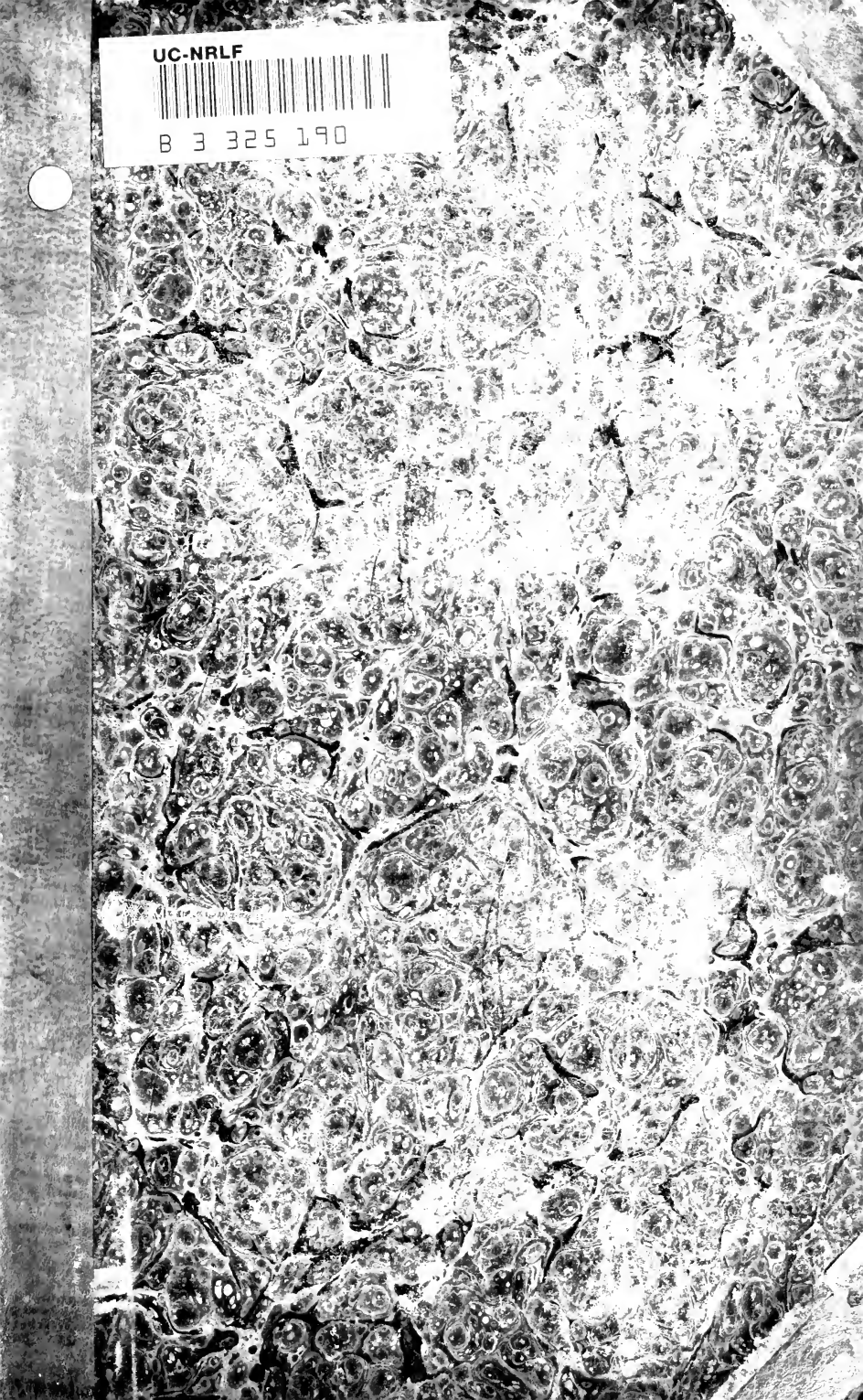
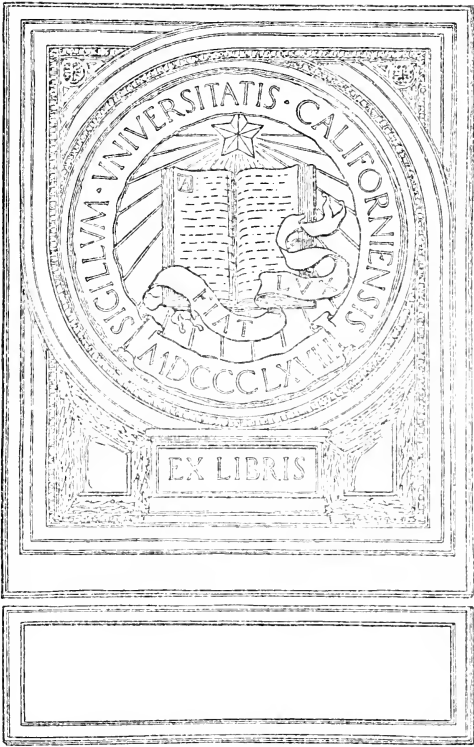


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THE

DOUBLE COURTSHIP.

