh, yes," she said, "I am quite well now. I should not have burdened you for so long a time," she added, with a sigh, as she slowly rose, and looking around her, "but I was so comfortable, so — so *happy*," she continued, fixing a pair of

mournful eyes upon him, "that I could not bear to move and break the spell."

"I shall never forget this night," said Leonard, in a low voice.

"Nor I," said Annida; but there was a wailing tone in her voice, and she drew her mantle around her as she spoke, shivering as though the night were cold. "I could never do it," she said to herself, as she thought of the part she was acting, "if I did not know that Arthur would always love me, let what will betide. I *must* marry Leonard Strathmore; but, my darling, my darling, we shall love each other still."

"You leave to-morrow by the early boat, I believe?" said Roy interrogatively to Elsie, as he found himself at her side in the general movement following the anchorage of the yacht.

"Yes," said Elsie, sadly; "to-morrow I leave my home for a year, or perhaps two; and who can tell what may happen in that space of time? I am getting nervous and low-spirited," and she looked up at him naturally, for the first time since his return.

"It is too bad that you are deprived of your friend's society," said Roy, sympathizingly; "she seems so fond of you, that I am sure she would have been a great comfort."

"You mean Nellie?" asked Elsie. "Oh, you have made her acquaintance, have you? I intended to introduce you myself, but I have not had the pleasure of seeing anything of you all day."

The last words were uttered in a tone of reproach, and brought a feeling of pleasure to Roy's heart.

"If I had only known—if I had dared believe that you cared about seeing more of me," he began, eagerly, but just then Maude's voice fell upon his ear, saying:

"Roy, Roy, will you come here a moment, please?" and,

turning in vexation towards the quarter from whence the sound came, he perceived her standing motionless, held firmly "in durance vile" by the chain he had given her, which had become entangled in her hair.

How could he refuse to go to her with that memento of his promised friendship glittering in the moonlight? and yet how could he leave Elsie just at the moment when an understanding seemed probable?

"Make haste, Roy," cried Maude, "I am pulling out all my hair," and with an inward groan he quitted Elsie's side for that of her sister, anathematizing bitterly his own stupidity in thus having forged his own chains.

"Good-bye," she said softly, as he turned away, and in a few moments he saw her handed over the side of the vessel, and then the little boat bore her from his sight.

In impotent frenzy he pulled and jerked at poor Maude's hair until she uttered a slight cry, exclaiming:

"I am being murdered, but I suppose I must bear that for the sake of my chain. I would go through a good deal rather than lose it," and she looked up into his face with a sweet smile.

"Well, Bob, old girl, has it been a nice day?" asked Jack, as he shut her up in the one-horse shay.

"Oh, *so* jolly, Jack," replied the girl, looking out at him with beaming eyes. "I shall never forget either it or you."

"Every lassie has her laddie, and nane they say hae I," sang Eleanor Marston, as she turned alone towards the house.

CHAPTER XI.

MIDNIGHT CONFESSIONS.

“Oh, that deceit should dwell
In such a gorgeous palace.”

ANNIDA DE LUCE hastened towards her room as soon as she arrived at the house, hoping thereby to avoid the dreaded *tête-à-tête* with Elsie, but that young lady was not thus to be outwitted, and, following after her, reached her door almost as soon as she did herself.

Finding herself pursued, Annida paused upon the threshold, trying to conjure up some excuse for delaying her promised explanation. She had offered to tell Elsie the true state of affairs when in imminent danger of having a mine sprung under her feet, but now that the panic was over, she deeply regretted what she had done, and determined that her secret should not be wrung from her without a struggle.

“Shall I come into your room, or will you come to mine?” said Elsie, standing before her victim like a stern Nemesis.

“It is very late, is it not?” faltered Annida, “and we are both so weary; do you not think it would be better to postpone our conversation until another time?”

“By no means,” replied Elsie, decidedly. “I must hear what you have to say in extenuation of your conduct at once, for I cannot leave the country with my father, knowing that plots and counterplots are taking place in his house, and without his knowledge; so let us understand each other without delay.”

"Plots and counterplots!" repeated Annida, with a sweet smile. "Dear me, how terrible those words sound. You speak as though I were the heroine of a three-volume sensational novel. You will be very much disappointed when you learn the truth, which is prosaic enough, I am sure. There, ease your mind of its burden, and rest on my assertion that I am not going to murder any one, or even elope out of the window in proper stage style. I will give you a written promise to that effect, if you will only let me go to bed now, I am so dreadfully sleepy," and she gave a prodigious yawn.

"You gave me a solemn promise this afternoon to tell me everything about your mysterious interview with Mr. Leighton, and the still more enigmatical words which you imprudently let fall after he had left you," replied Elsie, looking her steadily in the face, "and I on my part promised to hold my peace as to what I had seen and heard until I had received your explanation of the scene. I have kept my part of the agreement, and it now remains for you to keep yours."

"And suppose that I refuse to tell you my pitiful story," said Annida, with glittering eyes. "Suppose that, on mature consideration, I see no reason to lay bare my heart before you, and submit its writhings to your merciless gaze. What, then, Mademoiselle, am I to blame?"

"That is for your own conscience to decide," said Elsie, coldly. "I have nothing to do with that. I am here to listen to your confession, at your own desire, and to secure the honor of my father's house. Be frank with me, and I will deal as gently with you as the circumstances will permit; but refuse to give me your confidence, and I shall feel it to be my duty to place the matter in more experienced hands than my own."

"Go in," muttered Annida, moving aside to let her pass, and as Elsie entered she followed with clinched teeth and lowering brow.

“You are driving me too hard,” she continued. “Animals at bay are dangerous. Take care, or I may turn and rend you.”

Elsie looked at her almost with alarm, so sudden and terrific was the change in her cousin's face; but as she gazed the storm died away, and a hopeless, weary expression took the place of the threatening cloud.

“Sit down and make yourself comfortable,” she said, drearily, as she threw off her dress and wrapped herself in a light *robe de chambre*. “You have entailed upon yourself a long and dismal yarn,” she continued, sinking into an easy chair, and proceeding to loosen the heavy braids coiled around her shapely head, “and have only yourself to blame if you fall asleep before the end of it. Yet why should I make it long? What is there to interest you in my lonely life at the South — my struggles with poverty and uncongeniality — of Arthur Leighton's entrance on that life, and all he was and is to me? You only wish, I believe, to know for how long a time I have been engaged to him, and what was my motive in concealing the fact? Am I right?”

She paused and fixed her eyes on Elsie, who simply bowed her head in the affirmative.

“Let me then rather begin at the end than at the beginning,” she continued, threading her small white fingers through the luxuriant mass of hair now falling over her shoulders. “Three years ago I promised to be Arthur Leighton's wife; but, as we were neither of us possessed of sufficient means to support an establishment, we determined to keep our engagement secret until our prospects brightened, and not appear before the world as indigent lovers. Arthur had reason to believe — or, rather, thought he had — that he would soon be in an independent position; but that hope, like so many in my life, proved de-

lusive, and it will be years upon years before he can afford the luxury of a wife, therefore I have never spoken of my engagement. Now you know all, are you satisfied?"

"Not quite," said Elsie, gravely. "Your last words, uttered after he left you, are still unexplained. Why did you bid him farewell forever, if you still love him as you led him to suppose, and how could you encourage Mr. Strathmore's attentions, when you were engaged to marry another?"

"I have already told you that my promise was given some time ago," replied Annida. "I am three years older and wiser than I was then, and have seen enough of the world to know how weak and imprudent we are in thus wasting our lives in hopeless patience. What will our love avail us when we have grown gray awaiting its fruition? What if, when all chance of doing better is over, we find that time, the despoiler of all things, has carried away with him our love, and left us nothing in its place but mutual reproaches?"

"Can true love die?" asked Elsie, with her large eyes opened to their widest extent.

"Aye, child," answered Annida, with a short, dry laugh. "Love is subject to the law of nature as well as ourselves; it can die in the lapse of years, and is sometimes crushed out of life in a moment."

"You may be right in regard to some cases," replied Elsie, with heightened color, "but I will not believe it is thus in all; and, in my opinion, the man or woman who could thus thrust aside the best and purest passion of the human heart for a worldly consideration, is as criminal as one who would take the life of a fellow-creature."

"Would I were sixteen," said Annida, with a contemptuous smile, "and could think as you do; but my experience has taught me otherwise."

“Do you think, then, that Mr. Leighton loves you less than he did three years ago?” inquired Elsie. “Is it for his sake that you wish to break your engagement?”

“Who said I *wished* to break it?” exclaimed Annida, passionately. “Does it seem probable, when he is the only human being I have ever loved? The day I lose him will break my heart. Oh, God! oh, God! Life is so hard.”

She covered her face with her hands as she spoke, and moaned piteously as she rocked herself back and forth in her chair. Elsie's tender heart was touched. Bright tears of sympathy glistened in her soft eyes.

“Annida,” she said, gently, “do not be so despairing. Perhaps brighter days are in store for you than you imagine. Keep a brave heart, and above all, do not try to conquer a love which so entirely absorbs your being, lest you destroy yourself in the endeavor.”

“It is too late to talk to me in that way,” said Annida, sadly. “I have long since resigned all hope of happiness with Arthur Leighton. Fate is against it, and I cannot conquer fate. It is best for me to resign him—it is best for him that I should let him go.”

“Do nothing hastily,” exclaimed Elsie, eagerly. “Let me speak to my father and see what he can do.”

“No, no,” said Annida, quickly. “I will not have my uncle made acquainted with my troubles. What could he do for Arthur but take him into his office to swell the list of useless clerks? Do not make matters worse than they are, by publishing the secrets of my heart.”

“Then let me speak to Mr. Strathmore,” said Elsie. “He has so much influence in the city, and will, I am sure, use it to Mr. Leighton's advantage when he has heard your story. He might even take him as a private secretary, he has so much and

to spare, that he could afford to give a liberal salary, and you might live at Strathmore Park."

In her eagerness and delight at having thought of so pleasant a way out of Annida's troubles, Elsie approached her cousin and laid her hand affectionately on her shoulder; but she drew back instinctively as the bowed head was lifted, and a tearless face, on which rested a mocking smile, met her expectant gaze.

For a few moments they remained looking at each other in silence, and then Annida burst out laughing, exclaiming:

"Did any one ever see such charming simplicity? Do you really suppose, my dear child, that I would be content to live at Strathmore Park as the wife of a subordinate?"

"Would you not?" said Elsie, with a crestfallen look.

"Would you be content with half of a ripe apricot, if you could have the whole for the asking?" replied Annida. "My dear, I propose to live at Strathmore Park, but as the wife of the *master*, not of the servant," and her lip curled with scorn.

A deadly pallor overspread Elsie's face, and she regarded her cousin with a look of positive terror.

"Annida," she said, "are you a woman, or a fiend? Is it possible that, after all you have told me concerning your love for Mr. Leighton, you can seriously propose to marry Mr. Strathmore? To swear at the altar to love, honor, and obey the one, whilst the other possesses all your heart? That even as you lay in Arthur's arms this evening, you were plotting to deceive him, and give to another that hand which was his alone, by reason of the vows you had made him? I must have mistaken your meaning—you cannot be so heartless a deceiver."

"Poverty is a hard taskmaster," muttered Annida; "we must go whither he drives us."

"Never would I be driven to sell myself," exclaimed Elsie,

“or deliberately deceive one who loved me as passionately as Mr. Leighton does you.”

“You know so much about it,” said Annida, with a sneer. “Reared from infancy in luxury, you understand so well the carking care, the maddening anxiety to make two ends meet, that eat out a woman’s soul. And what is the reward of all this pain and misery? I will tell you. When a woman marries a poor man, giving up all to follow him, she must renounce every personal ambition, gratification, and desire; and when, having done this uncomplainingly, nay, cheerfully, she has lost, in the hard, one-sided warfare with the world, health, strength, youth, beauty,—in fact, all that makes a woman powerful among men—this one for whom she has sacrificed herself turns from the wreck with disgust, and some more favored child of fortune wins and wears her only treasure,—her ‘ewe lamb,’ her husband’s love—whilst she pines in secret, too proud to show her wounds, and with no power to avenge her wrongs. Ha! ha! It is amusing, is it not? this droll world. Let us be merry, for to-morrow we die. *Vive la bagatelle.*”

Annida, who had been growing more and more excited as she spoke, now burst into a wild fit of laughter, so mirthless and dreary that it struck terror to Elsie’s heart, and it was a moment or two before she could collect herself sufficiently to speak.

“Annida,” she said, at length, “I will not argue this subject with you, for I am too inexperienced; but I cannot allow you to play a double game, such as you meditate, with these two men. You must promise me either to break at once with Mr. Leighton, or give up all designs on Mr. Strathmore’s hand. This duplicity cannot continue under my father’s roof. *I* must speak the truth at all hazards, if *you* will not.”

“You will prevent my marrying Leonard Strathmore—is that

what you mean?" said Annida, looking fixedly at her. "You will tell him all that I have told you in confidence? How honorable in you! how I admire your keen sense of what is due to an orphaned cousin staying in your father's house!"

"I will not betray your confidence unless you force me," replied Elsie, flushing slightly at the taunt.

"You threaten me, do you?" said Annida, starting to her feet, and flashing a lightning glance upon her cousin, who stood pale and immovable before her. "Do you think that a little soft white kitten like yourself can compete with a tigress? Do you suppose that I would have disclosed my plans, had checkmate been possible? Let there be war between us if you will. I will stand no dictation from you as to what I shall or shall not do. Tell your tale to Leonard Strathmore, if you can see him before you leave to-morrow; go whining to him of heartlessness and deception, and he will hurl your own words back upon you, as it was only this evening that I told him the same about yourself, and he is under the impression that you have been playing him off against your cousin."

She paused to take breath, and Elsie stood speechless before her. She felt that she was no match for her cousin, and her sensitive nature revolted at the base treachery with which she had been treated.

"I have 'spiked your guns,' my little lady," continued Annida, "and it will be the better for you if you lay down your arms at once, and own yourself defeated, for I swear to you by all that is holy, that if you mar my plans, or put yourself in any way between me and my ambition, or — or — my love, I will ruin you forever. There, begone and do your worst, remembering always what I have just said."

Like one in a dream, Elsie turned to leave the room. It seemed as though she had no volition of her own.

“To think,” she said, “that I have lived so long with you, and never known you until to-night.” And she passed on mechanically to her own apartment, without another word or glance.

CHAPTER XII.

MY LADY SLEEPS.

“Ah, there's many a purer and many a better,
But more loved Oh, how few love!”

THE door closed on Elsie's retreating form, and Annida was alone to enjoy her triumph; yet, although she had driven the enemy from the field, her heart was not at peace, and a vague feeling of disquietude possessed her.

“She can do me no harm now,” she said, as if to reassure herself; “it is too late. She will be off at daybreak to-morrow, and after the sea rolls between us, we shall see who is mistress of Leonard Strathmore's heart. What was that?” and she paused suddenly before the mirror, and remained motionless, listening attentively.

Softly on the evening breeze floated the sound of music, and the serenade from Faust fell upon her listening ears. A fit of trembling seized her—her limbs refused to support her. Well, ah, too well, did she know that air, and recognize the singer. It had been Arthur Leighton's signal of approach ever since they had first exchanged vows, and the air had mingled with his first words of love, whispered low during the performance of the opera in New Orleans, on the eventful night when she had promised to become his wife. It was Arthur returning from

the Stevensons. She knew it, and yet she felt impelled to draw aside the curtain and satisfy herself, so, hastily lowering the gas, she stole across the room and peeped cautiously out of the window.

Yes, there he was, with the moon lighting up his handsome face, and gilding his bright wavy hair, as, cap in hand, he leaned back in the wagon in which he had conveyed Mr. Stevenson home, and, allowing the tired horses to choose their own gait, looked up anxiously at her window awaiting some answering signal.

Nearer came the song and the singer, until the voice seemed close beneath the window, and spell-bound Annida stood gazing, with increasing agitation, on the form of him she loved so well; eagerly imprinting each familiar lineament upon her memory—learning his face by heart, as one would that of a departed friend, soon to be buried from one's sight forever.

For once the woman's nature spoke within her, urging her to renounce her ambition for this man's sake, and, cleaving only unto him, to forego her cherished dream of power and wealth; but for too long had she listened to the voice of worldly prudence to make fight against it now, and although she moaned and shivered where she stood, and clutched the curtain to prevent herself from falling, she never for a moment swerved from her determination to sacrifice this man's happiness to her own comfort and convenience.

Arthur paused a moment beneath the window, and then, as no sign of life appeared, he moved on again, singing in a low, silvery, tenor voice:

“Moon of the summer night,
Far down yon western steeps,

Sink, sink in silver light;
 She sleeps,
 My lady sleeps,
 Sleeps."

"Ah, if she did but sleep," groaned Annida, crouching upon the floor like an animal in pain. "Yes, even if it were the last sleep, from which there is no awaking, it would be welcome, could I but escape from this hell of misery into which my heart has plunged me. Oh, that I had never seen his face!"

"Dreams of the summer night,
 Tell her, her lover keeps
 Watch, while in slumbers light
 She sleeps;
 My lady sleeps,
 Sleeps."

The voice filled the room with melody for a moment and then died away in the distance, the last words falling on the ear like an echo.

"I can bear no more," exclaimed Annida, starting to her feet, and, hastily approaching the toilet table, she took a box from the drawer, within which lay some powders. "I will sleep to-night," she muttered, "let what will happen to-morrow;" and pouring the contents of two of the little papers into her hand, she swallowed them at once, without giving herself time to reflect, then threw herself upon the bed, dressed as she was, and closed her eyes on the troublesome world.

Arthur Leighton pursued his way to the stables, never guessing the tragedy being played in the darkened room above, and, having surrendered his charge to the groom in waiting, returned quietly to the house.

The hall-door had been left unlocked on his account, and, entering, he closed it and secured the fastenings, after which he

would have extinguished the only light left burning, but, to his extreme astonishment, as he turned to do so a hand was put upon his arm, and Elsie Von Decker stood beside him, still clothed in the dress she had worn at the picnic, and which was now no whiter than her face.

“Mr. Leighton,” she said, in an imploring voice, “I hope you will forgive me for what I am doing, although I can scarcely forgive myself. Take this note, please, but do not read it until I am gone to-morrow, and whatever may happen, do me the justice to believe that I have only done that which I thought duty required.”

She was gone in a moment, and but for the note remaining in his hand, Arthur would have been tempted to imagine himself the victim of an optical delusion.

“By Jove! this is a queer piece of business,” he exclaimed, as he put the note in his pocket and extinguished the light. “I’ll be hanged if I understand head or tail of it.”

CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE SEA.

“Fare thee well! and if forever,
Still forever, fare thee well!”

WORN out by the day’s excitement, Elsie fell asleep as soon as her head touched her pillow, and it seemed to her to have been but a moment since she laid down, when the maid aroused her with the alarming intelligence that breakfast was served, and her father very impatient at her delay. She

sprang up at once, and making a hasty toilet, stole noiselessly past the room in which her mother still slumbered, and down the stairs, pausing only for one moment, as she opened the dining-room door, to still the beating of her heart, and prepare herself for a calm leave-taking of her cousin.

Her precaution was unnecessary, however, for Roy was not there, neither did he appear even when the carriage came to the door, and, dissolved in tears, she was ensconced therein by Maude and the boys.

“He does not care to bid me good-bye,” she said to herself, sorrowing, and at the same moment Roy, from an upper window, was breathing a sad farewell, and looking at her with eyes scarcely less misty than her own.

“It is all up with me,” he said, as the carriage disappeared among the trees; “my dream of love is over. I must wake up now and face the future like a man.”

So they parted from each other as strangers, and these two hearts, which seemed made to be united, were rudely forced asunder by what, perhaps, is the cause of two-thirds of human misery, namely, a misunderstanding.

Loving devotedly, they nevertheless drifted, each in his or her own way, into what seemed almost a wilful misconception of the other's feelings, nor could they have explained, had they been asked, why it had so happened.

All the way to the boat Elsie sobbed and cried, and wondered why Roy had been so relentlessly cruel. The pang of parting must, under any circumstances, have been great, but the thought that he had not cared enough for her to rise from his bed and bid her farewell, added poignancy to her grief.

“There! there! dry your eyes, child,” exclaimed her father, as they went on board of the steamer. “You could not cry more if I were going to drown you. Every one is looking at

me as though I were a monster, dragging you away from home and friends. Go below and bathe your eyes, before the police are put upon my track."

Elsie took his advice and went at once to her state-room, where she remained until she had recovered her composure, and when they were fairly out at sea, there was so much novelty in the situation, that she forgot to be miserable, and soon lost sight of her sorrows in interested observation of her fellow travellers.

She was destined, however, to have them recalled to her mind before very long, for her father also had noticed Roy's absence in the morning, and was curious to know the cause of it; so as they sat upon the deck that evening he introduced the subject, saying —

"Did you see Roy this morning, Elsie?"

"No, sir," she replied, in a low voice, whilst the red blood rushed into her cheeks.

"I wonder where he was?" continued her father, reflectively; "it was unlike his usual courtesy to let us leave without a word of farewell. You have had no disagreement with him, have you?"

"Oh, no, sir," said Elsie, quickly, but she volunteered no further information.

Mr. Von Decker maintained a puzzled silence for a time, and then, knocking the ashes off his cigar, he returned to the charge.

"About the chain, my dear," he said, "did you accept it? It was only a birthday present, remember, such as he has given you every year since he came to us, so don't make a *gage d'amour* of it, and cry yourself to sleep over it every night. I won't stand any of that nonsense yet a while, and so I told your cousin. You must cultivate your head a little more before you undertake your heart."

Elsie listened to him in amazement, but she determined not to confess her ignorance of the subject of his conversation, lest her father should not think fit to enlighten her afterwards, so she replied warily.

“I have no chain, sir; so the temptation to weep over it will not be great.”

“What!” exclaimed her father, in delighted surprise. “You refused it, then? My dear child, I cannot tell you how much you have pleased me. I consented to your cousin’s revealing his love to you in a moment of weakness, which I have been reproaching myself for ever since. You see I was afraid I had been rather harsh in turning my dead sister’s son out of the house because he had the misfortune to love my daughter, and when I saw how devoted his love was, and how dejected and unhappy he felt at your leaving home for so long a time without a word or a look for him, I yielded and sent him to you, under the condition that he would promise not to bind you with any engagement. He did not attempt to do that, did he?”

“No, oh, no,” said Elsie, struggling with the agitation which this revelation of Roy’s true feelings for her had caused; “he said nothing of that sort.”

“Ah, well, I am glad of it,” said Mr. Von Decker, contentedly, “and if I had only known how sensibly you were going to act, I would have let the poor fellow go home long ago, but I feared that your heart was engaged.”

Elsie made no answer. She was entirely overwhelmed by a torrent of self-reproach. How vividly every scene in which her cousin had played a part came before her. And, viewed in this new light which her father had shed upon it, how noble and self-sacrificing did his conduct appear. He had told her father of his love for her, and had accepted exile rather than

give her up; and all this time she had treated him with scorn, reproaching him bitterly in her heart for what she deemed faithlessness.

Now that the veil had fallen, she understood his looks, his words, his sighs, and remembered with shame and distress how she had resolutely repulsed his advances, and thrust back on him that love which, now that it was too late, she would have given the world to possess.

But was it too late? She asked herself the question again and again, as she sat looking blankly at the vast expanse of water stretched out before her eyes, and the result of her inquiry was that a timid voice broke in upon Mr. Von Decker's reflections, saying:

“Papa!”

“Well, dear,” he responded.

“Does the vessel put into port again?”

“Why do you ask, child?” said her father, with an amused smile; “are you home-sick already? Do you wish to be put ashore?”

“Oh, no,” replied Elsie, “but I should like to send a few lines to — to — Nellie Marston, if I could; I was so flurried this morning that I forgot a great many important things.”

“I am afraid they must wait until we have crossed the ocean then,” replied her father, “unless you can persuade the captain to put back. Tell him that you forgot to kiss one of your friends good-bye, and I have no doubt he will at once change the course of the vessel,” he added, with a humorous smile.

“Oh, you bad little papa!” exclaimed Elsie, laughing despite herself. “I do believe that you are making fun of me. Let me tell you, sir, that I won't have it. It has always been my prerogative to make fun of you, and I will not permit you to deprive me of it.”

“Dear, dear, what a naughty little child have we here,” said her father. “Just hear how saucy she is getting. I must send her to bed for punishment. Go at once, Miss, and I hope that the morrow will find you a better girl,” saying which he arose from his seat, and leading her below, tenderly kissed and left her to her first night’s repose at sea.

Long was it, however, before sleep visited her eyes, for, added to the unaccustomed noises of the vessel, her agitated feelings kept her wide awake, and she could do nothing but reflect on the strange information she had just received from her father, and pass the hours in unavailing regret, that so long a time must elapse e’er she could pour into Roy’s ear her love and penitence.

Annida rose late the morning of Elsie’s departure, and the effect of the over-dose of opium that she had taken the night before was to render her languid and feeble to so great an extent that she was obliged to remain in her room all day, her mental troubles being absolutely forgotten for the time, in real physical suffering.

When at last she came down stairs, Arthur was no longer at Beechcroft, having been suddenly summoned to the city on business, and her only sensation on hearing of his departure was one of relief, so great had been her perplexity as to how she could court Leonard under her former lover’s eyes without exciting his suspicion. She had fully resolved to sacrifice Arthur to her ambition, and, if possible, to become mistress of Strathmore Park; but she did not wish to risk one chance of happiness before the other was secure, and determined, therefore, to keep him in the dark up to the moment of her engagement to his rival, trusting to circumstances to reveal, when it must be done, her defection in a creditable light. Her influence over Arthur was great; she had never failed in making him view her actions

through her eyes, so she felt no doubt of being able to explain her conduct satisfactorily, if only he would give her time, and the lucky accident of his absence, just at this critical moment, gave her the opportunity she wished for action, so she lost no time in making her attack.

So absorbed was she in strategy, that Maude would have been very lonely after Elsie left, had not Nellie Marston consented to remain with her for a few weeks, for Roy, thoroughly unhappy and displeased with himself, and longing, now that there was no chance of it, to ask an explanation of Elsie, found Beechcroft unendurable, Maude's companionship irksome, and passed all his time in the city.

Jack, also, was of small account in the family circle, for Maude and himself never met without a war of words, and this continual strife had become so wearying that he no longer remained at home, but passed his days either riding "across country" with Roberta Stevenson, or lounging over the neighboring fields, gun in hand, in search of game.

The lazy fellow could not be persuaded to assist Roy, although he was often petitioned to do so.

"I was n't made for work," he would reply, with a yawn at the mere thought of it. "Who but a savage could ask me to stoop my symmetrical form over a desk, dim my bright eyes by reading crabbed notes from disappointed stock gamblers, and thread my chestnut locks with silver by the anxiety and care of a Wall Street office?"

BOOK SECOND.

CHAPTER I.

BOB AT HOME.

“Let the toast pass;
Drink to the lass;
I’ll warrant she’ll prove an excuse for the glass.”

THE eighteenth day of September dawned bright and cloudless, and Roberta Stevenson, who arose with the sun, stood at her chamber window looking wistfully at the green fields, longing for a scamper over them before the heat of the day, and yet fearing to desert her post without special permission, lest some untoward accident should occur to the “brethren” in her absence; for they were an unruly set, it must be confessed, and apt to get into mischief without constant supervision.

There was one exception, however, in the “menagerie,” and that one was August, without whom poor Roberta’s life would have been a burden, but with whose aid she managed to maintain a semblance of authority, and prevent any serious mutiny in the camp. This boy seemed formed of different clay from the others, resembling them no more either in personal appearance or character, than a delicate porcelain vase a common stone pot, and Bob loved him with all her heart as the one oasis in her desert life.

Many a time had he acted as peacemaker among his turbulent fellows, when Bob, an agonized spectator of a struggle, had

deemed the extermination of one of them unavoidable, and had he been on hand to-day, she would have taken a holiday without fear; but, alas! he had inherited with his mother's beauty her delicate constitution, and often, as now, he would be unable to rise in the morning, having passed half the previous night in restless tossings and weary spells of coughing.

As a rule, Bob was merry and good-tempered, and in no ways inclined to shirk her duty, or shrink from the many cares thrust upon her by her father, who seemed to entirely overlook the fact that she was young and needed youthful amusements; expecting from her, on the contrary, the steadiness and forethought of a woman of mature years, never praising meritorious conduct, but always visiting delinquencies with severe displeasure. But there were times, like the present, when nature asserted itself, and she was seized with an unspeakable longing to be free to roam where and when she pleased, without reference to the comfort of the "wild beasts," or her father's need of an amanuensis.

"It is too bad to waste such a day as this in that dingy old library," she said to August, as she arranged the breakfast-tray at his bedside.

"Papa is not awake yet," said August, in a low voice, for he occupied the room next to his father; "and if you hurry through your breakfast you'll have time for a scamper before he wants you. Run along and order 'Cat's-paw' at once. I don't need you any more, and after breakfast the boys will be at study."

"That is so," said Bob, blithely. "I can have a short ride after all, if only father does not wake," she added.

"Evoke Young's 'Night Thoughts,'" said August, with a smile, "'Tired nature's sweet restorer,' and all that, and see if you can't keep him asleep."

“I'll have to drug the boys, I'm afraid,” replied Bob, with an answering smile; “just listen to the young wretches! What a dreadful noise they are making.”

“It's 'feeding time,'” said August; “the little beasts are roaring for their victuals; cram their mouths with hot mush and molasses, and that will keep them quiet for a time.”

“Provided the mush is not *too* hot,” said Bob, as she ran laughingly away, “in which case their 'roaring' might be turned to 'howling.'”

Finding, on her arrival in the breakfast-room, that the meal was not yet served, Roberta hastened to the stable to secure the horse before he was carried off to work, for the invaluable “Cat's-paw” served all purposes in the Stevenson family, and was plough-horse or saddle-horse as occasion required.

Swiftly as Bob ran, she was nevertheless outstripped by two of the boys, who, scenting some frolic by her gladsome face, determined to have their share of it.

“What do you want? Where are you going?” they shouted, as the trio drew up breathless at the stable-door, and Bob faced about on them, vexed at being followed.

“I'm only going to take a ride,” said she. “Why can't you give me a moment's peace? There, go back to the house, like good boys, and I'll give you something nice for breakfast.”

“You have n't got anything nice to give,” replied Joe, composedly, knowing perfectly the condition of the larder; “but I'll go back at once if you will promise to take me out with you.”

“What nonsense!” exclaimed Will, his senior only by twelve months. “What could Bob do with a brat like you, I should like to know, unless she put you in her pocket? I'll go, Bobby; I can run alongside, you know, and hold your horse, if you want to get off and gather blackberries.”

“That's not fair,” said Joe, excitedly; “you went last time. Bob, take me, I can hold a horse as well as he can.”

“Bah, baby,” said Will, contemptuously; “you hold a horse! I'd like to see you. He'd cry if it whisked its tail; Bob, don't trust him.”

“I'm as much to be trusted as you are,” exclaimed Joe, almost foaming with rage; “and I'm no more of a baby than you are yourself. Take that! and learn to keep a civil tongue in your head,” and striking out from his shoulder like a young Hercules, Master Will, taken off his guard, rolled over and over on the loose straw, almost under the horse's feet.

“Joe! Joe!” exclaimed Bob, indignantly; “what do you mean by such behavior? I've a good mind to box your ears. Go at once to the house,” but the order was unnecessary, for, perceiving his brother rising in wrath from his lowly position, Joe had already beat a precipitate retreat.

“The mean coward,” growled Will, when he was once more upon his feet. “See how he runs, will you? Just wait a bit, my fine fellow, and I'll teach you to know your betters;” and had Roberta not interfered, he would have pursued the flying enemy.

“No, no, Will,” she exclaimed, grasping him by the arm, “you must not go after him. If you do, you shall have no breakfast. Now do be a good boy, for once, and make no noise, for I want to take a ride, and if you wake papa he will want me.”

“Then why did you let him strike me?” said Will, but he walked beside her in sulky silence, nor made another effort to catch his brother; for, notwithstanding their love of mischief, the boys all loved Bob, and not one of them would wilfully have deprived her of a moment's pleasure.

By this time breakfast was ready, such as it was. The fare at the Stevensons' was always simple, though healthy, and their morning meal consisted generally of bread, milk, and porridge,

but to-day, acting on August's advice, Bob produced a jug of molasses, which caused a general murmur of delight.

"Now, boys," she said, seating herself at the head of the board, "this is an especial treat, so I shall expect you to be especially good on account of it;" and then, whilst they eat the bread and butter, she proceeded to ladle out the porridge, covering each "mess" plentifully with the thick syrup, whilst the boys looked on gloatingly.

"I'll carry the plates round," exclaimed Will, suddenly starting from his seat, and had Bob seen the fiendish smile upon his face as he proceeded in his task, she would have chosen another servitor; but, as it was, he escaped observation, and, seating himself once more, applied his energies to the pile of bread and butter before him.

Joe had completed his first course, and now drew the porridge towards him lovingly. He filled the spoon as full as it could be, and then put it, all unsuspectingly, into his mouth, but, instead of the exclamation of delight with which he usually greeted the first mouthful of this coveted dish, he uttered a shriek of anguish, and sputtering horribly, fell tooth and nail upon his brother, who roared out laughing with delight.

"What *is* the matter?" cried poor Bob, in alarm.

"Pep-pep-pep-pep-pepper," cried the strangling Joe, and, true enough, the demoniacal Will had contrived, whilst carrying his brother's plate, to capsize the pepper-box into it; but his laughter was soon turned to notes of woe, for Joe fought like a young tiger to get possession of his brother's plate.

"I'll eat every bit of your porridge before your eyes," he shrieked; "just see if I don't! Oh! oh! oh! oh! my mouth burns so!" and then ensued a frightful struggle, during which the boys rose alternately to the surface, and made dives at the table to secure the remaining porridge, whilst Bob, beside her-

self with distress, appealed first to one and then the other, and little Spencer howled dismally from fright.

“Boys! boys!” entreated Bob, “pray be quiet. What *will* papa say?” but words fell unheeded upon the combatants, and the warfare waged more furiously than before, until, by a lucky snatch, Joe secured the plate, and springing agilely out of reach, endeavored to swallow its contents at a gulp.

This effort, however, was not a success; the porridge went down the wrong way, and whilst gasping spasmodically after breath, his face purple from strangulation, Will bore down upon him, and by a well-planted blow sent him flying through a glass door by which he was standing, whilst the ill-fated porridge plate performed a somersault in the air, and then landed in Mr. Stevenson's face, as, aroused from his slumbers by the frightful din, he opened the dining-room door to discover the cause of it.

If none of my readers have been unhappy enough to have ever met with an enraged philosopher in dressing-gown and slippers, spectacles on nose, over which glared a pair of furious eyes, and decorated from the summit of his high forehead to his feet with bright patches of mush and molasses, far be it from me to harrow up their feelings by endeavoring to portray this scene upon paper. Suffice it to say that a panic seized the unhappy Stevensons, and they stood in helpless silence, trembling before this frightful apparition.

“What means this noise and confusion?” exclaimed the old gentleman. “Is this a bear garden, or the breakfast-room of civilized human beings? Roberta, will you be so good as to explain this incomprehensible scene?”

“The boys, sir,” began Bob, in faltering tones, “they — they've had a little difficulty.”

“I am quite well aware of that,” said her father, with

another savage glare. "What I wish to know, is why you allow such disgraceful brawls? I should think that a young woman of your years would be capable of maintaining order during a matutinal meal, but it appears that I am mistaken."

"I am very sorry sir," said Bob. "I did my best, though; I begged them to make less noise."

"You *begged* them!" said Mr. Stevenson, scornfully; "if you had exerted a little authority and *made* them be quiet, it would have been more to the purpose. I desire now that the offenders be punished at once, after which you can come to the library and copy some manuscript for me. As I have been awaked so early, I may as well make use of the time," after which, with one more indignant glance at the boys, he left the room, nearly capsizing poor Augustus in his exit, who, white and trembling, now appeared upon the scene.

"There is nothing wrong," said Mr. Stevenson, his whole manner changing as he turned to this his favorite child. "You had better go back to your room, my boy; you look unwell this morning."

But August was not to be turned back. He saw beyond his father a scene which appealed to his warmest sympathies, namely, Roberta, with her face buried in the sofa cushion, sobbing bitterly, so he passed on hastily and stood beside her.

"What's the matter, dear?" he asked; but she was too much overcome to answer him. "What have you boys been doing?" he then asked, and at the sound of his gentle voice the culprits felt, for the first time, that they had been doing something wrong.

"Nothing much," said Will. "I've only smashed Joe's head for him, but the Governor always makes such a row. Golly! how he looked with the molasses running from his eyebrows and trickling down his nose!" and the "irrepress-

sible" burst out laughing, as though nothing had happened to distress him.

"It is very well for you to laugh," sobbed Roberta, "for whatever you do is always blamed on me. How can I manage two big fellows like Joe and you, I should like to know? and yet I am to be punished for your misbehavior, by being kept in the library the whole of this beautiful day."

"It's a great shame!" said August, gravely. "Boys, how could you be so unkind?"

"Because we're brutes, all of us," said Will, looking grave enough, now that he was made aware of his sister's disappointment. "I'm sorry, old girl, indeed, I am! I forgot all about you when I began to fight, or I'd have given up my share to keep the peace."

"Never mind," said Roberta, mollified by the first word of contrition, "I can go out some other day."

"You shall go out right off," said Will, impulsively kissing her; "I'm to be punished, you know, and I can't think of anything more awful than passing a whole morning with the Governor, so I'm off to take your place." And away rushed the merry, affectionate boy, to his self-imposed task, not waiting for a word of remonstrance.

Bob rose and wiped her eyes. "What dear, sweet boys you can be when you choose," she said. "It's a shame you're ever naughty. Here, Joe," she added, "you may have my plate of porridge, instead of the one Will peppered."

"No," said Joe, turning resolutely from the table. "Will is taking all the punishment, and so he must have the porridge. Get ready, Bob, and I'll bring up the horse."

So at last she really did get off, and the difficulties which had beset her path only served to make her ride the more charming, by contrast. There was a fine breeze blowing, and

“Cat’s-paw,” more lively than usual, actually consented to a frolicsome gallop, which was quite remarkable in an animal of his ruminative habits, and, as a reward, Bob allowed him to browse beside the wood for a while, whilst she wandered on foot into its shady depths, to gather wild flowers and berries.

Suddenly there came the report of a gun, and then a faint cry of pain.

Roberta’s first impulse was to return to her horse, but the howling of a dog next attracted her attention, and she paused, undecided which way to go. The howling became more and more distinct, and, feeling certain that some animal had been accidentally wounded, she was about to go to its assistance, when a large white setter bounded out from the bushes, showing every sign of delight and recognition when he saw her.

“Brush!” she exclaimed, for it was Jack’s dog, “where is your master? did he shoot you, old fellow?” but Brush was too active upon his feet to have been wounded; yet he never ceased his plaintive cry, and even seemed to be anxious for her to follow him into the bushes.

“Where is Jack?” asked Bob again, and at the mention of his master’s name the intelligent animal plunged into the thicket, pausing and looking back continually to see if she were following him.

And she did follow; her curiosity was excited by the dog’s remarkable behavior, and gathering her riding-skirt about her, she also plunged into the thicket and walked on, doing her best to keep the restless creature in sight, until he suddenly bounded away to the right, and came to a stop, with another prolonged howl, beside some dark object lying stretched upon the ground.

It was a human being. Roberta could see that from where she stood, but who can describe her anguish when, on approaching nearer, she recognized Brush’s master in the recumbent figure.

“Jack! Jack!” she cried, throwing herself upon the grass beside him, but no response came from the pallid lips, so ready, usually, to answer to her call.

She brushed back the hair from his forehead, then moved her hand quickly from his head to his heart, and gazed intently at him. No sign of life — he neither spoke nor stirred. Pale, still, and rigid were his features — a strangely unfamiliar mask for light-hearted Jack to wear.

CHAPTER II.

BEHOLDING HEAVEN AND FEELING HELL.

“For the witch hath sworn to catch thee,
 And her spells are on the air.
 ‘Thou art fair, fair, fatal fair,’
 O Irene!”

ARTHUR LEIGHTON had deferred the reading of Elsie's letter until after her departure, as she had desired, and when he had read it, its contents had occasioned him more amusement than alarm. True as steel himself, it was at first impossible for him to believe her assertion that Annida was playing a double game, and would eventually marry his rival, and the only part of the revelation which gave him a moment's uneasiness, was Elsie's discovery of the tender relation in which he stood towards her cousin.

“My poor darling, how could she have been so misunderstood?” he said, with a pitying smile for Elsie's youthful ignorance (for he could not but believe that she had acted conscientiously), and he had watched eagerly all that day for Annida to appear and give him her version of the conversation of the

evening before ; but, as has been already said, she kept her room all day, and he was summoned to town without having achieved the desired interview.

His first impulse on leaving had been to destroy the note, but on second thoughts he had transferred it to his letter-case, and there it confronted him every time he had occasion to look at a letter or private paper. Seeing it thus constantly before him, he read it over carefully more than once, and each reading had contrived to impress the seeming truthfulness of its contents more and more upon his mind. In vain he told himself that Annida was true — in vain he searched the note for some sign of an enemy's malice. The most determined calumniator could not but have read in every line the sense of duty which prompted it, and the distress of the writer at the part she felt herself obliged to act.

At length his anxiety became intense. He endeavored to write to Annida, but, after having begun and destroyed several letters, he gave up the attempt to express himself on paper, and determined to retrace his steps to Beechcroft, where he would have his fears at once confirmed or set at rest forever.

Thus it happened that, on a pleasant afternoon, as Eleanor Marston sat alone reading on the terrace, a shadow fell upon her book, and, raising her eyes, she encountered those of Arthur Leighton.

“Why, Mr. Leighton,” she said, smiling, “there is something decidedly ‘uncanny’ about you. One day you disappear without a word of farewell or apology, to appear some weeks after without the slightest previous warning. Confess honestly now where you have been, for I really think I can detect a smell of brimstone about you.”

Arthur laughingly disclaimed having been to any warmer climate than the city of New York, and inquired rather eagerly why she was alone, and how and where were her companions.

“Maude,” she said, “was within, writing to Elsie, and Miss De Luce was somewhere about the grounds with Mr. Strathmore. Would Mr. Leighton like to look for them? She would accompany him in the search if he so desired.”

But he did not care to go — was much too comfortable where he was, and if Miss Marston would just allow him to lie on the grass at her feet, he would be as happy as man could well be; and throwing himself down as he spoke, he was, to all outward seeming, perfectly contented with his situation, although inwardly he was suffering torture from this partial confirmation of the information he had received from Elsie.

Suddenly it struck him that the girl beside him had known Elsie from childhood, and, could he manage the conversation adroitly, he might glean from her some valuable knowledge of her friend's character; so he introduced the subject, and Eleanor, too pleased to find a common source of interest, at once took her cue, and launched into such a verbose description of Elsie's many excellences, that long e'er she ceased, Arthur had heard more than enough, and tried vainly to stem the torrent.

He had heard everything but that which he wished to hear, and feeling convinced that frankness was his only course of action, he suddenly raised himself from his recumbent position, and said, in a straightforward way:

“Miss Marston, did your friend tell you that she had written me a note on the eve of her departure?”

Nellie looked very much surprised. “No,” she said, after a moment's pause, “she did not mention it to me.”

“It was a note of some importance,” continued Arthur, “inasmuch as its purport was to warn me against trusting one who I have always considered as a true friend, but who, Miss Elsie would have me believe, is guilty of unspeakable treachery. Now, I shall be sincerely grateful to you, Miss Marston, if you

will be candid with me and tell me what motive you think induced your friend to write to me thus. Do not answer my question if it troubles you to do so, but if you *do* answer it, tell me nothing but the plain, unvarnished truth, for my life's happiness may hang on your words."

Eleanor's pale cheeks grew rosy from embarrassment, and she could think of nothing to say. What was it Arthur wished of her? Of course, if Elsie had written it was because she had some powerful reason for so doing, but how could she, Nellie, conceive of that reason when she was entirely ignorant of the contents of the note?

Noticing her embarrassment, Arthur said, gently:

"I do not wish to annoy you, but do you think that Miss Elsie could have been induced to write a defamatory note through a desire of revenge or a feeling of jealousy?"

Now Eleanor saw her way clear, and answered at once, and decisively.

"Never! Elsie Von Decker is incapable of such conduct, Mr. Leighton; and if you had paid her even ordinary attention during your visit here this summer, I should have thought you must have discovered that fact for yourself. Excuse me, but I do not think Miss Von Decker knows that you are here, so I will go to the house and tell her, if you will allow me to pass."

She arose as she spoke, and Arthur made way for her, too much overcome by her verdict to make even a polite attempt to detain her.

"You think, then," he said, slowly, "that she would have asserted nothing that she did not know to be true, and that I am safe in believing that she tells me, not that which might be, but which is?"

"Assuredly," said Eleanor, indignant at the question, and

she swept past him on her way to the house, half inclined to believe that he was making fun of her, and had received no note at all.

Meanwhile, where was Annida? As the old proverb has it, she was making hay whilst the sun shone, and feathering her nest with down.

She had left her room that afternoon with the determination of bringing things to a crisis. It was more than a month since Elsie's departure, and who could be certain that the child would not write to Strathmore, and ruin her prospects? and then Arthur might return any day, and she shuddered at the thought of again encountering him before anything was definitely settled in regard to the future, lest her truant heart should play her false, and persuade her to put off the sacrifice of love and honor to the greed for wealth and position.

Leonard Strathmore was fascinated by this woman, and was never so happy as at her side. His admiration for Elsie had died in a single night, and Annida had him fast bound in chains; nevertheless, he would not come to the point, and she grew anxious, fearing lest some untoward accident should dash this cup also from her lips, and she should be compelled to pass her days in a miserable remembrance of all that she might have possessed, but had missed.

She had dressed herself with particular care, and not an art was left untried by which she could enhance her loveliness.

"It is high time things were settled," she had said, and she spoke but the truth, for every moment brought Arthur Leighton a step nearer Beechcroft, and Leonard Strathmore awaited her in the parlor.

There she joined him, with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, dimples coming and going with every smile, and Leonard thought she had never looked so lovely, nor ever dreamed

that those ruby lips *could* say: "It is high time things were settled."

They wandered out to the garden; they strayed about among the flowers, talking those aimless nothings with which persons are apt to stave off serious converse when they are uncertain of the issue. But time was flying, and there was none to lose, for Arthur was nearly at the park gate. They drifted into a garden seat, "cast anchor," and sat down, not much nearer port, however, than when they had left the house.

The conversation flagged, and a sweet, dreamy silence stole over them, during which Leonard sat lost in admiration of the beautiful woman beside him, but, to her great aggravation, he gave her no more satisfactory evidence of the fact than a tender glance of the eye, which, with all her native genius, she found it impossible to construe into an offer of marriage.

"How shall I ever bring him to the point?" she thought, despairingly, as the precious moments flew away, and he still remained gazing in pensive silence. "I must break the ice myself, I suppose, and lead him up to the subject." She therefore turned to him, saying, in a sweet, deprecating voice:

"I am but a dull companion this evening, Mr. Strathmore; had we not better return to the house and join Miss Marston?"

"Do you wish to do so?" inquired Leonard.

"Oh, no, I am very comfortable," replied Annida, looking down bashfully; "but I feel so stupid and disinclined for conversation, that I feared I was wearying you."

"Then let us remain where we are," replied Leonard. "Silence by your side, Miss De Luce, is more to my taste than the most brilliant conversation with another."

"You are very good to say so," said Annida; "but you must forgive me if I doubt your assertion. It is hard to believe that my society is anything to you when I remember that it has

only been since my cousin left us that you have sought it at all."

"Had you ever given me reason to suppose that my presence, or absence, was remarked by you," replied Leonard, "you would have had no reason to complain of me, I can assure you."

"Oh, I was not complaining," said Annida; "I have no right to do that. You are, of course, at liberty to pass your time with whom you please. I only mentioned the fact; it should be of no consequence to me."

"You did not care anything about it, then?" inquired Leonard, in a disappointed tone. "I am sorry for that; I had a faint hope that it were otherwise."

"In other words, that I missed you sadly every day and hour that you passed in attendance on my cousin," said Annida, with a smile. "Is that what you wished me to say, Mr. Strathmore?"

"That would be asking rather too much of you, I fear," replied Leonard; "but, tell me candidly, if you will, whether or not you have ever cared enough for any man to wish to keep him always at your side?"

"Your question is very impertinent," said Annida, after a moment's hesitation, "but since it is *you* that ask it, it shall be answered. Yes."

"And the happy individual?" inquired Leonard, with considerable agitation. "Am I not to learn his name?"

"That, I think, *is* asking rather too much of me," replied Annida, gravely. "Why should I betray my secret to you?"

In her agitation she stooped to pluck a flower growing in the bed beside her, and forth from the gauzy folds of muslin crossed upon her breast, peeped a photograph, upon which Leonard fixed his jealous eyes. This, then, was the likeness of his rival.

Oh, that kind fortune would but reveal it for a moment to his gaze, he thought; and surely never did that fickle lady answer a suitor's prayer so speedily, for even as he wished, the *carte de visite* fell at his feet, dislodged from its hiding-place by Annida's efforts to secure a refractory rose-bud, which resented being plucked from its parent stem.

Stooping quickly he secured it, saying, as he eagerly turned its face upwards in his hand:

"Perhaps this will answer my question"—but all further words died upon his lips, as, to his infinite surprise, his gaze rested upon his own features.

Annida raised her head to look at him, and apparently noticed her loss for the first time, as she saw the picture in his hand, for, uttering a little cry of dismay, she thrust her hand into her bosom, and then, on drawing it forth empty, sank back in her seat, overcome with shame and confusion, and covered her face with a lace pocket-handkerchief.

"What can it mean?" thought Leonard, with beating heart, and then he said, in a tremulous voice:

"I beg your pardon, Miss De Luce, for my impertinent curiosity, but I trust you will tell me something of how this photograph came into your possession, for I do not remember ever having had the audacity to offer you one myself."

Annida was apparently too much overcome by her feelings to answer immediately, but after a moment's pause she said, in a smothered voice:

"You did not give it to me, Mr. Strathmore; in fact, it is not mine. It is the one you gave my cousin some months ago. She left it in her room when she went away, and—I did not think it was wrong at the time—I appropriated it. I have no right to it, I know; but please do not take it from me."

A perfect tornado of sobs came from behind the lace screen,

and Leonard, ignorant of the fact that it was "all wind and no rain," was deeply affected by her agitation.

"Why should I do so?" he exclaimed, almost melting into tears himself. "Oh, how can you suppose for a moment that I would? Am I not too happy to know that it has been honored with so fair a resting-place? Why do you weep?" he continued, drawing nearer to her; "why dim those beautiful eyes with tears? Of what do you accuse yourself, and why do you hide your face from me? The theft of the picture was no theft, for its rightful owner had cast it aside as a thing of no value, and surely you cannot think that *I* could rebuke you for your condescension in rescuing it. Dare I hope, Annida, that since you have treated this poor outcast with such angelic kindness, that you will not be less generous to the original?"

As he spoke he took within his own the fair hand which lay idle on her lap, its fellow being still industriously engaged in wiping the tearless eyes.

"Ah," she said, at length, raising her beautiful, agitated countenance to his, "do not make my burden harder to bear. I thought I had known the breadth and depth of woman's suffering, but I see that what I experienced whilst my secret was still my own, was nothing in comparison to the shame and mortification which I now feel in the knowledge that you, from whom above all others I would have concealed it, are now in possession of it."

Burning blushes suffused her cheek, for she felt the ignoble part she was playing, and her face again disappeared in her handkerchief, whilst Leonard continued to bend anxiously over her, longing to comfort yet fearing to offend. He could scarcely credit what he had heard, or persuade himself that this magnificent woman, whom he had once loved so despairingly,

was throwing herself into his arms, as it were, by openly confessing her love for him; yet, taking it all in all, what else could it mean?

“Why don't he come to the point?” thought Annida, impatiently. “Surely, I have humbled myself sufficiently,” and “it is,” indeed, “high time,” Annida, for Arthur Leighton has come, and stands not many paces from you, a silent witness of this, to him, incomprehensible scene.

“Miss De Luce,” said Leonard, at length, collecting his scattered senses, “do I dream, or can what I have just heard be true? Is it possible that I am the object of your affection?”

“Spare me!” she murmured, entreatingly, and the cruel summer breezes bore every word she uttered with painful distinctness to the ears of the man she had so deeply wronged. “Do not force me to more open confession of my feelings. Be merciful! do not despise me for loving you, and remember always that my love would have died with me, unknown, had it not been for an unlucky accident.”

“Despise you!” exclaimed Leonard. “That I could never do. Such love as yours demands respect. What more could a man ask of the gods than to hear he was beloved from such lips as these?” and drawing nearer he would have kissed her, had she not shrunk shudderingly away. It must come to this, of course, but she could not bear it yet, whilst the memory of Arthur's last embrace was still so fresh. The silent watcher behind them gathered fresh courage from this impulsive movement, and once more held his head erect, prepared to interpose between his darling and the insolence of her presuming companion, at the first sign she should give indicative of such a desire, listening again with strained ears to hear her indignant dismissal of his rival's suit, whilst Elsie's warning, hid in his

bosom, rose and fell with every motion of his agitated heart. Hush! she is speaking.

“Miserable woman that I am!” she exclaimed. “What have I not revealed to you in my madness. Forget it, oh, forget it; let this hour be as though it had never been. Do I not know that your heart is with my cousin? have I not watched your growing love for her through all these weary summer months? seen her sporting with your heart as a thing of no account, whilst I languished for a kind word? Giddy, careless child, what does she know of love? as little as a butterfly sporting among the flowers—as little as a dew-drop lying on the breast of a rose. Courted, loved, petted by all around her, scarcely more than a child in years, what was one more heart to her? and yet she coveted what would have made my happiness, and, once gained, threw it from her like a faded flower.”

Again her agitation overpowered her, and she paused, waiting in anxious silence for Leonard to speak, but he, apparently unable yet to grasp the meaning of her words, remained looking stupidly upon the ground.

