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120
THE DEAD SECRET.

BY

WILKIE COLLINS.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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1857.

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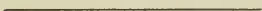
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BOOK IV.

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CHAPTER III.



INSIDE THE HOUSE.

MRS. PENTREATH'S surprise at seeing a lady through the window was doubled by her amazement at seeing a gentleman, when she opened the door. Waiting close to the bell-handle, after he had rung, instead of rejoining his niece on the step, Uncle Joseph stood near enough to the house to be out of the range of view from Mrs. Pentreath's window. To the housekeeper's excited imagination, he appeared on the threshold with the suddenness of an apparition — the apparition of a little rosy-faced old gentleman, smiling, bowing, and taking off his hat with a superb flourish of politeness, which had something quite superhuman in the sweep and the dexterity of it.

“How do you do? We have come to see the house,” said Uncle Joseph, trying his infallible expedient for gaining admission, the instant the door was opened.

Mrs. Pentreath was struck speechless. Who

was this familiar old gentleman with the foreign accent and the fantastic bow? and what did he mean by talking to her as if she was his intimate friend? Mrs. Frankland's letter said not so much, from beginning to end, as one word about him.

"How do you do? We have come to see the house," repeated Uncle Joseph, giving his irresistible form of salutation the benefit of a second trial.

"So you said just now, sir," remarked Mrs. Pentreath, recovering self-possession enough to use her tongue in her own defence. "Does' the lady," she continued, looking down over the old man's shoulder at the step on which his niece was standing; "does the lady wish to see the house too?"

Sarah's gently-spoken reply in the affirmative, short as it was, convinced the housekeeper that the woman described in Mrs. Frankland's letter really and truly stood before her. Besides the neat, quiet dress, there was now the softly-toned voice, and, when she looked up for a moment, there were the timid eyes also to identify her by! In relation to this one of the two strangers, Mrs. Pentreath, however agitated and surprised she might be, could no longer feel any uncertainty about the course she ought to adopt. But in relation to the other visitor, the incomprehensible old foreigner, she was beset by the most

bewildering doubts. Would it be safest to hold to the letter of Mrs. Frankland's instructions, and ask him to wait outside while the lady was being shown over the house? or would it be best to act on her own responsibility and to risk giving him admission as well as his companion? This was a difficult point to decide, and therefore one which it was necessary to submit to the superior sagacity of Mr. Munder.

"Will you step in for a moment, and wait here while I speak to the steward," said Mrs. Pentreath, pointedly neglecting to notice the familiar old foreigner, and addressing herself straight through him to the lady on the steps below.

"Thank you very much," said Uncle Joseph, smiling and bowing, impervious to rebuke. "What did I tell you?" he whispered triumphantly to his niece, as she passed him on her way into the house.

Mrs. Pentreath's first impulse was to go downstairs at once, and speak to Mr. Munder. But a timely recollection of that part of Mrs. Frankland's letter which enjoined her not to lose sight of the lady in the quiet dress, brought her to a stand-still the next moment. She was the more easily recalled to a remembrance of this particular injunction, by a curious alteration in the conduct of the lady herself, who seemed to lose all her diffidence, and to become surprisingly impatient to lead the way into the interior of

the house, the moment she had stepped across the threshold.

“Betsey!” cried Mrs. Pentreath, cautiously calling to the servant after she had only retired a few paces from the visitors. “Betsey! ask Mr. Munder to be so kind as to step this way.”

Mr. Munder presented himself with great deliberation, and with a certain dark and lowering dignity in his face. He had been accustomed to be treated with deference, and he was not pleased with the housekeeper for unceremoniously leaving him the moment she heard the ring at the bell, without giving him time to pronounce an opinion on Mrs. Frankland’s letter. Accordingly, when Mrs. Pentreath, in a high state of excitement, drew him aside out of hearing, and confided to him, in a whisper, the astounding intelligence that the lady in whom Mr. and Mrs. Frankland were so mysteriously interested, was, at that moment, actually standing before him in the house, he received her communication with an air of the most provoking indifference. It was worse still, when she proceeded to state her difficulties—warily keeping her eye on the two strangers all the while. Appeal as respectfully as she might to Mr. Munder’s superior wisdom for guidance, he persisted in listening with a disparaging frown, and ended by irritably contradicting her when she ventured to add, in conclusion, that her own ideas inclined her to

assume no responsibility, and to beg the foreign gentleman to wait outside while the lady, in conformity with Mrs. Frankland's instructions, was being shown over the house.

"Such may be your opinion, ma'am," said Mr. Munder severely. "It is not mine."

The housekeeper looked aghast. "Perhaps," she suggested deferentially, "you think that the foreign old gentleman would be likely to insist on going over the house with the lady?"

"Of course, I think so," said Mr. Munder. (He had thought nothing of the sort; his only idea just then being the idea of asserting his own supremacy by setting himself steadily in opposition to any preconceived arrangements of Mrs. Pentreath.)

"Then you would take the responsibility of showing them both over the house, seeing that they have both come to the door together!" asked the housekeeper.

"Of course, I would," answered the steward, with the marvellous promptitude of resolution which distinguishes all superior men.

"Well, Mr. Munder, I am always glad to be guided by your opinion, and I will be guided by it now," said Mrs. Pentreath. "But, as there will be two people to look after—for I would not trust the foreigner out of sight on any consideration whatever—I must really beg you to share the trouble of showing them over the house

along with me. I am so excited and nervous, that I don't feel as if I had all my wits about me—I never was placed in such a position as this before—I am in the midst of mysteries that I don't understand—and, in short, if I can't count on your assistance, I won't answer for it that I shall not make some mistake. I should be very sorry to make a mistake, not only on my own account, but—". Here the housekeeper stopped, and looked hard at Mr. Munder.

"Go on, ma'am," said Mr. Munder, with cruel composure.

"Not only on my own account," resumed Mrs. Pentreath, demurely, "but on yours; for Mrs. Frankland's letter certainly casts the responsibility of conducting this delicate business on your shoulders, as well as on mine."

Mr. Munder recoiled a few steps, turned red, opened his lips indignantly, hesitated, and closed them again. He was fairly caught in a trap of his own setting. He could not retreat from the responsibility of directing the housekeeper's conduct, the moment after he had voluntarily assumed it; and he could not deny that Mrs. Frankland's letter positively and repeatedly referred to him by name. There was only one way of getting out of the difficulty with dignity, and Mr. Munder unblushingly took that way, the moment he had recovered self-possession enough to collect himself for the effort.

“I am perfectly amazed, Mrs. Pentreath,” he began, with the gravest dignity. “Yes, I repeat, I am perfectly amazed, that you should think me capable of leaving you to go over the house alone, under such remarkable circumstances as those we are now placed in. No, ma’am! whatever my other faults may be, shrinking from my share of a responsibility is not one of them. I don’t require to be reminded of Mrs. Frankland’s letter; and—no!—I don’t require any apologies. I am quite ready, ma’am—quite ready to show the way up-stairs, whenever you are.”

“The sooner the better, Mr. Munder—for there is that audacious old foreigner actually chattering to Betsey now, as if he had known her all his life!”

The assertion was quite true. Uncle Joseph was exercising his gift of familiarity on the maid-servant (who had lingered to stare at the strangers, instead of going back to the kitchen), just as he had already exercised it on the old lady passenger in the stage-coach, and on the driver of the pony-chaise which took his niece and himself to the post-town of Porthgenna. While the housekeeper and the steward were holding their private conference, he was keeping Betsey in ecstasies of suppressed giggling by the odd questions that he asked about the house, and about how she got on with her work in it. His inquiries had naturally led from the south side

of the building, by which he and his companion had entered, to the west side, which they were shortly to explore; and, thence, round to the north side, which was forbidden ground to everybody in the house. When Mrs. Pentreath came forward with the steward, she overheard this exchange of question and answer passing between the foreigner and the maid:—

“But tell me, Betzi, my dear,” said Uncle Joseph. “Why does nobody ever go into these mouldy old rooms?”

“Because there’s a ghost in them,” answered Betsey, with a burst of laughter, as if a series of haunted rooms and a series of excellent jokes meant precisely the same thing.

“Hold your tongue directly, and go back to the kitchen,” cried Mrs. Pentreath indignantly. “The ignorant people about here,” she continued, still pointedly overlooking Uncle Joseph, and addressing herself only to Sarah, “tell absurd stories about some old rooms on the unrepaired side of the house, which have not been inhabited for more than half a century past—absurd stories about a ghost; and my servant is foolish enough to believe them.”

“No, I’m not,” said Betsey, retiring, under protest, to the lower regions. “I don’t believe a word about the ghost—at least, not in the day-time.” Adding that important saving clause in a whisper, Betsey unwillingly withdrew from the scene.

Mrs. Pentreath observed with some surprise that the mysterious lady in the quiet dress, turned very pale at the mention of the ghost-story, and made no remark on it whatever. While she was still wondering what this meant, Mr. Munder emerged into dignified prominence, and loftily addressed himself, not to Uncle Joseph and not to Sarah, but to the empty air between them.

“If you wish to see the house,” he said, “you will have the goodness to follow me.”

With those words, Mr. Munder turned solemnly into the passage that led to the foot of the west staircase; walking with that peculiar slow strut in which all serious-minded English people indulge when they go out to take a little exercise on Sunday. The housekeeper adapting her pace with feminine pliancy to the pace of the steward, walked the national Sabbatarian Polonaise by his side, as if she was out with him for a mouthful of fresh air, between the services.

“As I am a living sinner, this going over the house is like going to a funeral!” whispered Uncle Joseph to his niece. He drew her arm into his, and felt, as he did so, that she was trembling.

“What is the matter?” he asked under his breath.

“Uncle! there is something unnatural about

the readiness of these people to show us over the house," was the faintly-whispered answer. "What were they talking about just now, out of our hearing? Why did that woman keep her eyes fixed so constantly on me?"

Before the old man could answer, the house-keeper looked round, and begged, with the severest emphasis, that they would be good enough to follow. In less than another minute they were all standing at the foot of the west staircase.

"Aha!" cried Uncle Joseph, as easy and talkative as ever, even in the presence of Mr. Munder himself. "A fine big house, and a very good staircase."

"We are not accustomed to hear either the house or the staircase spoken of in those terms, sir," said Mr. Munder, resolving to nip the foreigner's familiarity in the bud. "The Guide to West Cornwall, which you would have done well to make yourself acquainted with before you came here, describes Porthgenna Tower as a Mansion, and uses the word Spacious, in speaking of the west staircase. I regret to find, sir, that you have not consulted the Guide Book to West Cornwall."

"And why?" rejoined the unabashed German. "What do I want with a book, when I have got you for my guide? Ah, dear sir, but you are not just to yourself! Is not a living guide like you,

who talks and walks about, better for me than dead leaves of print and paper? Ah, no, no! I shall not hear another word—I shall not hear you do any more injustice to yourself.” Here Uncle Joseph made another fantastic bow, looked up smiling into the steward’s face, and shook his head several times with an air of friendly reproach.

Mr. Munder felt paralysed. He could not have been treated with more easy and indifferent familiarity if this obscure foreign stranger had been an English duke. He had often heard of the climax of audacity; and here it was visibly and marvellously embodied in one small, elderly individual who did not rise quite five feet from the ground he stood on!

While the steward was swelling with a sense of injury too large for utterance, the housekeeper, followed by Sarah, was slowly ascending the stairs. Uncle Joseph seeing them go up, hastened to join his niece, and Mr. Munder, after waiting a little while on the mat to recover himself, followed the audacious foreigner with the intention of watching his conduct narrowly, and chastising his insolence at the first opportunity with stinging words of rebuke.

The procession up the stairs thus formed, was not, however, closed by the steward: it was further adorned and completed by Betsey, the servant-maid, who stole out of the kitchen to follow the strange visitors over the house, as

closely as she could without attracting the notice of Mrs. Pentreath. Betsey had her share of natural human curiosity and love of change. No such event as the arrival of strangers had ever before enlivened the dreary monotony of Porthgenna Tower, within her experience; and she was resolved not to stay alone in the kitchen, while there was a chance of hearing a stray word of the conversation, or catching a chance glimpse of the proceedings among the company up-stairs.

In the meantime, the housekeeper had led the way as far as the first-floor landing, on either side of which the principal rooms in the west front were situated. Sharpened by fear and suspicion, Sarah's eyes immediately detected the repairs which had been effected in the banisters and stairs of the second flight.

"You have had workmen in the house?" she said quickly to Mrs. Pentreath.

"You mean on the stairs?" returned the housekeeper. "Yes, we have had workmen there."

"And nowhere else?"

"No. But they are wanted in other places badly enough. Even here, on the best side of the house, half the bedrooms up-stairs are hardly fit to sleep in. They were anything but comfortable, as I have heard, even in the late Mrs. Treverton's time; and since she died——"

The housekeeper stopped with a frown, and a look of surprise. The lady in the quiet dress, instead of sustaining the reputation for good manners which had been conferred on her in Mrs. Frankland's letter, was guilty of the unpardonable discourtesy of turning away from Mrs. Pentreath before she had done speaking. Determined not to allow herself to be impertinently silenced in that way, she coldly and distinctly repeated her last words:—

“And since Mrs. Treverton died——”

She was interrupted for the second time. The strange lady, quickly turning round again, confronted her with a very pale face and a very eager look, and asked, in the most abrupt manner, an utterly irrelevant question.

“Tell me about that ghost-story,” she said. “Do they say it is the ghost of a man, or of a woman?”

“I was speaking of the late Mrs. Treverton,” said the housekeeper in her severest tones of reproof, “and not of the ghost-story about the north rooms. You would have known that, if you had done me the favour to listen to what I said.”

“I beg your pardon; I beg your pardon a thousand times for seeming inattentive! It struck me just then—or, at least I wanted to know——”

“If you care to know about anything so

absurd," said Mrs. Pentreath, mollified by the evident sincerity of the apology that had been offered to her, "the ghost, according to the story, is the ghost of a woman."

The strange lady's face grew whiter than ever; and she turned away once more to the open window on the landing.

"How hot it is!" she said, putting her head out into the air.

"Hot, with a north-east wind!" exclaimed Mrs. Pentreath, in amazement.

Here Uncle Joseph came forward with a polite request to know, when they were going to look over the rooms. For the last few minutes he had been asking all sorts of questions of Mr. Munder; and, having received no answers which were not of the shortest and most ungracious kind, had given up talking to the steward in despair.

Mrs. Pentreath prepared to lead the way into the breakfast-room, library, and drawing-room. All three communicated with each other, and each room had a second door opening on a long passage, the entrance to which was on the right hand side of the first-floor landing. Before leading the way into these rooms, the house-keeper touched Sarah on the shoulder to intimate that it was time to be moving on.

"As for the ghost-story," resumed Mrs. Pentreath while she opened the breakfast-room door,

“you must apply to the ignorant people who believe in it, if you want to hear it all told. Whether the ghost is an old ghost or a new ghost, and why she is supposed to walk, is more than I can tell you.” In spite of the housekeeper’s affectation of indifference towards the popular superstition, she had heard enough of the ghost-story to frighten her, though she would not confess it. Inside the house, or outside the house, nobody much less willing to venture into the north rooms alone could in real truth have been found than Mrs. Pentreath herself.

While the housekeeper was drawing up the blinds in the breakfast-parlour, and while Mr. Munder was opening the door that led out of it into the library, Uncle Joseph stole to his niece’s side, and spoke a few words of encouragement to her in his quaint, kindly way.

“Courage!” he whispered. “Keep your wits about you, Sarah, and catch your little opportunity whenever you can.”

“My thoughts! My thoughts!” she answered in the same low key. “This house rouses them all against me. O, why did I ever venture into it again!”

“You had better look at the view from the window now,” said Mrs. Pentreath, after she had drawn up the blind. “It is very much admired.”

While affairs were in this stage of progress on

the first floor of the house, Betsey, who had been hitherto stealing up by a stair at a time from the hall, and listening with all her ears in the intervals of the ascent, finding that no sound of voices now reached her, bethought herself of returning to the kitchen again, and of looking after the housekeeper's dinner, which was being kept warm by the fire. She descended to the lower regions, wondering what part of the house the strangers would want to see next, and puzzling her brains to find out some excuse for attaching herself to the exploring party.

After the view from the breakfast-room window had been duly contemplated, the library was next entered. In this room, Mrs. Pentreath, having some leisure to look about her, and employing that leisure in observing the conduct of the steward, arrived at the unpleasant conviction that Mr. Munder was by no means to be depended on to assist her in the important business of watching the proceedings of the two strangers. Doubly stimulated to assert his own dignity by the disrespectfully easy manner in which he had been treated by Uncle Joseph, the sole object of Mr. Munder's ambition seemed to be to divest himself as completely as possible of the character of guide, which the unscrupulous foreigner sought to confer on him. He sauntered heavily about the rooms, with the air of a casual visitor, staring out of window, peeping into books

on tables, frowning at himself in the chimney-glasses—looking, in short, anywhere but where he ought to look. The housekeeper, exasperated by this affectation of indifference, whispered to him irritably to keep his eye on the foreigner, as it was quite as much as she could do to look after the lady in the quiet dress.

“Very good; very good,” said Mr. Munder, with sulky carelessness. “And where are you going to next, ma’am, after we have been into the drawing-room? Back again, through the library, into the breakfast-room? or out at once into the passage? Be good enough to settle which, as you seem to be in the way of settling everything.”

“Into the passage to be sure,” answered Mrs. Pentreath, “to show the next three rooms beyond these.”

Mr. Munder sauntered out of the library, through the doorway of communication, into the drawing-room, unlocked the door leading into the passage—then, to the great disgust of the housekeeper, strolled to the fireplace and looked at himself in the glass over it, just as attentively as he had looked at himself in the library mirror, hardly a minute before.

“This is the west drawing-room,” said Mrs. Pentreath, calling to the visitors. “The carving of the stone chimney-piece,” she added, with the mischievous intention of bringing them into the

closest proximity to the steward, "is considered the finest thing in the whole apartment."

Driven from the looking-glass by this manœuvre, Mr. Munder provokingly sauntered to the window, and looked out. Sarah, still pale and silent—but with a certain unwonted resoluteness just gathering, as it were, in the lines about her lips—stopped thoughtfully by the chimney-piece, when the housekeeper pointed it out to her. Uncle Joseph, looking all round the room in his discursive manner, spied, in the furthest corner of it from the door that led into the passage, a beautiful maplewood table and cabinet, of a very peculiar pattern. His workmanlike enthusiasm was instantly aroused; and he darted across the room to examine the make of the cabinet, closely. The table beneath, projected a little way in front of it, and, of all the objects in the world, what should he see reposing on the flat space of the projection, but a magnificent musical-box at least three times the size of his own!

"Aïe! Aïe!! Aïe!!!" cried Uncle Joseph in an ascending scale of admiration, which ended at the very top of his voice. "Open him! set him going! let me hear what he plays!" He stopped for want of words to express his impatience, and drummed with both hands on the lid of the musical-box, in a burst of uncontrollable enthusiasm.

“Mr. Munder!” exclaimed the housekeeper, hurrying across the room in great indignation. “Why don’t you look? why don’t you stop him? He’s breaking open the musical-box. Be quiet, sir! How dare you touch me?”

“Set him going! set him going!” reiterated Uncle Joseph, dropping Mrs. Pentreath’s arm, which he had seized in his agitation. “Look here! this by my side is a music-box, too! Set him going! Does he play Mozart? He is three times bigger than ever I saw! See! see! this box of mine—this tiny bit of box that looks nothing by the side of yours—it was given to my own brother by the king of all the music-composers that ever lived, by the divine Mozart himself. Set the big box going, and you shall hear the little baby-box pipe after! Ah, dear and good madam, if you love me ——.”

“Sir!!!” exclaimed the housekeeper, reddening with virtuous indignation to the very roots of her hair.

“What do you mean, sir, by addressing such outrageous language as that to a respectable female?” inquired Mr. Munder, approaching to the rescue. “Do you think we want your foreign noises, and your foreign morals, and your foreign profanity here? Yes, sir! profanity. Any man who calls any human individual, whether musical or otherwise, ‘divine,’ is a

profane man. Who are you, you extremely audacious person? Are you an infidel?"

Before Uncle Joseph could say a word in vindication of his principles; before Mr. Munder could relieve himself of any more indignation, they were both startled into momentary silence by an exclamation of alarm from the housekeeper.

"Where is she?" cried Mrs. Pentreath, standing in the middle of the drawing-room, and looking with bewildered eyes all around her.

The lady in the quiet dress had vanished.

She was not in the library, not in the breakfast-room, not in the passage outside. After searching in those three places, the housekeeper came back to Mr. Munder with a look of downright terror in her face, and stood staring at him for a moment perfectly helpless and perfectly silent. As soon as she recovered herself she turned fiercely on Uncle Joseph.

"Where is she? I insist on knowing what has become of her! You cunning, wicked, impudent old man! where is she?" cried Mrs. Pentreath, with no colour in her cheeks, and no mercy in her eyes.

"I suppose, she is looking about the house by herself," said Uncle Joseph. "We shall find her surely as we take our walks through the other rooms." Simple as he was, the old man

had, nevertheless, acuteness enough to perceive that he had accidentally rendered the very service to his niece of which she stood in need. If he had been the most artful of mankind, he could have devised no better means of diverting Mrs. Pentreath's attention from Sarah to himself than the very means which he had just used in perfect innocence, at the very moment when his thoughts were farthest away from the real object with which he and his niece had entered the house. "So! so!" thought Uncle Joseph to himself, "while these two angry people were scolding me for nothing, Sarah has slipped away to the room where the letter is. Good! I have only to wait till she comes back, and to let the two angry people go on scolding me as long as they please."

"What are we to do? Mr. Munder! what on earth are we to do?" asked the housekeeper. "We can't waste the precious minutes staring at each other here. This woman must be found. Stop! she asked questions about the stairs—she looked up at the second floor, the moment we got on the landing. Mr. Munder! wait here, and don't let that foreigner out of your sight for a moment. Wait here while I run up and look into the second-floor passage. All the bedroom doors are locked—I defy her to hide herself if she has gone up there." With those words, the housekeeper ran out of the drawing-room,

and breathlessly ascended the second flight of stairs.

While Mrs. Pentreath was searching on the west side of the house, Sarah was hurrying, at the top of her speed, along the lonely passages that led to the north rooms.

Terrified into decisive action by the desperate nature of the situation, she had slipped out of the drawing-room into the passage the instant she saw Mrs. Pentreath's back turned on her. Without stopping to think, without attempting to compose herself, she ran down the stairs of the first floor, and made straight for the housekeeper's room. She had no excuses ready, if she had found anybody there, or if she had met anybody on the way. She had formed no plan where to seek for them next, if the keys of the north rooms were not hanging in the place where she still expected to find them. Her mind was lost in confusion, her temples throbbed as if they would burst with the heat at her brain. The one blind, wild, headlong purpose of getting into the Myrtle Room drove her on, gave unnatural swiftness to her trembling feet, unnatural strength to her shaking hands, unnatural courage to her sinking heart.

She ran into the housekeeper's room, without even the ordinary caution of waiting for a moment to listen outside the door. No one was there. One glance at the well-remembered nail

in the wall showed her the keys still hanging to it in a bunch, as they had hung in the long past time. She had them in her possession in a moment; and was away again, along the solitary passages that led to the north rooms, threading their turnings and windings as if she had left them but the day before; never pausing to listen or to look behind her, never slackening her speed till she was at the top of the back staircase, and had her hand on the locked door that led into the north hall.

As she turned over the bunch to find the first key that was required, she discovered—what her hurry had hitherto prevented her from noticing—the numbered labels which the builder had methodically attached to all the keys, when he had been sent to Porthgenna by Mr. Frankland to survey the house. At the first sight of them, her searching hands paused in their work instantaneously, and she shivered all over, as if a sudden chill had struck her.

If she had been less violently agitated, the discovery of the new labels and the suspicions to which the sight of them instantly gave rise would, in all probability, have checked her further progress. But the confusion of her mind was now too great to allow her to piece together even the veriest fragments of thoughts. Vaguely conscious of a new terror, of a sharpened distrust that doubled and trebled the headlong impatience

which had driven her on thus far, she desperately resumed her search through the bunch of keys. One of them had no label; it was larger than the rest—it was the key that fitted the door of communication before which she stood. She turned it in the rusty lock with a strength which, at any other time, she would have been utterly incapable of exerting; she opened the door with a blow of her hand, which burst it away at one stroke from the jambs to which it stuck. Panting for breath, she flew across the forsaken north hall, without stopping for one second to push the door to behind her. The creeping creatures, the noisome house-reptiles that possessed the place, crawled away, shadow-like, on either side of her towards the walls. She never noticed them, never turned away for them. Across the hall, and up the stairs at the end of it, she ran, till she gained the open landing at the top—and there, she suddenly checked herself in front of the first door.

The first door of the long range of rooms that opened on the landing; the door that fronted the topmost of the flight of stairs. She stopped; she looked at it—it was not the door she had come to open; and yet she could not tear herself away from it. Scrawled on the panel in white chalk was the figure—"I." And when she looked down at the bunch of keys in her hands, there was the figure "I." on a label, answering to it.

She tried to think, to follow out any one of all the thronging suspicions that beset her, to the conclusion at which it might point. The effort was useless; her mind was gone: her bodily senses of seeing and hearing—senses which had now become painfully and incomprehensibly sharpened—seemed to be the sole relics of intelligence that she had left to guide her. She put her hand over her eyes, and waited a little so, and then went on slowly along the landing, looking at the doors.

No. "II.," No. "III.," No. "IV.," traced on the panels in the same white chalk, and answering to the numbered labels on the keys, the figures on which were written in ink. No. "IV." the middle room of the first floor range of eight. She stopped there again, trembling from head to foot. It was the door of the Myrtle Room.

Did the chalked numbers stop there? She looked on, down the landing. No. The four doors remaining were regularly numbered on to "VIII."

She came back again to the door of the Myrtle Room, sought out the key labelled with the figure "IV."—hesitated—and looked back distrustfully over the deserted hall.

The canvases of the old family pictures, which she had seen bulging out from their frames, in the past time when she hid the letter, had, for

the most part, rotted away from them now, and lay in great black ragged strips on the floor of the hall. Islands and continents of damp spread like the map of some strange region over the lofty vaulted ceiling. Cobwebs, heavy with dust, hung down in festoons from broken cornices. Dirt stains lay on the stone pavement, like gross reflections of the damp stains on the ceiling. The broad flight of stairs leading up to the open landing before the rooms of the first floor, had sunk down bodily towards one side. The banisters which protected the outer edge of the landing were broken away into ragged gaps. The light of day was stained, the air of heaven was stilled, the sounds of earth were silenced in the north hall.

Silenced? Were *all* sounds silenced? Or was there something stirring that just touched the sense of hearing, that just deepened the dismal stillness, and no more?

Sarah listened, keeping her face still set towards the hall—listened, and heard a faint sound behind her. Was it outside the door on which her back was turned? Or was it inside—in the Myrtle Room?

Inside. With the first conviction of that, all thought, all sensation left her. She forgot the suspicious numbering of the doors; she became insensible to the lapse of time, unconscious of the risk of discovery. All exercise of her other

faculties was now merged in the exercise of the one faculty of listening.

It was a still, faint, stealthily-rustling sound ; and it moved to and fro at intervals, to and fro softly, now at one end, now at the other of the Myrtle Room. There were moments when it grew suddenly distinct—other moments when it died away in gradations too light to follow. Sometimes it seemed to sweep over the floor at a bound—sometimes it crept with slow, continuous rustlings that just wavered on the verge of absolute silence.

Her feet still rooted to the spot on which she stood, Sarah turned her head slowly, inch by inch, towards the door of the Myrtle Room. A moment before, while she was as yet unconscious of the faint sound moving to and fro within it, she had been drawing her breath heavily and quickly. She might have been dead now, her bosom was so still, her breathing so noiseless. The same mysterious change came over her face which had altered it when the darkness began to gather in the little parlour at Truro. The same fearful look of inquiry which she had then fixed on the vacant corner of the room, was in her eyes now, as they slowly turned on the door.

“Mistress !” she whispered. “Am I too late ? Are you there before me ?”

The stealthily-rustling sound inside, paused—

renewed itself—died away again faintly; away at the lower end of the room.

Her eyes still remaining fixed on the Myrtle Room, strained, and opened wider and wider—opened as if they would look through the very door itself—opened as if they were watching for the opaque wood to turn transparent, and show what was behind it.

“Over the lonesome floor, over the lonesome floor—how light it moves!” she whispered again. “Mistress! does the black dress I made for you rustle no louder than that?”

The sound stopped again—then suddenly advanced at one stealthy sweep, close to the inside of the door.

If she could have moved at that moment; if she could have looked down to the line of open space between the bottom of the door and the flooring below, when the faintly rustling sound came nearest to her, she might have seen the insignificant cause that produced it lying self-betrayed under the door, partly outside, partly inside, in the shape of a fragment of faded red paper from the wall of the Myrtle Room. Time and damp had loosened the paper all round the apartment. Two or three yards of it had been torn off by the builder, while he was examining the walls—sometimes in large pieces, sometimes in small pieces, just as it happened to come away—and had been thrown down by him on the

bare, boarded floor, to become the sport of the wind, whenever it happened to blow through the broken panes of glass in the window. If she had only moved! If she had only looked down for one little second of time! But she was past moving and past looking: the paroxysms of superstitious horror that possessed her, held her still in every limb and every feature. She never started, she uttered no cry, when the rustling noise came nearest. The one outward sign which showed how the terror of its approach shook her to the very soul, expressed itself only in the changed action of her right hand, in which she still held the keys. At the instant when the wind wafted the fragment of paper closest to the door, her fingers lost their power of contraction, and became as nerveless and helpless as if she had fainted. The heavy bunch of keys slipped from her suddenly-loosened grasp, dropped at her side on the outer edge of the landing, rolled off through a gap in the broken banister, and fell on the stone pavement below, with a crash which made the sleeping echoes shriek again, as if they were sentient beings writhing under the torture of sound!

The crash of the falling keys, ringing and ringing again through the stillness, woke her, as it were, to instant consciousness of present events and present perils. She started, staggered backward, and raised both her hands wildly to her head—paused so for a few seconds

—then made for the top of the stairs with the purpose of descending into the hall to recover the keys.

Before she had advanced three paces, the shrill sound of a woman's scream came from the door of communication at the opposite end of the hall. The scream was twice repeated at a greater distance off, and was followed by a confused noise of rapidly advancing voices and footsteps.

She staggered desperately a few paces farther, and reached the first of the row of doors that opened on the landing. There Nature sank exhausted: her knees gave way under her—her breath, her sight, her hearing all seemed to fail her together at the same instant — and she dropped down senseless on the floor at the head of the stairs.

CHAPTER IV.



MR. MUNDER ON THE SEAT OF JUDGMENT.

THE murmuring voices and the hurrying footsteps came nearer and nearer, then stopped altogether. After an interval of silence, one voice called out loudly, "Sarah! Sarah! where are you?" and the next instant Uncle Joseph appeared alone in the doorway that led into the north hall, looking eagerly all round him.

At first, the prostrate figure on the landing at the head of the stairs escaped his view. But the second time he looked in that direction, the dark dress, and the arm that lay just over the edge of the top stair, caught his eye. With a loud cry of terror and recognition, he flew across the hall, and ascended the stairs. Just as he was kneeling by Sarah's side, and raising her head on his arm, the steward, the housekeeper, and the maid, all three crowded together after him into the doorway.

"Water!" shouted the old man, gesticulating at them wildly with his disengaged hand. "She

is here—she has fallen down—she is in a faint! Water! water!”

Mr. Munder looked at Mrs. Pentreath, Mrs. Pentreath looked at Betsey, Betsey looked at the ground. All three stood stock-still; all three seemed equally incapable of walking across the hall. If the science of physiognomy be not an entire delusion, the cause of this amazing unanimity was legibly written in their faces; in other words, they all three looked equally afraid of the ghost.

“Water, I say! Water!” reiterated Uncle Joseph, shaking his fist at them. “She is in a faint! Are you three at the door there, and not one heart of mercy among you? Water! water! water! Must I scream myself into fits before I can make you hear?”

“I’ll get the water, ma’am,” said Betsey, “if you or Mr. Munder will please to take it from here to the top of the stairs.”

She ran to the kitchen, and came back with a glass of water, which she offered, with a respectful curtsy, first to the housekeeper, and then to the steward.

“How dare you ask us to carry things for you?” said Mrs. Pentreath, backing out of the doorway.

“Yes! how dare you ask us?” added Mr. Munder, backing after Mrs. Pentreath.

“Water!” shouted the old man for the

third time. He drew his niece backward a little, so that she could be supported against the wall behind her. "Water! or I trample down this dungeon of a place about your ears!" he shouted, stamping with impatience and rage.

"If you please, sir, are you sure it's really the lady who is up there?" asked Betsey, advancing a few paces tremulously with the glass of water.

"Am I sure?" exclaimed Uncle Joseph, descending the stairs to meet her. "What fool's question is this? Who should it be?"

"The ghost, sir," said Betsey, advancing more and more slowly. "The ghost of the north rooms."

Uncle Joseph met her a few yards in advance of the foot of the stairs, took the glass of water from her with a gesture of contempt, and hastened back to his niece. As Betsey turned to effect her retreat, the bunch of keys lying on the pavement below the landing, caught her eye. After a little hesitation, she mustered courage enough to pick them up, and then ran with them out of the hall as fast as her feet could carry her.

Meanwhile, Uncle Joseph was moistening his niece's lips with the water, and sprinkling it over her forehead. After a while, her breath

began to come and go slowly, in faint sighs, the muscles of her face moved a little, and she feebly opened her eyes. They fixed affrightedly on the old man, without any expression of recognition. He made her drink a little water, and spoke to her gently, and so brought her back at last to herself. Her first words were, "Don't leave me." Her first action, when she was able to move, was the action of crouching closer to him.

"No fear, my child," he said soothingly; "I will keep by you. Tell me, Sarah, what has made you faint? What has frightened you so?"

"O, don't ask me! For God's sake, don't ask me!"

"There, there! I shall say nothing, then. Another mouthful of water? A little mouthful more?"

"Help me up, uncle; help me to try if I can stand."

"Not yet—not quite yet; patience for a little longer."

"O, help me! help me! I want to get away from the sight of those doors. If I can only go as far as the bottom of the stairs, I shall be better."

"So, so," said Uncle Joseph, assisting her to rise. "Wait now, and feel your feet on the ground. Lean on me, lean hard, lean heavy.

Though I am only a light and a little man, I am solid as a rock. Have you been into the room?" he added in a whisper. "Have you got the letter?"

She sighed bitterly, and laid her head on his shoulder with a weary despair.

"Why, Sarah, Sarah!" he exclaimed. "Have you been all this time away, and not got into the room yet?"

She raised her head as suddenly as she had laid it down, shuddered, and tried feebly to draw him towards the stairs. "I shall never see the Myrtle Room again—never, never, never more!" she said. "Let us go; I can walk; I am strong now. Uncle Joseph, if you love me, take me away from this house; away anywhere, so long as we are in the free air and the daylight again; anywhere, so long as we are out of sight of Porthgenna Tower."

Elevating his eyebrows in astonishment, but considerably refraining from asking any more questions, Uncle Joseph assisted his niece to descend the stairs. She was still so weak, that she was obliged to pause on gaining the bottom of them to recover her strength. Seeing this, and feeling, as he led her afterwards across the hall, that she leaned more and more heavily on his arm at every fresh step, the old man, on arriving within speaking distance of Mr. Munder and Mrs. Pentreath, asked the housekeeper if

she possessed any restorative drops which she would allow him to administer to his niece. Mrs. Pentreath's reply in the affirmative, though not very graciously spoken, was accompanied by an alacrity of action which showed that she was heartily rejoiced to take the first fair excuse for returning to the inhabited quarter of the house. Muttering something about showing the way to the place where the medicine chest was kept, she immediately retraced her steps along the passage to her own room; while Uncle Joseph, disregarding all Sarah's whispered assurances that she was well enough to depart without another moment of delay, followed her silently, leading his niece.

Mr. Munder, shaking his head, and looking wofully disconcerted, waited behind to lock the door of communication. When he had done this, and had given the keys to Betsey to carry back to their appointed place, he, in his turn, retired from the scene at a pace indecorously approaching to something like a run. On getting well away from the north hall, however, he regained his self-possession wonderfully. He abruptly slackened his pace, collected his scattered wits, and reflected a little, apparently with perfect satisfaction to himself; for when he entered the housekeeper's room, he had quite recovered his usual complacent solemnity of look and manner. Like the vast majority of densely-

stupid men, he felt intense pleasure in hearing himself talk, and he now discerned such an opportunity of indulging in that luxury, after the events that had just happened in the house, as he seldom enjoyed. There is only one kind of speaker who is quite certain never to break down under any stress of circumstances—the man whose capability of talking does not include any dangerous underlying capacity for knowing what he means. Among this favoured order of natural orators, Mr. Munder occupied a prominent rank—and he was now vindictively resolved to exercise his abilities on the two strangers, under pretence of asking for an explanation of their conduct, before he could suffer them to quit the house.

On entering the room, he found Uncle Joseph seated with his niece at the lower end of it, engaged in dropping some sal-volatile into a glass of water. At the upper end, stood the housekeeper with an open medicine chest on the table before her. To this part of the room, Mr. Munder slowly advanced, with a portentous countenance; drew an arm-chair up to the table; sat himself down in it with extreme deliberation and care in the matter of settling his coat-tails; and immediately became, to all outward appearance, the very model, or picture, of a Lord Chief Justice in plain clothes.

Mrs. Pentreath, conscious from these pre-

parations that something extraordinary was about to happen, seated herself a little behind the steward. Betsey restored the keys to their place on the nail in the wall, and was about to retire modestly to her proper kitchen sphere, when she was stopped by Mr. Munder.

“Wait, if you please,” said the steward, “I shall have occasion to call on you presently, young woman, to make a plain statement.”

Obedient Betsey waited near the door, terrified by the idea that she must have done something wrong, and that the steward was armed with inscrutable legal power, to try, sentence, and punish her for the offence on the spot.

“Now, sir,” said Mr. Munder, addressing Uncle Joseph as if he was the Speaker of the House of Commons, “if you have done with that sal-volatile, and if the person by your side has sufficiently recovered her senses to listen, I should wish to say a word or two to both of you.”

At this exordium, Sarah tried affrightedly to rise from her chair; but her uncle caught her by the hand, and pressed her back in it. “Wait and rest,” he whispered. “I shall take all the scolding on my own shoulder, and do all the talking with my own tongue. As soon as you are fit to walk again, I promise you this: whether the big man has said his word or two,

or has not said it, we will quietly get up and go our ways out of the house."

"Up to the present moment," said Mr. Munder, "I have refrained from expressing an opinion. The time has now come, as it appears to me and Mrs. Pentreath, when, holding a position of trust as I do, in this establishment, and being accountable, and indeed responsible, as I am, for what takes place in it, and feeling, as I must, that things cannot be allowed, or, even permitted, to rest as they are—it is my duty to say that I think your conduct is very extraordinary." Directing this forcible conclusion to his sentence straight at Sarah, Mr. Munder leaned back in his chair, quite full of words and quite empty of meaning, to collect himself comfortably for his next effort.

"My only desire," he resumed, with a soft and plaintive impartiality, "is to act fairly by all parties. I don't wish to frighten anybody, or to startle anybody, or even to terrify anybody. I wish to state remarkable facts of a singular nature. I wish to unravel, or, if you please, the expression being plainer to all capacities, which is all I want to be, to make out, what I may term, with perfect propriety—events. And when I have done that, I should wish to put it to you, ma'am, and to you, sir, whether—I say, I should wish to put

it to you both, calmly, and impartially, and politely, and plainly, and smoothly—and when I say smoothly, I mean quietly—whether—in short, whether you are not both of you bound to explain yourselves.”

Mr. Munder paused, to let that last irresistible appeal work its way to the consciences of the persons whom he addressed. The housekeeper took advantage of the silence to cough, as congregations cough just before the sermon, apparently on the principle of getting rid of bodily infirmities beforehand, in order to give the mind free play for undisturbed intellectual enjoyment. Betsey, following Mrs. Pentreath's lead, indulged in a cough on her own account—of the faint, distrustful sort. Uncle Joseph sat perfectly easy and undismayed, still holding his niece's hand in his, and giving it a little squeeze, from time to time, when the steward's oratory became particularly involved and impressive. Sarah never moved, never looked up, never lost the expression of terrified restraint which had taken possession of her face from the first moment when she entered the housekeeper's room.

“Now what are the facts, and circumstances, and events?” proceeded Mr. Munder, leaning back in his chair, in calm enjoyment of the sound of his own voice. “You, ma'am, and you, sir, ring at the bell of the door of this

Mansion" (here he looked hard at Uncle Joseph, as much as to say, "I don't give up that point about the house being a Mansion, you see, even on the judgment seat") "you are let in, or, rather, admitted. You, sir, assert that you wish to inspect the Mansion (you say 'see the house,' but, being a foreigner, we are not surprised at your making a little mistake of that sort); you ma'am, coincide, and even agree, in that request. What follows? You are shown over the Mansion. It is not usual to show strangers over it, but we happen to have certain reasons—"

Sarah started. "What reasons?" she asked looking up quickly.

Uncle Joseph felt her hand turn cold and tremble in his. "Hush! hush!" he said, "leave the talking to me."

At the same moment, Mrs. Pentreath pulled Mr. Munder warily by the coat-tail, and whispered to him to be careful. "Mrs. Frankland's letter," she said in his ear, "tells us particularly not to let it be suspected that we are acting under orders."

"Don't you fancy, Mrs. Pentreath, that I forget what I ought to remember," rejoined Mr. Munder—who had forgotten, nevertheless. "And don't you imagine that I was going to commit myself" (the very thing which he had just been on the point of doing). "Leave this business in my hands, if you will be so good.

