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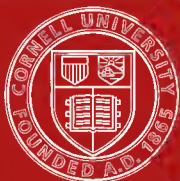
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IT NEVER DID RUN SMOOTH.

A NOVEL.

BY MRS. JANE G. AUSTIN,

*Author of "A Nameless Nobleman," "The Twelve Great
Diamonds," Etc.*



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IT NEVER DID RUN SMOOTH.

CHAPTER I.

TWO HEROES AND AS MANY HEROINES.

“EXCUSE me, sir, but these ladies cannot pass !”

“Beg pardon, I’m sure—of the ladies.”

And the speaker removed his foot from the end of the gangway plank, upon which he had planted it, while turning his head to give some last direction to the servant he was dismissing, and bowed politely to the ladies, who hesitated to pass him. They were two ; first, an exceedingly well preserved, aristocratic woman, who rewarded the interference of the first cavalier, and the movement of the last one, by an impatient smile and bow, fine and cold as winter sunshine. Behind her came a charming girl, American in the type of her beauty, that is to say lithesome and graceful of form, with dainty hands and feet, quick and nervous of temperament, high couraged and self-reliant, apt to observation and quick at learning, fond and loving, daring and innocent ; the coloring of her finely moulded features was mezzobrum, with gray eyes, whose black lashes could shade them into sombre melancholy, or the sunshine light them with a glint like that of running water. Her name was Hildegarde, and she was the only child and heiress of Mrs. Waterston, the dignified lady who preceded her over the plank.

The eyes of the two gentlemen, thus left vis-a-vis, met for the first time, and a glance of mutual, instinctive dislike shot from one to the other. And yet, both men were attractive in appearance, although of strongly opposing types, both handsomely dressed, both wearing the unmistakable air of the thorough gentleman, born and bred to his position. The first speaker was evidently a foreigner; his clear, olive skin, slight figure, and black hair and moustache, suggested a Spanish extraction; while his violet blue eyes, with short lashes, betrayed the strain of rich Milesian blood, coming to him from his mother's ancestry. The other man was taller, bigger, sturdier, and not so lithe of form; the coloring and expression of his proud, handsome face was essentially that of a high-bred Englishman. Mark Trecothick's father in fact, came from one of those Cornish families who preserve the family tree when the house is on fire, and let the bank-notes burn; and in transplanting his family to America, he had not forgotten to pack up every one of the traditions and observances, that had crystallized about the Trecothick stem, from even before the Norman conquest.

Slowly adjusting his traveling bag across his broad shoulders, and allowing the faintest trace of a supercilious smile to curve his golden moustache, the young fellow stared across the plank at the Cuban, whose blue eyes contracted and darkened ominously, as he demanded:

"What did you say, sir?"

"I said I begged pardon of the ladies, for detaining them. They don't seem to need any farther championship, do they?"

"Not at present, but I also go in this boat, and if they should require assistance, I shall be prompt to offer it."

"The ladies are most fortunate in their defender; let us hope his services will not be needed."

“Hello, Trecothick! what are you doing here, man?” demanded a hearty voice.

The Cuban thus interrupted, gravely inclined his head, and passing over the plank, mounted the companionway to the upper deck, where Mrs. and Miss Waterston were already seated.

“Who’s that Spaniard?” asked the newcomer.

“Don’t know, I’m sure, Bonnycastle. He was trying to teach me manners, and I chaffed him a little, that’s all,” replied Trecothick, indifferently. “What am I doing here? Why, going to sail for the Carribee Isles, or Patagonia, or anywhere that this boat goes.”

“Going to Cuba, you mean?”

“Yes.”

“Do you know the Waterstons?”

“No.”

“There they are on the promenade deck. Come up, and I’ll present you.”

“Thanks; but I want to get away from everybody and everything.”

“All right! see you later.” And Mr. Bonnycastle stepped up to the ladies’ room.

“So kind of you to come down!” exclaimed mother and daughter, in a breath. “Such lovely flowers! Too charming, altogether! Thanks, very much.” And Hildergarde and her mother daintily sniffed at the great box of fragrant blossoms, which Mr. Bonnycastle had sent.

“Do you know the captain of this boat, Mr. Bonnycastle?” inquired Mrs. Waterston, presently. “I always like to have the captain properly presented at the beginning, you know; and then there is no awkwardness in first sitting down at table. I always have the upper, right-hand seats, at the captain’s table, secured along with my ticket and stateroom.”

"Yes, that's nice, of course, and Captain James is a very pleasant sort of man to sit near, at table or anywhere. There, he's shaking hands with that Cuban gentleman. Do you know him?"

"Not in the least," said mamma, and Hilda murmured, "Only he is very polite," and smelled of the flowers again.

A moment later, Mr. Bonnycastle was presenting Captain James, who made his passengers welcome, in his own hearty fashion, saying:

"Going straight down to Havana, I hope? I was just telling Mr. Pampalona that we'll have a splendid run, and get there in time for the Christmas Holidays."

"No, we shall stay some weeks at Nassau, before we go to Cuba," replied Mrs. Waterston. "We are invited to make a visit to Governor Burleigh and his family, relatives of ours."

"Pampalona? That's the name of the proprietor of Las Palmas, the next estate to La Caridad, your new possession, Mrs. Waterston," said Mr. Bonnycastle, who was, in fact, the wealthy widow's lawyer and confidential adviser.

"Is it really? I wonder—perhaps Captain James would know."

Thus appealed to, the captain crossed over to the young Cuban, and brought him up to be presented to the ladies and Mr. Bonnycastle.

He did this, just as Mark Trecothick, repenting his refusal, came on deck again, seeking an introduction to the fair friends of his friend. The first thing he saw was the Cuban bowing profoundly and bareheaded before Mrs. Waterston and her daughter, while Bonnycastle, like a beneficent but portly fairy-godmother, smiled amiably upon all concerned.

"Pshaw!" muttered Trecothick, crossly. But as he

watched, at a distance, the play of Hilda Waterston's gray eyes, and caught the high-bred accents of her voice, he again repented of his churlishness, and was pondering the best means of attracting Bonnycastle's notice, when that gentleman hastily detached himself from the group, and hurried toward the step, against which Trecothick leaned. Intercepting him, and catching his arm, he muttered :

“Say, old fellow, I was an ass, just now. Present me.”

“Oh! Well, can't till I come up. Mrs. Waterston has just remembered a book she wanted, and I've to rush up the street, and see if I can find a shop. I'll be back.”

And he was off like a flash. A good deal annoyed, Trecothick threw himself upon a bench to wait for Bonnycastle's return, and sat there, looking doggedly down upon the busy quay, where now all was bustle and confusion, as the moment of departure approached.

At this moment, a carriage dashed through the gates ; the door was thrown violently open ; and a man sprang out. His white hair and beard suggested advanced life, which his angry and glittering eyes seemed to contradict. He ran to a pile of luggage, not yet on board, fiercely demanded checks, and cried out, impatiently, for some one to carry it on board. A little dog began to bark within the carriage, and presently appeared in the door, but was immediately caught back by two black-gloved hands.

Trecothick smiled lazily, and tried to peer into the carriage, to see the fat old dowager, that he had decided must appertain to such a lord. But, at that moment, a face suddenly appeared, framed in the dark opening of the door, and gazing straight at him ; the face of a woman not yet five and twenty years of age. It was pale, with that ivory, yet glowing whiteness, so different from the bluish pallor of ill health ; with waves of dark hair flowing from a low, straight brow, full and rounded at the temples. The lines

of the cheek were delicate, but curving into a round, soft chin; the mouth was one of pathetic loveliness. But the charm of the face was in the eyes, great, soft, velvety, dark eyes, like black pansies, and full of such intense meaning, that it thrilled one's blood to meet their gaze.

What *was* the meaning? Trecothick tried in vain to fathom. Was it terror, or anxiety, or an appeal for help? Something of all these, mingled with a childish frankness and innocence, impelling any brave and generous nature to dare and do something to answer that endless cry for help.

It was only for a moment that the two pairs of eyes met; in the next an angry voice exclaimed:

“Dolores!”

The white-haired man, as he spoke, darted back to the door of the coupe, within whose recesses the lovely terrified face had disappeared. Some words followed, inaudible to Trecothick's strained ears; but he saw the old man shake his fist at the hidden figure, and his own strong, young fingers clenched themselves upon the rail, over which he leaned, until it groaned again.

The pile of baggage, by this time, had been wheeled over the gangway; a shout from the boat warned the lagging passengers to come on board; and, finally, Trecothick's impatient eyes were greeted by the sight of a figure, closely muffled in a great, loose cloak, the head and face quite hidden in a thick veil, descending from the carriage. This shrouded figure was led across the plank by the still irate old man, who glanced fiercely in every direction, as if challenging notice or interference.

With two steps Trecothick was down the stairs, and lounging carelessly through the principal saloon, expecting to see the newcomers pass into one of the staterooms opening upon it. But they did not appear; and it soon became obvious that they had contented themselves with one of

those below, whose only merit is their superior seclusion. Passing down into the lower cabin, Trecothick looked along the rows of closed doors in vain, till he heard a shrill little bark from behind one of them.

“42,” murmured he, glancing at the number, and turning to seek the purser, whom he found in his office, affable, and not too busy to accept a cigar, and answer a question.

“42? Yes, sir. Let me see. He’s a little queer. 42 and 43 are taken for the Valdez family. Odd, isn’t it?”

“Well—I don’t know. Why?”

“Why, Valdez, in Cuba, means nobody, you know. Like John Smith with us. All the foundlings are named Valdez, after the founder of the Foundling Hospital, and so it is a sort of no name, you see.”

“I see. But there are two rooms.”

“Yes, I don’t know how many are in the family, but probably several.”

“A man, a woman, and a little dog,” murmured Trecothick, walking away, “and her name is, at least, Dolóres.”

“Hullo, Mark, catch,” shouted Bonnycastle’s hearty voice from the wharf, as he frantically waved a small parcel in his hand. “It’s Mrs. Waterston’s book, and the plank is drawn in. Hand it to her!”

He tossed the parcel, Trecothick caught it mechanically; the wheels revolved; the boat was off; the journey began.

CHAPTER II.

TRECOTHICK RETRIEVES HIS BLUNDER.

“MRS. WATERSTON?” inquired Trecothick, approaching the mother and daughter, and raising his hat. He looked very handsome, with the salt wind ruffling his tawny hair.

Mrs. Waterston inclined her head, and looked a polite interrogation.

“My friend, Mr. Bonnycastle, promised me the honor of an introduction, when he returned, but as he got back after the plank was taken in, he tossed me this little package, and told me to make it serve as an introduction.”

As he spoke, he slipped his card under the string of the parcel, and presented both to Mrs. Waterston.

“Any friend of Mr. Bonnycastle is sure of a welcome with us, Mr. Trecothick;” said the lady, graciously. “Hilda, dear, Mr. Trecothick; my daughter, sir; Mr. Pampalona, a neighbor of ours in Cuba.”

The Cuban raised his Irish eyes, with a gleam of languid triumph in their depths. Trecothick answered with a supercilious stare of indifference. Hildegarde did not seem to notice this by-play, though she saw it well enough, but quietly removed her shawl from a neighboring chair. Trecothick sat down, with a little bow of gratitude, and glided into one of those skirmishing and experimental conversations, with which people in society are apt to begin an acquaintance, which may prove interesting, later on.

The composite meal, replacing a regular dinner, on sailing day, was served; and by a little manœuvring, both Pampalona and Trecothick secured seats, the former beside Hildegarde, the latter opposite; but Trecothick’s attention wandered, continually, from the fair face of his *vis-a-vis* to a door, directly behind her, numbered 42.

Presently, the door opened, and the white-haired man choosing to call himself Valdez, appeared, locked the door on the outside, and putting the key in his pocket, stood for a moment, surveying the tables, scowled darkly at Trecothick, and taking a place at the other table, with his back to him, began his tea.

“Isn’t poor Dolóres to have anything, I wonder?” said

the young man, half aloud ; and Miss Waterston, whose eyes were fixed upon him, innocently asked :

“ Who ? ”

“ Oh ! Excuse me. I was wondering if that coffee was never coming. Are you doing pretty well with your dinner, Miss Waterston ? ”

He was careful not to talk aloud any more, but not a movement of the peevish and requiring old man escaped him. Valdez made the servant bring a salver, on which he heaped all manner of delicacies with his own hand ; and Trecothick was so interested in watching this, that he did not perceive the ladies leave the table, until Hilda's slender little boot-heels were just disappearing up the companion-way. Then he started to his feet, but still lingered, just in sight, until Valdez, followed by the servant, went to unlock the door of No. 42, and himself carried the salver inside, audibly bolting the door within.

“ Dolóres is a prisoner, although not on bread and water,” commented Mark. “ Does she inhabit 42 or 43 ? Do the rooms communicate ? Of course they do. Is she the old man's wife, or his daughter ? Is she afraid of him ? Does she need help ? Would she be outraged, if I asked her if I could help her ? ”

Revolving these questions, the young man slowly mounted the stairs ; but by this time, Mrs. Waterston and Hilda had gone to their staterooms. Pompalona was also seeking his.

“ Why, it's 22, by all that's queer ! ” exclaimed Trecothick, hastily pulling a ticket out of his pocket, and gazing at it. “ My room-mate for a whole blessed week ! I detest Spaniards. Well, that *is* luck ! ”

CHAPTER III.

HOW SEVERAL PERSONS TRIED TO CHEAT, AND GOT CHEATED.

By the fourth morning, the passengers were becoming accustomed to the sea, and most of them appeared at the breakfast-table, excepting Dolóres. Meantime, the most artful inquiries that Mark could frame, had failed to elicit from the stewardess, or the man who attended rooms 42 and 43, more than the information that the lady and gentleman were both "pretty comfortable." Neither attendant knew whether they were married, or father and daughter. Finally, on this last day, Trecothick attacked the captain, with whom he had cultivated quite an intimacy, during their solitary meals.

"Going to land us at Nassau, to-night, captain?"

"Yes, sir, wind and weather permitting."

"How many?"

"Well, I don't know; for any of the passengers, having tickets for Havana, may take a fancy to stay over a trip, at Nassau. Mrs. and Miss Waterston, and you, I believe, are going to stop."

"I haven't quite settled," replied Mark, disingenuously; for his ticket was distinctly printed for Nassau, only. "What about that queer old Spanish fellow? Valdez, I believe."

"He? Well, I don't really remember. I suppose he's going on, however. What should he want in Nassau?"

"And Pampalona's going on," mused Trecothick. "Well captain, I don't believe I shall land, after all. I

suppose I can pay the difference of passage-money on board, just as well as to get a ticket at Nassau?"

"Yes, indeed. Well, the ladies will have to lose both their beaux, at once, won't they?"

"They never will miss a stupid fellow like me," replied Mark, with a contented air. "But please don't mention anything about my plans; they are not quite settled yet."

"All right," replied the captain, carelessly, and half an hour later dropped a word in Hilda's ear, which that young lady received with a vacant and innocent expression worthy of seven years old.

Late in the afternoon, Mark lounged up to where she sat alone, her novel neglected upon her lap.

"Can you see Nassau yet, Miss Hildegarde?"

"Almost. Oh, I shall have such lovely times there! My cousin Tom is such a capital horseman, and they say there are splendid rides. I am fairly longing to feel a good horse under me, and to be on shore. Don't you think a sea-voyage horribly monotonous?"

Trecothick half closed his keen blue eyes, after a near-sighted fashion of his own, and studied her face, swiftly and intelligently. Hilda felt the gaze, understood it perfectly, and raised her proud, delicate features a little more clearly to the light.

"Plenty of pluck, my dear; but for all that, you've heard that I am going on to Cuba; and you're provoked." So said Trecothick, in his heart, while with his lips he replied, still intently watching the upraised, delicate face:

"Won't you let me join your riding party, occasionally?"

In spite of herself, a great wave of color flashed into her cheeks, and mounted to her brow; she knew it, she knew that he saw it; she could have cried with shame and vexation; and had she been less high-bred, she would

have done it; as it was, she slowly raised her eyes, until they looked straight into his, and with a smile of superb indifference, replied :

“ Yes, indeed, if you are to be at Nassau. Are you? I don't remember whether you are landing there, or going on.”

“ That's awfully crushing, Miss Waterston, when we've talked Nassau so much these two days. But Pampalona's going on, and how could I tear myself from Pampalona? Don't you consider his society worth sacrificing a good deal for? ”

“ I fear I must sacrifice yours, just now, at any rate,” replied Hilda, in whose heart vexation and disappointment were fighting very hard with her conventional training. “ I must see if mamma is coming on deck before dinner.”

At that instant, Mrs. Waterston's head appeared above the companionway, followed by Pampalona's.

“ There is your mamma, and there is your—friend. No wonder I want to escape to Cuba, or anywhere,” muttered Mark, in Hilda's ear; and then strode forward to offer his arm to Mrs. Waterston, leaving the young girl thoroughly puzzled as to his meaning.

Was he really jealous? If so, was it her place to assure him, delicately, that so far from Pampalona's being her favored admirer, he——

But at this point, maidenly consciousness stepped in, and refused to allow the sentence to finish itself, and at the same moment, the young Cuban's musical voice said, softly, in her ear :

“ You land at Nassau to-night, senorita? ”

“ Yes.” And Hilda smiled both sadly and gently. She was pitying herself, and he thought she was pitying him.

His purple eyes darkened rapturously.

"I am thinking of landing, too," said he, watching her as intently as Mark had done, but with widely different motives.

He was rewarded by a glance and smile of genuine pleasure, the reward a proud woman is always ready to give to the man who brings balm to the feelings, or the vanity, that another man has wounded. But how was he to know? He mistook her, as any but one of her own stamp would have done, and eagerly exclaimed:

"I shall do as you advise, *senorita*. Will you have me land at Nassau, or go on to Cuba?"

"Of course, if you leave it to me, I shall selfishly say, land at Nassau," replied Hilda, in the tone she would have recommended sherbet rather than cream. "Mamma and I will of course be glad of more of an acquaintance, and the place is worth seeing, if you have never been there."

"Then I shall land," said Pampalona, a little chilled, for the most sanguine lover could have found nothing personal, or conscious, in word or tone.

Hilda watched him—watched Mark promenading the deck with her mother, and all the time most fixedly watched a sea-gull gyrating about the mast.

"Isn't he graceful?" exclaimed she, at length.

"*Senorita*, they call our women cruel because they go sometimes to bull-fights. You Northern women are more cruel," said Pampalona, softly.

"Do you think so? Oh, no! Why, we all dote on Mr. Bergh in New York; and mamma walks sometimes, rather than take the horses out, in bad weather."

"Yes, you are very tender of animals, all of you, and revenge yourselves on men," said the Cuban, bitterly.

Hilda turned and looked at him in real kindness, almost tenderness; but her voice was full of pride, as she slowly said:

“Because men can take care of themselves, Mr. Pampalona. A man who allows a woman to gain such power over him, that she *can* be cruel, has sold his birthright for a mess of very weak and vapid pottage. A man must rule his own will and his own heart, or he will never conquer those of a woman who is worth having.”