She would have liked to stamp her foot in her impatience. What did his silence mean? Had she stooped so low for nothing? Was it possible that he did not comprehend her? or, horrible suggestion, could it be that he had no wish to marry her? She felt she could bear no more—the scene must at once be ended, or she should lose her self-command—so, nerving herself for one last effort, she turned suddenly towards him, and bringing the powerful battery of her beautiful eyes to bear upon him, she exclaimed, in a melo-dramatic voice:

“Go, leave me, follow where your heart leads. Seek Elsie, secure her for your own, and be happy. Let no thought of me intrude to mar your bliss,—remember me only as one who

crossed your life but for a brief moment, like a cloud over the disk of the sun, and then passed away despairingly into obscurity forever."

She paused again to let him speak, and not long did she await a response, for Leonard was no longer master of himself, and falling upon his knees before her, he poured out a stream of incoherent vows and protestations.

"My darling! my darling!" he exclaimed; "could you for one moment suppose that I love your cousin better than yourself? Do you not remember that long before I ever saw or heard of her, I knew and loved you? Yes, I have loved you ever since I first looked upon your beautiful face, and it was your own coldness, your haughty, disdainful manner which drove me from your side, and that alone."

"And have I not atoned for that?" murmured Annida.

"Aye, and so nobly too," replied Leonard, "that my life alone can recompense you. Annida, the dearest wish of my heart is to call you my own; will you then consent to be my wife? Speak, oh, speak quickly, I implore you, and put me out of my suspense."

It had come, the long wished for proposition, and although she had been expecting, nay, plotting for it, for weeks past, it seemed to find her unprepared, for, turning very white and well-nigh fainting, she sank back upon her seat, and tried to realize what she had brought upon herself.

Speak, Annida, your wealthy lover kneels before you a suppliant for your hand. Why waver now when the hour of your triumph is at hand? Speak! houses and lands, wealth and position, are all at your command. Speak! and not only to Leonard Strathmore, but to that other, who, with bowed head and in silence, stands awaiting his doom. Speak! "*it is high time,*" for Arthur Leighton stands behind you.

Weary of waiting, longing to hold his darling in his arms, a loving instinct has led him hither ; once more, therefore, I say speak, and show him what manner of woman it is that he has cherished in his bosom.

She struggled with her bad angel in mortal anguish. Oh, it is not easy to sell one's soul ; and the good angel whispered of Arthur, saying : " How he loves you ! oh, how he loves you ! " but in the end the devil conquered, and slowly and deliberately she spoke, each word an act of treachery against herself and him.

" What is there left for me to say ? You already know I love you. Leonard Strathmore, if this be truth, and not a dream, that you would have me for your wife, then take me,— I am yours."

She sank into the arms extended to receive her ; she laid her head upon his breast, and Leonard, stooping, pressed his lips to hers in a betrothal kiss.

The twilight deepened, the shadows of night gathered about them as they sat enclosed in each other's arms, the owls hooted in the trees, and a man cowered among the bushes—a miserable, broken-hearted wretch, moaning and clinching his teeth in an agony of grief — but what matters it if one man weep ? another is happy in his stead, and so the eternal scales are balanced.

CHAPTER III.

DEEP WATERS.

“ But as some muskets so contrive it,
As oft to miss the mark they drive at,
And though well aimed at duck or plover,
Bear wide and kick their owners over.”

THE last feeble glimmer of daylight disappeared, and the night came on apace. Leonard and Annida had returned to the house some time before, but Arthur lingered still in the shrubbery, unable to face this terrible misfortune which had so suddenly overtaken him.

He had loved Annida so long, and so deeply, that every hope and interest in life had become associated with her, and it seemed impossible, at a moment's warning, to wrench his heart from hers. He had believed in her to the utmost bounds of credulity, and in return she had made him her dupe. He would as soon have doubted his own existence as her love and fidelity, and in return she had given herself to another. Even now he could scarcely lose all faith in her, and with eager, earnest love he brought to mind her words and actions in that memorable interview in the arbor at Strathmore Park, when she had told him that she should always love him, and laughed to scorn his foolish fears of a rival.

But even as he thought of this, a paper rustled in his breast, and Elsie's warning once more rose before him, quenching the faint spark of hope, which had risen only to leave him a moment after more miserable than before.

He started to his feet with a groan, and, anxious only to

escape the scene of his anguish, he hastily pursued the first path he saw, unheeding where it should lead him.

On he rushed at headlong speed along the garden walk — oh, that he could outstrip himself, and leave his miseries behind him — and suddenly found himself on the terrace by the house, which was overlooked by the windows of a little boudoir, curtained off from the parlor.

He paused; the lights were lit, and in the full blaze of the tiny chandelier she stood who was all the world to him, whilst close beside her was his rival, one arm tenderly encircling her waist, whilst the hand of the other stroked and caressed the fair cheek and brow so near to him.

The veins swelled upon Arthur's forehead, a suppressed oath forced itself from between his clinched teeth. "My God!" he muttered, "could I but shoot him down like a dog as he stands there, I would gladly pay the forfeit of my life;" but, fortunately he was unarmed, save with his angry glances, and they fell unheeded upon the happy pair before him, who abated not one whit of their billing and cooing, because a madman stood without and cursed them.

"Mr. Strathmore's drag," announced a servant, appearing suddenly from behind the curtained doorway, and disappearing with as great celerity, when he became conscious of the mistake he had made in appearing at all.

"Dearest," said Leonard, tenderly, "I cannot leave you so soon to-night. I have scarcely had time to realize my happiness. May I not send the horses to the stable and remain with you for the rest of the evening?"

"Need you ask my permission for that?" replied Annida, smiling sweetly. "Go at once, but return quickly."

Leonard left the room to give the necessary orders to the groom, and Annida turned listlessly to a sofa, on which she

threw herself, to reflect soberly on the events of the afternoon. She was triumphant, yet she was miserable, and there being no reason at the moment for disguise, her feelings were legibly written on her face.

Arthur looked at her, and his angry feelings melted like hoarfrost in the sun. After all, she could not give him up without a pang. No; to judge by her countenance and general air of despondency, she was suffering little less than himself; and at this thought all his pent-up love rushed out towards her, as it had ever done since he had known her. A longing seized him to take her in his arms once more, and chase the shadows from her brow — to lay the dear head upon his breast and soothe away her pain — to press his lips to hers, and call up again the light of hope from the depths of those beautiful eyes.

Of his wrongs he could remember nothing — he only saw that she was suffering, and, kneeling in the grass in outer darkness, he stretched out his arms in impotent anguish towards her figure glowing in the light. “My darling, oh, my darling,” came from between the parched lips, and great drops of sweat stood out upon his brow.

“There, that business is satisfactorily disposed of,” said Leonard, returning and taking his seat beside Annida, “and now give me one more kiss to certify me that this is not all a beautiful dream.”

Annida turned her face towards him, and at the same time towards the window, and if Arthur had needed further proof of her power to make herself that which she chose, he had it now, in the expression of that face, and the subtle, false smile upon it, which had been his yesterday, was his rival's to-night, and heaven alone knew whose it might be on the morrow. Surely the terrified, horror-stricken face without had affected, by some strange magnetism, the beautiful one within, for Annida

shuddered violently on her comfortable sofa, with her lover's arms around her, and prayed him to close the window. It was done, and the picture within the little room which had fascinated, whilst it filled him with despair, was shut out from Arthur's gaze, and he was alone with his misery.

He rose once more to his feet, and staggered from the house. On he went, up one pathway, down another. What mattered it now where he went, or what became of him? there was not in the whole world one human being left to cheer him if he lived, to mourn him should he die. For that false woman who had just now shut him out in the darkness, he had given up friends and kindred; for her he had refused a princely offer from his uncle, because, forsooth, he must marry according to that uncle's wishes, and sacrifice his love.

The night wore on, and still he wandered, nor thought of taking shelter. Now and again his weary limbs refused to support him, and then he would sink down upon the ground for a time, and remain lying prostrate, until the agony of his mind overcame his physical suffering, when he would rise again and resume his dreary march, turning over and over the pages of his life's romance, and writing upon his heart with a burning brand, the little word, "Finis."

Thus the morning dawned upon him, and he shuddered at the light, praying the darkness to cover him once more—to hide him from himself and others—or, if possible, to utterly annihilate the miserable spark of life within him.

Then nature awoke to life. The birds twittered in the trees, the cocks crew loud and long, a welcome to the morning. Then the low of the distant cattle was heard, and the milk-maid's early "matins," after which the great house was unlocked and unbarred, and the sunlight streamed into the little room which had last night so engrossed his attention.

Then the voice of the gardener greeted his ear, and he started to his feet, realizing suddenly that he was still at Beechcroft, notwithstanding his nightly wanderings, and that if he was discovered, some explanation of his conduct must be offered: so he hastened out of the grounds and down the hill, pausing only at a little wayside inn to rearrange his dishevelled toilet and swallow a cup of coffee, after which he pursued his way towards the boat-landing, choosing the most circuitous route, lest he should encounter some of his acquaintances.

His intention was to leave instantly and unnoticed for the city, and, once there, to settle his plans at his leisure, when he should have become more composed, but the fates had decided against his return that morning, and probably smiled a smile of superior intelligence as they saw him making his way towards the boat with so determined an expression of countenance.

“Pause a while, young man,” they said, and he at once complied, for his astonished eyes suddenly rested upon an antiquated quadruped of the horse species tied carelessly to a tree. Every portion of his body, except that covered by a lady’s saddle, was a prey to horse-flies and mosquitoes, which his poor little stump of a tail found it impossible to wage war against successfully, and as Arthur gazed in mute surprise, a sound came from among the bushes, and a clear, fresh, young voice cried, “Help! help!” in tones of the deepest distress.

Misanthropic as he now felt, there was something in this voice which stirred his chivalry, and, springing lightly over the fence, he made his way in the direction from which it had proceeded, calling aloud meanwhile to herald his approach.

“I am coming,” he shouted. “Where are you?”

“Here, to the right,” replied the voice, and a few more steps brought him to the scene of Jack’s disaster.

Bob was still upon the grass beside him, and she had man-

aged to raise his head upon her lap, but although she had made every effort to restore his consciousness, he still remained as pale and motionless as a corpse.

In a few words she explained to Arthur all that she knew of the circumstances, which, indeed, was not much, and ended by saying :

“ He is not dead, for I have felt his heart beat several times, yet I cannot arouse him to consciousness.”

Arthur kneeled upon the grass, and taking Jack's hand within his own, placed his fingers on his pulse.

“ Yes,” he said, “ he is still alive, for his pulse is beating, though very slowly and irregularly. What can have caused so strange an attack ? ”

He moved his hand upward, and pushing aside Jack's shooting-jacket, placed it upon his heart, but brought it back a moment or two after quite wet with blood; and on opening the coat and vest, his shirt-sleeve was found to be completely saturated, which readily accounted for the poor fellow's prolonged swoon.

“ We must get him home at once,” said Arthur, “ before he loses any more strength; but, wait a moment—is not your house the nearest, Miss Stevenson? Could you not get on your horse and bring assistance from thence, whilst I examine the wound and endeavor to stanch the blood ? ”

Bob expressed her willingness at once, and was gone almost before he had ceased speaking. She was not obliged to go all the way home, however, for a countryman was leisurely driving a pair of sleek, over-fed animals in a covered wagon, which contained butter, eggs, etc., intended for the early city market, and when Bob had told her story, with all the eloquence she could command, he instantly complied with her request, and, leaving his horses in her charge, proceeded to aid Arthur in

carrying the unconscious Jack to his wagon, where he was settled as comfortably as the accommodations would allow.

Bob still supporting his head, and Arthur upon the front seat beside the driver, the horses' heads were turned, and they drove slowly towards the Stevensons, "Cat's-paw," like a well-bred horse, following in the rear.

They lumbered up to the door at last, just as Bob thought they never would come to the end of their journey, and she could not comprehend how everything at home should be so precisely as she had left it, when she herself had endured such agony of mind. It seemed weeks instead of hours since she had left the house in the morning, and yet the breakfast-table was still uncleared, Spencer and Joe were ringing changes on the verb *amo* in a dreary tone of desolation, and through the study-window came Will's monotonous voice as he droned out the words his father dictated to him, before committing them to paper, to prevent all mistakes.

"As we see in the 'Descent of man,'" said Mr. Stevenson, sonorously.

"I wonder if it was the man in the moon, who came down too soon?" thought Will. "Descent of man," he drawled out.

"The homological structure of man, his embryological development, and the rudiments which he still retains, all declare in the plainest terms that he is descended from some lower form."

"Gracious heavens!" thought Will. "I no longer wonder that the poor fellow 'inquired his way to Norwich.' He must have been puzzled by such long words."

"Go on, sir, go on," said his father, impatiently; "you stem the tide of my eloquence by your dilatoriness. Write what I have just said, and repeat it as you write."

“The homononsensical spectre of man,” stammered Will, “his embryosurgical envelopment, and the sediments which he still restrains, all declare in the plainest of sperms that he is distracted from some lower scum. Isn't that correct?” he faltered, suddenly meeting his father's eye fixed upon him in glowing indignation, and perhaps it was well that Bob entered just at that moment, and drew her father's attention upon herself and her story.

CHAPTER IV.

OFF WITH THE OLD LOVE.

“What makes all doctrines plain and clear?
 About two hundred pounds a year.
 And that which was proved true before,
 Prove false again? Two hundred more.”

AH! yes, my dear, it is sad, very sad indeed,” said Mr. Stevenson, in his peculiar slow way, when Bob had finished her story; but his absent manner, and the vague, dreamy expression of his eyes, told his daughter plainly that he but half understood her situation, and that his mind was still concentrated upon his books.

She stood silent and motionless before her father for a few moments, and tried to make up her mind as to the course she had best pursue, for she felt quite hopeless of receiving any advice from him in his present mood; but he seemed to become suddenly aware that she had expected something more of him, and, starting like one from a dream, he tried to recall at least a part of what she had just told him.

As a poor wretch returning to the bosom of his family from a convivial meeting on a Saturday night, although bent on proving himself sober and with the best intentions of keeping the perpendicular, will from necessity sway right and left, and end finally by stretching his length upon the ground, so this man, drunk from the fount of learning and with his brain steeped in the muddy mysteries of the past, struggled vainly to prove himself clear-headed, and preserve his mental equilibrium.

“You said that you had brought some one home with you, did you not?” he asked, at length, in a hesitating way.

“Yes, sir,” replied Bob, very agreeably surprised to hear that even this much of her tale had been remembered. “Jack Von Decker,” she continued, endeavoring to supply the “missing link” for which she perceived him groping.

“Oh, it was Mr. Jack that brought him home, was it?” said her father, feeling now quite sure that he was walking in a straight line. “It was very kind of him — that is, quite proper, I mean; and — a-hem! what do you and Mr. Jack propose to do with him, now that he is here?”

Bob's heart once more sank within her, but she said, as calmly as she could, “That is what I came to consult you about, sir,” and would have patiently recapitulated the case, had she not seen a look of placid despair passing over her father's face as he clasped and unclasped his white, nerveless fingers.

“Pray don't do that, my dear!” he exclaimed, in a tone of distress. “I have no time this morning to enter into domestic details; besides which, you surely have more experience in these matters than I have.”

Here he interrupted himself suddenly, and came to a full stop, for something in his daughter's face told him that this last speech was a dreadful divergence from the straight line; then, with a desperate effort to regain his course, he went on again, saying hurriedly:

“In the house, I think you said? Ah! yes; very well, let him stay here then by all means. Any friend of Mr. Von Decker's is welcome to my hospitality, I am sure. Make him comfortable, my dear; get him a — a — book, and — and — something to eat.”

Thus speaking he waved his daughter from him with a triumphant smile, nor ever dreamed that (to continue the figure) he “had stretched his length upon the ground.”

Bob slowly turned and left the room, wondering much within herself that past experience had taught her so little. Since her mother died had she ever received any advice or assistance from any one? Never; and yet she continued to look, long, and ask for it, although she always met with a rebuff. Sadly she retraced her steps to the parlor, where she had left Jack in Arthur's care to await the arrival of the physician, who had been immediately summoned, but the latter was coming to seek her, and they met half way.

“Miss Stevenson,” he said, as he approached, “the doctor is here, but he says that he cannot properly examine Jack's wound in his present position, and that it is impossible that he should be moved until he has done so. I see nothing that we can do, therefore, but throw ourselves upon your hospitality, and ask the favor of board and lodging for a little while. What do you say? can you accommodate us?”

“Oh, certainly,” said Bob, impulsively. “Carry him upstairs, by all means;” but a moment after she almost regretted her hasty assent, as she wondered where on earth she should put him. The house was singularly uncomfortable and incommodious, and the upper rooms, with two exceptions, looked more like soldiers' barracks than anything else, owing to the untiring mischief of the boys. To these exceptions, therefore, she turned her attention, and perceiving at a glance that it

would not do to dispossess her father, who was the occupant of the first, she had Jack conveyed, without more ado, to the second, namely, her own little bed-chamber, where he was laid upon the small bed with its snowy coverings, which had been hers ever since she had been old enough to sleep alone.

The examination of the wound in Jack's shoulder did not consume much time, and was pronounced by the physician to be, in itself, of small importance. "But," he said to his patient, who had now recovered his consciousness, and, with much confusion, confessed to having carelessly shot himself, "young gentlemen who endeavor to play cricket with loaded fire-arms must expect to experience some discomfort from it, and, owing to the great loss of blood which you have sustained, sir, you will be unable to leave your bed for some days to come."

"I am afraid my friends will be the ones to suffer in that case," said Jack, with a smile; "and, by the way, will some one please send the old lady word, that, like the ancient and respected female who resided under a hill, 'I am not dead, but live here still.'"

His wishes were complied with at once, and the poetical message forwarded to Beechcroft; not to "the old lady," however, but to Maude, who, without loss of time, prepared to go to her brother and ascertain the extent of his injuries, before she told her mother anything about his accident.

Great had been Eleanor's astonishment the evening before when Arthur Leighton had so mysteriously disappeared, but the announcement of Annida's engagement to Leonard Strathmore, which took place later in the evening, had for the time obliterated the remembrance of it from her mind; now, however, when the messenger brought a note from him, dated from the Stevensons, she recalled his curious conduct, and mentioned it to the others of the family.

A painful foreboding of the truth seized Annida as she listened to Eleanor's story, and, when Maude appeared ready dressed for her expedition, her astonishment was great at finding Annida awaiting her, also dressed for a drive, and to hear that she purposed accompanying her.

"I shall be very glad to have company, but I should never have thought of asking *you* to come with me," said Maude, as they set off together in the little pony carriage, "for engaged girls are usually too much absorbed in themselves to give heed to the woes of others."

"I am well aware that anything I may try to do for you is liable to misinterpretation," said Annida, "and that you never look for any good from me, but I always try to do what I think right, notwithstanding," and then the two girls continued their way in silence.

On arriving at the Stevensons they were at once ushered up to Jack's room, where he lay very snug and comfortable, although still suffering from exhaustion. Arthur, who stood beside him, could not restrain a start as Annida entered so unexpectedly, and his pallor was extreme as he took her outstretched hand and endeavored to return her greeting. Both the start and the change of color were apparent to Annida, and her pulses quickened with apprehension. He suspected something, that was evident; but oh, how much did he *know*? She asked herself the question again and again, until her anxiety became almost insupportable.

"Do you think you treated me well, yesterday?" she said at last, looking up into his face with a beguiling smile, when they found themselves, comparatively speaking, alone (for Maude and Jack were absorbed in each other). "How is it that you found time to pay Miss Marston a visit, but could not wait a few moments to see me?"

"I heard that you were so agreeably occupied," replied Arthur, endeavoring to speak calmly, "that I did not like to interrupt you."

"Foolish boy," she said, speaking in a still lower key; "are you growing jealous again?"

"Jealous?" repeated Arthur. "Oh, no; to be jealous it is necessary to have a claim on a person's affections, and I have none on yours."

It was now Annida's turn to change color, as she said, with suppressed emotion: "What can you mean, Arthur? I thought we settled all our difficulties on the day of the picnic. Did you not then promise never to distrust me again?"

She looked so truthful, loving, and innocent as she stood beside him in the partially darkened room, that Arthur felt disposed to believe all that he had witnessed was but a dream, and with a voice full of emotion, exclaimed:

"Tell me once more, Annida, that your heart is mine—that I need fear no other man on earth—that to me, and me only, shall pertain the right in the future to call you 'wife,' and I will once more own myself in the wrong, and sue for pardon."

Annida was unprepared for this outburst, and could not at once frame a suitable reply. She wished to allay his suspicions and retain his love, yet she felt that matters had gone so far now with Leonard, that it would be hardly possible to keep her engagement a secret much longer; which then was the better course to pursue—to acknowledge it openly to Arthur and trust to her influence to make him believe that this marriage was forced upon her? or brave it out to the end, and try to keep him in ignorance? Whichever was best, she could say nothing where she was, with the constant fear of interruption before her; she, therefore, turned silently from him, and passed out of the door, motioning him to follow her.

Their withdrawal was unperceived by the brother and sister, and they proceeded to the parlor without interruption. Once within, and the door closed, Annida turned towards her lover a passionate, glowing countenance, and, standing directly before him, exclaimed :

“ And now, Arthur Leighton, that we are alone, what is it that you wish me to tell you? Put your fears into words, and I will do my best to answer you truly.”

“ Tell me, then,” said Arthur, approaching nearer and laying a hand upon either shoulder, “ whether or not you are true to me! Answer me as you would your Maker, Annida, do you love me?”

“ More than life,” replied the girl, looking him full in the eyes, and for once she spoke the truth.

Arthur read it in the tender depths of her eyes, in the changing color of her cheek, in the quiver of the beautiful red, tremulous lips, and he stood for a moment gazing at her in silent wonder. Recovering himself, at length, he said, in a low, distinct voice, whilst his eyes continued to search hers :

“ Why, then, have you given yourself to another?”

His words took her entirely by surprise, proving, as they did, that he knew the worst, and, at a loss for a response, overcome by her emotion, she could no longer meet his gaze, but veiled her eyes with their long lashes, whilst her whole frame quivered under his grasp.

A gasping sob escaped him at this silent corroboration of his fears, and he tightened his hold upon her, as though he feared she would attempt to evade his question by a sudden retreat.

“ Answer me,” he continued, fiercely. “ To whom are you acting a lie? Which is your dupe—myself, or the man in whose arms I saw you lying only last evening? By heaven! you shall speak the truth now, if never again in this life.”

Every vestige of color forsook Annida's cheek, and she once more raised her eyes and gazed appalled at the sudden transformation of her usually tractable lover. She could scarcely recognize him in the fiery, furious man before her, whose tight grip upon her shoulders had become absolutely painful, and, indeed, at the moment, he was beside himself with rage and misery, and an object to strike terror to the heart of a woman against whom his anger was directed.

But Annida was not intimidated. Whatever her faults, she was no coward, and she at once perceived the necessity of impressing this fact upon him; collecting herself, therefore, she said, with calm dignity:

"If you will release me, sir, and act as a gentleman should, I will answer any questions you may put to me, but no *force* will ever wrest from me a syllable."

Recalled to himself by her conduct, Arthur at once released her, and, with a few muttered words of apology, pushed a chair towards her, whilst he took possession of one directly opposite.

"Now that we are properly situated, in regard to *les convenances*," he said, sarcastically, "would you be so good as to tell me to whom you consider yourself engaged? It may be impertinent curiosity, but I must confess to an earnest desire for the information. Miss De Luce, do you propose marrying me?"

"No," replied Annida, in a low, yet distinct voice, and with her eyes fixed full upon him.

Arthur gasped as though some one had thrown cold water upon him, but he continued, calmly:

"Do you then think of wedding Mr. Strathmore?"

"I promised to do so last evening," replied Annida; but this time her voice faltered slightly, and it was with an effort that she preserved her composure.

Silence ensued for a few moments, and then Arthur essayed to speak. Rising from his seat, he slightly inclined his head towards her, saying :

“Many thanks for your frankness, which comes none too soon. I am answered ; there is nothing for me to say, but to offer you my congratulations, and — and —” but his feelings overmastered him, he could say no more, and with a feeble cry, he fell prostrate at her feet.

In a moment she was on the floor beside him, and he rallied from his sudden faintness to find himself cradled in her arms, to feel her hot tears falling on his face, to be wiped away next moment with burning, passionate kisses.

“Oh, my darling,” she cried, “do not make my task harder than it already is. Judge by your own feelings what *my* misery is, and be merciful. I *must* settle myself in life, and you well know that I cannot marry you ; why not then accept, as I do, the inevitable, and help me to bear my burden ?”

“Do you realize what you are asking ?” exclaimed Arthur, staggering once more to his feet ; “do you think I could patiently bear an eternal separation from you ?”

“Your position would be no worse were I to marry than it is now,” said Annida, hurriedly. “Are we not doomed, as it is, to live apart ? The only difference it could make would be that I should be independent of my rich relations, and with means enough at my disposal to further your interests, and advance you in some congenial career.”

“You are then perjuring yourself on my account,” said Arthur, slowly.

“Yes,” she replied. “It is best for us both that I should marry, and when Leonard Strathmore took me by surprise last evening with an avowal of his love, I felt that for both our sakes I must sacrifice my over-sensitive feelings.”

“His offer of marriage took you by surprise, then?” inquired Arthur, looking keenly at her, whilst his hand strayed instinctively towards his waistcoat-pocket, where Elsie’s note of warning lay hidden. “You, of course, knew nothing of his love until he revealed it yesterday, and are innocent of all charge of duplicity towards the man you professed to love? You never dreamed of being Leonard Strathmore’s wife before last night?”

“How can you accuse me, even in jest, of such unworthiness?” she answered, reproachfully. “Could you continue to love one whom you deemed capable of following such a course?”

“On my honor, no,” replied Arthur, with a strange, unnatural smile, “and to prove it to you —”

“Hush,” interrupted Annida, suddenly, with a warning gesture, as the door opened and Maude appeared, followed closely by Bob.

“What do you think of your brother, Miss Von Decker?” said Arthur, quietly, as they entered the room.

“I do not know what to think, Mr. Leighton,” she replied; “he would joke, you know, if he was going to die, so his cheerfulness is no sign that his wound is slight.”

“But the doctor assured us that such was the case,” said Bob; “did he not, Mr. Leighton?” and she turned to Arthur to corroborate her words.

“Certainly,” he replied. “He told us there was no possible cause for uneasiness, and that a few days’ good nursing would make him all right again.”

“But how is he to be well nursed so far from home?” said Maude. “It is very absurd, I think, that we may not take him back with us. Certainly there is no room here for any more of us to come as nurses,” and she looked around contemptu-

ously upon the small and meanly furnished apartment in which she stood.

The hot blood rushed to Bob's cheeks as she noted the expression of Maude's face, and she made haste to enter the lists for the protection of her household gods. What mattered it if the shabby furniture was covered with common horsehair, the color of the carpet undistinguishable, and the wall-paper ornamented by a bordering of blue mould; was it not her own, and the only home which she possessed? And her dark-blue eyes flashed forth defiance at the haughty visitor who had so far forgotten herself as to express contempt for these precious relics of a past which Bob had never known. Arthur caught the glance, and hastened to avert the coming storm by a conciliatory speech.

"Indeed, Miss Von Decker," he said, with a smile, "you do not do us justice. Miss Stevenson and myself propose nursing your brother so well, that you may congratulate yourself if he ever consents to return home again. Your only fear for him need be lest he be killed with kindness."

"Oh, if *you* are going to stay with him, that alters the case entirely," said Maude, brightening at once into animation; "and I cannot tell you how grateful mamma and myself will be to you for such kindness."

"Do not be too effusive," said Arthur, laughing, "for, after all, I may think better of it and return to the city. My only reason for remaining was to be of service to Miss Stevenson, and prevent her from wearing herself out in attendance upon Jack."

"Oh, I trust you will stay," said Maude, earnestly, but without paying the least attention to Bob. "We shall feel so much easier if he has some one to depend upon. Come, Annida," she continued, "we must go home at once, or mamma will

discover our absence. Mr. Leighton, will you send for the ponies, if you please?" and with a stately bow to poor Bob she passed out of the room, without one word of thanks to the girl who had been the means, perhaps, of saving her brother's life.

"I never felt so much like marrying Jack Von Decker in my life," thought Bob, as she stood alone, pressing her teeth into her lips to keep down the storm within. "It would be a glorious revenge," and a furtive smile dawned in her eyes at the thought. "But no," she continued, talking to herself, "I will never enter any house unwelcomed. You are safe, Master Jack, until your lady sister begs of me to take pity on you," and she laughed a little at the idea, but her heart was very sore.

"Take this," whispered Arthur, pressing a folded paper into Annida's hand as he took leave of her, "and when you read it, remember my last words." And away dashed the ponies, bearing her from his sight all smiles and blushes, whilst she carried with her, all unwittingly, Elsie's warning.

CHAPTER V.

TEMPEST-TOSSED.

"Souls made of fire, and children of the sun,
With whom revenge is virtue."

LETTERS! letters from Paris!" shouted Alfred and Edwin in a breath, as they rushed precipitately into the library the following morning. "One for mamma, one for Nellie, and one for Maude."

"How much will you bid for them, girls?" continued Al-

fred, holding the precious missives just out of reach; "letter-carriers must be particular, you know; I can't give them up without a fee."

"Really, boys, you are very aggravating," said Maude, indignantly. "Give us our letters at once," and she made a little angry snatch at the one nearest to her, but Alfred was too quick for her, and jumping nimbly to one side, he retreated to the door, saying, mockingly:

"What? try to cheat the government in such a barefaced manner as this? Miss Von Decker, I blush for you. Pay the postman, ladies, or I retire with the letters."

Maude, who was now excessively angry, rose from her seat with the intention of giving chase to her brother; but Nellie, who felt instinctively that such a course could but end in failure, laid a detaining hand upon her arm, whilst with the other she held out a box of bon-bons, saying, laughingly:

"Here then, postman, come help yourself; but deliver the letters first, if you please, for I never pay for work before it is done."

Thus approached, Alfred at once delivered up his treasures, and departed with his pockets full of sugar-plums, very much pleased with the issue of affairs.

Left once more alone, the girls eagerly opened their letters, and were soon absorbed in their contents. Maude's was from her father, and briefly stated their safe arrival at their destination in good health and spirits; concise and to the point, perhaps, but uninteresting; let us pass on, therefore, and, peeping over Nellie's shoulder, read what our golden-haired Elsie says of her first impressions of Paris.

PARIS, September, 1869.

Paris! Nellie, dearest, do you realize that it is I, your little friend and schoolmate, who dates her letter to you from

the capital of the world? that I am really and actually in the city of delights,—the “American’s heaven”? To speak the truth, it is a continual source of wonder to me to find myself here, and I have been constantly rubbing my eyes ever since we arrived to prove whether or not all that I see and hear is a dream.

Within the hotel it is hard to believe oneself in France, so constantly does one run against a fellow-countryman. Without doubt “Meurice’s” is the favorite American house; unless, indeed, the whole of the American population emigrated at the same time as myself, and have inundated Paris. Outside, however, the case is different, and I have only to glance from my window along the beautiful Rue de Rivoli to convince myself that this is indeed the queen of cities.

I cannot as yet, my dear, give you any satisfaction as to the “manners and customs of the natives,” for we only arrived this morning, and, as a matter of course, my experience is limited; neither can I give you a graphic description of all the wonders and glories which we so longed to behold in our childish days, when we sat side by side with arms entwined, in the “gloaming,” on the old oak bench in Madame’s oriel window, reading or, better still, dreaming over some old French novel, feloniously appropriated, because, as yet, I know nothing at all about them.

All that I *can* say, then, is that if the whole of Paris is as beautiful as that portion of it which I saw on my way from the depôt, and all the *tables d’hotes* as delightful as the one I found on my arrival here, I could be content to pass the rest of my days where I am, if only — “Ah, that little ‘if!’” I hear you exclaim (and I can almost see you shaking your finger at me), “that little ‘if’ which you allow to spoil all your happiness in life.” Well, we will not dispute the point — perhaps I am too prone to see the disadvantages of my surroundings, as a general thing, but this one “if,” my darling, you must allow to pass, as I would say, “*if*” *only you were with me.*

I feel lonely and dispirited already, and I have not yet even seen my “prison;” how then will it be with me when I shall find myself incarcerated, and papa, my last home link, shall have returned to America? Oh, I cannot think of it with any

fortitude. The tears are falling on my paper as I write; and there is papa calling me to dress at once for dinner, so, *au revoir, ma chère amie*, and think often and sympathetically of

Your attached friend,

ELSIE VON DECKER.

P. S.—I enclose you a little note for my cousin, and will be endlessly grateful if you will give it to him on some private occasion. It is of no importance, simply an explanation of certain circumstances, but Maude is so peculiar that I would rather you did not mention the matter to her."

"What a long letter Elsie has written you!" exclaimed Maude, in a discontented tone. "I think she might have spared time to send a few lines to her sister. If you have finished with it, let me see what she says," and she put out her hand to receive the letter.

Poor Eleanor blushed a rosy red. What excuse could she give for withholding Elsie's letter from her sister, and yet how impossible it was for her to surrender it.

"There is nothing particularly interesting in it," she faltered out at last; "but if you wish, I will read it out to you."

"Oh, no; pray, don't trouble yourself to do that," said Maude. "I have no desire to intrude on your school-girl secrets," and rising, she left the room with a would-be contemptuous air, which badly concealed her evident chagrin, passing Annida in the hall, who now made her appearance for the first time since her drive home from the Stevensons the day before, having been ever since confined to her bed by a violent headache. Poor Annida! She had not even glanced at the paper Arthur left in her hand when he bade her farewell, until she had reached her own room, fearing lest Maude's watchful eyes should detect her in the act, but had placed it in her bosom, where it rose and fell with the palpitation of her heart,

as she thought of what the little rose-colored missive might contain. No idea of its real character ever crossed her mind for a moment, and when, once alone, she drew it forth and hastily opened it, it was with a glad smile of expectation on her face, for she had determined that it was a poem, or a love-token, at the least, which her repentant lover had indited to appease her anger, called forth by his behavior of the morning.

Judge, then, her sensations when she slowly read the following words :

DEAR MR. LEIGHTON :

It is very late, and my last night at home, but I feel it to be my duty, before I say good-bye to you, to make a confession of a secret which I would I could persuade myself to preserve inviolate ; but I cannot rest until all is told. To be brief, then. I was to-day an unwilling spectator of a scene between yourself and my cousin in the arbor at Strathmore Park, and learned then for the first time, and with much surprise, that you considered her your affianced wife, for she had never given me the slightest hint of any connection between you, but that of the most platonic friendship. I could have easily forgiven this secrecy, however, for I can appreciate how earnestly one would desire to hide a passionate and apparently hopeless love from an unsympathetic eye ; and my heart was filled with pity for you both, when you hurried away at the rustling of the leaves under my feet, but this feeling was quickly changed to indignation as, with your kisses still warm upon her lips, your words of love still lingering on her ear, my cousin said slowly and distinctly :

“ Good-bye, aye, good-bye *forever*, Arthur Leighton. Would to God I could crush you from my heart as I must from my life. Oh, why did perverse fortune give to Leonard Strathmore all this wealth, and to you all my love ? ”

Horrified by these words, coming so immediately upon the scene I had witnessed, I followed her to her room on our return home, and forced from her the acknowledgment that, although she loved yourself, she had determined to marry Mr. Strathmore ; and all my persuasions have been of no avail (although

I have been pleading with her up to the present moment), for I have left her as determined on her course as I found her when I first broached the subject.

And now, dear sir, I have told my tale—whether for good or evil, I know not; but this I beg, that whatsoever may occur, you will exonerate me from any unworthy motive in writing this note, and believe me, as ever,

Yours truly,

ELSIE VON DECKER.

If this note had given Arthur pain, he was now amply revenged, for the knowledge that she was unmasked before him, that the man whose esteem she valued above all the world was now acquainted with her as she really was, had fathomed all her subtle plans, and knew that she had lied to him, drove the iron into her soul, and made her a thing so contemptible in her own eyes, that she would fain have hidden from herself.

There she sat, gazing blankly for a while at the fatal note, and wondering that she should have been so stupid on that last evening as to trust Elsie from her sight. Why had she not fondled instead of irritated her? Why not have followed her to her room, cradled her head upon her breast, held her close in an embrace until the morning dawned, and Elsie passed, with the night's shadows, from among them? Fool, fool, that she was, not to have foreseen what had come to pass, but allowed herself to be outwitted by a child; and then, as the note again caught her eye, a storm of futile anger rushed over her soul. She threw it upon the floor, she stamped upon it, uttering meanwhile furious and incoherent invectives against the writer. Then she took it once more within her hands, and, tearing it into pieces, held towards them a lighted match, watching with fierce glittering eyes until the last scrap of writing was consumed, unheeding the pain caused by the bright flame's close contact with the white and shapely fingers. She could have

borne any physical torture at that moment and not known it. She was more like a ferocious animal than a woman, and ill would it have fared with Elsie had she but stood within her reach.

But Elsie was thousands of miles away, and there was nothing for Annida to do but bear the burden she had placed upon her own shoulders, and from which, strive as she would, she could never again release herself. No; the note was burned, it was true, but the letters had written themselves in blood upon her brain, and she saw them everywhere.

“I will have my revenge, so help me heaven,” she muttered through her closed teeth. “I must bide my time, but, sooner or later, she shall know how I can hate. I must think it over—but first, I must go to sleep,” and having recourse to her precious powders, she straightway lost all consciousness of pain and trouble.

As I have already stated, she remained in her room all that evening, and awoke the next morning an altered woman. The one softening influence, namely, Arthur's love, had gone out of her life, and all that was womanly in her departed with it, leaving a frozen heart within a frame which, alas, was only too full of vitality. No likelihood that she might soon shake off the chains which bound her—lay down her disappointed life and sleep forever. No, the hot blood coursing through her veins, the mad passions raging in her breast, forbade the hope of rest, until time had laid his chastening finger on her pulse, and whispered, “Peace, be still.”

She looked with sullen scorn upon her beautiful features reflected in the mirror—she remembered with a shudder that the hour was at hand when she must receive her affianced husband, yet dressed herself with slow, methodical care, only repeating

ever the same refrain — “I must bide my time, but *she shall know how I can hate.*”

“Good - morning,” she said, smiling sweetly at Maude (“I must bide my time,” still ran her thoughts). “Yes, I feel much better, thank you — am really quite myself again,” then once more the old chorus — “She shall know how I can hate.”

She entered the library-door with noiseless, velvety tread, and not until she stood close beside her, did Eleanor perceive her approach. She started with an exclamation as Annida laid her hand upon her arm, and Roy's note slipped from her grasp and fell to the ground at her feet. In a moment Annida's eye had recognized the handwriting, and, stooping quickly, she picked it up, and read the superscription.

A fierce light of exultant and demoniacal joy shot into her eyes, which she prudently veiled with her long lashes, as she put the note into Eleanor's outstretched hand, saying sweetly :

“Letters from abroad? May I not know what my fair cousin is doing in Paris?” and then, as Eleanor briefly recapitulated the contents of her letter, Annida said softly to herself :

“A secret correspondence with *le beau cousin*. *Brava!* this is charming; this is romantic. Is it possible, *ma chérie*, that heaven has heard my prayers, and thrown my revenge into my hands so soon? Perhaps you, too, despite your childishness, possess a heart that may be wrung with anguish; we can but try. Ha! ha! *I bide my time, but you shall know how I can hate!*”

CHAPTER VI.

BOILED MUTTON WITH "CAPER" SAUCE.

"What will Mrs. Grundy say?"

THE next few days were anxious ones to Jack's mother and sister, for they could only be with him at certain hours, and were very doubtful as to the care he received from his nurses during their absence. When they came to visit him he was always alone, and as it was impossible for them to conceive that both nurses had fled precipitately when they were announced, they of course concluded that it was thus he passed his days, and naturally bewailed his sad fate and solitary confinement, nor noticed how restless he was during their visits, and how eagerly he bade them adieu. The true state of the case was, however, that Jack was being made of so much importance, waited on so constantly by his patient nurses, and so generally petted by the whole family, that he had never been happier in his life, and could have dispensed with his relatives' assiduous visits without a sigh of regret.

Whilst he lay immovable from weakness, and suffering acute pain in the swollen and inflamed shoulder, his nurses never left him for a moment. Now it was Bob who, with gentle touch, pushed back the hair from the feverish brow, and tenderly bathed it with some cooling liquid; and then again it was Arthur, who, bending over him, loosened the tight bandage and gave him a moment's relief; thus, like figures in a dream, they passed and repassed before him, but one or other was always at his side.

Then, as his convalescence progressed, and he was allowed more freedom from restraint, they sat together with him and beguiled the time by many a sprightly joke or repartee; but at the sound of Maude's low, modulated tones, or Mrs. Von Decker's light step upon the stairs, they would start up like guilty creatures, and make good their escape as quickly as possible, for Arthur feared always that Annida might be of the party, and Bob could not recover from the wound Maude had given her pride on the day she had brought Jack home.

"Why do you always run away when my mother or Maude come to see me?" said Jack to her one day as she returned to his side after one of these absences.

"Why do little dogs take to their heels when they see a big one coming after them?" answered Bob, with a laugh. "I am afraid of your august relatives."

"What nonsense," said Jack. "You have known them all your life, and I don't suppose my accident has rendered them any more ferocious than usual."

"That is all *you* know about it," said Bob, smiling; "but the 'instinct of self preservation' is strong within me, and my prophetic soul tells me that, if I am not cautious, Maude will bite."

Despite her smiling countenance, Jack perceived that something had occurred to distress her, and there was a ring of sadness in her voice which his quick ear at once detected.

He glanced anxiously at her, but could read nothing in her face, as she moved softly about the room, setting everything in order with her deft fingers, and singing to herself in a low voice.

Suddenly the door flew open, and Tom appeared upon the threshold, saying:

"What will you have for dinner?" with the air of a *chef de*

cuisine, blessed with inexhaustible resources ; but as Jack, with a mischievous look in his eyes, opened his mouth to express his wishes, the child hastily added, to prevent all mistakes, "There's nothing but boiled mutton."

"Boiled mutton?" exclaimed Jack. "Ye gods, what a treat. Hurry, Tom, and bring me some ; I am all impatience to begin my feast." Although his words were gravely spoken, and in apparent earnestness, there was something in his tell-tale eyes that instantly attracted Tom's attention, who at once beat a retreat, banging the door after him with a muttered exclamation that "if he was too fine to eat mutton, he could go without his dinner;" after which he quietly took his seat at the table and paid his respects to the despised dish, totally disregarding the tray which was placed beside him for Jack's dinner, although the duty of carrying it up had been, until to-day, his chief pleasure.

As the moments passed, and he did not reappear, Bob began to be suspicious, and, excusing herself, hurriedly descended the stairs to the dining-room, where she arrived just in time to save a morsel of meat from the rapacious jaws of her brethren, who were apparently endeavoring to see how much could be consumed in a given time, and were steadily progressing from one end of the joint to the other with eager zest.

All the best of it was gone, and Bob, as she perceived it, lost all control over her temper, and scolded them heartily all around, calling them "selfish, heartless little brutes," and a number of similar tender and loving names, which took her audience completely by surprise ; after which she filled the dishes on the tray, and, putting a double set of plates and knives and forks upon it, she took it in her hands and swept from the room like a young tornado, regardless of the many offers of assistance she received from the now thoroughly repentant boys.

“Here I am at last,” she said, as she entered Jack’s room, with flashing eyes and cheeks all aglow, “and it is well that I went down when I did, for a few moments later would have sealed the fate of your dinner. Meagre as the fare is, you must make the most of it, for it is positively all that the boys have left you,” and she placed the tray on the table at his side, looking with rueful countenance at its contents.

“You have brought a double set of plates,” said Jack, looking inquiringly at her.

“Yes,” she replied. “I have invited myself to dinner with you, to compensate you with a ‘feast of reason and a flow of soul,’ for whatever is amiss with the bill of fare.”

“That’s jolly,” said Jack, looking thoroughly comfortable and very much pleased. “‘Reason’ and ‘soul’ might not be considered the proper diet for a sick man by the uninitiated, but you and I know of how much use they are when taken in moderate quantities. Let us have the ‘soul’ first, please.”

“Oh, of course, we must begin at the wrong end,” said Bob, blithely, “or our century would not own us. Let us begin to ‘gush’ at once, and picture to ourselves this mutton as a little lambkin, frisking about the green fields at its fleecy mother’s side, never dreaming in its innocence the anguish it must one day cause to those — who try to eat it,” she added, laughingly, as she perceived Jack struggling vainly to masticate the piece to which he had just helped himself.

“I fear,” he said, as soon as he was able to speak, “that through some fatal mismanagement that ‘fleecy mother’ was killed instead of her child. There is nothing infantine about this piece of meat — it is not even ‘sheepish’ — it is a veritable patriarchess,” and he leaned back, exhausted, on his cushions.

“You are too particular, young man,” said Bob; “you have been bred in an epicurean school, and lost your taste for good

solid food. Let me set you an example of good behavior," and helping herself to a slice, she made a bold attack upon it, but, alas, with no better success than Jack.

"What do you think of it?" said he, laughing heartily at her discomfiture. "Don't hesitate to express your opinion—the animal was no relation of mine."

"But perhaps the shepherd was?" said Bob, with difficulty articulating her words; "and on him rests the blame of having raised such a jaw-breaking animal. Oh!" and dropping her knife and fork, she too gave up the contest, and confessed herself "beaten by a sheep."

"Divide that other slice," said Jack, pointing towards the dish; "perhaps it may be tenderer."

Bob took up the knife and fork once more, obedient to his will, but after a moment's trial she said, pathetically, "Would you mind doing it by the 'rule of three'? This knife produces no impression on it at all."

"Could n't think of such a thing in my weak state," said Jack, laughing; "try the effect of a 'cutting remark.'"

"Or, better still," replied Bob, "lend me the 'edge off your appetite.'"

They were both laughing heartily over their own nonsense, as only those can laugh who have yet to experience a heart sorrow, when the door opened once again, and without a word of warning Maude stood before them. She held in her hand a covered basket, but beyond mutely extending it towards her brother, she uttered no explanation of this her second visit, being entirely too much overcome by the scene before her to be able to command language; and poor Bob, perched upon the edge of the bed beside Jack, with a plate upon her knees, and the disorderly tray between them, felt her cheeks burning a rosy red beneath the scornful glance of her eye.

“Halloo! Maude,” said Jack, with a discomfited expression of countenance, “what brought you all the way over from Beechcroft again? Nothing wrong there, I hope?”

“Oh, no,” replied his sister, recovering her composure, “we are all doing very well, but mother thought perhaps some of Emile’s fricassee might tempt your appetite, and so I came over with it and one or two other trifles. I should have knocked at the door, but I supposed you dined alone.”

“No harm done, since you did n’t knock the door down,” said Jack, gayly, recovering his spirits despite himself, at the sight of something that he could eat. “Clear away the first course, waiter, and we will begin again,” he added, turning towards Bob with a bright smile.

But Bob needed no orders, for, with a dread that Maudé’s keen eye would take in their frugal meal, she had at once seized upon the tray, and was bearing it from the room, in the hope that she had thus concealed its contents from her view, when the two little words, “Boiled mutton!” fell upon her ear, uttered by her enemy in tones of unmitigated contempt. For a moment she was tempted to retrace her steps and argue the merits of the rejected dish, and sympathized with Tom’s violence at dinner-time, but sober second thought induced her to pursue her course, and the clean plates were carried up by one of the boys.

Maude took them from the child’s hand, and closing the door upon him, set out the table with the dainties she had brought, cooing out meanwhile her sympathy with her brother thus exiled from home and home comforts, and her earnest hopes that he would soon be able to come among them again.

Jack did not echo her remarks, neither did he express his satisfaction at the appetizing viands before him; in fact, he looked so thoughtful and grave that his sister anxiously inquired

what was amiss with him, and if there was anything she could get him.

“No, thanks; I have everything I want,” he answered; “I am only waiting for Bob. I wonder where the child is?”

“Washing the dishes, probably,” replied his sister, with a slight curl of the lip, as she seated herself decorously in a chair beside the bed.

Jack looked at her, and tried to solve the puzzle as to what it was he wished for, and why he had so suddenly lost his appetite and good spirits. Maude was irreproachably dressed, and her every action and word bespoke the lady; his dinner also was all that the most fastidious could desire, yet he missed Bob's slight, symmetrical figure from its perch, and felt that her sparkling eyes, and hearty, unconventional laughter had been his best tonic; so, taking it all in all, he began to realize that Bob and tough mutton were more to his taste than Maude and the “delicacies of the season.”

He fidgeted about, looking gloomy and morose, for some minutes, interrupting Maude's small talk every now and then by an impatient, “What can that girl be doing?” until his sister absolutely lost her patience, and exclaimed:

“Well, Jack, are you going to eat your dinner? or do you wish me to hunt up the whole Stevenson crew, and bring them in to partake of it with you?”

“I think I told you before that I was waiting for Bob,” replied her brother, tartly: “she came up to dine with me, and we had only just began our dinner when you came in.”

Maude's usually pale cheeks flushed with indignation. “I should think,” she said, with difficulty controlling herself, “that it would be better for her not to dine at all, than in the indecorous manner in which I found her on my entrance.”

“What do you mean?” said Jack, turning angrily towards

her; "but don't explain," he added, hastily, "for you will only make me more angry than I am. You never can speak well of Bob, therefore you had better not mention her name at all."

"It is impossible for me to hold my peace," said Maude, "when I see you deliberately falling into a snare which has been laid for you by as artful a girl as ever breathed."

"I can take care of myself, thank you," replied Jack, "and would be much obliged if you would allow me to do so."

"I have no doubt you would," said Maude; "but I have the interests of our family too near my heart to allow me to remain silent when, by speaking a word in time, I may save them from disgrace."

"Who is going to disgrace them, Miss Von Decker?" said a clear, ringing voice beside her, and, with a start, Maude looked up directly into Bob's clear, honest eyes, which were fixed upon her with a glance of lofty pride that fully equalled her own.

"Not you, Jack, I hope?" she continued, turning towards him with a smile. "Remember that I shall feel responsible for your conduct, hereafter, having assumed the character of nurse and monitor towards you, and do not throw discredit on my instructions. Trust in me, Miss Maude; your brother shall not disgrace you," she continued, and once more she looked at Maude, with a curious expression in her eyes.

Maude felt very uncomfortable. It was impossible to know how much Bob had heard of the foregoing conversation, or what significance there was in her words, and, being unable to think of any graceful method of remedying the situation, she determined to beat a retreat, so, rising from her seat, she murmured some inarticulate excuses, and, with a hasty farewell, left the room, betaking herself to her own home, with a feeling

of hot indignation against poor Bob, whose only fault was that Jack found her more attractive than his sister.

“Come, eat your dinner at once,” said Bob, as the door closed upon Maude. “Why have you waited so long, you naughty boy? you have let everything get cold,” and she proceeded to help him as quickly as possible to the tempting dishes set before her.

“I have been waiting for you,” said Jack, wistfully; “I could not eat alone, somehow; I lost my appetite suddenly after you left me.”

“Nonsense,” said Bob, energetically; “you talk as if I had been breakfasting, dining, and supping with you every day since your accident, instead of which this is the very first time that I have tried it, and I think I may safely say that it will be the last, also.”

“I should like to know why?” said Jack, quickly. “I am sure the pleasantest way of taking one’s meals that could be imagined is this sort of jolly *tête-à-tête* which Maude so rudely interrupted, but which, if you please, we will now continue. Take a seat — not there,” as she moved towards Maude’s chair; “get up on your perch again; you are nothing but a little sparrow, after all, and have no right to be putting on airs, and sitting in chairs. There, now we are comfortable again,” he continued, as she took her old seat upon the bed, and placing his uninjured hand upon her shoulder, he said, in a gentle, affectionate tone:

“Don’t let grown-up people put nonsense in your dear little head, Bobby; we understand each other, and that is enough.”

“Don’t disgrace your family, Jack,” said Bob, with something very like a sob in her voice. “Ah, I knew she would ‘bite’ some day.”

CHAPTER VII.

CLANDESTINE CORRESPONDENCE.

“Ye gods! annihilate but space and time,
And make two lovers happy.”

SOME days elapsed after the receipt of Elsie's letter before Eleanor found an opportunity of giving Roy his note, for, although he was constantly at Beechcroft, his cousin Maude monopolized his society, and Elsie had especially requested that Maude should be kept in ignorance of the fact that she had written to him.

At length one day, when Jack's recovery was declared complete, and both his mother and sister had driven over to the Stevensons for the purpose of escorting him home, the desired opportunity occurred, and Eleanor, finding him alone in the library, prepared with beating heart to fulfil the commission entrusted to her.

It would appear, at first sight, that the giving of a note was not such a momentous business as to call for the amount of trepidation which Eleanor exhibited, and in an ordinary girl it would have been affectation, but she had been brought up in a strict, old-fashioned school, one wellnigh forgotten in these days, and she had hesitated more than once as to whether she would not be committing an impropriety in thus encouraging a secret correspondence between the cousins. Her old habit, however, of following Elsie's lead in all these affairs, determined her at last to seize upon the moment, and deliver the letter without more ado, so she entered the room and took her

seat not far from Roy, opening a book, that she might not appear over-anxious to enter into conversation with him.

For a few moments they remained silent, as Roy also held a book; but perceiving, at length, that his companion had kept her eyes steadfastly fixed upon one paragraph for fully five minutes, he turned towards her with a smile, saying:

“Is that sentence so deep that you cannot master it, Miss Marston? or are you, like myself, reading against your inclination?”

“I fear I must plead guilty to the latter charge,” replied Eleanor, closing her book and turning towards him. “I have had a letter from your cousin, and my mind is preoccupied with its contents.”

“Indeed,” said Roy, with suddenly awakened interest, “and what does she say that is so absorbing, if I may ask such an impertinent question?”

“Oh, it is not at all impertinent,” replied Eleanor. “Elsie and I have no secrets. That is,” she continued, “none in which you are not concerned.”

“Am I to understand then that you have secrets concerning me?” said Roy, smiling. “I feel very much honored, I am sure,” and he gave her a glance from his handsome eyes which made her shut her own up tighter than ever, feeling very hot and uncomfortable.

She had thought that she was opening the matter with the utmost diplomacy, but the expression of his face completely disconcerted all her prearranged ideas, and she felt painfully conscious that she had given him to suppose that he was of personal interest to herself, which increased her embarrassment tenfold.

“I wish I had just handed the note to him, and then run away,” she thought, but it was too late to do that now, so she

took courage at the thought that her disagreeable task would soon be over if she persevered, and renewed the conversation.

