

The
ALBATROSS
◆ NOVELS ◆



HIS PRIVATE
CHARACTER

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ALBERT ROSS

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HIS PRIVATE CHARACTER.

BY ALBERT ROSS,

AUTHOR OF

THOU SHALT NOT," "SPEAKING OF ELLEN,"

"IN STELLA'S SHADOW," "WHY I'M SINGLE,"

"HER HUSBAND'S FRIEND," ETC.

"I see you lying in his arms," said the witch, peering into the translucent stone. "I see you lying on his bed."

"In life and death?" faltered Cora, handing her the money.

"In life and death," repeated the wron, solemnly.—Page 65.



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TO MY READERS.

When it became evident, (within three months of its publication) that my novel entitled "Thou Shalt Not" would achieve a circulation larger than that ever attained by any anonymous piece of American fiction, my publisher asked me to do two things: First, to allow him to use my name in the later editions; and second, to give him the manuscript of another book as soon as possible.

I hesitated to comply with his request. "Thou Shalt Not" had been written with the intention of conveying a great moral lesson. It was meant to show that measure for measure may be meted to men of unchaste lives; that no man who laughs at the virtue of women should expect the serpent to avoid his own hearthstone. But I soon saw that certain reviewers, running through a few of its pages at hap-hazard, were giving the public a totally erroneous opinion of its character. I found myself accused of improprieties. The dark background to my picture was paraded as the picture itself. Hector Greyburn's early sins were dilated upon and his terrible punishment ignored. The stainless purity of Clara Campbell, the

heroic life and death of Lena, the rigid morality of John Dinsmore, were forgotten.

There were honorable exceptions, however. There were reviewers who saw what I had tried to do and gave me full credit therefor. They perceived that "Thou Shalt Not" was a tragedy, designed to impress in the strongest manner the heinousness of violating the Seventh Command, and one of them said: "When ten thousand platforms are devoted to decrying the abuse of the wine-cup; when a hundred thousand pulpit voices are raised in protest against the growing desecration of the Sabbath—may not one little book be permitted to point plainly to the blasting path of the adulterer?"

So I read what the various critics wrote and saw how widely their opinions varied; and I told my publisher he might use my name and gave him another story. I called the new book "His Private Character," and here you have it.

Though written with more circumspect language and with a less bold hand, (the subject did not require it) "His Private Character" has its lesson also. I pity the man or woman who can read these pages from beginning to end and not find it.

ALBERT ROSS.

Address :

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New York City.

HIS PRIVATE CHARACTER.

CHAPTER I.

“HE'S RICH, THAT'S THE MAIN THING.”

“What is His Private Character?”

Having uttered this question, Mrs. Henry Madison leaned back in her armchair with the air of one who had performed an important duty and waited for her young friend, Miss Isabelle Vaughan, to reply.

“His Private Character!” echoed Miss Vaughan. “How in the name of goodness should I know? There is a question of far greater moment, it seems to me—‘How much money is he worth?’—and that, within a reasonable margin, I can tell you. As for Claude’s Private Character, most likely it is like that of other men, which means that the less you investigate it the happier you will be. ‘Private Character,’ indeed! What have the men of to-day to do with such things!”

Miss Vaughan made a pretty picture, as she sat there in Mrs. Madison’s sitting-room. She was a pronounced blonde of perhaps one-and-twenty summers,

of good height and with one of those well-rounded figures which would better please did they not arouse fears of too great avoirdupois in the distant future. At present she was as nearly perfect a Hebe as it is possible to imagine. Her mass of straw-tinted hair was arranged in a manner that would have become a queen. Her head was poised grandly on her shapely neck. She had a bright color that was all her own, and her excessive vivacity became her well.

Mrs. Madison was a widow of about forty years of age, who might once have been beautiful, but who now seemed to feel the cares of life too heavily to mind the deep furrows which time had hastened to place in the lines of her pale countenance. She had a certain air of matronly dignity, as one who had seen better days, and could rise, in thought at least, above the misfortunes of recent years. The house which she occupied was situated within pistol shot of Harvard College, in the city of Cambridge. It was a comfortable, old-fashioned structure, set back from the street, and almost hidden from the gaze of pedestrians by the shade trees and very tall hedge which bordered the sidewalk. Her support came almost wholly from the letting of rooms to students, from which source she managed to support, in a modest manner, herself and her two daughters. She listened with much interest to Miss Vaughan's rejoinder, and then said :

"He is rich, then?"

"You may set that down as assured when I have promised to marry him," smiled the young lady. "His grandfather was one of those Lowell mill owners who made such a pile of money fifty years or so ago. He left it all to Claude when he was a baby—that is, to his guardians, of course—and it has kept on grow-

ing and growing, as such fortunes do. Oh, yes, Claude is rich enough; but as for his Character, that's quite another thing. I haven't got as far as that yet."

The speaker paused and looked contentedly at her companion. If the troubles of this world had made much impression on her young life there was no outward evidence of it. A big yellow cat which sat sleepily on the window seat, a few yards away, seemed quite as much worried by either past or present as she. Yet this young lady had a history which would make the foundation of a romance. An air of mystery pervaded her life, which no one seemed able to penetrate. She had her moods, too, and the Isabelle Vaughan of one of them seemed very little like the Isabelle Vaughan of another.

Mrs. Madison had known her when a child. Her father, Captain Arthur Vaughan, was a Cambridge man, and when her mother died Mrs. Madison saw much of the pretty little orphan girl, until the captain took her out to South America, whence he never returned. One of the first things Belle did, after coming back a grown young lady, was to seek out Mrs. Madison's house. The old friendship was renewed and, as is often the case, it gained strength from the fact that the two ladies were so totally dissimilar, as well as from other causes which will appear later on.

"I am glad, indeed, Belle, that you are to be so happy," said the widow. "Money is not a thing to be despised, and those who pretend to so consider it are only striving for effect. I have often felt the need of it since my husband died, partly for myself, but much more for Cora and Jessie. Money will do a great deal to make life pleasant, but the first requisite in a matrimonial partner should be Private Character. You

cannot comprehend this fully, Belle; you are too young. You remember Henry. There were things about him which I could have wished different, but no one ever impeached his Private Character. When the bank officials found that he had fled, with the books in such bad shape and thirty thousand dollars gone, it was a blow to me. The news which followed so soon of his death abroad was very hard to bear. My only consolation in my distress was the reflection that, whatever he might have done, his Private Character was untarnished."

There was a momentary suspicion of amusement in Miss Vaughan's deep blue eyes, but she mastered it before it attracted her friend's attention, and said :

"I am sorry to say I can't agree with you. If *my* husband should ever run away, he might take all the women in America with him for all of me. But if he forgot to leave me a handsome pile of cash, I'd never forgive him, never! I have Claude all right on that score in advance. The day we are married he is to give me fifty thousand dollars. That'll make a sure foundation for me in case anything *should* happen. Ah! Mrs. Madison, if every husband would do as well, how much more married happiness there would be!"

Miss Vaughan laughed at her own pleasantry and the elder lady's features relaxed a little.

"And you have been engaged for more than a year," said Mrs. Madison.

"Yes, and I would make it ten if I could—that is, if I dared—for he might have heart disease and go off suddenly. I could get him to give me the money now, but that would have a disagreeable look. I think Claude would wait for me a century, if I compelled

him to. Talk about infatuation! Why, you never heard of such a case as his in your life!"

"Tell me all about it," said Mrs. Madison, moving her chair an inch closer. "Tell me everything, Belle; I want the whole truth."

Miss Vaughan colored a little and waited some seconds before replying. Then she said:

"Well, I will, for I know what I tell you will go no further, and I really should like to tell some one. You won't judge me harshly, I'm sure, for you've known me ever since I was smaller than Jessie and I've always regarded you just like a mother. But, really, I fear my story will shock even you."

She paused.

"The telling of it can do no harm," said the other lady, evidently feeling the curiosity, for which her sex is noted, becoming stronger. "If you have done anything imprudent I may be able to advise you and prevent its repetition."

The young lady laughed silently and gave her companion a sly look.

"Well, here it is," she began. "At Newport, last summer, I was introduced to him for the first time. There was a yachting party, and I had on the stunningest suit imaginable. A yachting costume just sets me off, and I knew the minute I glanced around the boat that I had no rival there. I noticed Claude standing with the skipper, who seemed to know him well, and as he was by far the best looking man aboard, I asked an elderly gentleman, in a quiet way, who he was. 'Why, that's Claude Wyllis,' he replied, 'one of the best fellows as well as richest here this season. Let me present you.' It was an inspiration.

Mrs. Madison, that led me to decline that old man's offer."

Mrs. Madison looked much puzzled.

"You declined to be introduced?"

"Right the first time," said Miss Vaughan. "If I hadn't declined, I should never have been to-day the blushing fiancée that you see before you."

Mrs. Madison shook her head. "Your riddles are too hard for me, Belle."

"Did you ever catch bluefish from a boat under full sail?" asked the young lady.

"Bluefish?"

"Yes. You cast out your line with a spoon-hook and scud as fast as you can through the waves. The bluefish see the shining thing; they dive for it and swallow it—bait, hook, spoon and all!"

"Well?"

"I was the spoon-hook, and Claude the bluefish—see?"

Mrs. Madison caught a short breath, and said: "Ah!"

"I thought you would. Claude saw I did not want an introduction and that made him all the more anxious to get one. He got the ear of the old gentleman to whom I had spoken of him. I couldn't hear them, but I knew exactly what they were saying, though I had my eyes on a ship a mile away all the time. 'Who is that pretty girl?' asked Mr. Claude. I'm not vain, but I'm not a fool, either, and I've looked in the glass. I know he said 'pretty.' Then the old man answered, 'Her name is Vaughan, and she is staying with the Mitchells at their cottage.' Then they waited a minute. Then Mr. Claude said, 'Introduce me,' and the old man—bless his heart!—"

replied, 'I can't; she has declined it already.' At this Mr. Claude opened his big eyes and was disposed to get angry. Then, for a little while, he affected not to care. And then—*then*—he made up his contrary masculine mind that he would make my acquaintance, whether I liked it or no, and see what sort of young woman it was who had given him the first snub of his dainty life."

Miss Vaughan stopped to take breath, and looked triumphantly at her interested listener.

"Shall I go on?" she asked. "Or shall I continue this narrative the next time I come over? I shall have to stop and think up some of it before I can make a connected story. It's more than a year since it happened, you know."

"Go on, by all means," said Mrs. Madison. "I am quite entertained."

"Well, that very evening, after dinner, I strolled out—totally unconscious of any other person's existence, you understand—and took my way idly along the sand. There was a brisk breeze blowing and I could only keep my hat on by holding to the ribbons. My front hair blew around my face and my dress was nearly unmanageable. There came a terrible moment when I felt my skirts inflating, and I had to choose quickly between two evils, so I let go of my hat and away it sailed through the air. A gentleman, strolling some rods behind, caught it as deftly as the best league catcher could have caught a ball, and hastened to bring it to me. You never could guess who."

'Not—' began Mrs. Madison.

"But, odd as it seems, it was. I had secured control of my skirts by the time he came up and was able to take my hat, place it on my head and thank him in

a cold, formal manner. I tied the strings tightly under my chin this time, as I had no further use for a flying hat, and started on my way. But another gust came along at that exact moment—you never saw such a gust!—I thought I should go up in the air like an inflated balloon. It was terrible! My face was enveloped in my dress skirt in a second, so I never can testify from actual knowledge the extent of the ruin, but it was enough. And that terrible man caught my dress and pulled it down, just as if it was any of his business. And the first thing I saw, when my burning face was restored to the light, was his royal highness, bowing profoundly and hoping I was now quite able to proceed on my way. Can you conceive of anything more annoying?"

"It was, indeed," admitted Mrs. Madison. "What *did* you do?"

"What did I do? I turned on that man with all the sternness I could muster, stamped my foot on the ground and said: 'I believe you did that on purpose.'

"'You're quite right,' he replied, saucily. 'I brought the wind-squall along here just at the moment I knew you were coming. I did it, I admit; but, if you'll forgive me, I'll never do it again.'

"Now, what could one say to a man like that?"

The face of a beautiful child of ten years peeped in at the doorway at this juncture. She had heavy dark hair hanging loosely about her head in half-tangled masses.

"I only want Tabby, mamma," she said, going to the window and taking the big cat in her arms. "We are playing school and there aren't scholars enough. We want Tabby to sit in one of the chairs."

The last explanation was made for Miss Vaughan's benefit and that young lady signified her approval of the scheme by a smile and nod.

"You're going to stay to dinner?" continued the child, interrogatively, as she held the door ajar. "'Cause Cora would be very much disappointed if you didn't."

"Yes, Jessie," said Mrs. Madison, speaking for her visitor. "Belle will surely be here to dinner. She is going to stay several days. Run along now; we are very busy with our conversation."

The child hesitated a moment longer.

"Something little girls shouldn't hear, I s'pose," she said, wisely. "It's always the way. I shall be so glad when I am big enough to hear everything!"

She trudged off with the cat and Miss Vaughan proceeded :

"What a lovely child Jessie is! Let me see, where was I? Oh, yes! Well, I drew myself up with what dignity I could command—for I still had a wholesome fear of what the next gust might do—and I said, in withering tones (only they didn't seem to wither him at all), 'You are very impertinent, sir; I wish you a good evening!' Then I marched off home without looking around and, as luck would have it, without further accident."

Mrs. Madison waited for her guest to proceed, seeming quite absorbed in the story she was hearing.

"If you can conceive of anything more inauspicious than that in the way of making an acquaintance," continued Miss Vaughan, "I would like to know it. I hid in the house for three days, overcome with the occurrence, and then only ventured out guardedly. But Mr. Claude was not the sort of youth to be discouraged by

little things. He happened, as it turned out, to know Colonel Mitchell, and it was easy enough to get asked up to the cottage. One day I walked out on the piazza and came squarely upon him and the colonel, where there was no escape. 'Belle, this is Mr. Claude Wyllis,—Mr. Wyllis, Miss Vaughan,'—and it was done.

"Claude bore himself remarkably well at that time. As for me, I must have looked like a red, red rose. The good colonel saw nothing—these ancient military men never do—and the usual commonplaces followed. In a few minutes a messenger came post-haste for him and he excused himself in the briefest manner.

"'Mr. Wyllis,' said he, 'Miss Vaughan will entertain you, I'm sure, till my return. I sha'n't be over an hour,' and off he flew. I looked rather helplessly after him and then, as there seemed no remedy, took a chair and sat looking at the sea for the next ten minutes without a word."

"Goodness, Belle!" exclaimed Mrs. Madison. 'How *could* you!'

"How could I do otherwise? He had no right to be there at all. He should have relieved my embarrassment by taking himself out of the way. I gave him ten minutes to do it and that ten minutes cost him his freedom for life. I didn't look as if I was thinking of anything in particular as I sat there with my eyes on the ocean, but I was maturing a plan and I carried it out to the letter."

"A plan?"

"Yes, a plan to make that saucy fellow come to me on his knees. I knew he was laughing at me every minute and I object of all things to being ridiculed.

Finally I turned my chair about and looked him full in the eyes. Yes, he was laughing, just as I suspected.

'Colonel Mitchell spoke the truth,' he said, in response to my scowling look. 'He said you would entertain me; and you do—immensely.'

"Indeed! That is much more than you do for me!" I answered, defiantly.

"At that he burst out laughing and I felt the wrinkles disappearing, in spite of all I could do.

"Come," he said, holding out his hand. 'Let's be friends. Why we've got to! There are reasons!'

"I could have swept into the house and left him, but that would not have sufficed.

"You were on the yacht the other day," he pursued, 'and you avoided me. We walked on the shore and the wind championed my cause. I came to this piazza and that lucky message has aided me. I wish to talk to you, Miss Vaughan.'

"You would do me the greatest favor by leaving me," I said. 'You ought to see that your presence annoys me. Your conduct justifies this statement, which might otherwise seem rude.'

"But you heard me promise Colonel Mitchell that I would wait till his return," he said, elevating his eyebrows.

"Then I will go," I answered, half rising. (Of course I had no intention of going.)

"No," he replied, making a movement to dissuade me. 'He left you here to entertain his guest and you will never let me tell him you disregarded his wish.'

"Then, Mrs. Madison, I made a heroic effort. I laughed as heartily as I could and professed to have intended the whole affair as a joke. In a few moments we were chatting like old friends. Before the colonel

returned we were talking of a hundred things and I knew I had my fish all ready whenever I chose to jerk the line."

Bridget opened the door to inquire whether they would take dinner at the usual hour or wait for Miss Cora.

"Oh, wait for Cora, by all means," said Miss Vaughan. "She can't be much later." Then she resumed :

"To make a long story short, Claude hung about me from that hour. I rode with him, sailed with him, played tennis, strolled, went to suppers and to balls with him. I had him insane in a fortnight and mad-lin in a month. One night, at a german, we got lost in a conservatory and he tried to kiss me. His arm was around my waist and his lips almost touching mine before I suspected his intention. It took absolute strength to stop him. One of his hands was on my bare shoulder. He looked awfully, eyes bloodshot, breath coming and going fast. I wrenched myself from him and all the customary things came into my mind, but I could not utter one of them. I wanted to tell him he was a brute, that he must never speak to me again, and a hundred things like that, but I couldn't. How it came out I don't know, but this is what I said :

"There is but one road to my lips, Mr. Wyllis !"

"He staggered backward and I escaped to the ball-room, where I was relieved to accept an immediate invitation to dance. When the set was finished a boy handed me this note :"

Miss Vaughan took a crumpled piece of paper from her pocket and read it aloud :

"I know the road and I wish to take it. Please answer by bearer."

Mrs. Madison cried out in a startled way and Miss Vaughan said :

"Yes, he sent me that ; and I answered on the back of a card, 'Wait a month and I may tell you.'"

"That was very risky," interrupted the prudent elder lady.

"No ; I knew him. It was as good as a direct 'yes,' and answered my purpose much better. For the next thirty days I saw him as little as possible. When the limit expired, he sent a note asking me to meet him, and I went. 'How can you look me in the face?' was my inquiry. 'You have acted in an ungentlemanly manner.' 'My love overcame me,' he stammered, for he was really frightened now. 'Your love !' I echoed. 'It was more like the love of a grizzly bear than of a gentleman !' 'I'm very sorry,' he entreated, humbly. 'You asked me to come here,' I continued, abruptly, 'what do you wish?' 'Wish?' he repeated, 'why, *you* ! I have waited your thirty days and I want your answer. Will you marry me?' 'I supposed a month would cure you of that idea,' I said. 'A month? No, nor a year !' he cried. 'Nothing will ever change my mind.' I looked at him. He was pale and trembling. It was a severe case. I pitied him—and then, he had a million, at least. 'It's nothing to act silly about,' I said. 'Let's talk it over sensibly.'

"Then I said everything I could think of to dissuade him. I was an orphan girl, without near relations. He would soon tire of me. It was a sudden passion, which he would regret by-and-by. All use-

less ! It wasn't my relations he wanted, but me. He could give me money enough, either then or after marriage.

"Well," I said at last, 'if you really insist on it.'

"Then he caught my hand and covered it with kisses. And then—'One from the lips to seal the engagement!' he cried ; but I absolutely forbade it. 'Am I never to kiss you?' he asked, blankly. 'Not till after marriage,' I answered. 'Well, then,' he said, 'we will hasten the day.' 'Oh, no!' I said, 'it must wait a very long time.' 'A month?' cried poor Claude, 'not longer!' 'A year, at least,' I answered. Oh, he was a sight, then !"

Miss Vaughan burst into a hearty laugh at the recollection.

"You were cruel, my dear," said the widow, tapping the girl indulgently with her fan.

"I owed him every bit of it," smiled Miss Vaughan. "But the day is set now, early in October, and he is becoming more like a human creature. I'll wager it's the longest year he ever saw, though," and she laughed again.

A buggy stopped at this moment before the house and a young girl alighted. She was between sixteen and seventeen years of age, rather slight, with a bright face, around which the chestnut hair made a handsome frame. It was like little Jessie, grown older. Both ladies arose to meet the new comer at the doorway.

"Who brought you, Cora?" was the mother's first question, as she glanced at the buggy, whose occupant was still waiting at the gate.

"A very nice gentleman, mamma, who came along luckily, just as I had missed the car in Brighton. He offered to drive me on till we caught up to the car.

which was visible down the street, but afterwards he said he might as well bring me home. He knows you, too, Belle," she added. "Here's his card—Mr. Claude Wyllis."

Mrs. Madison uttered a slight exclamation, and Miss Vaughan walked down to the gate with a contracted brow. Mr. Wyllis sat idly in the buggy, evidently awaiting her.

"What business had you to come here?" she asked him, when she reached the wheel.

"Oh, Belle," he answered, "don't scold me *all* the time! I didn't know where the child was going till we got nearly here, and then I couldn't run away, could I? She had my card and I knew you would see it. There was nothing for me to do but wait."

"You will not call here again until I send you word," she commanded, imperiously. "I cannot be dogged all the time. I am free till October, at least."

"October!" he cried, rapturously. "How long it is in coming!"

"All too soon, for me," she said.

His face clouded.

"You were so different before our engagement," he muttered. "You were not so icy, then. Which, I wonder, is the real and which—"

"Mr. Wyllis!" she said, sharply. "I will not listen to such words! Now go; and, remember!"

He drove obediently away and she went back to the house.

"No, he couldn't possibly come in," she said, in response to the questions that were showered upon her. "I'll bring him out some day, though, before—October."

"Oh, is it in October that you are to be married?"

cried Cora. "I'm so glad, Belle. I know he'll make you a lovely husband. He was as pleasant to me as he could be."

Mrs. Madison left the room to see if all was in readiness for dinner.

"He talked so nicely to me," continued Cora. "And when we were almost here he told me to promise him never to let a strange man take me in his buggy again, no matter what the excuse might be. 'It's all right in this case,' he said, 'but you might make a great mistake another time.' As if I couldn't take care of myself! But he spoke so kindly I could only say, 'Yes, sir.' When I pointed out the house, he looked startled. 'Does any one live there except your own people?' he asked. So I told him all about the students that we lodge and also that a Miss Vaughan was visiting us. Then he gave me the card. I'm so glad to have seen him, and I know you'll love him very much."

Miss Vaughan turned to the mirror to arrange her hair. There was moisture in her eyes.

"Cora insists on your sleeping with her," said Mrs. Madison, that night, when she found herself alone for a moment with her guest. "I hope you'll be candid and say so if you prefer a room alone."

"Oh, no, I would much rather have her," responded Miss Vaughan.

"You'll be very careful what you say before her," said the widow, pointedly, "won't you? She is as much of a child as Jessie, and I wish to keep her so as long as possible."

CHAPTER II.

LOVE? WHAT IS LOVE?

As Claude Wyllis drove up the street from Mrs Madison's residence, he encountered a young man who was coming briskly along the sidewalk. The young man's eyes brightened as he recognized the occupant of the buggy, and mutual pleasure was visible in the countenances of both.

"Well, Jack, old boy, how do you find yourself this evening?" was the greeting of Mr. Wyllis, as he drove to the curb, stopped his horse, and leaned out to shake hands.

"Never better!" said Mr. Jack Elton. "And if I had felt ever so ill, the sight of your face would have made me well again."

"Always flattery," smiled Mr. Wyllis, with a significant gesture. "Get in here with me and take a ride for a half hour or so. I have something to say to you, and this place is as good as any."

Mr Elton got into the buggy without more ado. He was a tall, handsome fellow, perhaps twenty-three years of age, of rather dark complexion and of athletic build. He was now a Harvard senior and his oar had helped that year's junior class crew to victory.

"First," said Mr. Wyllis, "let us talk business. Have Brewster & Bassett given you all the money you have needed since I last saw you?"

"Yes," was the reply. "The checks must have come back to you."

"I've only seen half-a-dozen little bits of checks. I feared the bankers had shut down on you, when I saw they weren't larger. You don't mean to say you have lived on what you have drawn on my order?"

"Not quite," replied Jack. "I have been the college correspondent of a Boston paper part of the time, and that has helped me out. As every cent you lend me will be repaid with interest when I get to making my living, I naturally wish to keep the sum as small as possible."

Mr. Wyllis laughed, as he started his horse into a little faster gait.

"Then you still hold to the absurd notion that you are to repay me?" he said.

"I should never have taken a penny on any other condition," said Jack Elton, positively.

"All right," was the rejoinder. "And when you have brought back those few hundreds and put them into my purse, you might go and take a bucketful of water and throw it into Charles river. One would have as much effect as the other."

"If I owed a bucketful of water to the Charles, I would pay it," said Elton, seriously. "Especially if that bucketful had succored me when I was in sore danger of perishing with thirst. Ah, Claude, I never can make it up, this kindness of yours to me!"

Mr. Wyllis put out his hand in a deprecatory way.

"You are breaking our compact," he said. "Gratitude was never to be mentioned between us. You know, as well as I, what I have done has cost me nothing. And I know—if you don't—that I never did

anything, that I never would do anything, for you or anybody else in the world, that would lose me one moment's pleasure."

"Tell that to some one beside me," said Elton. "Have I not known of a score of kindly things you have done—things that have turned sorrow into happiness, that have brightened disconsolate hearts? Why, I believe the sun never rises and sets that you do not perform some action worthy the name of noble."

Mr. Wyllis drew the reins so tightly during this speech that his horse came to a walk. He was driving at random out toward Arlington.

"Did you know I was to be married, Jack?" he said, changing the subject abruptly.

"No," said Elton, showing sudden interest. "Soon!"

"In October."

"I am very glad," said Jack, simply.

"Why?" asked the other, turning his face fully toward his companion.

"Why?" reiterated Elton. "Because I am glad of anything which will make you happier."

Wyllis turned away for a moment. Then he said:

"Does marriage make every man happier?"

"It should," replied Elton. "Surely it was meant to; and surely you would never enter into the state unless you were quite convinced it would be so in your case."

"Shall you ever get married, Jack?"

The question was put in a low tone and the listener was struck with the deep meaning which it seemed to bear.

"That's a hard question, Claude," he answered,

"to put to a student who found himself at nineteen without an education and whose best hope is to find himself at twenty-seven or twenty-eight with a sheepskin and a debt of several thousand dollars as his only capital. If I had the fortune and the bright future immediately before me that you have (don't think I envy you, Claude—I am only too glad it is so) I could answer you without much hesitation."

Mr. Wyllis waited a minute and then said :

"Let me understand you: If you had money enough to live on comfortably and a woman had promised to marry you, you would consider it a cause for congratulation. Is that it?"

Elton smiled, rather than spoke, assent to the proposition.

"Well, then," said Wyllis, slowly, "I may ask you to do me a favor. I've got the money and I'm heartily sick of it. As near as I can figure it out, it has been the ruin of me. It has deprived me of all incentive to make anything of myself, from my cradle up. It has made me a drone, an incubus on society, a perfectly useless incumbrance to the world. The prospect ahead is no better. I have no object in being anything but what I am. Upon my soul, Jack, I think if I were to find myself somehow without a hundred dollars I should astonish you by the success I would make. With a million I am nobody. Now, I have an idea—I am not quite sure of it yet, but it's working in my mind—that I would like some good, honest fellow like you, whom money wouldn't spoil, to take my cash and—my bride with it."

Elton laughed at the conclusion, but seeing that his companion's face did not lose its seriousness, he grew grave.

"Claude, old fellow, you are in the dumps to-night, or else you are trying me. What is the matter?"

"How long have you roomed at Mrs. Madison's?" asked Wyllis, changing the subject again.

"Over a year," replied Elton. "Who told you?"

"Miss Cora."

"Cora!"

"Yes; we were out riding together this afternoon."

Elton was visibly disturbed. His self-possession left him the moment the name of his landlady's daughter was mentioned.

"I—did not—know—you knew her," he stammered.

"I *didn't* know her until to-day," said Wyllis, in an off-hand manner. "I happened to be driving through Brighton and I saw her waiting on the sidewalk. So I took her home."

Jack Elton's teeth shut together with a sudden, vicious snap, and his dark eyes blazed. Had any other man in the world uttered those words in that cool way he would have paid for it, then and there. Wyllis thoroughly comprehended all that was passing in his friend's mind.

"She should have been more thoughtful," said Elton, recovering himself. "Allowing such a liberty to a stranger might sometimes be dangerous."

"Just what I said to her," assented Wyllis. "I did more than say it, too—I made her promise never to do it again. Oh, it's an old trick of mine—if I've done it once I have a hundred times—inducing a girl to do something that might cause talk under other circumstances and then giving her a lecture on the folly of it."

"But, do you think that wise?" interrupted Elton.

"I don't think I've got that deep into it," smiled Wyllis, "but at any rate it is always very amusing."

He knew that every word of this light badinage was cutting into his friend's heart, but his wilfulness was in the ascendant. He knew, too, how far he could strain the cord in this careless way and not break it.

"She told me many things," he went on. "I never met a more entertaining little conversationalist. She's pretty, too, or will be in a few years more—you hadn't noticed it? Well, I'm surprised. Unless I'm totally wrong she'll be what they call a beauty when she's twenty. Her eyes are most expressive; her brow, while not highly intellectual, shows something better; her complexion will be a thing for painters to rave over; and her mouth—"

Jack Elton could not help the gasp which escaped him. He was struck with sudden and awful pain.

"It's nothing!" he explained, when Claude commented on his pallor. "I've been rowing to-day and I'm a trifle exhausted."

Wyllis was affected with momentary contrition.

"That devilish boat will kill you yet," he said. Then he resumed:

"She told me her mother was a widow and that they took students to lodge. Of course I thought of you at the word 'students,' and I asked her if she had ever heard of Mr. Elton. 'Why, yes,' she said. 'He lives at our house.' 'Indeed,' I replied, 'and what kind of a fellow is he?' 'Oh, a very nice gentleman,' she answered with warmth. 'My ten year old sister Jessie calls him her "big brother," and my mother thinks there are few young men as good as he.' There,

Jack, I see the blushes coming to your face and I will leave the story right here "

Mr. Wyllis turned his horse's head towards Watertown and, as they drove through one of the shaded roads which connect that suburb with Arlington, the bright rays of the slowly setting sun shone through the branches upon the pair.

"I see my proposal to give up my promised bride to you would be declined," said Wyllis, jokingly, after they had ridden for a short distance without speaking. "As the old ladies say, 'Your market is already made.'"

Mr. Jack Elton was no master of the art of pretence and his startled look completed the task of convincing his companion.

"She will be a beautiful woman, Jack. As I said before, I congratulate you heartily."

"Claude," interposed Elton, placing his hand on his companion's arm, "you must not speak like that."

Wyllis had never heard him say anything with such a serious mien.

"You have been more than a brother to me, Claude, but there are subjects upon which even you must not jest. Cora Madison is one of them."

Wyllis looked into the serious face with well simulated surprise.

"Jest?" he exclaimed. "And on a subject so dear to you? Jack, I thought you knew me better."

"Claude," said the young student, impulsively, "you have compelled me to a confession. If I were of a different station in life—if I had something to offer to a wife except the weary companionship of a friendless physician, who must expect years of toil before he can hope for any considerable monetary reward—I

might cherish hopes that I could, by-and-by, propose marriage to Miss Cora. She is not yet seventeen, and at the best I should have to wait a long time. But, as it is, she shall never hear a word from me to cloud that happiness which must come to her from some one more fit to be her equal mate."

Claude Wyllis felt each word as if they had been coals of fire.

"You do love her, then?" he said, gently.

"Love her!" repeated Elton, "yes. Too much to ever let her know it unless circumstances arise which are not now within the bounds of apparent probability."

Wyllis felt the depth of meaning in the answer surging through his brain. Ah! Could he only feel a love like that—a love so deep that selfishness could find no place in it!

"You're a queer fellow, Jack," he said, presently. "I can't comprehend you in the least. Here's a man who can take an oar and fairly pull a whole boat-load of incapables over the line ahead of every other class crew—I know a good oarsman who saw you do it—and yet, with a hundred and fifteen pounds of femininity at stake, he drops his paddle without a struggle. It's lucky you've got a sensible chap like me to come along once in a year or two and brace you up. Now, I tell you distinctly, you must marry this girl. Any other idea is too nonsensical to even discuss. You can wait; she can wait. You're nearly twenty-three; she's nearly seventeen. Next year you will graduate from Harvard. Then you'll take a year in the Medical School here and three years in Germany. Then you'll be twenty-seven, as old as I am to a day. Miss Cora will be twenty-one, exactly the age of my fiancée.

You'll get married and go through all the delights of short allowance which novelists tell us make people love each other more and more, but it won't last long. You'll have a handsome practice in a year or two and then all will be smooth sailing. There! I've planned it all out for you and if you deviate a hair from the path I shall almost wish I'd never seen you."

"I wish you were a seer," smiled Elton, brightening a little, "but I know it can never be, so we might as well dismiss it from our minds. But tell me about your own lady. Everything that concerns you has the deepest interest for me."

"Well, in the first place, by a queer coincidence, she is also stopping at this moment at Mrs. Madison's house. I spoke to her there when I left Miss Cora, just before I met you."

"At Mrs. Madison's!" repeated Elton, in astonishment.

"Yes. She is an old acquaintance of the family; in fact, I think her people used to live here. You may have seen her—Miss Isabelle Vaughan."

No. Jack had not seen her, but he had heard her spoken of. He could not tell his friend what he had heard said of her. It might or it might not have a basis of truth. Collegians were not always either just or generous in their estimates of women. He had a momentary wish that Claude's affianced was some one else, and then he felt a sharp sense of pain that Miss Vaughan should be so intimate with the Madisons.

"I did not myself know she was there until Miss Cora told me, along with her other confidences," said Wyllis. "She said Miss Vaughan would stay for some days. She lives in New York when at home, but is quite a bird of passage. Summer usually finds her at

shore, mountain or springs, and winter in Florida or the Carolinas."

He had talked on at random to fill up the time and his companion knew it intuitively.

"How did it happen—the engagement?" Elton asked.

Claude Wyllis laughed, discordantly.

"That is what I've wondered at for a long time."

Elton looked at him strangely.

"Engagements to marry are solemn things, Claude," he said.

"I should say they were!" ejaculated the other. "This one has kept me in a stew since a year ago last June. I shall be glad when it's over."

"Over?"

"Yes; when we're married."

"But it will be only begun then," said Elton. "'For life, for death!' Those are the words."

"Oh, it won't be so serious as all that," expostulated his friend. "If it doesn't suit me I shall give it up, you may be sure. I know the rigmarole the minister repeats—I've heard it often enough—and I suppose 't's necessary to have some formality, but it really means nothing; nothing at all, I assure you. If people took it literally the marriage statistics would show a decided falling off."

Elton looked little short of horrified.

"How a man who really loves a woman can speak in that way is past my comprehension," he said, fervently. "Claude, I must take some of your expressions as meaningless. You can't realize their full significance!"

Wyllis smiled into the troubled eyes that confronted him.

"I'm not all intensity like you," he said. "That cursed fortune of mine has compelled me to amuse myself in odd ways. I first met Miss Vaughan at Newport last year. She tried to be pert with me and I determined to break her. We had a tilt and she came out ahead. The only woman who ever made me fetch and carry is entitled to the spoils of war and since then I've merely graced her chariot wheels."

"But—you love her?" said Jack, anxiously.

"Do I?" cried Wyllis, rather bitterly. "Well, I'm not so sure. I felt something like it, when I first knew her; in those weeks when we were playing at battledore and shuttlecock; something like it, Jack, and yet not the sort of thing that I find in you, when Miss Madison is concerned. I wanted her at first as a man might want a handsome horse. And now I want her as I might like to possess a beautiful wild animal that had bitten me!"

Wyllis' face had changed so terribly before he reached the last words that Elton could hardly retain his composure. He had never heard him look or speak so, and he was about to interpolate something when his friend continued:

"She plays with me as a lioness might with a kitten—and I am helpless. She has postponed the marriage to the very last moment. She has hardly allowed me to be seen in public with her since the engagement. When I waited at Mrs. Madison's gate to-night she stalked to the curbstone and ordered me away. She knows I will bear it all and exults in her power. Why the devil do I tell you these things?" he added, stopping short and shuddering violently.

Elton showed his sympathy in every lineament of his handsome face.

"It may do you good, Claude, to tell me," said he. "If it does, I will hear it all."

"Love?" broke out Wyllis. "What *is* love? Does an accepted lover press his kisses upon the lips of his fair one? Well, I never was permitted to touch hers. Does she allow his arms around her and hide her shrinking, bashful face on his shoulder? Well, I never have had the tiniest embrace. Is she glad when she hears his step and does she run lightly to meet him? I've read of such things in books—I've seen them in plays—but if that's love, it's of a different variety from that possessed by Miss Isabelle Vaughan."

Elton had never seen such a look on the face of any human being.

"Claude," he said, firmly, "you must never marry a woman toward whom you entertain such a feeling as this. It would be sacrilege."

Wyllis turned fiercely upon him.

"Not marry her! By God, I will, though! Inside the wedded bond she shall find me her master! Do you think I would act this disgraceful part for fifteen months and then throw up my reward? Let her play her pretty game while she may! For every pang she has given me I will give her a hundred! The sweetheart may look down on me loftily, but the wife shall be under my feet! I'll—"

Elton cried out:

"Don't Claude! It's like insanity! Calm yourself!"

But he went on:

"We were out in the conservatory at Newport, Jack, among the roses. She had made me frantic—yes, she knew what she was doing. We had waltzed together. I tried to kiss her. One of my hands fell, by

pure accident, on her shoulder. It was but a second, but every particle of sense vanished from my brain. She knew all. Shrewdly and calculatingly she took every advantage. I do not blame her. Had she given me that kiss then, the tables would have been turned. She held the winning card—the ability to restrain herself—and, like a fly in a spider's trap, I surrendered without a struggle. That was *her* victory. Mine will come in October!"

He paused, and Elton could not for his life find suitable words in which to reply. They had driven down Brattle Street and were nearly at Mrs. Madison's gate again. A little figure on the sidewalk spied Jack in the buggy and called to him. It was Jessie.

"Oh, Jack, we've wanted you dreadfully," said the child, as the buggy came to a stop. "Cora wanted to have some singing and she got Mr. Binden to come down for the bass and we thought, of course, you would give us the baritone, but we could not find you anywhere. Miss Vaughan sings beautifully, just like an angel—do you know Miss Vaughan? Where have you been riding and who is this gentleman?"

The frankness and innocence of the child came like a cool breeze of evening to help drive the heat from Claude Wyllis' brow. He and Elton both alighted.

"Who am I?" he said, putting his hand on Jessie's curls. "So you don't know, eh? Well, I know who *you* are. You are Cora Madison's little sister Jessie; and you are ten years old; and you call Jack Elton your 'big brother.'"

Seeing that the oddity of his friend's manner confused the child, Elton said:

"Jessie, this is Mr. Claude Wyllis."

"Ah, ha!" cried the sprite, nodding her head wisely. "Now I can tell something about *you*, too! You are the man who takes girls to ride, and then tells them never to let anybody else do the same thing; and you are going to marry Miss Vaughan in October. You see I've heard of you, also. You must come into the house, because you have surely got time enough now, if you hadn't before, and mamma will think it real rude if you don't."

Wyllis felt how hard it was to equivocate with those honest eyes fixed upon him, but he said:

"My dear Miss Jessie, if I come I shall miss the ten o'clock train, which I have barely time to catch." Then, dropping his voice to a whisper, he said to Elton, "I'm at Young's; run in to-morrow," and, with a goodby to each, he drove away.

"I've seen your Mr. Wyllis," said Jessie, to Miss Vaughan, five minutes later, quite unabashed by the presence of several other persons who were gathered in her mother's parlor.

"How do you like him?" asked that young lady, after hearing the particulars of the interview.

"W-e-l-l," said Jessie, slowly, "I don't ex-act-ly *like* him and I don't ex-act-ly *dis-like* him. If he was *my* lover, though—and came as near the house as *he* did—and drove off to catch trains instead of coming in to *see* me—"

"Jessie!" called Cora, warningly.

"I don't *care*; I *mean* it!" she persisted, going to where Elton had seated himself on the sofa. "Say, Jack, don't you think, if a man really cared much for a girl, he ought to find time to *see* her, even if it was the *teeniest* minute?"

Everybody in the room looked at Elton, as he drew Jessie to him and ran his fingers through her hair.

"Yes, Jessie, I think so," he said.



CHAPTER III.

ONE WAY TO ENTER HARVARD.

Jack Elton was not happy when he went to his chamber that night. A double grief rested on his heart. The feeling that had grown up there towards Cora Madison had received a wound. For a long time he had known that he loved her. For almost as long he had striven to master the sentiment and striven in vain. Now he had heard her spoken of lightly by the man whom he esteemed above all others—the man who had made it possible for him to become something in the world above a common laborer—and it gave him a degree of pain which he would not have believed could come from such a source. Then, not so heavy as his own, but still of great weight, was the burden of Claude's own situation. Both troubles pressed upon him, making his temples to ache and his heart to grow faint.

He had been an orphan boy in the West. His chance for education seemed very slight when he left the grammar school at eleven years of age. Books of every kind that fell in his way were eagerly devoured, but they were all too few and not of the best. From the first he hoped—somehow—to acquire learning, but years passed and the prospect grew no brighter. He

had not a single friend to whom he could appeal. The rough farmers whose land he tilled were content with their weekly *Tribune* or *Pioneer*, and could not understand what a "workingman" could want with more. He turned the soil in the late autumn, harrowed and seeded it in the spring, reaped it in the early fall—and waited.

One day he resolved to try to become a doctor. He went to a physician's office and stated his case, asking employment.

The medical man was struck by his earnestness, but he said :

"That is not the way to become a successful doctor, now, my young man. Times have changed. The physician of the future is to be a man of the most liberal education. No one with a mere technical knowledge of anatomy and hygiene can win the prizes of the next twenty years. Lay your foundation deep in some college. Get a degree of B. A. before you try for one of M. D. If that proves impossible, take some other method of getting a livelihood, for that of medicine will not do."

Jack turned sadly away.

"Go East!" called the physician after him. "Go to Boston. Many a man has passed through Harvard with no capital beside pluck and determination. Get into the right environment and await your chance."

So Jack put what few dollars he had into his pocket—they were not many—and went to Milwaukee. Here he sought out a steamer that was going through the Great Lakes. From the captain he readily obtained permission to "work his passage" to Ogdensburg, N. Y. During the journey, which was somewhat tempestuous, he attracted the captain's attention and told his

story. When they reached the steamer's destination, the captain handed him a letter addressed to the superintendent of the railroad and asked him to deliver it. To Jack's surprise the result was a pass to Boston.

The day after his arrival at the Hub he presented himself at the dean's office in the college yard at Cambridge. The information which he there obtained startled him. It would take at least a year, and probably more, in some preparatory school, or with a private tutor, before he could enter the college at all. The expense after that, at the lowest possible estimate, seemed gigantic to him. For a moment he wished himself back in Minnesota, with his hands on the plow and the reins of his horses hanging over his neck.

As he went out toward the street, his dejected appearance attracted the attention of a young man who stood at the gate. Though but eighteen, Elton looked at least two years older.

"What's the matter?" said the young man, kindly. "Didn't you pass?"

Elton was too disheartened to resent the apparent impertinence of the question. He saw that the young man was well dressed and realized that his own garments were unfashionable enough. There seemed a gulf between them that might have led him at another time to make a sharp retort.

"I did not apply for admission," he said, "but only to learn the requirements. I find they are too hard for me."

"I wish they were twice as hard," said Claude Wyllis, for it was he. "Then everybody would give up the confounded nonsense. It is a terrible waste of time, to my mind, learning these dead languages and

deader sciences. I've been here three years and I've had enough. I only wish I'd decided to quit it sooner."

Elton looked at his new acquaintance with considerable interest and felt drawn toward him in a manner he could not account for.

"I wanted to be a doctor," he went on to explain, "and I lack the first requisite, a good education. I came from the West on the advice of a physician there, but I find the prospects harder than I supposed. I think I shall have to give it up."

"Oh, if you're to be a doctor, of course you'll have to write Latin," said Wyllis, "in order to puzzle your patient and his druggist with unmeaning recipes. But I should think you might get Latin enough for that at a preparatory school. Then all you'll need is a lot of salts and senna and a carving knife."

Elton laughed at this statement and so did Wyllis, who evidently thought it a good joke.

"But I haven't even been to a preparatory school yet," said Jack. "It must seem odd to you, but I hadn't the remotest idea what was necessary."

"Come over into my room in Holyoke," said Claude, kindly. "There must be some way of accommodating a fellow who wants to drudge away half-a-dozen years. Come over and let's see what can be done."

So Jack went over to Holyoke and was duly amazed at the magnificence—as he thought it—of Mr. Wyllis' apartments there. They were the typical rooms of the Harvard boy. The furniture was clothed in bright colors, and the pictures, which fairly covered the wall, were mostly of female objects.

Little by little Wyllis learned the whole story

"The dean was right," he said. "It will take a year or more of hard study to fit you to enter the freshman class. A private tutor would be much the surest way."

"And that would cost more than I have any means of getting," said Elton, with a sigh. "It's very clear I am not to be a college man and I must make up my mind to it with as little regret as I can."

Wyllis went and looked out of the window with a thoughtful air, which, however, immediately vanished. A young lady was passing on the opposite side of the street, and he threw her a kiss, to which she returned a bright smile.

"I want to look into your case, if you'll let me" he said, when he came back. "Where are you staying?"

"Nowhere in particular," Jack confessed. "I only arrived in Boston this morning."

"Well," said Wyllis, thoughtfully. Then, after a moment, "Would you do me a favor?"

"If I can, I shall be only too glad to do so."

"I've got through with the old 'varsity, as I told you," said Wyllis, "and yet I am in a quandary over these rooms. I hired them for the term before I decided to quit and I've got to pay for them. It seems a pity to lock them up, and beside, I have got things I would rather were personally attended to. There will be letters delivered here, which I might lose, and—"

He paused to see if Elton caught the idea. It was evident he did, by the rich color which swept over his face.

"Excuse me," he said. "I cannot misunderstand your offer. It is made in kindness, I am sure, but I could never think of accepting it."

Wyllis looked distressed.

"You know me so little," he said, "that my proposition doubtless seems sudden. But you must look at things squarely as they are. You have come more than a thousand miles with a certain object. The care of these rooms may seem disagreeable to you, at first thought, (though the janitor does everything) but you should not be too proud. I knew a fellow—a very nice fellow, too—who waited on table for his board and got high rank at last."

Elton caught eagerly at the suggestion.

"I would do that, too," he said. "I am not proud. I will do any honest work to get an education. All I object to is anything that looks like charity."

"Spoken like a hero!" cried Wyllis. "That's the sort of talk I like to hear. The table racket can't be worked now, though. They've got nothing but niggers here. Besides, it wouldn't help you in the preparation. If you are to qualify yourself for next year you will need to work night and day at your books."

"All of which will bring me to the same conclusion it has you," said Elton, good-naturedly—"that I must give it up."

Wyllis walked over to him and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Give it up! Then you don't care for it as I thought you did."

Elton rose and confronted him with a pleasant smile.

"You speak kindly and I will confide my whole situation to you," he said. "It will cost, the dean tells me, two thousand dollars to graduate me, with the utmost economy. I have one hundred and fifty-seven

dollars and some odd cents towards the amount. It will take but a minute's figuring to show how much I shall need to accomplish the work. The only thing I want now is some one to tell me where to get it."

Wyllis brought his fist down on the mantel with vehemence.

"Now you are growing wise," he said. "You want nothing but money. You have the time, the inclination, the ability, I'm sure, and all you need is the cash. Why not borrow it?"

Elton came very near making an impatient reply. It seemed as if his questioner must be making game of him.

"Who would lend money to a stranger, without security, under such circumstances?" he asked.

"I will," said Wyllis, briefly.

Elton started.

"You?" he said.

"Yes, I. Here is my card. I have lately come into possession of a good deal of wealth. Some of it is in manufacturing stock, some in railroads, some in real estate, and some I keep to loan. I am a greedy fellow, I assure you, a regular Shylock. You are the kind of chap I am looking for. You are in great need of accommodation and will pay the highest rate."

Jack looked puzzled.

"What rate?" he asked.

"Well, in your case," said Wyllis, reflectively, "I should want ten per cent. on the first year's receipts after you get into a paying practice, and some time or other, when you find it convenient, you might return the principal."

"Are you in earnest?" gasped Jack, catching at the straw which seemed so powerless to save him.

"Could I borrow the money of you without incommoding you at all and repay it later with a handsome bonus? Would you trust me so far, with nothing but my note and my word of honor? For I would repay it to the last sou with my earliest earnings. You would be sure to get it all back—unless—unless I should die beforehand."

Wyllis looked radiant as he heard this partial acceptance of his proposal.

"Your problematical death shall not stand in our way," he smiled. "We money-lenders have a way of securing ourselves in such cases. You must insure your life and make the policy payable to me. I do not lend money so carelessly as you might think. I shall want a good legal note and a carefully drawn agreement. You will find me a sharper and, if you violate the bond by so much as a hair's breadth, I shall demand the pound of flesh, with whatever flowage of blood may ensue."

"How can I ever repay you!" cried Elton, rapturously.

"You will repay me when the time comes, or there will be trouble," laughed Wyllis. "I am going to have an open-and-shut agreement. And, as this money is to help you to a classical and medical education, I shall reserve in writing the privilege of stopping your allowance whenever I find you neglecting your studies."

CHAPTER IV

A MIDNIGHT COMPACT.

All of this conversation ran through Jack's head again, as he sat in his room at Mrs. Madison's, on the night of his ride with Wyllis. Four years had passed and he still owed his living, his education, and all his hopes for the future to the generous offer there made and accepted. He had passed his year of preparation and become successively a freshman, sophomore and junior, ranking high in each class. He had seen his benefactor at infrequent intervals, and not long at any one time. The Boston banking firm of Brewster & Bassett had honored all his calls for money, according to the arrangement made at the beginning. In leisure moments he had studied medical works and attended several lectures, besides seizing every opportunity to converse with the physicians whom he met. He felt that the profession he had chosen was the one to which he was best adapted. Every moment was bringing him nearer to the life he coveted and to those German schools where its intricacies can best be learned.

He should have been happy ; but, as has happened to many another man, the "woman in the case" had come to distress him. Cora Madison : Sixteen years of age. With dresses that hardly touched the tops of her little boots : A girl still in the Cambridge High School.

Jack Elton's brightly pictured career as a doctor lost most of its beauty when he came to know how

little he would care for it all unless this girl could share it with him.

He had said very little to Cora during the year he had roomed at her mother's house, but during the last few months he had learned much of her. He had discovered how utterly distasteful she found the cramped life which she was compelled to lead.

He had seen her decline invitations to parties because she deemed her garments too poor or too old for the company that would be there. Her mother's income was very slight and luxuries were out of the question. Elton had learned to bear poverty for himself very well. It had stood for years like a wall between him and the career he sought, and yet he could endure it. To ask this girl to share it was another thing entirely.

Jessie and he were fast friends. He was not afraid of Jessie; she wasn't old enough. She used to tell him many things of Cora, running on like the little chatterbox she was, when once she began the subject.

"I do hope some awfully rich man will die some day and leave all his money to Cora," she would say. "At least, if he is *going* to die, I mean; for, of course, I don't want him to die on purpose. My! doesn't she love pretty things! I don't think she ever owned a dress yet that she thought good enough to go to school in. Her jewelry, too. The same old things, she says, that she had years and years ago. Mamma always praises Cora for staying at home and helping her, but it's not because she likes housework. No, indeed! Give her what she'd like to wear and she'd go to every party there is in Cambridge!"

"I can't believe your sister is so vain as all that," Elton would reply.

Then the count would grow serious.

"It's not what you'd call vain, exactly, Jack. I don't know what it is. She'd just rather not go anywhere than not look as well as the others, that's all. As for me, I never care *what* I wear. Mamma says I'd as lief go to church with a gingham apron on as anything else."

"When you are a young lady you will change about that," Jack would answer.

"Oh, Cora was always the same. When she was a three-year-old baby they say she would cry if her dress didn't suit. She can't help it. Mamma says it was born in her."

Would she ever like him, even if he had a fortune to offer her? Jack didn't know. It seemed doubtful. There is that intense longing which makes us all afraid. Elton would have been twice as much with Cora Madison if he had not been in love with her.

He had a fine sense of honor. He could not try to win the girl's heart, when he had only his empty hands to offer her. Besides, he kept saying to himself, "She is so very young." That was his only consolation—her extreme youth. Perhaps before she became of marriageable age something might happen. Who could tell?

He could not sleep and at eleven o'clock he went out with the intention of taking a short walk. It was a very warm night and he found Mrs. Madison on the piazza.

"Going out, Mr. Elton?" she said. "Isn't it rather late?"

"It is so warm," he explained, "and I am not sleepy. I thought I would take a turn or two up the street."

"If you were going nowhere in particular," said the lady, "you might sit down here. There is a good breeze at this corner. I would like to talk to you."

Jack sat down, much surprised. Mrs. Madison's conversation with her lodgers had usually been limited to the compliments of the season and a "Thank you," when she received her rent.

"You know Mr. Claude Wyllis, I understand," said Mrs. Madison.

"Oh, yes," said Jack.

"You know he is to marry Miss Vaughan in October."

"Yes; he told me to-night."

"Have you been acquainted with him for a long time?"

"About four years."

"And you like him?"

"Very much," said Jack, warmly.

"I am glad for Belle's sake she is to do so well," said the lady. "He is very rich" (here Jack winced) "and his family is one of the oldest" (here Jack winced again) "and most respectable in the State, I am told. I have always taken a great interest in Belle. She was born here in Cambridge. Her mother died when she was very young and her father always seemed the most unfortunate of men. He tried in every way to make a fortune, but was drowned six or seven years ago, somewhere in South America."

Mr. Elton grew quite interested.

"Miss Vaughan could not have been over fifteen years old at that time," he ventured. "Very young to be left entirely alone in the world."

"Yes," assented Mrs. Madison, "and how she has got along has always puzzled me. She was with him

in that South American place when he lost his life. It has been said that his death was not an accident—that he did it purposely. The story was at the time that he had been gambling and lost his last dollar.”

“Very unfortunate for such a young girl to be left alone among strangers,” Jack suggested.

It was not like him to pry into other people's affairs, but in this case he resolved to learn all that he could and felt justified in doing so.

“Yes,” replied the widow, “it was hard on poor Belle. I did not hear of her again for the next three or four years and had come to suppose she was dead, too, when one day she walked into the house here, grown up to be the handsome woman you have seen. She dropped a hint about some wealthy gentleman having adopted her or taken an interest in her friendless condition. Of course I couldn't ask questions. I was in pecuniary difficulties at the time and she offered me what I needed. She is a most generous girl and I am sure no one will ever suffer when she gets to be a rich man's wife.”

Poor Mrs. Madison! She is always “in pecuniary difficulties,” as most of her friends had occasion to know.

“Miss Vaughan is very handsome, is she not?” she said, as Elton did not seem inclined to speak.

“I presume so,” he replied, haltingly. “I hardly know. I am no judge.”

“Everybody thinks so,” said the widow. “When she came home first from the South I thought the students would break the door-bell. She went everywhere, to ball after ball and reception after reception. There was a carriage in front of the house every moment she was here, I really believe. I never saw

another girl as vivacious as she was. She has become much more sedate now—partly on account of her engagement, I suppose.”