Pampalona was about to reply, when the dinner-bell sounded.

“Oh, welcome sound!” cried Hilda, glad to escape. “Aren’t you hungry? I am starved.”

“Yes—I am starved,” replied Pamplona, bitterly; and Hilda blithely rejoined, not choosing to understand him: “Well, relief is at hand. Let us go to dinner.”

Dinner over, another interview took place. Senor Valdez, instead of retreating at once to his stateroom, as was his habit, mounted to the deck, and sought his compatriot, whom he found moodily leaning against the rail, while Mrs. Waterston, her daughter, Trecothick, and the captain, chatted gaily at a little distance.

“Pardon my intrusion, senor,” said he, courteously, and in Spanish, “but I knew your father very well, and I am a Cuban gentleman. May I ask a question, without impertinence?”

“I am at your service, senor; and if you will tell me to whom I have the honor of speaking, I doubt not I shall remember the name of my father’s friend.”

“That is not important. I call myself Valdez, at present; a traveling name, you understand. Some day I will call at Los Palmas, in my true character. My question is simply, what does the gentleman, your room-mate, intend to do? Will he land at Nassau, or go on to Cuba?”

“The gentleman is no friend of mine, hardly an acquaintance, so I betray no confidence in saying that he

announced, to-night, his intention of proceeding to Havana."

"Aha! It is settled?"

"Entirely. That is, he said that he should remove to a vacant stateroom, to-night, and leave ours to me alone."

"Very good. Thanks, senor. Your kindness emboldens me to ask yet one more question. The senorita lands also at Nassau?"

"Yes, senor."

"And this gentleman, is he her suitor?"

"Pardon, senor, but I know nothing of his affairs, beyond what I have told you."

"Excuse me, senor, and thanks." And the gray-haired man walked away, very grave exteriorly, but inwardly chuckling.

"Thou art jealous, Rafaelito, as thy mother used to call thee. Ah, Violeta, sweet flower of my youth—and now!"

And now an air of preparation pervaded the ship. The passengers were absorbed in packing their stateroom belongings, or in looking through the twilight for the glimpse of land; the steward and stewardess were all-pervading, and blandly smiling in expectation of a fee; the captain had no time for chat; the sailors, ropes, chains, hatchways, anchors, and luggage became predominant features of the quiet deck.

The moon rose, and the white lighthouse, on the end of Hog Island, shone out like a monster ghost; the twinkling lights of the town appeared, crowning the steep heights by Government House and the Prison, and glimmering all down the slope to the water's edge; the soft land breeze, loaded with the perfume of orange, and jessamine, and magnolia, drifted lazily out to meet the eager travelers; and the anchor slid from the bows, and took hold in the silvery sands, that, shining through the clear waters of this

bay, give it color and light, such as no other water in the world possesses; the engine ceased its throbs; the temperature of the air changed, from chill and bracing, to balmy and quiet; the voyage was over; and the lovely life of the tropics had begun.

“Captain, can we land to-night?” clamored a voice, at every turn, and the patient captain replied, invariably:

“Certinly, if you like; but I wouldn’t advise it, as you can’t take any luggage ashore, and may not get any beds.”

So nearly everybody subsided, especially as no boats appeared, and the vessel was not yet alongside the wharf.

But at a wonderfully early hour in the morning, everybody was astir; the steamer had lifted anchor, and was at the quay; the shore was crowded with the oddest of all hack-carriages, and with negroes of every size, age, and shade; the custom-house officers were on board; and porters were carrying luggage ashore, and piling it upon drays, carriages, and trucks, with as much noise and as little exercise of brain as possible.

Hilda Waterston, a little pale and silent, stood by herself on the after deck, watching all this, and waiting for her mother to finish dressing, when Pampalona hurriedly approached.

“Senorita, the last moment has come. I am already to go ashore, or I will remain on board. It is for you to decide——”

But Hilda was spared answering, by the cries of the urchins that called from the shore:

“Say, mister, want to see us dive? I’ll go you twenty feet for a shilling,” said one.

“I’ll dive for a sixpence!” cried another.

“I’ll go for a check!” shouted a third.

“For a penny!” vociferated a fourth.

“Fling in a bit of silver, miss, 'cause it shines most, and I'll fetch it up in my mouth,” was the culminating exclamation of a fifth.

Hilda laughed, partly because the crowd of sable imps, all stripped to their waists, and balancing themselves on the edge of the wharf, were so grotesque a sight, and partly that the tears were so near the surface, that she must laugh to keep them down.

“Want to see them dive, Miss Waterston?” called Trecothick's blithe voice, from his stateroom window. “Look!”

He tossed a silver coin into the twenty-foot deep water, so clear, in spite of its depth, that every object on the bottom was perfectly apparent. The silver coin could be seen whirling down through layer after layer of sunshine and shade, until, before it reached the bottom, these little, sable wretches had pursued and captured it, fighting among themselves for it, as they rose, cork-like to the surface.

Hilda laughed, gleefully. Trecothick applauded. Pampalona muttered a strong Spanish oath, deep down in his throat.

“What *is* the matter, Hilda?” demanded Mrs. Waterston, a little peevish at having to rise so early, and by her presence on deck completing Pampalona's discomfort.

At the same moment, the steward, when Trecothick had several times essayed to bribe for information concerning the Valdez family, entered his cabin with a cup of coffee, and in putting it down, innocently remarked:

“The old gentleman and the lady went off very pre-miscuous from 42, didn't they, sir!”

“42? What do you mean? Tell me all about it, steward.”

Trecothick, as he spoke, slipped a gold piece in the man's palm.

“ Well, Senor Valdez, the lady, and the little dog, with the luggage in the staterooms, left the ship in the dead of the night. A carriage was waiting, at the head of the wharf, for which the captain must have sent, or it would not have been there ; it drove off. They left their heavy luggage on board, whether to be landed later, or not, I cannot say.”

The story was hardly finished, before Mark Trecothick was packing his valise.

“ I’ll do all that, sir. Going ashore, sir ? ” inquired the steward, at this.

“ Yes. Do it—that’s a good fellow—while I go to see about my trunks. I suppose they’re not hoisted up.”

And thus it came about that Pampalona, comforting herself for the loss of his quiet moment with Hilda, by the reflection that he should find many another moment in Nassau, and that his detestable rival would not be there to interfere, had the chagrin of hearing the captain give orders to the officer, in charge of getting the luggage out of the hold, to hurry up Mr. Trecothick’s trunks, who was going ashore, after all.

Hilda, almost at the same moment, met Mark rushing through the saloon. She put out a slender, gray-gloved hand to be shaken, and said, in a gay, careless, little voice :

“ Good-bye, Mr. Trecothick. We are just going, and shan’t see you again.”

He stopped, took the hand, pressed it, and detained it, looking deep into the eyes, which were too proud to sink beneath his gaze, yet too clear to quite hide the sharp pain under all this brave exterior ; looked and probed, and satisfied his own vanity, as these brave men always do, at the expense of the weaker and more self-forgetting natures, that

are forever giving their gold for other's brass, and then he slowly said :

“ Did you think I could go, Hildegarde ? I shall stay where you are.”

Even her perfect training could not keep down the flash of delighted surprise from her eyes, or the lovely flush from her cheeks, nor could she quite hold the full tones of her voice, as she suddenly released her hand, and turned from him, saying :

“ I—I am glad.”

Trecothick, scowling at himself as he hurried on, muttered :

“ Am I a fool, or a rascal ? But I must land. I must see Dolóres once more. I must know what those eyes mean.”

CHAPTER IV.

THE FAMILY VALDEZ.

It is pleasant, to the average mind, to find one's self of consequence. It is also pleasant to visit governors, and potentates generally. Mrs. Waterston's mind was of the average, in that particular ; and when she and Hildegarde walked up the quay, with Pampalona and Trecothick in dutiful attendance, a servant in livery carrying their satchels, and an exceedingly bright, handsome young fellow, of twenty or so, greeting them with effusion, and welcoming them to Government House, in his father's name, Mrs. Waterston was placidly content with herself and her surroundings, and did them great credit, too.

A handsome carriage, with more livery, was in attendance ; for servants are a universal luxury in Nassau. The

ladies were duly seated, with Mr. Tom Burleigh and the parcels upon the front seat; the liveries bestowed themselves in their appointed places; and Mrs. Waterston turned, with real kindness in her eyes, to the two young men, standing like supporters to a shield, at either side of the door of the barouche.

“And now, I suppose, we must say good-bye, for a while, at least, to you gentlemen, hoping to meet again, perhaps in Cuba, Mr. Pampalona; perhaps in New York, Mr. Trecothick.”

Both men bowed; Trecothick smiled, Pampalona looked embarrassed.

The Saxon was readiest to declare his intentions.

“I certainly hope to meet again, Mrs. Waterston,” he said, “but may I not change the scene from New York to Nassau, and the time to this evening, or to-morrow morning?”

“What, are you going to stay here?”

“With your permission, dear madam.”

“Oh! Well, I am very glad, I’m sure.” And she spoke the truth, for Trecothick was an unexceptionable *parti*, and Hilda was a marriageable girl. “But you, Mr. Pampalona?” continued she, holding out her hand.

“I too, madam, am proposing to remain in Nassau,” said the Cuban, with a pleading half glance at Hilda, who looked at the sea, shimmering in the sunshine.

“Perfectly charming!” exclaimed Hilda’s mother, in her most society tone, for she was really vexed. “Then as there are no adieux to make, we will not detain you gentlemen longer, just now, hoping to see you at Government House, very soon and very often. Good morning.”

Both gentlemen lifted their hats. Pampalona, including Trecothick in his sweeping bow, was turning away, when the latter, with a sudden impulse, made a stride toward

him, and offered his hand. The Cuban took it, but looked surprised.

“Let us walk up the street, together,” said Mark. “I have something to say. And in the first place, I will beg you to excuse any want of ceremony, or etiquette, in this way of breaking the ice; but I’m a plain, honest sort of fellow, and say what I mean, without fear or favor, to every one.”

“I shall meet you in the same spirit, sir, and am honored by your confidence,” replied Pampalona, guardedly.

“Well, we have been rather at cross purposes, so far, because there’s been a little rivalry, perhaps; and you, more than I, have been jealous; but the fact is just here. On board that ship there was a lady, whose name I do not know, and to whom I never spoke; but for whose sake I am going to stay in Nassau, just as for her sake I could have gone to Cuba, or to the world’s end, to get another look into her face, and see what she meant by the look she did give me, the only time I ever saw her.”

“And you do not address Miss Waterson?”

“Not at all, except as she is a very charming girl, and of my word, and so we naturally are companionable.”

This time it was the Spaniard who grasped the Saxon’s hand, and stared straight into his eyes.

“My friend, you have slain a terrible lion in my path, and one of which I was horribly afraid,” said he. “Now, tell me if I can help you in this matter.”

“Very much, perhaps; for the lady is either the wife, or daughter or your countryman, Valdez.”

“Valdez! I know nobody called Valdez,” replied Pampalona, guardedly.

“Oh, it is only a travelling name, I presume; but he is the old gentleman, with whom I saw you speaking, on the after-deck, last night. Gray-haired, rather stout, with

shaggy eyebrows, and keen, black eyes. His staterooms were 42 and 43."

"Yes, yes, I know. No, he is not really Valdez, of course he is not; and he said he used to know my parents, and would come to my house, sometime, in his true character. I do not know, at all, who he is," said Pampalona, musingly. "And it is a lady with him, whom you are in this place to meet?"

"Yes, and I hoped you could tell me who she is."

"No, I have never heard of her until now; but your confidence shall not be misplaced, *senor*. I will keep your secret, and help you to unravel your mystery; always with the understanding that you are not my rival with the *Senorita Waterston*."

"It is a bargain, *amigo*." And once more the young men struck hands, and proceeded together up the steep, white hill of Parliament street, to the huge, pink hotel, whose hospitable roof shelters pretty nearly every visitor to Nassau.

But upon the books of the Royal Victoria, though Trecothick looked, and looked again, appeared no such name as Valdez; and to the table came no such face; and in the corridors resounded no such shrill bark, as proclaimed the presence of the dog belonging to the Valdez family.

That afternoon, the two young men, enlisting the services of a shrewd and very black gentleman, who offered himself as guide, servant, and general factotum, thoroughly explored the town, at least, so far as minor hotels, lodging houses, and furnished apartments went; but still no trace of the family Valdez was discovered. Tired, disgusted and puzzled, they stood at the top of the hill above the hotel, to watch the steamer gracefully curve her way out of the harbor. Suddenly Pampalona exclaimed:

"Amigo! The family Valdez is on board that vessel!"

“No! What do you mean?”

“What more natural? Valdez wishes to throw you off the scent. He knows that you will discover that he has landed; perhaps it was he who bribed the steward to tell you so; he comes on shore, puts himself out of the way until the vessel is about to sail, then goes quietly on board again, and is off before you guess at the trick. Eh?”

“And no way to follow for two weeks! Let us go up to Government House and call upon our friends there,” said Trecothick, lighting a cigar and handing his case to his friend.

Pampalona looked at him out of the corners of his violet eyes. This stolid Saxon self-command and reticence was so foreign to his nature as to fill him with suspicion; and declining the cigar with a backward movement of the hand, he asked, coldly:

“Are we, then, to be rivals again?”

Mark stared him full in the face, colored angrily, and then burst into a loud laugh.

“Excuse me, Pampalona; slow-moulded fellows, like us, can’t whiffle around at that rate. At five o’clock, ready to swim from here to Cuba to follow Dolóres; and at six, making love to Miss Hildegarde Waterston! Besides that, there’s such a word as honor in English; and I presume in Spanish, also.”

“Men have died by thousands to prove that there is both such a word in Spanish, and such a thing,” replied the Cuban, proudly.

In reply, Mark silently offered the cigar case again, this time with success.

That evening the young men strolled along the crest of the hill, looking down upon the twinkling lights of the town; and across the bay to the Pharos, on the long, low island serving as its breakwater. They followed the white,

hard road, until it wound in between iron gates guarded by a sentry, and so walked along the front of the handsome residence known to Nassau folk as Government House.

The ladies were at home, a fact patent to the guests, as they were sitting upon the veranda, Hilda looking very lovely in the white lawn dress she had already disinterred from her boxes, and Mrs. Waterston, serene and dignified, in black lace and velvet, with jewels in her soft, white hair. The Governor, a gentleman somewhat advanced in life, and a widower, was away from Nassau, making an official tour through the out-islands; but he was represented at home by his private secretary, who was, furthermore, husband of the governor's daughter; and by his son Tom, with whom we are already acquainted, and who, with all the ardor and freshness of twenty, was now making desperate love to his cousin Hilda.

But the latter, however, listened to him in amiable abstraction, while her eyes shyly followed Mark Trecothick's movements, as he made himself agreeable, now to Mrs. Murray, now to Mrs. Waterston, and without apparent intention avoided herself, while Rafael's dark and luminous glances shot ceaselessly from her face to that of her friend.

Nobody felt very comfortable or at ease, and Trecothick was fingering his hat, preparatory to leave-taking, when, in one of those sudden pauses to which general conversation is liable, Tom Burleigh's merry voice was audible, saying:

"Oh, yes, cousin, there is a jolly underground passage, from here to Fort Charlotte, as much as two miles long, and danger has no end. I'll show it you, some day."

"Nonsense, Tom," interposed Mrs. Murray, who was of an eminently practical turn of mind. "Papa says there is no such passage, and if there ever was it is filled up now. You know he doesn't like you to talk in that wild way."

“But was there ever really such a passage, and what was it for?” demanded Mrs. Waterston, curiously.

“I don’t know, really. How is it, James?” asked Mrs. Murray, deferring to her husband, who had amused himself a little with antiquarian researches, and she was replied :

“Why, yes, I think, no doubt, there was and is such a passage ; but the entrance is walled up in the fort, and hidden at this end. It was constructed to enable the governor to escape to a place of safety, in case of one of the insurrections, or attacks of Spaniards or pirates, so common in the early history of the colony. There are also subterraneous passages from Fort Charlotte to the sea-coast, so any fugitive governor, prudent enough to have a vessel in the offing and a boat on the beach, would have a very fair chance of escape.”

“There, Bertha, you see it was not ‘nonsense,’ after all,” exclaimed Tom, triumphantly ; and as Bertha seemed likely to reply with some warmth, Trecothick hastened to take leave, idly musing, as he and Pampalona walked back to the hotel, upon the subterraneous passage from Government House to Fort Charlotte, a boat upon the beach, and a vessel in the offing.

Three days passed languidly away. The Cuban cared for nothing in Nassau but Hilda Waterston, and was always at Government House. Trecothick cared for nothing, whatever, in Nassau, and only waited for the day when he could leave it. He found a good saddle-horse, and rode, restlessly hither and yon, sometimes with his party, oftener alone.

One day, when he had allowed his horse to choose a faint hill track, hardly to be made out among the luxuriant vegetation of the place, he suddenly perceived that he had come upon the rear of a wild settlement of native Africans, colonized here, and as savage, except, perhaps,

for cannibalism, as in the wilds of Timbuctoo. The roads through this place are hardly more than foothpaths, and as intricate as a maze, so that Trecothick, not wishing to sever his acquaintance with people, or dwellings, turned his horse hither and thither, trying to escape this vicinity, until he felt himself fairly lost, and paused beside a hedge of maguey, looking inquiringly about him.

A shrill little yelp, from the other side of the hedge, startled him, and sent the blood racing through his veins with a tingle of delight. That yelp! It was, it must be, the yelp of the only dog in the world, for which Trecothick cared—the dog of the Valdez family.

He reined his horse close to the hedge; but the maguey plants grew so strongly, and so close, that it was impossible to see over or through them, or to thrust them aside. One sense disappointed, he assayed another, and half timidly, half audaciously, exclaimed:

“Dolóres! Are you there?”

A low rustle, as of a woman's garments, a pause, and then a soft voice replied, tremulously:

“Who calls? Who knows poor Dolóres?”

“A friend. One who will help her if he can. (Confound the hedge!) Wait until I can come to you, dear lady, and I will tell you more.”

And Mark, who had, as may be imagined, spoken some of these phrases aloud, and one to himself, shook his horse's bridle, and set off at a gallop down the line of the hedge, which terminated, at last, beside a high, locked gate, through whose bars he saw a large, old house of weather-stained limestone, half buried in tropical foliage.

Leaning from his horse, the young man examined the fastenings of the gate. They were proof against anything less than a locksmith's or blacksmith's arts, and the iron pickets rose eight feet from the ground. No one was in

sight. But the sharp voice of the little dog sounded nearer, and Mark waited with such patience as he might, until he again caught the sound of rustling skirts, and the next moment saw a slender, black-clad figure emerge from the thicket, and approach the gate.