What reasons did you say, ma'am?" he added aloud, addressing himself to Sarah. "Never you mind about reasons; we have not got to do with them now; we have got to do with facts, and circumstances, and events. Be so good as to remember that, and to listen to what I was saying, and not to interrupt me again. I was observing, or remarking, that you, sir, and you, ma'am, were shown over this Mansion. You were conducted, and indeed led, up the west staircase—the Spacious west staircase, sir!—You were shown with politeness, and even with courtesy, through the breakfast-room, the library, and the drawing-room. In that drawing-room, you, sir, indulge in outrageous, and, I will add, in violent language. In that drawing-room you, ma'am, disappear, or rather, go altogether out of sight. Such conduct as this, so highly unparalleled, so entirely unprecedented, and so very unusual, causes Mrs. Pentreath and myself to feel——" Here Mr. Munder stopped, at a loss for a word for the first time.

"Astonished," suggested Mrs. Pentreath, after a long interval of silence.

"No, ma'am!" retorted Mr. Munder severely. "Nothing of the sort. We were not at all astonished; we were—surprised. And what followed and succeeded that? What did you and I hear, sir, on the first floor?" (looking

sternly at Uncle Joseph). "And what did you hear, Mrs. Pentreath, while you were searching for the missing and absent party on the second-floor? What?"

Thus personally appealed to, the housekeeper answered briefly:—"A scream."

"No! no! no!" said Mr. Munder, fretfully tapping his hand on the table. "A screech, Mrs. Pentreath—a screech. And what is the meaning, purport, and upshot of that screech? Young woman!" (here Mr. Munder turned suddenly on Betsey)—"we have now traced these extraordinary, these singular, and indeed these odd, facts and circumstances as far as you. Have the goodness to step forward, and tell us, in the presence of these two parties, how you came to utter, or give, what Mrs. Pentreath calls a scream, but what I call a screech. A plain statement will do, my good girl—quite a plain statement, if you please. And, young woman, one word more—speak up. You understand me? Speak up!"

Covered with confusion by the public and solemn nature of this appeal, Betsey, on starting with her statement, unconsciously followed the oratorical example of no less a person than Mr. Munder himself; that is to say, she spoke on the principle of drowning the smallest possible infusion of ideas in the largest possible dilution of words. Extricated from the mesh of verbal

entanglement in which she contrived to involve it, her statement may be not unfairly represented as simply consisting of the following facts:—

First, Betsey had to relate that she happened to be just taking the lid off a saucepan, on the kitchen fire, when she heard, in the neighbourhood of the housekeeper's room, a sound of hurried footsteps (vernacularly termed by the witness, a "scurrying of somebody's feet"). Secondly, Betsey, on leaving the kitchen to ascertain what the sound meant, heard the footsteps retreating rapidly along the passage which led to the north side of the house, and stimulated by curiosity, followed the sound of them, for a certain distance. Thirdly, at a sharp turn in the passage, Betsey stopped short, despairing of overtaking the person whose footsteps she heard, and feeling also a sense of dread (termed by the witness, "creeping of the flesh") at the idea of venturing alone, even in broad daylight, into the ghostly quarter of the house. Fourthly, while still hesitating at the turn in the passage, Betsey heard "the lock of a door go," and, stimulated afresh by curiosity, advanced a few steps farther—then stopped again, debating within herself the difficult and dreadful question: whether it is the usual habit and custom of ghosts in general, when passing from one place to another, to unlock any closed

door which may happen to be in their way, or to save trouble by simply passing through it? Fifthly, after long deliberation, and many false starts, forward towards the north hall and backward towards the kitchen, Betsey decided that it was the immemorial custom of all ghosts to pass through doors and not to unlock them. Sixthly, fortified by this conviction, Betsey went on boldly close to the door, when she suddenly heard a loud report as of some heavy body falling (graphically termed by the witness a "banging scrash"). Seventhly, the noise frightened Betsey out of her wits, brought her heart up into her mouth and took away her breath. Eighthly, and lastly, on recovering breath enough, to scream (or screech) Betsey did, with might and main, scream (and screech), running back towards the kitchen as fast as her legs would carry her, with all her hair "standing up on end," and all her flesh "in a crawl" from the crown of her head to the soles of her feet.

"Just so! Just so!" said Mr. Munder, when the statement came to a close—as if the sight of a young woman with all her hair standing on end and all her flesh in a crawl, were an ordinary result of his daily experience of female humanity. "Just so! You may stand back, my good girl—you may stand back. There is nothing to smile at, sir," he continued, sternly addressing Uncle Joseph, who had been exces-

sively amused by Betsey's manner of delivering her evidence. "You would be doing better to carry, or rather transport, your mind back to what followed and succeeded the young woman's screech. What did we all do, sir? We rushed to the spot, and we ran to the place. And what did we all see, sir? We saw *you*, ma'am, lying horizontally prostrate, on the top of the landing of the first of the flight of the north stairs; and we saw those keys now hanging up yonder, abstracted, and purloined, and, as it were, snatched, from their place in this room, and lying horizontally prostrate likewise, on the floor of the hall. There are the facts, the circumstances, the events, laid, or rather placed, before you. What have you got to say to them? Yes! what have you got to say to them? I call upon you both solemnly, and, I will add, seriously!—in my own name, in the name of Mrs. Pentreath, in the name of our employers, in the name of decency, in the name of wonder—what do you mean by it?"

With that fiery conclusion, Mr. Munder struck his fist on the table, and waited with a stare of merciless expectation, for anything in the shape of an answer, an explanation, or a defence which the culprits at the bottom of the room might be disposed to offer.

"Tell him anything," whispered Sarah to the old man. "Anything to keep him quiet; any-

thing to make him let us go! After what I have suffered, these people will drive me mad!"

Never very quick at inventing an excuse, and perfectly ignorant besides of what had really happened to his niece while she was alone in the north hall, Uncle Joseph, with the best will in the world to prove himself equal to the emergency, felt considerable difficulty in deciding what he should say or do. Determined, however, at all hazards, to spare Sarah any useless suffering, and to remove her from the house as speedily as possible, he rose to take the responsibility of speaking on himself, looking hard, before he opened his lips, at Mr. Munder, who immediately leaned forward on the table with his hand to his ear. Uncle Joseph acknowledged this polite act of attention with one of his fantastic bows; and then replied to the whole of the steward's long harangue, in these six unanswerable words:—

"I wish you good day, sir!"

"How dare you wish me anything of the sort!" cried Mr. Munder, jumping out of his chair in violent indignation. "How dare you trifle with a serious subject and a serious question in that way? Wish me good day, indeed! Do you suppose I am going to let you out of this house without hearing from you, or from that person who is most improperly whispering to you at this very moment, some explanation of the

abstracting and purloining and snatching of the keys of the north rooms ? ”

“ Ah ! it is that you want to know ? ” said Uncle Joseph, stimulated to plunge headlong into an excuse by the increasing agitation and terror of his niece. “ See, now ! I shall explain. What was it, dear and good sir, that we said when we were first let in ? This :— ‘ We have come to see the house. ’ Now, there is a north side to the house, and a west side to the house. Good ! That is two sides ; and I and my niece are two people ; and we divide ourselves in two, to see the two sides. I am the half that goes west, with you and the dear and good lady behind there. My niece here is the other half that goes north, all by herself, and drops the keys, and falls into a faint, because in that old part of the house it is what you call musty-fusty, and there is smells of tombs and spiders, and that is all the explanation, and quite enough, too. I wish you good day, sir.”

“ Damme ! if ever I met with the like of you before ! ” roared Mr. Munder, entirely forgetting his dignity, his respectability, and his long words, in the exasperation of the moment. “ You are going to have it all your own way, are you, Mr. Foreigner ? You will walk out of this place when you please, will you, Mr. Foreigner ? We will see what the justice of

the peace for this district has to say to that," cried Mr. Munder, recovering his solemn manner and his lofty phraseology. "Property in this house is confided to my care; and unless I hear some satisfactory explanation of the purloining of those keys, hanging up there, sir, on that wall, sir, before your eyes, sir—I shall consider it my duty to detain you, and the person with you, until I can get legal advice, and lawful advice, and magisterial advice. Do you hear that, sir?"

Uncle Joseph's ruddy cheeks suddenly deepened in colour, and his face assumed an expression which made the housekeeper rather uneasy, and which had an irresistibly cooling effect on the heat of Mr. Munder's anger. "You will keep us here? *You?*" said the old man, speaking very quietly, and looking very steadily at the steward. "Now, see. I take this lady (courage, my child, courage! there is nothing to tremble for)—I take this lady with me; I throw that door open—so! I stand and wait before it; and I say to you, 'Shut that door against us, if you dare.'"

At this defiance, Mr. Munder advanced a few steps, and then stopped. If Uncle Joseph's steady look at him had wavered for an instant, he would have closed the door.

"I say again," repeated the old man, "shut it against us, if you dare. The laws and customs

of your country, sir, have made me an Englishman. If you can talk into one ear of a magistrate, I can talk into the other. If he must listen to you, a citizen of this country, he must listen to me, a citizen of this country also. Say the word, if you please. Do you accuse? or do you threaten? or do you shut the door?"

Before Mr. Munder could reply to any one of these three direct questions, the housekeeper begged him to return to his chair, and to speak to her. As he resumed his place, she whispered to him, in warning tones, "Remember Mrs. Frankland's letter!"

At the same moment, Uncle Joseph, considering that he had waited long enough, took a step forward to the door. He was prevented from advancing any farther by his niece, who caught him suddenly by the arm, and said in his ear, "Look! they are whispering about us again!"

"Well!" said Mr. Munder, replying to the housekeeper. "I do remember Mrs. Frankland's letter, ma'am, and what then?"

"Hush! not so loud," whispered Mrs. Pentreath. "I don't presume, Mr. Munder, to differ in opinion with you; but I want to ask one or two questions. Do you think we have any charge that a magistrate would listen to, to bring against these people?"

Mr. Munder looked puzzled, and seemed, for once in a way, to be at a loss for an answer.

“Does what you remember of Mrs. Frankland’s letter,” pursued the housekeeper, “incline you to think that she would be pleased at a public exposure of what has happened in the house? She tells us to take *private* notice of that woman’s conduct, and to follow her *unperceived* when she goes away. I don’t venture on the liberty of advising you, Mr. Munder, but, as far as regards myself, I wash my hands of all responsibility, if we do anything but follow Mrs. Frankland’s instructions (as she herself tells us,) to the letter.”

Mr. Munder hesitated. Uncle Joseph, who had paused for a minute when Sarah directed his attention to the whispering at the upper end of the room, now drew her on slowly with him to the door. “Betzi, my dear,” he said, addressing the maid, with perfect coolness and composure; “we are strangers here; will you be so kind to us as to show the way out?”

Betsey looked at the housekeeper, who motioned to her to appeal for orders to the steward. Mr. Munder was sorely tempted, for the sake of his own importance, to insist on instantly carrying out the violent measures to which he had threatened to have recourse; but Mrs. Pentreath’s objections made him pause in spite of himself—not at all on account of their validity, as abstract objections, but purely on account of their close connection with his own personal

interest in not imperilling his position with his employers by the commission of a blunder which they might never forgive.

“Betzi, my dear,” repeated Uncle Joseph, “has all this talking been too much for your ears? has it made you deaf?”

“Wait!” cried Mr. Munder, impatiently. “I insist on your waiting, sir!”

“You insist? Well, well, because you are an uncivil man, is no reason why I should be an uncivil man, too. We will wait a little, sir, if you have anything more to say.” Making that concession to the claims of politeness, Uncle Joseph walked gently backwards and forwards with his niece in the passage outside the door. “Sarah, my child, I have frightened the man of the big words,” he whispered. “Try not to tremble so much; we shall soon be out in the fresh air again.”

In the mean time, Mr. Munder continued his whispered conversation with the housekeeper, making a desperate effort, in the midst of his perplexities, to maintain his customary air of patronage, and his customary assumption of superiority. “There is a great deal of truth, ma’am,” he softly began, “a great deal of truth, certainly, in what you say. But you are talking of the woman, while I am talking of the man. Do you mean to tell me that I am to let him go, after what has happened, without at least

insisting on his giving me his name and address?"

"Do you put trust enough in the foreigner to believe that he would give you his right name and address if you asked him?" inquired Mrs. Pentreath. "With submission to your better judgment, I must confess that I don't. But supposing you were to detain him and charge him before the magistrate—and how you are to do that, the magistrate's house being, I suppose, about a couple of hours' walk from here, is more than I can tell—you must surely risk offending Mrs. Frankland by detaining the woman and charging the woman as well; for, after all, Mr. Munder, though I believe the foreigner to be capable of anything, it was the woman who took the keys, was it not?"

"Quite so, quite so!" said Mr. Munder, whose sleepy eyes were now opened to this plain and straightforward view of the case for the first time. "I was, oddly enough, putting that point to myself, Mrs. Pentreath, just before you happened to speak of it. Yes, yes, yes—just so, just so!"

"I can't help thinking," continued the house-keeper, in a mysterious whisper, "that the best plan, and the plan most in accordance with our instructions, is to let them both go, as if we did not care to demean ourselves by any more quarrelling or arguing with them; and to have them

followed to the next place they stop at. The gardener's boy, Jacob, is weeding the broad walk, in the west garden, this afternoon. These people have not seen him about the premises, and need not see him, if they are let out again by the south door. Jacob is a sharp lad, as you know; and, if he was properly instructed, I really don't see ——”

“It is a most singular circumstance, Mrs. Pentreath,” interposed Mr. Munder, with the gravity of consummate assurance; “but when I first sat down to this table, that idea about Jacob occurred to me. What with the effort of speaking, and the heat of argument, I got led away from it in the most unaccountable way ——”

Here, Uncle Joseph, whose stock of patience and politeness was getting exhausted, put his head into the room again.

“I shall have one last word to address to you, sir, in a moment,” said Mr. Munder, before the old man could speak. “Don't you suppose that your blustering and your bullying has had any effect on me. It may do with foreigners, sir; but it won't do with Englishmen, I can tell you.”

Uncle Joseph shrugged his shoulders, smiled, and rejoined his niece in the passage outside. While the housekeeper and the steward had been conferring together, Sarah had been trying hard to persuade her uncle to profit by her knowledge

of the passages that led to the south door, and to slip away unperceived. But the old man steadily refused to be guided by her advice. "I will not go out of a place guiltily," he said, "when I have done no harm. Nothing shall persuade me to put myself, or to put you, in the wrong. I am not a man of much wits; but let my conscience guide me, and so long I shall go right. They let us in here, Sarah, of their own accord; and they shall let us out of their own accord, also."

"Mr. Munder! Mr. Munder!" whispered the housekeeper, interfering to stop a fresh explosion of the steward's indignation, which threatened to break out at the contempt implied by the shrugging of Uncle Joseph's shoulders, "while you are speaking to that audacious man, shall I slip into the garden and give Jacob his instructions?"

Mr. Munder paused before answering—tried hard to see a more dignified way out of the dilemma in which he had placed himself than the way suggested by the housekeeper—failed entirely to discern anything of the sort—swallowed his indignation at one heroic gulp—and replied emphatically in two words: "Go, ma'am."

"What does that mean? what has she gone that way for?" said Sarah to her uncle in a quick, suspicious whisper, as the housekeeper

brushed hastily by them, on her way to the west garden.

Before there was time to answer the question, it was followed by another, put by Mr. Munder.

“ Now, sir ! ” said the steward, standing in the doorway, with his hands under his coat-tails and his head very high in the air. “ Now, sir, and now, ma’am, for my last words. Am I to have a proper explanation of the abstracting and purloining of those keys, or am I not ? ”

“ Certainly, sir, you are to have the explanation,” replied Uncle Joseph. “ It is, if you please, the same explanation that I had the honour of giving to you a little while ago. Do you wish to hear it again ? It is all the explanation we have got about us.”

“ Oh ! it is, is it ? ” said Mr. Munder, “ Then all I have to say to both of you is——leave the house directly ! Directly ! ” he added, in his most coarsely offensive tones, taking refuge in the insolence of authority, from the dim consciousness of the absurdity of his own position, which would force itself on him even while he spoke. “ Yes, sir ! ” he continued, growing more and more angry at the composure with which Uncle Joseph listened to him. “ Yes, sir ! you may bow and scrape, and jabber your broken English somewhere else. I won’t put up with you here. I have reflected with myself, and reasoned with myself, and thought with myself,

and asked myself, calmly—as Englishmen always do—if it was any use making you of any importance, and I have come to a conclusion, and that conclusion is—no, it isn't! Don't you go away with a notion that your blusterings and your bullyings have had any effect on me. (Show them out, Betsey!) I consider you beneath—aye, sir, and below!—my notice. (Show them out!) I wash my hands of you, and I dismiss you (show them out!) and I survey you, and I look upon you, and I behold you, with contempt!”

“And I, sir,” returned the object of all this withering derision, with the most exasperating politeness, “I shall say, for having your contempt, what I could by no means have said for having your respect, which is, briefly—thank you. I, the small foreigner, take the contempt of you, the big Englishman, as the greatest compliment that can be paid from a man of your composition to a man of mine.” With that, Uncle Joseph made a last fantastic bow, took his niece's arm, and followed Betsey along the passages that led to the south door, leaving Mr. Munder to compose a fit retort at his leisure.

Ten minutes later, the housekeeper returned breathless to her room, and found the steward walking backwards and forwards in a high state of irritation.

“ Pray make your mind easy, Mr. Munder,” she said. “ They are both clear of the house at last, and Jacob has got them well in view on the path over the moor.”

CHAPTER V.



MOZART PLAYS FAREWELL.

EXCEPTING that he took leave of Betsey, the servant-maid, with great cordiality, Uncle Joseph spoke not another word, after his parting reply to Mr. Munder, until he and his niece were alone again under the east wall of Porthgenna Tower. There, he paused, looked up at the house, then at his companion, then back at the house once more, and at last opened his lips to speak.

“I am sorry, my child,” he said. “I am sorry from my heart. This has been, what you call in England, a very bad job.”

Thinking that he referred to the scene which had just passed in the housekeeper’s room, Sarah asked his pardon for having been the innocent means of bringing him into angry collision with such a person as Mr. Munder.

“No! no! no!” he cried. “I was not thinking of the man of the big body and the

big words. He made me angry, it is not to be denied; but that is all over and gone now. I put him and his big words away from me, as I kick this stone, here, from the pathway into the road. It is not of your Munders, or your housekeepers, or your Betzies, that I now speak—it is of something that is nearer to you and nearer to me also, because I make of your interest my own interest, too. I shall tell you what it is, while we walk on—for I see in your face, Sarah, that you are restless and in fear so long as we stop in the neighbourhood of this dungeon-house. Come! I am ready for the march. There is the path. Let us go back by it, and pick up our little baggages at the inn where we left them, on the other side of this windy wilderness of a place.”

“Yes, yes, uncle! Let us lose no time; let us walk fast. Don't be afraid of tiring me; I am much stronger now.”

They turned into the same path by which they had approached Porthgenna Tower in the afternoon. By the time they had walked over a little more than the first hundred yards of their journey, Jacob, the gardener's boy, stole out from behind the ruinous enclosure at the north side of the house, with his hoe in his hand. The sun had just set, but there was a fine light still over the wide, open surface of the moor; and Jacob paused to let the old man

and his niece get farther away from the building before he followed them. The housekeeper's instructions had directed him just to keep them in sight, and no more; and, if he happened to observe that they stopped and turned round to look behind them, he was to stop, too, and pretend to be digging with his hoe, as if he was at work on the moorland. Stimulated by the promise of a sixpence, if he was careful to do exactly as he had been told, Jacob kept his instructions in his memory, and kept his eye on the two strangers, and promised as fairly to earn the reward in prospect for him as a boy could.

“And, now, my child, I shall tell you what it is I am sorry for,” resumed Uncle Joseph, as they proceeded along the path. “I am sorry that we have come out upon this journey, and run our little risk, and had our little scolding, and gained nothing. The word you said in my ear, Sarah, when I was getting you out of the faint (and you should have come out of it sooner, if the muddle-headed people of the dungeon-house had been quicker with the water)—the word you said in my ear was not much, but it was enough to tell me that we have taken this journey in vain. I may hold my tongue, I may make my best face at it, I may be content to walk blindfolded with a mystery that lets no peep of daylight into my eyes—but it is not the

less true, that the one thing your heart was most set on doing, when we started on this journey, is the one thing also, that you have not done. I know that, if I know nothing else; and I say again, it is a bad job—yes, yes, upon my life and faith, there is no disguise to put upon it; it is, in your plainest English, a very bad job.”

As he concluded the expression of his sympathy in these quaint terms, the dread and distrust, the watchful terror, that marred the natural softness of Sarah’s eyes, disappeared in an expression of sorrowful tenderness, which seemed to give back to them all their beauty.

“Don’t be sorry for me, uncle,” she said, stopping, and gently brushing away with her hand some specks of dust that lay on the collar of his coat. “I have suffered so much and suffered so long, that the heaviest disappointments pass lightly over me now.”

“I won’t hear you say it!” cried Uncle Joseph. “You give me shocks I can’t bear when you talk to me in this way. You shall have no more disappointments——no, you shall not! I, Joseph Buschmann, the Obstinate, the Pig-headed, I say it!——”

“The day when I shall have no more disappointments, uncle, is not far off, now. Let me wait a little longer, and endure a little longer: I have learned to be patient, and to

hope for nothing. Fearing and failing, fearing and failing—that has been my life, ever since I was a young woman—the life I have become inured to by this time. If you are surprised, as I know you must be, at my not possessing myself of the letter, when I had the keys of the Myrtle Room in my hand, and when no one was near to stop me, remember the history of my life, and take that as an explanation. Fearing and failing, fearing and failing—if I told you all the truth, I could tell no more than that. Let us walk on, uncle.”

The resignation in her voice and manner while she spoke was the resignation of despair. It gave her an unnatural self-possession, which altered her, in the eyes of Uncle Joseph, almost past recognition. He looked at her in undisguised alarm.

“No!” he said, “we will not walk on; we will walk back to the dungeon-house; we will make another plan; we will try to get at this devil’s imp of a letter in some other way. I care for no Munders, no housekeepers, no Betzies—I! I care for nothing, but the getting you the one thing you want, and the taking you home again as easy in your mind as I am myself. Come! let us go back.”

“It is too late to go back.”

“How too late? Ah, dismal, dingy, dungeon-house of the devil, how I hate you!”

cried Uncle Joseph, looking back over the prospect, and shaking both his fists at Porthgenna Tower.

“It is too late, uncle,” she repeated. “Too late, because the opportunity is lost; too late, because if I could bring it back, I dare not go near the Myrtle Room again. My last hope was to change the hiding-place of the letter—and that last hope I have given up. I have only one object in life left now; you may help me in it; but I cannot tell you how, unless you come on with me at once—unless you say nothing more about going back to Porthgenna Tower.”

Uncle Joseph began to expostulate. His niece stopped him in the middle of a sentence, by touching him on the shoulder and pointing to a particular spot on the darkening slope of the moor below them.

“Look!” she said, “there is somebody on the path behind us. Is it a boy, or a man?”

Uncle Joseph looked through the fading light, and saw a figure at some little distance. It seemed like the figure of a boy, and he was apparently engaged in digging on the moor.

“Let us turn round, and go on at once,” pleaded Sarah, before the old man could answer her. “I can't say what I want to say to you, uncle, until we are safe under shelter at the inn.”

They went on, until they reached the highest ground on the moor. There, they stopped, and looked back again. The rest of their way lay down hill; and the spot on which they stood was the last point from which a view could be obtained of Porthgenna Tower.

“We have lost sight of the boy,” said Uncle Joseph looking over the ground below them.

Sarah’s younger and sharper eyes bore witness to the truth of her uncle’s words—the view over the moor was lonely now, in every direction, as far as she could see. Before going on again, she moved a little away from the old man, and looked at the tower of the ancient house, rising heavy and black in the dim light, with the dark sea-background stretching behind it like a wall. “Never again!” she whispered to herself. “Never, never, never again!” Her eyes wandered away to the church, and to the cemetery-inclosure by its side, barely distinguishable now in the shadows of the coming night. “Wait for me a little longer,” she said, looking towards the burial-ground with straining eyes, and pressing her hand on her bosom, over the place where the book of Hymns lay hid. “My wanderings are nearly at an end: the day for my coming home again is not far off!”

The tears filled her eyes, and shut out the

view. She rejoined her uncle, and taking his arm again, drew him rapidly a few steps along the downward path—then checked herself, as if struck by a sudden suspicion, and walked back a few paces to the highest ridge of the ground. “I am not sure,” she said, replying to her companion’s look of surprise—“I am not sure whether we have seen the last yet of that boy who was digging on the moor.”

As the words passed her lips, a figure stole out from behind one of the large fragments of granite-rock which were scattered over the waste on all sides of them. It was once more the figure of the boy, and again he began to dig, without the slightest apparent reason, on the barren ground at his feet.

“Yes, yes, I see,” said Uncle Joseph, as his niece eagerly directed his attention to the suspicious figure. “It is the same boy, and he is digging still—and, if you please, what of that?”

Sarah did not attempt to answer. “Let us get on,” she said hurriedly. “Let us get on as fast as we can to the inn.”

They turned again, and took the downward path before them. In less than a minute they had lost sight of Porthgenna Tower, of the old church, and of the whole of the western view. Still, though there was now nothing but the blank darkening moorland to look back at, Sarah persisted in stopping at frequent intervals, as

long as there was any light left, to glance behind her. She made no remark; she offered no excuse for thus delaying the journey back to the inn. It was only when they arrived within sight of the lights of the post-town that she ceased looking back, and that she spoke to her companion. The few words she addressed to him amounted to nothing more than a request that he would ask for a private sitting-room, as soon as they reached their place of sojourn for the night.

They ordered beds at the inn, and were shown into the best parlour to wait for supper. The moment they were alone, Sarah drew a chair close to the old man's side, and whispered these words in his ear:—

“Uncle! we have been followed every step of the way from Porthgenna Tower to this place.”

“So! so! And how do you know that?” inquired Uncle Joseph.

“Hush! Somebody may be listening at the door, somebody may be creeping under the window. You noticed that boy who was digging on the moor?——”

“Bah! Why, Sarah! do you frighten yourself, do you try to frighten me about a boy?”

“O, not so loud! not so loud! They have laid a trap for us. Uncle! I suspected it when we first entered the doors of Porthgenna Tower;

I am sure of it now. What did all that whispering mean between the housekeeper and the steward, when we first got into the hall? I watched their faces, and I know they were talking about us. They were not half surprised enough at seeing us, not half surprised enough at hearing what we wanted. Don't laugh at me, uncle! There is real danger: it is no fancy of mine. The keys—come closer—the keys of the north rooms have got new labels on them; the doors have all been numbered. Think of that! Think of the whispering when we came in, and the whispering afterwards, in the housekeeper's room, when you got up to go away. You noticed the sudden change in that man's behaviour, after the housekeeper spoke to him—you must have noticed it? They let us in too easily, and they let us out too easily. No, no! I am not deluding myself. There was some secret motive for letting us into the house, and some secret motive for letting us out again. That boy on the moor betrays it, if nothing else does. I saw him following us all the way here, as plainly as I see you. I am not frightened without reason, this time. As surely as we two are together in this room, there is a trap laid for us by the people at Porthgenna Tower!"

"A trap? What trap? And how? and why? and wherefore?" inquired Uncle Joseph, expressing bewilderment by waving both his

hands rapidly to and fro close before his eyes.

“They want to make me speak, they want to follow me, they want to find out where I go, they want to ask me questions,” she answered, trembling violently. “Uncle! you remember what I told you of those crazed words I said to Mrs. Frankland—I ought to have cut my tongue out rather than have spoken them! They have done dreadful mischief—I am certain of it—dreadful mischief already. I have made myself suspected! I shall be questioned, if Mrs. Frankland finds me out again. She will try to find me out—we shall be inquired after here—we must destroy all trace of where we go to next—we must make sure that the people at this inn can answer no questions—O, Uncle Joseph! whatever we do, let us make sure of that!”

“Good,” said the old man, nodding his head with a perfectly self-satisfied air. “Be quite easy, my child, and leave it to me to make sure. When you are gone to-bed, I shall send for the landlord, and I shall say, ‘Get us a little carriage, if you please, sir, to take us back again to-morrow to the coach for Truro.’”

“No, no, no! we must not hire a carriage here.”

“And I say, yes, yes, yes! We will hire a carriage here, because I will, first of all, make sure with the landlord. Listen. I shall say

to him, 'If there come after us, people, with inquisitive looks in their eyes and uncomfortable questions in their mouths—if you please, sir, hold your tongue.' Then, I shall wink my eye, I shall lay my finger, so, to the side of my nose, I shall give one little laugh that means much—and, crick! crack! I have made sure of the landlord! and there is an end of it!"

"We must not trust the landlord, uncle: we must not trust anybody. When we leave this place to-morrow, we must leave it on foot, and take care that no living soul follows us. Look! here is a map of West Cornwall hanging up on the wall, with roads and cross-roads all marked on it. We may find out, beforehand, what direction we ought to walk in. A night's rest will give me all the strength I want; and we have no luggage that we cannot carry. You have nothing but your knapsack, and I have nothing but the little carpet-bag you lent me. We can walk six, seven, even ten miles, with resting by the way. Come here, and look at the map—pray, pray come and look at the map!"

Protesting against the abandonment of his own project, which he declared, and sincerely believed, to be perfectly adapted to meet the emergency in which they were placed, Uncle Joseph joined his niece in examining the map. A little beyond the post-town, a cross-road was

marked, running northward at right angles with the highway that led to Truro, and conducting to another road, which looked large enough to be a coach-road, and which led through a town of sufficient importance to have its name printed in capital letters. On discovering this, Sarah proposed that they should follow the cross-road (which did not appear on the map to be more than five or six miles long) on foot, abstaining from taking any conveyance until they had arrived at the town marked in capital letters. By pursuing this course, they would destroy all trace of their progress, after leaving the post-town—unless, indeed, they were followed on foot from this place, as they had been followed over the moor. In the event of any fresh difficulty of that sort occurring, Sarah had no better remedy to propose than lingering on the road till after night-fall, and leaving it to the darkness to baffle the vigilance of any person who might be watching in the distance to see where they went.

Uncle Joseph shrugged his shoulders resignedly when his niece gave her reasons for wishing to continue the journey on foot. "There is much tramping through dust, and much looking behind us, and much spying and peeping, and suspecting, and roundabout walking in all this," he said. "It is by no means so easy, my child, as making sure of the land-

lord, and sitting at our ease on the cushions of the stage coach. But if you will have it so, so shall it be. What you please, Sarah; what you please—that is all the opinion of my own that I allow myself to have till we are back again at Truro, and are resting for good and all at the end of our journey.”

“At the end of *your* journey, uncle: I dare not say at the end of *mine*.”

Those few words changed the old man's face in an instant. His eyes fixed reproachfully on his niece, his ruddy cheeks lost their colour, his restless hands dropped suddenly to his sides. “Sarah!” he said, in a low, quiet tone, which seemed to have no relation to the voice in which he spoke on ordinary occasions—“Sarah! have you the heart to leave me again?”

“Have I the courage to stay in Cornwall? That is the question to ask me, uncle. If I had only my own heart to consult, O, how gladly I should live under your roof—live under it, if you would let me, to my dying day! But my lot is not cast for such rest and such happiness as that. The fear that I have of being questioned by Mrs. Frankland drives me away from Porthgenna, away from Cornwall, away from you. Even my dread of the letter being found, is hardly so great now, as my dread of being traced and questioned. I have said what I

ought not to have said already. If I find myself in Mrs. Frankland's presence again, there is nothing that she might not draw out of me. O, my God! to think of that kind-hearted, lovely young woman, who brings happiness with her wherever she goes, bringing terror to me! Terror when her pitying eyes look at me; terror when her kind voice speaks to me; terror when her tender hand touches mine! Uncle! when Mrs. Frankland comes to Porthgenna, the very children will crowd about her—every creature in that poor village will be drawn towards the light of her beauty and her goodness, as if it was the sunshine of Heaven itself; and I—I, of all living beings—must shun her as if she was a pestilence! The day when she comes into Cornwall is the day when I must go out of it—the day when we two must say farewell. Don't, don't add to the wretchedness of that, by asking me if I have the heart to leave you! For my dead mother's sake, Uncle Joseph, believe that I am grateful, believe that it is not my own will that takes me away when I leave you again." She sank down on a sofa near her, laid her head, with one long, deep sigh, wearily on the pillow, and spoke no more.

The tears gathered thick in Uncle Joseph's eyes as he sat down by her side. He took one of her hands, and patted and stroked it as

though he were soothing a little child. "I will bear it as well as I can, Sarah," he whispered faintly, "and I will say no more. You will write to me sometimes, when I am left all alone? You will give a little time to Uncle Joseph, for the poor dead mother's sake?"

She turned towards him suddenly, and threw both her arms round his neck with a passionate energy that was strangely at variance with her naturally quiet self-repressed character. "I will write often, dear; I will write always," she whispered, with her head on his bosom. "If I am ever in any trouble or danger, you shall know it." She stopped confusedly, as if the freedom of her own words and actions terrified her, unclasped her arms, and, turning abruptly away from the old man, hid her face in her hands. The tyranny of the restraint that governed her whole life was all expressed—how sadly, how eloquently!—in that one little action.

Uncle Joseph rose from the sofa, and walked gently backwards and forwards in the room, looking anxiously at his niece, but not speaking to her. After a while, the servant came in to prepare the table for supper. It was a welcome interruption, for it obliged Sarah to make an effort to recover her self-possession. After the meal was over, the uncle and niece separated at once for the night, without venturing to

exchange another word on the subject of their approaching separation.

When they met the next morning, the old man had not recovered his spirits. Although he tried to speak as cheerfully as usual, there was something strangely subdued and quiet about him in voice, look, and manner. Sarah's heart smote her as she saw how sadly he was altered by the prospect of their parting. She said a few words of consolation and hope; but he only waved his hand negatively, in his quaint foreign manner, and hastened out of the room to find the landlord and ask for the bill.

Soon after breakfast, to the surprise of the people at the inn, they set forth to continue their journey on foot, Uncle Joseph carrying his knapsack on his back, and his niece's carpet-bag in his hand. When they arrived at the turning that led into the cross-road, they both stopped and looked back. This time they saw nothing to alarm them. There was no living creature visible on the broad highway over which they had been walking for the last quarter of an hour, after leaving the inn.

"The way is clear," said Uncle Joseph, as they turned into the cross-road. "Whatever might have happened yesterday, there is nobody following us now."

"Nobody that we can see," answered Sarah. "But I distrust the very stones by the roadside.

Let us look back often, uncle, before we allow ourselves to feel secure. The more I think of it, the more I dread the snare that is laid for us by those people at Porthgenna Tower."

"You say *us*, Sarah. Why should they lay a snare for *me*?"

"Because they have seen you in my company. You will be safer from them when we are parted; and that is another reason, Uncle Joseph, why we should bear the misfortune of our separation as patiently as we can.

"Are you going far, very far away, Sarah, when you leave me?"

"I dare not stop on my journey till I can feel that I am lost in the great world of London. Don't look at me so sadly! I shall never forget my promise; I shall never forget to write. I have friends—not friends like you, but still friends—to whom I can go. I can feel safe from discovery nowhere but in London. My danger is great—it is, it is, indeed! I know, from what I have seen at Porthgenna, that Mrs. Frankland has an interest already in finding me out; and I am certain that this interest will be increased tenfold when she hears (as she is sure to hear) of what happened yesterday in the house. If they *should* trace you to Truro, O, be careful, uncle! be careful how you deal with them; be careful how you answer their questions!"

"I will answer nothing, my child. But tell

me—for I want to know all the little chances that there are of your coming back—tell me, if Mrs. Frankland finds the letter, what shall you do then ? ”

At that question Sarah’s hand, which had been resting languidly on her uncle’s arm while they walked together, closed on it suddenly. “ Even if Mrs. Frankland gets into the Myrtle Room,” she said, stopping and looking affrightedly about her while she replied, “ she may not find the letter. It is folded up so small ; it is hidden in such an unlikely place.”

“ But if she does find it ? ”

“ If she does, there will be more reason than ever for my being miles and miles away.” As she gave that answer, she raised both her hands to her heart, and pressed them firmly over it. A slight distortion passed rapidly across her features ; her eyes closed ; her face flushed all over—then turned paler again than ever. She drew out her pocket-handkerchief, and passed it several times over her face, on which the perspiration had gathered thickly. The old man, who had looked behind him when his niece stopped, under the impression that she had just seen somebody following them, observed this latter action, and asked if she felt too hot. She shook her head, and took his arm again to go on, breathing, as he fancied, with some difficulty. He proposed that they should sit down by the roadside and

rest a little; but she only answered, "Not yet." So they went on for another half hour; then turned to look behind them again, and, still seeing nobody, sat down for a little while to rest on a bank by the wayside.

After stopping twice more at convenient resting-places, they reached the end of the cross-road. On the highway to which it led them, they were overtaken by a man driving an empty cart, who offered to give them a lift as far as the next town. They accepted the proposal gratefully; and, arriving at the town, after a drive of half an hour, were set down at the door of the principal inn. Finding on inquiry at this place that they were too late for the coach, they took a private conveyance, which brought them to Truro late in the afternoon. Throughout the whole of the journey, from the time when they left the post-town of Porthgenna to the time when they stopped, by Sarah's desire, at the coach-office in Truro, they had seen nothing to excite the smallest suspicions that their movements were being observed. None of the people whom they saw in the inhabited places, or whom they passed on the road, appeared to take more than the most casual notice of them.

It was five o'clock when they entered the office at Truro to ask about conveyances running in the direction of Exeter. They were informed

that a coach would start in an hour's time, and that another coach would pass through Truro at eight o'clock the next morning.

You will not go to-night?" pleaded Uncle Joseph. "You will wait, my child, and rest with me till to-morrow?"

"I had better go, uncle, while I have some little resolution left," was the sad answer.

"But you are so pale, so tired, so weak."

"I shall never be stronger than I am now. Don't set my own heart against me! It is hard enough to go without that."

Uncle Joseph sighed, and said no more. He led the way across the road and down the bye-streets to his house. The cheerful man in the shop was polishing a piece of wood behind the counter, sitting in the same position in which Sarah had seen him when she first looked through the window on her arrival at Truro. He had good news for his master of orders received, but Uncle Joseph listened absently to all that his shopman said, and hastened into the little back parlour without the faintest reflection of its customary smile on his face. "If I had no shop and no orders I might go away with you, Sarah," he said when he and his niece were alone. "Aïe! Aïe! the setting out on this journey has been the only happy part of it. Sit down and rest, my child. I must put my best face upon it, and get you some tea."

When the tea-tray had been placed on the table, he left the room, and returned after an absence of some little time with a basket in his hand. When the porter came to carry the luggage to the coach office, he would not allow the basket to be taken away at the same time, but sat down and placed it between his feet while he occupied himself in pouring out a cup of tea for his niece.

The musical-box still hung at his side in its travelling-case of leather. As soon as he had poured out the cup of tea, he unbuckled the strap, removed the covering from the box, and placed it on the table near him. His eyes wandered hesitatingly towards Sarah, as he did this: he leaned forward, his lips trembling a little, his hand trifling uneasily with the empty leather-case that now lay on his knees, and said to her in low, unsteady tones:—

“You will hear a little farewell song of Mozart? It may be a long time, Sarah, before he can play to you again. A little farewell song, my child, before you go?”

His hand stole up gently from the leather-case to the table, and set the box playing the same air that Sarah had heard on the evening when she entered the parlour, after her journey from Somersetshire, and found him sitting alone listening to the music. What depths of sorrow there were now in those few simple notes!

What mournful memories of past times gathered and swelled in the heart at the bidding of that one little plaintive melody! Sarah could not summon the courage to lift her eyes to the old man's face—they might have betrayed to him that she was thinking of the days when the box that he treasured so dearly, played the air they were listening to now, by the bedside of his dying child.

The stop had not been set, and the melody, after it had come to an end, began again. But now, after the first few bars, the notes succeeded one another more and more slowly—the air grew less and less recognisable—dropped at last to three notes, following each other at long intervals—then ceased altogether. The chain that governed the action of the machinery had all run out: Mozart's farewell song was silenced on a sudden, like a voice that had broken down.

The old man started, looked earnestly at his niece, and threw the leather-case over the box as if he desired to shut out the sight of it. "The music stopped so," he whispered to himself, in his own language, "when little Joseph died! Don't go!" he added quickly, in English, almost before Sarah had time to feel surprised at the singular change that had taken place in his voice and manner. "Don't go! Think better of it, and stop with me."

"I have no choice, uncle, but to leave you—

indeed, indeed I have not! You don't think me ungrateful? Comfort me at the last moment by telling me that!"

He pressed her hand in silence, and kissed her on both cheeks. "My heart is very heavy for you, Sarah," he said. "The fear has come to me that it is not for your own good that you are going away from Uncle Joseph, now!"

"I have no choice," she sadly repeated, "no choice but to leave you."

"It is time then to get the parting over." The cloud of doubt and fear that had altered his face, from the moment when the music came to its untimely end, seemed to darken, when he had said those words. He took up the basket which he had kept so carefully at his feet, and led the way out in silence.