Elton made no response.

“Cora thinks there is no one like her,” continued Mrs. Madison. “Belle has been very good to her—made her lots of presents in the way of clothing and fancy things. They are sleeping together to-night, like two sisters, and to-morrow they are going to make calls. Why, what is the matter with you, Mr. Elton?”

If Jack had been warm when he came out of doors, he was on fire now. His throat had swollen until nothing but the forcible removal of his necktie saved him from strangulation.

“I am not well!” he ejaculated, hoarsely, “and I must beg you to excuse me. A stroll will make me feel better.”

He staggered down the walk and out to the street, while the good landlady mentally gave the same reason for his complaint that Wyllis had done in jest.

“It’s the boat rowing,” she decided. “I must give him a caution or he’ll be down sick.”

Jack walked over to Jarvis Field and threw himself on the ground. The night had grown cloudy and no one, not within a few feet, could see him.

“What a mother!” he muttered to himself. “And Cora is sleeping with that woman, and will show herself all over Cambridge and Boston with her to-morrow! Good Heaven! It will make me wild! I believe everything they say about her,” he went on to himself. “Everything! She is not fit to breathe the same air with Cora Madison! But I am helpless! Oh, what can I do—what can I do?”

For an hour he wrestled with his thoughts and

could find no escape. Then he arose and walked moodily back to Mrs. Madison's house. As he came to the corner of the fence, a woman's figure rose suddenly from the shadow of a tree and raised a warning finger.

"Hush!" it said. "Everyone in the house is sound asleep. No one knows I am out of doors. I have a word to say to you."

"Say it," he said, sternly, "and quickly!"

"You are my enemy!" said the figure. "I knew it the moment I saw you. You would rob me of the friendship of these people here, if you could; yes, and of the man whose promised wife I am!"

"Miss Vaughan—" he began.

"Stop!" she interrupted, hardly above a whisper. "Speak lower. I overheard all Mrs. Madison said to you to-night. I know what construction you put upon her story of me. It matters not that you are wholly wrong, for it is not at present in my power to prove it to you. You cannot stop my marriage. You may make my friends in this house turn the cold shoulder to me for a little while, but that will not harm me in the end. Mr. Elton, I warn you not to interfere in affairs which are none of your own!"

He drew himself up. There was light enough for her to see, two feet away, the scornful look in his face.

"You love Cora," she continued. "You shall marry her. She will take my advice when the moment comes. Don't waste words in denials," she added, as he tried to speak. "I saw it the moment you entered the parlor this evening. If you wish to be let alone, you must let me alone. Attempt to crush me, and we shall see who can crush the harder!"

Elton's mind was in a tumult.

"What do you say?" she demanded. "What shall it be between us—peace or war?"

"I have one condition that must be complied with before I answer," he said.

"And that is—"

"That you leave this house to-morrow morning."

"I agree," she said, a spasm crossing her handsome features. "And after that—"

"So long as your name cannot be in any way connected with Miss Cora, I shall have no motive to harm you."

"It is a bargain!" she whispered, and vanished into the house like a shadow.

CHAPTER V.

"HOW DID YOU LIVE IN BRAZIL?"

The next morning, when Isabelle Vaughan awoke, her eyes rested on the face of Cora Madison, still in the depths of a peaceful and profound slumber. The countenance was one that would have attracted the attention of the most callous spectator, but to Miss Vaughan it had at the moment a surpassing interest. It was in truth a beautiful face, lying as it was on the dimpled, curved arm of its owner, with its pure complexion, long lashes fringing the closed eyes and the rosebud mouth parted just enough to display the pearly treasures beyond the lips. Could it have been transferred to canvas it might well have been labelled,

"Sleeping Innocence." The slight bosom rose and fell with the girl's regular breathing, rustling the narrow lace on the neck of her chemise like the waving of summer grasses under the gentle caresses of the south wind. Woman as she was, Miss Vaughan was powerfully affected by the spectacle and, yielding to an impulse she could not resist, she startled the sleeper into sudden wakefulness by clasping her in her arms and imprinting a kiss on her cheek.

"Ah, it's you!" gasped the astonished maiden, opening her eyes wide. "Is it very late?"

"On the contrary, I think it must be very early," was the reply, "and I have committed a gross cruelty in waking you. I did not mean to do it. The act took place before I had time to form a resolve."

The girl threw her disengaged arm around her friend's neck and returned her kiss with warmth.

"I am glad to be awakened when I find *you* here!" she said. "I wish you could stay always."

"You would tire of me much sooner than 'always,'" smiled Miss Vaughan, a little sadly. "And besides," she added, "you forget that, in a month and a-half more, another will hold a claim upon me."

Cora's happy look disappeared instantly.

"A month and a-half," she said. "Why do you allow him to take you so soon? He should wait another year. You are too young, Belle. Why, you are only twenty-one. It is terrible to be chained up at twenty-one!"

The girl's perfect ingenuousness charmed her friend.

"Look out you are not wearing the same kind of chains yet earlier!" she said, mockingly. "Some mas-

culine heart will surely be captured by those bright eyes of yours long ere four years have flown."

Cora tried to laugh, but she colored in spite of herself.

"Don't be foolish, Belle. Mamma tells me every day I am a mere child and I don't think she will consider me old enough to get married before I am forty. We shall agree on that, if on nothing else. It is understood between mamma, Jessie and I, that I am to be the old maid of this family."

Miss Vaughan smiled roguishly.

"I am glad one pair of ears I could mention are not listening to those words," she said.

"Whose?" cried Cora, sitting up in bed and looking thoroughly startled. "Ah, but," she added, drawing a deep breath, "how silly I am! You are joking, of course!"

"Indeed, no!" replied Belle, determined to try the effect of a bold move. "Can you think of no young gentleman whose heart beats faster when you are near, whose tongue fails him when he tries to speak to you, whose eyes follow your every motion? Honest, now, can't you?"

"Not one," replied Cora, growing rosier, nevertheless. "Not one; and I must have noticed it, had such a thing occurred."

Miss Vaughan nestled into her pillow and smiled up at the earnest face above her.

"Then I will not set your bosom to palpitating by telling you," she said. "For, mark my words, he will tell you himself before long."

Cora bent down caressingly and kissed her companion between the eyes.

"Oh, Belle, darling, *do* tell me—that's a good girl!

That is, tell me who you *think* it is, for I know you are entirely mistaken. I never can guess anything and I should hunt through the whole directory in vain."

"The *city* directory or the *college* directory?" asked Miss Vaughan, meaningly.

"The *college* directory?"

"Yes, the college directory. The senior class—for instance, the lodgers at Mrs. Madison's—perhaps," Belle proceeded, slowly. "There—now you have it!"

Cora shook her head in a puzzled way.

"Not Mr. Binden?" she queried.

"Not Mr. Binden, of course."

"Not Mr. Danforth—no, for he is engaged to a lady in Brookline."

"Not he, for he is engaged to a lady in Brookline," drawled Belle, provokingly.

"Those are our only seniors," said Cora, "except—Oh, Belle, you don't mean Mr. Elton? Why, he never looks at me!"

Miss Vaughan laughed aloud.

"Say—is it Jack—dear, good Jack? Then you have made a very natural mistake, dearest. He is engaged to Jessie and he can't marry us both."

Cora seemed much relieved when she had uttered this witticism.

"I am wiser than you, my dear," Belle said, "and my specialty is love affairs. Now, I am going to tell you seriously, and there is no need of it's making you cry, either, that Mr. Jack Elton loves you and that the reason why he says so little to you and acts so constrained when you are near is *because* he loves you. He finds Jessie interesting, because she is Cora's sister. You are very young yet, little girl, but I did

think you were old enough not to be misled in such a positive case as this.'

Then Cora became very sober and said: "Belle, dear, you ought not to make fun of Jack, for he is one of the best young men I ever knew. He has had an awful hard time in life, worked at all sorts of rough things, living on farms, and he never had any polish until he came to Harvard. He studies with all his might and means to be at the head some day, and I am sure he will. He is to be a doctor—one of the best kind, like those who live on Boylston street, opposite the Public Garden, and charge ten dollars for feeling your pulse. As soon as he gets through college he is going into the Medical School and then to Germany. His clothes are not very elegant, (they are as good as mine though, for that matter) and there are things, I know, he feels backward in; but he is dreadful good—and—Belle, I wish you wouldn't—"

She paused, noticing for the first time the odd combination which beamed from Miss Vaughan's roguish eyes.

"Go on!" cried that young lady. "You are doing excellently! Champion him all you can! If he could hear you now he would have little fear of your threat of being an old maid!"

But she could not induce Cora to join in her merriment.

"Did you really mean it?" asked the girl, in a tone which showed how seriously the matter affected her.

"Mean it, my darling?" cried Belle, folding her arms around her. "Every word! I am a prophetess; I can foresee events; and I tell you, Cora, the day will come when Jack Elton will hold you in his

arms—as I do now—and kiss away the blushes on these cheeks—as I am doing."

Cora gave a little scream and tried gently to disengage herself. The imagery was too real.

"Oh, Belle, that's *awful!*" she said.

Then Miss Vaughan laughed again.

"What would you expect?" she asked. "What kind of a husband would you want—one who would never embrace you?"

"I don't—think I—would want one—at all!" said Cora, her voice trembling at the newly-awakened emotions. "But, Belle, are you *sure* Jack cares for me? I have admired him so much. How many times I have wished I could tell him how brave he seemed to me, fighting out his way in life, with everything against him; but I always thought he avoided me. Could it be that he was afraid, as you seem to believe, and that he really liked me all the while?"

Her companion felt the tears coming into her eyes as she listened. In every woman's heart there is a spring of salt water, if only the proper vein be touched, and Isabelle Vaughan, whatever Jack Elton might think, was a woman.

"I am sure of it, Cora," she said, earnestly. "I *know* it. I know more than I can tell you. Mr. Elton does not like me; he thinks he has reason to hate me, but there he is wrong. After I am gone he may urge you to give up friendships that you prize. Understand, I am not criticising him—he does what he thinks is right—but his likes or dislikes of others have nothing to do with this matter. He loves *you*, of that be certain. Watch him and prove it. Some day, when he gains courage to tell you so, when he has a home and

a livelihood to offer you, write and tell me I predicted well."

She arose and began to dress herself; and Cora, quite pleased at all she had learned, did likewise. When they had partly finished, a tap on the door announced a visitor. It was only little Jessie.

"I came to tell you mamma says you needn't hurry any," said the child, seating herself in one of the big chairs. "There's only ourselves, you know, and it makes no difference whether we breakfast late or early. I've been up an hour and out of doors, but I'm not hungry—at least, not *very*. I've been for a long walk, too, up to Memorial Hall to wait for Jack, and then over into Norton's woods with him, after flowers. Jack is awful blue this morning about something, I don't know what. He's just as pleasant as ever, but he seems to be thinking and thinking to himself. Sometimes I had to speak to him twice before he would hear me."

She paused a moment and then burst out—

"What a pretty bride you'll be, Miss Vaughan!"

Miss Vaughan gave a start.

"Well, Jessie," she said, "you are the queerest little girl and say the most unexpected things of any child I ever saw!"

"Oh, but you *will*!" persisted Jessie. "You've got the *fairest* arms and neck—"

"Stupid one!" called out Cora, "brides don't show their arms and necks. They wear tulle or nun's veiling or white satin or something else, clear to chin and gloves."

"Oh, well," said Jessie, unabashed, "perhaps they *do*—at the *church*; but—"

"You'd better not get up for such early walks very

often," suggested Cora. "You are getting altogether too wise for your years."

Miss Vaughan seemed to find this conversation vastly amusing.

"When Cora gets married, Jessie," she suggested, "you must pay attention to all the details of dress, and then there will be no possibility of your making mistakes."

"Cora!" sneered the child, with a pout. "Nobody 'll ever marry her. She snaps folks up too much!"

This made Miss Vaughan laugh again.

"I heard something about you, Jessie," she said "I heard you were engaged—to Mr. Jack Elton."

Jessie was not the least bit taken aback by this wholly unexpected statement.

"Well, if nobody else marries Jack, I will, if he wants me," she said, with a very grave face.

Cora exchanged glances with her friend.

"I think that will do for the present, Jess," she said. "Run and tell mamma that we will be ready in ten minutes."

Jessie vanished.

"What a bright, winsome little thing she is!" said Miss Vaughan. "One can never tell what she is going to say next. There is a great deal in your little sister, Cora, and some day she will grow into a remarkable woman. Look out she isn't your rival by-and-by!"

"I can't forget what you said about Jack," said Cora. "I am very foolish to talk about love—I am not seventeen into a fortnight—and I am sure I don't understand very much about such things; but I do like Jack, and if I thought I could help him in any way I would give anything to do it. It is not a senti-

mental feeling," she continued, growing red again under the quizzical glances which her friend bestowed upon her, "only, he is so noble, so unselfish, I cannot help admire him. He seems to have no intimates and Jessie is the only girl he ever cares about being with. If I could do him any good—"

Miss Vaughan kissed the small mouth, which had begun to tremble a little.

"You can make or unmake him," she said, seriously. "Show him from now on that his success is of interest to you. It is easy to do that without forwardness. Let him see that you do not avoid him. Treat him fairly and openly. Try this for one month and let me hear the result. It is true, my dear, that you are very young. It is also true that by the time he has returned from his German hospitals you will be much older. Who knows how much inspiration the thought of a sweetheart waiting here for him might be to a lonesome student four thousand miles away!"

The girl returned the kiss and they went down to the dining-room with their arms around each other's waists. Mr. Jack Elton was there, but Belle did not see him until he had taken in the friendly attitude.

The surprise and shock was mutual. Elton was instantly angered at what he considered Miss Vaughan's deception. When he saw her last she promised to leave the house the next morning. There was yet time for her to keep her word, but he had understood she would avoid undue intimacy with Cora.

Belle divined his thoughts with the speed of the electric current. Cora, not in the least suspecting

what passed in the minds of the other two, felt startled at seeing so unexpectedly the person of whom she had just been talking in such a strain. It was a most awkward meeting for all three. The greetings were constrained ones and Cora felt a heartache at noting what seemed a colder manner on Elton's part than ever before.

He was merely paying his room rent and the receipt of the landlady had just been handed to him. He started to withdraw, when Miss Vaughan stepped forward and with admirable finesse, said :

"I will bid you good-by as well as good-morning, Mr. Elton. I have decided that I must attend to certain business matters in New York, which will necessitate my leaving Cambridge to-day."

"Leave to-day!" cried the entire Madison family in one breath. "We thought you would stay until Saturday, at least!"

"It will be impossible," said Miss Vaughan, watching Elton narrowly. "I have thought it all over and I must go."

She tried to have him see in her eyes, which were turned toward him alone, that she meant to keep her faith.

"So it's good-by to you now," she added, "until October, when, I understand, Mr. Wyllis will require your assistance on an important occasion."

She tried to look modest, but to him she appeared brazen. He did not like her better on acquaintance. There came ringing through his brain the thought of the previous night. "I believe everything they say about her! Everything!—everything!"

He said good-by with difficulty. His education in the art of dissimulation was very imperfect. If it had

When in the Harvard curriculum he would have failed of his degree.

When, several hours later, Miss Vaughan tore herself away from the friends who felt genuine sorrow at her departure, she pressed an envelope, unseen by the children, into Mrs. Madison's hand. There was one hundred dollars in money in it and a note requesting that it might be spent mainly for Cora, but in such a way that she should not suspect its source. Cora was too proud to have accepted such a gift and Miss Vaughan knew it.

At the Boston & Albany station on Kneeland street she was about to enter the drawing-room car for New York when Elton confronted her.

"You have ten minutes," he said, hurriedly, "and I have something important to say to you."

"Very well," she responded, with external composure, "we will walk down the platform."

"You have left Mrs. Madison, as you promised," he said, when they were alone. "What you may have done before you left your chamber this morning I do not know and I do not ask—"

"It was nothing against you," she interrupted, "as you may some day know."

"As I said," he continued, "I do not know and I do not ask. What I wish to tell you now is, I regret my contract with you last night. I thought then only of myself. I should have thought also of another—of one to whom I owe all I am and all I hope to be."

A look of sudden intelligence crossed her features, but he did not see it. His eyes were riveted on the platform.

"What do you demand?" she asked, in firm tones. "I am very calm, sir. There are things I should con-

cede and there are others I should refuse. If you have anything to ask of me, consider carefully before you utter the words."

"I have to think of my friend, Mr. Wyllis," said Elton, without raising his eyes.

"Well, cannot your friend—let us say *my* friend—take care of himself?"

"No," he answered. "Not in a case like this. He is hypnotized."

She felt inclined to laugh—it seemed so absurd—but she restrained herself and only said: "Well?"

"You were left a friendless orphan girl in South America at fifteen years of age."

"Yes."

"How have you lived since that time? It is a plain question. I want a plain answer."

She looked askance at him and saw that he was immovable.

"Perhaps on borrowed money—as you do."

He winced a little.

"You are not answering me," he asserted, not relishing her reply. "You say 'perhaps.' Let me also offer a 'perhaps.' *Perhaps it was on the wages of SHAME!*"

She controlled herself with a mighty effort.

"You are a bold man to say that to me!" she said. "Why do you cast down your eyes? Look up! I want to see the appearance of a man's face who can offer a woman an insult like that!"

He answered her challenge and she searched his face with flashing eyes.

"You have insulted me beyond all bounds, Mr. Elton, but I will answer you. If you insist on knowing on what money I lived after my father's death you

may come to New York five weeks from to-day. You will find me at this address."

She handed him a card.

"I shall come," he said, "before October 9th, the date set for Claude Wyllis' marriage. If I am satisfied then, it will be all right. If not—"

"I know," she nodded. "You will forbid the banns. Write or telegraph the day before you come, lest I should be absent from the city."

The conductor was calling: "All aboard!" The big bell in the depot had sounded its one stroke. People were looking at them from the car windows. She turned toward her coach and, with instant thought that many eyes were on them, placed her hand in his for a hasty good-by. It was icy. With all her outward calmness Isabelle Vaughan had gone through the severest mental strain in those few moments.

About a week later, as Cora Madison was walking slowly along Kirkland street, just at dusk, on her way home from a friend's house, an old, bent woman, enveloped in a garment which answered for cloak and hood, and with a stout cane on which she leaned, hobbled toward her.

"Pretty lady! pretty lady!" she called, in hoarse accents. "Let me tell your fortune! I will give you a good one for a very little piece of silver."

Cora paused and searched her pockets. Where is the young girl who can resist hearing her fortune told by a gypsy, even though she believes the whole race to be deceivers? But in Cora's mind, at the moment she heard the hag's voice, the image of Jack Elton was supreme. With the quickness of her youth it had grown there hour by hour ever since Isabelle

Vaughan's words had first aroused the slumbering instinct.

"Will she tell me anything about Jack?" was Cora's thought. She produced a dime and held it in her fingers while she spoke.

"If you will give me a true fortune you may have this."

The old woman took the girl's hand in hers.

"Ah, here is the best thing," she said, "this beautiful ring, (it was an amethyst). Let me look. Ah!" She nodded her head several times. "I see a handsome lover here—a tall, dark man. He has many books. He will learn to make fine medicines and you will love him dearly. Yes, I see you lying in his arms," said the witch, peering into the translucent stone. "I see you lying on his bed."

"In life and death?" faltered Cora, handing her the money.

"In life and death," repeated the crone, solemnly.

Cora did not believe in gypsy powers of divination, but she was much affected by the strange occurrence. Her spirits rose and she found herself very happy before she reached home. Elton bowed to her politely, as she crossed the piazza, though the sad look was still in his face.

"If you only knew, you dear Jack!" she laughed to herself. "I am fated to be yours, in life and death, and who can stand against Fate?"

CHAPTER VI.

SOMETIMES THREE IS A CROWD.

As the day set for the marriage of Claude Wyllis and Isabelle Vaughan drew near, the expectant bridegroom grew more and more uneasy. He had not set eyes on his fiancée since the night when she so peremptorily dismissed him at Mrs. Madison's gate. All communications between them (and very brief they were) had been in writing. When only a fortnight remained he wrote her that it was absolutely necessary a meeting should take place without further delay.

"I do not even know," he wrote, "whether you design that we shall be married in the highest style of the art or in the plainest manner known to the profession. I have not dared invite a single friend, lest you should put your veto on publicity. If invitations are to be sent out, the time is now all too short for that purpose. Then there is the marriage settlement, on which we agreed. For Goodness' sake, Belle, don't be a captious wretch and compel me to put myself and friends into a queer situation! Send me word where I can see you and whether I shall bring along a lawyer or two, a caterer, a milliner and a florist."

To this he finally received answer that he might present himself at the Gilsey House in New York on the morning of September 30th, with as many lawyers as he pleased, but with none of the other functionaries of which he had written. "I hope you didn't think," she wrote, "that I intended making a spectacle

of myself. All the witnesses I wish present are those made necessary by the law, and you will oblige me by not providing a lot of lookers-on from among either your masculine or feminine acquaintances.'

So it was that, on the morning designated, one of the little parlors of the Gilsey held three persons and no more, while certain documents were signed and certain papers of value transferred. And it also happened that Miss Vaughan was about to withdraw in advance of the others, when she was arrested by a request, made audibly, that she would remain for a moment after the attorney had departed. As she could not decline without attracting remark from a stranger, she complied, and a moment later the strangely assorted couple were alone together.

"Have you any choice regarding the clergyman?" asked Claude, the minute the door closed, feeling intuitively that he could hold her there no longer than actual business required.

"None whatever," she said, eyeing him with supreme indifference.

"You care nothing for denomination—"

"Any authorized Protestant will do for me. Colonel Mitchell will be there, and I hope you will consider that sufficient."

"But Jack Elton—you don't know Jack—or, perhaps you may, though; he rooms at Mrs. Madison's, at Cambridge. He is an old friend of mine—"

She stopped him with a deprecatory gesture.

"If we are to have old friends I could bring a thousand. I don't want him."

"Very well," he said, and paused.

"Is that all?" she asked, rising.

"Yes," he said, hesitatingly. "Only—where do you wish to go?"

"To go?" she repeated, and then seemed to comprehend. "Oh, anywhere. A long way off. Not near New York."

He looked pleased.

"To Europe?" he suggested.

She shook her head.

"Chicago? St. Louis? San Francisco?—"

"Montreal."

She settled it with a word, as she did everything else. It seemed to make no difference to her whether it pleased him or not. To a looker-on he might have been taken to be her servant or, at the most, her confidential man of business.

"I will have tickets ready for Montreal, then," he said. "And—shall we stay in that city long?"

She gave an impatient toss of her head.

"How should I know? How you do catechise me?" Then, as she had her fingers on the door-knob, she asked, "What was the date to be? I have forgotten."

Wyllis stared at her.

"October 9th; just ten days from to-day. It was your own selection."

A fear that she would find an excuse to postpone it rose in his mind.

"October 9th," she mused. "Oc-to-ber 9th. Why wait so long? Why not make it to-morrow?"

He could scarcely believe his ears. To-morrow! His impulse was to spring to her and thank her for the great boon, but he restrained himself.

"As you please," he answered, diplomatically.

"To-morrow morning, then—"

"At what hour?"

"Very early," she said, thoughtfully. "Very early indeed. What time does the first train leave?"

"At 8 o'clock, but—"

"You must be here at a quarter past six sharp, with your minister. Don't tell me it's early—I know what hour it is. Colonel Mitchell will be present."

She was gone.

It was quite as well. He was about to ask, "Why not this evening? Why not this afternoon? Why not *now*?" It was quite as well she had gone.

He went to the Fifth Avenue, where his luggage was, and began to pack his clothes. It seemed like helping to hasten the time when he should find Belle speeding off to Montreal with him on the lightning express. There were things to buy, and he went out on Broadway and bought them. He got his tickets. "For two, if you please," he told the agent, in a gay voice. "Pullman, sir?" asked the man. "Yes, a compartment," said he; and there was an "I understand" look in the agent's eye as he took the money. Wyllis was nearly at the door when he heard a voice calling after him that he had forgotten his change. He took up half of it, sweeping the rest back toward the ticket-seller as if he owned mines. The part he took up he gave to a ragged newsboy on the street, who yelled "Morning papers!" at him.

He went back to the hotel and sat down—to think. Suddenly an idea struck him that made him laugh immoderately. He had a paper in his hand at the time, and a gentleman near by who held its duplicate peered over his shoulder, and then searched his own copy for the paragraph which had apparently caused his amusement. Wyllis went to the telegraph office and began

to write on a blank. What he wrote seemed to please him vastly, and he nearly choked with the laughter that he tried to conceal. He paid for the message at the counter, and a couple of hours later got an answer that satisfied him.

Somebody asked him if he had lunched, and he had to think a while before he could tell. No, he said, he believed not. Then the Somebody lugged him off to the dining-room, and told him news and gossip while he pretended to eat. The day dragged slowly away and it was after dark before he bethought himself that he had not as yet secured a clergyman.

He took a carriage and was driven to the residence of a celebrated divine, only to find that the gentleman was out of town. He tried another, who was reported at the door to be not well enough that evening to receive callers and would not to-morrow do just as well? In a drug store he took the big directory and copied off a long list of addresses. The first man he tried to see had recently moved. He began to get alarmed.

At last he found one—an old white-haired man of most venerable aspect. Yes, he would be happy to perform the ceremony; what time would his presence be required? When the hour of six A. M. was mentioned, however, he decidedly shook his head. "I could not get up before nine on any account," he said, in his quavering voice.

Wyllis drove back to his hotel. It was nearly ten o'clock. He went to the night clerk with his trouble. He told him he wanted a minister at six o'clock the next morning at the Gilsey House, to marry a couple who must depart on the eight o'clock train. Was

there no clergyman in the hotel who could be appealed to. The case was imperative and money no object.

There was one—the young and ambitious pastor of a Hoboken church—who frequently spent a night at the Fifth Avenue in order to get an early train for the country, where he was brought up. He had to get such a train the very next morning, and it would not inconvenience him at all to stop at the Gilsey for so good a purpose. All this the young minister said, when they found him, and more. Wyllis experienced a relief which amounted to positive joy.

He went to bed and slept. It was a sleep of dreams, not of rest. At five, when the servant called him, according to orders, he sprang to the floor with a bound. This was that longed for “to-morrow!”

Arriving at the Gilsey, he ran across Colonel Mitchell on the stairs, and astonished that gentleman by the effusiveness of his welcome. Together they repaired to the little parlor. The young clergyman came soon after. They talked a good deal as they waited, but nobody said anything worth repeating. It was an odd party.

They thought Miss Vaughan would never come. Claude looked at his watch twenty times. The minister looked at his, saying he must not miss the New Haven train. Colonel Mitchell looked at his and compared it with the others. At the very last moment Miss Vaughan appeared. She was dressed for travelling. A young woman accompanied her—also dressed for travelling. Nobody knew the young woman and Claude wondered anxiously who she was.

Claude said “Yes,” at the proper places, with some coaching. His bride had no trouble with the responses. As Claude told Jack Elton, the words meant

nothing to him. They were only a necessary formality. He was thinking in the midst of the ceremony where he had better give her the first embrace. He decided to do it in the carriage on the way to the station. He feared a refusal if he attempted it earlier.

The words were said. She was his wife. Pretend as either of them might—pretend as hundreds do pretend every year—they had taken solemn vows.

Colonel Mitchell and the minister withdrew, but the young woman remained. Claude looked at her inquiringly.

"This is Helen, my maid," Mrs. Wyllis remarked. "I *hope* you didn't forget to buy tickets for three."

She looked at him with eyes which said quite as well as words could have done: "You will not make a scene here!"

He could have brained them both without compunction, but he only answered: "I can easily get another ticket at the station. We must hasten now, or we shall lose the train."

The young woman got into the carriage with the newly-wedded couple. To have suggested a second carriage for her would have looked ridiculous on Claude's part, as his wife evidently wanted her there. At the station he bundled both women into his compartment and went to procure the missing ticket. When he returned, Helen had stepped out for a moment, and he had time for a question:

"Is that woman to ride in the same compartment with us?"

"Certainly," replied Mrs. Wyllis. "I am liable to need her at any time."

It was a dull ride, for him; not at all like the one he had dreamed of. He alternated between the

smoker and the compartment, going to the former for comfort and to the latter occasionally for the sake of appearance. Once, when he returned, the door was locked and it could not be opened. The maid announced in a low voice that Madame was arranging her toilette. She was, in fact, having her hair placed in order. Claude went out on the platform and swore for half-an-hour.

CHAPTER VII.

" I PREFER THE SOFA," HE SAID.

When the train reached Montreal the streets were lighted. Claude stepped to where the carriage drivers were gathered and said, "Brousseau."

A man came forth and with equal brevity said, "Pierre." Both words were spoken in whispers. The bridal party entered the man's carriage and were driven off at speed. After what seemed an interminable ride, the horses stopped before a doorway.

Mrs. Wyllis alighted and accompanied her husband without question up two flights of stairs, where they entered a parlor. She passed in before him, and as he closed the door she noted with some surprise that he locked it with a quick motion and put the key in his pocket.

"Where is Helen?" she demanded, in the imperious way in which she had so long addressed him.

He laughed disagreeably.

"The femme-de-chambre has escorted the girl to her room, I presume."

"Ring for her instantly!"

"Oh, no!"

He did not take long to say these words, but their effect was striking.

"If I am not to have my maid," said the wife, in tones of indignation, "let some one show me to my rooms!"

"These are your rooms, my dear," he smiled.

"Then I request you to leave them!"

"But—they are also mine," he answered.

She took a chair and looked at him. The quick deep breaths which came from her red lips did not lessen the charm of her beauty. Her magnificent bosom rose and fell, as the waves of mingled emotions dashed over her soul.

"You grow more lovely every hour!" he said, gazing at her with half shut eyes. "Mon dieu! You are worth your price!"

She turned from him then and looked at the windows. He wondered whether she was contemplating throwing herself from one of them, and he knew if she did he would raise no hand to stop her.

"I shall sit here in these uncomfortable garments until you leave," she said, without turning round.

"Unless," he suggested, slowly, "I tire of seeing you in them, in which case—"

She flashed a look at him that would have cowed most men.

"In which case, you were saying!—"

"I might assist you," he smiled.

She arose and took a step toward him.

"Do you wish to know what I shall do in another

moment, unless you open that door? I shall scream for help!"

"Scream!" he said, nodding his head as if he approved of the suggestion. "Scream! I think the people in the house expect it. Scream with all your lungs and you'll frighten no one, unless it be poor Helen. Belle, where do you think we are—in a Montreal hotel? Not at all! We are at a country house, a good mile from any other residence, and every person in the building is employed by a man who is paid well to-night with my money!"

She paled perceptibly as he proceeded.

"And the object of all this?" she queried, majestically, but with a slight tremor nevertheless.

"What an admirable actress you are!" he cried, "to ask that question as if you meant it! I'm going to ring for our trunks now, and when the men bring them I shall have to open the door. But don't think for a moment, my love, (here he pulled the bell-rope) that you are going to desert me on that apparently convenient occasion. The men here cannot speak a word of anything but their Canadian patois, and they would have no idea what you were saying if you appealed to them. Beside, they perfectly understand that you must be restrained, should you attempt to leave. To them, you may be, for all I know, a criminal in custody, or an insane person. One thing I can guarantee, they have no idea you are my true and lawful bride. So don't make trouble, for it would be useless."

The men were at the door and he let them in. His wife, so far from attempting escape, walked to the farther end of the parlor and stood with her back toward them. When they had gone, Willis locked

the door again and returned the key to his pocket. Seeing that his wife did not move, he threw himself negligently upon a sofa.

"Take your time, my dear, take your time," he said. "Only—be reasonable."

For several minutes the lady remained in the position she had taken. Then she turned slowly to a long mirror which was set in the wall, and surveyed herself in it leisurely. There is a way women have of regaining their moral courage by the sight of their own reflections. By the revelation of a mirror they know exactly how much they have exhibited of fear or anger or surprise; and knowing is with them half the battle. From that vantage ground they can rally their forces for the next attack.

The mirror told Belle Wyllis she had allowed herself to be betrayed into an excitement which was ill-timed. The next thing her husband saw surprised him. She was taking off her bonnet and cloak.

"That's very well indeed!" was his comment, when she had finished.

She had reorganized her scattered forces, formed a new line of battle and was ready for the conflict. The next thing she did surprised him still more. She drew her chair—a big one on castors, and covered in oil silk—over to where he lay, and rested herself as his vis-à-vis. The pleasant smile in the face to which he looked up startled him more than anything else she could have done.

"So you thought it necessary to lock me up, did you?" she said. "A mediæval way to use a wife, truly! How odd of you!"

Then she added, with a grimace:

"My feet are pinched. Would you mind unbuttoning my boots?"

Wyllis sat upright and looked at her. His smile was gone. It was another dream and he would awake to find it so; of that he felt persuaded. He stared at her like one fascinated, but he never offered to touch her.

"Oh, well," she said, good naturedly, "I can do it myself."

He saw her reach down and unloosen the offending buttons. Then she leaned toward him and kissed him. He would have resisted had he had the power.

"You thought," she was saying—he could hear the words like the sound of some strange instrument—"because I have kept you at a distance during the past year, I was made of ice. You couldn't see it was necessary—stupid! You were ready at any minute to explode, and I had to be the one to use caution!"

She kissed him again and all he could do was to fumble in his pockets. It took him a good while to find what he sought, but he brought it forth at last, and held it up to her.

"What is that?" she asked.

"The key to the door."

She laughed gaily (how it jarred on his ear—that laugh!) and pushed his hand aside, saying, "Why, I don't want it."

He started to rise.

"I will go for Helen."

She pulled him down and put both her arms about his neck.

"I don't want her—unless—for a very little while. If you could get her just long enough to help me unpack my trunks—"

" I will get her," he said, mechanically.

She rose with him, still retaining a half embrace, and so led him to the door.

" In half-an-hour at the furthest, Claude," were the words that pursued him down the stairs.

He hunted up Brousseau and gave the directions. Then he wandered out into the night air. It was quite cold, but he felt no inconvenience. The northern breeze relieved his hot temples. It was what he needed. He walked about under the trees. His thoughts were incoherent. Nothing seemed reasonable. Suddenly he found himself looking at an upper window. The room was brilliantly lighted. Heavy lace curtains hung across the sashes. To the occupants of the room the windows undoubtedly seemed curtained. It was the old mistake. The inner light and the outer darkness served the familiar purpose. The stroller in the grounds could see two women. One was assisting the other to disrobe from her traveling clothes and don garments suitable for the house. The watcher saw a white shoulder and arm and then the figures moved back out of sight. He reeled and caught for support at the trunk of the tree by which he stood.

The half-hour was gone and another half-hour with it when he crept up the stairs. His wife sat there patiently awaiting him, but sprang up as he appeared. He glanced around the room, inquiringly.

" Helen?" she said, divining his thought. " I have told her to retire and get her rest. I shall not need her again to-night."

He did not seem to have any capacity for speech. They were both silent for several minutes.

"Could we get anything to eat?" she asked, at last. "I am nearly famished."

It was the last thing he could have expected her to say and it struck him as very droll. Hungry? He had never heard anything like that!

"Shall I ring the bell?"

He nodded and she pulled the rope. A garcon appeared in answer.

"*Quelque chose à manger,*" said Claude to him, looking at his wife. "*Nous avons tres faim.*"

The boy bowed and withdrew. In a few minutes he returned and spread a table. When the repast was ready it was found to be ample, but made up of a curious conglomeration of odds and ends. There was plenty of wine, though, and everything tasted good.

Belle sat on one side of the little table and Claude on the other. She acted as mistress of the feast, filling his plate and pouring his wine. They began to eat, and after a couple of tumblers of sherry he found his voice returning.

"I like this," she was saying. "It seems like a bit out of Bohemia. What one wants at a supper is not so much high quality in the viands as good fellowship. A pleasant companion is sauce to any bill of fare."

He suspected her of irony and thought he would say something ugly :

"Yes," he replied, "the most glorious meal I ever tasted was in Paris. I had a young girl for my companion. We awoke in the night starving and hunted in her pantry for anything that would satisfy our hunger. There were only two things there—pickled pigs feet and honey. I never enjoyed another meal half as well."

Belle laughed heartily. She seemed to think the recital very funny indeed.

"Pickled pigs feet and honey!" she repeated "That was an odd combination."

She seemed determined to make him jolly. When the meal was ended she went to her trunk and produced a package of cigarettes. When he stared at her, because she lit one for herself as well as him, she said :

"I lived some years in South America. All the ladies there smoke them. Beastly habit, is it not, for a woman?"

He was contrary enough to reply that it was a very nice habit for women—of a certain class. The little French girl of whom he had told her used to smoke hundreds of them, he said, with her feet on the table.

She went over and kissed him again. Was it impossible to make her angry?

"Belle," he said, "if you mean that, I don't like it. If you do it for amusement, I don't object so much."

She looked at him with mild reproach, but very sweetly still.

"Claude, are you not my husband?"

Then he broke out :

"You know very well I am ; and you know also, if I could have got you here on any other terms, I would never have gone through that supreme idiocy !"

The woman gazed into his eyes.

"Let us forget it all," she whispered. "Let us be for to-night as 'f the ceremony had never been thought of.'

He revolved that for a little while in his mind, when he noticed that his cigarette was out and asked her for a light.

She gave him a new one instead, igniting it between her ruby lips. He took it and began to smoke slowly. After a while she looked at her watch.

"It is one o'clock, Claude."

He did not look toward her, but remarked that the bed was in the other room and she might retire when she chose.

"And you—"

"I prefer the sofa," he said, stretching himself out upon it with an indolent motion.

Some time after, he heard a soft rustling and a woman's form in white garments was kneeling by his side. Rounded arms encircled his neck and a delicate cheek was pressed against his face.

"Tell me, Claude, that you love me!"

"I won't have this nonsense, Belle!" he expostulated, trying to disengage himself from her clasp. "I really won't! I—so!—you used to live in South America, did you? Yes, I have *heard* of that!"

It hurt her—those words—as he meant they should, but he was immediately sorry; for all she did in response to the thrust was to press her cheek closer to his.

"Come, Belle," he said, more gently, "get to bed. You will catch cold here."

"Do you love me?" she persisted, before she would let go.

"I shall, I very much fear, at the rate things are going on," he answered, regretfully.

She pressed a long kiss on his lips and left him there.

He slept.

CHAPTER VIII.

JESSIE MAKES A SHREWD GUESS.

The morning of Claude Wyllis' marriage, Mr. Jack Elton found the following letter awaiting him when he came down from his room at Mrs. Madison's :

"GILSEY HOUSE, NEW YORK, *Sept. 30th, 18—.*

"MR ELTON—Dear Sir :

"When I accepted your kind offer to come on to New York and examine into certain matters of interest to myself (it was at the railway station in Boston, you may remember) I did not sufficiently realize how much I was asking from a gentleman who was very nearly a total stranger to me. Upon consideration I have decided that it will not be necessary to put you to so much trouble. At another time, when your convenience will be more subserved, it will be easy for me to consult you. Your generous willingness to sacrifice your time in my behalf will not, however, be forgotten.

"If you should have occasion to address me by mail, you will please send your letters to "Mrs. Claude Wyllis, in care of Colonel Humphrey Mitchell, 31 Wall Street, N. Y.," who will forward them. Some hours before you receive these lines I shall assume my new title and leave the country on my wedding trip. Circumstances made a change in the announced date seem advisable. New York papers of Thursday morning will probably have brief particulars.

"With regards, etc.,

"ISABELLE VAUGHAN."

Elton's surprise was unbounded, and it was not until he had made a journey to the Parker House in Boston, and seen the announcement in the New York dailies, that he felt sure the woman's letter was no trick. Even then he had doubts, as he knew false notices have sometimes been placed in newspapers with a purpose to mislead. But he reflected that it would be quite as easy for her to hasten the marriage as to go to all the trouble which the other arrangement would imply. Claude was captivated. He had wanted the ceremony to take place fifteen months ago. If by any luck it had been made to occur sooner than he expected, surely he would not have stood in the way. Elton saw that Miss Vaughan had outwitted him, and the undergraduate felt natural displeasure at her easy victory. He returned to Cambridge and was about to go to his room when Cora Madison came toward him. She had a letter in her hand and he knew what it was before she spoke.

"You remember Miss Vaughan—why, of course you do—and you know her friend, Mr. Wyllis, also. Well, they are married."

He could not pretend before this girl, if indeed he could before any one, and he merely said :

"I know it."

Cora looked a little disappointed. Most people like to bear news.

"Oh, I suppose Mr. Wyllis wrote you."

"No, Miss Vaughan wrote me," he replied. "There was some—some business—I was to see to—for her, and she wrote me of the— the change of date."

Some such explanation was necessary, as the girl had raised her brows suddenly when he mentioned Miss Vaughan's name. She seemed satisfied.

"Have you known Mr. Wyllis, long?" she continued.

"For four years."

"Oh, come out on the piazza and tell me all about him!"

It was delicious to be asked to talk to this girl about anything, but Jack wished heartily it could have been on a different subject. Still, he reflected, no other topic would have been likely to procure the chance at all. He could not remember when Cora had held a long conversation with him.

"I want you to tell me everything," she said, when they were seated.

The broad lawn sloped toward the street. The tall bushes and large shade trees hid them from the gaze of passers. Over the tree-tops they could see the tower of Memorial Hall.

"Tell me everything you can think of," she said. "I have seen him only once. I cannot think of him as a hero unless I know his distinctive characteristics. But he is rich," she added, reflectively, "and that counts for much."

"Yes," said Jack, with a sigh. "He is rich; but, more than that, he is generous."

Cora clasped her hands together.

"I do hope he will make Belle a good husband," she said, slowly. "She has had a hard time so far in life, and no one deserves happiness more."

What could he say to her?

"A hard time?" he ventured.

"Yes, her mother died when she was very small. Her father, Captain Vaughan, was of a roving nature and carried her about with him east and west, north and south. He loved her—in his way—but she needed

a mother. Then, when Belle was only fifteen, he died, away off in Brazil, and she was left without a friend."

Tears had gathered in the girl's eyes at her own recital

"It is hard to be left an orphan," said Jack.

"I—forgot," she stammered. "You have had the same misfortune. I, too, have lost a father, but my mother is left. I sympathize so much with those who have lost both. It is hard for a boy, but how much more so for a girl."

He could not help putting the question which was still uppermost in his thoughts.

"Did Miss Vaughan's father leave her any—any money?"

The girl shook her head.

"Nothing, I believe."

"She has done very well for herself," he suggested. He hated the part he was playing. It seemed despicable, and yet he could not help it. "She has not wanted for means," he explained, as the girl looked up inquiringly.

"No," she responded. "There was some one who took an interest in her, I have heard mamma say. She never spoke to me of the matter herself."

It was clear that the idea which Elton had was wholly out of Cora's mind. He could say no more at that time. Such absolute innocence abashed him.

"Did she write where they were going—on their wedding tour?" he asked.

"No, she only said 'out of the country.' I presumed she meant Europe."

"Then," said he, "will you not be likely to correspond with her?"

"Oh, no, I did not expect to. We are not such

close friends as that. I have only seen her a dozen times in my life, and perhaps never shall again. There is something about her, though, that has always interested me. I can remember Belle coming to see us when I was a little thing in the primary school, and I liked her then. She seemed so good and kind, I never could have forgotten her. When she returned from Brazil she was just the same. She brought me a box of curiosities, and never seemed to feel she was so much older than I, the way most big girls do. When she would get a carriage to drive she would often take me with her, and show an interest in me in a hundred little ways. I never saw a woman so thoroughly unselfish."

Elton grew surprised at the ease with which he could talk to Cora. He began to wonder why he had been afraid of her so long. It was almost—not quite—as easy now as talking to Jessie.

"I have heard she was a great favorite in Cambridge when she first came back from South America," he ventured. "I mean, particularly, with the college boys."

Cora bowed in acknowledgment of the truth of this observation.

"Well, she was handsome and dashing, and you know what college boys *are*." She stopped and laughed airily as she recognized the oddity of the remark.

"Of course, I mean *some* college boys," she explained. "They have nothing to do but amuse themselves, apparently, and they *did* come after Belle in swarms. She went out riding with some of them—it was a relief, she told mamma, to see Christians after those years in Brazil—but she tired of it very soon. One night she came home very angry on account of

something one of them said to her (his name was Stetson, I believe) and she went away the next day."

The stories which Elton had heard were ascribed to Stetson, who was in the Law School when Jack was a freshman. The young man thought for a moment that there might be some redeeming feature, after all. But no, he reflected later. Her own conduct since—the way she had hastened her marriage and fled—made out a strong circumstantial case against her. He was very glad she had gone; glad that Cora was not likely to see her soon. After he had thought of that awhile his own indebtedness to Wyllis returned to him, and it made him sad to think it might be many months, perhaps even years, before he and Claude would meet again.

Cora went into the house to assist her mother. What a lovable girl she was, Jack thought. How sweet and innocent! Could it ever be, as Claude had so freely predicted, that such a treasure would be his in that by-and-by when, as a famous doctor, he was to win patients and gold? Pictures began to frame themselves in his brain—of cozy sitting-rooms where She and he sat in front of coal fires in open grates; She with some bit of fancy work, or a book, and he with his newspaper, reading it and glancing furtively by turns at Her face, lit up with the dazzling blaze. Pictures of a doctor's phaeton, hastening over the roads at some sudden call, with Her on the seat beside him for company. Pictures—oh! there was no end to the pictures that would come; but, could they ever be real?

In the midst of his picture-making little Jessie's curly head came upon his physical vision, and the

next moment the child sprang with the lightness of youth into his lap.

"Jack," she said, looking up into his eyes, "what were you saying to Cora? I never knew you two to talk so long together."

"Little people mustn't ask questions," he responded, with mock gravity.

"That's terribly *old!*" she said, with a pout. "I think a Harvard Man—that's what you fellows call yourselves, Harvard Men—ought to invent something better than that. Come, honest, Jack, what were you saying to Cora? I'll bet—" here she paused as if she had made a great discovery—"you were asking her to *marry* you!"

Elton started up so suddenly that he nearly threw Jessie to the floor, and stood there looking at her as if bereft of sense. She stepped back a little, astonished at the change which her question had wrought, and said:

"I didn't hear a word—not a word—I just guessed it, that's all; and I won't tell anybody—not a soul—unless you want me to."

The first intelligent idea he had was that he was frightening the child. He sat down again and took both her hands in his.

"Jessie, tell me, what made you say such a thing as that? Didn't you know it was very wrong?"

She shook her head until the curls fell over her face, nearly hiding it.

"But it is not amusing, Jessie," he went on, "and you must never speak so again. I am sure your mother would be very displeased if she knew it."

She pushed back enough of the thick hair to show that she was very sober.

"Mamma is displeased at everything I do," she said. "I've got no real friends at all, 'cept you and Tabby -'n' f you're going to scold, I shall have nothin' left but the cat!"

She looked so lugubrious that his countenance relaxed.

"I am not scolding you," he said. "You didn't think how it sounded, I am sure. I am going up to my class now to recite, and I want you to come as far as the college yard with me."

She got her hat obediently and placed her small hand in his big one.

"What makes you study so awful much?" she asked, as they trudged along. "I should think you would have learned all there was before this time."

"Hardly," he smiled. "Did you ever go to Gore Hall and see all the books in the college library?"

"Yes," she said. "Don't you remember? You took me there one day, ever so long ago. We had to talk in whispers."

"I do remember now," said Elton. "Well, if I knew what was in those thousands and thousands of books, I would have but a small part of the learning there is in the world."

"And you intend to learn it *all*?" said the child, in an awestruck voice.

"Oh, no; only a little. Let me illustrate. There is a great market in Boston where people go to select their dinners. No one person buys everything there, but out of the great variety each one can take what he needs most. You have been into Jordan & Marsh's. There are acres covered with goods and a thousand clerks to wait on you, but you could use

very little of all that stock for yourself, even if you were allowed to take what you pleased. That is the way with this university. Study as hard and as long as I may, there will always be much that I can never learn."

Jessie tried to look duly impressed.

"How do you know when you've got enough?"

"Well, there are certain things that all wise men agree a gentleman should know, and for those studies it takes four years. That is the part I am learning now. And, after that, I must study four years more, at least, to learn to be a physician."

Jessie drew a very long breath.

"I'm afraid you'll be old and die before you have any fun at all!" she said. "As for doctors," she added, sagely, "I don't think they're any good. People die just the same for all the medicine they give them. Why, I know a doctor, myself, whose own father was buried this year!"

She raised her eyes triumphantly to his, confident that she had the best of the argument.

"Everybody must die some time," he said, regarding her affectionately, "but medical science undoubtedly prolongs life and assuages pain. I can think of nothing more worthy than a conscientious physician, and such a one I shall try to be."

The child comprehended his meaning, if she did not clearly understand all his phrases.

"When you're a doctor," she said, good naturedly, "I don't believe you'll *let* anybody die in your neighborhood. I'm sure if anything ails *me* I shall send for you."

They laughed together at this sally, and as the

college gate was reached they parted there. It was the child's frequent habit to walk with Elton, and it would be hard to say which of them enjoyed it most.

CHAPTER IX.

SHOOTING BEAR AT CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

Jack had found it so easy to talk with Cora at his first long trial that he tried it again whenever opportunity offered. She noticed with pleasure that he seemed to feel more at ease in her presence, and required little encouragement to pass an evening in the parlor with the Madison family. One evening, shortly after his walk with Jessie, Cora came out of the house—by the merest accident, of course—just as Elton was about to leave the yard.

"A fine night for a stroll," she remarked, looking up at the sky, which was filling with stars.

"Yes," he answered, quickly. "Wouldn't you like to walk a little way with me. I'm going nowhere in particular."

He wondered afterward, and will wonder as long as he lives, how he ever said it, but the words were out and they brought a glad look to Cora's face.

"I should like it very much. Wait till I speak to mamma."

There was no reason why Mrs. Madison should say no, and she did not. She knew Mr. Elton to be an exceedingly well behaved young man, and she believed "His Private Character" (her great hobby) to be all

right. The idea of a possible love affair between him and her daughter never entered her matronly head. Such a child as Cora! To her mother she was still a baby in frocks. Jessie, if anything, seemed the elder. If Jessie could walk and talk with Mr. Elton, why not Cora? It is to be doubted if the good lady would have raised any objection had Cora jumped into his lap as her younger sister was in the habit of doing.

In five minutes the girl was ready and they set off. Oxford street and the adjacent avenues were as quiet as any, and in that direction they bent their steps.

Elton had never before in his life escorted a young lady. He perceived a difference between the younger Madisons, if their mother did not. But Cora's tact made everything easy. She got him to talking first of the stars (she was in astronomy) and together they found the constellations. The general subject of education followed—what she was studying, and what she expected to do after she graduated from the High School the next summer. She frankly told him she longed for a year or two at some finishing school, but knew her mother's finances would not admit of it. Perhaps, she said, she could pursue her studies with the private help of a lady whom she knew, who had passed through a seminary, but that was to be decided later. She said she thought a girl ought to fit herself in these days, to earn an honorable livelihood in some way, to which he assented. When she asked him what one he would suggest he was at a loss how to answer. She spoke of a lady physician of whom she had some knowledge, but like a true disciple of his school he discountenanced that idea. The art of medicine required the most ardent preparation, he said, and a degree of physical strength which only

men possessed. There was the profession of a nurse, however; that required skill, and feminine hands were often the best at it. Beside, it could be made to pay very well. So she settled it with a laugh, which sounded sweetly musical to him, that she was to be a nurse, and that he was to recommend her to his wealthy patients. And all the while the Pictures kept coming up in his mind, and he saw her everywhere you can imagine except in a hospital or a sick room. But he could say nothing of that to her—yet.

Finally she got him to talking of his boyhood—that hard life of which she had before had an inkling.

“It was not so very hard, though,” he said, “until after I got ambitious. I used to get up at four o'clock in the morning, and I have been so tired at night I have fallen asleep on my bed without undressing; but I did not mind it then. I was well and reasonably happy. I could plough my two acres a day, or reap ten with a machine, and there was a great satisfaction in seeing the work well done. There were real pleasures, too, in the dull season, when I could take my gun or my fishing line and go off into the woods. I killed a bear when I was only twelve years old.”

The girl showed great interest.

“A bear—a real live bear?”

“Yes, he was a real live bear when I first saw him, but a real dead bear when I had finished. Do you want to hear about it? Well, it was this way: One morning the farmer for whom I worked missed several young pigs, which were kept in a pen near the barn; that is, their mother was kept in a pen, which was pretty strongly made, but there was a board off where the young ones could crawl under and run out and in as they pleased. It was evident that a bear had caught

the little fellows while they were outside the pen. The creature's tracks could be seen in the soil, and a little pool of blood showed where he had eaten at least one of them. (Cora shivered.) The farmer said he was going to town to get a steel-trap to set for Master Bruin, as he would be pretty sure to come back the next night after more pork. I knew it was not at all sure he could get a trap, as a good many people had been after them lately for the same reason, bears being plenty that fall; so after dinner I went and got his rifle and loaded it, saying nothing to any one, for I felt sure they would stop me if they knew what I meant to do. It was about this time of year, (Cora's teeth were chattering now and she was clinging tightly to his arm) but considerably colder.

"I followed the bear's track for nearly two miles, when I lost the trail, and before I found it sundown came on. There is a long twilight out there, but it is not good for much to hunt up a cold trail in. I was much disappointed, but there seemed no help for it and I started for home. I was walking along as quiet as you please, with my rifle over my shoulder, when I heard a branch snap a little way from me, (Cora shivered worse than ever) and turning about, I saw one of the biggest bears ("Oh!" from Cora) I had ever beheld, coming right toward me. He weighed five hundred pounds dressed, but he looked as big as a house to me at that minute. Up he rose on his hind feet, hardly more than the length of my gun from me. I was scared—I don't dispute that—but my nerves were like steel. I took aim at his heart—

Goodness Cora! how do you suppose I can take aim with you holding me in that way?"

It was very ludicrous. Cora's imagination had

been so worked upon by his description that she almost thought the bear was right there before them, at the corner of Mellen street, where they stood. She had both hands clasped so firmly around Elton's right arm that he would have had no small difficulty in defending himself with a rifle or any other weapon.

She unloosed her clasp and they laughed together. She was very happy. The bear was not there, but Jack was; and he had called her "Cora."

"To finish my story," said Elton, "I put a bullet through his heart at the first shot. When I got home the farmer declared I must have fired at a stump or a fallen tree. I could hardly persuade him to go out with me to get the body, but he did at last."

Cora took his arm again and, as it was growing more chilly, she nestled up to him just the least bit.

"And that's a specimen of the pleasures of your childhood," she said. "I think I should have liked the plowing and reaping better."

"Oh, there were other things," said he. "That was my most harrowing experience. The game I shot was usually of a milder kind—deer, prairie chickens and that sort of thing. The fishing was splendid at some seasons. I had a boat of my own and I used to spear fish by moonlight on the lowlands, when the river was high. I had another thing, too, that furnished me with much diversion—a cave in the bluffs. Nobody but myself was ever in that cave, as far as I can tell. I found it one day while chasing a fox. There was a hole that you would never dream to be anything more than an ordinary depression in the rock, and I happened to stumble into it. I fell on my hands and saw there was an opening into some place where it was light. So I crept along and came out

into a cave as large as your mother's parlor, into which straggling rays of the sun came through a rent in the rock.