Yes, there were the great, unfathomable, darkeyes, with that wistful gaze intensified now, as they, rested inquiringly, upon his; the sweet, pale face, and infantile mouth; the low, wide sweep of brow; and the massive waves of hair, rippling above it. Yes, Dolóres, herself, and better worth the seeking, than he, at first, had thought her. He leaped from his horse, and, hardly knowing what he did, thrust both hands through the bars, exclaiming, passionately:

“Thank God! I see you at last!”

She hesitated, and drew a little nearer, but not within reach of the wistful hands, and shyly asked:

“But who are you, senor, and how do you know my name?”

“I am Mark, call me Mark; and let me call you Dolóres.”

“Mark! It is an English name; and you, are you an Englishman?”

“No, an American. But tell me, quickly, Dolóres, are you in danger, or unhappy? Do you need help? Who is that old man? Is he——”

He wished to say “your husband,” but the words choked him, and he could not speak them. Nor did Dolóres reply. In the momentary pause that ensued, the little dog jumped up, and began barking furiously, looking in the direction whence the crackling of boughs and the rustle of leaves, suggested that some one was approaching.

Dolóres clasped her hands, and turning yet paler than was her wont, exclaimed:

“They are coming! Go, go, quickly! Oh, go, or you can never help me again. Come to-morrow.”

Mark leaped upon his horse, and at the same moment the gray head of Senor Valdez protruded itself from among the bushes, followed by that of a sullen-looking negro.

CHAPTER V.

THE CATACOMBS OF FORT CHARLOTTE.

“Hi! Mas’ Cottick! Wan speak to you, mas’r!”

Mark Trecothick, lounging discontentedly, with a cigar in his mouth, upon the balcony of the Royal Victoria Hotel, and meditating upon the humiliating close of his interview with Dolóres, looked over the rail, and was aware, through the darkness of the just fallen night, of a still darker moving object, emphasized by certain white and flashing points, possibly the eyes and teeth of a very black human face. On this theory the young man spoke.

“Want to see me, John?”

“Yessir. Name ain’t John, but got a lilly letter for you.”

“A letter, eh? Well, why don’t you come up, and bring it?”

“Tain’t possorable, mas’r. Lady in de case, sir. ’Xpect you’ll have to be so kind as come down here. An’, mas’r, please don’t say noffin to nobody. ’Taint safe, nohow.”

A wild throb of the young man’s heart suggested that the “lady in the case,” might possibly be Dolóres. Without farther parley, Trecothick hastened to the end of the gallery, and running down the outer stairs, found his sable friend waiting in a discreet shadow, which almost entirely screened him from view.

“Here’s de letter, Mas’r ’Cottick. You can see wid de light ob dat smokin’-room winder.”

Accepting the suggestion, Trecothick moved a little farther down the drive, and pausing in the stream of light that poured from the smoking-pavilion, he unfolded the scrap of paper, and read the hastily penciled lines, written in a cramped Spanish hand, which was quite unfamiliar to him.

The note was as follows :

“Yes, I do need help, kind friend. My tyrant and his slave discovered your visit to-day, and I shall be carried away, where you will never find me. If I do not escape to-night, I never shall ; but there is no means of leaving the island. All that I can do, is to hide in the dungeons below the ruined fort, until they have left the island. Will you help me? Will you meet me there, to-night, and tell me what can be done? The man who gives you this is faithful, and will help us. He will show you where I shall be at twelve o’clock, to-night. His name is Brom, and if you send a message by him that you will come, I will risk all, and make my escape. I dare not start until I know that you will meet me, for I cannot go back, when once I have started. Oh ! I am wild with doubt and dread. Help me, help me, if you are a man.

DOLÓRES.”

Hardly waiting to finish the incoherent, and almost illegible lines, Trecothick turned to the negro, who had closely followed him.

“Brom,” he said.

“Yessir.”

“Your mistress says you are to be trusted ; that you are faithful and secret ; and willing to help her in what she is thinking of undertaking.” The negro nodded. “Now, go straight back to her, and tell her I will be at the place she mentions, long before twelve, and will arrange everything exactly as she wishes. You will help her in reaching the fort, of course.”

"Surely mas'r. But 'pears to me it's de bes' way for you to go long wid me now; and I'll show you jes' de place I'll fotch her to. You would nebber find it and it would be a mighty poor plan to be hangin' 'round dere waiting for us, and mebbe miss us in de dark. You might take a book, you see, and your cigars, and I've got a dark lantern in my pocket; and I'll leave you in de room, ober dere, and go fotch missy right away."

"Yes, that would be better, as I should have to take some one to show me the way, anyhow," replied Mark, musingly. "Well, come on. But stop, I must go back to the house a minute."

"Miss 'Lory tole me to ask you pertikler not to take Mas'r Vi'let when you're goin', 'cause he knows ole mas'r an' ole mas'r will go, an' ask him first t'ing if he knows 'bout it."

"Mas'r Vi'let?" asked Trecothick, wonderingly.

"Yessir, Mas'r Pampalony; my ole mas'r always call him Vi'let, 'cause dat he modder's name, an' she de sweet-heart ob my ole mas'r."

"Oho!" And Trecothick paused, half inclined to question the slave as to his master's real name, and especially his relations toward Dolóres. But a sense of honor, possibly overstrained and excessive, closed his lips; and simply nodding his head, he hastened back into the house, changed his dress a little, placed a loaded revolver and stout knife in his waistband, saw that his purse was well filled, thrust a book into one pocket, and some more cigars into another, and was leaving the room, when a neck-tie of Pampalona's, thrown across the handle of the door, attracted his attention, and a spirit of fun suddenly coming uppermost in his excited feelings, he took a card from his pocket, and scribbled upon it:

"Good-bye; I am just sailing for the moon."

Then he laid it upon the pillow of his companion's bed, smiling as he thought of the other's astonishment, if that were the only news he received of him that night.

Rejoining Brom, the two left the grounds of the hotel, unobserved by any one.

"You kin walk a couple o' mile, mas'r?" asked the negro, cautiously.

"A couple of dozen, if needed," replied the stout young fellow, gaily.

Keeping down Parliament into Bay street, the strangely assorted companions soon passed through the silent town, and emerged upon the lonely coast road, leading far out into the tropical wilderness of the almost unexplored island, whose human life centers all but exclusively in the city of Nassau. The night was dark and damp, one of those heavy, odorous nights, frequent in that latitude, and occasional in our own, when the very spirit of sadness, of reverie, of love and longing seems abroad; when the thick, sweet air seems to kiss the cheek that it presses against, and the heart aches with a vague and restless longing, that seems just on the point of declaring itself and receiving satisfaction. Somewhat of all this stirred in Mark Trecothick's soul, as he strode along between the hedges of cactus, wild orange, hemp and maguey shrubs, bordering the road, while close at his right hand thundered the surf, its spray often moistening his brow.

A couple of miles were rapidly passed, and then at the left hand, arose the crumbling walls and ruined barracks of old Fort Charlotte, a stronghold built by the Earl of Dunmore, a century ago, and carefully provided with the avenues of escape so necessary in those troublesome times. The hill, whereon the old fort stands, is steep, and the path rough; but Mark breasted it gallantly, and the heavier negro toiled doggedly up behind him, until both stood at the

doorway leading through a paved passage into the interior of the works.

In this passage Brom pulled out his dark lantern, and lighting it, inquired :

“ Been here afore, mas'r? ”

“ No, but I have heard a good deal about the place,” replied Trecothick, peering curiously about him. “ Lots of queer corners, and underground passages, and secret cells, and hidden entrances, aren't there? ”

“ Yes, mas'r, an' I'm de boy dat knows all 'bout ebery one on 'em. Used to be signal-man there, two or three years ago, an' sort o' studied it all up, jes' for fun ; wot I doesn't know 'bout ole Fort Charlie ain't wuf knowin', no-how.”

“ And I dare say it was you that put the idea of hiding here into—your mistress' mind,” suggested Mark, awkwardly halting over the name of his almost unknown inamorata.

Brom grinned in the darkness, but answered soberly enough :

“ Yessir. Miss 'Lory sort o' 'pends on me a good deal. Yessir, I'se b'longed to mas'r——”

“ Senor Valdez? ”

“ Yessir ; b'longed to him all my life, an' I'se a good deal older dan missy, an' so—but lors ! ef I stan' chatterin' here, dere won't be time to get her over safe, 'fore mas'r's up an' 'boat.”

“ Come on, then. What are we waiting for? ” And Trecothick, whose interest in Dolóres's history was weaker than his proud reserve with an inferior, led the way, until the two stood once more in the open air, inside the walls of the fort.

“ Now, mas'r, don't be skeered ; foller right down,” muttered Brom, removing the covering from the top of

what appeared to be a well, hewn out of the living rock ; but as the negro held his lantern within the mouth, Mark could perceive the upper steps of a narrow stairway, hewn, like the walls, from the solid stone, and winding dizzily down, around a central shaft left uncut in the midst. The steps were dark, and slippery with the noisome damp of the place, and the air, sullenly rising, like an imprisoned Afrit, about to take shape in the freer space, and work some ill to the rash mortals who had liberated it, was chill and deadly to the lungs.

“ We’re not going down into that hole, are we ? ” asked Trecothick, peering in and then tossing up his head with the impatient gesture of a fiery horse full of courage, and yet disliking to approach some object.

“ Here’s where Miss ’Lory’s comin’ fer ter meet yer, Mas’r ’Cottick. *She* wont be feard o’ nottin’, bless her lubly face,” said Brom quietly.

Without reply, Trecothick placed his foot upon the first stair and followed the feeble light, which, striking upon the rough hewn sides of the tunnel, showed the glistening track of snails, and lizards and numberless creeping vermin that infest such places. A sudden gloom closed down upon the young man’s spirit, as the heavy air shot down upon his lungs, and with an uneasy effort to throw it off, he exclaimed with a laugh :

“ Look here, Brom, how many thieves, ghosts of pirates and smugglers, and stately gentry, is one liable to meet here ? Did you ever see them ? ”

“ Hush, mas’r ! hush, for God’s sake ! ” muttered the negro, turning round and showing a muddy, yellow face and rolling, white eyeballs, in place of his usual assured aspect. “ It ain’t good to talk ob dem t’ings here. Ef any ob dem ole mas’rs walk, dey isn’t goin’ for to hurt us. Dey

wouldn't lower deirselves so far as to go troublin' a poor nigger like me."

The wheedling, deprecatory tone of the last words, evidently addressed to some unseen, but present power, was irresistible to Mark's sense of humor, and he burst into a sonorous laugh, whose cadences went rolling up and down the narrow, rock-hewn passage, until they were reverberated back in hollow mimicry, as if the goblins of whom he had spoken were taunting him with their presence and their power.

"Laugh away, you fool," muttered Brom, in his native African. "You won't laugh long. And serve you right, too, for bringing the devils that live here round our heads. But it ain't me that they'll harm."

"What are you growling over now, Brom?" demanded Trecothick. "And where are we going to bring up?"

"Right 'long dis way, mas'r. Min' de step, down heah." And Brom, turning abruptly into a side passage, leading off from that conducting to the "Governor's Chamber," hastened along so rapidly that Trecothick could hardly keep up with him.

A short distance brought them to a great mass of limestone, so huge and shapeless that in passing around it he lost all idea of the original direction. After turning into one of the two or three galleries beyond, and from that into another and another, all running in different directions, Trecothick perceived with dismay that he was completely at a loss to know whence he had come, and still more so to determine whither he was going. He realized, too, that if his guide should desert him, his chance of escape would be small indeed. As this idea crossed his mind, Brom suddenly halted, and holding up the lantern, showed a square opening before them, with a yet blacker darkness beyond.

“Dere, mas'r,” said he, triumphantly, “dat’s de place I’se done got fixed fer Miss ’Lory to hide in. Aint it fus’ rate?”

“It may be safe enough, but I can’t say much for the cheerfulness of it,” replied Mark, dubiously. “Open your lantern, and let’s have a good look.”

“Here, mas'r, you take dis yer piece of candle, and I’ll hold de lantern, an we’ll have a lumernation,” proposed the negro, cheerfully; and taking a small end of candle from his pocket, he lighted it at the lantern and gave it to Trecothick, who, holding it above his head, advanced cautiously into the cell, leaving Brom adjusting the lantern.

“Why, I don’t see anything ready here!” exclaimed Mark, indignantly, as he reached the limit of the small and utterly bare stone cell.

The slam of a door behind him was the only response, and turning suddenly, he perceived, as he had not before, that the doorway of the dungeon was fitted with a stout plank door, and that this door, swinging on newly-oiled hinges, had been softly closed behind him, and was now securely locked.

“Perdition!” exclaimed the young man. “It is a trap! I am a prisoner!”

It was quite true. He was a prisoner in the catacombs, beneath Fort Charlotte.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SECRET ARCHIVES.

WHILE Trecothick, under charge of Brom, was thus exploring the mysteries of Fort Charlotte, his friend, or companion, Pampalona, was basking in the light of Hilda

Waterston's lovely eyes, as she wandered with him through the dim and odorous alleys of the great garden attached to Government House.

Mrs. Murray played propriety; that is, she sat upon the steps, leading from the veranda down into the garden, and as the young people, in their promenade, came, every now and then, within speaking distance, she exchanged a few words with them. Her husband lay upon a bamboo settee, smoking, and spoiling his eyes in the attempt to read by the flickering light of a candle behind a glass shade. Tom Burleigh, who had, all day and all the evening, assumed an apparitional character—appearing suddenly from no one knew whence, and disappearing, presently, no one could say whither—now suddenly emerged from the house, looking both worn and excited, stood for a moment gazing grimly down into the garden, where Hilda's white dress gleamed in and out among the dark foliage, and her clear, bird-like voice made music sweeter to the poor boy's ear than all the melody of sea or shore, as gathered up in the marvel of a tropic night.

“Pampalona again!” muttered Tom. “I'll spoil his fun.”

“Tom!” exclaimed his sister, whose quickness of the ear was a great convenience to herself, and an equal inconvenience to her family, “what *do* you mean? And where are you going? Don't interrupt them, for pity's sake. That poor fellow has been aching, for the last two days, to get a moment alone with Hilda; and she has kept him off, until, just now, I took compassion on him, and asked her to go and show him the night-blooming cereus. Do give him a chance.”

“Well, I shan't, then,” replied Tom, with the decisiveness of his age. “He isn't going to have Hilda, any way;

and she don't want to be bored with his offer. She'd give a deal more for what I could tell her."

"You conceited imp!" began his sister; but Tom was already down the steps, and making quietly toward a side alley, by which he proposed to come round and confront the promenaders, as they slowly paced down the principal one.

It was an interesting moment, for Pampalona, stung by the gay indifference of Hilda's manner, and the coolness with which she parried one after another of his attempts to lead the conversation to a personal issue, had suddenly turned savage, and although too well-bred to allow his manner or tone to change from their usual polished deference, the Latin blood was seething darkly in his veins, and the Latin jealousy and unscrupulous desire for revenge was rising paramount to all sense of honor or friendship. Almost before he knew, he spoke out:

"By the way, Miss Hilda, I have an amusing secret to confide to you, about our friend, Trecothick!"

"Is there anything amusing connected with Mr. Trecothick?" inquired Hilda, with unconscious bitterness, for she could no longer be blind to the indifference and preoccupation of the man, for whom she secretly cared more than she confessed, even to herself.

"Decidedly, yes. Figure to yourself a man passionately in love, ready to sacrifice his plans, his future, his friends, his life, perhaps, for a phantom; for a woman whose name he does not know, whose face he has seen but twice—yes, the wife of another man. Do you not find that amusing?"

"Amusing? I find it disgusting—maniacal! But what do you mean? What is this story?"

Pampalona, in answer, gave the history of Mark's pursuit of his shadowy love, coloring the story more or less by

his own jealous fancies, and bestowing Dolóres upon old Valdez as a wife, with absolute certainty.

Hilda listened, in utter silence. The darkness hid her face—mercifully hid it—for never, perhaps, in all her life, had those delicate and high-bred features expressed such dark passions, such bitter woe.

“And he was secretly pursuing this disgraceful passion, even while I was all but showing him that I cared for him, more than ever I cared for man before,” she muttered, behind her clenched teeth.

The Cuban could not hear the words, but he caught the intonation, and it chimed too well with his own bitter mood to be misinterpreted. He knew that he had roused that jealousy, which in some natures is stronger than all the sweetness of love, and he knew that many a heart is caught in the rebound, that never otherwise had been caught at all.

He seized the moment, and taking her hand, exclaimed, passionately :

“Why do you spend time and thought upon this man’s folly? What are his loves to us? What to you, who sit enthroned above the mad passion you inspire? What to me, who am so consumed by love myself, that I have no thought for any but the object of my love? Hilda, beautiful, peerless Hilda, you know——”

“Oh, here you are!” exclaimed Tom, blithely, at this instant, as he stepped out from the shade of the great clump of banana trees, behind which he had listened to the closing sentences of this conversation. “I have been looking everywhere for you, Hilda.”

“For me?” asked Hilda, mechanically. She passed her hand across her forehead, and moistened her frozen lips; for her brain seemed on fire, while her blood was turned to ice.

“Yes. Bertha has sent you this wrap. Don't you know it is dangerous to be out in the evening air, in this climate, without some covering for the head?”

And Master Tom gravely presented a light shawl, which he had snatched off the back of his sister's chair as he passed her.

Hilda allowed him to place it upon her shoulders, and to draw her hand within his arm; indeed the support was timely, for she could not have walked without it. Pampalona looked on solemnly and said nothing, too much enraged at Tom Burleigh to feel ready to address him, except in insult and defiance.

So Tom, quite competent for the occasion, took the whole conversation upon himself; asked and answered his own questions; made and laughed at his own jokes; and finally, declaring for Hilda that she was quite tired out, and needed rest, led her to the house, and seated her upon the steps, within earshot of his sister, lazily stretching himself at her feet.

Pampalona watched this arrangement in half concealed anger, and after a few moments of sullen silence, took his leave, murmuring in Hilda's ear:

“I shall finish the sentence, so, rudely broken, to-morrow, if you permit me. It is life and death to me.”

Hilda replied not a word, but she did not withdraw her hand from his lingering pressure; nay! a faint emotion of pleasure stirred her proud heart, as she felt that this man valued, as his very life, the love so bitterly slighted by the other.

The concession was slight, but it soothed, somewhat, Pampalona's angry disappointment.

Hilda rose at his departure, and saying that she must look after mamma, and might remain with her, bade Mrs. Murray good-night, and was going through the little recep-

tion-room, opening upon the veranda, on her way to the stairs, when Tom followed her, calling out :

“ Oh, but Hilda, are we going riding in the morning, and do you want your side-saddle altered? I must tell David about it, to-night.”

“ I don't mind, Tom. Yes, I suppose we will ride,” replied Hilda.

“ All right, then. But see here,” in a whisper, “ I've a secret for you.”

“ A secret? What is it? ”

“ Come into the study, and I'll tell you,” replied Tom. His manner was so earnest that Hilda followed.