“We have never had any secrets concerning you until now,” she said, “and what she says in this letter is scarcely worthy of so great a name, for she only requests me, in a postscript, to give you this note,” and she pushed it towards him as she spoke.

Roy's heart leaped within him at the sight of Elsie's well-known handwriting, but his pride kept him from showing the smallest surprise at, or interest in, the note before a stranger, so he carelessly reached out his hand for it, and, after a moment's examination, allowed it to drop once more upon the table, simply saying:

“Some commission, I suppose. One of the hundred and fifty things that she, like most young ladies, should have done, but forgot to do until too late;” and then, turning the conversation into another channel, chatted carelessly on indifferent subjects until the return of the family from the Stevensons.

Eleanor was disappointed. She had expected that he would at least have expressed some pleasure at thus hearing from Elsie, so soon after her departure, and she began to fear that she had encouraged false hopes, and that he did not, after all, love her friend as he should, or as she had supposed he must; but had she seen him snatch up the note a few moments after she left the room, and, first pressing it passionately to his lips, tear it open with tremulous hands, too eager almost to grasp its meaning, her mind must assuredly have been set at rest.

Thus ran the note:

I know that you will be very much surprised at the sight of my handwriting, and will, I fear, be tempted at first to throw this note aside unread, but I beg of you to conquer this impulse, and hear me, if for the last time even, whilst I speak

in extenuation of my conduct towards you just before I left home.

I know that I led you to believe that I not only did not care for you, but loved another; but I did not know then that such knowledge would give you pain, nor did I dream that *you* loved *me*, until my father told me so on our first night at sea.

It seemed, as I heard him tell of you and all you thought of me, as though my heart would break with shame and contrition for the past, and I vowed that if I lived to reach the shore, although the ocean rolled between us, and I could not actually place my hand in yours, yet I would, as reparation for the wrong I had done you, write this frank confession, and tell you that you, and you alone, can ever fill my heart, which has been yours ever since I can remember.

What more shall I, or rather *can* I, say? I admit, with tears of penitence, that you have been unjustly treated; that I have been cold, unkind, cruel — what you will; but, oh, Roy, write me one little line, to say that *you forgive me*, and you will never have reason to complain of me again.

Your unhappy cousin,

ELSIE.

Roy read and re-read this epistle, scarcely daring to believe his happiness, and then, as footsteps sounded in the hall, he hastily secreted his treasure in his bosom, and, springing lightly out of the window to avoid the persons approaching, he rushed away to indulge in solitude in ecstatic dreams of love and Elsie, and compose a suitable reply to this letter, which had brought such joy to his heart.

He wandered about the grounds for an hour or more, lost in delightful reveries, and even when recalled to the realities of life by a summons to dinner, he went into the dining-room still dreaming, and acted throughout the meal more like an escaped lunatic than anything else — eating horse-radish with his pudding and sauce with his beef, sugaring his ham and salting his coffee. How he ever recovered from the effects of that dinner, has been a mystery to himself and his friends ever since.

As soon as the meal was concluded he rushed to his room, and, seizing his pen, indited a long letter to his darling, robbing the dictionary of every caressing term to express himself, and bringing into the field so many adjectives that the nouns hung their heads with mortification.

This production being considered satisfactory, after having been altered a score of times, he folded it and placed it in an envelope, and then it occurred to him, for the first time, that he was entirely ignorant of his cousin's address, so he made his way down-stairs again in quest of Eleanor, from whom he hoped to gain the required information.

He found her, as he had expected, in the drawing-room, but, alas! she could not assist him. She told him that by that time Elsie must be at school, and until they heard from her again it would be useless to send his letter; but, she added, if he would trust her with it, she would send it as soon as possible.

There seemed to be nothing better to do, so Roy placed the letter in her hand, commending it to her especial care, and moved away from her side again, lest he should attract the attention of the other occupants of the room, and give rise to conjecture on their part, as to his newly-awakened interest in Miss Marston.

Poor Nellie! she was in a sad predicament. The letter left in her hand must be conveyed to her pocket unobserved, under fire of four or six pairs of eyes, and she, utterly unused to such doings, felt that she was attracting general attention by her evident embarrassment, the very consciousness of which made her more nervous and flurried than before, so that at last she dropped it upon the floor, and, suggesting that it had fallen from her work-basket, picked it up before them all, and boldly pocketed it.

This device served to deceive all present but one, and she,

smiling to herself with triumph and delight, said softly, as it disappeared, "I bide my time, but she shall know how I can hate," and as Maude passed into her bedroom that night another figure entered with her, that of Annida de Luce.

"Oh!" cried Maude, starting, "how you frightened me, Annida. I did not hear you come in. Is anything the matter? do you want me?"

"I only want to speak to you, dear," she replied; "I want to tell you of a discovery that I have made which causes me considerable uneasiness."

"A discovery!" repeated Maude, in surprise. "Shut the door at once, my dear, and tell me what it is," and she made herself comfortable in an easy-chair, motioning to Annida to do the same.

Annida complied with her request, and then sat down almost directly opposite her, but remained quite silent, looking reflectively upon the floor, until Maude grew impatient.

"Have you gone to sleep?" she said, laughing. "If not, pray let me hear your discovery without loss of time, for I am burning with curiosity, and expect to hear of a gold mine upon the premises at least."

Annida looked up at this and smiled, but instead of coming at once to the point, she said, to Maude's infinite surprise:

"Maude, who gave you that gold chain which you wear around your neck?"

"Why do you ask?" replied Maude, coloring slightly; "will the knowledge assist your discovery?"

"I don't know until you tell me who it was," replied Annida. "You need not speak, though," she continued. "I can guess, I think, only if I am mistaken, you must tell me so."

"Very well," said Maude. "Who do you think it was?"

"Your cousin, Roy Weston," replied Annida. "Am I not right?"

“I cannot say ‘no,’” replied Maude, blushing; “but how did you come to make such a good guess?”

“Why every one can see that he is devoted to you,” replied Annida, “and that if left to himself he would have offered you his hand long ago, and that is the discovery which I have made.”

“Which?” said Maude, laughing, “that he would offer himself to me if allowed?”

“No,” replied Annida, “but the person who will not allow him to do so.”

“Indeed?” said Maude, gravely. “Well, that *is* a discovery. Will you be so kind as to tell me who it is?”

“You will not be shocked, or angry with me, if I tell you?” inquired Annida.

“Not in the least,” said Maude, but she did not know, nor even guess, that Annida would say—

“Elsie Von Decker.”

“You cannot mean it,” she said, starting up in her excitement. “Why, Annida, how can the child influence him now, when she is out of the country?”

“By writing to him, my dear,” replied Annida.

“But,” said Maude, incredulously, “she has not had time to write to him yet. We have only heard from her once, and no letter came to him by that mail.”

“No?” said Annida, with a smile. “I think you are mistaken on that point, for I not only suspect that he received one at the same time as yourself, but actually *saw* it, as it fell from Eleanor Marston’s, in which it was enclosed.”

Maude’s mind instantly rushed back to the arrival of the letters, and she remembered quite distinctly Eleanor’s unwillingness to show Elsie’s, and her embarrassment when asked to do so. A humiliating sensation swept over her as she

thought what a dupe she had been, and she hid her face in her hands to conceal her emotion, as she thought that perhaps Roy's interest in herself had been only fraternal.

"Now do not be distressed, my dear," said Annida, "for there is really nothing to trouble you in the matter. Roy is deeply attached to you, and is as anxious to break with Elsie as you could be to have him do so, but she is such a mischievous little flirt that she cannot bear him to escape her toils, and has written to him, without doubt, to make trouble between you, just through her love of fun and excitement. There is no harm done by this first letter, not a bit; but, my dear, she must not write another, for men are but men after all."

"But how can we prevent that?" asked Maude, excitedly. "We cannot tell what she may send him through Nellie Marston, I am sure."

"No, that is true," replied Annida; "but I think I can suggest an effective plan of putting an end to the correspondence, and will carry it out with your assistance. You must remember that Elsie is a proud girl in her way, and a very little repulse from Roy will be enough to make her give him up at once, which I well know is what you both want, although you do not confide in me."

"But it is useless to think of persuading Roy to repulse Elsie's advances," said Maude, sharply; "even if it were a matter of personal indifference to him, he would feel constrained to be more than civil to her on papa's account."

"I know that," said Annida, "and therefore it is necessary that we should help him, and not suffer your happiness to be ruined by too great scrupulousness."

"What can we do?" asked Maude.

"We can prevent Elsie from ever receiving any answer to her clandestine letter," replied Annida.

“How is that to be done?” asked Maude, looking puzzled. “Are we to tell him not to write to her?”

“Not exactly,” said Annida, smiling, “for he would not listen to our advice in the first place; and in the second, his letter is already written, and consigned to Eleanor Marston for safe keeping, until she discovers Elsie’s address.”

“Then the case is hopeless,” said Maude, sinking back in her chair. “Things must be allowed to take their own course.”

“And Elsie allowed to trifle with and destroy the man you love!” exclaimed Annida. “Maude, you have no spirit; I am ashamed of you.”

“But how can I help it?” sobbed Maude. “You say that the letter is written, and Eleanor is to send it; how then can I prevent it?”

“Eleanor must come to you for the address, must she not?” inquired Annida, with glittering eyes.

“Yes, I suppose she must,” replied Maude, slowly.

“Tell her, then, that you will direct it for her, and — *bring the letter to me*, I will see about posting it.”

“But that would actually be stealing,” said Maude, in horror. “Oh, I could not do that, Annida.”

“And is not Elsie trying to ‘steal’ your lover from you?” exclaimed Annida. “You are talking absurd nonsense, Maude; but it is of no consequence to me, I am sure,” she added, rising from her seat as she spoke. “You may ruin your happiness if you wish; it will harm no one but yourself and Roy. Good-night,” and she turned towards the door, but before she crossed the threshold Maude called her back again, and they renewed the conversation, which lasted far into the night.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SPIDER AT WORK.

“The woman that deliberates is lost.”

DURING the week following Maude suffered much from an internal struggle 'twixt right and wrong. Although Annida had placed the subject before her in its best light, and had urged upon her the necessity of checking Roy's intercourse with Elsie, she could not but shrink at the suggestion of intercepting his letter, and Annida found it impossible to obtain a promise from her to that effect; but as the days passed, the struggle became less violent, and at length she compromised matters with herself, by mentally determining to allow the trouble to settle itself, and to be guided entirely by the mood of the moment when the next letter from Paris should arrive.

It came by the next steamer, and with it, as before, one for Eleanor; but Maude, who received them both, could not make up her mind to deliver the latter without mature consideration, so she put them both in her pocket, and withdrew to her own room to think the matter over.

For a long time she sat lost in thought, with the letter lying on her lap. Roy loved her — she was sure he did — and would one day thank her for what she was about to do; but suppose he were to discover that she had deceived him, and, acting the spy upon his actions, had broken up his correspondence with his cousin, how then? Thus she argued the case, first on one side and then on the other, but never coming any nearer a decision, until a gentle tap at the door aroused her from her

reverie, when she sprang from her seat, dropping the letter hastily into her writing-desk, which lay open upon the table, and then closing the desk, she sat down once more and opened her sister's letter to herself, just as a second rap came upon the door.

"Come in," she said, and at once Eleanor Marston entered, followed closely by Annida.

"We heard you had letters from abroad," said the latter, fixing her eyes full upon Maude, "and have come to hear the news, and learn the last Paris fashions."

"I cannot tell you anything yet," she replied; "you must have patience until I read my letter. I have only just begun it," and she ran her eyes hastily over the page before her. "There is nothing particularly interesting to tell you," she continued. "Elsie says that she has not yet been able to see much of Paris, for papa's time was so limited, and there was so much to be arranged in regard to placing her at Madame Geradin's Academy. She is established there now, however, and already feels quite at her ease, and papa has left Paris on his way home. She has made the acquaintance of a charming girl, whose name is Julie St. Evremond, a day-scholar only, and she encloses her address that all letters, which we do not wish opened and read by the school authorities (as is the general rule), may be sent through her. She says, also, that Julie has an uncle, Col. St. Evremond, with whom she lives, and, as he frequently takes her out sight-seeing on half holidays, she has promised to call for Elsie on such occasions, that she may see something of the outer world.

"The St. Evremonds are of the old *régime*," she says, "and scorn everything that is new, carrying their prejudices so far as to refuse to live in any of the magnificent streets which the present Emperor has opened, and clinging to the Faubourg St.

Germain as tenaciously as the ivy does to a mouldering wall. That is about the substance of her letter, and now I must redirect my last letter to this new address," she added, rising from her seat. "I am glad I did not send it this morning, for I have no idea of Madame's examining my correspondence."

Eleanor's heart beat rapidly. Maude had told her everything but what she most wished to know, namely, Elsie's address, and, although it would be most natural for her to ask for this, her conscience made a coward of her, and she remained standing silently beside the table, watching Maude as her busy fingers changed the covering of her letter.

Just as she was about resigning all hope of getting what she was waiting for, Maude turned towards her, saying, sweetly :

"Have you not a letter, Nellie? Run, fetch it, if you have, and I will address it for you with my own."

This was too good a chance to be lost, and uttering a few words of thanks, Eleanor rushed away to her room for Roy's letter, with which she returned in a few moments, and handed it to Maude.

"Well done," Annida had whispered to her companion during Eleanor's temporary absence, and Maude had answered quickly, "You must take it, I cannot." So when Maude had addressed it, and put on the requisite stamps, Annida quietly took up the letters, saying :

"I am going out to drive with Mr. Strathmore almost immediately, and as we shall pass the post-office, I will leave these for you, girls, and then you will be sure that they have gone."

Eleanor was taken by surprise, and could think of no objection to this suggestion, although she felt sure that Roy expected his letter back again, and would rather have mailed it himself; but whilst she was thinking the matter over, Annida hurriedly left the room, and was soon to be heard driving along

the hard gravel road towards the post-office, thereby settling the question forever, and so Eleanor walked thoughtfully away, wondering what Roy would say to her.

Over the even-made roads rolled the drag, and the mettlesome horses demanded so much attention when they first started, that Leonard had but little to spare for his *fiancée*, whilst she, on her part, had so much to engross her mind that she scarcely noticed his unwonted silence.

She had gained her end — the means of revenge upon Elsie lay within her grasp, and for the time a sense of triumph overpowered every other feeling. She forgot the loss of Arthur's love, her own misery from it, and even that she was soon to be bound for life to the man beside her, for whom she felt more and more contempt each succeeding day, and remembered only that Elsie had dared to thwart her plans, and that Elsie would now suffer for it.

The post-office was reached, and Maude's letter dropped in the box, but Roy's remained in her pocket, where she had put it soon after she got into the drag; and as they drove on again, she placed her hand upon it to be certain that it was perfectly secure.

The horses had by this time become quiet, and as they trotted leisurely along the green lanes, Leonard found time to enjoy his companion's society, and to introduce a subject which had been for some time agitating him.

“Annida,” he said, “do you know where I am taking you?”

“No,” she replied; “but I do not feel at all alarmed at my ignorance. As I have promised to marry you, and no one raises any objection, I do not think it likely that you will elope with me this afternoon.”

“I had not thought of it,” said Leonard, smiling, “but it is a good idea, and if you do not soon put me out of suspense

and fix some definite period for our marriage, I shall be tempted to carry you off some fine day, and marry you whether you will or not."

"Ah, now I *do* feel frightened," said Annida. "Tell me at once, sir, where we are going, or I shall spring over the side of the drag. Better destruction than deception."

"Wait a moment, and I will help you down," replied Leonard, "for we are almost at the gate of Strathmore Park."

"Indeed!" said Annida, in surprise; "and why did you bring me here?"

"Because I wanted you to look carefully over the house and grounds, and see what alterations you would like to have made, prior to taking up your abode here. You have never been to Strathmore since we were engaged, and it is time you paid it a visit."

"Oh, there is no hurry about that," said Annida; "we shall have time and to spare before we are married."

"And why should we?" said Leonard, quickly. "What good reason can you give me for delaying our marriage? We are neither of us very young, I have plenty of money, and you know your relations will not grieve long after you."

"That is all true," said Annida, gravely; "but — let us say no more about it just at present; I will think the subject over and try and get used to it."

Leonard complied with her request, and they drove on silently for some little time, until they drew up before the Park entrance, when they descended from the drag, and, leaving the horses with the coachman, proceeded to walk up the magnificent avenue leading to the house. Leonard made no attempt to renew the subject just then, but contented himself with pointing out the many advantages of his estate, judging rightly that Annida would be more influenced by these than any other per-

suasions he could make use of, and he soon saw the wisdom of his course, as she began first to listen to him, and then to offer her opinion on various suggested improvements, imperceptibly associating the surroundings with herself.

From the grounds they proceeded to the house, and this also underwent a strict inspection. From room to room they wandered, now and then speaking, to suggest some slight alteration, but oftener in total silence. At last they entered a spacious bed-chamber on the second floor, furnished handsomely, and commanding a fine view of the bay from its heavily-draped windows. Next to this, and opening into it, was a little octagon-shaped room, furnished entirely with blue satin and white lace, the walls and windows being draped with the same.

An exclamation of delight escaped Annida as she entered this fairy-like room, and she paused on the threshold between the two, gazing upon them alternately with wonder and surprise.

"I do not remember these rooms at all," she said, "and yet I thought I knew the house well. How is it that these escaped my attention when I was last here?"

"You did not see them for one very good reason," replied Leonard, smiling, "which is that they did not then exist as they now are. They have only just been completed," he added, and then coming a step nearer he placed his arm around her, saying:

"I had them furnished for my bride, Annida; I have been hard at work ever since you promised to be mine. Everything is ready for you, darling; will you still keep me waiting without cause?"

Annida felt herself entrapped. The thought that she might lose all this elegance by procrastination was appalling, and then why should she put off the evil day? it must come before she

could enjoy the possession of the beauty which surrounded her, and the sooner it was over, the sooner would she enter upon her dignity and state.

“My uncle is still absent,” she murmured, “and I have said nothing about a speedy marriage to my mother.”

“But your uncle will be home shortly,” replied Leonard; “and as for your mother, you can write to her to-night. I do not wish you to be married to-morrow, only to give me a promise that as soon as Mr. Von Decker returns you will allow me to make my preparations, and bring you here once more, as my wife, as soon afterward as possible. What do you say, darling? not ‘no,’ surely.”

And Annida did *not* say “no,” but suffered herself to be prevailed upon to give the desired promise, and then they drove home, amicably discussing their future plans.

But on the terrace stood one whom Annida would gladly have avoided, namely, Arthur Leighton; Bob Stevenson also was there, having driven him over to Beechcroft, that he might bid Jack good-bye before he returned to the city.

Arthur came forward, as they drew up at the door, and assisted Annida to alight, after which they all went into the house together, joining the rest of the household, who were rejoicing over Jack's return to health and activity.

“How are you?” said Bob, as she gave her hand to him. “Do you feel quite strong again, and are your relations taking good care of you?”

“Oh, I'm well enough,” replied Jack, “but there are no nurses here who can compare with you, and I'm pining for some boiled mutton.”

“Come over and dine with me, then,” said Bob, “and I'll give you the ‘lion's share.’”

“What is the matter with my Lord Hamlet?” asked Jack, pointing towards Arthur, whose melancholy countenance suddenly attracted his attention. “Is it a case of a ‘father’s ghost,’ or a ‘fair Ophelia’?”

“I am as ignorant as yourself,” replied Bob, “but he must be either in love or in debt, for he neither eats nor sleeps any more, ‘making night hideous’ by his incessant march over my head, until I am charmed to think that he is going to betake himself elsewhere, and leave me to peaceful repose. Why he has stayed with us so long I cannot imagine, but, thank heaven, he goes to-morrow.”

“Maude received a letter from her sister to-day,” said Eleanor in a low voice to Roy, who was standing beside her.

“Indeed?” he said, eagerly. “And did she send her address?”

“Yes,” replied Eleanor, “and your letter is addressed and mailed. I passed it off as my own,” she continued, hastily, “and I hope you will not be vexed with me. Indeed, I could not otherwise avoid detection.”

“Vexed,” repeated Roy; “certainly not; on the contrary, I am very much obliged to you.”

“Miss De Luce,” said Arthur, suddenly pausing before her, “I have not yet congratulated you on your engagement. Allow me to do so now, and to wish you all possible happiness in your future life.”

“You are very kind,” said Annida, whilst her color came and went with conflicting emotion, “and I thank you very much for your good wishes.”

She would fain have said something more, to prove herself as calm and collected as the man before her, but the words died upon her lips, and all her old regrets returned as she met the dark eyes of her sometime lover fixed upon her no longer

in love and tenderness as of yore, but with fierce indignation and undying resentment. "Lost, forever lost," she murmured to herself, as he turned from her, "but I shall be avenged."

CHAPTER IX.

A STEVENSON TO THE RESCUE.

"When all the blandishments of life are gone,
The coward sneaks to death, the brave live on."

ARTHUR LEIGHTON returned to the city a depressed and broken-hearted man. Back to his work he went with the determination to forget his troubles in the vortex of an active and ambitious life, as so many men had done before him, and, seating himself in his little third-story back room, in a very inferior boarding-house, he put his feet upon the table, tilted his chair, and tried to imagine, as he lighted his cigar, that he was a picture of bachelor comfort, which, in outward seeming, perhaps he was.

He sorted the papers and letters which had accumulated during his absence—he drew forth from his desk pen, ink, and paper, wherewith to jot down any brilliant thought which might occur to him during their perusal; but although he read and re-read them a dozen times, the words contained no meaning for him, and his heart kept repeating the unhappy story of his disappointed hopes, until, half mad with misery, he started to his feet once more, and throwing his correspondence *en masse* into an open drawer abruptly left the room, feeling keenly that in

his present state of mind he was utterly unfit to give it his attention.

Had his occupation been of an active nature—one that led him among men, and drew him out of himself—the plan for forgetfulness which he had laid out might have been successful, but, alas! poor Arthur was an author, a contributor to magazines and weekly papers, and his mind, so far from raising him above his troubles, sank utterly beneath them, so that his sedentary life became unbearable, and, gloomy and morose, he gave himself up wholly to brooding over his wrongs, thus rendering himself every day more incapable of any profitable work.

He knew Annida was unworthy of the love he had lavished on her—he felt, indeed, that he had loved a creature as unreal as those of his own creation—yet he could not rouse himself from his inertia, nor shake off the dull despair which had seized upon him. One week passed away, and then another. He learned incidentally that Mr. Von Decker had returned, and then, more miserable than ever, awaited feverishly the intelligence of Annida's wedding, which he felt assured would now no longer be postponed.

Meanwhile this harassing life had made great havoc in his health, whilst the nonfulfilment of his "press" duties caused a depletion of his finances, which threatened to seriously inconvenience him; but he viewed the decline of strength and fortune with equal indifference, nor made an effort to save himself, by making up for lost time in the earnestness and absorption of work. He could do nothing until Annida was married, thus he argued, and yet when, one morning as he sorted his letters, he came upon a beautiful snow-white envelope, bearing the Von Decker crest, he leaned back in his chair for a moment or two before daring to open it, and felt that more than her marriage was necessary to put his heart at rest with itself. Within was a

printed card of invitation to the wedding, which would take place that day week.

Of course this invitation had been sent by Maude, as to a friend of the family, without a suspicion of the existing circumstances; but Arthur, who was in no mood to reason calmly about anything, at once looked upon it as a new and additional insult from the woman who had deceived him, and set himself to think of some method of revenge — some way of moving her stony heart to grief.

“She invites me to her wedding!” he exclaimed. “She thinks I will not come — that I cannot bear to see her given to another. Well — perhaps she is right — who knows? But I shall go, nevertheless, and add to the bridal entertainment a ‘show’ of my own.” And with a mirthless laugh he went about packing boxes of books, sorting odd papers, and setting his affairs to rights with a scrupulous care unusual in a man who was going away but for a day, and to attend a wedding.

“There,” he said, as he closed his valise on the appointed day, and looked approvingly around the small room, which presented an unusually neat appearance; “everything is in order, and my friends will have no trouble;” and then, taking his valise in his hand, he crossed for the last time the threshold of all that he had to call a home.

And Annida, how did she bear the advent of her wedding morn? Alas! it had dawned upon as miserable a woman as could well be found. No sleep had visited her eyes the night before, and, strange to say, she had not courted it, nor sought to calm her nervous agitation by recourse to her favorite sedative. No, through the livelong night she had kept her lonely vigil, that she might think and dream of Arthur, perhaps for the last time, unreservedly. She recalled all his loving words and tender actions, all that he had been to her, and all that he

had done for her, since she had first known him, and the longing of her heart after him knew no bounds.

She drove the remembrance of Leonard from her with scorn. "Not yet," she murmured, as his unwelcome shadow intruded on her thoughts; "this one night shall be Arthur's, and to-morrow — to-morrow will be time enough to face the future," but even as she spoke the morrow dawned — Leonard's time had come, and with the darkness fled her last hope of happiness.

The morning light flooded the room, the sun streamed in upon her, and then, indeed, she rose from her chair, and approaching the toilet-table, took therefrom one of her powders, saying, as she prepared to swallow it, "I must be a little stupefied, or I shall never accomplish that which I have to do," and when the maid tapped at the door with the coffee, it was opened to her by a gracious, smiling woman, the perfect picture of a happy bride.

Annida took her seat before the mirror and placidly submitted her luxuriant tresses to the hands of the *artiste*, to be curled, braided, and puffed according to custom, striving meanwhile to keep her feelings in subjection by thinking only of her coming grandeur. Maude and Eleanor soon joined her, offering their sincere congratulations on the beautiful weather which crowned her wedding day, and what, with dressing, discussing the all-important occasion, their toilets, and forming bright schemes for the future, the morning passed away more cheerfully than Annida had expected; and when the appointed hour came, she found herself perfectly calm and self-possessed, quite ready to descend to the parlor, where a large assemblage of friends were eagerly awaiting her appearance.

Among the guests was Arthur, but looking so unlike himself as to attract general attention. "He has been ill," said some; "He has been drinking!" exclaimed others, whilst the un-

conscious object of remark passed idly from one to another, exchanging commonplaces with all, only bent on one thing, namely, proving to those around him how entirely he was at his ease, and how little interest he took in the coming ceremony.

Silence suddenly ensued among the gay throng, for the folding doors were slowly opened, and under the arch of evergreens came the bride, in queenly majesty, robed in white satin and guipure lace, and crowned with orange blossoms, and — her own glowing, dazzling beauty; whilst around her neck hung a costly string of pearls, from which a cross of diamonds depended. She advanced steadily, leaning on her uncle's arm, toward the place assigned for the ceremony, and a proud, triumphant feeling possessed her, as she heard the whispered admiration of the guests, and for the first time tasted that cup of adulation for which she had so often sighed. But, of a sudden, her joy was changed to mourning, and the haughty fire died out of her eyes. Arthur, determined to let her know that there was present at least one living, though silent witness of her perjury, had placed himself conspicuously in her path, and, as she moved along with stately tread, her eye fell upon him as he stood gazing at her, with sunken, bloodshot eyes, and a face as pallid as a corpse.

A smothered cry escaped her, as she stopped short in her course, trembling with emotion, and her bouquet, falling from her nerveless hand, rolled at his feet. She seemed to herself to have suddenly fallen from her greatness, and to be, now, something less even than the women around her. Her uncle endeavored to urge her on, but she appeared to be unable to move; all around eagerly interrogated her as to the cause of her agitation, but she could not or would not speak a word, standing there the cynosure of all eyes, and a picture of dismay,

until Arthur, far more collected than herself, stooping, raised the flowers and restored them to her, saying, in a voice inaudible to all save herself:

“Pass on!”

At his words, uttered commandingly, she seemed to awake from a spell, and to realize her situation, for she moved quickly on, and without further delay, but in hurried and uncertain tones, she spoke the fatal words which parted her forever from the man she loved.

The ceremony over, and Mr. and Mrs. Strathmore having received the congratulations and good wishes of their friends, the festivities of the day began, and no one was gayer or more at ease, apparently, than the bride, whilst the groom, in a seventh heaven of delight, was overflowing with kindness and attention to all.

Arthur tried to rival Annida in self-command and indifference, but as the day wore on he became weary of the heartless game, and grew more and more moody and silent, drinking heavily to hide his increasing melancholy, but turning from the feast with loathing. More than one anxious glance was directed at him during the collation—in fact, almost every one but Annida noticed his strange behavior, but she dared not trust herself to give a single look that way, lest she should forget her rôle and betray her feelings.

Roberta Stevenson was standing not far from her, eating an ice with extreme satisfaction, and amusing herself at the same time, with a very young gentleman, whose breath she had taken away several times by calling him “My dear child,” when a voice suddenly whispered in her ear:

“I smell a rat!”

“Good gracious!” exclaimed Bob, and starting with alarm at these unexpected and ominous words, she emptied the con-

tents of her plate on her unfortunate companion, who withdrew, in indignation, at such uncivil conduct. Looking over her shoulder to see who had caused all this confusion, Bob discovered Jack Von Decker, who was laughing heartily at the sudden defection of the very young gentleman.

"You should not give your admirers such a cold reception, Miss Stevenson," he said with mock gravity; "that poor baby will have the croup to-night, I am sure."

"Oh, you horrid boy!" exclaimed Bob. "Why did you shriek in my ear, and discompose my nerves in such an unseemly manner? Did n't you know I was on my good behavior, and trying to appear genteel?"

"I never guessed it for a moment," replied Jack, laughing heartily, "you hid your gentility so well."

"For shame!" said Bob; "I was getting into a beautiful flirtation, when you came and screamed 'Rats!' in my ear. What interest have I in rats, I should like to know? I'm neither a terrier nor a piece of burnt cheese."

"Don't be flippant, child," said Jack, "but give me your attention whilst I 'a tale unfold.' Just cast your eye upon my Lord Hamlet first, though, and tell me whether he is drunk or mad. Did you ever see such midnight darkness enthroned upon a kingly brow?"

Bob looked at Arthur for a moment, but her heart was too light to be troubled by his gloomy bearing, and she only answered by humming in a low voice:

"There was a young man all dressed in silk,
Who lived upon lemons and buttermilk;
And thinking this world was a sour old place,
He carried its acid all over his face,"

and then she laughed merrily.

“You won't feel inclined to laugh much longer, my lady,” said Jack, “for if I am not mistaken that fellow will soon lose his head, knock Strathmore down, or kill somebody.”

“I do not think he looks dangerous,” replied Bob, “and why should you suppose he would attack Mr. Strathmore; they have always been good friends, have they not?”

“Apparently they have,” replied Jack, “but you see I am a very clever boy, and by putting two and two together, I have discovered —”

“That they make four?” said Bob, interrogatively; “why I know that myself.”

“But you don't know *which* four they made in this case,” replied Jack, “and that is what I wish to explain. The three given quantities,” he continued, lowering his voice, “are Mr. and Mrs. Strathmore and my Lord Hamlet, whom I have every reason to believe considers himself injured by to-day's ceremony, and the unknown quantity is the one who is going to watch the third given quantity, and prevent him from dividing the first given quantity into decimals. There, now you have the proposition before you as well as I can state it, with so large an audience.”

“I understand you very well,” said Bob, thoughtfully. “It is a case of jealousy. Leave him to me,” she continued, after a moment's reflection, “and I will give you timely warning in case of danger.”

“All right,” replied Jack. “I'd rather trust you than many men that I know; but you must be very careful not to let him know that you are watching him, for that will only expedite the mischief. It is an uncomfortable piece of business,” he continued, musingly, “and, as ‘master of ceremonies,’ I cannot possibly keep my eye on him, so good luck to you, my boy, and good-bye,” saying which he shot off to the other

side of the room as abruptly as he had come, whilst Bob contrived to place herself a little nearer to her charge.

She found no difficulty in keeping him in sight whilst he remained in the dining-room, but when he left there, although she immediately followed, he managed to elude her, and when she reached the parlor, was nowhere to be seen, either in that room or the hall, through which she had just passed. His disappearance was so mysterious, that Bob determined to acquaint Jack at once of the fact, but, unfortunately, he was also not to be found, and she was standing at the foot of the staircase, wondering what she should do, when Eleanor Marston stole softly up to her and whispered :

“Come with me to the end of the hall for a moment.”

Bob placed her arm in that of her friend, and suffered herself to be led away unquestioningly, for a glance at Nellie's face convinced her that something unusual had occurred.

“Were you looking for any one?” asked Nellie.

“Yes, for Arthur Leighton,” replied Bob. “Have you seen him anywhere?”

“No! Yes! I know where he is,” said Nellie, in great agitation. “What did you want him for?”

Bob briefly stated what had passed between Jack and herself relating to Arthur, and when she mentioned their suspicion that he had himself aspired to Leonard's position, Nellie clasped her hands, exclaiming, in a tone of distress :

“Oh, let us find Jack at once, Bob, or a terrible misfortune may befall that poor young man. He has gone out to the garden-house without hat or cloak, with a pistol in his hand, gesticulating and talking to himself like one who is out of his head.”

“How long since?” asked Bob, anxiously.

“About fifteen minutes ago,” replied Nellie; “I saw him from a window in the upper hall.”

“We cannot wait to find Jack, then,” said Bob, quickening her speed and dragging her friend along with her. “We must go ourselves, Nellie; so wrap that shawl around you, and I will borrow this jacket; not being mad, we will otherwise find it rather cool in the garden.”

As she spoke Bob took the articles from the rack, and hastily putting them on, the two girls left the house, and ran down the path leading to the garden.

“Softly,” said Bob, as they neared the garden-house; “the door is open, Nellie, and we must not be seen,” so they stole noiselessly around to the rear, and peeping cautiously through the open window, beheld a sight which corroborated their worst fears.

At the small table within sat Arthur, with his head upon his hand, gazing earnestly at a small miniature which lay open before him, and which the girls had no difficulty in recognizing as Annida's; a note, written in pencil, but not folded, lay beside him, and in his disengaged hand he held a pistol ready cocked.

Eleanor could scarcely restrain herself from screaming, so alarmed was she at the threatened catastrophe, but Bob covered her mouth with her hand, whispering in her ear at the same time:

“Be silent; if you make a sound, everything is lost. His back is turned to the door — watch here alone for a moment — I am going in to him,” and the brave, resolute girl crept noiselessly back to the front of the house and in through the open door.

Arthur heard nothing, nor dreamed that he was watched, and Bob succeeded in placing herself so near him that she could without trouble read the note upon the table. Thus it ran:

“Farewell, Annida. Fortune has smiled on you, and given you all that you desired. Around your neck hangs your chain of servitude — the pearls and diamonds with which your husband bought your love admit no other term. Kind friends (who have never known you until to-day) have lavished gifts upon you, and shall not I, your childhood's friend, offer you some token of regard? Alas, there is but one thing left me now to give; but, Annida, it is yours. Life alone is mine, and now I give it to you as a wedding gift. Adieu.”

A chill crept through Bob's frame as she read these significant words, but she never stirred from her position, knowing well that it was too late now to retreat. She knew her danger, for were Arthur to turn suddenly and find her there, what could prevent him, in his half-insane condition, from shooting her? Yet there was no time to seek other assistance, so she prepared herself for the worst, and stood her ground, calm and resolute, an inflexible purpose imprinted on her bright young face — like a soldier under arms, awaiting the signal to fly to the rescue of a comrade.

- “Lost! lost!” moaned Arthur; “my whole life blasted by that false face — my curse rest on you forever and forever!” he shouted, and dashing the picture to the ground, he raised the pistol to his head and fired. His aim was true, yet the bullet passed harmlessly over his head, for a quick stroke from behind dashed the muzzle of the pistol up, whilst a clear girlish voice rang out upon the air, saying:

“Coward!”

CHAPTER X.

A TRIAL OF NERVE.

“ We live in deeds, not years ; in thoughts, not breaths ;
In feelings, not in figures on a dial.
We should count time by heart-throbs. He most lives
Who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best.”

ARTHUR started furiously to his feet. He had been followed from the house, his long-cherished project defeated, the worthless life he had thought to have thrown away was still his, and the consciousness that there were more days of suffering in store for him, goaded him to madness.

“ Who is it that plays the spy on me, and dares to call me coward ? ” he cried, turning quickly to grapple with the foe ; but as his angry glance fell upon the slight girlish figure, draped in white muslin, unarmed, save with a brave and dauntless spirit, his upraised arm dropped powerless at his side, and he staggered back against the wall, drooping his head upon his bosom as though he would fain hide from the clear, penetrating gaze now bent upon him.

“ It was I who called you ‘ coward, ’ ” she said, in a clear, distinct voice, “ and I spoke but the truth. What better name does a man deserve who will not face his fate, but seeks, like a craven, to slink out of life ? For shame, Arthur Leighton ; does a soldier leave his post at the firing of the first gun ? ”

“ No, ” he slowly said, “ but often he falls to the ground overwhelmed by the severity of his wounds. ”

“ Aye, I grant you that, ” said Bob ; “ but when he is down, he does not seek to take his own life, but rather bears his agony

in quiet patience, until some comrade helps him to rise, or death itself seeks him."

"Hold your peace," exclaimed Arthur, starting upright once more; "by what right do you interfere in my affairs, and then preach to me of patience?"

"I interfered to save you from a shameful deed," replied Bob, "and I 'preach' that I may arouse you to a sense of your misconduct."

"And who was I wronging when I strove to rid myself of the intolerable burden of living?" cried Arthur, staggering to a rustic bench which stood beside the table, and burying his head in his hands. "Is not my life my own? and if I choose annihilation to dragging on a miserable existence for threescore years and ten, why should I be forced to live?"

He paused for a reply, but poor Bob stood silent, with a puzzled look on her round, rosy face. Since her mother's death, the little religious instruction that she had ever received had entirely faded from her mind, and none of her father's scientific reasonings on the course of nature seemed to her to afford a sufficient cause for forcing a man to live who had become weary of his life. Why had she saved Arthur's? because she had thought suicide a sin, of course, but when called upon to explain *why* it was a sin, she felt herself unequal to the task, and stood silent and troubled before her questioner.

"Leave me," continued Arthur, in a tone of misery. "I shall be better when alone. You have saved my miserable life this time, and may the consciousness of it bring you peace; for myself, I cannot but hate you for what you have done," and he moaned bitterly, whilst his head sunk lower still, until it rested on the table.

"Ah! do not say that," said Bob, filled with compassion at

the sight of his suffering. "Take courage; rise above your troubles, and you may live to thank me yet."

"Never!" exclaimed Arthur, raising his head once more, and looking fiercely at her. "You have robbed me of my only hope, that of total oblivion. It is only for a time, however," he muttered; "I will have my way despite fate," and he resumed his former position, apparently determined to ignore her presence.

Bob hesitated for a moment as to what it would be best for her to do. Arthur was in no mood to listen to reason, that was plainly to be seen; indeed, he seemed to be scarcely conscious of what he said and did — his cheeks were flushed and his eyes shone feverishly, whilst he continued to moan, and at intervals to utter disconnected words. She felt so useless, and yet it seemed impossible to leave him a prey to his unhappiness, lest, during her absence, he should again attempt to take his life. Eleanor now appeared in the doorway, motioning her to come away, but she went no further than the little spring beside the door, from whence she drew a cup of cold water, and then returned, bidding her friend go back to the house and explain to Jack (but to Jack only) the reason of her prolonged absence.

Once again within the garden-house she hesitated no longer, but boldly approached her charge, and, without a word, folded up her handkerchief, and, after saturating it in the cold water, laid it gently on his burning forehead. The cool application was most grateful, and he raised his eyes to her sympathizing face, saying:

"That was well done; you have allayed the flames. I shall die easily now," and then, after a moment's pause, he continued: "It is strange how long it takes to die. I aimed the shot well — the ball should have pierced my brain — but I think, and see, and feel still, as though even death refused to

comfort me. My God! I hope I am not dead!" he exclaimed, as a sudden fear took possession of him. "Have I sent my soul to hell, and must I bear this torture through eternity?" and he attempted to rise in his agony, but his physical sufferings for the moment conquered, and he fell back senseless on his seat.

Once more Bob had recourse to the water, and this time she used it lavishly, drenching his hair and moistening his parched lips, whilst she watched anxiously for returning life. He opened his eyes at last, and looked at her. "Child," he said, "what are you doing here? Have you betrayed your love? This is the purgatory of condemned souls. I am awaiting Annida De Luce. She escaped me in life, but in death she must be mine. Hell is not such a bad place after all," he added, "when one can see one's enemies suffer," and he laughed discordantly.

Bob shuddered, and cast a longing glance through the open door, to see if, perchance, Jack were not coming to her rescue; but no one was in sight, and the sound of distant music told that the revelry within the house was still at its height. She turned her eyes once more upon her charge, whose increasing wildness filled her every moment with greater dread. What if he should become violent? How could her cry for help be heard above the loud rejoicings in yonder house? and what would her puny strength avail against a madman's? True, there was still time for flight, but her loyal heart revolted at the thought of deserting her post before Jack arrived.

Arthur grew more and more restless. "Go, child, go," he said, at length, with some impatience; "why should you linger here? Life must still be beautiful to you—leave this place, therefore, whilst you may; when the gates of hope once close, they remain forever shut—forever!"

“I have remained too long already,” said Bob, thinking it best to humor his conceit; “the gates are closed now, and I must stay with you; so close your eyes and take some rest, whilst I watch beside you.”

“Rest!” exclaimed Arthur, starting to his feet; “there is no rest for me. I will watch with you — watch for my bonnie bride, my beautiful Annida. She must come, you know; she has promised, and legions of fiends could not make her break her word. Why do you look at me so strangely?” he added, abruptly, looking fiercely at Bob. “Do you doubt my word? Do you think she will not come? Fiend, are you keeping her from me? Perdition! if I thought it, I would throttle you.”

It had come — the wild outbreak she had feared — and as Arthur advanced furiously upon her, poor Bob looked anxiously around for some means of protection. Flight was impossible, for he was between herself and the door, and there was no weapon of defence within reach.

Backing away from him, with terror in her heart, but composure in her face and mien, she struck against something, and turning, beheld what she had entirely forgotten — the ladder leading to the loft where the garden-seeds were kept. Swift as thought she sprang up the steps, and, once within her hiding-place, tried to draw the ladder up after her, and so make good her retreat; but Arthur, who had for the moment been stupefied by her rapid movement, sprang forward when he saw the ladder moving, and seizing, drew it once more to the ground, muttering:

“Not so fast, my lady; you have not escaped me yet. You must pay the forfeit of your sins;” and replacing the ladder, he began to ascend, hand over hand, in a nervous, eager, and excited manner.

Bob once more glanced despairingly around, but every

avenue of escape now seemed closed, so she tried to compose herself to meet her fate, and with clasped hands watched the madman's ascent. He was already half way up; it seemed as though she could feel his fingers closing on her throat; and, seizing the ladder, she shook it so violently that the iron hooks loosed their hold, and it swayed back and forth in her hands.

Here was a chance for life — a slight one, it is true, for her strength might give way at any moment; but still, as long as she could keep the ladder from the wall she was safe, as no one could climb whilst it was so unsteady.

Arthur felt the unexpected motion and paused in his ascent, standing about two-thirds up, completely puzzled. He raised his eyes; a calm, fearless gaze met his own, and they fell, cowed by the superior power of reason. The moments passed — they seemed hours to poor Bob, whose strength waned rapidly — and just as she began to feel that further resistance was useless, her eye fell upon Jack and Dr. Marston walking rapidly down the garden-path. She tried to scream, but her terrible danger seemed to deprive her of the power, and only a low wailing cry escaped her lips. Low as it was, however, it reached Jack's ear, and quickening his pace to a run, he was soon within the house. At the sound of his footsteps, Arthur turned his head, and springing from the ladder attempted to rush past him; but Jack seized him firmly in his arms, and, after a struggle, succeeded in throwing him upon the ground, and, with Dr. Marston's assistance, secured him from further violence.

“Where is Bob?” cried Eleanor, who had followed her father and Jack from the house, and then they noticed for the first time that she had not descended from the loft. Jack hastily climbed the ladder, appearing some moments after with an unconscious bundle of soft muslin in his arms. “Help me to carry her down,” he said to the doctor, for, for the first and last time in her life, Bob had fainted.

They conveyed Arthur to the house, where he was put to bed, and left in the doctor's charge, and Bob, as soon as she was sufficiently recovered, followed also. The revelry and feasting were over, the bride and groom had departed, and the deepening shadows warned Bob to prepare for her return home, so the old "one-horse shay" was ordered out, and she began to wrap her shawl around her, to keep off the chill October air.

"You were so long coming to my rescue," said she to Jack, who was standing at her side, "that I thought Nellie had forgotten to tell you to come."

"She could n't find me. Poor Nell, she was almost beside herself with terror, when we at last met," said Jack. "Tell me," he added, winding her nubia around her, "why did you not run away when she did?"

"How could I?" said Bob, looking very much surprised; "had I not promised you not to leave Arthur until you came?"

"And you risked your life rather than betray your trust," said Jack, huskily. "Bobby, you're a brick. I'm not a sentimental fellow, but I'll be hanged if I would n't like to cry just here and now." And something very like a sob broke his usually deep, manly voice, whilst he held both her hands in his with a tremulous pressure, quite unlike his ordinary hearty grasp.

The blood rushed to Bob's face in a crimson tide, and she felt a curious mist rising before her eyes, as she witnessed his emotion. "Don't be a goose," she tried to say in an easy, bantering tone, but her voice quivered, and the words were almost unintelligible. Jack led her to the door in silence, then placed her in the wagon, wrapping her up with tender care.

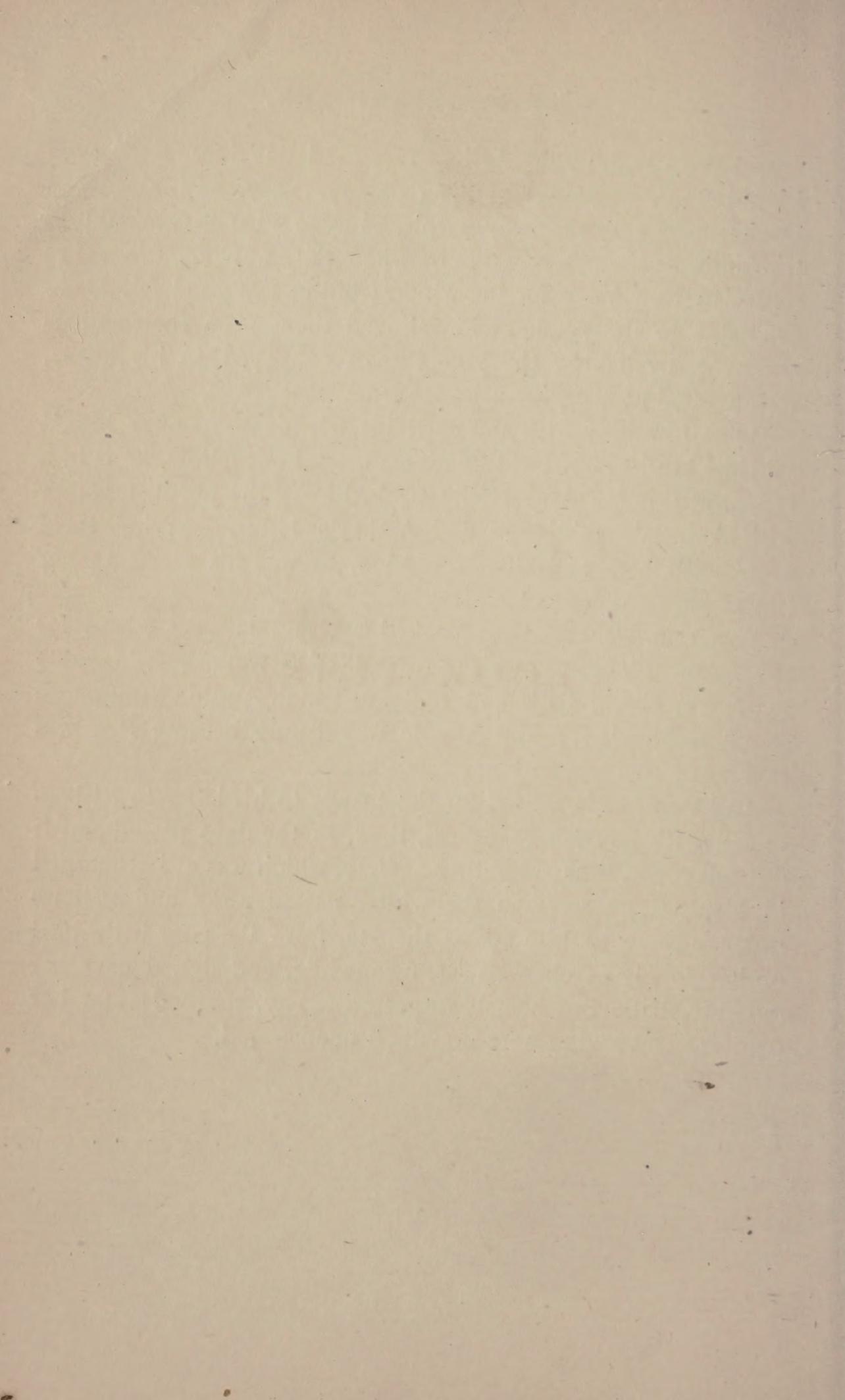
"Bobby," he said, "I should like to — to — 'disgrace my family' to-night," and then, hastily shutting the carriage-door, he disappeared into the house, as it drove rapidly away.

For days and weeks Arthur remained delirious, until even Dr. Marston despaired of his recovery. Mr. and Mrs. Von Decker were very seriously perplexed as to what they should do with him, as the season came on when they were accustomed to return to New York for the winter; but at last good Dr. Marston came to the rescue, and relieved them from their embarrassment, by having the young man conveyed to his house, which stood at no great distance from Beechcroft.

“Let him stay with me until his friends come after him,” said the kind-hearted old gentleman. “Poor fellow, he is in a sad condition.” And Nellie packed away the pistol, together with Annida’s miniature and Arthur’s letter, carrying them away with her, as jealously hidden, as was his secret in her heart.

The Von Deckers then packed up, and left the island for the season, plunging into the turmoil of New York fashionable existence, giving balls and routs, at which Annida Strathmore shone resplendent; and Maude was happy because Roy was there.

And Roy? He waited for the answer to his letter to Elsie—at first with feverish eagerness, then, as the days passed and it did not come, with trembling anxiety, which was at last merged in blank despair, when the winter passed away and still no message came to him across the sea, from the poor little bird on her lonely perch, who sat, meanwhile, and sighed over her sad fate, believing herself forgotten—nay, spurned—for her penitent and loving note remained unanswered.



BOOK THIRD.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE CONVENT GARDEN.

“ This is truth the poet sings,
That a sorrow’s crown of sorrow is remembering happier things.”

THE winter has passed away, with its ice and snow, the spring also is no more ; but June, beautiful, sweet-scented June, is here, ushering in the summer crowned with roses, to the joyous melody of the birds, which hail with untaught harmony the bright sunshine and the renewed foliage.

The “season” in New York is over, and once more the trunks come forth from the store-rooms, and the *élite* prepare for a “flitting” to Saratoga, Newport, Cape May, the White Mountains, in fact anywhere and everywhere, that they may escape the heat of the city, and, as they express it, “recruit their health after a winter’s dissipation.” This *may* be their purpose, but, to the uninitiated, it is a deep, unsolvable mystery how and when they “recruit ;” for the dancing continues with unabated zest all through the hot summer evenings — each hour gives birth to a new toilet, whilst walking, bathing, riding, driving, and flirting occupy all that remains of the day ; yet they return home in the fall, with the satisfied consciousness that they have done their duty to themselves and greet each other with little ecstatic embraces, exclaiming between each, “Oh, my dear, how well you look ! As brown as a bun, I declare, and really quite stout !” the one addressed answering,

“Yes, do I not look well? You see I went to such a *quiet* place, my dear,—no balls, or anything of that sort,—only a little ‘German’ in the evening, and I drank milk, and walked, and rode, and had, oh, such a nice time.”

There are, however, some sensible people, who do really recruit, by retiring to their country houses and resting there for a time, before they undertake the arduous duties of society at a fashionable watering-place, and among these is our old friend Mr. John Von Decker, who has already established his household gods at Beechcroft, and persistently refuses to allow Maude to go to Newport, for at least a month, notwithstanding Mrs. Leonard Strathmore’s pressing invitation, urging her to pay her a visit at her cottage as soon as possible; and Maude is naturally indignant at such parental severity, especially as the Marstons, her only near neighbors, are going, taking with them Bob Stevenson and Arthur Leighton, and she will, therefore, be all alone, for Elsie — little Elsie — is still in Paris.

She has only completed her first year at Madame Geradin’s academy, and is but seventeen years old, yet she is thinking sorrowfully of how bright and joyous these sunshiny hours are to those at home, and comparing her gayety of last year to the dull routine of her present life, although she really has no right to complain, for her “lines have fallen in pleasant places,” in comparison with other girls of her own age at the same academy; those who are still suffering from a miserable homesickness, and from a want of *savoir-faire* have made themselves the butts of the school, until their lives are almost unendurable.

Elsie never had these trials to combat. The novelty of all around her had soon effaced her longings for home and home faces, whilst her beauty and winning ways had captivated both scholars and teachers, with all of whom she at once became a pet. She was, however, the especial *protégé* of the young

French girl whom she mentioned in her letter to Maude — Julie St. Evremond—who, being her senior by a year or two, but very much behind her in the arts and coquetries of young ladyhood, looked upon her as a living wonder, and adored accordingly.

Nothing could be more dissimilar than they were in appearance. Julie, a tall, dark, gaunt girl, with coal-black hair and eyes to match, appeared to more than usual disadvantage beside Elsie's plump, round figure, snow-white skin, and golden hair, whilst the latter's assured manner and ready answers, when in company, made her friend seem even more awkward than she really was.

Yet Julie clung to her with undiminished affection, calling for her on every holiday, accompanied by *le cher oncle*, as she termed the Colonel, and taking her the rounds of all the theatres, and other places of amusement, diversifying the time now and then by a day's shopping, the evening usually bringing with it a *petit souper*, all of which our little American enjoyed immensely.

But the day was near at hand when all these pastimes were to come to an untimely end, and poor Elsie to experience, in all its bitterness, that sense of loneliness and isolation of which she had spoken to Eleanor before she left home; and when the blow fell, and she found herself alone and unprotected, she remembered, with pangs of remorse, how she had repined at the dull yet safe routine of the academy, and wondered that she had not been perfectly happy whilst she had companions.