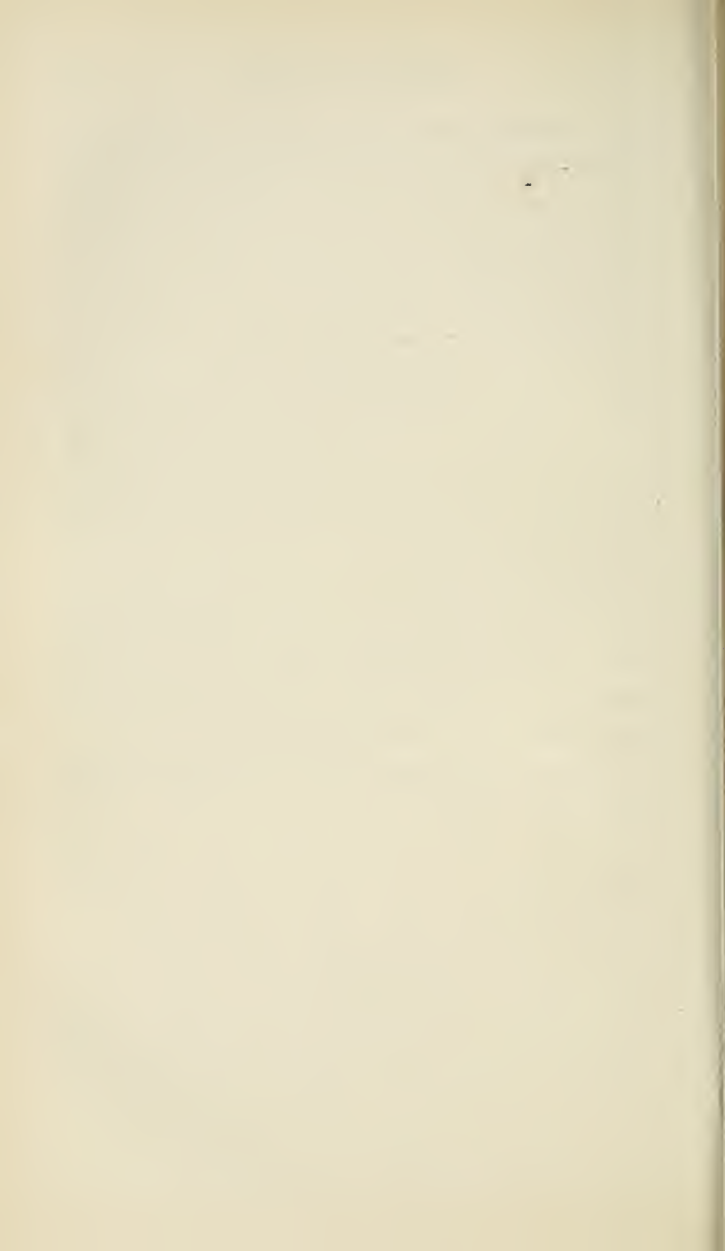
They were barely in time: the driver was mounting to his seat when they got to the coach-office. "God preserve you, my child, and send you back to me soon, safe and well. Take the basket on your lap; there are some little things in it for your journey." His voice faltered at the last word, and Sarah felt his lips pressed on her hand. The next instant the door was closed, and she saw him dimly through her tears standing among the idlers on the pavement, who were waiting to see the coach drive off.

By the time they were a little way out of the

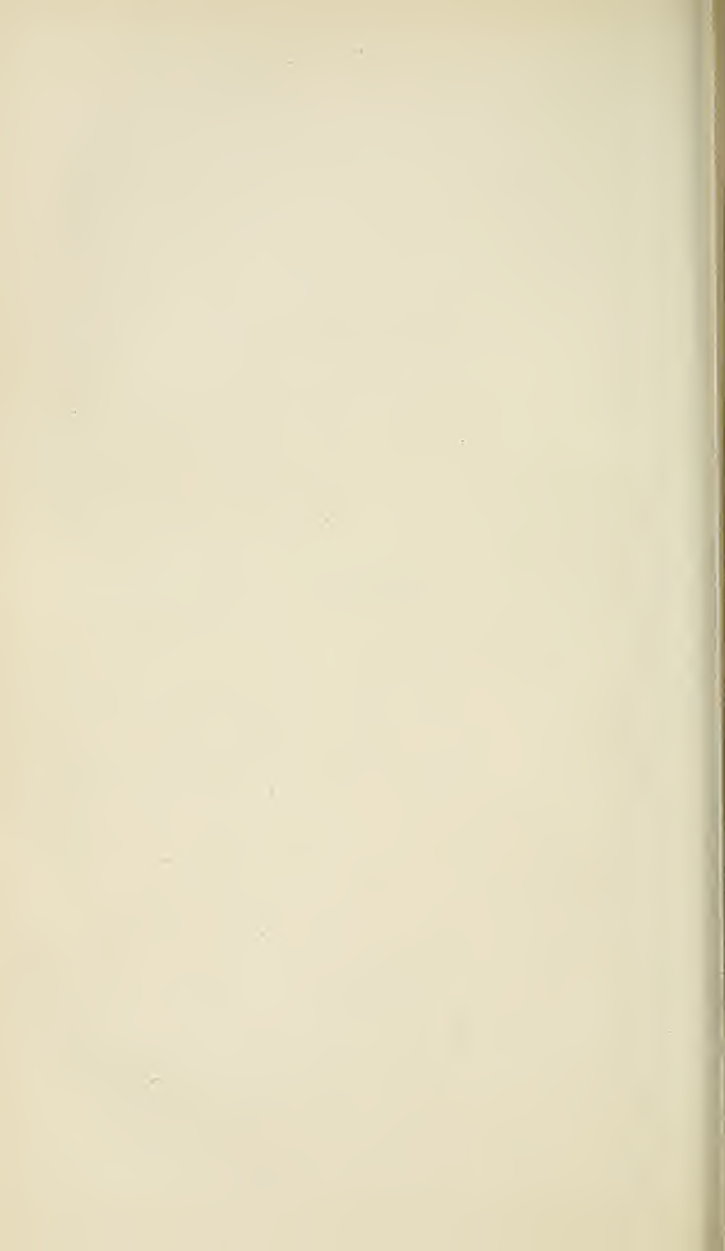
town, she was able to dry her eyes and look into the basket. It contained a pot of jam and a horn spoon, a small inlaid workbox from the stock in the shop, a piece of foreign-looking cheese, a French roll, and a little paper-packet of money, with the words, "Don't be angry!" written on it, in Uncle Joseph's hand. Sarah closed the cover of the basket again, and drew down her veil. She had not felt the sorrow of the parting in all its bitterness until that moment. Oh, how hard it was to be banished from the sheltering home that was offered to her by the one friend she had left in the world!

While that thought was in her mind, the old man was just closing the door of his lonely parlour. His eyes wandered to the tea-tray on the table and to Sarah's empty cup, and he whispered to himself in his own language again:

"The music stopped so, when little Joseph died!"



BOOK V.



CHAPTER I.



AN OLD FRIEND AND A NEW SCHEME.

IN declaring, positively, that the boy whom she had seen digging on the moor had followed her uncle and herself to the post-town of Porthgenna, Sarah had asserted the literal truth. Jacob had tracked them to the inn, had waited a little while about the door, to ascertain if there was any likelihood of their continuing their journey that evening, and had then returned to Porthgenna Tower to make his report, and to claim his promised reward.

The same night, the housekeeper and the steward devoted themselves to the joint production of a letter to Mrs. Frankland, informing her of all that had taken place, from the time when the visitors first made their appearance, to the time when the gardener's boy had followed them to the door of the inn. The composition was plentifully garnished throughout with the flowers of Mr. Munder's rhetoric, and was, by a necessary consequence, inordinately long as a

narrative, and hopelessly confused as a statement of facts.

It is unnecessary to say that the letter, with all its faults and absurdities, was read by Mrs. Frankland with the deepest interest. Her husband and Mr. Orridge, to both of whom she communicated its contents, were as much amazed and perplexed by it as she was herself. Although the discovery of Mrs. Jazeph's departure for Cornwall had led them to consider it within the range of possibility that she might appear at Porthgenna, and although the house-keeper had been written to by Rosamond under the influence of that idea, neither she nor her husband were quite prepared for such a speedy confirmation of their suspicions as they had now received. Their astonishment, however, on first ascertaining the general purport of the letter, was as nothing compared with their astonishment when they came to those particular passages in it which referred to Uncle Joseph. The fresh element of complication imparted to the thickening mystery of Mrs. Jazeph and the Myrtle Room, by the entrance of the foreign stranger on the scene, and by his intimate connection with the extraordinary proceedings that had taken place in the house, fairly baffled them all. The letter was read again and again; was critically dissected paragraph by paragraph; was carefully annotated by the doctor, for the purpose

of extricating all the facts that it contained from the mass of unmeaning words in which Mr. Munder had artfully and lengthily involved them ; and was finally pronounced, after all the pains that had been taken to render it intelligible, to be the most mysterious and bewildering document that mortal pen had ever produced.

The first practical suggestion, after the letter had been laid aside in despair, emanated from Rosamond. She proposed that her husband and herself (the baby included, as a matter of course), should start at once for Porthgenna, to question the servants minutely about the proceedings of Mrs. Jazeph and the foreign stranger who had accompanied her, and to examine the premises on the north side of the house, with a view to discovering a clue to the locality of the Myrtle Room, while events were still fresh in the memories of witnesses. The plan thus advocated, however excellent in itself, was opposed by Mr. Orridge on medical grounds. Mrs. Frankland had caught cold by exposing herself too carelessly to the air, on first leaving her room, and the doctor refused to grant her permission to travel for at least a week to come, if not for a longer period.

The next proposal came from Mr. Frankland. He declared it to be perfectly clear to his mind, that the only chance of penetrating the mystery of the Myrtle Room, rested entirely on the dis-

covery of some means of communicating with Mrs. Jazeph. He suggested that they should not trouble themselves to think of anything unconnected with the accomplishment of this purpose ; and he proposed that the servant then in attendance on him at West Winston—a man who had been in his employment for many years, and whose zeal, activity, and intelligence could be thoroughly depended on—should be sent to Porthgenna forthwith, to start the necessary inquiries, and to examine the premises carefully on the north side of the house.

This advice was immediately acted on. At an hour's notice, the servant started for Cornwall, thoroughly instructed as to what he was to do, and well supplied with money, in case he found it necessary to employ many persons in making the proposed inquiries. In due course of time he sent a report of his proceedings to his master. It proved to be of a most discouraging nature.

All trace of Mrs. Jazeph and her companion had been lost at the post-town of Porthgenna. Investigations had been made in every direction, but no reliable information had been obtained. People in totally different parts of the country declared readily enough that they had seen two persons answering to the description of the lady in the dark dress and the old foreigner ; but when they were called upon to state the direction in which the two strangers were travelling, the

answers received turned out to be of the most puzzling and contradictory kind. No pains had been spared, no necessary expenditure of money had been grudged; but, so far, no results of the slightest value had been obtained. Whether the lady and the foreigner had gone east, west, north or south, was more than Mr. Frankland's servant, at the present stage of the proceedings, could take it on himself to say.

The report of the examination of the north rooms was not more satisfactory. Here, again, nothing of any importance could be discovered. The servant had ascertained that there were twenty-two rooms on the uninhabited side of the house:—six on the ground floor opening into the deserted garden: eight on the first floor, and eight above that, on the second story. He had examined all the doors carefully from top to bottom, and had come to the conclusion that none of them had been opened. The evidence afforded by the lady's own actions led to nothing. She had, if the testimony of the servant could be trusted, dropped the keys on the floor of the hall. She was found, as the housekeeper and the steward asserted, lying, in a fainting condition, at the top of the landing of the first flight of stairs. The door opposite to her, in this position, showed no more traces of having been recently opened than any of the other doors of the other twenty-one rooms. Whether the room

to which she wished to gain access was one of the eight on the first floor, or whether she had fainted on her way up to the higher range of eight rooms on the second floor, it was impossible to determine. The only conclusions that could be fairly drawn from the events that had taken place in the house, were two in number. First, it might be taken for granted, that the lady had been disturbed before she had been able to use the keys to gain admission to the Myrtle Room. Secondly, it might be assumed from the position in which she was found on the stairs and from the evidence relating to the dropping of the keys, that the Myrtle Room was not on the ground floor, but was one of the sixteen rooms situated on the first and second stories. Beyond this, the writer of the report had nothing further to mention, except that he had ventured to decide on waiting at Porthgenna, in the event of his master having any further instructions to communicate.

What was to be done next? That was necessarily the first question suggested by the servant's announcement of the unsuccessful result of his inquiries at Porthgenna. How it was to be answered, was not very easy to discover. Mrs. Frankland had nothing to suggest, Mr. Frankland had nothing to suggest, the doctor had nothing to suggest. The more industriously they all three hunted through

their minds for a new idea, the less chance there seemed to be of their succeeding in finding one. At last, Rosamond proposed, in despair, that they should seek the advice of some fourth person who could be depended on; and asked her husband's permission to write a confidential statement of their difficulties to the Vicar of Long Beckley. Doctor Chennery was their oldest friend and adviser; he had known them both as children; he was well acquainted with the history of their families; he felt a fatherly interest in their fortunes; and he possessed that invaluable quality of plain clear-headed common sense, which marked him out as the very man who would be most likely, as well as most willing, to help them.

Mr. Frankland readily agreed to his wife's suggestion; and Rosamond wrote immediately to Doctor Chennery, informing him of everything that had happened since Mrs. Jazeph's first introduction to her, and asking him for his opinion on the course of proceeding which it would be best for her husband and herself to adopt, in the difficulty in which they were now placed. By return of post an answer was received, which amply justified Rosamond's reliance on her old friend. Dr. Chennery not only sympathised heartily with the eager curiosity which Mrs. Jazeph's language and conduct had excited in the mind of his correspondent, but he

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had also a plan of his own to propose for ascertaining the position of the Myrtle Room.

The vicar prefaced his suggestion by expressing a strong opinion against instituting any further search after Mrs. Jazeph. Judging by the circumstances, as they were related to him, he considered that it would be the merest waste of time to attempt to find her out. Accordingly, he passed from that part of the subject at once, and devoted himself to the consideration of the more important question, How Mr. and Mrs. Frankland were to proceed in the endeavour to discover for themselves the mystery of the Myrtle Room?

On this point, Doctor Chennery entertained a conviction of the strongest kind; and he warned Rosamond, beforehand, that she must expect to be very much surprised when he came to the statement of it. Taking it for granted that she and her husband could not hope to find out where the room was, unless they were assisted by some one better acquainted than themselves with the old local arrangements of the interior of Porthgenna Tower, the vicar declared it to be his opinion that there was only one individual living who could afford them the information they wanted, and that this person was no other than Rosamond's own cross-grained relative, Andrew Treverton.

This startling opinion Doctor Chennery sup-

ported by two reasons. In the first place, Andrew was the only surviving member of the elder generation who had lived at Porthgenna Tower, in the bygone days when all traditions connected with the north rooms were still fresh in the memories of the inhabitants of the house. The people who lived in it now, were strangers who had been placed in their situations by Mr. Frankland's father ; and the servants employed in former days by Captain Treverton were dead or dispersed. The one available person, therefore, whose recollections were likely to be of any service to Mr. and Mrs. Frankland, was indisputably the brother of the old owner of Porthgenna Tower.

In the second place, there was the chance, even if Andrew Treverton's memory was not to be trusted, that he might possess written or printed information relating to the locality of the Myrtle Room. By his father's will—which had been made when Andrew was a young man just going to college, and which had not been altered at the period of his departure from England, or at any after time—he had inherited the choice old collection of books in the library at Porthgenna. Supposing that he still preserved these heir-looms, it was highly probable that there might exist among them some plan, or some description of the house as it was in the olden time, which would supply all the information that was

wanted. Here, then, was another valid reason for believing that if a clue to the position of the Myrtle Room existed anywhere, Andrew Treverton was the man to lay his hand on it.

Assuming it, therefore, to be proved that the surly old misanthrope was the only person who could be profitably applied to for the requisite information, the next question was, How to communicate with him? The vicar understood perfectly that after Andrew's inexcusably heartless conduct towards her father and mother, it was quite impossible for Rosamond to address any direct application to him. That obstacle, however, might be surmounted by making the necessary communication proceed from Doctor Chennery. Heartily as the vicar disliked Andrew Treverton personally, and strongly as he disapproved of the old misanthrope's principles, he was willing to set aside his own antipathies and objections to serve the interests of his young friends; and he expressed his perfect readiness, if Rosamond and her husband approved of the proceeding, to write and recall himself to Andrew's recollection, and to ask, as if it was a matter of antiquarian curiosity, for information on the subject of the north side of Porthgenna Tower, including, of course, a special request to be made acquainted with the names by which the rooms had been individually known in former days.

In making this offer, the vicar frankly acknowledged that he thought the chances were very much against his receiving any answer at all to his application, no matter how carefully he might word it, with a view to humouring Andrew's churlish peculiarities. However, considering that, in the present posture of affairs, a forlorn hope was better than no hope at all, he thought it was at least worth while to make the attempt, on the plan which he had just suggested. If Mr. and Mrs. Frankland could devise any better means of opening communications with Andrew Treverton, or if they had discovered any new method of their own for obtaining the information of which they stood in need, Doctor Chennery was perfectly ready to set aside his own opinions and to defer to theirs. In any case he could only conclude by begging them to remember that he considered their interests as his own, and that all the service he could render them was cheerfully and heartily placed at their disposal.

A very brief consideration of the vicar's friendly letter convinced Rosamond and her husband that they had no choice but gratefully to accept the offer which it contained. The chances were certainly against the success of the proposed application; but were they more unfavourable than the chances against the success of any unaided investigations at Porth-

genna? There was, at least, a faint hope of Doctor Chennery's request for information producing some results; but there seemed no hope at all of penetrating a mystery connected with one room only, by dint of wandering, in perfect ignorance of what to search for, through two ranges of rooms which reached the number of sixteen. Influenced by these considerations, Rosamond wrote back to the vicar to thank him for his kindness, and to beg that he would communicate with Andrew Treverton, as he had proposed, without a moment's delay.

Doctor Chennery immediately occupied himself in the composition of the important letter, taking care to make the application on purely antiquarian grounds, and accounting for his assumed curiosity on the subject of the interior of Porthgenna Tower, by referring to his former knowledge of the Treverton family, and to his natural interest in the old house with which their name and fortunes had been so closely connected. After appealing to Andrew's early recollections for the information that he wanted, he ventured a step farther, and alluded to the library of old books, mentioning his own idea that there might be found among them some plan or verbal description of the house, which might prove to be of the greatest service, in the event of Mr. Treverton's memory not having preserved

all particulars in connection with the names and positions of the north rooms. In conclusion, he took the liberty of mentioning that the loan of any document of the kind to which he had alluded, or the permission to have extracts made from it, would be thankfully acknowledged as a great favour conferred; and he added, in a postscript, that, in order to save Mr. Treverton all trouble, a messenger would call for any answer he might be disposed to give, the day after the delivery of the letter. Having completed the application in these terms, the vicar (with many secret misgivings as to results) inclosed it under cover to his man of business in London, with directions that it was to be delivered by a trustworthy person, and that the messenger was to call again the next morning to know if there was any answer.

Three days after this letter had been despatched to its destination—at which time no tidings of any sort had been received from Doctor Chennery—Rosamond at last obtained her medical attendant's permission to travel. Taking leave of Mr. Orridge, with many promises to let him know what progress they made towards discovering the position of the Myrtle Room, Mr. and Mrs. Frankland turned their backs on West Winston, and, for the third time, started on the journey to Porthgenna Tower.

CHAPTER II.



THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

IT was baking day in the establishment of Mr. Andrew Treverton, when the messenger intrusted with Doctor Chennery's letter found his way to the garden-door of the cottage at Bayswater. After he had rung three times, he heard a gruff voice, on the other side of the wall, roaring at him to let the bell alone, and asking who he was, and what the devil he wanted.

"A letter for Mr. Treverton," said the messenger, nervously backing away from the door while he spoke.

"Chuck it over the wall then, and be off with you!" answered the gruff voice.

The messenger obeyed both injunctions. He was a meek, modest, elderly man; and when Nature mixed up the ingredients of his disposition, the capability of resenting injuries was not among them.

The man with the gruff voice—or, to put it in

plainer terms, the man Shrowl—picked up the letter, weighed it in his hand, looked at the address on it with an expression of contemptuous curiosity in his bull-terrier's eyes, put it in his waistcoat pocket, and walked round lazily to the kitchen entrance of the cottage.

In the apartment which would probably have been called the pantry, if the house had belonged to civilised tenants, a hand-mill had been set up ; and, at the moment when Shrowl made his way to this room, Mr. Treverton was engaged in asserting his independence of all the millers in England, by grinding his own corn. He paused irritably in turning the handle of the mill, when his servant appeared at the door.

“What do you come here for?” he asked. “When the flour's ready, I'll call for you. Don't let's look at each other oftener than we can help ! I never set eyes on you, Shrowl, but I ask myself whether, in the whole range of creation, there is any animal as ugly as man ? I saw a cat this morning, on the garden wall, and there wasn't a single point in which you would bear comparison with him. The cat's eyes were clear—yours are muddy. The cat's nose was straight—yours is crooked. The cat's whiskers were clean—yours are dirty. The cat's coat fitted him—yours hangs about you like a sack. I tell you again, Shrowl, the species to which you (and I) belong, is the ugliest on the whole face of creation. Don't

let us revolt each other by keeping in company any longer. Go away, you last, worst, infirmerest freak of Nature—go away !”

Shrowl listened to this complimentary address with an aspect of surly serenity. When it had come to an end, he took the letter from his waistcoat pocket, without condescending to make any reply. He was, by this time, too thoroughly conscious of his own power over his master to attach the smallest importance to anything that Mr. Treverton might say to him.

“ Now you’ve done your talking, suppose you take a look at that,” said Shrowl, dropping the letter carelessly on a deal-table by his master’s side. “ It isn’t often that people trouble themselves to send letters to you—is it? Who do you think it comes from? I wonder whether your niece has took a fancy to write to you? It was put in the papers, the other day, that she’d got a son and heir. Open the letter, and see if it’s an invitation to the christening. The thing wouldn’t be complete without you; the company would be sure to want your smiling face at the table to make ’em jolly. Just let me take a grind at the mill, while you go out and get a silver mug. The son and heir expects a mug, you know, and his nurse expects half-a-guinea, and his mamma expects all your fortune. What a pleasure to make the three innocent

creeturs happy ! It's shocking to see you pulling wry faces, like that, over the letter. Lord ! lord ! where can all your natural affection have gone to ?——”

“If I only knew where to lay my hand on a gag, I'd cram it into your infernal mouth !” cried Mr. Treverton. “How dare you talk to me about my niece ? You wretch ! you know I hate her for her mother's sake. What do you mean by harping perpetually on my fortune ? Sooner than leave it to the play-actress's child, I'd even leave it to you ; and sooner than leave it to you, I would take every farthing of it out in a boat, and bury it for ever at the bottom of the sea !” Venting his dissatisfaction in these strong terms, Mr. Treverton snatched up Doctor Chenner's letter, and tore it open in a humour which by no means promised favourably for the success of the vicar's application.

He read the letter with an ominous scowl on his face, which grew darker and darker as he got nearer and nearer to the end. When he came to the signature his humour changed, and he laughed sardonically. “Faithfully yours, Robert Chenner,” he repeated to himself. “Yes ! Faithfully mine, if I humour your whim. And what if I don't, Parson ?” He paused, and looked at the letter again, the scowl re-appearing on his face as he did so. “There's a lie of some kind lurking about under these

lines of fair writing," he muttered suspiciously. "I am not one of his congregation: the law gives him no privilege of imposing on *me*. What does he mean by making the attempt?" He stopped again, reflected a little, looked up suddenly at Shrowl, and said to him:—

"Have you lit the oven fire yet?"

"No, I hav'n't," answered Shrowl.

Mr. Treverton examined the letter for the third time—hesitated—then slowly tore it in half, and tossed the two pieces over contemptuously to his servant.

"Light the fire at once," he said. "And, if you want paper, there it is for you. Stop!" he added, after Shrowl had picked up the torn letter. "If anybody comes here to-morrow morning to ask for an answer, tell them I gave you the letter to light the fire with, and say that's the answer." With those words Mr. Treverton returned to the mill, and began to grind at it again, with a grin of malicious satisfaction on his haggard face.

Shrowl withdrew into the kitchen, closed the door, and, placing the torn pieces of the letter together on the dresser, applied himself, with the coolest deliberation, to the business of reading it. When he had gone slowly and carefully through it, from the address at the beginning to the name at the end, he scratched reflectively for a little while at his ragged

neglected beard, then folded the letter up carefully and put it in his pocket.

“I’ll have another look at it, later in the day,” he thought to himself, tearing off a piece of an old newspaper to light the fire with. “It strikes me, just at present, that there may be better things done with this letter than burning it.”

Resolutely abstaining from taking the letter out of his pocket again, until all the duties of the household for that day had been duly performed, Shrowl lit the fire, occupied the morning in making and baking the bread, and patiently took his turn afterwards at digging in the kitchen-garden. It was four o’clock in the afternoon before he felt himself at liberty to think of his private affairs, and to venture on retiring into solitude with the object of secretly looking over the letter again.

A second perusal of Doctor Chennery’s unlucky application to Mr. Treverton helped to confirm Shrowl in his resolution not to destroy the letter. With great pains and perseverance and much incidental scratching at his beard, he contrived to make himself master of three distinct points in it, which stood out, in his estimation, as possessing prominent and serious importance. The first point which he contrived to establish clearly in his mind was, that the person who signed the name of Robert Chennery was desirous of examining a plan,

or printed account, of the north side of the interior of a certain old house in Cornwall, called Porthgenna Tower. The second point appeared to resolve itself into this:—that Robert Chenery believed some such plan, or printed account, might be found among the collection of books belonging to Mr. Treverton. The third point was, that this same Robert Chenery would receive the loan of the plan or printed account as one of the greatest favours that could be conferred on him. Meditating on the latter fact, with an eye exclusively fixed on the contemplation of his own interests, Shrowl arrived at the conclusion that it might be well worth his while, in a pecuniary point of view, to try if he could not privately place himself in a position to oblige Robert Chenery by searching in secret among his master's books. "It might be worth a five-pound note to me, if I managed it well," thought Shrowl, putting the letter back in his pocket again, and ascending the stairs thoughtfully to the lumber-rooms at the top of the house.

These rooms were two in number, were entirely unfurnished, and were littered all over with the rare collection of books which had once adorned the library at Porthgenna Tower. Covered with dust, and scattered in all directions and positions over the floor, lay hundreds and hundreds of volumes, cast out of their packing-

cases as coals are cast out of their sacks into a cellar. Ancient books, which students would have treasured as priceless, lay in chaotic equality of neglect side by side with modern publications whose chief merit was the beauty of the binding by which they were enclosed. Into this wilderness of scattered volumes Shrowl now wandered, fortified by the supreme self-possession of ignorance, to search resolutely for one particular book, with no other light to direct him than the faint glimmer of the two guiding words, Porthgenna Tower. Having got them firmly fixed in his mind, his next object was to search until he found them printed on the first page of any one of the hundreds of volumes that lay around him. This was, for the time being, emphatically his business in life, and there he now stood, in the largest of the two attics, doggedly prepared to do it.

He cleared away space enough with his feet to enable him to sit down comfortably on the floor, and then began to look over all the books that lay within arm's length of him. Odd volumes of rare editions of the classics, odd volumes of the English historians, odd volumes of plays by the Elizabethan dramatists, books of travel, books of sermons, books of jests, books of natural history, books of sports, turned up in quaint and rapid succession; but no book containing on the title-page the words "Porth-

genna Tower," rewarded the searching industry of Shrowl for the first ten minutes after he had sat himself down on the floor.

Before removing to another position, and contending with a fresh accumulation of literary lumber, he paused and considered a little with himself, whether there might not be some easier and more orderly method than any he had yet devised of working his way through the scattered mass of volumes which yet remained to be examined. The result of his reflections was, that it would be less confusing to him if he searched through the books in all parts of the room indifferently, regulating his selection of them solely by their various sizes; disposing of all the largest to begin with; then, after stowing them away together, proceeding to the next largest, and so going on until he came down at last to the pocket-volumes. Accordingly, he cleared away another morsel of vacant space, near the wall, and then, trampling over the books as coolly as if they were so many clods of earth on a ploughed field, picked out the largest of all the volumes that lay on the floor.

It was an atlas, Shrowl turned over the maps, reflected, shook his head, and removed the volume to the vacant space which he had cleared close to the wall.

The next largest book was a magnificently bound collection of engraved portraits of dis-

tinguished characters. Shrowl saluted the distinguished characters with a grunt of gothic disapprobation, and carried them off to keep the atlas company against the wall.

The third largest book lay under several others. It projected a little at one end, and it was bound in scarlet morocco. In another position, or bound in a quieter colour, it would probably have escaped notice. Shrowl drew it out with some difficulty, opened it with a portentous frown of distrust, looked at the title-page—and suddenly slapped his thigh with a great oath of exultation. There were the very two words of which he was in search, staring him in the face, as it were, with all the emphasis of the largest capital letters.

He took a step towards the door to make sure that his master was not moving in the house; then checked himself and turned back. “What do I care,” thought Shrowl, “whether he sees me or not? If it comes to a tustle between us which is to have his own way, I know who’s master and who’s servant in the house by this time.” Composing himself with that reflection, he turned to the first leaf of the book with the intention of looking it over carefully page by page, from beginning to end. The first leaf was a blank. The second leaf had an inscription written at the top of it, in faded ink, which contained these words and initials:—“Rare.

Only six copies printed. J. A. T." Below, on the middle of the leaf was the printed dedication:—"To John Arthur Treverton, Esquire, Lord of the Manor of Porthgenna, One of his Majesty's Justices of the Peace, F. R. S., &c. &c. &c., this work in which an attempt is made to describe the ancient and honoured Mansion of his Ancestors—" There were many more lines, filled to bursting with all the largest and most obsequious words to be found in the Dictionary, but Shrowl wisely abstained from giving himself the trouble of reading them, and turned over at once to the title-page.

There, indeed, were the all-important words:—"The History and Antiquities of PORTHGEMNA TOWER. From the period of its first erection, to the present time; comprising interesting genealogical particulars relating to the Treverton family: with an inquiry into the Origin of Gothic Architecture, and a few thoughts on the Theory of Fortification after the period of the Norman Conquest. By the Reverend Job Dark, D.D., Rector of Porthgenna. The whole adorned with Portraits, Views, and Plans, executed in the highest style of Art. Not Published. Printed by Spaldock and Grimes, Truro, 1734."

That was the title-page. The next leaf contained an engraved view of Porthgenna Tower, from the West. Then came several pages,

devoted to *The Origin of Gothic Architecture*. Then more pages, explaining *The Norman Theory of Fortification*. These were succeeded by another engraving—*Porthgenna Tower, from the East*. After that followed more reading, under the title of *The Treverton Family*; and then came the third engraving—*Porthgenna Tower, from the North*. Shrowl paused there, and looked with interest at the leaf opposite the print. It only announced more reading still, about the *Erection of the Mansion*; and this was succeeded by engravings from family portraits in the gallery at *Porthgenna*. Placing his left thumb between the leaves to mark the place, Shrowl impatiently turned to the end of the book, to see what he could find there. The last leaf contained a plan of the stables; the leaf before that, presented a plan of the north garden; and on the next leaf turning backward was the very thing described in Robert Chenery's letter—a plan of the interior arrangement of the north side of the house!

Shrowl's first impulse on making this discovery, was to carry the book away to the safest hiding-place he could find for it, preparatory to secretly offering it for sale, when the messenger called the next morning for an answer to the letter. A little reflection, however, convinced him that a proceeding of this sort bore a dangerously close resemblance to the act of

thieving, and might get him into trouble if the person with whom he desired to deal, chose to go through the ceremony of asking him any preliminary questions touching his right to the volume which he wanted to dispose of. The only alternative that remained, if the idea of possessing himself of the book were abandoned, was to make the best copy he could of the Plan, and to traffic with that, as a document which the most scrupulous person in the world need not hesitate to purchase.

Resolving, after some consideration, to undergo the trouble of making the copy rather than run the risk of purloining the book, Shrowl descended to the kitchen, took from one of the drawers of the dresser an old stump of a pen, a bottle of ink, and a crumpled half-sheet of dirty letter-paper; and returned to the garret to copy the Plan as he best might. It was of the simplest kind, and it occupied but a small portion of the page; yet it presented to his eyes, a hopelessly involved and intricate appearance, when he now examined it for the second time.

The rooms were represented by rows of small squares, with names neatly printed inside them; and the positions of doors, staircases, and passages, were indicated by parallel lines of various lengths and breadths. After much cogitation, frowning, and pulling at his beard,

it occurred to Shrowl that the easiest method of copying the Plan would be to cover it with the letter-paper—which though hardly half the size of the page, was large enough to spread over the engraving on it—and then to trace the lines which he saw through the paper as carefully as he could with his pen and ink. He puffed, and snorted, and grumbled, and got red in the face over his task; but he accomplished it at last—bating certain drawbacks in the shape of blots and smears—in a sufficiently creditable manner; then stopped to let the ink dry and to draw his breath freely, before he attempted to do anything more.

The next obstacle to be overcome, consisted in the difficulty of copying the names of the rooms, which were printed inside the squares. Fortunately for Shrowl, who was one of the clumsiest of mankind in the use of the pen, none of the names were very long. As it was, he found the greatest difficulty in writing them in sufficiently small characters to fit into the squares. One name in particular—that of The Myrtle Room—presented combinations of letters, in the word “Myrtle,” which tried his patience and his fingers sorely, when he attempted to reproduce them. Indeed, the result, in this case, when he had done his best, was so illegible, even to his eyes, that he wrote the word over again in larger characters at the top of the page,

and connected it by a very wavering line with the square which represented the Myrtle Room. The same accident happened to him in two other instances, and was remedied in the same way. With the rest of the names, however, he succeeded better; and, when he had finally completed the business of transcription, by writing the title, "Plan of the North Side," his copy presented, on the whole, a more respectable appearance than might have been anticipated. After satisfying himself of its accuracy by a careful comparison of it with the original, he folded it up along with Dr. Chenner's letter, and deposited it in his pocket with a hoarse gasp of relief and a grim smile of satisfaction.

The next morning, the garden-door of the cottage presented itself to the public eye in the totally new aspect of standing hospitably ajar; and one of the bare posts had the advantage of being embellished by the figure of Shrowl, who leaned against it easily, with his legs crossed, his hands in his pockets, and his pipe in his mouth, looking out for the return of the messenger who had delivered Doctor Chenner's letter the day before.

CHAPTER III.



APPROACHING THE PRECIPICE.

TRAVELLING from London to Porthgenna, Mr. and Mrs. Frankland had stopped, on the ninth of May, at the West Winston station. On the eleventh of June they left it again to continue their journey to Cornwall. On the thirteenth, after resting two nights upon the road, they arrived, towards the evening, at Porthgenna Tower.

There had been storm and rain all the morning; it had lulled towards the afternoon; and at the hour when they reached the house, the wind had dropped, a thick white fog hid the sea from view, and sudden showers fell drearily from time to time over the sodden land. Not even a solitary idler from the village was hanging about the west terrace, as the carriage containing Mr. and Mrs. Frankland, the baby, and the two servants who were with them drove up to the house. No one was waiting with the door open to receive the travellers; for all hope of their arriving on that day had been given up, and the

ceaseless thundering of the surf, as the stormy sea surged in on the beach beneath, drowned the roll of the carriage-wheels over the terrace road. The driver was obliged to leave his seat, and ring at the bell for admittance. A minute or more elapsed before the door was opened. With the rain falling sullen and steady on the roof of the carriage, with the raw dampness of the atmosphere penetrating through all coverings and defences, with the booming of the surf sounding threateningly near in the dense obscurity of the fog, the young couple waited for admission to their own home, as strangers might have waited who had called inopportunately.

When the door was opened at last, the master and mistress, whom the servants would have welcomed with the proper congratulations on any other occasion, were now received with the proper apologies instead. Mr. Munder, Mrs. Pentreath, Betsey, and Mr. Frankland's man, all crowded together in the hall, and all begged pardon confusedly for not having been ready at the door, when the carriage drove up. The appearance of the baby changed the conventional excuses of the housekeeper and the maid into conventional expressions of admiration; but the men remained grave and gloomy, and spoke of the miserable weather apologetically, as if the rain and the fog had been of their making. The reason for their persistency in dwelling on this

one dreary topic, came out while Mr. and Mrs. Frankland were being conducted up the west staircase. The storm of the morning had been fatal to three of the Porthgenna fishermen, who had been lost with their boat at sea, and whose deaths had thrown the whole village into mourning. The servants had done nothing but talk of the catastrophe ever since the intelligence of it had reached them, early in the afternoon; and Mr. Munder now thought it his duty to explain that the absence of the villagers, on the occasion of the arrival of his master and mistress, was entirely attributable to the effect produced among the little community by the wreck of the fishing boat. Under any less lamentable circumstances, the west terrace would have been crowded, and the appearance of the carriage would have been welcomed with cheers.

“Lenny, I almost wish we had waited a little longer before we came here,” whispered Rosamond, nervously pressing her husband’s arm. “It is very dreary and disheartening to return to my first home on such a day as this. That story of the poor fishermen is a sad story, love, to welcome me back to the place of my birth. Let us send the first thing to-morrow morning, and see what we can do for the poor helpless women and children. I shall not feel easy in my mind, after hearing that story, till we have done something to comfort them.”

“I trust you will approve of the repairs, ma’am,” said the housekeeper, pointing to the staircase which led to the second story.

“The repairs?” said Rosamond, absently. “Repairs! I never hear the word now, without thinking of the north rooms, and of the plans we devised for getting my poor dear father to live in them. Mrs. Pentreath, I have a host of questions to ask you and Mr. Munder, about all the extraordinary things that happened when that mysterious lady and that incomprehensible foreigner came to see the house. But tell me first—this is the west front, I suppose?—how far are we, here, from the north rooms? I mean, how long would it take us to get to them, if we wanted to go now to that part of the house?”

“Oh, dear me, ma’am, not five minutes!” answered Mrs. Pentreath.

“Not five minutes!” repeated Rosamond, whispering to her husband again. “Do you hear that, Lenny? In five minutes we might be in the Myrtle Room!”

“Yet,” said Mr. Frankland, smiling, “in our present state of ignorance, we are just as far from it, as if we were at West Winston still!”

“I can’t think that, Lenny. It may be only my fancy, but now we are on the spot, I feel as if we had driven the mystery into its last hiding place. We are actually in the house that holds the secret; and nothing will persuade me that

we are not half way already towards finding it out. But don't let us stop on this cold landing. Which way are we to go next?"

"This way, ma'am," said Mr. Munder, seizing the first opportunity of placing himself in a prominent position. "There is a fire in the drawing room. Will you allow me the honour of leading and conducting you, sir, to the apartment in question?" he added, officiously stretching out his hand to Mr. Frankland.

"Certainly not!" interposed Rosamond sharply. She had noticed with her usual quickness of observation, that Mr. Munder wanted the delicacy of feeling which ought to have restrained him from staring curiously at his blind master, in her presence; and she was unfavourably disposed towards him in consequence. "Wherever the apartment in question may happen to be," she continued with satirical emphasis, "I will lead Mr. Frankland to it, if you please. If you want to make yourself useful, you had better go on before us, and open the door."

Outwardly crest-fallen but inwardly indignant, Mr. Munder led the way to the drawing-room. The fire burned brightly, the old-fashioned furniture displayed itself to the most picturesque advantage, the paper on the walls looked comfortably mellow, the carpet, faded as it was, felt soft and warm underfoot. Rosamond led her

husband to an easy chair by the fireside, and began to feel at home for the first time.

“This looks really comfortable,” she said. “When we have shut out that dreary white fog, and the candles are lit, and the tea is on the table, we shall have nothing in the world to complain of. You enjoy this nice warm atmosphere, don’t you, Lenny? There is a piano in the room, my dear; I can play to you in the evening at Porthgenna, just as I used in London. Nurse, sit down and make yourself and the baby as comfortable as you can. Before we take our bonnets off, I must go away with Mrs. Pentreath, and see about the bedrooms. What is your name, you very rosy, good-natured looking girl? Betsey, is it? Well then, Betsey, suppose you go down and get the tea; and we shall like you all the better, if you can contrive to bring us up some cold meat with it.” Giving her orders in those good-humoured terms, and not noticing that her husband looked a little uneasy while she was talking so familiarly to a servant, Rosamond left the room in company with Mrs. Pentreath.

When she returned, her face and manner were altered: she looked and spoke seriously and quietly.

“I hope I have arranged everything for the best, Lenny,” she said. “The airiest and largest room, Mrs. Pentreath tells me, is the room in which my mother died. But I thought we had

better not make use of that: I felt as if it chilled and saddened me only to look at it. Further on, along the passage, there is a room that was my nursery. I almost fancied, when Mrs. Pen-treath told me she had heard I used to sleep there, that I remembered the pretty little arched doorway leading into the second room—the night-nursery, it used to be called in former days. I have ordered the fire to be lit there, and the beds to be made. There is a third room on the right hand, which communicates with the day-nursery. I think we might manage to establish ourselves very comfortably in the three rooms—if you felt no objection—though they are not so large or so grandly furnished as the company-bedrooms. I will change the arrangement if you like—but the house looks rather lonesome and dreary, just at first—and my heart warms to the old nursery—and I think we might at least try it, to begin with, don't you, Lenny?"

Mr. Frankland was quite of his wife's opinion, and was ready to accede to any domestic arrangements that she might think fit to make. While he was assuring her of this, the tea came up; and the sight of it helped to restore Rosamond to her usual spirits. When the meal was over, she occupied herself in seeing the baby comfortably established for the night, in the room on the right hand which communicated with the day-nursery. That maternal duty performed,

she came back to her husband in the drawing-room; and the conversation between them turned—as it almost always turned, now, when they were alone—on the two perplexing subjects of Mrs. Jazeph and the Myrtle Room.