Opening the door of the large and handsome room, devoted to Governor Burleigh's private use, and therefore called his study, Tom lighted the candles upon the table, and then closed the door, quietly slipped the noiseless bolt upon the inside.

Hilda stood, looking curiously at him.

For now he applied his shoulder to the end of a great bookcase, apparently as solid as the wall itself. The bookcase slid forward a little, leaving room for a person to pass behind it.

“ Look in, Hilda. What do you see? ” whispered Tom, pointing toward the cavity thus exposed.

“ A door. Where does it lead? How did you find it? ” asked Hilda, her curiosity more excited than ever.

“ The subterranean passage to Fort Charlotte. Isn't it a rummy start to have found it all myself? I don't believe another soul knows of it, unless it's the governor; for I've a notion it's like the secret of the Iron Mask, and the Governors of the Bahamas receive it along with the seal of office, and don't part with it except to their successors.”

“ But how did you find it out, Tom? ”

“ Why, you know, they're always laughing at me for

mouse round. Bertha calls it curiosity, but it's really a laudable thirst for information; and, to-day, I was turning over some papers in a box, that I found one of my keys fitted——”

“Why, Tom! was it your father's box?”

“Well, yes, it's his just now; but I may be Governor of the Bahamas some day; and then it'll be mine. It's locked up in that secretary, and I saw the governor open it once. It is labeled, outside, ‘Private Archives.’ I always wanted to know what the Secret Archives were about; and so, to-day, I got into the secretary, and then into the tin box, and read everything in it. And among the papers, I came to this.” And from an inner pocket the boy carefully drew and unfolded a very antique looking document, nearly broken apart in the folds, and docketed:

“The Subterraneans of Fort Charlotte.”

CHAPTER VII.

THE GHOST OF A GREY NUN.

“‘SUBTERRANEANS of Fort Charlotte,’” repeated Hilda, looking, with a half-frightened curiosity, at the old document. “Well, what does it say, Tom?”

“You can read it, if you like.”

“No, indeed. I don't believe in opening other people's boxes, and reading their private documents.”

“Pshaw! It's nothing private for papa; it's only private for the English government. Come, don't be cross,” pleaded the boy, holding the skirt of his cousin's dress as she turned away. “Never mind the paper; it only tells how the governor of that day was scared, lest the Spaniards were quietly preparing the minds of the slaves for an insurrection, and would at the same time descend

upon the island themselves. So he constructed, secretly, a passage from this room to Fort Charlotte, and from Fort Charlotte down to the edge of the water; and always kept a fast-sailing little schooner at anchor, with a few trusty men on board. The old fellow finally died, quietly, in his bed; but before that happy event occurred, he wrote down this description of his work, and told just how to open the passage, as you see me do. Look, here's the place, behind this row of Colonial Reports, (clever old fellow to select his own official reports as the books least likely to be disturbed in the whole library,) and putting your finger in that hole, and pulling toward you, and at the same time pushing the bookcase, you move the whole thing on its secret rollers, and open the passage. It goes very easily; just try it yourself."

As he spoke, Tom replaced the bookcase in its original position, and made Hilda perceive how immovable and solid it appeared, and really was, except when the pressure upon the spring allowed the rollers to act; then he showed her the precise mode of working the spring, and smote his leg in boyish triumph, as the bookcase rolled noiselessly out, obedient to the girl's well-directed movements.

"There now, Hilda," exclaimed he. "Knowledge is power, they say; and you've got that much knowledge through me, haven't you? Aren't you much obliged?"

"Of course I am, Tom. Come, let's go into the passage."

"Will you? That's jolly. I'll take one of these candles."

"But no, it isn't safe now, for Bertha will be sure to go into mamma's room, on her way to bed, and——"

"Tom! Tom! Where are you, Tom?" called a shrill voice, from the upper landing. Tom made a face of comical dismay, exclaiming:

“Bertha herself! It’s lucky we hadn’t started. You push the bookcase back, while I run and see.”

“Yes, run!” said Hilda, hurriedly; and Tom presently appeared in the lower hall, calling up to his sister:

“What is it, Bertha? I’m here, in the study, showing Hilda some old books and papers.”

“Oh! I thought you were up here,” replied Bertha, slowly descending, as she spoke. “They’ve sent up from Col. Eastman’s, to know if you can watch with poor Harry again. He is worse, and has asked for you, particularly.”

“Poor old chap!” exclaimed Tom, heartily. “Yes, indeed, I’ll go directly. Poor Harry! And a week ago, we were over on Hog Island, shooting.”

“These fevers are so sudden. Hilda, child, I wouldn’t sit up, too late, reading; we think plenty of sleep one of the best preventions of disease, here.”

“Yes, I am just going up. Good-night again, Bertha;” and Hilda granted her peachy cheek to the other’s kind, if somewhat woodeny kiss, and the three separated, Tom finding a moment to whisper hastily in Hilda’s ear:

“To-morrow, sometime, we’ll get a chance.”

Hilda nodded, said good-night, and went at once to her mother’s room, where she remained, until Mrs. Waterston sank into a quiet sleep, likely to last through the night. The girl crept away to her own bedroom, found that it was about midnight, and began to prepare for rest. But now, when all duties were over, when no eye was upon her, all the suppressed pride and shame, and anger seething in her heart for hours, rose to the surface, and throwing open the jealousies of the window, she leaned her folded arms upon the sill, bowed her head upon them, and gave herself up to a flood of thought, memory, and self-contempt.

Suddenly she raised her head, dashed the burning tears

from her eyes, and springing to her feet, exclaimed, aloud :

“Hilda Waterston, is this you? Shame, shame! Well, it is the last, the very last time, you will disgrace yourself in this way, I hope. Yes, the very last.”

She stood gazing from the window, and abstractedly murmured, “yes, the last time,” over and over, while the pungent sea-breeze, stirring, as the night turned toward morning, drifted in at the open window, and cooled the fever of her lips and brow. Perhaps it was some latent association, perhaps the whim of a restless mind; but as she smelt the sea, a sudden recollection of the subterranean passage, from Fort Charlotte to the shore, and a desire to explore it, came into the girl’s fancy. Glancing at her watch, she murmured :

“Two o’clock. The deadeest time of night, and the safest. I cannot sleep; I am afraid of nothing so much as of myself; I would like bodily fatigue, and a new sensation; why shouldn’t I? I will.”

And twisting up her long, brown hair, already loosened for the night, Miss Waterston hastily exchanged her dress for a gray wrapper, her dainty slippers for thick shoes, and wrapped her head in a dark, tissue veil.

“I look like the ghost of a nun—and not a bad looking one, either,” she said to herself, giving the inevitable look into the mirror, by which a pretty woman tests every novel costume.

Taking the unlighted candle in her hand, and putting some matches in the pocket of her wrapper, she softly opened her door, peered out, listened, and finally stole quietly into the corridor and down the stairs. All was silent. Letting herself, noiselessly, into the study, she bolted the door within, and approached the bookcase, which gave way readily, as before, to her touch. Without a

pause for reflection, with the lighted candle in her hand, she passed through. She now found herself at the head of a steep flight of stone steps, so narrow, that, as she descended, her garments brushed the dark and slimy walls at either side.

Down, down, and down she went, till the steps ended in a narrow passage, cased at the sides and overhead with stone; for it was hewn out of the solid rock. Here abode strange and gloomy echoes, that were stirred even by the girl's light feet. More than once she paused, and raising the candle above her head, looked curiously back, thinking she was pursued. But as she paused, the echoes held their breath, and hid behind the dense veil of darkness, that completely shut in the solitary figure with its feeble little taper.

She was not afraid, in the sense that cowards know fear; for she came of a brave and high-hearted race; and had she been a man, she would have led a forlorn hope to the battery's mouth, as blithely as her ancestors had done. But the position was unusual and startling, and in these frequent pauses she could hear the dull thumping of her own heart, and caught her breath in rapid and eager draughts.

"I'm glad I came. It's better than lying there, and making a fool of myself," whispered she once; and a faint little echo whispered back, "elf," as if warning her of the neighborhood of elfin powers and dangers.

The distance seemed interminable. But Hilda was resolved to see the end of the passage, before she turned back. So she kept steadily on, stopping now and again beneath one of the spiracles, or air-holes, contrived at short intervals in the rocky roof, to inhale a long breath of the cool, salt night-breeze, or to consult her watch, and judge of the distance.

Suddenly, after she had gone, as she supposed nearly two miles, the passage ended in a blank wall, whose rough stones and careless masonry, as Hilda examined them, by the faint light of her candle, suggested that it was of later and more careless construction than the passage it closed.

"Mrs. Murray said it was stopped up," said Hilda to herself. "Well, Tom can knock down the wall. I'll tell him in the morning. Won't he be astonished——"

"Is that you, you villain?" exclaimed a voice, close at her ear, in strange, sepulchral accents, which yet seemed to be familiar.

Hilda, really startled, sprang suddenly backward, and dropped her candle, which was extinguished in the fall.

"Brom, I say! Is that you?" repeated the voice, angrily. "You needn't pretend you're not there, for I saw the light. Answer me, you dog, or I'll shoot you like one, the minute I get out! What did you lock me in for?"

"It's Mark Trecothick's voice," gasped Hilda, in a whisper to herself, almost doubting if she were awake and sane. Then she raised her voice, saying:

"It is not Brom."

"What! A woman's voice—Dolóres! Have you come at last, dear? Oh, where are you? I cannot see anything in this dungeon—I cannot find the way out—I thought it was a trap. Speak again, Dolóres; speak, for heaven's sake! I am so worn and wrought up with rage, and wonder, and useless efforts to escape, and this darkness and loneliness is so horrible, that I am all but mad, and if you had not come—speak——"

And the poor fellow, on whose sanguine and impatient temperament half a dozen hours of solitary confinement, in utter darkness and stillness, had wrought even more ruthlessly than that fearful punishment does upon ordinary criminals, stood pale, haggard, dripping with the cold sweat of

agony, upon one side of the wall, dividing his cell from the passage; while the woman, whose love his neglect had turned to hate, stood upon the other, her great eyes staring into the palpable darkness, whence that voice had issued, her icy hands clasped together, her dry lips quivering, as they tried to form an audible sound.

“Dolóres! Speak to me, my darling! You will not leave me here, surely!”

“How came you here?” gasped Hilda, in whose heart a whole world of demons seemed holding carnival.

“Don’t you know!” demanded Mark, in astonishment; and he poured out a brief and incoherent account of the transaction.

“And you, Dolóres?” he said, at the end. “How came you here, alone? Can you open this door? Speak to me, at least, my darling.”

“You love—Dolóres, very much, then?” murmured a voice, so broken and hoarse, that no ear could have recognized it as Hilda’s.

“Love you, dearest! Wait until I can grasp your hand, and look in your eyes, and you shall see if I love you.”

Jealousy, pride, rage, all evil passions mastered the girl, at this avowal.

“Aye, wait until you grasp Dolóres’s hand, and look in Dolóres’s eyes! Wait, Judas, wait!” she cried.

With the words, she turned, and fled down the dark and echoing passage.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FENCING MATCH.

“WELL, Brom, is it done?”

“Yes, master.”

“He’s safely locked up, in the hidden dungeon?”

“Yes, master.”

“And you piled the rubbish in the passage again, to look as if it were caved in and impassable?”

“Yes, master.”

“Where’s the key?”

“Here, master.”

“And you’re sure you made the door strong, and saw that the lock was not rusted away?”

“Put on a new lock, master, and pounded lots more nails into the door. Safe’s Morro Castle.”

“All right. You’re a useful dog, Brom, and you shall be rewarded. You’re sure that this brother of yours is to be trusted?”

“Trust him quicker’n I would myself, master.”

“He’s been very useful, getting this house ready, and all; though, as it has turned out, I had better have pushed on to Havana. Confound this fellow—did you have any trouble in getting him into the trap?”

“Not a bit. I just told him the senorita was waiting for him, and he went fast enough.”

Senor Valdez laughed, grimly. “He’ll have time to cool his ardor, before she comes; I fancy. Now mind, Brom, I don’t want any injury done to this young man. Of course, you or your brother, or somebody, will see that he is properly fed.”

The slave looked steadily into his master's face, and the master looked steadily back ; and one might well fancy that the air grew thick with the breath of hell, and that exultant demons waved their bat-wings approvingly, as that unspoken decree of murder, by starvation, was given and received.

" I suppose there's something to eat there, master," said the slave at last, in a hoarse whisper.

" Of course, of course, and you must take care not to forget to give the key to your brother, before we leave, and tell him to go and let the man out. Two or three days' imprisonment, with plenty to eat, won't hurt him."

" No, master, and I hope I sha'n't forget to leave the key with Nesmus, I hope I sha'n't."

" Well, I hope you won't, though I dare say, I never shall remember to ask you whether you did or not. Now we have to see about getting on board the schooner that is to take us off."

" I told Hagar to tell Missy—"

" Senor !" exclaimed another voice, and pushing open the door of the room, Dolóres glided swiftly in. She came close to the old man, laid her hand upon his arm, and fixing her great, dark eyes upon his face, asked, imperiously :

" What has happened ? Why are we to leave this place, like thieves in the night ? Have you killed a man, or has this hound of yours pulled him down for you ?"

She turned a glance of loathsome horror, as she spoke, upon Brom, who restlessly changed his leg, and licked his lips, very much like the hounds she compared him to.

" Oh, you're anxious about your cabellero," sneered Valdez. " He's safe enough, I can assure you. Brom was just telling me of meeting him, walking on the beach, with the girl he was making love to on board the steamer—"

“Send that slave out of the room. I have something to say to you in private.”

“Do you hear, Brom? Your mistress wishes to be alone with me, and I with her. Go.”

The slave looked at his master, with a grin of diabolical intelligence, and left the room. Hardly had he closed the door, when Dolóres, throwing back the veil, in which she had partly hidden her face, swept close to Valdez, and demanded :

“What are you plotting? What are you doing? What fiend’s work has that slave been accomplishing? I saw it in both your faces; I heard it in your voices. I know you, Henrico de—”

“Hush, girl! My name is Valdez, only Valdez, remember that. And what does this insane jealousy and suspicion mean? What do you suspect? What have you heard or seen?”

“I listened, for a moment, at the door, to discover if you were alone, and—”

“Well!”

As he uttered the ejaculation, the old man fixed his fiery eyes upon the girl’s face with an expression that might have struck terror to the stoutest heart. Dolóres never blanched, however. With undisguised scorn, she replied :

“Oh, yes, you can bully, you can threaten; and I know very well that you can strike; but it is in the dark, and in secret, and generally through another hand. Who has that jackal of yours been murdering, now?”

“Be careful, Dolóres, be careful!”

“Oh, I am not afraid. You won’t kill me, for you want my money, and if I die before I am of age, you won’t, as you well know, get it.”

“It is not your money, you heartless girl, it is you that I want; you, you, and you know it well. Oh, Dolóres, say

that you will marry me ; vow it upon the crucifix, at your neck ; and I will, in one moment, change from the cruel tyrant you force me to appear, to your humble and willing slave."

" Will you spare the Americano's life ? "

" Yes—"

" Aha ! I have trapped you, monster ! He is in danger then, and yet not dead, or you could not change his doom for any bribe. Where is he ? What has been done ? What is threatened ? "

" Nothing, you foolish girl. I only meant that if he crossed my path again, I would not chastise, as I had intended, his impertinent intrusion into my affairs, his making love to you, his presumption in supposing—I was only promising to refrain from vengeance not yet offered by me. But, Dolóres, if you will but listen favorably, I can do much for him with the woman whom he loves. I know, through Violeto de Pampalona, that he wishes a certain position, in order that he may have means to marry. I have some influence that would gain it for him, or Dolóres—vengeance is sweet, especially to your sex—this man has pretended to admire, perhaps, to love you, for I will not affect to know more of his acquaintance with you than I really do, but at any rate, he has pursued you with words and looks of love, while all the while he was betrothed to another, and anxiously seeking the means of marrying her. Dolóres, give me your promise, and I will in return, swear to you that Mark Trecothick shall never marry Hildegarde Waterston, or any other woman. I will make his life, or I will destroy it, as you choose ; for it is in my power ; but I must have my reward."

" Where is he now ? " asked Dolóres, averting her eyes, lest Valdez should see the desperate terror suddenly overflowing them.

He shrugged his shoulders, and threw out his palm contemptuously.

“Child! Do you think me such a tyro, as to show you my cards, and then invite you to play with me? Give me your promise, and I will give you an oath in exchange.”

“And your oath would be less than the idlest breath of wind, that rustles those palm trees. Nor is this man’s life or death so much to me, that it should weigh in the decision of a question, involving my whole life. As for marrying you—”

“Well, are you disposed to think more indulgently of the plan? It was your father’s dearest wish.”

“So you say. He never told me so.”

“He was dead, before you could be fetched from your convent. He left his commands with me for you.”

“Yes, yes, I have heard it all so often. Well, it might, after all, be less intolerable than this perpetual imprisonment. I will think of it. Let me alone, and perhaps it will grow into a resolution. But, meantime, be careful that nothing happens to this Americano, for I may yet fancy seeing his life made or marred, as you say you have the means of doing. If you lose your hold of him by death, or in any other way, our bargain may yet fall through.”

She left the room, with a coquettish glance of farewell, closing the door behind her. Valdez, looking after her, nodded his head two or three times, and said :

“Yes, my beauty, I understand all that; you are afraid of harm to your handsome young gallant, and you will temporize a little, until you can assure yourself of his safety. You are very clever, my little darling; but you have to do with a man considerably cleverer than yourself.”

An hour later, Hagar, the maid of Dolóres, softly opened

the door of the bed-chamber, and found Brom crouching upon the floor, outside.

“Tell master she’s in bed, and sound asleep,” whispered she.

The other nodded, and crept away on his errand, while the girl, locking the door, and putting the key in her bosom, took a long draught of lemonade, from the pitcher beside her mistress’ bed, lay down upon the floor, close across the doorway, and was soon fast asleep.

Half an hour or so passed without change or sound, except the heavy breathing of the servant, the distant roar of the surf upon the shore, and the murmur of the wind outside.

Then, Dolóres, quietly opening her sleepless eyes, lay for some minutes, looking about her; then stealthily rose, dressed herself, looked with a smile at the sleeping maid, and from her to the pitcher of lemonade; and, finally, taking a knotted cord, evidently made of torn strips of linen, from under her mattress, she tied it firmly to the window-sill, seized it with both hands and, light and agile as a young leopardess, disappeared through the open casement.

CHAPTER IX.

DOLÓRES MAKES HER ESCAPE.

RETURNING from his vigil beside the couch of his sick friend, in the first gray of early dawn, Tom Burleigh was a good deal startled, on reaching the gates of Government House grounds, at seeing a slender, black-robed figure start from her seat upon a rock beside the road, and come swiftly toward him, her pallid face, and great, dark eyes gleaming,

spirit-like, from the lace veil, draped with careless grace about her head. Pausing, half-scared, half-enchanted, and pulling off his hat, Tom waited until the apparition spoke, which, unlike most apparitions, it did without waiting for an objuratation. At first, it addressed him in Spanish, and when he shook his head it spoke in English, an English that was charming in its purity, but that had the slow utterance and strong accent of one who had learned the language grammatically, but had never spoke it much.