Rumors of the approaching war had, of course, reached Mr. Von Decker's ears, but he was one of those hard-headed individuals who will not believe that "coming events cast their shadows before," and consequently took no steps towards recalling his daughter until the fatal declaration of war stared him in the face, and aroused him to a sense of his carelessness.

He wrote at once to Elsie, notifying her that he would sail for Europe by the next steamer, and then began hurriedly to arrange his affairs preparatory to his departure.

Elsie received his letter just as she was about to accept an urgent invitation from Madame St. Evremond to accompany Julie and herself to Brussels, whither they had been advised by the Colonel to take refuge, until the troubles had blown over.

“I cannot go now,” she said, despondingly, as she sat down upon her well-packed trunk, “lest papa should come and not be able to find me. I must stay where I am, Julie dear, and in case of trouble, I am sure that you will not forget me.”

So with weepings and wailings, and many embraces, the girls at length parted; *le cher oncle* promising over and over again that he would call daily and see that Mademoiselle wanted for nothing, and convey her to a place of safety if danger threatened.

And so her first friend left Paris; and her distress was quickly forgotten in the deep anxiety which began to oppress her, as one by one the scholars were recalled from the academy, until she alone remained of the fifty boarders; and still her father did not come, neither did she hear from him.

Colonel St. Evremond called, as he had promised, every day, and had more than once urged her to accept his sister's invitation, but Elsie was always quite sure that the next day would bring either her father or a letter, and so she lived in a state of alternate hope and fear.

Mr. Von Decker had, as might be supposed, done his best to reach his daughter without loss of time, but, as is often the case when one is over-anxious to set off on a journey, he met with detention at every step, and when he at last actually sailed, the vessel met with an accident, and was obliged to lay over for a day or two for repairs. Thus the month of August found poor

Elsie still within the walls of Paris, and her dismay reached a culminating point when Madame Geradin announced her intention of leaving the city at once, and requested her charge either to accompany her or find herself other lodgings.

Elsie was still resolved not to leave Paris until her father's arrival, and so in her despair she applied to *le cher oncle*, telling him her strait and imploring his protection. Colonel St. Evremond was no longer young — in fact, in the experienced eyes of seventeen summers, he was well advanced in years — she therefore felt very little embarrassment in thus appealing to him, much less, indeed, than did he, although a soldier and a widower, in accepting the charge committed to him.

He listened to all she had to say with quiet gravity, urged once more the advisability of accepting his sister's invitation, and then, finding her resolved upon her own course of action, bade her adieu, and took his way to the convent of *Les sœurs de Charité*, where he had a distant cousin living, and, placing Elsie's sad story before her, found a refuge and a hearty welcome for the young girl among the good sisters.

Thither Elsie removed at once, leaving her address with the American minister, and then began a life so monotonous that it was difficult to tell one day from another.

In the convent garden a swing had been put up for her particular benefit, and there the poor child would sit hour after hour, musing over her hapless condition, or re-reading the old letters she had received from home, for want of any later intelligence. Let us peep over her shoulder as she sits thus, idly swinging to and fro, and see if we can discover from her correspondence what has brought so grave a shadow over so young and beautiful a face.

NEW YORK, Nov. 3d, 1869.

I told you in my last letter, dear Elsie, all about Annida's wedding, and Arthur Leighton's sudden and mysterious illness,

and, owing to the multiplicity of my engagements, I have been unable to write to you since; but Nellie Marston tells me that she has done so, so I suppose you have not missed my stupid scrawls.

I am having a very good time here, although a great many persons have not yet come to town, for Roy, who is now my constant attendant, is forever finding something pleasant for me to do. Whenever the weather is good we have a gallop in the Park, and when it is bad he stays at home and reads to me whilst I work, or we play chess together, unless some stupid people interrupt us, and then we get up an *impromptu* dance.

I suppose it seems very strange to you that I, who love society so much, should be content to pass my evenings so quietly; but do you know, my dear, I really believe I have lost my taste for going out, and Roy takes such pains to make himself agreeable, that I should be an ungrateful wretch if I did not appreciate his efforts. Indeed, he stays with me a great deal more than he ought to, and so I often tell him, but he only answers with a smile, "When I find any one more agreeable, I will go away," and so I have to put up with him and let him dance attendance on me, although I know it is occasioning much remark. Mrs. Turner came up to me in the street the other day, saying, "My dear Miss Von Decker, you must allow me to congratulate you on your choice. Such a handsome, distinguished-looking young man as Mr. Weston is. The match in every way so suitable. If it is not impertinent, may I ask when the important event will come off?" I told Roy about it in the evening, and he wanted me to write her an invitation at once.

Here Elsie abruptly closed the letter, and deposited it in its envelope. It was from Maude, of course, but after the first reading she had never again reached the signature, being unable with equanimity to bear the truth thus forced upon her, namely, that her sister had supplanted her in Roy's affections.

She had tried her feelings once more to-day, trusting that her later troubles had weakened the severity of this former one, but her lips quivered as she read, her breast heaved with emo-

tion, and some bright drops fell upon the letters in her lap, proving, that despite her efforts, she was not yet mistress of her heart.

“It is my own fault,” she sobbed. “I know he loved me once, but I was so cruel and wicked to him, that he does not love me any longer. I thought my letter would have made all right between us, but he was too angry to even answer it, and now he is going to marry Maude, and I shall have to live in the same house with them, and meet him every day, knowing that I am nothing to him, nor ever can be anything but his sister. Oh, I cannot, cannot bear it,” and the tears streamed down the poor child’s face, whilst her whole frame shook with emotion.

“But I *must* bear it,” she exclaimed, suddenly arousing herself from her grief. “I must learn to think of it with patience, and conceal my own distress, for I will not have them know I suffer, and be an object of compassion to them.” And she ceased crying almost as suddenly as she had begun, wiping her eyes, and taking up another letter, which bore Eleanor’s superscription :

MY DEAR ELSIE (thus it ran), I am so weary to-night that I can scarcely hold my pen, yet I cannot bear to think of your missing your expected letter by the next mail, so I am going to try and tell you what has happened since I last wrote, and if I am unintelligible, you must forgive me, taking the will for the deed.

Mr. Leighton, as I wrote you, has been very, very ill, and for some time his life was despaired of. His disease took a turn, however, some weeks ago, and papa thinks now that he is entirely recovered, both in body and mind.

As far as his health is concerned, he is certainly much better ; but, Elsie, no one but myself knows how dreadful is his mental suffering. I cannot tell you all, for it is his secret and not mine, but he has been very cruelly used, and has no strength

of mind to rise above his wrongs, but broods upon them night and day, unless I am at his side to drive the blue devils away, so that my time is never my own, as he calls upon me at all hours, and I cannot, of course, refuse him my society when he is so wretched.

I do not think you would recognize me, dear, if you could sometimes hear me preaching to this young man. Fancy your bashful, timid Nellie scolding this handsome youth, and violently upbraiding him for his want of manliness in shrinking from his troubles. Your cousin Roy (who, by the by, has been my assistant nurse), came upon us the other day in the middle of a lecture on the subject of the duties one owed to one's fellow-men, and I shall never forget the amazement depicted on his countenance, when, turning suddenly, I encountered his gaze. My eloquence, of course, ceased when I became aware of his presence, and he has ever since been trying to "draw me out," but I never *can* talk to him, Elsie, although I agree with you entirely in considering him one of the handsomest and most attractive of men. He comes to see us very often—I am inclined to think more on account of your letters to me than my own attractions—for he always seems to be expecting some message or little enclosure, which never comes; I wonder why not, *chérie*?

There! the clock is striking midnight, and I must go to bed, so, good-night, my darling, and when you next write, remember what I have just told you.

Your loving

ELEANOR.

CHAPTER II.

A JOYFUL SURPRISE.

“ But hushed be every thought that springs
From out the bitterness of things.”

CONTRADICTION as these two letters appeared to be, they were both of them, nevertheless, quite true. Roy, sick at heart with “hope deferred,” sought Maude’s society continually, and was grateful to her for her kindness and goodwill towards him; but it had never occurred to him that her regard for him was anything more than cousinly affection, or that she could mistake the nature of his feelings for herself. It was not a cause for wonder, however, that the poor girl, loving him so dearly, should have been blinded to the truth, when Annida’s assertions, and his every action, coincided with her own conviction that he had always loved her.

She had, it is true, intercepted a letter to Elsie, which was supposed at the time to have been written by him, but Annida, who had actual possession of it, told her that they had both been mistaken, and the note was only what it had purported to be, a little remembrance from Nellie herself.

Maude was very much relieved at this discovery, for her conscience had upbraided her severely for the theft, and she had felt almost unable to meet Roy’s eye, whilst supposing herself guilty; but when her mind was set at rest on this point, she gave herself over to happy dreams, and enjoyed her cousin’s society without alloy.

Roy, on his part, could not help but hope that some unfore-

seen accident had prevented Elsie from answering his letter, and that, sooner or later, some note or message would arrive for him; thus, after every mail he visited the Marstons, ostensibly to cheer Arthur Leighton, but, as Nellie knew, to look for an enclosure in her letter.

More than once she thought of writing frankly to her friend, and asking her on what terms she was with her cousin, and whether she had received and answered his letter; but as neither of the parties concerned seemed inclined to confide in her, she thought better of it, and contented herself with little ambiguous sentences on the subject when she wrote to Elsie, always keeping her answers for Roy to read when he came, in lieu of anything more satisfactory.

But of course poor Elsie, incarcerated in a convent in Paris, could form no conception of the truth, and so she sat and sighed her days away, growing more unhappy every hour, and scarcely longing for a release from captivity which would entail on her the daily sight of Maude and Roy's happiness. However much she tried to believe that she was cured of her folly, this letter of Maude's always opened her wounds afresh, and then she would have recourse to Nellie's (which breathed of hope), and when her equanimity was restored, give the credit to her own strength of character.

Over and over she read it, now trying to reconcile it with what Maude said of Roy, and so deeply was she absorbed, that good Sister Marie Eloise stood at the convent door calling her for some moments ere the sound reached her.

"*Mademoiselle! Mademoiselle Elsie,*" fell upon her ears at last; "*où est cette méchante fille? Dépêchez-vous, mon enfant; venez ici tout de suite. Votre papa est arrivé, et vous attend dans le salon!*"

These words, as might be supposed, brought Elsie back to

the realities of life in a moment, and pausing only long enough to embrace this messenger of glad tidings, she flew to the parlor, and was soon locked in her father's arms.

"Oh, papa! papa!" she exclaimed, pressing herself close and closer to his heart; "I thought you would *never* come," and she cried and laughed alternately, whilst Mr. Von Decker, scarcely less agitated than herself, could only reply by mute caresses and loving kisses.

There was a silent yet not unmoved spectator to this scene, who stood quietly beside the door, awaiting his opportunity to put in a claim for recognition.

It was Colonel St. Evremond, but he made no effort to interrupt the happiness of the father and daughter, until, on Elsie's exclaiming, as she concluded an account of her troubles — "And oh, papa, how did you find me? Colonel St. Evremond left my address at the American minister's, but I was so afraid it would be lost, and then you would not know where to look for me."

"I did not go to the American minister's," replied her father; "the fact is, I had a great deal of difficulty in getting into the city at all, and when I had at last managed it, I had not gone fifty yards before I was arrested; my Dutch face and name told against me, you know, and it would have gone hard with me if it had not been for a gentleman — an officer — good gracious! I beg your pardon, sir, I had forgotten you were here. This is the gentleman, Elsie," he continued, rising from his seat and leading her towards St. Evremond; "thank him, my dear, in your very best French, for, but for him, you might never have seen your father again."

"Colonel St. Evremond!" exclaimed Elsie, stepping forward and taking his hand in both of hers. "Indeed I will thank him, in both French and English; and you must too, papa, for

it is he who has taken care of your little girl ever since she was deserted by her friends."

"Is it possible?" said Mr. Von Decker, in surprise. "Well, our meeting to-day was indeed a most singular coincidence. I have already told you, sir, that I can never thank you sufficiently for rescuing me from prison this morning; but your goodness to my child has made me your debtor forever."

"You do me too much honor, sir," replied St. Evremond, in a deep, sweet voice. "I have done nothing more for you than common justice demanded; and as for Mademoiselle, it must ever be a pleasure to serve her."

"Do not trust him too far, papa," said Elsie, laughing roguishly, "he got so tired of me at one time that he wanted to send me out of the city; but I was not to be so easily disposed of," she added, "and now I am so glad that I was firm enough to resist. Think of my dear, precious old papa wandering all over France in search of his little girl. Was not my course the wisest?" she continued, looking up smilingly at St. Evremond.

"*Cela dépend, Mademoiselle,*" he replied, with an answering smile. "There is certainly no danger at present of your father's wandering all over France — Frederic William has provided against that misfortune."

"And when do we start for home, dearest?" inquired Elsie, turning once more to caress her father, and comprehending only in part to what Colonel St. Evremond alluded.

"Indeed, my child, that is just what I cannot tell you," replied her father, gravely. "I can assure you that I found it difficult enough to get into the city, and I understand that it will be still more difficult to get out."

"Why so?" asked Elsie, looking with surprise from one to the other. "Why can we not leave when we choose?"

It was now Mr. Von Decker's turn to look amazed. "Bless the child!" he exclaimed, "does she know nothing of the war?"

"Not quite so bad as that," replied St. Evremond, smiling; "but as she was alone, and perfectly secure, I thought it best to keep her in ignorance of the fact that the city was besieged, lest she should experience needless alarm."

"The city besieged!" exclaimed Elsie, growing very pale. "Oh, poor, dear papa, what a dreadful risk you ran in coming to me."

"I am too glad to have reached you alive to think of that now," replied her father. "When I arrived at Liverpool, and learned the true state of affairs here, I was almost beside myself with remorse that I had not come to your rescue sooner."

"But what will become of us?" exclaimed Elsie, whose ideas of a siege were comprised in the words, "pestilence and famine, murder and sudden death." "We shall all starve or be shot!"

"I do not think you need be alarmed," said St. Evremond; "we are well provisioned, and as yet not a single attack has been made on the city. At all events, I am convinced that the siege will be of short duration," he continued, turning to Mr. Von Decker. "There seems to be no doubt that France is rising *en masse*, and in a few weeks, at the utmost, three armies must be prepared to throw themselves upon the Prussians, who are, I understand, already very much disorganized."

"I don't know about that latter statement," said Mr. Von Decker, shaking his head. "All that I have seen on my way here leads me to think that France is in a bad way."

"For heaven's sake, my dear sir, do not allow any Frenchman to hear you say so," exclaimed St. Evremond; "he

would instantly have you arrested and shot as a 'German sympathizer.' "

"Well, well," said Mr. Von Decker, "I am usually accustomed to 'call a spade a spade,' but 'in Rome do as the Romans do,' is a very good adage; so whilst Paris hospitably insists upon my remaining within her walls, I shall strive to be a Frenchman and believe everything I hear."

"That is a wise resolve," replied St. Evremond; "and now, if you will permit me, I will say *au revoir*, as I have a review of my troops at twelve o'clock, and it is now past eleven."

He made a profound bow, and left the room, leaving father and daughter together alone. They remained silent whilst his firm, soldierly tread resounded along the corridor, and then, as the closing of a distant door announced his departure, Mr. Von Decker turned to Elsie, saying:

"Who is this gentleman, my dear, and how did you come to be so well acquainted with him?"

"Oh, he is Julie's *cher oncle*," she replied, carelessly. "I don't know him *very* well — that is, I have never talked to him before as much as I did this morning. He used to take Julie and me out on a holiday, but he was always so grave and grand that I was afraid to speak to him."

"Well, you must not be afraid any more," said her father, "but be very kind and polite whenever we meet, for I do not know what would have become of us without him."

And then their conversation turned upon home and friends, and Elsie had so much to hear and say, that the day was not half long enough for her. She had to hear how they had all missed her at Christmas, and how they had drunk to her health on the anniversary of her birthday — how attached her father had become to Nellie Marston, and how he admired the doctor, who had not only saved Arthur's life, but had insisted on his

remaining with him after his recovery, taking him into his office to study medicine.

Through all that he told her, Elsie listened anxiously for Roy's name, but her father never mentioned him until just before he left, when, in speaking of the anxiety that would be felt at home, when it came to be known that they were still within the besieged city, he said:

"It will be some time before they find it out, however, for Jack has gone to the sea-shore, your mother never looks at a paper, and Maude and Roy are so absorbed in each other that I doubt if they would know if their own country were invaded."

"But is there no way by which we can inform them that we are safe?" asked Elsie. "Are we cut off from all communication with the outer world now?"

"Not wholly," replied her father. "Individuals will now and then force their way out of the city, and there is, I understand, a system of transporting the mails by balloons. I will write to your mother at once, and Major What's-his-name will see the letter safely off, I have no doubt."

"Colonel St. Evremond, I suppose you mean," said Elsie, laughing. "You dear old papa, you don't remember names a bit better than you used to."

"It seems that my memory fails me in every way," replied her father, smiling grimly, "for I was quite sure that last summer Roy Weston told me he loved you, and asked my permission to make you a present, and, I *think*, I remember that I was uneasy lest you returned his affection; but as he has never mentioned the subject since, the chain hangs around Maude's neck, and you have not as yet even inquired how he is, this must also have been one of my vagaries. What have you to say on the subject?"

“That I am very glad I did not insist upon marrying the young man, owing to my papa’s representations,” replied Elsie, laughing again. “It would have been unfortunate had I, through a mistake, married my prospective brother-in-law.”

“I hope that it will be years and years before you marry any one, my darling,” said her father, kissing her fondly. “I cannot lose my little bird so soon.”

“I am never going to marry at all,” replied Elsie, returning his kiss. “I am going to live and die an old maid, for my late experience has taught me that existence without you is intolerable.”

“Oh, ho, what magnificent sentiments,” said her father, whose eyes twinkled with amusement. “I need not then consult you when I receive an offer for your hand, but simply say, ‘No, sir; Miss Elsie has taken a vow of celibacy.’”

“I see you do not believe me,” replied Elsie, quietly, and raising to his a very serious face, “but I mean what I say nevertheless. I shall never marry.”

“Well, don’t look at me as though you thought I were going to object,” replied her father. “I don’t approve of coercion, and so I promise faithfully to let you have your own way in this matter. And now, good-bye, for the present,” he continued, rising from his seat. “I shall be back again in an hour or two, but I must secure lodgings for myself near by, so that I can keep guard over this ‘dove-cot,’ and prevent any hawk from pouncing upon its inmates.”

He left her, and Elsie went to her room with a heart so full of both happiness and regret, that it seemed almost impossible to analyze her feelings. Her worst fears had been corroborated — Roy did indeed love Maude, and from henceforth he was nothing to her; but then she had her loving, tender father at her side once more, and she felt that gratitude was due for his preservation during his dangerous journey.

“I cannot mourn for anything now,” she said to herself, as she stood at the window, looking down the street where he had disappeared. “Roy, I have loved you dearly, but I will, from this moment, do my best to forget the past.”

CHAPTER III.

AMONG THE ROCKS.

“O life! thou art a galling load,
Along a rough, a weary road,
To wretches such as I.”

CONTRARY to Mr. Von Decker's expectations, the war news did penetrate the shades of Beechcroft, but it occasioned no alarm to its inmates, for Maude and her mother had basked for so long in the sunshine of prosperity, that they had learned to look upon it as perpetual, and were unable to grasp the idea that any serious trouble could befall them.

Roy was the first to become anxious, and even he hesitated to give words to his fears, until, upon the list of Americans who had left Paris, he failed to discover either Elsie's or her father's name; then, indeed, he hastened home, with terrible forebodings, lest his darling had missed her father, and, alone and unprotected, was exposed to the horrors of a siege. All his indignation at her long silence was forgotten—he now saw many reasons for it which had before escaped his penetration. Perhaps she had never received his letter, or, having received it, had not been able to answer it unobserved; or, owing to the troubled condition of the country, she might actually have written to him and her letter have been lost.

However this might be, he could no longer cherish resentful feelings, when he forever beheld in his imagination a piteous picture of poor little Elsie, her sweet eyes looking wistfully around for help that never came—the bright bloom fading from her soft round cheek, as the food grew scarcer day by day—the girlish figure cowering before some brutish soldier, and no protecting arm near to save.

Once more at Beechcroft he opened his heart to Maude, explaining fully all his fears, and demanding sympathy for her sister, but, to his great surprise, she made light of the whole affair, and refused still to believe that any mischance had occurred.

Elsie, she said, had probably left Paris before their father's arrival, or their names had, by accident, been omitted from the list; she was quite sure that they were safe and happy somewhere, and thought herself a much more deserving object for sympathy, incarcerated as she was at Beechcroft, without a hope of leaving it all summer.

Roy was annoyed at her insensibility, and endeavored once more to arouse her to a true sense of her sister's position, becoming, at length, indignant at her obstinate recapitulation that Elsie's troubles existed only in his own imagination; but Maude's jealousy, which had been so long slumbering, now woke to life again, and, like a giant refreshed by sleep, seized upon her with renewed strength, so that she could not conquer nor even conceal it. Bitter words rose to her lips, and ere she was fully aware of what she was doing, a torrent of severe reproaches burst forth upon her cousin, who received them with undisguised amazement.

She accused him of ingratitude, heartlessness, and a host of other sins, until Roy's temper was fairly aroused. At first he controlled it with an effort, and endeavored to stem the tide of

her causeless invective ; but, finding this at length to be impossible, he threw off all restraint, and expressed his opinion of her conduct in no measured words ; after which he took his leave, not only of her, but of Beechcroft, too much excited to be willing to meet his aunt, and made his way back to the city.

Arrived there, he tried to compose his spirits, and think seriously of what his own course should be under the circumstances ; but the atmosphere was close and hot, and his mind would revert to the incomprehensible scene he had just been through, so that midnight found him as unsettled as ever in his plans, and, despairing of coming to any conclusion without some rest, he threw himself, dressed as he was, upon his bed and slept.

The morning haply brought with it the desired composure, and on reviewing the case he determined to advise with Jack, who was, indeed, the proper person to take the first step in the matter, and to this end he packed his valise and set off for Newport.

On his arrival he went at once to the Ocean House, where Jack was staying, but upon inquiry at the office he learned that he was out. Would he be home soon ? the clerk did not know ; rather thought not, as he seldom passed his evenings there. Did the clerk think he could find him ? Perhaps he might ; he went generally towards the Cliffs ; so Roy strolled that way himself, disconsolate and disappointed.

The twilight was coming on, and his walk was anything but inspiriting, so that when he reached the Cliffs, after one despairing look around, he threw himself upon the ground and gave himself up to sad reflections.

These reflections, however, were soon broken in upon by voices, which seemed at no great distance from him, and he smiled as he said to himself, "A pair of turtle-doves come to

coo among the rocks," and then he sighed, and gave an attentive ear to what they said, although he knew it was very wrong to do so.

"You must not give way to such feelings," said a sweet, low-toned treble, reproachfully.

"I can't help it," replied a deep baritone.

"He's jealous," thought Roy, and smiled again, as men always do, when they discover a weakness in a fellow-man.

"You are ungrateful," continued the lady. "She risked her life to save yours, and you say that you cannot forgive her. Is this a proper return for so great a service?"

"It was no service," replied the gentleman. "I wished to be rid of my misery, and she has bound the burden to my back more firmly than before."

"Hush, Arthur," said the lady, and Roy started, for it seemed to him that he had heard the voice before. "You know I do not permit you to say such naughty things, now that you are well. It is one thing to raise your hand against your life when mentally and physically ill, but quite another thing to defend the act, when sound in body and mind."

"Nellie," cried the gentleman, and his voice sounded wild and passionate, "it is of no use for you to preach to me; I cannot view these things as you do. Why should a man not part with a ruined life as he would with a worn-out garment? If I wished to kill a fellow-creature, you would be right to prevent me if you could; but my life is my own, therefore, why should I not do with it as I will?"

"Arthur — Nellie!" said Roy to himself; "can it be the Arthur and Nellie that I know? but, heavens! what a remarkable conversation."

"And is your life really yours?" asked Nellie's musical voice; "did you, then, assume the responsibilities of your own

accord, that you deem you have a right to shake them off when you see fit?"

"Were this so," replied Arthur, "had I, indeed, placed the burden on my own shoulders, I should be a poltroon to try to rid myself of it; but when it was placed there without wish of mine, I have surely the right left me to evade it as I would any other evil chance."

"Life did not come by chance," said Nellie, "neither is it 'evil' until we have made it so. I might give you a knife, for instance, and if you used it properly it would be a good gift; but if you perversely cut yourself with the sharp edge, it would be an evil gift, not through my fault though, but through your own; and you would do wrong to throw it from you and vent your indignation on my head. Life comes to us from God, and as we use it, so shall it be of use to us."

"Life is misery!" exclaimed Arthur, "and mankind are but the puppets in the show, made to please a ruthless tyrant whom you call 'God' and 'Father,' but who binds us in chains of iron, and condemns us to suffer eternal torments, both here and hereafter."

"Have you always thought thus?" said Nellie; "has your life had no days in it when it was a happiness to live? Think again, Arthur, before you revile your Creator."

For a moment there was silence, and, drawing nearer to the edge, Roy, unable to restrain his curiosity, looked over. Yes, there they were, some feet below him on the rocks — Eleanor Marston and Arthur Leighton — and the settled gloom on the face of the latter, proved, without doubt, that from his lips had come the mad words to which Roy had just been a listener.

As he gazed at them, wonderingly, from his height, Arthur raised his hand and pointed downward to the water:

"See," he said, in a deep, melancholy voice, "the epitome

of human existence! See the struggle of the human soul against inexorable Fate! In that seething mass below us are many million little drops of water; born in the same rill—many sons of many mothers—see them rushing onward to the boundless ocean, each striving to be foremost in the race—to leave his mark behind him. Watch how they struggle to be free—how they lift their crested heads to heaven in mad, impotent agony, as they dash themselves upon the rocks and die. They are gone—their places know them no more—and mingled with their last, despairing groans is the exultant shout of others, following in their wake to certain yet unseen death.”

He moaned aloud at the frightful picture he had drawn, and buried his face in his hands, and Roy looked eagerly at Nellie. Was this the shrinking, bashful girl he knew as Nellie Marston? Never! Here was a woman, who for beauty and purity might have stood beside the angels, bending over the prostrate form of poor, half-crazed Arthur, stroking his silky hair with a sister's tender touch, whilst in her large, lustrous eyes—eyes which he seemed never to have seen before—stood bright drops of womanly sympathy, which the angels would not probably have felt. The metamorphosis was so great that he could scarcely prevent himself from uttering an exclamation, which would have revealed his proximity and undone him forever.

“Arthur,” said this new Nellie, in a tremulous voice, “you are not well enough yet to bear so much excitement. You must cease to think for a time, and be content to read nature through my eyes. Shall I tell you what I see in the waters?”

“Yes, yes,” said poor Arthur, in a choked voice; “talk to me, Nellie—say what you will—I should go mad without you.”

“These restless, troubled waves are the toils and turmoils of the world,” she said, still soothing him as one would a tired child.

“Yonder in that foam lie envy, hatred, malice, dark sins, and heavy cares. One false step, Arthur, and we are among them fighting for life, but whilst we hold fast to our faith, whilst we stand where God has placed us, on a rock, we can smile upon them in disdain. Let them beat against our place of refuge, they cannot harm us; though it storm ever so madly, we are safe; shall we then throw ourselves headlong into the abyss, Arthur, at the first clap of thunder which heralds the approaching tempest? or, when the roar of the multitude offends our ears, and the din of life is too oppressive, shall we not rather, looking upward, fix our eyes on heaven until the storm is past?”

“Until the day dawn and the darkness flee away,” murmured Arthur. “Nellie! Nellie! you are my good angel. Oh, save me from myself!”

“Or rather save you *for* yourself,” said Nellie; “for that better self which is springing up within you, and of which I shall one day be so proud.”

Roy started to his feet. “I’m a wretch,” he said, “to stay here and watch that girl; I’ll do it no longer,” and he hurried off at random down the cliff.

“What incomprehensible things women are,” he continued, in soliloquy. “There’s a girl who, to ordinary men, cannot give a simple greeting without confusion; but when she meets with a half-crazed wretch, whom every one else shuns, she pours out upon him a flood of eloquence and sympathy.”

“Stand back there, man, will you?” shouted a voice from up in the clouds, apparently. “Do you want to be run over?” and to his horror Roy discovered that he had walked directly into a horse, his abstraction and the increasing darkness having rendered him oblivious to the fact that a drag and pair were coming leisurely along the road from the opposite direction.

"I'm very sorry," began Roy, as he drew back, feeling as if he ought to apologize to some one for his stupidity, but the driver interrupted him merrily, saying:

"No necessity for an apology, my dear sir, I don't think you hurt the animal," and then peering into the darkness, he exclaimed: "By Jove, it's Roy Weston. Well, young man, how long is it since you've taken to butting about like a gigantic ram after dark?"

"Jack!" said Roy, now recognizing his cousin. "This is certainly a remarkable coincidence," he continued, "that I should have been searching for you all the afternoon, and never find you until you drive over me. Where have you been?"

"We've been to a clam-bake," exclaimed a chorus of girls' voices, "and have had such a delightful time."

"What brought you down so suddenly?" interrupted Jack; "nothing wrong, I hope, with the Governor or Elsie?"

"I know nothing about them," replied Roy; "I came to see if you could give me any information."

"We're all in Egyptian darkness down here," said Jack; "but come along to the house, we shall be better able to tell you what we don't know there, than out on the highway. Girls, can't you make room behind there?" he called, but Roy would not allow them to move; springing upon the step, he declared himself very comfortably situated, and they drove on again merrily.

"Where are we going, may I ask?" inquired Roy.

"To Rose Cottage," replied Jack. "The Marstons are there for the summer, and are having a very gay time."

"That is, their guests are having a very gay time," said Roberta Stevenson, for of course she was one of the party; "but poor Nellie does nothing but nurse Arthur Leighton all day long. Her patience is positively angelic."

Roy thought of the scene he had just witnessed, and agreed with her in his heart, although he said nothing.

"Here they are," exclaimed Jack, "directly in front of us."

"In that case I will join them," said Roy, hastily. "I should like to speak to Miss Marston before I take her father and mother by storm," and dropping from his perch, he suddenly presented himself to the astonished girl.

The ordinary civilities being exchanged, she at once interrogated him in regard to Elsie, but when that subject had been exhausted, they relapsed into silence, and she was once more the shy, constrained girl he had hitherto known.

"She's all ablaze with eloquence and poetic sentiments until I appear," he thought, "and then, *presto*, out she goes, as though I were an extinguisher."

Nellie was thinking very much the same thing at the same time, and wondering at it, when Roberta Stevenson walked down the road to meet them; the trio hailed her with delight, and Roy, transferring his attentions to her, they went briskly towards the house, leaving Arthur and Nellie once more in the rear.

"It's a hopeless case," said Bob, laughing. "There's no use in trying to relieve Nellie; Mr. Leighton will soon have her as mad as himself."

"Is he then actually insane?" asked Roy.

"Oh, no," replied Roberta, "he considers himself all right; but when the moon is full, I'd rather not meet him alone after dark. He dislikes me particularly, however."

"That proves that the poor devil is crazed," said Roy, gallantly, and Jack called out from the open doorway, —

"Can't you two people leave a few sweet things to say after supper, and come in out of the night air, before the food and the feeders have all taken cold? It's a confounded shame,

Roy, for you to come down here and steal my sweetheart ; don't you know that Bobby and I have been spooning frightfully all afternoon? By Jove! she got so fond of me that she eat my share of the clams beside her own, for fear I'd make myself sick."

"And no wonder I did," said Bob, laughing, "for he picked out all the large ones for himself, and left me nothing but the odds and ends."

"Oh, fie! for shame!" said Jack; "I blush for you, Roberta. I picked out the small ones purposely on account of the size of your mouth. I did n't think you could get a large one into it, and this is my reward. Such base ingratitude — it makes me weep," and he raised the corner of his neckerchief to his eyes.

"There! there! children," said Nellie, coming up behind them, "stop quarrelling, and come in and eat your tea."

CHAPTER IV.

FRIENDSHIP OR LOVE.

"Oh, many a shaft, at random sent,
Finds mark the archer little meant."

ROY received a hearty welcome from the hospitable doctor and his worthy consort, who pressed him to make their house his home whilst he remained at Newport; but this kind offer he thought best to decline, not only because the party already in possession seemed even larger than "Rose Cottage" could conveniently accommodate, but also because it was evident that if he wished to talk reason to Jack, it must be in some

atmosphere less impregnated with fun and merriment than the one which surrounded Roberta Stevenson, who seemed to have formed a resolution to speak no word of common sense until her return home.

He persisted therefore in his original plan of lodging with his cousin, and on their way back to the Ocean House that night, relieved himself of his solitary anxieties, placing before Jack an unvarnished statement of his fears for Elsie, and proposing that one of them should go at once to seek her. Jack listened as attentively as he could wish, and seemed equally anxious with himself, but he absolutely refused to agree to Roy's proposition, reminding him that they two had been left by Mr. Von Decker to manage his affairs during his absence, and that to leave their post without orders from headquarters, would be an unpardonable breach of discipline.

He urged that, were their fears groundless, and should they learn on their arrival in France that Elsie and her father had already *started* for home, they would be at a loss to account to their superior for their hasty conduct, and be likely to receive a severe reprimand. Roy admitted the truth of the suggestion, but advanced on his side the supposition that one of them might arrive just in time to avert some heavy catastrophe, and thus be rendered happy for life in having yielded to his first impulse, which was, naturally, to seek the straying.

They talked together far into the night, but without coming to any satisfactory conclusion, and at last, as the stars faded away, and the first feeble gleam of approaching day crept in upon them, they gave up the subject as hopeless, and, "adjourning the meeting *sine die*," retired to rest, determining to take no steps, at least, for the present.

A week passed away, and then another, and still the young man remained irresolute, hoping, fearing, yet learning nothing.

Most of their time was passed at "Rose Cottage," and Roy's happiest hours were those when Eleanor Marston, decoyed from the rest of the party, sat beside him on the rocks, and talked of Elsie; the one theme on which she grew eloquent even with him.

He loved to draw an untruthful picture of his darling, and hear her friend's indignant denial of the likeness; to find fault with her conduct, and watch the flash of Nellie's eyes as she eagerly defended the absent.

"You are a stanch ally," he said to her, smilingly, one afternoon, as they sat thus together looking out upon the ocean. "I should like to have a friend like yourself, who would so ably defend my character in my absence. What do you say, Miss Marston? will you accept the onerous position?" and as he spoke he took her hand in his, and fixed his eloquent eyes upon her, with a soft pleading look, which set Nellie's pulses beating rapidly.

She looked down upon the ground in a sudden fit of shyness, and the rare "tea-rose blush" stole into her colorless cheeks.

"I cannot promise," she said, at length; "I do not know you well enough. You might do something very wrong, and then my conscience would not allow me to defend you."

She looked very lovely in her embarrassment, and Roy tightened his hold of the hand, which trembled in his grasp, saying as he did so:

"But you are supposing an impossibility. Who that was honored with your friendship could so far forget himself as to be guilty of an action so blameworthy that you could not defend it? Try me, Miss Marston, I will not disgrace you — promise, at least, that you will not hear me slandered without speaking a word in my defence."

"That I will gladly promise," said Nellie, eagerly; "I can never sit silent when any one is unjustly censured."

"*Any one,*" repeated Roy, in a disconsolate tone. "Is that all you can do for me? must I be classed with the common herd, and have no more favor extended me than what you would grant the most distant acquaintance? I do not think that is fair; I want something more, Miss Marston."

Roy's words had no definite meaning—they were merely the idle compliments which every man deems it his duty to render to the woman beside him, at certain times and in certain places, and without which they seem to think she would be unable to exist. His whole heart was so entirely given to his cousin, that he had no corner of it left in which to receive another guest, and why he so persistently implored Eleanor's friendship, it would have puzzled even himself to explain, except that he was by nature a flirt, and could never miss an opportunity of looking unutterable things into a woman's eyes when the occasion seemed to warrant them.

There was another reason, however, underlying his present conduct, but he scarcely acknowledged it to himself, and this was that his pride induced him to endeavor to hide his love for Elsie, even from her intimate friend, until he had some certain information that she returned it; and every day that his letter to her remained unanswered increased his desire to deceive Nellie as to its real purport. He could not resist talking of his cousin, but he always contrived to introduce the subject carelessly, and to make it appear that Nellie herself had first broached it.

With all his faults, Roy was not a conceited man, and it had never once occurred to him that the game he was playing might prove dangerous to Nellie until this afternoon; but now, as he watched her varying color, and felt the hand he held fluttering within his own like an imprisoned bird, his conscience smote him, and a fear crept into his heart lest he had been acting un-

wisely — a fear soon to be changed to a certainty, as she raised her eyes to his, suddenly unveiling her inmost heart, whilst she murmured almost inaudibly: “What is it then that you wish?”

It was impossible to misinterpret her glance; she was too innocent and unused to the ways of the world to have feigned the deep feeling which he read therein, and bitterly did he curse his want of consideration in having selfishly made use of her *pour passer le temps*, and to dissipate his increasing anxiety on her friend's account. He had but a moment in which to consider his proper course of action, for she was awaiting his answer with parted lips and anxious, expectant look; but in that moment he formed the bold resolution of telling her the whole truth, at whatever hazard to his own miserable pride.

“I want you to be my friend,” he replied, looking at her with a gentle, serious expression, all *tendresse* entirely thrown aside; “*my* friend as truly as you are now Elsie's, for I trust at some not very distant period to make her my wife, and I should be jealous of so very zealous a friend as yourself who did not include me in her friendship. Do you understand now why I have sought your society so persistently, and made such a demand upon your time and sympathies? Elsie is the one thought of my life, and she has talked of you so constantly that your very name recalls her image.”

Long before he ceased speaking, Nellie's eyes had again sought the ground, and her hand had ceased to tremble, and now she said; in a calm, sweet voice, in which no tremor could be detected:

“I understand you perfectly, and thank you for your frankness. Your love is well bestowed, and I congratulate you sincerely on your choice.”

“And your friendship?” said Roy, as she paused; “may I count that as secure?”

“It is yours now without reservation,” said Nellie, with a smile; “your love for Elsie will cover a multitude of sins,” and she continued to talk on quietly without a shade of embarrassment, descanting on her friend’s charms and many lovable characteristics, and dwelling with apparent pleasure upon the happy future in store for her and himself.

Roy said nothing at all in answer to all this; in fact, Nellie’s former shyness seemed all at once to have been transferred to him, and he sat silent and awkward at her side, holding her hand as though he did not exactly know what to do with it. It is very mortifying when we have braced ourselves up to the point of acting magnanimously to discover suddenly that the magnanimity only existed in our imagination, and thus Roy, who had worked himself into a fever of generosity, and nobly confessed his secret to check all delusive hopes that he might have raised in Eleanor’s heart during the last few weeks, felt, as she cheerfully discussed his future with him, as though he had perhaps been rather hasty, or, to use his own words, had made “a consummate ass of himself.”

His position became more unendurable every moment, and at last, making some hasty excuse, he quitted her side, feeling it absolutely necessary that he should be alone for a little while, if he was ever to recover his composure.

And Eleanor? why she also was glad to be alone, and breathed more freely as his step grew fainter in the distance. Inwardly she was not as composed as she was outwardly, but her feelings were so new and strange that she only comprehended them in part, and thought her agitation due to the mingled pain and pleasure with which she regarded Elsie’s marriage.

“It will estrange her from me, and she is my only friend,” she thought, looking wistfully out to sea, “but I ought to be very glad that she has given her heart so wisely, and drop all

selfish repinings. He is in every way worthy of her — so generous, so noble, so attractive, so devoted. Oh, yes, I am very happy that she has won him," and then — strange incongruity — she wept; but one never knows certainly what a woman will do under excitement — just as we think she will smile, she often cries, and *vice versâ*.

CHAPTER V.

"BOBBY."

"And sat upon a rock and bobbed for whale."

WHILST Nellie sat and wept, another lonely damsel strayed out upon the rocks, namely, Roberta Stevenson, and "perched" herself in solitary grandeur to await Jack's appearance on the scene, for she had promised to go sailing with him in the afternoon. But solitude did not agree with Bob; she always felt, she said, a need of some one to enjoy it with her, as she never could be quiet long enough to follow out a train of thought. She would rather have been a scullion in the kitchen than lived alone in state upon a throne, and when there was no one near to talk to, she usually broke out in snatches of little songs; and the incongruity of the medley must have made any one smile who heard her, for they were usually regulated by what was taking place around or in her own mind; hence she now passed, with easy transition, from "Love lies dreaming" to "Six o'clock is striking," on hearing the venerable timepiece in the cottage give out the hour.

"First he gives me apples, then he gives me pears," she shouted,

"And then he gives me sixpence to spend among the fairs."

“Beautiful,” said Jack’s voice beside her, “but the ‘sixpence’ came ‘first’ I know,” and he dropped a little coin in her lap.

“No,” she said, laughing, “the ‘apples’ came first in the original, but we’ll transpose it to suit the occasion. Where have you been, truant? Do you know I’ve been waiting for you for half an hour?”

“So have I,” said Jack, seating himself beside her.

“So you have what?” demanded Bob; “been waiting for yourself?”

“Not exactly,” he replied, laughing; “put the question in another form. I’ve been waiting for *the* mail, and you’ve been waiting for *a* male.”

“Did you get a letter?” asked Roberta.

“No,” said Jack, “the letters had not been sorted when I left, on your account, but Roy has taken my place, and will get what there is for me. I am very anxious to hear from abroad,” he added, “and had I known that you were rhapsodizing over the ocean, and happy in my absence, I think I should have remained where I was.”

“Go back if you wish to,” said Bob, “but don’t add insult to injury by calling me ‘happy,’ when I’m all alone ‘by the sad sea waves.’”

“Why can’t you possess your soul in peace,” said Jack, “and sit ‘upon a rock and bob for whale?’”

“I might for fifteen minutes,” replied Roberta, “but after that I should precipitate myself into the water, if no one came to my relief.”

“Then I should have to ‘sit upon a rock and “wail” for “Bob,”’” said Jack, dolefully. “What an awfully tragic thing it would be. The newspapers would have it all in an ‘extra,’ headed ‘The Lore Lei of the nineteenth century. A young girl

springs into the sea, singing that sweet melodious measure "Six o'clock is striking." Then the fellows would want our photographs, and how beautiful you'd look in your 'sea-weedy trophy.' Oh, do jump, Bob; here's a chance to immortalize ourselves."

"You don't suppose I'll go alone," said Roberta, "and leave you to enjoy the fun, do you? Not I. When I jump, I shall take you with me as a 'weedy trophy.'"

"That's a shameful reflection on my cigar," said Jack. "Insult me, Robert, if you will, but spare my friend. Come, if you wish to go sailing, we must start at once."

"Oh, I don't care particularly about it," replied Bob, "and as you are anxious about your letters we may as well stay where we are until Mr. Weston brings the mail."

"All right," said Jack; "we'll sit and look at the water, and grow sentimental."

"I'll look at the water, if you wish me to," said Bob, laughing, "but I can't be sentimental; it's not in my nature."

"But that's the proper thing to be when you sit by the sea-side with the man of your heart," said Jack. "'Make an effort, Mrs. Dombey,' and see if you can't be fashionable. What do you think of this vast expanse of water, Miss Stevenson?"

"'Neat but not gaudy,'" replied Bob, "'as the monkey said when he painted his tail blue.'"

"Roberta," cried Jack, "this is absolutely shameful; I must really undertake your education. See now, my child, if you cannot commit a sea poem to memory, so that you may not again disgrace yourself when asked that question. Try and repeat these words after me — I'll say them slowly:

"The sea! the sea! the open sea!
The blue, the fresh, the ever free!"

“What nonsense,” exclaimed Bob. “There’s an absurdity in the first line, and three lies in the last. It’s a pity the author did n’t wash the cobwebs from his brain by a ‘dip’ in ‘The sea, the sea, the open sea,’ instead of lying about it. Who ever heard of a ‘fresh sea,’ I should like to know? He’d better swallow a little of it, and that will set him right on that point.”

“How about ‘the blue’ and ‘the ever free?’” said Jack, laughing heartily.

“Can anything be free when it has prescribed limits?” asked Roberta; “and as for its color, it changes like a chameleon; close to the rocks it is gray, fringed with silver; a little further out a pale sea-green; whilst yonder, where the sun is shining, it is violet, tipped with gold.”

“Bravo,” cried Jack; “you beat Bryan Proctor all to pieces. There is music in your soul after all, Robert, only no one knows how to play upon the instrument. The right fellow will come along some of these days, and then you’ll go walking about with a rhyming dictionary under each arm.”

“Not at all,” replied Bob; “I’ll make him carry them for me, and when he wants ‘sentiment,’ I’ll refer him to the books. It is much the safer method of courtship, because there can be no misunderstanding in the case, and when the lover is referred to Volume II., page 21, sixteenth line, for the sentiment corresponding to ‘heart,’ he’ll find ‘cart,’ ‘start,’ ‘part,’ ‘tart,’ and a variety of others, from which he can choose the one he wishes, instead of hearing but commonplace from the lips of his beloved, which might not be to his taste.”

“It’s a beautiful idea,” said Jack. “You’re a woman of genius, Roberta. I’m beginning to be afraid of you, my dear, you’re getting so strong-minded. Do — do — don’t marry me until I’ve asked my ma, will you?”

"I'll give you plenty of time," said Bob, gravely; "not only for that, but to get your *trousseau*," and here their conversation was broken in upon by Roy, bearing in triumph the long expected letter from abroad.

Jack tore it open eagerly, and read it aloud, whilst Roberta and Roy stood beside him and listened; and although it corroborated their fears that the travellers were within the besieged city, it was a relief to know that they had met, so, taking it all in all, the news was good, and as such they celebrated it with a regular jollification.

Late that night Roberta stood beside the table in the room which she shared with Eleanor Marston, turning something over and over in her hand.

"There's a hole in it," she said, half aloud, and she turned it over again.

"A hole?" murmured sleepy Nellie, from beneath the bed-clothes; "there's cotton in my basket, dear, darn it."

"I never have sworn in my life," said Bob, "and I don't see why I should begin on your cotton. 'Darn it' indeed," and she cast a merry look upon what she held in her hand, which was nothing more or less than the coin Jack had dropped into her lap in the afternoon.

"The hole is pretty large," she said, after a pause.

"I can't help it," said poor Nellie, with a drowsy sigh; "put something in it."

"Great minds think alike," said Bob, laughing; "that's just what I want to do. Give me a little piece of ribbon, and I'll stop it up."

"Anything you want, dear," purred Nellie, more than two-thirds on her way to the land of nod; "look in my basket," and Roberta lost no time in doing so.

"Tape?" she said, looking inquiringly at a roll, "it's too

thick to go through the hole. Spool cotton?" she continued, "it's too thin, it will cut my throat. Bobbin? that will do exactly," and stringing the coin, she tied it around her neck, dancing before the glass to see the effect, and singing, as her bright eyes sparkled back at her:

"There was a little robin,
Who tied a piece of bobbin
Around her neck, for a charm, charm, charm;
She said, 'Ye powers above,
If e'er I fall in love,
May it hang me, and keep me from harm, harm, harm.'"

CHAPTER VI.

A NEW HERO.

"A combination and a form indeed,
Where every god did seem to set his seal,
To give the world assurance of a man."

IT is now the seventh day of October, and from the north, south, east, and west, the summer tourists are returning to their winter homes, to take up once more the burden of life, and, by severe application to business, atone for their long holiday.

The Newport party are at home again on Staten Island, all but Roy, who, not having yet made his peace with his cousin Maude, thought it best to go at once to the city, for the nominal purpose of attending to his uncle's affairs.

It is "an early fall," as the saying is; the trees have already lost their verdure, the birds have sung their farewell songs, and

flown away to a more congenial clime; and nature seems to be in haste to don her winter garb, if one may judge by the gossamer veil of frost-work with which she every morning shrouds herself.

None of our friends are very happy — the frost seems to have blighted their jollity with the flowers, and although the sun streams forth cheerily, and seems inclined to make amends for dame nature's severity, every one mopes and is discontented with himself or some one else.

Eleanor Marston is still waiting upon Arthur, and nursing back his lost interest in life, but all the while there is something wanting in her own, although she dares not confess it even to herself. She misses Roy's handsome face, his bright genial smile, and the numberless trifling attentions which she received from him during the weeks they passed together by the sea, but she will not acknowledge this, saying always as she sighs, "It is Elsie that I miss so sadly; oh, would that she were at home once more."

At Beechcroft Maude is as nearly "cross" as a young woman of her good breeding can be; Mrs. Von Decker is nervous and dispirited, and Jack is plunged over head and ears in a sea of farm accounts, which have been for some time collecting, owing to his father's absence.

Even Roberta Stevenson seems dull, going through her accustomed round of duties in a spiritless way, which calls forth repeated complaints from "the brethren," who have never, up to the present time, considered that she had a right to be miserable when they would have her merry. Home seemed so dreary to her after the gay life she had led at "Rose Cottage." Jack was too busy to come and see her, and now that neither Elsie nor Eleanor were at Beechcroft to be visited, her pride forbade her going thither, knowing well what construction Maude would put upon her visits.

So everybody was unhappy, and everybody said, "It is because Elsie is not at home," until it became a matter of surprise to them that they had not more highly prized her whilst she was still among them; meanwhile she, whose absence they so deeply deplored, believed herself forgotten, and sought eagerly each day to drive the past further and further from her mind.

She was not unhappy; in fact, her life flowed on smoothly now. Although her fears had at first been many, yet, as time passed, she became accustomed to her situation, nor heeded the booming of the guns more than the familiar twittering of the robin-redbreast, in the old homestead where she was born.

Paris had changed its aspect very much since she had first arrived, little more than a year before, but the change had been so gradual that it remained almost unnoticed by her; and guns, pickets of horses, tents, camp fires, and soldiers seemed in their natural places beneath the great trees in the garden of the Tuileries.

The Champs Elysées was, it is true, almost deserted. No private equipages rolled along its beautiful carriage roads as of yore, and few if any loiterers were to be found upon its chairs. The Champs de Mars was a camp, and along the quays by the river-side were cavalry and infantry regiments with the *tentes d'abri*.

Often and often in the evening she sallied forth with her father and Colonel St. Evremond, who was now their constant guide and companion, and threaded her way between private barricades erected by trembling citizens, and street hawkers' tables, whereon would be exhibited statuettes of the "two inseparables of Berlin, William and his little Bismarck," or General Trochu and the members of the government, in gilt gingerbread, and unless, as sometimes happened, they chanced to meet a litter whereon lay a wounded soldier, or an unfortunate

wretch, under suspicion of being a spy, being dragged to justice, followed by a howling mob, she would return home as placid and contented as though she were living in the midst of peace and plenty.

Colonel St. Evremond was a soldier of the "line," and his regiment was kept outside the city, yet he contrived to be on hand whenever he was wanted by our friends, and seemed, indeed, to enjoy nothing more than piloting them through the crowded city from wall to wall, and listening with keen amusement to Elsie's naive suggestions in regard to fortifications and defences, and to her father's no less naive opinions in regard to French politics.

Louis Eugene St. Evremond, fourteenth baron de Cavaignac, was a Bourbonite at heart, and the day when he had found himself obliged to take up arms for Napoleon III. had been a dark one in his calendar; but he was then a younger son, with no patrimony, and there were no means of subsistence for him save the army or a wealthy marriage. His father, therefore, waived his prejudices, and forced upon him a military life, marrying him, also, as soon as possible, to a young French girl of no very high rank, but possessed of a good fortune in her own right.

This poor child was an orphan, and, until her marriage, had lived entirely within the walls of the convent, where she had been educated, a petted guest of the good nuns, who pitied the friendless condition of the little heiress—so wealthy in all the world could give, so poor without that one great gift of heaven, love; and when she left their tender care, it was with many blessings and prayers, that in her husband's house she might find that which hitherto her life had lacked.

This, however, was not to be the case. She never loved St. Evremond, whilst, on his part, although he was scrupulously

attentive to his wife's comfort, her presence or absence was a matter of indifference to him, and an order which took him from home was rather a subject of congratulation than otherwise. Thus they dragged on an existence of a few years together in the eyes of the world, but, alas! with hearts as far asunder as the poles, until Teresa, for so she was called, sank beneath the burden of a mistaken life, and buried her complainings in the grave, leaving St. Evremond a widower, thirty years of age, with a large fortune, unencumbered save by a puny infant of some twelve or fourteen months, which bade fair to follow its mother within the year.

Every one supposed that St. Evremond would marry a second time, and, as his father and elder brother also died soon after, leaving him the title and estates of Cavaignac, he was considered a very desirable *parti*, and all the mammas with marriageable daughters endeavored to catch him with the matrimonial halter; but, for some unexplainable reason, he proved impervious to their attacks upon his liberty, and, giving his little son into his sister's care, devoted himself exclusively to his profession, to which he had by this time become resigned. It was now seven years since his wife had died, and he still retained his freedom, living as quiet and retired a life as his duties would allow, and devoting himself to the education of his boy.

This, then, was Elsie's sole companion—a man in his thirty-eighth year, of middle height, of proud, resolute, and soldierly bearing, with a dark, keen, gray eye, that seemed to force obedience from the most refractory. The discipline of the forces within the walls of Paris was far from being what it should have been, but Colonel St. Evremond's regiment stood at the head of the soldiers of the line, with an unblemished reputation for steadiness under fire.

His features were too strongly marked to be absolutely handsome, and here and there, conspicuous among its dusky fellows, shone a snow-white hair, which, together with his habitual gravity and taciturnity, gave him the appearance of being a much older man than he really was.

There was very little freedom in his intercourse with Elsie, for he regarded her as nothing more than a forward but amusing child, and, although inwardly piqued at his want of appreciation, she, so ready usually with her tongue, was often at a loss for something to say, sitting mute whilst her father told of home and home pleasures to their silent companion.

Sometimes, as they rolled along the boulevards in a *fiacre*, drawn by an overworked, ill-fed animal, her mind would suddenly revert to Beechcroft, and she would see, as in a picture, the lofty green trees, the bright sun shining on the bay, her own pony carriage, with the pretty bays, so beautifully matched, and above all Roy's face, eloquent with anticipated pleasure, as he stood holding the reins and curbing the restless animals until the candidate for the seat beside him should appear. And who would that be, now that she was no longer there? Who could it be but Maude? and then, with a bitter, heavy sigh, she would lean forward in the carriage, and strive to forget these wretched morbid fancies, in the stir and bustle of the miniature world in which she now lived.