“I wish it was not night,” said Rosamond. “I should like to begin exploring at once. Mind, Lenny, you must be with me in all my investigations. I lend you my eyes, and you give me your advice. You must never lose patience, and never tell me that you can be of no use. I look to you to keep up my courage, as well as to help me with advice. How I do wish we were starting on our voyage of discovery at this very moment! But we may make inquiries at any rate,” she continued, ringing the bell. “Let us have the housekeeper and the steward up, and try if we can’t make them tell us something more than they told us in their letter.”

The bell was answered by Betsey. Rosamond desired that Mr. Munder and Mrs. Pentreath might be sent up-stairs. Betsey having heard Mrs. Frankland express her intention of questioning the housekeeper and the steward, guessed why they were wanted, and smiled mysteriously.

“Did *you* see anything of those strange visitors who behaved so oddly?” asked Rosamond, detecting the smile. “Yes, I am sure you did.

Tell us what you saw. We want to hear everything that happened—everything down to the smallest trifle.”

Appealed to in these direct terms, Betsey contrived, with much circumlocution and confusion, to relate what her own personal experience had been of the proceedings of Mrs. Jazeph and her foreign companion. When she had done, Rosamond stopped her on her way to the door, by asking this question :—

“ You say the lady was found lying in a fainting fit at the top of the stairs. Have you any notion, Betsey, why she fainted ? ”

The servant hesitated.

“ Come ! come ! ” said Rosamond. “ You have some notion, I can see. Tell us what it is.”

“ I’m afraid you will be angry with me, ma’am,” said Betsey, expressing embarrassment by drawing lines slowly with her forefinger on a table at her side.

“ Nonsense ! I shall only be angry with you, if you won’t speak. Why do you think the lady fainted ? ”

Betsey drew a very long line with her embarrassed forefinger, wiped it afterwards on her apron, and answered :—

“ I think she fainted, if you please, ma’am, because she see the ghost.”

“ The ghost ! What ! is there a ghost in the house ? Lenny, here is a romance that we never

expected. What sort of ghost is it? Let us have the whole story."

The whole story, as Betsey told it, was not of a nature to afford her hearers any extraordinary information, or to keep them very long in suspense. The ghost was a lady, who had been at a remote period the wife of one of the owners of Porthgenna Tower, and who had been guilty of deceiving her husband in some way unknown. She had been condemned in consequence to walk about the north rooms, as long as ever the walls of them held together. She had long curling light-brown hair, and very white teeth, and a dimple in each cheek, and was altogether "awful beautiful" to look at. Her approach was heralded to any mortal creature who was unfortunate enough to fall in her way, by the blowing of a cold wind; and nobody who had once felt that wind had the slightest chance of ever feeling warm again. That was all Betsey knew about the ghost; and it was in her opinion enough to freeze a person's blood only to think of it.

Rosamond smiled, then looked grave again. "I wish you could have told us a little more," she said. "But, as you cannot, we must try Mrs. Pentreath and Mr. Munder next. Send them up here, if you please, Betsey, as soon as you get down-stairs."

The examination of the housekeeper and the

steward led to no result whatever. Nothing more than they had already communicated in their letter to Mrs. Frankland could be extracted from either of them. Mr. Munder's dominant idea was, that the foreigner had entered the doors of Porthgenna Tower with felonious ideas on the subject of the family plate. Mrs. Pen-treath concurred in that opinion, and mentioned, in connection with it, her own private impression that the lady in the quiet dress was an unfortunate person who had escaped from a madhouse. As to giving a word of advice, or suggesting a plan for solving the mystery, neither the house-keeper nor the steward appeared to think that the rendering of any assistance of that sort lay at all within their province. They took their own practical view of the suspicious conduct of the two strangers, and no mortal power could persuade them to look an inch beyond it.

“O, the stupidity, the provoking, impenetra-ble, pretentious stupidity of those two people!” exclaimed Rosamond, when she and her husband were alone again. “No help, Lenny, to be hoped for from either of them. We have nothing to trust to now but the examination of the house to-morrow; and that resource may fail us, like all the rest. What can Dr. Chen-ery be about? Why did we not hear from him before we left West Winston yester-day?”

“Patience, Rosamond, patience. We shall see what the post brings to-morrow.”

“Pray don’t talk about patience, dear! My stock of that virtue was never a very large one, and it was all exhausted ten days ago, at least. O, the weeks and weeks I have been vainly asking myself that one question, Why should Mrs. Jazeph warn me against going into the Myrtle Room? Is she afraid of my discovering a crime? or afraid of my tumbling through the floor? What did she want to do in the room, when she made that attempt to get into it? Why, in the name of wonder, should she know something about this house that I never knew, that my father never knew, that nobody else——?”

“Rosamond!” cried Mr. Frankland, suddenly changing colour, and starting in his chair. “I think I can guess who Mrs. Jazeph is!”

“Good gracious, Lenny! What do you mean?”

“Something in those last words of yours started the idea in my mind, the instant you spoke. Do you remember, when we were staying at St. Swithin’s on Sea, and talking about the chances for and against our prevailing on your father to live with us here—do you remember, Rosamond, telling me at that time of certain unpleasant associations which he had with the house, and mentioning among them the

mysterious disappearance of a servant on the morning of your mother's death?"

Rosamond turned pale at the question. "How came we never to think of that before?" she said.

"You told me," pursued Mr. Frankland, "that this servant left a strange letter behind her, in which she confessed that your mother had charged her with the duty of telling a secret to your father — a secret that she was afraid to divulge, and that she was afraid of being questioned about. I am right, am I not, in stating those two reasons as the reasons she gave for her disappearance?"

"Quite right."

"And your father never heard of her again?"

"Never!"

"It is a bold guess to make, Rosamond, but the impression is strong on my mind that, on the day when Mrs. Jazeph came into your room at West Winston, you and that servant met, and *she* knew it!"

"And the secret, dear—the secret she was afraid to tell my father?"

"Must be in some way connected with the Myrtle Room."

Rosamond said nothing in answer. She rose from her chair, and began to walk agitatedly up and down the room. Hearing the rustle of her dress, Leonard called her to him, and, taking

her hand, laid his fingers on her pulse, and then lifted them for a moment to her cheek.

“I wish I had waited until to-morrow morning before I told you my idea about Mrs. Jazeph,” he said. “I have agitated you to no purpose whatever, and have spoilt your chance of a good night’s rest.”

“No, no! nothing of the kind. O, Lenny, how this guess of yours adds to the interest, the fearful, breathless interest, we have in tracing that woman, and in finding out the Myrtle Room. Do you think ——?”

“I have done with thinking, for the night, my dear; and you must have done with it too. We have said more than enough about Mrs. Jazeph already. Change the subject, and I will talk of anything else you please.”

“It is not so easy to change the subject, said Rosamond, pouting, and moving away to walk up and down the room again.

“Then let us change the place, and make it easier that way. I know you think me the most provokingly obstinate man in the world, but there is reason in my obstinacy, and you will acknowledge as much when you wake to-morrow morning refreshed by a good night’s rest. Come, let us give our anxieties a holiday. Take me into one of the other rooms, and let me try if I can guess what it is like by touching the furniture.”

The reference to his blindness which the last words contained brought Rosamond to his side in a moment. "You always know best," she said, putting her arm round his neck and kissing him. "I was looking cross, love, a minute ago, but the clouds are all gone now. We will change the scene, and explore some other room, as you propose."

She paused, her eyes suddenly sparkled, her colour rose, and she smiled to herself as if some new fancy had that instant crossed her mind.

"Lenny, I will take you where you shall touch a very remarkable piece of furniture indeed," she resumed, leading him to the door while she spoke. "We will see if you can tell me at once what it is like. You must not be impatient, mind; and you must promise to touch nothing till you feel me guiding your hand."

She drew him after her along the passage, opened the door of the room in which the baby had been put to bed, made a sign to the nurse to be silent, and, leading Leonard up to the cot, guided his hand down gently, so as to let the tips of his fingers touch the child's cheek.

"There, sir!" she cried, her face beaming with happiness as she saw the sudden flush of surprise and pleasure which changed her husband's naturally quiet, subdued expression in an instant. "What do you say to that piece of furniture? Is it a chair, or a table? Or is it

the most precious thing in all the house, in all Cornwall, in all England, in all the world? Kiss it, and see which it is—a bust of a baby by a sculptor, or a living cherub by your wife!” She turned, laughing, to the nurse: “Hannah, you look so serious that I am sure you must be hungry. Have you had your supper yet?” The woman smiled, and answered that she had arranged to go down stairs, as soon as one of the servants could relieve her in taking care of the child. “Go at once,” said Rosamond. “I will stop here and look after the baby. Get your supper, and come back again in half-an-hour.”

When the nurse had left the room, Rosamond placed a chair for Leonard by the side of the cot, and seated herself on a low stool at his knees. Her variable disposition seemed to change again when she did this; her face grew thoughtful, her eyes softened, as they turned, now on her husband, now on the bed in which the child was sleeping by his side. After a minute or two of silence, she took one of his hands, placed it on his knee, and laid her cheek gently down on it.

“Lenny,” she said, rather sadly, “I wonder whether we are any of us capable of feeling perfect happiness in this world?”

“What makes you ask that question, my dear?”

“I fancy that I could feel perfect happiness, and yet——”

“And yet, what?”

“And yet, it seems as if, with all my blessings, that blessing was never likely to be granted to me. I should be perfectly happy now, but for one little thing. I suppose you can't guess what that thing is?”

“I would rather you told me, Rosamond.”

“Ever since our child was born, love, I have had a little aching at the heart—especially when we are all three together, as we are now—a little sorrow that I can't quite put away from me, on your account.”

“On my account! Lift up your head, Rosamond, and come nearer to me. I feel something on my hand which tells me that you are crying.”

She rose directly, and laid her face close to his. “My own love,” she said, clasping her arms fast round him. “My own heart's darling, you have never seen our child.”

“Yes, Rosamond, I see him with your eyes.”

“Oh, Lenny! I tell you everything I can—I do my best to lighten the cruel, cruel darkness that shuts you out from that lovely little face lying so close to you! But can I tell you how he looks when he first begins to take notice? can I tell you all the thousand pretty things he will do, when he first tries to walk? God has been very merciful to us—but, oh, how much more heavily the sense of your affliction weighs on me, now when I am more to you than your

wife, now when I am the mother of your child!"

"And yet, that affliction ought to weigh lightly on your spirits, Rosamond; for you have made it weigh lightly on mine."

"Have I? Really and truly, have I? It is something noble to live for, Lenny, if I can live for that! It is some comfort to hear you say, as you said just now, that you see with my eyes. They shall always serve you—oh, always! always!—as faithfully as if they were your own. The veriest trifle of a visible thing that I look at with any interest, you shall as good as look at, too. I might have had my own little harmless secrets, dear, with another husband; but, with you, to have even so much as a thought in secret, seems like taking the basest, the cruellest advantage of your blindness. I do love you so, Lenny! I am so much fonder of you now, than I was when we were first married—I never thought I should be, but I am. You are so much handsomer to me, so much cleverer to me, so much more precious to me, in every way. But I am always telling you that, am I not? Do you get tired of hearing me? No? Are you sure of that? Very, very, very sure?" She stopped, and looked at him earnestly, with a smile on her lips, and the tears still glistening in her eyes. Just then, the child stirred a little in his cot, and drew her attention away. She arranged the bed-clothes

over him, watched him in silence for a little while, then sat down again on the stool at Leonard's feet. "Baby has turned his face quite round towards you now," she said. "Shall I tell you exactly how he looks, and what his bed is like, and how the room is furnished?"

Without waiting for an answer, she began to describe the child's appearance and position with the marvellous minuteness of a woman's observation. While she proceeded, her elastic spirits recovered themselves, and its naturally bright happy expression reappeared on her face. By the time the nurse returned to her post, Rosamond was talking with all her accustomed vivacity, and amusing her husband with all her accustomed success.

When they went back to the drawing-room, she opened the piano, and sat down to play. "I must give you your usual evening concert, Lenny," she said, "or I shall be talking again on the forbidden subject of the Myrtle Room."

She played some of Mr. Frankland's favourite airs, with a certain union of feeling and fancifulness in her execution of the music, which seemed to blend the charm of her own disposition with the charm of the melodies which sprang into life under her touch. After playing through the airs she could remember most easily, she ended with the Last Waltz of Weber. It was Leonard's favourite, and it was always reserved on that

account to grace the close of the evening's performance.

She lingered longer than usual over the last plaintive notes of the waltz; then suddenly left the piano, and hastened across the room to the fireplace.

"Surely it has turned much colder within the last minute or two," she said, kneeling down on the rug, and holding her face and hands over the fire.

"Has it?" returned Leonard. "I don't feel any change."

"Perhaps I have caught cold," said Rosamond. "Or perhaps," she added, laughing rather uneasily, "the wind that goes before the ghostly lady of the north rooms, has been blowing over me. I certainly felt something like a sudden chill, Lenny, while I was playing the last notes of Weber."

"Nonsense, Rosamond. You are over-fatigued and over-excited. Tell your maid to make you some hot wine and water, and lose no time in getting to bed."

Rosamond cowered closer over the fire. "It's lucky that I am not superstitious," she said, "or I might fancy that I was predestined to see the ghost."

CHAPTER IV.



STANDING ON THE BRINK.

THE first night at Porthgenna passed without the slightest noise or interruption of any kind. No ghost, or dream of a ghost, disturbed the soundness of Rosamond's slumbers. She woke in her usual spirits and her usual health, and was out in the west garden before breakfast.

The sky was cloudy and the wind veered about capriciously to all the points of the compass. In the course of her walk, Rosamond met with the gardener, and asked him what he thought about the weather. The man replied that it might rain again before noon, but that, unless he was very much mistaken, it was going to turn to heat in the course of the next four-and-twenty hours.

"Pray did you ever hear of a room on the north side of our old house, called the Myrtle Room?" inquired Rosamond. She had resolved, on rising that morning, not to lose a chance of making the all-important discovery for want of asking questions of everybody in the neigh-

bourhood ; and she began with the gardener accordingly.

“ I never heard tell of it, ma'am,” said the man. “ But it's a likely name enough, considering how the myrtles do grow in these parts.”

“ Are there any myrtles growing at the north side of the house ? ” asked Rosamond, struck with the idea of tracing the mysterious room by searching for it outside the building instead of inside. “ I mean close to the walls,” she added, seeing the man look puzzled, “ under the windows, you know ? ”

“ I never see anything under the windows, in my time, but weeds and rubbish,” replied the gardener.

Just then the breakfast-bell rang. Rosamond returned to the house, determining to explore the north garden, and, if she found any relic of a bed of myrtles, to mark the window above it, and to have the room which that window lighted opened immediately. She confided this new scheme to her husband. He complimented her on her ingenuity, but confessed that he had no great hope of any discoveries being made out of doors, after what the gardener had said about the weeds and rubbish.

As soon as breakfast was over, Rosamond rang the bell, to order the gardener to be in attendance, and to say that the keys of the north rooms would be wanted. The summons was answered

by Mr. Frankland's servant, who brought up with him the morning's supplies of letters, which the postman had just delivered. Rosamond turned them over eagerly, pounced on one with an exclamation of delight, and said to her husband:—"The Long Beckley postmark! News from the vicar, at last!"

She opened the letter and ran her eye over it—then suddenly dropped it in her lap with her face all in a glow. "Lenny!" she exclaimed, "there is news here that is positively enough to turn one's head. I declare the vicar's letter has quite taken away my breath!"

"Read it," said Mr. Frankland, "pray read it at once."

Rosamond complied with the request in a very faltering, unsteady voice. Doctor Chenery began his letter by announcing that his application to Andrew Treverton had remained unanswered; but he added that it had, nevertheless, produced results which no one could possibly have anticipated. For information on the subject of those results, he referred Mr. and Mrs. Frankland to a copy subjoined of a communication marked private, which he had received from his man of business in London. The communication contained a detailed report of an interview which had taken place between Mr. Treverton's servant and the messenger who had called for an answer to Dr. Chenery's letter. Shrowl, it appeared,

had opened the interview, by delivering his master's message, had then produced the vicar's torn letter and the copy of the Plan, and had announced his readiness to part with the latter for the consideration of a five pound note. The messenger had explained that he had no power to treat for the document, and had advised Mr. Treverton's servant to wait on Doctor Chennery's agent. After some hesitation, Shrowl had decided to do this, on pretence of going out on an errand—had seen the agent—had been questioned about how he became possessed of the copy—and, finding that there would be no chance of disposing of it unless he answered all inquiries, had related the circumstances under which the copy had been made. After hearing his statement the agent had engaged to apply immediately for instructions to Doctor Chennery; and had written accordingly, mentioning, in a postscript, that he had seen the transcribed Plan, and had ascertained that it really exhibited the positions of doors, staircases, and rooms, with the names attached to them.

Resuming his own letter, Doctor Chennery proceeded to say that he must now leave it entirely to Mr. and Mrs. Frankland to decide what course they ought to adopt. He had already compromised himself a little in his own estimation, by assuming a character which really did not belong to him, when he made his

application to Andrew Treverton; and he felt he could personally venture no further in the affair, either by expressing an opinion or giving any advice, now that it had assumed such a totally new aspect. He felt quite sure that his young friends would arrive at the wise and the right decision, after they had maturely considered the matter in all its bearings. In that conviction, he had instructed his man of business not to stir in the affair until he had heard from Mr. Frankland, and to be guided entirely by any directions which that gentleman might give.

“Directions!” exclaimed Rosamond, crumpling up the letter in a high state of excitement as soon as she had read to the end of it. “All the directions we have to give may be written in a minute and read in a second! What in the world does the vicar mean by talking about mature consideration? Of course,” cried Rosamond, looking, womanlike, straight on to the purpose she had in view, without wasting a thought on the means by which it was to be achieved,—“Of course we give the man his five-pound note and get the Plan by return of post!”

Mr. Frankland shook his head gravely. “Quite impossible,” he said. “If you think for a moment, my dear, you will surely see that it is out of the question to traffic with a servant for information that has been surreptitiously obtained from his master’s library.”

“O, dear! dear! don’t say that!” pleaded Rosamond, looking quite aghast at the view her husband took of the matter. “What harm are we doing, if we give the man his five pounds? He has only made a copy of the Plan: he has not stolen anything.”

“He has stolen information, according to my idea of it,” said Leonard.

“Well, but if he has,” persisted Rosamond, “what harm does it do to his master? In my opinion his master deserves to have the information stolen, for not having had the common politeness to send it to the vicar. We must have the Plan—O, Lenny, don’t shake your head, please!—we must have it, you know we must! What is the use of being scrupulous with an old wretch (I must call him so, though he *is* my uncle), who won’t conform to the commonest usages of society? You can’t deal with him—and I am sure the vicar would say so, if he was here—as you would with civilised people, or people in their senses, which everybody says he is not. What use is the Plan of the north rooms to him? And, besides, if it is of any use, he has got the original; so his information is not stolen, after all, because he has got it the whole time—has he not, dear?”

“Rosamond! Rosamond!” said Leonard, smiling at his wife’s transparent sophistries, “you are trying to reason like a Jesuit.”

“I don't care who I reason like, love, as long as I get the Plan.”

Mr. Frankland still shook his head. Finding her arguments of no avail, Rosamond wisely resorted to the immemorial weapon of her sex—Persuasion; using it at such close quarters and to such good purpose, that she finally won her husband's reluctant consent to a species of compromise, which granted her leave to give directions for purchasing the copied Plan, on one condition. This condition was, that they should send back the Plan to Mr. Treverton as soon as it had served their purpose; making a full acknowledgment to him of the manner in which it had been obtained, and pleading in justification of the proceeding his own want of courtesy in withholding information of no consequence in itself, which any one else in his place would have communicated as a matter of course. Rosamond tried hard to obtain the withdrawal, or modification, of this condition; but her husband's sensitive pride was not to be touched, on that point, with impunity, even by her light hand. “I have done too much violence already to my own convictions,” he said, “and I will now do no more. If we are to degrade ourselves by dealing with this servant, let us at least prevent him from claiming us as his accomplices. Write in my name, Rosamond, to Doctor Chennery's man of business, and say that we are willing to

purchase the transcribed Plan, on the condition that I have stated—which condition he will of course place before the servant in the plainest possible terms.”

“And suppose the servant refuses to risk losing his place, which he must do if he accepts your condition?” said Rosamond, going rather reluctantly to the writing-table.

“Let us not worry ourselves, my dear, by supposing anything. Let us wait and hear what happens, and act accordingly. When you are ready to write, tell me, and I will dictate your letter on this occasion. I wish to make the vicar’s man of business understand that we act as we do, knowing, in the first place, that Mr. Andrew Treverton cannot be dealt with according to the established usages of society; and knowing, in the second place, that the information which his servant offers to us, is contained in an extract from a printed book, and is in no way, directly or indirectly, connected with Mr. Treverton’s private affairs. Now that you have made me consent to this compromise, Rosamond, I must justify it as completely as possible to others as well as to myself.”

Seeing that his resolution was firmly settled, Rosamond had tact enough to abstain from saying anything more. The letter was written exactly as Leonard dictated it. When it had

been placed in the post-bag, and when the other letters of the morning had been read and answered, Mr. Frankland reminded his wife of the intention she had expressed at breakfast-time of visiting the north garden, and requested that she would take him there with her. He candidly acknowledged that since he had been made acquainted with Doctor Chennery's letter, he would give five times the sum demanded by Shrowl for the copy of the Plan, if the Myrtle Room could be discovered, without assistance from any one, before the letter to the vicar's man of business was put into the post. Nothing would give him so much pleasure, he said, as to be able to throw it into the fire, and to send a plain refusal to treat for the Plan in its place.

They went into the north garden, and there Rosamond's own eyes convinced her that she had not the slightest chance of discovering any vestige of a myrtle-bed near any one of the windows. From the garden they returned to the house, and had the door opened that led into the north hall.

They were shown the place on the pavement where the keys had been found, and the place at the top of the first flight of stairs where Mrs. Jazeph had been discovered when the alarm was given. At Mr. Frankland's suggestion, the door of the room which immediately fronted

this spot was opened. It presented a dreary spectacle of dust and dirt and dimness. Some old pictures were piled against one of the walls, some tattered chairs were heaped together in the middle of the floor, some broken china lay on the mantel-piece, and a rotten cabinet, cracked through from top to bottom, stood in one corner. These few relics of the furnishing and fitting-up of the room were all carefully examined, but nothing of the smallest importance—nothing tending in the most remote degree to clear up the mystery of the Myrtle Room—was discovered.

“Shall we have the other doors opened?” inquired Rosamond when they came out on the landing again.

“I think it will be useless,” replied her husband. “Our only hope of finding out the mystery of the Myrtle Room—if it is as deeply hidden from us as I believe it to be—is by searching for it in that room, and no other. The search, to be effectual, must extend, if we find it necessary, to the pulling up of the floor and wainscots—perhaps even to the dismantling of the walls. We may do that with one room when we know where it is, but we cannot, by any process short of pulling the whole side of the house down, do it with the sixteen rooms, through which our present ignorance condemns us to wander without guide or clue. It is

hopeless enough to be looking for we know not what; but let us discover, if we can, where the four walls are within which that unpromising search must begin and end. Surely the floor of the landing must be dusty? Are there no foot-marks on it, after Mrs. Jazeph's visit, that might lead us to the right door?"

This suggestion led to a search for footsteps on the dusty floor of the landing, but nothing of the sort could be found. Matting had been laid down over the floor at some former period, and the surface, torn, ragged, and rotten with age, was too uneven in every part to allow the dust to lie smoothly on it. Here and there, where there was a hole through to the boards of the landing, Mr. Frankland's servant thought he detected marks in the dust which might have been produced by the toe or the heel of a shoe; but these faint and doubtful indications lay yards and yards apart from each other, and to draw any conclusion of the slightest importance from them was simply and plainly impossible. After spending more than an hour in examining the north side of the house, Rosamond was obliged to confess that the servants were right when they predicted, on first opening the door into the hall, that she would discover nothing.

"The letter must go, Lenny," she said, when they returned to the breakfast-room.

"There is no help for it," answered her

husband. "Send away the post-bag, and let us say no more about it."

The letter was despatched by that day's post. In the remote position of Porthgenna, and in the unfinished state of the railroad at that time, two days would elapse before an answer from London could be reasonably hoped for. Feeling that it would be better for Rosamond if this period of suspense was passed out of the house, Mr. Frankland proposed to fill up the time by a little excursion along the coast to some places famous for their scenery, which would be likely to interest his wife, and which she might occupy herself pleasantly in describing on the spot for the benefit of her blind husband. This suggestion was immediately acted on. The young couple left Porthgenna, and only returned on the evening of the second day.

On the morning of the third day, the longed-for letter from the vicar's man of business lay on the table when Leonard and Rosamond entered the breakfast-room. Shrowl had decided to accept Mr. Frankland's condition—first, because he held that any man must be out of his senses who refused a five-pound note when it was offered to him; secondly, because he believed that his master was too absolutely dependent on him to turn him away for any cause whatever; thirdly, because if Mr. Treverton did part with him, he was not sufficiently

attached to his place to care at all about losing it. Accordingly, the bargain had been struck in five minutes,—and there was the copy of the Plan, enclosed with the letter of explanation to attest the fact!

Rosamond spread the all-important document out on the table with trembling hands, looked it over eagerly for a few moments, and laid her finger on the square that represented the position of the Myrtle Room. “Here it is!” she cried. “O, Lenny, how my heart beats! One, two, three, four—the fourth door on the first-floor landing is the door of the Myrtle Room!”

She would have called at once for the keys of the north rooms; but her husband insisted on her waiting until she had composed herself a little, and until she had taken some breakfast. In spite of all he could say, the meal was hurried over so rapidly, that in ten minutes more his wife’s arm was in his, and she was leading him to the staircase.

The gardener’s prognostication about the weather had been verified: it had turned to heat—heavy, misty, vaporous, dull heat. One white quivering fog-cloud spread thinly over all the heaven, rolled down seaward on the horizon line, and dulled the sharp edges of the distant moorland view. The sunlight shone pale and trembling; the lightest highest leaves of flowers at open windows were still; the domestic animals

lay about sleepily in dark corners. Chance household noises sounded heavy and loud in the languid airless stillness which the heat seemed to hold over the earth. Down in the servants' hall, the usual bustle of morning work was suspended. When Rosamond looked in, on her way to the housekeeper's room to get the keys, the women were fanning themselves, and the men were sitting with their coats off. They were all talking peevishly about the heat, and all agreeing that such a day as that, in the month of June, they had never known and never heard of before.

Rosamond took the keys, declined the housekeeper's offer to accompany her, and, leading her husband along the passages, unlocked the door of the north hall.

"How unnaturally cool it is here!" she said, as they entered the deserted place.

At the foot of the stairs she stopped, and took a firmer hold of her husband's arm.

"Is anything the matter?" asked Leonard. "Is the change to the damp coolness of this place affecting you in any way?"

"No, no," she answered hastily. "I am far too excited to feel either heat or damp, as I might feel them at other times. But, Lenny, supposing your guess about Mrs. Jazeph is right?—"

"Yes?"

“And, supposing we discover the secret of the Myrtle Room, might it not turn out to be something concerning my father or my mother which we ought not to know? I thought of that, when Mrs. Pentreath offered to accompany us, and it determined me to come here alone with you.”

“It is just as likely that the secret might be something we ought to know,” replied Mr. Frankland, after a moment’s thought. “In any case, my idea about Mrs. Jazeph is, after all, only a guess in the dark. However, Rosamond, if you feel any hesitation——”

“No! come what may of it, Lenny, we can’t go back now. Give me your hand again. We have traced the mystery thus far, together; and together we will find it out.”

She ascended the staircase, leading him after her, as she spoke. On the landing, she looked again at the Plan, and satisfied herself that the first impression she had derived from it, of the position of the Myrtle Room, was correct. She counted the doors on to the fourth, and looked out from the bunch the key numbered “4,” and put it into the lock.

Before she turned it she paused, and looked round at her husband.

He was standing by her side, with his patient face turned expectantly towards the door. She put her right hand on the key, turned it slowly

in the lock, drew him closer to her with her left hand, and paused again.

“I don’t know what has come to me,” she whispered faintly. “I feel as if I was afraid to push open the door.”

“Your hand is cold, Rosamond. Wait a little—lock the door again—put it off till another day.”

He felt his wife’s fingers close tighter and tighter on his hand, while he said those words. Then there was an instant—one memorable, breathless instant, never to be forgotten afterwards—of utter silence. Then he heard the sharp, cracking sound of the opening door, and felt himself drawn forward suddenly into a changed atmosphere, and knew that Rosamond and he were in the Myrtle Room.

CHAPTER V.



THE MYRTLE ROOM.

A BROAD, square window, with small panes and dark sashes; dreary yellow light, glimmering through the dirt of half a century, crusted on the glass; purer rays striking across the dimness through the fissures of three broken panes; dust floating upward, pouring downward, rolling smoothly round and round in the still atmosphere; lofty, bare, faded red walls; chairs in confusion, tables placed awry; a tall black book-case, with an open door half dropping from its hinges; a pedestal, with a broken bust lying in fragments at its feet; a ceiling darkened by stains, a floor whitened by dust;—such was the aspect of the Myrtle Room when Rosamond first entered it, leading her husband by the hand.

After passing the doorway, she slowly advanced a few steps, and then stopped, waiting with every sense on the watch, with every faculty strung up to the highest pitch of expectation—waiting in the ominous stillness, in the forlorn

solitude, for the vague Something which the room might contain, which might rise visibly before her, which might sound audibly behind her, which might touch her on a sudden from above, from below, from either side. A minute, or more, she breathlessly waited; and nothing appeared, nothing sounded, nothing touched her. The silence and the solitude had their secret to keep, and kept it.

She looked round at her husband. His face, so quiet and composed at other times, expressed doubt and uneasiness now. His disengaged hand was outstretched, and moving backwards and forwards and up and down, in the vain attempt to touch something which might enable him to guess at the position in which he was placed. His look and action, as he stood in that new and strange sphere, the mute appeal that he made so sadly and so unconsciously to his wife's loving help, restored Rosamond's self-possession by recalling her heart to the dearest of all its interests, to the holiest of all its cares. Her eyes, fixed so distrustfully, but the moment before, on the dreary spectacle of neglect and ruin which spread around them, turned fondly to her husband's face, radiant with the unfathomable brightness of pity and love. She bent quickly across him, caught his outstretched arm, and pressed it to his side.

“Don't do that, darling,” she said, gently; “I

don't like to see it. It looks as if you had forgotten that I was with you—as if you were left alone and helpless. What need have you of your sense of touch, when you have got me? Did you hear me open the door, Lenny? Do you know that we are in the Myrtle Room?”

“What did you see, Rosamond, when you opened the door? What do you see now?” He asked those questions rapidly and eagerly, in a whisper.

“Nothing but dust and dirt and desolation. The loneliest moor in Cornwall is not so lonely-looking as this room; but there is nothing to alarm us, nothing (except one's own fancy) that suggests an idea of danger of any kind.”

“What made you so long before you spoke to me, Rosamond?”

“I was frightened, love, on first entering the room—not at what I saw, but at my own fanciful ideas of what I might see. I was child enough to be afraid of something starting out of the walls, or of something rising through the floor; in short, of I hardly know what. I have got over those fears, Lenny, but a certain distrust of the room still clings to me. Do you feel it?”

“I feel something like it,” he replied, uneasily. “I feel as if the night that is always before my eyes was darker to me in this place than in any other. Where are we standing now?”

“Just inside the door.”

“Does the floor look safe to walk on?” He tried it suspiciously with his foot as he put the question.

“Quite safe,” replied Rosamond. “It would never support the furniture that is on it, if it was so rotten as to be dangerous. Come across the room with me, and try it.” With these words she led him slowly to the window.

“The air seems as if it was nearer to me,” he said, bending his face forward towards the lowest of the broken panes. “What is before us now?”

She told him, describing minutely the size and appearance of the window. He turned from it carelessly, as if that part of the room had no interest for him. Rosamond still lingered near the window to try if she could feel a breath of the outer atmosphere. There was a momentary silence, which was broken by her husband.

“What are you doing now?” he asked anxiously.

“I am looking out at one of the broken panes of glass, and trying to get some air,” answered Rosamond. “The shadow of the house is below me, resting on the lonely garden; but there is no coolness breathing up from it. I see the tall weeds rising straight and still, and the tangled wild-flowers interlacing themselves heavily. There is a tree near me, and the leaves look as if they were all struck motionless. Away to the

left, there is a peep of white sea and tawny sand quivering in the yellow heat. There are no clouds; there is no blue sky. The mist quenches the brightness of the sunlight, and lets nothing but the fire of it through. There is something threatening in the sky, and the earth seems to know it!"

"But the room! the room!" said Leonard, drawing her aside from the window. "Never mind the view; tell me what the room is like, exactly what it is like. I shall not feel easy about you, Rosamond, if you don't describe everything to me just as it is."

"My darling! You know you can depend on my describing everything. I am only doubting where to begin, and how to make sure of seeing for you, what you are likely to think most worth looking at. Here is an old ottoman against the wall—the wall where the window is. I will take off my apron, and dust the seat for you; and then you can sit down, and listen comfortably while I tell you, before we think of anything else, what the room is like, to begin with. First of all, I suppose, I must make you understand how large it is?"

"Yes, that is the first thing. Try if you can compare it with any room that I was familiar with, before I lost my sight."

Rosamond looked backwards and forwards, from wall to wall—then went to the fire-place,

and walked slowly down the length of the room, counting her steps. Pacing over the dusty floor with a dainty regularity and a childish satisfaction in looking down at the gay pink rosettes on her morning shoes; holding up her crisp, bright muslin dress out of the dirt, and showing the fanciful embroidery of her petticoat, and the glossy stockings that fitted her little feet and ankles like a second skin, she moved through the dreariness, the desolation, the dingy ruin of the scene around her, the most charming living contrast to its dead gloom that youth, health, and beauty could present.

Arrived at the bottom of the room, she reflected a little, and said to her husband:—

“Do you remember the blue drawing-room, Lenny, in your father’s house at Long Beckley? I think this room is quite as large, if not larger.”

“What are the walls like?” asked Leonard, placing his hand on the wall behind him while he spoke. “They are covered with paper, are they not?”

“Yes; with faded red paper, except on one side, where strips have been torn off and thrown on the floor. There is wainscoting round the walls. It is cracked in many places, and has ragged holes in it, which seem to have been made by the rats and mice.”

“Are there any pictures on the walls?”

“No. There is an empty frame over the

fire-place. And, opposite—I mean just above where I am standing now—there is a small mirror, cracked in the centre, with broken branches for candlesticks projecting on either side of it. Above that, again, there is a stag's head and antlers; some of the face has dropped away, and a perfect maze of cobwebs is stretched between the horns. On the other walls there are large nails, with more cobwebs hanging down from them heavy with dirt—but no pictures anywhere. Now you know everything about the walls. What is the next thing? The floor?”

“I think, Rosamond, my feet have told me already what the floor is like.”

“They may have told you that it is bare, dear; but I can tell you more than that. It slopes down from every side towards the middle of the room. It is covered thick with dust, which is swept about—I suppose by the wind blowing through the broken panes—into strange, wavy, feathery shapes that quite hide the floor beneath. Lenny! suppose these boards should be made to take up anywhere! If we discover nothing to-day, we will have them swept to-morrow. In the meantime, I must go on telling you about the room, must I not? You know already what the size of it is, what the window is like, what the walls are like, what the floor is like. Is there anything else before we come to

the furniture? O, yes! the ceiling—for that completes the shell of the room. I can't see much of it, it is so high. There are great cracks and stains from one end to the other, and the plaster has come away in patches in some places. The centre ornament seems to be made of alternate rows of small plaster cabbages and large plaster lozenges. Two bits of chain hang down from the middle, which, I suppose, once held a chandelier. The cornice is so dingy that I can hardly tell what pattern it represents. It is very broad and heavy, and it looks in some places as if it had once been coloured, and that is all I can say about it. Do you feel as if you thoroughly understood the whole room now, Lenny?"

"Thoroughly, my love; I have the same clear picture of it in my mind which you always give me of everything you see. You need waste no more time on me. We may now devote ourselves to the purpose for which we came here.

At those last words, the smile which had been dawning on Rosamond's face when her husband addressed her, vanished from it in a moment. She stole close to his side, and, bending down over him, with her arm on his shoulder, said, in low, whispering tones:—

"When we had the other room opened, opposite the landing, we began by examining the furniture. We thought—if you remember—

that the mystery of the Myrtle Room might be connected with hidden valuables that had been stolen, or hidden papers that ought to have been destroyed, or hidden stains and traces of some crime, which even a chair or a table might betray. Shall we examine the furniture here?"

"Is there much of it, Rosamond?"

"More than there was in the other room," she answered.

"More than you can examine in one morning?"

"No; I think not."

"Then begin with the furniture, if you have no better plan to propose. I am but a helpless adviser at such a crisis as this: I must leave the responsibilities of decision, after all, to rest on your shoulders. Yours are the eyes that look, and the hands that search; and, if the secret of Mrs. Jazeph's reason for warning you against entering this room, is to be found by seeking in the room, *you* will find it——"

"And you will know it, Lenny, as soon as it is found. I won't hear you talk, love, as if there was any difference between us, or any superiority in my position over yours. Now, let me see. What shall I begin with? The tall bookcase opposite the window? or the dingy old writing-table, in the recess behind the fire-place? Those are the two largest pieces of furniture that I can see in the room."

“Begin with the book-case, my dear, as you seem to have noticed that first.”

Rosamond advanced a few steps towards the book-case — then stopped, and looked aside suddenly to the lower end of the room.

“Lenny! I forgot one thing, when I was telling you about the walls,” she said. “There are two doors in the room besides the door we came in at. They are both in the wall to the right, as I stand now with my back to the window. Each is at the same distance from the corner, and each is of the same size and appearance. Don’t you think we ought to open them, and see where they lead to?”

“Certainly. But are the keys in the locks?”

Rosamond approached more closely to the doors, and answered in the affirmative.

“Open them, then,” said Leonard. “Stop! not by yourself. Take me with you. I don’t like the idea of sitting here, and leaving you to open those doors by yourself.”

Rosamond retraced her steps to the place where he was sitting, and then led him with her to the door that was farthest from the window. “Suppose there should be some dreadful sight behind it!” she said, trembling a little, as she stretched out her hand towards the key.

“Try to suppose (what is much more probable) that it only leads into another room,” suggested Leonard.

Rosamond threw the door wide open, suddenly. Her husband was right. It merely led into the next room.

They passed on to the second door. "Can this one serve the same purpose as the other?" said Rosamond, slowly and distrustfully turning the key.

She opened it as she had opened the first door, put her head inside it for an instant, drew back, shuddering, and closed it again violently, with a faint exclamation of disgust. "Don't be alarmed, Lenny," she said, leading him away abruptly. "The door only opens on a large, empty cupboard. But there are quantities of horrible, crawling brown creatures about the wall inside. I have shut them in again in their darkness and their secrecy; and now I am going to take you back to your seat, before we find out, next, what the book-case contains."

The door of the upper part of the book-case, hanging open and half-dropping from its hinges, showed the emptiness of the shelves on one side at a glance. The corresponding door, when Rosamond pulled it open, disclosed exactly the same spectacle of barrenness on the other side. Over every shelf there spread the same dreary accumulation of dust and dirt, without a vestige of a book, without even a stray scrap of paper, lying anywhere in a corner to attract the eye, from top to bottom.

The lower portion of the book-case was divided into three cupboards. In the door of one of the three, the rusty key remained in the lock. Rosamond turned it with some difficulty, and looked into the cupboard. At the back of it were scattered a pack of playing cards, brown with dirt. A morsel of torn, tangled muslin lay among them, which, when Rosamond spread it out, proved to be the remains of a clergyman's band. In one corner she found a broken corkscrew, and the winch of a fishing-rod; in another, some stumps of tobacco pipes, a few old medicine bottles, and a dog's-eared pedlar's song-book. These were all the objects that the cupboard contained. After Rosamond had scrupulously described each one of them to her husband, just as she found it, she went on to the second cupboard. On trying the door, it turned out not to be locked. On looking inside, she discovered nothing but some pieces of blackened cotton wool, and the remains of a jeweller's packing-case.

The third door was locked, but the rusty key from the first cupboard opened it. Inside, there was but one object—a small wooden box, banded round with a piece of tape, the two edges of which were fastened together by a seal. Rosamond's flagging interest rallied instantly at this discovery. She described the box to her husband, and asked if he thought she was justified in breaking the seal.

“Can you see anything written on the cover?” he inquired.

Rosamond carried the box to the window, blew the dust off the top of it, and read, on a parchment label nailed to the cover: PAPERS. JOHN ARTHUR TREVERTON. 1760.

“I think you may take the responsibility of breaking the seal,” said Leonard. “If those papers had been of any family importance, they could scarcely have been left forgotten in an old book-case by your father and his executors.”

Rosamond broke the seal, then looked up doubtfully at her husband before she opened the box. “It seems a mere waste of time to look into this,” she said. “How can a box that has not been opened since seventeen hundred and sixty help us to discover the mystery of Mrs. Jazeph and the Myrtle Room?”

“But do we know that it has not been opened since then?” said Leonard. “Might not the tape and seal have been put round it by anybody at some more recent period of time? You can judge best, because you can see if there is any inscription on the tape, or any signs to form an opinion by, upon the seal.”

“The seal is a blank, Lenny, except that it has a flower like a Forget-me-not in the middle. I can see no mark of a pen on either side of the tape. Anybody in the world might have opened

the box before me," she continued, forcing up the lid easily with her hands, "for the lock is no protection to it. The wood of the cover is so rotten that I have pulled the staple out, and left it sticking by itself in the lock below."