"I was a romantic boy, then, with my head full of mysteries, and I contrived to buy and carry off to my cave a number of things to make it habitable. In a few months I had a fire-place arranged with a copper kettle to boil water, cooking pans, a rude bed and many other adjuncts of semi-civilization. I used to go in there and imagine myself a sort of pirate king ; only I had no crew of bandits and no wish to harm any one. I fixed a large stone over the mouth of the cave so as to more effectually conceal it. And there is my home to-day, for I cannot believe any one has ever discovered it, with everything, I have no doubt, exactly as I saw it last, five or six years ago."

Cora evidently enjoyed the recital.

"I should like to see it," she said. "Only I suppose there are bears hiding all around."

"Oh, no," he replied. "The country has been settled too fast for that. It is not likely there is a bear within forty miles."

"Then I would like it very much," said Cora. "If I ever happen to meet you in that vicinity you must not forget to take me there. Where is this cave, in Minnesota?"

"No," said Elton, "it is on the Wisconsin side of the Mississippi. Have you ever heard of the Maiden's Rock?"

"Where the Indian Girl jumped to death—"

"Rather than marry the man she did not love—yes, that's the place."

Cora grew thoughtful. They were approaching home.

"Is that story true?" she asked.

"The Indians have always claimed so," he replied, evasively. "It is a very pretty legend, and I see no use in spoiling it."

"Yes," said Cora, absently. "It is very beautiful."

She was just seventeen—only a child, as her mother said—but she wanted very much to beguile some little word that sounded like love from the lips of that tall young man. She did not wish for a declaration; she would have been distressed at a formal proposal; she could wait a long time for that yet. But she wished he would say something that she could treasure away and revert to afterward as to a point on the chart when the vessel has sailed to its haven. He had called her "Cora," which might have been purely accidental. Supposing he should kiss—not her lips, but her hand—when he left her. No, he would never do that. Where among his plows and his reapers could he have learned such things? She was in no hurry; she could wait; she knew he liked her; but she coveted something tangible.

"Would you have done that?" he asked.

"What?" Her mind had wandered far from the story of Maiden Rock.

"What Wenona did?"

"I would surely rather die than marry a man I detested."

Elton was growing very bold.

"And if you loved a man—would you go through every obstacle to be his bride, wait for him, if necessary, for years—"

He paused. He had already said much more than he intended.

"If I loved a man," she repeated, slowly, "I would wait for him—*forever!*"

It was not her hand that he kissed then—this plowman—but her cheek. He did it so gently she hardly felt his lips. More like a brother's kiss it was than like a lover's, yet it thrilled her through and through.

He had not meant to do it. But who can tell when Love will burst its bars!

"Good-night, Cora!" he said at the gate. It was the same word again!

"Good-night, Jack!"

He strolled over towards the college yard, wondering how all the stars had found out his happiness so quickly; for they smiled at him as they never had smiled before when he looked up into the azure field where they lay.

CHAPTER X.

AMATEUR PHOTOGRAPHY.

The next morning, when Claude Wyllis awoke from his sleep on the sofa, he saw his wife, fully dressed, arranging several bouquets of autumn foliage in some tall vases upon the mantelpiece. She was doing the work in the most natural manner, humming a tune in a very low key meanwhile. He saw her cutting the stems to proper lengths with a pair of scissors and placing each sprig so as to give its best effect to the combination. No stranger, who had happened to

enter the room, would have suspected that there was anything peculiar in the marital relations of the apparently contented and happy lady. Claude was too astounded to say anything, and he had stared at her for several minutes when Belle, looking around, noticed that he was awake and came toward him.

He did not exactly repulse her, but it was evident that the embrace she was about to offer would be distasteful, so she contended herself with taking a chair near him and asking, in the ordinary way, how he had passed the night.

"Oh, elegantly!" he responded. "If you ever slept on a sofa with your clothes on you know how rested one feels in the morning!"

"There was a good bed in the other room," she ventured, gently.

"Yes," he growled, "which you appropriated to your own use."

"It is a very wide one," she began, "and I would certainly have changed places with you if I had thought you preferred it alone."

A sneer crossed his lips.

"Isn't this farce about played out, Belle?"

She looked at him inquiringly.

"You have deceived me!"

"Deceived you, Claude?"

"Don't be a parrot, I beg. You know very well what I mean. I can't find any fault. It was my own cursed folly brought me here, but I am not obliged to pretend I like it."

She still looked the question she did not speak, and he continued:

"Why did I propose marriage to you—for love? Weil, yes, at first that was my reason. I *did* love you,

as near as I am capable of loving any woman. I certainly had a blind, reckless passion for you and would have exchanged a world, had I owned one, to be one hour in your arms. You thoroughly comprehended me. You knew so long as you kept me at a distance I would dog your footsteps. You chose the proper way to get me—or to get my fortune, which was what you wanted. Had you allowed me the usual liberties of an engaged lover we probably should never have been here as husband and wife. I only repeat this as a preface to what I am going to say."

He paused, to see if she would dispute his statements, but she did not. She only looked at him.

"You know how you treated me for fifteen months. Had I been a hound you could not have shown greater contempt. I was allowed to see you but seldom, rarely ever for a minute alone, and then always where others could hear if my voice was raised in the slightest degree. What do you suppose became of my overpowering *love* under such treatment? It evaporated like water under a July sun. And still I kept to our engagement. Was it because I feared a suit for breach of promise? No; I could have paid in cash for my folly, as I have paid before. Why, then, did I allow you to make a fool of me for more than a year after I ceased to care for you? Why?"

He waited again. She did not interrupt, but her sphinx-like eyes never left his face.

"When you named Montreal as the city where you would like to spend your honeymoon (he sneered as he pronounced the word) I thought of this house in the suburbs. I have been here before—yes, with women—and I knew I could depend on its proprietor to any extent, if he was well paid. I wired him to

send a man to meet us at the station, and he did so. When we entered this room, and I turned the key in that lock, I felt the first real joy I had known for months. As I told you, they are used to screams here. No one would have interfered, no matter how loudly you cried out."

He paused again, and she said in a very low voice :
"You meant to murder me?"

"No—imbecile! I meant to master you! You kept up your imperious ways after the door was fastened. You issued your orders to me as though I were your lackey. 'Open the door—instantly!' 'Send my maid here!' 'Leave my apartments!' I meant to work you up to your most violent temper, and then lay hands on you. Do you understand? I would not have marred your handsome, statue-like face, but I would have conquered you! I wanted to take you forcibly in my arms, kiss you in spite of your struggles, crush your spirit with the greater brute strength which I possess! For that triumph over your will, for that moment when you should lie exhausted at my mercy, I have endured these long months of contumely. Belle, the victory is yours. Take it."

He fell back on the sofa and covered his face with his hands.

She stroked his hair gently, but he rose and began to pace the room.

"Of all things," he said, "I object to being pitied. I need not have told you all this story, but you are entitled to every line. Only, now I have been magnanimous enough to make a full confession, don't pity me. I can bear anything but that."

After he had paced the room awhile uninterrupted, he came and stood before her chair :

"You can get a divorce as soon as you like, and we won't quarrel over the amount you are to receive in addition to what I've given you."

She smiled up into his clouded eyes, and said :

"Is it not just a little too soon to discuss that subject, Claude?"

"What do you want?" he growled.

She looked very sweet and winning at that moment.

"You!" she said.

He recoiled and took a step backward.

"Sit down here and let me talk to you."

He complied from very curiosity.

"You remember little Cora Madison," she began, "the young girl whom you brought home in your buggy at Cambridge, two months ago. Her mother—where your friend Elton lodged, you know—is a dear friend of mine. When I told her I was engaged to marry you, what do you suppose she asked? You never could guess. It was not if you were young, handsome or rich, but—"What is His Private Character?"

"And you—" he interrupted; but she stopped him with a movement of her hand, and went on :

"Do you think your Private Character was unknown in Newport and New York? Why, you have never tried to conceal it. When I was first seen with you, friend after friend hastened to warn me. If you had worn a sign, reading, 'Look out for this man—he's dangerous!' it would not have been more notorious. And if no one had told me, I could have judged for myself the second time we met. I did like you, or I never would have been here, but I was wise enough to heed the warnings, both of my friends

and of my own brain. When you tried to kiss me in the conservatory that night, you were a wild man. From that moment I kept you at bay, from sheer necessity."

"And after the marriage knot was tied—"

"I am coming to that. I did not interrupt you and you will give me the same chance. When I saw how you rebelled at my bringing a maid with me, than which nothing could be more reasonable, I got a little cross, too. When we came into this room and you locked the door I was for several minutes in a state bordering on alarm. You did not look pretty, my dear, just then, and I was not certain what your intentions might be. When you spoke about assisting me to remove my wrappings in case I declined, I understood all at once, and from that moment I have tried to be as kind to you as a true wife should. That is my whole story, Claude. Now come and give me a kiss."

He made no move to comply with her request, but took a chair a little distance away.

"It is a very pretty story," was his comment on her remarks. "You would make a great success as a writer of cheap fiction. By-the-way, did your friend, the landlady, ask you what anybody else's Private Character might be—your own, for instance?"

"No," replied Belle, in a natural voice, as though the question were the most ordinary one in the world.

"I wish she had asked *me*," he said. "I would have told her."

She grew a little paler, in spite of the wonderful nerve she possessed.

"What would you have told?"

"I'll let you know some time," he said, with a dis-

agreeable grin. "I wouldn't like to spoil the happiness of our honeymoon with unpleasant revelations."

She looked at him intently.

"How long have you possessed the information of which you speak?"

"Oh, a long time; more than a year."

"It did not influence your choice of a wife, then?"

He laughed.

"Not at all. I am not squeamish. I have lived a pretty rapid life myself, and I never expected to marry a piece of alabaster. In fact, I never meant to marry at all till your shrewd scheme led me into it, and what I learned of your past had, as you say, no effect. But, I am getting hungry. It is I who have the appetite this morning. If you don't object, I'll ring."

After the garcon had answered the bell and gone again, Claude renewed his subject. He could see, in spite of her assumed air of nonchalance, that his words annoyed Belle exceedingly.

"Yes," he proceeded, "you might as well know. I met a man one day who had lived in South America; somewhere near the city of Rio Janeiro, I think. He was an entertaining fellow and a good story teller, for a Spaniard. (Did I say he was a Spaniard?) He told me a lot of interesting things about that country and asked me if I wouldn't like to buy some photographic views of natural scenery there. What's the matter with you, Belle? you are looking faint. Won't you have some wine?"

He reached for a decanter and poured her out a glass, which she drank. Then he proceeded:

"Some of the scenes photographed were of the mountains, some were of the harbor, some of residences, some of natives. They didn't interest me

much, though I bought a few to oblige the man, for he seemed a nice, pleasant, deserving fellow. But he had one picture in the lot—one picture (Belle, if you don't listen, you can't expect me to talk) that was worth seeing. It was—but perhaps you would like to see it. I have it here in my luggage."

All attempts to conceal her pallor had failed Isabelle Wyllis. Had her husband been about to produce her death warrant, she could not have looked more ghastly. While he was searching his trunk the garcon brought the breakfast, spread it upon the table and withdrew.

"Ah, here it is!" said Claude, coming toward his wife with a piece of cardboard in his hand. "But, as breakfast is ready, and as that is of much more importance, suppose we dispose of it. We can talk about this bit of Brazilian scenery (which is really of no great account) at the same time.

He drew his chair up to the table.

"Here is something appetizing, Belle. I knew if Brousseau had time he would give us something fit to eat. You will sit where you did last night, I suppose. Here is fish—fresh fish, looks good; omelettes—these French, wherever you find them, know how to cook an omelette; cutlets, chops, vegetables, rolls, fruit, wine, coffee—why, here is enough for the hungriest wedded couple who ever found themselves with a pair of matrimonially sharpened appetites."

CHAPTER XI.

"HOW INNOCENT SHE LOOKS THERE ASLEEP!"

Belle resolved to attempt the breakfast if it choked her. She fortified herself with more wine and nibbled at the viands with a poor show of eating, while her husband talked on:

"This Spaniard told me (let me help you to butter) that there were only three pictures taken like the one I have here. (Do you take two lumps of sugar in your coffee?) Two of the three have been, he said, destroyed, but I told him nobody can ever be sure how many duplicates of a photograph are in circulation. As he had the 'only copy,' according to his version, he put a fancy price on it. I actually paid the fellow (you are not eating at all, my dear) three hundred dollars for this little picture. I don't believe a photograph so small—it is only cabinet size, you see—was ever sold before for so much money. Probably the requisite combination of avarice and folly will never happen again.

"Now this little picture," pursued Wyllis, drawing his story out with the set purpose of one who lengthens deliberate pain, "is a very remarkable affair. It is not a picture of a landscape, nor of the wild animals which abound in Brazil, nor of any native, nor even of the Emperor or any court official. (Let me ring for something else, Belle; you really ought not to go on in this way—all right, if you won't; but you'll get ill.) It is a picture of a young lady, about seventeen years

old, I should judge, of a face and form truly lovely, and the peculiar thing about it is—"

Mrs. Wyllis had risen from the table and stood trembling, with her clasped hands resting on the cloth.

"Stop!" she commanded, in a shaking voice. "You have tortured me enough!"

He feigned astonishment.

"If you are not well, I certainly will stop. Another time—"

"No!" she said. "At no other time. Never again! If you have anywhere lurking within you the heart of a man, you will destroy that picture now."

He put his arm around her and led her to the sofa where he had slept the previous night. Then he said:

"Destroy the picture, Belle—the picture I paid three hundred dollars for? Why, what a whim! Ask something reasonable, but not so absurd a thing as that. I may wish to show it to my friends, by-and-by."

She caught her breath and pressed her hands over her heart.

"The deepest pain of my life center, around that bit of pasteboard!" she gasped out. "It is infamous of you to keep it to stab me with!"

Still he pretended ignorance.

"To stab you with!" he repeated. "Really, I think your mind is weakening!"

He held the photograph up to the light and looked at it long.

It showed the interior of a room with a marble floor and walls on which flowers were lavishly painted. On a couch in the centre lay a beautiful young girl, apparently asleep. With the exception of a sheet

thrown carelessly across her the exquisite form was nude, unless the long hair which hung half to her feet in lovely disarrangement could be said to form a covering. The picture was well executed, but showed signs of wear. Though years had evidently elapsed since it was taken, no one could doubt for a moment that it had had for its subject the unhappy woman who was now pleading for its destruction.

"You are very foolish to hold any spite against that picture," he said, after his long and admiring survey. "For if it hadn't been for it, you would, in all probability, never have borne my name. I admired your beautiful face the first time I saw it, and this picture aroused in me a determination to know you more intimately. I paid three hundred dollars to the Spaniard for it, and you got fifty thousand dollars. It seems very unreasonable in you to complain!"

Belle's white lips opened then :

"If I—will give you back—that money—that fifty thousand dollars—will you destroy the picture? I will send—for the bonds—at once."

"Um—," he mused. "That looks like a handsome offer; but I don't wish to take your wedding present from you, and I have taken a great fancy to this picture. I may think favorably of the proposition later. But tell me, dear, how you happened to get photographed in such a very striking costume?"

An angry flush swept over the woman's face, driving out the pallor in spots.

"I will *not* tell you!" she exclaimed. "You are acting barbarously! I have asked you for that picture for the last time! You may think what you please about it! You may exhibit it to every man you know,

if you like! It is a picture of your *wife*, Claude Wyllis, don't forget that!"

She looked superbly as she uttered these words, with her head thrown back, her heaving bust in full relief and her eyes flashing.

"Keep it! Show it to your friends and announce yourself the wretch you are! Look at it and see mirrored on its surface the face of a man without honor or shame? Gloat over it and find in the depths of your thoughts what a hideous thing a man may become when Vice has stamped him for its own!"

He moved his chair nearer to her and tried to put his arm about her neck. She had never charmed him as she did at that moment. But she drew back.

"Don't dare to touch me!" she cried. "I am roused now. There was nothing else you could have done but this. You little know what memories that picture brings to me. There were three of them, as the Spaniard told you. I know him—his name is Manuel Silva. Did he show his bare back, on which one hundred lashes were laid on account of that photograph? The blood ran down in streams; I saw it! So he got three dollars each for them—cheap enough! And he only got free by swearing that his copy was destroyed—this copy you were mean enough to buy! The second copy was brought to me from a prisoner who is now digging in the mines of Brazil with fetters on his limbs; he would have been hanged had I not interceded! The man who had the third copy poured his life blood over it at my feet! It is not a safe thing to carry about—that picture—and you may find it so!"

He reddened a little.

"If you think you can frighten me—"

"Oh, no!" she answered. "I have no intention of it. The thing has lost all significance. It was the past and not the possible future that agitated me."

Wyllis was tired of the affair and yet he did not like to give it up just then.

"You are making a great fuss, it seems to me," he said, "over nothing. I don't know about these terrible results that have happened on account of that picture, but things have changed now. If you had some hot headed lover in Brazil who wanted to kill and flog everybody who got hold of a picture meant only for his personal eye, I can't help that. Of course, you don't pretend you've lived the life of a vestal from your birth to this hour. Now, have you?"

"No!" she thundered.

"Well, then," he said, much mollified at her confession, "what's the use of all this excitement? I didn't suppose a girl who was left an orphan in a foreign country could live there three or four years on air. If she happened to be pretty that wouldn't make her appetite lighter. As I said a little while ago, I've been too wild myself to expect an angel for a wife."

Belle's disdainful look grew deeper.

"Your friend Elton asked me the question point-blank. 'How did you live,' said he, 'during those years?' I wonder you did not employ a more diplomatic tool."

"But I never knew Jack did that!" said Wyllis, with evident sincerity. "It was d—d rude of him, upon my word! And what did you say?"

"I told him perhaps I lived on borrowed money, as he did."

Wyllis laughed heartily at this.

"By George, Belle! That was a corker! But I never told you I had let Jack have money."

"You told me something that made me suspect it before you ever supposed I should meet him, and his actions confirmed the rest."

"Well, Belle," said Wyllis, after a momentary pause, "where are we? 'After what has occurred,' etc., I suppose you wish no more of me."

Her usual manner had by this time returned.

"Don't imagine I shall let you off so easy," she answered. "You are married to me and shall wear your chains. Husbands were devised to annoy women, I have always heard, and your early beginning, though rougher than I anticipated, was not wholly unexpected."

He sat there looking at her handsome face with a strange expression. He had seen her in many moods during the past thirty hours.

"Belle," he broke out, "you are a good girl; upon my soul you are! I wouldn't injure you for the world; and now our little tiff about this confounded picture is over, I'll make you a present of it."

He tossed it toward her, but she sprang away with a little shriek.

"I wouldn't look at it nor touch it for millions of dollars!" she said, stepping back from the place on the carpet where it lay. "Do what you like with it, but don't bring it near me."

He went humorously and got a pair of tongs from the fireplace, with which he took up the photograph as if it were something poisonous.

"By Jove, it seems a sinful shame to burn that up!" he said, turning the picture around so as to get one last look at it. "But I suppose it must go on the

altar of domestic peace and harmony. I never saw anything so beautiful! Of course—having got the original—but then, years work changes, they say. Belle, may I not keep it, just to look at myself, and never, never let it go out of my possession? Why, there are paintings in the Louvre, that have made reputations, not half as pretty. The little, sweet child! How innocent she looks there asleep! Mayn't I, Belle?"

She relented enough to come and shake his arm so as to drop the troublesome picture on the coals, and drew a long breath of relief as the flames reduced it to ashes.

"I never felt so wicked in my life," said Claude, taking one of the big chairs and pulling her down into his lap. "I can almost smell the burning flesh of that innocent young creature—"

She put her hand over his mouth.

"Well, now we are friends again," he said—"We are friends, are we not?—what's next?"

"A ride," she suggested. "A ride up into the city and around the vicinity, where we can get some fresh air. You see to the team, and while you are gone I will ascertain how they are using poor Helen."

The maid was very well, and not at all displeased to have so little to do. She ascribed the reason to the natural exigencies of newly wedded life and had no idea of the warring elements which had agitated her master and mistress since she left them.

A pair of fast horses was soon ready. Claude took the reins himself (he knew the neighborhood well) and off they drove at a good pace. The brisk morning atmosphere and the occurrences of the last half hour

had wrought a great change in Belle and she now looked the picture of health.

"Claude," she said, as she leaned against him, "I don't want you to misunderstand one answer I gave you when we were disputing there—after you said something about—a—a vestal. I don't want you to think—"

"Oh, bother that!" he cried, ungallantly, but kindly. "I don't care *what* you've been!"

"You have not kissed me yet."

"Haven't I? Well, here goes!"

The horses ran nearly a mile before Claude could recover the reins. It was a miracle the riders were not killed.

CHAPTER XII.

CORA GOES BUGGY RIDING.

Nearly two years have passed away. Cora Madison is now nineteen, little Jessie is twelve, and their mother and they still live in Cambridge, in the antique house with the long piazza, the sloping lawn and the high bushes and big shade trees along the street side. Some of the old college lodgers are there, some have finished their terms and gone away, and one or two new ones have come to take the vacant rooms. Another apartment will soon be tenantless, for Mr. Jack Elton is about to sail for his German university, and this fact casts a sombre hue over everything.

Mrs. Madison likes Jack. As a young man whose rent has never been overdue and who has even paid in

advance at sundry times, upon urgent request for needed accommodation ; as a gentleman whose Private Character is above suspicion ; who has taken great interest in Jessie and taught a naturally wayward child to obey and honor him ; and last, though by no means least, has been for over a year the careful preceptor of Cora, whose yearning for higher education might otherwise have gone unsatisfied. Yes, Jack has guided the girl in new studies, giving time to her which he needed for himself, though he would not admit that fact. During the past season he has sacrificed a dearly loved seat in the 'varsity boat in order to keep up with his lessons and hers, and has seen the college crew beaten at New London by so short a distance that he feels certain his arm would have gained the victory. How to get along without Jack is a poser to Mrs. Madison.

Jessie likes Jack : The idea that her "big brother" is to be gone from her for three years is more than she can realize. Who is she going to with all her small joys and sorrows ? Mamma doesn't appreciate them as Jack does, and Cora is always busy. No one to watch for at the gate ; no one to walk with to the college yard or street car ; no one she can run up behind when he sits on the piazza and blindfold with her little hands to make him "guess" who she is ! It makes Jessie very sober when she thinks of these things, but she doesn't quite believe it yet. Something will certainly happen, she feels sure, to keep Jack here.

Cora likes Jack : She would put it in her thoughts with a dearer name--she loves him. Ever since that night when they shot the big bear together, up at the corner of Oxford and Mellen streets, she has had no

doubt she and Jack are meant for each other. Very little of what most young people would denominate "love talk" has passed between them. Jack does not know how to be "spooney." Never, strange as it may seem, since that night, has he offered her a kiss. They have gone on like two satisfied friends who need none of these things to show each other how they feel. She knows the watchword is "Wait!" Three years more of study for him and then at least a year to get settled in practice. That fire does not burn the longest which has at its inception the hottest blaze. Gossiping neighbors find little to say of the young couple. It is clearly, to their minds, not a love affair at all. They are students—no more.

And Jack: The haven which stretches before him, and which he has so longed for, begins to have its regrets. Three long and weary years at Freiburg, with no sight of Cora's face and no sound of Cora's voice! He is an enthusiast in his profession, the year he has studied it at Harvard proving to him more than ever how well it is adapted to his tastes. But that slender piece of femininity, with the chestnut hair and the thoughtful eyes, that is adapted to his tastes, too. Jack is no dreamer, but he is a man; and being a man he cannot help looking wistfully after her as she moves about the house and thinking how soon he will look and see her not.

Jack knew that something tangible must be said before he went on his long journey. He put it off as long as he could, from very timorousness, (he was quite a coward in some things—this plowman) but one August evening, shortly before he was to sail, he found himself, as the sun was setting, walking with her along the southern slope of Mt. Auburn, in an unfrequented

part of that beautiful cemetery, and felt that he must use the opportunity. Finding a convenient seat they rested, gazing for a few minutes at the winding Charles beneath their feet and marking how plainly they could discern the various church steeples in the city beyond. When Jack found space for his words they were direct, as it was his nature to say everything.

"Do you remember, Cora, the night we were walking on Oxford street, nearly two years ago, when we spoke of Wenona and Maiden Rock? I asked you then, whether, if you loved a man, you would wait for him years, if need be, and you said you would wait forever."

"Yes," she said, in a low voice.

"I am going away next week, to be gone a long time—it seems very long indeed to me. When I return I shall have a profession, and I hope soon to be in possession of a good income. You know—you have known for a long time—that I love you. And I want you to tell me now that you will wait for me."

A tear, which fell to the earth as she looked up, answered his question. She put her hand in his.

"I don't know how I can bear to have you gone so long," she said, in a trembling voice. "It will seem so cheerless."

"But I will write you very often," he interposed, "and you will answer me. That will help a good deal; and when we know that every day makes one less to wait that will be something to think of. It is a long time, though," he admitted, looking dolefully on the ground.

They sat there a little while in silence.

"Shall I tell mamma?" she asked.

"What do you think?" he questioned.

"I think it would be best not. She is not well, and the thought that I had promised to leave her, even at such an indefinite time, might worry her. Oh, Jack, I am afraid you will not find mamma here when you return!"

He thought as she did, with his practiced eye, but he felt it his duty to say her mother was still young.

"Yes, I know it; she is not old, but she grows weaker every day. Even the little cares of the house are too much for her, and she won't let me take all the load, as I am so anxious to do. I wish I could take her away somewhere, where she would have nothing to think of but getting well, but it's no use talking of that."

Elton felt, as he had been often called upon to feel, the pang that poverty brings to those whose natures are generous and whose purses are light. If he could have made any sacrifice that would have given Cora her wish, how gladly he would have made it!

"Cambridge is not a bad place for invalids, by any means," he said, comfortingly, "and with your thoughtful care we may hope for the best. When I reach home again and get that wonderful practice that I have dreamed of for so long, we will take your mother and Jessie under our protecting wings and relieve them of all further anxiety. Do you know," he added, as the recollection came back to him, "Jessie asked me ever so long ago if I were going to marry you. What a darling little thing she is!"

"Did she?" said the girl, with brightening eyes. "It's just like her. She is indeed a darling, but I quite despair of keeping her in order after you go."

You have no idea how often mamma and I have persuaded her to do or not to do things, by threatening to tell you. All we could say to her would amount to nothing compared with one sober look on *your* face."

Elton looked surprised and not displeased.

"I had no idea I was being used as a 'boogey,'" he smiled, "but, if it proves beneficial, continue it. A threat to write to me and tell of her peccadilloes ought to be effective, I should think. The idea of a big German student coming across the ocean to scold her would frighten almost any child. Seriously, I have a very warm place in my heart for Miss Jessie, and I think if she will keep up a personal correspondence with me, I can guide her quite as well as if I were here."

As the sun had disappeared, they began to walk slowly homeward, discussing on their way many little things which can safely be omitted without destroying the continuity of this narrative.

"Are you sure," she asked him once, "that three years will not suffice to make you forget that you have cared so much for me? There will be young ladies in Germany as well as here, and perhaps one of them may captivate your heart."

She said it in a bantering way, but Elton could not treat it otherwise than seriously.

"There is and will be but one woman in the world for me, Cora."

At that she grew serious and said she was sure of it; and so talking they reached home.

For several days after Jack sailed there was a settled gloom in the Madison household. Cora busied herself with the housework more than ever, as her

mother grew yet feebler, and another servant was out of the question. The work was just then a godsend to her, however, as it helped to pass away the weary hours which were not to be brightened by Jack's step or Jack's voice. Jessie's eyes were red most of the time for, young as she was, she took her loss much to heart. The first thing to break the monotony was a buggy, which stopped at the gate, and a loud ring at the door bell from its late occupant. Cora, on learning that she was inquired for, walked into the parlor to find there no less a person than Mr. Claude Wyllis.

"Do you remember me?" he smiled.

"Why, yes," she said. "It is Mr.—"

"Wyllis; Belle's husband; of course! Two years since you've seen me, isn't it? And you—why, you've grown wonderfully! You were a child, now you are a woman. Belle will be delighted to see you. We are at the Parker House. I ran over in my buggy to take you there."

Cora was so delighted at the prospect of seeing Belle again that she never thought to wonder why that lady had not come to Cambridge instead of sending for her in this manner. She instantly replied that she would be delighted to go, and went to inform Mrs. Madison. In twenty minutes Cora was at the gate.

"You told me the last time we met never again to ride with a gentleman," she said, gaily, hesitating at the step.

"Oh, no," he corrected, "I never said anything as ridiculous as that. I said 'with a stranger.' It is quite different now. You have known me for two whole years."

This novel idea amused Cora very much. It was the first happy moment she had known for a week and her spirits rose as she drove down the street with her new escort. To her hundred questions he told her he and Belle had been in Europe most of the time since their marriage. He spoke of the various places which they had visited and said they had only returned to America within the past fortnight.

"And Elton!" he added. "Jack, poor old fellow, has gone right over where we came from. We just missed him, not thinking he was going so early. I would have given anything to see Jack."

"I did not know you were so intimate with him," she said, surprised.

"Intimate!" he echoed. "Well, I guess if you knew you would call it 'intimate!' There is no other fellow on this round planet that I like as well as I do Jack Elton."

"Then you have corresponded with him all the time?" she said, inquiringly. "I wish I had known it, for I could have got Belle's address. There were several things I wanted to write to her."

He looked at her roguishly.

"You wanted to tell her of the engagement, eh? But she knew it, somehow—Belle knows more things than any one else, I really believe. Well, Jack is worthy of you, little girl. He will make you a good husband. Ah! now you are blushing!"

And indeed she was, like a peony.

"You are trying to make me say things I have not said," she stammered. "But, where are we going? This is not the way to the Parker House."

For the first time she noticed that Wyllis was driving toward Longwood.

"I know it is not the most direct way," he admitted, "but I want to keep my horse off the pavement all I can, and this is not much farther. Speaking of Jack, he has three whole years before him in Germany. By George, Cora—I mean Miss Madison—that's a long time to wait for a lover!"

The girl began to think her escort quite too free in his manner, but she did not know how to stop him without appearing silly. So she said :

"Three years being necessary for the completion of his medical studies, three years he must remain. What part of Europe do you think the pleasantest?"

Wyllis totally ignored the question. He was looking admiringly at the face of his companion.

"If I were Jack Elton," he said, "and there was a girl like you waiting here for me, I would see all their old doctor-books in the bottom of the sea before I would stay there three years. Why, Cora—you must let me call you Cora, I never hear of you by any other name—I would rather stay here and sip the honey from those lips of yours than to have all the knowledge those blasted Dutchmen have got in all their universities!"

The boldness of this language angered the maiden. She felt that the limit had passed when silence was a duty.

"Mr. Wyllis," she said, coldly, "you have no right to use such language to me! I resent it utterly! If it is continued I shall refuse to ride with you. If you intend to take me to your wife, you must take the nearest direction to School street, and cease using words which are unfit for me to hear!"

He gave a long whistle, indicative of great surprise and dismay.

"Why, Co—Miss Madison—you are not angry with me! Heavens! what have I said? Well, it is always the way! I am the most innocent man in the world, and yet I am forever saying the wrong thing. Off to Parker's then it is, by the air line, if it lames the horse so he never goes again."

So saying he turned into Beacon street. It was near the Brookline end, and long before the recent improvements created there one of the finest avenues on this continent. There were hardly any residences near where they were and he was driving very leisurely. Seeing that Cora made no reply, he proceeded:

"You are not going to refuse to speak all the way to Boston on account of my intended compliment, are you?"

She answered with dignity:

"I do not consider it a compliment and have no wish to hear anything more of the kind. If that ends the matter with you, it certainly does with me."

"Then," he said, suddenly stopping his horse in the middle of the road, "let's kiss and make up!"

His action was so unexpected that Cora found his arms around her and his lips against hers before she could make the least response. The next instant all her outraged maidenhood was aroused and, unmindful of everything but her injury, she struck him full in the face with her clenched fist. It was a small fist but there was a will behind it, and it drew blood from his mouth, which discolored his face and her hands. She did not see this at first and, with an instinctive movement of self-protection, she caught the buggy whip out of its socket and struck him with that, too. In some way she managed to reach the ground and

was still striking at him in a blind rage with the new weapon, when the horse, becoming frightened at the blows, ran off down the road with Wyllis and left her there.

As soon as she realized what had happened Cora ran to a house a short distance back ; and, when the good lady admitted her, fell in a dead faint in the front hall.

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. JOHNSON, THE LAWYER.

It will always be a source of astonishment to the writer of these lines that a woman can go through the most terrible excitement with a nerve truly wonderful, and yet fall into unconsciousness the moment the danger is past. That they do this all careful observers will bear witness. Cora's case can be paralleled in this feature every day.

The house into which she fled was the home of excellent people, who did all in their power to restore the girl, first to consciousness and then to tranquillity ; for she regained her senses only to burst into hysterical weeping, which continued for upward of an hour, and would give no explanation of the cause of her distress. As the day wore on a girl employed in the house returned from an errand with the information that a gentleman's horse had run away with him ; that the buggy in which he rode had been overturned a little way down the street, and that the animal had been killed.

Cora was now filled with a new alarm. Perhaps Mr. Wyllis had been seriously injured! She felt she ought to go to Boston and see about it. Bad as he was, he was Belle's husband—good, kind Belle Vaughan, to whom she owed so much. So she quieted her nerves as much as possible, made herself look presentable, thanked the people of the house for their kindness and set off for the city, walking to the nearest horse cars.

At the Parker House she sent up her name to Belle, and in a few minutes that lady was in the parlor to meet her, with her arms around her neck. It was after this effusive greeting that Belle noticed for the first time her friend's swollen eyes and excited manner.

"Why, Cora," she cried, "what is the matter? Has anything happened? I was so overjoyed to see you that I did not notice at first."

Cora held back the tears with difficulty, and said in a shaking voice: "Oh, Belle, I am so sorry! Is he—is Mr. Wyllis very badly hurt? I don't think I knew what I was doing. He alarmed me so much, and I never had a thing happen like that before."

A quick flash of intelligence passed over Mrs. Wyllis' features. It was her first intimation that her husband's accident had anything to do with Cora. He had been brought home in a carriage, somewhat bruised about the face and with a sprained ankle, but beyond stating that his horse took fright, had given no explanation. As his hurts were not severe, no suspicion had arisen that there was anything he had not cared to tell.

Belle was a diplomat, not the less so after two years of wedded life, and she quickly decided not to let Cora

know that she had brought the first news. She therefore responded :

"Oh, no, dear ; it's nothing serious. He is a little scratched up and may walk lame for a week or two, but that's all. Sit down here on the sofa and tell me how it happened. Claude has gone to his room, where the doctor advises him to stay for at least a day or two, and there hasn't been time to ask him."

Cora reddened at the question.

"I don't know how to answer you, Belle. He had better tell you, if he will. But I know I struck him with the whip, even after I left the buggy, and it must have scared the horse." She spoke haltingly and kept her eyes on the carpet. "I was so anxious to see you that when he came for me I just ran to get ready, and when he began talking so, and at last when he—well, I couldn't help it, that's all there is to it. But I am sorry and I wanted to see you right away and tell you. And you are so good not to scold me !"

She uttered a sob and wiped away a tear with her handkerchief.

Belle saw it all now, and while it annoyed, it did not surprise her.

"I don't blame you in the least, you poor darling !" she said. "He is the one to be scolded. Claude is the most thoughtless man, I suppose, that ever lived. His impulses govern him in everything. Had I known he would ask you to ride over here (it is not a nice thing to say about one's husband, is it ?) I would have advised you to decline and take some other conveyance."

"Why, Belle," interrupted Cora, with a start, "he told me you sent him !"

Belle bit her lips at the *faux pas*.

"I did not tell him to go after you *alone!* He would have known me better! He is not responsible when there is a pretty girl in the question—no, he really is not! The sight of a pair of bright eyes makes him non-compos, a parasol renders him insane, and he goes raving mad at the sight of a stocking—unless it happens to be mine. I have lived with him two years and I ought to know!"

Cora's eyes opened very wide.

"But, Belle, it is dreadful! I don't see how you can laugh at it. Why, I would not for all Boston have him kiss me like that again!"

Belle could not repress a laugh.

"You are such an innocent little goose," she said, "that I hardly know what to say to you. When you know men as well as I do—but there! I am not going to fill you with pessimistic notions. If Claude has scared you, I will make him apologize. There are some things he ought to know. Come up stairs. He is only on the sofa. You shall hear me talk to him!"

But Cora held back.

"I don't think I'd like to go, Belle. He will scold me and I am very nervous."

"Come on!" said Belle, reassuringly. "Claude would feel badly if he knew you had been here and gone without seeing him. He is not the worst man in the world; though,—to repeat the old witticism—he is the worst I ever saw. Come along! I want him to see you."

She drew the shrinking girl towards the elevator and in another minute they entered the apartments of the Wyllises. Claude lay propped up by pillows on a wide sofa at one side of the room, reading a news-

paper Various pieces of court plaster adorned his countenance. One of his legs was bandaged at the ankle, and the smell of arnica and other aromatic drugs feebly scented the room. He did not look up at first, supposing his wife was alone, but when he did he gave a great start.

"The devil!" he ejaculated.

"No," corrected his wife, "Miss Cora Madison, who has been giving me the particulars of the very polite way you used her, while professing to act as my messenger. What have you to say—you naughty, bad boy!"

Cora could not help detecting in her friend's tone the humorous way in which she evidently regarded the transaction, and a rebellious feeling arose in her heart that this view should be taken of it. But, after all, she reasoned, the wife might know best how to govern her husband, who was evidently an extraordinary individual; and, beside, the hospital-like appearance of the room acted powerfully on the girl's sympathetic nature.

"Does Miss Madison come to scold me or to condole with me?" was Claude's reply. "If I might make a suggestion, I should say the penalty I am suffering is at least as great as my offense."

Cora made haste to answer.

"I only came to see how much you were injured. I heard about the horse—poor beast, he suffered the most and did nothing to deserve it!—and I feared you might be badly hurt. I am glad it is no worse, but I am very sorry it is as bad as it is!"

Her eyes filled with tears and her manner proved how earnestly she felt all she said. Claude looked at her and smiled.

"That was very handsomely said, Miss Cora, and now I know exactly what to say to you. I am sorry for the fright I gave you. I never supposed it would scare you so much, of course, but I am quite satisfied, now it is over and I am lying here on this sofa, that I was wrong. So, if you are sorry for killing my horse and smashing my buggy and giving me a face full of bruises and a sprained ankle—as I understand you to say you are—why, I am sorry for kissing you; that is, I am sorry you didn't like it. Say, Belle, is my apology ample?"

His wife playfully shook her fist at him.

"When will you reform?" she asked. "Must my friends always be in danger that you will embrace them against their will? Do you intend to go on forever alienating my dearest companions with your wicked acts? Why, Cora," she added, turning to the girl, "I cannot keep a maid, unless she is a picture of ugliness. How many have left me on your account, Claude? How many, I say?"

She waited for him to state the number, which he declined to do.

"Forty, I really believe!" she said. "Just as I began to like them, in they would come in a rage and give their notice. 'What's the matter?' 'The master insulted me.' Yes! All over Europe it was the same. England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, it made no difference. France—that was the worst of all. Italy, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, why, I did nothing but search for new maids! And all," here she shook her fist again with mock anger at her husband, "all on account of that bad man!"

Claude gave a gesture of impatience.

"You believed everything they told you."

"I did!" she said, solemnly. "Because, I knew you."

Then they both laughed, which Cora thought very odd indeed.

"You may make fun of it," said Mrs. Wyllis, "all you like, but it is true. And now I am going to punish you by going home to Cambridge with Cora and staying all night. You have made her nervous and somebody must do the quieting."

Cora looked delighted.

"Can you go?" she cried. "Can he spare you, with his lameness?"

"He must spare me," said Mrs. Wyllis. "If he wants anything the annunciator is handy and this house swarms with waiters. Do you hear, you wicked fellow? (to Claude) I am going home with Cora."

Saying no more, she proceeded to the inner room, where she was soon supposed to be undergoing the process of changing her attire. Claude took up the newspaper again, with an apology for so doing, and was soon lost in its contents; when, suddenly, a knock was heard.

"I am sorry to have to ask you, Cora," he said, "but I cannot walk very well and Belle is probably not suitably—"

"I am very glad to go," she answered.

She found at the door a gentleman perhaps thirty-eight or forty years of age, who had no sooner announced himself as "Mr. Johnson," than Claude's voice rang out, bidding him to enter without ceremony.

"Mr. Johnson," he said, as that gentleman entered the room, "let me introduce Miss Madison, a very particular friend of my wife. Miss Madison—M. John-

son." The usual bows were exchanged and Cora resumed her seat, while the new-comer walked over to the sofa where Claude lay.

"What's the matter—been getting hurt?" he asked, as he saw the bandages and court-plaster.

"Yes," said Claude, "a little; horse ran away; it's nothing. I'll see you in a minute. The ladies are going out."

Mr. Johnson glanced in an interested way at Cora and said: "Do you reside in Boston, Miss Madison?"

"No, sir; in Cambridge."

"Mr. Johnson is my solicitor," explained Claude. "His home is at New York, but his business is—well everywhere. Isn't that about it, Johnson?"

"Hardly," replied the legal gentleman. "Still, it's pretty well scattered—pretty well scattered."

He seemed quite contented with his business, himself and everybody else, Cora thought. An air of prosperity pervaded him.

"If you have as good luck managing everybody's property as you do mine," said Claude, pleasantly, "your clientage ought to be limitless. It's—let's see—ten years since you took charge of my affairs. I've spent money like water, had everything I wanted and some things I didn't (here he telegraphed to Cora an allusion to the bandages), and I've got considerable more than when I began."

"Considerable more," echoed the lawyer. "Considerable more!" Then he fell to looking at Cora again.

Mrs. Wyllis soon came out with her things on, and, after a few informal words with her husband's visitor, she took her leave with Cora.

"That is one of the most successful of the younger

New York lawyers," she said, in allusion to Mr. Johnson, when they were out of hearing. "He belongs to an old New York family that used to be very rich—his great-grandfather led them all, I've heard—but this man's father lost a good deal of it. His son determined to retrieve the family fortunes and he is doing it fast. He is not married, but I've heard it intimated that he is enamored of a Miss Van Rensselaer, whose fortune is phenomenal and who, it is said, looks favorably on his suit. She will be a happy girl who gets him. He is simply perfection in point of Private Character, as your mother would say, and he will carry her to the top of the social ladder."

They entered one of the carriages on School street and set out for Cambridge. As they climbed Beacon Hill, Cora said :

"Do you know, Belle, I hate to hear the word 'money' used in connection with marriage. It seems as if it lowered the most sacred of human ties."

Belle eyed the girl with a strange but kind expression.

"Never despise money," she said, "in whatever connection it is used. As this world is constituted, it becomes a most important factor in the question of happiness. I don't say it always brings it, but it may avert great trouble. I wonder what I should ever have done without it," she added, reflectively.

"By the way," she said, after a slight pause, "what has become of our young friend, the student?"

"Mr. Elton?"

"Yes. I have often wondered how my prophesy about him and you was turning out."

"We are engaged—at least, I suppose so," said Cora, blushing. "He asked me to wait for him till his

three years' study in Germany is ended. Please don't tell mamma. Nobody knows it but you.'

Mrs. Wyllis promised.

"Your secret is safe with me," she said. "I'm glad if it makes you happy. He seemed a very good young man. If he only had a fortune he would be quite my beau ideal."

Cora smiled at the "if."

"I don't think Jack would know what to do with a fortune," she said.

"Trust me, he would," said her friend. "The first thing he would do would be to marry the little girl he loves and take her to share those dull hours of student life which he must now pass away from her. That is—I've no doubt they're dull to your Jack; but I've been at Freiburg and Bonn and seen quite another vein in those student chaps. I've seen them drinking great glasses of weiss beer and lager, with one arm around the neck of some pretty blonde with long braids—"

Cora threw up her hands with a gesture of disapproval.

"Oh, don't give me a portrait like that to think of whenever I try to imagine Jack!" she cried, half laughing.

"I never meant to do that, I am sure," protested Belle. "I can only think of Mr. Elton as a tall, sedate, (she drawled her words) sad-eyed youth, sitting apart from the roysterers and gazing in a westerly direction toward where the love of his heart resides. And yet," she added, seriously, "as true as I live, Cora, I have no confidence in these absent lovers. They usually find consolations, wherever they are, and there is no place where there are more of them than in a German

university town. Don't let me discourage your bright dreams, child. Indulge them all you can, and if your theory is right I shall be all the more pleased."

Cora did not like to hear these things, but she did not know how to reply. Her friend seemed so much older and wiser, and then, had she not traveled? They soon reached her mother's, where Mrs. Madison and Jessie joined in welcoming Mrs. Wyllis and making her stay as enjoyable as possible.

The next day Cora, in a letter to Jack, told about Belle's visit to her (omitting the causes which led up to it) and how glad she was to have her so near, where she could go about with her frequently. And Jack, afar in his Freiburg loneliness, ground his teeth in impotent despair at his distance in miles and days from his heart's idol. Then he tried to set about the hard task of warning her against Belle's too close companionship, all the harder because he could not give the real reason which made him dread it.

CHAPTER XIV.

A FEW WEEKS AT SWAMPSCOTT.

"Am I not looking terribly?" were Mrs. Madison's first words to her visitor. "I don't believe, Belle, I shall ever be well again!"

"Oh, you, mustn't say that!" was the reply. "Courage is the best of all medicines. We will have you out in the air more. I go to ride a great deal and shall love to take you. Then, you must come down

to the shore somewhere and spend a few weeks with me. You can't imagine the improvement it will make in your looks."

The widow thanked her guest for the kind offer, but said seashore places were very expensive and she couldn't think of accepting it.

"Expensive!" echoed Belle. "What does 'expensive' matter to me, with a husband just rolling in wealth? Claude never questions my expenses, whatever else he may do, (here she looked at Cora) and I am sure the little extra you would eat would never make us suffer. I am going to Swampscott next week and you are going with me."

Mrs. Madison was relenting already. The prospect evidently pleased her.

"But Cora—" she said.

"Cora? Why, Cora is going, too; and Jessie, of course. You know there is nothing at all to keep you here in August. I don't believe one of your lodgers is in town, or will be till the term begins, and if there is one, get a woman to run in and make his bed and he will be all right. Jessie, darling, wouldn't you like to go down to the seashore and sit on a big piazza and watch the ships?"

The child looked up with sudden interest.

"What ships?" she asked. "Do any of them go to Germany?"

Belle nodded wisely:

"Straight to Bremen, I have no doubt, where you could get a train right up to the town where your big brother is. You can write him that you saw the ships sailing away over toward the northeast, and—good Heaven! The child is crying!"

It was true. The thought of Jack had been a hard

one for Jessie ever since his departure, and the tears now flowed in spite of all her efforts to repress them. At Belle's exclamation she ran from the room to avoid further comment.

"She thought so much of Mr. Elton," explained her mother. "He was here several years, you know, and he used to take a great interest in her. I never thought she would take it so to heart, though, when he went away. Why, she didn't seem to care at all till he was out of sight. He talked to her a great deal before he went. On the last morning they were together an hour and still she gave no sign. After his departure I found her in her bedroom sobbing fearfully. She said she didn't want to make him feel badly and so had kept her grief back."

Belle looked grave.

"Jessie is a dear child," she said, softly. "There is more in her little head than in most children of her age. Her affections, once enlisted, will be lasting."

The conversation then reverted to Mrs. Wyllis and her husband. Mrs. Madison wanted to hear about the places they had visited abroad and what their plans were for the future. At the last question Belle smiled.

"The future!" she repeated. "I think the present is about all that Mr. Claude Wyllis can attend to. He is a typical lily of the field in that respect. He not only takes no thought for the morrow, but not even for the afternoon or evening. It is very lucky for him his grandfather did. As for me, my future plans consist entirely of taking the Madison family down to Swampscott for a month and, that being my only aspiration, I am not to be balked of it. Cora, put in a word for me. Your mother is almost persuaded."

The girl looked her questioner frankly in the eye as she answered, "Mother and Jessie can go, if they think best, but as for me it would be impossible. I have no clothes."

Mrs. Wyllis made an impatient movement.

"Clothes!" she echoed. "Who wants clothes at the shore? You will want a bathing suit—that will take four yards of fifty-cent flannel and I will help you make it. I think I can sew yet, though it is some time since I tried. That will be everything you will need and if you don't wish to bathe (you ought, I always do) you won't have to get even that. It is very silly to parade a lot of costumes at a place like Swampscott. The thing to do is to be comfortable and one suit is enough for that."

Cora still shook her head.

"Belle, I haven't even the one."

Mrs. Wyllis knitted her brows.

"Not the one, Cora? What are you in at this moment?"

"This? A suit I have worn three summers, Belle. Don't think I am finding fault," she added, as her quick eye discovered a shadow on her mother's face. "It is good enough for home—quite good enough—but for a seashore place—Belle, you *know* better!"

Thus appealed to, Mrs. Wyllis eyed the dress critically

"I wish you were not so dreadfully proud," she said. "I would offer you anything, either of my own or new from the shop, but you wouldn't take it. What are you going to do? Stay here in Cambridge and roast instead of coming to see me, merely on a question of clothes? Well, your mother and Jessie

are coming—that's settled—and I'll find some way to bring you around yet."

When the friends were alone in their room that night Cora asked, "Is Mr. Wyllis going to be at Swampscott with you?"

"Ah! that's the point, is it?" said Belle, with a glance of intelligence. "Well, he sha'n't be there if you don't want him. I'll make him keep away. There are plenty of places where he can go."

Cora looked bewildered.

"You don't want him with you?"

"No; not when he is displeasing to my guests. Husbands are nuisances from their very nature, but they must be given set bounds. When I want Claude I can find him; when I don't, I inform him of it. It is very easy if you begin right."

"Then you—quarrel?"

"Quarrel? I should say not. I would like to see myself quarrel with him!"

"I don't understand it," said Cora.

"No," laughed Belle, "and I can't make you. I don't understand it very well myself, but we get along splendidly on the basis we adopted at the start. We have agreed—not formally, you know, but tacitly—not to interfere too much with each other. Claude does things I don't like (this afternoon, for example) but I am sensible enough to know that all I could say would not entirely stop him, and I pass it off as best I can. Probably I do things (nothing very bad, of course) that he doesn't like, and he treats me in the same manner. I guess that's our secret."

Cora shook her head again.

"It's not my idea of marriage, Belle, if you'll let me say so."

"No," laughed Belle. "I know what your idea is, 'Two souls with but a single thought, two hearts that beat as one.' That's very pretty and very poetic, but how often is it realized? *You* are going to realize it, my dear, of course, but you and your husband will look very lonely in this sad world."

Cora threw her arms around her friend's neck.

"But—are you happy?" she whispered. "I think people should be so happy together when they are married; and if they are not, what is the use of being married at all?"

Belle smiled into the innocent eyes.

"What's the use, child! Is it of no use to have a man's checkbook always at one's disposal?"

"Then poor people should not marry?" said Cora, drawing her own inference.

"Yes, they should, dear, and then they should get rich as quick as they can."

Mrs. Wyllis worked her plan to a successful issue, by bringing all her adroitness into play, and a week later she had the pleasure of finding the entire Madison family installed as her guests at a Swampscott villa. She had luckily succeeded in hiring the house furnished from its owner, who wished to vacate it for the balance of the season, and thus overcame Cora's disinclination to the greater publicity of a hotel. Mrs. Madison's sallow countenance took on a new hue after the first few days of sea air; Jessie played with neighbors' children and grew "as brown as a berry," whatever shade that may be; and Cora, between the pleasant surroundings and her friend's efforts to make her stay charming, enjoyed a most pleasant vacation.

The question of dress had been settled much easier than at first seemed possible. Belle had little difficulty

in pressing a money present into the hand of the widow, as she had so often done before. One new suit, with the et ceteras, did not cost a great deal, and Cora's natural beauty was of a kind which shines best with the simplest adornments.

Although it had been understood that Mr. Wyllis was not to be a part of the household, there was nothing in his contract to prevent him calling, and he drove up one day in his dog-cart, accompanied by Mr. Johnson. Cora had sufficiently recovered from her shock to receive him without open affront and an outsider would never have suspected that anything especially unpleasant had occurred between them. He explained his absence from his wife on the rather lame plea of having "business" at Marblehead Neck, and the presence of his legal adviser gave some color to this assertion. After the first call, as he drove away with Mr. Johnson, he demanded the gentleman's opinion of his wife's fair guest.

"Does that quiet little creature strike you as possessing elements of danger? Does she look like a girl who would give a man a lot of blows in the face with fist and whip just because he tried to steal a kiss?"

Mr. Johnson had heard the story, told in Claude's own peculiar manner, and had been much interested in it.

"It is ve-ry re-markable," he said, in his slow, legal way. "Ve-ry re-markable!"

"She is engaged to be married," pursued Claude, "to a young fellow who has gone to Germany to study medicine—a sort of protege of mine, named Elton. I suppose I ought to tell you all my affairs, but that is a kind of side-show that I don't wish generally known, the boy is so devilish proud. He draws money for his

expenses at Brewster & Bassett's, on my account, and has for several years. It will take about three more before he gets ready to practice and another year at least before he can make enough to warrant him in taking a wife on his hands. It is a shame, I think, for the little girl to wait all that time, but what can be done? Belle says she is attached to Jack beyond anything."

Cora's next letter to Elton would bear reading aloud before any company. There was little of the sentimental between them as yet, and the girl felt a shy disinclination to write too affectionately to a man who in three years of constant association had kissed her but once. But it was a letter which put Jack on the very pinnacle of uneasiness. It told of the pleasant time she was having at Swampscott with Belle, of the good the vacation was doing her mother, and of the necessary absence "on business" of Mr. Wyllis. Much of it was devoted to her entertainer, whose goodness seemed to the girl nearly perfect.

Believing, as he did most thoroughly, in Belle's inherent wickedness—with that unexplained Brazilian past always before his eyes—Elton still felt it his duty to warn Cora against this intimacy, which gave him the liveliest distrust. How to do this, without giving his true reason, became a problem which he found most difficult to solve. He dreaded to tell Cora what he thought. Her mind was too pure to be lightly sullied by even the insinuation of a thing so vile. He wanted her to avoid Belle—he felt that she must be made in some way to do so—but the longer he thought on the matter the more desperate it became. He wrote a dozen letters, erased and interlined them, made new copies, destroyed them and tried again,

This paragraph, in a long epistle which told of his life at his new quarters, was finally resolved upon :

“Your account of your visit to Swampscott was read long before this will reach you, you will be again at home in Cambridge, and I suppose Mrs. Wyllis will have left Boston. I shall be very glad if this is so, as I would rather you associate with her as little as possible. Her husband is my best friend and I dislike to write this on his account, but I know you will feel that my motive is right and bear my wish in mind.”