St. Evremond would fix his eyes curiously upon her at such times, and so deep and penetrating was his gaze, that she often sank back again upon her seat with a palpitating heart, fearful that her sad little romance had been read upon her face. She felt that she could bear anything better than the knowledge that this stern man possessed her secret, and her cheeks burned at the mere thought of the contemptuous smile with which he would regard her woes. He gave her no reason, however, to

be anxious on that score, for beyond looking at her, he paid no attention to these dark moods, save now and then, when they lasted longer than usual, to ask, in a strangely gentle voice to issue from so heavy a moustache :

“*Qu' avez-vous, Mademoiselle? Etês-vous malade?*” and when she had uttered a confused negative, he would turn his eyes away and apparently forget her.

As for Mr. Von Decker, he had hitherto borne his captivity better than could have been expected, considering the neglect to which his financial interests were exposed at home during his prolonged absence ; but now he began to be restless, and had even gone so far this morning as to interrogate Mr. Washburne as to the probability of his being able to force his way through the lines without a special permit, but was informed by that gentleman that it would be extremely dangerous to make an effort to leave the city even with a pass, and alone, it would be downright insanity to do so without one, and accompanied by his young daughter.

He returned home now, for the first time, dissatisfied and unhappy, and inclined to visit his woes upon the innocent heads of his companions, Elsie and St. Evremond.

“I tell you, sir,” he exclaimed, turning to the latter, as though he were the chief instigator of the siege, and personally to blame for their captivity, “that my business will go to the dogs if I remain here a week longer. I shall be ruined, sir, absolutely ruined.”

St. Evremond looked at him with deep concern, judging from his manner that something was amiss, but he made no immediate response, as Mr. Von Decker's words seemed to him rather ambiguous, and he was trying to reconcile the idea of *les chiens* monopolizing his unfortunate friend's business, and thus ruining his financial career. A few words muttered

in French revealed his perplexity to Elsie, who burst into a little peal of laughter at the misunderstanding, to the great surprise of both her companions.

St. Evremond regarded her with quiet gravity, but her merriment added to her father's rapidly increasing indignation, and turning on her sharply, he exclaimed :

“What is it that you find so amusing in my troubles, Miss Elsie, may I ask? It is unkind to keep it to yourself; Colonel St. Evremond and myself would like to laugh also.”

Elsie's mirth died a sudden death. Never before had her father looked at her so sternly, or spoken in so severe a tone, and for a moment she was too much startled to reply.

“It is a strange subject for delight,” continued her father, pacing up and down the room. “You act as though you possessed no heart. Here you have been separated from your mother, your brothers and sister for over a year, and when I say that it may be a year more before you see them again, you laugh hilariously.”

“It was not at that, I laughed,” said Elsie, falteringly, “it was at what you said last — about your business — about —”

“Oh, I don't want to hear any more,” interrupted her father. “‘Least said, soonest mended;’ don't attempt to explain — you will only make matters worse. Colonel, you will find me at my rooms when you want me,” and, snatching up his hat, he left the convent in hot haste.

Elsie moved over to the window, and stood with her back to St. Evremond, trying to force back the tears with which her eyes were filled into their proper channels, and he, after pausing irresolutely about half-way to the door through which Mr. Von Decker had made his hasty exit, turned slowly around, and made his way to her side.

“Is it true, Mademoiselle,” he said, “that you would be sorry to leave *La Belle France*?”

“No, Monsieur,” replied Elsie, in a low voice. “*La Belle France* is nothing to me. The summons to leave at once would cause me but little concern.”

“Why then did you not say to your father that you desired above all things to return home?” asked St. Evremond, endeavoring to get a glimpse of her face. “It would have pleased him much, and now he has left you in anger.”

“Because — because — that would not have been true either, Monsieur,” said Elsie, in a still lower voice. “I do *not* wish to go home.”

“Ah!” said the Colonel, in a reflective tone, “you do not then wish to see your mother and sister and the little boys?”

“My mother will not miss me whilst she has Jack,” replied Elsie, evasively; “the boys do nothing but tease me when I am at home, and my sister — my sister will be married soon.”

“And the old homestead — the place where you were born,” continued St. Evremond, “has it no place in your heart, Mademoiselle?”

“Why should it?” said Elsie, passionately. “Why should I love those old mouldering walls? not surely for the reason you mention, because within them I first saw the light of life. No, only animals cling to places — human affections have no locality — the heart makes a home anywhere that it is loved.”

“But surely your heart finds most to love on its native soil?” said St. Evremond; “there, therefore, it must long to return.”

“My heart needs but one to make a home for it in the desert,” replied Elsie, “and that one, Monsieur, is my father, and he is angry with me,” and the tears, until now restrained, fell streaming over her face, and trickled through the fingers which she held up before it.

“*Pauvre enfant,*” said St. Evremond, “*elle pleurt,*” and then

stroking her hair gently, he continued, "do not weep, my dear little child, I will at once see *Monsieur votre père*, and, depend upon it, he shall not be long angry with you. *Au revoir*. I go to seek him," and he turned at once and left the room.

CHAPTER VII.

PASSING THE "LINES."

"As headstrong as an allegory on the banks of the Nile."

A RECONCILIATION was soon effected between the father and daughter. Indeed, it was with some difficulty that the Colonel persuaded the former that his little girl was weeping over his hasty words, which had been forgotten almost as soon as uttered.

"The fact is," he said, confidentially, as he suffered himself to be led back to the convent, "this confounded siege is ruining my temper as well as my fortunes. By some means or other I shall leave Paris this week. I will not be bullied any longer. Mr. Washburne has known that I wished to leave ever since I arrived, and why the deuce he don't make an opportunity for me, passes my comprehension; but it's always the way with these beggarly office-holders; as long as they get their money they don't care what becomes of the unfortunate people they are paid to take care of."

Colonel St. Evremond uttered a feeble remonstrance against this wholesale condemnation of one who had made himself very popular with men of all nations, by his affability and unwearied sympathy, in their fortunes during the siege, but Mr.

Von Decker was not to be moved from his opinion, and answered all the Colonel's remarks with —

“Then why don't he get me out of Paris, sir? That's what he's here for.”

They returned to the convent, and Elsie was comforted by her father's assurances that he was not angry with her; nevertheless, their usual pleasant intercourse was interrupted, for Mr. Von Decker was unable to shake off his depression, or allay his nervous desire to be gone. Again and again he reverted to the subject, until the Colonel's patience was wellnigh exhausted.

“*Parbleu!* Monsieur,” he exclaimed, “your minister cannot drive away the King of Prussia; why then do you complain of him?” and rising he took his leave, feeling very sorry for the little girl he left behind him, who, he felt sure, would be compelled to listen to the same strain all the afternoon. But he was mistaken, for no sooner did the door close upon him than Mr. Von Decker also took his leave, a plan suddenly suggesting itself to him which he hastened to put into execution.

He would visit the various gates of the city, and take a bird's-eye view of the enemy from the ramparts, and thus learn for himself the extent of the danger he would run in attempting to pass through the lines. Hiring a *fiacre*, drawn by a poor, crazy-looking horse, so thin as to call for tears from the unfortunate man who might one day have to eat him, he sprang in and ordered the driver, who had been “manifesting” all the morning, and was not altogether as sober as he should have been, to drive to the Arc de Triomphe.

On they went at a snail's pace, for at every opening which revealed the ramparts the patriotic charioteer checked his fiery steed, that he might shake his fist in the direction of the Prussians, and relieve his feelings by a few unctuous words. They

did, however, reach their destination in the course of time, and hurriedly paying the double fare called for by the driver, for the frightful risk his noble animal had run from the Prussian needle-guns pointed at the opposite side of the city, Mr. Von Decker made his way to the Rue de l'Imperatrice, and attempted to reach the ramparts in that direction. This, however, he found to be no easy matter, for between the Arc de Triomphe and the wall and moat which closed the avenue, were three barricades of masonry and earth, besides three ditches; whilst every house was garrisoned, a number with *Nationeaux*, and some few with artillerymen. He was stopped at every turn and questioned as to his business, until he nearly lost his temper, and would not have been allowed upon the ramparts at all, had he not met with the officer who was selecting the patrol for the night, and who, being satisfied with the letters he produced, consented to his accompanying him on his duty.

Along the top was a line of sentinels, and behind them guards and other patrols were continually passing, whilst at almost every step they were stopped and obliged to give the password, although the officer who accompanied him was well known. At one of the gates they paused, and Mr. Von Decker took advantage of the detention to look through the bars of his cage, and survey the country. The sight was not reassuring. Other patrols and guards were moving round the city outside the walls as well as within, and on either side, as far as the eye could reach, were numerous regiments, some in tents, others lying upon the ground in the open air, although the nights were now becoming very chilly, and here and there and everywhere were bayonets sparkling in the rays of the setting sun, as plenty as violets in May.

Mr. Von Decker said nothing to his companion of the hopes which this walk had blasted, but returned to his own home as

soon as possible, a sadder and a wiser man, and was content for a few days more to take things as they were. Happy would it have been for them all had he continued in this equable frame of mind; but, before the week was out, his restless spirit was once more at work devising plans of escape, and this time no warning availed to save him from his fate, on which he rushed with the same dogged obstinacy which had characterized all the actions of his life.

Mr. Washburne was again assailed by his irascible fellow countryman, and, being by this time extremely weary of his importunities, he yielded to his wishes, and provided him with the necessary papers to enable him to pass the gates, warning him at the same time, however, that he could do nothing to protect him against the Prussian outposts. Mr. Von Decker seized upon the precious papers with avidity, and declared them to be all that he wanted; once out of Paris—once beyond those hated walls, he was convinced that his troubles would be over, and he was as confident of a safe passage through the enemy's lines as though he were Frederick William's intimate friend and boon companion.

On his return to the convent, the coveted papers were shown to Elsie, under a promise of secrecy, and the plan of the route cautiously mapped out upon the checkered table-cloth for her edification, with as many starts and anxious glances over the shoulder as though they were two conspirators plotting for the fall of Paris.

Very guilty did poor Elsie feel that evening when Colonel St. Evremond came in as usual to see if all was well with them, for she had been strictly forbidden by her father to even mention the subject to him, lest he should throw some obstacle in the way of their departure; and this guilty feeling increased more and more as the appointed day drew near, and she found

that she must leave her kind friend, who, up to the last moment, was planning excursions to amuse her for weeks ahead, without a word of farewell, or a recognition of his many favors.

And when the last evening came, and he rose as usual to take his leave, Elsie's spirit rose in rebellion at the ungracious and ungrateful part her father had assigned her. She drew near to St. Evremond as he made his stately bow, and slipped her small hand in his, looking up, meanwhile, into his face with a troubled look, which seemed sadly out of place on her bright youthful countenance.

"What is it, Mademoiselle?" he inquired, pressing the hand he held, and looking down at her with the benignant glance which we bestow upon a favored child when it would ask a favor of us; and had Elsie been alone, she could not have resisted this invitation, but would assuredly have confided all to him, and thus, perhaps, saved the troubles which were gathering like heavy clouds about her; but Mr. Von Decker was present, and she dared not speak plainly, so she only answered, in a troubled voice:

"Nothing, Monsieur," adding, after a moment's pause, "*Adieu!*"

"*Pas 'adieu,'* Mademoiselle," said St. Evremond, smiling; "*c'est 'au revoir!'*" and he turned away, but as he crossed the threshold of the convent-door, the word, and the look which accompanied it, came back to him, like the last cadence of a sad song, and more than once during the evening, and the night following, he thought of and wondered at them.

The next day, after having packed their necessary clothing into as small a space as possible, paid their month's rent, and stowed away all the articles which they were obliged to leave behind them in trunks — sealed and directed, it is true, but which they scarcely dared hope to see again — they quietly

passed out of the convent with a few brief words of explanation, and made their way to the American minister's, where they found their carriage awaiting them. It was an open barouche, drawn by a remarkably good-looking pair of horses, considering the rapidly increasing demand for the article, and American flags had been placed in every conceivable corner of the vehicle, not to speak of those decorating the animals' heads.

With the air of a prince, Mr. Von Decker followed his daughter into the carriage, in the midst of an admiring crowd, drawn together by the magnificent appearance of the travelling carriage, and the vague and mysterious reports as to the cause of these illustrious travellers' departure.

They bore letters from General Trochu, so it was said, wherein he demanded that the Germans should return at once to their own homes, in which case the French would magnanimously forgive the past, and pursue them no farther than Alsace and Lorraine; so when everything was ready, and the carriage actually began to move, the enthusiastic mob shouted and cheered, and accompanied it some distance on its way, to the great detriment of both speed and comfort.

Mr. Von Decker's letters were to the commandant of the fort of Vanves, who was enjoined to forward the bearer, under a flag of truce, to the Prussian lines, and, as I have said, Mr. Von Decker was quite convinced that, thus far upon his journey, his papers and certificates would enable him to proceed farther without difficulty; but whether or not this would have proved so, he never knew, for fate determined that he should not.

At the gate through which they sought to leave the city they were challenged first, but their papers proving all correct upon inspection, they were allowed to pass without further molestation, and with great pleasure soon found themselves bowling along through the open country.

Mr. Von Decker's heart swelled with pride. He had accomplished his purpose, and, despite the many difficulties in his path, was now *en route* for home, with his little daughter safe and well beside him.

"We will show them what American pluck can do," he said, boastingly. "That fellow Washburne don't know anything about his business. To think of his having refused us a safe-conduct all this time, and kept us caged up in that abominable city, when any day we might have done what we are doing now, riding into the enemy's quarters in perfect security."

"*Halte, la!*"

The words came with crushing velocity apparently from the clouds, but on looking upward the occupants of the carriage perceived some half dozen men in the uniform of the *garde mobile* upon a low wall beside them, whose muskets were levelled at their heads.

The coachman asked for no orders, but pulling his horses in, dropped his reins and leaped from the box, with every symptom of the wildest alarm.

"Confound that idiot!" exclaimed Mr. Von Decker, as he stood up, and, grasping the reins himself, turned to the soldiers and asked the reason of his detention.

The men whispered together for a moment, and then told him in French that they had orders not to allow any one to pass that way, which communication Elsie interpreted to her father, upon which he produced his papers for their inspection; but, contrary to their former experience, these invaluable documents proved here of no avail.

It is a subject for speculation whether these men were really able to decipher them; but be that as it may, so far from being satisfied by their perusal, they seemed to become more suspicious as they read, and ended at length by peremptorily ordering the travellers to return at once to the city.

This was more than Mr. Von Decker was prepared for, and his indignation knew no bounds, at the thought of being turned back at this stage of his journey. He tried to reason with his captors, then offered them a bribe, but all was of no avail—they were resolute. He plead and threatened until, losing both temper and discretion, he determined to escape by flight, and, seizing a favorable opportunity, he suddenly lashed the horses with the whip.

The plan was well conceived. The soldiers, taken off their guard, were dashed aside by the impetuous horses, as they sprang forward obedient to the whip and voice, and for a moment it seemed as though success had crowned this daring effort. A scattering volley was sent after the rapidly retreating carriage, but, save for a single ball which crashed through the leather top, vehicle and occupants escaped unharmed. But though now safe from the rear, Mr. Von Decker had not thought of further danger in his front; a more advanced guard hearing the fusillade, and seeing the fugitives bearing down upon them, making, apparently, for the Prussian lines, sprang to their feet, and poured a second volley into them as they flew by—this time, alas! with deadly effect. The off-horse stumbled, reared, then fell heavily to the ground, dragging his companion with him, and John Roderic Von Decker, pierced by three Chassepôt bullets, inclined suddenly forward, then sank back upon his seat without a moan, and passed the French and Prussian lines at last—alone.

In a moment the soldiers were beside the carriage, and with a shriek of horror Elsie threw herself upon her father to protect his prostrate, senseless form from further violence.

“Do not touch him,” she cried, “he is my father; back! back! and give him air. We are Americans on our way to the Fort of Vanves, and with a safe-conduct from General Trochu.”

The men looked at her with perplexed surprise, and then at one another. This explanation, rendered in good French, seemed clear and explicit, and they more than half repented their morning's work. After a moment's silence they asked to see the letter, and whilst they looked it over, Elsie endeavored to restore her father to consciousness.

"Ah, my God! my God! he is dead," she cried, at last, with uncontrollable emotion, as all her efforts proved vain. "Oh, papa darling, look up once more! Do not leave me here alone. Papa! papa! come back to me!" but the dead man neither moved nor spoke, and the *garde* looked on, silent and helpless, at the misery caused by their over-zeal.

It has been said by a writer of the present time, that the chief characteristic of the *garde mobile* during the siege of Paris, was their readiness to shoot first and make inquiry afterwards, but he adds that when they were convicted of a mistake, they were always ready to "*apologize to the corpse.*" These men, therefore, having done the mischief, were now quite ready to "apologize," and politely returning Elsie's letter, announced their readiness to allow her to depart in peace, if such were her wish.

For a while they waited in silence for Elsie to express her wishes, but finding at length that she was incapable of acting for herself, they cut loose the dead horse, set the other, which was uninjured, upon his feet, and bade the driver, who had now appeared upon the scene, to proceed slowly towards Paris, whilst a guard was detailed to accompany them and prevent further trouble.

The procession moved. Slowly, drearily it went, dragging along like a funeral train. Elsie's sobs grew faint and fainter, until they altogether ceased, and a dreamy sense of unreality stole over her as she sat dry-eyed and silent, supporting her

father in her arms, neither knowing nor caring whither they were taking her. The jaunty little hat, donned that morning with such care, had fallen from her head, and lay somewhere upon the roadside, and a tangled mass of golden curls fell unrestrained about her shoulders, whilst hair, and clothes, and delicate white skin were here and there stained crimson, by the life-blood flowing from her father's heart.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT SHALL HE DO WITH HER?

“He is dead and gone, lady,
He is dead and gone;
At his head a grass-green turf,
At his heels a stone.”

WHILST these unfortunate events were transpiring, Colonel St. Evremond was leisurely making his way to the convent, to pay his daily visit, and great was his consternation on learning from the sisters that Mr. Von Decker had actually left the city with his daughter.

“This day above all others!” he exclaimed, as he turned away from the gate; “when the guard has been changed, and the rawest recruits we have are on duty,” and, full of forebodings, he hastened to the American minister's to hear, if possible, the details of their route.

All that Mr. Washburne could tell him, was the gate by which they intended to leave the city, and thither the Colonel posted in search of further news. He questioned the guard

closely, but they either could not, or would not give him any information, and he was about turning back in despair, when the melancholy *cortége* appeared, wending its way towards the city.

At first no one could ascertain exactly what it was, but, borrowing a field-glass, the Colonel soon discovered that his worst fears had been realized, and that the fugitives were returning in charge of the *garde mobile*. He looked long enough to see that only one over-wearied horse was attached to the carriage, and returning the glass, he drew his horse up beside the gate and awaited in silence their approach.

He thought he knew exactly what had happened — the guard had met them a few miles off, they had attempted flight, were turned back, and one of the horses had given out — and his only concern was how to liberate them from captivity; his feelings, therefore, are more easily imagined than described, when, at his order, the carriage drew up beside him, and, on approaching it, he perceived the true state of the case.

“*Mon Dieu!*” he exclaimed, springing from his horse; “what will these ruffians do next? She is covered with blood. Mademoiselle! Mademoiselle! are you hurt?” and in his eagerness he almost took her in his arms, but started back with horror as he suddenly perceived her lifeless burden.

Elsie looked up at him, but there was no recognition in her eyes, and her face was white as a marble image.

“You shall not touch him,” she murmured, mechanically, “he is my father. We are Americans on our way —” The rest of the sentence became inaudible, and her head drooped once more over her father’s inanimate form.

“*Pauvre enfant,*” said the Colonel, in a voice of suppressed emotion, and then resigning his horse to the care of an orderly, he entered the carriage and took his seat beside her, ordering

the driver to move on as quickly as possible to the convent, and the guard to return to their post, which orders were at once obeyed, the Colonel's rank and position being too well known to admit of their being disregarded.

The rest of the way was accomplished very slowly, for, notwithstanding the driver's efforts, the poor over-wearied horse could go no faster than a walk, and the crowd which quickly gathered also impeded their progress, so that it seemed to the Colonel as though they would never reach their destination. The long drive came to an end at last, however, and they drew up before the convent gates, from whence poor Mr. Von Decker had stepped forth in such confidence and pride some few hours before, never dreaming that his farewell was not, to Paris, but to life.

At the sound of the bell the portress opened the gate, and her cry of alarm soon brought the sisters flocking to see what had occurred. Elsie, yielding to their persuasions and assurances that she should not be called upon to leave her father, suffered them to lead her into the house, whither they also had him carried, but before she had crossed the threshold her senses seemed to leave her, and she walked on mechanically like a somnambulist, offering no resistance and speaking no word.

They placed Mr. Von Decker upon a sofa, and she stood quietly beside him, with her eyes fixed upon his rigid face and form, seemingly oblivious that anything extraordinary had occurred.

"Mademoiselle," said the Colonel, in a gentle, compassionate voice, "do not grieve too deeply. You have lost a friend and protector, it is true, but in me you shall find another; you have not said adieu to all," and he took her hand tenderly within his own.

She raised her dull eyes to his for a moment, and then let

them fall again upon her father, whilst confused memories seemed jostling each other in her brain.

“*Pas adieu,*” she said, at length, a dim recollection of their last conversation coming over her; “*c'est au revoir,*” and then clasping her head in her hands she staggered, and fell forward upon her father's body.

“I will carry her to her room at once,” said the Colonel to Sister Marie Louise, who was in attendance; “it will be better for her to recover her senses away from her father; the shock will be less,” and, lifting her in his arms, he followed the good sister along the corridor and up the stairs, pausing only to lay his precious burden down upon the bed in the small room which had been hers ever since she had taken refuge within the convent walls.

“You can leave her to me now,” said the sister, as he stood irresolutely at the foot of the bed. “I will take good care of her, and, if necessary, will send for you when she recovers. She will be better if left alone in her first burst of grief. I have suffered, and I know this to be so.”

With perfect confidence in Sister Marie Louise's experience, and remembering how much there was to be done below stairs, Colonel St. Evremond left the room as desired, and proceeded to the American minister's to inform him of what had taken place.

On his return he was informed that Elsie was still unconscious, and that Sister Marie Louise desired a physician should be sent for, as she was becoming alarmed at her patient's long-continued swoon.

St. Evremond at once dispatched a messenger for a physician, and went himself to Elsie's room, where he found her lying just as he had left her, with half-closed eyes and parted lips, from between which, however, he detected, on close observation, a faint, irregular breathing.

“This is not a swoon,” he said, decidedly, “it is more like a stupor.” And such it proved to be. It lasted for two or three days, and then only gave way to fever and delirium, which were equally alarming in their turn.

The days passed into weeks, and still the fever did not abate. Sister Marie Louise was devoted in her attendance, the Colonel unremitting in his attentions, but Elsie, unconscious of all around her, was living in a world of her own, and repeating, with every possible variation, the horrible tragedy in which she had played so sad a part.

It was touching to hear her supplications for her father's life, her adjurations to the guard to let them pass, and it was terrible to listen to her anguish, her mad cries of despair when she dreamed that she had failed, and thought she stood once more beside his bleeding corpse.

The Colonel was perplexed beyond measure as to what he should do with the poor child in case of her recovery, or how he could communicate with her friends were she to die, for he had no clue to their whereabouts, save the casual observations which Elsie had let fall, in conversing about her home and family.

Mr. Von Decker's remains were placed in the convent vault, in a metallic case, according to the instructions of the American minister, who duly recorded, in the archives of the mission, his name and the date of his death, with all the circumstances attending the same.

Mr. Washburne being equally ignorant with St. Evremond as to the precise locality of the deceased's residence in America, could offer no advice to Elsie's self-appointed guardian on the subject of communicating with her friends, but promised to mention the fact of Mr. Von Decker's death in his next dispatches, although he could give no idea as to when these

would probably get off. Owing to the uncertainty of the mails, they might remain in the city for a month to come, but it was the best that the minister could do for him, so St. Evremond resigned himself to circumstances, passing all the time he could spare from his duties, at the convent, awaiting the change for better or worse which must soon take place in his ward's condition.

Elsie did not die. The struggle was long and hard, but youthful vigor conquered in the end, and she languished back to life. Wearily, feebly she opened her eyes upon a world on which the sun, for her, had set, and the future appeared shrouded in impenetrable gloom, as by degrees she realized her sad position.

When she lost Roy, it had seemed to her that happiness was at an end, but hope renewed itself within her heart when she was once more at her father's side, and she had felt that life might still be rendered tolerable by his tender love and care. But now? Alas! there was nothing to look forward to.

If she had before disliked the idea of returning home to be a daily witness of another's happiness, the thought of it was now intolerable, without that kind father's supporting presence which had been her only solace. Her strength slowly returned, but the vivacity of youth seemed to have forsaken her forever. Her buoyant spirit seemed to have deserted her, and in its place was a quiet languor, which manifested itself in her slow movements and listless air, contrasting strongly with her former restlessness and unvarying liveliness.

Good Sister Marie Louise tried hard to awaken in her some interest in life, to make her talk of home, her mother, brothers and sister, but she was strangely reticent on these subjects, and refused all overtures towards confidence, completely confounding her friend by her apparent heartlessness and indifference

towards those still left her by a merciful Providence, and in whom she should have found her happiness.

“Do not commiserate me,” she said one day, as the sister spoke sympathizingly of her isolation. “I am as happy here as I shall ever be in this world, and I have no wish to leave these walls, were the way open to me.” And this speech was duly reported to the Colonel by the sorely perplexed sister, with an anxious question as to what was to become of this strange girl, who seemed to have no human ties of sufficient strength to draw her from her father's grave.

St. Evremond had asked himself this question every day since Elsie's recovery had been assured, but now, when the sister appealed to him, he was no nearer an answer than at first.

“Can she not remain where she is?” he asked. “Here, at least, she is safe.”

“Safe just at present,” replied the sister, “but, ah, for how long may our home be unviolated? Do you not know that we have already been called upon to receive the wounded? And when our house becomes a hospital, will it, think you, be an asylum in which a young and handsome girl should seek a refuge? Alas, no. You and I know *Jeune France* too well to dream of it.”

“You are right,” said St. Evremond; “it would not do to leave her here unprotected by name or rank. I must see the child at once, and arrange her future plans. Will you announce me to her?” And Sister Marie Louise hastened to do his bidding, rejoiced at having at last aroused him to a sense of his responsibility.

Elsie received his summons with her usual apathetic indifference, and entered the *salon* so quietly, that it was some moments before the Colonel became aware of her presence.

“Did you wish to see me?” she asked, at length, seeing that her entrance was unnoticed, and, starting from a reverie, he turned quickly in the direction of the sweet, low-modulated voice.

He hastily apologized for his inattention, and took a step forward, intending to lead her to a seat, but there he paused, and, as his eye fell upon her, a mingled feeling of pity and respect seemed to keep him rooted to the spot.

This was not the merry child he had formerly known during her father's lifetime, neither was it the little girl he had borne in his arms along the corridor on the day she was first taken ill. No; as hair will sometimes whiten in a night, so these weeks of anguish had made a woman of Elsie.

The golden hair was drawn plainly back from her low, broad forehead, and lay in coils upon her shapely head. The face was colorless, and beneath the hazel eyes were those dark lines painted only by sickness and distress; and her form, grown much slighter since he had last seen her, was draped in deep mourning, which added still more to the sombre effect of the *toute ensemble*, and gave her girlish figure a dignity and stately grace which had until now been a stranger to it.

St. Evremond was unprepared for this great change, and, for the moment, could scarcely collect his scattered senses.

“Mademoiselle,” he said at last, “will you sit down for a few moments? I have something important to say to you.”

She seated herself without a word in the nearest chair, and regarded him with her usual impassive glance, apparently awaiting what he had to say more through compulsion than through interest.

He took two or three turns up and down the room to recover himself, and then pausing before her began abruptly:

“Sister Marie Louise has been speaking of you to me, my

child, and she says that you have given her no idea of your wishes in regard to the future, and that, owing to the troubled condition of the times, it is necessary that I should make some provision for your comfort and safety, in case the government should turn the convent into a hospital. Will you, then, kindly give me the address of your friends, that I may communicate with them without loss of time?"

"I can give you my mother's address," said Elsie, in slow, measured tones, "but I do not see of what use it will be to write to her just now, for she cannot assist me, nor even send any one to my relief. I have but one brother who is old enough to travel so far, and as he is now the sole protector of the family, it is far better that he should not risk his life in an attempt to reach me."

"What then will you do, Mademoiselle?" asked the Colonel, looking very much puzzled.

"I will remain where I am, Monsieur," she replied, "until this horrible siege is over; and then, if I am still alive, it will be time enough to write for my friends."

"But you do not understand," said the Colonel; "this place will be no better than a barrack full of soldiers, and the sisters will have no time to spare from their nursing to care for you."

"I do not wish them to care for me," replied Elsie, calmly; "I can take care of myself; besides, I intend to assist them in their labors — I shall be a nurse myself."

"Alas! Mademoiselle, that cannot be," said St. Evremond; "you are too young, and — forgive me — too beautiful to take upon yourself such a task. The nuns and the married ladies divide these duties between them, and you have neither a husband nor a long veil."

He said the last words playfully, trusting to bring forth one of her old rippling smiles, but he failed in his purpose, for she

sat as grave and still as before, clasping her hands tightly together and saying :

“Too young? Oh, no; I have grown very old these last few weeks. Too beautiful? that is easily remedied. Let them cut my hair and shroud me in the nun's black veil and none will know what I have been.”

“But you cannot take the black veil, my child, unless you bind yourself for life by solemn vows, which will separate you forever from all you love,” said St. Evremond, gravely.

“I am well aware of that,” replied Elsie, “and yet I wish to do it. Listen,” she said, rising and approaching him with more show of emotion than he had seen in her since the beginning of the interview, “my life is over. There is nothing now to take me home — my closest earthly tie is the grave within these walls, and here would I live and die.”

“But the novitiate,” said St. Evremond, in a bewildered tone. “You must be a novice first, Mademoiselle; you cannot take the black veil at once, even if I could persuade myself that it was right to allow you to do so.”

“I have no one but myself to consult,” she replied; “no one else has a right to regulate my actions here. It is my irrevocable determination, Monsieur, to become a nun, and I beg that you will use your best endeavors to make it feasible for me to take the vows at once. I absolutely forbid your communicating with my brother,” she continued, hastily, “for I will have no more lives lost in my service. Adieu,” and turning, she passed out of the room as silently as she had come, leaving St. Evremond almost beside himself with anxiety and distress of mind.

CHAPTER IX.

A DESPERATE REMEDY.

“Beware of desperate steps, the darkest day,
Live till to-morrow will have passed away.”

COLONEL ST. EVREMOND left the convent more anxious and perplexed than when he entered. He had seen enough of Elsie to know that, having once formed a resolution, nothing short of absolute authority could make her abandon it, and yet it seemed heartless to stand by inactive whilst this child, yielding to an impulse born of grief, sacrificed all her hopes of happiness in this world.

He could see no help for it, however, and therefore, obedient to her instructions, he sought another sisterhood, less strict in their rules than the nuns among whom Elsie now lived, and, presenting the case to the superior, asked whether or not the novitiate could be dispensed with and the young applicant be at once permitted to take the final vows, stating frankly, however, that her request had been already refused by another order.

The superior took the subject into consideration, promised to use her best endeavors to arrange the matter, and then dismissed St. Evremond, telling him to call again in three days and she would give her answer.

These three days dragged heavily for Elsie. She could settle to no occupation — even reading seemed to pall upon her. Sister Louise chid her gently for her restlessness. “My child,” she said, “is it thus you prepare yourself to become the betrothed of Christ?”

Elsie blushed and hid her face on the kind sister's shoulder.

"Bear with me," she said, in a low voice; "when I have taken the vows I shall be at peace."

"Alas! my child," said the sister, folding her arms around her tenderly, "vows alone will not give peace to a troubled heart."

The third day came, but it was not until the evening that St. Evremond appeared. Elsie's impatience knew no bounds. She had been anxiously awaiting him since early morning, and, as his footfall was heard upon the paved court-yard, she started impulsively from her seat to run and meet him.

"Stop!" said a clear, low voice, and a detaining hand was laid upon her shoulder by the mother superior, whilst a pair of penetrating eyes looked down upon her with a keen, searching gaze.

"Why this impatience?" she continued, gravely. "Rash child, you are rushing on your fate. You have no vocation for the lot you covet — your education, habits, tastes, are all against it. Beware how you thrust yourself among the Lord's anointed without a wedding garment. Go to the chapel, kneel before the picture of your crucified Saviour, and search well your inmost soul for the *motive* of your wish to take the vows. See whether it is your overweening love for Him — your yearning desire to yield Him up a pure young life that influences you, or rebellion at the burden of grief which He has put upon you, and a cowardly shrinking from the duties He has seen fit to impose upon you in the outer world. Go."

With bowed head and faltering step, Elsie retired to the chapel, and, making her way to the crucifix upon the altar, she fell upon her knees, overcome by the violence of her emotion. Too surely did she know that the mother had spoken but the truth. She needed no self-examination to prove that

her chief desire had been to put an impassable barrier between herself and Roy, that they might never meet again.

She raised her eyes to the figure on the cross, and a deep sense of shame came over her. Oh, how small did her trivial griefs appear in comparison with the agony pictured there; how cowardly her effort to escape her trials, in His sight, who had "suffered all things," of His own free will, for her.

Once more she buried her face in her hands. She had said her prayers — the little formula taught her in the nursery — every night and morning since she could remember; but now, for the first time, her over-charged heart found words for itself, and a supplicating, wailing cry for help went up to heaven.

Steps came along the corridor; she heeded them not. The chapel door swung back, — still she did not move, — and St. Evremond entered, with a slow, cautious tread, fearing to disturb her devotions.

The moments flew by. Silently he approached and stood beside her, with folded arms and bowed head, scarcely less devotional than herself.

"No, I must not be a nun!" she exclaimed, at length, starting to her feet. And then perceiving who her companion was, she suddenly relapsed into silence, and stood, confused and motionless, before him.

"I am glad to hear you say that, Mademoiselle," he said, gently, "for it makes my task all the easier. I am here from the convent of L——, to tell you that, after much consideration and prayer, the superior thinks best to refuse your request, and insist upon the full novitiate before she can admit you to the sisterhood."

"It is as well," replied Elsie, "for I had just decided that I was not worthy to take my place among those saintly women. I have been deceiving myself, Colonel St. Evremond," she

continued, hastily, feeling a necessity of confessing to some one, "and it was not religious devotion which influenced me in my choice, but a distaste to life and its duties, — a mad desire to separate myself forever from my home and friends."

"And have your feelings changed?" inquired St. Evremond, gazing at her in bewilderment. "Has nature asserted itself at last — are you pining now for your native land?"

"Changed?" echoed Elsie, in a melancholy tone. "Alas! no. The heart cannot rid itself of sinful murmurings in a few brief moments. No, Colonel St. Evremond, I am not 'pining for my native land;' but you tell me that I can no longer claim the shelter of the convent unless I am enrolled among the sisterhood, which cannot be. What is left me, therefore, but to take up my burden and pass onward towards the trials which await me across the water."

"I know nothing of your home, Mademoiselle," said St. Evremond, "nor can I guess for what reason you should shun it; but I know full well the dangers to be encountered by the way, and I cannot seriously advise you to attempt, just now, the journey."

"Oh, gracious heaven!" cried Elsie, clasping her hands, and turning a piteous gaze upon St. Evremond. "What, then, is to become of me? You tell me first I cannot stay, and then again I must not go. Is there no place for me anywhere in the world? Why, oh, why, did not God take me with my father?" And she threw herself upon the velvet cushion, on which she had been kneeling, in a passion of tears.

"Do not weep, *mon enfant*," said St. Evremond, in a voice full of feeling; "your case is not so hopeless. I would not have spoken thus, were there not another means of rescue from your difficulties still open to us. Will you dry your tears and listen to me for a moment?"

Taking courage from his tone and words, Elsie wiped her eyes and looked up. St. Evremond was still standing, leaning lightly against the altar-rails, and his dark gray eyes met hers with a calm, tranquil gaze, which gave her a sense of rest, a consciousness of sure protection, whatever might befall.

He smiled in answer to her eager, questioning look, and said :

“I am no conjurer ; I cannot spirit you away unseen, nor can I lay the foe to rest, drugged by a potent spell, until you have passed the lines ; but perhaps I may make your life here tolerable, even though the siege continue longer than we now expect. I can at all events save you from the necessity of returning home, which you seem to dread so much, and also from the insults of a distraught mob, should you remain in Paris. Will you listen patiently and try to understand me, Mademoiselle ?”

Elsie eagerly signified her assent, and St. Evremond, after a moment's pause, in which to collect his thoughts, continued :

“I am a soldier, Mademoiselle, and have lived a soldier's life ; and, being unused to courtly language, I feel that I can scarcely attune my tale to a young girl's ear ; but you must be gracious and forgive me if I weary you, and remember that in all I say I have your interest most at heart. You are alone, defenceless, in a foreign land ; this only gives me courage to make you an extraordinary offer — you need protection — I can give it to you. You need position, a name to guard you against insult — I can give it to you. Mademoiselle, will you be my wife ?”

He ceased. Elsie gave him one startled, incredulous look, and then hid her face in her hands, whilst burning blushes tinged her throat and ears, which were all that St. Evremond could see of her.

She could scarcely believe that she had heard aright, so totally unexpected was his proposal, and as she compared the

life he offered her with that which her fancy had once painted, her heart beat and her pulses throbbed almost to suffocation.

“Roy! Roy!” she cried within her heart, “how could any one presume to take the place *you* left vacant?” and her soul rose in rebellion at the thought of accepting another’s love.

“Oh, do not speak to me of marriage,” she exclaimed, passionately. “My heart is cold and dead — what have I to do with love?”

“I asked you, Mademoiselle, to try and understand me,” said St. Evremond, gravely; “but as you have failed to do so, let me explain myself more fully. I did not speak to you of love. Nay, I repeat to you your own words, — ‘What have I to do with love?’ A man more than twice your age, oppressed by the cares of maturer years, weighed down by his country’s peril — Mademoiselle, I ask again, what have I to do with love?”

Silence ensued, a deep silence, broken only by Elsie’s convulsive breathing and short gasping sobs. St. Evremond left his place at the altar-rails, and approaching nearer, kneeled beside her on the cushion.

“See, now, my child,” he said, gently, “how needlessly you are afflicting yourself. I never asked you for your heart, for I have long believed it given elsewhere; but your distress of mind led me to suppose that your love was hopeless, and thus I have offered you an alternative to returning home, until time has softened your sufferings.

“You would have taken the veil to avoid this return, and the vows I ask of you are no more binding. Indeed, they are less so, for at the convent your servitude would only end with your life, whilst in this case my death will be your freedom.

“It is not a common marriage I propose, Mademoiselle. I would not ask you to link your young life with mine, — it is

but an agreement, a pact between us, that you shall take my name as a shelter from the storm now raging round you, and hide behind it until the clouds lighten and the sun of peace shines out."

"Roy! Roy!" moaned Elsie, softly; and she clasped her hands tightly over her heart, whilst her eyes once more sought the crucifix.

"Your bondage will not be long," said St. Evremond, deprecatingly. "I am no longer young, and even should the Prussian bullets spare me, it is unlikely that I shall survive the suffering and hardships of the siege; and, in case of my death, you will be amply provided for, and enabled to remain in France, an independent woman, for the residue of your life."

"I dare not marry you in the hope that you may die," said Elsie, shudderingly; "that would be but a poor return for all your goodness."

"Do not think of me, Mademoiselle," said St. Evremond, in a deep, tender voice; "think only of yourself. My life is over, yours but just begun; and if you feel that my proposition can in a measure relieve you from your difficulties, do not hesitate for a moment to accept it."

"But — but, if we should both survive the siege," faltered Elsie, "what then — oh, what then? Could you be content with a wife who was but one in name, who had taken advantage of your generosity, and bound you to her side for her own protection from — from her love for another? There, now, you know all. My whole heart is given to one who does not love me — to one who will never wed me — and I have but one desire left in life, which is never, never, never to see him again; and I would take any vow which would shut me out from him forever, save that which commanded me to love another. Ah, that I cannot do."

“Is there no hope?” asked St. Evremond. “Do not deceive me, Mademoiselle, for deception now, may be irreparable ruin in the future.”

“There is none,” replied Elsie, in a tone which brought conviction to St. Evremond’s heart.

“Then hesitate no longer, Mademoiselle,” he exclaimed, “but tell me at once that you will be my wife. I ask nothing of you but to be your guardian and protector, and I swear to you, by Him in whose presence we now are, never to take advantage of the power with which you invest me, or claim authority over any of your actions, but, devoting myself to your interests, to promote your comfort and happiness, even at the cost of my own, until God shall call me from my post.”

He ceased speaking, and listened anxiously for her response; but for a few moments Elsie could say nothing, so overcome was she by the magnanimity of the man beside her.

Mistaking her silence, St. Evremond rose slowly to his feet, saying:

“I see, Mademoiselle, that your case is not so hopeless as you at first pronounced it, and that you cannot make up your mind to put a barrier between yourself and the past, and, no doubt, you are in the right. Consider what I have said, therefore, as unsaid, and I will go at once to Mr. Washburne’s and place you under his protection. *Dieu vous benisse.*” And he placed his hand tenderly in blessing on her head ere he turned to leave her.

Aroused by his words and the touch of his hand, Elsie raised her head and looked up at him, with an earnest, trusting expression in her large eyes.

“Forgive me,” she said, “if I have seemed ungrateful. You have misunderstood my silence. It was not of myself that I was thinking, but of you. I could not bear to accept your

sacrifice, and fetter you for life with a helpless burden ; but if, as you say, you do not shrink from it, and will not expect from me that which I cannot give, then, Monsieur, I accept your generous offer — I will be your wife. And," she continued, rising and approaching the crucifix, "as you have sworn to make my happiness your first consideration, so I now swear to make your honor mine. Though living my life apart from yours, — perchance in another land, — it shall be my constant purpose to preserve, pure and free from blemish, the proud name you give to shelter a poor, friendless girl."

"Mademoiselle, I thank you," said St. Evremond, deeply moved. "Believe me, your trust is not misplaced — you shall never regret this day," and raising her hand respectfully to his lips, he turned and left her, feeling instinctively that she would rather be alone, now that she had pledged her life to him, to reconcile herself to her fate, and as his footsteps died away she threw herself once more upon her knees, and wrestled with her grief.

CHAPTER X.

WHAT THEY THOUGHT OF IT.

"'T is strange, but true ; for truth is always strange —
Stranger than fiction."

I NEVER was so surprised in my life," said Maude.

"It is incomprehensible," replied Maude's mother.

"You might knock me down with a feather," said Master Jack, and the little boys said nothing, being too stupefied to speak.

They were seated around the breakfast-table in a handsome house in Fifth Avenue, and Eleanor Marston, who was visiting them, glanced from one to the other as she entered the room, as much puzzled by their agitated countenances as by their enigmatical words.

“What has happened?” she ventured to ask, at length, seeing that her presence was unnoticed, and then, as they perceived her for the first time, the flood-gates opened and they all spoke at once:

“Married, my dear, actually married,” said Maude.

“Sacrificed,” moaned Mrs. Von Decker; “immolated upon the altar of—”

“A beggarly Frenchman,” shouted Jack; “that is what I cannot understand.”

“Who is ‘married’ and ‘sacrificed on the altar of’ ‘a beggarly Frenchman?’” said Nellie, laughing; “pray be more explicit, good people.”

Seeing that she was still ignorant, and each member of the family being desirous to be the first to impart the wonderful news, they all cried “Elsie!” in a breath, and Eleanor, as much overwhelmed by the information as they could desire, sank speechless into her seat, and mutely regarded the untasted breakfast, as though it could solve the enigma for her. Her thoughts fled quickly to Roy and his probable distress, and with a slight shudder she exclaimed, at length:

“Are you quite sure that this is true? may you not be mistaken?”

“Here is our authority,” said Jack, holding up an open letter; “here is the information in her own handwriting, and over her own signature.”

“What does she say?” said Nellie.

“Not much,” replied Jack, “the missive is short and sweet;

she supposes we will be surprised to hear that she has married a Colonel something or other. She may never see any of us again, but she hopes we will all be happy and prosperous, and she is our 'affectionate daughter and sister, Elsie St. Evremond,' that is the name," continued Jack, reading from the letter.

"St. Evremond!" exclaimed Nellie. "I never heard anything so remarkable. He is old enough to be her father."

"What do you know of him?" they all exclaimed, eager for every scrap of information in regard to this new member of their family, who had entered it so suddenly and unannounced.

"She has often mentioned him in her letters," said Nellie, "but always as an elderly man. Don't you remember, Maude? He is Julie's *chere oncle*."

"True," said Maude; "I had forgotten that circumstance, but it does not make her marriage any the less mysterious."

"And it is so strange that she never mentions her father's name," said Mrs. Von Decker, "nor has he written a line of explanation to me, although I think I might reasonably have expected to be consulted in so grave a matter as my daughter's marriage."

"It is certainly very strange," said Eleanor, musingly, and her thoughts reverted to Roy, whilst a feeling of tender pity for him filled her heart. What would he say when he learned that Elsie had given herself to another — that all his dreams of happiness were forever dissipated? And then she remembered that she was to meet him that evening at a reception, and she trembled lest the duty of breaking the sad news to him should devolve upon herself, and began to search hurriedly for some excuse, by which she might induce her friends to go without her.

But her anxiety was causeless, for even as she thought of him, she heard his voice below, in the hall, and his footstep on the stair.

Her heart beat rapidly. She pressed her hands over it to still its pulsations, and tried to retain her composure; but as he approached, she found herself unequal to the effort of sitting by, unmoved, whilst Maude dealt a death-blow to all his hopes, so, just as he placed his foot on the topmost step, Nellie suddenly stood before him, pale and agitated. She fixed her eyes upon him, with a tender pity beaming from them, which filled the young man with wonder and surprise.

“Be prepared,” she said, softly, inclining slightly towards him, “there is bad news awaiting you yonder. The Paris despatches have arrived.” And then she fled, precipitately, up the stairs, and sought the seclusion of her own room, where she wept bitterly over Roy’s disappointment. As I have before said, there is no accounting for women’s tears.

The young man, on his part, walked boldly forward to meet his fate, and, although he comprehended but in part what Eleanor had said to him, he was on his guard when he entered the breakfast-room, and enabled thereby to perform his part much better, than if the news had come upon him without any preparation.

A momentary fear lest some accident had befallen Elsie, was quickly relieved by Maude’s first words to him.

“Well, Roy,” she said, triumphantly, “I think you need give yourself no further uneasiness in regard to Elsie. I do not think either Jack or yourself will be welcomed, if you undertake a pilgrimage to Paris to bring her home.”

“What has occurred?” asked Roy, endeavoring to be perfectly calm. “Has she become too fond of her studies to be induced to leave them off, even in face of the Prussian needle-guns?”

“Not exactly,” replied Maude; “but she thought it best to have a protector at hand during the French troubles, so she has married the Colonel of one of the French regiments.”

“Not that any immediate danger threatened her,” said Jack, “but, according to Mrs. Toodles’ notions, there *might* be trouble, my dear, and then it would be so handy to have him in the house.”

“Jack!” said Mrs. Von Decker, reprovingly, “how can you speak so lightly of an event which so nearly concerns your sister’s happiness? Believe me, matrimony is too serious a subject to be spoken of laughingly.”

“I agree with you entirely, mother,” said Jack, “and I can safely promise you that after I am married I will never smile again.”

“You had better begin to practise gravity at once, then,” said Maude, “for it will not be an easy science for you to learn.”

“I beg your pardon, but you are mistaken,” said Jack, affably. “The mere consciousness that I was tied for life, to some estimable and irreproachable young woman like yourself, would be sufficient in itself to banish joy forever from my heart.”

This little skirmish was of great service to Roy, inasmuch as it gave him time to recover himself, and in his heart he blessed Eleanor for her few words of warning, as with a “bold front he faced the music” and quietly discussed the strange news.

For a little while he sat with them thus, and then took his leave, as placidly as though no unwelcome intelligence had been given him, so that Maude, who had jealously watched his countenance, felt ashamed of her suspicions, and said to him, in a cordial tone, which had been out of use for some time in her intercourse with her cousin :

“I suppose it would be of no use to ask you to stay with us any longer this morning, as you are on your way to the office ; but we shall see you this evening, shall we not? and then I shall have a great deal to say to you.”

“Oh, certainly, I will be with you this evening,” replied Roy, scarcely heeding what he said in his anxiety to be off; and then, pressing her hand, he hastened away, not daring to trust himself further.

Once more alone he hurried along the street, scarcely conscious of where he was going, but still retaining his outward composure, and returning smilingly the salutations of his friends. His one object was to escape notice, and his chief fear, lest the world should learn his disappointment. His pride revolted at the thought that he might become an object of pity to the unsympathizing crowd, and he mentally resolved that whatever he might suffer, he would give no outward sign.

He was not really suffering then — the blow had been too sudden. As the spring of a tiger on his prey deadens the victim's sensibility, and, stupefied and bewildered, he loses even the sense of fear, so his heart seemed suddenly paralyzed, and he only comprehended vaguely what had occurred. He told himself over and over that Elsie had proved false, but he could not make himself believe it. He thought of the letter he had just seen, signed with her married name, but another letter would recur to his mind, one full of love and trust in him, every word of which was engraven on his heart. Unlike Arthur Leighton, he did not for a moment succumb to fate. He went to his work with undiminished zeal, and passed the day in minute examination of his uncle's affairs. “It is more than ever necessary that the bank account should stand well,” he said to himself; “these foreigners all marry for money, and as long as Elsie's holds out her husband will probably treat her well ”

Towards evening he became restless, and a feverish desire to prove his strength induced him to keep his promise to Maude, and go to the reception, so he dined at his club, and then

dressing himself with extra care, presented himself at the house just as the Fifth Avenue party were ready to start.

"I thought I would go with you," he said, as he helped them into the carriage; "it is so difficult to find any one at a crowded reception," and then he took the vacant seat beside Eleanor, and the carriage rolled away.

Maude was in a state of triumphant delight. Elsie was married, Roy was free, and he had borne the news so well that she was quite convinced of the fact that Annida was right when she said that he cared for her, Maude, and was but trifling with Elsie. She talked on unremittingly during the drive, so that no one noticed Eleanor's taciturnity save Roy himself, who caught a glimpse now and then of her scared, white face, and divined her thoughts in regard to him.

"Why is she so troubled?" he asked himself, and then the scene upon the rocks came into his mind, and he once more wondered whether it was possible that this girl loved him. Wounded, sore, his pride touched to the quick, the thought that this might be so gave him pleasure, and he inwardly determined that before the night was over he would prove whether he was right or wrong in his supposition.

The rooms were crowded, and, after they had spoken to the hostess, our party soon lost sight of one another, so that it was some time before Roy again encountered Eleanor; but the interval, which was filled by curious interrogatories in regard to Elsie's marriage, only confirmed his resolution to come to an understanding with her, and he determined to seek a private interview at the first opportunity.

After a long and persistent search, he found her in the music-room, with Arthur Leighton; and scarcely returning the young man's salutation, he hurriedly asked her to accompany him to the conservatory.

“It is so hot here,” he said, “and the noise is deafening.”

Eleanor hesitated a moment, and looked at Arthur. She had become so accustomed to consult his wishes, during his ill health, that she never thought of acting in opposition to them now, although he had entirely recovered, both in body and mind.

“It is warm,” he said, in answer to her look, “and you are very pale. What a brute I am to have kept you here so long. Go with Mr. Weston, by all means ; it will be pleasant in the conservatory.”

So she took Roy's arm, and suffered herself to be led away, inwardly wondering why he had sought her, and if he would mention Elsie. She would have liked to have told him how she sympathized in his trouble, but a feeling, which she did not understand herself, kept her lips sealed, and they walked along in uncomfortable silence.

“What is the matter?” he said, at length, with a forced laugh, as, having reached a retired portion of the conservatory, they paused to admire a beautiful flower. “What makes you so very quiet? and why do you look so scared?”

Eleanor blushed and looked down.

“There is nothing the matter,” she said ; “I am always quiet ;” but her lips quivered as she spoke, and she dared not raise her eyes.

Roy regarded her curiously for a few moments, and then he said :

“Your education is but half complete, Miss Marston, you cannot lie without blushing. There *is* something the matter, and, as you will not tell me what it is, I will tell you. You think that I am in trouble, and your true womanly nature prompts you to offer me your sympathy, but, at the same time, an innate delicacy warns you against opening the sub-

ject, lest you wound where you would comfort. Am I not right?"

"I promised you my friendship," said Nellie, in a low voice, "and that includes my sympathy. I am very sorry for you," and then she raised her eyes to his.

"I know it," said Roy, as much moved by the look as the words; "more sorry for me, perhaps, than I am for myself. With a friend like you, no man's life could be barren."

There was a moment's pause, and then he continued:

"You ought to know me well, Miss Marston, for I have spoken more frankly to you of my inmost heart than to any other woman in the world, and yet you do not understand me. My character is naturally reserved and proud, and I have never yet been any woman's slave. That I loved my cousin devotedly, you already know, but there was nothing submissive in that love. I met her on equal terms (or so I thought), and rendered love for love. What changed her feelings towards me, or why, without a word of warning, she married another, I am as ignorant as yourself; but the fact that she has done so is beyond a doubt, and no other evidence is needed to prove that she was unworthy of the love I lavished on her."

"Not 'unworthy,'" said Nellie, hastily; "you must not judge her unheard. I am quite sure that if we knew all, we should see that she could not have acted otherwise."

"Still true to your friend!" said Roy, with a sad smile. "Well, although I do not agree, I will not argue the matter with you. Keep your faith as long as you can," and he heaved a deep sigh.

"And keep yours, also," said Nellie, gently divining, from what he said, that the hardest thing for him to bear was the fact that Elsie no longer loved him.

"That is impossible," said Roy, sternly; "you are arguing

against your friend. Elsie would never have married another, loving me. No, my faith in her is dead, and with my faith my love."

He said this in so assured a tone, that although Nellie was beyond measure surprised, she was forced to believe that he spoke the truth, and he — God help him — thought so also at the time.