A Romance of Deep Interest.

BY MRS. M. L. SWEETSER.

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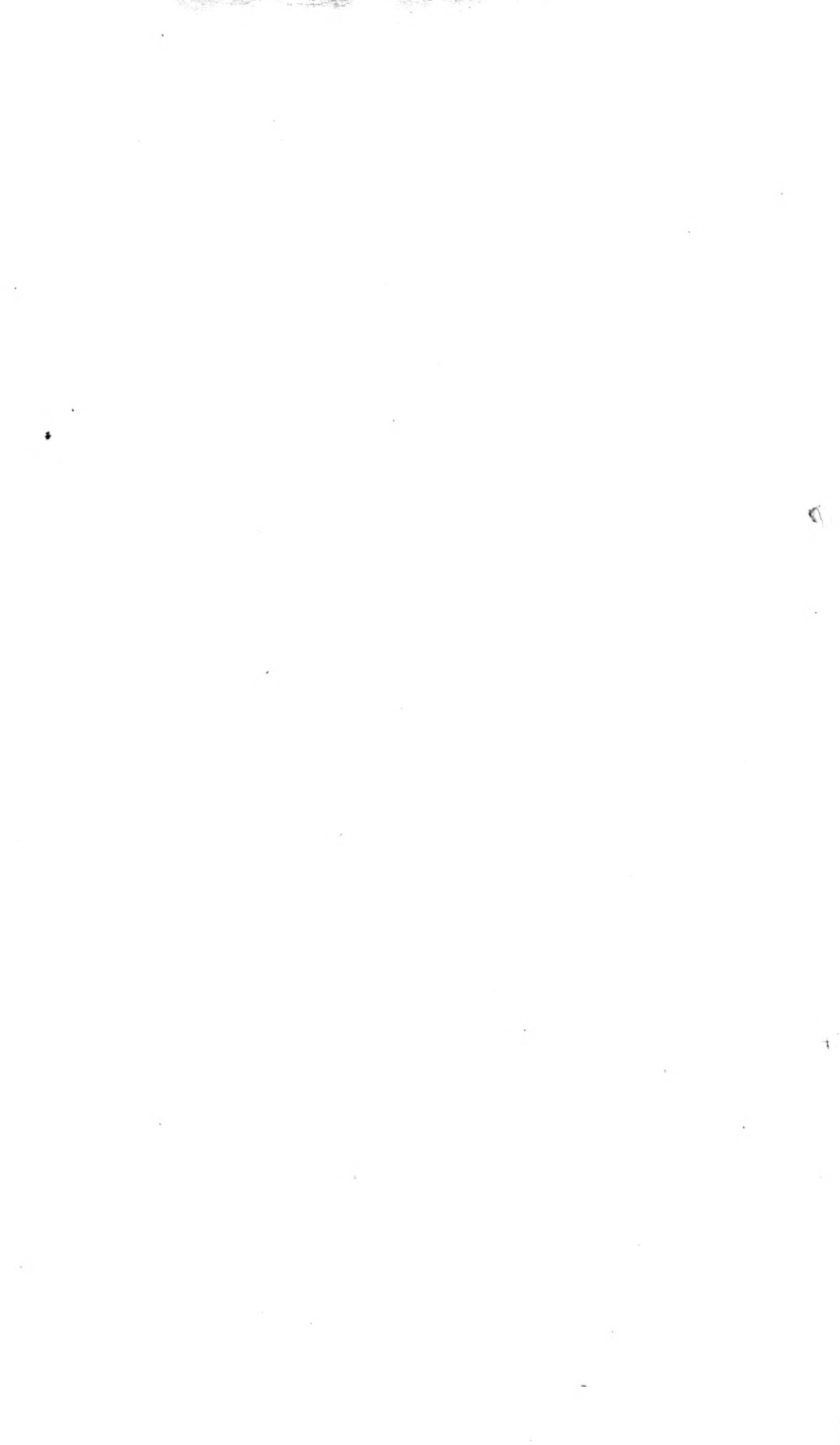
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P R E F A C E .