During the four or five weeks which elapsed between the date of the sending of Cora's letter and that in which she received the answer containing the foregoing, she had, as Elton supposed, finished her visit at the shore and returned to Cambridge. Her intimacy with Mrs. Wyllis had been so extremely pleasant that the girl viewed with pain the prospect of parting, and was delighted when Belle promised to spend a short time with her before leaving, as she intended soon to do, for New York. As Belle's generosity was as ample as her means, she found a hundred ways in which to make her stay agreeable to Mrs. Madison, even in a pecuniary sense, though she was so well liked for herself alone that this was unnecessary. The bright, dashing woman carried the house by storm and soon had only to make a suggestion to have it complied with. She was really very fond of Cora's companionship and set her heart on taking her to New York for a short time. To secure the consent of both Mrs. Madison and her daughter to such an important step was a matter of some difficulty, but after much diplomatic argument it was at last accomplished. Just

at this time Jack's letter arrived, and, as may be imagined, it threw Cora into an excited state of mind.

Belle found her in her room in tears, so unusual a state for her at that time that it aroused instant apprehension. The woman's quick eye espied the letter lying on the table and she said :

"Why, Cora darling, what is the matter? He is not ill, I hope."

The girl shook her head sadly and tried to brush away the tears.

"No, dear, he is quite well, but—"

She hesitated and then, in the warmth of her ingenuous nature, she cried :

"Oh, Belle! What did you ever do to him? How can he ask me not to see you!"

Mrs. Wyllis's brow was contracted for the briefest moment with a spasm of pain. Then she said, gently :

"Ah! It is that, is it?"

"Yes," said Cora. "Listen:"

She read her the whole paragraph, though her cheeks burned. It seemed the only thing she could do.

"Did you ever hear anything so cruel?" Cora asked, as she finished reading. "To give up you—the dearest and best friend I have in the world, except mamma and Jessie!"

Mrs. Wyllis added good naturedly :

"And Jack."

Cora wiped her eyes again.

"Oh, I don't know," she said. "I do like Jack very much, but this sort of thing is not pleasant. He must give me reasons. He has no right to say whom I shall and shall not associate with, at his mere whim. I shall

write to-day and tell him so. He must give me reasons," she repeated.

Mrs. Wyllis drew the girl impulsively into her lap, in one of the big arm-chairs.

"And if he should give you reasons, Cora?"

The girl looked at her friend in helpless astonishment.

"If he should?" she echoed. "But—he can't!"

"How can you tell?" asked Belle. "He may have learned much about me that you do not know."

Cora looked at the enigmatical face for a moment and then said:

"Belle, you are trying me. I will never believe anything against you, never! Unless—you admit it yourself."

"And if I should admit it?" asked the woman, gazing longingly into the dark eyes.

Cora smiled incredulously.

"That is too improbable to need discussion" she said. "I could tell a bad woman by looking at her, I am sure I could. If you were very wicked you could not look me in the face and talk about it, as you are doing."

Belle folded the girl in a warm embrace.

"You little darling!" she exclaimed, "the wickedest woman in the world would abandon her sins if brought in contact with your perfect innocence. But—th's is all very sad for me. Of course I cannot hope you will go home with me now, after you have received such express *orders* from Germany."

Cora shrank at the word "orders" and then drew herself up proudly.

"Yes, I shall go with you," she said. "I will write to Jack and tell him what I am doing and say I resent

his dictation in such a case. It will be time enough for him to 'order' what friends I shall meet when we are married. We will see what he says to *that!*"

CHAPTER XV.

"MY HUSBAND HAS NEVER ASKED."

So Cora's answer to her lover's request did not tend to alleviate his anxiety. During the month and a half before it came he had persuaded himself that she would do as he asked without question and had succeeded in setting his mind somewhat at ease. When he read what she wrote, and saw how little effect his missive had, he was plunged into melancholy. The thousands of miles that intervened, the long time it would take to get another letter to her and the knowledge that, after all, he could not give her the full reasons for his action made him desperate.

"Good heaven!" he said to himself. "By this time she has been three weeks in New York with that woman—they two together and Claude away. Cora is wholly unused to the manners of the gay world and Mrs. Wyllis will have her completely in her power. Deep, cunning and unscrupulous as she evidently is, Cora might as well be in the den of a tigress. What can I do—what can I do?"

In this state of mind he wrote another letter, and despairing of finding easier terms sent it in haste as first indited. In it were these lines :

"Your request that I should tell you why I so particularly asked you not to associate longer with Mrs. Wyllis, and your statement that, in spite of my request, you were going to New York and remain for some time at her house, caused me the deepest pain. There are some things, Cora, that I cannot even write, and I hoped you would feel such confidence in my love that unquestioned compliance would be a pleasure. You asked my 'reasons.' Must I tell you there is a dark cloud hanging over four years of the life of this woman—that nobody knows how or where she lived in Brazil from the time her father died till she returned to the United States? Must I say that before she married my friend she promised to explain those years to me and hastened her wedding day in order to prevent the visit which I had threatened to make. Cora, she would have explained those years to me if she could. Mr. Wyllis was no match for her. He was too infatuated to ask questions. I would have made any sacrifice rather than tell you this, but you have forced it upon me. If you love me, if you wish to live a happy life, avoid as you would a pestilence a woman who dares not open to the light of day four years of her young womanhood."

When Cora received this she was enjoying, perhaps, the pleasantest month of her whole life. As the guest of Mrs. Wyllis, at the Murray Hill Hotel, she had been initiated into a round which she had never before dreamed of. The luxuriousness of her surroundings acted on the girl's sensitive mind like a drug which both soothes and stimulates. Her hostess, with the adroitness of which she was mistress, aided in every way to make her feel at ease. Cora's natural charm

of manner made her a welcome addition to the circle in which they moved. Belle had no want of money. A carriage whenever they wished to drive in the park or to the large stores was always ready, as well as to the theatre or opera, where the music and gayety fascinated the unaccustomed senses of the girl. Every time she thought of the humdrum life at home, the common round of daily duties, her spirits fell. Life as Belle lived it—ah!—that *was* life. The view behind the scenes of wealth was very pleasing, and the prospect of returning to the abode of poverty disagreeable in the extreme.

Mrs. Wyllis had a very limited list of intimate acquaintances. Among those who were in the habit of calling frequently were Mr. Johnson, the lawyer, and Mr. Johnson's sister. The latter lady was a widow named Ashleigh, who presided over her brother's domestic establishment, for, though a single man, he kept house on Thirty-third Street, not far from Fifth Avenue. Cora was shown over the mansion by Mrs. Ashleigh on her first visit and duly impressed with the importance of the Johnson line, a score of oil portraits of whom adorned the wall. The furnishings were largely of the antique style, just becoming fashionable, with the advantage that their antiquity was real. A modern piano, however, graced the drawing-room, and "modern improvements" were to be noted everywhere. Cora's fingers on the musical instrument, at the earnest request of Mrs. Ashleigh, awoke the echoes in the quiet place.

"I wish dear John had a wife to brighten his life for him," said Mrs. Ashleigh. "He has lived here ever since mother died, with no one but a housekeeper and servants, until I came; and I am as dull as the

rest. John is too much absorbed in business. A wife would draw his attention from his cares and give him something to live for."

"I have heard," said Cora, looking up, "of a Miss Van Rensellaer."

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Ashleigh. "Miss Van Rensellaer's people tried to arrange that, all by themselves, but they forgot, strangely enough, to consult my brother. John has a great deal of family pride and the Van Rensellaers are very aristocratic; but when he weds it will be a heart affair. No combination of wealth or ancestry will weigh with him when it comes to the most important step of his life."

Mrs. Wyllis and Cora (Claude still keeping absent "on business") were invited by the Johnsons to dinner one evening, and everything was done to make the girl happy. The service was fine, the menu elaborate and the conversation bright. Mr. Johnson contented himself with being a good listener, as his taciturnity at most places except the bar was proverbial. Every word that Cora uttered seemed to draw his attention and his eyes were riveted upon her animated face as much as they could be without attracting undue attention. Cora said to Belle that night that Mr. Johnson was a very kind and agreeable gentleman. The idea that the dinner, or the lawyer's frequent calls, or his sister's invitations to numberless places, had any reference to her presence in New York, never entered the unsophisticated head of the Cambridge girl. The reader, being more astute, must have seen it at once.

In the midst of all this, Jack's letter came, and it caused, as might have been expected, a miniature earthquake. Cora read it with mingled astonishment and indignation. It seemed to her so scandalous, so

unjust, that she could hardly summon patience to read it to the close. Jack was going altogether too far; she had no doubt of that. If this was the way he proposed to begin, it was as well to know it now. Such a good, kind, noble woman as Belle was! His insinuations were preposterous!

She went directly to Mrs. Wyllis with this letter, as she had with the other.

"Oh, Belle, he makes me so angry!" she said. "But it can be easily settled, now that he has given his ridiculous 'reasons.' Tell me about those years he speaks of, that I may write him what a goose he is and relieve his mind for once and all."

Mrs. Wyllis's face grew a little paler as she saw the perfect confidence with which the girl made her request.

"I cannot do it," she said, firmly.

"Cannot?" cried Cora. "Are there then, as he says, years of your life which you are unable to explain? Oh, Belle, you don't mean that!"

Mrs. Wyllis hesitated a full minute before replying. The time seemed an age to her impetuous companion.

"I must ask you to trust me," she said, finally. "There is a secret in my life, but it is not wholly my own and I cannot reveal it yet, even to you. Mr. Elton has chosen to put upon my silence the most injurious construction. I wonder," she added, slowly, "if you will do the same."

The girl looked much distressed.

"There is no person in the word," continued Mrs. Wyllis, solemnly, "and I mean all that implies—for I except none—whom I love as I do you. But if you are unwilling to trust me; if you demand that I reveal what I have no right to do; if you are not con-

tent to wait until the time comes, when I can tell you all—we must part."

The distressed look on Cora's countenance did not abate.

"But your husband—he knows?" she said, desperately.

Mrs. Wyllis shook her head.

"No; and I will do him this justice—he has never asked. While your friend Elton was ready to pursue me even to the altar, unless I would tell him all, Claude expressly said he wished no explanations. An odd thing, is it not, that one man could take me for a wife and be content to let me keep my own secrets, while the other, with no possible personal interest in me, would have wrenched them from me as the price of my happiness."

Cora began to feel a little ashamed of Jack and then of herself. She was not satisfied, but she saw no way to make herself more so. At last she said:

"Belle, dear, I *will* trust you, for I am sure I may. But tell me just this; say it in your own way: There is nothing you would wish me not to know if you had a right to tell?"

Mrs. Wyllis rose and clasped her hands in front of her.

"Now you are getting as bad as he," she said. "I cannot be cajoled into any statement whatever. Either you will trust me or you will not. Which shall it be, Cora?"

Tears came into the girl's eyes.

"I *do* trust you," she said. "God knows I do! But—what can I write to Jack?"

The least lovable of the many moods of this strange woman came to the surface.

"I know what I'd write," she said, with set teeth, "but you can do as you like. He would have torn my husband from me if he could, and now he has taken you. Well, good-by!"

She held out her hand to the astonished girl, who took it, but would not let it go.

"People drive us wild!" pursued the woman, more to herself than to Cora, "and then wonder at the things we do. I could have crushed that man Elton as I could a fly under my hand, but I forbore. He was not worth the effort. He stood there, in that Boston railway station, demanding of me—of *me*—how I lived in Brazil for four years after my father died! He uttered an innuendo which made me ask him to look me in the eyes and repeat it, that I might see how a man appeared with such words on his tongue. He looked at me and there was no shame in his face. I could, with one word, have dealt him as hard a blow, but I would not—because I knew you loved him!"

Cora uttered a low cry, released her clasp on Belle's hand, and sank to the floor.

"I could strike him any hour," continued the exasperated woman, "and he would never rise from the blow, but I am not contemptible enough to do it. It took a man to strike such a girl as I was, with threats about what he would do unless I revealed a past of which I could not even think without agony. Merciless! merciless! And now, when I have but one friend left to love me, he would take her, too!"

She seemed only then to realize that Cora had fallen to the carpet and, sitting down beside the girl, whose face was a picture of woe, she drew her to her breast.

"You will know, years from now, that no one ever

loved you better—ever will love you better—than Belle Vaughan. You will see, then, whether those who profess deeper affection show it in more tangible ways than I. The coachman will take you and your things to the boat. So long as you have in your heart this feeling of mistrust you will not want to see me. If there ever comes a time when you can trust me without reservation, send and I will come to you. Until then I could not bear it, and it will not be your desire."

She rose and was about to leave the room when Cora cried .

"Belle, must we part like this?"

"Yes," was the cold reply. "Until you can feel that my face is an honest one it will do you no good to look upon it."

It was early in the afternoon and the Fall River boat does not leave until five. After packing her things—which did not take long—Cora sat down and wrote to Elton. She told him that the pleasantest part of her life had been broken into by his letter, which she regarded as unreasonable. She described the effect it had upon Belle, and said the result was a separation which, while it might please him, gave her the most poignant grief. Then, angry at his praise of Claude, she added the story of the assault in the buggy and of its results. "Your dear friend," she said, "that you speak of so highly, offered me the greatest insult of my life. His wife has done everything, not only for me, but for mamma. If I am to renounce her, I think you ought to know his character."

She took her boat without seeing Belle again, feeling as if her heart was breaking. And the little letter she had written took its way across the sea,

freighted with more direful consequences than it would seem possible to carry in one half-ounce of ink and paper.

CHAPTER XVI.

MRS. ASHLEIGH TAKES ROOMS.

Nothing was ever duller than Cora Madison's life seemed to her after she returned to Cambridge. The dead leaves which fell from the trees in front of the house had not less of heart in them than the girl, who felt that everything had suddenly combined to make her miserable. To add to her discouragement, her mother grew steadily feebler. Jack's room remained tenantless, reducing the already too scant income of the family. She could not write to Belle and none of her other female friends seemed to fill the great void. It was useless to write more to Elton until it should be seen how he received the last letter, which, while she felt it just, was also, she knew, severe. So the dreary days went on and Cora grew thinner and paler, until she looked as much of an invalid as her mother. Four long weeks passed, when one day she was intensely startled, on answering the door bell, (they kept not even one servant now) to find standing there Mr. Claude Wyllis.

Claude lifted his hat politely and she saw that his face was very grave. Without hesitation she invited him into the parlor, and, when she had also entered, closed the hall door. She knew instinctively that he had news of importance.

"That's a good girl," were his first words. "I've been fretting ever since I started for fear you would refuse to speak to me alone, and what I've got to say requires a private audience. But, by the way, Cora, you're looking devilish ill; and I'm afraid what I'm going to say won't make you any better."

She took a chair opposite to his and only answered him by a look of anxiety.

"I don't know how to begin it," he said. "You and Belle have fallen out over something, she won't say what. But you've done something else that has made trouble and will make more if we can't find some way to get around it. You've written to Jack Elton about my conduct in the buggy that day."

Cora's scarlet cheeks answered for her. She stammered, "I don't understand"—when he interrupted:

"No, of course you don't, or you wouldn't have done it. You didn't know—how could you?—that I had been furnishing Jack money for his education—it's all out now, so concealment is useless—and that he was to draw on me for all he wanted till his income as a doctor made it unnecessary. You 'didn't know that. Nobody did, but Jack and I—and Belle, of course—she finds out everything—and the bankers he drew on, and Mr. Johnson, my lawyer—I believe that's all. I would rather have told you, a thousand times rather, than have had you written him that about me, which I never dreamed you would think of. For Jack is a fiery fellow, and what does he do when he gets your letter—Lord knows what you told him! He just writes me, in the hottest anger, that he'll never use another cent of my money, not even to buy a ticket home so that he can thrash me, and all that sort of thing. And there the scamp is, four thousand miles or so away,

without a kreutzer to bless himself with, his education gone to smash and his career ended, unless some one knocks some sense into him. Now, what are we to do?"

Cora laid her head on her hands and sobbed. The news was worse than anything she had conceived of. In her rashness she had undoubtedly ruined Jack irreparably. Wyllis essayed several expressions designed to give her comfort and then arose and walked about the room. When he saw no sign that her grief was likely to abate he became very sympathetic. He drew his chair to hers and put his hand soothingly on her head. She never could have believed it possible, but he seemed at that moment the only friend she had, and even when he leaned over and kissed her gently on the forehead she made no movement to repulse him.

"Cora," he said, smoothing her hair back, "you mustn't take on so. I came here for advise. It is serious, but perhaps it can be mended. Jack has no right to do a thing like this—no moral right, in common business honesty—and I have so written him. He began to take my money over five years ago, under an agreement that he would complete a medical education and then pay it back. If he quits the university now he will lose all chance of returning the twenty-five hundred dollars or so that he has drawn. I have sent him all that argument by mail. I've told him, 'You can be as mad at me as you like, dear boy, and no doubt I deserve it, but you must stick to your business agreements.' Do you think that will do him any good?"

Cora raised her melancholy eyes to his.

"None whatever," she said, sadly "I am sure Jack will never touch another penny of your money, and

what he will do I cannot guess. He told me he had his education to pay for in the future, but I never thought of you in that connection. I have ruined him and we must bear the punishment together."

Claude looked discouraged.

"But—he's such an ass!—excuse me, Miss Madison—I mean Cora—how can he live a week in a God-forsaken German town with nothing in his pocket? Of course he will look for work and try to keep from starvation in that way, but it's a slim chance. I'd take the steamer and run after him, but I really think he'd break my head at sight. Such a devilish row over a kiss!"

He uttered the last sentence with a dim idea that it might force a smile on the girl's face, but it had no such effect. She did not look as if she could ever smile again. The expression on her countenance was terrible to see. She was thinking of Jack, gloomy and despairing, in that foreign city, without friends or money. What might he not be tempted to do? Suicide even was possible! And in the midst of these horrors a voice seemed to be continually repeating "All your fault—all your fault!"

They talked it over a while longer, but neither of them seemed able to make a suggestion that would meet the case. Claude, with his natural buoyancy, tried to inspire the girl with hope, but he was unsuccessful. Her spirit was completely crushed. When he was about to leave he drew her to him in a brotherly way, talking encouragingly, and imprinted a kiss on her cheek. She was too broken to resist even this; indeed she hardly noticed it. He looked sorrowfully at her for a moment and then vanished, saying he would return another day.

A few days later a carriage, containing Mrs. Ashleigh, drove up to the house. Cora's troubles had given her a settled expression of sadness, which the visitor was quick to notice, but too wise to comment upon. What she wanted was to know if she could hire two or three rooms for a while, where she could make her home during a temporary stay in Cambridge. The girl's reply that they had no apartments good enough for the lady, was met with a request to see what there were. Jack's room and another leading from it were shown, and at once pronounced quite satisfactory.

"If I can have these, with the privilege of using the parlor, I shall be delighted," said Mrs. Ashleigh. "The price will be no object at all, and I dread so much going to those Boston hotels that I shall esteem it a great favor to come here."

Mrs. Madison was reclining in a rocking chair when Mrs. Ashleigh was introduced to her. It was only for a small part of each day now that the invalid left her bed. Her slender resources made the prospect of an addition to her household very agreeable; and, as Mrs. Ashleigh insisted on nearly doubling the price she fixed, declaring it altogether too low for a "transient" rate, there was no trouble in coming to a satisfactory arrangement. Almost before the Madisons were aware of it, their new tenant, with her maid, was installed on the premises, and seemed completely at home there. Within another week she had secured Mrs. Madison's consent to bring a cook from New York and have her meals served with the rest, she agreeing to pay all the family's provision bills for the privilege. A carriage and horses were also domiciled in a stable near Harvard square and frequently

used by the lady. The widow found a short ride in the middle of the day very beneficial, and Jessie thought the frequent invitations which she received great treats. Cora resisted all persuasions at first, but finally accepted occasionally. All this time not a word came from Jack, and she grew thinner and paler.

At last, a letter did come, but there was little in it to cheer the despondent girl. It was dated at Berlin, where Jack said he had been obliged by unforeseen circumstances to go for a while. Its language would have been very mysterious to her but for the explanation she had received from Wyllis, in the light of which it was perfectly clear. Among the things Jack wrote were these :

“You promised to wait for me, when we both thought I would be able to return in three years with my diploma. I fear now it will be much longer, though I mean, if possible, to achieve it sometime. How long would you wait—how long ought I to ask you to wait?—these are the questions that are troubling me. I sometimes feel that I have taken advantage of your youth and inexperience to demand too great a pledge. If I have, write and tell me so and, at whatever personal suffering, I will release you.”

There was not a word about Wyllis and his wife, which seemed strange, nor any explanation of his present position or reasons for quitting Freiburg. Cora was glad to get the letter, for it proved that Jack was still alive and that was something. It aroused strange thoughts, however. Could it be that she and Jack might yet be separated—that all the years she had

considered herself as his future wife might count as naught ?

It brought a possibility into her life which, while it gave her a dull pain, set her thoughts into a new channel, and so far relieved the pressure on her mind.

She was a good while in answering the letter, and when she wrote said little except on ordinary things ; how her mother and Jessie were ; that a new lodger had come ; that Cambridge had changed little since he left. As he had not spoken of Claude or Belle, neither did she, and as for his suggestions regarding her engagement she did not know how to answer him. There was a vague feeling in her heart that if Jack really cared so much for her as he professed, he would have told her about his letter to Wyllis and not leave her to find it out by accident. He had been so free in demanding things of her since he went away, he might have confided his troubles as well. Oh ! how distance distorts the dearest and sweetest things and makes a noble action seem a selfish one !

Wyllis called several times. He was evidently in genuine distress at the turn affairs had taken.

"By George !" he said to Cora, "I wish you and Belle would make up. That woman has got the greatest head to unravel things, and if she would take hold of this she would find the end of the string in no time. I've tried to get her interested, but she shuts down on me like a steel-trap. What devilish queer things women are. Two of them will be hugging and kissing like anything one day and the next you couldn't pull them together with a rope and tackle. I said to her the other day, 'Belle, you must help me out on this Elton matter ; by George !' I says, 'the fellow may starve over there !' And what do you think she said ?—

'Let him *starve*!' Now, that's a nice kind of way for a woman to talk, isn't it—'*Let him starve!*'"

Claude gave a long whistle to relieve his over-charged feelings.

"This is devilish hard on you, too," pursued the impetuous man. "Lord knows when Jack will ever get ready to be married at the rate he is going on! He may keep you dillydallying along for a dozen years, till you are an old maid, and then return to plowing and hunting bear in the West. That's what he was made for, and I sometimes wish I'd sent him back there instead of trying to make a doctor of him. A doctor! He took me—or I took him, I should say—out there last year, and it seemed to delight him to see the confounded crops and stupid old bluffs and prairies. He told me there was a secret cave of his up on a hill, where he used to hide as a boy. If you don't look out, Cora, he'll take you there to live when he marries you. It'll be about all the home he'll be able to afford."

Cora answered sadly.

"Don't mind me," she said in a low voice. "It has been Jack's misfortune that he ever knew me. I can never make up the loss I have caused him."

But Claude demurred.

"Come, now, I won't have that!" he said. "The blame is on my shoulders and on no one else's. You shouldn't have looked so outrageously pretty, though, that day in the buggy. If I was to have been hung for it, I couldn't have helped what I did."

Cora looked at him reprovingly:

"Why do you persist in saying such things? You know very well it is wrong."

"Why do I?" he retorted. "Because it's my nature

to say precisely the opposite thing to a girl that I ought to say. I do it all the time, though it's the most senseless of habits. If I go into a store or restaurant where there are girls, do you think I buy what I want and pay for it in a decent way? No. I say some devilish silly thing that I ought to be kicked out for. Half of them like it and show they do, and the other half like it and pretend they don't. You've got to get used to me, Cora. I'm like this New England climate—one can live through it after a couple of winters."

CHAPTER XVII.

"I'M VERY SORRY, IF YOU REALLY MEAN IT!"

One day, as Claude was driving away from the Madison house, he saw Miss Jessie coming from school and stopped to speak to her.

"Well, how is Jack Elton's little sister to-day?" he asked. "You remember Jack used to say he was your 'big brother.'"

The child's large eyes filled with tears.

"I'm pretty well," she answered, "but Jack never writes to me now. I heard Cora tell mamma he had moved to a new place. Perhaps he doesn't get my letters."

"Ah, ha!" he cried, gaily. "So you correspond with Jack, do you? How often do you write, now?"

"Every week," said Jessie, earnestly. "And it is over two months since I had an answer. Is there any

way I could find out whether he gets my letters and what his new address is?"

Claude was affected by the sombre aspect of the little face.

"You may be sure all your letters are forwarded to Jack," he said, "if you send them to the old address at Freiburg. I think he is moving about and in no settled place. Jack has had some trouble, you see—about money—and doesn't feel like writing; but don't you get the idea into your head that he has forgotten his Jessie. When things come around right again you'll get the first letter, depend upon it!"

Jessie looked a little brighter.

"But," she said, "he has written to Cora; or how would she know he had moved?"

"Ah!" said Claude, knowingly, "but Cora is his sweetheart, you know, the girl he is to marry when he gets to be a great doctor, and he *has* to write to her."

Over the child's face passed a look of quick comprehension.

"Oh! Will Jack marry Cora!" she cried, clasping her hands in joy. "Are you sure of that? Then we will have him all the time, and never be parted again!"

Like sunshine bursting through clouds was the radiant look which illumined the tear-stained face. Claude saw that he had unintentionally revealed a secret, for he had never doubted that Jessie knew the relations of her sister and Elton; but it was too late to recede.

"I asked Jack one day, ever so long ago," the child continued, "if he was to marry Cora. He looked much displeased and said I must never say such a thing again. How can anybody tell what lovers will

do? They always act so strange! Now Cora, when I speak of Jack, will hardly answer me. What is the reason? Why does being in love make folks different from everybody else?"

Claude paused before he answered a question which has puzzled wiser heads than Jessie's. He had to adapt his reply to the capacity of his auditor.

"Well," he said, finally. "I should put it in this way: Cora is sad because Jack is in trouble; Jack is sad, too, for the same reason, which may compel him to put off his marriage a very long time. If he and your sister were together again, I think you would find their troubles disappearing very quickly."

"Oh, I wish they were!" cried Jessie. "I did not want him to go. There are very nice doctors who never went to Germany, and why need Jack? I am awfully lonesome without him. Mamma is sick and Cora is cross. I've no one to talk with or to get to help me with my studies."

That night Jessie wrote Jack a long letter, telling with a child's frankness what she had learned about him and urging him to return before Cora got so pale that he wouldn't know her. "That nice man, Mr. Wyllis," she wrote, "that you used to ride with, comes here to see Cora, and he tells me you are going to marry her. I am very glad, Jack, for I love you very much myself, and I shall be glad when you come to live at our house forever. Let the old German doctor-school go and come back to Cambridge, were you can learn just as much—a doctor here told me so—and then we will all be happy once more."

She bought a stamp with some money of her own, and sent the letter without a word to any one.

When Jack received it, he was working for little

more than his board as courier at a hotel in Berlin. He had not one-quarter enough money to pay his passage to America, had he been disposed to go, which indeed, he was not. The ingenuous statement of the child that Wyllis was in the habit of calling on Cora completed his cup of misery. Was Cora, then, a deceitful creature, who would at one moment write a letter declaring that a man had grossly insulted her, and at the next welcome him as a guest at her home? His sense of injury at Claude's action grew deeper when he reflected that he might be attempting to ruin the unsophisticated girl. For what other reason, said Jack to himself, could Wyllis continue to visit her, after his wife and she had parted companionship?"

What could Elton write to her that she did not already know? It seemed to him he must learn to renounce the hope of his life in the face of the astounding developments of the last few months. But when he tried to do this—when he attempted to reconcile himself to the thought of giving up Cora—he learned, as others have done before him, how deep a root love had taken in his heart. He could argue it out, reason it away, but there it stayed, after all. So Jack worked on, waiting for the succor which it seemed would never come, but he wrote no letters.

Mr. Johnson, the lawyer, called occasionally, as was very natural, to see his sister, Mrs. Ashleigh, at the Madison house. Their interviews were held in the parlor, and it was also natural that Cora should be asked, on one pretext or another, to meet him there. She was very poor company, she felt, but she deemed it her duty to oblige her mother's best paying tenant in every reasonable way. Things had been easier in a pecuniary sense, since Mrs. Ashleigh's arrival, and this

was not to be despised. The lady often hinted to Cora that when the time came for her to return to New York she hoped the girl would pay her a long visit there, but Cora's previous experience made her disinclined to do this. She had loved Belle as she never could love Mrs. Ashleigh, and yet trouble had arisen between them.

She dreaded returning to a place filled with such sad memories.

Mrs. Madison, who continued in the same delicate state of health, received Mr. Johnson several times and was much impressed by his gentlemanly bearing. Mrs. Ashleigh used to talk, in his absence, of her brother's bright prospects in his profession, of the high social position of the family and of his comfortable fortune.

"Ah, Mrs. Madison!" she would say, in closing, "if dear John only had a good wife to share his home I should be quite content. He could almost take his choice of the marriageable girls in New York's wealthiest families, but he will never marry unless his heart and hand go together."

Mr. Johnson would talk to Mrs. Madison as much as he talked to anybody. He used to second all his sister said, which did quite as well as if he had advanced the ideas himself.

"I have been telling Mrs. Madison, John," Mrs. Ashleigh would say, "that these winters are too severe for her, and that a trip to the Bermudas or Cuba would be of vast benefit. She feels that she cannot afford to undertake such a journey, but if we were to go, as we have talked of, she could accompany us just as well as not. She has been so kind to me since I came here that I feel under peculiar obligations."

Then Mr. Johnson would murmur, "Certainly, Esther; certainly," and Mrs. Madison would say, in her feeble voice, that the proposition was very kind indeed, but that she could not think of accepting so great a favor. Then Mrs. Ashleigh would add, "Well, Mrs. Madison, we hope you will not decide to refuse us, until you think it over." And Mr. Johnson would echo, "Certainly; she must think it over—think it over!"

Late in January the physician who attended Mrs. Madison had a serious talk with Cora.

"I can do nothing more for your mother," he said. "The only hope for her is a change of climate. It is my habit to speak plainly and honestly. A southern trip would benefit and might save her—I cannot promise the latter—but a March spent in this latitude is absolutely dangerous."

The girl was being hedged in by a series of circumstances which neither she nor anyone else could control. Her frail craft was being borne rapidly to the edge of the great cataract.

One day Mrs. Ashleigh came to the point, in a talk with her landlady.

"My dear Mrs. Madison, I have something to say to you that will doubtless cause you great surprise, but ought not, on reflection, to be deemed disagreeable. I have been watching my brother for some time and I am sure he has at last discovered an object upon which his affections may justly be placed."

The widow said, politely, that she was very glad to hear it. Mr. Johnson, she was sure, was a gentleman whose hand any lady might be proud to accept.

"I knew you would say so," said Mrs. Ashleigh, much gratified. "You must have noticed his manner

yourself, and perhaps you are partially prepared for what I am about to say. You can guess, doubtless, on whom John's hopes are centered."

Mrs. Madison shook her head wonderingly.

"Is she—is she a Cambridge lady?"

"She is," said Mrs. Ashleigh, "and the best and sweetest of them all. Mrs. Madison, don't let me agitate you. It is your dear daughter, Cora."

The widow was wholly surprised and only the application of the ever-present smelling-salts prevented her fainting.

"Cora!" she gasped, on recovering. "Cora! Why, Mrs. Ashleigh, she is only a child!"

"She is nearly twenty," replied Mrs. Ashleigh. "Three years older than I was when I entered the married state."

Mrs. Madison had a look of genuine pain on her pale features.

"Oh, I could never spare her!" she said. "Cora is now my sole reliance."

"You would not be asked to spare her," replied Mrs. Ashleigh. "My brother would consider it both a duty and a pleasure to receive you as a permanent member of his family. You are ill and unfitted for the cares you have here. Your daughter is taxed beyond her strength. You need a change of scene and of climate—I heard your physician say so last week. If Cora will marry my brother we will all take a trip to Bermuda, returning to America when the rough spring winds have been softened by the warmth of summer. After that your home will be with them, either at New York or Newport, according to the season. My brother's wealth will be ample for you and Jessie, and you will never want for anything."

The prospect was indeed alluring, but the widow held out for a long time. It was hard to think, all at once, of Cora as a marriageable possibility. At last she was induced to say she would leave it to the girl to decide.

"I never shall ask my daughter to sacrifice herself for me," she said, tenderly. "If she wishes to marry Mr. Johnson of her own free will, I shall not refuse my consent."

While this talk with Mrs. Madison was very wisely entrusted to Mrs. Ashleigh, the actual proposal must of necessity be made by Mr. Johnson himself. The lawyer, who had an extended fame as an advocate, who could tear a verdict from a jury by sheer eloquence, found it the hardest task of his life to tell that slender girl of nineteen that he loved her. Mrs. Ashleigh arranged to leave him and Cora together in the parlor one evening, by stating that she had a letter which she must write in season for the late mail, and he nerved himself for the declaration.

"Miss Madison," he began, "I have something of—of importance—to say to—to you."

She looked interested, but evidently had no idea to what his words would lead.

"I am older than you," he continued, slowly, "considerably older. In fact, I am thirty-nine years of age. I belong to a family of which I may well feel—proud. My grandfather was governor of his State and—widely known. One of my uncles is a bishop. I am in possession of a good law practice (he gained courage as he saw her perfect equanimity) and have a fortune that would be considered—by most men—a large one."

He paused a moment and she bowed to show that

she was attentive, still wondering why he confided these things to her.

"My position," he proceeded, "seems a strong one. I have been for three terms in the Assembly and can go to the Senate when I please. Congress will be open to me after a few years. You have seen my home. You have seen Me. I believe no lady could esteem it less than an honor if asked to be my wife."

Cora bowed again, and said in a low tone that she felt sure of that.

"I have been a man of close attention to business," he continued, "and have never—until recently—thought of being in love. And now there is but one woman in the world to whom I would offer my hand. Miss Madison, if you will accept it—"

He stopped, for the girl had risen, with a look of the blankest dismay, and stood clutching the back of the chair she had lately occupied, in great agitation.

"*Me!*" she cried. "*No, No!* there is some mistake!"

"None," he replied, considerably astonished. "I ask you in good faith. I will make your happiness my greatest care if you will confide it to me."

"Oh, sir!" cried Cora, "I am very sorry, if you really mean it! You are very kind—and I appreciate it—but I couldn't think of it! You must excuse me!"

She gave him a low curtsey, and left the room, leaving behind her a very confused and disappointed gentleman.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"MAMMA, DO YOU WISH ME TO MARRY?"

Mr. and Mrs. Claude Wyllis were living in their apartments at the Murray Hill Hotel and enjoying the winter, each in their own way. That is, Claude was enjoying it, for it took a very big cloud indeed to darken his sky very long at a time. But Belle, while she did all she could to pass the hours pleasantly, missed Cora sadly. The bright, handsome, ingenuous girl had given her a degree of pleasure for which nothing else seemed to compensate. The opera, the theatre, the calls, the dances, the drives and the shopping all seemed less attractive when Cora was no longer there to share them. Claude and his wife were by no means inseparable and usually went their various ways in mutual content. Since the experience of his wedding night and the next morning he had come to regard Belle as a woman who would certainly outwit him in any fair contest and, in spite of his one attempt to humiliate her, he did not ordinarily delight in doing ugly things to anybody.

He had grown to like Belle extremely well—more he would hardly have claimed. She was stylish, of fine personal appearance and usually agreeable to him. She did not annoy him with unanswerable questions when he came home at daylight or forgot to come at all. Claude Wyllis could never have endured a devoted wife—one who would have followed him to the door and pined while he was absent. That was

very sweet in a mistress—in some pretty love episode that might last a month or two—but in a wife, bosh!

Belle went where she liked and he did the same. Sometimes, often indeed, they went together. When they did not, that ever convenient excuse of "business" served them as it has served others. The long purse which he held, into which his wife was privileged to insert her fingers to the full length of her beautiful arm, smoothed over everything for both. And yet Belle liked him very much. Had a case arisen where his interests demanded a heroic movement on her part it is more than probable she would have made it. She understood him, and understanding him, she contrived to please him and yet maintain at the same time almost the independence of an unmarried woman.

But Belle missed Cora and she had perpetual struggles with her pride to keep from posting off to Cambridge and making friends with her again at whatever cost.

Claude used to come home from his own visits there and tell Belle all about them. She knew almost as soon as he about Elton's fiery letter. She knew the student had voluntarily stopped taking Claude's money and was struggling with poverty at the German capital. She felt a touch of vindictiveness and a certain satisfaction at this humbling of the man who had once taken it upon himself to arrange her private affairs. Still, if Cora loved him, she was sorry, too. The girl must be in great distress, with all her troubles. Claude's pictures of her pale and emaciated face touched Belle deeply. But everytime he would ask her to suggest something the contrary spirit would rise to the surface.

"Belle," he said to her, over and over, "you could

get us out of this, if you would. You have a head for calculating. Give me an idea."

"There is no idea," she replied, as often, "that will enter the head of a mule in a state of rebellion, and that's just what this Jack Elton is. After all you've done for him, to think he would fly into such a passion over nothing!"

"Nothing!" cried Claude. "Don't call that kiss '*nothing*!' Upon my soul, I would give half I'm worth for a dozen of them, taken at leisure!"

Belle laughed.

"You are not likely to take many of them 'at leisure,' if your first experience is a criterion. What I mean is, no lover has any business to be so confoundedly jealous. A nice husband he'll make! What does the fool think? Is he going to have a handsome wife and allow nobody to look at her!"

Claude took a chair and drew her on to his knee.

"You're a trump!" he said, "and I'm all the more anxious to enlist your services in this righteous cause. Silly as Jack may be, it is none the less true that if I had left that beehive alone nobody would have been stung. You just ought to see Cora once—why, you'd hardly know her. Come, my dearest, help me out!"

Belle took the kisses which accompanied the request and even returned them, but still shook her head. She was not as sure as her husband that she could invent a way out of the morass into which Elton had plunged.

One day, however, when Claude came home, he found his wife arrayed in traveling garments.

"Whither away?" he asked, embracing her.

"To Cambridge," she said, in her ordinary tone.

"You are going to Cora at last?" he cried, joyfully.

"Belle, let me kiss you again!"

When she could extricate herself from his caresses she said :

"You big Newfoundland dog! I believe I shall have to have my hair done up again. Going to Cora! No, indeed. I'm going to see my friend, Mrs. Madison."

He would not abate one jot of his gaiety.

"You are a jewel!" he kept repeating. "You will bring it around all right. If you do I will register a solemn vow to eschew buggies—with pretty girls in them—forever after. How long shall you stay there? May I come and see you?"

"My stay will depend on my reception," replied his wife, arranging her bonnet at the mirror. "If it is prolonged, of course you will make some ceremonious calls. I may want something."

She left him executing a fandango in the middle of the floor, though for what purpose she was at a loss to conceive. She had no idea she would accomplish anything.

Belle's intention as to her conduct at the Madison house was deliberately fixed. When Cora responded to her ring in person she was momentarily confused, but managed to ask, "Can I see Mrs. Madison?" with only a formal bow of recognition.

Cora repressed the impulse to throw herself into Belle's arms, and showed her into the parlor.

"I will see what mamma says," was her reply. "She is worse to-day, but I think she will try to see you."

The girl's pale face, paler than she had imagined it would be; the repressed welcome that showed in her luminous eyes; the marks of a grief borne alone on those young shoulders; and, above all, the emphasis

she placed on the word "*you*"—were too much for Belle. As Cora turned to leave the room she sprang toward her, caught her to her breast and kissed her madly.

"You dear, darling child! How could I have used you so!" she cried. "Making my cruel stipulations when you had so much to trouble you! I never can forgive myself!"

Cora lay for a moment in the embrace, which was so grateful to her, and then drew gently away.

"Belle," she stammered, "you know how I love you; you know how glad I am to see you; you also know why we separated."

The astonished woman could hardly believe her ears.

"It was because I said I could not bear to be with you while you mistrusted me. You are in great grief and I have thrown my pride to the winds in order, if possible, to be of use to you. Do you repulse me?"

Cora leaned for support against the door, the handle of which she had grasped.

"It is so hard to answer you, Belle."

"Do you mean that you mistrust me still? Sit down here for one moment—I shall not harm you in that little time—and let us understand each other."

Cora took a chair, as requested. She was weak enough to make it almost necessary. The sight of her former friend, and the demand she made, nearly took away the little strength she had.

"There is not much to say," she faltered. "Mamma will be glad to see you, if she is able; and I think she is, though you will see she has failed fast."

She paused for breath, and Belle felt the most intense sympathy for her.

"Mr. Elton was the one who asked you not to associate with me," she said, to divert the girl's mind from her mother's condition. "When did you last hear from him?"

"Many weeks ago," replied Cora, sadly.

"You have written to him since?"

"Twice."

Belle leaned toward her and spoke impressively:

"Do you throw over a friend who is ready to sacrifice anything for your happiness at the behest of one who thus coldly deserts you? Oh, Cora!"

The girl felt a sharp thrill of pain.

"I do not blame Jack," she said. "If I had not written him about Mr. Wyllis; if I had cheerfully complied, when he asked me to—to give up you—all would have been well. My foolish obstinacy has wrought his ruin."

Belle reflected a moment.

"What do you think he will do?" she asked.

"Mr. Wyllis told me that you said, 'Let him starve!'"

Cora's reproachful eyes fixed themselves on Belle's as she uttered the words.

"You never supposed I meant it!" said Belle. "Claude and I have puzzled our brains how to make him accept money, but we have hit on no plan. There never was a case like it. He can draw all he likes, by merely going to the bank and getting it, but he won't. Claude has had him interviewed by one of the bank's correspondents and it did no good. I think he will go there yet, himself, at whatever risk, and see him in person. You think we are not friendly to you, child! Why, nothing ever gave us half the anxiety that your case has done!"

Cora's lip trembled slightly.

"You are very kind, both of you," she said. "Believe me, I appreciate it, and it makes what I have to say the harder. I am nearly friendless, Belle. Jack will never return to me again; of that I feel certain. Mamma is going rapidly. Soon there will be only Jessie. I shall have to earn my living as best I may, with my little sister to care for. Only one thing of value will be left to me—my reputation."

Belle looked pityingly at the girl as she slowly enunciated the final words.

"And you think contact with me would jeopardize it?"

"You—you are unable to explain—"

"I soon shall be," replied Belle, "to even your satisfaction. I must be content to wait. In the meantime I certainly can do something for your mother, whom I love very dearly, and who has no such harrowing suspicions. If you will see her and prepare her for my visit, I will wait here for you."

The girl left the room. Mrs. Wyllis rose and paced it slowly for several minutes, with her eyes on the carpet. She was in a deep study when the door opened and Mrs. Ashleigh looked in. The recognition and surprise were mutual.

"Why, how came you here?" was on the lips of both at once.

"I have been boarding here for a couple of months," said Mrs. Ashleigh, "while visiting friends in the vicinity, but I go to-day. In fact, all of my belongings, except hand-luggage, have already gone, and I was looking for Miss Madison to settle the bill."

"I came especially to see her mother," said Mrs.

Wyllis, "who, I learn, is very low. Cora is now preparing her for my call."

The two ladies launched into a brief conversation upon society matters, returning again to the Madison family. Then Mrs. Ashleigh grew confidential.

"You know my brother John is one of the most obstinate of men. If he sets his mind on anything he must have it, if it is possible to obtain. I long ago ceased to oppose him in any wish, no matter how little I agreed with his ideas. Well, after thirty-nine years of single life, after attaining what we thought was confirmed bachelorhood, he fell in love, desperately; and with whom, do you suppose?"

Mrs. Wyllis said she couldn't guess.

"Why, with this little Miss Madison here, that he and I first met at your hotel!"

Mrs. Wyllis was quite unable to conceal her astonishment.

"With Cora!"

"Yes, with Cora," said Mrs. Ashleigh. "The other day he made her a formal proposal in this room—and—she refused him!"

Mrs. Wyllis's look of surprise grew deeper.

"Refused—my—brother!" continued Mrs. Ashleigh, impressively. "Refused John S. Johnson, whom half the heiresses of New York would jump at! Did anybody ever hear the like?"

Mrs. Wyllis doubted if anybody ever d'd.

"Of course it is unpleasant for me to remain here after this," continued Mrs. Ashleigh. "I have paid a good sum for my rooms, and since I brought my cook I have borne all the table expenses of the household. John would have stopped at nothing. I told Mrs.

Madison he would take her and Jessie under his charge, and that she should go to Bermuda with her daughter as soon as the wedding was over. The lady said she would leave it entirely to Cora. I can see now that the girl's decision is a disappointment to her. It will be hard for her to die and leave her children so entirely unprovided for and helpless."

Cora came at this juncture to say that her mother was ready to see Mrs. Wyllis and, when that lady had left the room, took the money which Mrs. Ashleigh handed to her. If she could have done so, she would have refused it, but the necessities of the poor compel the relinquishment of even the luxury of pride. It was evident to the girl that Mrs. Ashleigh's entire visit to the house had been made on account of her brother's design, and every dollar she paid seemed in a sense to add to Cora's humiliation.

"That is the amount remaining due, I think," said Mrs. Ashleigh, "sixty-two dollars and a-half. I still feel that there is an unsettled obligation to your family, but it could not be liquidated in money. I shall remember you all with the greatest gratitude."

Mrs. Ashleigh paused to see whether Cora had anything to say to this, but the girl remained silent.

"My brother wishes me to say just one thing more, to you personally. He esteems you quite as highly as he did before you felt it your duty to give him a negative answer to his proposal of marriage. His love is not changed by your reception of it, and it will not change. If he does not marry you he will lead a single life. He will be glad, whenever possible, to render you any service in his power, without expecting you to feel that its acceptance places you under any obligation whatever; and, if circumstances should arise

which change your decision, you will find him the same devoted aspirant for your hand that he was when he addressed you."

Cora could not help being affected.

"You and Mr. Johnson are both very kind," she said. "Everybody is very kind to me—much kinder, I am sure, than I deserve."

Mrs. Ashleigh rose to depart.

"Can you say nothing that will comfort my brother?" she asked, as she pressed the girl's hand.

"Only," said Cora, gently, "that I esteem him most highly and hope he may soon forget me."

"If you are in want, at any time—as you soon may be—you will call upon us?"

Cora hesitated.

"I will remember your offer," she replied, evasively.

Belle established herself in the rooms that Mrs. Ashleigh had vacated.

"You can't help yourself," she said, pleasantly, to Cora, as she announced her intention. "I have hired the rooms of your mother, who is still mistress of the mansion, though God knows how long she will be if she persists in refusing offers to take her to a suitable climate. I will say as little to you as possible, but your mother is a dear friend, for whom I must do all I can."

Imperceptibly Mrs. Madison came to rely on Mrs. Wyllis and to place herself almost entirely in her hands. A woman came on from New York under the pretext of acting as Belle's maid, who was really a trained nurse from one of the hospitals, and spent most of her time in the sick room. Delicacies, which the widow's slender means would not have allowed,

were procured ostensibly for Belle and conveyed in portions to the chamber. The burden of care was lifted from Cora, who experienced a pained gratitude at what she felt she ought not to accept and yet could not refuse.

Claude came to Boston and put up at Young's again, driving out every day to see Belle, but never making long calls. It was a curious state of affairs—the Wyllises devoting themselves to Cora's service, and the girl shrinking from them through her sense of duty to her absent lover and herself.

Mrs. Madison spoke to Belle of Mr. Johnson's offer and Cora's refusal. She dwelt upon the matter often in their conversations. She told how kind Mrs. Ashleigh had been and what Mr. Johnson had offered to do for the entire family.

"If Cora could have thought differently," she said, in one of these talks, "it would have been pleasant for us all. She could have had a lovely home, a good husband, a sure settlement in life—and I could have died happier."

Cora had entered the room noiselessly and heard these words. She was struck with contrition as she realized how disappointed was the tone of the patient sufferer she loved so well.

"Mamma," she said, going to the bedside and looking tenderly at her mother, "do you wish me to marry Mr. Johnson?"

The invalid raised her eyes to the pale face.

"I wish you to be happy, Cora. No one will ever wish you more happiness than the mother who has passed the point where she can do anything to aid you."

Cora sat down on the edge of the bed and pressed one of the thin hands between her own.

"No mother could be better than you have been," she said, earnestly, "and we shall keep you with us a long time yet. The least your children can do is to heed your every wish. If you desire me to marry Mr. Johnson, I will write to him to-day."

The sick woman seemed pleased, but she replied :

"I cannot decide for you, Cora. If you should come to me and say you had changed your mind it would make me glad to hear it, but you must decide for yourself. It is a most important step. Mr. Johnson, I learn, is an excellent man. He has a good property and reputation His Private Character is unimpeached."

She paused a moment and then added as before, "But you must decide."

For several days Cora walked the house like a restless ghost. Frequently she returned to her room and wept for hours. She was mourning for the absent lover, whom she had given up all hopes of ever seeing. She was mourning for the coming bridegroom, whose steps she awaited with trepidation. Finally she made up her mind. She wrote a brief letter to Miss Ashleigh, requesting her to ask Mr. Johnson to call the next time he happened to visit Cambridge. When this letter was deposited in the post-office, she felt like a ship whose anchor has been weighed and its sails spread. Nothing could save her now.

As soon as the express train could take the lawyer to Boston he was there, and an hour later his carriage stopped at the Madison gate. A telegram had preceded him, and Cora, using every effort to preserve her calmness, was ready to meet him. He looked very

anxious as he accompanied her to the parlor and took the seat offered him.

"I came in response to your brief letter to my sister," he said. "May I hope that you have changed your decision—that you will make me the happiest of men?"

She turned a set face toward him.

"Do not let me deceive you," she said. "My mother is dying; slowly, very slowly, I hope, but yet dying. No one can tell how much I wish to do everything according to her desires. She has intimated that my marriage—my settlement in life—would gratify her. I do not pretend to return your love. My heart has been in the keeping of another, who is now far from here, and whom—I shall probably—never—see again. There is nothing in me worthy of your choice. If you wish me as I am, I will accept you."

Each of her sentences showed their effect in his countenance, as in a mirror, but at the last words he forgot all the rest and, coming to her side, he put his arm about her.

"When may I call you wholly mine?" he cried.

"As soon as possible," she said, rigid as marble in his embrace. "There is yet time to take my mother to Bermuda before the summer, and the trip may prolong for a few days that life so dear to me. I desire no formal wedding, nothing but the simplest ceremony here in this house. My mother's condition would make anything else inappropriate."

He said hurriedly that everything should be as she would have it and suggested that Mrs. Ashleigh had best come at once to assist her in making arrangements. This she agreed to. He then asked if he might see Mrs. Madison and thank her for the treasure

she was to convey into his keeping, but Cora thought the excitement might be injurious, until she had first prepared her mother for the news. After a little further conversation Mr. Johnson withdrew, in a much more contented state of mind than when he last left that house.

Through the partially opened parlor window a little eavesdropper had heard enough to inform her of what was going on. Miss Jessie, who had accidentally taken a seat there, in an interval of other amusements, rose just before Mr. Johnson did, slipped around to the back door, and subsequently watched him as he left, from an upper chamber. She was in a rage. Cora promising that man to marry him, when Jack was away! Her Jack, her big brother, who was worth all the Johnsons in the world! She stamped her foot in fury. Should she tell Cora what she had heard? Not she! But she would tell Jack all about it! He should know what was going on in his absence.

"I'm only thirteen, but I'm a match for them!" she said, defiantly, as she took down paper and began to write.

CHAPTER XIX.

"TUM TE TUM-I-TY, TUM TE TUM!"

Belle Wyllis watched the preparations for Cora Madison's marriage with deep interest. She fully believed that nothing more opportune than Mr. Johnson's proposal could have occurred. He had every-

thing that should make a wife happy, from her standpoint, while Jack Elton had nothing. Now that the young student had abandoned both his career and his sweetheart, the prospect that opened before Cora seemed to her worldly friend a very bright one.

One thing only troubled her. She was not sure that Claude would accept her view of the situation. He had a peculiar way of "kicking over the traces," on the very worst part of the road. He liked Elton. The latter's obstinate refusal to continue to take his money had occasioned him great annoyance. The thought of the student penniless in a foreign land had caused him much disquietude. Until Jack had more formally renounced his claim to Cora, Belle feared that Claude would endeavor to have the girl's marriage with another delayed. While he was usually the most obedient and tractable of husbands, Belle knew from experience that when he did take it into his head to be mulish he was uncontrollable.

This difficulty, however, was met in a most unexpected way. Before her husband called again, Belle received a hastily penned note from him stating that he was to sail immediately for Germany, to carry out his oft-expressed intention of personally investigating Elton's condition. It was very lucky, Belle thought, that he had made this resolve, as before he could return Cora would be bound fast in the bonds of wedlock. She kept her own counsel, saying little, but thinking a good deal. When any one asked about Mr. Wyllis, she said he had been summoned away for a month or two "on business," and skillfully avoided giving a more definite answer.

Those priestesses of Hymen, ycleped dressmakers and milliners, flocked into the house to prepare the

lamb for the sacrifice Cora patiently bore the infliction of measurements and fittings, but left to Belle all questions of taste and quality of materials. The girl was in a sort of daze, from which she never expected to awake. The consciousness of duty nerved her to bear all. Her mother's face brightened so much oftener than of old, that she felt hourly repaid. Mrs. Madison seemed better after the marriage was decided upon, and became the most interested spectator of the rapidly fashioning trousseau. Cora was to be a rich man's wife, a grand lady who would never feel the griping hand of poverty. To be sure she was looking pale, but she did that long before the coming of the Ashleighs and Johnsons. She was absent-minded and low-spirited, but brides were often so. Mrs. Madison remembered that she herself cried an hour on the morning of her wedding day.

The irreconcilable factor in the case was Miss Jessie. Nothing would induce her to look at "Cora's pretty things," or join in any praise of the prospective bridegroom. She avoided Mrs. Ashleigh, who was now a daily visitor at the house. She refused to listen even to Belle, who had been a favorite of hers. Mr. Johnson encountered her on one occasion in the parlor, and in the course of a brief conversation came off much the worse.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, in a pleasant voice, "this is Miss Jessie, I suppose?"

"Yes!" snapped the child. "And Miss Jessie doesn't like you, either—no, nor never will! You needn't try to make her!"

He was at first amused, though considerably surprised at the way she received him.

"Why don't you like me?" he queried.

"Because you are trying to marry my sister! You had no business to come here at all! Nobody asked you! We were all right without you, and I wish you would go away as quick as you can."

"Why, my little dear—" he began.

"No; I am not your little dear!" she interrupted, viciously. "I am nobody's little dear but Jack's, whom Cora promised to marry long before she ever saw you or ever expected to."

"But," said Mr. Johnson, argumentatively, "Jack has gone away and will not return. He's many miles over the sea, and Cora does quite right in forgetting a promise which he also has forgotten."

The child drew herself up stiffly.

"Don't think Jack has forgotten!" she said. "Something has happened to keep him from writing. He'll come back, and if he finds you've taken Cora—why—you just look out! Jack's bigger than you and he'll come and take her away! See if he doesn't!"

He began another sentence when she burst out:

"I won't *talk* to you! I don't *like* you! I *hate* you! I wish you would go off and never let us see you again!"

Then she escaped by the door, and ran down into the garden, and he saw her no more that day.

Mr. Johnson mentioned to Mrs. Wyllis his reasons for thinking he was not wholly agreeable to Cora's sister.