On examination, the box proved to be full of papers. At the top of the uppermost packet were written these words: "Election expenses. I won by four votes. Price fifty pounds each. J. A. Treverton." The next layer of papers had no inscription. Rosamond opened them, and read on the first leaf:—"Birthday Ode. Respectfully addressed to the Mæcenas of modern times in his poetic retirement at Porthgenna." Below this production, appeared a collection of old bills, old notes of invitation, old doctor's prescriptions, and old leaves of betting-books, tied together with a piece of whipcord. Last of all, there lay on the bottom of the box, one thin leaf of paper, the visible side of which presented a perfect blank. Rosamond took it up, turned it to look at the other side, and saw some faint ink lines crossing each other in various directions, and having letters of the alphabet attached to them in certain places. She had made her husband acquainted with the contents of all the other papers, as a matter of course; and when she had described this last paper to him, he explained to her that the lines and letters represented a mathematical problem.

“The book-case tells us nothing,” said Rosamond, slowly putting the papers back in the box. “Shall we try the writing-table by the fire-place, next?”

“What does it look like, Rosamond?”

“It has two rows of drawers down each side; and the whole top is made in an odd, old-fashioned way to slope upwards, like a very large writing-desk.”

“Does the top open?”

Rosamond went to the table, examined it narrowly, and then tried to raise the top. “It is made to open, for I see the keyhole,” she said. “But it is locked. And all the drawers,” she continued, trying them one after another, “are locked too.”

“Is there no key in any of them?” asked Leonard.

“Not a sign of one. But the top feels so loose that I really think it might be forced open—as I forced the little box open just now—by a pair of stronger hands than I can boast of. Let me take you to the table, dear; it may give way to your strength, though it will not to mine.”

She placed her husband's hands carefully under the ledge formed by the overhanging top of the table. He exerted his whole strength to force it up; but, in this case, the wood was sound, the lock held, and all his efforts were in vain.

“Must we send for a locksmith?” asked Rosamond, with a look of disappointment.

“If the table is of any value, we must,” returned her husband. “If not, a screw-driver and a hammer will open both the top and the drawers, in anybody’s hands.”

“In that case, Lenny, I wish we had brought them with us when we came into the room; for the only value of the table lies in the secrets that it may be hiding from us. I shall not feel satisfied until you and I know what there is inside of it.”

While saying these words, she took her husband’s hand to lead him back to his seat. As they passed before the fire-place, he stepped upon the bare stone hearth; and, feeling some new substance under his feet, instinctively stretched out the hand that was free. It touched a marble tablet, with figures on it in basso-relievo, which had been let into the middle of the chimney-piece. He stopped immediately, and asked what the object was that his fingers had accidentally touched.

“A piece of sculpture,” said Rosamond. “I did not notice it before. It is not very large, and not particularly attractive, according to my taste. So far as I can tell, it seems to be intended to represent——”

Leonard stopped her before she could say any more. “Let me try, for once, if I can’t make a

discovery for myself," he said, a little impatiently. "Let me try if my fingers won't tell me what this sculpture is meant to represent."

He passed his hands carefully over the basso-relievo (Rosamond watching their slightest movement with silent interest, the while,) considered a little, and said:—

"Is there not a figure of a man sitting down, in the right hand corner? And are there not rocks and trees, very stiffly done, high up, at the left hand side?"

Rosamond looked at him tenderly, and smiled. "My poor dear!" she said. "Your man sitting down is, in reality, a miniature copy of the famous ancient statue of Niobe and her child; your rocks are marble imitations of clouds, and your stiffly done trees are arrows darting out from some invisible Jupiter or Apollo, or other heathen god. Ah, Lenny, Lenny! you can't trust your touch, love, as you can trust me!"

A momentary shade of vexation passed across his face; but it vanished the instant she took his hand again, to lead him back to his seat. He drew her to him gently, and kissed her cheek. "You are right, Rosamond," he said. "The one faithful friend to me in my blindness who never fails, is my wife."

Seeing him look a little saddened, and feeling, with the quick intuition of a woman's affection, that he was thinking of the days when he had en-

joyed the blessing of sight, Rosamond returned abruptly, as soon as she saw him seated once more on the ottoman, to the subject of the Myrtle Room.

“Where shall I look next, dear?” she said. “The bookcase we have examined. The writing-table we must wait to examine. What else is there, that has a cupboard or a drawer in it?” She looked round her in perplexity: then walked away towards the part of the room to which her attention had been last drawn—the part where the fire-place was situated.

“I thought I noticed something here, Lenny, when I passed just now with you,” she said, approaching the second recess behind the mantel-piece, corresponding with the recess in which the writing-table stood.

She looked into the place closely, and detected in a corner, darkened by the shadow of the heavy projecting mantel-piece, a narrow, rickety little table, made of the commonest mahogany—the frailest, poorest, least conspicuous piece of furniture in the whole room. She pushed it out contemptuously into the light with her foot. It ran on clumsy old-fashioned castors, and creaked wearily as it moved.

“Lenny, I have found another table,” said Rosamond. “A miserable, forlorn-looking little thing, lost in a corner. I have just pushed it into the light, and I have discovered one drawer

in it." She paused, and tried to open the drawer; but it resisted her. "Another lock!" she exclaimed impatiently. "Even this wretched thing is closed against us!"

She pushed the table sharply away with her hand. It swayed on its frail legs, tottered, and fell over on the floor—fell as heavily as a table of twice its size—fell with a shock that rang through the room, and repeated itself again and again in the echoes of the lonesome north hall.

Rosamond ran to her husband, seeing him start from his seat in alarm, and told him what had happened. "You call it a little table," he replied, in astonishment. "It fell like one of the largest pieces of furniture in the room!"

"Surely there must have been something heavy in the drawer!" said Rosamond, approaching the table with her spirits still fluttered by the shock of its unnaturally heavy fall. After waiting for a few moments to give the dust which it had raised, and which still hung over it in thick lazy clouds, time to disperse, she stooped down and examined it. It was cracked across the top from end to end, and the lock had been broken away from its fastenings by the fall.

She set the table up again carefully, drew out the drawer, and, after a glance at its contents, turned to her husband. "I knew it," she said, "I knew there must have been something heavy

in the drawer. It is full of pieces of copper-ore, like those specimens of my father's, Lenny, from Porthgenna mine. Wait! I think I feel something else, as far away at the back here as my hand can reach."

She extricated from the lumps of ore at the back of the drawer, a small circular picture-frame of black wood, about the size of an ordinary hand-glass. It came out with the front part downwards, and with the area which its circle inclosed filled up by a thin piece of wood, of the sort which is used at the backs of small frames to keep drawings and engravings steady in them. This piece of wood (only secured to the back of the frame by one nail) had been forced out of its place, probably by the overthrow of the table; and when Rosamond took the frame out of the drawer, she observed between it and the dislodged piece of wood, the end of a morsel of paper, apparently folded many times over, so as to occupy the smallest possible space. She drew out the piece of paper, laid it aside on the table without unfolding it, replaced the piece of wood in its proper position, and then turned the frame round, to see if there was a picture in front.

There was a picture—a picture painted in oils, darkened, but not much faded, by age. It represented the head of a woman, and the figure, as far as the bosom.

The instant Rosamond's eyes fell on it, she

shuddered, and hurriedly advanced towards her husband with the picture in her hand.

“Well, what have you found, now?” he inquired, hearing her approach.

“A picture,” she answered faintly, stopping to look at it again.

Leonard’s sensitive ear detected a change in her voice. “Is there anything that alarms you in the picture?” he asked, half in jest, half in earnest.

“There is something that startles me—something that seems to have turned me cold for the moment, hot as the day is,” said Rosamond.

“Do you remember the description the servant-girl gave us, on the night when we arrived here, of the ghost of the north rooms?”

“Yes, I remember it perfectly.”

“Lenny! that description and this picture are exactly alike! Here is the curling light-brown hair. Here is the dimple on each cheek. Here are the bright regular teeth. Here is that leering, wicked, fatal beauty which the girl tried to describe, and did describe, when she said it was awful!”

Leonard smiled. “That vivid fancy of yours, my dear, takes strange flights sometimes,” he said, quietly.

“Fancy!” repeated Rosamond to herself. “How can it be fancy when I see the face? how can it be fancy when I feel——” She stopped, shuddered again, and, returning hastily to the

table, placed the picture on it, face downwards. As she did so, the morsel of folded paper which she had removed from the back of the frame caught her eye.

“There may be some account of the picture in this,” she said, and stretched out her hand to it.

It was getting on towards noon. The heat weighed heavier on the air, and the stillness of all things was more intense than ever, as she took up the paper from the table.

Fold by fold she opened it, and saw that there were written characters inside, traced in ink that had faded to a light yellow hue. She smoothed it out carefully on the table—then took it up again, and looked at the first line of the writing.

The first line contained only three words—words which told her that the paper with the writing on it was not a description of a picture, but a letter—words which made her start and change colour the moment her eye fell upon them. Without attempting to read any further, she hastily turned over the leaf to find out the place where the writing ended.

It ended at the bottom of the third page; but there was a break in the lines, near the foot of the second page, and in that break there were two names signed. She looked at the uppermost of the two—started again—and turned back instantly to the first page.

Line by line, and word by word, she read

through the writing; her natural complexion fading out gradually the while, and a dull, equal whiteness overspreading all her face in its stead. When she had come to the end of the third page, the hand in which she held the letter dropped to her side, and she turned her head slowly towards Leonard. In that position she stood,—no tears moistening her eyes, no change passing over her features, no word escaping her lips, no movement varying the position of her limbs—in that position she stood, with the fatal letter crumpled up in her cold fingers, looking steadfastly, speechlessly, breathlessly at her blind husband.

He was still sitting as she had seen him a few minutes before, with his legs crossed, his hands clasped together in front of them, and his head turned expectantly in the direction in which he had last heard the sound of his wife's voice. But, in a few moments, the intense stillness in the room forced itself upon his attention. He changed his position—listened for a little, turning his head uneasily from side to side—and then called to his wife.

“Rosamond!”

At the sound of his voice her lips moved, and her fingers closed faster on the paper that they held; but she neither stepped forward nor spoke.

“Rosamond!”

Her lips moved again—faint traces of expression began to pass shadow-like over the blank

whiteness of her face—she advanced one step, hesitated, looked at the letter, and stopped.

Hearing no answer, he rose surprised and uneasy. Moving his poor helpless, wandering hands to and fro before him in the air, he walked forward a few paces, straight out from the wall against which he had been sitting. A chair, which his hands were not held low enough to touch, stood in his way; and, as he still advanced, he struck his knee sharply against it.

A cry burst from Rosamond's lips, as if the pain of the blow had passed, at the instant of its infliction, from her husband to herself. She was by his side in a moment. "You are not hurt, Lenny?" she said faintly.

"No, no." He tried to press his hand on the place where he had struck himself, but she knelt down quickly, and put her own hand there instead; nestling her head against him, while she was on her knees, in a strangely hesitating timid way. He lightly laid the hand which she had intercepted on her shoulder. The moment it touched her, her eyes began to soften; the tears rose in them, and fell slowly one by one down her cheeks.

"I thought you had left me," he said. "There was such a silence that I fancied you had gone out of the room."

"Will you come out of it with me, now?" Her strength seemed to fail her, while she asked

the question; her head drooped on her breast, and she let the letter fall on the floor at her side.

“Are you tired already, Rosamond? Your voice sounds as if you were.”

“I want to leave the room,” she said, still in the same low, faint, constrained tone. “Is your knee easier, dear? Can you walk, now?”

“Certainly. There is nothing in the world the matter with my knee. If you are tired, Rosamond—as I know you are, though you may not confess it—the sooner we leave the room the better.”

She appeared not to hear the last words he said. Her fingers were working feverishly about her neck and bosom; two bright red spots were beginning to burn in her pale cheeks; her eyes were fixed vacantly on the letter at her side; her hands wavered about it before she picked it up. For a few seconds she waited on her knees, looking at it intently, with her head turned away from her husband—then rose and walked to the fire-place. Among the dust, ashes, and other rubbish at the back of the grate, were scattered some old torn pieces of paper. They caught her eye, and held it fixed on them. She looked and looked, slowly bending down nearer and nearer to the grate. For one moment she held the letter out over the rubbish in both hands—the next she drew back shuddering violently, and turned round so as to face her husband again.

At the sight of him a faint inarticulate exclamation, half sigh, half sob, burst from her. "Oh, no, no!" she whispered to herself, clasping her hands together, fervently, and looking at him with fond, mournful eyes. "Never, never, Lenny—come of it what may!"

"Were you speaking to me, Rosamond?"

"Yes, love. I was saying—" She paused, and, with trembling fingers, folded up the paper again, exactly in the form in which she had found it.

"Where are you?" he asked. "Your voice sounds away from me at the other end of the room again. Where are you?"

She ran to him, flushed, and trembling, and tearful; took him by the arm; and, without an instant of hesitation, without the faintest sign of irresolution in her face, placed the folded paper boldly in his hand. "Keep that, Lenny," she said, turning deadly pale, but still not losing her firmness. "Keep that, and ask me to read it to you as soon as we are out of the Myrtle Room."

"What is it?" he asked.

"The last thing I have found, love," she replied, looking at him earnestly, [with a deep sigh of relief.

"Is it of any importance?"

Instead of answering, she suddenly caught him to her bosom, clung to him with all the

fervour of her impulsive nature, and breathlessly and passionately covered his face with kisses.

“Gently! gently!” said Leonard, laughing. “You take away my breath.”

She drew back, and stood looking at him in silence, with a hand laid on each of his shoulders. “Oh, my angel!” she murmured tenderly. “I would give all I have in the world, if I could only know how much you love me!”

“Surely,” he returned, still laughing, “surely, Rosamond, you ought to know by this time!”

“I shall know soon.” She spoke those words in tones so quiet and low that they were barely audible. Interpreting the change in her voice as a fresh indication of fatigue, Leonard invited her to lead him away by holding out his hand. She took it in silence, and guided him slowly to the door.

CHAPTER VI.



THE TELLING OF THE SECRET.

ON their way back to the inhabited side of the house, Rosamond said nothing more on the subject of the folded piece of paper which she had placed in her husband's hands. All her attention, while they were returning to the west front, seemed to be absorbed in the one act of jealously watching every inch of ground that he walked over, to make sure that it was safe and smooth before she suffered him to set his foot on it. Careful and considerate as she had always been, from the first day of their married life, whenever she led him from one place to another, she was now unduly, almost absurdly, anxious to preserve him from the remotest possibility of an accident. Finding that he was the nearest to the outside of the open landing, when they left the Myrtle Room, she insisted on changing places, so that he might be nearest to the wall. While they were descending the stairs, she stopped him in the middle, to inquire if he felt any pain in the

knee which he had struck against the chair. At the last step she brought him to a stand-still again, while she moved away the torn and tangled remains of an old mat, for fear one of his feet should catch in it. Walking across the north hall, she entreated that he would take her arm and lean heavily upon her, because she felt sure that his knee was not quite free from stiffness yet. Even at the short flight of stairs which connected the entrance to the hall with the passages leading to the west side of the house, she twice stopped him on the way down, to place his foot on the sound parts of the steps, which she represented as dangerously worn away in more places than one. He laughed good-humouredly at her excessive anxiety to save him from all danger of stumbling, and asked if there was any likelihood, with their numerous stoppages, of getting back to the west side of the house in time for lunch. She was not ready, as usual, with her retort; his laugh found no pleasant echo in hers: she only answered that it was impossible to be too anxious about him; and then went on in silence, till they reached the door of the housekeeper's room.

Leaving him for a moment outside, she went in to give the keys back again to Mrs. Pentreath.

“Dear me, ma'am!” exclaimed the housekeeper, “you look quite overcome by the heat of

the day, and the close air of those old rooms. Can I get you a glass of water, or may I give you my bottle of salts?"

Rosamond declined both offers.

"May I be allowed to ask, ma'am, if anything has been found this time in the north rooms?" inquired Mrs. Pentreath, hanging up the bunch of keys.

"Only some old papers," replied Rosamond turning away.

"I beg pardon, again, ma'am," pursued the housekeeper; "but, in case any of the gentry of the neighbourhood should call to-day?"

"We are engaged. No matter who it may be, we are both engaged." Answering briefly in these terms, Rosamond left Mrs. Pentreath, and rejoined her husband.

With the same excess of attention and care which she had shown on the way to the housekeeper's room, she now led him up the west staircase. The library door happening to stand open, they passed through it on their way to the drawing-room, which was the larger and cooler apartment of the two. Having guided Leonard to a seat, Rosamond returned to the library, and took from the table a tray containing a bottle of water, and a tumbler, which she had noticed when she passed through.

"I may feel faint as well as frightened," she said quickly to herself, turning round with

the tray in her hand to return to the drawing-room.

After she had put the water down on a table in a corner, she noiselessly locked first the door leading into the library, then the door leading into the passage. Leonard, hearing her moving about, advised her to keep quiet on the sofa. She patted him gently on the cheek, and was about to make some suitable answer, when she accidentally beheld her face reflected in the looking-glass under which he was sitting. The sight of her own white cheeks and startled eyes suspended the words on her lips. She hastened away to the window, to catch any breath of air that might be wafted towards her from the sea.

The heat-mist still hid the horizon. Nearer, the oily, colourless surface of the water was just visible, heaving slowly from time to time in one vast monotonous wave that rolled itself out smoothly and endlessly till it was lost in the white obscurity of the mist. Close on the shore, the noisy surf was hushed. No sound came from the beach except at long, wearily long intervals, when a quick thump, and a still splash, just audible and no more, announced the fall of one tiny, mimic wave upon the parching sand. On the terrace in front of the house, the changeless hum of summer insects was all that told of life and movement. Not a human figure was to be seen anywhere on the shore; no sign of a sail

loomed shadowy through the heat at sea; no breath of air waved the light tendrils of the creepers that twined up the house-wall, or refreshed the drooping flowers ranged in the windows. Rosamond turned away from the outer prospect, after a moment's weary contemplation of it. As she looked into the room again, her husband spoke to her.

"What precious thing lies hidden in this paper?" he asked, producing the letter, and smiling as he opened it. "Surely there must be something besides writing—some inestimable powder, or some bank-note of fabulous value—wrapped up in all these folds?"

Rosamond's heart sank within her, as he opened the letter and passed his finger over the writing inside, with a mock expression of anxiety, and a light jest about sharing all treasures discovered at Porthgenna with his wife.

"I will read it to you directly, Lenny," she said, dropping into the nearest seat, and languidly pushing her hair back from her temples. "But put it away for a few minutes now, and let us talk of anything else you like that does not remind us of the Myrtle Room. I am very capricious, am I not, to be so suddenly weary of the very subject that I have been fondest of talking about for so many weeks past? Tell me, love," she added, rising abruptly and going to the back of his chair; "do I get worse with my

whims and fancies and faults?—or am I improved, since the time when we were first married?”

He tossed the letter aside carelessly on a table which was always placed by the arm of his chair, and shook his forefinger at her with a frown of comic reproof. “Oh fie, Rosamond! are you trying to entrap me into paying you compliments?”

The light tone that he persisted in adopting seemed absolutely to terrify her. She shrank away from his chair, and sat down again at a little distance from him.

“I remember I used to offend you,” she continued quickly and confusedly. “No, no, not to offend—only to vex you a little—by talking too familiarly to the servants. You might almost have fancied, at first, if you had not known me so well, that it was a habit with me because I had once been a servant myself. Suppose I had been a servant—the servant who had helped to nurse you in your illnesses, the servant who led you about in your blindness more carefully than anyone else—would you have thought much, then, of the difference between us? would you——”

She stopped. The smile had vanished from Leonard's face, and he had turned a little away from her. “What is the use, Rosamond, of supposing events that never could have happened?” he asked rather impatiently.

She went to the side-table, poured out some of the water she had brought from the library, and drank it eagerly; then walked to the window and plucked a few of the flowers that were placed there. She threw some of them away again the next moment; but kept the rest in her hand, thoughtfully arranging them so as to contrast their colours with the best effect. When this was done, she put them into her bosom, looked down absently at them, took them out again, and, returning to her husband, placed the little nose-gay in the button-hole of his coat.

“Something to make you look gay and bright, love—as I always wish to see you,” she said, seating herself in her favourite attitude at his feet, and looking up at him sadly, with her arms resting on his knees.

“What are you thinking about, Rosamond?” he asked, after an interval of silence.

“I was only wondering, Lenny, whether any woman in the world could be as fond of you as I am. I feel almost afraid that there are others who would ask nothing better than to live and die for you, as well as me. There is something in your face, in your voice, in all your ways—something besides the interest of your sad, sad affliction—that would draw any woman’s heart to you, I think. If I was to die—”

“If you were to die!” He started as he repeated the words after her, and, leaning for-

ward, anxiously laid his hand upon her forehead. "You are thinking and talking very strangely, this morning, Rosamond! Are you not well?"

She rose on her knees and looked closer at him, her face brightening a little, and a faint smile just playing round her lips. "I wonder if you will always be as anxious about me, and as fond of me, as you are now?" she whispered, kissing his hand as she removed it from her forehead. He leaned back again in the chair and told her jestingly not to look too far into the future. The words, lightly as they were spoken, struck deep into her heart. "There are times, Lenny," she said, "when all one's happiness in the present depends upon one's certainty of the future." She looked at the letter, which her husband had left open on a table near him, as she spoke; and, after a momentary struggle with herself, took it in her hand to read it. At the first word her voice failed her; the deadly paleness overspread her face again; she threw the letter back on the table, and walked away to the other end of the room.

"The future?" asked Leonard. "What future, Rosamond, can you possibly mean?"

"Suppose I meant our future at Porthgenna?" she said, moistening her dry lips with a few drops of water. "Shall we stay here as long as we thought we should, and be as happy as we have been everywhere else? You told me on

the journey that I should find it dull, and that I should be driven to try all sorts of extraordinary occupations to amuse myself. You said you expected that I should begin with gardening and end by writing a novel. A novel!" She approached her husband again, and watched his face eagerly while she went on. "Why not? More women write novels now than men. What is to prevent me from trying? The first great requisite, I suppose, is to have an idea of a story; and that I have got." She advanced a few steps further, reached the table on which the letter lay, and placed her hand on it, keeping her eyes still fixed intently on Leonard's face.

"And what is your idea, Rosamond?" he asked.

"This," she replied. "I mean to make the main interest of the story centre in two young married people. They shall be very fond of each other—as fond as we are, Lenny—and they shall be in our rank of life. After they have been happily married some time, and when they have got one child to make them love each other more dearly than ever, a terrible discovery shall fall upon them like a thunderbolt. The husband shall have chosen for his wife a young lady bearing as ancient a family name as—"

"As your name?" suggested Leonard.

"As the name of the Treverton family," she continued, after a pause, during which her hand

had been restlessly moving the letter to and fro on the table. "The husband shall be well-born—as well-born as you, Lenny—and the terrible discovery shall be, that his wife has no right to the ancient name that she bore when he married her."

"I can't say, my love, that I approve of your idea. Your story will decoy the reader into feeling an interest in a woman who turns out to be an impostor."

"No!" cried Rosamond, warmly. "A true woman—a woman who never stooped to a deception—a woman full of faults and failings, but a teller of the truth at all hazards and all sacrifices. Hear me out, Lenny, before you judge." Hot tears rushed into her eyes; but she dashed them away passionately, and went on. "The wife shall grow up to womanhood, and shall marry, in total ignorance—mind, that!—in total ignorance of her real history. The sudden disclosure of the truth shall overwhelm her—she shall find herself struck by a calamity which she had no hand in bringing about. She shall be crushed, petrified, staggered in her very reason by the discovery; it shall burst upon her when she has no one but herself to depend on; she shall have the power of keeping it a secret from her husband with perfect impunity; she shall be tried, she shall be shaken in her mortal frailness, by one moment of fearful temptation; she shall

conquer it, and, of her own free will, she shall tell her husband all that she knows herself. Now, Lenny, what do you call that woman? an impostor?"

"No: a victim."

"Who goes of her own accord to the sacrifice? and who *is* to be sacrificed?"

"I did not say that."

"What would you do with her, Lenny, if you were writing the story? I mean, how would you make her husband behave to her? It is a question in which a man's nature is concerned, and a woman is not competent to decide it. I am perplexed about how to end the story. How would you end it, love?" As she ceased, her voice sank sadly to its gentlest pleading tones. She came close to him, and twined her fingers in his hair fondly. "How would you end it, love?" she repeated, stooping down till her trembling lips just touched his forehead.

He moved uneasily in his chair, and replied, "I am not a writer of novels, Rosamond."

"But how would you act, Lenny, if you were that husband?"

"It is hard for me to say," he answered. "I have not your vivid imagination, my dear: I have no power of putting myself, at a moment's notice, into a position that is not my own, and of knowing how I should act in it."

“ But suppose your wife was close to you—as close as I am now ? Suppose she had just told you the dreadful secret, and was standing before you—as I am standing now—with the happiness of her whole life to come depending on one kind word from your lips ? Oh, Lenny, you would not let her drop broken-hearted at your feet ? You would know, let her birth be what it might, that she was still the same faithful creature who had cherished, and served, and trusted, and worshipped you since her marriage-day, and who asked nothing in return but to lay her head on your bosom, and to hear you say that you loved her ? You would know that she had nerved herself to tell the fatal secret, because, in her loyalty and love to her husband, she would rather die forsaken and despised, than live, deceiving him ? You would know all this, and you would open your arms to the mother of your child, to the wife of your first love, though she was the lowliest of all lowly-born women in the estimation of the world ? Oh, you would, Lenny, I know you would ! ”

“ Rosamond ! how your hands tremble ; how your voice alters ! You are agitating yourself about this supposed story of yours, as if you were talking of real events. ”

“ You would take her to your heart, Lenny ? You would open your arms to her without an instant of unworthy doubt ? ”

“Hush! hush! I hope I should.”

“Hope? only hope? Oh, think again, love, think again; and say you *know* you should!”

“Must I, Rosamond? Then I do say it.”

She drew back as the words passed his lips, and took the letter from the table.

“You have not yet asked me, Lenny, to read the letter that I found in the Myrtle Room. I offer to read it now, of my own accord.” She trembled a little as she spoke those few decisive words, but her utterance of them was clear and steady, as if her consciousness of being now irrevocably pledged to make the disclosure, had strengthened her at last to dare all hazards and end all suspense.

Her husband turned towards the place from which the sound of her voice had reached him, with a mixed expression of perplexity and surprise in his face. “You pass so suddenly from one subject to another,” he said, “that I hardly know how to follow you. What in the world, Rosamond, takes you, at one jump, from a romantic argument about a situation in a novel, to the plain, practical business of reading an old letter?”

“Perhaps there is a closer connection between the two, than you suspect,” she answered.

“A closer connection? What connection? I don’t understand.”

“The letter will explain.”

“Why the letter? Why should *you* not explain?”

She stole one anxious look at his face, and saw that a sense of something serious to come was now overshadowing his mind for the first time.

“Rosamond!” he exclaimed, “there is some mystery —”

“There are no mysteries between us two,” she interposed quickly. “There never have been any, love; there never shall be.” She moved a little nearer to him to take her old favourite place on his knee, then checked herself, and drew back again to the table. Warning tears in her eyes bade her distrust her own firmness, and read the letter where she could not feel the beating of his heart.

“Did I tell you,” she resumed, after waiting an instant to compose herself, “where I found the folded piece of paper which I put into your hand in the Myrtle Room?”

“No,” he replied, “I think not.”

“I found it at the back of the frame of that picture—the picture of the ghostly woman with the wicked face. I opened it immediately, and saw that it was a letter. The address inside, the first line under it, and one of the two signatures which it contained, were in a handwriting that I knew.”

“Whose?”

“The handwriting of the late Mrs. Treverton.”

“Of your mother?”

“Of the late Mrs. Treverton.”

“Gracious God, Rosamond! why do you speak of her in that way?”

“Let me read, and you will know. I would rather read it than tell it. You have seen, with my eyes, what the Myrtle Room is like; you have seen, with my eyes, every object which the search through it brought to light; you must now see, with my eyes, what this letter contains. It is the Secret of the Myrtle Room.”

She bent close over the faint, faded writing, and read these words:—

“To my husband—

“We have parted, Arthur, for ever, and I have not had the courage to embitter our farewell by confessing that I have deceived you—cruelly and basely deceived you. But a few minutes since, you were weeping by my bedside, and speaking of our child. My wronged, my beloved husband, the little daughter of your heart is not yours, is not mine. She is a love-child, whom I have imposed on you for mine. Her father was a miner at Porthgenna, her mother is my maid, Sarah Leeson.”

Rosamond paused, but never raised her head from the letter. She heard her husband lay his

hand suddenly on the table ; she heard him start to his feet ; she heard him draw his breath heavily in one quick gasp ; she heard him whisper to himself the instant after, “ A love-child ! ” With a fearful, painful distinctness she heard those three words. The tone in which he whispered them turned her cold. But she never moved, for there was more to read ; and while more remained, if her life had depended on it, she could not have looked up.

In a moment more she went on, and read these lines next :—

“ I have many heavy sins to answer for, but this one sin you must pardon, Arthur ; for I committed it through fondness for you. That fondness told me a secret which you sought to hide from me. That fondness told me that your barren wife would never make your heart all her own until she had borne you a child ; and your lips proved it true. Your first words, when you came back from sea, and when the infant was placed in your arms, were :—‘ I have never loved you, Rosamond, as I love you now. ’ If you had not said that, I should never have kept my guilty secret.

“ I can add no more, for death is very near me. How the fraud was committed, and what my other motives were, I must leave you to discover from the mother of the child, who writes this

under my dictation, and who is charged to give it to you when I am no more. You will be merciful to the poor little creature who bears my name, I know. Be merciful also to her unhappy parent: she is only guilty of too blindly obeying me. If there is anything that mitigates the bitterness of my remorse, it is the remembrance that my act of deceit saved the most faithful and the most affectionate of women from shame that she had not deserved. Remember me forgivingly, Arthur,—words may tell how I have sinned against you; no words can tell how I have loved you!”

She had struggled on thus far, and had reached the last line on the second page of the letter, when she paused again, and then tried to read the first of the two signatures—“Rosamond Treverton.” She faintly repeated two syllables of that familiar Christian name—the name that was on her husband’s lips every hour of the day!—and strove to articulate the third, but her voice failed her. All the sacred household memories which that ruthless letter had profaned for ever, seemed to tear themselves away from her heart at the same moment. With a low, moaning cry she dropped her arms on the table, and laid her head down on them, and hid her face.

She heard nothing, she was conscious of nothing, until she felt a touch on her shoulder

—a light touch from a hand that trembled. Every pulse in her body bounded in answer to it, and she looked up.

Her husband had guided himself near to her by the table. The tears were glistening in his dim, sightless eyes. As she rose and touched him, his arms opened, and closed fast round her.

“My own Rosamond!” he said, “come to me and be comforted!”

BOOK VI.

CHAPTER I.



UNCLE JOSEPH.

THE day and the night had passed, and the new morning had come, before the husband and wife could trust themselves to speak calmly of the Secret, and to face resignedly the duties and the sacrifices which the discovery of it imposed on them.

Leonard's first question referred to those lines in the letter, which Rosamond had informed him were in a handwriting that she knew. Finding that he was at a loss to understand what means she could have of forming an opinion on this point, she explained that, after Captain Treverton's death, many letters had naturally fallen into her possession, which had been written by Mrs. Treverton to her husband. They treated of ordinary domestic subjects, and she had read them often enough to become thoroughly acquainted with the peculiarities of Mrs. Treverton's handwriting. It was remarkably large, firm, and masculine in character; and the address, the line

under it, and the uppermost of the two signatures in the letter which had been found in the Myrtle Room, exactly resembled it in every particular.

The next question related to the body of the letter. The writing of this, of the second signature ("Sarah Leeson"), and of the additional lines on the third page, also signed by Sarah Leeson, proclaimed itself in each case to be the production of the same person. While stating that fact to her husband, Rosamond did not forget to explain to him that, while reading the letter on the previous day, her strength and courage had failed her before she got to the end of it. She added that the postscript which she had thus omitted to read, was of importance, because it mentioned the circumstances under which the Secret had been hidden; and begged that he would listen while she made him acquainted with its contents without any further delay.

Sitting as close to his side, now, as if they were enjoying their first honeymoon-days over again, she read these last lines—the lines which her mother had written sixteen years before, on the morning when she fled from Porthgenna Tower:—

"If this paper should ever be found (which I pray with my whole heart it never may be), I wish to state that I have come to the resolution

of hiding it, because I dare not show the writing that it contains to my master, to whom it is addressed. In doing what I now propose to do, though I am acting against my mistress's last wishes, I am not breaking the solemn engagement which she obliged me to make before her on her death-bed. That engagement forbids me to destroy this letter, or to take it away with me if I leave the house. I shall do neither,—my purpose is to conceal it in the place, of all others, where I think there is least chance of its ever being found again. Any hardship or misfortune which may follow as a consequence of this deceitful proceeding on my part, will fall on myself. Others, I believe, on my conscience, will be the happier for the hiding of the dreadful secret which this letter contains."

"There can be no doubt, now," said Leonard, when his wife had read to the end; "Mrs. Jazeph, Sarah Leeson, and the servant who disappeared from Porthgenna Tower, are one and the same person."

"Poor creature!" said Rosamond, sighing as she put down the letter. "We know now why she warned me so anxiously not to go into the Myrtle Room. Who can say what she must have suffered when she came as a stranger to my bedside? Oh, what would I not give if I had been less hasty with her! It is dreadful to remember

that I spoke to her as a servant whom I expected to obey me; it is worse still to feel that I cannot, even now, think of her as a child should think of a mother. How can I ever tell her that I know the secret? how—" She paused, with a heart-sick consciousness of the slur that was cast on her birth; she paused, shrinking as she thought of the name her husband had given to her, and of her own parentage, which the laws of society disdained to recognise.

"Why do you stop?" asked Leonard.

"I was afraid—" she began, and paused again.

"Afraid," he said, finishing the sentence for her, "that words of pity for that unhappy woman might wound my sensitive pride, by reminding me of the circumstances of your birth? Rosamond, I should be unworthy of your matchless truthfulness towards me, if I, on my side, did not acknowledge that this discovery *has* wounded me as only a proud man can be wounded. My pride has been born and bred in me. My pride, even while I am now speaking to you, takes advantage of my first moments of composure, and deludes me into doubting, in the face of all probability, whether the words you have read to me, can, after all, be words of truth. But, strong as that inborn and inbred feeling is—hard as it may be for me to discipline and master it as I ought, and must, and will,—there is another feeling in my heart that is stronger

yet." He felt for her hand, and took it in his; then added: "From the hour when you first devoted your life to your blind husband,—from the hour when you won all his gratitude, as you had already won all his love, you took a place in his heart, Rosamond, from which nothing, not even such a shock as has now assailed us, can move you! High as I have always held the worth of rank in my estimation, I have learnt, even before the event of yesterday, to hold the worth of my wife, let her parentage be what it may, higher still."

"Oh, Lenny, Lenny, I can't hear you praise me, if you talk in the same breath as if I had made a sacrifice in marrying you! But for my blind husband I might never have deserved what you have just said of me. When I first read that fearful letter, I had one moment of vile, ungrateful doubt if your love for me would hold out against the discovery of the secret. I had one moment of horrible temptation that drew me away from you when I ought to have put the letter into your hand. It was the sight of you, waiting for me to speak again, so innocent of all knowledge of what had happened close by you, that brought me back to my senses, and told me what I ought to do. It was the sight of my blind husband that made me conquer the temptation to destroy that letter, in the first hour of discovering it. Oh, if I had been the hardest-

hearted of women, could I have ever taken your hand again,—could I kiss you, could I lie down by your side, and hear you fall asleep, night after night, feeling that I had abused your blind dependence on me, to serve my own selfish interests? knowing that I had only succeeded in my deceit because your affliction made you incapable of suspecting deception? No, no; I can hardly believe that the basest of women could be guilty of such baseness as that; and I can claim nothing more for myself than the credit of having been true to my trust. You said yesterday, love, in the Myrtle Room, that the one faithful friend to you in your blindness who never failed, was your wife. It is reward enough and consolation enough for me, now that the worst is over, to know that you can say so still.”

“Yes, Rosamond, the worst is over; but we must not forget that there may be hard trials still to meet.”

“Hard trials, love? To what trials do you refer?”

“Perhaps, Rosamond, I over-rate the courage that the sacrifice demands; but, to *me* at least, it will be a hard sacrifice of my own feelings to make strangers partakers in the knowledge of the secret that we now possess.”

Rosamond looked at her husband in astonishment. “Why need we tell the secret to anyone?” she asked.

“Assuming that we can satisfy ourselves of the genuineness of that letter,” he answered, “we shall have no choice but to tell the secret to strangers. You cannot forget the circumstances under which your father—under which Captain Treverton—”

“Call him my father,” said Rosamond sadly. “Remember how he loved me, and how I loved him, and say ‘my father,’ still.”

“I am afraid I must say ‘Captain Treverton’ now,” returned Leonard, “or I shall hardly be able to explain simply and plainly what it is very necessary that you should know. Captain Treverton died without leaving a will. His only property was the purchase-money of this house and estate; and you inherited it, as his next of kin—”

Rosamond started back in her chair and clasped her hands in dismay. “Oh, Lenny,” she said simply. “I have thought so much of you, since I found the letter, that I never remembered this!”

“It is time to remember it, my love. If you are not Captain Treverton’s daughter, you have no right to one farthing of the fortune that you possess; and it must be restored at once to the person who is Captain Treverton’s next of kin—or, in other words, to his brother.”

“To that man!” exclaimed Rosamond. “To that man who is a stranger to us, who holds our

very name in contempt! Are we to be made poor that he may be made rich?—”

“We are to do what is honourable and just, at any sacrifice of our own interests and ourselves,” said Leonard firmly. “I believe, Rosamond, that my consent, as your husband, is necessary, according to the law, to effect this restitution. If Mr. Andrew Treverton was the bitterest enemy I had on earth, and if the restoring of this money utterly ruined us both in our worldly circumstances, I would give it back of my own accord to the last farthing; I would give it back without an instant’s hesitation—and so would you!”

The blood mantled in his cheeks as he spoke. Rosamond looked at him admiringly in silence. “Who would have him less proud,” she thought fondly, “when his pride speaks in such words as those!”

“You understand now,” continued Leonard, “that we have duties to perform which will oblige us to seek help from others, and which will therefore render it impossible to keep the secret to ourselves? If we search all England for her, Sarah Leeson must be found. Our future actions depend upon her answers to our inquiries, upon her testimony to the genuineness of that letter. Although I am resolved beforehand to shield myself behind no technical quibbles and delays—although I want nothing

but evidence that is morally conclusive, however legally imperfect it may be—it is still impossible to proceed without seeking advice immediately. The lawyer who always managed Captain Treverton's affairs, and who now manages ours, is the proper person to direct us in instituting the search; and to assist us, if necessary, in making the restitution."

"How quietly and firmly you speak of it, Lenny! Will not the abandoning of my fortune be a dreadful loss to us?"

"We must think of it as a gain to our consciences, Rosamond; and must alter our way of life resignedly to suit our altered means. But we need speak no more of that until we are assured of the necessity of restoring the money. My immediate anxiety, and your immediate anxiety, must turn now on the discovery of Sarah Leeson—no! on the discovery of your mother; I must learn to call her by that name, or I shall not learn to pity and forgive her."

Rosamond nestled closer to her husband's side. "Every word you say, love, does my heart good," she whispered, laying her head on his shoulder. "You will help me and strengthen me, when the time comes, to meet my mother as I ought? Oh, how pale and worn and weary she was when she stood by my bedside, and looked at me and my child! Will it be long before we find her?"

Is she far away from us, I wonder? or nearer, much nearer, than we think?"

Before Leonard could answer, he was interrupted by a knock at the door, and Rosamond was surprised by the appearance of the maid-servant. Betsey was flushed, excited, and out of breath; but she contrived to deliver intelligibly a brief message from Mr. Munder, the steward, requesting permission to speak to Mr. Frankland, or to Mrs. Frankland, on business of importance.

"What is it? What does he want?" asked Rosamond.

"I think, ma'am, he wants to know whether he had better send for the constable or not," answered Betsey.

"Send for the constable!" repeated Rosamond. "Are there thieves in the house in broad daylight?"

"Mr. Munder says he don't know but what it may be worse than thieves," replied Betsey. "It's the foreigner again, if you please, ma'am. He come up and rung at the door [as bold as brass, and asked if he could see Mrs. Frankland."

"The foreigner!" exclaimed Rosamond, laying her hand eagerly on her husband's arm.

"Yes, ma'am," said Betsey. "Him as come here to go over the house along with the lady—"

Rosamond, with characteristic impulsiveness,

started to her feet. "Let me go down!" she began.

"Wait," interposed Leonard, catching her by the hand. "There is not the least need for you to go down stairs. Show the foreigner up here," he continued, addressing himself to Betsey, "and tell Mr. Munder that we will take the management of this business into our own hands."

Rosamond sat down again by her husband's side. "This is a very strange accident," she said, in a low, serious tone. "It must be something more than mere chance that puts the clue into our hands, at the moment when we least expected to find it."

The door opened for the second time, and there appeared, modestly, on the threshold, a little old man, with rosy cheeks and long white hair. A small leather case was slung by a strap at his side, and the stem of a pipe peeped out of the breast-pocket of his coat. He advanced one step into the room, stopped, raised both his hands with his felt hat crumpled up in them to his heart, and made five fantastic bows in quick succession—two to Mrs. Frankland, two to her husband, and one to Mrs. Frankland, again, as an act of separate and special homage to the lady. Never had Rosamond seen a more complete embodiment in human form of perfect innocence and perfect harmlessness, than the foreigner who was described in the housekeeper's letter

as an audacious vagabond, and who was dreaded by Mr. Munder as something worse than a thief!

“Madam, and good sir,” said the old man, advancing a little nearer at Mrs. Frankland’s invitation, “I ask your pardon for intruding myself. My name is Joseph Buschmann. I live in the town of Truro, where I work in cabinets and tea-caddies, and other shining woods. I am also, if you please, the same little foreign man who was scolded by the big major-domo when I came to see the house. All that I ask of your kindness is, that you will let me say for my errand here and for myself, and for another person who is very near to my love,—one little word. I will be but few minutes, madam and good sir, and then I will go my ways again, with my best wishes and my best thanks.”