THE favourable reception which this work has already met with from the public is exceedingly gratifying, both to the Author and the Publisher.

The characters are drawn from real life; and the events narrated, although slightly altered to suit the purposes of the novelist, will be recognised by many who witnessed or took a part in them. The moral conveyed is so just that the work may with safety be placed in the hands of the young; for a good novel smuggles many truths into the world, and many feelings into the heart which would often perish if they fell from the solemn pulpit or the stern moralist.

London, September, 1817.



THE DOUBLE COURTSHIP.

A Romance of Deep Interest.

BY MRS. M. L. SWEETSER.



CHAPTER I.

THE COUSINS.

It was in September, 1845, that, a little past the hour of dinner in the fashionable and aristocratic mansion of the Trellan's, two beautiful girls sat chatting familiarly in their own private parlour, which fronted one of the principal streets of New York.

No. 1.

"The period of his absence has expired—he should be here," said Carlotta, the elder and prouder of the two, suddenly, and with a somewhat imperious movement, flinging aside her lace-work and going to the window, through which she peered long and earnestly into the rapidly deepening twilight. "'Tis the hour for the postman and he comes not—everything is delayed to-night," she continued, with increasing impatience; but scarcely had she uttered the words, when she was startled by his loud, quick, peculiar knock at the street door. A moment after a light-footed, bright-eyed lady's maid entered, leaving a curiously wrought ivory basket surmounted with silver, containing various letters and papers, the postman's deposit.

Instantly the pleasing eyes of Carlotta detected the well-known address, and hastily drawing from the pile the long expected letter, she bade the maid bring a light immediately, that she might be no longer delayed in the delicious pleasure of hearing from her far off lover. The slightly but quickly varying colour produced by anticipation deepened into crimson as she devoured the impassioned words of her betrothed, the expression of his ardent love as he hastened to her embrace after a year's absence. Suddenly raising her eyes from the paper, she exclaimed,—

"Listen, Edna, here is a dash of the mysterious! We shall live over again the days of knighthood and true love, but, ah! guard well your heart or beware"—and she gaily raised two fingers with a threatening menace; "but I trust you, *ma belle cousin*, so once more listen. Theodore's description will charm you."

"Our whole voyage has been the scene of a most mysteriously exciting romance. Among our passengers is a man who has been from the first the object of intense curiosity. In person and character he is one of Nature's noblest works. The strength and vigour of his intellect, the extent of his information, the graceful condescension of his manners, the ease and elegance of his conversation are only equalled by the exalted sentiments which fall from his lips and the lofty nobleness of his soul. Ah, Lotta! he is a grand specimen of what Nature can effect under true circumstances. With the fullest and most active sympathy of all kinds of sorrow, miseries or joy, he nevertheless seems to live far above our common weaknesses, and to derive his existence solely from the vast resources of his own nature. At times he charms and enchains us for hours with his delightful conversation, during which he completely develops each idea by assuming the character to which it belongs—so that after listening to him, we are strangely beguiled into the fancy that we have just mingled in a large and highly intellectual company.

"Again he is wrapped for days in his own meditations, and remains in his state-room or paces the deck in solemn majesty, reminding us of some ancient powerful hero. Suddenly, and without any visible cause for the change, he becomes the thorough man of the world, and talks of its pursuits, its follies, its good and evil traits with the softened complacency of one well versed in its ways, and viewing with an unerring eye in the distance the ultimate order and good to which all this apparent disorder and evil are tending.

"No one is presuming enough to inquire concerning his birth and country upon which he preserves a profound silence. He conversed with equal fluency in several European languages, so that it is a matter of much curious conjecture to what nation he belongs. But by far the most mysterious and romantic circumstance remains to be told. In Lord Elwyn's suite is a little girl of some twelve or fourteen years, a perfect fairy in dimensions, beautiful as an houri, whose large, deep, melancholy eyes contrast strongly and beautifully with the almost infantile features and expression of her clear sunny face.