“ You are *Senor de Pampalona*, sir ? ”

“ Oh, no, madam. My name is *Burleigh*, and I am a son of the governor, who lives in this house.”

“ Yes. Some one told me it was the governor’s house, but the gate was locked, and I waited. Does *Pampalona* live there, also ? ”

“ No, indeed. He lives at the hotel, just here. The *Royal Victoria*, you know.”

“ I wish very much to see him, sir.”

“ Yes? Well, I don’t suppose he is about yet. It is only three o’clock, or so, you know.”

“ He could be waked, perhaps.” And *Dolóres*, for it was she, fixed her great, eloquent eyes upon the boy’s face, giving his young blood a sudden thrill of chivalrous admiration, such as it had never known before.

He drew a step nearer, and smiled.

“ Yes, of course he could be waked ; and I will go and see about it, if you like.”

“ *Muchos gracias!* You are so good. We will go immediately.”

“ But perhaps it would be better for me to go alone,” suggested Tom, slightly embarrassed at the idea of presenting himself in the vestibule of the *Royal Vic*, at that time of the morning, escorting so charming and so unusual-looking a companion.

Dolóres' quick ear and quicker instinct caught the tone, and comprehended it.

"I will come as far as the gate, or where I will not be seen from the house," said she, quietly; and Tom at once led the way, not through Government Grounds, however, as would have been shortest, but along the hill-road below. The fact was, that Tom would have been sorry to exhibit his companion, at least to one pair of eyes, already, perhaps, waking, in his paternal mansion; and he was a good deal startled to hear his thought echoed, as it were, from Dolóres's unconscious lips.

"Does Miss Hildegarde live, then, with you?"

"Miss Hildegarde Waterston? Oh—do you know her?" asked he, more abruptly than courteously.

"No. But I know of her—well, it is of her affairs that I wish to see Violeto de Pampalona."

"Well, but you know—I beg your pardon, but the young lady is my cousin, and Mr. Pampalona is only an acquaintance; and if you have anything to say about her, wouldn't it be better to say it to me, you know?"

And Tom stopped short, and in the gray light took another, and yet more anxious survey of this strange, lovely, unworldly creature, who had dropped, as it were, from the clouds, to meddle and make trouble between Hilda and Pampalona, the very man toward whom his own heart was filled with pettish jealousy and dislike. He was annoyed and alarmed; and again Dolóres read his feelings, but this time gave them a wrong motive. This cousin of the Americano's, so she decided, was also a lover, consequently a rival of Trecothick's, consequently not to be trusted in any degree; while Pampalona, Mark's friend, and nobody's lover, that she had ever heard, a Cuban gentleman, too, and therefore honorable and gallant—yes, he was the man to help her, and she was very glad she had be-

trayed nothing to this boy who dared to look at her with such suspicious eyes.

“This is the gate of the hotel grounds, madam,” announced Tom, rather coldly, at this point of her meditation. “And I will, if you like, go and rouse Pampalona; but once more, let me suggest, that, in any matter connected with Miss Waterston, her own relatives seem more proper confidants than a stranger, and——”

“But remember, dear sir,” suggested Dolóres, sweetly, for she feared to lose this new ally before he had served her purpose, “Remember that Senor Violeto, although a stranger to you, is different to me. He is my compatriot, my cousin, in a fashion, and——”

“Yes, but he has nothing to do with *my* cousin, that’s the point,” interposed Tom, already almost convinced by the logic of those wonderful eyes and voice, and the light touch of that slender hand upon his arm.

“Certainly, he has not,” exclaimed Dolóres, mournfully. “Senor Violeto is not your cousin’s lover, I know, very well.”

Tom looked at her, and a new and brilliant theory took shape in his fertile brain. This lovely incognita was, no doubt, the betrothed, perhaps the wife of Pampalona, and was looking him up, in consequence of some rumor that he was attentive to another lady. She knew, as she just had said, that he could not be the lover of another than herself, and yet she wished to remind him of his obligations to herself. Yes, it was, on the whole, a good thing, to further this interview, which he had hitherto discouraged; for it might prove the means of ending the Cuban’s attentions to Miss Waterston, and so removing an annoyance from Master Tom’s own path; that young gentleman unconsciously assuming the *role* of the dog in the manger, who

could not eat the oxen's provender, and yet would not allow them to come to it.

So it was quite cheerily that he exclaimed :

"There, you just sit down on this rock, at the angle of the wall, and I'll bring Violeto, as you call him, in the twinkling of an eye. A little patience, and all will go well."

"Muchos gratias, senor," murmured Dolóres, meekly seating herself as directed, and drawing her veil about her face, until she looked more like the watcher upon the threshold, of whom Bulwer tells, than like a real woman.

Fifteen minutes, or so, passed, and then the quick, light tread of high-arched feet, so different from the ponderous tramp of the Anglo-Saxon, announced the approach of the Cuban, who presently paused before the veiled figure, asking, in Spanish, and with courteous curiosity :

"Is it you, who wishes to speak with Violeto Pampalona, senora?"

"It is I—Dolóres—senor," replied the girl, rising, and throwing back her veil. "And my errand may be a very foolish one; but tell me, is your friend safe and well?"

"My friend? What friend, senora?"

"Mark—I cannot say the rest of his name."

"Trecothick? It is hard for Spanish tongues, is it not? But—safe and well? Why should he not be?"

"But is he? Do you know? Is he there, in that house?"

"No. He has gone to the moon."

"Senor! Is it courteous to mock one, who comes to you in all sincerity and confidence?"

"Ah, pardon! Not for worlds would I do wrong to your noble frankness, senora; but I repeated, jestingly, the jest, which is the only clue my friend left to his destination, when he went away from the hotel, last night. I spent the

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traveling from the impassive, yellow face of the guardian, to the frightened eyes, and pallid, quivering mouth of the girl, over whom he thus claimed authority.

“Certainly, my ward—quite leagally and formally so, and she will not deny it herself—that is, if she is herself; but since you have seen her, senor, I think it necessary to confess that the poor child is not always perfectly responsible for what she says and does. It is necessary to keep her very secluded and quiet, and like other dementos, she is always trying to escape from those who only restrain her in the kindest and wisest manner.”

The last words were spoken aside, but Dolóres caught at their meaning, if not their sound, and vehemently interposed.

“Is he saying that I am mad? He always does, when people are interested, and would defend me. Do not believe him, senor! He is a bad man, a tyrant——”

But fatigue, anger, terror, all wrought against the calmness, with which she would fain have spoken, and her accusation was choked in a burst of hysterical tears.

Senor Valdez glanced significantly at Pampalona, who nodded in reply, and raising his hat, said, gently:

“Senora, I bid you good-morning, wishing every felicity. Good-morning, Senor—Valdez.”

“And now, my dear ward,” said the guardian, as the Cuban walked quickly away, “we will return to the house, and I think I can promise that you will not have another opportunity of escape, until we are safe upon my plantation in Cuba. Foolish child, to match your puny strength against that of your master! You are sure to be beaten.”

Dolóres made no reply. In Pampalona’s departure, she saw her own defeat, and was too proud to struggle vainly, or to waste words in controversy. At least, she had warned Mark’s friend of his possible danger, and if he were a true

man, and loyal comrade, he would not rest until he had assured himself of his safety. So, in utter silence, she allowed herself to be mounted upon the horse, which Brom led by the bridle, while Valdez walked beside, and Toro, the hound, followed close behind. Thus escorted, she returned to her prison, and on that evening's tide, Valdez and his entire household sailed for Cuba.

CHAPTER X.

THE LAST THING IN DAMONS.

As the light sound of Hilda's flying footsteps died upon the air, Trecothick, who had never doubted, until that moment, that this was Dolóres, come to liberate and join him, felt a sudden doubt and terror seize his mind, for little as he knew or had seen of her, the instinct of love assured him that she never, under any circumstances, would thus have deserted him, or failed to reply, in some words of consolation, to the earnest appeals he had made to her pity. But if not Dolóres, who then? What other woman knew of his presence in this strange place, or his name, or his love for herself? Was it a woman, at all? A thrill of unaccustomed terror shivered through the young man's nerves. He was no coward; but darkness, solitude, fasting and suspense are powerful agents in taming the boldest spirit, and the daring, sanguine temperament, most fearless in face of an open and familiar danger, is most easily cowed by what is mysterious and intangible. But presently came the revulsion and a wild thirst for action and for vengeance seized the mind of the prisoner. Springing to his feet, for he had been crouching upon the floor, just where he had sunk in the first moments of Hilda's desertion, he began to beat

madly upon the wall with his fists, uttering imprecations and threats of vengeance against Brom, his master, and the world in general, unless he should be immediately released. Cramping his fingers upon the wall, and digging his nails into the soft limestone, he tore and scratched at it, as one sometimes sees a caged lion, in whom the desert fury has, for the moment, overcome the stupefaction of captivity, and who rends the very iron of his bars asunder, until the keeper comes with red-hot steel to torture him again into submission.

But in this apparently useless demonstration, Trecothick suddenly came upon a discovery so momentous, that it had the effect of calming his fury, and restoring method to his madness. The largest finger of his right hand caught in a cavity, whose edge gave way beneath the pressure, so that a large morsel of stone was loosened, and fell tinkling to the earth. Hastily groping with his finger, Mark soon ascertained that the cavity was a deep one, and apparently had been made designedly. Even so vague a hope of escape was enough to inspire new life into the courageous spirit of the prisoner; and hastily unclasping the pocket-knife, fortunately in his possession, began to work the cavity larger and larger, finding the soft limestone and poorly-made cement, more friable than he could have imagined. One blade of the knife snapped; he took the other; that snapped, also; he used first one stump, and then the other, and when both failed, he employed his fingers, and pieces of the stone itself; until, finally, to his infinite joy, he perceived that a great stone was so loosened, that a vigorous shove of the shoulder dislodged and sent it crashing to the ground.

Exploring the opening thus made, Trecothick found it large enough to admit a man's body; and without much caring whither it led, he passed through, and found himself

standing precisely where, some hours earlier, Hildegarda Waterston had stood, and whence she had fled in her jealous fury, leaving him, as she supposed, to starve. It may have been done before, who knows? For this little aperture, upon which Trecothick had so marvellously fallen, was, in very truth, one arranged for the purpose of espial upon the prisoners of the cell; and who can tell what tragedies may have been enacted here? Who can tell what jealous and angry heart has brought forth murder; what love has turned to hate, what or how many men have learned, once again, in this gloomy cell, that, verily "Hell holds no fury like a woman scorned!"

But Mark Trecothick, bewildered and in darkness, could know nothing of his situation, beyond what the senses, unaided by the eyes, could teach. Cautiously straightening his tall figure, he found that he could stand upright; then that the ground beneath his feet was firm and smooth; then that within reach of both extended hands rose a smooth, stone wall. All this pointed to a gallery; the idea of a gallery suggested a passage to the outer air, to freedom; and yet, might it not be a more short path to some horrible pit, a place of unknown and helpless death, an oubliette, in short? He stood quite still, and listened so intently, that the pulsing of his own heart throbbed upon his ear, like the beat of a distant drum. With this mingled another sound; the monotonous march or the surf upon a sea-beach; and as Trecothick recognized this, his courage leaped up and shook itself awake; for here was a sound of the healthy, vigorous, outer world; here was the voice of the freest, grandest thing in nature, the voice of the unconquered ocean, which no man has ever imprisoned or subjugated. If he could reach those trampling, battling waves, Trecothick felt that he, too, should be free—should throw off, as it were, the cobwebs and intangible fetters that seemed

bound and meshed all around him, in those last hours; he should be a man again, and no longer a captive.

Hastily feeling in all his pockets, he satisfied himself, once more, that he had not a single loose match about him; his well-stocked smoking-case had fallen from his pocket, in the course of his first frantic efforts to batter down the door of his cell, and he had not perceived the loss until too late to recover the treasure. Trusting, perforce, to the sense of feeling, keeping one hand upon each wall, and trying every step before he ventured to place his foot firmly down, he began slowly to advance, pausing, as he reached the first air-hole, to breathe in the fresh, morning breeze, and then to grope persistently around, in every direction, to find the door or opening, which he knew this current of air must indicate.

Leaving him thus employed, we must go back to Pampalona, whom we left returning toward his hotel, sorely perplexed, and somewhat annoyed, by his interview with Dolóres, and by the summary close put to it by Valdez. That she had spoken truth, he was convinced, or, at least, what she believed to be truth; but she might well be mistaken; and, at any rate, it is not pleasant, especially for a man of Latin blood, to interfere in another man's household affairs, at least openly, and Pampalona was conservative to the back-bone. Nor was it to be expected of his blood, if indeed of any man of any race, that he should overthrow mountains, or, which is harder, overthrow and turn his back upon his own nature, to discover the whereabouts of a rival, whom he shrewdly suspected to be the barrier to his own success with the lady of his love. And yet—Mark Trecothick would have perilled life and limb, had his comrade, if not his friend, been in danger. Of this Violeto Pampalona felt surer than of himself. Pacing moodily up and down the veranda, outside his bed-room window, the

young man revolved and weighed, set aside, and resumed all these, and many more, phases of this argument, until his whole soul was sick of the matter, and had Nassau been under the dominion of the steam-king, he would have jumped upon an express train, and fled away, whither, he knew or cared not. But unless he accepted the chance of a leaky sail boat, bound for the out-islands, no chance of escape offered itself; and forced to remain and face the dilemma, Pampalona hit upon a compromise. He would see Hilda Waterston, directly, and neither circumstance nor person should prevent his obtaining a private interview, and finishing the appeal begun on the previous evening.

If successful—and he must, he would be successful—he would take no denial; he would over-ride and set aside all coyness, all objections; he would crush and subdue all opposition by sheer force of his passion; she must, she should consent; and then, all danger of his rivalry over, he would be magnanimous, and if Trecothick had not appeared by the time of his return from his wooing, he would raise the alarm, and spare no pains to find him. Well, probably it was not just what Mark would have done, in the same place; and then poor Pampalona was only an average man, and we are all of us supernaturally good—in our conceit.

It was still necessary to wait several hours, before the usages of the world would permit him to call at Government House; and those hours were the very longest, you may be sure, of Violetto de Pampalona's whole life. Ah, those hours of waiting, waiting for the moment that is to influence all one's existence, waiting for the human breath, which is to us, just then, as the voice of God proclaiming salvation or loss. Have you ever spent such hours? No? Then you have not known what life means, in one of its most cruel aspects.

So Pampalona waited, and wondered that his hair had not turned white, as, while the clock struck two, he seized his hat, cast one anxious look in the glass, to see if those waiting hours had told disastrously upon his appearance, and turned yet paler than before, as his eye fell upon the penciled card, which the chambermaid had stuck in the corner of the glass: "*Gone to the moon.*"

"And if he has, or worse, could *I* help it? Is it my fault?" muttered the Cuban, savagely, as he left the room, and strode out of the house, and up the hill, and along the breezy hill-path leading to Government House.

Yes, Miss Waterston was at home, the servant said, and "would Mr. Pampalona step into the parlor?" But at this juncture a half-sovereign was slid gently into Mungo's yellow palm, and the visitor whispered;

"You needn't mind disturbing the family, Mungo. If you find Miss Waterston alone, you can take me to her, instead of calling her. Is she in the garden?"

"No, sar," replied Mungo, intelligently. "Miss Waters'n is in de gov'nor's study. I see her going in there, 'bout half an hour ago; and I been right here all de time, and dat young lady not come out. Dat's de door, Mas'r Pampalona."

"All right, my friend. I sha'n't mention how I found her; and you had better step out of the way, and not see me going in. I believe Mr. Tom left some books for me in there, didn't he!"

"I'm puffickly sure he did, mas'r. Perhaps he's in there, hissself, if you want to see him, Mas'r Pampalona."

"I do, very much—but not just now," replied Pampalona, with a very nervous smile; and Mungo disappeared in the direction of the garden, saying, aloud:

"I'll go look for de ladies, sar."

CHAPTER XI.

A RAT BEHIND THE ARRAS.

“**COME in!**” said Hilda’s high-bred voice, as a discrete tap, combined with the turning of the handle, suggested the approach of a servant, or one of the household, but certainly not of a visitor; and as Pampalona appeared, quietly closing the door behind him, the young lady rose to her feet, with an unmistakable expression of annoyed surprise.

“Mr. Pampalona!” exclaimed she. But before she could say more, the Cuban gracefully interposed:

“What! you here, among these ponderous volumes of musty parchments, my dear Miss Waterston? I was expecting only to find your cousin, Senor Tomase, who was to lend me some book upon the history of this lovely island; and here I come upon the loveliest thing the island ever contained, and no need of books to tell me how to value it.”

“You are complimentary, as usual, Mr. Pampalona,” replied Hilda, wearily. “But I think we can find a pleasanter spot in which to discuss the beauties of Nassau; will you come into the garden?”

“Ah, my dear Miss Hilda, for once be indulgent, and allow me to remain with you, in this quiet room, long enough to finish saying what I began to say last night. Do not stir, I beseech you! You look so charmingly in your white dress, buried in that great, green chair! Sit down once more, I implore you, and listen!”

Hilda hesitated a moment, glanced rapidly at a great,

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out beauty, or principle, or education—a mere lady o' love——”

But at this point, the Cuban's voice was drowned in such a tumult of sounds that one might have believed it to have evoked the very spirits of evil, who had come to claim their own. Behind the bookcase, close to which Hilda sat, was heard the muffled and resounding tones of a deep and angry voice, whose articulations were lost in the reverberations of the blows and kicks, which a powerful fist and foot were dealing upon the woodwork, so jarring the books upon the shelves, that several fell rattling to the ground, one striking Hilda upon the head, who started to her feet, shrieking violently, while, at the same instant, the door of the apartment was thrown open, and Tom Burleigh, looking pale and angry, entered hastily, and closing and bolting the door, sprang toward Pampalona, exclaiming :

“What is this? What are you doing here? Hilde, why did you scream? What, in heaven's name——”

For in the midst of his angry ejaculations, the blows and curses behind the bookcase redoubled in vehemence, and demanded his attention, hitherto jealously concentrated upon his cousin and her lover.

“Oh, Tom, come away! Don't meddle, don't go near it! Go away, and take him—leave me! I deserve it—I am not afraid! Leave me to face it alone!”

Gasping these broken phrases, Hilda clung close about her cousin's neck, holding down his arms and hampering his movements; but he, staring down at her in the greatest astonishment, freed himself with unconscious force, exclaiming :

“Why, Hilda, what has come to you? You're crazy, I believe! Let go, dear—you must, indeed! Hilda! There, now, sit there—I must, I will——!”