“Pray, consider, Mr. Buschmann, that our time is your time,” said Leonard. “We have no engagement whatever which need oblige you to shorten your visit. I must tell you, beforehand, in order to prevent any embarrassment on either side, that I have the misfortune to be blind. I can promise you, however, my best attention as far as listening goes. Rosamond, is Mr. Buschmann seated?”

Mr. Buschmann was still standing near the door, and was expressing sympathy by bowing to Mr. Frankland again, and crumpling his felt hat once more over his heart.

“Pray come nearer, and sit down,” said Rosamond. “And don’t imagine for one moment that any opinion of the steward’s has the least influence on us, or that we feel it at all necessary for you to apologise for what took place the last time you came to this house. We have an interest—a very great interest,” she added, with her usual hearty frankness, “in hearing anything that you have to tell us. You are the person of all others whom we are, just at this time—” She stopped, feeling her foot touched by her husband’s, and rightly interpreting the action as a warning not to speak too unrestrainedly to the visitor, before he had explained his object in coming to the house.

Looking very much pleased, and a little surprised also, when he heard Rosamond’s last words, Uncle Joseph drew a chair near to the table by which Mr. and Mrs. Frankland were sitting, crumpled his felt hat up smaller than ever and put it in one of his side pockets, drew from the other a little packet of letters, placed them on his knees as he sat down, patted them gently with both hands, and entered on his explanation in these terms:—

“Madam and good sir,” he began, “before I can say comfortably my little word, I must, with your leave, travel backwards to the last time when I came to this house in company with my niece.”

“Your niece!” exclaimed Rosamond and Leonard, both speaking together.

“My niece, Sarah,” said Uncle Joseph, “the only child of my sister Agatha. It is for the love of Sarah, if you please, that I am here now. She is the one last morsel of my flesh and blood that is left to me in the world. The rest, they are all gone! My wife, my little Joseph, my brother Max, my sister Agatha and the husband she married, the good and noble Englishman, Leeson—they are all, all gone!”

“Leeson,” said Rosamond, pressing her husband’s hand significantly under the table. “Your niece’s name is Sarah Leeson?”

Uncle Joseph sighed and shook his head. “One day,” he said, “of all the days in the year the evilmost for Sarah, she changed that name. Of the man she married—who is dead now, madam—it is little or nothing that I know but this:—His name was Jazeph, and he used her ill, for which I think him the First Scoundrel! Yes,” exclaimed Uncle Joseph, with the nearest approach to anger and bitterness which his nature was capable of making, and with an idea that he was using one of the strongest superlatives in the language. “Yes! if he was to come to life again at this very moment of time, I would say it of him to his face:—Englishman Jazeph, you are the First Scoundrel!”

Rosamond pressed her husband’s hand for the

second time. If their own convictions had not already identified Mrs. Jazeph with Sarah Leeson, the old man's last words must have amply sufficed to assure them that both names had been borne by the same person.

“ Well, then, I shall now travel backwards to the time when I was here with Sarah, my niece,” resumed Uncle Joseph. “ I must, if you please, speak the truth in this business, or, now that I am already backwards where I want to be, I shall stick fast in my place, and get on no more for the rest of my life. Sir and good madam, will you have the great kindness to forgive me and Sarah, my niece, if I confess that it was not to see the house that we came here, and rang at the bell, and gave deal of trouble, and wasted much breath of the big major-domo's with the scolding that we got. It was only to do one curious little thing, that we came together to this place—or, no, it was all about a secret of Sarah's, which is still as black and dark to me as the middle of the blackest and darkest night that ever was in the world—and, as I nothing knew about it, except that there was no harm in it to anybody or anything, and that Sarah was determined to go, and that I could not let her go by herself: as also for the good reason that she told me, she had the best right of anybody to take the letter and to hide it again, seeing that she was afraid of its being found if longer in that room she left it, which

was the room where she had hidden it before— Why, so it happened, that I—no, that she—no, no, that I—Ach Gott!” cried Uncle Joseph, striking his forehead in despair, and relieving himself by an invocation in his own language. “I am lost in my own muddlement; and whereabouts the right place is, and how I am to get myself back into it, as I am a living sinner is more than I know!”

“There is not the least need to go back on our account,” said Rosamond, forgetting all caution and self-restraint in her anxiety to restore the old man’s confidence and composure. “Pray don’t try to repeat your explanations. We know already —”

“We will suppose,” said Leonard, interposing abruptly before his wife could add another word, “that we know already everything you can desire to tell us in relation to your niece’s secret, and to your motives for desiring to see the house.”

“You will suppose that!” exclaimed Uncle Joseph, looking greatly relieved. “Ah! I thank you, sir, and you, good madam, a thousand times for helping me out of my own muddlement with a ‘Suppose.’ I am all over confusion from my tops to my toes; but I can go on now, I think, and lose myself no more. So! Let us say it in this way: I and Sarah, my niece, are *in* the house—that is the first ‘Suppose.’ I and Sarah, my niece, are *out* of the house—that is the second

‘Suppose.’ Good! now we go on once more. On my way back to my own home at Truro, I am frightened for Sarah, because of the faint she fell into on your stairs here, and because of a look in her face that it makes me heavy at my heart to see. Also, I am sorry for her sake, because she has not done that one curious little thing which she came into the house to do. I fret about these same matters, but I console myself too; and my comfort is that Sarah will stop with me in my house at Truro, and that I shall make her happy and well again, as soon as we are settled in our life together. Judge, then, sir, what a blow falls on me, when I hear that she will not make her home where I make mine. Judge you, also, good madam, what my surprise must be, when I ask for her reason, and she tells me she must leave Uncle Joseph, because she is afraid of being found out by *you*.” He stopped, and looking anxiously at Rosamond’s face, saw it sadden and turn away from him, after he had spoken his last words. “Are you sorry, madam, for Sarah, my niece? do you pity her?” he asked with a little hesitation and trembling in his voice.

“I pity her with my whole heart,” said Rosamond, warmly.

“And with my whole heart for that pity I thank you!” rejoined Uncle Joseph. “Ah, madam, your kindness gives me the courage to

go on, and to tell you that we parted from each other on the day of our getting back to Truro! When she came to see me this time, it was years and years, long and lonely and very many, since we two had met. I was afraid that many more would pass again, and I tried to make her stop with me to the very last. But she had still the same fear to drive her away; the fear of being found and put to the question by you. So, with the tears in her eyes (and in mine), and the grief at her heart (and at mine), she went away to hide herself in the empty bigness of the great city, London, which swallows up all people and all things that pour into it, and which has now swallowed up Sarah, my niece, with the rest. 'My child, you will write sometimes to Uncle Joseph?' I said, and she answered me, 'I will write often.' It is three weeks now since that time, and here, on my knee, are four letters she has written to me. I shall ask your leave to put them down open before you, because they will help me to get on farther yet with what I must say, and because I see in your face, madam, that you are indeed sorry for Sarah, my niece, from your heart."

He untied the packet of letters, opened them, kissed them one by one, and put them down in a row on the table, smoothing them out carefully with his hand, and taking great pains to arrange them all in a perfectly straight line. A glance at

the first of the little series showed Rosamond that the handwriting in it was the same as the handwriting in the body of the letter which had been found in the Myrtle Room.

“There is not much to read,” said Uncle Joseph. “But if you will look through them first, madam, I can tell you after, all the reason for showing them that I have.”

The old man was right. There was very little to read in the letters, and they grew progressively shorter as they became more recent in date. All four were written in the formal, conventionally correct style of a person taking up the pen with a fear of making mistakes in spelling and grammar, and were equally destitute of any personal particulars relative to the writer; all four anxiously entreated that Uncle Joseph would not be uneasy, inquired after his health, and expressed gratitude and love for him as warmly as their timid restraints of style would permit; all four contained these two questions relating to Rosamond:—First, had Mrs. Frankland arrived yet at Porthgenna Tower? Secondly, if she had arrived, what had Uncle Joseph heard about her?—And, finally, all four gave the same instructions for addressing an answer:—“Please direct to me, ‘S. J., Post Office, Smith Street, London,’”—followed by the same apology, “Excuse my not giving my address, in case of accidents; for even in London, I am still afraid of being followed and

found out. I send every morning for letters ; so I am sure to get your answer."

"I told you, madam," said the old man, when Rosamond raised her head from the letters, "that I was frightened and sorry for Sarah when she left me. Now see, if you please, why I get more frightened and more sorry yet, when I have all the four letters that she writes to me. They begin here, with the first, at my left hand ; and they grow shorter, and shorter, and shorter, as they get nearer to my right, till the last is but eight little lines. Again, see, if you please. The writing of the first letter, here, at my left hand, is very fine—I mean it is very fine to me, because I love Sarah, and because I write very badly myself—but it is not so good in the second letter, it shakes a little, it blots a little, it crooks itself a little, in the last lines. In the third it is worse—more shake, more blot, more crook. In the fourth, where there is least to do, there is still more shake, still more blot, still more crook, than in all the other three put together. I see this ; I remember that she was weak, and worn, and weary when she left me, and I say to myself, 'She is ill, though she will not tell it, for the writing betrays her !' "

Rosamond looked down again at the letters, and followed the significant changes for the worse in the handwriting, line by line, as the old man pointed them out.

“I say to myself that,” he continued, “I wait, and think a little; and I hear my own heart whisper to me, ‘Go you, Uncle Joseph, to London, and, while there is yet time, bring her back to be cured, and comforted and made happy in your own home!’ After that, I wait, and think a little again—not about leaving my business; I would leave it for ever sooner than Sarah should come to harm—but about what I am to do to get her to come back. That thought makes me look at the letters again; the letters show me always the same questions about Mistress Frankland; I see it plainly as my own hand before me, that I shall never get Sarah, my niece, back, unless I can make easy her mind about those questions of Mistress Frankland’s that she dreads as if there was death to her in every one of them. I see it! it makes my pipe go out; it drives me up from my chair; it puts my hat on my head; it brings me here, where I have once intruded myself already, and where I have no right, I know, to intrude myself again; it makes me beg and pray now, of your compassion for my niece, and of your goodness for me, that you will not deny me the means of bringing Sarah back. If I may only say to her, I have seen Mistress Frankland, and she has told me with her own lips that she will ask none of those questions that you fear so much—if I may only say that, Sarah will come back with me, and I

shall thank you every day of my life for making me a happy man !”

The simple eloquence of his words, the innocent earnestness of his manner, touched Rosamond to the heart. “I will do anything, I will promise anything,” she answered eagerly, “to help you to bring her back ! If she will only let me see her, I promise not to say one word that she would not wish me to say ; I promise not to ask one question—no, not one—that it will pain her to answer. Oh, what comforting message can I send besides ! what can I say !”—— she stopped confusedly, feeling her husband’s foot touching hers again.

“Ah, say no more ! say no more !” cried Uncle Joseph, tying up his little packet of letters, with his eyes sparkling and his ruddy face all in a glow. “Enough said to bring Sarah back ! enough said to make me grateful for all my life ! Oh, I am so happy, so happy, so happy, my skin is too small to hold me !” He tossed up the packet of letters into the air, caught it, kissed it, and put it back again in his pocket, all in an instant.

“You are not going ?” said Rosamond. “Surely you are not going yet ?”

“It is my loss to go away from here, which I must put up with, because it is also my gain to get sooner to Sarah,” said Uncle Joseph. “For that reason only, I shall ask your pardon if I take my

leave, with my heart full of thanks, and go my ways home again."

"When do you propose to start for London, Mr. Buschmann?" inquired Leonard.

"To-morrow, in the morning, early, sir," replied Uncle Joseph. "I shall finish the work that I must do to-night, and shall leave the rest to Samuel (who is my very good friend, and my shopman too), and shall then go to Sarah by the first coach."

"May I ask for your niece's address in London, in case we wish to write to you?"

"She gives me no address, sir, but the post-office; for even at the great distance of London, the same fear that she had all the way from this house, still sticks to her. But here is the place where I shall get my own bed," continued the old man, producing a small shop card. "It is the house of a countryman of my own, a fine baker of buns, sir, and a very good man indeed."

"Have you thought of any plan for finding out your niece's address?" inquired Rosamond, copying the direction on the card while she spoke.

"Ah, yes,—for I am always quick at making my plans," said Uncle Joseph. "I shall present myself to the master of the post, and to him I shall say just this and no more: 'Good morning, sir. I am the man who writes the letters to S. J. She is my niece, if you please; and all that I want to know is, Where does she live?' There

is something like a plan, I think? A-ha!" He spread out both his hands interrogatively, and looked at Mrs. Frankland with a self-satisfied smile.

"I am afraid," said Rosamond, partly amused, partly touched by his simplicity, "that the people at the post office are not at all likely to be trusted with the address. I think you would do better to take a letter with you, directed to 'S. J. ;' to deliver it in the morning when letters are received from the country; to wait near the door, and then to follow the person who is sent by your niece (as she tells you herself) to ask for letters for S. J."

"You think that is better?" said Uncle Joseph, secretly convinced that his own idea was unquestionably the most ingenious of the two. "Good! The least little word that you say to me, madam, is a command that I follow with all my heart." He took the crumpled felt hat out of his pocket, and advanced to say farewell, when Mr. Frankland spoke to him again.

"If you find your niece well, and willing to travel," said Leonard, "you will bring her back to Truro at once? And you will let us know when you are both at home again?"

"At once, sir," said Uncle Joseph. "To both these questions, I say at once."

"If a week from this time passes," continued

Leonard, "and we hear nothing from you, we must conclude, then, either that some unforeseen obstacle stands in the way of your return, or that your fears on your niece's account have been but too well founded, and that she is not able to travel?"

"Yes, sir; so let it be. But I hope you will hear from me before the week is out."

"Oh, so do I! most earnestly, most anxiously!" said Rosamond. "You remember my message?"

"I have got it here, every word of it," said Uncle Joseph, touching his heart. He raised the hand which Rosamond held out to him, to his lips. "I shall try to thank you better when I have come back," he said. "For all your kindness to me and to my niece, God bless you both, and keep you happy, till we meet again." With these words, he hastened to the door, waved his hand gaily with the old crumpled hat in it, and went out.

"Dear, simple, warm-hearted old man!" said Rosamond, as the door closed. "I wanted to tell him everything, Lenny. Why did you stop me?"

"My love, it is that very simplicity which you admire, and which I admire, too, that makes me cautious. At the first sound of his voice I felt as warmly towards him as you do; but the more I heard him talk, the more convinced I became that it would be rash to trust him, at first, for

fear of his disclosing too abruptly to your mother that we know her secret. Our chance of winning her confidence and obtaining an interview with her, depends, I can see, upon our own tact in dealing with her exaggerated suspicions and her nervous fears. That good old man, with the best and kindest intentions in the world, might ruin everything. He will have done all that we can hope for, and all that we can wish, if he only succeeds in bringing her back to Truro."

"But if he fails—if anything happens—if she is really ill?"

"Let us wait till the week is over, Rosamond. It will be time enough, then, to decide what we shall do next."

CHAPTER II.



WAITING AND HOPING.

THE week of expectation passed, and no tidings from Uncle Joseph reached Porthgenna Tower.

On the eighth day, Mr. Frankland sent a messenger to Truro, with orders to find out the cabinet-maker's shop kept by Mr. Buschmann, and to inquire of the person left in charge there, whether he had received any news from his master. The messenger returned in the afternoon, and brought word that Mr. Buschmann had written one short note to his shopman since his departure, announcing that he had arrived safely towards nightfall in London; that he had met with a hospitable welcome from his countryman, the German baker; and that he had discovered his niece's address, but had been prevented from seeing her by an obstacle which he hoped would be removed at his next visit. Since the delivery of that note, no further communication had been received from him, and nothing

therefore was known of the period at which he might be expected to return.

The one fragment of intelligence thus obtained was not of a nature to relieve the depression of spirits which the doubt and suspense of the past week had produced in Mrs. Frankland. Her husband endeavoured to combat the oppression of mind from which she was suffering, by reminding her that the ominous silence of Uncle Joseph might be just as probably occasioned by his niece's unwillingness as by her inability to return with him to Truro. Remembering the obstacle at which the old man's letter hinted, and taking also into consideration her excessive sensitiveness and her unreasoning timidity, he declared it to be quite possible that Mrs. Frankland's message, instead of re-assuring her, might only inspire her with fresh apprehensions, and might consequently strengthen her resolution to keep herself out of reach of all communications from Porthgenna Tower. Rosamond listened patiently while this view of the case was placed before her, and acknowledged that the reasonableness of it was beyond dispute; but her readiness in admitting that her husband might be right and that she might be wrong, was accompanied by no change for the better in the condition of her spirits. The interpretation which the old man had placed upon the alteration for the worse in Mrs. Jazeph's handwriting, had

produced a vivid impression on her mind, which had been strengthened by her own recollection of her mother's pale, worn face, when they met as strangers at West Winston. Reason, therefore, as convincingly as he might, Mr. Frankland was unable to shake his wife's conviction that the obstacle mentioned in Uncle Joseph's letter, and the silence which he had maintained since, were referable alike to the illness of his niece.

The return of the messenger from Truro suggested besides this topic of discussion, another question of much greater importance. After having waited one day beyond the week that had been appointed, what was the proper course of action for Mr. and Mrs. Frankland now to adopt, in the absence of any information from London or from Truro to decide their future proceedings?

Leonard's first idea was to write immediately to Uncle Joseph, at the address which he had given on the occasion of his visit to Porthgenna Tower. When this project was communicated to Rosamond, she opposed it on the ground that the necessary delay before the answer to the letter could arrive would involve a serious waste of time, when it might, for aught they knew to the contrary, be of the last importance to them not to risk the loss of a single day. If illness prevented Mrs. Jazeph from travelling, it would be necessary to see her at once, because that illness might increase. If she were only suspicious of

their motives, it was equally important to open personal communications with her before she could find an opportunity of raising some fresh obstacle, and of concealing herself again in some place of refuge which Uncle Joseph himself might not be able to trace.

The truth of these conclusions was obvious, but Leonard hesitated to adopt them, because they involved the necessity of a journey to London. If he went there without his wife, his blindness placed him at the mercy of strangers and servants, in conducting investigations of the most delicate and most private nature. If Rosamond accompanied him, it would be necessary to risk all kinds of delays and inconveniences by taking the child with them on a long and wearisome journey of more than two hundred and fifty miles.

Rosamond met both these difficulties with her usual directness and decision. The idea of her husband travelling anywhere under any circumstances, in his helpless, dependent state, without having her to attend on him, she dismissed at once as too preposterous for consideration. The second objection of subjecting the child to the chances and fatigues of a long journey, she met by proposing that they should travel to Exeter at their own time and in their own conveyance, and that they should afterwards insure plenty of comfort and plenty of room by taking a car-

riage to themselves, when they reached the railroad at Exeter. After thus smoothing away the difficulties which seemed to set themselves in opposition to the journey, she again reverted to the absolute necessity of undertaking it. She reminded Leonard of the serious interest that they both had in immediately obtaining Mrs. Jazeph's testimony to the genuineness of the letter which had been found in the Myrtle Room, as well as in ascertaining all the details of the extraordinary fraud which had been practised by Mrs. Treverton on her husband. She pleaded also her own natural anxiety to make all the atonement in her power for the pain she must have unconsciously inflicted, in the bedroom at West Winston, on the person of all others whose failings and sorrows she was most bound to respect; and having thus stated the motives which urged her husband and herself to lose no time in communicating personally with Mrs. Jazeph, she again drew the inevitable conclusion, that there was no alternative, in the position in which they were now placed, but to start forthwith on the journey to London.

A little further consideration satisfied Leonard, that the emergency was of such a nature as to render all attempts to meet it by half measures impossible. He felt that his own convictions agreed with his wife's; and he resolved accordingly to act at once, without further inde-

cision or further delay. Before the evening was over, the servants at Porthgenna were amazed by receiving directions to pack the trunks for travelling, and to order horses at the post-town for an early hour the next morning.

On the first day of the journey, the travellers started as soon as the carriage was ready, rested on the road towards noon, and remained for the night at Liskeard. On the second day, they arrived at Exeter, and slept there. On the third day, they reached London by the railway, between six and seven o'clock in the evening.

When they were comfortably settled for the night at their hotel, and when an hour's rest and quiet had enabled them to recover a little after the fatigues of the journey, Rosamond wrote two notes under her husband's direction. The first was addressed to Mr. Buschmann: it simply informed him of their arrival, and of their earnest desire to see him at the hotel as early as possible the next morning; and it concluded by cautioning him to wait until he had seen them, before he announced their presence in London to his niece.

The second note was addressed to the family solicitor, Mr. Nixon,—the same gentleman who, more than a year since, had written, at Mrs. Frankland's request, the letter which informed Andrew Treverton of his brother's decease, and of the circumstances under which the captain

had died. All that Rosamond now wrote, in her husband's name and her own, to ask of Mr. Nixon, was that he would endeavour to call at their hotel on his way to business the next morning, to give his opinion on a private matter of great importance, which had obliged them to undertake the journey from Porthgenna to London. This note, and the note to Uncle Joseph, were sent to their respective addresses by a messenger, on the evening when they were written.

The first visitor who arrived the next morning was the solicitor,—a clear-headed, fluent, polite old gentleman, who had known Captain Treverton and his father before him. He came to the hotel fully expecting to be consulted on some difficulties connected with the Porthgenna estate, which the local agent was perhaps unable to settle, and which might be of too confused and intricate a nature to be easily expressed in writing. When he heard what the emergency really was, and when the letter that had been found in the Myrtle Room, was placed in his hands, it is not too much to say that, for the first time in the course of a long life and a varied practice among all sorts and conditions of clients, sheer astonishment utterly paralysed Mr. Nixon's faculties, and bereft him, for some moments, of the power of uttering a single word.

When, however, Mr. Frankland proceeded from

making the disclosure to announcing his resolution to give up the purchase-money of Porthgenna Tower, if the genuineness of the letter could be proved to his own satisfaction, the old lawyer recovered the use of his tongue immediately, and protested against his client's intention with the sincere warmth of a man who thoroughly understood the advantage of being rich, and who knew what it was to gain and to lose a fortune of forty thousand pounds. Leonard listened with patient attention, while Mr. Nixon argued from his professional point of view, against regarding the letter, taken by itself, as a genuine document, and against accepting Mrs. Jazeph's evidence, taken with it, as decisive on the subject of Mrs. Frankland's real parentage. He expatiated on the improbability of Mrs. Treverton's alleged fraud upon her husband having been committed, without other persons, besides her maid and herself, being in the secret. He declared it to be in accordance with all received experience of human nature, that one or more of those other persons must have spoken of the secret either from malice or from want of caution, and that the consequent exposure of the truth must, in the course of so long a period as twenty-two years, have come to the knowledge of some among the many people in the West of England as well as in London, who knew the Treverton family personally or by

reputation. From this objection he passed to another which admitted the possible genuineness of the letter, as a written document; but which pleaded the probability of its having been produced under the influence of some mental delusion on Mrs. Treverton's part, which her maid might have had an interest in humouring at the time, though she might have hesitated, after her mistress's death, at risking the possible consequences of attempting to profit by the imposture. Having stated this theory, as one which not only explained the writing of the letter but the hiding of it also, Mr. Nixon further observed in reference to Mrs. Jazeph, that any evidence she might give was of little or no value in a legal point of view, from the difficulty—or, he might say, the impossibility—of satisfactorily identifying the infant mentioned in the letter, with the lady whom he had now the honour of addressing as Mrs. Frankland, and whom no unsubstantiated document in existence should induce him to believe to be any other than the daughter of his old friend and client, Captain Treverton.

Having heard the lawyer's objections to the end, Leonard admitted their ingenuity, but acknowledged, at the same time, that they had produced no alteration in his impressions on the subject of the letter, or in his convictions as to the course of duty which he felt bound

to follow. He would wait, he said, for Mrs. Jazeph's testimony before he acted decisively; but if that testimony were of such a nature, and were given in such a manner, as to satisfy him that his wife had no moral right to the fortune that she possessed, he would restore it at once to the person who had—Mr. Andrew Treverton.

Finding that no fresh arguments or suggestions could shake Mr. Frankland's resolution, and that no separate appeal to Rosamond had the slightest effect in stimulating her to use her influence for the purpose of inducing her husband to alter his determination; and feeling convinced, moreover, from all that he heard, that Mr. Frankland would, if he was opposed by many more objections, either employ another professional adviser, or risk committing some fatal legal error by acting for himself in the matter of restoring the money; Mr. Nixon at last consented, under protest, to give his client what help he needed in case it became necessary to hold communication with Andrew Treverton. He listened with polite resignation to Leonard's brief statement of the questions that he intended to put to Mrs. Jazeph; and said, with the slightest possible dash of sarcasm, when it came to his turn to speak, that they were excellent questions in a moral point of view, and would doubtless produce answers which would be full of interest of the most romantic kind.

“But,” he added, “as you have one child already, Mr. Frankland, and as you may, perhaps, if I may venture on suggesting such a thing, have more in the course of years; and as those children, when they grow up, may hear of the loss of their mother’s fortune, and may wish to know why it was sacrificed, I should recommend—resting the matter on family grounds alone, and not going further to make a legal point of it also—that you procure from Mrs. Jazeph, besides the *vivâ voce* evidence you propose to extract (against the admissibility of which, in this case, I again protest), a written declaration, which you may leave behind you at your death, and which may justify you in the eyes of your children, in case the necessity for such justification should arise at some future period.”

This advice was too plainly valuable to be neglected. At Leonard’s request, Mr. Nixon drew out at once a form of declaration, affirming the genuineness of the letter addressed by the late Mrs. Treverton, on her death-bed, to her husband, since also deceased, and bearing witness to the truth of the statements therein contained, both as regarded the fraud practised on Captain Treverton and the asserted parentage of the child. Telling Mr. Frankland that he would do well to have Mrs. Jazeph’s signature to this document attested by the names of two competent witnesses, Mr. Nixon handed the declara-

tion to Rosamond to read aloud to her husband, and, finding that no objection was made to any part of it, and that he could be of no further use in the present early stage of the proceedings, rose to take his leave. Leonard engaged to communicate with him again, in the course of the day, if necessary; and he retired, reiterating his protest to the last, and declaring that he had never met with such an extraordinary case and such a self-willed client before in the whole course of his practice.

Nearly an hour elapsed after the departure of the lawyer before any second visitor was announced. At the expiration of that time, the welcome sound of footsteps was heard approaching the door, and Uncle Joseph entered the room.

Rosamond's observation, stimulated by anxiety, detected a change in his look and manner, the moment he appeared. His face was harassed and fatigued, and his gait, as he advanced into the room, had lost the briskness and activity which so quaintly distinguished it when she saw him, for the first time, at Porthgenna Tower. He tried to add to his first words of greeting an apology for being late; but Rosamond interrupted him, in her eagerness to ask the first important question.

"We know that you have discovered her address," she said, anxiously, "but we know

nothing more. Is she as you feared to find her? Is she ill?"

The old man shook his head sadly. "When I showed you her letter," he said, "what did I tell you? She is so ill, madam, that not even the message your kindness gave to me will do her any good."

Those few simple words struck Rosamond's heart with a strange fear, which silenced her against her own will, when she tried to speak again. Uncle Joseph understood the anxious look she fixed on him, and the quick sign she made towards the chair standing nearest to the sofa on which she and her husband were sitting. There he took his place, and there he confided to them all that he had to tell.

He had followed, he said, the advice which Rosamond had given to him at Porthgenna, by taking a letter addressed to "S. J." to the post-office, the morning after his arrival in London. The messenger—a maid servant—had called to inquire, as was anticipated, and had left the post-office with his letter in her hand. He had followed her to a lodging-house in a street near, had seen her let herself in at the door, and had then knocked and inquired for Mrs. Jazeph. The door was answered by an old woman, who looked like the landlady; and the reply was that no one of that name lived there. He had then explained that he wished to see the person for

whom letters were sent to the neighbouring post-office, addressed to "S. J.;" but the old woman had answered, in the surliest way, that they had nothing to do with anonymous people or their friends in that house, and had closed the door in his face. Upon this, he had gone back to his friend, the German baker, to get advice; and had been recommended to return, after allowing some little time to elapse, to ask if he could see the servant who waited on the lodgers, to describe his niece's appearance, and to put half a crown into the girl's hand to help her to understand what he wanted. He had followed these directions, and had discovered that his niece was lying ill in the house, under the assumed name of "Mrs. James." A little persuasion (after the present of the half crown) had induced the girl to go up stairs and announce his name. After that, there were no more obstacles to be overcome; and he was conducted immediately to the room occupied by his niece.

He was inexpressibly shocked and startled, when he saw her, by the violent nervous agitation which she manifested as he approached her bedside. But he did not lose heart and hope, until he had communicated Mrs. Frankland's message, and had found that it failed altogether in producing the re-assuring effect on her spirits which he had trusted and believed that it would exercise. Instead of soothing, it seemed to excite

and alarm her afresh. Among a host of minute inquiries about Mrs. Frankland's looks, about her manner towards him, about the exact words she had spoken, all of which he was able to answer more or less to her satisfaction, she had addressed two questions to him, to which he was utterly unable to reply. The first of the questions was, Whether Mrs. Frankland had said anything about the Secret? The second was, Whether she had spoken any chance word to lead to the suspicion that she had found out the situation of the Myrtle Room?

The doctor in attendance had come in, the old man added, while he was still sitting by his niece's bedside, and still trying ineffectually to induce her to accept the friendly and re-assuring language of Mrs. Frankland's message, as sufficient answer to the questions which he was unable to meet by any more direct and more convincing form of reply. After making some inquiries and talking a little while on indifferent matters, the doctor had privately taken him aside; had informed him that the pain over the region of the heart and the difficulty in breathing, which were the symptoms of which his niece complained, were more serious in their nature than persons uninstructed in medical matters might be disposed to think; and had begged him to give her no more messages from any one, unless he felt perfectly sure beforehand

that they would have the effect of clearing her mind, at once and for ever, from the secret anxieties that now harassed it—anxieties which he might rest assured were aggravating her malady day by day, and rendering all the medical help that could be given of little or no avail.

Upon this, after sitting longer with his niece, and after holding counsel with himself, he had resolved to write privately to Mrs. Frankland that evening, after getting back to his friend's house. The letter had taken him longer to compose than anyone accustomed to writing would believe. At last, after delays in making a fair copy from many rough drafts, and delays in leaving his task to attend on his niece, he had completed a letter narrating what had happened since his arrival in London, in language which he hoped might be understood. Judging by comparison of dates, this letter must have crossed Mr. and Mrs. Frankland on the road. It contained nothing more than he had just been relating with his own lips—except that it also communicated, as a proof that distance had not diminished the fear which tormented his niece's mind, the explanation she had given to him of her concealment of her name, and of her choice of an abode among strangers, when she had friends in London to whom she might have gone. That explanation it was perhaps needless to have

lengthened the letter by repeating, for it only involved his saying over again, in substance, what he had already said in speaking of the motive which had forced Sarah to part from him at Truro.

With last words such as those, the sad and simple story of the old man came to an end. After waiting a little to recover her self-possession and to steady her voice, Rosamond touched her husband to draw his attention to herself, and whispered to him—

“I may say all, now, that I wished to say at Porthgenna?”

“All,” he answered. “If you can trust yourself, Rosamond, it is fittest that he should hear it from your lips.”

After the first natural burst of astonishment was over, the effect of the disclosure of the Secret on Uncle Joseph exhibited the most striking contrast that can be imagined to the effect of it on Mr. Nixon. No shadow of doubt darkened the old man's face, not a word of objection dropped from his lips. The one emotion excited in him was simple, unreflecting, unalloyed delight. He sprang to his feet with all his natural activity, his eyes sparkled again with all their natural brightness: one moment, he clapped his hands like a child; the next, he caught up his hat, and entreated Rosamond to let him lead her at once

to his niece's bedside. "If you will only tell Sarah what you have just told me," he cried, hurrying across the room to open the door, "you will give her back her courage, you will raise her up from her bed, you will cure her before the day is out!"

A warning word from Mr. Frankland stopped him on a sudden, and brought him back, silent and attentive, to the chair that he had left the moment before.

"Think a little of what the doctor told you," said Leonard. "The sudden surprise which has made you so happy, might do fatal mischief to your niece. Before we take the responsibility of speaking to her on a subject which is sure to agitate her violently, however careful we may be in introducing it, we ought first, I think, for safety's sake, to apply to the doctor for advice."

Rosamond warmly seconded her husband's suggestion, and, with her characteristic impatience of delay, proposed that they should find out the medical man immediately. Uncle Joseph announced—a little unwillingly, as it seemed—in answer to her inquiries, that he knew the place of the doctor's residence, and that he was generally to be found at home before one o'clock in the afternoon. It was then just half-past twelve; and Rosamond, with her husband's approval, rang the bell at once to send for a cab. She was about to leave the

room to put on her bonnet, after giving the necessary order, when the old man stopped her by asking, with some appearance of hesitation and confusion, if it was considered necessary that he should go to the doctor, with Mr. and Mrs. Frankland; adding, before the question could be answered, that he would greatly prefer, if there was no objection to it on their parts, being left to wait at the hotel to receive any instructions they might wish to give him on their return. Leonard immediately complied with his request, without inquiring into his reasons for making it; but Rosamond's curiosity was aroused, and she asked why he preferred remaining by himself at the hotel to going with them to the doctor.

"I like him not," said the old man. "When he speaks about Sarah, he looks and talks as if he thought she would never get up from her bed again." Answering in those brief words, he walked away uneasily to the window, as if he desired to say no more.

The residence of the doctor was at some little distance, but Mr. and Mrs. Frankland arrived there before one o'clock, and found him at home. He was a young man, with a mild, grave face, and a quiet subdued manner. Daily contact with suffering and sorrow had perhaps prematurely steadied and saddened his character. Merely introducing her husband and herself to

him, as persons who were deeply interested in his patient at the lodging-house, Rosamond left it to Leonard to ask the first questions relating to the condition of her mother's health.

The doctor's answer was ominously prefaced by a few polite words which were evidently intended to prepare his hearers for a less hopeful report than they might have come there expecting to receive. Carefully divesting the subject of all professional technicalities, he told them that his patient was undoubtedly affected with serious disease of the heart. The exact nature of this disease he candidly acknowledged to be a matter of doubt, which various medical men might decide in various ways. According to the opinion which he had himself formed from the symptoms, he believed that the patient's malady was connected with the artery which conveys blood directly from the heart through the system. Having found her singularly unwilling to answer questions relating to the nature of her past life, he could only guess that the disease was of long standing; that it was originally produced by some great mental shock, followed by long wearing anxiety (of which her face showed palpable traces); and that it had been seriously aggravated by the fatigue of a journey to London, which she acknowledged she had undertaken at a time when great nervous exhaustion rendered her

totally unfit to travel. Speaking according to this view of the case, it was his painful duty to tell her friends, that any violent emotion would unquestionably put her life in danger. At the same time, if the mental uneasiness from which she was now suffering could be removed, and if she could be placed in a quiet comfortable country home, among people who would be unremittingly careful in keeping her composed, and in suffering her to want for nothing, there was reason to hope that the progress of the disease might be arrested, and that her life might be spared for some years to come.

Rosamond's heart bounded at the picture of the future which her fancy drew from the suggestions that lay hidden in the doctor's last words. "She can command every advantage you have mentioned, and more, if more is required!" she interposed eagerly, before her husband could speak again. "Oh, sir, if rest among kind friends is all that her poor weary heart wants, thank God we can give it!"

"We can give it," said Leonard, continuing the sentence for his wife, "if the doctor will sanction our making a communication to his patient, which is of a nature to relieve her of all anxiety, but which, it is necessary to add, she is at present quite unprepared to receive."

"May I ask," said the doctor, "who is to be

entrusted with the responsibility of making the communication you mention?"

"There are two persons who could be entrusted with it," answered Leonard. "One is the old man whom you have seen by your patient's bedside. The other is my wife."

"In that case," rejoined the doctor, looking at Rosamond, "there can be no doubt that this lady is the fittest person to undertake the duty." He paused, and reflected for a moment; then added:—"May I inquire, however, before I venture on guiding your decision one way or the other, whether the lady is as familiarly known to my patient, and is on the same intimate terms with her, as the old man?"

"I am afraid I must answer No to both those questions," replied Leonard, "And I ought, perhaps, to tell you, at the same time, that your patient believes my wife to be now in Cornwall. Her first appearance in the sick room would, I fear, cause great surprise to the sufferer, and possibly some little alarm as well."

"Under those circumstances," said the doctor, "the risk of trusting the old man, simple as he is, seems to be infinitely the least risk of the two—for the plain reason that his presence can cause her no surprise. However unskilfully he may break the news, he will have the great advantage over this lady of not appearing unexpectedly at the bedside. If the hazardous

experiment must be tried,—and I assume that it must, from what you have said,—you have no choice, I think, but to trust it, with proper cautions and instructions, to the old man to carry out.”

After arriving at that conclusion, there was no more to be said on either side. The interview terminated, and Rosamond and her husband hastened back to give Uncle Joseph his instructions at the hotel.

As they approached the door of their sitting-room they were surprised by hearing the sound of music inside. On entering, they found the old man crouched up on a stool, listening to a shabby little musical box which was placed on a table close by him, and which was playing an air that Rosamond recognised immediately as the “Batti, batti” of Mozart.

“I hope you will pardon me for making music to keep myself company while you were away,” said Uncle Joseph, starting up in some little confusion, and touching the stop of the box. “This is, if you please, of all my friends and companions the oldest that is left. The divine Mozart, the king of all the composers that ever lived, gave it with his own hand, madam, to my brother, when Max was a boy in the music-school at Vienna. Since my niece left me in Cornwall, I have not had the heart to make Mozart sing to me out of this little bit of box

until to-day. Now that you have made me happy about Sarah again, my ears ache once more for the tiny *ting-ting* that has always the same friendly sound to my heart, travel where I may. But enough so!" said the old man, placing the box in the leather case by his side, which Rosamond had noticed there when she first saw him at Porthgenna. "I shall put back my singing-bird into his cage, and shall ask, when that is done, if you will be pleased to tell me what it is that the doctor has said?"

Rosamond answered his request by relating the substance of the conversation which had passed between her husband and the doctor. She then, with many preparatory cautions, proceeded to instruct the old man how to disclose the discovery of the Secret to his niece. She told him that the circumstances in connection with it must be first stated, not as events that had really happened, but as events that might be supposed to have happened. She put the words that he would have to speak, into his mouth, choosing the fewest and the plainest that would answer the purpose; she showed him how he might glide almost imperceptibly from referring to the discovery as a thing that might be supposed, to referring to it as a thing that had really happened; and she impressed upon him, as most important of all, to keep perpetually before his niece's mind the fact that the discovery of the

Secret had not awakened one bitter feeling or one resentful thought, towards her, in the minds of either of the persons who had been so deeply interested in finding it out.

Uncle Joseph listened with unwavering attention until Rosamond had done ; then rose from his seat, fixed his eyes intently on her face, and detected an expression of anxiety and doubt in it which he rightly interpreted as referring to himself.

“ May I make you sure, before I go away, that I shall forget nothing ? ” he asked, very earnestly. “ I have no head to invent, it is true ; but I have something in me that can remember, and the more especially when it is for Sarah’s sake. If you please, listen now, and hear if I can say to you over again all that you have said to me ? ”

Standing before Rosamond, with something in his look and manner strangely and touchingly suggestive of the long past days of his childhood, and of the time when he had said his earliest lessons at his mother’s knee, he now repeated, from first to last, the instructions that had been given to him, with a verbal exactness, with an easy readiness of memory, which, in a man of his age, was nothing less than astonishing. “ Have I kept it all as I should ? ” he asked simply, when he had come to an end. “ And may I go my ways now, and take my good news to Sarah’s bedside ? ”

It was still necessary to detain him, while Rosamond and her husband consulted together on the best and safest means of following up the avowal that the Secret was discovered, by the announcement of their own presence in London. After some consideration, Leonard asked his wife to produce the document which the lawyer had drawn out that morning, and to write a few lines, from his dictation, on the blank side of the paper, requesting Mrs. Jazeph to read the form of declaration, and to affix her signature to it, if she felt that it required her, in every particular, to affirm nothing that was not the exact truth. When this had been done, and when the leaf on which Mrs. Frankland had written, had been folded outwards, so that it might be the first page to catch the eye, Leonard directed that the paper should be given to the old man, and explained to him what he was to do with it, in these words:—

“When you have broken the news about the Secret to your niece,” he said, “and when you have allowed her full time to compose herself, if she asks questions about my wife and myself (as I believe she will), hand that paper to her for answer, and beg her to read it. Whether she is willing to sign it, or not, she is sure to inquire how you came by it. Tell her in return that you have received it from Mrs. Frankland—using the word ‘received,’ so that she may believe at

first that it was sent to you from Porthgenna by the post. If you find that she signs the declaration, and that she is not much agitated after doing so, then tell her in the same gradual way in which you tell the truth about the discovery of the Secret, that my wife gave the paper to you with her own hands, and that she is now in London——”

“Waiting and longing to see her,” added Rosamond. “You, who forget nothing, will not, I am sure, forget to say that?”

The little compliment to his powers of memory made Uncle Joseph colour with pleasure, as if he was a boy again. Promising to prove worthy of the trust reposed in him, and engaging to come back and relieve Mrs. Frankland of all suspense before the day was out, he took his leave, and went forth hopefully on his momentous errand.

Rosamond watched him from the window, threading his way in and out among the throng of passengers on the pavement, until he was lost to view. How nimbly the light little figure sped away out of sight! How gaily the unclouded sunlight poured down on the cheerful bustle in the street! The whole being of the great city basked in the summer glory of the day; all its mighty pulses beat high; and all its myriad voices whispered of hope!