"The dear, loyal little creature!" cried Belle. "She is so attached to Mr. Elton. He came here nearly four years ago and used to do everything for her. As she had no real brother she adopted him, and her heart has been quite broken since his departure."

"Does—does Miss Cora—still feel—"

"Undoubtedly," asserted Belle. "It would be idle to deny it. He was the first possessor of her girlish heart. But Cora is of true metal. She does what she believes right. If I were you, however," she added, pointedly, "I would not unnecessarily delay the ceremony. Accidents up to that point would be possible and very awkward for all concerned."

Mr. Johnson took the hint and dropped a word in the ear of Mrs. Ashleigh. The preparations were hastened slightly and the day set a little nearer than was first intended. It was arranged that the wedded pair should take a run on to New York for three or four days and then return for Mrs. Madison, with whom they were to take the Bermuda boat. Arriving at the island, Mr. Johnson expected to pass a few days with them and then go back to the city, where his law business was pressing, returning again later. He determined to leave nothing undone that would add to the happiness of his prospective bride, and the few suggestions she made were at once incorporated in his plans. They were to be united by a Cambridge clergyman, at Mrs. Madison's house, in the evening, with absolutely no one but the family, Mrs. Ashleigh and Mrs. Wyllis present. At eleven o'clock they were to leave Boston by the Shore Line in a compartment car.

On the day set for the marriage Jessie became desperate. Her letter to Elton had brought no reply. All she had tried to do for him and Cora seemed futile. Her mother sent for her and besought her to be "a good girl" and get ready to see her sister wedded. All that could be said to her was in vain. Entreaties, commands, even tears made no impression.

"I will never see Cora marry that hateful thing!" she declared, with an ugly scowl. "I will never call him my brother! I hate him! I *hate* him! I HATE him!"

Late in the afternoon she was idling along the street in front of the house, hoping against hope to the last, when a telegraph messenger boy came up.

"Does Miss Jessie Madison live here?" he asked, holding out a message.

"Yes, it's for me!" she cried, catching at it. "Oh! let me read it quickly!"

"Hold on!" said the youth. "You must sign the book." But she had torn open the envelope and devoured the words:

"I will be at your house at eight to-night.

"JACK."

The message was dated at New York City.

Jessie could hardly sign the book, in her impatience, but at last she succeeded. Then she crushed the message in her pocket and flew off to her room, where she read it again and again, to make sure there was no mistake.

"He'll come to-night! He'll come to-night!" she sang, in a hushed voice, to herself. "He'll stop this mean old wedding and take Cora away and marry her! Oh, you old Johnson!"—apostrophizing the figure of that gentleman, wherever he might happen to be—"you'll find out! Jack 'll be here, and if you say a word he'll—"

She illustrated her idea by doubling up her diminutive fist and shaking it savagely.

Soon after this Mrs. Wyllis was struck with surprise

to hear the child singing gaily on the lawn in the rear of the house. She went out to see her.

"Tum te tum-i-ty, tum te tum!" sang Jessie.

"You are feeling better," said Mrs. Wylis, pleasantly.

"Oh, yes! Tum te tum-i-ty, tum te tum!"

"Now you'll be a good girl and let me dress you up for the wedding, won't you?"

"I'd just as lief. Tum te tum-i-ty, tum te tum!"

Though much puzzled at the sudden transition, Belle took advantage of it and presently had Jessie arrayed in suitable garments for the important occasion so near at hand. When dressed, the child went down, agreeable to request, to see her mother, who congratulated her on her improved appearance. Coming afterwards through the hall she met Cora and stopped her "tum te tum-i-ty, tum te tum," to go up and kiss her surprised sister.

Cora pressed the little figure to her heart and, as they strolled out of doors, she dropped a tear on the dark curls.

"I am glad to see you happy, darling," she said. "It grieved mamma to hear the naughty things you said to Mr. Johnson. You will go and speak nicely to him when he comes to-night, won't you?"

"No," said Jessie, promptly. "Tum te tum-i-ty, tum te tum!"

"You must," said Cora, "for my sake. Will you try?"

All that Jessie would do at first was to look very wise and hum the same tune. When Cora persisted, however, she grew suddenly grave.

"You know, Cora, I shall always hate him! What

can I say to Jack when he returns? You promised to marry him. Mr. Wyllis told me."

Cora tried to discourage her and the tears fell freely.

"S'posin' Jack should come to-night, just when the minister is here," suggested Jessie, cautiously. "Would you marry that old Johnson or your own dear boy? Wouldn't you say to the minister, '*This* is the man—not that hateful thing!' I guess you would, sister!"

Jessie illustrated her words with plenty of pantomime, but Cora heard her with a shudder.

"Oh, I hope that won't happen!" she said, with a sigh. "I want to get married and away to Bermuda as soon as I can. Even if Jack were to return now, it would be too late, and we should all feel so badly!"

The little sister looked up surprised.

"Would be too late!" she echoed. "Do you think Jack would *let* any one have you if you were here? I guess *not!* He'd take you in his arms, like a Scottish knight I read of, and bear you off where no Johnsons would ever find you! Don't you think he wouldn't! Jack would know you were unhappy the minute he saw you. He would see that you only do this to please mamma—for you do, you know you do—and it's a wicked, cruel shame!"

Cora's tears continued to fall, as she gently strove to calm her impetuous sister. Jessie's indignation was too great to show itself in that manner.

"All this talk is useless," said Cora, after a time, "and I must go into the house. Jack has deserted me. He will never come back. I am doing what I

think is right and you must not make it harder for me than it is already."

Jessie would make no promises. She learned that the ceremony was set for half past eight o'clock and felt sure Jack would arrive in time to stop it. In a few minutes she was again singing her new song, as she flitted in and out of the house.

"Tum te tum-i-ty, tum te tum!"

After seven she could not be found.

"He may come a little earlier," she reasoned, "and I am going down the street to get the first glimpse of him."

Knowing her feelings the people in the house were not surprised at her absence when the important moment came. Indeed, they rather felt relieved by it, as she was as likely as not to give vent to her anger at the most improper time. They knew she could not be far away and were sure she would come in by-and-by. The clergyman, a slender gentleman of scholarly mien came a few minutes before the time set and had a private talk with both bride and groom. He was a conscientious gentleman, and felt it his duty to impress upon each the importance of the step they were taking. Had he known all the reader does in relation to the betrothal, he might have declined to perform the rite. But there was nothing in the answers of either of the most interested parties to arouse his suspicions. The license, which Mr. Johnson had procured at the city clerk's office, was examined and found properly made out. A word or two of instruction was given in order to prevent any hitch in the ceremony.

As the minutes flew by, Jessie's impatience grew greater. The clocks in several steeples rang out eight

strokes, louder, it seemed to her, than they had ever rung before. Still no Jack! She strained her eyes to see if each passer was the one waited for. Twice she thought she discerned his familiar face, only to be disappointed.

She took out the crumpled message and read it again by the light of the street lamp. Yes, he had said eight o'clock. It was far past that.

"Why doesn't he come! Why doesn't he come!" she murmured, below her breath.

CHAPTER XX.

A WEDDING RING.

It was almost nine when Jessie saw through the tears which were now nearly binding her a carriage dashing at full speed up the street toward her. The driver's whip was applied unsparingly to his horses, who were panting with their exertion and covered with foam. There was another man on the box! Yes, yes! It was Jack—at last!

Jessie called to him faintly, but he heard; and, springing to the ground, he caught her in his arms.

"I saw it announced—in a Boston paper—on the train," he gasped, "for to-night! Is it—am I—too late?"

Jessie hurried him through the garden gate to an arbor.

"Wait here!" she said, and was gone.

Up to the house she flew like the wind. She

entered the kitchen and asked the cook breathlessly where Cora was.

"In her room; she's just gone there," was the answer.

Five seconds later the child burst without ceremony into her sister's chamber.

"Cora, darling," she cried, "he's come! Jack's here—in the arbor at the foot of the garden—waiting for you!"

The bride reeled and seemed about to swoon, when Jessie caught her.

"Don't faint, Cora! Bear up a little! It's Jack! He's come all the way from Germany for you! He drove here from Boston, with the horses at a gallop! Come with me! Come, before it is too late!"

The child threw a shawl over her sister's head and shoulders and led her dizzily out of the house by a side door and down to the arbor. Nobody saw them go.

Elton started up as he heard and took a step toward them. Then, in the murky light of the evening, he saw the bridal garments and stopped short.

"I've got her!" cried Jessie, in ecstasy. "I've got her, Jack!"

The man looked at the shrinking, delicate form, arrayed in white. The shawl fell back and he saw there were flowers in her hair. This his quick eye caught at a glance. When he did not offer to support her the woman leaned for strength against the arbor, and when he still hesitated, she opened her arms to him. As she did so he saw the gleam of a plain band of gold on her finger.

"You are married!" he said, in awe-struck tones.

She made no verbal reply, but held her arms out still.

"You are a wife. I cannot touch you," he proceeded, slowly. "I heard of your intention, in Germany, and an hour later I was on a steamer. I reached New York after noon to-day and caught the train with difficulty. An accident occurred—a wheel broke—which delayed us in Springfield. It was when we were almost into Boston that I saw—in a newspaper—that your wedding was to be to-night. I made the coachman run his horses."

She sank upon an adjacent seat, which she found with Jessie's help. And still she held out her arms to him.

"I had my money from Wyllis. I never told you that. When you wrote me what he did, I could not take another cent of his. I left the school. I could find only menial employment. Despair took possession of me. What could I write to you? I could only hope. I had told you, if you could not wait for me, to say so and I would release you. You did not ask it. I believed you would be true. Just before I heard you were about to wed another I received word that an uncle—an elder brother of my father, whom I had never seen—had died and left me ten thousand dollars. A cablegram enabled me to draw a part of the money. A week sooner it might have saved me. What good will it do now?"

He stood like a statue of Doom, uttering these terrible words. She sat like a pitying angel, holding out her arms to him.

"You are married—to a man, they say, who has wealth and refinement to offer you. I hope you will be happy. Why do you hold out your arms to me?"

You know there is no power on earth to unclasp that ring from your finger! You have taken vows. For the love of Heaven, keep them sacred!"

Cora rose and would have fallen, had he not interposed to save her. He caught her and replaced her on the arbor seat.

"Good-by," he said. "I have money enough now to finish my studies. With a medical education I may do some good in the world. First, I will repay all I used of that man's, with interest. In a few days I shall sail for Germany. There is nothing but sad memories for me here."

He turned to go, when Cora found her voice.

"Jack!" she cried.

"Well?" he said, in a chilling voice, pausing where he stood.

"You will not leave me! Oh, I never knew how much I loved you until this moment!"

His features did not relax.

"You are a wife!" he said. "Be careful what you say! Even words may constitute infidelity!"

The woman struggled to express herself.

"I know I am a wife, Jack; it is needless to remind me of the fact which keeps you—the only man I ever did or ever can love—at this freezing distance. But there are holier things than a marriage like mine. *Love* is a holier thing! You love me and you cannot leave me! You don't know all! Mamma is slowly dying! We heard nothing from you! I seemed abandoned! Mamma wished it so much! I consented, to ease her mind! For myself, I would rather have died! You *shall not* go without me! Married or single, I am yours!"

Elton turned squarely and looked the supplicating figure in the face.

"You can take me from here!" she tried, growing more excited. "I can get a divorce—after a time! We will then be married; we, who love each other so dearly. We will go to Europe together. I will not hinder your studies, but help them. Jack, dear Jack, hear me!"

His expression grew sterner as she proceeded.

"Your mother—your little sister, who listens to you—your fame—what of them?"

"I can sacrifice no more!" she said. "Mamma, when she learns all, will forgive me. Jessie, young as she is, has urged me against the marriage I have just contracted. For my fame, is it dearer to me than my peace of mind, which, losing you, will vanish forever?"

His words came out sharp and cold.

"You have evidently much mistaken me. That I loved you I cannot deny. That I would have given the world to call you mine, you know. But now there are Mountains between us! Good-by."

He had taken a dozen of his long strides when Jessie, who had remained a silent spectator of the scenes just recorded, was at his side. He stopped and placed an arm about the child.

"Are you going to leave Cora?" she said, pleadingly, holding up her eager face to his.

"You are too young to understand—" he began, stooping to kiss her; but she drew away.

"It will kill her!" she continued. "She cried for you, day after day! You would not write! They have urged her to marry against her will! She loves you! Oh, come back to her!"

She tried to draw him toward the arbor by main strength.

"You won't!" she cried, seeing in his face no sign

of relenting. Then I will never love you again! You are no more my big brother! I told Mr. Johnson I should always hate him, but I shall hate you worse! You're wickeder than he is, for he loves Cora and you don't. *Please come, Jack!*" she added, as a last effort. *Please do!*"

He linked his fingers in her curls and felt how little he could impress upon her childish mind the infamy of that to which she urged him in her innocence.

"Jessie, I cannot," was all he could utter.

"Then *go!*" she cried, angrily. "*Go!* Cora will die! You will be happy then! Remember—I *hate* you!"

She left him, with the terrible words ringing in his ears, and went back to Cora. Her sister had succumbed to the strain on her mind and lay unconscious on the arbor seat. Jessie ran to the house and dashed into the parlor.

"Cora took a walk with me into the garden," she cried, "and she has fainted there!"

Help was procured and the inanimate form was carried to a bed, where shortly after a physician stood by it, giving directions. It was a severe case, he admitted, and it would be at least several days before she ought to rise. The wedding trip was incontinently postponed and the bridegroom was compelled, at a late hour, to seek a Boston hotel alone.

After Mrs. Ashleigh had been persuaded to retire, Mrs. Wyllis, with a nurse, watched with Cora through the night. Delirium set in and the name of "Jack" rang out in pleading accents more than once. "Jack!" Cora would scream, "don't leave me! Oh, I love no one else! I didn't think you would ever return! I

married him to make mamma's mind easier!" Plaintively the words came, many times, "Oh, I never knew till now how much I loved you!"

About three o'clock Mrs. Wyllis had occasion to go for something into Jessie's room and found the girl wide awake, sitting in a chair. She had not even undressed.

"Why, child, are you not in bed?" she said. "You will be sick at this rate."

Jessie answered her in a hoarse voice:

"Will Cora die?"

"Die!" repeated Mrs. Wyllis. "Certainly not! She is merely exhausted. To-morrow or next day she will be around again."

"I think she would rather die, if she could," said Jessie.

Mrs. Wyllis' suspicions had been aroused by Cora's rambling exclamations. She believed that Jessie had a secret on her mind.

"What were you and Cora doing in the garden?" she asked.

"Nothing," replied Jessie.

"Who else was there?"

"No one," said the child, boldly.

"Do you call Mr. Elton no one?" asked Mrs. Wyllis, determined to risk everything on one question.

Jessie was thrown completely off her guard.

"Did you see him?" she asked, guiltily.

"How came he to be there?" asked Mrs. Wyllis, evasively.

"I wrote to him. He would have got here at eight o'clock only for a car wheel that broke at Springfield.

But for an accident Cora would never have married that hateful, horrid old Johnson !”

Mrs. Wyllis drew a deep sigh of relief. Had the escape, then, been so very narrow ?

“What did Mr. Elton say when he found he had come too late ?” she asked, composedly.

“Oh, he said everything that was mean ! I shall never love him again ! I shall never love anybody ! They’re all alike ! I thought Jack was better than the rest, but he wouldn’t take Cora away, though she begged him so hard ! He talked very high and said he couldn’t—and that she was married—and that he was going right back to Germany to finish his old doctor-books ! Some uncle or other has left him plenty of money, so he won’t have that to trouble him. I wish he’d tied it around his neck and drowned himself. I do really ! I thought everybody else was mean, but I believed in Jack !”

“A double escape from a most perilous position,” thought Mrs. Wyllis. “Well, the young fellow did a very creditable thing. I could not have believed Cora would go so far.”

When she left the room, she tried to impress upon Jessie the importance of not relating to any one else what she had told her. She said Cora would feel very badly if others were to hear it.

“Oh, I don’t care who hears it,” Jessie answered, spitefully. “I don’t care for anything or anybody.”

Still, after further talk, Mrs. Wyllis felt that the secret was safe, and left without fear that it would get repeated further.

Cora did not get well the next day nor the next. She lay for six weeks in a darkened chamber and only the best of care preserved her life. Her husband

alternated between Cambridge, Boston and New York, now buoyed up with hope, now stricken with despair. When at last he received his trembling bride from her physician's hands and was allowed to bear her away to his metropolitan home, she was but a pale, spirit-like shadow of the beautiful girl with whom he became enamored six months previous.

Before Cora left Cambridge, she visited Mount Auburn where, beneath a mound of freshly dug earth, they told her lay the mother at whose last request she had given up what she most dearly loved. The bride bent low over the grave.

"Dear mamma, you are at rest!" she whispered. "Would to God I were beside you!"



CHAPTER XXI.

IT IS FATE !

Claude Wyllis was not more than a few days sail from land on his steamer when Jack Elton embarked from a German port. They passed each other somewhere in mid-ocean, neither suspecting the movements of his late friend. Claude had worried a good deal over the complications which had grown out of what he termed "his little indiscretion." That so great a trouble could arise from so small a cause seemed ridiculous, but as it had arisen, he meant to do everything possible to remedy it. He expected to be received coldly, perhaps threateningly, by the irascible

student; but he was no coward. He believed Cora's unhappy situation might be made a sufficiently strong argument to convince Elton that he was pursuing a wrong course.

Claude had no suspicion of the Johnson-Ashleigh movement on the Madison household. Mr. Johnson's deep interest in the "buggy story" he attributed solely to its inherent value, and the invitations of Mrs. Ashleigh to Cora while in New York seemed to him only natural. As much as he knew of women, in a certain sense, he never claimed to understand their code of dealings with each other. Cora was young and handsome. What more reasonable than for Mrs. Ashleigh, who knew Belle so well, to invite them both to dinner, where her brother would of course be present? He knew the lawyer as a business man of methodical habits, and supposed, as did that gentleman's other acquaintances, that he had settled down into confirmed bachelorhood. If he should ever take upon himself connubial ties it would be, Claude thought, with some aristocratic and wealthy lady in his own circle. That he might offer his hand to a girl of no family or means, seemed preposterous.

The fact that Mrs. Ashleigh had taken rooms at the Madison house, even had he known it, would have signified nothing to Claude; but it happened that, in the few visits which he made to Cora after that lady arrived, he saw nothing of her, and the girl was too much absorbed in more engrossing subjects to think 't worthy of mention.

As he sat in his steamer chair, sailing out of the harbor, visions of Jack and Cora, reunited and happy, flitted across his brain. He had a sanguine temperament and was apt to look on the brighter side, unless

annoyed persistently by an adverse fate. At an early hour he sought his stateroom and was soon wrapped in slumber.

When he reached the deck next morning he was the earliest passenger there. The steamer was plowing her way through a dense fog, as she neared the "Banks," the view in all directions being completely obscured. Claude paced slowly up and down for half-an-hour and was about to descend into the cabin when a sight that always had charms for him broke upon his vision.

A young girl, perhaps seventeen years of age, came toward him and in the frankest manner inquired :

"Do you think this fog will last all day, sir?"

Claude smiled into the fair, fresh young face. The girl was tall, with that shade of light hair for which so many Germans are noted, and with the tawny eyes so often read of in stories and so seldom seen in real life.

"I am smiling," he said, "because everybody not used to crossing the sea asks that identical question on the first morning out. I would like to answer you, but the fact is, nobody can predict much about these fogs. They may clear away by noon and they may last three or four days."

She had broken the ice with her question and very soon they became confidential to a degree which never could happen on land, but seems perfectly natural on shipboard. Before the day was over she knew his name was Claude Wyllis, his residence New York, and his destination Berlin; and he knew she was Miss Lulu Bornstein, of Milwaukee, an orphan, bound also to Berlin, where she expected to secure an engagement in the opera. Her father had been of German birth, her mother an American, and she spoke the languages

of both countries equally well. Her voice had received much cultivation and she now sought experience in the schools where music reaches its highest point. She bore letters of introduction to eminent teachers and maestros. Yes, she was traveling wholly alone. Her guardian, an old Milwaukee brewer, let her do entirely as she pleased.

"He couldn't help it; I am quite unmanageable," she explained.

Neither she nor Claude knew another soul on the steamer, and after the first day they became inseparable. They met early each morning for a ten minutes' appetizer on the deck. They descended to breakfast together, the purser having, by request, given them seats at the same table, which happened to be that of the captain. After the meal was ended they took chairs on the deck and sat together, sometimes reading, sometimes talking, until lunch. In the afternoon they separated for a siesta, according to the nearly universal custom. At dinner they met again, and after seven o'clock the deck was revisited, to be left only at a very late hour.

By ten o'clock, and sometimes earlier, most of the passengers, tired of the ocean's monotony, retired to their staterooms. The deck was thus left, almost exclusively, with the exception of the necessary officers of the ship, to Lulu and Claude. A ship's officer seems to pay no more attention to a young couple than if he were a graven image, unless appealed to by one of them. Their hour for retiring grew later and later. A new moon started with the ship and kept it company all the way, growing bigger and brighter night by night. The new friends found enough to talk about. What they said does not matter, but it was nothing of

love. Claude Wyllis knew better than to breach that subject too early.

The other passengers noticed their attachment and made comments among themselves, more or less ill-natured, concerning it. As the criticised couple did not know this, it had no effect on them, and probably would not, even if they had. Wyllis was not of a disposition to care for any one's opinion, and Miss Bornstein was just wilful enough to continue her course "for spite." They pursued the even tenor of their way undisturbed, until one remarkably beautiful night, when Claude grew sentimental.

"It is our last walk on this ship," he said, placing his hand upon the little one which lay within his arm. "The happiest hours I have ever known are those we have passed here together."

The girl laughed merrily.

"What a sober face!" she cried. "You should have your photograph taken with that look on it!"

He answered a little regretfully :

"Are you glad, then, that our journey is to be ended so soon?"

"Yes," she answered. "I am very anxious to get to Berlin, where I can go on with my music. Every day on this steamer keeps me from the goal of my ambition—the triumph I am to achieve as a great prima donna!"

"I may call on you at Berlin?" he queried. "You have promised it."

"Oh, yes; brief calls; but I shall be so busy, that is, if I get into the opera, as I must. It will be study, study, all the time."

"Is there not something I can do to help you?"

"Yes; keep away when I am not prepared to give

up my time to you ; and by-and-by, when I appear in solo parts, you can purchase the most expensive boxes and applaud vigorously."

He could not tell, experienced though he was, how much of her retort was real—whether any of it concealed a deeper feeling.

"I wish to put a question to you," he said, after some further conversation. "It is merely a hypothetical case and I want you to consider it. Supposing a girl was crossing the ocean—we will say from America to Germany ; a girl of perhaps seventeen years of age, with everything about her to charm the beholder ; a girl with talents, bright, vivacious, hopeful."

"You are only supposing this case ?" interrupted Miss Bornstein.

"Only supposing it. Well, now, supposing this girl to have met a strange gentleman on the steamer with whom she had passed, we will say, a pleasant voyage. Supposing they were walking the deck alone at a late hour—on the last night before they would reach port—and this gentleman should ask this girl—"

"Yes," she said, as he hesitated.

"For a kiss—just one little kiss—to carry its memory with him as long as he lived—wherever he might be. I say, in a case which we might suppose like this, what should that girl reply ?"

He stopped in his walk. They leaned together on the rail. The moon illumined her face and made a halo of her hair.

"I—should—say," she replied, slowly, "that this girl, who—we will suppose—intended to devote her life to the operatic stage, ought to use the greatest care to preserve her reputation. As much as she might have enjoyed the gentleman's companionship, she

would hesitate, I think, to commit an act which would always cause her regret. For she would know that some one existed who could say, whenever he saw her or heard her name, 'That girl gave to me what she should never have given except to relation or lover.' The result would be that it would always lower her in his estimation and in her own."

She said the words very kindly, but he felt them as a rebuke.

"I am glad to hear you say so," he answered. "I should have come to the same decision. But let us suppose a little farther—let us suppose that the gentleman asked it as a lover's guerdon?"

She looked up to study his face before replying.

"If this girl of whom we are speaking—this hypothetical young lady—hoped to make a name before the footlights, she would be wise to keep all lovers at a distance for many years. Lovers and music are both very good things, doubtless, but they are irreconcilable."

"Lulu," he said—"I may call you Lulu?"—

"Yes."

"Lulu—a true friend may be of value to you."

"I am sure of that," she answered.

"You are young—excuse me, I must say it—to be alone in a foreign land. A hundred pitfalls will open before you. You will not know whom to trust."

She looked up brightly.

"Then I will trust no one. I shall find no trouble in securing rooms with some motherly frau, and my studies will leave me no time to go far astray. It is late now and we must part for the night. You know my Berlin banker's address. I shall be glad to see you again, but I warn you it cannot be often. I have

liked you so far because you have not filled my ears with nonsense. I shall continue to like you until you begin something of that kind, and then there will be a sudden and wide separation."

There was so much dignity in her manner, combined with such a touching gentleness, that Claude essayed no reply. He escorted her to the cabin, where he bade her good night as cheerfully as he could.

Two hours later he tossed sleeplessly in his berth.

"Why should I have said those cursed things to her!" he muttered to himself. "She is destined to a great career—with her youth, beauty, energy and talent. How the passengers stared when she sang in the cabin that evening! She can be another Parepa at least; perhaps a Lucca or Gerster! And I would tear it all to pieces for a few months' gratification! When I think of it I feel like throwing myself in the sea. I wish I had the courage to write her the truth. Then she would despise me, but it would save her."

After a little further thought he rose and, taking out his writing materials, indited the following:

"MISS BORNSTEIN :

"The pleasure of your company during these days of travel is something I can never forget. But I owe you a confession, which, painful as it is to me, and may be to you, I now summon the courage to make. It is, in brief, that I am married.

"When you know this fact I can no longer accept your kind invitation to call on you at Berlin. I write this in a moment of repentance, realizing its full effect.

"This may warn you against the too intimate con-

idences of strangers and, when its unpleasant taste is gone, prove a benefit. *You cannot trust men!*

“Yours contritely,

“CLAUDE WYLLIS.”

He sealed this letter up, addressed it, and rang for the room steward.

“See that Miss Bornstein gets this the first thing in the morning,” he said to the man, handing him the letter and a gold piece.

The boat reached her moorings early. Wyllis, tired out after a sleepless night, was the last passenger to leave. As he was about to depart, one of the female stewards came to him with his letter in her hand.

“I think you gave this to one of the men, sir, to be handed to Miss Bornstein. She left in such a hurry that I forgot to give it to her. You may have learned her address.”

Claude took the letter, opened it and read over its contents. Then he mechanically tore it into little pieces and let them fall in the water.

“I tried, but I could not succeed. It is FATE!” he said.

CHAPTER XXII

LULU AND CLAUDE.

For several days Claude hunted for Jack, and at last arrived at the truth. He found he had made his journey for nothing, as far as Elton was concerned, but believed that if the young man had reached Cam-

bridge all was undoubtedly well. Not long after, however, he received a letter from his wife which made him open his eyes. In it were the following paragraphs :

“I think I have news that will surprise you. Cora Madison was married last evening, not to your friend Elton, but to Mr. J. S. Johnson, of New York. It seems they had arranged it quietly among themselves, Mrs. Madison being anxious to have Cora well settled before she died. Elton arrived here an hour or so after the ceremony. He behaved very well and will return at once to finish his education. An uncle has left him a bequest, and I understand your money has been left for you at Brewster & Bassett's. I don't know as you will agree with me, but I think Cora's marriage is splendid. It will be much better than for her to wait until your hot-headed friend could give her a home.

“The Madisons will all reside with Mr. Johnson. Mrs. M., who grows feebler daily, will be taken to Bermuda in a short time.”

Claude's feelings, when he read these lines, were not enviable. He went out for a long walk to quiet his nerves. He suspected that Belle had a deeper hand in the Johnson movement than she admitted. This made him get into a rage with his wife, and before he had done with that phase of the subject he had determined on a number of reprisals. When he thought of Johnson he grew still angrier. Was it the part of courtesy for that man—his own confidential attorney, whom he had introduced to Cora—to arrange this marriage off-hand, without saying a word

to him? He would take every particle of his business from such a man; yes, he would, as soon as he could write him to that effect! It was despicable! In this way Claude raved for an hour or two to himself, and ended as usual by doing nothing.

It was Cora's affair, after all. If she preferred Johnson, after the way Elton used her, she had a right to do so. Perhaps it was best that way. Johnson had suddenly become a lover, for the first time in his life. Claude, as he became more sober, could not criticise too harshly a man in that insane condition. It would look contemptible to avenge himself by taking his business from the lawyer. He felt sorry for Elton, but it was somewhat the student's own fault. Why need he have made such a row with a man who had befriended him, over such an insignificant affair. He now had money enough and could probably study better with the love affair effaced from his mind. Then, there was Belle. Claude began to think of her tenderly. He was getting lonesome without her. He wished he had brought her along.

Thoughts of Belle led him very naturally to thoughts of Lulu and, as a week and more had elapsed since he saw her, he ventured to leave a polite note at her banker's—who happened to be also his own—asking when he might call.

The week had been a dull one to the ambitious girl. She had found it not so easy as she supposed to plunge at its highest tide into the musical sea of Berlin. Some of the musicians to whom her letters of introduction were addressed were out of the city; others answered in what she thought a very cool way. One appointed an hour for her, heard her sing and said, in reply to her earnest queries, "Possible! possible! But you

will need much teaching before you can expect the doors of the opera to open to you."

When Claude's letter came, it was a genuine delight. He was at least a person whom she had known before she reached the city in which all others were perfect strangers. She could talk to him in English, which sounded more like a mother-tongue than the gutturals she had never till now disliked. Then, again, she felt the need of a chaperon. She could not walk about freely without an escort, as at Milwaukee. Men stared at her in the street and made remarks intended as compliments, but which brought the blood to her cheeks. She had not dared venture out in the evening at all.

When Claude called, he was delighted at the warmth of his reception. As she talked of her experiences, in her frank, vivacious manner, his pleased smile deepened.

"You will begin to believe me after a time," he said. "You need, more than any thing else, a masculine friend, who will hold himself subject to your commands. Once more, let me offer myself in that capacity."

She laughed gaily and said :

"A masculine friend is an article not to be despised ; that I am willing to admit. He may be very useful when needed. The only difficulty I anticipate is, that he will persist in appearing at inconvenient times, and thus become a nuisance. If I could call him with a bell, as I could a domestic, and dismiss him in like manner, he would be invaluable."

He declared himself willing to accept the position on those terms, and they grew very merry together.

"What do you think of the opera here?" he asked, presently.

"I haven't attended a single performance," she admitted. "How could I? I don't know a person here and to go alone would subject me to great annoyance."

He looked delighted.

"Let me propose, then, that we begin our new arrangement without delay. Let me take you to a little dinner immediately and to the opera to-night. I will sign a bond, if you require it, to return you safe and sound at this door."

She showed the pleasure the proposition gave her.

"I presume it is all wrong," she said, "according to the canons of society, for me to do anything of the sort, but I cannot refuse. You are exceedingly kind and I will be ready in a few minutes."

He sat there, awaiting her, in his happiest mood. He forgot the serious letter he had written and afterward torn to pieces. She was young and beautiful, and her presence charmed him. It was as impossible for him to forego the pleasure of an evening with her as it is for the steel to avoid kissing the magnetized metal.

She looked more charming than ever in her bonnet and wrap, and, as they walked along the street, many heads were turned to look at the handsome couple, who evidently found each other's society so agreeable.

A private room at the elegant restaurant to which he took her suggested nothing improper to the girl, who had never dined at such a place before in her life. While waiting for the meal to be prepared he sent a messenger for an opera box and had the fortune to secure one of the best. The dinner was excellent and

both attacked it with zest. The wine, of which the girl partook sparingly, did not lessen the flow of conversation, and the ship-board friendship was nothing compared to that which they formed when thus thrown together entirely by themselves.

At the opera, Lulu was entranced. "I can sing that! I can sing that!" she whispered to him a dozen times, putting her hand on his arm. "Oh, I can sing it, if they'll only give me a chance!" And he whispered that she should have the chance—that he would use his influence, if it became necessary, through friends on the American legation. He thought it reward enough when she thanked him with her beautiful tawny eyes.

Agreeable to his promise—though sorely to his regret—he took her in a carriage to her lodgings as soon as the curtain fell. He was content with the progress he had made. Lulu would not repulse him again. He would become a necessity to her in a little while—and then!

One day his correspondents at Freiburg wrote him that Elton had returned to the university, and he went there. He must see the student some time and he wanted it over. If Jack was bound to break with him forever, he preferred to know it. If he could talk him into reason he would rather do it now than later.

As he was crossing the city from his hotel on the morning of his arrival, he met Elton unexpectedly in one of the small parks. The student's look was dark enough, as his former friend and benefactor stopped him with outstretched hand.

"Jack, old boy," said Wyllis, "I have crossed the ocean to see you. Won't you shake hands?"

Elton made no movement to comply.

"Two months ago," he said, harshly, "I think I should have struck you! Now I can only say, I do not wish you to speak to me."

"You have forgotten—" Claude began.

"No, I have forgotten nothing. I wish I could know what you did to aid me. Your money, with ten per cent. interest—the agreement was six—awaits you at Boston. I have other means and shall finish my studies with them. You have wronged me deeply and you must not think of addressing me hereafter."

"Is that the kindest word you have for me, Jack?"

"That is all. I am not one who can pretend. You acted outrageously to the girl I loved. She is now a wife and my right to avenge her wrongs has expired, but I cannot forget. You say you came here to see me. You are not welcome. Our paths lie in different directions."

Wyllis looked at the moody face with a tender expression.

"Some day, Jack, you will know you have wronged me. I tried to kiss Cora in a moment of passion. It was different from a deliberately planned attempt to injure you, like that, for instance, which you made when you tried to prevent Miss Vaughan from marrying me—and yet I have said nothing."

Elton turned on him savagely.

"Do you wish to know why I did that?" he cried.

"No," said Claude, gently, "I wish to know nothing that could reflect on the honor of my wife."

He turned and went his way; and Elton felt a momentary pity for him—a pity that he could not understand—but which deepened as he saw the once-loved shadow disappearing in the distance.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ONE KIND OF MATRIMONY.

"I never dreamed that anything could be quite so horrible !"

So wrote Cora Johnson to Mrs. Wyllis a month after she became a wife in reality and joined her husband at his New York home. Mrs. Wyllis was visiting at Colonel Mitchell's Newport villa when the letter reached her.

"I have said unpleasant things to you," pursued Cora, "which I hope you will forgive. I have never credited the insinuations against you ; but if all were true which they would have had me believe, you would still seem to me no lower than I feel myself in this hateful union. To be at the beck of a man for whom I entertain no sentiment of affection ; to accept his caresses, to the last drop in the nauseous cup ; to bear his name ; to think that this must last until death claims one or the other ! What fate can be more dishonorable ! He is so kind that I have no excuse for harshness, for he loves me, though on account of what quality I puzzled my mind to conceive. Dear Belle, if you still care for a broken-hearted girl, come and see me !"

Impulsive Mrs. Wyllis lost no time in complying with this request, and the warmth with which the two women embraced each other settled all doubt in the minds of both.

"Let the past go," was Mrs. Wyllis' verdict, when

Cora began explanations of her letter. "From now on, my darling, nothing shall separate us."

Mr. Johnson was much pleased, when he came home to dinner, to find Mrs. Wyllis there.

"Cora has recovered very slowly from her illness," he said, "and seems averse to society. I have hesitated to urge her while she continues so slight and pale, but you will effect a cure. Stay as long as you can ; or, better yet, take her down to Newport, where the sea air will surely prove beneficial to her. I will run over often and see that nothing is wanted."

So Cora went to Newport. She established herself with Belle in the Johnson villa, which was in a very quiet place, a little removed from the centre. She wanted no excitement, and for her sake Belle was willing to forego her favorite pleasures. Mr. Johnson sent them a pair of gentle ponies, which they drove daily on the avenues. Many a man of the world paused to look at the two handsome women, one all color, the other fair as alabaster, as they drove quietly along in the early evening.

"By Jove! there's a pair of beauties!" was the common exclamation.

A species of quiet contentment came into Cora's life while she and Belle lived thus together, broken only by the visits of Mr. Johnson. The lawyer usually came on Saturday evening and remained until Monday morning, and the young wife's spirits always felt perceptibly as the time of his advent drew near. When he had gone Cora would throw herself into Belle's arms, crying, "Now, darling, I am yours again!" And when Friday night came she would say with a shudder, as Belle folded her to her heart, "To-morrow!"

Inexperienced as he was, Mr. Johnson had no suspicion of the way his wife regarded him. He thought her merely shy and believed the shrinking from his presence a natural exhibition of feminine modesty. Instead of affronting, it charmed him. His wife's face was handsome, her manner gentle and her appearance unexceptionable. She would learn to show affection more fully in time. She had admitted that she did not love him, when she accepted his proposal. He would do all he could to warm that delicate flower into life and he believed it would yet grow spontaneously. He went on his way, contented because ignorant.

Very often Cora's thoughts would revert to Jack Elton. She reflected with bitterness on his refusal to accept her, when, with the supremest effort of her life, she brought herself to beg that favor at his hands. With what high scorn he threw her back upon her scarce-wedded husband, reminding her of the vows she took in that unhappy hour! She could not understand a love like that. For Jack, she would have braved the sneers of the world and the stings of her own conscience. He had no such sentiment. He could let her wait for months without a word from him and then appear at the one moment when his presence must bring the greatest torture.

And yet—with all these bitter thoughts passing continually through her mind—Cora loved Jack Elton still. Yes, loved him more madly than ever before. The words of the old gypsy frequently occurred to her:

"You shall lie in his arms. You shall lie upon his bed."

Badly as the prophecy seemed to have turned out, it still haunted her. She believed that somehow it

would yet come true. One day she told Belle about it.

"But," said her astonished friend, "you can't entertain such ideas now, Cora. You are married."

Cora lifted her dark eyes, seeming darker than ever now, in contrast to her pure complexion.

"Can't I, Belle? That shows how little you know me. It may also show how little I deserve your friendship. Wife or no wife, I would follow Jack to the end of the world if he asked me. It is my love for him that makes this union seem so terrible. I belong to Jack. When I resign myself to another, I feel that there is the crime, there the infidelity. I can't help it, Belle. It grows stronger every hour."

The prudent Mrs. Wyllis thought it her duty to remonstrate against these expressions. Having secured a husband of good standing—and reasonable means—a woman, she said, should be careful not to jeopardize her position. Nobody could be more considerate than Mr. Johnson. It was not necessary for Cora to develop a romantic attachment for her husband, but she should give him no cause for jealousy. To entertain a readiness to elope at a given signal with another man, especially one comparatively poor and obscure, seemed to Belle the height of folly, and she told Cora so.

"You will outgrow it, dear," she said, in conclusion. "Life is a serious thing for a woman. Once settled in a comfortable position as regards money—as regards money—she should look well to her steps."

"It matters little," Cora replied, "what I might be willing to do, when the man I love is thousands of miles away in geographical distance and millions in sentiment. But, Belle, are you really as highly moral as your expressed views would indicate? Would you

smother all heart feeling and give yourself coolly for life to one for whom you could never care? I did not think it of you."

Belle smiled curiously.

"I know what you thought—or, at least, what Mr. Elton wanted you to think. I am not sure what folly I might perpetrate, if my heart, as you call it, got the better of my judgment. Marriage is a serious business. I never regarded it sentimentally. Claude, luckily for him, takes a similar view. He is enjoying himself in Europe, to judge by the length of his stay, and I am enjoying myself here. How much wiser than for us to be dissolved in tears at our separation, like the heroes and heroines in novels. Now, if Claude wants a flirtation there—and nothing else would keep him, of that I am certain—let him have it. If I want one here, you may be sure it will not be of a nature to gain publicity. I don't know whether he would care or not, but I will never give him a chance to charge it to me."

Cora listened with interest.

"You would 'flirt,' then, if you wanted to?" she asked.

Her friend laughed at the serious way in which she put the question.

"If I wanted to very badly, yes. But it would be a mild type of flirtation, I think, as my disposition does not favor anything very savage in that direction. Certainly I would never compromise myself. You know, perhaps, that the chief of the commandments is of modern origin—Don't get found out."

Cora shook her head.

"You don't know what love is!" she said, soberly.

"It must be a very unpleasant thing, judging by

the way it affects you," laughed Belle. "It seems but yesterday when I told you what I had discovered of Mr. Elton's feelings, as we lay in bed that morning at your house. Don't you remember? I said the time would come when Jack would fold you in his arms, as I was doing, and kiss away your blushes; and you cried out, like a frightened baby, 'Oh, Belle, that's AWFUL!'"

Cora acknowledged the correctness of the reminiscence.

"I remember how it frightened me to think of it," she said. "Love was hardly born in my heart then. Now I would give the rest of my days to lie for one hour in those dear arms. Yes, I could die happy there!"

Mrs. Wyllis tried to rally her.

"You would be far from content with death under those conditions, I fear," she said.

"It would be preferable to life under my present circumstances," responded Cora. "The only thing I can conceive of to make existence bearable would be to have Mr. Johnson take a trip to the Antipodes. The very thought that he is coming here always gives me a cold shiver. When the summer ends and I have to return to New York, he will be with me constantly. There will be no escape! How can I be happy with that prospect ever before me?"

A tremor passed through the slight frame at the unpleasant thought.

In spite of all, however, Cora's physical health improved at Newport. A bit of color came into her face and her form grew rounder as midsummer passed. To please Belle she joined several yachting parties, in some of which Mr. Johnson participated. The people she met considered the young bride very "interesting."

and invitations to receptions, dinners and hops began to come in small cart-loads. Had she chosen she might have become "the thing," but Cora shrank from too much society. The few hops she attended were in response to her husband's urgent requests. At one of them she danced with a young naval officer, Lieutenant Fred Stanhope, who alone of all she met managed to interest her.

"I arrived from Germany last week," said the lieutenant, eyeing her narrowly. "I believe you have friends there."

She looked at him inquiringly.

"Mr. Claude Wyllis—"

"Oh, yes. He is the husband of my most intimate friend."

"And Mr. Elton of the University—"

"I used to be acquainted with him," said Cora, with wonderful self-possession. "He was a Harvard man and we lived at Cambridge."

Lieutenant Stanhope chose his words carefully.

"They say at Freiburg he is destined to be a famous surgeon. He leads in his class and has shown wonderful ability. He is the closest student imaginable. Nothing else seems to be thought worthy of his attention."

Cora listened without betraying herself.

"I am glad to hear such a good report of him," she said, in her ordinary tone.

The lieutenant walked out on the piazza, humming a tune below his breath.

"Wyllis told me she was passionately in love with Elton," he mused, "but she has evidently adapted herself very easily to circumstances. Well—that's the depth of a woman's love!"

That night Belle and Cora were on the balcony together, slowly swinging in adjacent hammocks, when the clock struck two. A servant came to say that Mr. Johnson presented his compliments and feared his wife was unaware of the lateness of the hour.

"He will lie awake till I come, Belle," said Cora, between her teeth. "Do you know, dear, I think some day I shall get a pistol and kill him!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

"AND SHALL YOU?"

Before the Newport season ended a new terror came to the young wife. She was to experience another phase of the life she so much detested. Not only must she endure the presence of a man she was growing to like less and less; she was to become a mother.

The knowledge prostrated her at first. A mother—to that man's child! She believed the bare thought would kill her. Ideas of throwing herself into the Atlantic began to form in her frenzied brain. Only the constant presence of Mrs. Wyllis kept her from doing something desperate. To her husband she became for the first time outwardly incensed, repelling him with harsh epithets. Much alarmed, he brought an eminent physician to see her, who assured his patron that such outbeaks were not uncommon at such periods.

"Humor her!" said the wise physician. "Let her

do every reasonable thing she pleases. Give her the associates she prefers and avoid exciting her by your presence. Her life might pay the forfeit of a contrary course."

The kind-hearted husband besought Mrs. Wyllis not to leave his house, begging her to do everything possible for Cora's comfort. He said he was willing to sacrifice his own pleasure for his wife's best good, and would, according to the doctor's advice, absent himself until she grew into a calmer frame of mind. It was decided, however, that Cora should go to Belle's Murray Hill apartments for the present, as that was her decidedly expressed wish; and Mr. Johnson soon found himself walking up and down at night through his desolate chambers.

"He sha'n't come here, shall he?" cried Cora, hysterically, when she found herself in Belle's hotel.

"No, dear," replied Mrs. Wyllis. "We will keep widow's hall, with no horrid men to molest or make it afraid. Even if Claude comes home I will send him out to look for lodgings. We will be two lone women and any man who dares attempt to intrude on us will do it at his peril!"

Belle's bright sayings helped to cheer Cora, but she could not blot out the Fact which stared her in the face. She did not want a child whose father she detested.

"If it was Jack's how gladly I would welcome it!" she found herself thinking, wickedly.

Jessie, who had been sent to a select boarding school, was permitted to come and see her sister at the brief November vacation. During the summer intermission, Cora had felt that she could not bear it, and the child had spent the time at the mountains in

company with some school friends. But now Cora began to long for her little sister, and she was brought to Murray Hill. She was now fourteen years old and of good size for her age—a handsome girl who had learned rapidly everything except politeness.

"Where's old Johnson?" was her query, as soon as she had kissed Cora.

"He's at his own house," interposed Belle. "These rooms are mine. Cora is visiting me here and we allow no masculine individual to step over our threshold."

"Oh, isn't that elegant!" cried Jessie. "I wish the whole world was that way. The men make all the trouble there is in it!"

"That's a very sage remark for a young lady of fourteen," smiled Mrs. Wyllis.

"They do, though!" reiterated the child. "Look at our house in Cambridge! Weren't we always happy till these Eltons and Johnsons came prowling around? I could bite 'em both"—she snapped her teeth together, viciously—"and Jack's the worst of the two. I'd like to see any man talking love to me!"

Mrs. Wyllis had to smile at Jessie's earnestness.

"You go too far, my child," she said. "Men are necessary evils in this world, and they must be tolerated, to a certain extent."

"No, they're not!" retorted Jessie, defiantly. "They're of no earthly use! I don't see what God made 'em for."

It did Cora more good than anything else to have Jessie there. It seemed to take her back, in a sense, to her childhood. She loved the task of braiding the girl's hair, putting on her ribbons and seeing that her dresses fitted well. Then Jessie, who really was very fond of her sister, would take down Cora's tresses,

brushing and rearranging them, chatting meanwhile of her school, which, in spite of certain drawbacks, she liked extremely well. It would have brightened a paler cheek than Cora's to hear the child rattle on about the principals and teachers, giving to each a pet cognomen, indicative of some peculiarity of feature or disposition. The girls of the school also came in for their share of criticism, with the exception of two or three, who were the special favorites of the narrator and therefore exempt.

Jessie raised Cora's spirits so much that she was twice induced, during her stay, to attend the theatre and seemed much benefited by the diversion. On the second evening, Lieutenant Stanhope, who happened to be in the house, descried the party, and came to spend a few minutes between acts in their box.

"I hope your husband was quite well when you last heard from him," he said, politely, to Mrs. Wyllis.

"Quite so," she responded, without pausing in her occupation of pointing out distinguished persons in the house to Jessie and answering the child's numerous questions.

"I had a letter from Mr. Elton, yesterday," he said, in a low voice, to Cora.

She turned on him with a quick motion.

"Why do you tell me that?"

He looked at her for a moment. She was growing more beautiful every day. Wild thoughts surged through the naval officer's brain. Might it not be possible for him to obtain this lovely creature for himself?

"Do you think I don't know," he said, meaningly, "of your old attachment to my friend Elton? You can

hardly be indifferent to the prosperity of a man to whom you once gave your *love!*"

As she cast down her eyes and made no reply, he added :

"Forgive me, if I have said too much. I thought you would like to hear of him."

"Go on," she whispered.

"He will finish in two years the course that usually occupies three. Next summer he expects to return to America. A professorship in the Medical School will undoubtedly be tendered him soon after."

She listened with great interest. Then she said :

"Is he—do you think—happy?"

Lieutenant Stanhope leaned nearer to her.

"It is a strange coincidence. He asked me in his letter the same question of you."

She started violently.

"He referred to *me* in his letter to *you!* Why should he?"

"Because I wrote him that I had the pleasure of meeting you at Newport."

"And what," she said, dreamily, "shall you answer him?"

"I shall tell him, '*No!*'" replied the lieutenant.

The curtain had risen on another act and the attention of Mrs. Wyllis and Jessie was riveted on the stage. Lieutenant Stanhope leaned back in his chair, where he was invisible to the people in the house, and Cora continued to talk with him a little longer.

"You can do me a favor if you mention my name to Mr. Elton, by saying nothing of my association with"—she indicated Mrs. Wyllis. "He doesn't like her."

The lieutenant bowed profoundly.

"Any request from you to me will be equal to a command."

"He has no reason—it is a mere whim—but his prejudices are strong."

"Does she expect her husband soon?" inquired the Lieutenant, in the same low tone.

"I don't know."

"She needn't," he said. "He is otherwise engaged. Quite infatuated. It looks like a long stay."

She wondered why she listened to this man, when he ventured on such a theme. It was such a little while ago that she would have risen with burning cheeks and bade him quit the box. But what did it matter? He knew she had loved Jack, and that she loved him still, though a wife. There could be nothing to sink her lower in his estimation.

"Who is it?" she asked, calmly.

"An opera singer—a most entrancing beauty—destined, they say, to achieve the first rank. She is only eighteen, but her singing has attracted wide attention. Wyllis has given her what she needs, an influential friend. Talent, and even beauty would have been of no avail without influence."

Cora intimated by a motion of her head that Belle must not hear this.

"It would make no difference," he smiled, showing his evenly arranged teeth. "She is not sentimental. Nobody is, nowadays, hardly. I only know two persons who are much so."

As she looked at him inquiringly, he explained:

"Mr. Elton and you."

She did not dispute his statement.

"He came across the ocean just too late, I heard," said he. "He had a conversation with you that night.

I have the greatest curiosity to know what he said. He is so strange!"

The wonder that she listened to this man—that she answered him—grew on the young wife, but she found a fascination in it.

"He told me, as I had taken vows, to be faithful to them," she whispered, in a voice scarcely audible.

Lieutenant Stanhope leaned over till his breath fanned her cheek:

"And shall you?"

She turned abruptly away and watched the scene on the stage. The lieutenant leaned back in the shadow and watched her. Her beauty appealed to his senses; the evident sadness of her wedded life made him long for her confidence. He could see her profile as she bent forward. How lovely it was! What a supple, willowy form—ah! A suspicion flashed upon his brain. Could it be possible! Absurd! And yet, why not?

By some mysterious divination she felt his thoughts and rearranged her sealskin garment, which had been thrown carelessly from her shoulders. It was warm in the theatre. Why did she do that—unless!

The green curtain dropped and Lieutenant Stanhope escorted the ladies to their carriage. He offered his arm to Cora and she took it. He said a pleasant good-night and was gone.

Half-an-hour later Mrs. Wyllis stopped in the midst of her disrobing to say to Cora:

"Well, my dear, you have begun well!"

As Cora looked up inquiringly, she added:

"With Lieutenant Stanhope."

"What did I do that I should not have done?"

asked Cora. "I said very little to him. You know he was introduced to me at Newport."

"He is the most noted libertine in New York," said Belle.

"Yet you, who knew it, did nothing to warn me," replied Cora, soberly.

Belle threw her arms about her in the old, impulsive way.

"Do you think I care, you darling! I love to see you amuse yourself! Only, as you are such an amateur sportswoman, I was surprised to see you take such big game. Take my advice, dear, and try some of the little ones first."

"He seems a gentleman," said Cora.

"Oh!—to be *sure!* They *all* do! I think it would have given your husband a chill though, to see him there, talking to you so confidentially, through a whole act. Mr. Johnson doesn't go out much in the world, but he ought to have heard of Stanhope."

"Belle," cried Cora, impatiently, "we were not to introduce Mr. Johnson's name here! You know how much I dislike it!"

"How Lieutenant Stanhope would love to hear that!" exclaimed Belle, still holding Cora in her embrace. "It would give him courage and hope. To slightly alter Byron :

'A husband who is not at all in unity
With his young wife, a time and opportunity.'

Given the first, your enterprising roué thinks it easy to find the other two requisites. Stanhope, unless people lie about him, has broken a score of hearts of greater or lesser softness. Why not yours? Are you

so sure, my dear, that you could never forget, as so many of your sex have done before you, the proprieties of life?"

Cora did not look at Belle, but beyond her.

"There is one man for whom I could forget every thing—but not this Stanhope. He has no attractions for me—or rather had none until you suggested that he might be unpleasant to another person. That would be worth something."

A few minutes later she said: "Belle, if the time should ever come when I *did*—of course, I never *shall*—but if I ever *did*—"

"I understand, darling."

"Would you love me just as well as you do now?"

Belle hugged her to her breast.

"I am not sure I should not love you *better!*" she cried, warmly. "I do so like people who are *human!*"

CHAPTER XXV.

"THE DUTIES OF MATERNITY TAKE PRECEDENCE."

Cora's baby was a boy. Its father, who had begun to think marriage a failure, was greatly rejoiced. The child was born in the Thirty-third Street residence, to which Mrs. Wyllis had with difficulty persuaded the wife to return in season.

"You must!" she said firmly. "I will go with you, if you desire, and we will exclude masculinity as much as possible. If you are ready to throw your husband overboard—and a nice time this would be for such a

proceeding—you can announce it to him and the rest of the world by refusing to enter his house. No, my dear, you must swallow your preferences and go home."

The young mother passed through the ordeal much as thousands of other young mothers have done. She was ill enough, God knows ! but she came out all right. Her sharpest pain was when her husband was ushered into the room to take his first peep at the speck in the nurse's arms. After inspecting it he came to bend over Cora's bed and kiss her. She shut her eyes tightly and the doctor touched Mr. Johnson on the sleeve.

"My darling !" was all the lawyer whispered, as he softly withdrew. No words could have cut her deeper.

She made grimaces when obliged to nurse the little fellow. She looked on him with ill concealed dislike ; and yet she felt an alarm, several days after, when he cried very hard and the nurse said something must ail him.

They called him Willie, after an uncle of his father. Belle pronounced him a very pretty boy, after surveying him under various favorable circumstances, but she had not enough love for children to care to fondle him much. Mrs. Ashleigh, who had lately returned after a year in California, came and looked at him with her accustomed dignity. In her eyes he was a great future probability. She found herself wondering whether he would prefer the Law or the Church, in both of which fields the Johnsons had been distinguished for generations.

"How long shall I have to nurse this child ?" Cora asked of Dr. Livingstone, at the end of a fortnight.

"That is for you to say," responded the physician, politely. "The longer the better, for him."

"Is it necessary?" she asked.

"No," he replied. "The boy would probably live on a bottle. Still, I would think a while before I gave it up, if I were in your place."