"Lira, for that we have learned is the name of the angelic little creature, comes on deck once every day, firmly clasping the hand of Lord Elwyn, and closely attended by a duenna who never loses sight of her. After an hour's recreation during which he devotes himself entirely to her amusement, he embraces her affectionately at the door of her state-room, and commits her to the care of her attendant. Lira frequently sobs bitterly on parting with her protector, but soon we hear the low, sweet, monotonous warbling which is only learned in the east,

and which, we fancy, soothes the child to sleep. Notwithstanding the almost infinite variety of feelings, emotions, or notions—whichever you may term them, that mingle themselves in Lord Elwyn's intercourse with us, to Lira he is ever the same, the embodiment of tenderness. He lands with his suite at New York, where I shall endeavour to present him to you, though I warn you that I shall be very zealous. Previous to our arrival, however, we shall probably be detained a few hours in Boston, a detention which will be extremely irksome to me. Delightfully as my days pass in such society, I am nevertheless devoured with impatience to bask once more in the sunlight of your smiles. My heart is ever with thee, dearest, and each tedious moment is to me a day—a month—an eternity.

“Adieu, my beloved—my idolized one. THEODORE.”

“Yes, he must soon be with us,” exclaimed the passionate girl, after having perused the last few lines and counted the days since the date of the letter. A sudden cry from Edna startled her, and looking up, she saw her cousin pale and excited, pointing to a paragraph in a newspaper which she had meanwhile unfolded, and held in her hand.

“What is it, Edna? Quick! why are you so agitated? Carlotta.” Instantly, with admirable presence of mind, Edna perceived the mischief she was doing, and commanding her voice said, though somewhat hurriedly,—

“It may, it must be a mistake. It is doubtless some other. Tell me the date of your letter.”

“The first of September, but why,—what mean you—what is this?”

“Ah, Carlotta, my dear cousin, have courage, command yourself, I pray you,” said Edna, as if dreading the fearful shock.

“What have I to fear?” cried the affrighted girl, grasping the paper with a trembling hand—“but my head swims—I cannot see—tell me—tell me quickly.”

“Calm yourself and listen,” replied Edna, as with one arm she supported her cousin, and in the other hand held the paper, from which she read aloud the following notice:—

“Lost overboard, on the 4th instant, from the packet *Clementina*, between Boston and New York, on her homeward passage from Liverpool, Theodore Montrevor, a son of one of the wealthiest and most respectable citizens, as he hastened to the arms of his friends after a year's absence. Every possible exertion was made by the gallant crew and passengers to save this unfortunate young man, but in vain. The intelligence was brought by land, having been obtained by the master of a fishing schooner, which was within speaking distance of the *Clementina* a short time after the accident occurred.”

With the silent calmness of despair, the young girl forced herself to listen to the end, then heaving one long-drawn sigh—the herald of a broken heart—she sank lifeless upon the floor.

The burden was too much for Edna's slender strength, and releasing her arm from beneath the weight, she seized the bell cord, and giving one alarming peal, hastened to apply water and salts to the face of the sufferer. The family and servants, alarmed by the sudden and powerful summons, ran in greatest confusion to learn the cause. All were in the utmost alarm and consternation. Of course nothing was done—Edna, the only one who had retained the least presence of mind, with a quick hand looped back the rich damask curtains at one end of the parlour, and requested two of the servants to raise the stricken girl tenderly in their arms, and place her upon her own couch, which occupied a recess within. The father not daring to trust a servant, had himself gone for a physician—the mother hung over her child in speechless anxiety, incapable of the least exertion, whilst Edna, assisted by Carlotta's maid, used every means to restore her to consciousness.

After a long and fearful struggle she slowly opened her eyes, just at the moment when her parents were perusing the fatal paragraph. Edna sprang to conceal the paper, but too late. Uttering one piercing shriek, she again relapsed into the insensibility of despair. The physician now feared it might terminate in insanity, and the parents hovered around her in tearless, speechless anguish. The blow was so sudden, so powerful, so intensely aggravated by the immediate

previous anticipation of unusual happiness, that time only would reveal how deep and endless was the wound.

Meanwhile the evening wore away and the little French clock within the dressing-room rang out in musical notes the hour of eleven.

Suddenly there was heard a slight bustle in the hall below—rapid questions and answers—incoherent exclamations—then hurried footsteps upon the stairs—finally they approached, the door opened, and he whom they mourned stood before them.

Greeting with a flash of the eye each individual in the apartment, he sprang with one light bound to the side of the couch where lay the still insensible girl, not breathing but gulping forth at short intervals low, broken and stifling sighs. Forgetful of all ceremony, he quickly raised her in his arms murmuring “Carlotta—dearest—it is I—your own Theodore,” and he wildly kissed her marble brow—her closed eyes—her pallid cheeks and stiffened lips.