CHAPTER III.

THE STORY OF THE PAST.

THE afternoon wore away, and the evening came, and still there were no signs of Uncle Joseph's return. Towards seven o'clock, Rosamond was summoned by the nurse, who reported that the child was awake and fretful. After soothing and quieting him, she took him back with her to the sitting-room; having first, with her usual consideration for the comfort of any servant whom she employed, sent the nurse down stairs, with a leisure hour at her own disposal, after the duties of the day. "I don't like to be away from you, Lenny, at this anxious time," she said, when she rejoined her husband; "so I have brought the child in here. He is not likely to be troublesome again; and the having him to take care of is really a relief to me in our present state of suspense."

The clock on the mantel-piece chimed the half-hour past seven. The carriages in the street were following one another more and more

rapidly, filled with people in full dress, on their way to dinner, or on their way to the opera. The hawkers were shouting proclamations of news in the neighbouring square, with the second editions of the evening papers under their arms. People who had been serving behind the counter all day, were standing at the shop door to get a breath of fresh air. Working men were trooping homeward, now singly, now together, in weary, shambling gangs. Idlers, who had come out after dinner, were lighting cigars at corners of streets, and looking about them, uncertain which way they should turn their steps next. It was just that transitional period of the evening at which the street-life of the day is almost over, and the street-life of the night has not quite begun—just the time, also, at which Rosamond, after vainly trying to find relief from the weariness of waiting by looking out of window, was becoming more and more deeply absorbed in her own anxious thoughts, when her attention was abruptly recalled to events in the little world about her by the opening of the room door. She looked up immediately from the child lying asleep on her lap, and saw that Uncle Joseph had returned at last.

The old man came in silently, with the form of declaration which he had taken away with him by Mr. Frankland's desire, open in his hand. As he approached nearer to the window, Rosa-

mond noticed that his face looked as if it had grown strangely older during the few hours of his absence. He came close up to her, and still not saying a word, laid his trembling forefinger low down on the open paper, and held it before her so that she could look at the place thus indicated without rising from her chair.

His silence and the change in his face struck her with a sudden dread which made her hesitate before she spoke to him. "Have you told her all?" she asked, after a moment's delay, putting the question in low, whispering tones, and not heeding the paper.

"This answers that I have," he said, still pointing to the declaration. "See! here is the name, signed in the place that was left for it—signed by her own hand."

Rosamond glanced at the paper. There indeed was the signature, "S. Jazeph;" and underneath it were added, in faintly traced lines of parenthesis, these explanatory words: "Formerly, Sarah Leeson."

"Why don't you speak?" exclaimed Rosamond, looking at him in growing alarm. "Why don't you tell us how she bore it?"

"Ah! don't ask me, don't ask me!" he answered, shrinking back from her hand, as she tried in her eagerness to lay it on his arm. "I forgot nothing. I said the words as you taught me to say them. I went the roundabout way to

the truth with my tongue ; but my face took the short cut, and got to the end first. Pray, of your goodness to me, ask nothing about it ! Be satisfied, if you please, with knowing that she is better, and quieter, and happier now. The bad is over and past, and the good is all to come. If I tell you how she looked, if I tell you what she said, if I tell you all that happened when first she knew the truth, the fright will catch me round the heart again, and all the sobbing and crying that I have swallowed down will rise once more and choke me. I must keep my head clear and my eyes dry—or, how shall I say to you all the things that I have promised Sarah, as I love my own soul and hers, to tell, before I lay myself down to rest to-night ? ” He stopped, took out a coarse little cotton pocket-handkerchief, with a flaring white pattern on a dull blue ground, and dried a few tears that had risen in his eyes while he was speaking. “ My life has had so much happiness in it,” he said, self-reproachfully, looking at Rosamond, “ that my courage, when it is wanted for the time of trouble, is not easy to find. And yet, I am German ! all my nation are philosophers—why is it that I alone am as soft in my brains, and as weak in my heart, as the pretty little baby, there, that is lying asleep in your lap ? ”

“ Don't speak again ; don't tell us anything till you feel more composed,” said Rosamond.

“We are relieved from our worst suspense now that we know you have left her quieter and better. I will ask no more questions,—at least,” she added, after a pause, “I will only ask one.”—She stopped; and her eyes wandered inquiringly towards Leonard. He had hitherto been listening with silent interest to all that had passed; but he now interposed gently, and advised his wife to wait a little before she ventured on saying anything more.

“It is such an easy question to answer,” pleaded Rosamond. “I only wanted to hear whether she has got my message—whether she knows that I am waiting and longing to see her, if she will but let me come?”

“Yes, yes,” said the old man, nodding to Rosamond with an air of relief. “That question is easy; easier even than you think, for it brings me straight to the beginning of all that I have got to say.” He had been hitherto walking restlessly about the room; sitting down one moment, and getting up the next. He now placed a chair for himself, midway between Rosamond—who was sitting, with the child, near the window—and her husband, who occupied the sofa at the lower end of the room. In this position, which enabled him to address himself alternately to Mr. and Mrs. Frankland without difficulty, he soon recovered composure enough to open his heart unreservedly to the interest of his subject.

“When the worst was over and past,” he said, addressing Rosamond—“when she could listen and when I could speak, the first words of comfort that I said to her were the words of your message. Straight she looked at me, with doubting, fearing eyes. ‘Was her husband there to hear her?’ she says. ‘Did he look angry? did he look sorry? did he change ever so little, when you got that message from her?’ And I said, ‘No: no change, no anger, no sorrow, nothing like it.’ And she said again, ‘Has it made between them no misery? has it nothing wrenched away of all the love and all the happiness that binds them the one to the other?’ And once more I answer to that, ‘No! no misery, no wrench. See now! I shall go my ways at once to the good wife, and fetch her here to answer for the good husband with her own tongue.’ While I speak those words there flies out over all her face a look—no, not a look—a light, like a sunflash. While I can count one, it lasts; before I can count two, it is gone; the face is all dark again; it is turned away from me on the pillow, and I see the hand that is outside the bed begin to crumple up the sheet. ‘I shall go my ways, then, and fetch the good wife,’ I say again. And she says, ‘No, not yet. I must not see her, I dare not see her till she knows—’ and there she stops, and the hand crumples up the sheet again, and softly, softly, I say to her,

‘Knows what?’ and she answers me, ‘What I, her mother, cannot tell her to her face, for shame.’ And I say, ‘So, so my child! tell it not, then—tell it not at all.’ She shakes her head at me, and wrings her two hands together, like this, on the bed-cover. ‘I *must* tell it,’ she says. ‘I must rid my heart of all that has been gnawing, gnawing, gnawing at it, or how shall I feel the blessing that the seeing her will bring to me, if my conscience is only clear?’ Then she stops a little, and lifts up her two hands, so, and cries out loud, ‘Oh, will God’s mercy show me no way of telling it that will spare me before my child!’ And I say, ‘Hush, then! there is a way. Tell it to Uncle Joseph, who is the same as father to you! Tell it to Uncle Joseph, whose little son died in your arms, whose tears your hand wiped away, in the grief-time long ago! tell it, my child, to *me*; and I shall take the risk, and the shame (if there is shame) of telling it again. I, with nothing to speak for me but my white hair; I, with nothing to help me but my heart that means no harm—I shall go to that good and true woman, with the burden of her mother’s grief to lay before her; and, in my soul of souls I believe it, she will not turn away!’”

He paused, and looked at Rosamond. Her head was bent down over her child; her tears were dropping slowly, one by one, on the bosom of his little white dress. Waiting a moment to

collect herself before she spoke, she held out her hand to the old man, and firmly and gratefully met the look he fixed on her. "O, go on, go on!" she said. "Let me prove to you that your generous confidence in me is not misplaced!"

"I knew it was not, from the first, as surely as I know it now!" said Uncle Joseph. "And Sarah, when I had spoken to her, she knew it too. She was silent for a little; she cried for a little; she leant over from the pillow and kissed me here, on my cheek, as I sat by the bedside; and then she looked back, back, back, in her mind, to the Long Ago, and very quietly, very slowly, with her eyes looking into my eyes, and her hand resting so in mine, she spoke the words to me that I must now speak again to you, who sit here to-day as her judge, before you go to her to-morrow, as her child."

"Not as her judge!" said Rosamond. "I cannot, I must not hear you say that."

"I speak her words, not mine," rejoined the old man gravely. "Wait, before you bid me change them for others—wait, till you know the end."

He drew his chair a little nearer to Rosamond, paused for a minute or two, to arrange his recollections, and to separate them one from the other; then resumed:

"As Sarah began with me," he said, "so I, for my part, must begin also,—which means to

say, that I go down now through the years that are past, to the time when my niece went out to her first service. You know that the sea-captain, the brave and good man Treverton, took for his wife an artist on the stage—what they call play-actress, here? A grand big woman, and a handsome; with a life, and a spirit, and a will in her, that is not often seen: a woman of the sort who can say, We will do this thing, or that thing—and do it in the spite and face of all the scruples, all the obstacles, all the oppositions in the world. To this lady there comes for maid to wait upon her, Sarah, my niece,—a young girl, then, pretty, and kind, and gentle, and very, very shy. Out of many others who want the place, and who are bolder and bigger and quicker girls, Mistress Treverton, nevertheless picks Sarah. This is strange, but it is stranger yet, that Sarah, on her part, when she comes out of her first fears, and doubts, and pains of shyness about herself, gets to be fond with all her heart of that grand and handsome mistress, who has a life, and a spirit, and a will of the sort that is not often seen. This is strange to say, but it is also, as I know from Sarah's own lips, every word of it true."

"True beyond a doubt," said Leonard. "Most of the strong attachments in the world are formed between people who are unlike each other."

"So the life they led in that ancient house

of Porthgenna began happily for them all," continued the old man. "The love that the mistress had for her husband was so full in her heart, that it overflowed in kindness to everybody who was about her, and to Sarah, her maid, before all the rest. She would have nobody but Sarah to read to her, to work for her, to dress her in the morning and the evening, and to undress her at night. She was as familiar as a sister might have been with Sarah, when they two were alone, in the long days of rain. It was the game of her idle time—the laugh that she liked most—to astonish the poor country maid, who had never so much as seen what a theatre's inside was like, by dressing in fine clothes, and painting her face, and speaking and doing all that she had done on the theatre-scene, in the days that were before her marriage. The more she startled and puzzled Sarah with these jokes and pranks of masquerade, the better she was always pleased. For a year this easy, happy life went on in the ancient house,—happy for all the servants,—happier still for the master and mistress, but for the want of one thing to make the whole complete, one little blessing, that was always hoped for, and that never came—the same, if you please, as the blessing in the long white frock, with the plump delicate face and the tiny arms, that I see before me now."

He paused, to point the allusion by nodding and smiling at the child in Rosamond's lap; then resumed.

“As the new year gets on,” he said, “Sarah sees in the mistress a change. The good sea-captain is a man who loves children, and is fond of getting to the house all the little boys and girls of his friends round about. He plays with them, he kisses them, he makes them presents--he is the best friend the little boys and girls have ever had. The mistress, who should be their best friend too, looks on and says nothing; looks on, red sometimes, and sometimes pale; goes away into her room where Sarah is at work for her, and walks about, and finds fault; and one day lets the evil temper fly out of her at her tongue, and says, ‘Why have I got no child for my husband to be fond of? Why must he kiss and play always with the children of other women? They take his love away for something that is not mine. I hate those children and their mothers too!’ It is her passion that speaks then, but it speaks what is near the truth for all that. She will not make friends with any of those mothers; the ladies she is familiar-fond with, are the ladies who have no children, or the ladies whose families are all up-grown. You think that was wrong of the mistress?”

He put the question to Rosamond, who was

toying thoughtfully with one of the baby's hands which was resting in hers. "I think Mrs. Treverton was very much to be pitied," she answered, gently lifting the child's hand to her lips.

"Then I, for my part, think so too," said Uncle Joseph. "To be pitied?—yes! To be more pitied some months after, when there is still no child and no hope of a child, and the good sea-captain says, one day, 'I rust here, I get old with much idleness, I want to be on the sea again. I shall ask for a ship.' And he asks for a ship, and they give it him, and he goes away on his cruises—with much kissing and fondness at parting from his wife—but still he goes away. And when he is gone, the mistress comes in again where Sarah is at work for her on a fine new gown, and snatches it away, and casts it down on the floor, and throws after it all the fine jewels she has got on her table, and stamps and cries with the misery and the passion that is in her. 'I would give all those fine things, and go in rags for the rest of my life to have a child!' she says. 'I am losing my husband's love; he would never have gone away from me if I had brought him a child!' Then she looks in the glass, and says between her teeth, 'yes! yes! I am a fine woman with a fine figure, and I would change places with the

ugliest, crookedest wretch in all creation, if I could only have a child!’ And then she tells Sarah that the captain’s brother spoke the vilest of all vile words of her, when she was married, because she was an artist on the stage; and she says, ‘If I have no child, who but he—the rascal-monster that I wish I could kill!—who but he will come to possess all that the captain has got?’ And then she cries again, and says, ‘I am losing his love—ah, I know it, I know it!—I am losing his love!’ Nothing that Sarah can say will alter her thoughts about that. And the months go on, and the sea-captain comes back, and still there is always the same secret grief growing and growing in the mistress’s heart—growing and growing till it is now the third year since the marriage, and there is no hope yet of a child; and, once more the sea-captain gets tired on the land, and goes off again for his cruises—long cruises, this time; away, away, away, at the other end of the world.’

Here Uncle Joseph paused once more, apparently hesitating a little about how he should go on with the narrative. His mind seemed to be soon relieved of its doubts, but his face saddened, and his tones sank lower, when he addressed Rosamond again.

“I must, if you please, go away from the mistress now,” he said, “and get back to Sarah,

my niece, and say one word also of a mining man, with the Cornish name of Polwheal. This was a young man that worked well and got good wage, and kept a good character. He lived with his mother in the little village that is near the ancient house ; and, seeing Sarah from time to time, took much fancy to her, and she to him. So the end came that the marriage-promise was between them given and taken ; as it happened, about the time when the sea-captain was back after his first cruises, and just when he was thinking of going away in a ship again. Against the marriage-promise nor he nor the lady his wife had a word to object, for the miner, Polwheal, had good wage and kept a good character. Only the mistress said that the loss of Sarah would be sad to her—very sad ; and Sarah answered that there was yet no hurry to part. So the weeks go on, and the sea-captain sails away again for his long cruises ; and about the same time also the mistress finds out that Sarah frets and looks not like herself, and that the miner, Polwheal, he lurks here and lurks there, round about the house ; and she says to herself, ‘ So ! so ! Am I standing too much in the way of this marriage ? For Sarah’s sake, that shall not be ! ’ And she calls for them both one evening, and talks to them kindly, and sends away to put up the banns next morning the young man Polwheal. That night, it is his turn to go down into the Porth-

genna mine, and work after the hours of the day. With his heart all light, down into that dark he goes. When he rises to the world again, it is the dead body of him that is drawn up—the dead body, with all the young life, by the fall of a rock, crushed out in a moment. The news flies here; the news flies there. With no break, with no warning, with no comfort near, it comes on a sudden to Sarah, my niece. When, to her sweetheart that evening she had said good-bye, she was a young, pretty girl; when six little weeks after, she, from the sick-bed where the shock threw her, got up,—all her youth was gone, all her hair was grey, and in her eyes the fright-look was fixed that has never left them since.”

The simple words drew the picture of the miner's death, and of all that followed it, with a startling distinctness—with a fearful reality. Rosamond shuddered and looked at her husband. “Oh, Lenny!” she murmured, “the first news of your blindness was a sore trial to me—but what was it to this!”

“Pity her!” said the old man. “Pity her for what she suffered then! Pity her for what came after, that was worse! Yet five, six, seven weeks pass, after the death of the mining-man, and Sarah, in the body suffers less, but in the mind suffers more. The mistress, who is kind and good to her as any sister could be, finds out, little by little, something in her face which is

not the pain-look, nor the fright-look, nor the grief-look; something which the eyes can see but which the tongue cannot put into words. She looks and thinks, looks and thinks, till there steals into her mind a doubt which makes her tremble at herself, which drives her straight forward into Sarah's room, which sets her eyes searching through and through Sarah to her inmost heart. 'There is something on your mind besides your grief for the dead and gone,' she says, and catches Sarah by both the arms before she can turn away, and looks her in the face, front to front, with curious eyes that search and suspect steadily. 'The miner-man, Polwheal,' she says; 'my mind misgives me about the miner-man, Polwheal. Sarah! I have been more friend to you than mistress. As your friend I ask you, now—tell me all the truth?' The question waits; but no word of answer! only Sarah struggles to get away, and the mistress holds her tighter yet, and goes on and says, 'I know that the marriage-promise passed between you and miner Polwheal; I know that if ever there was truth in man, there was truth in him; I know that he went out from this place to put the banns up, for you and for him, in the church. Have secrets from all the world besides, Sarah, but have none from *me*. Tell me, this minute, tell me the truth! Of all the lost creatures in this big, wide world, are you—?' Before she

can say the words that are next to come, Sarah falls on her knees, and cries out suddenly to be let go away to hide and die, and be heard of no more. That was all the answer she gave. It was enough for the truth, then ; it is enough for the truth now."

He sighed bitterly, and ceased speaking for a little while. No voice broke the reverent silence that followed his last words. The one living sound that stirred in the stillness of the room, was the light breathing of the child as he lay asleep in his mother's arms.

"That was all the answer," repeated the old man, "and the mistress who heard it says nothing for some time after, but still looks straight forward into Sarah's face, and grows paler and paler the longer she looks—paler and paler, till on a sudden she starts, and at one flash the red flies back into her face. 'No,' she says, whispering and looking at the door, 'once your friend, Sarah, always your friend. Stay in this house, keep your own counsel, do as I bid you, and leave the rest to me.' And with that she turns round quick on her heel, and falls to walking up and down the room,—faster, faster, faster, till she is out of breath. Then she pulls the bell with an angry jerk, and calls out loud at the door. 'The horses! I want to ride;' then turns upon Sarah, 'My gown for riding in! Pluck up your heart, poor creature! On my life

and honour I will save you. My gown, my gown, then; I am mad for a gallop in the open air!’ And she goes out, in a fever of the blood, and gallops, gallops, till the horse reeks again, and the groom-man who rides after her wonders if she is mad. When she comes back, for all that ride in the air, she is not tired. The whole evening after, she is now walking about the room, and now striking loud tunes all mixed up together on the piano. At the bed-time, she cannot rest. Twice, three times in the night she frightens Sarah by coming in to see how she does, and by saying always those same words over again, ‘Keep your own counsel, do as I bid you, and leave the rest to me.’ In the morning, she lies late, sleeps, gets up very pale and quiet, and says to Sarah, ‘No word more between us two of what happened yesterday—no word till the time comes when you fear the eyes of every stranger who looks at you. Then I shall speak again. Till that time let us be as we were before I put the question yesterday, and before you told the truth!’”

At this point he broke the thread of the narrative again, explaining, as he did so, that his memory was growing confused about a question of time, which he wished to state correctly in introducing the series of events that were next to be described.

“Ah, well! well!” he said, shaking his head,

after vainly endeavouring to pursue the lost recollection. "For once, I must acknowledge that I forget. Whether it was two months, or whether it was three, after the mistress said those last words to Sarah, I know not—but at the end of the one time, or of the other, she, one morning, orders her carriage and goes away alone to Truro. In the evening she comes back with two large, flat baskets. On the cover of the one there is a card, and written on it are the letters, 'S. L.' On the cover of the other there is a card, and written on it are the letters, 'R. T.' The baskets are taken into the mistress's room, and Sarah is called, and the mistress says to her, 'Open the basket with S. L. on it; for those are the letters of your name, and the things in it are yours.' Inside, there is first a box, which holds a grand bonnet of black lace; then a fine, dark shawl; then black silk of the best kind, enough to make a gown; then linen and stuff for the under garments, all of the finest sort. 'Make up those things to fit yourself,' says the mistress. 'You are so much littler than I, that to make the things up, new, is less trouble, than from my fit to yours, to alter old gowns.' Sarah, to all this, says in astonishment, 'Why?' And the mistress answers, 'I will have no questions. Remember what I said; keep your own counsel, and leave the rest to me!' So she goes out, and leaves Sarah to work; and

the next thing she does is to send for the doctor to see her. He asks what is the matter; gets for answer that she feels strangely, and not like herself; also that she thinks the soft air of Cornwall makes her weak. The days pass, and the doctor comes and goes, and, say what he may, those two answers are always the only two that he can get. All this time, Sarah is at work; and when she has done, the mistress says, 'Now for the other basket, with R. T. on it; for those are the letters of my name, and the things in it are mine.' Inside this, there is first a box which holds a common bonnet of black straw; then a coarse dark shawl; then a gown of good common black stuff; then linen, and other things for the under garments, that are only of the sort called second best. 'Make up all that rubbish,' says the mistress, 'to fit me. No questions! You have always done as I told you; do as I tell you now, or you are a lost woman.' When the rubbish is made up, she tries it on, and looks in the glass, and laughs in a way that is wild and desperate to hear. 'Do I make a fine, buxom, comely servant-woman?' she says. 'Ha! but I have acted that part times enough in my past days on the theatre-scene.' And then she takes off the clothes again, and bids Sarah pack them up at once in one trunk, and pack the things she has made for herself in another. 'The doctor orders me to go away out of this

damp, soft Cornwall climate, to where the air is fresh, and dry, and cheerful-keen !' she says, and laughs again, till the room rings with it. At the same time, Sarah begins to pack, and takes some knick-knack things off the table, and among them a brooch which has on it the likeness of the sea-captain's face. The mistress sees her, turns white in the cheeks, trembles all over, snatches the brooch away, and locks it up in the cabinet in a great hurry, as if the look of it frightened her. 'I shall leave that behind me,' she says, and turns round on her heel, and goes quickly out of the room. You guess, now, what the thing was that Mistress Treverton had it in her mind to do ?"

He addressed the question to Rosamond first, and then repeated it to Leonard. They both answered in the affirmative, and entreated him to go on.

"You guess ?" he said. "It is more than Sarah, at that time, could do. What with the misery in her own mind, and the strange ways and strange words of her mistress, the wits that were in her were all confused. Nevertheless, what her mistress has said to her, that she has always done ; and together alone those two from the house of Porthgenna drive away. Not a word says the mistress till they have got to the journey's end for the first day, and are stopping at their inn among strangers for the night. Then

at last she speaks out, 'Put you on, Sarah, the good linen and the good gown to-morrow,' she says, 'but keep the common bonnet and the common shawl, till we get into the carriage again. I shall put on the coarse linen and the coarse gown, and keep the good bonnet and shawl. We shall pass so the people at the inn, on our way to the carriage, without very much risk of surprising them by our change of gowns. When we are out on the road again, we can change bonnets and shawls in the carriage—and then, it is all done. You are the married lady, Mrs. Treverton, and I am your maid who waits on you, Sarah Leeson.' At that, the glimmering on Sarah's mind breaks in at last: she shakes with the fright it gives her, and all she can say is, 'Oh, mistress! for the love of Heaven, what is it you mean to do?' 'I mean,' the mistress answers, 'to save you, my faithful servant, from disgrace and ruin; to prevent every penny that the captain has got from going to that rascal-monster, his brother, who slandered me; and, last and most, I mean to keep my husband from going away to sea again, by making him love me as he has never loved me yet. Must I say more, you poor, afflicted, frightened creature—or is it enough so?' And all that Sarah can answer, is to cry bitter tears, and to say faintly, 'No.' 'Do you doubt,' says the mistress, and grips her by the arm, and looks her close in the face with fierce eyes, 'Do you

doubt which is best, to cast yourself into the world forsaken, and disgraced, and ruined, or to save yourself from shame, and make a friend of me for the rest of your life? You weak, wavering, baby-woman, if you cannot decide for yourself, I shall for you. As I will, so it shall be! To-morrow, and the day after, and the day after that, we go on and on, up to the north, where my good fool of a doctor says the air is cheerful-keen—up to the north, where nobody knows me or has heard my name. I, the maid, shall spread the report that you, the lady, are weak in your health. No strangers shall you see, but the doctor and the nurse, when the time to call them comes. Who they may be, I know not; but this I do know, that the one and the other will serve our purpose without the least suspicion of what it is; and that when we get back to Cornwall again, the secret between us two will to no third person have been trusted, and will remain a Dead Secret to the end of the world!’ With all the strength of the strong will that is in her, at the hush of night and in a house of strangers, she speaks those words to the woman of all women the most frightened, the most afflicted, the most helpless, the most ashamed. What need to say the end? On that night Sarah first stooped her shoulders to the burden that has weighed heavier and heavier on them with every year, for all her after-life.”

“How many days did they travel towards the north?” asked Rosamond, eagerly. “Where did the journey end? In England or in Scotland?”

“In England,” answered Uncle Joseph. “But the name of the place escapes my foreign tongue. It was a little town by the side of the sea—the great sea that washes between my country and yours. There they stopped, and there they waited till the time came to send for the doctor and the nurse. And as Mistress Treverton had said it should be, so, from the first to the last, it was. The doctor and the nurse, and the people of the house were all strangers; and to this day, if they still live, they believe that Sarah was the sea-captain’s wife, and that Mistress Treverton was the maid who waited on her. Not till they were far back on their way home with the child, did the two change gowns again, and return each to her proper place. The first friend at Porthgenna that the mistress sends for to show the child to, when she gets back, is the other doctor who lives there. ‘Did you think what was the matter with me, when you sent me away to change the air?’ she says, and laughs. And the doctor, he laughs too, and says, ‘Yes, surely! but I was too cunning to say what I thought in those early days, because, at such times, there is always fear of a mistake. And you found the fine dry air so good for you that you stopped?’ he says. ‘Well, that was right! right for yourself and right also for the child.’

And the doctor laughs again and the mistress with him, and Sarah who stands by and hears them, feels as if her heart would burst within her, with the horror, and the misery, and the shame of that deceit. When the doctor's back is turned, she goes down on her knees, and begs and prays with all her soul that the mistress will repent, and send her away with her child, to be heard of at Porthgenna no more. The mistress, with that tyrant-will of hers, has but four words of answer to give:—"It is too late!" Five weeks after, the sea-captain comes back, and the 'Too late' is a truth that no repentance can ever alter more. The mistress's cunning hand that has guided the deceit from the first, guides it always to the last—guides it so that the captain, for the love of her and of the child, goes back to the sea no more—guides it till the time when she lays her down on the bed to die, and leaves all the burden of the secret, and all the guilt of the confession, to Sarah—to Sarah who, under the tyranny of that tyrant-will, has lived in the house, for five long years, a stranger to her own child!"

"Five years!" murmured Rosamond, raising the baby gently in her arms, till his face touched hers. "Oh me! five long years a stranger to the blood of her blood, to the heart of her heart!"

"And all the years after!" said the old man. "The lonesome years and years among strangers,

with no sight of the child that was growing up, with no heart to pour the story of her sorrow into the ear of any living creature, not even into mine ! ‘ Better,’ I said to her, when she could speak to me no more, and when her face was turned away again on the pillow : ‘ a thousand times better, my child, if you had told the Secret ! ’ ‘ Could I tell it,’ she said, ‘ to the master who trusted me ? Could I tell it afterwards to the child, whose very birth was a reproach to me ? Could she listen to the story of her mother’s shame, told by her mother’s lips ? How will she listen to it now, Uncle Joseph, when she hears it from *you* ? Remember the life she has led, and the high place she has held in the world. How can she forgive me ? How can she ever look at me in kindness again ? ’ ”

“ You never left her,” cried Rosamond, interposing before he could say more ; “ surely, surely, you never left her with that thought in her heart ! ”

Uncle Joseph’s head drooped on his breast. “ What words of mine could change it ? ” he asked, sadly.

“ Oh, Lenny, do you hear that ? I must leave you, and leave the baby. I must go to her, or those last words about me will break my heart.” The passionate tears burst from her eyes as she spoke ; and she rose hastily from her seat, with the child in her arms.

“Not to-night,” said Uncle Joseph. “She said to me at parting, ‘I can bear no more to-night; give me till the morning to get as strong as I can.’”

“Oh, go back then yourself!” cried Rosamond. “Go, for God’s sake, without wasting another moment, and make her think of me as she ought! Tell her how I listened to you, with my own child sleeping on my bosom all the time—tell her—oh, no, no! words are too cold for it!—Come here, come close, Uncle Joseph (I shall always call you so now); come close to me and kiss my child—*her* grandchild!—Kiss him on this cheek, because it has lain nearest to my heart. And now, go back, kind and dear old man—go back to her bedside, and say nothing but that *I* sent that kiss to *her*!”

CHAPTER IV.



THE CLOSE OF DAY.

THE night, with its wakeful anxieties, wore away at last; and the morning light dawned hopefully, for it brought with it the promise of an end to Rosamond's suspense.

The first event of the day was the arrival of Mr. Nixon, who had received a note on the previous evening, written by Leonard's desire, to invite him to breakfast. Before the lawyer withdrew, he had settled with Mr. and Mrs. Frankland all the preliminary arrangements that were necessary to effect the restoration of the purchase-money of Porthgenna Tower, and had despatched a messenger with a letter to Bayswater, announcing his intention of calling upon Andrew Treverton that afternoon, on private business of importance relating to the personal estate of his late brother.

Towards noon, Uncle Joseph arrived at the hotel to take Rosamond with him to the house where her mother lay ill.

He came in, talking, in the highest spirits, of the wonderful change for the better that had been wrought in his niece by the affectionate message which he had taken to her on the previous evening. He declared that it had made her look happier, stronger, younger, all in a moment; that it had given her the longest, quietest, sweetest night's sleep she had enjoyed for years and years past; and, last, best triumph of all, that its good influence had been acknowledged, not an hour since, by the doctor himself. Rosamond listened thankfully, but it was with a wandering attention, with a mind ill at ease. When she had taken leave of her husband, and when she and Uncle Joseph were out in the street together, there was something in the prospect of the approaching interview between her mother and herself, which, in spite of her efforts to resist the sensation, almost daunted her. If they could have come together, and have recognised each other without time to think what should be first said or done on either side, the meeting would have been nothing more than the natural result of the discovery of the Secret. But, as it was, the waiting, the doubting, the mournful story of the past, which had filled up the emptiness of the last day of suspense, all had their depressing effect on Rosamond's impulsive disposition. Without a thought in her heart which was not tender, compassionate, and true towards her

mother, she now felt, nevertheless, a vague sense of embarrassment, which increased to positive uneasiness the nearer she and the old man drew to their short journey's end. As they stopped at last at the house-door, she was shocked to find herself thinking beforehand, of what first words it would be best to say, of what first things it would be best to do, as if she had been about to visit a total stranger, whose favourable opinion she wished to secure, and whose readiness to receive her cordially was a matter of doubt.

The first person whom they saw after the door was opened, was the doctor. He advanced towards them from a little empty room at the end of the hall, and asked permission to speak with Mrs. Frankland for a few minutes. Leaving Rosamond to her interview with the doctor, Uncle Joseph gaily ascended the stairs to tell his niece of her arrival, with an activity which might well have been envied by many a man of half his years.

"Is she worse? Is there any danger in my seeing her?" asked Rosamond, as the doctor led her into the empty room.

"Quite the contrary," he replied. "She is much better this morning; and the improvement, I find, is mainly due to the composing and cheering influence on her mind of a message which she received from you last night. It is

the discovery of this which makes me anxious to speak to you now on the subject of one particular symptom of her mental condition, which surprised and alarmed me when I first discovered it, and which has perplexed me very much ever since. She is suffering—not to detain you, and to put the matter at once in the plainest terms—under a mental hallucination of a very extraordinary kind, which, so far as I have observed it, affects her, generally, towards the close of the day, when the light gets obscure. At such times, there is an expression in her eyes, as if she fancied some person had walked suddenly into the room. She looks and talks at perfect vacancy, as you or I might look or talk at some one who was really standing and listening to us. The old man, her uncle, tells me that he first observed this when she came to see him (in Cornwall, I think he said) a short time since. She was speaking to him then on private affairs of her own, when she suddenly stopped, just as the evening was closing in, startled him by a question on the old superstitious subject of the re-appearance of the dead, and then, looking away at a shadowed corner of the room, began to talk at it—exactly as I have seen her look and heard her talk up-stairs. Whether she fancies that she is pursued by an apparition, or whether she imagines that some living person enters her room at certain times, is more than I can say; and the old man

gives me no help in guessing at the truth. Can you throw any light on the matter?"

"I hear of it now for the first time," answered Rosamond, looking at the doctor in amazement and alarm.

"Perhaps," he rejoined, "she may be more communicative with you than she is with me. If you could manage to be by her bedside at dusk to-day or to-morrow, and, if you think you are not likely to be frightened by it, I should very much wish you to see and hear her, when she is under the influence of her delusion. I have tried in vain to draw her attention away from it, at the time, or to get her to speak of it afterwards. You have evidently considerable influence over her, and you might therefore succeed where I have failed. In her state of health, I attach great importance to clearing her mind of everything that clouds and oppresses it, and especially of such a serious hallucination as that which I have been describing. If you could succeed in combating it, you would be doing her the greatest service, and would be materially helping my efforts to improve her health. Do you mind trying the experiment?"

Rosamond promised to devote herself unreservedly to this service, or to any other which was for the patient's good. The doctor thanked her, and led the way back into the hall again. Uncle Joseph was descending the stairs as they

came out of the room. "She is ready and longing to see you," he whispered in Rosamond's ear.

"I am sure I need not impress on you again the very serious necessity of keeping her composed," said the doctor, taking his leave. "It is, I assure you, no exaggeration to say that her life depends on it."

Rosamond bowed to him in silence, and in silence followed the old man up the stairs.

At the door of a back room on the second floor, Uncle Joseph stopped.

"She is there," he whispered eagerly. "I leave you to go in by yourself, for it is best that you should be alone with her at first. I shall walk about the streets in the fine warm sunshine, and think of you both, and come back after a little. Go in; and the blessing and the mercy of God go with you!" He lifted her hand to his lips, and softly and quickly descended the stairs again.

Rosamond stood alone before the door. A momentary tremor shook her from head to foot as she stretched out her hand to knock at it. The same sweet voice that she had last heard in her bedroom at West Winston, answered her now. As its tones fell on her ear, a thought of her child stole quietly into her heart, and stilled its quick throbbing. She opened the door at once, and went in.

Neither the look of the room inside, nor the view from the window; neither its characteristic ornaments, nor its prominent pieces of furniture; none of the objects in it or about it, which would have caught her quick observation at other times, struck it now. From the moment when she opened the door, she saw nothing but the pillows of the bed, the head resting on them, and the face turned towards hers. As she stepped across the threshold, that face changed; the eyelids drooped a little, and the pale cheeks were tinged suddenly with burning red.

Was her mother ashamed to look at her?

The bare doubt freed Rosamond in an instant from all the self-distrust, all the embarrassment, all the hesitation about choosing her words and directing her actions which had fettered her generous impulses up to this time. She ran to the bed, raised the worn shrinking figure in her arms, and laid the poor weary head gently on her warm, young bosom. "I have come at last, mother, to take my turn at nursing you," she said. Her heart swelled as those simple words came from it—her eyes overflowed—she could say no more.

"Don't cry!" murmured the faint, sweet voice timidly. "I have no right to bring you here, and make you sorry. Don't, don't cry!"

"Oh, hush! hush! I shall do nothing but cry if you talk to me like that!" said Rosamond.

“Let us forget that we have ever been parted—call me by my name—speak to me as I shall speak to my own child, if God spares me to see him grow up. Say ‘Rosamond,’ and—oh, pray, pray,—tell me to do something for you!” She tore asunder, passionately, the strings of her bonnet, and threw it from her on the nearest chair. “Look! here is your glass of lemonade on the table. Say ‘Rosamond, bring me my lemonade!’ say it familiarly, mother! say it as if you knew that I was bound to obey you!”

She repeated the words after her daughter, but still not in steady tones—repeated them with a sad, wondering smile, and with a lingering of the voice on the name of Rosamond, as if it was a luxury to her to utter it.

“You made me so happy with that message and with the kiss you sent me from your child,” she said, when Rosamond had given her the lemonade, and was seated quietly by the bedside again. “It was such a kind way of saying that you pardoned me! It gave me all the courage I wanted to speak to you as I am speaking now. Perhaps my illness has changed me—but I don’t feel frightened and strange with you; as I thought I should, at our first meeting after you knew the Secret. I think I shall soon get well enough to see your child. Is he like what you were at his age? If he is, he must be very, very ——” She stopped. “I may think of

that," she added, after waiting a little, "but I had better not talk of it, or I shall cry too, and I want to have done with sorrow now."

While she spoke those words, while her eyes were fixed with wistful eagerness on her daughter's face, the old instinct of neatness was still mechanically at work in her weak, wasted fingers. Rosamond had tossed her gloves from her on the bed but the minute before; and already her mother had taken them up, and was smoothing them out carefully and folding them neatly together, all the while she spoke.

"Call me 'mother' again," she said, as Rosamond took the gloves from her and thanked her with a kiss for folding them up. "I have never heard you call me 'mother,' till now—never never till now, from the day when you were born!"

Rosamond checked the tears that were rising in her eyes again, and repeated the word.

"It is all the happiness I want, to lie here, and look at you, and hear you say that! Is there any other woman in the world, my love, who has a face so beautiful and so kind as yours?" She paused and smiled faintly.

"I can't look at those sweet rosy lips now," she said, "without thinking how many kisses they owe me!"

"If you had only let me pay the debt before!" said Rosamond, taking her mother's hand, as she

was accustomed to take her child's, and placing it on her neck. "If you had only spoken the first time we met, when you came to nurse me! How sorrowfully I have thought of that since! O, mother, did I distress you much, in my ignorance? Did it make you cry when you thought of me after that?"

"Distress me! All my distress, Rosamond, has been of my own making, not of yours. My kind, thoughtful love! you said, 'Don't be hard on her'—do you remember? When I was being sent away, deservedly sent away, dear, for frightening you, you said to your husband, 'Don't be hard on her!' Only five words—but, oh, what a comfort it was to me, afterwards, to think that you had said them! I did want to kiss you so, Rosamond, when I was brushing your hair: I had such a hard fight of it to keep from crying out loud when I heard you, behind the bed-curtains, wishing your little child good-night. My heart was in my mouth, choking me all that time. I took your part afterwards, when I went back to my mistress—I wouldn't hear her say a harsh word of you. I could have looked a hundred mistresses in the face then, and contradicted them all. Oh no, no, no! you never distressed me. My worst grief at going away was years and years before I came to nurse you at West Winston. It was when I left my place at Porthgenna; when I stole into your

nursery, on that dreadful morning, and when I saw you with both your little arms round my master's neck. The doll you had taken to bed with you was in one of your hands; and your head was resting on the captain's bosom—just as mine rests now—oh, so happily, Rosamond!—on yours. I heard the last words he was speaking to you! words you were too young to remember. 'Hush! Rosie, dear,' he said, 'Don't cry any more for poor mamma. Think of poor papa, and try to comfort him!' There my love—there was the bitterest distress, and the hardest to bear! I, your own mother, standing like a spy, and hearing him say that to the child I dared not own! 'Think of poor papa!' My own Rosamond! you know, now, what father *I* thought of when he said those words! How could I tell him the Secret? how could I give him the letter, with his wife dead that morning—with nobody but you to comfort him—with the awful truth crashing down upon my heart, at every word he spoke, as heavily as ever the rock crushed down upon the father you never saw!"

"Don't speak of it now!" said Rosamond. "Don't let us refer again to the past: I know all I ought to know, all I wish to know of it. We will talk of the future, mother, and of happier times to come. Let me tell you about my husband. If any words can praise him as he

ought to be praised, and thank him as he ought to be thanked, I am sure mine ought—I am sure yours will! Let me tell you what he said and what he did when I read him the letter that I found in the Myrtle Room. Yes, yes, do let me!”

Warned by a remembrance of the doctor's last injunctions; trembling in secret, as she felt under her hand the heavy, toilsome, irregular heaving of her mother's heart, as she saw the rapid changes of colour from pale to red, and from red to pale again that fluttered across her mother's face, she resolved to let no more words pass between them which were of a nature to recal painfully the sorrow and the suffering of the years that were gone. After describing the interview between her husband and herself which ended in the disclosure of the Secret, she led her mother, with compassionate abruptness, to speak of the future, of the time when she would be able to travel again, of the happiness of returning together to Cornwall, of the little festival they might hold on arriving at Uncle Joseph's house in Truro, and of the time after that, when they might go on still further to Porthgenna, or perhaps to some other place where new scenes and new faces might help them to forget all sad associations which it was best to think of no more.

Rosamond was still speaking on these topics ;

her mother was still listening to her with growing interest in every word that she said, when Uncle Joseph returned. He brought in with him a basket of flowers and a basket of fruit, which he held up in triumph at the foot of his niece's bed.

"I have been walking about, my child, in the fine bright sunshine," he said, "and waiting to give your face plenty of time to look happy, so that I might see it again as I want to see it always, for the rest of my life. Aha, Sarah! it is I who have brought the right doctor to cure you!" he added gaily, looking at Rosamond. "She has made you better already; wait but a little while longer, and she shall get you up from your bed again, with your two cheeks as red, and your heart as light, and your tongue as fast to chatter as mine. See! the fine flowers, and the fruit I have bought that is nice to your eyes, and nice to your nose, and nicest of all to put into your mouth. It is festival-time with us to-day, and we must make the room bright, bright, bright, all over. And then, there is your dinner to come soon; I have seen it on the dish—a cherub among chicken-fowls! And, after that, there is your fine sound sleep, with Mozart to sing the cradle-song, and with me to sit for watch, and to go down-stairs when you wake up again, and fetch you your cup of tea. Ah, my child, my child, what a fine thing it is to have come at last to this festival-day!"