He watched the sudden glow come over her face with deep interest, and when her eyes brightened with irrepressible delight, he felt pleased himself, and smiled back at her, as though his heart had never felt a wound.

"I am so glad," she said, impulsively. "I feared so much the effect of this blow upon you, but I see I did not know your strength of character."

"You will understand me better in the future, I hope," said Roy, "and remember this, that there is not much I cannot bear — with you to help me."

The last words were spoken very low, and Eleanor answered in the same subdued tone, but very deeply agitated.

"I did not know that I was of so much consequence."

"Nor I, until to-night," replied Roy, "but the discovery once made I trust we shall neither of us forget it. Will you try to remember?"

"Good gracious, here they are!" exclaimed a voice beside them before Nellie had time to answer, and Maude made her appearance, saying: "Do you know what the hour is, my friends? or are you going to spend the night here?"

CHAPTER XI.

LORD OF HIMSELF.

“And to his eye
There was but one beloved face on earth,
And it was shining on him.”

IT will be seen by the previous chapter that Elsie had not faltered in her purpose, but had faithfully fulfilled her engagement with St. Evremond, when he came to claim her hand, which was much sooner than either of them expected, for, the Colonel being suddenly called upon to head a sortie of the besieged, and comprehending with the experience of an old soldier how unlikely it was that he would ever return, deemed it unwise to postpone the ceremony which was to invest Elsie with all the honors and titles pertaining to the wife of Louis Eugene St. Evremond, Baron de Cavaignac, and Colonel of the —— regiment of the line. They were, therefore, married in haste one bright day in the convent chapel, just before the Colonel joined his troops, and in one brief half-hour little Elsie Von Decker became Madame la Baronne de Cavaignac, sealing with her signature the first chapter of her life, and bidding an eternal farewell to the old, careless, happy Beechcroft days.

Immediately after the ceremony they repaired to the *salon*, where the sisters had prepared a simple refecton of ices, cakes, and wine, to do honor to the occasion, and, having drunk to his bride's health, standing, the Colonel prepared to take his leave, as his orders admitted of no delay.

The moment was a solemn one. All present were affected, and Elsie's hand trembled with emotion as she placed it in that

of her husband and turned to receive his first and perhaps his last commands.

“Madame la Baronne,” he said, “I have the honor to salute you,” and bending over her hand he kissed it; then, standing erect, he fixed his eyes upon her, saying, with deep solemnity: “May the God of heaven, whom we both adore, bless and keep you in my absence, and if it be His will that we never meet again, may He prosper you in all your future life, and give you that happiness which, just now, you have so sadly missed.”

There was a moment's pause, and then taking a packet from his breast-pocket, he gave it to her, saying: “Here you will find a copy of my last will and testament, together with all the papers necessary to establish your rights after my death. Preserve them carefully, for on them may depend not only your prosperity, but your personal safety. I have left you a life interest in my property, and unlimited control of my yearly income, together with the guardianship of my little son, until he shall be of age, or you shall marry again, in which case he will return to his aunt, with whom he now is. Is this arrangement satisfactory?”

He paused for a reply, and Elsie essayed to speak, but to her impressionable nature there was something at once so grand and melancholy in this calm preparation for death, that she was completely overcome by it.

“Monsieur,” she began, struggling to control her feelings, but the word ended in a sob, and she could only convulsively press his hand.

“Tears, Mademoiselle?” exclaimed St. Evremond, falling back instinctively upon the name to which she was most accustomed. “But why then do you cry, my child? have I not done everything to please you? and my death—will it not be freedom? Oh, you have no cause to weep.”

“Do you think, then, that I am heartless?” exclaimed Elsie, through her sobs. “Do you suppose that I can listen unmoved to all that you have done for me, and feel no pang that there is no way in which I can show my gratitude? Ah, Monsieur, I was both wicked and selfish when I consented to this marriage, and I hate myself for what I have done. Give me an opportunity to repay your kindness, I entreat you—do not leave me thus. Let me be at your side in trouble, and prove by my devotion that I am not the cold, ungrateful creature that I seem.”

She stretched out her hands towards him, and swayed to and fro from excessive agitation, seeming so incapable of supporting herself, that St. Evremond came a step nearer and passed his arm around her waist.

The sisters stole silently from the room, leaving the husband and wife alone together, and Elsie drooping her head upon his arm, wept unrestrainedly.

St. Evremond uttered not a word, but looked down with moist eyes upon the soft coils of golden hair, and the mobile, girlish figure, clad in its black draperies — so near him, and yet, alas! so far away. All the man within him cried out, “Draw her closer to you; rest her head upon your heart. Is she not yours to do with as you will? where should a wife find comfort save in her husband’s arms?” But honor said sternly, “Would you break your promise in the first hour of trial, and take advantage of this poor child’s gratitude to betray her trust?” and he stood resolute, although his heart beat quickly and his strong frame quivered with emotion, as he realized what he had only half suspected when he married — that he loved his wife.

The struggle with himself was fierce. Never in this man’s life had happiness come so near him, and now to let the chance

of it pass him by—to be bound by his word, to raise no detaining hand—oh, it was hard! Why was there such a gap of years between them? Why had destiny not placed this girl at his side in early life, when he might have won her heart? or, failing that, why had she come now, when the heyday of his youth was over, to mock him with the knowledge that he had never truly loved before?

As there are seeds of choicest flowers buried in the bosom of mother earth so deep that neither the rain nor the sun can bring their beauty to the surface, so in the heart of man, oftentimes, love lies dormant through a lapse of years. He passes through life like his fellows—eating, drinking, working, striving—he even marries and believes that he is happy, but the iron plough of circumstances suddenly overturns the soil, and in a moment there springs to life and light a rare, choice blossom, compared with which the past loves of his life are as wall-flowers and the deadly nightshade. Perhaps this blossom blooms unseen—perhaps this love never finds words save in dreams—yet the man is a better, purer man for it, learning to love his Maker through His works, for all true love ennobles.

Such was the love which now dawned for St. Evremond, and whilst it plead for expression, bade him be true to his word though it broke his heart.

“My child,” he said, gravely, “you must not afflict yourself for so trifling a cause; you have no reason for reproach. Such marriages as ours take place every day in France. *Mariages de convenance* they are termed, and few have the good reasons for them that have influenced us. You owe me nothing—I have conferred no favor on you in lending you my name, and if I have bequeathed my fortune to you, have I not also left you the most sacred charge of rearing and educating my little

son? Believe me, that in discharging faithfully this trust, you will more than repay all that I may have done for you.

“Oh, if you but knew,” he continued, “how often my soul has sunk within me as the bullets whistled round me, and I thought of that poor child — my only tie to life, it is true, and yet one that paralyzed my arm, and made me a coward in the face of danger; but I shall go into the field to-day with a brave heart, for I know that in you my orphan boy will find a friend.

“I give him to you, *mon amie*, and with him all my brightest dreams of life. Teach him to be an honest and an upright man, to scorn deceit, to hate a lie, to live for his country, not himself, and make him wiser, better, happier than his father has ever been. Adieu!”

He would have released himself and gone at once, feeling that every moment his danger became greater, but Elsie clung to his arm, and bedewed the hand she held with tears.

“Not yet,” she said, excitedly. “Oh, give me a few more moments. I want to tell you how deeply I appreciate your trust, and how earnestly I will strive to do always that which I think you would wish. I want to say — I want you to know — oh, why can I not find words before you go?”

“I need no words,” said St. Evremond, gently. “I know just what you would say, so do not try to speak; but — lift your head, *mon amie* — let me look at you once more, that, when my hour of trial is at hand, I may recall the image of my — my boy's mother, and take comfort.”

Slowly she raised her head as he desired, and looking, he saw a tender, wistful, childish grief depicted on her fair face, that almost unmanned him. His lips quivered, his hand trembled, his whole soul rushed into his eyes, and then he wrenched himself from her and strode away, not daring to cast a look behind.

That evening they learned the troops had moved, and the

good sisters gathered in the chapel to pray for their safe return. Thither, also, went Elsie, and joined in their prayers, for it was all that she could do now for her friend and benefactor; and the thought that she was to be the gainer by her husband's death oppressed her like a nightmare, and added fervor to her devotions.

Long she wept and prayed that night, and communed with her own heart, but when, at last, she laid her head upon her pillow, she forgot her trouble in bright dreams, wherein she ministered to St. Evremond, and gave a double measure of affection to his little son.

CHAPTER XII.

A DANGEROUS RIDE.

“Our acts our angels are, or good or ill,
Our fatal shadows that walk by us still.”

IT must not be supposed that Elsie had neglected to inform her mother of her father's sad fate. She did not write to her immediately, it is true, fearing lest Jack should endeavor to reach her, should he know she was alone; but on her engagement to Colonel St. Evremond, she had at once written a full and explicit account of all that had befallen her, so that the note announcing her marriage had been but a short, and, as we have seen, unsatisfactory one; the first letter never having reached its destination, and her family being in ignorance as to her desolate condition.

There was one who could have given them some information,

had she so desired, and this was Annida Strathmore, who still preserved the stolen letter, the loss of which had parted two loving hearts forever, and smiled in triumph when she heard how successful her scheme had proved. Her revenge was complete—even more than she had asked was granted—for the girl had forged for herself enduring chains, and Annida knew full well the suffering which lay before her, wedded to one man with her heart given to another.

But the knowledge of her victory over the “soft white kitten” did not give the “tigress” the gratification she had expected. After all, it was but a poor compensation for what she was suffering to know that her enemy suffered also, and her life, despite its splendor, was becoming unbearable. To the outer world she appeared to be one of fortune’s favorites, and a worthy object for the ire of the gods, so smoothly did her life flow on; but she knew that she had thrown the ring of Poly-crates in the water, when she lost Arthur Leighton.

Many efforts had she made since her marriage to win him back to her side once more, and though always meeting with repulsion, she kept on hoping that some day he would relent and take pity on her lonely, loveless life; but she did not know how changed he was from the Arthur of “Auld lang syne,” or her hopes would at once have perished. There was a time when she could have made him see her actions through her eyes, and blinded him to all else save her beauty—a time when he would have made no effort to release himself from the thralldom in which she held him, with all his senses stupefied, drunk with that poisonous wine of life, a sensuous and degrading passion; but the blow which had fallen upon him, with such crushing violence, had brought this blessing with it, that it aroused him from this sleep of death, and restored his manhood to him.

He could not hate this woman, although she had so deeply

wronged him, and the old habit of making excuses for her still lingered with him; but he had learned how little outward perfection was worth, and abhorred himself for having been so long her slave, despite the many warnings her ambitious pride had given him.

Arthur was by nature a poet, and possessed of a poet's susceptibility to all that is beautiful in nature, and it was owing to this that Annida had gained her ascendancy over him; but, although capable of great things, during the period of his love for her, he had written nothing of any worth, passing his days in an idle inertia, working only when it was absolutely necessary, and then so carelessly as to give no idea of his ability.

Now, however, his day-star dawned, and in Eleanor Marston he found the friend and sympathizer, without which he would never have risen from the gloomy shadows Annida had cast around him, nor the world have known the wealth of poetry in his heart, which had been overlaid by a thick crust of selfish indulgence, for so many years.

To his over-weary spirit, this calm, placid friendship was an inestimable boon, and Nellie became the loadstone of his existence. He considered her the embodiment of all womanly purity and virtue, and enshrined her in his heart, as a good Catholic does his patron saint, worshipping her at a distance, with a poet's adoration, and drawing from her inspiration for his sweetest songs.

Annida watched this growing intimacy in alarm. Whilst the throne was empty in Arthur's heart, there was still a chance that she might regain her old position; but should this new friend usurp it, then, indeed, her reign was forever ended. As her fears gained ground, she became more and more restless, flying from one excitement to another, in the vague hope of crushing her anxiety, until poor Leonard, who followed in her

wake, was forced to plead for mercy and a short interim of rest at Strathmore Park, where they had scarcely been since their marriage; but Annida would not leave the field in the enemy's possession, and stood her ground until Nellie Marston returned home.

Nellie meanwhile, wholly unconscious of the trouble she was causing, led a very happy life; and had Annida only possessed the power of reading her heart, her fears would soon have been set at rest, for she would have seen that Roy, not Arthur, was the object of her thoughts.

From the evening of the reception, Roy had determined to ask Eleanor to be his wife, but the opportunity seemed never to occur. Whilst in New York, she was constantly in society, and at home Arthur never left her side, and, as the days passed, a dread lest Elsie should return and triumph in the fact that she had broken his heart, rendered Roy positively desperate.

"She shall find me married, also," he said; "but, confound it all, how can I offer myself, when that fellow forever monopolizes Nellie?" Then a brilliant idea occurred to him, and he hastened to put it into execution.

"Mr. Weston's compliments, Miss, and will you go driving with him?" said the servant, entering a little room opening on the garden, wherein Nellie and Arthur were established for the afternoon, the one sewing industriously, the other reading aloud fragments from a well-worn volume of Shelley.

Nellie's face flushed with pleasure. "What shall I say?" she asked, looking at Arthur; "do you think I might go? Papa and mamma are both out — but perhaps you want me here?"

"Perhaps?" said Arthur, with a smile. "I do not think there is much doubt about it; I always want you everywhere."

"Then I had better send word that I cannot go," said Nellie, endeavoring to conquer the feeling of regret which passed over her.

“On the contrary, you will send word that you are coming down at once,” said Arthur, “if only to prove that you can be humanly selfish now and then. Miss Marston will be very happy to go driving, Thomas,” he said, addressing the man, who left the room at once with the message.

“Now, run and put on your hat,” he said to Nellie, “or Mr. Weston, horses, carriage, and all, will be in the house to see what keeps you.”

“But what will you do by yourself all the afternoon?” inquired Nellie, looking wistfully at him.

“Oh, I shall do very well,” said Arthur; “I must get accustomed to be alone, for something tells me that I shall not have you very long, to pet and spoil me as you have been doing.”

“What do you mean?” asked Nellie, in confusion.

“Nothing, nothing; there! run away,” said Arthur, “but take my advice, and don't trust yourself too near a church with that young gentleman in the wagon.”

Nellie laughed and blushed and ran away, and Arthur looked after her with a sigh, saying:

“I am an uncommonly selfish brute. Why can I not feel pleased that she is going to enjoy herself?”

Meanwhile Roy sat in the wagon, trying to determine with what words he should woo his companion, and rather regretting that he had not given the subject more attention before he left home.

“Jack asked me to exercise his horses,” he said, as Eleanor seated herself beside him, “and I thought perhaps you would like to go out this lovely afternoon.”

“It was very kind of you to think of me,” replied Nellie; “I shall enjoy a drive very much,” and then they talked about the weather, the early spring, the birds, the foliage, in fact on every subject but the one Roy most wished to introduce.

Once or twice he ventured on a piece of sentiment, but before he was able to follow it up, the horses expressed their disapprobation by whisking their tails over the reins, and then indicating a wish to kick them off again; or by endeavoring to race an animal which passed them, or affecting to be very much afraid of their own shadows, so that Roy's time was occupied in the struggle for mastery. Nevertheless he did succeed at length in bringing the horses down to a walk, and then adroitly introduced the subject of matrimony generally, and the animals, seeming to give up the contest, went along sadly, as though they had lost their self-respect in allowing themselves to be forced to listen to such nonsense, and were now as innocent of mischief as newly-born lambs.

"This is my chance," said Roy to himself; "if I do not offer myself now, I shall never do so," and then he continued his conversation.

"I am not a wealthy man, Miss Marston," he said, "but I do not think riches the highest aim of life. I cannot understand how a human being can convert himself into a mere money-making machine, and spend the best years of his life in laying up wealth for another to squander after he is gone, and passing his youth alone, because he is not worth a hundred thousand dollars. Some men suppose that they could not marry, if they would, on less than this; but I think that if a woman truly loves a man she would far rather share his poverty than live in plenty, but apart from him."

"I am quite sure of it," replied Nellie; "but there are very few men, Mr. Weston, who understand a woman's heart."

"That is in a measure owing to the fact that there are many women not worth studying," replied Roy. "There are but few true women, Miss Nellie, but there are many bearing the

semblance of most beautiful womanhood, who hold themselves only for the highest bidder."

"I can scarcely believe that," said Nellie, gravely. "Surely one cannot buy love."

"Not exactly," replied Roy; "but the semblance of it may be, and is, bought every day. I am often tempted to give thanks for my poverty, when I see one of these fair devils snaring some unlucky bird with golden feathers. I think I should cut my throat after marriage, if I found that my wife did not love me."

"I can think of nothing more heart-rending than to find that one has been deceived in such a way," said Nellie, "especially after the marriage vows are spoken, and there is no chance of retreat; but no amount of misery justifies suicide, Mr. Weston."

She spoke so earnestly, that Roy looked up quickly at her, a vague remembrance of a curious story which he had heard regarding her, suddenly crossing his mind.

"Will you tell me," he said, after a pause, "if it is true that Arthur Leighton attempted to put an end to his life just before his severe illness?"

Nellie looked confused. "You had better ask him," she said, at length. "Mr. Leighton's secrets are his own."

"He shares them with you, however, does he not?" said Roy.

"But that is not sharing them with you," she replied, laughing.

"No, unfortunately not," replied Roy, with a sigh. "I only wish it were. It would make me very happy to think that your confidence in me was so great, you would talk to me as to a second self."

This was a great step on the road to matrimony, and Roy began to have hopes that after all he should succeed in making

an offer of his hand and heart before the ride was over, and the near-horse, despite the depression of his spirits, negligently switched his tail over the rein without attracting any attention.

“I have no secrets of my own,” replied Nellie, “and under no possible circumstances would I betray another’s, even to my second self,” she added, laughing.

“But would you tell me all about yourself?” asked Roy. “Do you trust me sufficiently to call upon me should you be in any trouble?”

“I trust you, certainly,” replied Nellie; “but I should never think of asking your assistance, for fear of giving trouble.”

“And do you think that anything which I could do for you would give me trouble?” inquired Roy. “Don’t you know that it would be a pleasure? I would risk my life, if it would do you any good.”

He stooped his head, so that he might see the color rising in her cheek and the soft light stealing into her large, dark eyes; but when she gave him, in return, a glance full of innocent, trusting love, his heart smote him for taking so much and giving so little.

Now the off-horse switched his tail over the other rein. The conversation was getting unpleasantly sentimental, and, despite his wish to keep the peace, he must express his disapproval; his driver, however, did not seem to care, but continued his conversation, without regard to the “signs of the times.”

“I can scarcely believe that you think so much of me,” said Nellie, softly.

“But you will believe it, if I tell you so?” said Roy. “If I tell you that you are more to me than all the world—that—”

The horses laid their ears upon their necks, “So much the better to hear you, my dear,” and—the dash-board became a thing of the past.

Recalled thus unpleasantly to his duties as charioteer, Roy did his best to control the unruly animals ; but they defied his skill, and darted off at full speed, as though possessed, dragging after them the shell of a wagon, which threatened to go to pieces every moment.

“Are you frightened?” asked Roy of his companion, as they dashed along.

“No,” she whispered, “not whilst I am with you.” There was not much in the words, but the tone went to Roy’s heart, and he felt that his suit had been accepted.

“Pass your hand through my arm, darling,” he said, when he spoke again ; “it will serve to steady us both, and then if we meet death we shall be together.”

She did as he desired, and the mad race continued until they were within sight of home. The church at the top of the hill next came to view, and then Roy said :

“Brace yourself firmly against me ; I must pull the horses into this fence, for we can never reach the foot of the hill in safety—the wagon will go to pieces. Put your arms around me. Remember, you hold me as well as yourself.”

She did exactly as he told her, unquestioningly, and put both arms about him, in the vague hope of being of some use. Then came a crash, as the horses struck the fence—a sensation of being thrown violently into the air, and then a dull unconsciousness, from which she aroused to find herself within the church-porch, with Roy sprinkling water on her face.

“At last !” he said, as she looked up at him. “I began to fear that those dear eyes would never open again. Where are you hurt, darling ?”

“I do not think I am hurt at all,” replied Nellie, making an effort to rise ; “only a little bruised and frightened ; and you—are you uninjured ?”

“Yes, I am all right,” replied Roy. “I sprang out of the wagon as it struck, and tried to take you with me; but you flew over my head like a bird, before I had a chance to seize you. It is fortunate that you fell upon the soft turf,” and, folding his arms around her, he drew her head upon his shoulder. “My first effort at protection has been very poor,” he continued, with a smile, “but I shall make amends for it by the future. You may trust your life to me without fear, my darling.”

“Where did you go,” asked Arthur, when Eleanor at last returned home.

“To church,” said Nellie, laughing and blushing.

“Ah! you would not listen to my advice,” replied Arthur. “Well, ‘a wilfu woman maun hae her ain way.’ May I congratulate you?”

“I suppose so,” said Nellie, “if you are not vexed with me.”

“Well, old fellow, you are engaged to be married at last,” said Roy, to himself, as he walked slowly home that evening. “And — by Jove! you did n’t offer yourself after all.”

CHAPTER XIII.

MADAME LA BARONNE.

“Oh, woman! in our hours of ease,
Uncertain, coy, and hard to please;
And variable as the shade
By the light quivering aspen made;
When pain and anguish wring the brow,
A ministering angel thou!”

FOR weeks Elsie heard nothing of her husband. The newspapers announced the sortie as having been successful, but its success was not made apparent by any advantage accruing to the besieged, and the names and number of the killed and wounded were carefully suppressed.

Elsie's anxiety was great; she had promised herself to repay St. Evremond's kindness by a life's devotion, and now the fear lest this was no longer to be hoped for, caused her inexpressible pain, so that when at last one of the visiting sisters brought tidings that some one answering his description was lying seriously wounded in the Palais de l'Industrie, she felt as though a reprieve had been granted. He might die still, it was true, but not until she had poured forth her gratitude and ministered to his needs.

“Sister Antonia,” she said, rising suddenly during the good sister's story, “will you lend me your costume for a little while?”

“Certainly,” said she, in surprise. “It is, however, but a shabby garment for Madame la Baronne.”

“None other would suit me as well, however,” replied Elsie,

with a sad smile, "and see, I will give you the dress I have on in place of it."

The exchange was quickly made, and Elsie stood converted into as dainty and picturesque a *sœur de charité* as one could well imagine.

"But it becomes you wonderfully!" exclaimed the Frenchwoman, in raptures over her work, "and Madame will not wear the veil."

"The veil is the most important point," replied Elsie, shrouding herself in it. "Now, sister, be quick and tell me how I shall find Monsieur le Baron."

"Madame would go to him?" said the sister, in surprise; "but it is not at all a nice place, this Palais de l'Industrie — the dead and living are packed close like the sardines in a box, and the ventilation is so bad — ugh, Madame will fall ill."

"Then it must be very bad for Monsieur to be there," replied Elsie; "tell me quickly how to get to him, that I may have him removed."

"*Mais bien!* that is well," said the sister; "at the Hotel Grande it is delightful, fine rooms, good ventilation, and — *quelque chose pour* — eat. We will take him there, *n'est ce pas?*"

On Elsie's arrival at the Palais, she found the sister's account fully realized, and shuddered to think how long her husband had lain there, alone and uncared for. She quickly found her way to the miserable pallet on which he lay, and tears filled her eyes as she looked upon him, so changed was he from when she had last seen him.

The physician who had escorted her, now looked inquiringly at the beautiful face the removal of the veil revealed, so unlike the ordinary hospital nurses. "You are then a relative of Monsieur's?" he asked. "We have been unable to discover who he was, as he has not been conscious since he was brought here."

“Monsieur is my husband,” said Elsie, controlling her emotion with difficulty, “and as soon as it is possible I would have him removed to more comfortable quarters.”

“Monsieur cannot go now,” said the Frenchman, with an expressive shrug. “Serious wounds and long exposure have done their work, and the fever is still very high.”

“Then I will remain here with him,” said Elsie, laying aside her bonnet with a determined air, and taking her place beside him.

The days passed, he grew no worse, and still he did not improve; but Elsie nursed him assiduously, leaving his side only when he slept to take a little recreation. His lethargy passed away, but he was still delirious, and knew nothing of what went on around him, talking ever of his little son, and all his future plans for him.

Meanwhile, Elsie received letters from home. They had only just heard there of Mr. Von Decker's death, and their grief was excessive. Their sympathy did Elsie good, and for the first time she felt a yearning to return to America, and breathe her sorrows into her mother's ear. But what was this postscript, which she had overlooked on first reading the letter? She looked again and read:

“Roy and Eleanor Marston were married in St. Thomas' Church yesterday afternoon. They send warmest love and sympathy through me, and Nellie says that she will write to you at once.”

Roy and Eleanor Marston! Elsie was struck dumb with amazement. Maude had written the letter, and yet she spoke of this marriage carelessly, as though it were an ordinary event. What did it all mean? Was it possible that she had been deceived, and Roy after all had not loved Maude? Married, and to Nellie! it was incredible. Why had he acted thus? He

could not have loved her, they were so unlike, and Nellie had confessed she was afraid of him. Ah, could it be that he still loved herself, and in his disappointment at her marriage had turned for consolation to her friend? Had she, by her own rash act, raised the barrier between them? A tide of misery swept over her soul as this idea suggested itself to her mind, and she dared not dwell upon it.

“It does not matter now,” she said to herself, “however this has come about, my future life is settled. Here is my duty whilst my husband lives, and after he is gone, I have his dying charge, his little son.” And at his bedside, upon her knees, she renewed her vows, sealing them with a tender kiss upon the thin white hand, lying so still upon the coverlet.

He stirred as she raised her head, and looking up, she met a glance of recognition.

“You here, my child?” he murmured, and, springing to her feet in glad surprise, Elsie hastened to summon the physician.

“Ah! yes, he is doing well,” said this gentleman, when he appeared; “keep up a good heart, Monsieur, and we will soon be able to remove you to better quarters. You are very weak still,” he continued, “but you must know that you have been very ill—so ill, indeed, that but for the tender care of this good nurse, I doubt if we could have saved your life.”

“You saved my life?” said St. Evremond, feebly, after the doctor had left them. “Ah! *mon enfant*, may you never live to repent it.”

Shortly after this he recovered sufficiently to be removed, and was taken to the convent, where he remained, still an invalid, until the siege was over, tended and cared for by the little community of which his wife had so long been an honorary member.

Now that she knew that Roy had not married Maude, Elsie's longing to return home was not to be suppressed; and when at last peace was declared, and the Colonel, disgusted with his countrymen, expressed his willingness to emigrate with her, her heart seemed overflowing with gladness.

Hastily writing home to the effect that she would soon be on her way thither, Elsie devoted herself to preparations for the journey, whilst the Colonel set his affairs in order, and made arrangements for his boy to meet them on the steamer.

Everything went on prosperously. The Colonel, although still far from well, seemed to improve in anticipation of leaving the great city, once his pride, but now so associated with distress and mortification that he turned his back upon it without regret.

It was a bright, beautiful day when they went on board the steamer, and Elsie looked eagerly around for her new son. It was difficult, however, to recognize even the features of a friend in the crowd upon the vessel, and much more so to pick out, from among a dozen children, one whom she knew only by description.

As she stood considering, beside a group of little ones, a clear, childish treble exclaimed, suddenly: "But I am here, my own papa, here with my dear Jeanette," and the next moment a handsome little fellow had sprung into her husband's arms, and was being fondly pressed to his heart.

A little while after, when they were seated in the cabin together, Elsie had an opportunity of inspecting her future charge. He was more than merely handsome, although he was that also, but beyond his regular features, sparkling eye, and curly, waving hair, there was a certain princely air, which became him well, and an assured, bold manner, which denoted that he had been taught early a lesson of self-dependence.

“Lorraine,” said his father, addressing him, “I have brought you a companion. Do you see this young lady? She is going to live with us and make you very happy. Go give her a kiss, my boy, and thank her for her kindness.”

“I will kiss her,” said the boy; “but why should I thank her? I did not ask her to live with us, and she has done nothing for me.” And he looked intently at his step-mother.

“But she will do a great deal for you,” replied his father. “I told you that she would make you very happy.”

Lorraine stood irresolute for a moment, and then advancing to Elsie’s side, held up his mouth for a kiss.

“I will kiss you now,” he said, “and when you have made me very happy, I will thank you.”

“That will be best,” said Elsie, laughing heartily. “You are an honest, straightforward little boy, and I shall love you very dearly.”

“Oh, every one does that,” said the young prince. “I had rather you amused me. Do you know any stories? and what’s your name?”

“I know a great many beautiful stories,” replied Elsie; and then she paused and looked timidly at the Colonel for an answer to the second question.

“And her name is Elsie,” said his father, “but you may call her mamma, if you wish.”

“No,” said the boy, in a decided tone, “I will call her Elsie. My mamma is in heaven,” he continued, looking up, “and I do not want another.”

A look of pain crossed St. Evremond’s face, and he turned quickly away to hide it.

“Elsie is much the prettier name,” said Elsie, “and you shall be my little brother, and call me what you will.”

BOOK FOURTH.

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CHAPTER I.

A RETURN TO THE NEST.

“Home again! home again!
From a foreign shore;
And, oh! it fills my heart with joy
To see my friends once more.”

WHAT time will they arrive?” inquired Roberta Stevenson of Jack Von Decker, as they stood together upon the terrace at Beechcroft, and gazed along the river-road to see if any carriage were in sight.

“They will come by the afternoon boat, if they come at all,” replied Jack; “but they may not be here before to-morrow. Elsie writes that the Colonel has not borne the voyage as well as they hoped he would, and they may be obliged to remain in New York for a time, until he has recruited his health. She says he is at present unable to bear any further fatigue or excitement.”

“I should not think that a trip over in the ferry-boat could be termed either fatiguing or exciting,” said Bob, laughing. “He must be one of those interesting creatures who are possessed of a ‘highly-strung nervous organization.’”

“It is not the effect of the boat that she fears,” said Jack; “it is his introduction to his august brother-in-law that causes her anxiety. I wish I had her note about me; it would make you laugh to see how many cautions she has given me in regard

to my behavior. I believe she is half afraid lest I frighten her little Frenchman to death."

"I am not at all surprised," said Bob. "If I had a little Frenchman, I should always put him in my pocket whenever you approached."

"If you ever dare to have a little Frenchman," said Jack, threateningly, "put him in an 'eating-proof safe,' or I'll devour him alive, without pepper or salt."

"Alas!—alas!" cried Bob, "I weep for my prospective lord, but I shall have to put on mourning for you both, I fear, for you never could digest a Frenchman—he would certainly *disagree* with you."

"I might swallow a little 'French polish' first," said Jack, "and even if that did n't answer, what's an attack of indigestion in comparison with the happiness of a friend? I should die content in the knowledge that I had saved you from a life-long misery."

"There is the boat," cried Bob; "raise your glasses quickly, Jack, and see if Elsie is on board."

"Number one, is a seedy old gentleman with a gold-headed cane," said Jack, watching the landing of the passengers; "number two, a little darkey; number three, a cow—well, none of those are Elsie, I hope, although one never knows to what extent one's nearest and dearest may be metamorphosed by a sojourn in Paris."

"Stop your nonsense," exclaimed Bob, "and look at that carriage just landing. You don't suppose they would bring a sick man over on foot."

"Ah, true," said Jack, "there is a carriage, and on the front seat is a fanciful looking female with a little boy. On the back—ah! yes, there is Elsie, bless her pretty face, with a bundle beside her, which must, I presume, be what she calls

her husband. There's a gorgeous-looking creature beside the driver, but I suppose he is the valet."

"And it is really Elsie?" said Bob; "dear child, I am so glad she is at home again. I will run away now, Jack, lest my presence agitate the Colonel; but you will come for me, will you not, when Elsie is ready to receive me?"

"Yes, yes, I'll come for you," said Jack, "but it may not be for a week or more; it will take a long while to make a man out of that bundle of clothes she has beside her."

"Let us hope for the best," said Bob, with a merry laugh, as she ran away.

The trees were as green in Beechcroft Avenue as when Elsie went away, and as the horses turned into it, and she caught a glimpse of the old house, with her mother, brothers, and sister standing at the door to receive her, she scarcely knew whether to rejoice or weep. It was comforting to be among them all once more, and when she felt her mother's arms about her, she laughed for joy, but a moment after the tears were rolling down her cheeks, as she missed the dearest face of all, and realized that never more could she receive her father's greeting.

"Have I kissed you all?" she said, at last, looking brightly round her. "Mother, Maude, Alfred, Edwin — but where is Jack?"

Wonder of wonders, Jack was mercifully extricating "the Frenchman" from his wraps, and assisting him to alight from the carriage.

"*Merci! merci!*" said St. Evremond, as, having reached *terra firma*, he accepted his brother-in-law's arm to support him into the house; "it gives me pain to be so troublesome, but I have been very ill. I would have waited for a day or two to recruit before presenting myself, but Madame was impatient

to behold you all, and would not let me remain in the hotel without her."

"I am very glad that you came on at once," said Mrs. Von Decker, advancing to meet her son-in-law with a pleasant smile; "you will recover much more rapidly, I feel assured."

She put out her hand to him as she spoke, and the Colonel's gallantry overbalanced his strength, for, quitting Jack's arm to respond to her cordial greeting, he staggered and fell fainting to the ground.

"Alphonse!" cried Elsie, in alarm, and in a moment the valet was at his side.

It was nothing, he assured her, only a passing weakness; but if the young gentleman would assist, it would be better to carry Monsieur le Baron at once to his room.

This suggestion was at once put into execution, and Elsie, after seeing Master Lorraine led away by her little brother to inspect the curiosities of the well-remembered library, followed in the wake of the trio to the guest-chamber at the end of the upper hall.

"I do not know whether your rooms will suit you, dear," said Maude, as she walked beside her, "but if they do not, it is easy to change them. The green-room is arranged for the Colonel and yourself, and there is a bed in the dressing-room for the little boy, if you wish to have him near you."

"Oh, no," said Elsie; "Lorraine always sleeps with Jeanette; he would not like to be with me, and his father is not well enough to have him in his room; but the bed will do admirably for Alphonse, as he always stays with Monsieur through the night."

"And you, dear?" asked Maude, looking puzzled.

"I will go back to my own dear little room, if you will let me," said Elsie, blushing. "And we will try to think we are

little children again, Maudy, and talk all night through the open door," she continued, putting her arms around her sister, and resting her head upon her shoulder. "You see," she went on, after a moment's pause, "I should only be in the way if I stayed with Monsieur, for I am such a poor nurse. I tried to take care of him when he was in the hospital; but as soon as he could move, he engaged Alphonse to take my place, and he has been with him ever since."

So the matter was settled, and Elsie gradually sank into her accustomed niche at home, pursuing her old occupations, visiting her old haunts, and becoming daily so like her former self, that, but for the Colonel's presence in the family circle, the members of it had been tempted to believe her marriage all a dream.

The Colonel watched the improvement in her health and spirits with sad interest, for he felt how wide a gulf was opening between himself and this light-hearted, happy girl. He was able now to go about, but he never joined her in her walks or rides, nor expressed a wish to do so. He had resolved to settle in America, and had bought a handsome property on Staten Island; but he never asked her to inspect it with him, nor alluded to her going thither when it was in order. "She shall have her choice," he would say to himself. "I will not force her to leave the home where she is so happy, to follow the fortunes of a man more than twice her age, and as uncongenial as myself." And Elsie, ignorant of the cause of his constraint, saw that he shunned her society, and consequently kept herself aloof from him.

"They are the most remarkable pair of turtle-doves that I ever saw," said Jack, as he talked the new-comers over with Roberta Stevenson. "I only hope that when I marry, my wife may be as scrupulous about intruding her society upon me as Elsie is upon her husband."

“If I should ever have a lord and master with such secluded tastes,” replied Bob, “I shall retire with him to a desert island, where we can occupy opposite sides, if we see fit, without attracting the ill-natured comment of our relatives.”

“Bobby,” said Jack, “you talk a great deal too much of that future lord and master; it looks sometimes as though you seriously contemplated matrimony.”

“Of course I do,” replied Bob. “What else is there, my child, for a poor, lone woman, with five boys, to look forward to?”

“And must the misguided wretch who takes you, marry also all five of the boys?” said Jack.

“Why, certainly,” replied Bob. “Do you suppose that I would marry, if it was n't for my children? Dear! no; but I want a father for them.”

“What for?” asked Jack; “to give them a thrashing all around? You need n't sacrifice yourself on that account—I'll do it. Speak but the word, and off comes my coat this minute.”

“Thrash my precious, innocent babes!” exclaimed Bob; “that I should live to hear it even suggested! Away, monster, from my sight at once. *You* shall never be my darlings' step-father. No; I want some one to be very good to them, and help them on in the world.”

There was a sort of wistful tenderness in the last few words, which attracted Jack's attention.

“I don't think they seem to want much help,” he said, cheerfully. “They get along as well as any boys I know.”

“The younger ones are very happy,” said Bob, seriously; “but August is very miserable.”

“What's the matter with him? not in love, I hope?” said Jack.

“No, you wretch,” said Bob, laughing; “there are other

ills in life, although you only know of one. August wants to be a clergyman, but father will not hear of it."

"Wants to be a clergyman!" repeated Jack, in a tone of wonder. "Your father's son wants to be a clergyman! Ye gods and little fishes! it is enough to make old Plato turn in his grave," and he laughed heartily.

"Hush!" said Bob, "please don't laugh," and a look of pain crossed her face. "My father was not always as you know him. He never lost his faith until my mother died. He loved her so dearly, Jack, so dearly. When she lay dying, she took my hand and made me promise to be good to him, and try to take her place; and I did try, but he would not go to church with me, and by-and-by I forgot all my mother taught me. August has not forgotten, though; he has all mother's little books, and he wants to run away from here, before we all grow wicked."

"And your father will not let him go?" asked Jack.

"He says he cannot afford to send him to the seminary," said Bob; "and, oh, Jack if I could only make some money—only save enough to send him there myself—I should feel as though mother would forgive me for my broken promise."

"Nonsense," said Jack, springing up and making an effort to shake off the serious mood which was creeping over both of them. "You have no reason to upbraid yourself; few girls are so conscientious; and as for August, stick to your first plan, get him a new father, and think seriously of me as first candidate. I'll promise to send our eldest boy, at once, to the first seminary in the country, my dear, and the other four according to their tastes. It's a good offer, Bobby; you ought to accept it, if only for your family's sake."

"It's a first-class offer," said Bob, rising also, and laughingly extending her hand; "but I don't think I'll accept it, my sweet Jacky, if only for your family's sake."

CHAPTER II.

ELSIE'S "LITTLE FRENCHMAN."

“Weep no more, lady; weep no more,
 Thy sorrow is in vain;
 For violets plucked, the sweetest showers
 Will ne'er make grow again.”

ELSIE'S arrival at Beechcroft brought Annida at once to Strathmore Park. She longed to triumph over her enemy, but she kept her feelings in subjection, fearing lest her share in the loss of the missing letter should be suspected.

“Mr. Weston's marriage must have surprised you,” she said to Elsie one morning, as she was paying her a visit.

“Yes,” replied Elsie, “it did. I heard he was married before I heard of his engagement. It was very sudden, was it not?”

“Very sudden,” replied Annida. “I do not think the notion ever occurred to him until you set the fashion.”

“He was not engaged, then, when my note arrived?” inquired Elsie, in a would-be careless tone.

“No, unless he was engaged to you,” said Annida, with a smile; “we all suspected that, you know.”

“Then you were all mistaken,” replied Elsie. “Mr. Weston never even offered himself to me; we were cousins to each other, that was all.”

“Indeed?” said Annida, with an incredulous smile; “then your clandestine correspondence was purely platonic?”

“I do not know to what you allude,” replied Elsie, but her blushes belied her words: “I never wrote my cousin but one

short note in my life, and as he never answered that, I do not think we can be accused of having carried on a clandestine correspondence."

"He never answered it?" said Annida, in mock surprise; "that is very strange."

"Not at all," said Elsie, "it did not positively require an answer."

"You do not understand me," said Annida. "That he did answer it, I know; my surprise is that you did not receive his letter."

"How do you know that he answered it?" asked Elsie, falteringly.

"Because I saw him hand the letter to Miss Marston," said Annida. "She dropped it upon the floor, and I read your address in Mr. Weston's handwriting."

"It must have miscarried then, I suppose," said Elsie; "so many of my letters went astray during the siege," and she tried to speak calmly, that Annida might not guess what a difference that letter might have made in her life.

"But it was written some time before the siege," persisted Annida, "and you received and answered one of Maude's letters which must have gone with it — if it were sent."

"Did you not say it was?" asked Elsie, in surprise.

"I only said I saw Miss Marston receive it," replied Annida, evasively.

"Is not that the same thing?" said Elsie, coldly.

"Not exactly," said Annida. "Miss Marston may have neglected to post it."

"Nellie would never have forgotten so important a commission," said Elsie, decidedly.

"No, I do not for a moment suppose that she forgot it," said Annida, "but she may have had her own reasons for re-

taining it. As it is, you know, she is Mr. Weston's wife, and she might have missed her present happiness had that letter reached its destination."

"Annida!" exclaimed Elsie, starting to her feet and recoiling as though a serpent had stung her, "why do you tell me all this now, when you know the information can bring no good with it to any one? Why do you try to force upon me the knowledge of that which I had better never know? Why? because you love to promote unhappiness — because you live only in others' miseries; but you shall not triumph in my woes — I will not listen to another word — I will forget all you have said, and never, never shall you persuade me to distrust the purest and best woman that ever lived."

"Don't put yourself in such a passion," began Annida, but she said no more, for, true to her word, Elsie had beat a precipitate retreat.

"The seed is sown," laughed Annida, as she prepared to return home; "you may run away, my little lady, but you cannot leave your thoughts behind," and this was, alas! only too true. Wherever she went, and whatever her occupation, her mind still returned to this troublesome subject, and she tried to fathom the mystery which hung around the fate of that all-important letter. At times she thought she could bear her troubles better, could she only read it once and be sure that Roy had loved her, and then again she prayed that she might never see it lest her heart should break at the knowledge of the love that she had lost.

The sudden change which came over her did not escape her husband's watchful eye, and he pondered deeply over it, wondering sadly if he had in any way induced it. St. Evremond had become very popular, not only in the Von Decker family, but with all of their acquaintances, who esteemed Elsie a most

fortunate young woman in having drawn such a prize in the lottery of life. He was, indeed, a man calculated to shine in any society, — literary, political, or social, — for his life had been devoted to self-culture, and all the time he had been able to spare from his military duties had been passed among his books, or in the study of mankind from its best model — man himself. His manners were perfection, uniting to a soldierly bearing the gentle deference of a courtier; and his interested attention to what was said to him, be the speaker ever so humble, was extremely flattering, and won him many friends. Jack's prejudice was soon conquered, and his brother-in-law became his best friend. He could not but respect a man of so much mind, and his many ribbons and orders, all tokens of his military glory, together with his honorable scars, called for admiration from the younger man, to whom this phase of life was a sealed book. St. Evremond was not a man to glory in his own distinction, or repeat stories redounding to his own credit; but finding how eager the boys were for information as to a soldier's life, he could always find in memory's storehouse a few stirring tales, with which to beguile an hour or two of the sultry summer evenings. And even Elsie was drawn into this charmed circle at last.

When she came, St. Evremond's happiness was complete. Never did the words follow each other as rapidly as on these rare occasions; never was the speaker so eloquent as when that silent figure reclined upon the greensward at his feet, and those beautiful eyes turned now and then their light upon him, as the interest of the story deepened, and the ringing voice and flashing eye of the hero of many battles seemed to command her attention.

But however great he appeared to the other members of the family, to his wife St. Evremond was as diffident as a school-

boy. When these evening gatherings were over, and the party rose to retire, it was always Mrs. Von Decker who entered the house on his arm; and although his good-night greeting was hearty to Elsie's brothers and sister, he never spoke to her, unless she first noticed him. Sometimes, therefore, she would pass him by without a word, and he would make no effort to detain her; and then, again, she would pause beside him for a moment and extend her hand, and he would take it timidly in his own, scarcely daring even to press it, as he stammered a good-night.

Thus the time passed away, until the new house was ready for its occupants, and then a new dilemma arose in Elsie's mind. Notwithstanding the approach of the time for flitting, St. Evremond had spoken no word to her on the subject, and she began to think that perhaps he did not intend to take her with him. She could scarcely tell at first whether this idea gave her pain or pleasure. It was certain that she had now no particular interest in Beechcroft, nor much in life beyond little Lorraine, to whom she had become very much attached; and yet would it be possible for her to live alone with her husband on their present terms? — to pass days without speaking to each other? The prospect was not alluring; and, to add to her discomfort, the Westons had returned, and every day she was called upon to hear of or witness Roy's devotion to his wife.

She began, also, to distrust Annida's story of the letter, and it distressed her to think that she had written him so candid a confession of her feelings, when he had been so far from returning them. He could never have loved her — of that she had no doubt — or how could he have greeted her so cordially, and expressed such frank admiration of her husband. What would he say — what would the world say, should St. Evremond leave her now, so soon after her marriage? Oh, she

could not bear it; and yet she had herself stipulated that she should be allowed to live her life alone. She recognized this fact, and yet she wished that he had consulted her, and not taken her wishes for granted.

“Elsie!” exclaimed Lorraine, bursting in one day upon these reflections, “it is only a short time now, and then we will go into our new house.”

“Who will go, dearest?” asked Elsie, with beating heart.

“Papa and I,” answered the boy, “and you must come and see us, Elsie, every day. Oh, it will be so nice.”

“You will not take me with you, then?” said Elsie, pressing the boy closer to her throbbing breast, whilst with difficulty she repressed her tears. “My little brother, that I love so dearly, is glad to go away, and has no place for me in his beautiful new home. Ah! Rainé, would I have treated you thus?”

The little fellow hung his head, and his eyes filled with tears. “It is not I,” he said; “it is papa who says you will not care to leave your home, and all your brothers, for only him and me.”

“But I have no home, Lorraine,” said Elsie, sadly, “and I have one little brother for whom I would do anything, and leave every one, but he does not love me any more.”

“I do love you,” said the boy, earnestly. “You must not say I do not.”

“Then how are we to live apart and be happy?” said Elsie. “I shall miss you every day, and cry for my little brother.”

“Poor Elsie,” said the child, kissing her fondly, and then suddenly extricating himself from her embrace, he bounded off again.

Elsie listened to his retreating footsteps with a sad smile. “It does not seem,” she said, “as though I were of much use in the world. Even this child, to whom I have devoted myself,

is ready to leave me on the first opportunity," and she drooped her head upon her hand and gazed drearily out of the window.

Presently, however, she was roused from her reverie by the sound of approaching footsteps. Lorraine was returning, but there was a heavier step than his coming along the corridor, and Elsie knew, before they entered, that the child had brought his father with him.

"Here she is, papa," cried the boy, dragging him into the room. "Now tell her that we will not go away without her. Ask her to come with us, papa; do not leave my poor Elsie here alone."

The position was extremely embarrassing, and at first neither Elsie nor St. Evremond could utter a word — the former being overwhelmed with confusion at the thought that Lorraine had repeated her words, and that she stood before her husband as a suppliant, praying to be taken to his home; and the latter fearing lest the boy had been mistaken, and the wish had been father to the thought, that Elsie would go with them.

"Why don't you speak, papa?" said the boy, impatiently, looking from one to the other in surprise.

"Because I do not know what to say, my boy," said St. Evremond, "for I scarcely think that Elsie requires to be told how much she will add to our happiness by coming with us, and she knows better than yourself why it is that I have not asked her. Run away now, though, and I will say all that you wish."

Thus adjured, Lorraine departed, and St. Evremond turned to Elsie.

"What is it that the child tells me, Madame?" he said. "Are you really willing to leave Beechcroft and accompany me to my new home? Do not do so from any sense of duty, for I do not expect it of you. When we married, it was expressly

understood that the ceremony was simply a form, and that I was never to take advantage of the authority with which it invested me. I accepted this rendering of it, and the fact that when I did so, I thought myself on the eve of certain death, makes my vow no less binding. You are free, Madame, from every vow which you have taken to love, honor, and obey, and if you would also resign the name you bear, I will leave you now, and as soon as may be your wish shall be fulfilled."

"I do not wish to resign your name," said Elsie, falteringly, "neither would I be free, if you do not yourself desire it. I am no companion for you, I well know, and, as I have told you, I have no heart to give, but I also have no longer any interest in life, and my strongest wish is to do my duty towards you. Take me to your home, therefore, if you will, and I will labor and strive to do all that I can to make you happy."

St. Evremond sighed deeply. "You speak so sadly," he said, "that it almost breaks my heart to hear you. You are barely eighteen, and yet life is over for you? Ah, no, dear child, this must not be. Do you think, then, that I will accept this sacrifice? You have not understood me. Let me explain, and do not be wounded at my recalling to your memory a confidence you once gave me.

"You said to me, in the little chapel, 'My heart is dead; I have nothing now to do with love,' but then you thought yourself unloved; is it that on your return you find that you deceived yourself, and that the *jeune Monsieur* is still true?"

Elsie hid her burning cheeks in her hands, and trembled violently.

"Nay, do not weep," he said, gently; "there is still a remedy, if this be so. The law can separate that which the church has joined, and — you may still be happy. You do not know what this offer costs me," he continued, and his usual

round, full tones deserted him. "I am offering my life for yours; but better that, ten thousand times, than to watch you fading, dying by my side — the fetters with which I bound you eating into your soul — when it is too late to save you."

"It is too late now," said Elsie, speaking with an effort. "He of whom I spoke is bound by vows no less solemn than my own — he is married also, Monsieur."

"Poor child," said St. Evremond, laying his hand tenderly upon her head. "Then you shall come with me, and I will do my best to dissipate your sadness. You must never be afraid," he added, "but confide in me always; for although I may seem at times to be hard and cold, I have seen life, and I know what it is to love — and — to have no hope."

Thus, then, it was settled, and shortly after Elsie left Beechcroft once more, but this time forever. It was on a beautiful, bright summer's day, when she first entered her new home. Nature seemed to have sympathized with St. Evremond in his desire to please his young wife, and to have opened her storehouse of beauties to assist in the endeavor.

St. Evremond assisted Elsie to alight when they reached the door, and leading her into the house, he showed her a pretty suite of rooms opening into the garden.

"These," he said, "are your own. We began life at the wrong end, by marrying without a proper courtship, so now we will reverse the situation, and I will court my wife. Behold, Madame," he continued, taking her hand and kissing it, "the most ardent of admirers, and the most faithful of friends, who will be yours so long as life shall last."

CHAPTER III.

FIRING THE MINE.

“Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned,
Nor hell a fury like a woman scorned.”

ROY married Eleanor Marston more from pique than any other feeling, and he certainly did not deserve the happy lot into which he stumbled, as it were, blindfold; but fortune does not always honor the brave; on the other hand, she seems to positively enjoy surprising the human race—now crowning a life's labor with disaster, and anon plunging some ne'er-do-well into the sunshine of prosperity.

There is this much, however, to be said in Roy's favor, that having drawn a prize, he did not, like many men, shut his eyes to the fact, and pass his life in wilful ignorance, “entertaining an angel unawares.” No, he soon discovered what a treasure he possessed, and to his love, which grew daily, he added a contrite desire to promote the happiness of this girl, whose pure true love he had made use of to cover his wounded pride.

Nellie's was a character difficult to comprehend, unless intimately known. She was so sensitive and reserved, and her best and warmest feelings were often buried in her heart so deep, that they never found vent in words. She was like a delicate rose-bud, with all its petals hidden within its bosom, awaiting the kiss of the sun to unfold its beauties, and her husband became intoxicated with delight, as, expanding in the warmth of his affection, she each day discovered some new grace, or revealed to him some hidden charm.

“Where have you hidden yourself all these years?” he asked her, playfully. “Had I known you earlier, I should never have loved Elsie.”

“Take care,” said Nellie, laughing joyously, “that is almost more than I can credit.”

“It is a fact, nevertheless,” replied Roy. “Elsie is, perhaps, more beautiful than you are — although I begin to doubt even that — but Elsie is flesh and blood, and you, Nellie — you are an angel.”

Nellie blushed and hid her face upon his breast. “Do not flatter me,” she said, softly; “a husband and wife should be friends as well as lovers, and a true friend should not stoop to flattery.”

“I am only saying what I really think,” replied Roy. “There are very few persons who know you, Nellie, you hide your true self so completely. Even I doubted at first if you were capable of loving any one intensely —”

“And now?” said Nellie, looking up for the completion of the sentence.

“And now,” continued Roy, folding his arms around her, “I know that beneath a calm exterior there lies a slumbering volcano, but — an angel guards it, Nellie.”

This conversation had taken place before Elsie's return, and, despite Roy's assurances, Nellie could not but feel anxious, when he was once more exposed to her influence; but as the days passed, and she found him still her own, her fears were allayed, and she sank into a blissful state of security, seeming to forget that human happiness is mutable. Beneath most of the flowery paths of life, however, trains of gunpowder are lying, awaiting only the lighting of the match to blow the unwary wanderer into atoms; and Eleanor's was no exception to the general rule.

The combustible material was there—the explosion, therefore, was inevitable; but it was sad that fate should have chosen Arthur's hand with which to light the match.

Thus it came to pass. Annida, with Pandora's fatal curiosity, determined to discover what part she still retained of Arthur's heart, and how far Nellie had undermined her power. She was piqued that whilst he refused to visit her, alleging as a reason that she was married, and had no need of other society than her husband's, he was constantly with Nellie, and her marriage seemed but to have riveted their friendship.

There was a gathering at the Marstons in honor of Roy and Eleanor, and here, at last, Annida succeeded in forcing Arthur to an explanation. He had retired to the doctor's office to avoid the noise and glare of the parlors, for he was, like most poets, variable in his moods, and to-night the sound of revelry jarred upon his sensitive nerves. He would not have come at all, had he not promised Nellie to do so, and, after having spoken to her, he felt that his duty for the evening was over, and determined to solace himself with a book.

He had but just taken one of the doctor's volumes from its shelf, and was idly turning over the pages, when a slight rustling attracted his attention, and on looking up he perceived Annida coming towards him.

A dread presentiment of evil seized him, and had flight been possible, he would have made a cowardly retreat; but she stood between him and the door, and, without rudely pushing her aside, he could not leave the room, so he resigned himself to his situation, and rising, politely asked what he could do for her.

“Give me your seat first,” she replied, with a smile, “and then find yourself another.”

He complied with her first request, and pushed his chair to-

wards her, but he remained standing, even after she was seated.

“Will you not sit down?” she asked, imploringly. “I have so much to say.”