Again there was a slight relaxation of the rigid features—a little spot of crimson tinged each cheek and she moaned faintly like a sick child. The enraptured lover pressed her warmly to his bosom, while the physician by signs commanded the utmost quiet.

At length her lips moved, and Edna, placing her ear close to the lips of the sick girl, heard her faintly whisper the name of her lover, with some other half-uttered words; she evidently was in some degree conscious of the sad cause of her present misery.

“Let her hear your voice now, but in the gentlest tones,” said the physician to Theodore.

Softly, but thrillingly, the young lover pronounced her name and then his own—it was like magic. The mental cloud began to disappear—the golden chord so nearly severed again vibrated in tune and some degree of hope and happiness was restored to many aching hearts.

Two or three days after, the same group were gathered in the same apartment, but under circumstances widely different. Still pale and retaining many traces of recent and severe suffering, the beautiful and idolised Carlotta gently inclined among the soft cushions of an easy chair, her loose white robe gathered so neatly at the throat and falling in graceful and ample folds over her tall slight figure, contrasting singularly with her usual splendid attire. Her lover sat by and gazed upon her with fresh delight—a delight enhanced a thousand fold by the recent twofold prospect of separation. Edna had drawn an ottoman to her cousin’s side, and each expressive feature of her lovely countenance revealed the depth and sincerity of her sympathy.

Major Trellan, an affectionate, high-minded man, hovered around his daughter with the jealous care with which one would watch a newly recovered treasure, but his lady—a thorough woman of the world—having been assured by the physician that all danger was past, was fast recovering her accustomed state of fashionable indifference.

The stern command of the medical attendant to afford the invalid perfect quiet was now removed, and Theodore was admitted for the first time since the recognition of him, immediately after which he was forced to leave her. In the interval, however, he had lingered about the room, sending frequent assurances of his health, continued affection and such other messages as tended to tranquillise her mind and hasten her recovery. But there still hung over the past a mysterious cloud which she could not penetrate, and with returning health had increased her impatience to hear from her lover’s lips a solution of the difficulty. “Tell me everything,” she said eagerly.

“Ah, yes!” replied Theodore, with a slight shudder; “it was a terrible moment—none can conceive its horrors but in its actual realisation.”

“Then it was true that you fell overboard?” asked Carlotta feebly, while her lips grew white, and she seemed ready to faint.

“True—yes—but, my love, you see I am here actually—not spiritually, and to speak of it lightly, as of something quite foreign to us, is now all that is left us.”

“If one could,” she sighed, the tears gathering in her dark passionless eyes, and her hand firmly clasped in his.

“It was entirely an accident,” he continued; “the shock of the cold bath—the deepening roar of the water—the bewildering and vain struggles to catch at something stationary—the distant and confused noise of the ship’s crew—the instinctive feeling that they wished to save me—were sensations which I can now analyse, but which were then far more rapid and imperfect than we can well imagine. I know not whether I shouted for assistance—I cannot tell whether I did anything to save myself—consciousness departed with the vain effort to speak your name, for somehow I deemed myself near you. After that I had a vague thought that I leaned against something for support—that a powerful arm was heaving me up. When animation was restored, I lay in my own state-room, surrounded by many serious faces; but nearest and most anxious of all was Lord Elwyn, upon whose noble countenance there was an expression of calm and heartfelt satisfaction as I drew several breaths in rapid succession. ‘He lives—we are repaid,’ he said in a tone so gentle that I involuntarily raised my eyes for some fair music. He saved me. By the most incredible exertions he succeeded in reaching me at the last moment, and bore me in his arms a long, long distance. It was told me by those present, that when he came on deck his strength was so exhausted that he fell prostrate, and yet so soon did he recover his wonderful self-possession that when I saw his face bent over mine to catch the first evidence of returning life, it was sweet and unruffled as the glassy sea in a still summer eve. So vigorous and elastic is his nature that there remained no trace of his recent unparalleled efforts. And when I sought to express my gratitude, he replied without the least excitement. ‘I need no thanks; trifling as was the act, it will be a source of joy to me, and I shall no doubt find your life one worth preserving;’ then rising he left me to the care of my servant. Ah, Carlotta! I am so impatient to introduce this man to you.”

“And I have your impatience,” said his betrothed, a slight colour caused by excitement tinged each pale cheek.

“Lord Elwyn!” suddenly exclaimed Major Trellan to whom Theodore’s encomiums were a mystery. “Had you so distinguished a passenger in the *Clementina*? Does he propose to establish himself in this city, or is he on a tour of inspection?”