As soon as she was able, they returned to the Newport cottage, where the season was in full blast again. A nurse and an extra servant were added to last year's occupants of the villa. Cora and Belle began to drive out as of yore. People recognized them again and men told the story to each other :

"Johnson's wife—the big lawyer, you know. They say she doesn't care much for him, but there's a baby at their cottage. There was a Harvard man mixed up with her, but I think that has blown over Stanhope—the dashing naval officer—hung around there early in the winter, but the baby drove him off. Ha, ha! The other is Claude Wyllis' wife—Wyllis, the millionaire. He is over in Europe somewhere, hanging on to the skirts of a singer or actress, or something of the kind. She stops here. Is she giddy? *I* don't know. She looks demure enough. One never can tell."

Lieutenant Stanhope's war-ship had been in the Mediterranean most of the winter and he had been with it when not flitting about among the most interesting European capitals; but one day it steamed into Newport harbor, and the next he called at the Johnson villa. The ladies were out driving when he arrived, and he passed most of the intervening time inspecting the baby, for whom he immediately inquired, and giving the nurse various sage maxims in

regard to its care, culled from his extensive bachelor experience.

"Be careful what you give it to eat," he said, as a final injunction. "Millions of babies are killed every year by injudicious diet."

"But Mrs. Johnson nurses the boy, sir, and he never has anything else!" exclaimed the woman.

Stanhope walked, whistling, to the farther end of the piazza and inspected his vessel, plainly visible from there.

When the ladies returned from their drive, the lieutenant thought they were not displeased to see him. He felt sure Mrs. Wyllis entertained that feeling, but Cora said so little he was in some doubt in her case.

"There is hardly any one here yet worth dancing with," said Belle, "and you will be a Godsend. I shall begin to think of going to the assemblies."

Stanhope spoke to Cora :

"Shall you also be there?"

Then, as she hesitated, he added :

"I forgot ; the duties of maternity, of course, take precedence."

Belle laughed at this and Cora reddened a little. She did not know what to say. At this unfortunate juncture the nurse came to signal her. It was evident that the baby was waiting for its evening meal. She excused herself in so much perplexity of manner that Belle had the greatest difficulty in preserving her countenance till she was gone.

"Oh, these young mothers, they make me laugh!" she said, at the end of a fit of merriment. "How nonsensical it is! As if she hadn't a right to nurse that

baby without acting as if she were going to violate the Public Statutes!"

Lieutenant Stanhope, who had remained quite grave, hastened to partially agree with her.

"Nevertheless," he added, "there is a charm in that very bashfulness that passes explanation. You women never know in what your fascination over men consists. Much of it is in little things like that, which are apt to cause you annoyance. I have never seen a young mother with a babe at her breast, but I have felt like falling down and worshipping. The paintings and statues of the Madonna and Child have made more Christian proselytes than all the terrors of Hades."

Belle elevated her eyebrows in comic admiration.

"You are a sentimental fellow," she said, "full of moods, but the spectacle of which you speak would hardly prevent you, I think, from running off with the wife and mother, if she happened to be attractive. Don't talk to me!"

He protested vigorously against the charge, declaring that he had been much abused.

"All right!" she said, pleasantly. "I was only going to take the opportunity to say that, while you are very welcome here, you will waste your valuable time if it is devoted to Mrs. Johnson. She is not vulnerable—in your quarter."

"I never can fathom you women," he replied. "You always credit us with sinister designs and frequently put the first wrong idea in our heads. Let me assure you again that you are wholly incorrect if you think I entertain an improper sentiment towards Mrs. Johnson. By the way, I believe I have seen *your*

husband since you have. Would you like to hear about him?"

Mrs. Wyllis looked directly into his eyes and spoke with a meaning which it was impossible to misunderstand.

"Anything you think he would like you to tell me I would like to hear. However, there cannot be much that is news to me. He writes every week."

He felt completely foiled, but recovered his ground with celerity.

"I also saw Mr. Elton. He is to come home this autumn."

Cora was returning to her place in the group and heard the last sentence, as he intended she should.

"He was looking well," he continued, "and is destined to be very famous. 'You must marry some nice girl,' I said to him, 'and settle down in New York.' 'No,' he answered, 'I shall not marry. I have but one sweetheart—my profession.'"

Stanhope told the story with unusual moderation and marked the pallor which deepened on Mrs. Johnson's face at the climax.

"Elton was in a terrible box there when he ran out of money last year," pursued the lieutenant. "His pride prevented him asking any one to help him, and he actually left Freiburg for several months. When he got that ten thousand dollars from Mr. Johnson it was like a fortune to him."

Both ladies, in the height of their surprise, cried in one breath:

"From Mr. Johnson!"

"Yes; it was through his hands as a lawyer that Elton's legacy passed. Didn't you know that? I had no intention of revealing a secret. What great things

hang on little events! If Jack had got that money a week earlier, now—'

He sprang to catch Cora, who was reeling in her seat, but she recovered strength enough to accept Belle's arm instead. The housekeeper, who was summoned, tenderly escorted her half-fainting mistress to her room. Having accomplished all he expected to do on this occasion, Lieutenant Stanhope expressed his regret at the inexplicable illness of Mrs. Johnson and soon after took his leave.

When Belle entered Cora's chamber she found her in a hysterical state.

"Do you believe that man could have done such a wicked thing? Could he have kept that money back so Jack would be unable to get here? It seems too dreadful to be possible!"

"We can easily find out," said Belle, soothingly, "and you are very foolish to get yourself into such a state of excitement over a mere suspicion."

"If he did," sobbed Cora, "I will never live with him again! I shall ask him when he comes. If it is true, he cannot deny it to me!"

"Well, dear, go to sleep to-night, and we will talk about it in the morning," said Belle, gently.

It was hours before Cora could follow the advice.

Two days must elapse before her husband would arrive. Cora's first thought was to write him a letter, taxing him with the deceit. She gave this up, thinking it would be better to be present when he first knew of her suspicion and watch its effect on him. Her next idea was to telegraph for him to come at once to Newport. After a while she decided to wait until his ordinary visit; and when he actually did arrive, she

found the courage that had been so strong had all oozed away.

It would be a step of deep importance to leave her husband. She began to realize that. It would possibly mean going out into the cold world, friendless and penniless. Under excitement, this seemed preferable to life with a man who, she believed, had obtained her by fraud. Upon quieter reasoning the terrors of poverty appealed to her judgment.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CAPTAIN HAWKINS, OF THE ENGINEER CORPS.

So the weeks passed by at the Johnson villa without an open rupture, and one day a variation occurred in the monotony by the unexpected advent of Claude Wyllis, who sprang from a conveyance upon the piazza and threw his arms boisterously around his wife's neck.

"Belle, you old darling, I thought I would surprise you!" he said, giving her half-a-dozen hurried kisses. "Looking just as pretty as ever, upon my word! I don't believe you have pined for me one minute! And here's Cora! Can't kiss her! I haven't forgotten the buggy, ha, ha! Well, how are you both—and where's the blessed baby?"

He dove into the house before they could answer him, and immediately returned with the heir of the Johnsons, which he had snatched without ceremony from the lap of its faithful attendant.

"The image of his pa!" he cried, brandishing the infant aloft, to the consternation of everybody. "A Johnson, out and out! Don't pretend, Cora, that you're the mother of this! There's not a drop of Madison blood in him, more's the pity! How things have changed since I went away! Then you were a little, shrinking girl—now you're a great, bold mother of a family!"

Belle and the nurse rescued the infant at some peril, and Claude was at last persuaded to take a chair and behave in a more sensible manner.

"Come, now, give an account of yourself," said Mrs. Wyllis. "You have been gone more than a year. A nice sort of husband, truly! What have you been about?"

Her husband threw his head to one side, imitating the action of a bird.

"I have written you almost every week," he said, "and, of course, told you everything."

"Everything!" echoed his wife, incredulously.

"Well, nearly everything," he laughed. "There are some things no man should tell his better half, if he cares for peace in the family; though, Belle, my dear, I think I could relate everything I've done since I saw you, verbatim et punctuatum, without endangering the good feeling which always prevails between us."

"Go on and relate it, then," smiled Mrs. Wyllis. "It will doubtless prove interesting."

Claude looked from his wife to Cora.

"There are ladies present, Belle! you seem to forget that. What I could tell you and what I could say before Mrs. Johnson are—"

Cora interrupted him, with a vexed expression of countenance.

"You could say nothing before me which would annoy me so much as to call me by that name!"

He gave a very impolite whistle and opened his eyes wider.

"You have not kept me as well posted on important matters as I have you," he said, reproachfully, to his wife. "I supposed that Mrs. John—I beg pardon—that my esteemed friend Cora, was the happiest little married woman this side of the sea. With that, too!" indicating the direction in which nurse had vanished with baby. "How does it happen? Tell us, do."

"Do you think you must know everything that is going on?" said Belle, using at the same time her entire code of private signals to warn him that he was on dangerous ground. "There may be little misunderstandings between husband and wife—"

Cora raised a hand to stop her.

"Why should we use metaphor before Mr. Wyllis?" she asked. "He must know sooner or later. I do not like my husband," she added, to Claude. "My marriage is distasteful to me. I endure my present life with difficulty. That child is all that could hold me to it an hour."

Claude's eyes opened wider yet, as he heard this explicit statement.

"I am surprised," he said. "I have known Johnson for years, and I thought him a perfect gentleman."

"He is all that," responded Cora, quickly. "It is not his fault that I cannot like him. I know nothing against him in any way, unless—yes, I have lately had a suspicion of one wrong thing he may have

done. I wonder if you could tell me. Do you know anything about the legacy which Jack's uncle left him?"

The question affected Wyllis unaccountably. He stared at Cora as if he had been suddenly detected in a questionable transaction.

"You knew—did you not—that an uncle died and left him ten thousand dollars, which was conveyed to him through Mr. Johnson's hands?"

He looked a little relieved and said, yes, he had heard of that.

"It has occurred to me," she said, in troubled tones, "that he—that Mr. Johnson—might have held back that money until we were too near our—marriage—to make it possible for Jack to reach here in time to stop it. He came only half-an-hour late. But for the breaking of a car-wheel he would have been at Cambridge an hour earlier. Had he arrived, even though I was dressed for my wedding with Mr. Johnson, I should not—could not—have married him. I knew my great mistake when I saw Jack's face. That sight, half-an-hour after I had pledged myself to another, made it impossible for me to find happiness in my new relation. As I said, Mr. Johnson has always seemed a gentleman. If he were not my husband I might like him; but if he willfully held back that legacy—if I could be sure of it—I would not sleep another night under his roof. It would make me a participator in a great crime."

Claude looked at the trembling lips and was glad he could relieve the lawyer of the wife's haunting suspicion.

"I am pleased to be able to assure you," he said, "that Mr. Johnson acted with perfect honor in that

matter. I know about it, you see, because I was in constant correspondence with him. I went to Europe to hunt Jack up, and tried to persuade him to continue to use my own money. Before I got there, Johnson had cabled him enough for present use—done it by telegraph, you know—and he had started for America. If your husband had the design you impute to him, he could reasonably have used the mail, which would have taken a dozen days longer. What I have never yet understood is, how Jack came to start home in such haste. Did you write to him at that time?"

"Jessie did," replied Cora, "and without breathing a word to any of us. The dear little girl! I wish her missive had sped faster!"

Claude looked at her for a minute with awakening pity. Then he broke out:

"By Gracious, Cora! I don't like to hear you talk like that! You, a married woman, with a baby! It's—hang it!—it's immoral!"

As the conversation was becoming dispiriting, Mrs. Wyllis thought it her duty to interfere.

"Talking of immoralities, Mr. Preacher, how is your latest inamorata?" she inquired.

"My—Goodness, Belle! What *are* you talking about?"

"Oh, I know very well," she responded, with a smile. "Shall I mention her name? Fraulein—"

He put his hand quickly over her mouth.

"You may be about to do injustice to an excellent lady," he said, in explanation of his action. "It is wrong to seriously couple such a word as you used with the name of any woman, unless you have something like proof."

She struck his serious face daintily with her ivory-handled fan.

"Do you deny, you wicked man, that there *is* a fraulein—we won't mention names—who has kept you this fifteen months from your lawful spouse? Do you dispute that she is a singer in the Berlin opera—and that she came over on the same steamer with you?"

He had not sufficient command of his features to dissemble when she uttered the last words.

"You are a diviner!" he said, admitting everything. "How the deuce did you know?"

"Never mind," she responded. "You confess to all I charge you with. Now, are you not ashamed?"

She learned forward and peered into his eyes, as children do into those of babies which they are trying to make laugh.

"I don't follow your reasoning," he protested, placing an arm around his wife and drawing her towards him. "You ask me if there is 'a fraulein, of the opera, who has kept me in Europe for fifteen months,' and I admit it. Now you ask me if I am not ashamed, and I answer 'No!' What is there for shame in the divine passion of Music? I am entranced with her singing—that's all!"

Belle drew herself away, to make her next words more impressive.

"So entranced that you brought her home with you on the steamer. Where is she now?"

She made a comical motion as if she would tear the singer's eyes out.

"Not in any of my pockets, I assure you," he responded, offering them for her inspection. "As to coming on the same steamer, it was a—a coincidence.

There were lots of people on that steamer. Jack Elton was one of them."

"Jack!" exclaimed Cora.

"Yes, Mr. Jack, the disconsolate. He was the solitary passenger who spoke to nobody unless first spoken to, and then answered only in monosyllables. He is not like the boy you used to love, Cora, not in the least. I promenaded the decks passing and repassing within three feet of him, evening after evening, with—yes, with a certain fraulein—and he never looked toward us nor uttered a word!"

To the surprise of the entire party a carriage containing Mr. Johnson and another gentleman drove up at this moment. The other gentleman was "Captain Hawkins, of the Engineer Corps," as the lawyer introduced him to each in turn.

"And you are here, too, Mr. Wyllis," said Mr. Johnson, grasping that gentleman's hand with warmth. "Why didn't you let us know? I only came myself by accident. I had a chance to run over for a night and I was glad to improve it."

Claude kept his eyes on Cora. How different her face had looked when he told her Elton had reached America! Now it bore marks of actual pain.

Mrs. Wyllis set about entertaining the stranger, Cora acting as a mild assistant, while the talk between the lawyer and Claude drifted into business channels. Mr. Johnson had lately been engaged on a great will case—a will involving millions—and had just learned that a verdict had been given to his clients.

"Business was never so good with me," he said, rubbing his hands together. "I have all I can attend to. If my wife's health were better," he added, in a low tone, "there's nothing more I could ask. She is

delicate and has wanted to go abroad. The baby—you have seen my boy, of course—has kept her here, but if the doctor thinks it will help her I shall let her cross over this fall. She has been pretty badly.” He dropped his voice still lower. “Before the child was born she got so nervous I had to keep away almost entirely. She went to live at the Murray Hill, you know. She is not herself, even now, but I think she is improving. Slowly, very slowly, but a little.”

As the conversation lagged after this, Wyllis indicated the visitor with a motion of his head.

“Who is he?”

“Captain Hawkins, of the Engineer Corps,” replied Mr. Johnson. “Didn’t I introduce you?”

“Yes, you did; but *who* is he?”

“That’s all I know about it,” replied the lawyer. “That’s the way he was introduced to me. He’s a very pleasant fellow and a great friend, I have heard, of Lieutenant Stanhope, of the Navy. Do you know Stanhope?”

Yes, Claude knew him. And he thought, though he did not say so, that the fact was no particular recommendation to Captain Hawkins, of the Engineer Corps.

Captain Hawkins took Mrs. Wyllis’ arm and began to promenade the piazza on the opposite side. Cora had gone in, presumably on account of distress signals from the nurse. Mrs. Wyllis seemed much entertained with the gentleman’s remarks, whatever they were, and their mutual laughter broke at intervals on the air of the early evening. The captain could be descried, as he and his partner reached the corner nearest to the section occupied by Mr. Johnson and

Wyllis, bending very low toward his fair companions and saying something with great earnestness.

"Confound him! He's pretty rapid with his conquests!" thought Claude, with a feeling in his breast which had never found lodgment there before.

When dinner was served, Captain Hawkins sat by Mrs. Wyllis, and soon after leaving the table Belle appeared in her wraps, with the gallant officer at her side.

"We're going for a little ride, Claude, dear," she said, sweetly. "The Captain's dog-cart has been sent for. We sha'n't be late, but if we are, don't sit up. Good-night, Mr. Johnson! I suppose you will retire early, as usual. Good-night, Cora! Ah, yes! Let me kiss the baby!"

Claude Wyllis had never felt in his life as he did when his wife stepped into that dog-cart and drove off with Captain Hawkins. Mr. Johnson told him a long story of a great railroad case that he had settled, but Claude heard him not. He wondered where the riders had gone. He wondered what was the object of their ride. He wondered whether the captain was leaning toward Belle, as he had seen him on the piazza, and if she was laughing at his apparently witty sallies. Perhaps he had placed an arm about her! Perhaps—

Mr. Johnson went to bed, but Claude sat there on the piazza. It was eleven o'clock and still they did not come. Christ!

Suddenly he became aware how ridiculous it was to sit there. If they should see him he would look like a spy. He decided to retire, and called a domestic. "No, not Mrs. Wyllis' room," he said. He was tired after journeying and did not wish to be disturbed.

The room given him overlooked the driveway. At two o'clock he heard the sound of wheels and almost instantly of laughing voices also. Captain Hawkins assisted Belle to alight, holding her in his arms much longer than was necessary, Claude thought, before placing her on the ground. They exchanged a few words in tones too low to be understood. Then Belle came into the house and the member of the Engineer Corps drove away.

In the morning Belle found a letter awaiting her, stating that her husband had been obliged to run up to New York on important business—connected with the opera—and had hesitated to disturb her rest, knowing that she retired late.

"Poor fellow! I hope it didn't hit him too hard!" she mused, affectionately, as she read his note.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"AS A MOTHER IT IS A VERY DIFFERENT THING."

Dr. Elton's bell was hastily pulled early one morning several months after the events narrated in the last chapter. He had located himself near Madison Square and launched at once into a practice, the extent of which astonished him. The fame of the new physician grew with each case he treated. On the particular morning in question he entered his office to find Mr. Johnson there.

"I wish you to come to my house, sir, at once!" exclaimed the lawyer, hurriedly. "The baby, my

young son, has broken an arm by falling from a chair. I have hastened here in a carriage, knowing your success with fractures."

Dr. Elton thought of many things in that brief moment.

"Any good surgeon can set a baby's arm," he said, gravely. "I have several important engagements this morning."

"But—you will come!" pleaded the father, nervously. "He is our only child, you know, and money is no object whatever. His mother is nearly crazed with grief. If you—"

"I will come," interrupted Dr. Elton. "Harry," turning to his servant, "ask any callers to wait. I shall return in an hour."

He put on his hat and overcoat and entered the carriage with Mr. Johnson. In a few minutes they alighted at the Thirty-third Street residence, where they found everybody in a highly excited condition. The nurse, to whose carelessness the accident was attributed, was weeping and wringing her hands. Mrs. Ashleigh, who happened to be visiting at the house, was offering wild suggestions of no possible value. Mrs. Wyllis, not as calm as usual, though very much so compared with the others, was trying to comfort Cora, who held the baby in her arms and declared that no one should touch it until the physician came.

Dr. Elton bowed gravely to the ladies and then asked in the quietest manner that such of the child's garments as covered his broken arm might be carefully removed. Cora, at sight of him, seemed to lose all strength and resigned the boy to Belle, who took him to a sofa and, with the doctor's help, exposed the injured limb. A sharp cry from the baby, followed by

copious weeping, soon brought the mother to the place.

"He is hurting him!" she screamed.

The doctor did not turn toward her, nor did he suspend his operations, but he spoke for the general ear.

"Not more than is necessary," he said. "The pain will last a very few moments and it is better he should endure it than to take an anæsthetic. I think, sir," he added, to Mr. Johnson, "you would prefer a brief interval of suffering for your child, to a limb deformed for life?"

"For *your* child!" thought Cora. "How coldly he spoke of the child as her husband's! Was his mother nothing?"

Dr. Elton wound the bandages tightly and applied liniments which he had brought with him.

"Give him these powders if he is very restless, according to the directions I have written," he said, later. "I will drop in again some time to-morrow. Good-day."

The boy's cries were stilled. He sat in Mrs. Wyllis' lap, looking curiously at the big swathings on his arm. Mr. Johnson's fears being allayed, he departed for his office, after a few words of general caution. Mrs. Ashleigh went out on a shopping expedition. Cora consented to resign Willie to his nurse's care once more, the poor woman protesting that she would never leave him again, even for a minute. When the young wife was alone with Belle she gave vent to her feelings.

"Did you see him? So cold, so mechanical! Not a pleasant word! Nothing but the merest formalities!

One would have thought he had never heard of me before."

"What did you expect, dear?" answered her friend. "That he would throw his arms around your neck and kiss you?"

"No," she replied. "I do not think I expected anything; but I could not have imagined that frigid demeanor if I had studied the probabilities for years."

"If he were alone with you he might unbend," suggested Belle. "I would like to know if that iceberg could melt. You might try him."

"How?" asked Cora, earnestly.

"Why, you are in a bad state of health, you know. Mr. Johnson has repeatedly begged you to consult another physician. He will have great faith in the new doctor when Willie's arm is strong."

Cora thought a little while.

"I don't believe I could bear it," she said at last. "Not if we were entirely alone. I have never seen him so since he lived with us at Cambridge. I don't know what he might do."

Belle laughed.

"I know," she said. "He would feel of your pulse, look at your tongue, write a prescription and bow himself out. Let me recommend you to have a good fire when he calls or he will chill you to death. Oh, Cora! I wish you would get out of this morbid state. It makes you so unhappy and nothing in the world can ever come of it. When Mr. Johnson proposed to go for Dr. Elton I thought to myself—one sight of the man of medicine will cure her as well as the baby. If your love survives his iciness it is of a solid character indeed. Banish him from your mind, my darling! You can have anything else you want in the world and

you can't have him. Look that fact squarely in the face and be a woman !"

Cora shook her head sadly, but did not offer any other reply.

"We are two stranded females clinging to the shores of time," pursued Belle, with vivacity. "Look at me ! My adored one stayed fifteen months abroad, dead in love with an opera singer, came home in a rush, gave me a couple of kisses, went to bed by himself and was gone at daylight in the morning. Now he is back at Berlin with her. Your lover, to use his own words, has taken a profession for a sweetheart, and to judge from appearances, she has quite filled your old place. Shall we pine away and die of lovesickness ? No ! Let us throw such nonsense to the winds and enjoy ourselves, as we have a right to do. Here we are refusing invitations daily. Captain Hawkins declares that I am driving him to despair, and Lieutenant Stanhope has become a walking shadow on your account. Let us reward their devotion."

Cora lifted her eyes to Belle's, to see how much she meant by these careless words.

"You have an excuse, perhaps," she said, "but I have none. My husband has not deserted me. He is only too faithful. But in any event, I can conceive of no pleasure in throwing myself into the arms of the first libertine who passes. I could give myself to no man unless the spark of love was kindled in my breast."

Belle had been getting into one of her reckless moods, and Cora's expressions drove her yet farther.

"No excuse, you gosling !" she cried. "You have the greatest of all excuses ! If Claude would stay here I would never ask for a better man, but your husband

neither is, was, nor can be a source of happiness to you. Claude finds himself better amused in Berlin and he shall never know I care. I would sooner die than write him to come home. Now look at your case. You are an unsophisticated girl and this crafty lawyer sets his arts at work to secure you. His sister goes to live at your house so as to get your mother on his side. You sacrifice your own feelings and consent to fall into the trap. Johnson, luckily for him, becomes the custodian of Mr. Elton's little legacy. Like the honest fellow he is, he wires him the news and sufficient funds to resume his studies. But he was not bred at his crafty trade for nothing. He realizes that Elton may make a trip home, in which event his own cake would become an unpalatable piece of dough, so he hastens his marriage, calculating the date, as he thinks, against such probability. He does not know of the little sister's letter and naturally supposes the student, being unwarned, will require a longer time to prepare for the journey. He expects to be off for Bermuda with his bride long before the hero of the play comes on the stage. Nicely planned as are his purposes, nothing but a slight railroad accident prevents their being upset. But Fate favors him. He secures the body of the coveted woman and the law makes it his. Her SOUL is her own and she bestows it where she will !"

Cora looked like one awakening from a dream, as she listened to this audacious arraignment of her husband.

"It must be so," she murmured. "Why did I not see it before ! You should have warned me !"

"I?" ejaculated Mrs. Wyllis. "Did I know what they were doing ? You considered me then hardly

fit to speak to—don't interrupt, you know it is true. When I came to sit by your mother's bedside, I dared give no advice, for I found everything settled without me. I helped you get ready for the wedding, but I did not know your bridegroom was aware of a legacy which would restore hope and confidence to your lost lover. I might not have raised any opposition if I had been consulted, as I supposed the old love had been dropped on the threshold of the new one. Who could foresee that, when you got every comfort in life at your disposal, you would forget all but the one thing you ought to forget first?"

Cora looked the picture of despair.

"I shall leave him," she said, in a shaking voice. "I have no other choice, now I know what he has done."

Belle made an impatient gesture.

"You will do nothing so idiotic. If he had settled a snug sum on you, as Claude did on me, you might, but not now. You would go forth with only your clothes and jewels and either starve or find a shop-girl's place. He has married you; make him support you; that is part of his bargain. He is engrossed in business and it is a wise provision of nature that allows mice to enjoy themselves in the absence of their natural enemy."

The nurse came up with Willie and retired while he was receiving his nourishment. The mother looked at the little fellow as he greedily imbibed his food, and kissed him softly several times when he smiled up into her face. She wondered, if she was getting to love him. When he had gone she said to Belle:

"As a wife, I think I could take your advice. As a mother—it is a very different thing!"

"You should not have been a mother," smiled her friend. "It is very unfashionable and I was quite surprised at you. However, my advice is always thrown away—and I will offer no more except this: Forget that North Pole M. D. as fast as you can. He will never do you any good, and it's perfect folly to freeze' to him!"

She laughed at her own pun and the conference terminated good-naturedly.

The bones of the baby's arm knit rapidly together. Dr. Elton made about half-a-dozen visits altogether, and Mr. Johnson received his bill for two hundred and fifty dollars at the end of the month.

"Whew!" ejaculated the lawyer, showing the bill to his wife. "Elton is charging pretty good prices for a beginner! Well, why shouldn't he! The old surgeons are giving way to him everywhere. He will be a rich man in a few years at this rate."

Then Mr. Johnson found himself wondering whether Elton had entirely recovered from his youthful passion.

"Yes, it is evident he has," he reasoned. "I watched him at the house and he hardly looked at her. Oh, it is much better for them both!"

One evening in the middle of winter, Mr. Johnson being away at Albany attending the meetings of the Senate, Belle persuaded Cora to go out to dinner with her at an ultra-fashionable restaurant not far from the corner of Broadway and Twenty-sixth Street. They went on foot, as the walk was such a short one; and, by a remarkable coincidence, encountered Captain Hawkins and Lieutenant Stanhope almost at the door. Learning of their errand, the gentlemen begged the

ladies to allow them the favor of becoming their entertainers. Mrs. Wyllis, who did most of the talking, protested at first that they could not think of it, and ended by accepting with apparent hesitation.

"If it wasn't such a terribly respectable place I wouldn't think of it," she whispered to Cora, as they ascended the stairs. "The best people in New York come here to dine."

A cozy, private room was found, and the gentlemen conducted themselves with the utmost propriety during the dinner. Cora was almost wholly unused to sparkling wines and the champagne, which was freely served, affected her easily. She began to talk rapidly and developed a gaiety which Belle had never seen in her before. Delighted to have her friend throw off the sombre face of so many long months, Belle continued to fill her glass until it became necessary to caution her against raising her voice too high. Mrs. Wyllis drank with more caution, but soon she also began to feel the effect of the beverage as well as of her surroundings, and the two officers exchanged quick glances of satisfaction.

When the dishes were cleared away and cigarettes brought, Belle eagerly lit one and passed it from her mouth to that of Captain Hawkins, who seemed to think the action very droll indeed. Then Cora, who had never touched one in her life, was persuaded to light Lieutenant Stanhope's in the same manner.

"It is a common custom in Brazil, where I used to live," explained Mrs. Wyllis.

Another bottle of champagne was opened and its effect on the ladies was immediately noticeable. They grew careless of their words and actions. The arms of the gentlemen stole unrebuked around their waists,

A great many things were said and laughed at without being comprehended. Before the bottle was emptied kisses were given. Bacchus hides his jolly face nowhere more effectively than in a quart of that seductive beverage.

They amused themselves in many ways. Finally Lieutenant Stanhope offered to bet a box of gloves that he could guess the size of Cora's boot. He guessed it was No. 1. She said he had lost, as it was No. 1½. He said he would not pay until he had proof and she agreed to exhibit the boot for him to measure. In rising she reeled against the table and there was a crash of glass. This brought an attendant, who remonstrated, saying that this sort of thing could not be permitted.

Then there arose a difference of opinion between the two officers. Lieutenant Stanhope favored punching the attendant's head. Captain Hawkins preferred leaving the restaurant and going to some place where a party of ladies and gentlemen could be properly treated. The ladies sided with Captain Hawkins, in the interest of peace. The bill was haughtily demanded and paid, including a round sum for the shattered glass. A carriage was sent for. The party entered it and a whispered direction was given to the driver. Belle's head lay on Captain Hawkins' shoulder. Cora leaned against Lieutenant Stanhope.

They came to a hotel—somewhere. They got into an elevator and soon reached a suite of handsomely furnished rooms. The gentlemen consulted and decided that more champagne and cigarettes were necessary. All drank, smoked and chatted. Finally Mrs. Wyllis asked the hour. Captain Hawkins looked at his watch and said it was ten o'clock. Mrs. Wyllis said

her watch must have stopped, then, as the hands pointed to two. Cora's watch was appealed to and its hands also indicated two. The queer coincidence of both watches having stopped at precisely the same minute amused everybody immensely.

Captain Hawkins and Mrs. Wyllis began to promenade the room. They waltzed a few minutes, to the great joy of Cora, who essayed to imitate them with the lieutenant, but was too dizzy to do so successfully. Then the couples became separated. Captain Hawkins and Belle found themselves in a chamber on one side of the parlor where they had been staying. In some mysterious way the door became shut. The captain had Belle in his arms and was kissing her violently on the mouth.

Suddenly a ray of reason came into Belle's head. She comprehended it all in a moment.

"Let us return," she said. "Cora will be alarmed at our absence."

He remonstrated.

"She is with Stanhope and would much rather we did not intrude. I assure you it would be impolite."

Then he kissed her again and whispered something in her ear.

She drew herself up proudly.

"I am a foolish woman, perhaps, but not a bad one, Captain Hawkins! This has gone far enough! Open that door!"

He tried to restrain her.

"Belle, my darling, you do not know how much I love you!"

She broke from him and opened the door herself. At that moment they heard the sound of a falling body in the room beyond.

They both hastened in that direction and, to their horror, saw the lieutenant lying at full length on the carpet and Cora standing over him with an empty champagne bottle grasped in her hand. There was a gash in his head from which blood oozed slowly.

"Is he dead" cried Belle, in freezing tones.

"I hope so," responded Cora, calmly. She was entirely sober now.

"Why did you do it?" demanded the captain.

"No matter!"

Hawkins leaned over the body.

"He is alive!" he said. "I guess it won't be serious. Where is the water?"

They found the water and a quantity of it, dashed repeatedly in Stanhope's face, made him open his eyes. The captain helped him to the bed, which looked as if somebody had previously lain upon it.

Belle got a towel and wiped the blood from the gash. The captain said a plaster would fix that all right—there was no need of stitches. Cora took a chair and looked on aimlessly. In a short time the injured man could sit up.

"I forgive you, Cora," were his first words. "I know you did not mean to do it."

"I meant to kill you!" she replied, fiercely.

"But you are sorry now?"

"Yes; that I did not succeed!" she responded.

Mrs. Wyllis asked Captain Hawkins to call a carriage. "You will not need to come," she said. "Your friend wants you here."

He talked to her a few minutes in a low voice, seeming to consent with regret. Then he rang the bell and ordered the vehicle.

Stanhope tried to rise, when he bade the ladies

good night, but was unequal to the effort. He begged Cora to take his hand and say they were still friends. When she paid no attention to this, he said she would at least know that no one would ever hear of the occurrences of the evening from him.

When the ladies reached home they were surprised to find the house so dark. Belle consulted her watch and when she saw it was nearly four she realized all at once the deception. They let themselves in noiselessly with a latch-key and retired without disturbing any one.

In the morning the two friends met each other with averted eyes. They went about the house for some hours without exchanging more words than were necessary, till at last Belle broke the silence :

"Cora, dear, I am as sorry as you for the trouble last night, but you mustn't blame me for it. I had no idea those men would behave so badly. I never was in such a position before in my life."

Cora did not look up at first.

"I have been wondering," she said, "if that is what you called 'amusement,' when we were talking the other day. It has revealed to me one strata lower than the miserable marriage I have made, and so far it may do me good. But I think I never can live long enough to blot out its memory. I feel disgraced through and through. Most of the occurrences of the evening I recall only through a blur, and yet I think I forget nothing. We were drunk, Belle, in plain English. Yes, we were affected by that wine. Those execrable fellows considered us too silly creatures and would have made us two wicked ones, if they could. Their arms were around us, their kisses were on our lips—ugh! A few more swallows of wine and there

would have been no limit to our full disgrace. I feel as if I could never bear to see my face in the glass; and if I should meet either of them anywhere I should not know how to hide my head."

Belle heard her humbly.

"I feel just as you do," she said. "I was ennuied to death here, with no excitement, and I thought a little gaiety would brighten my spirits. It has taught me a lesson, love, as well as you. I think that blow you gave Stanhope has taught him one also, and when I saw him lying there I had an awful feeling, for I really thought he was dead!"

In the evening a servant brought them the cards of Captain Hawkins and Lieutenant Stanhope, with a pencilled note from the former, stating that the gentlemen would like to make an apology in person for the unpleasant events of the preceding evening.

Belle consulted a moment with Cora.

"Tell the gentlemen there is no answer whatever," was the message they gave the domestic.

The next day Mr. Johnson was surprised at receiving an unsigned letter with these words:

"Ask your wife where she was on Wednesday night."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SOME SAY IT WAS A CYCLONE.

Mr. Johnson's reply to the anonymous letter which he received was to tear it into minute particles and crush them under his heel on the office floor. If he could have done as much for the author of the epistle he would have been glad. Ask his wife about her movements, indeed! The wife of Hon. J. S. Johnson, member of the New York Senate, prospective candidate for Congress, leader of the Empire State bar! Other men's wives might or might not be fit subjects for anonymous letter writers, but his—ridiculous! He dismissed the matter from his mind, and it was a long time before it came back there in a serious light.

The rest of the winter passed quietly at the house in Thirty-third Street. The two ladies were as circumspect as nuns. When they went out it was in a carriage of their own, which waited for and returned with them. Captain Hawkins and Lieutenant Stanhope, after repeated attempts to secure another interview, gave up the chase with a few expletives at the bad luck. The latter's ship was ordered into southern seas and the former found himself transferred to another station.

Baby Willie thrived well. His arm knit together so perfectly that the fracture would never have been suspected. When spring came he was toddling about the house in short skirts. His mother took him with her often when she went for a ride in the park. Senator Johnson was generally too busy to accompany them,

but he did whenever he could, for he liked to meet acquaintances and see them look at his handsome wife and boy. It was much better than being a bachelor and riding alone, he thought. While Cora still behaved toward him with the old reserve, he was too little versed in such matters—as well as of too busy a life—to notice it much. Her quiet dignity became her. Her still pale face made her look interesting. The senator saw nothing in his matrimonial sky to occasion him uneasiness. His bark seemed sailing placidly to its proper harbor.

It surprised him a little in the autumn when Mrs. Johnson suddenly changed her mind about going to Europe. He supposed the journey decided upon. Her physician declared a change of some sort necessary to her health. Mrs. Wyllis expressed her willingness to accompany her, and there seemed nothing in the way of a pleasant and beneficial tour. When she told him she had concluded to spend the winter in New York, he was gratified, though he would willingly have borne a long separation for her sake. Between his duties at Albany and those of his growing practice he was frequently absent from home for days at a time, but that was nothing compared to missing her for six or eight months, which the other plan would have entailed. Senator Johnson loved his wife and knew no pleasure greater than that of coming to his home when she was there.

Jessie came to spend the Christmas holidays. She was now fifteen, a tall handsome girl, with a dignity of carriage which Cora had never possessed. The year had made a wonderful change in her. Her dresses covered the tops of her boots, her hair, suffered no longer to hang in curling waves, was gathered into a Grecian knot, and a new carefulness in the

little things of her attire was plainly visible. Her teachers reported that she was making rapid progress in her studies and would be ready for Vassar in the fall, if it was decided to send her there. Cora felt a sisterly pride in the beautiful girl, but recollections of her own childhood at the same age, when life seemed so fresh and fair, would sometimes rush like a torrent over her mind. Still there were compensations.

"My sacrifice could not save my darling mother," she used to muse, "but it will give Jessie ease and comfort. In that way it will be worth something, after all."

Jessie did not learn to like Mr. Johnson, but she did learn to treat him with outward respect, which answered quite as well. He frequently told his wife to spare nothing that would make her sister happier, saying he considered her one of his family in the fullest sense. The girl sometimes accepted his urgent requests to play and sing for him, in both of which accomplishments she excelled. Cora had rarely touched the piano since her marriage and a song had never issued from her lips. Jessie could play, not only that instrument, but the guitar and banjo as well, and Mr. Johnson liked to hear both. If she found him sound asleep in his chair after a few moments, it caused her no chagrin. She did not play to exhibit her talent, but from a sense of duty, and if he dropped into a nap the labor was the sooner over.

Claude Wyllis, who had returned to Berlin after that night at Newport when his wife went riding with Captain Hawkins, still remained there. His weekly letters, containing little besides perfunctories, were answered regularly by Belle, and Mr. Johnson

managed his financial affairs very much after his own fancy. Miss Bornstein made great progress that winter in the esteem of the music-loving public, and offers from impressarios on two continents were ready for her consideration when her present engagement should end. Claude had become devotedly attached to the fair cantatrice. His former brief passions seemed like nothings compared to that which he felt for the beautiful young singer. On her part she recognized the debt she owed the man at whose word the gates of Opportunity swung open before her. Months passed and the twain continued inseparable. Madam Rumor filled the air of Berlin with gossip concerning them, most of which never reached their ears. Success had lit like a dove on Lulu's forehead. That was enough for her and for him.

Claude used to think sometimes of his wife, and a little twinge would seize him as he recalled the scene at Newport, when she returned laughing, at that late hour, in Captain Hawkins' dog-cart, while he sat brooding with suppressed fury in the silent chamber over her head. How coolly the captain lifted Belle out, holding her superb form in his arms before he set her on the ground! Probably he still danced attendance on the deserted wife. Claude felt it was none of his business, if he did; but somehow he disliked to dwell on the subject. Belle's life before he married her was open to grave suspicion. She had admitted to him that she did not profess to have been a vestal. He recalled the photograph which he burned, that strangest of all mornings, at Brousseau's, in the suburbs of Montreal. Belle couldn't talk to *him*—but then she never attempted to. He couldn't talk to Belle, and he had no idea of trying. She had her money—there

was no limit to what she might draw—and she had her lovers, too, more or less devoted; of that he felt confident. On the other hand, Claude had Lulu—why should he not be happy?

Lulu must know by this time that he was married and yet she never alluded to the subject. She was without near relations, and the aged brewer at Milwaukee had too much to do with his malt and his hops to bother her with criticism or advice. She would have accepted neither with a good grace. Her only ambition was to make a great name on the roll of songsters, and that she seemed sure of attaining. Anything which aided her in that ambition, anything which made the ascent less steep, she welcomed.

And yet Lulu Bornstein loved Claude; yes, though she did not realize it then, she loved him better even than her Art!

So much for our other characters, on all of whom the observant reader will doubtless wish to keep a careful eye. Now to return to Cora:

Dr. Livingstone was one of those successful practitioners whose method is to find out what their wealthy patrons want most and proceed to order it with becoming despatch. No plan is more successful with lady patients. When Cora wanted to go to Europe—before she learned that Elton had reached America—Dr. Livingstone highly extolled the benefits likely to result from such a journey. The baby was weaned and had much better, Mrs. Johnson thought, be left at home with its nurse. Certainly, the doctor said, it would be safer there than encountering the disagreeable sensations experienced at sea. When Cora concluded not to go, the doctor thought perhaps it was

better for her, on the whole, to stay in New York another winter. Yes, the American metropolis was a very healthy place in cold weather. And when, early the next April, she decided to take a short trip into the Western states, he could not say enough to commend her judgment. The Northwest was a paradise of health in the spring. It was the place of all others where she would be most likely to recuperate her wasted strength.

Mrs. Wyllis happened to be away on a visit at Colonel Mitchell's, whose ordinary residence was in Syracuse. Cora therefore took with her only one attendant,—a Mrs. Wilkins, who had been with the Johnson family for years and confidently believed that all the glory of the earth centred in its crest and name. They traveled slowly across the country, stopping at Niagara, which Cora had never seen, and at other places, for a few days at a time, until they reached Cleveland. Here they took a steamer and made the delightful trip through Lakes Erie, St. Clair, Huron and Michigan to Chicago. Cora had not felt so well for two years. The freedom of being by herself gave her the kind of joy that a vacation from school brings to a child. Color came to some extent into her cheeks and her appetite astonished her.

Mrs. Wilkins was a woman whose boast was that "she knew her place," and Cora was as free from interference as if she had been entirely alone, while relieved at the same time of all the troubles and annoyances of travel. She got acquainted with several ladies on the steamer and found their companionship very charming. Nothing affects depressed spirits like a water trip; and the great lakes and rivers of the Western hemisphere are excelled in this respect by

none. From Chicago they went by train to St. Louis and at that city took another steamer, in which they began the ascent of the lordly Mississippi. The magnificent scenery which borders the great stream proved to Cora, as it must to every traveler who views it for the first time, a source of deep admiration. She spent most of each day on the hurricane deck, in a comfortable chair, engaged in watching the delightful and constantly changing panorama. Her rest at night was perfect in the comfortable berth of her broad stateroom.

On the second morning she was up and walking the decks soon after daylight, when the boat made its landing at Dubuque. She stood at the rail, watching with interest the moving bales, bundles and barrels, which went up and down the gang-plank, and the passengers who embarked or disembarked, in little groups or singly, during the hour of the boat's stay. Only one figure attracted more than passing attention, but that one gave her a decided start. It was Dr. Elton, who walked up the plank with a satchel in his hand, and who evidently intended to take passage, as immediately preceding him was a negro with a trunk, about which the doctor seemed to be giving directions.

For several months Cora had thought little about Elton, compared to the old days. He was the farthest person in the world from her mind when her eyes encountered his unmistakable form. She had persuaded herself, whenever the matter had come up, that she was outgrowing an attachment which she was now convinced could cause her naught but distress. Her married life could not bring her joy—she knew that as well as ever—but after her adventure with

Stanhope she had learned that there were worse things even than it. She was Mr. Johnson's wife and had resolved to bear the duties of that position with what patience she might. Elton had shown her how coldly he could renounce her love. She had often said to herself that, if they ever met again, she would be as cold as he.

But when she saw him, all her resolutions vanished in one instant.

If he should come and beckon her to follow him nothing in the world could hold her back.

What should she do? She felt an unconquerable fluttering at the heart. Should she fly to her room and hide until he left the boat; or should she seize this opportunity—there might never be another—to have a final talk with him? There was much she would like him to know, even though the knowledge could now do her no good. There were things she could tell him that might soften the harshness with which he seemed to regard her. If she only had a little more strength and courage!

While she was trying to decide what course to adopt, Elton came up the stairway, within ten feet of her. He recognized her at once, lifted his hat, said "Good morning, Mrs. Johnson!" and was about to pass on, when she found words.

"Dr. Elton, I did not expect to meet you at this distance from New York. Are you going far on this boat?"

"To Lake City," he responded, evincing considerable surprise at the question.

"Ah!" she said. "You used to live near there."

Her calmness was a source of greater surprise to her than even to him.

"Yes; that vicinity was my boyhood's home."

"It was not many miles from there that you killed the big Bruin?" she said, smiling faintly.

As he bowed assent, an expression of great pain crossed his features. What memories those words awoke! What glimpses of a "might have been!"

It was evident he did not intend to linger.

"Your family is well, I trust?" he said, to change the subject.

"Quite so. Your operation on Willie's arm was wonderful. One would never know it had been broken. We are very grateful to you."

Dr. Elton hesitated.

"The bill was rendered and paid," he said, rather bluntly. "There is no obligation."

"Can money compensate for everything?" Cora asked, unguardedly.

He said more than he intended when he answered:

"I have sometimes thought so."

Then he turned to one of the boat's officers, who was approaching, and, after asking him a question, lifted his hat to Cora and disappeared.

She was very happy; for she had spoken to him and he had answered her. He would not avoid her if they met again, as they were almost sure to do, on the same boat. He had said nothing to encourage her; indeed, his words were hardly up to the standard of politeness; but she had heard his voice. It was a beginning, even though inauspicious. The condemned criminal finds relief in inditing petitions for clemency, though the task seems a hopeless one.

Another opportunity to engage Elton in conversation did not come, though eagerly sought for. He

took his meals at another table and spent most of the day either in his stateroom or on the lower deck, where ladies were not supposed to go. In the evening, as she promenaded the upper deck with Mrs. Wilkins, she saw him, but he was engrossed with another gentleman, probably in some business or political discussion, and did not look toward her. Mrs. Wilkins noticed him and called Cora's attention to the fact that he was on board.

"Yes; he spoke to me when he came on, early this morning," responded Cora, quietly, as if that ended her interest in the subject.

At nine o'clock the steamer entered Lake Pepin, that surpassingly lovely sheet of water beneath whose placid surface the great volume of the Mississippi's waters flows for twenty-eight miles without causing the slightest current to appear on the surface. More than three miles wide at its broadest part, it is lined, on both the Wisconsin and Minnesota shores, the greater part of the way, with lofty bluffs, clad with forests which cover them during the vernal season in a mantle of beauty, except at intervals, where the precipitous sides show masses of smooth rock that remind one of the Palisades on the lower Hudson. The night was cloudy, and the full moon, struggling occasionally through the mists, lent splendor to the scene. Most of the passengers remained on the decks after the usual hour for retiring, entranced by the beauty of water, shore and sky. Little did any of the happy throng imagine how soon their feelings would change to consternation and terror!

Some say it was a cyclone; others believe it to have been a waterspout. Whatever it was, its like never was seen on Lake Pepin before or since, within the

memory of civilized man. Shortly before the boat was to make her landing at Lake City, on the Minnesota shore, a storm cloud burst and rain descended upon her with terrific fury. Water came down, not in drops, but as if poured from gigantic pitchers. The passengers fled precipitately into the cabin. Hardly had they reached that shelter every one who had been on deck being drenched to the skin, when the rain turned to hail, the stones being of a size to break all the glass of the windows and arouse fears lest they should dash in the roofs. Immediately after this, a resistless tornado struck the steamer and, in spite of engines and rudder, bore her rapidly toward the Wisconsin shore.

The heavenly pyrotechnics which accompanied this exhibition will never be forgotten by those who witnessed them. The sky was ablaze. Deafening thunder came in crash after crash, each seeming louder than the one preceding. The gale was terrible. A Mississippi steamer is not built for severe storms of this nature, and pieces of the boat went whirling through the atmosphere like so many feathers. She careened several times so badly that fears were rife she would upset in mid-lake. No one could keep his feet without holding to some support. Screams of women and children added to the horrors of the affair. The boat was swept on by the southeasterly wind up the lake and still nearer the opposite bank.

The rain and hail stopped as suddenly as they began, but the wind increased in violence, and, as the steamer seemed likely to strike bottom soon, the passengers again sought the decks, to be ready for emergencies.

In the midst of the excitement Cora became separated from Mrs. Wilkins. She passed moments of intense alarm. Death seemed imminent. She knew nothing of the depth of the lake, but she could not swim a yard and believed the sinking of the boat only a question of minutes. She thought of her baby and was glad he was safe. She thought of her husband and a tear—yes, a tear—fell for him. Thoughts of Belle, of Jessie and of all the rest flashed rapidly through her mind. She believed they would be sorry to learn she was dead.

When the other passengers rushed back to the decks she followed them, but was caught by the gale before she could find a support to cling to. As the element whirled her toward the starboard side, from whence the rails had long since been wrenched by the storm, she caught one glimpse of Elton; and, as the tornado swept her like a thistle-down toward the lashing waves, she cried, in a terror-stricken voice :

“Oh, Jack! Save me! Save me!”

The next instant she was in the water. It engulfed her at first and she felt the initial pangs of those who drown. How dark it was under there! How the water roared in her ears! How it strangled her in throat and nostrils! Then she got a sight of the sky again and a breath of the air which seemed so sweet; and then she felt herself sinking once more, with her soaking clothes dragging her down, down—in spite of her frantic struggles to bear herself up a little longer; and then, when hope was about to depart, a strong hand seized her.

It was Jack's hand. She could not see him; her eyes were blinded with the water and she was dizzy;

but she knew it was Jack's hand : and a feeling of infinite security stole over her soul as she fell into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER XXIX.

WHERE WENONA LEAPED TO DEATH.

When Elton plunged into the angry waves of the lake and caught the drowning woman by her drenched garments, he had no time to form any idea beyond the briefest thought that she was perishing and that he might save her or die with her. She was no longer his sweetheart ; she was another man's wife ; he had no hope that Destiny would change its ruthless decision. But the storm had swept her overboard, and her last words were a cry for his aid.

It seemed probable that the rapidly drifting steamer would reach them the next moment and crush them both under her black hull. Luckily this did not happen, for two reasons : First, the part of the deck from which the accident occurred was near the stern ; and, second, by an apparently miraculous veering of the wind, the boat was arrested in her course and turned in an opposite direction. Those of the crew and passengers who witnessed the accident were powerless to render the slightest aid. It was a time when individual safety seemed the only thing worth seeking, and the securing of even that was doubtful. The boat drifted rapidly up the lake and now headed again for the Minnesota shore, while Elton sought with his burden to reach the Wisconsin side.

It was a terrible struggle. The tempest had lashed the waves into a fury. Few men could have saved themselves, to say nothing of carrying with them an inert body. The occasional brief brightenings of the sky, caused by the remains of the electrical disturbance, showed Elton in which direction to bend his energies. Otherwise he would have been as likely to swim further out as toward land. But the wind was now against him, and the water chilled him through and through.

For many minutes he fought these contrary elements and then found his strength failing. Could he have both arms free it would be easy to save his own life, as the shore was steadily growing nearer. He knew he could not support Cora much longer. It was doubtful if life still remained in her still form. In spite of all his efforts the waves had dashed a hundred times over her head. Being conscious, he could suspend breathing until they subsided, but she was powerless to do so. Should he sacrifice himself to carry ashore a dead body? Such thoughts—who can help his thoughts?—came into Elton's mind, but they were instantly dismissed. He would save both or neither! He would carry the woman to the land, dead or alive, or sink with her!

In that awful hour Jack Elton knew, if he had doubted it before, that his love had suffered no abatement with the lapse of years.

At last his strength gave out. He felt that he could bear up no longer and, with a prayer to Heaven, he resigned his exhausted form to the greedy waters. He threw his swimming arm around Cora and brought her face close to his. A momentary flash of lightning showed him the pale features and the closed eyes.

The sight gave him a chill greater than that of the icy waves. They were sinking together! His last hope of life was gone!

Was it a miracle! his feet touched sand. He had swum into the shallows. They might yet be saved! He held up the quiet form by his side and struggled slowly on. A few minutes later he felt a joyful sensation as he found himself on higher ground. The water was only to his waist.

He paused to rest, with a devout expression of gratitude. It was pitch dark all about him. The waters dashed against his tired frame with unlesened violence.

Until now he had given no thought to his surroundings. He had no idea on what particular part of those once well-known shores he had been cast. He took long breaths and waited. It was useless to take another step until he could tell where it would lead him. All he knew was that he must be on the Wisconsin side. He hoped he might be near the village of Pepin, or the hamlet of Stockholm, but the absence of a single light glimmering through the darkness gave little encouragement to such thoughts.

As he waited, the atmosphere was suddenly illumined for miles with the electrical current, and he saw everything plainly. The steamer he had left was five or six miles from him. Lake City, Florence, Frontenac and other places could be discerned more easily than at mid-day, and all were far out of reach. But what most interested the weary man was the majestic front of the Maiden Rock, looking down on him, less than a mile away, across a stretch of submerged marshes, which could not be unfordable at this season.

The village named for the Rock was about four

miles off. The Rock itself would have suggested nothing of value to the ordinary traveler in such an emergency as this. To Elton, however, it suggested much. For, in one of its precipitous sides was the secret cave where he had played as a boy, and in which were still, without doubt, the housekeeping utensils he had left there.

As he thought of this, renewed strength came into his frame. He raised Cora's inanimate form in his arms and plunged bravely into the marsh in the direction of the Rock.

It was a weary road. The water alternated in depth as he proceeded. Sometimes it was only to his knees; again it was to his armpits and again to his neck. At times he had to lift Cora's body above his head and, great as was his ordinary strength, he found it difficult to do this in his present semi-exhausted condition. When the water reached only to his waist, he frequently shifted his burden from one shoulder to the other to rest himself, holding her as a mother sometimes does a babe which she would put to sleep, with her cold, wet face lying against his. When there was a long interval of darkness, he would wait until another flash showed him the nearest road. Once or twice he stepped into deep places where he had to swim for a moment before he could find footing.

So long as he found the Rock growing nearer, he was not discouraged. At last he reached its base and rested for a moment on unsubmerged ground before he essayed the difficult ascent.

The traveler who climbs Maiden Rock in the best of weather, from the water side, must of necessity go slow. He will have cause to avail himself of all the aids which a stout alpenstock and the out-cropping

bushes afford. When he reaches the summit he need not be ashamed to own that he is tired. To achieve the same result with an inert burden of one hundred and fifteen pounds, after two hours submersion in chilling waters, is a feat to boast of; but Elton finally accomplished it, and at the entrance to his cave he laid down his load for the first time.

He soon found the stone which he had used to hide the doorway. The trouble which he experienced in dislodging it from the earth convinced him that no one had disturbed it in his long absence. After rolling it to one side he let himself down into the aperture and explored the interior of the cave to make sure that all was secure and that no offensive or dangerous creature had made its home there. From the pocket of his coat he produced a tight matchbox and struck a light. To his joy he found a candle lying on a shelf which he had built, and in a moment its welcome beams lit up the rude apartment.

Everything was as he had left it. The rough bed, made of skins stretched from staples in the rocky walls; the fireplace of loosely cemented stones; the copper kettle and other implements of cookery; the old chest, filled with a score of articles useful to the woodsman, as well as many other well remembered things, were hailed with deep satisfaction. He ran back to fetch Cora into the room, securing the entrance as before. Then he took the candle and peered into the woman's face, with a feeling in which fear, hope and awe were inextricably mixed.

Was she dead?

There was no apparent movement to the chest. The eyes were tightly closed.

He bent an ear to listen at her heart. If it was

beating, the sound was very faint indeed. He could not tell.