“I cannot think that Mrs. Strathmore has anything to say to me which I may not hear standing,” he replied; “my time is limited; I have work to do this evening, and it would not be worth while for me to sit down again.”

“I would make it so, Arthur,” she said, leaning slightly forward and fixing her eyes upon him searchingly; “I would make it so, if you would let me. If you will but give me one short half-hour of your time, I will tell you all about myself, lay bare my soul before you, and if, after having heard all, you still condemn me, you shall be my judge, and I will accept my punishment.”

“I do not wish to hear your confession, madame,” said Arthur, sternly; “lay bare your soul before your husband’s eyes, and accept his verdict. Happy would it be for you could I be your judge, but there is one, even the most high God, before whose tribunal you must one day stand to answer in the spirit for the evil done here in the flesh — make your peace with Him.”

“You are cruel,” said Annida, wincing under his words. “Who are you to preach of God, and repentance, when you do not fulfil the first of the gospel laws, and forgive your wrongs? The Son of God forgave His enemies when they reviled and mocked Him, and you are merciless though but human, and to a repentant woman who cries to you from her heart, ‘I have sinned, I have sinned,’ but I will kneel to you, Arthur, if you will then reach your hand to me in token of forgiveness.”

She bowed her head before him, her breast heaved with

genuine emotion, and at a kind word she would have thrown herself at his feet; but Arthur remained unmoved, and cold and stern came his reply: "I have forgiven you—I forgave you long ago, and had wellnigh forgotten you, had you not thus forced yourself upon my notice."

"You had wellnigh forgotten me!" exclaimed Annida, starting up with flashing eyes; "you, who once worshipped the ground I trod on! Ah! I am amply compensated for my years of tender and devoted love. Go on—do not spare me; tell me that 'you had wellnigh forgotten me' in the love of another woman, of her whose saintly habits, and pious church goings are but blinds to the onlookers, and whose husband is no restriction on your intercourse, as you have falsely pleaded mine. Speak up and tell her name; or if you will not, I will do it for you. The woman for whom you have left me is Nellie—"

"Hold!" exclaimed Arthur, in a voice of suppressed passion, and springing towards her he seized her arm. "You are a woman, it is true; but, by heaven, you shall not desecrate the name of the best and purest creature that God ever made. I shall place my hand over your mouth if you attempt to speak again, so be silent and listen to what I have to say. I do love Eleanor Weston, as a man may love the angels, and I breathe her name, as a little child his prayers, to drive away the evil spirits with which you filled my soul. You drove me to despair, she ministered unto me; for your sake I would have sent my soul to hell, but she brought it back and laid it at her Saviour's feet; out of a great darkness she caused the light to shine, and gave me once more a life to live; and whilst I move and breathe, that life is hers to command and hers only. I think our half-hour has expired; allow me to bid you good evening," and before she had recovered herself, he was gone.

She went back to the ball-room and danced and smiled away the hours. Never had she looked handsomer or been more admired, and no one dreamed that she hid beneath her gayety a deadly purpose of revenge. She had been hard struck — both pride and love had suffered, but she made no sign, lest her prey should be forewarned of her approach and so escape the toils.

A few days after this she called at the Westons. “Nellie, dear,” she said, “would you object to looking at some of Elsie’s old letters from Paris, and settling a dispute between Mr. Strathmore and myself as to the precise date of her letter mentioning the siege?”

Of course Nellie did not object, but sent at once for her desk, from whence she took a bundle of letters, tied together with a blue ribbon.

“True blue; a lover’s knot,” said Annida, picking up the package which Nellie had laid down, after having selected the letter desired. “How devoted you and Elsie have always been to one another.”

Before Nellie had time to answer, the letters had fallen from the string to the floor. “How stupid of me!” exclaimed Annida; “but there! don’t trouble yourself, I’ll pick them up,” and she was down on her knees in a moment, gathering them together.

“How many ought there to be?” she called out from under the table. “Two, four, six, eight, and one is nine. Is that right?”

“Yes; thank you,” said Nellie, holding out her hand to receive them. “It was too bad for you to have had to pick them up; but here is the date at last, as a reward,” and she read it out to Annida, after which she put the letters away in their hiding-place, never dreaming of the serpent which lay concealed in one of them.

That evening Elsie received a note. "I have found the missing letter," it said. "*Eleanor Weston has it!*" Long she pondered over this remarkable missive. At first she felt inclined to discredit it; but, although there was no signature, she knew the note was from Annida, and Annida was not the woman to assert that which she did not know. Even though the information were correct, then, she asked herself, of what use was it to her? Should she go to her false friend and accuse her of the theft? What would it avail her? The woman who would betray a friend would not hesitate to hide her fault by lying. Should she take the note to Roy, and ask an explanation? To what end? What purpose could it serve, save to part him from his wife, whom he both loved and trusted? He had said that he was happy, and Nellie, — yes, she was happy also in his love, and, although she had been so hardly used, Elsie could not find it in her heart to take this mean revenge upon one who had been so dear to her up to the present hour. She read the note once more, slowly, to impress its meaning on her mind, and then she tore it into minute scraps, determining that the secret should never pass her lips.

It was a noble resolve, but it availed not to avert the coming catastrophe. The match was lighted, and no human power could extinguish it, for that same evening Roy suddenly appeared before her, as she sat idly dreaming in the garden, and, without further preface, asked, abruptly: "Elsie, did you receive a letter from me whilst you were in Paris?"

The color left her cheek, she trembled violently, and turned her head away without speaking. How could she tell him the truth without exciting his suspicions?

"Answer me, Elsie," he continued, with a faltering voice; "and if you can say 'yes,' ah! for God's sake, say it."

He knew a'l, she felt convinced, from his agitation. Further

concealment, therefore, was impossible, so she answered, sadly: "I would I could say what you wish to hear, but I did not receive your letter, nor did I know that you had ever written to me, until a few days ago."

"And how did you hear it then?" asked Roy, eagerly. If Nellie had confessed to her friend, he felt that he could forgive her with less difficulty, than if she were still cherishing her unhappy secret.

"I will not tell you that," said Elsie. "You already know more than enough. Do not seek to be too wise; ignorance sometimes is indeed bliss."

"You, also, then know where the letter is," he said, huskily.

She made no reply. "You shall have it, Elsie," he went on; "it is yours, and you shall have it, if it is where we have heard it is."

"No, no," said Elsie, passionately; "do not try to find it, I implore you. It is of no use now. Our lives are fixed—nothing but death can release us from our vows. Let the dead past bury its dead. You were happy yesterday; be so again to-morrow, and forget to-day."

Roy looked as though he did not comprehend what she was saying. A dark cloud rested on his face, which was resolute and stern. "I am going to find that letter," he said, "if I break my heart in doing so."

"But you have more than yourself to think of," wailed Elsie. "Think of me, Roy, and, oh! think of your wife; she loves you so dearly—the temptation was so great. Ah! forgive her, Roy, forgive her for my sake."

"Never!" said Roy, starting to his feet. "If this be true, Elsie, and a fearful foreboding tells me that it is, I will never call her wife again, so help me God! It is of no use for you to plead," he continued, as she raised her hands in supplication to him, "I will not listen to a word more."

“But you may be mistaken,” pleaded Elsie. “Do not be hasty, Roy—weigh well what you are about to do. Where did you get your information?”

“I might answer you in your own words,” said Roy, bitterly, “and say that I would not tell you, but it is of no consequence one way or the other. I received this note.”

Elsie took it from his hand. It was but a *fac simile* of her own, except that it mentioned what he had not known before, that Elsie had never received his letter.

“My information came by note also,” said Elsie, “and the handwriting is the same. Do you know, Roy, this gives me fresh courage,” she continued, with animation; “this looks like a preconceived plan—it may be the work of an enemy to separate you from your wife. Take this note direct to Nellie, and listen to her explanation. Be gentle with her, Roy, whatever the issue.”

“‘Blessed are the peacemakers,’” said Roy, taking her hand in his and looking down at her with emotion. “I will do your bidding, Elsie, and you shall know the result before very long.”

“Go, go at once,” said Elsie, trembling violently, “and whatever happens, Roy, do not trust yourself here again.”

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE WEB.

“And to be wroth with one we love,
Doth work like madness in the brain.”

ROY strode home at a rapid pace. He felt that there was no rest for him until he had cleared the mystery in which his wife was shrouded, and determined therefore to ascertain the truth at once.

Before he reached the house he heard Nellie's voice singing in the garden, and turning in that direction, he came upon her as she watered her flowers. “Be gentle with her for my sake,” came the echo of Elsie's voice, but, indeed, no such intercession was needed, for at sight of his wife with her delicate beauty and large spiritual eyes, Roy's heart sank within him, and he felt as though he were about to arraign a saint for stealing.

“She could not have done it. It is impossible,” he said to himself, as she advanced to meet him, her face bright with a joyous welcome.

“You are back early,” she said, leaning caressingly upon his arm. “I did not expect you so soon. Did your horse prove unruly?”

“I did not go out on horseback,” said Roy; “the distance was so short, I walked.”

“Walked to Beechcroft?” said Nellie, in surprise.

“No, not Beechcroft,” said Roy; “I did not get so far as that, I went over to see Elsie.”

“Indeed!” said Nellie, looking still more surprised. “Why did you not tell me you were going there, and I would have gone with you. It has been some days since I last saw Elsie.”

“To tell the truth,” said Roy, gravely, “I did not care to have you, Nellie. I went over on business of a very disagreeable character, and I am not sure that I would not have done better had I stayed at home. Certain it is that you alone can unravel the mystery, and I wish now that I had first applied to you.”

Roy looked anxious and careworn. Never had Nellie seen such trouble expressed in his face. “Come into the house, dear,” she said, gently, “and tell me all about it. I am not much used to unravelling mysteries, but it must needs be a hard knot that we cannot untie together,” and she led him in to his comfortable study, placing him in the easy chair covered with the work of her skilful fingers, and then took her place on a stool at his feet.

“Now,” she said, smiling gayly up at him, “‘two heads are better than one, even if one is a blockhead,’ so let us explore this mystery.”

Roy shaded his eyes with his hands, that he might not see her innocent, bright face, for every moment his tale became harder to unfold.

“It is something very sad I have to tell, Nellie,” he said, huskily; “turn your eyes from my face, dear—they seem to burn into my soul.”

“Go on,” said Nellie, in grave wonder, “I am looking out of the window.”

“You must ransack your memory, Nellie,” he continued; “you must take yourself back over a space of time, and answer me a question, and however hard it may be for you, you must tell me nothing but the truth.”

“Have I ever told you anything else?” said Nellie, flushing slightly; “you dishonor me, Roy, by making such a requisition.”

“Words, words are nothing!” exclaimed Roy, passionately. “Give me proof, Nellie, that you have never deceived me. Did you or did you not post a letter given you long ago by me for Elsie?”

He sat upright now, and his eyes seemed to search her heart, striving to read there the answer she would give. Nellie’s breath came quickly, and she looked up at him in alarm.

“Why do you ask that question now, Roy?” she asked.

“Because I have only just discovered that she never received the letter,” said Roy; “but you evade the question — did you or did you not post it?”

“You know I did, Roy,” she said, falteringly. “I told you at the time that it had gone with one of Maude’s.”

“Then you will not object to giving me that package of Elsie’s letters to examine, Nellie,” said Roy, looking considerably relieved. “I have been told that the missing letter is among them, and I must see that it is not so.”

“You will not accept my word for it?” asked Nellie, in surprise. “Roy, I do not know you to-day, you are so unlike yourself.”

“Bring me the letters, Nellie, at once,” said Roy. “I tell you I must examine them, and the sooner this disagreeable business is over the better it will be for all concerned.”

“Roy,” said Nellie, gravely, “I will not give you Elsie’s letters. I have never shown them to any one, and I do not think you ought to ask it.”

“Nellie,” said Roy, sternly, “sentiment is ill-placed when so much hangs in the balance. I must have those letters; I owe it to Elsie, as well as to you and myself, to investigate this mat-

ter thoroughly, and if you will not give them to me, I will take them."

He rose as he spoke and stood before her, awaiting her decision. The color had entirely faded from her face, and her eyes looked supernaturally large and strange.

"I will not give you Elsie's letters," she said; "you may rob me of them if you will."

Roy hesitated for a moment. "Give them to me, Nellie," he said once more; "do not force me to so despicable an action," but she did not move or speak, and striding across the room, he seized and broke open the little fancy desk which contained her treasures. She uttered a cry as the lock gave way and everything fell out in a confused heap upon the table. She seemed to be in a horrible dream, and she hid her face in her hands that she might not see her husband so far forget what was due to his wife, as to search for proofs of her veracity among her private papers.

Roy heard the cry, and he trembled as he took the letters in his hand. "Poor darling," he thought, tenderly gathering up the other trifles and replacing them with care, "I will just glance over the letters without reading, and then restore them to her. She suffers, but I must be firm." He sat down beside the table, and opened the envelopes one by one, only enough to satisfy himself that they contained only one letter, and his spirits rose as he neared the bottom of the heap without making any discovery. Suddenly, however, he became deadly pale, and he gazed at the envelope he held, as though he had seen a spectre. At a suppressed exclamation from him, Nellie raised her eyes and looked. Incredulous horror was depicted on his countenance as he slowly drew out his own letter, written so long ago, and every word of which breathed devoted love for Elsie. He sank back with a groan, and his head fell upon his

breast. Nellie, scarcely less horrified than himself, sprang to his side.

“What is it, Roy?” she gasped. “Have you found it? — was it really there?” and then, as she saw it in his hand, she threw herself upon her knees beside him, exclaiming: “Oh, my darling! oh, my darling! you must and shall believe me, when I say I did not know it.”

“Do not perjure yourself,” said Roy, in a strange, hard voice. “Yesterday I would have sworn to anything on your mere word, but henceforth no oath that you could take would I believe. My God! to think how you have wrecked our lives — mine and that poor child’s over yonder — and her last words to me this morning were: ‘Be gentle with her, Roy, for my sake.’”

“Roy, Roy,” said Nellie, cowering before him, “be merciful. You stab me with your words. If you do not wish to see me die at your feet, do not say such bitter things. You wrong me; before heaven, I say you do. So pause ere you say more, lest you pass your life repenting the present moment.”

“‘Be gentle with her for my sake,’” said Roy, rising slowly to his feet. “Aye, for her sake I will spare you; but, wretched woman, beware how you approach me in the future. You have ruined me, but you shall not profit by my ruin.”

He rushed away and left her kneeling at his chair. She raised her hand and drew it dreamily across her forehead. What did it all mean? Was it indeed her husband who had just gone out? was it his voice still ringing in her ears, cursing her from his presence? Had he gone forever from her life, — he, her joy, the one thing that made that life of value? And the letter — oh, how had it ever been placed among her papers? Could she have forgotten and put it there herself? And thus she crouched upon the floor, and thought and thought, her poor

brain growing dizzy with the effort to solve this dreadful enigma, until Arthur, entering, found her there, and raised her to her feet, looking at her in blank amazement, as she whispered, eagerly :

“I am mad, am I not? Oh! won't you say that I am mad?”

CHAPTER V.

“O'ER CRAG AND TORRENT.”

“For of all sad words of tongue or pen,
The saddest are these — ‘It might have been.’”

IT was the evening of this day of troubles, and Elsie sat quiet and pensive at the open window of her little parlor, which commanded the finest view of any room in the house. St. Evremond had ridden over to dine with a neighbor, and she was alone, save for little Lorraine, who had remained up after his usual hour, and was now fast asleep, with his head upon her knee.

She had been sitting thus for an hour or more, seriously reflecting on her position and the thorns which beset her path, and, as she grasped them, these thorns seemed to be less prickly than usual, and she even thought, that here and there among them she could detect a flower, rearing its delicate head. She was surprised to find herself less moved than she had expected by the revelation of the afternoon, and still more amazed at the discovery that she was criticising Roy's conduct, and inwardly comparing him with her husband, greatly to the disadvantage of the former.

She could not but disapprove of Roy's readiness to condemn his wife, nor help wondering that he should have told her his suspicions, before he had heard what Nellie had to say in her own defence. Would St. Evremond have acted thus? No: she could not for a moment picture her generous, noble-hearted husband as accepting the evidence of an anonymous note against her, and revealing his wrongs to a third party, before he had given her an opportunity to contradict the statement. Even had the charge proved true, she felt convinced that no human being would ever have known it, but that he would have buried his grievances within his heart, and with noble magnanimity have stood beside the woman he had made his wife, shielding her, however guilty, from the condemnation of the world.

Would he have uttered that fierce "Never!" with which Roy had treated her prayer for Nellie's forgiveness? Ah, no; she had seen him too often receive his little son back into his arms after some misdemeanor, not to know that, although he would be firm with a delinquent whilst impenitent, the first contrite word would serve to open the portals of his large heart, and full forgiveness would follow swift upon confession.

She had never thought so deeply upon these subjects as to-night, although she had been much happier since she left Beechcroft than before, for her husband had been untiring in his efforts to please and interest her, and life had seemed to have still some object left in it to live for; and now, as she reflected on his character, and the purity and beauty of his daily life, she was conscious of a new and strange tenderness springing up within her heart, and a longing that he would soon return, it seemed so lonely there without him.

Even as the wish passed through her mind, she detected a manly footstep in the hall, and although, owing to the precious burden in her lap, she could not rise, she turned her face

expectantly towards the door, and had St. Evremond entered then, the shy, wistful, tender greeting of her eyes would have gladdened his heart, and shed sunshine on his life forever. Ah, if there was but some good angel to tell us when to come and when to go, how many lives would wear a different coloring? He did not come, and in his place Roy entered, like a dark spirit of evil and discontent, into an abode over which peace and rest were just spreading their protecting wings.

There was no light in the room save moonlight, but the corner where Elsie sat was as bright as day. The moonbeams streamed in through the open window, forming a charmed circle around her, bringing out her beautiful fair face in vivid lines from the surrounding darkness, adding a deeper sweetness to the hazel eyes, and causing the golden hair to shine like the halo round the pictures of the saints.

To Roy, in his overwrought condition, there was something weird and unearthly in her beauty, and with a pang of jealous agony he recollected that she belonged to another, and that but for Nellie's treachery she should now be all his own. The thought nearly drove him mad.

"Elsie," he exclaimed, coming forward and kneeling beside her in the shadow, "it is all true—all true. Here is the letter—I found it among her things—read it, and tell me how I shall support my life."

"Roy," she said, gently, as he laid it in her hand, "why should I read this now? It can be of no use to us, and it may do harm. Let me destroy it, and we will forget that it was ever written."

"No, no," said Roy, fiercely; "you distrusted me,—you believed that I was false. You owe it to me to read this letter, and do me tardy justice. Read," he continued, opening it and thrusting it once more into her hand, and then he leaned

his bowed head against the chair until it nearly rested on her shoulder, and they read the letter, word for word, together, whilst the child lay still and slumbered on her knee.

My darling (thus it ran), what shall I say to you in return for your precious note, which lies nestled on my breast next my heart, where I would I could lay your golden head, and tell you without words how the love of my life is yours. Can I forgive you, do you say, my sweet one? Ah, there is no crime I could not overlook, were my lips once pressed to yours; but now I rave at you, myself, and destiny, that so many dreary miles of land and sea should separate us, and that the precious hours which were ours for loving intercourse were wasted in misunderstandings and idle bickerings. Oh, had I but known what I now know before we parted—could I but once have heard your sweet lips utter what your note tells me,—“Roy, I love you,”—this dreadful separation could be better borne; but now months, years (centuries they will seem), must elapse ere I can hold you in my arms and answer your sweet confession with tender caresses, and burning, passionate words of love. It makes my heart sick to think of it. How can my feeble pen express the half of what my soul would say? Oh, my darling! Oh, my Elsie! my love reaches out to you across the waters, my soul embraces yours; stoop your dear head and listen whilst I whisper, that for this world and the next, my heart, my soul, my love is yours, forever and forever.

Thus the letter ended, and in the silence which ensued, Elsie could hear the beating of the heart of the man beside her. She dared not look at him, she dared not speak—her whole soul was in tumult, and she dreaded, adding by a spark, to the fire that was consuming him.

“For this world and the next, my heart, my soul, my love is yours, forever and forever.”

The words were repeated softly in her ear—so low they were but a whisper—but his hot breath fanned her cheek, his burning

hand was on her own, and what wonder was it that they both forgot the present in the past, and dreamed that time had paused for them since that letter first was written.

His hot kisses rained upon her face. "My darling," he said, "we must never part again. I have left my home to-night forever, and it would be an outrage against nature for you to live another day beneath the roof of this cold-blooded man, who calls you wife. I leave you to-night, only that I may make arrangements for our flight, and to-morrow — to-morrow you shall be all my own."

Again he would have pressed his lips to hers, but, with a cry, Elsie pushed him from her and pointed to the child. He lay in her lap as quiet as before, but the soft dark eyes were no longer closed, and from their shadowy depths looked out an angel of purity, peace, and innocence, which drove the devil from his vantage-ground, and gave poor Elsie still a day of grace.

"You must not kiss my Elsie," said the boy, in his childish treble tones; "even papa does not do that."

"He has seen and heard everything," exclaimed Roy, *sotto voce*; "we are lost if we cannot silence him," and he uttered an oath beneath his breath.

Elsie shuddered, and placed her arms protectingly around the child, as though to guard him from the malediction.

"See here, my boy," said Roy, "you must never say such words as those again. I was not kissing Elsie, and if you ever dare to say so, I shall know how to punish you."

He leaned over the child as he spoke, and so fierce and desperate did he look in the moonlight, that the little fellow clung to Elsie in terror, crying: "I will not tell anything that you do not wish me to, Elsie; but won't you send that man away? he frightens me. Oh, I wish—I wish papa would come."

Elsie pressed him closer to her heart and gently soothed him, whilst a deep sense of shame came over her at the ignoble part Roy was playing, in wooing her thus beneath her husband's roof, and frightening a baby into silence.

"I beg that you will go away," she said, in an agitated voice. "Do you not see the child is frightened?"

"What care I for the child?" said Roy, fiercely. "Is there to be ever something thrust between me and my love? I will not move from here till you have sworn to meet me to-morrow on the ferry-boat. Come, Elsie, do not waste the precious moments. God knows we have suffered enough from procrastination. I know your heart is mine — this night has shown me that, at least. You have gone too far to recede, my darling. Not all the waters of Lethe could obliterate this last half-hour from our lives. Speak, Elsie, and tell me you will come."

He paused for an answer, and the silence of the night was broken by the sound of horses' feet approaching over the even road to the house.

"Papa!" exclaimed Lorraine, raising his head and clapping his hands.

"Roy! Roy! for heaven's sake leave the room," cried Elsie, clasping her hands together in an agony.

"Swear!" said Roy, standing erect before her. "Do you think I am going away empty-handed? Swear! or, by all that is holy, I shall stay and tell my story to his face."

The sound of steps came nearer. Elsie pressed her hand against her heart. Was what Roy told her true? Had she in that moment of weakness forever barred against herself her husband's heart? Alas! it seemed so, for how could she daily meet his perfect trust and confidence, with the secret of this evening hidden in her heart? or how could she bear his stern, inquiring glance, should Lorraine ever betray what he had seen?

But there was no more time for thought — the horse was at the door, and Roy still stood before her, as silent and fixed as a statue, awaiting her response.

“Go,” she said, with difficulty articulating her words. “I will meet you to-morrow. You have forced me to it. May God forgive you!” and Roy, with an exclamation of delight, sprang through the open window, as St. Evremond slowly crossed the hall to bid his wife good-night.

“Darling,” she said, stooping over the child, “the man has gone away. Do not mention him to papa, and I promise he shall never come again.”

“I will not tell papa a word about it,” said the trembling boy, “not even if he ask me: then I will say I do not know, I was asleep.”

“Teach him to scorn deceit, to hate a lie.” Were the words really spoken? No, it was conscience whispering in her heart, upbraiding Elsie for her broken trust, and scalding tears fell from her eyes upon the child, as she thought of his father’s first and last request, so sadly disregarded.

CHAPTER VI.

A RAY OF HOPE.

“You may break, you may shatter the vase, if you will,
But the scent of the roses will hang round it still.”

IT was with difficulty that Arthur could glean, from Nellie’s incoherent account, what had actually occurred, and even after he had mastered the facts, it was impossible for him to understand them.

“You posted the letter when it was first given to you,” he said, looking very much puzzled, “and yet Roy discovers it to-day among your papers. Well, there is only one way of explaining such a phenomenon—some one must have stolen it and put it there. Can you think of any one who could have done it?”

“No,” said Nellie, shaking her head hopelessly. “Perhaps it is as Roy thinks, and I put it there myself.”

“Roy is a—fool,” said Arthur, impetuously, “if he is nothing worse. The idea of any one in his senses supposing for a moment that you could do such a thing.”

“He has every reason to think so,” said Nellie, in a dreary voice, “as long as I cannot account for having the letter still in my possession.”

“He has no right to believe it, though all the world stood up in evidence, with your word against it,” said Arthur, fiercely. “I wish,” he added, with lowering brow, “that he had only imparted his suspicions to me in the first place; he would not have repeated them, I can assure you.”

“And Elsie will believe it, too,” said Nellie. “Oh, Arthur, I am very unhappy.”

“Elsie!” exclaimed Arthur. “You don’t mean to say that he has taken her into his confidence?”

“He took the letter to her,” said Nellie, falteringly; “he thought it was his duty to let her see it, and explain the circumstance.”

“Explain to Elsie,” cried Arthur, starting to his feet in a rage. “This passes all forbearance. See here, Nellie; I was going to waste my time in an examination of this case, to ease both your and Roy’s mind, but, by heaven, Roy don’t deserve it. If he is in such a hurry to condemn you, let him do it; do not demean yourself by offering an explanation.”

“Arthur,” said Nellie, gravely, “you forget that you are speaking of my husband.”

“And has he not forgotten he was speaking of his wife?” replied Arthur.

“Two ‘wrongs’ never yet made a ‘right,’” said Nellie, gently; “whilst I live, no word of complaint against him shall pass my lips.”

“I know that,” said Arthur, tenderly. “You would, if you could, persuade yourself that you had really stolen the letter.”

“Would to God I could,” said Nellie, sobbing bitterly. “Oh, Roy, Roy, I wish I had died before you had so unjustly suspected me.”

Arthur turned away and rushed up and down the room, pulling his moustache fiercely to hide the quivering of his mobile mouth. “Nellie,” he said at last, pausing before her, “the fact is you ought never to have married—you are too good for any man on earth; and now that you have discovered this fact, for heaven’s sake, child, get unmarried as fast as possible.”

“‘Those whom God hath joined together,’” sobbed Nellie, without raising her head.

“‘Let no man,’ etc., etc.,” said Arthur, renewing his march. “I know all about that, and I am not going to advise you to get a divorce; but—your father and mother are in New York for some days, are they not? Well, go to-morrow and join them, and if I am not mistaken, Master Roy will come to his senses, when he returns home and finds his hearth deserted.”

“I think I had better go away for a little while,” said Nellie, thinking with a shudder of Roy’s parting words; “but, Arthur, you will not stay here alone and meet Roy, will you? you are so excited, and I don’t think you understand him.”

“Probably not,” said Arthur, with a ghost of a smile, “nor

do I care to. I should like to stay here and force him to eat his words ; but, as you say, he is your husband, and I have no right to interfere as long as you permit him to abuse you. Give me the note you spoke of, and I will go at once."

Nellie rose and handed him Annida's note, which still lay upon the table where Roy had dropped it, and, glancing at it, Arthur uttered an exclamation of surprise and horror.

"Good God!" he said; "will that woman never weary of her wickedness?" and then he sat down and leaned his head upon his hand, losing himself for a time in painful reflection.

"Who is it that you speak of, Arthur?" said Nellie. "Do you know that handwriting?"

"I do," said Arthur, slowly, "and it behooves us to act cautiously, Nellie, for you have fallen into bad hands. This is the work of the fiend who wrecked my life, and she would ruin yours now, because you are my friend."

"Annida Strathmore!" exclaimed Nellie, in surprise; "but, Arthur, she has always been on friendly terms with me."

"No doubt," replied Arthur; "she never 'barks' before she 'bites;' but, mark my words, she knows more of the letter and how it got among your papers than you do yourself. Think, Nellie, has she had access to them lately?"

Nellie's face flushed, and a look of joy flashed into her eyes. "Arthur," she said, "how can I thank you for that happy suggestion? I feel sure that you are right, for Annida had Elsie's letters only a few days ago."

"Ah, ha!" said Arthur, triumphantly; "the subject becomes interesting. Tell me everything that you can recollect, Nellie, and we will see if we cannot put together the pieces of this puzzle."

With the hope of discovery before her, Nellie at once became collected, and with a slight effort of memory she repeated

all that she knew about the letter from the time she first received it up to date, and Arthur sat before her taking notes of all she said, and growing more hopeful of his case every moment.

“There,” he said, rising from his seat when she had finished her recital, “I have not a doubt, Nellie, but that we are on the right track. Annida stole that letter, I am certain of it, but we will show her more consideration than has been shown to you; and not condemn her without proof. And now, good-night. I cannot sleep until I have laid my plans, and it is growing late. I shall meet you in New York to-morrow, dear, and God grant that I may have some cheering news for you.”

It was but eight o'clock when Arthur left her, and there were still two precious hours before the last ferry to New York, so he hastened at once to Beechcroft, determining to see if Maude could give him any information.

Poor Maude! The clouds were gathering thick around her, and everywhere she turned she heard the mutterings of the coming storm. Of late her life had been made up of sorrows. Roy's marriage had been the first crash of thunder, and quickly on it followed the news of her father's death; then Elsie had returned, and there was a temporary lull. Soon, however, her heart was racked again, for her mother, never very strong, began slowly to decline in health, and day by day she faded; still gentle, queenly, and gracious to the very end, nor seeming to know that she was ill, it was piteous to her daughter to watch the gradual change, and feel that almost her last tie to life was being sundered.

There were outside troubles also to perplex her, and for the first time she was called upon to think of money, and realize its value. Jack and Roy, who had proved themselves good sailors with their captain at the helm in Wall Street, now found

themselves at sea without a compass, and it seemed not at all unlikely that the good ship would founder. Jack's sunny face grew dark with anxiety as loss followed loss with frightful rapidity, yet he knew not how to turn the tide, nor even drop his anchor; so they drifted helplessly along, watching the wind and weather.

It had been some time since Arthur had seen Maude, and he was unprepared for the change which had taken place in her. She looked so pale and sad, and her agitation was so great when he explained the motive of his visit, that, had it not been for Nellie that he was working, he would have left without accomplishing his purpose; but he had promised her some cheering news, and if Maude could give it, he must have it.

Maude was unutterably wretched. How could she confess her share in the theft of the letter and draw down upon herself the contempt and aversion of the only man she had ever loved? and yet Arthur told her that Roy's happiness depended on her frankly disclosing all she knew, and could she refuse to make him happy?

"You must not hurry me," she said, at length, nervously clasping and unclasping her thin white hands. "I will tell you this much now, that I know who took the letter, and it was not Nellie Marston; but for further information, you must wait until I am more composed."

"Will you write that statement down and sign it?" said Arthur, eagerly; and, after a moment's demur, Maude consented, and he departed with this scrap of comfort in his pocket.

"If my cousin wishes to know more," she said, as he left her, "let him come himself and ask me."

CHAPTER VII.

SCIENCE AND RELIGION.

“'T is the divinity that stirs within us —
'T is heaven itself that points out an hereafter,
And intimates eternity to man.”

ABOUT this time a great change occurred in the Stevenson family. “The book” was published, and met with a most astounding success. There was a demand among the public for scientific scraps, and, as a book of reference, Mr. Stevenson’s was unrivalled. All those who wished to appear wise without the trouble of acquiring knowledge, bought it and read it carefully, extracting here and there “the honey” which had caused the author so many weary months of labor, as we lazy mortals take the work of the industrious bee to satisfy the idle taste of the moment, without a thought given to the time he has expended on it. Edition after edition sold rapidly, and Mr. Stevenson became not only famous, but wealthy.

“So your old stones are yielding crops of golden guineas,” said Jack to Bob one day.

“How could they help it,” replied the laughing girl, “when watered by the family’s tears? Tom and Joe have emptied gallons of brine upon those fossils.”

This addition to their income relieved Roberta of considerable anxiety, and life would have gone with her “as merry as a marriage-bell,” had it not been for Augustus, whose health seemed rapidly declining. Day by day she watched his languid footsteps grow more feeble, his fair skin more transparent,

and her heart died within her as the fear dawned upon her that God had heard the boy's oft-repeated, oft-rejected prayer, and would take him to Himself, and slake his thirst for knowledge in the fountain of the living waters.

"Do not fret," he said to her one day, "I shall soon know more than father does. None of them, however learned, can see beyond the grave, Bob," and Bob turned away to hide her tears, lest she added to his troubles, distress for hers.

But other eyes than Bob's had seen how fragile the boy looked, and Dr. Marston's kind heart was touched by the hopeless patience of his face, as, day by day, he labored at his father's side at uncongenial tasks, and, when released, sat wrapt in ecstasy at the old church-organ, drawing wondrous melody from its well-worn chords; or kneeled in the churchyard at his mother's grave, watering the flowers that his tender hand had planted.

"Old Stevenson will kill that boy," he muttered to himself one day, as he paused to watch him at his task. "I don't suppose it will be of any use, but I think I'll step around and speak to him."

Mr. Stevenson was asleep in his study. He had gone there to write, but the afternoon was sultry, the flies troublesome, and he had ended by seating himself in his easy chair beside the window, to catch the breeze rising from the river, and, as I have said, he fell asleep.

Perhaps he was dreaming of a falling star, or a newly-discovered fossil, or he might have been in search of Mr. Darwin's missing link; but be that as it may, we shall never know the truth of it, for he was suddenly interrupted in his nap by the entrance of Dr. Marston, and rudely brought back to sublunary affairs by the remarkable question, propounded energetically:

"Stevenson, do you want to kill that boy of yours?"

“Kill my boy!” exclaimed the old gentleman, starting from his recumbent position. “A — ahem! which boy, my dear sir?” he continued, as though the particular child would make a difference in his answer.

“Augustus,” replied the doctor. “You must surely have observed how ill he is looking.”

“He is not quite well,” said Mr. Stevenson; “but I fail to see how I am the cause of his ill health. I try to make my boys happy.”

“Well, if you will excuse the frankness of an old friend,” said Dr. Marston, “you go about it in a very poor way.”

“I don’t understand you,” said Mr. Stevenson; “pray be more explicit. What fault have you to find with me?”

“Just this,” said the doctor, “that you do not sufficiently consider your childrens’ individualities, and you endeavor too much to influence their inclinations. These inclinations, my friend, are the most obstinate things in creation. They cannot even be bent in the twig. I believe children are born with them; and you might as well amputate an infant’s foot, and compel it to walk on one, as to put a boy in a groove of your choosing, and expect him to run as on oiled wheels. The baby would eventually hop along, without doubt, but it would be a cripple; and the boy would go the way he was driven, but the friction would wear him out.”

“The metaphor is good,” said Mr. Stevenson; “be so kind as to point the moral.”

“The sting of a wasp is in its tail,” said the doctor, with a good-natured smile. “My moral is that Augustus is a martyr to friction. His inclinations are pulling him one way, whilst his father is driving him another, and in the battle between the two, the poor fellow’s strength is giving way. Why don’t you let your boy go into the church?”

A dark cloud gathered upon Mr. Stevenson's face. "I should think you would scarcely need to ask me that question," he said, gravely, "knowing, as you do, my sentiments in regard to religion. Could I, as an honest man, suffer one of my sons to enter that order of hypocrites called the priesthood, who, for their own selfish ends, delude poor, ignorant humanity, with nursery tales of heaven, hell, God, and the devil?"

"There are one or two things to be considered before I can answer you," said the doctor. "In the first place, are all priests hypocrites? and in the second, is it an assured fact that heaven, hell, God, and the devil are delusions?"

"For an answer to the first question," said Mr. Stevenson, "you have but to cast your eye into the past. For how long a time did the earth groan and travail beneath the load of superstition forced upon it by false men, who refused the light of reason, and persecuted truth? Look at Galileo, the most illustrious man of his age, driven by an ignorant priesthood to abjure and curse the doctrine of the movement of the earth, kept under strict surveillance for the residue of his life, denied Christian burial at his death, and thrown into the earth like a dog. Look at Bruno — imprisoned, tortured, murdered, because, forsooth, he refused to believe that the world was flat, supported on pillars, and the sky a firmament, the floor of heaven. A thousand times rather let me have a Bruno for a son, than a Peter who could deny his Lord. The one died nobly for truth's sake, the other betrayed his friend and benefactor through pusillanimity."

"They were a blind, bigoted set, those old priests of the Inquisition," said Dr. Marston, cheerfully; "we don't want to make Augustus one of them; but how much better are we, my friend, if we persecute our children because they will not think as we do? Of what use is knowledge if it does not teach us to

be liberal? We cannot all eat one food — we do not even all see alike; who, then, is to tell his neighbor, 'This is truth'? What says Anaxagoras? 'Nothing can be known, nothing can be learned, nothing can be certain. Sense is limited, intellect is weak, life is short.'"

"Aye," said Mr. Stevenson, slowly, "we have no criterion of truth. The best of us must say with the disciples of Pyrrho, 'We assert nothing, no, not even that we assert nothing.'"

"You are not prepared to assert, then, that there is no God?" said Dr. Marston.

"There is no need of one," said Mr. Stevenson; "nature is sufficient in herself."

"But things exist of which neither you nor I see the need," said Dr. Marston. "The fact that you believe nature to be sufficient in herself, is no proof that God is not."

"No," said Mr. Stevenson, reluctantly. "The non-existence of an infinite being cannot, of course, be proved."

"There is a doubt on the subject, then?" said Dr. Marston.

"Assuredly," replied Mr. Stevenson.

"Then give your Creator the benefit of the doubt," said the doctor, rising; "satisfy your son's longings, and take him from his unhappy reveries in the graveyard before it is too late. Good-bye, old friend, and forgive my interference in your private affairs. I saw the boy lying on the damp grass as I passed the church just now, and I felt that I must speak whilst there was time."

The doctor went his way, and Mr. Stevenson tried once more to settle to his work, but his friend's warning would not be put aside, and he found his mind wandering to Augustus's pale face, and vague fears took possession of him lest he should lose this boy, who was, above all, his favorite, owing to his likeness to his mother.

He rose and went to the door. "Roberta," he called, "where is Augustus?"

"I think he has gone to church, papa," was the timid response; "but if I can be of any use in his place—" The sentence was unfinished, however, for her father had already left the house.

He walked on hurriedly to the church. Afternoon service had begun, but Augustus was not there, and turning aside into the churchyard, his father began a search for him among the graves. He had not long to look, for, not far from the entrance, lay the boy with his head pillowed on his arm, and his dreamy blue eyes fixed on space.

His father stole upon him unawares, nor noticed whither his steps were leading him, until, as he stood beside the grassy mound covered with a carpet of bright flowers, he read, between the garlands on the headstone, "Sacred to the memory of Catharine Stevenson," and then, a little way below, "*Mors mihi lucrum*" ("Death to me is gain").

He sighed heavily, and looked once more at the boy. It seemed as though the dead had risen from her grave; not as he had seen her last, worn and weary with the strife of life, but in the beautiful bloom of youth, when he had first met her and won her love. Certainly Augustus was very like his mother. Was the same doom hanging over his head? must he watch him also go down into the grave?"

"Augustus!" he exclaimed, "you must not lie on the damp grass; you will take cold."

August started up and looked about him in surprise. "Father!" he exclaimed, as his eyes fell upon him, and the word spoke a volume of astonishment.

"Dr. Marston has just left me," continued Mr. Stevenson, "and he says that you come too frequently to this unhealthy

spot. You must discontinue the habit; I cannot allow you to undermine your constitution in this way."

August grew very white. "I hope, sir," he said, pleadingly, "that you will not forbid my coming here occasionally; I assure you it does me no harm, and—and these are my happiest hours."

"And why should they be, sir?" said his father. "It is a curious place to come for recreation. Why do you not occupy yourself like others of your age? Take a gun or a fishing-rod and amuse yourself reasonably. What profit or pleasure do you find in lying on the grass and looking at the clouds?"

"I do not come here for that purpose," said August, coloring slightly, "and I will promise not to lie again upon the grass, if you will allow me still to tend my flowers. They will all die if I do not care for them."

"Put your flowers in your garden," said Mr. Stevenson, "and you can do what you like for them."

"This is my garden," said the boy, leaning sadly over the grave. "Here lies the most precious flower that ever graced our lives, father."

It was a moment before Mr. Stevenson could speak, and even when he did, his voice was broken.

"Augustus," he said, "you cannot too tenderly respect your mother's memory, but your affection for this mound of earth is mere sentiment, and of a most unhealthy sort. Death is a stern, cruel, resistless power, and sweeps from us often that which we would give our own lives to retain, but it is the inevitable sequence of life, one of nature's immutable laws, and as such we must accept it, nor brood like children over our losses."

"I do not brood over my loss," said August, raising his bright eyes to his father's; "it would be both wicked and

foolish to do so. 'I heard a voice from heaven, saying, blessed are the dead who die in the Lord: even so saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labors.' "

"Who shall say that they rest?" said Mr. Stevenson, gloomily; "who can tell that they must not, in the course of time, repeat their lives, according to the laws of nature, and perhaps in this next condition suffer misery unspeakable?"

"Who, indeed, could tell us this, save He who rose from the dead?" said August; "He who said to the dying thief, 'To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise?'"

"Paradise," said Mr. Stevenson, musingly; "that is the 'fairy land' of children of larger growth, and has no place save in fiction. It is not beneath our feet, for it is the earth, we stand on; it is not over our heads, for the blue canopy above us is nothing but stellar space. Could your eye pierce the vapor which lies betwixt it and yourself, your paradise would be found as dark as Erebus, owing simply to the absence of all floating matter capable of diffusing light; but this vapor is like a poet's fancies, rising from earth to heaven, changing the darkness to a soft cerulean blue, and peopling with fantastic shapes, what but for it, were a dark, impenetrable void."

"I think paradise is very near," said the boy, dreamily; "it is around and about us everywhere. The angels appeared suddenly to the watching shepherds, not as though they had travelled far to find them."

"Then the kingdom of God is upon earth?" queried Mr. Stevenson.

"Behold the kingdom of God is within you," said August, solemnly; "these were the words of one, of whom the soldiers said, 'Never man spake like this man.'"

"If His kingdom be on earth, wherefore, then, did your Christ ascend?" asked Mr. Stevenson.

“He ascended into Heaven, from whence He came,” replied August. “Heaven is above us.”

“Heaven and hell are then in stellar space,” said Mr. Stevenson, scornfully. “It is quite remarkable that science does not find some trace of the existence of these worlds; one would suppose that they must needs have some place in the solar systems.”

“And how do you know that they have not?” asked August.

“Because,” said Mr. Stevenson, “astronomical observations show us that through certain universal laws of attraction and repulsion, each planet keeps its place, and you must see for yourself that the existence in the universe of a celestial body, large enough to hold all the inhabitants past, present, and to come, of not only our own globe, but of all the other countless worlds which gem the sky, could scarcely fail to be known through the powerful effect it would exert upon the solar systems.”

“Science,” said August, with a smile, “is like a schoolboy standing by the ocean, and bounding it with the line of the horizon, because he can see no further. Perhaps, when age has brought experience, it will find that what in youth it called the universe, was in magnitude but as a single star, when compared with God’s creations — system upon system, each revolving round its little sun — universe upon universe, revolving round a glorious centre, the heaven of the heavens, the throne of the most high God.”

“The idea is ingenious,” said Mr. Stevenson; “it is, however, no more than a suggestion — you have no proof to offer to substantiate it.”

“I have more proof of the fact that there is a heaven than you have that there is not,” said August, eagerly; “for has not

the Son of God testified of it? And what can science adduce to the contrary, save the commonplace objection, 'I do not see it?' We do not see the wind, we do not see an echo, and yet we know that there is both wind and echo."

"The Son of God!" said Mr. Stevenson, slowly. "My boy, be no longer blinded by such foolish superstition. Throw off these Popish leading-strings, think for yourself, and face the truth. There is no God!"

"My father," said August, in a sweet, low voice, "I am blinded by no superstition. Have you not taught me yourself the great laws of nature? And what other teachers have I had save her and my mother's Bible? I know very little, and willingly confess my ignorance, and if science, whilst she says what is not, will but tell me that which is, I will yield my feeble knowledge at once and follow in her wake; but, although she says 'There is no God, nature is sufficient in herself,' she does not tell me who made nature so self-sufficient. And whilst she tells me that the world was formed by the commingling of minute atoms, forming molecules, which, according to the laws of attraction and repulsion, built themselves one upon the other, she does not answer when I ask 'Who made these laws? who first started these atoms into action?' I admit all the truths that science has revealed, but I say the creation of the universe is Godlike, the mystery of life is Godlike. Man must worship, my father. If you would take my God from me, you must give me another. 'Go, search diligently, and when ye have found Him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship Him also.'"

"The mystery of life is inscrutable," said Mr. Stevenson, gravely. "Some say that heat is sufficient in itself to produce it, and others say that the clashing together of these molecules, which compose nature, resulted in the vital spark."

“That force which produced life was divine,” said August. “Tell me, therefore, father, where it is, that I may worship it. Could dead atoms produce life? Let me then bow the knee to oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen, carbon, and phosphorus. Was it indeed heat or light? Then let us be fire worshippers. It was none of these? No. Then what was it but the breath of God? Ah! father, I say to you, as Christ to the woman of Samaria, ‘Ye worship ye know not what; we know what we worship.’”

“Man worships knowledge,” said Mr. Stevenson.

“And yet how little does he know,” said August. “See how laboriously he climbs the mountain side; see how he struggles towards his goal, and just as the highest peak is neared, just as the sun seems bursting forth, his foot slips, his time has come, and he goes down into the darkness, to make way for another weary worker, who gets but a few steps further, before he, too, meets his fate.”

“Aye, death is the enemy of knowledge,” said Mr. Stevenson, gloomily.

“Not so,” said August, energetically. “Death is but the opening of the door to everlasting truth. In this world we are but blind men, groping after light; but when death, who is God’s messenger, shall have laid his hands upon our eyes, we shall no longer ‘see through a glass darkly, but then face to face.’”

“You firmly believe, then, in a future state?” asked his father.

“This life but foreshadows the next,” said August, “as spring betokens the advance of summer. What saith Christ? ‘Ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time?’”

“You believe also in the resurrection?” asked his father.

“‘I know that my Redeemer liveth,’” said August, “‘and

that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God, whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another.' ”

“If, then, you rise with this body you now have,” said Mr. Stevenson, “you will again be subject to decay?”

“I did not say that this identical flesh and blood would rise again,” said August. “‘Thou sowest *not* that body which shall be, but bare grain; it may chance of wheat, or of corn, or of some other grain, but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him, and to every seed his own body.’ ‘There is a natural body and a spiritual body.’ ‘It is sown a natural body — it is raised a spiritual body.’ ”

“How can matter become spirit?” said Mr. Stevenson.

“Why should you suppose that it does?” said August. “If the kingdom of God is within us, may it not be this ‘spiritual body’ which stamps its impress on our faces? May it not be born in us, increase with our years, and grow with our growth? When I look at you, my father, I see but one man, and yet in reality how many have you within you? First we have your image in the rough skeleton, and that is one; next in the muscles, and that is two; again we find you in the delicate tracery of the veins, which is three; and in the brain and nerves is still a fourth you. If, then, there are four forms which I cannot see, within one that I can, why should there not also be a fifth, a spiritual form, in perfect accord with the other four?”

“It has never been discovered that any such thing existed,” said Mr. Stevenson; “all we really know is that the body returns to that earth from whence it came.”

“Aye, and that is all that the finite mind will ever know, if it confines itself to facts,” replied August, “and makes no effort to rise above what it sees. Of what use is the knowledge of

what is, if it does not lead us to draw conclusions from it of what may be? My father, you might as well endeavor to persuade me that these flowers are not in bloom, as that this fair lily lying beneath the sod will not one day be with her Lord in paradise, bearing the same form and face which we knew and loved here, but in her spiritual body, which shall know neither corruption nor decay. 'There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars,' but the highest glory of all, my father, is the glory of God, and 'the life of the world to come.' "

"Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,

Lead Thou me on;

The night is dark, and I am far from home —

Lead Thou me on.

Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see

The distant scene; one step enough for me.

"So long thy power hath blest me, sure it still

Will lead me on

O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till

The night be gone,

And with the morn those angel faces smile

Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile. Amen."

It was the choir singing the evening hymn. The boys' flute-like voices floated on the flower-scented air like angels' whispers, whilst the red sun in the west sank slowly down to rest, giving each fleecy cloud a golden border, and resting like a heavenly benediction on the old man's silver hair, and the golden brown locks of the young champion of the faith.

"Roberta," said Mr. Stevenson that evening, as she bade him good-night, "it would be well for you to look over your brother's clothes, as he will go to the seminary next month; and Roberta —"

“Yes, papa.”

“Hand me the third book from the end of the second shelf before you go.”

Roberta walked over to the bookcase, but paused as she read the title of the book her father had designated.

“Papa,” she said, timidly, “have n't you made a mistake?”

“I think not,” said her father, looking up, and she thought she had never seen so gentle an expression on his face since her mother died.

“But, papa, that is the Bible!” exclaimed the astonished girl.

“Yes, my dear,” replied her father, “I know it is.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FLIGHT.

“One woe doth tread upon another's heel,
So fast they follow — your sister's drown'd.”

CLEAR and bright dawned the day on which Elsie was to leave her home, and as the gray dawn melted into daylight, she raised her head from her sleepless pillow, and glanced around the room, her eyes resting wistfully on the familiar objects, which after to-day she should never see again.

Who would occupy those pretty rooms when she was gone? Would St. Evremond pack away the pictures, books, and ornaments with which he had surrounded her, and, locking the chamber-doors, sternly forbid any one to ever mention the wife who had betrayed him; or would he leave them all untouched

— the shawl hanging over the chair, the slippers by the bed — just as she would leave them, and come there in the twilight with his little son, to talk of her and wish for her return? Tears filled her eyes as she thought that this might be, but she dashed them hastily away and arose and dressed, stifling as best she could her sorrow and remorse.

She dropped into an open valise some necessary articles of clothing, and the others she laid carefully away in drawers and presses, and when at last her work was finished, she fell upon her knees beside her bed, and hid her face once more among the pillows. There was a knock upon the outer door; at first she did not answer, but another and another brought her from her room to question who was there. It was Alphonse. Would Madame come to breakfast? Monsieur wished to know — it was ready, and they only awaited her arrival to send it in.

She looked hesitatingly around the room, and her eye rested on the chair beside the window where Roy had found her the night before. Could she face her husband with that interview still so fresh in her mind? She shuddered; no, Madame would not descend; she would breakfast in her room — she had rested badly and was suffering from a headache; so a tray was brought her with coffee and fresh rolls, and a little bouquet of flowers, with Monsieur's kind regards, and a hope that she would join them presently in the garden.

She drank the coffee standing; she could not eat, and then, with trembling hand, she raised the flowers and kissed them. Her hand was feverish, her breath was hot, and as she held them they drooped and wilted on their stems. She put them down again upon her plate, saying, bitterly: "All that I touch I kill," and then continued the preparations for her departure.

She heard St. Evremond come out into the garden with Lorraine; they paused beside her window, and she listened with bated breath to hear what they were saying.

“See, Lorraine,” said his father, “some one has ruined Elsie’s pretty flowers. I had these fuchsias placed beneath the window yesterday, and to-day they are lying in the dust, with all their leaves and flowers broken. The gardener thinks some one must have jumped from the window and crushed them. What do you think, my boy?”

There was no answer, and trembling violently, Elsie approached the other window, and gazed at them from behind the curtain. St. Evremond had his little son by the hand, and was pointing to the flowers, but the boy was holding back, with his eyes fixed resolutely on the ground.

“Do you think that any one jumped from the window?” continued St. Evremond, kindly; “don’t be afraid to speak.”

“I don’t know,” stammered the boy.

A sharp pang went through Elsie’s heart. He was true to her, but he had lied to his father, and she felt that, whatever the consequences, she would rather he had told the truth.

St. Evremond looked troubled. He knew the boy was hiding something, but he never dreamed he was deceiving him. “Lorraine,” he said, at length, “I do not think that you would tell a lie to screen yourself from punishment; therefore, tell me frankly, did you break those flower-pots?”

“No, papa.” This time the answer was firm and bold.

“But you know who did?” continued his father, looking at him keenly.

“No, papa.” Now the answer was faint again, and Lorraine hung his head and blushed.

“I cannot understand it,” said St. Evremond; “you look so guilty, Rainé, and yet you speak so fair. But you have never yet deceived me, so I will believe you now; but, remember this, that, whilst I will forgive any fault confessed, I shall be merciless if you have told a lie.”

They passed on, and, drawing back, Elsie hid her face in her hands. "It is well that I am going," she sobbed; "I should have destroyed him as I did the flowers;" and then she hastily put on her bonnet, gloves, and veil, and turned to go.

In the upper hall she paused a moment. It was used as a picture-gallery, and when she reached her father's likeness, she raised her eyes to the dull canvas, saying: "Papa, *you* will not blame me.—you know why it is I go!" and then she hurried on again. Once more she stopped, however. In the hall below there hung an old gray plaid. It had been wrapped around St. Evremond when he was carried off the field, and now he used it when the nights were damp to spread upon the grass, as they sat together on the lawn. Lorraine called it "Papa's friend," and his father laughingly replied: "And not unlike papa, Lorraine, for it has seen much good service and is the worse for wear," to which the boy replied, with spirit, "But it is a warm, true friend for all that."

"Aye, 'warm and true,'" said Elsie, as she stood beside it now and recalled the words, and she laid her hand on it and caressed it, as though it were a sentient being. "So kind and true as he has been to me. Oh, God, forgive me if I break his heart!" The words were broken by a sob. "If I dared stay—oh, if I dared—but I must not think of that. Only last evening I was dreaming, dreaming of a happy life—only last evening I was hoping, hoping that the time might come when he would draw me closer, closer to his side, and I might rest my weary head upon his brave, true heart; now—now—" She pressed her soft cheek convulsively against the coarse gray cloth; bitter sobs came from the parted lips; the tears were streaming from her eyes. "Alphonse, who is that in the hall?" called St. Evremond; and, like a startled fawn, she sped away.