And tearing himself from the fingers still grappling,

tender-like, with his clothes, he pushed his cousin back into the deep chair, and turning to the bookcase, grasped the end, and pressed upon the secret spring with all his might ; but whether previous violence had injured it, or whether the lad had forgotten the trick, it refused to work, while the noise and agitation from behind increased with every moment, until suddenly the whole gave way with a crash, and amid splintered wood and falling books, and the reiving and rending of all its fastenings, the great bookcase fell forward into the room, leaving exposed the narrow doorway behind, and framed within its black and fragmentary setting, the white, haggard face and disordered figure of Mark Trecothick, who stood, for a moment, glaring about him, while Hilda, with a moan of excessive terror, sank upon her knees, covering her face with her hands. Tom stood, open-mouthed, silenced by astonishment, and Pampalona exclaimed, in Spanish :

“ She was right ! ”

“ Who was right, you double-distilled scoundrel ? ” demanded Trecothick, who seemed to have only paused to accustom his eyes to the light for an instant, and now springing over the debris of the fallen bookcase, seized Pampalona by the throat, and shook him violently, shouting ;

“ Down on your knees, you scoundrel, I say ! Down on your knees, and confess that all you said to this lady, just now, with regard to the woman whom I love, was a mean, vile lie ! Confess, if you know anything about her, that the Senora Dolóres is as pure and chaste as snow ; is as far above your miserable slanders as the sun above the earth, is——”

“ She is Valdez’s mistress,” gasped Pampalona, freeing himself from the other’s grasp, by an agile movement, and drawing a slender stiletto from his waistband. “ Touch

me again, you dog of an American, and I will plant this in your heart!" he hissed.

But the words were hardly out of his mouth, before a blow of Trecothick's sledge-hammer fist beat his right arm powerless to his side, and sent the weapon spinning across the room.

Hilda sprang after it, seized it, and thrust the handle again into the Cuban's fingers, muttering, hoarsely: "He struck you—kill him!"

But that one blow had been sufficient, for at least that day; the nerveless fingers refused to close upon the weapon, and it fell tinkling to the ground. Setting his foot upon it, Mark turned, and fixed a glance of flaming contempt upon Hilda's defiant face.

"That's twice," said he. "You've tried starving, and you've tried steel. Perhaps poison will answer; and before I sleep to-night, I'll write to my executors, warning them, if I die by foul means, who the jealous woman is that killed me. And before I die, I will make Dolóres my wife!"

"Look here, Trecothick," interposed Tom, at last, finding his tongue and a point for interference, "I don't know what all this row's about, or how you came in there, or what Pampalona has to do with it, and you fellows can settle your quarrels in your own fashion, only not here, nor in my cousin's presence; but as for you bringing her in, and speaking in that style to, or about her, I'll be hanged if I'll have it!"

"Shut up, you young idiot," growled Trecothick, not half hearing, or attending, to him; for his eye was fixed on Pampalona, who, livid and quivering with rage, was whispering something in Hilda's ear. Again Trecothick's hand was upon him, but this time only to grasp, and pow-

erfully press upon, his shoulder, while, in strangely calmed tones, he said :

“ I meant what I said, just now. You have foully slandered a pure and innocent woman, the woman whom I love and intend to marry. You must unsay those words, here and now.”

“ I will not. I believe the woman, calling herself Dolóres, to be the mistress of the man with whom she lives ; and you insult this lady, by mentioning the name of such a creature in her presence.”

The two men looked at each other. The Cuban's swarthy face was livid ; his dark eyes glowed like coals ; his long moustache writhed like a serpent, with the working of his violet, hard lips ; his lamed arm hung, powerless, at his side ; and his slender figure, measured against Trecothick's, was like a reed beside an oak ; but one saw, in every line of face and form, in the steady glow of the eyes, in the death-like clench of the left hand, Violeto Pampalona might have been hewn to pieces where he stood, but that, right or wrong, he would hold his ground, nor quail before his rival and in presence of his beloved, even should torture and death stare him in the face.

And Trecothick ? Perhaps when he comes to die, he may recall that moment ; for nothing short of the agony of death will equal it. He could not strike a slender, unarmed man, already injured by his blow ; he dare not raise one of those fists, clenched at his sides until the skin seemed cracking upon the knuckles ; he could not speak, for the fury possessing him choked his breath and stifled his heart ; he could not see for the dazzling, blood-red mist flowing before his eyes ; he could do nothing. The agony was too much, too much ; and a bitter groan burst from the strong man's lips, as clenching both his hands across his forehead, he exclaimed :

“I could kill you, you villain. Do you hear? But I cannot kill a defenceless man.”

“*Muchos gracias!*” sneered the Spaniard, who at this moment, was master of the situation. “But unless I am very unfortunate, it will be I who shall have the pleasure of killing you, just so soon as my arm recovers from the brutal blow of your peasant’s fist. So soon as I am fit, we will fight as gentlemen, supposing you to understand the word; and then we shall see where the killing comes in.”

Trecothick made no answer, but striding to the window, stood, for a moment, staring at the ocean, which he had so longed to reach, and now could not see for that horrible mist of blood before his eyes. Tom followed him and laid a hand upon his arm.

“You must apologize to my cousin. You have insulted her.”

Trecothick laughed, scornfully, and turning on his heel, strode back again, until he stood close before Hilda. Then he looked fixedly down into the eyes which she proudly raised to meet his own.

“Miss Waterston,” he said, “will you relate to your cousin certain events, at present only known to us two? Or do you wish me to do so? Or do you request my silence? Your kinsman, and your betrothed husband, have, perhaps, a right to an explanation; but you are a woman; you have honored me with regard far beyond my deserts, and I shall never, unless at your desire, reveal my cause of complaint against you to any human being. Do you request my forbearance?”

Hilda glanced from Tom Burleigh’s honest, puzzled face to Pampalona’s dark and agitated features, and back to the inexorable face towering above her. One man despised her, and would despise her for life; but why should two

others do so, also? Twice her white lips tried to speak, and at last, they rather shaped than uttered :

“ Yes. I do request it.”

“ And do I owe you any apology, as your cousin suggests? ”

“ No.”

“ That is enough. Burleigh, the lady is satisfied, and you can have nothing now to say. Senor Pampalona, you will easily find me whenever you wish to see me. Miss Waterston, I apologize for any fright, or annoyance, I may have caused you by my abrupt entrance, and I wish you all good-morning.”

He opened the door, but before he could pass through it, Hilda darted before him, and fled like a bird up the stairs to her own room. Pampalona picked up his dagger, silently bowed farewell to Tom, and took his own way homeward, almost as suddenly.

Tom found himself alone, with the ruins of the mysterious bookcase. He looked at them, and shook his head.

“ It's lucky Bertha and Jim are out, and have taken Mrs. Waterston along with them. Mungo will be the only servant in this part of the house, at this time of day; and Mungo can be both scared and bribed. Mungo, moreover, is a bit of a carpenter, and we'll patch it up, somehow. I hope the governor never read that paper. I'll tear it up.”

But no patching could return the secret spring to its proper use, and in the end, Mungo and his young master nailed the bookcase firm and fast to its place, obliterating, until some new discoverer should arise, all access from Government House to the subterraneans of Fort Charlotte.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CARNIVAL PROCESSION.

HAVE you seen the Carnival of Havana? If not, you have missed a study of human nature, in one of its culminations of folly and vagary, well worth a wise man's thought, and a madman's emulation.

Not so magnificent as at Rome, not so gay as at Naples, not so reckless as in Paris; but touched throughout with a tropical languor and *abandon*, all its own, and culminating, at night, in the *danza criolla*, the inimitable Spanish waltz; not the *valse* of Paris and New York, but the modulated, passionate, yet dreamy, movement, suited to the climate and the people, and containing and suggesting all the subtle sensuousness of Offenbach's music, or Swinburne's poetry. Mounted upon a spirited little black horse, almost his first purchase in Havana, Trecothick joined the procession upon the Prado, and gazed with admiring interest upon the scores of charming women, who, many of them dressed in full ball costume, with bare, white arms and shoulders, and jewelled tresses, only half-shaded by the traditional mantilla, lay gracefully back in their open carriages, toying with their elegant fans, and using them to exchange signals and greetings with friends of either sex, whom they encountered in the glittering throng that moved at a foot-pace, in two long lines, in opposite directions. The young man, in the course of an hour's survey, came to several positive conclusions. The first was, that the most irresistible eyes he had ever looked into, were set in Cuban faces. The next, that no custom could be more laudable,

than for ladies to appear upon the Prado in ball costume, revealing those charms, which in more vigorous climes and codes of propriety, are never exposed to the outer air. Third, that lovely as some of these faces were, not one was more than a foil to the beauty of Dolóres. And fourth, where was she?

As this last sapient, but by no means new, reflection, crossed our hero's mind, he was startled by a loud cry from behind of "Guarda, señor, guarda," accompanied by the clatter of horses' feet, mingled with a variety of sounds, even more shrill and uncouth than those to which he had become somewhat accustomed during the Carnival.

Turning hastily in his saddle, Mark found that he had become involved in a sort of escort of mounted men and women, dressed in the most outrageous and fantastic of costumes, their faces either masked, or so painted and daubed as quite to disguise their identity. This cavalcade surrounded a triumphal chariot, in which were seated four bold beauties, dressed to represent the four seasons, and as the seasons of Cuba do not include the necessity of much clothing at any period, their four types, however differing otherwise, marvellously resembled each other in the brevity and flimsiness of their draperies.

Perceiving that he and his horse were obstructing the course of this pageant, Trecothick very willingly drew aside, and sat watching its progress, with a cynical smile. Suddenly, quite across the road, and between the heads of a score of commonplace strangers, he caught a glimpse of a face—the face—the only face in all the world which could have sent the blood tingling and rushing through his veins, with that sharp, half-pain, half-delight, which this did.

"Dolóres!" exclaimed he, aloud, and struck his spurred heels against his horse's flanks.

The spirited creature answered the sudden sting with a

bound and a curvet, disturbing his comrades on either hand, and nearly bringing his rider in contact with the wheels of the triumphal car, then just abreast of him.

“Basta, señor! You will make trouble for yourself, and all of us, if you don't quiet that horse!” growled an officer, mounted on a half-broken and most uneasy chestnut mare, close at hand.

Mark made no reply; he only looked for some avenue of escape from the throng, and passage across the wide and crowded Prado, beyond which lay the glimpse of paradise, just seen and lost, as glimpses of paradise so often are. But to cross the Prado, in the full tide of a carnival procession, is no easy matter; and when a special parade of four queens of Love and Beauty in one car is added, the difficult matter becomes an impossible matter. It was only at a point, therefore, several rods in the rear of the noisy pageant, that our hero finally succeeded in winding his way through and across the crowd of horses, equipages and pedestrians, and reaching the other shore, so to speak, of the living river. In another moment, he was opposite the point where he had started, and staring into the face of every lady within reach, in so eager and purposeful a manner as to seriously disturb the impassive, not to say stolid, demeanor, affected by most of these pretty, aristocratic creatures in public. But beneath the devouring eyes of this handsome, and probably mad American, Donna Ignocia smiled, Donna Isabella blushed, Mercedes and Juanita put up their fans, and only ugly old Senora Donna Francis frowned and turned aside. But, amiable and charming though they were, not one of all these beauties was Dolóres. Nor was Dolóres to be seen in any direction; and yet Mark never could have been mistaken—oh, never! So, up and down the whole long line of carriages, a mile this way and a mile that, the angry little black horse and

his eager-eyed rider hastened, peering into every carriage, staring every lady out of countenance, drawing down maledictions and muttered curses on every side, and never giving over the search until darkness shut down upon the scene, after the drop-curtain fashion of the tropics, and all the world went home to dine, and to prepare for the grand ball at the Tacon theatre, which was to finish that day's festivities.

Trecothick went home, too, since nothing else remained to do, and as he entered the doors of the Telegrafo Hotel, one of the seven hundred and fifty negroes, lounging about the doors of that hostelrie, slid, serpent-like, out of the swarm, and wended his way through the still crowded streets, in the suburb of Havana called the Cerro, pausing at a small door in a high garden wall, hospitably topped with broken glass.

Letting himself in by means of a key, our friend, Brom, rapidly crossed the garden, and entering the house by a rear entrance, made his way to the private room, where no less a person than the Senor Valdez awaited him with the impatience of a lover.

"Telegrafo, senor," announced the negro, as soon as he had closed the door.

"Ah! Then it was him?"

"Trecothick, Americano; yes, senor."

"And is the house ready to receive us?"

"It will be, in a week, senor. But the roof blew off the west end, in the last tornado; and the rain has spoiled the walls; and the rest of the house is very dirty. They did not expect any of us, and the overseer has stored boxes of sugar in the sola, to keep them dry; and the insurrectionists came and carried off the doors for litters, to transport their wounded; and the cook is dead; and the overseer was afraid there was nobody fit to take her place;

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“Yes, a blow, and in your presence, my queen!” muttered the Cuban, his sallow cheek glowing duskiy, and the lovelight of his eyes deepening to a lurid glow. “Hilda, you love me, or you would not resent so bitterly an insult to me.”

“Can a proud woman sit still, and see her betrothed husband struck, like a dog, and not resent it?” demanded Hilda, in a constrained voice, while, even through her mask, Violeto caught the deadly gleam of her great, gray eyes, and felt his cheek scorched with the fever of her breath. A sort of terror, a vague doubt, pierced, icily, through the fervor of his love. How bitterly she hated Trecothick! Could such hate be purely the product of her very mild love for himself? Was it not more like the deadly poison, bred of a slighted affection? Had she really cared for the American, and had he refused her love? Or had he won it, and enjoyed it, and wearied of it? Starting from his chair, he hurriedly left the box.

At the same moment, a figure, disguised in domino hood and mask, so effectually that one could not, at once, determine either its sex or age, left a box, nearly opposite to Mrs. Waterston’s, and descended the stairs leading to the lobby on that side of the house, just as Pampalona did the same upon his own side. At the foot of the stairs, the domino waited for a moment to make sure of the Cuban’s intentions, and as the latter listlessly wandered out of doors, he made an almost imperceptible signal to a stout negro, waiting among other servants and officials, who immediately, but very quietly, came to his side.

“The American does not come, Brom,” muttered Senor Valdez.

“Not yet, senor. I would have come to tell you, if he had entered.”

“Maldita! Pampalona is growing impatient, and will commit some folly. Here he comes, with a woman——”

“And here is the American, just entering, *senor!*”

“Good. Go and whisper to *Senor Violeto*, to look toward the door; that jade is absorbing his attention.”

The negro nodded assent, and darting forward, intercepted the progress of the Cuban.

“*Senor!* Look at the American, coming in at the door!” hissed he, in Pampalona’s ear; and the Cuban, dropping the arm of the dancing girl, who had fastened herself upon him, turned with a sharp ejaculation, just as Trecothick, beginning to look about him, caught sight of Brom, and with a sort of suppressed roar of rage and delight, leaped forward, exclaiming, in English:

“Here! You black villain! I’ve caught you, at last!”

Brom, recognizing the voice, did not pause to turn round, but with a yell of terror, sprang aside, and dodging between the swarthy little *guardas civiles*, keeping the doors, rushed out into the street, closely followed by Trecothick, shouting angry and useless orders to him to pause and return. Pampalona, at first petrified at the sudden disturbance, stood staring for a moment, and then would have followed, precipitately, but was doubly prevented, first, by the domino, who, grasping his arm, muttered, “*Paciencia!* They will return. You would only lose him by pursuit. Wait.” And, secondly, by a formal and courteous stranger, who, with a ceremonious salute, announced: “*Pardon, senor, but Madame Waterston, whom I have just left, desired me to request your attendance. I think the young lady is not well, and desires to leave the ball.*”

It was impossible for Miss Waterston’s betrothed husband to neglect such a summons as this, and without a word, he turned and hastened back to the box, where he gave an arm to each of the ladies, and left the theatre.

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“He says he tried to make you meet him in Nassau, senor, but you evaded him,” suggested the count, in a suspicious tone.

“Evaded him! I sent a letter to the hotel for him, explaining the reason of my departure. I found that a vessel was sailing for Havana; almost in the hour of my last seeing Pampalona; and I would not miss the chance of following some one who needed me, and had left a note. But all this is nothing to you, sir, and if Mr. Pampalona recovers, I shall be happy, either to bury the past in friendly forgetfulness, or to meet him in the manner contemplated.”

Again the Count de Malastetsa bowed ceremoniously and politely, and straightening himself, said:

“Pardon, senor. It is not necessary for you to deny yourself instant satisfaction, if you choose to take it.”

“How, pray?”

“I, senor, stand in my friend’s place, and will very willingly fight you in his stead.”

“But I have no quarrel with you, my dear sir; and I am not one of those bloodthirsty individuals, who must absolutely kill some one or other by way of recreation, every few days.”

In plain Spanish, you will not fight, senor?”

“Not with you, count; certainly not.”

The Count de Malastetsa turned the points of his fierce moustache a little higher, smiled in a most insufferable manner, bowed lower than ever, and saying, “Good morning, Senor Americano,” slowly moved toward the door. The blood rose to Trecothick’s brow, and he made one hasty step forward; then remembering Dolóres, stopped suddenly, and bowing as ceremoniously as the other, merely said:

“Good-morning, sir. If you see more of me, you may change your present opinion.”

The door closed, and he was alone.

"If I were really a coward, I should feel a great deal put out. As it is, I don't care," remarked Trecothick to the four walls, and went to bed again.

Two o'clock in the afternoon, and again the streets were crowded with pleasure-seekers; this time, all steadily streaming in one direction, toward the Plaza de Toros, to see the bull-fight.

Trecothick went, with the others, and, as Valdez had foreseen, paid the highest price, and secured a seat upon the shady side of the amphitheatre; the tickets for that side of the arena bearing the recommendatory word "shady." The judges' stand is in the centre of this half of the circle, and at either hand of this, certain close boxes are set aside, for the *elite*, including the few ladies of position who still encourage these spectacles. In the depths of one of these boxes sat Dolóres, shrouded in a great mantilla of black Spanish lace, and wearing a half-mask, allowable in carnival times. The height of the partitions prevented the occupant of the box from seeing, or being seen, by the other spectators, unless it were the populace upon the opposite, or sunny, side of the ring, for whose comments the high-born dames of the boxes would care less than for the summer wind toying with their mantillas; and although Mark Trecothick actually sat within twenty feet of the woman whom he had come to this, and every other, entertainment of the carnival to seek, she was as completely hidden from his search as if he had still been in the dungeons of Fort Charlotte. Senor Valdez, who sat in the front of the box, had greater facilities, and after a few cautious investigations of the house, discovered the presence of his enemy, and drawing back, so as to be out of sight, telegraphed the fact to Brom, upon the opposite side of the house, and having two eyes, kept one upon Dolóres, who listlessly reclined in

the chair where he had placed her, looking at nothing but the sky, while the other was indulged in the spectacle going on below.