With a bright look at Rosamond, and with both his hands full of flowers, he turned away from his niece to begin decorating the room. Except when she thanked the old man for the presents he had brought, her attention had never wandered, all the while he had been speaking, from her daughter's face; and her first words, when he was silent again, were addressed to Rosamond alone.

"While I am happy with *my* child," she said, "I am keeping you from *yours*. I, of all persons, ought to be the last to part you from each other too long. Go back now, my love, to your husband and your child; and leave me to my grateful thoughts and my dreams of better times."

"If you please answer Yes to that, for your mother's sake," said Uncle Joseph, before Rosamond could reply. "The doctor says, she must take her repose in the day as well as her repose in the night. And how shall I get her to close her eyes, so long as she has the temptation to keep them open upon *you*?"

Rosamond felt the truth of those last words, and consented to go back for a few hours to the hotel, on the understanding that she was to resume her place at the bedside in the evening. After making this arrangement, she waited long enough in the room to see the meal brought up which Uncle Joseph had announced, and to aid the old man in encouraging her mother to par-

take of it. When the tray had been removed, and when the pillows of the bed had been comfortably arranged by her own hands, she at last prevailed on herself to take leave.

Her mother's arms lingered round her neck ; her mother's cheek nestled fondly against hers. " Go, my dear, go now, or I shall get too selfish to part with you even for a few hours," murmured the sweet voice, in its lowest, softest tones. " My own Rosamond ! I have no words to bless you that are good enough ; no words to thank you that will speak as gratefully for me as they ought ! Happiness has been long in reaching me,—but, oh how mercifully it has come at last !"

Before she passed the door, Rosamond stopped and looked back into the room. The table, the mantel-piece, the little framed prints on the wall were bright with flowers ; the musical-box was just playing the first sweet notes of the air from Mozart ; Uncle Joseph was seated already in his accustomed place by the bed, with the basket of fruit on his knees ; the pale, worn face on the pillow was tenderly lighted up by a smile : peace and comfort, and repose, all mingled together happily in the picture of the sick room, all joined in leading Rosamond's thoughts to dwell quietly on the hope of a happier time.

Three hours passed. The last glory of the

sun was lighting the long summer day to its rest in the western heaven, when Rosamond returned to her mother's bedside.

She entered the room softly. The one window in it looked towards the west, and on that side of the bed the chair was placed which Uncle Joseph had occupied when she left him, and in which she now found him still seated on her return. He raised his finger to his lips, and looked towards the bed, as she opened the door. Her mother was asleep, with her hand resting in the hand of the old man.

As Rosamond noiselessly advanced, she saw that Uncle Joseph's eyes looked dim and weary. The constraint of the position that he occupied, which made it impossible for him to move without the risk of awakening his niece, seemed to be beginning to fatigue him. Rosamond removed her bonnet and shawl, and made a sign to him to rise and let her take his place.

"Yes, yes!" she whispered, seeing him reply by a shake of the head. "Let me take my turn, while you go out a little and enjoy the cool evening air. There is no fear of waking her: her hand is not clasping yours, but only resting in it—let me steal mine into its place gently, and we shall not disturb her."

She slipped her hand under her mother's while she spoke. Uncle Joseph smiled as he rose from his chair, and resigned his place to

her. "You will have your way," he said; "you are too quick and sharp for an old man like me."

"Has she been long asleep?" asked Rosamond.

"Nearly two hours," answered Uncle Joseph. "But it has not been the good sleep I wanted for her;—a dreaming, talking, restless sleep. It is only ten little minutes, since she has been so quiet as you see her now."

"Surely you let in too much light?" whispered Rosamond, looking round at the window, through which the glow of the evening sky poured warmly into the room.

"No, no!" he hastily rejoined. "Asleep or awake, she always wants the light. If I go away for a little while, as you tell me, and if it gets on to be dusk before I come back, light both those candles on the chimney-piece. I shall try to be here again before that; but if the time slips by too fast for me, and if it so happens that she wakes and talks strangely, and looks much away from you into that far corner of the room there, remember that the matches and the candles are together on the chimney-piece, and that the sooner you light them after the dim twilight-time, the better it will be." With those words he stole on tiptoe to the door and went out.

His parting directions recalled Rosamond to a

remembrance of what had passed between the doctor and herself that morning. She looked round again anxiously to the window.

The sun was just sinking beyond the distant house-tops: the close of day was not far off.

As she turned her head once more towards the bed, a momentary chill crept over her. She trembled a little, partly at the sensation itself, partly at the recollection it aroused of that other chill which had struck her in the solitude of the Myrtle Room.

Stirred by the mysterious sympathies of touch, her mother's hand at the same instant moved in hers, and over the sad peacefulness of the weary face there fluttered a momentary trouble—the flying shadow of a dream. The pale, parted lips opened, closed, quivered, opened again; the toiling breath came and went quickly and more quickly; the head moved uneasily on the pillow; the eyelids half unclosed themselves; low, faint, moaning sounds poured rapidly from the lips—changed ere long to half-articulated sentences—then merged softly into intelligible speech, and uttered these words:—

“Swear that you will not destroy this paper! Swear that you will not take this paper away with you if you leave the house!”

The words that followed these were whispered so rapidly and so low that Rosamond's ear failed to catch them. They were followed by a short.

silence. Then the dreaming voice spoke again suddenly, and spoke louder.

“Where? where? where?” it said. “In the bookcase? In the table-drawer?—Stop! stop! In the picture of the ghost——”

The last words struck cold on Rosamond’s heart. She drew back suddenly with a movement of alarm,—checked herself the instant after, and bent down over the pillow again. But it was too late. Her hand had moved abruptly when she drew back, and her mother woke with a start and a faint cry,—with vacant, terror-stricken eyes, and with the perspiration standing thick on her forehead.

“Mother!” cried Rosamond, raising her on the pillow. “I have come back. Don’t you know me?”

“Mother?” she repeated in mournful, questioning tones. “Mother?” At the second repetition of the word a bright flush of delight and surprise broke out on her face, and she clasped both arms suddenly round her daughter’s neck. “Oh, my own Rosamond!” she said. “If I had ever been used to waking up and seeing your dear face look at me, I should have known you sooner, in spite of my dream! Did you wake me, my love? or did I wake myself?”

“I am afraid I woke you, mother.”

“Don’t say ‘afraid.’ I would wake from the sweetest sleep that ever woman had, to see your face and to hear you say ‘Mother’ to me. You

have delivered me, my love, from the terror of one of my dreadful dreams. Oh, Rosamond, I think I should live to be happy in your love, if I could only get Porthgenna Tower out of my mind—if I could only never remember again the bedchamber where my mistress died, and the room where I hid the letter——”

“We will try and forget Porthgenna Tower now,” said Rosamond. “Shall we talk about other places where I have lived, which you have never seen? Or shall I read to you, mother? Have you got any book here that you are fond of?”

She looked across the bed, at the table on the other side. There was nothing on it—but some bottles of medicine, a few of Uncle Joseph’s flowers in a glass of water, and a little oblong work-box. She looked round at the chest of drawers behind her—there were no books placed on the top of it. Before she turned towards the bed again, her eyes wandered aside to the window. The sun was lost beyond the distant housetops: the close of day was nearer at hand.

“If I could forget! O, me, if I could only forget!” said her mother, sighing wearily and beating her hand on the coverlid of the bed.

“Are you well enough, dear, to amuse yourself with work?” asked Rosamond, pointing to the little oblong box on the table, and trying to lead

the conversation to a harmless, every-day topic, by asking questions about it. "What work do you do? May I look at it?"

Her face lost its weary, suffering look, and brightened once more into a smile. "There is no work there," she said. "All the treasures I had in the world, till you came to see me, are shut up in that one little box. Open it, my love, and look inside."

Rosamond obeyed, placing the box on the bed where her mother could see it easily. The first object that she discovered inside was a little book, in dark, worn binding. It was an old copy of Wesley's Hymns. Some withered blades of grass lay between its pages; and on one of its blank leaves was this inscription:—"Sarah Leeson, her book. The gift of Hugh Polwheal."

"Look at it, my dear," said her mother. "I want you to know it again. When my time comes to leave you, Rosamond, lay it on my bosom with your own dear hands, and put a little morsel of your hair with it, and bury me, in the grave in Porthgenna churchyard, where *he* has been waiting for me to come to him so many weary years. The other things in the box, Rosamond, belong to you; they are little stolen keepsakes that used to remind me of my child, when I was alone in the world. Perhaps, years and years hence, when your brown hair begins to grow grey like mine, you may like to show these

poor trifles to your children when you talk about me. Don't mind telling them, Rosamond, how your mother sinned and how she suffered—you can always let these little trifles speak for her at the end. The least of them will show that she always loved you.

She took out of the box a morsel of neatly-folded white paper, which had been placed under the book of Wesley's Hymns, opened it, and showed her daughter a few faded laburnum leaves that lay inside. "I took these from your bed, Rosamond, when I came as a stranger, to nurse you at West Winston. When I heard who the lady was who was staying at the inn, the temptation to risk anything for the sake of seeing you and seeing my grandchild was too much for me. I tried to take a ribbon out of your trunk, love, after I had taken the flowers—a ribbon that I knew had been round your neck. But the doctor came near at the time, and frightened me."

She folded the paper up again, laid it aside on the table, and drew from the box next a small print which had been taken from the illustrations to a pocket-book. It represented a little girl, in a gipsy-hat sitting by the water-side, and weaving a daisy chain. As a design, it was worthless; as a print, it had not even the mechanical merit of being a good impression. Underneath it a line was written in faintly

pencilled letters:—"Rosamond when I last saw her."

"It was never pretty enough for you," she said. "But still there was something in it that helped me to remember what my own love was like, when she was a little girl."

She put the engraving aside with the laburnum leaves, and took from the box a leaf of a copy-book, folded in two, out of which there dropped a tiny strip of paper, covered with small printed letters. She looked at the strip of paper first. "The advertisement of your marriage, Rosamond," she said. "I used to be fond of reading it over and over again to myself when I was alone, and trying to fancy how you looked and what dress you wore. If I had only known when you were going to be married, I would have ventured into the church, my love, to look at you and at your husband. But that was not to be,—and perhaps it was best so, for the seeing you in that stolen way might only have made my trials harder to bear afterwards. I have had no other keepsake to remind me of you, Rosamond, except this leaf out of your first copy-book. The nurse-maid at Porthgenna tore up the rest one day to light the fire, and I took this leaf when she was not looking. See! you had not got as far as words then,—you could only do up-strokes and down-strokes. O me! how many times I have sat looking at this one leaf of

paper, and trying to fancy that I saw your small child's hand travelling over it, with the pen held tight in the rosy little fingers. I think I have cried oftener, my darling, over that first copy of yours than over all my other keepsakes put together."

Rosamond turned aside her face towards the window to hide the tears which she could restrain no longer.

As she wiped them away, the first sight of the darkening sky warned her that the twilight dimness was coming soon. How dull and faint the glow in the west looked now! how near it was to the close of day!

When she turned towards the bed again, her mother was still looking at the leaf of the copy-book.

"That nurse-maid who tore up all the rest of it to light the fire," she said, "was a kind friend to me, in those early days at Porthgenna. She used sometimes to let me put you to bed, Rosamond; and never asked questions, or teased me, as the rest of them did. She risked the loss of her place by being so good to me. My mistress was afraid of my betraying myself and betraying her if I was much in the nursery, and she gave orders that I was not to go there, because it was not my place. None of the other women-servants were so often stopped from playing with you and kissing you, Rosamond, as

I was. But the nursemaid—God bless and prosper her for it!—stood my friend. I often lifted you into your little cot, my love, and wished you good-night, when my mistress thought I was at work in her room. You used to say you liked your nurse better than you liked me, but you never told me so fretfully; and you always put your laughing lips up to mine whenever I asked you for a kiss!”

Rosamond laid her head gently on the pillow by the side of her mother's. “Try to think less of the past, dear, and more of the future,” she whispered pleadingly; “try to think of the time when my child will help you to recall those old days without their sorrow,—the time when you will teach him to put his lips up to yours, as I used to put mine.”

“I will try, Rosamond,—but my only thoughts of the future, for years and years past, have been thoughts of meeting you in heaven. If my sins are forgiven, how shall we meet there? Shall you be like my little child to me,—the child I never saw again after she was five years old? I wonder if the mercy of God will recompense me for our long separation on earth? I wonder if you will first appear to me in the happy world, with your child's face, and be what you should have been to me on earth, my little angel that I can carry in my arms? If we pray in heaven, shall I teach you your prayers there, as some

comfort to me for never having taught them to you here?"

She paused, smiled sadly, and, closing her eyes, gave herself in silence to the dream-thoughts that were still floating in her mind. Thinking that she might sink to rest again if she was left undisturbed, Rosamond neither moved nor spoke. After watching the peaceful face for some time, she became conscious that the light was fading on it slowly. As that conviction impressed itself on her, she looked round at the window once more.

The western clouds wore their quiet twilight-colours already: the close of day had come.

The moment she moved in the chair, she felt her mother's hand on her shoulder. When she turned again towards the bed, she saw her mother's eyes open and looking at her—looking at her, as she thought, with a change in their expression, a change to vacancy.

"Why do I talk of heaven?" she said, turning her face suddenly towards the darkening sky, and speaking in low, muttering tones. "How do I know I am fit to go there? And yet, Rosamond, I am not guilty of breaking my oath to my mistress. You can say for me that I never destroyed the letter, and that I never took it away with me when I left the house. I tried to get it out of the Myrtle Room; but I only wanted to hide it somewhere else. I never

thought to take it away from the house : I never meant to break my oath."

"It will be dark soon, mother. Let me get up for one moment to light the candles."

Her hand crept softly upward, and clung fast round Rosamond's neck.

"I never swore to give him the letter," she said. "There was no crime in the hiding of it. You found it in a picture, Rosamond? They used to call it a picture of the Porthgenna ghost. Nobody knew how old it was or when it came into the house. My mistress hated it, because the painted face had a strange likeness to hers. She told me, when first I lived at Porthgenna, to take it down from the wall and destroy it. I was afraid to do that; so I hid it away, before ever you were born, in the Myrtle Room. You found the letter at the back of the picture, Rosamond? And yet that was a likely place to hide it in. Nobody had ever found the picture. Why should anybody find the letter that was hid in it?"

"Let me get a light, mother! I am sure you would like to have a light!"

"No! no light now. Give the darkness time to gather down there in the corner of the room. Lift me up close to you, and let me whisper."

The clinging arm tightened its grasp as Rosamond raised her in the bed. The fading light from the window fell full on her face, and was reflected dimly in her vacant eyes. "I am

waiting for something that comes at dusk, before the candles are lit," she whispered in low breathless tones. "Down there!" And she pointed away to the farthest corner of the room near the door.

"Mother! for God's sake, what is it! what has changed you so?"

"That's right! say, 'Mother.' If she does come, she can't stop when she hears you call me 'Mother,' when she sees us together at last, loving and knowing each other in spite of her. Oh, my kind, tender, pitying child! if you can only deliver me from her, how long I may live yet!—how happy we may both be!"

"Don't talk so! don't look so! Tell me quietly—dear, dear mother, tell me quietly——"

"Hush! hush! I am going to tell you. She threatened me on her death-bed, if I thwarted her: she said she would come to me from the other world. Rosamond! I *have* thwarted her, and she has kept her promise—all my life since, she has kept her promise! Look! Down there!"

Her left arm was still clasped round Rosamond's neck. She stretched her right arm out towards the far corner of the room, and shook her hand slowly at the empty air.

"Look!" she said. "There she is as she always comes to me, at the close of day,—with the coarse, black dress on, that my guilty

hands made for her,—with the smile that there was on her face when she asked me if she looked like a servant. Mistress! mistress! Oh, rest at last! the Secret is ours no longer! Rest at last! my child is my own again! Rest at last; and come between us no more!”

She ceased, panting for breath; and laid her hot, throbbing cheek against the cheek of her daughter. “Call me ‘Mother’ again!” she whispered. “Say it loud; and send her away from me for ever!”

Rosamond mastered the terror that shook her in every limb, and pronounced the word.

Her mother leaned forward a little, still gasping heavily for breath, and looked with straining eyes into the quiet twilight dimness at the lower end of the room.

“*Gone!!!*” she cried suddenly, with a scream of exultation. “Oh, merciful, merciful God! gone at last!”

The next instant she sprang up on her knees in the bed. For one awful moment her eyes shone in the grey twilight with a radiant unearthly beauty, as they fastened their last look of fondness on her daughter’s face. “Oh, my love! my angel!” she murmured, “how happy we shall be together now!” As she said the words, she twined her arms round Rosamond’s neck, and pressed her lips rapturously on the lips of her child.

The kiss lingered till her head sank forward gently on Rosamond's bosom—lingered, till the time of God's mercy came, and the weary heart rested at last.

CHAPTER V.



FORTY THOUSAND POUNDS.

No popular saying is more commonly accepted than the maxim which asserts, that Time is the great consoler; and, probably, no popular saying more imperfectly expresses the truth. The work that we must do, the responsibilities that we must undertake, the example that we must set to others,—these are the great consolers, for these apply the first remedies to the malady of grief. Time possesses nothing but the negative virtue of helping it to wear itself out. Who that has observed at all, has not perceived that those among us who soonest recover from the shock of a great grief for the dead are those who have most duties to perform towards the living? When the shadow of calamity rests on our houses, the question with us is, not how much time will suffice to bring back the sunshine to us again, but how much occupation have we got to force us forward into the place where the sunshine is waiting for us to come? Time may claim

many victories, but not the victory over grief. The great consolation for the loss of the dead who are gone is to be found in the great necessity of thinking of the living who remain.

The history of Rosamond's daily life, now that the darkness of a heavy affliction had fallen on it, was in itself the sufficient illustration of this truth. When all the strength even of her strong character had been prostrated by the unspeakably awful shock of her mother's sudden death, it was not the slow lapse of time that helped to raise her up again, but the necessity which would not wait for time—the necessity which made her remember what was due to the husband who sorrowed with her, to the child whose young life was linked to hers, and to the old man whose helpless grief found no support but in the comfort she could give, learnt no lesson of resignation but from the example she could set.

From the first the responsibility of sustaining him had rested on her shoulders alone. Before the close of day had been counted out by the first hour of the night, she had been torn from the bedside by the necessity of meeting him at the door, and preparing him to know that he was entering the chamber of death. To guide the dreadful truth gradually and gently, till it stood face to face with him, to support him under the shock of recognising it, to help his mind to recover after the inevitable blow had struck it at

last, these were the sacred duties which claimed all the devotion that Rosamond had to give, and which forbade her heart to dwell selfishly on its own grief. It was not the least of the trials she had now to face, to see the condition of vacant helplessness to which he was reduced under the weight of an affliction which he had no strength to bear.

He looked like a man whose faculties had been stunned past recovery. He would sit for hours with the musical-box by his side, patting it absently from time to time, and whispering to himself as he looked at it, but never attempting to set it playing. It was the one memorial left that reminded him of all the joys and sorrows, the simple family interests and affections of his past life. When Rosamond first sat by his side and took his hand to comfort him, he looked backwards and forwards with forlorn eyes from her compassionate face to the musical-box, and vacantly repeated to himself the same words over and over again: "They are all gone—my brother Max, my wife, my little Joseph, my sister Agatha, and Sarah my niece! I and my little bit of box are left alone together in the world. Mozart can sing no more. He has sung to the last of them now!"

The second day there was no change in him. On the third, Rosamond placed the book of Hymns reverently on her mother's bosom, laid

a lock of her own hair round it, and kissed the sad, peaceful face for the last time. The old man was with her at that silent leave-taking, and followed her away, when it was over. By the side of the coffin, and, afterwards, when she took him back with her to her husband, he was still sunk in the same apathy of grief which had overwhelmed him from the first. But when they began to speak of the removal of the remains the next day to Porthgenna churchyard, they noticed that his dim eyes brightened suddenly, and that his wandering attention followed every word they said. After a while, he rose from his chair, approached Rosamond, and looked anxiously in her face. "I think I could bear it better if you would let me go with her?" he said. "We two should have gone back to Cornwall together, if she had lived. Will you let us still go back together now that she has died?"

Rosamond gently remonstrated, and tried to make him see that it was best to leave the remains to be removed under the charge of her husband's servant, whose fidelity could be depended on, and whose position made him the fittest person to be charged with cares and responsibilities which near relations were not capable of undertaking with sufficient composure. She told him that her husband intended to stop in London, to give her one day of rest and quiet

which she absolutely needed, and that they then proposed to return to Cornwall in time to be at Porthgenna before the funeral took place; and she begged earnestly that he would not think of separating his lot from theirs at a time of trouble and trial, when they ought to be all three most closely united by the ties of mutual sympathy and mutual sorrow.

He listened silently and submissively while Rosamond was speaking, but he only repeated his simple petition when she had done. The one idea in his mind, now, was the idea of going back to Cornwall with all that was left on earth of his sister's child. Leonard and Rosamond both saw that it would be useless to oppose it, both felt that it would be cruelty to keep him with them, and kindness to let him go away. After privately charging the servant to spare him all trouble and difficulty, to humour him by acceding to any wishes that he might express, and to give him all possible protection and help without obtruding either officiously on his attention, they left him free to follow the one purpose of his heart which still connected him with the interests and events of the passing day. "I shall thank you better soon," he said at leave-taking, "for letting me go away out of this din of London with all that is left to me of Sarah, my niece. I will dry up my tears as well as I can, and try to have more courage when we meet again."

On the next day, when they were alone, Rosamond and her husband sought refuge from the oppression of the present, in speaking together of the future, and of the influence which the change in their fortunes ought to be allowed to exercise on their plans and projects for the time to come. After exhausting this topic, the conversation turned next on the subject of their friends, and on the necessity of communicating to some of the oldest of their associates the events which had followed the discovery in the Myrtle Room. The first name on their lips while they were considering this question, was the name of Dr. Chennery; and Rosamond, dreading the effect on her spirits of allowing her mind to remain unoccupied, volunteered to write to the vicar at once, referring briefly to what had happened since they had last communicated with him, and asking him to fulfil, that year, an engagement of long standing, which he had made with her husband and herself, to spend his autumn holiday with them at Porthgenna Tower. Rosamond's heart yearned for a sight of her old friend; and she knew him well enough to be assured that a hint at the affliction which had befallen her, and at the hard trial which she had undergone, would be more than enough to bring them together the moment Doctor Chennery could make his arrangements for leaving home.

The writing of this letter suggested recollections which called to mind another friend, whose intimacy with Leonard and Rosamond was of recent date, but whose connection with the earlier among the train of circumstances which had led to the discovery of the Secret, entitled him to a certain share in their confidence. This friend was Mr. Orridge, the doctor at West Winston, who had accidentally been the means of bringing Rosamond's mother to her bedside. To him she now wrote, acknowledging the promise which she had made, on leaving West Winston, to communicate the result of their search for the Myrtle Room; and informing him that it had terminated in the discovery of some very sad events, of a family nature, which were now numbered with the events of the past. More than this, it was not necessary to say to a friend who occupied such a position towards them as that held by Mr. Orridge.

Rosamond had written the address of this second letter, and was absently drawing lines on the blotting-paper with her pen, when she was startled by hearing a contention of angry voices in the passage outside. Almost before she had time to wonder what the noise meant, the door was violently pushed open, and a tall, shabbily dressed, elderly man, with a peevish, haggard face, and a ragged grey beard, stalked

in, followed indignantly by the head waiter of the hotel.

“I have three times told this person,” began the waiter, with a strong emphasis on the word ‘person,’ “that Mr. and Mrs. Frankland ——”

“Were not at home,” broke in the shabbily dressed man, finishing the sentence for the waiter. “Yes, you told me that; and I told you that the gift of speech was only used by mankind for the purpose of telling lies, and that consequently I didn’t believe you. You have told a lie. Here are Mr. and Mrs. Frankland both at home. I come on business, and I mean to have five minutes’ talk with them. I sit down unasked, and I announce my own name, Andrew Treverton.”

With those words he sat down coolly in the nearest chair. Leonard’s cheeks reddened with anger while he was speaking, but Rosamond interposed before her husband could say a word.

“It is useless, love, to be angry with him,” she whispered. “The quiet way is the best way with a man like that.” She made a sign to the waiter which gave him permission to leave the room—then turned to Mr. Treverton. “You have forced your presence on us, sir,” she said quietly, “at a time when a very sad affliction makes us quite unfit for contentions of any kind. We are willing to show more consideration for your age than you have shown for our grief. If

you have anything to say to my husband, he is ready to control himself and to hear you quietly, for my sake."

"And I shall be short with him and with you, for my own sake," rejoined Mr. Treverton. "No woman has ever had the chance yet of sharpening her tongue long on me, or ever shall. I have come here to tell you three things. First, your lawyer has told me all about the discovery in the Myrtle Room, and how you made it. Secondly, I have got your money. Thirdly, I mean to keep it. What do you think of that?"

"I think you need not give yourself the trouble of remaining in the room any longer, if your only object in coming here is to tell us what we know already," said Leonard. "We know you have got the money; and we never doubted that you meant to keep it."

"You are quite sure of that, I suppose?" said Mr. Treverton. "Quite sure you have no lingering hope that any future twists and turns of the law will take the money out of my pocket again and put it back into yours? It is only fair to tell you that there is not the shadow of a chance of any such thing ever happening, or of my ever turning generous and rewarding you of my own accord for the sacrifice you have made. I have been to Doctors' Commons, I have taken out a grant of administration, I have got the money legally, I have lodged it

safe at my banker's, and I have never had one kind feeling in my heart since I was born. That was my brother's character of me, and he knew more of my disposition, of course, than anyone else. Once again, I tell you both, not a farthing of all that large fortune will ever return to either of you."

"And once again I tell you," said Leonard, "that we have no desire to hear what we know already. It is a relief to my conscience and to my wife's to have resigned a fortune which we had no right to possess; and I speak for her as well as for myself when I tell you that your attempt to attach an interested motive to our renunciation of that money, is an insult to us both which you ought to have been ashamed to offer."

"That is your opinion, is it?" said Mr. Treverton. "You, who have lost the money, speak to me, who have got it, in that manner, do you? Pray, do you approve of your husband's treating a rich man who might make both your fortunes, in that way?" he inquired, addressing himself sharply to Rosamond.

"Most assuredly I approve of it," she answered. "I never agreed with him more heartily in my life than I agree with him now."

"O!" said Mr. Treverton. "Then it seems you care no more for the loss of the money than he does?"

“He has told you already,” said Rosamond, “that it is as a great relief to my conscience as to his, to have given it up.”

Mr. Treverton carefully placed a thick stick which he carried with him, upright between his knees, crossed his hands on the top of it, rested his chin on them, and, in that investigating position, stared steadily in Rosamond’s face.

“I rather wish I had brought Shrowl here with me,” he said to himself. “I should like him to have seen this. It staggers me, and I rather think it would have staggered him. Both these people,” continued Mr. Treverton, looking perplexedly from Rosamond to Leonard, and from Leonard back again to Rosamond, “are, to all outward appearance, human beings. They walk on their hind legs, they express ideas readily by uttering articulate sounds, they have the usual allowance of features, and in respect of weight, height, and size generally, they appear to me to be mere average human creatures of the common civilised sort. And yet, there they sit, taking the loss of a fortune of forty thousand pounds as easily as Cræsus, King of Lydia, might have taken the loss of a halfpenny!”

He rose, put on his hat, tucked the thick stick under his arm, and advanced a few steps towards Rosamond.

“I am going now,” he said. “Would you like to shake hands?”

Rosamond turned her back on him contemptuously.

Mr. Treverton chuckled with an air of supreme satisfaction.

Meanwhile, Leonard, who sat near the fireplace, and whose colour was rising angrily once more, had been feeling for the bell-rope, and had just succeeded in getting it into his hand, as Mr. Treverton approached the door.

“Don't ring, Lenny,” said Rosamond. “He is going of his own accord.”

Mr. Treverton stepped out into the passage, then glanced back into the room with an expression of puzzled curiosity on his face, as if he was looking into a cage which contained two animals of a species that he had never heard of before. “I have seen some strange sights in my time,” he said to himself. “I have had some queer experience of this trumpery little planet, and of the creatures who inhabit it—but I never was staggered yet by any human phenomena, as I am staggered now by those two.” He shut the door without saying another word, and Rosamond heard him chuckle to himself again as he walked away along the passage.

Ten minutes afterwards the waiter brought up a sealed letter addressed to Mrs. Frankland. It had been written, he said, in the coffee-room of the hotel, by the ‘person’ who had intruded himself into Mr. and Mrs. Frankland's presence,

After giving it to the waiter to deliver, he had gone away in a hurry, swinging his thick stick complacently, and laughing to himself.

Rosamond opened the letter.

On one side of it was a crossed cheque, drawn in her name, for Forty Thousand pounds.

On the other side, were these lines of explanation :—

Take this. First, because you and your husband are the only two people I have ever met with who are not likely to be made rascals by being made rich. Secondly, because you have told the truth, when letting it out meant losing money, and keeping it in, saving a fortune. Thirdly, because you are not the child of the player-woman. Fourthly, because you can't help yourself—for I shall leave it to you at my death, if you won't have it now. Good-bye. Don't come and see me, don't write grateful letters to me, don't invite me into the country, don't praise my generosity, and, above all things, don't have anything more to do with Shrowl !

ANDREW TREVERTON.

The first thing Rosamond did, when she and her husband had a little recovered from their astonishment, was to disobey the injunction which forbade her to address any grateful letters to Mr. Treverton. The messenger who was sent with her note to Bayswater, returned without an answer, and reported that he had received directions from an invisible man, with a gruff voice, to throw it over the garden-wall and to go away immediately after, unless he wanted to have his head broken.

Mr. Nixon, to whom Leonard immediately

sent word of what had happened, volunteered to go to Bayswater the same evening, and make an attempt to see Mr. Treverton on Mr. and Mrs. Frankland's behalf. He found Timon of London more approachable than he had anticipated. The misanthrope was, for once in his life, in a good humour. This extraordinary change in him had been produced by the sense of satisfaction which he experienced in having just turned Shrowl out of his situation, on the ground that his master was not fit company for him after having committed such an act of folly as giving Mrs. Frankland back her forty thousand pounds. "I told him," said Mr. Treverton, chuckling over his recollection of the parting-scene between his servant and himself. "I told him that I could not possibly expect to merit his continued approval after what I had done, and that I could not think of detaining him in his place, under the circumstances. I begged him to view my conduct as leniently as he could, because the first cause that led to it was, after all, his copying the plan of Porthgenna, which guided Mrs. Frankland to the discovery in the Myrtle Room. I congratulated him on having got a reward of five pounds for being the means of restoring a fortune of forty thousand; and I bowed him out with a polite humility that half drove him mad. Shrowl and I have had a good many tussles in our time: he was always even

with me till to-day, and now I've thrown him on his back at last !”

Although Mr. Treverton was willing to talk of the defeat and dismissal of Shrowl as long as the lawyer would listen to him, he was perfectly unmanageable on the subject of Mrs. Frankland, when Mr. Nixon tried to turn the conversation to that topic. He would hear no messages—he would give no promise of any sort for the future. All that he could be prevailed on to say about himself and his own projects, was, that he intended to give up the house at Bayswater and to travel again for the purpose of studying human nature, in different countries, on a plan that he had not tried yet—the plan of endeavouring to find out the good that there might be in people as well as the bad. He said the idea had been suggested to his mind by his anxiety to ascertain whether Mr. and Mrs. Frankland were perfectly exceptional human beings or not. At present, he was disposed to think that they were, and that his travels were not likely to lead to anything at all remarkable in the shape of a satisfactory result. Mr. Nixon pleaded hard for something in the shape of a friendly message to take back, along with the news of his intended departure. The request produced nothing but a sardonic chuckle, followed by this parting speech, delivered to the lawyer at the garden-gate.

“Tell those two amazing people,” said Timon

of London, "that I may give up my travels in disgust when they least expect it; and that I may possibly come and look at them again, for the sake of getting one satisfactory sensation more out of the lamentable spectacle of humanity before I die."

CHAPTER VI.

THE DAWN OF A NEW LIFE.

FOUR days afterwards, Rosamond and Leonard and Uncle Joseph met together in the cemetery of the church at Porthgenna.

The earth to which we all return had closed over Her: the weary pilgrimage of Sarah Leeson had come to its quiet end at last. The miner's grave from which she had twice plucked in secret her few memorial fragments of grass, had given her the home, in death, which, in life, she had never known. The roar of the surf was stilled to a low murmur before it reached the place of her rest; and the wind that swept joyously over the open moor, paused a little when it met the old trees that watched over the graves, and wound onward softly through the myrtle hedge which held them all embraced alike in its circle of lustrous green.

Some hours had passed since the last words of the burial service had been read. The fresh turf was heaped already over the mound, and the

old headstone with the miner's epitaph on it had been raised once more in its former place at the head of the grave. Rosamond was reading the inscription softly to her husband. Uncle Joseph had walked a little apart from them while she was thus engaged, and had knelt down by himself at the foot of the mound. He was fondly smoothing and patting the newly-laid turf,—as he had often smoothed Sarah's hair in the long past days of her youth,—as he had often patted her hand in the after-time, when her heart was weary and her hair was grey.

“ Shall we add any new words to the old worn letters as they stand now ? ” said Rosamond, when she had read the inscription to the end. “ There is a blank space left on the stone. Shall we fill it, love, with the initials of my mother's name, and the date of her death ? I feel something in my heart which seems to tell me to do that, and to do no more.”

“ So let it be, Rosamond,” said her husband. “ That short and simple inscription is the fittest and the best.”

She looked away, as he gave that answer, to the foot of the grave, and left him for a moment to approach the old man. “ Take my hand, Uncle Joseph,” she said, and touched him gently on the shoulder. “ Take my hand, and let us go back together to the house.”

He rose as she spoke, and looked at her doubt-

fully. The musical-box, enclosed in its well-worn leather case, lay on the grave near the place where he had been kneeling. Rosamond took it up from the grass, and slung it in the old place at his side, which it always occupied when he was away from home. He sighed a little as he thanked her. "Mozart can sing no more," he said. "He has sung to the last of them now!"

"Don't say to the last, yet," said Rosamond, "don't say to the last, Uncle Joseph, while I am alive. Surely Mozart will sing to *me*, for my mother's sake?"

A smile—the first she had seen since the time of their grief—trembled faintly round his lips. "There is comfort in that," he said; "there is comfort for Uncle Joseph still, in hearing that."

"Take my hand," she repeated softly, "Come home with us now."

He looked down wistfully at the grave. "I will follow you," he said, "if you will go on before me to the gate?"

Rosamond took her husband's arm, and guided him to the path that led out of the churchyard. As they passed from sight Uncle Joseph knelt down once more at the foot of the grave, and pressed his lips on the fresh turf.

"Good-bye, my child," he whispered, and laid his cheek for a moment against the grass, before he rose again.

At the gate Rosamond was waiting for him. Her right hand was resting on her husband's arm; her left hand was held out for Uncle Joseph to take.

"How cool the breeze is!" said Leonard. "How pleasantly the sea sounds! Surely this is a fine summer day?"

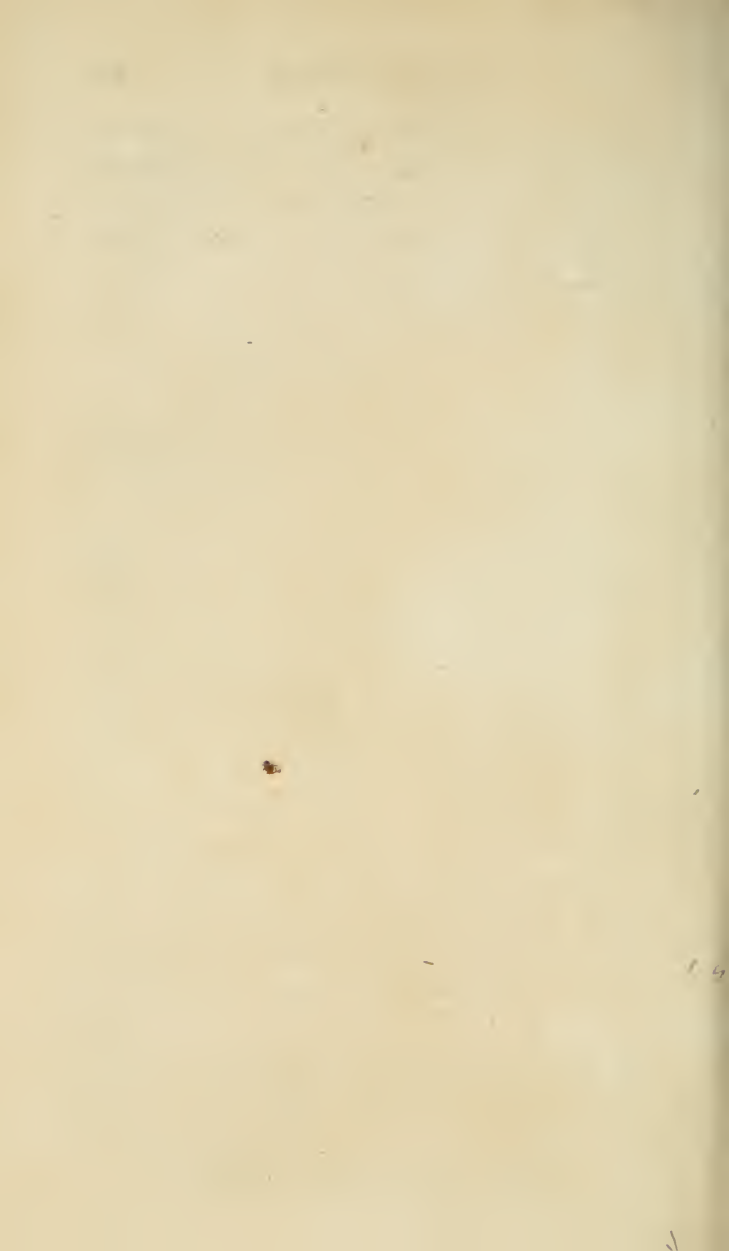
"The brightest and loveliest of the year," said Rosamond. "The only clouds on the sky are clouds of shining white; the only shadows over the moor lie light as down on the heather. The sun glows clear in its glory of gold, and the sea beams back on it in its glory of blue. O, Lenny, it is such a different day from that day of dull oppression and misty heat when we found the letter in the Myrtle Room! Even the dark tower of our old house, yonder, gains a new beauty in the clear air, and seems to be arrayed in its brightest aspect to welcome us to the beginning of a new life. I will make it a happy life to you, and to Uncle Joseph, if I can—happy as the sunshine that we are all three walking in now. You shall never repent, love, if I can help it, that you have married a wife who has no claim of her own to the honours of a family name."

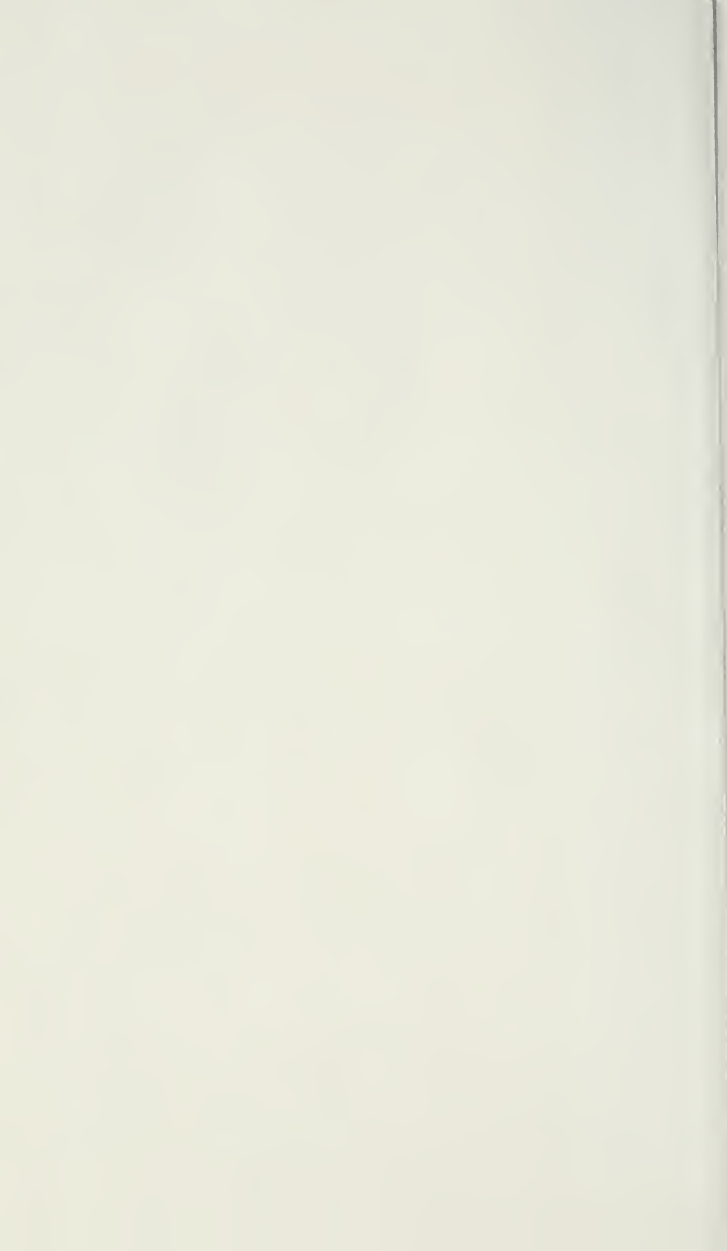
"I can never repent my marriage, Rosamond, because I can never forget the lesson that my wife has taught me."

"What lesson, Lenny?"

“An old one, my dear, which some of us can never learn too often. The highest honours, Rosamond, are those which no accident can take away—the honours that are conferred by LOVE and TRUTH.”

THE END.







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