Dr. Elton had been in hospitals where, without a tremor of the hand, he had cut with skill into the tenderest parts of the human anatomy. He knew the entire science of restoring persons who have been subjected to immersion in water for too long a period. He was a physician with a fame that had risen in the last year beyond precedent. Here was an opportunity to test the skill of which men prated. Of all things, he loved best to undertake apparently hopeless cases.

Why did he hesitate ?

There was but one way to save Cora's life, if indeed it was not already past saving. He knew of no residence within a long distance. To go for aid to either of the nearest villages would take hours. She had been exposed to the dangers of her drenched condition for too great a time as it was. He was as wet as she, but he did not think of that. His constitution was strong, hers delicate. He had no fear for himself. Had it come to a choice between his life and hers, he would not have given a moment to the decision.

She lay there perishing, when he had the skill and knowledge which might save her.

Why did he wait ?

This was the reason : His only hope of restoring her suspended animation lay in removing her clothing. He shrank from an act which, however praiseworthy in itself, seemed like a profanation of her person.

It was but a few minutes that Dr. Elton waited. He went to the entrance of the cave and looked out. The sky was black as jet, and the rain was again descending in torrents

There was but one way, if Cora's life was to be saved.

The lover, with his scruples, vanished. The conscientious physician took his place :

Hastily he collected the available fuel and started a fire. He took the copper kettle outside and, after filling it with water from a little stream made by the storm, hung it in its place over the blazing fagots. He held the blankets and robes of the bed before the flames until they were thoroughly heated and then replaced them. Then he knelt by the still form on the floor, and, nerving himself for the effort, began as rapidly as possible to disrobe it.

It was an unaccustomed task for his fingers. A gold breastpin, studded with jewels, made him some trouble, but he disentangled it. He unfastened the soaked collar and unbuttoned the waist. The sleeves were so tight that he had nearly decided to cut them, when at last he hit upon the correct plan of drawing them down from the top. He proceeded but slowly after that, through wholly unfamiliar ground, but the work gradually neared completion. The boots were shrunken by the water and came off with great difficulty.

When half way through Dr. Elton bethought himself of a flask of brandy in one of his pockets. It was a Godsend ! He mixed some of the liquor with hot water and poured it down Cora's throat, forcing the teeth apart, and giving it in spoonful doses. When it had time to take effect he applied his ear again to the heart. Joy of joys ! it was beating !

When he had removed the last vestige of clothing from the sleeper, he took cloths and hot water and began to rub her briskly. All his timidity had van-

ished. She lived! The delight of the true physician who has called back a departing spirit filled his soul. He forgot who she was—what she had been to him. He saw only a patient whose vitality he might restore.

After thoroughly rubbing her with the hot water and towels—and that delicate skin had never before experienced such necessary roughness of contact—he lifted her in his arms and laid her on the couch, rolling her in the hot blankets and placing a great pile of robes and skins upon her. The fire diffused a pleasant temperature through the apartment. He took several hot stones from the hearth, wrapped them in blankets and placed them at her feet. He gathered her long, damp hair back from her shoulders, and bound a towel around her head to keep it from chilling her. He gave her more of the brandy and water, and was glad to find her teeth clenched less tightly. Her breathing was clearly perceptible. He experienced a great exultation!

Not till then did he devote a moment to himself. The hot air of the room enveloped him in a cloud of steam. He examined the cave more carefully and found a suit of rough farmer-clothes, abandoned when he was a penniless plowman. He improvised a curtain across a corner of the cave and retired there to change his garments, which were nearly as hard to remove as Cora's. Rough as was his appearance, he experienced a sensation of comfort as he donned the old suit. It was dry and it was warm.

When he returned to Cora, she was sleeping quietly. "Tired nature's sweet restorer" was doing better work for her than he could now.

Dr. Elton resumed his labors. He wrung the water

out of her garments and his own and hung them where they would dry. He filled the kettle again and hung it over the fire. He heated the stones at Cora's feet once more and tucked the blankets close about her. Then he sat down and tried to think.

What should he do when she awoke?

He could not leave her till then. She must be conscious enough to hear and understand him before he could walk to a village and get medicines and summon assistance.

What should he say to her?

What would she say to him?

CHAPTER XXX.

"ONE KISS BEFORE YOU GO."

His watch had stopped and so had hers also. He did not know what time it was, but felt sure morning could not be far off. The rain still poured down, though not so severely. He could brave it, if necessary, when day broke. Would she be afraid to stay there alone while he was gone? Or would she be more afraid to find him there, when she realized where she was and what he had been obliged to do to save her life?

He turned to look at his patient. Her eyes were wide open and bent upon him. As he started up, unnerved by the unexpected sight, she tried to speak, but could not. He gave her a drink of brandy and water, kneeling by the bedside to administer it. She

took the restorative gratefully and soon afterward drew one hand from its concealment and placed it on his shoulder.

"Jack," she whispered, "shall I die here?"

No other words could have chained him there. Perhaps, he thought with a thrill of anguish, it might be so. She had had a great shock. In spite of all he had done, it was not unlikely, from a medical point of view, to prove fatal.

"If I do," she added, gently, "I shall not be sorry. I am willing to die, with *you*!"

He turned his face away to hide the emotion which he could not prevent obtaining a momentary mastery of him.

"You will not die, Cora," was the first thing he found strength to say, in broken accents. "Forgive me for what I had to do. You were perishing in your garments, soaked for two hours in the floods. It would have been impossible to save you without removing them. There was no help to be had. You will not die; you *must* not! I will go now for medicines and for women who will dress you in dry clothes and take you hence."

She caressed his burning face with her hand.

"I am glad it was you, Jack. If it had been any one else I could not have borne it. Where are we?"

"In that cave of mine, in Maiden Rock, of which I used to tell you," he replied.

He did not know if he ought to kneel there, so close to her, but he had not the strength of purpose to leave.

"How did you get me here? I remember being blown into the water, and that some strong hand,

which I felt was yours, seized me as I was sinking. Was that hours ago? It seems but a few minutes."

Then he told me briefly what had passed.

"And you carried me all that weary distance?" she said, her voice trembling. "You, Jack, after all I have done to make you unhappy?"

She wept softly for a little while and he kept repeating that what he had done was not worth talking of, and that he only regretted his inability to serve her better. When her tears ceased he rose and spoke of what lay hardest upon his mind.

"I shall go, as soon as it is light enough, to get help for you. As soon as the effect of your shock is over, you will recover rapidly, I am sure. You have come out of your sleep in better condition than I could have believed possible. But there is something else for us to consider that is of even greater importance. We must do all we can to avert talk. There will be busy tongues over this affair. That is the worst phase of it."

Cora studied his face as he spoke.

"What can they say?" she asked.

"Anything they please to imagine," he replied. "We must look it squarely in the face. If anybody has been saved from the steamer—and I am inclined to think it outrode the storm—the world will know that you fell overboard and that I sprang after you. When I find help among the people near here they will understand that I brought you to this cave—which I can no longer conceal—and that we passed hours here together. We must be ready to meet the most terrible suspicions. Society is apt to be very cruel!"

She wrapped the blankets closer about her form

and, at her request, he raised her head a little upon an improvised pillow.

"What shall we do?" she asked.

Her tone was one of complete confidence in his judgment. It was well that way. She would leave it all to him.

"Your clothes are nearly dry," he answered. "I hung them up as best I could. After I am gone you must put them on again and say you dried them on you at the fire. I will take mine, change them in the woods, and tell the same story. That will give the gossips at least one thing less to talk about."

She smiled at him sadly.

"Do you want me to falsify? You, who were always the most scrupulous of truth-tellers!"

"It is the lesser of two evils," he responded. "I despise a lie, under ordinary circumstances, above all things. Here we have no choice. You must see that."

She drew a deep breath and then cried—

"Oh, Jack, I see nothing but that you are here—that we are alone—and that I am very happy!"

A deep shadow crossed Dr. Elton's features. He walked to the entrance of the cave and found that it was growing lighter outside and that the rain had ceased. When he returned his countenance bore a stern expression, which Cora did not like to behold.

"It is light enough to go, now," he said, curtly, "and it is necessary that I should seek the earliest possible aid for you. It may be two or three hours before I return. Dress yourself and wait for me."

He took his clothing from the line, and had started to go, when she interrupted him.

"I can't get into my clothes, Jack. it would be dangerous for me. They are partly dry, it is true, but

still very damp. Pneumonia might result. I am sure it would endanger my life. If you wish to save me, don't insist on that."

"But what *can* we do?" he asked in a disheartened way.

"I'll tell you," she said. "You can go and find some farmer's wife who will sell you a complete outfit—her best one, perhaps. The price being no object, you will have little trouble. There is plenty of money in my pocketbook there. Tell her you want everything that a woman wears—I cannot put on one of my things without great risk. Then hire a team and come as near here as you can drive. Being me the clothes—I will dress in them—we will be driven to the nearest railroad station and get as soon as possible to St. Paul. Be sure to buy a thick veil, so that no one will recognize me. Perhaps we can get word to the steamer people before they announce our loss in the papers. If not, we can wire our friends to-day that we got ashore all right. Nobody will know that we were ever in this cave together, and all will be well. Believe me, a woman's plan is always the best."

He thought it over and seemed inclined to her opinion.

"I suppose there is no doubt I can buy the clothes," he said, thoughtfully. "Well, I will do the best I can. I have money enough, though it is pretty damp. The wet clothes *would* be bad for you."

He put extra fuel on the fire, bade her keep well covered, and was about to depart for the second time, when she called his name again :

"Jack!"

He paused.

"Don't leave me like this!" she cried. "You have

saved my life! It was no accident of travel, but the resistless hand of Fate that threw us together on the same steamer on that awful night! Forget your cruel principles for one brief moment and be yourself! I ask so very little! Give me one kiss before you go!"

He drew himself up and clasped his hands tightly over his eyes.

"Just one! Just one, to blot out all the frightful pain I have endured because of my love for you; to mark one bright spot in the long months of suffering I have passed, and must still pass, because I am the wife of one man, while I love another; to remind me of those happy hours which we spent together at Cambridge before all this trouble came between us; to give me strength to live and bear the burden which is almost too great for me! Just one, Jack!"

His voice shook as he answered:

"Do you think *I* have not suffered also? Do you think it was easy for *me* to give up the dearest thing in my life? There are things a man must bear. There are things an honest man cannot do. One of them you have asked, and I must not listen to you."

Her face grew whiter.

"How long must I endure this?"

"Till death!" he said. "Was not that your obligation?"

"Then let it come now!" cried Cora. "Why did you save me from the waves to kill me with a greater cruelty? You have held me to your heart through the valley of the shadow! You have restored me my life, at the risk of your own! You have a right to claim me. If you loved me with one tithe of the affection you profess, you would never let me go, but all I asked was one kiss and you refused it! Now, hear what I

say: I will never leave this place! Yours were the last hands to touch me, and your boyhood's play-house shall be my tomb!"

She settled herself resolutely in her wrappings and turned her face from him. A groan burst from his lips.

"I cannot even let you die!" he cried. "If you persist, I must send people to find and succour you. Think before you entail needless misery on yourself, on your family and on me."

She turned toward him and spoke with vehemence:

"I am resolved! You are stubborn in your decisions; so am I! Leave me in this way and you will never find me alive! I can throw myself from this rock as well as Wenona!"

He hardly believed she would do it, and yet he was afraid to go. He walked to the entrance of the cave and was startled to hear voices.

"Yes, it is real smoke," one was saying, "rising out of the rock. There must be a nearly extinct volcano under this bluff. The phenomenon may be connected with the dreadful storm. I shall write an article about it for the *Scientific Monthly*."

Dr. Elton stepped back hastily and extinguished the fire on his hearth. When he returned to the entrance the voices had ceased. The visitors had evidently gone.

"What will you do?" he asked the mute figure on the bed. "Use reason!"

The determined voice answered:

"I have asked but one thing. You ask many. So long as you refuse I shall do the same!"

"But I cannot do it!" he groaned. "You know I

cannot! It would be the height of wrong! It is impossible!"

She startled him by suddenly rising to a sitting posture, the bed-clothes falling in a heap to her waist.

"Do as you will!" she cried, bitterly. "You have made me wild! Why do you hide your face? Look at me, if you like! What do I care! Shame—I have none! All the blood in my heart has turned to vinegar! I awoke here at peace with myself and all mankind; now I am desperate! What I shall become when I go forth no one can tell! But one thing has sustained me—my deep love for you! I had no one in the wide world who was so dear to me! There is a little sister, who will never hear of me except to blush! There is a child who will be taught to forget his mother's name! When you hear of me after this—in whatever depths I may have sunk—remember it was you who brought me there—*you!* YOU!!!"

Her voice grew louder and louder as she uttered the last sentence and she took a step toward him. Then she fell at his feet in a dead faint.

Dr. Elton could bear no more. His strong nerves shook and he sought the outer air. He had exhausted his expedients. He first sought a place to change his clothes, and then started down the hillside, bent on finding help. He had gone but a little way when he encountered a woman climbing up the rocks.

"Come with me, for God's sake!" he cried. "A lady has gone insane above there!"

He pointed to the summit. For an instant the woman seemed disposed to fly, but the earnestness of his manner dissuaded her. She muttered something

in German to the effect that she spoke no English, and he was able to answer her in her native tongue. She was soon led to understand that the lady and himself had been upset in the lake and had found shelter in the cave, where fright and exposure had brought on dementia, until the unfortunate lady had begun to strip herself of her clothing and show other signs of violent insanity. Guiding the woman to the entrance of the cave, Dr. Elton showed her how to descend into it, and could hear her exclamations of astonishment as she came upon the prostrate body. Obeying his directions, given from without, the woman placed Cora again upon the bed, and set about restoring her to consciousness, which was soon accomplished. Then the frau came out to give Elton directions how to reach her own house, where she said he would find her daughter, who would accompany him with the necessary articles to the cave.

He found the house on the main road, a mile or so away, and had just delivered his errand when a carriage came in sight from an up-river direction, containing several people, one of whom Elton immediately recognized as Mrs. Wilkins. She saw him at the same instant, and a moment later knew that Cora was alive and within reach.

It seemed the steamer had landed her passengers safely at Redwing, where she had been laid off for repairs. Mrs. Wilkins had taken an early boat across the lake and begun her search for Cora, making numerous inquiries and engaging parties at every house to search the shore for traces of the missing ones.

"I took Mrs. Johnson to a cave that I used to use as a boy," explained Elton, as they climbed the

eminence together, along with the German woman's daughter. "Restoration to consciousness was quite easily accomplished and everything seemed going on well when she was suddenly attacked by insanity, due doubtless to her shock. She will require the most careful attention for some days. You must take her as soon as possible to St. Paul, where she can get better medical attendance than can be secured in this vicinity. The rest I must trust to your own judgment."

"But you will not leave us now!" cried Mrs. Wilkins. "I know Mr. Johnson has perfect confidence in you and would rather you attended his wife than any one else."

"I have imperative engagements which I must fulfill," replied Dr. Elton, with a strange look. "Here is the place. Now let me caution you about one thing more. You will have to treat Mrs. Johnson like a child in her present nervous condition. Pretend to believe anything she may say, though it will all be colored, probably, by her disordered brain. You will know how little value to attach to her imaginings, but you must not let her see that you disbelieve her."

"How can we ever thank you for saving her life!" cried Mrs. Wilkins.

He replied that it was nothing; and, as he disappeared through the forest, the woman entered the cave where Cera lay.

CHAPTER XXXI

WHO PAID THAT TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS?

Dr. Elton spent but a few days longer in the vicinity of Lake Pepin. That was sufficient for a stroll over the farms where he had toiled and to inspect the few landmarks left by a rapidly changing civilization. He found that Swedes, Norwegians and Germans were everywhere taking the places of the original settlers. The pioneers of Minnesota and Wisconsin were now the pioneers of Dakota or Montana. They had tired of settled neighborhoods and gone out to conquer new regions of virgin soil. Some of his old friends who were left met his greetings with surprised stares, and when they learned who he was, accorded him a hearty welcome. Not one could have recognized the farm laborer in the dignified, well-dressed physician, so complete was the metamorphosis.

The greatest surprise which he had, however, and one which, for a time, gave him much uneasiness, was caused by a careless remark dropped by an old farmer who had known the Elton family for three generations.

"You're an Elton, out and out!" he said to the doctor. "I knew your grandfather and all his four sons. Elijah and Judah were killed in the war—they were fine strapping fellows as ever shouldered a musket. John, your father—well, he was never as strong as the rest, and your mother's death finished him. He wasn't himself after she went. Then there's Jared—the only one of the lot who could get any money

together—he's down at Keokuk, living an old-bachelor life, and loaning his savings out at twenty per cent."

"You are mistaken about my uncle Jared," remarked Dr. Elton. "He died several years ago."

The old man stared.

"Well, I guess not!" he ejaculated. "Don't you think I know Jared, when we went to school together? Why, he was up here two months ago, looking after a mortgage! If you don't believe me, ask Lawyer Brown, over at Lake City, or Mr. Hutchins, at whose house he stayed. Old Jared dead! Now, who told you such a yarn as that!"

The next day Dr. Elton was at Keokuk, where he made inquiries for Jared Elton. Yes, they told him, the old man was alive and well on his farm near the city. Dr. Elton drove out there, still thinking there was a possibility of mistake; but no, there was his uncle, without doubt, standing in his doorway. He introduced himself and they held a brief conversation over the fence. The miser did not ask him to enter, fearing that such a proceeding might be followed by an indefinite stay, to the danger of his meagre stock of provisions. He remembered when, some years before, friends of his brother's young orphan had written to ask for aid in sending the boy to school and he had returned a quick refusal. School, indeed! What need had an Elton of schooling! Jared had never been but two winters, and had made more money than half their scholars. Perhaps Jack was after a loan now. He decided to treat him civilly, but not with too great familiarity.

"Have you always been well?" asked Dr. Elton, when convinced that there was no possibility of mistaking the man before him.

"Never sick a day in my life, and I'm sixty-nine," replied old Jared. "So you're a doctor, eh? Your profession wouldn't get rich on such fellows as me."

He laughed at the idea, and Dr. Elton drove back to Keokuk.

His uncle Jared was alive—that uncle from whose estate Mr. Johnson had professed to pay him ten thousand dollars three years before. What did it mean? Where could the money have come from? People were not in the habit of throwing ten thousand dollars away! The more he thought of it the more inexplicable it seemed.

His quest was ended and he took the first train for New York, determined to go at once to Mr. Johnson and compel him to divulge the source of this peculiar bequest. Johnson had sent him the cablegram informing him of his uncle's death and had transferred the money to him. Johnson must be a party to the deceit.

Elton's thought traveled rapidly.

Who had the greatest motive to lift him out of the poverty into which he had been plunged?

Was this not the result of a twinge of conscience on the part of Mr. Johnson himself, who, when he appropriated Cora, thought to ease his mind by relieving her rightful lover in a pecuniary way?

Yes, that must be it. Elton could think of no other solution of the mystery.

He decided to go directly to Mr. Johnson and compel him to admit the truth. He was thankful he had money enough in the bank to repay, without a moment's delay, dollar for dollar, with interest. He did not wish to be for one unnecessary second the debtor of a

man who had robbed him of his sweetheart when he was suffering everything for her sake in a foreign land.

Arriving at New York he partook of a hasty breakfast, read over his letters and then repaired to Mr. Johnson's office. The clerk recognized him and, on being informed that his business was urgent, took his card at once to an inner room, where the lawyer was engaged in writing. An immediate summons to enter followed, and Dr. Elton found himself confronting a very nervous gentleman, who had risen from his chair and stood leaning against his desk, without making any of the customary moves used in greeting a welcome visitor.

But Dr. Elton was too much occupied with his errand to notice this.

"I have something of importance to say to you, Mr. Johnson," he said, "and I have taken the earliest opportunity to call on you for that purpose."

The lawyer was undoubtedly much agitated at that moment.

"I have, also, something of importance to say to you, sir!" he responded sharply. "If you had not come to see me, I should have sought you out, sir!"

"Indeed!" exclaimed the physician, somewhat astonished.

"Yes sir!" continued the lawyer, growing more excited. "My wife returned home yesterday, sir!"

"Well," said Elton, calmly. "And what has that to do with me?"

Mr. Johnson trembled perceptibly.

"It may have *much* to do with you, sir!" he said, angrily. "You have behaved basely, sir! You have—"

"Stop right there!" cried Elton, thoroughly

aroused. "I will not permit you to slander me in that manner. Produce your authority for your statements or retract them instantly!"

Mr. Johnson was nearly choking with the excess of his rage.

"Perhaps you have not been in Wisconsin!" he sneered. "Perhaps your name is not Elton! Perhaps you have not seen my wife within the last ten days!"

Elton calmed himself.

"I have been in Wisconsin; my name is Elton; and I have seen your wife," he responded. "If that is the limit of your accusations, I confess their truth. I will confess even more. I saved your wife's life at the peril of my own. I restored her to consciousness, and gave her to her friends."

Mr. Johnson's excitement did not abate in the least.

"You restored her—but how! You carried her in your arms to a cave in the rocks and passed the night there with her. Do you deny that?"

He struck his fist on the desk when he put the question, as he had done so often on the table of a court room when badgering a timorous witness, but it did not frighten Elton.

"It is difficult to answer you seriously," was the physician's reply. "I did what I considered the best things under the circumstances. When I seized Mrs. Johnson she was sinking in the water. I had the greatest difficulty in gaining the shore, and was about to give up the task when I found myself in the shallows. I carried her in my arms because there was no other means of conveyance. You may be sure it was not easy to transport a lady a mile in that way, with

the water often reaching to my neck. I took her to the cave because there was no other place so accessible. I stayed with her there till morning because I dared not leave her and because the rain continued to pour in rivers from the black sky. You should be sensible enough, Mr. Johnson, to know that desperate cases require desperate remedies."

Nothing that he said seemed to pacify the lawyer in the least.

"Was it necessary to strip off her clothing while she lay unconscious?" he screamed. "Probably you can explain that, too?"

Elton regarded him almost with pity.

"Imagine, if you can," he replied, "the condition of a woman after being two hours in the chilling waters of a lake at this season and unconscious most of the time. Could she be restored without dryness and warmth? It was a grave question, sir, whether all I could do would bring back life to her veins, but I succeeded. Certainly I undressed her. I would have been unfit to call myself a physician had I let her die under the flimsy excuse of modesty. I removed her soaked garments, bathed her with the hottest water she could bear, rubbed her vigorously with towels, wrapped her in warm blankets, put heated stones to her feet, forced brandy down her throat and after an hour of such labor, saw her eyes open with intelligence. Is it this of which you complain? If so, you ought to be committed to a lunatic asylum!"

The lawyer heard with impatience.

"You tell your story well," he snarled, "but you forget some of it. Why did you do all this, at the risk, you say, of your life? It was because of the love

you bear her—a love which you had years ago and which, notwithstanding her marriage, you have never let die out!"

Elton had changed color.

"It was certainly not for love of *you!*" he cried, hotly. "I supposed shame would tie your tongue on that subject! I came here this morning to demand an explanation of your pretense that the money you sent me in Europe came from Jared Elton's estate!"

Mr Johnson was evidently surprised.

"Pretense!" he repeated, vaguely.

"Yes, pretense!" said Elton. "For I saw and talked with Jared Elton at Keokuk, Iowa, not three days ago."

"Saw him—talked with him!"—repeated the lawyer.

"Yes, I did. Now, why did you send me that money, pretending it was his? It was to ease your guilty conscience from the sin of taking advantage of my troubles to induce the girl who loved me to marry you. You have talked very plainly, Mr. Johnson, and I may do the same. You knew I loved her. You knew she loved me. You knew I was penniless, four thousand miles away. You married her. She is yours. When I sprang from the steamer to try to save her life, I knew it could avail me nothing. If the old love has never left my breast, I have at least hid its manifestation, except in that one instance. It may have nerved me for the perilous leap, but it has saved a life that must be dear to you—the life of your child's mother. As soon as I could leave her with safety to herself I did so. If I can be the one to decide, I shall never see her again."

The lawyer seemed to find his strength failing him. He sank heavily into an adjacent chair.

"That money!" he gasped. "I do not understand

it! The amount was brought to me in an envelope, with a letter purporting to be written by the executor! I will find it for you. My professional honor is at stake. I insist that you shall see it."

He rang for a boy, to whom he gave the necessary directions, and who, in a few minutes, brought him a package of documents, from which the lawyer, with a shaking hand, drew the letter in question. It bore a New York date and merely stated that Sebastian Hubbard, executor of the will of Jared Elton, wished to convey to J. S. Johnson, Esq., for Mr. J. T. Elton, now a student at Freiburg, Germany, ten thousand dollars to him bequeathed. A messenger had brought the money and taken a receipt therefor.

"If that money was not from your uncle's executor, I cannot imagine who sent it," said Mr. Johnson, when Elton returned the letter to him. "It is no uncommon thing in my business to be asked to transmit legacies to parties abroad. I did it in the usual way, deducting my fees, and thought no more about it."

The door of the inner office had been left slightly ajar by the boy who brought the letter and Mr. Johnson's last words reached the ear of a lady who had just entered the outer office and was waiting to see him. With quick intuition she divined that Elton was there and, on being informed by a clerk that such was the case, she walked to the door and tapped upon it. Having thus arrested the attention of the occupants, she pushed the door open and entered.

"In a moment, Mrs. Wyllis," said the lawyer. "I am engaged just at present."

Her reply was to close the portal behind her and take a chair near the disputing parties.

"Excuse me," she said, pleasantly. "I have unwittingly

tingly overheard enough of your conversation to feel that I can aid you—both of you—if you will let me. Dr. Elton has discovered that his uncle did not leave him the money which he received in Germany, and comes here to charge you, Mr. Johnson, with deceiving him. This charge, being untrue, you, of course, deny. Now, where did that money come from? I think I can guess."

Elton did not like Mrs. Wyllis, but he was sufficiently interested in her remarkable statement to listen to her, and Mr. Johnson did likewise.

"I cannot prove what I am going to say," continued the lady, "as proof would be required—in a court, but there has been for a long time no doubt in my mind about it. To me it is perfectly plain that the money was sent to you by my husband."

"By Mr. Wyllis!" cried both gentlemen at once.

"Why not?" pursued the lady. "Claude had made the trouble—Mr. Johnson knows all about that—and when Mr. Elton refused to touch any more of his money he was in a terrible state of mind. He asked me twenty times a day to help him out, but I could think of nothing. I believe he sent that money here and started the next day for Germany to make sure it was accepted without suspicion."

"How would he know your uncle's name?" asked the lawyer of Elton.

"We have often talked about him," responded the other, gloomily. "It must be so. Mr. Johnson, for my unjust suspicion I ask your pardon. When you view the acts of which we were previously speaking in the right light, you will ask mine. If you have no more to say to me, I will wish you good morning."

Then he bowed to both of them and withdrew.

CHAPTER XXXII.

DR. ELTON PERUSES DOCUMENTS.

Mr. Johnson turned eagerly to Mrs. Wyllis.

"How was Cora when you left the house!"

"About the same. What have you been doing—scolding Dr. Elton? I am surprised at you!"

"I gave him my opinion of his conduct," replied Mr. Johnson, uneasily.

"You jealous wretch!" cried Mrs. Wyllis. "You should have overwhelmed him with thanks. He did nothing but what was right, I am sure. Do you think Claude will care because I told him about the money? I am glad I did, anyway. He may have a kinder feeling for him now. He can't go on hating a man like that forever."

"I wonder if your guess is the right one," mused the lawyer. "But about Cora," he added after a moment's thought. "What will be the outcome, do you think?"

Mrs. Wyllis had a very sober look as she answered:

"I wish I could tell you, but I can't. It is a most unfortunate affair. Dr. Livingstone owns himself completely puzzled. She doesn't seem to care for any of us, and yet Mrs. Wilkins says she insisted on coming home without delay. She goes about the house like a somnambulist, refusing to reply to questions. I thought I could arouse her, but she won't even listen to me. She has the idea to-day that she is still in the cave and that Dr. Elton, or 'Jack,' as she always calls

him, is with her. The poor girl is not responsible for what she says, but she calls for him day and night."

Mr. Johnson's disturbed look grew more pronounced as she proceeded.

"And yet you wish me to thank him!" he said, bitterly.

"Certainly I do! It's no fault of his. Half the men in the world would have run off with her while in this state of mind and left you to get your divorce at your leisure. Dr. Elton is the most high-minded gentleman I ever knew, and I am going to his office this very day and tell him so. I'd like to see Claude in his place! He'd have been thousands of miles away with her now. Elton knew her acts were the result of the shock to her brain and acted accordingly; though, if she had been sane as a judge, it would have made no difference with him. He is a hero, I tell you, and you ought to see it!"

He did not agree with her, though he was much impressed with her words.

"Mrs. Wilkins said—" he began.

"Mrs. Wilkins!" echoed Belle, with disgust. "She is a tattling old fool and I hope Cora will ship her to the Feejee Islands as soon as she recovers! If she had kept her mouth closed all would have been well! She must fill your ears with nonsense and you were just silly enough to listen! Oh, you men! I am out of patience with you all!"

Mrs. Wyllis laughed good naturedly, after her partly assumed vexation.

"Did you know I was going to Europe?" she asked, as he did not seem inclined to pursue the other subject further.

"When?"

"Very soon now. I am tired to death of everything here. Cora will be ill a long time, I fear, and I can do her no good. Claude has been living over there for two years and I am going to see what keeps him. I don't mean to interfere with his amusements—I detest interference—but I think he owes me a little attention, too. I have written that I am coming, so he can be prepared. A sudden shock might be dangerous to the poor fellow!"

Dr. Elton was somewhat surprised, several hours later, on returning from a professional call, to find Mrs. Wyllis waiting in his private office.

"You are not glad to see me," she said, reading as much in his face.

"I am always ready to treat patients. Any other business I cannot transact in office hours."

"But there is no one here just now," she said, "and my errand is brief. I am here for two reasons: First, I wish to thank you on my own account for your noble act in rescuing and restoring to life my dear friend, Mrs. Johnson. If her rash husband does not appreciate your heroism, I do. The moral grandeur of your conduct, under all the circumstances, as I learn them, deserves the highest praise."

He was totally unmoved by her compliments and his lip curled slightly as he replied:

"I did not think you were a judge of Moral Grandeur, Mrs. Wyllis!"

She colored painfully at the cruel taunt.

"My second reason in coming," she continued, striving to master her confusion, "is to offer you the proofs you wanted so long ago that I have been an honest woman."

She proceeded to open a small hand-bag which she carried and to take therefrom sundry documents and newspapers, but he interrupted her.

"Pardon, me, Mrs. Wyllis! The question which you wish me to investigate is not now of importance to me. You must be aware that the issue which raised it has long since been settled."

The lady fixed her eyes upon him without flinching.

"Several times," she said, "and the last one since I entered this room, you have insinuated that my life in South America was an unchaste one. You have nothing on which to base that insinuation but the merest suspicion. I have a right to clear myself, and you must give me justice!"

"There was more than suspicion," he answered, boldly. "Do you wish me to tell you? A photograph was brought to me by a Spaniard who wished to sell it—ah!—you understand now."

Mrs. Wyllis closed her eyes for one instant in a spasm of pain. Then she said:

"Yes, I understand only too well. In these documents the origin of that picture is fully explained, so that even you must be satisfied. I shall leave these things here. You may take your own time to examine them, but if you are the honest man for whom I take you, you will not refuse to do it."

She placed the documents and newspapers on the table and rose to depart.

"I am going to Berlin in a few days and shall see my husband there," she continued. "I shall tell him what I said to you about the money. If you write to him meanwhile, there is no occasion for you to use rough language. No one loves you better to-day than

he does, and even a dog will refuse to bite a continually caressing hand. If you send him the money, he will doubtless decline to take it. You and I may suspect what we please, but we can prove nothing. Think a little before you do the wrong thing."

That night Dr. Elton took the documents and papers which Mrs. Wyllis had left and read them over carefully. The first one was addressed, "To my dearest daughter, Isabelle, Countess Murillo," and signed, "Maria Voges." In it were these lines :

"When you read this I shall have gone to my long sleep and you will be absolved from the strict promise which I exacted of you. My poor son, whose life you tried to brighten, cannot suffer from any revelation which your duty to yourself may call upon you to make. When I induced you to marry José I believe I had secured happiness for you both. On account of your father's sudden death you were left to my care, an orphan girl, subject to the perils of youth. José loved you, in his own wild way, and you obeyed my desire that you should wed him. The sad ending of his life, caused by his own folly, has robbed me of all earthly peace and I can only hope for happiness in another world. With my possessions, which I have willed to you (and which I am sorry, for your sake, are not greater) I leave you a mother's blessing."

Elton's surprise as he read this document was very great. The next article he perused was a copy of a marriage certificate, given at Rio Janeiro and embellished with numerous signatures and seals, attesting that José, Count Murillo, was united on a certain date to Isabelle, daughter of the late Captain Arthur Vang

man, of Cambridge, Mass., U. S. A. Next he picked up a copy of a long deposition made before a Brazilian court, duly certified, entitled, "A copy of a Deposition of Isabelle, Countess Murillo, in Reference to the Cause of the Death of the late Count." The paragraphs which interested Dr. Elton most are given below in a condensed form :

"On the thirteenth day of July, 18—, I went, according to my custom, into the bathing apartment of our villa. After performing my ablutions, the atmosphere being unusually oppressive, I reclined on a sofa and fell into a profound sleep. The count was the only person besides myself who had access to this room and I supposed him absent at the time. When I awoke I noticed nothing to excite suspicion that any one had intruded during my slumbers, but the next day, the count, in a sporting mood (it was after dinner) invited me to look at some productions of an amateur photographic apparatus which he was in the habit of using. Among the pictures which he showed me was one of myself, evidently taken while I lay in the bathing apartment on the previous day. All my entreaties that he would destroy the plate and picture did not move him. He declared no one else should ever see it and refused to hear my prayers, though made repeatedly and with tears. He said he had printed three copies and should keep them. I succeeded in entering the room where the camera was kept and breaking the negative in pieces, but I could not secure the printed pictures, as he kept them in a secret place. Appeals from his mother, to whom I mentioned my distress, did not move him. He declared with a laugh that he would

not humor two foolish women who were making an unnecessary fuss over a thing of no importance.

"Shortly afterward, our villa was entered one night by robbers. The count found that many things of value had been taken and, after a thorough search, he came to me as white as death. 'Good God, Isabelle!' he cried, 'they have stolen those photographs also!' His distress at the discovery was hardly less than mine. The ablest detectives were put upon the track of the thieves and soon one of them was apprehended. He, however, swore at first that he had given all of the pictures to an acquaintance named Silva, not considering them of any value. He was sentenced to twenty years in the mines, but afterward secured a commutation to ten years by returning one of the pictures, which he then admitted he had retained. Neither bribes nor threats could recover from him the remaining ones. It became evident they were in other hands.

"Time passed on and the count grew more melancholy, day by day. He avoided me and dwelt upon nothing but the disgrace he had caused me. One day he sought me out in high spirits, with the second picture in his hand. He had reclaimed it by paying a heavy blackmail to the man Silva. When he asked me to join in his rejoicing, I only said, 'There is still another!' These words seemed to unbalance his reason. He drew a pistol from his pocket and a second later fell dead at my feet, his blood deluging the photograph in my hand.

"Silva was captured and sentenced to three hundred lashes for blackmail. When half of them had been administered, he was offered pardon if he would give up the remaining photograph. He doggedly answered

that he did not know where it was and the sheriff finished his work.

“This deposition is made by Isabelle, Countess Murillo, before the Imperial Court at Rio Janeiro, and is to be kept from publicity, except such as may be necessary to further the cause of justice.”

There were also several letters in the package from ladies and gentlemen of the upper Brazilian circles, expressing grief at the misfortune which Isabelle had suffered in the death of the count. One bore the imperial seal and was sent by order of the Emperor himself. The personal regard which the writers felt for the countess appeared in every line. The newspapers contained accounts of certain ceremonious visits of prominent people to the countess on the eve of her departure for the United States, a year later. This letter, from Mrs. Wyllis to Dr. Elton, was last in the list :

“My dear Doctor : At last, after years of waiting, the death of Señora Voges, mother of my former husband, Court Murillo, leaves me free to open to the gaze of all suspicious eyes the proofs that I lived honestly during the years that immediately followed my poor father's death. Señora Voges was devotedly attached to her son and could not bear that any one, outside the narrow circle of officials who were obliged to be told, should know of the thoughtless acts which led to his death. I gave her my promise never to allude to him in any way while she lived, and should have kept it, no matter what temptation might have arisen to do otherwise.

“You have never liked me. I do not blame you for

that. You have said harder things to me than you should have said. I forgive you. You have had your sorrows in life as well as I. No one is perfect and no one can tell what he or she might have done under other circumstances. I am naturally of a gay disposition and no weight of suffering could permanently bear me down. No doubt to a serious mind like yours I seem frivolous. You have accused me wrongfully in your thoughts for years. When you think of this hereafter, it may teach you how fallible is human judgment."

Dr. Elton read everything in that package twice, with a very grave face. Then he resigned himself for a long time to deep meditation. The clock in his office ticked louder and louder, until it sounded like the clang of bells, and this is what it said :

"Wrong—WRONG!! Wrong—WRONG!! You have been—very WRONG! You have been—very WRONG!!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"IF IT WERE NOT FOR LULU I COULD LOVE HER."

Claud Wyllis came into Lulu Bornstein's room one morning in the autumn with a troubled face.

"I have something to tell you, love," he said, going directly to where the girl awaited him. "My wife is coming here."

"You do not seem pleased to learn it," was her quiet comment.

"Oh, yes, I am pleased," he said. "I shall be glad to see her; but it may separate me from you for a little while. Belle is a good girl. I wish you and she were friends—I mean intimates—but I suppose that cannot be. You would like her. She is very bright."

The girl looked intently at the notes on a sheet of music which she held in her hand.

"I am sure I should like her," she assented. "I like her already, though I have never seen her. But she would dislike me; that is natural."

"I am not certain of it," Claude said. "Belle is very sensible—not at all like most women. She would never cross the ocean to make trouble. She has always written to me to enjoy my stay here all I can and she has known for a long time what keeps me."

Miss Bornstein leaned toward him and laid her hand softly upon his knee.

"If you should be compelled to choose between us—what then?"

He took up the hand and kissed it passionately.

"Can you ask!" he cried. "I like Belle—I wish her every happiness—but you—you! I could not live away from you!"

"That is a rash statement," smiled the singer, leaving the hand in his. "You have doubtless made it many times before to others."

"What I did before I knew you is buried," he said, tenderly. "It is not worth resurrecting."

"What a strange story that was which your wife sent you in the summer!" said Lulu, when she next spoke. "A destitute orphan, a countess and a widow before she was eighteen! I cannot understand how you married her without more inquiry."

"It was a strange marriage," he answered, "but

when there is no absorbing passion to guide men, they do strange things. Belle and I learned to like each other afterward, and I never felt much interest in her past life, which I had reason to think was not one she would like to reveal. I told you of the photograph, the origin of which is explained in the papers she sent. Her ride with Captain Hawkins the last time I saw her was, I am persuaded, nothing but a frolicsome attempt to make me jealous. I could the more easily forgive it, as it brought me back the sooner to you."

Lulu listened to these words with a pleased smile.

"Belle writes me that she took these documents to Dr. Elton, who has perused them. It seems he saw the picture before I did and came to the conclusion that she was not good enough to marry me. That sounds funny now, but dear old Jack at that time believed me an angel right from the upper ether. He met Belle, accused her of all sorts of things and threatened to prevent our marriage unless she could explain her life in Brazil. Being bound by her promise to Sefiora Voges she could not do it and only escaped him by hastening the wedding day. Her anxiety to clear her character of all suspicion in the eyes of a man like Jack is a touching piece of evidence in her favor."

Lulu gazed at him searchingly.

"You are very glad to have her reputation redeemed," she said. "No matter what you say or do, you men admire feminine virtue."

He laughed uneasily.

"Virtue is an acquired taste, while love is a natural one," he said. "Men undeniably like to esteem their wives chaste. I have placed no restrictions on Belle. She knows the world is open to her. If, in the

face of that fact, she has been true, I must be gratified. She cannot have had such a love as I bear to you," he added. "The steel should never boast what it will do till it has felt the lodestone!"

Mrs. Wyllis went directly to a hotel on her arrival at Berlin and had a letter left for her husband at his banker's stating that she would like a visit from him "at his convenience." When he called he met the warmest of welcomes. She crossed the room to embrace him and a moment later they were engaged in animated conversation. Still no on-looker would have supposed her a wife whom he had seen but once in two years. They seemed like two very good friends; nothing more.

She had a great deal to tell him. He wanted to hear the story of the Lake Pepin accident again, as the account in her letter was necessarily meagre. She knew most of the particulars, having pieced together the newspaper accounts of the cyclone, Mrs. Wilkins' gossip and Cora's exclamations. Claude was much interested in the affair and warmly endorsed her praises of Elton's conduct.

"Jack's a saint, that's just what he is!" was his hearty comment, "and I'm glad you told Johnson so! Why, the fellow is an ass not to see it! And so Cora is still ill. Poor girl! She'll never get over her love for Jack; no, nor he for her, if appearances are to be relied on. I think somebody had better go and stab that husband of hers under the fifth rib and leave them free to marry. What an awful bond matrimony is, Belle!"

She smiled archly, and said yes, it was, to some people. Then she gave him little scraps of news about numerous other people for whom he inquired.

Mrs. Ashleigh had been traveling, but was now at home on Cora's account. Jessie Madison had gone to Vassar College and was to be a teacher. She was now a tall girl of sixteen, very handsome, but as sedate as a supreme court justice.

"And Captain Hawkins?" suggested Claude, when she declared the list complete. "You came near forgetting him. Does he still call at night to take you out to ride and bring you home at two A. M., lifting you in his arms from his dog-cart?"

"No," she laughed. "He is somewhere out in California or Alaska, I think, at a new station. I have no use for him when you are not there to fume and fret over our absence and watch us when we return through the blinds of the upper front chamber! Oh, I knew you did it! To be honest, though, if I had thought you would feel so badly as to run off the next morning before I arose, I wouldn't have gone."

Claude leaned back in his chair and they enjoyed the reminiscence together. He was glad to see Belle looking so well. He appreciated the magnanimity of her conduct toward him.

"Those documents you sent gave me the greatest surprise of my life," he said, presently. "So you were a wife long before you met me. I did not think I was marrying a countess when we stood up before the minister that morning at the Gilsey House. I am not sure but I could have you arrested even now for obtaining a husband under false pretenses. I have just thought of another thing, too, which may invalidate our marriage. You pretended your name was Vaughan, when it was really Murillo. That constitutes a fraud and makes us still two single individ-

nals if I understand New York law. I shall certainly consult Johnson about it."

She laughed with him at the idea and then responded :

"Don't think me so careless ! Before I left Brazil I obtained a decree permitting me to resume my maiden name. I wonder I didn't think to get a copy of that with the others. Yes, I resigned my title, to become plain Isabelle Vaughan again. I never expected then to see another man whom I should wish to marry. I believe you were the only one in all the world who could have got a 'yes' from me."

These words might have produced a sobering effect, but for the vivacious manner in which they were uttered. Mrs. Wyllis evidently intended to be entertaining.

"What is your programme ?" asked her husband.

"Oh, not very definite. A few days here, a few weeks at some watering-place, then to Paris and after that a winter somewhere in Italy. Colonel Mitchell's family are now in London and they expect me to meet them by-and-by. The Colonel sends a cordial invitation to you to accompany me, but I presume that is too much to expect."

Claude hesitated, as an answer seemed required.

"I could hardly—" he began.

"So I supposed," she interrupted, pleasantly. "Your musical engagements are doubtless very pressing. I have read a good deal of your rising star. You must show her to me."

He started a little and his eyes roamed over her face.

"You mean—"

"Exactly so."

"Miss Bornstein will sing to-night," he said, "and I shall be glad to get you a box. You will be well rewarded."

She looked at him quizzically.

"Why do you call her Miss Bornstein to me? Why not Lulu?"

He did not like the tone of raillery which she assumed.

"Belle," he said, "there are some subjects upon which it is not proper for us to jest."

She sobered instantly and said :

"My dear boy, my only wish is to see you happy ! Tell me—do you love her very much ?"

He saw that her trifling was ended.

"Do you wish the truth ?"

"Yes, the whole truth."

"I love her beyond earth or heaven !" he cried. "I breathe because she inhales the same atmosphere ! I exist only because she exists ! My love cannot be told or measured. It is illimitable !"

The power Mrs. Wyllis had cultivated of stifling visible emotion was severely tested at that moment, but she came out victorious. She gave him her hand frankly.

"I am glad for your sake, Claude."

In the excess of his delight he would have pressed a kiss upon her lips, but she stayed him, saying :

"You have no right ! A love like yours demands everything, even to outward seeming. Keep your kisses for the lips to which your heart leads you. It would be almost a crime to give them to me. I hope—nay, I am sure—she is worthy of them."

"Oh, I know you would say that if you knew her !" he exclaimed, fervently. "I will send to engage a box

for you immediately. You can see her face and hear her voice, you can form an idea of how great a favorite she is with the public. But that is not to know her. Beautiful as she appears before the footlights, she is much more lovely in private life."

Belle accompanied her husband to the door and, as he was about to depart, said :

"You must not come here too often, Claude. I wish to attract no attention in Berlin. I have a traveling companion—a lady who knows these countries well—who will accompany me wherever I wish to go. I will write to you if there is anything I need."

He looked astonished.

"But I may call?" he said.

"To be sure, whenever you think best; but do not feel bound to do so. Once or twice a week will answer. I shall wish to talk to you after I have seen your cantatrice."

As he was about to leave, he hesitated.

"Belle, I wish I might kiss you once, you are so very kind."

"Well, just one for good will," she assented. "Not one that could make Lulu jealous."

He pressed the ripe lips for a moment, placing an arm around the buxom waist.

"I believe if it were not for Lulu, I could love Belle now," he thought, as he went soberly out to the street.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

BELLE AND LULU EXCHANGE PRESENTS.

That night the great opera house was packed. The elite of the music lovers of Berlin had come to see their favorite songstress in a new and difficult opera. Most of them remembered her as the little chorus girl of two years before, the development of whose superb talent they had watched with interest. Before the curtain rose, every inch of standing room was crowded. The entrances to the auditorium were filled with people who were obliged to be content with places where they might hear, even if they could not see, the singers.

As Claude Wyllis drove through the streets with Lulu, he had an anxious face. He held her to his heart in the carriage, whose curtains were tightly drawn, and smothered her lips with kisses of encouragement.

She was a little afraid as the moment approached. Her professional reputation would receive a great impetus if she acquitted herself well, and until that day she had entertained no doubt of her ability to do so. She knew the house had been sold to the last inch and that her friends would be there to encourage her in every possible manner. She feared but one person in that vast audience.

What Claude told her of Belle's kindness only unnerved her the more. Had Lulu's anger been aroused she could have braved anything. The unexpected sweetness of her lover's wife—her resignation

to the circumstances—was harder to meet than scorn or hatred.

Claude had access to all parts of the theatre. He went to examine the house through a convenient aperture and returned with the information that Belle was in her box. Lulu stole to the spot and took a long look at the handsome lady, whose queenly form was set off by a most becoming costume, cut décolleté, and by a profusion of diamonds.

“Oh, Claude!” she said, with a sigh, “how could you desert that magnificent creature for poor little me! It seems as if I could not sing with her there!”

“Courage!” he whispered. “Think only of your part until you are at ease. You will not fail on this night of nights!”

A thousand lorgnettes were levelled at the box where Mrs. Wyllis sat, and the handsome Americaine was made the subject of innumerable compliments. Such a complexion! such eyes! such arms! such a throat! Who could she be! Not a resident of Berlin, surely. Soon the whisper began to circulate that she was a Russian princess, and in a short time this was universally accepted as the truth.

The musicians struck up the overture and the buzzing grew fainter. The great curtain slowly revealed the stage. The opera was begun.

At Miss Bornstein's first appearance the audience went wild. The cheering was loud and long. Lulu bowed repeatedly, with a rapidly beating heart, and gave one glance at the box which Mrs. Wyllis occupied. She saw Belle leaning over the edge, with both hands engaged in assisting the general welcome to the singer,

and, even in that brief moment, an encouraging smile was wafted down to her.

Lulu's fears was gone. Her voice soared out into the grand realms which the opera had opened for it to inhabit. At the end of her first solo the audience redoubled their applause, until the very walls shook with the echo. As she returned to her dressing-room she met Claude, pale but overjoyed. He caught her in his arms before the entire company and pressed her to his breast.

"I saw her!" she said, tremulously. "She was applauding with the rest. She smiled to me and I needed no more. Oh, Claude, I wish I might go to her box and thank her!"

The manager of the opera came up.

"Fraulein," he cried, with enthusiasm, "you sang superbly! Nothing you have done before has even approached it! You will soon have no rivals but Sembrich and Patti!"

They had to surrender her to her tiring-woman. She was very happy. Her triumph was complete. There was nothing to dim its lustre.

The remaining acts were equally successful. At another great recall, a basket of the rarest flowers was handed to the prima donna. She had time to read on the card, "From Belle to Lulu, with her dearest love." Then she sang again, more divinely than before, keeping her face turned toward one particular box and pressing the basket of flowers to her heart.

"Clearly," thought the audience, who could not help noticing the action, "the Fraulein knows the Russian princess!"

When the curtains fell for the last time, the vast concourse could hardly be persuaded to leave the

house. Again and again Miss Bornstein responded to their calls until the manager interposed and forbade another appearance. Then the people dispersed slowly, talking as they went of the great success of the young singer.

"We shall soon lose her," they said. "One city cannot long keep such a song-bird to itself."

After the house was emptied, and after the company had departed, Claude still sat with Lulu in her dressing-room. They were too happy to care to move. He was telling her what some of the newspaper writers had said to him as they were leaving, and her eyes brightened as he repeated the words of praise. It was an event in Berlin's musical history, they had said. Such a voice, combined with such youth and beauty, would capture Europe and America.

Lulu's chief desire was to attain a high place in the estimation of her native country. Her intention was to go from Berlin to Italy and perfect her pronunciation of the Italian tongue. A season at Milan and Naples would make her perfect, she believed, in the most musical of languages. Claude would go with her—everywhere! They had never seemed so dear to each other as in that supreme hour when all Berlin was ringing with the triumph of the new operatic star.

Suddenly a faint cry of "Fire!" was heard. It must be in some building not far off, Claude said. They resumed their conversation. She told him for the fourth or fifth time how Belle had smiled on her and showed him again the flowers she had sent and the inscription on the card.

"I never can love her enough!" she cried. "What-

ever happens after this, her name will always be dear to me!"

The cry of "Fire!" sounded again. They could hear the ringing of bells and the shouts of men. Claude thought he could smell smoke and remarked that the conflagration might be near enough to make it worth going to see. He opened the door, when a thick fog burst in and almost stifled them. The fire must be very near to make a smoke like that!

He wrapped Lulu's outer garments about her and they walked into the space where the scenes were. A bright light penetrated the fog and the heat came unpleasantly near them. They sought the usual door of exit and found it locked. Claude called the names of several of the employées of the house, but none replied. He went to the edge of the stage, looked beyond the curtain and shrank back appalled. The great building was ablaze!

Taking Lulu's arm, he hurried her in several directions. Every door they came to was fastened, every window was barred. It was evident they were alone in the opera house. The watchman had supposed them gone and, according to his custom, had repaired to a neighboring restaurant for supper. The flames were spreading rapidly and the place was becoming uncomfortably hot.

"We will try below stairs," said Claude, drawing the slight figure after him. "There are exits there. We may be able to open one of them."

Lulu kept close to him, clinging to his arm with a frightened grip. Claude would save her. She would trust his judgment.

In the basement they found temporary relief from the smoke and heat, but the exits were as securely

fastened as those above. The faithful watchman had performed his work altogether too well. There were two little windows, which would have been wide enough to squeeze through, except for the heavy iron bars which crossed them. The case began to look desperate, but the girl did not utter a cry.

"We must try everything," said Claude, when he had taken in the entire situation. "You go to that window, break the glass and call for help as loudly as you can. I will do the same at this one."

She paused just long enough to throw her arms around his neck and then complied with his desire. Both windows were soon broken and the cries went forth. The prisoners could now hear the roaring of the flames, the shouting of the firemen and the noise of the engines, beside a confused jumble of other sounds. For a little while their comparatively slight voices seemed to have no effect. Then a man's face was seen at Lulu's window, and a voice cried, "Otto, call some of the men quick! Tell them to bring bars and hammers! Here's a lady fastened in!"

Claude heard the voice like a message from another world. He had almost given up in despair, but he could not bear that Lulu should know how little hope he had of escape. He called to her to remain where she was and started in her direction. He had only taken a few steps, however, before there came a great crash. A brick wall, which had rested on an iron girder, collapsed and came down with terrific force just in front of him. Beams, timbers and flooring came with it, prostrating him in the debris, but not injuring him seriously. As soon as the great noise which this caused had ceased, he called to Lulu and she answered him. She also was unhurt, but he

could no longer go to her. The fallen mass raised an impenetrable barrier between them.

When the men arrived at Lulu's window she told them of Claude's situation and begged part of them to go at once to his rescue. The work was very dangerous for all engaged in it, as the main walls of the building were liable to fall outward at any time, but the brave fellows did not mind that. Like their brethren all over the world they were accustomed to risk their lives in the performance of duty. But when they reached Claude's window and began work upon it, an unexpected obstacle confronted them. He forbade them to touch the bars which confined him until Lulu was safe.

"Go, all of you, to the fraulein!" he cried. "She needs you more than I! When you have taken her to a place of safety, then return for me!"

The men consulted and one, who appeared to be in authority, said the idea was preposterous.

"We can save you both, Mein Herr," he replied. "Let us to work, for we have no time to lose."

Claude drew a revolver and cocked it. He was very much excited.

"Before God, I will kill the first man who touches these bars till the fraulein is safe!" he shouted. "Save her, and I will give you a thousand florins each, but don't come for me till that is done!"

The offer of the reward had more effect upon the men than the threat. Claude could hear the blows of their hammers ringing on the bars of Lulu's window. She cried out to him that they were giving way and he bade her throw off her wraps so the men could pull her more easily through the small place occupied by the window. She did not know of his

orders to the men and supposed he was also being released.

"Yes," he cried, in answer to her questionings. "Yes, I shall soon be free!"

Free of earth! he thought with a strange calmness. Free of the body! And then, what?

An idea seized him. He snatched a memorandum book from his pocket and began to write rapidly with a lead peccil:

"I, Claude Wyllis, now resident in Berlin, being in momentary expectation of death by fire and suffocation—fastened in the basement of the burning Opera House, with no hope of escape—but a few minutes, as I believe, from my Eternal Judge—do swear that all my relations with Miss Lulu Bortstein have been pure and honorable. I swear that she has never comported herself, to my knowledge, otherwise than as a chaste and modest lady. This is true, as I hope for heaven!"

He read this over, folded it up and waited. Soon the firemen came, a dozen now, with their bars and hammers. Before he would let them touch his window he made sure that Lulu was safe. Then he handed the chief officer the note he had written and, giving him his purse with it, bade him take it to the mayor of the city, with a request to use it as he thought wise.