The seats were filled, the standing room crammed, the hour for the Fancion was past, and the populace, having smoked its third cigarette, was beginning to murmur, when, with a wild burst of music, the great doors, opening upon the tan-strewn arena, were thrown open, and the procession of "the gentlemen of the noble exhibition of the contest of bulls," as the programme described them, entered, amid the *vivas* of the multitude. First, upon a handsome horse, loaded with gaudy trappings, rode the honorable custodian of the keys, and secured the door of the pen, where the poor bull, already starved, and goaded almost to madness, awaited his doom. Behind him, came, two by two, the picadors, or spearsmen, whose office it is to begin the attack, by approaching on horseback the dazed and bewildered bull, at the first moment of his liberation, and goading him to fury by thrusts of the long-handled lances which they carry; the bull retaliates by an attack upon the horse, who certainly, by no will of his own, elevates the picador above any chance of harm to himself, and generally more horses than bulls are slain. Next to the picadors, came the chulos, agile young footmen, carrying gaily pointed and embroidered cloaks, which they flap in the bull's face, to attract his attention, and withdraw it, when necessary, from the picador, should the bull upset him and his horse, as occasionally happens. After the picadors and chulos, came the banderilleros, footmen carrying little banners fastened to barbed javelins, which they will strike into the flesh of the bull's neck, where they remain, every movement of the creature tearing and inflaming the wound, and torturing him to renewed attacks upon his persecutors. The banderilleros are also provided

with darts containing fulminating powder, which explode after entering the flesh, and add maddening terror to maddening agony. Finally, in this procession, where Dore should have simply copied into one of his illustrations of the Inferno, came the matadors, or killers, strong and agile men, tricked out in the gayest and richest clothes imaginable, carrying on the left arm a brilliant scarlet cloak, and in the right hand a short, straight, double-edged sword. The banderilleros having retired, one of these men presents himself before the bull, shakes the scarlet cloak in his face, and as the beast rushes upon it, steps dextrously aside, and strikes the sword into the creature's stooped neck, just at the vital point where spine meets skull. Sometimes the bull is too much for the matador, and disregarding the scarlet cloak, attacks the man so persistently and furiously, as to either kill him, or drive him to the last dastardly device in this list of torture, the semi-lune, a curved knife set upon a long pole, by which an assistant hamstringing the poor victim, whom the matador then despatches.

The procession entered, passed around the arena, saluted the Captain-general, and other high dignitaries present, and passed out. With much ceremony, the key, delivered to the proper official, was turned in the lock of the bull-pen, the doors were thrown open, and the bull, stimulated by the cruel thrust of a steel-tipped goad, rushed out, and was received by the picadors waiting for him. Just as these men were about to withdraw, Trecothick's eyes, roving over the sea of faces, a sea that was inflamed by the lust of cruelty and blood, fell upon Brom's brutish features. The negro, excited by the desire of seeing every drop of gore shed by the horses and bull, had quite forgotten his master, Trecothick, and everything else, and had thrust himself forward, from the secluded nook in which he had been bidden to keep himself hid. No sooner did Trecothick

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rushed in front of him, snatched up the lad, just as the horn grazed the child's clothing, and putting forth all his Herculean strength, tossed the little fellow lightly up among the spectators above, receiving himself, in the same instant, the full weight of the bull's charge, but fortunately escaping stiletto-like points of the horns. The blow was one not to be resisted ; Trecothick was hurled upon the tan, while the bull went plunging on for a moment, and then turned to charge again. That moment was enough, however, to give Trecothick time to recover himself. Springing to his feet, he snatched the sword from the hand of a matador, who had, by this time, leaped over the fence, and stood ready to kill his bull on the rebound, since he had missed him in the arena. But the murderous lust of angry manhood was boiling in Trecothick's veins. None but he, he was resolved, should shed the blood of the mad beast, who would so willingly have shed his. Armed with the sword, he placed himself full in the bull's path, and shouted wildly :

“ Come on, you devil ! Come on, if you dare ! ”

Perhaps the bull had studied English. More probably he understood the universal language of menace and taunt ; for, replying with a hoarse bellow of rage, he lowered his head, and made his rush. Then it was a sight worth seeing, to watch the man's muscles gather and tighten themselves, from the rigid face, so set and stern, and the hands, so clenched and white upon the sword-hilt, down to the feet, that seemed ready to spring from the earth like Mercury. On came the bull. Like a rock in his path stood Trecothick. A moment more, and the creature's hot breath and bloody foam was in his face. Then, quick as lightning, he leaped aside with a steel-like bound, struck the sword strongly, deeply, into the shaggy neck, just where spine and skull meet, just where the life lies most open to assault. The great beast stopped, suddenly quivered once through all his

great carcass, and then fell forward, first upon his knees, then upon his side, with the dark blood rushing from his mouth, and the red, angry light fading from the rolling, glazing eyes.

A great shout went up, from all these hundreds of spectators, at this sight; a shout of homage to courage greater than their own; a shout of triumph in the new conquest of man over brute; a shout of pent-up excitement and suspense; and floating, as it were, upon that diapason of male voices, rose one clear soprano, a woman's joyfully crying:

“Mark! My Mark!”

CHAPTER XV.

THE MYSTERY OF DOLÓRES.

To Miss Waterston, sitting alone, and brooding moodily over the report, with which Havana rung, of the courage and strength of the American, entered a servant with a card upon his salver, and fire in his eyes.

“Senora? It is the American metador!”

“What?” And Miss Waterston, picking up the card, read incredulously,

MARK TRECOTHICK.

Under the name, written in pencil, were these words: “Begg to see Miss Waterston, on important business.”

“Show the gentleman up, Pepe,” said she, presently, and wondered, as she heard it, if that voice were indeed her own.

As the man left the room, she ran to the door of the bedroom, where her mother sat, nursing a touch of neuralgia, and hurriedly whispered:

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her protection? Besides, there will be a search, and she must be disguised and hidden, or she can never get off the island. Now, my plan is this: I will bring her to you, as soon as she is free from her prison; and you will say to your mother, and to everybody else, that you have a new lady's-maid."

She hesitated a moment, then said,

"Well. Go, and find your Dolóres, and bring her to me. All shall be as you wish."

"You are a noble creature, and Pampalona must try to grow to his good fortune."

"Good-bye. I will give orders to Pepe, the groom of the chambers, to have a room ready for my maid, and if you arrive during the night, he will show you where to lodge her."

"Thanks. I leave all that to you. Good-bye."

From the Hotel Pasaye, Trecothick rushed to the abode of a priest, his only familiar acquaintance in Havana, one whom he had met, years before, upon the Continent, and with whom he had sustained a regular correspondence ever since. His first visit in the city was, naturally, to this friend, and, as naturally, he had, at once confided to him his motive for visiting Cuba, and had besought his aid. Padre Garcia, being a secular priest, and under no superior, but his bishop, promised, and gave this aid, engaging himself to discover, through channels of his own, all that was to be known of the family Valdez, as described by Mark.

The padre was at home.

"I have it all, my son," he began, shortening the amenities usual in opening a Spanish interview, upon any subject. "He, whom you call Valdez, is the Marquis of Blanco, identified with some of the earlier insurrectionary movements. A price was set upon his head, and his estates

confiscated ; but he escaped from the country, and fled to St. Thomas, where he communicated with the government here, offering to sell the plans of his late comrades, and betray their principal leaders, if his own pardon, and restoration of his property could be assured. Juanez came to these terms, and some hundreds of brave men paid, with their lives, for the folly of having trusted to a traitor, and a coward. Some hot-heads among the patrons swore to have his life, and once more he fled the country, this time carrying with him his ward and cousin, Dolóres de Montalto, a child of twelve years old, whose father, a weak old man, had left her and her estates, in the hands of his cousin, de Blanco, after having signed a strange will, composed no doubt by the latter, by which he provided that Dolóres should, on or before her twentieth birthday, either marry Senor de Blanco, or enter the convent of Santa Clara, in which latter case, a moderate dowry went to the convent, and the rest of the property to the Marquis de Blanco. Should she decide neither to become his wife, nor to enter the convent, as a novice, she was compelled to make that, or some other religious house, her permanent abode, the cost of her maintenance, as a parlor boarder, being defrayed from the estate, which was still to remain in the hands of her guardian, the fee reverting to him, or his heirs, at her death. If, however, Senor de Blanco should die, or refuse to accept the bride thus bestowed upon him, Dolóres was left free to marry whom she would, or to remain single, provided she placed herself under the protection of a religious community, up to her fortieth birthday. So far, the will, carefully drawn up, under supervision of Senor de Blanco himself, was framed to suit his own wishes and advantages ; but when the dying man, in presence of his cousin and two witnesses, had formally executed this document, he insisted upon retaining it in his own posses-

sion until his decease. Hardly had the breath left his body, when the marquis himself withdrew the folded document from beneath the dead man's pillow, and committed it, at once, to the care of a notary, who, opening it in due course, discovered that to the original will was appended a codicil, in the tremulous handwriting of Senor de Montalto, to the effect, that, although fully confiding in the kindness and wisdom of his cousin, de Blanco, he could have no compulsion used with his only and darling child, and if, knowing his earnest desire for her to marry his cousin, she decided not to do so, she should be free, on her twentieth birthday, to marry anyone else she conscientiously preferred, if this latter was a man approved by her father confessor, and two old friends of the family, named in the will as legatees.

“In hearing this codicil read, Senor de Blanco felt like the man, who, having carefully reared a house upon the sand, sees it suddenly crumble down, in a mass of ruin, by the washing away of the foundation. But the notary had read it aloud, there were plenty of auditors, the signature of the testator, and those of the witnesses were not to be questioned, and both will and codicil were established, and acted upon without question. One point, however, the marquis had toiled for, and effected. Dolóres had been kept in ignorance of every provision of her father's will, except his desire, announced to her as a command, that she should marry Senor de Blanco, and the forfeiture of her property, on her twentieth birthday, should she refuse.”

All this, and more, Padre Garcia had ascertained, partly from common report, partly from his spiritual brother, Padre Anselmo, of the Jesuit College. The latter had been confessor of the deceased Montalto, and was confessor now of his daughter. He was, consequently one of the arbiters, upon whom depended her ability to marry whom she would,

in case she decided against her cousin, de Blanco, for whom she had, as we have seen, imbibed a bitter hatred. Padre Anselmo was a most amiable and conscientious priest, and had watched, with much uneasiness, the course pursued by Senor de Blanco toward his ward. He did not conceal from his confrere that he stood quite ready, at any fitting time, to inform his spiritual daughter of her rights, and of the provisions of her father's will, if he should see her in a position to marry a man, of whom he and the two friends of her deceased father could cordially approve. Such a man, Padre Garcia assured him, was to be found in the young American, whom the worthy priest described as an intimate friend of many years' standing. He now assured Mark, with a twinkle of his merry, black eyes, that he might descend upon Mother Church, privately, to sustain and assist him in any honorable and discreet project he might undertake, for gaining her daughter as a bride.

"But no bloodshed, no scandal, no open, appeal to the Church, my son," insisted the priest, in conclusion. "And, perhaps, should you succeed in your enterprise, gratitude, and your young wife's example, may bring you home, an accepted prodigal, to the one true fold."

"Perhaps," laughed the young man. "At any rate, Mother Church shall have no cause to complain of my forgetfulness, or ingratitude."

CHAPTER XVI.

YOUR LIFE OR MINE.

MASTER and slave stood face to face, and around them like black bats, hovered, unseen, the demons of cruelty, murder, hatred, revenge. The spy who saw the gold pass

from Trecothick's hand to that of Brom, had hastened to curry favor with his master, by giving information; and not all the lies and subterfuges that the slave glibly offered, shook for one moment the master's conviction that he had been betrayed. To what extent he knew not, and therefore imagined far more than the truth. Hence his vindictive determination to visit upon the head of his slave, not only his own treason, but the scorn and hate Dolóres heaped upon himself, whenever he approached her, and her unconcealed joy and pride in Trecothick's powers in the bull-ring.

"Sure as you're alive, master, I was only telling the man that you lived in Calle Obisipo—telling him the awfulest lies ever you see, master," pleaded Brom, his teeth chattering in terror, as de Blanco fixed his gloomy eyes upon him and sneered a devilish smile.

"Unless you lied better than you're lying now, the man was a fool to pay you for it," said he, slowly. "Never mind; I shall find out before long what you have been about. There is a detector, out at the ingenio, that cuts the truth out of a black heart better than a knife. We shall see, to-morrow night, my friend. Now go and get everything ready to start, at four o'clock to-morrow morning for La Caridad. You're watched, remember, and if you attempt an escape, I'll have you roasted alive. You can't cheat me, you dog, remember that."

Brom made no reply. He could not, for sheer terror rendered him speechless. He knew his master; he knew how disappointment or loss worked like poison in his blood, and never disappeared without somebody being harmed. He knew that the mood was upon him now, and that the fiend possessing him would not depart without a sacrifice. He had himself been the servile tool of many a murderous vengeance, far more undeserving than that impending over

himself. He felt absolutely certain that, once upon the plantation, and safe from the eye of the law or public opinion, Valdez would find relief and delight in torturing, perhaps murdering him outright ; and he felt that the moment he had long foreseen, and prepared for, had arrived, the hour had come to strike the blow at his master's life, by which alone his could be saved. That very morning he had perfected the plan, agreeing upon a signal, which once given was a sure sentence of death against the man who now so mockingly promised him the cruelest of deaths. And yet the slave hesitated. Something of brute loyalty, and devotion struggled with the lower brute of his nature, and he might even yet, like a dog, mutely gone to his death at his master's degree, without an effort at resistance, had not the devil put it into the master's heart to seal his own doom.

“Get up you vermin !” said Valdez, spurning with his foot the quivering creature prostrate before him. “Get up, and go down to Juan Merello's. Order the things I told you of, and then choose the biggest, toughest, hardest cowhide-whip in his stock : they may not have a new one at the ingenio, and we'll leave nothing to chance. Take Pedro with you, and send him here first for orders. I shall tell him to chain your wrist to his, and if you try to bolt, to call a guarda civile to shoot you. It is a happy thought to make you choose the whip.”

Without a word Brom rose to his feet. Without one word or look he left the room, and went to obey his master ; and in that moment of silence the master's doom was sealed.

Chained to his fellow-servant, Brom went forth upon his errand, and as he left the house, he raised his haggard eyes, and looked about him. A negro, with a game-cock

under his arm, crossed the street, and nodding familiarly, said:

"I brought that chicken we were talking about this morning, to see if you would take me to the man that you thought would buy him. When can you go?"

"I can't go at all. My master is going to his ingenio, and I've got to start with him at four o'clock, to-morrow morning," replied Brom.

"Aha!" returned the man with the game cock, carelessly, as he walked along behind, and noticed the chained wrist, and Pedro's big stick, and watchful mein. "Then I'll go alone, if you'll tell me where I'll find him."

"On the Matanzas road, a little beyond where the road to Casa Blanca crosses—"

"Can't have you chattering dis way, Brom," here interposed Pedro, not sorry to show his authority over his late superior. "Go 'long wid you, Sambo, and sell you' chicken for you'se'f. Dis nigger's got 'nough to do wid his own bus'ness."

"All right, gub'nor," replied the stranger, easily, and sauntered off, exchanging, as he passed in front of Brom, one quick, strong glance with him, that said, mutely, he comprehended all, and would faithfully and swiftly report to those who had sent him.

"Dis way, Brom," ordered Pedro, next. "'Fore we go to Merello's, I'se got to stop at Belen, and send your mist'esses priest over to de casa. She tole mass'r, when I was in de room, she would go 'way, nohow, 'less she saw dat priest and 'fessed her sins."

"Mist's Dolóres very pious, always," replied Brom, while a thrill of joy shot through his heart, for he doubted not that Dolóres, too, was contriving some escape, or some rebellion; and should his own plan fail, hers might avail for both. At any rate, it was a danger the more menacing

the man upon whose destruction his own safety now depended.

Once out of sight, the man with the game-cock exchanged his leisurely saunter for a rapid pace, nor halted until he entered a small, half-ruined little house on the Cerro road, and presented himself in an upper room, where two or three men sat smoking and talking, evidently waiting.

“Well, Maco!” demanded one, eagerly. “Did you see him?”

“I saw him, master, and he’s in trouble,” replied the negro, carefully replacing the game-cock in his cage. “He was chained to another nigger, and he looked scared most to death; but he told me that they will start to-morrow morning at four o’clock, for the ingenio, and that the place to meet them is the point where the Casa Blanca road crosses the Matanza road.”

“All right. You’ll have a donkey ready, and start with them from the house, keeping out of sight, of course, and follow to that spot. You’ll find us there. Come, brothers.”

Ten minutes later, the three men, excellently mounted, were riding out of Havana, carelessly staring in the faces of the guardos civiles, who, had they known the names of the travelers, would have shot them down, could they not have secured them alive; for these were three leaders of that great unseen power, which for years has agitated Cuba, as earthquakes agitate the cities built above them; the party of the patriots, the insurrectionists, the true men, or the rebels, as you choose to name them.

An hour later, Padre Anselmo left the house of Senor de Blanco, and took the path to the Hotel Pasaye, where he had a long interview with our friend, Mark Trecothick, who, as soon as the priest had left him, went to see Hilda Waterston. He found her dressed in black, pallid and

tearful. Violetto Pampalona was already dead of virulent yellow fever, and Hilda remained his quasi widow, and his heiress. The shock was severe, but, perhaps, the grief was not the most poignant which that proud heart had ever known. At any rate, she talked to her friend of all his hopes, and fears, and schemes, with keen interest, and showed an affectionate anxiety to forward them; and this she could the better do, as Pampalona's death induced her to wish to leave Cuba, as soon as the necessary formalities could be accomplished. The information as to the nature of Senor Montalto's will, had, however, modified Trecothick's plans. He was willing, now, to wait for Dolóres approaching twentieth birthday, that she might openly, and legally declare her refusal to marry the Marquis de Blanco, and her choice, with the approval of her three friends, of Mark Trecothick as her husband. But the young man was not willing to risk the guardianship of his future bride in the hands of a villain such as de Blanco another day, and especially he objected to her being removed to the distant and lonely plantation of La Caridad.

His present plan, therefore, was to abstract her from De Blanco's charge, and placing her in that of the Waterston's, cause her to disappear from everybody's knowledge, until the time for the legal decision should arrive. Hilda heard, assented, approved, and turned paler and paler, until at last, she rose abruptly, saying :

“ Now, go away, Mark. All shall be as you wish, but I can bear no more at present.”

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MEETING OF THE ROADS.

DAWN is a pretty sight anywhere, but nowhere is it so lovely as in the tropics. Never came it more fairer ; never did the blue of heaven glow more rosily, or the distant ocean heave its violet panoply more wooingly ; never did the heavy perfume of magnolia, and cereus, and tuberoses swell up more intoxicatingly, or the supple palm-tree wave more excitingly than now, when the little procession of the family Valdez moved through the fading dusk, along the lonely Matanzas road, and approached its junction with the smaller and lonelier path, leading to Casa Blanca.