"George," she said to the undergardener, as she passed out

of the gate, "if Monsieur asks for me, tell him I was obliged to go to the city, and had not time to tell him before I left."

"Yes, mum," said the man, touching his cap, "and if it's by the next boat you'd go, you'll have to be afther hurryin' a bit, for she's just roundin' the corner this blessid minit."

Elsie quickened her pace at this information, and reached the landing just as the boat was about to leave. The men were already drawing in the plank, and Roy, with wild anxiety depicted on his countenance, was urging them to wait yet one moment longer. "I expect a lady," he said, imploringly.

"All right; here she is," said the captain, and just then Elsie stepped on board.

At the entrance of the cabin was a woman dressed in black and closely veiled. She had followed Roy on board, and, after a moment's hesitation, had chosen this seat, and seemed to divide her attention equally between the rows of life-preservers, which hung over her head, and the fire-extinguishers, at her feet; but when he said that he expected a lady, she had involuntarily started, and now, as Elsie came up to her, leaning on his arm, the woman cowered down upon her seat, and seemed to be laboriously spelling out the name of the maker on the buckets.

"Darling," said Roy to his companion, as they passed her, "why did you frighten me so? I was half mad with anxiety. I thought your courage had given out and you were going to disappoint me."

"My courage never fails," said Elsie, "and I always keep my word. I could not get away before."

"Well, I shall not scold, as you are here," said Roy; "but if you had not come, Elsie, I should have jumped overboard and 'made an end on 't.' Shall we go in the cabin, or remain where we are?"

"It is pleasant where we are," said Elsie; "let us remain

here — the trip is but a short one." So Roy brought a couple of camp-stools, and they sat down within view of the veiled woman, but too far away for her to catch what they were saying. She could see, however, the varying color of the lady's face and the devoted love beaming in the gentleman's dark eyes; and, pressing her hand upon her heart, she tried once more to decipher the writing on the buckets.

"Smith and Dobson! Smith and Dobson!" she said to herself, mechanically, and then her heart cried: "Oh, Elsie! Elsie! why could you not leave me my husband's love? You, who are so beautiful and could have the world at your feet, why could you not spare this one man's heart?"

"And now, dearest, we must form our plans," said Roy; "I have not been able to do much without consulting you. I have telegraphed for a carriage to meet us at the ferry, and then you must decide where we shall go first. By the way, where is your luggage?"

"I could not bring it with me," replied Elsie; "I can send for it when I am ready."

"It is a pity you have nothing with you," said Roy, "for the *Europa* sails to-day, and I thought we might have taken passage on her. I have a friend who expected to go by her to Liverpool; but his wife has been taken ill, and he will be glad, I know, to let me have his tickets. Could you not make some slight provision for your wants in the city, and meet me on the vessel?"

"Oh, yes, I have some clothes in the city," said Elsie, dreamily; "I shall do very well."

"It is the best thing we can do," said Roy; "for we must get out of the way for a little while, until the storm blows over. I suppose that *Monsieur votre mari* will at least inquire after you, and it is as well to be beyond his reach."

“Oh, yes, he will inquire after me,” said Elsie, and a soft light stole into her eyes.

“Did you have much trouble in evading him this morning?” asked Roy.

“No; I did not see him before I left,” replied Elsie.

“It is better so,” said Roy. “We are nearing the city, Elsie,” he added, suddenly. “Soon, soon, my darling, we shall have left our past lives behind us, like an ugly dream, and have entered on a paradise of love.”

“Roy,” said Elsie, leaning towards him and speaking impressively, “have you considered well what you are about to do? Are you in the delirium of excitement or do you comprehend that you are luring me from home and friends, and all that a woman holds most dear? That you are bringing dishonor on a noble, good, and upright man, and leaving your true, devoted wife to break her heart?”

“I have no wife,” said Roy, fiercely, and raising his voice in his excitement, the words fell upon the ears of the veiled woman.

“Smith and Dobson! Smith and Dobson!” she murmured. “Oh, I wish that I was dead! God! God! take pity on me.”

“How can you be so cruelly vindictive?” said Elsie. “Even if Nellie had really wronged you — and you have her word that she did not — would it not have been through love for you she erred? It is less than human to cherish indignation against one who loves us, as she does you.”

“Let us leave the subject,” said Roy, gloomily. “I wish to forget all that has passed since you and I were childish lovers. Let us go back to that time, Elsie, and begin our life anew together. See, we are almost at the shore.”

“Roy,” said Elsie, “I will no longer deceive you; our paths lie together no farther than that shore. Not for all the

love, the bliss, the honor, glory, power of the world, would I break poor Nellie's heart, or bring a shadow on my husband's name."

"Elsie, you are mad," exclaimed Roy, growing very pale. "What can you mean by such words? Have you not left your home with me forever? How, then, can you leave me? Your husband would not receive you now, did you return to him; it is too late to save him from disgrace."

"And why is it too late?" said Elsie, fixing her eyes upon him. "What have I done to bring disgrace upon him? Is it so great a matter that I should come to the city for a few hours on business? or, that I should have met a friend on board the boat and conversed with him?"

"You basely deceived me when you said that you must leave your husband, then?" said Roy, indignantly. "What was the meaning of your words last evening?"

"I did not deceive you," said Elsie, slowly. "What I said then, I still mean. I have left my husband, Roy, and his home will see me no more. Could I live with him, think you, acting a daily lie? Could I meet his eye, accept his confidence, remembering last night? I have gone from him, Roy, because I am unworthy of his love, but in my solitude I shall guard his name as Elaine the shield of Launcelot, and keep his honor bright with tears."

"But, Elsie, Elsie, think of me," cried Roy. "Do you owe me nothing? My life will be a blank without you. The boat is at the dock — in a moment we shall land — for God's sake, dearest —" but his sentence was never finished.

Aye, "the boat was at the dock." Already the eager passengers crowded to the front, each anxious to land before his neighbor. Here was a woman on household deeds intent, and there a child decked out in ribbons, bound for a holiday; here

a man with care-worn brow, counting the gains of yesterday, and chafing that to-day's earnings were not yet begun, and there a young girl, blushing like a rose, and looking for her lover on the shore; some leaning on the taffrail looking idly at the water, some brushing back disordered locks from bright, sunshiny faces, some cording boxes, sorting bags, and others—oh, bitter woe!—resting carelessly against the cage, in which man had imprisoned that savage, restless demon “Steam.” What was the first warning? no one knew; but suddenly, hissing, crashing, boiling, bubbling, the monster broke his chains, and with a roar of triumph he burst his iron cage asunder, and rent the boat from stem to stern.

Oh, the wailing and the weeping! Oh, the cries to heaven for mercy! The stumbling o'er the dead to reach the imprisoned living. And 'mid the strife and carnage, one sat in quiet patience, only whispering softly: “Death is coming to me.”

They fought and wrestled round her to seize the life-preservers, but she only watched and waited, saying, “Death is coming to me.”

“Can you swim?” said Roy to Elsie; “the flames are coming near us.”

“No, no,” she said, hurriedly. “Is there no other plan of safety? Oh, to die—to die—so soon, and at the shore.”

“If I had anything to tie you to,” he said, in great distress. “Ah, for the love of God, good people, give me a life preserver.”

She heard the voice, the cry for help, and in one moment the silent watcher was struggling with her neighbor. “Give it to me,” she cried, and fought, and tore, and wrestled, until the prize was wrested from the foe, and as Elsie, pale and haggard, stood looking at her fate, around her waist the cord was passed and nimble fingers fastened it behind.

“Saved, saved!” cried Roy, seizing her in his arms, and springing from the deck into the dark waters below. “God in heaven bless you,” he shouted to their silent helper, and then struck out for shore.

“He blessed me! he blessed me!” she murmured. “Ah, I am ready now to die.”

“Turn on your back and float,” said Roy, seizing Elsie by the arm, and as she did so she looked up and back, and on the deck above her saw a slight pale woman, with the glow of youth still lingering round her. Her hands were clasped, her eyes were raised, and round her parted lips hovered a smile of more than human sweetness.

A wild shriek rent the air. “Eleanor! oh, Eleanor!” wailed Elsie; “Roy, save her.”

She heard the voice, and looked at them, love beaming from her gentle eyes. She waved her hand to them and whispered: “Death is coming for me,” and even as she spoke, a chasm opened wide before her, the flames rushed on her from behind, and she was seen no more.

CHAPTER IX.

COBWEBS SWEPT AWAY.

“Show us how divine a thing
A woman may be made.”

WHO could express Roy's agony as he saw the waters close over Eleanor? There are moments in which we seem to live years, so great is the amount of suffering compressed into them, and to him the short time that elapsed be-

tween landing Elsie in safety and returning to the wreck seemed an eternity.

Horror, remorse, pity, love, strove within him as he searched fruitlessly among the floating timber for her whom he had called his wife. Numberless were the pale, fixed faces, staring upwards from the water, but none bore her features, and at last, totally exhausted, he once more returned to the shore, to sit in silence and watch and wait as one by one the recovered bodies were brought up for recognition.

Hour after hour he sat there — no further thought of Elsie crossed his mind. Ever present with him was that last sweet smile, and he felt as well assured that Eleanor was innocent of what he had accused her, as that she had now passed beyond the reach of his repentance.

The evening closed in, but he moved not — he would stay there to the end ; sooner or later she must be brought to shore, and a chill horror rushed over him as he thought of how he would see her next. It was no matter ; he would hold the wet, cold figure to his heart, he would pray forgiveness of the senseless form, he would rain kisses on the pale blue lips, and then — he would kill himself, for he was not fit to live. He was a murderer, he had killed his wife, and as the law would not recognize the fact, he must take justice into his own hands, for Nellie should be avenged.

Some one came up to him and flashed a light into his face ; he did not raise his eyes. The figure stood beside him, and at last a deep voice said :

“Where is your wife, Roy Weston?”

He started and shuddered. Was the voice from within or without? Was it his accusing conscience speaking ; or was it the voice of God demanding of him this pure young life which he had taken? Wet clothes, and his long, frightful watch had

not been without their effect upon him, and his reason refused to answer his appeal. In vain he tried to collect his scattered senses, in vain he endeavored to look up, and at last, relinquishing the struggle, he buried his face in his hands, and groaned through his chattering teeth —

“Thou, God, knowest, and Thou only.”

The figure stooped over him to listen, and then exclaimed: “Roy! Roy Weston! Look up, man! don't you know me? what is the matter with you?”

“I confess! I confess!” moaned Roy. “It was I that killed her. Oh, my darling! oh, my darling! smile at me no more.”

“He is delirious, I do believe,” muttered Arthur Leighton, for it was he who had come in search of him. “I wish I had pocketed my wrath and come before. See here, old boy, can't you get your wits together? I want you to come home with me, Roy.”

“Home?” echoed Roy; “my home is with my wife. Let me go to her,” and, starting up, he went a few paces towards the water.

“That is just what I want you to do,” said Arthur; “but, thank God, you won't find her in that direction. Eleanor is at the hotel with her mother.”

These last words had the effect of fully arousing Roy. He turned about sharply, exclaiming:

“What do you say? — Eleanor is still alive? Don't lie to me, man,” he shouted, in mad excitement, “or I'll throttle you,” and, seizing Arthur by the shoulders, he shook him violently.

“There! there! that will do,” said Arthur, endeavoring to free himself from his grasp. “Eleanor is safe, I give you my word. I was standing on the dock waiting for her when

the accident occurred, and, springing at once into the water, I seized her as she was about to sink and carried her to shore. Come with me to her, now, for she is anxious about you."

But Roy sank back again upon his seat and covered his face with his hands.

"Safe! safe!" he said; "oh, God, it is too much."

"Come, man," said Arthur, impatiently, "don't sit down on that wet stone again. I tell you Nellie is waiting for you."

"Go to her," said Roy, speaking with difficulty; "tell her that I am safe, Arthur, but that from this day I will never see her again. Tell her that I know I have wronged her; tell her that I am not worthy to come into her presence, but for the rest of my life I will repent of my blind injustice and believe her word against the world."

"I am glad to hear you speak so sensibly," said Arthur, "especially as I have proof in my pocket—if the water has not destroyed it—that Eleanor had nothing whatever to do with the theft of the letter. But I will take no messages, old fellow—you must come yourself. I was told to bring you home, and I must do it."

"I cannot go," said Roy. "Neither you nor she can know how I would have wronged her, had it not been for the accident this morning. Take me home with you, Arthur, I am ill," he continued, hurriedly, pressing his hand to his side, "but do not trouble Nellie about her worthless husband."

Finding it impossible to move him in his determination, Arthur took a carriage and conveyed him to his lodgings, calling for a physician by the way, for Roy's mind began once more to wander, and his pulse was very high.

Having put him to bed and administered the remedies ordered by the doctor, Arthur returned to Nellie, whom he found wandering restlessly about the hotel parlor, like a pale, dreary ghost.

“Have you seen him?” she exclaimed, eagerly, as he entered. “Is he safe and well?”

“Yes,” said Arthur, “I have seen him,” and, drawing her aside, he related how and where he had found her husband, and how impossible it had been to persuade him to return with him. “I think he dreads your anger,” he continued. “Will you come around to my rooms with me and speak to him?”

“No! oh, no!” said Nellie, shrinking back; “he told me to keep out of his sight, and to force myself on him now, when he is suffering, would be ungenerous.”

“But I think his feelings have changed,” said Arthur. “His grief, when he supposed you dead, was dreadful to witness.”

“It would have been better, then, that I had died,” said Nellie, sorrowfully. “He loves Elsie, Arthur, and though, if dead, he might grieve for me, yet living, and in his way, he will hate me. No, I cannot go to him.”

“For the first time in your life, Nellie, you are acting selfishly,” said Arthur, “and I am going to enjoy the rare pleasure of scolding you. No one knows better than myself the womanly motives which influence you, and how difficult it is for you to go to him, unasked, after all that has passed between you; but can you not put aside these feelings for a time, forget you are his injured wife, and remember only that you are his best friend? He is ill and needs a nurse — must I look for another to fill the place?”

“He loves Elsie,” gasped Nellie. “Arthur, I cannot go.”

“Of the state of his affections, I, of course, know nothing,” said Arthur, “but if he do indeed love Elsie, then there is all the more reason that you should be his friend, and save him from himself. What can such love end in but misery, Nellie? and will his wife stand by, and see his wretchedness, without making an effort to make him less unhappy?”

"I heard him say he had no wife," said Nellie, with a shudder. "Arthur, Arthur, don't ask me to force myself upon him."

"He was mad when he said that," replied Arthur, "and thought that he had been basely deceived by you; but I have told him the truth now, and he is overcome by penitence and remorse. You will come to him, Nellie? I know that it is hard," he continued, as she made no answer, but stood irresolute before him, looking wistfully upon the ground; "it is almost more than human nature can endure, but you are more than human, dear, and the good angel which dwells within you, will, I am sure, lead you to your husband's side."

"I will go," said Nellie at last, hesitatingly; "but if he sends me from him again, Arthur, it will kill me."

"He will never send you from him any more," said Arthur, with a bright smile. "I will give my word for that; so let us go to him at once, poor fellow, for he stands in need of all our care."

So Arthur led the way to the room where Roy was tossing restlessly, from side to side, upon his bed, and muttering incoherent sentences, in which, now and then, Eleanor's name could be distinguished, coupled always with some endearing epithet or prayer for pardon. Overcome by her emotion, Nellie leaned over the sick man, and pressed her lips upon his unconscious brow. "You did not tell me how ill he was," she said, with a sob, "or I would have come before."

And meanwhile where was Elsie? She had fainted, from fatigue and fright, when Roy had left her on the shore, and on returning to consciousness she found herself in a house near the boat-landing, with a group of anxious people gathered round her, whilst a physician stood with his hand upon her heart, deciding for her the momentous question of life or death.

A glass of wine was at once administered, and as she revived under its influence, she was eagerly interrogated, by those about her, as to her friends, and several among them offered to carry a message for her to the city, or back to the Island.

She sent at once for Jack, for she had originally intended to stay at her mother's house in Fifth Avenue until she had arranged her plans for the future, but the messenger returned from a fruitless search after him, stating that both house and office were closed, and no one in the neighborhood could give any information in regard to the gentleman's whereabouts.

This was a severe blow to Elsie, and she knew not what to do. None of her friends were in the city at this season, and, apart from her disinclination to go alone to a hotel, she had not the necessary funds, having brought nothing with her, save a little change, being confident of meeting her brother and making him her banker.

There was nothing to be done, therefore, but to go home again, that is, to Staten Island;—her husband's house, she must never see again; so, weary, perplexed, and sick at heart, she turned once more to the ferry, shuddering at the sight of the water, and trying to erase from her mind that last terrible moment when they had lost sight of Nellie.

“Elsie,” suddenly exclaimed a voice beside her, “is it indeed you, alive and well?” and the next moment her husband's arms were about her, and she was clasped to his heart, whilst he faltered out, in an agitated voice, “Oh, my child, my dear one, I have been half mad with anguish! I thought that you were lost to me forever. Thank God, thank God, that I have found you at last.”

A flood of happiness rushed over Elsie's heart at these words, so expressive of his love for her, and for a moment all past woes were lost in present joy. It was but for a moment, however,

and then the recollection of her real position towards him, forced itself upon her, and blushing deeply, she shrank instinctively from his enfolding arms.

At her first effort, St. Evremond released her, and they stood for a moment looking in silence at one another. It was the first time he had ever embraced her, and he feared lest she should be angry with him for having so far forgotten himself, but there was nothing written on her face save bitter and intense sorrow, and her eyes seemed pleading that he would be merciful. He could not understand it, and waited anxiously for her to break the silence.

She spoke at last. "How did you hear of the accident?" she said, endeavoring to speak calmly.

"The news was sent over to the Island at once," replied St. Evremond, "and George, who came to me with it, told me you had gone to the city on the ill-fated boat; so I came over on the next one, and have been searching for you ever since. I would not go through this last hour's misery," he continued, "for all that the world could give me. Come, let us go home at once, and endeavor to forget this unhappy scene," and drawing her arm within his, he led her unresistingly on board the boat just starting from the pier, and a moment after she found herself *en route* for home, still under the protection she had that morning quitted, as she thought, forever.

They reached Staten Island in safety, but, alas, this day's troubles were not yet over, for Jack met them at the landing, with a sad, grave face. Mrs. Von Decker had breathed her last, quietly though suddenly, that morning.

CHAPTER X.

THE BITER BITTEN.

“Alas, the love of woman, it is known
To be a lovely and a fearful thing.”

THE next few weeks passed for Elsie like a troubled dream. Her mother's death, although they had known that her strength was failing rapidly, was still a shock to all of them, and Elsie remained at Beechcroft some time after the funeral to comfort Maude, who had broken down entirely under this new trial.

Jack, who was also terribly depressed, now confided to his sisters the difficulties he had tried to hide during his mother's illness for fear of troubling her last hours, and frankly confessed that more than half of their handsome property had sifted through his fingers.

“There is still left,” he said, “enough to keep Maude and the boys from want; and I am going away, Elsie, to see if I cannot do something for myself.”

“Maude and the boys must come to me,” said Elsie, eagerly; “and you too, dear Jack, we cannot let you go away.”

“You would not ask me to stay, Elsie,” he said, “and be the recipient of your husband's bounty? No, I must go, but I shall be glad to think that the others have found a home with you. What do you say, Maudy?”

“I think it would be best for the boys to go to school,” said Maude; “they could pass their holidays with Elsie then, and she would not be burdened with them all the time; and as for

myself, dear," she continued, with varying color, "I have my own plans, and will tell you when they are arranged." So the subject was dropped for the moment, and Elsie still remained with them.

Of course Maude had questioned her about the missing letter, and had heard to her dismay all the trouble which had resulted from its discovery in Eleanor's possession. She had at once determined that the truth must be told, and for this purpose sent for Annida to come and see her; but, although Annida came, she could not persuade her to see matters in the same light, and she indignantly refused to confess her part of the transaction, declaring that she had retained only a little note from Nellie to Elsie, as she had told Maude at the time, and knew nothing whatever about the theft of the letter.

Maude knew that she was not speaking the truth, but she had no evidence against her, so she was forced either to let the matter drop or to state frankly that she had taken it herself, and she ultimately decided on the latter plan; so, with a note of warning to Annida, she wrote a full confession of her fault to Roy and Eleanor, and appeared before Elsie one evening with the paper in her hand.

"Elsie," she said, "my plans are settled, and I have come to tell you of them. I have joined the sisterhood of St. Cecilia, and shall take my farewell of you to-morrow. Do not look so horrified," she said, with a smile, as Elsie stared at her in amazement; "this is only a Protestant institution established for benevolent purposes; and you have confessed to me that you were once very near taking the veil yourself, whilst you were abroad, in a Catholic convent."

"But I was in great distress of mind," said Elsie, "and saw no other way out of my troubles. It is a very serious thing, Maude, to renounce your home and all chance of matrimony."

“I do not think your mind could have been more troubled than mine is,” said Maude, with quivering lip; “and I am not renouncing my home, for it has run away from me. The boys will no longer need me, Jack is going away, and were I bound by no vows, Elsie, I should never marry.”

“But you will not take any such vow, Maude?” said Elsie, anxiously. “I cannot bear to think of you living so entirely apart from us.”

“I will do nothing hastily, Elsie,” said Maude. “I go to-morrow on trial, and if I am found to have no vocation, I shall be returned upon your hands; so don't distress yourself about my loss too soon.”

“And is there nothing I can do for you, dear?” asked Elsie, wistfully.

“Yes, there is one thing,” said Maude, “and I came to speak to you about it. Elsie, I have been guilty of a great wrong, and, although I sinned more through weakness than intent, I am very sorry for it now, and I wish to make it known that I am. I suppose I ought to tell you all about it, but I am such a dreadful coward that I cannot; so will you take this letter and give it to Mr. Leighton for me? He asked me for it some time ago, but I have only just had courage to write it. Read it yourself, dear, only not until I have gone. Good-night! it is very late, and high time your pretty eyes were shut,” and, stooping, she pressed more than one kiss upon her sister's fair forehead before she left her, for she knew that before Elsie had awakened on the morrow she would be far away.

Her confession had occasioned Maude much anguish, and it would have materially increased her happiness, as she left her home that morning, had she known that it would never meet either Roy's or Nellie's eye, which was, in fact, the case, for Arthur never called for it, although notified that it awaited him.

Convinced in his own mind that Annida was the culprit, and finding Nellie could not rest until her innocence was thoroughly established, he "bearded the lion in his den," and applied to Annida for a confession of her fault.

Annida was at first scornful and furious, but Arthur was not easily daunted, when acting in Nellie's service. He let her storm and rave, and weep and sigh, until her indignation had spent itself, and then, placing pen, ink, and paper before her, once more demanded a written confession.

"You speak like a king," she said, disdainfully. "How would you propose to wrest this knowledge from me, even if I possessed it?"

"You do possess it," said Arthur, quietly, "and I propose to wrest it from you by the sight of these!" and he drew from his pocket some dainty, perfumed notes, on which his own name was written in her delicate calligraphy.

She started and changed color. "Unmanly wretch!" she cried, "to use such notes for such a purpose! Every loving word within them calls you 'coward!'"

Arthur winced; her stroke went home, but he answered as quietly as before.

"And every word within them," he said, "will tell your husband how he has been duped. These last two notes were written after your engagement."

Annida uttered a cry and covered her face with her hands.

"If you do not comply with my wishes," continued Arthur, "I will myself place this evidence of your duplicity within his hands, and as you are dependent on him for your present grandeur, I think you will give me what I want."

"I am in your power, Arthur," she said, and all the old sweetness had come back to her voice. "I must needs do that which you dictate, and I have no hope of mercy from you now."

Despite himself, Arthur could not help being affected by the quiet despair of both tone and manner, but he crushed back the feeling of pity rising in his breast, and resolutely handed her the pen.

She took it from his hand, without a word, and wrote as he dictated, even to the last syllable, and then her signature. "Is that all?" she said, in a dreary voice. "Are you revenged, Arthur Leighton?"

"Revenged!" exclaimed Arthur. "Surely you do not think I am actuated in this matter by any desire for vengeance?"

"I wronged you, God knows I did," replied Annida.

"And God is my witness that I have forgiven you," said Arthur, gravely. "Despite the cause I have to hate you, Annida, had it been possible, I would have spared you to-day's humiliation; but I could not stand idle and see the innocent suffer for the guilty."

"Humiliation could have been borne from other hands than yours," said Annida; "but that *you* should force this from me, and through my letters, Arthur, is a retribution that I never looked for. I have indeed lost you forever."

"And did you prize me whilst you had me, Annida?" said Arthur. "Did I not lavish on you love that would have crowned another woman's life with happiness? and how did you reward me? There are your letters, false woman; read and re-read them; see how the falsehoods glided off your pen; how sweet and honeyed is the flattery within them, and tell me if it was any wonder that I was deceived, that I took your lies for gospel truth, and was willing to peril body and soul in your service, miserable dolt that I was."

He threw the letters down before her, and turned away panting with excitement, but he had not gone many steps before she was at his side.

“Arthur! Arthur!” she exclaimed; “I believe you love me still. Oh, if it be so, my darling, don't try to hide it from me, for my heart is breaking for one kind word. If I wronged you, I have lived to repent it bitterly; if I deceived you, I deceived myself, also, when I thought I could live without you. I cannot do it, Arthur, the martyrdom increases day by day. I once renounced you for worldly splendor, and a high position in society; but now speak but one kind word, and I will renounce them both for you. Take me away with you, Arthur, and I will be your slave for life.”

“Stand back!” said Arthur, fiercely, “and let me pass, miserable woman that you are. Is there not enough pride left in you, if nothing else, to save you from such degradation? And what do you take me for, that you tempt me to dishonor an upright man, whose only sin lies in loving you too well? If I loved you, Annida Strathmore, I might shoot your husband; but, betray him, never! Stand aside!”

“Arthur, I love you,” moaned Annida, raising her hands despairingly.

“Your love is born too late,” said Arthur. “Strangle it in its birth, and learn to love your husband.”

He was gone, and with him the last spark of human feeling that yet remained in the breast of the woman who had so grievously underrated her affections and overrated her ambition. She turned from the room where he had left her, cold, hard, and cynical, and thenceforth her career was one mad scene of triumph and of folly. Poor Leonard learned in time to know the woman he had chosen, and his life became as cheerless as a winter's day, so that when at last she left him, he could not but rejoice, although in so doing, she had made his name a by-word and reproach. So she drifted down the tide of life without guide or compass, and God help her poor soul, when it shall be required of her.

Let us turn our eyes from this sad picture to Nellie, gentle, patient Nellie, watching by her truant husband's side, with the tenderness of wife, friend, and mother, all in one, self-forgetting in her loving labor.

It was many days before Roy returned to consciousness; but when he did, the first object that his waking eyes rested upon, was his ill-used wife, upon her knees beside his bed, breathing a silent prayer for his recovery. When she saw him looking at her, she smiled, oh, such a tender smile, that his heart seemed full to bursting.

"Nellie! Nellie, darling!" he whispered, for he was still very weak, "Have you indeed forgiven me? How can I ever recompense you for your goodness?" and his deep, earnest love, once more spoke eloquently in the look cast upon her. "I have been mad, dear," he continued; "but you have exorcised the demon. I am all yours now, Nellie; kiss me, and tell me you forgive me."

"No confessions, no repentant words," she said, sealing his lips with a kiss of peace. "My dearest, I know all that you would say, and have already blotted out the past."

So she met the prodigal more than half-way, and, dressing him in purple and fine linen, killed the fatted calf and made a king of him, loving him all the more for all she had forgiven him; and when Arthur brought Annida's confession, he saw that it was no longer needed, for their hearts once more beat in unison, and the line of life shone clear and bright.

CHAPTER XI.

SUNRISE.

“The dawn is overcast, the morning lowers,
And heavily in clouds brings on the day.”

AS long as there was no immediate necessity for action, Elsie had put off thinking of her future, but after Maude and the boys had gone, there seemed no further reason why she should remain at Beechcroft, so St. Evremond came to take her home, and Jack also, until he had settled the estate and found himself some occupation.

Elsie hoped that her brother would decline the invitation, and thereby give her a few more weeks for consideration, but Jack accepted it, expressing much sorrow at having kept her so long from home, and many thanks for St. Evremond's kind offer, which, he said, would at once save him both time and expense, so there was nothing left for her to do but to return to her husband's house.

St. Evremond was even more kind and considerate than before the accident, and every tender word or thoughtful act drove an arrow into Elsie's heart. “If he only knew all,” she would say to herself, “I should be at peace, but how can I ever tell him?” The time was coming, however, when she would repent her indecision, for every day she had some fresh cause to lament the effect of her duplicity upon Lorraine. She could not blind herself to the fact that this boy, once so frank and open, now constantly practised little acts of deception towards his father, and to her remonstrances he would answer

sullenly, "You do not always tell papa the truth," and she would turn away from him with burning cheeks, sick at heart, to think that she was, as it were, aiding and abetting the child in deceiving his father; and yet, what could she say? Could she deny that she had done the same?

Thus the days and weeks dragged on, Elsie growing more and more unhappy, until St. Evremond could not help but notice that something had gone wrong, and affectionately interrogated her as to what was the matter. The old formula of, "There is nothing the matter with me," rose to her lips, and the moment after she hated herself for having said it, as she saw a smile of triumph on the child's face, and he whispered eagerly, as he bade her good-night, "You have told a lie yourself, Elsie; you cannot scold me any more," and after that he became still bolder in his unlawful practices.

Affairs could not go on this way much longer without the boy being completely ruined, of this Elsie was convinced, so she formed the wise resolution to tell St. Evremond the next time she found the child deceiving him, and she warned Lorraine of what she should do.

"Then I shall tell papa that you deceive him too," said the boy angrily.

"You may tell papa what you will," said Elsie, gravely. "What I have done will not make him any more lenient to your faults." But judging her by himself, the child did not believe she would fulfil her threat.

The test soon came. Lorraine had been positively forbidden by his father to go upon the river without permission, nevertheless, he frequently crept off, unobserved, to enjoy this stolen pleasure, keeping Elsie in an agony until he had returned in safety. One afternoon, just as he was coming home from one of these excursions, he suddenly encountered his father, and Elsie, at the entrance to the grounds from the river road.

“Where have you been, Lorraine?” he asked.

“Taking a walk, sir,” replied the boy.

“You have not been upon the water, I hope?” said St. Evremond, gravely; and calmly, and without a blush, the boy replied, “No, sir.”

Poor Elsie! her face became ashen white as she heard the deliberate lie. Her hour had come; there was no retreating from her word; if the child was to be saved, she must speak at once.

“Monsieur,” she said, struggling to control her emotion and speak calmly, “I do not think Lorraine is telling you the truth. I am quite sure that he has been out upon the water.”

It was done, the step was taken, and now the child's face was as white as her own.

“Lorraine!” said his father, and his voice sounded like distant thunder in the culprit's ears, “have you dared to tell me a lie?”

Trembling with fright the child stood silently before them, unable in his terror to articulate a word. His guilt was unmistakably written on his face, and after waiting a moment for his answer, St. Evremond placed his hand upon his shoulder, saying in the same deep, stern voice, “Come with me, sir, and let me see if I can teach you to speak the truth.”

“Papa! papa!” cried the frightened child, falling upon his knees, “oh, please don't punish me! I will tell you all, indeed I will! I did go upon the river, papa—I did tell a lie, but I'll never, never do so again!”

“I do not think you will,” said his father, gravely, “after I have punished you. Get up, sir! Disobedience is in itself a crime, but worse still is the cowardice which would hide behind a lie. You have sinned. Don't disgrace yourself by whining over the retribution.”

There was still enough left of the young prince, whom Elsie had first known, to be appealed to by his father's words; and, checking his sobs, the boy rose at once to his feet, nor spoke another word, as he followed his father to the house.

Elsie was troubled. St. Evremond looked distressed. Lorraine was in disgrace, and she could not help but blame herself for it all. Why had she been diverted from her original plan of leaving her husband, and then writing him an explanation? Had she been open from the first, this trouble might not have occurred. She was also touched by the boy's loyalty, for, although she had fulfilled her threat, he did not mention to his father her delinquencies, nor suggest the active part she had played in his first act of deception. Did St. Evremond know all, she thought, on whom would his displeasure fall most heavily?—the irresponsible child, who had wandered from the straight and narrow path, or the mature woman, who had set him the example? Lorraine would be punished; but, alas! who most deserved the punishment?

"Monsieur," she said, as, having reached the house, St. Evremond turned towards his rooms with the boy, "you will not be too severe with Lorraine?"

"Am I ever too severe?" said he, gravely. "I trust, Madame, that I am always just. Lorraine is guilty of a grievous offence, and his punishment must be in accordance with it."

"But there is an extenuation in his case," said Elsie, boldly, but with heightened color and downcast eyes, "of which you know nothing, Monsieur. I am more to blame than he is."

St. Evremond looked at her in surprise. "I do not understand you," he said.

"Lorraine," said Elsie, putting her arm around the boy, "we will have no more secrets from papa. Tell him everything, darling, even about the flower-pots. Monsieur," she

added, "do not punish him until you have heard his story," and then she crossed the hall to her own room, where she threw herself into an easy chair, and, burying her face in her hands, tried to compose herself, and think what she should say, when summoned by her husband to answer the boy's charges.

But, although she watched and waited for hours, the summons never came.

Lorraine passed her door on his way to bed, but she feared to call him in. The house was closed, the servants retired, and still no message came from the husband she had wronged, although the light, streaming into the dark hall from beneath his door, bore evidence that he had not gone to rest.

She rose and undressed. Why should she watch longer? He would not come now. No, he would never come again. She had deceived, and, as he thought, betrayed him, and his wrongs were too great to be easily forgiven. Her hands were hot and feverish; her head ached, so she loosened the heavy braids coiled round it, and bathed it with *Eau de Cologne*. The night was sultry, and she leaned from the window to inhale the fresh air. The garden was beautiful in the moonlight, but she saw nothing save that narrow streak of light in the dark hall within, and her mind kept repeating, without cessation, "What can he be doing in that silent room?" until, unable any longer to curb her restless anxiety, she thrust her bare feet into her slippers, threw around her a light muslin wrapper, and stole noiselessly down the hall to his door.

She crouched upon the floor and listened. He was writing—she could hear the scratching of his pen, and, now and then, the rustle of paper. Was he writing her a farewell letter—a scathing, pitiless, reproachful letter, reminding her of her broken vows, and how faithful unto death he was? If she could only see him as he wrote, she should know her fate; but

the door was relentlessly closed, locked, perhaps, like his heart, upon the woman of whom he was now taking an eternal leave.

What a wreck she had made of her life. It was almost beyond belief how she had thrown away her happiness, wasting her hours in idle dreams of Roy, and only learning that she loved her husband, when she found that she must leave him. She did love him,—yes, she knew it now, but of what use was the knowledge when he sat within, heaping just reproaches on her head, whilst she lay without, like a dog before its master's door? She sat down on the rug, and, hiding her face in her hands, wept silently.

St. Evremond paused a moment in his writing, his quick ear detecting something moving in the hall, but as the sound was not repeated, he concluded he had been mistaken, and once more took up his pen.

“It would have been better,” he wrote, “had we parted long ago, when your heart first failed you—” but here he paused again, an unwary sob penetrated the oaken door, and this time he knew his senses were not deceiving him.

Slipping off his shoes that he might make no noise, he crossed the room, and the next moment a flood of light from the open door revealed as piteous a picture as eyes could well behold.

“Elsie!” exclaimed St. Evremond, and at the sound of his voice she sprang to her feet in great confusion, blushing a rosy red as the consciousness of her light attire crossed her mind. She pulled the wrapper together at the throat, and then the small feet peeped out below, shining like polished ivory in their black velvet casings, so she hastily pulled it down again, and then the white throat and neck became exposed to view, so she ceased her efforts, and remained standing silently, and with downcast eyes before him, a beautiful vision of distress.

“Never mind your dress,” said St. Evremond kindly, pitying her confusion, “only tell me, child, what brought you here? Is anything amiss with you or the boy?”

“No,” replied Elsie, falteringly, “that is, nothing that you do not know of,” she added, “if Lorraine told you all.”

“Lorraine has been perfectly open with me,” said St. Evremond, gravely; “and although I felt it necessary to punish him, I admit that there were extenuations in the case, and so I have forgiven him.”

“And will you be less kind to me?” said Elsie, looking piteously at him. “Oh, Monsieur, will you condemn me unheard? You say that you are always just, and yet you heard the boy’s story, and never asked for mine!”

St. Evremond was silent for a moment, and then he said gravely: “If I did not send for you, Madame, it was simply on your own account, and to save you the pain of a confession.”

“The pain of your displeasure is far worse,” said Elsie, sobbing. “Oh, Monsieur, forget for a time that I am other than an erring child; treat me as you would Lorraine; let me first confess my fault, and then pronounce my doom.”

“So be it, then,” said St. Evremond, standing aside; “come in, my little girl, and I will hear all you have to say, even if it break my heart to do so;” and, closing the door behind her as she entered, he led her to the seat of honor, his large easy chair.

“No, no,” she said, shrinking back as he would have placed her in it, “that is your place, Monsieur, I will take Lorraine’s stool, and sit at your feet.” So he drew the stool up for her, and she sat down, veiling herself, like the Lady Godiva, in her long golden locks.

“Monsieur,” she said, “you have reason to be angry with me, but not so much as you suppose.”

“I am not angry with you,” said St. Evremond; “I am only hurt and grieved that you have for so long a time concealed this trouble from me. Child, child, why did you not trust me? Do you think I do not know that love will not be guided? The heart will not be a slave; but we must watch, Elsie, that it does not become our master, and drive us into wrong doing.”

“My heart will never lead me to offend you,” said Elsie, in a low voice. “Listen now whilst I make my confession. I will tell you nothing but the unvarnished truth, and after, you shall be my judge,” and she stated, as briefly as possible, the history of her hapless love for Roy, ending with an exact account of what had taken place on that eventful night, of which Lorraine had told him merely the outline.

St. Evremond heard her throughout in silence, and spoke not, even for a few moments after she had ceased.

“Are you very angry with me?” faltered Elsie.

“Angry!” said St. Evremond, in a deep, tender voice. “No, child, no; I am very sorry for you,” he added, laying his hand upon her bowed head. “Poor little Elsie, how you must suffer; and I, who would give my life to save you pain, can do nothing for you, although it is through me you suffer. I will leave you, though,” he added, in an agitated voice; “I will go back to France. You shall no longer be tortured by the daily presence of the tyrant who has bound this heavy burden on you, and cursed your bright young life. I will go, Elsie, and you shall remain here until death shall mercifully remove me from your path.”

“You are not angry with me?” said Elsie, raising her head and looking at him with a gleam of joy in her eyes. “You trust me still, after all that I have told you, and are willing to go away and leave your honor in my keeping, although you think I love another?”

“I would trust though all hell rose against you,” said St. Evremond; “your nature is as pure as the angels’ in heaven; I shall never have cause to blush for you, my child.”

His voice was agitated, and in his eyes was a yearning tenderness, which flooded Elsie’s heart with happiness.

She threw herself upon her knees beside him. She seized his hand and kissed it passionately. “Then do not leave me,” she cried. “Monsieur — Eugene — husband! say that you forgive me, and will stay with me forever.”

St. Evremond started and hastily withdrew his hand. “I must go at once,” he said, falteringly; “I should have gone before. Rise, Elsie, I — I — cannot bear it.”

“Why must you go?” she whispered, stretching her arms out towards him, whilst a smile hovered over her lips. “Is it because you hate me, Monsieur?” and “Lady Godiva” shook back the golden tresses from her beautiful face, which glowed with uncertain, innocent love.

“It is because I love you,” cried St. Evremond, and the whole force of his pent-up feelings found vent in the words. “It is because I love you, and can no longer live in sight of paradise, with the knowledge that the gates are closed upon me. Oh, Elsie, my vow has been present with me night and day since we were married, and I have struggled — God knows how hard — to keep it, but my powers of endurance will go no farther; I must fly your presence, or take you to my arms. I have hoped and hoped that the time might come when your heart would turn to me, and that then you would release me from my vow, but your tale has vanquished hope; you love another, and I must go before I lose my honor, and your confidence. Hate you? Oh, I love every hair upon this precious head — every dimple in this rounded arm. Back, Elsie, back; fly before it is too late. Oh, I love you, I love you, my darling, and I am no longer master of myself.”

He pushed his chair back, he waved her from him as though she were some fair demon tempting him to sin. "Fly, child," he cried again, as she did not move, "fly — fly before it is too late;" but still she did not rise, only moving closer to him with that strange light in her eyes.

"I will not go," she whispered; "I am your wife, Eugene; you shall not drive me from you," and the next moment she was locked within his arms, her fair head pillowed on his breast, and all the doubts and hopes and fears of love were lost in sweet fruition.

CHAPTER XII.

GOING OUT INTO THE WORLD.

"A little mouse sat down to spin,
Puss came by and popped his head in."

ROBERTA STEVENSON sat upon the floor in the old house, in the midst of a wonderful array of mysterious-looking packages and garments. In her hand she held a notebook and pencil, and as she wrote, she said: "Two, four, seven — that makes seven pairs."

"I hope they are all congenial and happy ones?" said a voice from the window, and there sat Master Jack Von Decker, smoking a meerschaum, as unconcernedly as though he had not risen to his present elevation by means of the outside trellis-work, and was seated on a Turkish divan instead of a very narrow wooden sill.

"Good gracious, Jack!" exclaimed Roberta; "how you do enjoy alarming surprises. Why did n't you come in by the door?"

"I am practising to be a house-breaker," replied Jack; "it seems to be the only lucrative profession for a young man of my slender abilities. But don't let me interrupt you," he added, "beyond asking what you are doing. I won't say a word until you've completed your arithmetic lesson."

"I'm packing August's clothes," said Bob, returning to her work; "he is going to the seminary day after to-morrow."

"Whew!" said Jack; "so he is going to be a clergyman, after all? Well, well; there's no accounting for tastes. But what does he want so many clothes for?"

"Stockings, one dozen and a half," announced Bob, writing down the figures.

"Heavens and earth!" exclaimed Jack; "the ladder of learning must be hard to climb, when it wears out so many hose."

"Handkerchiefs, twenty-four," continued Bob, without raising her eyes.

"Poor fellow!" said Jack; "he will be obliged to cry all day long. What a cheerful Christian he will be. Take off a dozen, Bob, and call it half a day."

"Six blue cravats," read Bob, still bent on discharging her duty.

"Six blue —? Oh, come, now, that's too bad," said Jack, "to make him blue both inside and out. There's one thing to be considered, though," he continued, — "by giving him 'the blues,' you enable him to use his twenty-four pocket-handkerchiefs."

"Jack," said Bob, laying down her pencil and laughing heartily, "what will you take to go away until I have finished counting these clothes? It is impossible to work whilst you sit there."

"There's only one thing would make me do it," said Jack.

“And what is that?” asked Bob.

“For you to come with me,” replied Jack.

“‘I’m lonely without you, my own fair bride,’”

he sang, melodiously, through his nose.

“But I really cannot come just now,” said Bob. “You see, there is no one to do anything for poor August but myself, and he is going away so soon.”

“And there is no one at all to do anything for poor Jack,” said that injured individual, “and he, also, is going away very soon.”

“Where is he going?” asked Bob, laughing. “‘Up a hill, to draw a pail of water?’”

“Yes,” replied Jack, with a half sigh, “he is going up a very steep hill; but, if he falls, Bob, there’ll be no ‘Jill’ to ‘tumble after.’”

“What are you talking about?” said Bob, looking up, in surprise, at his serious tone. “Are you really going away?”

“Yes,” he replied, “I’m off next week to seek my fortune. I’ve been settling the estate, Bob, and I find that, after all the obligations are paid and the property sold, there will be barely enough cash left to support Maude and the boys; and your humble servant will be the possessor of a suit of clothes, a pair of boots, a meerschaum pipe, and a bull-pup, not to speak of his elegant exterior and polished manners. Quite a catch, am I not?”

Bob made no answer. Her rosy face looked serious. The pencil and book had fallen to the floor, and her head was supported by her hand.

“Are you telling me the truth?” she said, at last; “or is this one of your jokes?”

“That’s a complimentary question, isn’t it?” said Jack,

appealing to an imaginary audience. "I tell a girl that I'm a catch, and she asks me if I'm joking. It's as true as gospel, my dear. I'm so afraid of being married by some New York belle, on account of my fortune, that I'm going clear out to California, to avoid the possibility."

"And everything is gone," said Bob, in a low voice. "Houses, lands, horses, and all. It seems like a horrible nightmare."

"I don't understand poetry," said Jack, "but if you allude to 'Black Bess,' my dear, she's in your own stable. Owing to the unexampled integrity of his conduct on this trying occasion, his creditors presented Mr. John Von Decker with his own mare, and, as he can neither carry her on his back, nor put her in his boot, nor smoke her in his pipe, he has generously made the gift over to you:

"For the sake of Auld lang syne, my dear,
For the sake of Auld lang syne."

"Jack," said Bob, gravely, "don't joke on such distressing subjects."

"Halloo! what's happened to you?" said Jack, taking his pipe from his mouth and staring at her; "it's the first time I ever heard a fine horse called a distressing subject. Ride her, my child, and you'll discover your mistake."

"I'll never get on her back," said Bob, energetically. "I'll never look at her, if I can help it; she's all that's left to you, and you have given her to me."

"Not quite all," said Jack, resuming his pipe. "I have myself and a bull-pup still. I had half a notion, when I first came over to-day, to offer you all my property; but you did n't seem alive to your advantages, so I bluffed off on the mare."

"I don't know what you are talking about," said Bob,

blushing furiously; "I wish you would go away, and let me count my clothes."

"It won't be half so bad to live out there as you might think," continued Jack, calmly smoking and looking into space. "I'm going out with an insurance agency, and when I get on a bit in the world, I shall buy a nice little farm, and stock it with cows, and sheep, and horses. You can send poor 'Bess' there, if she's still alive, and then you won't be obliged to look at her any more. I'd ask you to come and see me, but I suppose you'll be married by that time; there's no longer any reason for you to stay at home, is there?"

"No," said Bob, sadly, "the boys are all going to school, and papa is to lecture through the States. I am to stay with Aunt Robison until he returns."

"You love Aunt Robison very dearly, don't you, Bobby?" said Jack.

"I hate Aunt Robison, and you know I do," said Bob.

"She'll be of great service to you, though," said Jack, reflectively; "give you polish and style, and teach you to love your enemies."

"I don't want either polish or style," said Bob, indignantly. "I'm better off without them."

"Bless me," said Jack, "that's rank heresy. What will become of you in a New York ball-room? how do you expect to shine?"

"I don't want to shine," said Bob, "and there are places more to my taste than a New York ball-room."

"California farms, for instance?" said Jack, looking at her out of the corner of his eye, but smoking as serenely as before.

"A California farm is not so bad," said Bob, folding a pocket-handkerchief, "if one has congenial companions."

“Companions!” repeated Jack. “Humph! that’s in the plural. I’m plural too, however,” he added; “there’s the bull-pup, you know; he counts, don’t he?”

Bob made no answer, but began hurriedly to throw poor August’s possessions into the open trunk, in hopeless confusion.

“It will be very lonely, though,” said Jack, heaving a sigh; “the bull-pup is n’t much company after all. But I won’t fret; perhaps I may not live to get there, you know, the journey is very dangerous; and even if I do, some fever will probably soon make an end of me. I’m not very strong, and — I’ve never been from home alone before. You must keep ‘Black Bess’ if I die,” he continued, “and — and — I’ll get somebody to send you the bull-pup.”

It would be impossible to represent, upon paper, the lugubrious tone in which Jack spoke these melancholy words, but the effect upon Bob was dismal in the extreme.

“Jack,” she exclaimed, starting to her feet in excitement, “what do you mean by talking to me in this way? Do you suppose I’m a stock or a stone, and have no feelings?” and coming over to the window, she leaned out beside him with flushed cheeks and heaving breast.

“If you were only a stock or a stone,” said Jack, looking at her solemnly, “I’d put you in my pocket, and never be lonely any more. Or if you were a boy,” he added, “I’d say, ‘Strap your knapsack on your back, old fellow, and come along with me;’ but you’re a girl, Bobby, only a girl, and not fit to fight the world beside a reckless good-for-naught like me. No, I must go alone! but — you’ll write to me now and then, won’t you, Bobby?”

“Not a line,” said Bob, with a curious gurgling sound in her throat, and a mist over her eyes; “not a single, solitary line. You shall not go, I say; you really must not. See here,

Jack," she went on, mounting on the sill beside him, and looking beseechingly in his face, "I've got some money now—I don't know exactly how much, but I'll find out and tell you—and I don't want it, you know, I really don't. So won't you take it, Jack, and stay at home? Oh, do say you will."

Jack's composure threatened to desert him. He puffed hard at his pipe, then removed it from his mouth; winked his eyes vigorously, looked intently at the sparrows on the wall, and turning quickly, threw his arm around Bob's waist and kissed her.

"I know I ought not to," he said, the moment after, "but, by Jove, Bobby, you're just a little more than any fellow can stand. To want to give me all your money because I've been a fool and lost my own! I won't take it, dear—I really could n't, and I must go away; but if you care about it, Bobby, I'll come back again when I've made my fortune. Will you try and not forget me till I come?"

"I could n't trust myself so far away from you," said Bob, nestling closer and looking at him with a roguish smile. "I'm an awfully inconstant creature, you'd better take me with you."

"But I don't know where I'm going to settle," said Jack.

"Then take me to choose the spot," said Bob.

"And I have n't any money," continued Jack.

"Here's sixpence towards the common fund," said Bob, and shyly pulling out the little chain, she displayed the coin hanging on it.

"Bobby," said Jack, giving her another kiss, "is it possible you've kept that all this time?"

"Don't that fact prove I'm thrifty?" said Bob; "you'd better take me with you, Jacky."

And he did ; for, leaning too heavily upon the trellis-work, it gave way, and, losing their balance, this remarkable pair of lovers tumbled into the garden.

The distance to the ground was slight, and beyond a few scratches from the clinging vine, they were uninjured by the fall.

“ This is taking me out into the world with a vengeance,” said Bob, laughing, as she picked herself up.

“ We've lost some more personal property,” said Jack, rising ruefully ; “ I've smashed my pipe.”

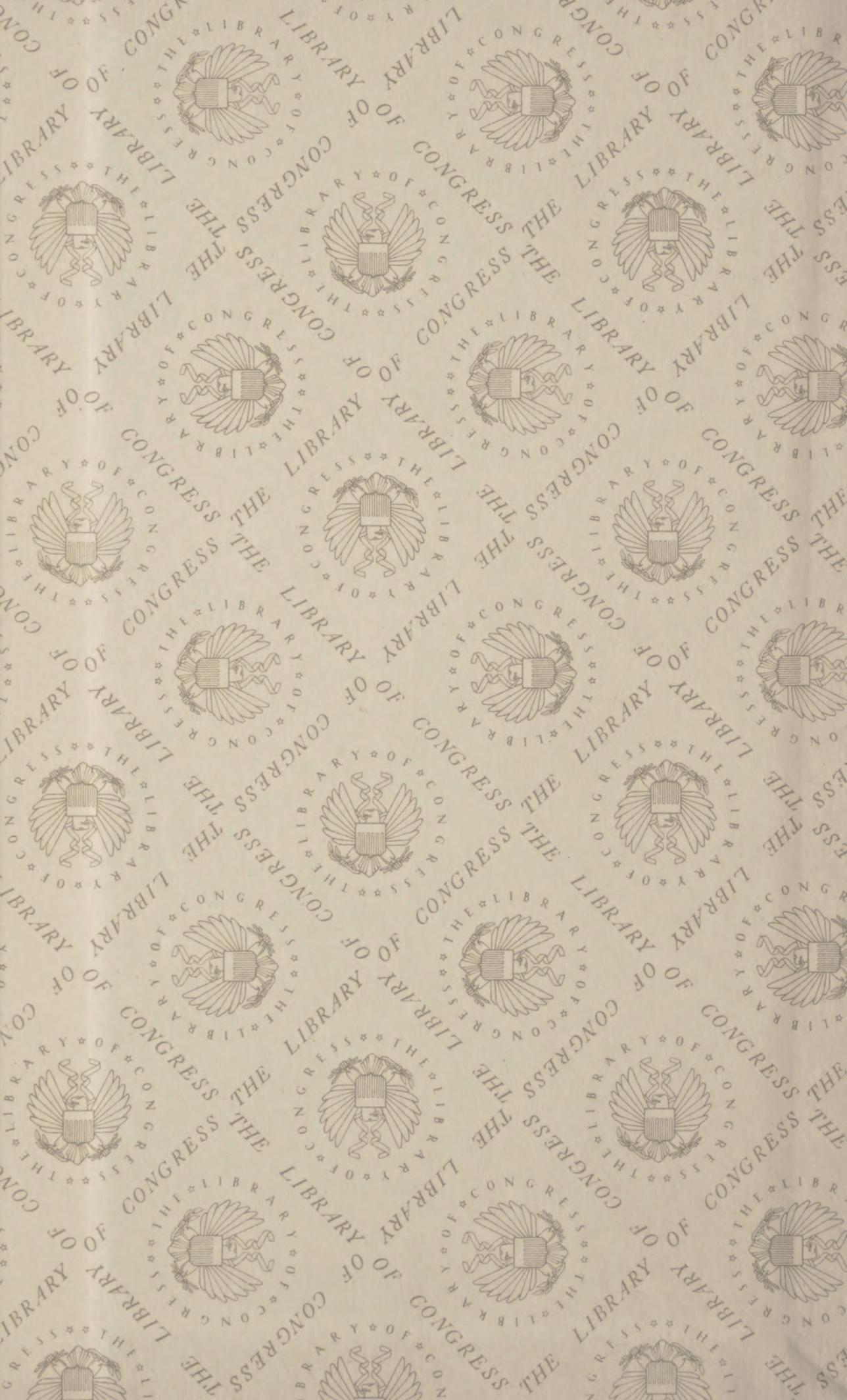
“ Never mind,” said Bob, consolingly, “ we've got each other, Jack.”

“ And the bull-pup,” replied Jack, “ don't forget him.”

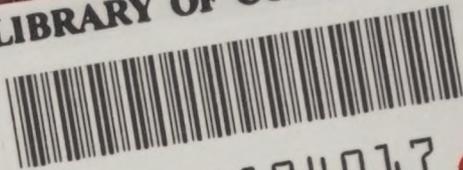
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