Two minutes after Lulu was removed, the walls of the building at the corner where she had been fell with a great noise, and before Claude was drawn from his living tomb the smoke became thick enough to render him unconscious. The firemen took him to a hospital, where Lulu had a short time before preceded

him in the same condition, and where the ablest physicians that could be summoned attended both.

With the advantage of his superior physique Claude regained his senses first. As he opened his eyes he saw his wife standing over him. She understood the question he had not the strength to utter, and said :

"She is here, in the next room. This is a hospital. They are doing everything for her."

He motioned Belle to go there and aid them and she went to Lulu's bedside. The heroine of a few hours before was strangely changed now. She also saw Belle with her first awakening and calmly put her hand in hers.

"Claude is there; he will recover," said Belle, pointing. "He must be quiet now, but he sent me to look after you. You must not try to talk to-night. To-morrow I will be with you again."

The doctors tried to keep Wyllis in bed the next morning, but he refused to stay there. His pleadings to be allowed to see Lulu were refused, until a little judicious bribery on the part of his wife secured the coveted permission. They arrayed him in a dressing gown and slippers and assisted him to the place, Miss Bornstein having been previously prepared for his coming. The shock to him as he realized how low she was, was terrible.

"Oh, my darling!" he cried, throwing his arms about her and pressing his lips to hers.

The doctors tried to restrain him, declaring the proceeding to be very rash, but the girl would not let him go. Mrs. Wyllis went outside, thinking the physicians caution might be partly on her account. When he was persuaded to take a chair by the bedside, Lulu

drew from under the counterpane the paper he had sent to the mayor.

"It was very noble of you, Claude, to write that," she enunciated, slowly, "but it is not quite true. We have been married, dear; married in that true bond of love which no church can give, no clergyman convey. We have been all in all to each other. Let us not deny it now!"

He hid his face in his hands. She motioned an attendant to call Mrs. Wyllis.

"I took your husband from you," she said, taking her by the hand. "He has been very dear to me, but I am going to give him to you again. I do not know whether I shall survive my injuries, and I want you to say you forgive me what I have done."

Belle stooped and kissed her. while her tears fell on her placid face.

CHAPTER XXXV.

MRS. WILKINS MAKES TROUBLE.

Senator Johnson was an unhappy man. The episode on Lake Pepin had been a hard one for him. Up to that time he had the fullest confidence in his wife. Her peculiarities made little adverse impression upon a man whose legal and political business gave him so little time to attend to domestic affairs. Mr. Johnson was very proud of his honor and of the high repute of the family name. He risked much of criticism when he married a unknown girl, but that he did

not mind. He knew her beautiful and believed she would win her way to the hearts of his social circle. When Cora became his wife—when she became a Johnson—he thought the elevation would carry with it a sufficient title for anybody. The disinclination which she afterwards showed to go into society did not displease him. He thought it very pleasant to have her so much at home, and contrasted to her credit the everlasting party-and-ball lives of some ladies whom he knew.

He did not forget Cora had loved Elton, but supposed that love buried in the distant past. That a girl should presume to remember a penniless student, after marrying a Johnson, seemed preposterous. The morning when the doctor set Willie's broken arm, the lawyer thought he saw enough to put his mind at rest, if indeed, anything of the sort was needed. He frequently urged Elton to assume the duties of physician to his family, in place of Dr. Livingstone, being convinced that the young man's abilities were superior to those of the elderly practitioner. Elton pleaded a crush of special cases as an excuse for delaying a definite reply to these suggestions. When the Lake Pepin disaster came, with its strange results, the cyclonic effect on Senator Johnson's mind was hardly less marked than that on the sky-tinted expanse of the hitherto quiet waters.

Mrs. Wilkins, with inexcusable volubility, related to him all she knew of the affair. As an old attaché of the Johnson household, the good lady felt in her own proper person the shock to the family dignity, when she found Cora lying in a roughly furnished cave from which her former lover had just issued. Mrs. Wilkins had not the slightest doubt any real Johnson would

have preferred sinking in the lake to going through such an improper experience. She had never believed Cora worthy to join the roll of immortals who were privileged to hand down to posterity the glorious Johnson name, but she was unprepared for so great a humiliation as this. The senator's excited nerves were easily acted upon. He had read of the disaster in an evening paper, and for some hours supposed his wife and Elton dead. The telegram which he received later, stating that they were alive, relieved, but did not wholly console him. For the first time, the Green-Eyed Monster took a hold upon his imagination. He found himself harboring suspicions. How happened it Elton was on that particular boat, unless by previous arrangement? That Mrs. Johnson and her old lover should be on the same steamer, twelve hundred miles from home, was a strange coincidence. How near Elton must have been to her in all that excitement, to be the one to spring to save her! Mr. Johnson had worked himself into a very uneasy state of mind long before Mrs. Wilkins arrived with his wife. When he heard her fuller particulars his nervousness, very naturally, did not abate.

She told him everything that she knew, and threw in, without extra charge, several leading insinuations, in her own shrewd manner. It was not so much what she said as what she led him to infer that gave her statements their chief effect. Every word seemed to breathe loyalty to her mistress and indignation against any one who should accuse her of impropriety, but the result was to awaken in the hearer's mind the very doubts she professed her ability to dispel.

"When I first saw Dr Elton," she said, "he was greatly excited. He was going back with the German

woman's daughter, and they had a lot of things which they were taking from the house. He told me on the way—and it was the hardest climb I ever had to get up there—that he carried Mrs. Johnson in his arms for over a mile, including that precipitous ascent, both of them soaking in the cold water of the lake and marsh. He said when they reached the cave and he laid her down, he felt almost sure she was dead. He unbuttoned her dress and could not tell whether her heart had stopped or not. He said he thought of everything—whether there was a possibility of summoning female aid—whether he dared leave her long enough to go to the village of Maiden Rock or Stockholm, which were each three or four miles off. He might have found that German family less than a mile away, but he did not know that then. When he concluded he could get no help for her, he lit a fire, put on the water to heat, and undressed the lady.”

Mr. Johnson gave a deep groan in spite of himself.

“Undressed her!” he exclaimed.

“Yes, sir. She was soaking in the wet garments, and he says she would have died of the chill had he delayed. It was only a few hours to morning, but he thought it necessary to hasten. He told me he had the greatest difficulty to detach some of the things—he is a bachelor, you know—but he got them all off in time.”

“*All!*” screamed the husband.

“Why, yes, sir,” replied Mrs. Wilkins, modestly casting down her eyes. “One garment would have been as dangerous as another, he said. Then he took the hot water and bathed her, rubbing her with the towels until she was perfectly dry and warm. After that he lifted her in his arms upon the bed and wrapped her

in warm blankets, in which she lay until she recovered consciousness enough to listen to him."

"He stayed there until she awoke—talked to her in that condition!" cried the senator, gnashing his teeth.

Mrs. Wilkins assented.

"Why, sir, as he said himself, what else could he do? Had she awoke in his absence, and found herself alone, she might have been frightened enough to do some desperate deed. He stayed until she could talk to him and then prepared to go for help. But she grew alarmed at the idea of remaining in that strange place, and the first thing he knew her mind became unbalanced. She rose from the bed, took a few steps toward him and fell fainting on the floor.

"Good God!" cried the lawyer, the perspiration breaking out on his face. "Did Elton tell you that?"

"Yes, sir. The German woman found her there when she came, as she explained to me by signs. When I arrived, she had her in the bed again, but we could hardly keep her there for several hours and she talked dreadfully. Poor thing, she didn't know what she was saying!"

The senator had been clutching wildly at his hair and beard.

"What *did* she say?" he asked, with emphasis.

"Well, I would not like to repeat it," simpered the woman. "It was about 'Jack,' as she called Dr. Elton, and about his deserting her. She wanted to go to him, and would have left the cave had we not restrained her by force."

"Undressed as she was!" cried the husband.

"Yes, sir. She would have gone out to find him.

She did not know what she was doing. You see, now, why he couldn't leave her before."

Yes, he saw, but he did not like the sight. Nothing in his life had seemed so horrible to Mr. Johnson as this recital. That retiring, dignified young wife of his—that perfection of modesty—exposing herself thus before a man, and that man the one who would have been her husband but for an accidental circumstance, was more than he could conceive. Mrs. Wilkins might repeat a hundred times that Cora was unaware of what she did, but that did not comfort him. The act, and not the cause, gave him misery. It seemed as if he could not survive the shame.

Darker thoughts did not fail to obtrude themselves, like unwelcome guests, who will not be stayed on the threshold. Elton had told Mrs. Wilkins a strange story. Had he told it *all*?

Mr. Johnson could not seriously suspect his wife, but the bare thought was enough to freeze his marrow. The couple was alone together for hours. They had loved each other years before. Temptation could array herself in no more inviting form. He resolved to talk to Cora as soon as she was calm enough, and mark well all she said. He did not mean to be unjust, but, if there had been wrong done him, some one should suffer. His pain was growing to be more than he could bear.

Dr. Livingstone, who attended Cora, positively forbade her husband having any interview with her until she was in a quieter state of mind, and an eminent physician whom he summoned to consult with him upon her case coincided in this decision. It was while fuming under the delay that the lawyer had the talk with Dr. Elton in his office, as previously narrated. He had

no proof of wrong-doing against the doctor, but his mind was in such a perturbed condition that he could treat him no better than he did. After what Mrs. Wyllis said to him, he began to feel a little ashamed. He questioned whether he ought not to write Elton a letter of apology, or call upon him and make one in person ; but this he could not bring himself to do. It is easier to admit to ourselves that we have done wrong than to others.

Cora was not confined to the bed. She went about the house and could have been taken out in a carriage had she desired. All that the doctors enjoined was quiet and watchful care, lest she take some injurious idea into her head and act upon it. She was sullen ; no word can better describe her manner. Nothing pleased her. She was at war with everybody in the house. Her coffee and toast were cold. Her soup was too hot. Her clothes did not fit.

The servants had a hard time of it. Mrs. Wilkins became especially distasteful to her, and an indiscreet reply resulted finally in the banishment of that lady from her presence. An appeal to Mr. Johnson produced no greater effect than six months' advance salary and a confirmation of the dismissal. He recalled Belle's words, "the tattling old thing." He had no love left for the woman who took such pains to enlarge on the evil news which had so troubled him.

After a few weeks the doctors said he might talk to his wife, if she was willing, but conjured him to say nothing that would unduly excite her. He sent word repeatedly to Cora that he would like an interview, but received the stereotyped reply from the French maid who kept nearest to her, "Madame says she is not well enough to see you to-day."

Cora went down to Newport, without consulting him, and one day he came home to find her gone with half the household. This angered him. He thought there was a limit to reasonable endurance and wrote her a curt letter, stating that he did not approve her actions, and warning her that, unless she could amend them, he must take measures to restrain her. He sent this by one of his clerks, to make sure that it was delivered, and the messenger returned with the verbal answer, "No reply is necessary."

The senator had also another trouble at this time. His congressional hopes had seemed about to find fruition when his unlucky domestic trouble was precipitated. A delegation of influential gentlemen from his district called upon him the morning after his wife returned from Wisconsin, and in his distressed state of mind he was thoughtless enough to send them word from his private office to call again. He did not even go out to take them by the hand and thank them for their visit. On going forth, indignant at this slight, they encountered his rival, and were warmly greeted by that worthy, whose conduct they contrasted with Mr. Johnson's, to the great disadvantage of the latter. This incident, small in itself, had an important effect on the senator's chances. Other politicians heard of it and hesitated to embark in the cause of a man who evidently had not learned the first principles of a successful political career. When an intimate friend of the senator came to remonstrate with him on account of his action, Mr. Johnson grew angry and told him to go the devil. That settled it. The nomination, which in that district was equivalent to an election, went to his rival, and the sneers of the party press at his "pretended strength, which did not develop at the con-

vention," completed the disgust of the defeated candidate.

The adage, "It never rains but it pours," began to come with new force and meaning to the unfortunate man.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CORR STRIKES WITH A SHARP WEAPON.

Cora went out more after she got to Newport, but she had no acceptable companion, and soon began to feel a terrible lonesomeness. Belle wrote her an account of the Berlin fire and sent newspapers to her. The nearly tragic story of the escape of Claude and Lulu did not impress Cora as it would once have done. Belle's love for the young singer, which showed in every line of her letter, was what riveted her attention.

"I have the two invalids on my hands here," wrote Belle, "and it is hard to tell which requires the most nursing. We shall go to Baden as soon as possible. Claude could go now, but Lulu, to whom I am becoming deeply attached, is recovering slowly. The doctor advises a sea voyage for Claude, and he will probably leave us before long for a trip to America. Both of us hate to spare him, but if it is for his good we must submit. You will think I am talking strangely, for I know you have never considered me especially enamoured of my husband, but the great danger through which he passed taught me a lesson. When I realized how near I had come to losing him, I knew

how dear he was. You would hardly know him now, he is so much changed in his manner."

Cora read with a sigh.

"They are all happy but me," she said to herself.

She thought seriously of suicide and dwelt upon the relative merits of pistols and poisons. She used to think of herself lying dead and of the horror of the people who made the discovery. She wondered what Jack would say when he heard it. She began several farewell letters, which she meant to send to him, but they were never finished. Some of them were too loving, some too severe. Would he care very much if he knew she killed herself on his account? Her doubts upon this question restrained her. She wanted very much to do something to make him care. There must be some way to penetrate his hard exterior. Humiliation on her part could go no farther. She had offered herself to him, only to be spurned. She had begged immodestly for one embrace—and been refused.

And yet she had heard him admit that he had not forgotten their old love—that he still bore its effects upon him. She had heard him cry in anguished tones: "Do you think *I* have not suffered also? Do you think it was easy for *me* to give up the dearest thing in my life?" He still loved her, but he had that exasperating control which she so totally lacked. Was there no way to move him? She would have purchased his repentance even at the cost of death, if she had been sure it would have that result.

When at nearly the lowest ebb of discouragement, Cora received a letter from Lieutenant Stanhope. It was couched in most respectful language and stated that, notwithstanding her merited refusal on a previous occasion, he hoped for one more chance to redeem

himself in the estimation of a lady for whom he entertained the highest regard. Cora, on first perusing the letter, threw it into the waste basket, recalling with swelling bosom the insult he had offered her on that memorable night when she went with Belle in search of "amusement." An hour later she wrote him a brief letter, telling him he might come.

She would be safe in her own house, and he was undeniably good company. She was literally dying of ennui.

Stanhope was at the Ocean House and lost no time in presenting himself at the Johnson villa. When Cora came into the drawing-room to meet him, after an unconscionable delay, he rose and bowed deferentially.

"Your kindness is more than I had hoped for," he said. "I had feared my sins were quite past forgiveness."

She motioned him to a chair.

"Let us talk of something more agreeable," was her rejoinder. "How long have you been at Newport?"

A pleased smile broke like sunshine over the handsome features of the officer.

"Talking of agreeable things, how long have I been here?" he said. "That is very delightful. Well, I came late last night. My ship is at Boston, but I saw in the society column of a newspaper that you were here, and I ran over. Now, speaking of other agreeable things, how are you enjoying yourself?"

"I?" she uttered the word with a sneer. "I enjoy nothing! I asked you to come here that I might tell you so I am utterly miserable!"

A look of concern drove the smile from his face.

"Really! I am surprised, Mrs. Johnson!"

She stamped her foot impatiently.

"I prefer my first name?"

"I prefer it also," he said, "but I feared it would seem too familiar. Well, Cora, is there anything I can do for you? Be sure you may command me."

She twisted the rings on her hands for some time before she replied

"I want a friend."

"I will be one to you," said the lieutenant, earnestly. "I would stake my last drop of blood and my last penny in your service!"

She raised her heavy eyes to his face.

"I do not want a lover. I want a friend. You are not the man."

He hesitated, not knowing what words would please her best.

"You have a husband," he ventured at random.

The shot struck home.

"I do not need to be reminded of it," she said. "It is on that account that I need a friend. I must leave my husband. I cannot much longer endure the life I am leading. In this emergency I need a friend—a true friend—to advise me."

"Of what do you accuse Mr. Johnson?" asked Stanhope.

"Of nothing."

He made a bold stroke.

"You still love Elton, then."

She did not dispute his assertion.

"I saw him at Boston a few days ago," pursued Stanhope. "He told me he was there on business. In a curious way I found out what the business was. He has resolved to assist some deserving young student each year to enter Harvard, as a testimony of his

obligation to Mr. Wyllis for a similar service. By the way, Mrs.—excuse me, I mean Cora,—what are the facts about his saving you from drowning, out West. I have heard it in so many different ways, I long to know the truth."

She told him the story, in its outline.

"By Jove!" he cried, when she finished, "you ought to love that man! I love you myself, madly, but I could set up no claim to offset his! Get a divorce and marry him! D—n it, it's your duty!"

She grew confidential under the melting influence of their conversation.

"Even if I were free I would never marry again," she said. "I think I have outgrown the capacity for affection. You have no idea what things surge through my brain. Sometimes I fear I shall become dangerous!"

He affected to make light of her remark and suggested that she try bromide.

"You will believe me some day when you hear what I shall do," she replied. "I shall astound the country yet!"

Still he would not take her words seriously.

"If you wish to make a real sensation, you might elope with me," he said. "I will throw up my commission, take you to Europe, and become your devoted slave. You had best think of it."

Cora seemed for a minute to be lost in reflection. Then she looked up and said:

"If your proposition were a serious one, I might consider it."

His heart gave a great bound.

"Do not tantalize a poor fellow!" he cried. "You love Elton and you do not love me. I am wise enough

to know that. This scar on my head,"—he pointed out the place—"will keep me from unwelcome liberties with you hereafter. But if you did mean what you say, if there was the ghost of a show you would do it—I would throw up everything for you."

A knock at the door at this moment was made by a man-servant, who announced that Mr. Johnson had just arrived and wished to see his wife at once.

"Tell him I am engaged and cannot see him to-day!" responded Cora, paling. "If he sends any other message," she added, "you need not trouble yourself to deliver it."

Stanhope heard the answer in surprise. He had not supposed hostilities had reached that point and he said as much to Cora. She replied that she had not seen her husband alone for many months and that she considered his visit impertinent. While they were talking thus a loud noise was heard in the hallway, and presently the lawyer burst into the room, in an angry and excited manner, in spite of the protestations of the domestic.

"Mind your business!" he cried to the man. "You shall be discharged at once! How dare you question my right to visit a room occupied by my wife?" He stalked across the floor and then, for the first time, his eye fell on the lieutenant. "Ah! you are here, sir!" he cried, addressing that gentleman, threateningly. "That is why I couldn't come in, is it? This is the friend whose company you prefer to mine, eh!" he added, to Cora. "A nice state of affairs, Mrs. Johnson!"

Cora rose with a calmness that was a wonder even to herself.

"You are quite right," she answered, with dignity.

"I prefer the company of a gentleman to that of a ruffian at any time. Lieutenant Stanhope, I regret the necessity, under such circumstances, to introduce to you my husband, the HONORABLE J. S. Johnson, of the New York Senate!"

"I have heard of Lieutenant Stanhope," he sneered, "and also of his friend, Captain Mawkins, or Jawkins, or Lawkins, with whom my wife and her friend, Mrs. Wyllis, spent a night of revelry at a certain restaurant and hotel some time ago! It will doubtless give him pleasure to see his name coupled with hers as co-respondent in the divorce suit which I am about to institute! I am glad to see Lieutenant Stanhope—very glad indeed—so as to know him hereafter, but just now I would inform him that his presence is not required here, and beg that he take a speedy departure."

Lieutenant Stanhope bowed again gracefully and took up his hat and cane, which lay upon an adjacent table.

"I shall always be glad to see you at any proper time, sir," he said to the senator, "in court or elsewhere, to protect my own character and that of this lady, which you have maligned."

He was about to depart, when Mr. Johnson addressed his wife, with even greater fury than before:

"Now, madam, I have something to say to *you*!"

Cora called to the lieutenant, as he was about to close the door, and he returned to the room.

"Fred!"

"Yes, Cora!"

"I beg you to remain for the present! I am afraid to be left alone with this man!"

Stanhope complied, with the same courtesy of

manner which he had shown on taking his leave, and Mr. Johnson's wrath burst all bounds.

"Fred!" "Cora!" he cried. "You call each other by your pet names, do you!"

Mrs. Johnson, with the deepest of outward composure, addressed her husband:

"You have said quite enough; and much more than I should have stayed to hear but for the presence of a third party. I am now going to leave your house. If, as you say, you have evidence which will secure a divorce from me, you can produce it at the proper place and need not offend my ears with it at this time. I have only one question to ask you—do you wish me to take Willie, or shall I leave him to you until this case is decided!"

He turned on her, completely beside himself, and uttered a string of oaths.

"By —— —-! do you think I want *my* son taken away by a —— —-!"

Stanhope would have struck him with his fist, but the wife held him back. She had a sharper weapon.

"*Your* son!" she cried. "YOURS! *Ha, ha!*"

Then the walls whirled around and all grew dark to the senator. When he could see plainly again, he was alone.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"I MEAN TO TOUCH JACK ELTON'S HEART!"

Claude Wyllis, one morning late that autumn, ascended the high steps of a handsome dwelling on Fifty-ninth Street, New York City. His experience at the Berlin fire, as well as the mental agony which followed, bore perceptible effects in his countenance and frame. A few furrows, hitherto unknown, had made their impression on his brow. Some white hairs had found their way among his dark locks. His slight stoop showed an illness hardly yet over. The sea voyage had benefitted him, but he had been through too much to expect an immediate cure.

He read the name on the door-plate and then rang the bell. When a servant ushered him into the reception room he asked her to give his card to "Mrs. Grover." In a few minutes came the request that he would walk up stairs.

Cora Johnson rose on his entrance. As he looked into her cold face, he felt a depth of pity through his entire being.

"I am sorry to see you here," were his first words, "living under a false name, and hidden from your family."

She heard him with perfect impassivity.

"I expected a lecture when I admitted you," she said, quietly. "Please make it as brief as possible."

A statue would have seemed as likely to be

affected by anything he could say, but he went on :

"Belle heard you had left your husband, and made me promise to take every pains to find you. I only reached America day before yesterday. Belle is at Baden."

"With your mistress," said Cora.

Wyllis shrank back at the words. They hurt him in a tender place.

"You are mistaken," he said. "The lady of whom you speak is merely my friend, and Belle's. No one can prove anything against her."

She did not seem to care.

"People make talk because Lieutenant Stanhope calls here," she said, "and yet they can prove nothing either. He may come to see me, or he may come to examine the carvings on the stairways. He may come at night and remain till morning. It proves nothing. You and I know that!"

Every word she uttered and the tone in which she spoke convinced him anew that talk would be wasted on her, but he said :

"Is there anything I can do for you?"

"There is nothing that I want. If there were, Fred would hardly like to have me call on another for it."

"I heard you were going on the stage," said Claude. "I could not believe it."

"It is true," she replied, composedly. "I have signed with English & Co. for twenty weeks."

He stared at her blankly.

"But—you know nothing of the theatre?"

"It is not necessary, they tell me."

"What shall you play?"

"Cleopatra."

Wyllis rose and paced the floor. Cleopatra! This slender girl with the face of a madonna portraying that Egyptian strumpet! It was inconceivable!

"Do you mean it?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Have you ever read the play?"

"I am reading it now for the first time. Mr. Clarke, of the Union Square company, is teaching me. He says I will do very well."

He tried to imagine it, but could not.

"When will your season open?"

"November 3rd. Mantali will support me."

Claude started.

"Mantali! Why, his reputation is terrible. He has figured in half-a-dozen divorces!"

She retained the impassive look.

"Yes; that is why I have engaged him."

He began to think he understood, at last.

"You are doing this to distress your husband; is that it?"

Then her eyes flashed.

"Don't think me so inane! I would not move my hand to give him pain or pleasure. There is another man whose heart I mean to touch—Jack Elton!"

He paused, utterly astonished, and then cried, fervently:

"Poor Jack! It will indeed cause him the greatest pain! He loves you as devotedly as he did when he was a student at Cambridge. I saw him yesterday and every reference to you brought the moisture to his eyes."

"You talked to him?" she said. "I thought you were no longer friends."

"He wrote me in Europe," said Claude, "asking that the old friendship might be renewed, and I gladly embraced the suggestion. My wife brought it about. He has asked her pardon for the unjust suspicions which he once communicated to you."

"He can relent, then!" she said, coldly. "I did not think he could ever be wrong. I took him for an unchanging rock. So he pretended to love me still. Well, we shall see!"

They talked then of the Berlin fire and he told the story over for her benefit. When the conversation lagged, he asked, suddenly:

"Are you living here as Stanhope's wife?"

She showed no sign of objection to the directness of the question.

"I expected you would ask that," she replied, "and I will tell you, on one condition."

"And that is—"

"That you will not repeat my answer."

"I promise," he said.

"Well, then, upon my soul! I am not; but I want the public to think so. My contract with English & Co. stipulates that I shall encourage the gossip about me in every possible way. I don't mean that this is in writing, but it is our verbal agreement. My husband's application for a divorce has been heralded everywhere, some of the newspapers giving columns to descriptions of myself and accounts of our marriage. Not a day passes that the interest is not purposely fanned by some new bit of information. To-morrow my agreement to star as 'Cleopatra' will be telegraphed over the country. My managers are working it shrewdly, and they need to, if they are to make much money for themselves out of the operation."

He listened with growing surprise.

"They are to pay me one thousand dollars a night for the twenty weeks," she added. "My contract guarantees me one hundred thousand dollars clear of expenses for the season. It is not so bad."

"One hundred thousand?" gasped Claude. "Why, that is more than Morris or Modjeska could get!"

Cora acknowledged this with a nod.

"But neither of them has a divorce case on the docket," she said. "They have no deserted husband belonging to the ancient aristocracy. There is, in their case, no rising young physician, dear to thousands of the upper ten, whose name can be brought into the scale as the lover who rescued the actress and spent the night with her in a cave! Each of these things has its commercial value!"

A look which was little short of horror crept over Claude's face as he heard her.

"Would you drag Elton into this!" he cried, "making his heroic action in saving your life the dagger with which to stab him!"

"Yes," she answered. "I have even thought of admitting that he assaulted me while we were in the cave."

"But it is not true!"

"Nothing *is* true!" said the woman, calmly.

He uttered a deep sigh and cried:

"Can this be that innocent young girl whose anger at a playful kiss nearly resulted in the death of the man who offered it! I could not have believed it, Cora!"

"No!" she said. "It is not that innocent girl! It is a woman desperate at the wrongs done her, whose only gratification must come from reprisals. That

girl had a heart. This woman has a lump of ice where that organ should be located. That girl was the perfection of modesty. This woman could walk naked from Harlem to the Battery. I suffered the horrors of life with a man I did not love, and I learned at least to endure, but when spurned by the one on whom all my affection was centred, I succumbed. What you see before you is not Cora Madison, but a wreck that no man can rescue!"

"I shall cable Belle to come and see you. She may have some influence to keep you from doing these mad things," he said.

"Why not Lulu?" she asked.

She did not know how much she hurt him by that insinuation.

"Don't speak in that way!" he said, pleadingly. "Miss Bornstein is very dear to me, but for fear that our intimacy might tarnish her reputation with the thoughtless, we have decided to be no more together. I have learned to love my wife and, God helping me, I will be true to her while I live!"

Cora retained her impassive expression of countenance, but her voice trembled slightly as she said:

"*You* have learned to love: *I* to hate! You have no right to judge me! Mr. Wyllis, this interview may as well close."

He rose at the suggestion, but a sublime pity for the unfortunate creature before him nerved him for a last effort.

"Cora—your little sister!"

She drew a long breath.

"Jessie would have kept me back, if anything could, but I have weighed all and decided. Even my

mother, were she living, could not dissuade me. What is it to you ?"

He had walked to the door and was about to leave, when she uttered the closing question. He turned and placed his hand tenderly upon her shoulder.

"Cora, it is *everything* to me ; for, by one thoughtless act, I caused all this misery !"

"You !"

"Yes. Have you not thought of that ? My stolen kiss in the buggy on that long past day has spread out to this fearful measure. You wrote of it to Jack ; that made him refuse to touch any more of my money, and left him penniless and hopeless during these months when Johnson was gaining the advantage. But for that kiss Jack would have finished his education as he intended, and you would now be the happiest wife in the world ! Do you wonder I care ? I see you going to destruction, and my conscience cries loudly that I am to blame !"

She heard him quietly, but the words had no more effect on her than those which preceded them.

"You are wrong," she replied. "I am the victim, not of your folly, but of a FATE which you could neither have aided nor averted. In spite of all you did Jack would have reached me in time to stop my marriage, except for a broken car-wheel. FATE fought against me, even to the imperfection in a piece of iron. Then, after I had learned to suffer and to bear my burden, FATE threw Jack and I together in that Lake Pepin accident that opened all my wounds afresh. A gypsy predicted it when I was a girl. Did you know that ?"

Claude shook his head. He thought her mind was wandering.

"Before Jack spoke to me of love I had my fortune told by an old crone whom I met in the street at Cambridge. She told me I would love a tall, handsome young man, who had many books and would make wonderful medicines. She took up an amethyst which I wore and gazing down into it, said, 'I see you lying in his arms; I see you lying on his bed.' In my foolish ecstasy I thought the words typical of marriage. I now know they referred to that night in the cave."

She spoke collectedly and he no longer had doubts that she was herself; but there seemed no more that he could say, and he silently left the house.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CLEOPATRA.

On the evening of November 3rd the most popular theatre in New York was crowded; though the regular prices were doubled, seats sold at a premium. All the wealth and fashion were there. The human race has not changed so very much since the aristocratic dames of France paid extravagant prices for windows that overlooked the scaffold where the assassin of Henri Quatre was tortured to death with red-hot pincers and boiling oil. The American woman who shudders at the idea of a bull-fight in Spain will go to the criminal court and listen unmoved at the trial of a hapless wretch, whose sufferings she views unconcernedly through her glasses, as he sits in the

dock and feels the rope tightening around his neck. The ladies who came to the New York theatre, on the night in question, did not expect to witness a true rendition of Shakespeare's wonderful drama. They came to look at a wife who had made herself notorious, a mother who had deserted her child, a woman who had wantonly dragged the name of an honored family in the dust.

An edifying spectacle, noble ladies! Get your lorgnettes ready! Miss nothing of the sight! It may be your turn next!

On the play bills was this announcement:

Mrs. John Smith Johnson,

SUPPORTED BY

SIGNOR RAFFEAL MANTALI,

For six nights only, at this house, in

"ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA."

"Mrs. John Smith Johnson!" Why? Because that name had, like other things, "a commercial value!"

Who would have cared to see "Cora Madison" act, or "Mrs. Grover?" The Johnson name was a famous one. It had been borne by high officials in State and church. No one could remember when scandal had fastened itself—until now—upon that high escutcheon.

The audience was not there to see "Cleopatra"—they did not expect it. They came to see Mrs. John Smith Johnson and paid their money with that object.

Secondarily, they came to see Mantali. They always liked the dear fellow, the terror of jealous husbands, the actor who had been facetiously surnamed "the Sieve," on account of the bullet wounds received in many brisk engagements, in which he had invariably retreated under heavy firing when detected with unfaithful spouses. Only a month before, a "high-toned" married lady had taken poison on his account, on discovering that he had another intrigue, the party inculpated being her maiden aunt. Mantali had a feminine appearance. His hair was curly and his hands and feet small. No doubt he would make a famous Antony!

When the curtain rose, everybody was obliged to admit that English & Co. had staged the piece well. The magnificence of the accessories delighted all eyes. There was a burst of enthusiasm at the scenery, but it hushed itself, as if by concerted arrangement, when "Cleopatra" appeared.

Her costume was historically correct—her beauty had never shown so brightly—but not the clapping of one pair of hands greeted her. The house was still as death. New York had paid to see, not to endorse her. No one had the temerity to applaud.

Hush! she is speaking:

"If it be love indeed, tell me how much!"

Was this a Cleopatra! This slender creature with the musical voice, with those filmy skirts through which her lower limbs outlined themselves at every motion! No more than that perfumed Adonis with

her was a "triple pillar of the world." The lorgnettes were used unceasingly. The actress was devoured, metaphorically, by the men and women before her.

"By Jove, I don't blame Stanhope!" whispered one old roué to another. "She can't *act*, but her figure is delicious!"

"I'd take Mantali's place for nothing a night and find my own costumes!" said a young blood to his companion. "To think of old Johnson letting that slip him!"

The ladies looked with all their eyes, but did not comment then. They were putting their own meanings to the words she uttered :

"Excellent falsehood!

Why did he marry Fulvia and not love her?"

And this :

"Why should I think you can be mine, and true,
Though you in swearing shake the thronéd gods,
Who have been false to Fulvia?"

What would Stanhope think of that? Many lorgnettes were turned to the box where the handsome young lieutenant sat with a party of his friends. It was his occasion. He knew a thousand men in that audience envied his supposed good fortune. The Shakespearean words did not penetrate his brain. He only heard the mellifluous tones, only saw the shapely form and pathetic face as she recited :

"Give me to drink man-d-r-a-g-o-r-a!"

The first act was over, but there was no call before the curtain for the principals. A buzzing arose in the

house. People talked for the relief it gave them. Some wondered if there would be any question about Mr. Johnson getting his divorce. Some thought Stanhope ought not to make himself so conspicuous in his box. Some asked if anybody had seen Dr. Elton, and others discussed the possibility of his being called to the stand to testify.

"There's no object in Elton's coming here," said one facetious young lady. "If all we hear is true, he saw much more of her in that Wisconsin cave than we do to-night. Any way, I think he's perfectly lovely, and I don't care what he did. I wish he'd ask *me* to marry him, that's all!"

The play went on. New Yorkers have not had time yet to forget it. The newspapers told the next day how reckless "Cleopatra" grew towards the close, when she assumed the most wanton attitudes. Nor did they forget to comment on the fact that when she put the aspic to her bosom she uncovered herself beyond the verge of even stage modesty, and gave a literal meaning to the lines :

"Dost thou not see my baby at my breast,
That sucks the nurse asleep?"

English & Co. had one hundred and nineteen nights left of their contract and they meant to have the amusement loving public of other cities thoroughly excited over the coming spectacle, before the tickets were placed on sale. While all the critics abused the actress, their comments were of a nature to increase the demand for places, and the speculators who had seats left reaped a large profit.

Mrs. John Smith Johnson was warmly congratu-

lated by her managers, before she stepped into Stanhope's carriage, at the close of the play. The crowd that waited for her in the street was so great the police had to force an exit for the horses. It was a silent crowd, however, like that which greeted her in the theatre. Not a cheer went up, and the faces Cora saw bore an expression she did not like.

Claude Wyllis had seen the play. An impulse he could not resist drew him to the place. The deathly silence with which Cora was received smote him. He felt the awfulness of the situation. He had discussed it over and over with Elton, and they had given it up in despair. Mrs. Johnson had made a legal contract and must carry it out. Claude wished the audience was smaller. The great crowd seemed to him like an encouragement of a very wicked thing. So long as money could be made by her managers, they would keep Cora before the public. There was no help.

Another suffering man was there: In a corner of a box, sitting where he could be wholly unobserved, Mr. Johnson endured every scene. He had not set eyes on his wife since she left him at Newport with a doubt of her child's paternity on her lips. It seemed to him like a hideous dream when she came forth in garments artfully designed to expose herself before three thousand witnesses of her shame. When she threw open to their gaze with such utter abandon the breast where he had so often seen her innocent boy, he was struck as with a sledge-hammer!

Some time after the curtain fell, he crept out of the theatre, as he thought, unobserved, but Wyllis met him on the stairs and gently drew his arm within his own. When they had entered a carriage, Claude essayed to comfort the unhappy man, but that was impossible.

Claude could not even get replies to anything he said. He seemed completely dazed and Wyllis left him at his door with the feeling that his reason had suffered an injury from which it would not easily recover.

Dr. Elton did not see "Cleopatra." The wealth of worlds would not have induced him to go there. He kept about his duties, and that evening they took him to a patient whose house he left quite late. Never caring for style or special comfort, he started for home in a street car. Opposite to him were two young men, whose conversation soon convinced him that they had been to see Mrs. Johnson's debut. They were in gay spirits and disposed to consider the performance very amusing.

"Of course she can't *play*," said one, "but it was a liberal education just to see her legs! I shall dream of them for a month. Wonder if I could buy a ticket for to-morrow night at any price."

"Legs!" cried the other. "They are all right, but after she nursed the asp, I forget everything but that! Stanhope is a lucky fellow! I thought the crowd in the street would never let their carriage pass. She's been living with him as his wife ever since she left her husband, you know."

Elton chafed horribly at every word, but until the end he felt he had no right to interfere. At the closing sentence he sprang upon the two young men with the ferocity of a tiger. He caught them by their collars before they could speak, and struck their heads violently together.

"How *dare* you speak in that way, sir, of a lady whom you do not know!" he vociferated to the author of the objectionable phrase. "And how dare you *listen* to him!" he cried to the other, in still louder tones.

He had them still by the collars, and was rapidly reducing them to a demoralized condition, when the conductor of the car, who knew him by name and reputation, interfered.

"Let them go, Dr. Elton," he said, in a mollifying way. "They were a little thoughtless, that's all."

Elton dropped them instantly. He had not realized what he was doing. The young men edged their way to the platform and, as they left the car, one of them called out, "We'll have you in court for this!" The folly of his action occurred to him then for the first time. He was heated and out of humor and soon he also left the car and walked home.

The next morning he was served with a warrant, and the day after that he rose in the police court when his name was called. It struck him that there was an unusually large number of people present. English & Co. had not failed to avail themselves of the advertisement, and every morning paper—though Elton did not know it then—contained a story in relation to the street car affair, more or less sensational.

He had no lawyer and made no defense.

"I am guilty as charged," he said to the judge. When his fine was named he paid it and walked away. It was not much of a sensation, after all, and the crowd felt swindled. However, they had seen him, and as they departed, the Johnson scandal was rolled under their tongues in the hope of extracting another drop of sweetness from that well-worn morsel.

Mrs John Smith Johnson finished her six nights in New York and the net receipts of her managers were double the sum they were to pay her. The advance sales at Boston were reported enormous. The Harvard students took a dozen rows where they could sit

together and see the little Cambridge girl who had figured so largely in the newspapers in connection with one of their alumni.

She was to take the eleven o'clock train for the Hub on Monday morning, but, to the consternation of English & Co., Lieutenant Stanhope came to the Grand Central station without her, and bearing in her place the following note :

“DEAR FRED :

“I have borne all I can. For the sake of humiliating one man I have endured the past six nights in this city. At and near Boston live many of the old acquaintances of my family and I cannot expose myself before them. There is no object in it. Tell English & Co. they owe me nothing. It will be a waste of time to search for me, as even if found I shall not return.

“CORÄ.”

English & Co. were in a pretty state of mind when they read this epistle. At first they thought it some trick of Stanhope's, but when they viewed the hollow-eyed and unkempt appearance of the officer, they dropped that theory at once. The Boston public, when they heard of it, imagined a trick was being put upon them to increase the price of admission and protested loudly. All they could get at the box office, however, in response to their mutterings, was the return of their money. Cora could not be found.

A few days later a fellow whom Claude knew slightly broke in on his dinner at the Hoffman House in this wise :

“Say, Wyllis, did you hear about old Johnson,—

the husband of that pretty 'Cleopatra' who has disappeared? They found him dead in his bed at home this morning, of apoplexy. Yes, sir, dead as a smelt!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

IN LIFE AND DEATH.

When Mr. Johnson's associates opened his private papers they found a will, dated a short time after the birth of his son, leaving to his "dearly beloved wife, Cora Madison Johnson," the sum of one hundred thousand dollars, and all the rest of his estate,—except fifteen thousand dollars, especially set aside for Mrs. Ashleigh—to the child. In case of Willie's death, his part also was to go to the mother. During the troubles which preceded his decease, Mr. Johnson had made no alteration in this disposal of his estate. That he meant to do so can hardly be doubted. While suing for a divorce from the wife he believed unfaithful, he could not have intended to leave her the fortune she would thus forfeit. Be that as it may, the will stood as stated; and the strangest thing in it was that Mr. Claude Wyllis was named as executor.

When informed of the duties thus thrust upon him, Claude was at first disposed to decline, and ask the court to appoint some person in his stead. He had never even attended to his own business, to say nothing of undertaking that of others. But, on consideration, he changed his mind. He felt that he had led a

rather useless life, thus far, and he wanted something to keep him busy. Then, most of his own estate had been in the hands of Mr. Johnson, and he could not think of another person in whom he would have equal confidence. So he accepted the trust, filed his bond and, with the valuable help of the office clerks, found it much easier than he anticipated. Mr. Johnson was a methodical man, as well as a thoroughly honest one. The large interests he had managed, both for himself and his clients, were conducted on the most careful principles, and every transaction showed plainly on his books. The executor was charmed to find everything in such perfect order.

The first thing to be done was to find Cora, if possible. The wife's disappearance had been complete. No news of her had been heard since the morning she left that note to be delivered to Stanhope. Claude consulted a well-known firm of detectives and left the case in their hands. The men detailed upon the job had long talks with him, with Dr. Elton, with Stanhope, and with others who knew her. The lieutenant was as anxious as the rest. His infatuation had much abated after her cold treatment, but he retained a great liking for her still. He dreaded to think harm had happened to her, for which he might be in a sense responsible. The detectives worked for weeks, but were obliged to admit that they could not get the slightest clue. If Cora had sunk in the earth she could not have more effectually baffled their endeavors.

Advertisements were tried, with no better success. It occurred to Claude that if she could know her husband was dead she might return or send some intimation of her whereabouts. He even—though with some

compunctions of conscience—appealed to the mother-love which he believed she must still have, by saying, in one of the announcements, “If she wishes to see her child she should delay no longer.” Nothing availed.

The will was probated without opposition. Mrs. Ashleigh had been too submissive to her brother’s desires in life, to think of opposing his testament. According to ordinary law the child would inherit everything, if the will were set aside, so she had nothing to gain. The divorce suit was, of course, stricken from the docket, and at the end of a few months the executor found himself with one hundred thousand dollars in his hands for Mrs. Johnson, and more than twice that sum for Master William Johnson, aged two.

Master William throve well and seemed destined to achieve the legal age when he would come into possession of his property. Mrs. Wyllis returned from Europe, leaving Lulu at Milan, and after due consideration, took the young Johnson into her own family, along with his retinue. If Claude was to be his guardian—which the court had decided—Belle thought she ought to have a hand in his bringing up.

“I know more about young gentlemen than you do,” she remarked, laughingly, to her husband, “and I am not going to have this one spoiled. Beside, he is all that is left of my darling Cora, and I love him for his mother’s sake. If she ever returns, I shall be able to say I did what I could for her baby. But where *can* she be?”

Another charge which seemed naturally to fall upon the Wyllis family was Miss Jessie, still at Vassar, and Claude took a trip up there one day to see her. She had been informed of her sister’s disappearance and of the measures taken to find her, as well as of

their non-success. Claude found the mischievous child, which he remembered so well, developed into a grave young lady, with a saddened mien, who seemed to feel with crushing effect the disgrace that had visited her family. Claude told her of the conditions of the will and conveyed, as gently as possible, the fact that if Cora should never be found, the money willed to her would become the property of her sister, as next of kin.

"I could not touch it!" responded Jessie, flushing. "When I graduate from here in the spring, I shall obtain a school. If you or Mrs. Wyllis will kindly supply the small sum I shall need until then, I will repay you later. I have no other wants."

"But you will not refuse that legacy if it comes to you honestly and legally!" he said.

"Yes, I shall. Let Cora take it if she will, when she comes back, but if it should be offered to me, I could not. Do not misunderstand me, please. I believe—I am sure of the perfect purity of my unhappy and misguided sister—that she could accept it with clean hands. They broke her heart amongst them. I remember too well. It was scandalous! I was a child, but I knew it all and could do nothing to prevent it. I trust you will find Cora, and I hope she will take the money if she wants it. For myself, I never liked Mr. Johnson, and he owed me nothing."

Winter passed away, with not a clew to Cora. When Jessie's term expired, she came to stay a while with the Wyllises, and all of them went to Newport to spend the heated term. Jessie was very anxious to secure a situation, but they persuaded her to make them a good long visit first. Then, when autumn came, Claude suggested a plan.

"Willie is three years old," he said, "and I must soon get him a governess. He is a wealthy young man and can afford to pay well for a first-class one. Jessie, let me offer you the place. If Cora ever returns, she will be glad her boy had such a teacher, and it will relieve both Belle and myself to have him under such excellent influence."

She tried to laugh it off at first, as an absurdity, but Belle joined her persuasions to her husband's.

"I have undertaken a great care," she said, "greater than I supposed. Unless you can help me out I shall be confined more than I feel able to be, for there are few persons I would trust Willie with. It will be a great favor if you can decide to accept."

Finally Jessie agreed to try it for the present, or until some more suitable opening offered for her talents. The result was that in a short time she became so attached to the boy she could not bear to think of leaving him.

He gave the title "Mamma" to her and Belle indiscriminately, and seemed to love one as well as the other. The little fellow became the delight of the household and his slightest ailment threw all alike into the extremity of terror.

"If Cora should come now," Jessie said, one day, "I don't see how I could give Willie up to her."

Claude smiled significantly to his wife. What a domestic couple they had become, to be sure! He had never felt such content as he did now in his own home.

He did not forget Lulu. He and Belle spoke of the singer almost daily, and both of them still corresponded with her. They anticipated with almost equal pleasure the day when she should come to America

and win plaudits on the operatic stage of her native land. Claude did not wish to blot from his memory the months he had passed with her, but he knew no temptation could induce him to live them over again. His wife had completely won his heart when, in that Berlin hospital, she stooped to kiss the almost dying girl and soothed her distress with the kindest expressions. Lulu had been as quick to feel it as he. Their passionate love had left its impress on them both, but they had risen stronger and wiser from its ashes. An Italian duke had recently asked Miss Bornstein for her hand—a duke whose patronage of music made him known on two continents and whose personal worth was beyond question. Claude had advised her to accept him and the engagement was already announced.

“I never can forget,” Claude wrote to her, “those hours of elysium that you and I passed together, when, having eaten of the ‘insane drug which takes the reason prisoner,’ we trod on ether and saw no cloud! Nor can I forget how near we came to death and that I took upon my soul an untruthful oath to save your reputation, which I had jeopardized. You made it easy for me to return to the path of virtue. God bless you for it! If is well now that you should marry. You may find peace on your husband’s heart, as I have found it on that of my wife.”

And Lulu wrote :

“I cannot love the duke as I loved you, though he is deserving of the best woman in the world, but I will at least make him a true consort, and find in my Art, as I have ever done since you left me, my truest inspiration. Kiss your dear wife for me, and when you hold her in your arms, remember sometimes the little

woman whose affection she won when she threw that radiant smile from the box at the Berlin opera."

Dr. Elton's professorship in the New York Medical College came to him, notwithstanding the gossip which connected his name with that of Mrs. Johnson in so many sensational newspaper paragraphs. The college authorities probed the matter to the bottom and unanimously decided his conduct worthy of the highest praise. His eminent skill as a surgeon was wanted in the classes, and while there was no direct pecuniary advantage to be gained by taking time so valuable in his practice, Elton had the student's love for investigation, which made him willing to spend several hours a week in the college, explaining the mysteries of the human frame to the students. He was as familiar with anatomy as a good watchmaker is with a fine timepiece. Every week he gave exhibitions and lectures from both living and dead "subjects." In the former case he showed equal skill in applying the ether, making the delicate incisions with his lancet, stopping the flowage of blood and bandaging the wounded places. There was no indecision in his manner, no hesitation in his touch. He was completely master of his profession and the elderly physicians who called in marvelled at the celerity and accuracy of his work.

His dissections of dead "subjects" were often attended by throngs which taxed the capacity of the operating room. This work, which is so apt to horrify the casual observer, was a source of real pleasure to him. He knew that nothing in all nature has such a wonderful mechanism as the human frame. To explain its intricacies and expose its motive forces

seemed to him worthy the deepest study of the greatest minds.

One day he received word that a special lesson was requested for that evening, as a "subject" of unusual excellence had been obtained. He accordingly went very early to the college and made his way alone to the dissecting room. On the wooden table lay the body to be carved, covered with a white sheet. With that quickened pulse which a true student must always feel on such an occasion, Dr. Elton grasped the sheet and drew it down, so that he could look at the face.

Good God! what a scream!

He sprang to the door he had just entered. The janitor had heard the cry and came running to ascertain its cause. He saw the doctor's livid countenance and heard his shaking voice say, "No, I want nothing." Then he heard him lock the door.

Yes, it was CORA! Dead, as his quick eye told him, from an overdose of opium, taken purposely or accidentally, who could tell?

It was a hour before he could compose himself enough to write two notes. One was to say there would be no lecture that evening. The other was to Wyllis, telling him of his discovery and asking him to bring an undertaker and his female assistants.

Then he returned to the body.

"I can kiss you now, darling!" he whispered, "and violate no law, human or divine!"

His lips touched the cold forehead. Then he knelt by her side.

"Oh, Christ! be merciful to her," he prayed, "for she has suffered much!"

CHAPTER XL.

BEHIND THE PORTIERES.

Let us pass over three years and bring our story down to the present date.

Dr. Elton still practises medicine, at his office near Madison Square. His fame has grown with every hour, until no physician in the American metropolis commands a finer patronage or larger fees. His residence is now on Fifth Avenue, in its most fashionable quarter, and nothing that wealth and taste can suggest is absent from its furnishings. As he alights from his carriage at the door, let us follow him up the steps. Let us forget politeness for the time and steal into the large hall after him. Hiding behind the ample portieres of the reception room we shall see an unaccustomed sight. A beautiful woman of twenty comes to meet the doctor. Her rounded arms are about his neck and her warm kiss is on his lips. He returns the embrace, gazing down upon the lovely creature with devoted admiration.

Have we not seen the pretty lady before? Yes, many times. And what are you doing here, Miss Jessie Madison?

She is Jessie Madison no longer, but Jessie Elton. For two years she has been Jack's wife—the Jack Elton in whose lap she used to sit, ten years ago, and call her "big brother." She loved him then for Cora's sake, and often recalls how she tried to make him take her sister even after the wedding ring was on her hand. Ignorant little child! How awful that sug-

gestion seems to her, now that her advancing years have taught her its full significance! She sees herself standing there, calling after him, "Remember, I *hate* you!" and he, firm in his fealty to right, even though it rends his heart, stalking away from her. Dear Jack! how could she ever have scolded him!

It came about very naturally. Elton met her at Cora's quiet funeral. She put her hand in his, impulsively, as they stood with streaming eyes about the casket. He called afterwards upon the Wylises and met her there. The childhood's estrangement found no place in their conversation. From that time on he was called occasionally to attend little Willie for infantile derangements. Ten months after Cora's death, he opened his mind to her.

"Jessie," he said, "love for the dear one who has gone would have kept me from marriage as long as she lived, but I think if she could look down on us now, she would second the proposal I am about to make to you. I want you to be my wife."

She refused at first.

"Oh, Jack," she said, "you have endured enough through my family already! Let us continue to be brother and sister, as we are now. I have loved you in that way so many years—yes, even after that night when I spoke so crossly to you—that any other relation seems impossible!"

He put his strong arm about her.

"I want a *wife*, Jessie. I want a *home*. I want *you*. Think of it."

She did think of it. The result was that three months latter she joined her life to his, and she has never regretted the step.

But what is this—a baby! Mrs. Elton receives it

from its nurse's arms, and the doctor watches her proudly. What has Jessie Elton to do with babies? It is lucky she does not see us hiding behind the portiere, as she places it to her breast. Dr. Elton looks on entranced, but he is privileged to look. The storm clouds that for so long filled his sky seem to have vanished. Kind nature spreads her vines and fig trees even over graves. The young physician is a happy man.

Where are the Wyllises? Why, next door! Only a party-wall separates the families. Claude has grown daily more attached to that wonderful woman, his wife. He thinks there is nothing so delightful in the world, with possibly one exception—a little tot, who creeps over his floors and calls him "Papa." What—a baby here, too! Yes, the sweetest little girl you ever saw, a miniature image of her handsome mother. They have named her "Cora Lulu," and wonder how they ever considered the house complete before she came.

Master Willie belongs to both families. He is six years old now, and seems to love "Mamma Jessie" and "Mamma Belle" with indiscriminate fondness. He looks wonderfully like Cora and, as a consequence, gets petted more than is good for him. But he has a sunny disposition and will grow up to be a fine man yet.

The Duchesse di Alpena, *née* Bornstein, has visited America twice and been accorded great ovations as the prima donna of the leading Italian opera company. Her husband, a scholarly-looking gentleman, whom she likes extremely well, accompanied her. When in New York, they stayed at the Wyllis mansion, as Mrs. Wyllis would not hear a word of any other plan. The duke and Claude are attached friends. If His

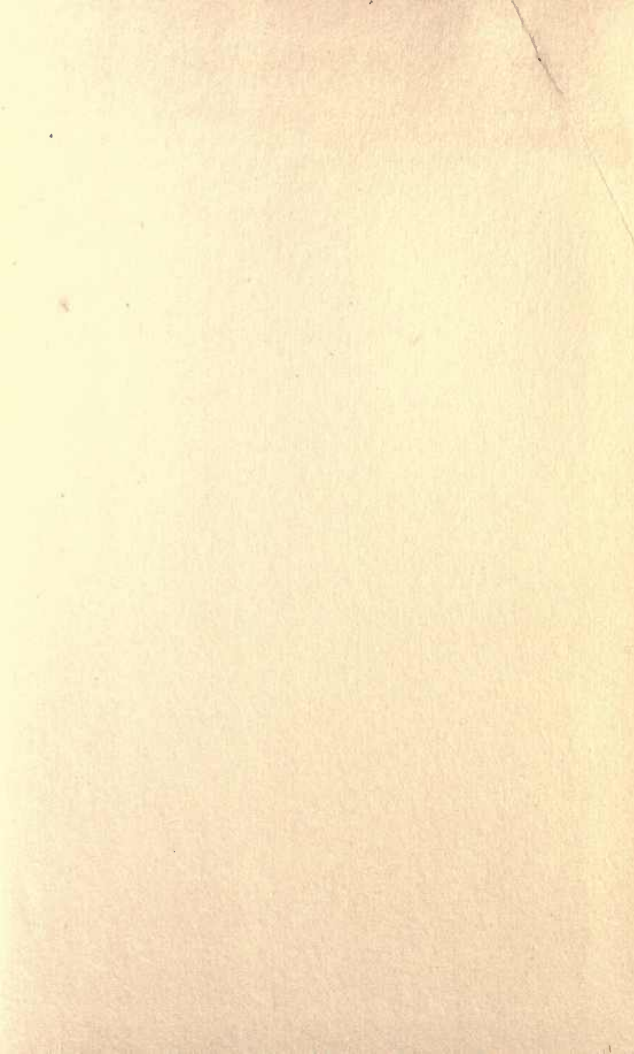
Grace suspects there was anything peculiar in the former relations of his wife and Wyllis, he has the wisdom to say nothing. Some things are best forgotten.

The last time they were there, Belle, with new-found jealousy, though of a very mild type, appealed to her husband one evening, when she had him alone:

"You love no one but me now, Claude?"

"Except Cora Lulu," he answered, indicating that young lady

"Oh, of course, except her," she assented, with a gratified air.



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