Could Senor Valdez have looked through the steep hill and the wild growth of jungle, covering it from its crest to the Casa Blanca road, that curled around its base, he would have seen a body of well-armed, and well-masked men, who lay sheltered snugly within the palmetto thicket, while a negro, crouching among the bushes on the shoulder of the hill, watched the road from Havana, and as the little cavalcade appeared in sight, crept swiftly back to give notice to the masked men that their prey was at hand.

But greatly as Senor Valdez would have been astonished at this sight, perhaps the masked men themselves would have been even more astonished, could they have seen another little troop of men, also well-mounted, also well-armed, also well-masked, who were leisurely moving up the other branch of the Casa Blanca road, so as to reach the junction with the Matanzas road, at the opposite side from themselves. All three, however, remained serenely uncon-

scious of the triple combination, and all three slowly and surely approached each other.

The cavalcade Valdez reached the meeting of the roads; the nose of Senor Valdez's horse overlapped the Casa Blanca road. The leader of the troop, at this, loosed his trotting horse, and shouted:

“Advance, comrades! Death to the traitor!”

At the same moment he shot out from his covert, like a thunder-bolt, and seizing Valdez's horse by the bridle, threw him upon his haunches, crying:

“Tomaso de Blanco, remember Juan de Castiglione, who was garroted through your treason. I come to avenge him! Die!”

Another voice thundered: “And remember Cherubino de Montero. I am his brother. Die!”

And still another: “And Paulo de Moroey Monaldo. Die!”

Three pistol shots punctuated the three sentences of death, and Tomaso de Blanco, throwing his arms wildly into the air, and gasping a blasphemy with his last breath, fell dead from his horse.

The little troupe behind him rent the air with shrieks and exclamations, but the leader of the patriots held up a hand for silence, shouting:

“Be quiet! Have no fear, for there is no danger. Those of you men who wish to join us, are free to do so. We have no slaves—you are our comrades. As for you, fair lady——”

“The lady needs no assurance of safety, senor,” interposed a stern voice, in strangely accented Anglo-Spanish. “I am here to take charge of her.”

The leader turned, and found a handsome, florid face close beside his own. He knew it, for he had seen it at the Plaza de Toros, the day before; and men who carry

their lives in their hands, learn to know faces; men, too, who face danger daily, respect and reverence bravery. He bowed, respectfully, and rode close to the volante.

“Senora, the king of the matadors is here, with your approval? Is it so?”

“It is so, senor,” replied Dolóres, gravely.

“That is well. This man, whom we killed, deserved his fate. He was our trusted comrade, and he betrayed and sold us. The blood of some of our bravest and best beloved, was shed upon the field, and in the prison yard, through his treason; was it not just that his life should atone?”

“It was just, senor!” said the girl, her scornful, dark eyes glaring at the body of the traitor.

“Then all is said. Good-bye, senora. Good-bye, emperor of matadors.”

And down the dim road, into the shadow, that still lay around the foot of the hills, rode the little troop of avengers, each man feeling that he had done that day a most righteous work.

Do you care to hear all the rest? It would be so tame to tell just how they rode back into Havana; and how Mrs. Waterston was delighted with the romance, and took Dolóres to her heart at once; and how the Captain-General, and his august family, made much of the child; and how His Excellency smoothed the way for her to assume possession of her father's estate; and, finally, how there was a grand wedding at the church of Belen, with Pedro Anselmo officiating, and everybody who could crowd into the pretty church, as spectators.

Fancy it all, dear reader, and love my little Dolóres a little, in spite of her Spanish faults, and want of un-Spanish training; but after loving her a little, give something more than love to Hilda Waterston, who still, in the earli-

est prime of her beauty and grace feels the heart within her broken, and crippled and crushed ; not dead, for the dead are at rest ; but full of stinging pain, as it recalls to its own woeful sin and weakness ; full of humiliation as it feels that its best love has been poured forth, spilled, and wasted, like water upon sand ; full of sorrow that must never find utterance, for it could never find sympathy.

Well, joy cometh in the morning, and broken hearts have healed before now into hearts as good as new, and if one loves but once in a lifetime, there are admirable substitutes for love, likely to wear even, longer and more brightly than the real article. Let us hope all things for Hilda, for she is framed for a noble woman, physically, mentally, and spiritually.

ST. VALENTINE'S CHARM.

It was the Fourteenth of February, and the ground was covered with freshly-fallen snow, as the sun rose brilliantly. Every tree was a miracle of beauty in its coat of ice, with long glittering icicles depending from branch and stem.

Just as the first rays of the sun kissed her window, Nellie Gordon threw it wide open, and with her eyes fast closed, sang, in a clear, sweet voice—

“Blessed St. Valentine, now when I look,
Open the page of the future's sealed book;
Blessed St. Valentine, show unto me,
He who my future true love shall be.”

Opening her eyes wide, she suddenly drew in her head, and quick, vivid blushes chased each other over neck, arms, and cheeks.

“Oh, I hope he did not hear me! He will think I am ridiculing him,” she said, aloud.

“What is the matter, Nell?” said a very sleepy voice from the bed.

Nellie tossed aside the dressing-gown she had wrapped around her, and resumed her place beside her cousin before she said:—

“I was singing the Valentine charm, just for fun, Tasia, and when I opened my eyes and looked out, Ned was handing Doctor Holway from the carriage.”

“Nell! Did he see you?”

“I don't know. He certainly must have heard me.”

“But you knew he was coming to-day, and that the train comes in at daybreak.”

“I forgot all about him.”

“Nell, is he so frightful?”

“I never looked twice. He is certainly very short, but he was so wrapped in cloaks and shawls he might have been a woman. Ned was almost carrying him.”

“What makes Ned so crazy about him, Nell? I have only heard in a vague way that he felt under some obligation to him, but I never heard the whole story.”

“When Ned was in Mississippi in the fall of 1867 he was attacked with yellow fever, on the train. He was taken into a little open station and left there alone. No station master was required for so insignificant a stopping place, and a bare wooden bench was the only furniture in the little room. Ned was in the first stages of the fever, not so ill but that he was perfectly conscious of his desertion and desolation. He was lying still, thinking to rest awhile, and then try to find some house, when he saw come in at the door, a little, misshapen figure, and heard a voice asking him how he came there.

“‘Just taken with yellow Jack on the train.’ Knowing the fear and horror of the disease in all parts of the South, and feeling keenly the proof of it just given him by the passengers upon the train, Ned expected to see his visitor rush away. Instead of this he came forward, and gravely felt his pulse, asked him some questions, and said:—

“‘I will send a spring wagon for you presently. Lie quietly until it comes. I am Doctor Holway.’

“The fever was creeping over Ned with rapidity, for he says he confused all this speech with vague thoughts of being carried to a hospital, asking somebody to write home, wondering if anybody would bury him, and thinking of the spring of cold water at home. When Doctor Holway

returned he must have been delirious, for he has no further recollection of events until he recovered his senses nearly two weeks later, and found himself in a large, airy room, with a stately old colored woman nursing him.

“Not until he was nearly well again did he know the extent of Doctor Holway's devotion. He had taken him to his house, consisting of two rooms, an office and bed-room, and had given the latter up for his use, sleeping himself upon a sofa in the office. He had hired the colored woman to assist him, and had nursed Ned night and day back to life. But, Tasie, what made all this real devotion and charity was the fact that the doctor himself, having lost all his property during the war, was actually so poor that he sold his watch, ring, and a portion of his library to pay the expenses of Ned's illness, and never opened his portemonnaie to use the money he would have found there.

“It was but natural that the two should form a strong friendship for each other, and as they became intimate Ned learned that the doctor had not always been crippled. An accident upon a railway train when he was nearly thirty years old, had resulted in perfect deformity. His betrothed wife shrank from him, and his patients decreased in number. Then the war came, and poverty was added to his other burdens.

“Ned took care that his generous kindness did not place him under pecuniary loss, but he felt that he owed him his very life. When he returned home, he spoke to father, and they have been looking out constantly for some position to offer the doctor. It was not until poor Mr. Wilson's death left vacant the professorship of *belles-lettres* at the college that they were successful.

“Doctor Holway, Ned says, is peculiarly fitted for this position, being a close student and reader in most of the modern languages.”

"Then he will live at B———?"

"After the first of April. In the meantime he will be our guest."

It must be admitted that Nellie was very nervous as the breakfast bell summoned her to meet her brother's guest and friend. She had heard so often of his devotion to her brother, of his learning, his noble qualities, and his sensitive shrinking from notice, that she was bitterly conscious that her carelessness in forgetting his early arrival, had betrayed her into an act that might be construed into wanton cruelty or insult. She was a kind-hearted, impulsive girl, just eighteen, full of gratitude and pity for the unfortunate physician, and her step was slow, her heart beating rapidly when she followed Tasie into the breakfast-room.

Standing near her tall, stalwart brother was a man that she knew was her visitor, and her whole womanly sympathy at once was aroused. He was short and misshapen, one shoulder twisted higher than the other, and one leg shorter. But upon the deformed body was a noble head, with broad, high brow, large, deep eyes, massive features, and a firm, finely-curved mouth. Clusters of rich brown hair were tossed back from the forehead, and curled in profusion upon the well shaped head. But the face was very, very pale, and the eyes sad and wistful.

Nelly forgot her morning's folly, only remembered that this man had saved the life of her only brother, at the risk of taking himself a loathsome and contagious disease. She went to him, in her impulsive fashion, with only this thought in her heart.

"You need not introduce me, Ned," she said, extending both hands to Doctor Holway. "We all owe Doctor Holway too great a debt to stand upon ceremony in our welcome. We can never thank you, sir," she said, with

earnest fervor, "but we are very, very glad to have the opportunity to tell you we deeply feel your generosity and goodness."

The face she looked upon had flushed a little under the warm sincerity of her words, and her cordial manner. A voice low and sweet answered her:—

"Your brother overrates what any Christian man must have done for him."

"Breakfast is cooling," said Mrs. Gordon. "Doctor Holway, my niece, Miss Anastasia Graham."

Tasie bowed courteously, in answer to the doctor's greeting, and the family gathered around the table.

It made an unfortunate contrast for Doctor Holway's small, misshapen figure, that both Mr. Gordon and his son were tall, large men, while Nellie, though so young, was also tall and of rather full figure. But before this first meal was concluded Doctor Holway had made every member of the family forget his infirmities, in cordial admiration of his great mental powers, and his peculiarly winning manner. It was hard to believe he had led so much the life of a recluse, when he was so finished a gentleman in his courtesy. It was hard to reconcile his hermit life with his thorough knowledge of all news at home and abroad.

The ladies forgot their domestic affairs and lingered to hear the animated political discussions between the two, where there was just sufficient diversity of opinion to make the arguments sparkling and vivacious.

After the doctor had retired to his room for the much needed rest after his long journey, Nellie sought her brother, with penitent apologies.

"Did he hear me, Ned?" she asked.

"Certainly he did. How was it you did not know we were there?"

"The sound of the wheels must have been lost in the fresh snow."

"But you stood singing a minute or two. Did you not see us?"

Nellie blushed deeply. "I was singing a Valentine charm with my eyes fast shut."

"You absurd child! Well, don't fret about it. Try to make him feel at home. I depend a great deal upon you, Nell. This Willis case will take a great deal of preparation before it comes into court, and father is busy, too, just now. Mother is always busy, so you and Tasia must entertain the doctor."

"Tasia goes home to-morrow. It is just as well, Ned, for she cannot feel as we do, and she gives little shivers of horror now when she speaks of the doctor. What a handsome face and head he has, Ned!"

"Caliban with the frontispiece of Jove," was the reply. "I must be off. Take good care of Doctor Holway."

In obedience to this last request, Nellie was waiting in the drawing-room when the doctor came down stairs, occupied with some piece of fancy sewing, that allowed tongue and wits to be in freedom.

She was not exactly a pretty girl, this heroine of mine, but she had a bright, frank face, and one that was very pleasant to look upon. Her great charm was her sincere, cordial manner. Looking into her well-opened blue eyes, hearing the sound of her fresh, girlish voice, awakened instinctively the confidence of any companion. You could not doubt either her earnestness or her sincerity. Whatever she undertook, she gave her whole interest to it, and just now she had undertaken to make her brother's home pleasant for Doctor Holway. So without glance or word ever betraying that she thought of his infirmities, she yet contrived that the easiest chairs were those that naturally fell

to his share ; the books he was reading, the newspapers in the morning, the backgammon board in the evening, were, by some magic, ever within easy reach of his hands. He wondered why he was so seldom obliged to limp across a room at Mr. Gordon's.

When Nellie found he loved music, a cosy chair mysteriously found its way to a comfortable corner near the piano-forte, and not too far from the cheerful open grate, and there Doctor Holway passed hours, dreamily listening to the fresh young voices singing ballads, or the firm fingers playing his favorite airs. Nellie was no musical genius, but she played with taste and feeling, and understood the art of keeping her performances within the limits of her ability, never undertaking anything of the sky-rocket order, but selecting such music as pleased her listeners, without any fear of the performer's falling into trouble over intricate difficulties. She sang ballads well, her pure, clear voice full of feeling, and her pronunciation distinct. Music, singing, games, animated conversation, and sometimes an hour or two of reading, filled the days, and in the evening the family were usually together, with often a pleasant circle of visitors.

It seemed impossible April was really so near, when one bright day in March Ned drove the doctor to B———to inspect his rooms at the college where his new duties were to be performed. The grounds attached to the college were very extensive, and dotted here and there were pretty one-story cottages.

Doctor Holway's rooms were in the huge pile of brick and mortar where the students boarded, and were fitted up with that chilling neatness peculiar to bachelor quarters. Making all necessary arrangements, the gentlemen left the college, and re-entered the low basket carriage in which they had driven over. They were slowly wending their

way to the gate, when Doctor Holway commenced upon the little cottages already mentioned.

"They are for the married professors," said Ned, when actually obliged to speak.

"Was my predecessor married?"

"Yes. The cottage nearest the college was his. It is closed yet, but if you would prefer to live there, I will mention your desire to the president."

"No," with a little weary sigh. "My rooms are very pleasant, and as I cannot keep house, it is better for me to be near the dining-room."

The ride home was rather a silent one. Doctor Holway was evidently pondering intently upon some subject that filled his heart with sadness. His large, earnest eyes looked forward with mournful steadiness, and his lips were closed with a firm pressure.

Ned was thinking of the coming separation, and wondering how the gap in the home circle, left by his friend could ever be filled. Never had the hours sped along so swiftly as they had since Doctor Holway became an inmate of the family. Looking into his sad face now, it was difficult to picture it lightened by mirth and jest, but many an hour had passed when no laugh was freer, no jest brighter, than that of the crippled, deformed physician. They were nearly at home, when by some irrepressible emotion the doctor seemed forced to open his heart to his friend.

"I think you will do me the justice to believe, Ned, that I am not ungrateful when I tell you I think I must give up this professorship and return to Mississippi."

"You do not like the college?"

"I turn my back on Paradise when I leave you all, Ned. You have made me very happy here; so happy that I forgot my deformity and my forty years, and dreamed that I

was young and straight again. Laugh at me for a madman if you will, Ned, when I tell you I love Nellie; love her as I never loved the woman who cast me off for this," and he touched his shoulder.

There was no answer. How could Ned comfort such misery as spoke in the doctor's voice and look? How could he say that fresh young life would link itself to this weak one?

"I am her Valentine, you know, Ned," the doctor said, with a bitter, self-mocking laugh. "I was the dashing cavalier her eyes fell upon as she finished her song. Poor child! she started back as if an adder had stung her."

"No, no; it was not that. She was afraid she had wounded you."

"I know. God bless her tender, true heart, and the man who wins it!"

"Here we are at home!" said Ned. "Do not resign hastily, doctor. You have ten days yet here, and"—the voice was very earnest—"if you can win her heart, there is no one to whose keeping we would more gladly confide our Nellie."

"Ah, me! that is a safe promise, dear friend. I will not expose myself to the pain of seeing her surprise, nor wound her kind heart by making her refuse me."

There was an empty parlor to receive the gentlemen, but Mrs. Gordon soon bustled in.

"Don't have the horse taken out, Ned," she said. "Nellie has gone over to Tasie's, and she wants you to drive over and bring her back."

"All right. I'll stay to tea."

"Do. We have quite neglected Tasie lately. Let Nell stay all night if she is tired. It is a long walk."

It seemed as if never had evening passed so slowly. Mr. Gordon and the doctor talked, and Mrs. Gordon nodded

over her knitting, but there was no Nellie to sing, no Ned to joke, and the evening was wanting in all the vivacity and brightness that had seemed the prevailing element of the home circle.

It was after ten o'clock when the family retired, concluding the young folks would stay all night at their cousin's, but the doctor heard the carriage drive up at a still later hour, and the voices of the brother and sister when they entered the house.

Very early next morning he limped down to the library to find a volume he had been intending to read, and break the monotony of the long sleepless hours. Even in that room he found everywhere the traces of the bright young life that embodied for him all womanly tenderness, grace, and sweetness. Upon one table was the backgammon board as they had left it the previous morning; upon another the book they had consulted, and in its leaves the dainty gold thimble and piece of fine needle work Nellie had wrought while she listened to his voice, reading or chatting.

The man was only human. He had carried his burden for eleven long years, patiently, if not cheerfully. He had suffered no murmur to his lips, but now, as he looked around him, he spoke:—

“It is too much. My cross is heavier than I can bear.”

A gentle touch fell upon his clasped hands; a voice, low, musical and sweet, answered his despairing cry.

“Will you let me help you carry it, dear friend?”

“Nellie! Nellie!” he shouted, in ringing tones; then, with sudden revulsion of feeling, he said, hastily, “No, no. Tie your young life to mine? Drag you down to such as I am? No, no, a thousand times. God bless you for the pitying impulse! but it can never be.”

The young girl stood erect and still for a moment, looking steadily into the wild eyes raised to her own.

"I do not pity you," she said, in a clear, firm voice. "I may be unmaidenly, bold, forward in speaking, but I cannot let you go from us without making one effort to keep you. Dear friend, I love you. If you will take me into your warm, noble heart, I will never wound nor grieve it. If you will let me share your home, my whole life shall be passed in trying to make it a happy one."

While she spoke, he sank upon a low chair, hiding his face with his thin white hands, and sobbing like a child. There was no unmaidenly boldness in Nellie's heart as she knelt down and drew the head upon her own shoulder, kissing the waving curls, and whispering words of affection.

"Well, I declare!" said a voice at the door, laughing, with a suspicious little choke in the tone. "Pray, Mr. Nellie, are you making a proposal in that romantic attitude?"

"I am, Ned. Go away till I am accepted or refused."

"Not I," said Ned, rightly judging that the scene had better be changed. "I remain here to challenge any man who dares refuse my sister."

"I am afraid I'll have to take you, Nell," the doctor said, letting his happiness irradiate his face.

"You must," she said. "St. Valentine himself gave you to me."

So the professor took the little cottage, and Mrs. Holway presides there, and does the honors.

[THE END.]