“He is none of your travelling scribblers,” replied Theodore, enthusiastically, “but a man, who, if he honours us with his friendship we can but receive and admire. His birth-place—his country—his life are wrapt in profound mystery. He never alludes to the past, his servants never gossip, and notwithstanding the utmost freedom of manner, he and his suite are perfectly impenetrable.”

“Is his lordship married or unmarried?” asked Mrs. Trellan with true womanly curiosity.

“It is impossible to say,” replied Theodore, and he again alluded to the child whose beauty and grace had made so strong an impression upon himself.

“We must seek his acquaintance and introduce him as our friend; it will make a brilliant winter for us,” said the ambitious mother, glancing at Carlotta.

“We will seek his friendship for its own sake,” replied the husband, “if it be so well worth the trouble as our young friend supposes; at least we must thank him fervently for so nobly risking his life for a stranger, and that stranger one so dear to us.”

Mrs. Trellan accustomed during her whole life to measure out her smiles or favours according to the position of the recipient in the fashionable scale, was far from satisfied with any ordinary attentions to this new and, as she fancied, brilliant star in the gay world, but persuaded her husband that Theodore’s return and Carlotta’s restoration would demand of them a grand ball, while her only thought was being the first to invite Lord Elwyn, and she sighed when she thought that he might be unmarried, and Carlotta was already betrothed, for visions of worldly greatness were the only ones that ever entered her mind; her glance towards Theodore as she left the apartment was therefore one of mingled reproach, sorrow, and delight.

The apartments exclusively devoted to Carlotta and Edna—the daughter and niece of Major Trelan, were peculiar in their construction and arrangement, the result of genuine taste and unsparing wealth. In the centre was a parlour common to both, small but elegant and convenient in structure. Three windows fronted the street and extending to the floor opened upon the upper balcony. A Turkey carpet rivalling in beauty and softness the richest velvet, literally enveloped the fairy feet of the lovely girls with flowers of dazzling brilliancy. Two immense mirrors each moment reflected their varied and delicate personal charms, while sofas and ottomans each moment invited to indolent and luxurious repose.

Opposite the windows, and upon either side of the beautifully carved and ornamented fire-place, were two damask curtains, heavily fringed, which, when looped up with their golden cords, revealed within two small cabinets, precisely alike, with their miniature libraries, collections of curiosities, beautiful and rare pictures, writing tables, and easy chairs.

An arched window in the extremity of each was filled with fragrant and treasured exotics, and threw a softened and mellow light over the little closets, favourable in the highest degree to tranquillity and mental enjoyment.

Upon each side of the parlour were other and larger curtains, concealing two sleeping rooms with luxuriant couches spread with silk of delicate violet. Still within these, and each extremity of the building, were dressing closets well lighted by large windows, while in the sleeping apartment was only admitted a soft twilight. Each bed-room also communicated with the cabinet of its occupant.

Some hours after the conversation detailed, Edna bade her maid light the cabinet lamp and retire; after which, as was frequently her custom, she disrobed, threw on a dressing gown, and seated herself for an hour's calm reflection. Her figure was slight, her features regular, slightly rounded and singularly expressive of ingenuous frankness, strong intellectual power, moral greatness, and childlike simplicity. Her eyes were blue and wore that clear, calm, confiding look, which it would be so difficult to betray. Her hair was of a rich, silky chestnut, and still hung over her fair neck in that simple, natural, wavy ringlets of childhood. But sixteen summers had dawned upon her, but circumstances, powerful and effective in their influence, had produced in her a maturity of thought and feeling belonging to greater years.

As Edna entered the cabinet, she touched the cord that held the curtain separating it from the parlour, and its ample folds swept over the floor concealing her from all intrusion. Then drawing a chair beneath the suspended lamp, she gazed long upon the seal and address of a letter as yet unsealed, as if by the power of her own quick perception to obtain a premonition of its contents. At last she slowly broke the envelope and perused it. Now and then she paused and allowed her head to droop upon her bosom, while tears of sorrow flowed sadly over each pale cheek. Then resuming the paper she read on:

“Do you remember, dearest, the day of our betrothal—when you, a little angel of eight years, knelt with me beside our parents, and your only surviving one—looking into the future with that clearness of perception which the near approach of death gives—prayed for our happiness as we fulfilled his last, his dying wish! Through our long separation how constant has been my heart to this pledge. Not a thought, not a wish, not a dream of my soul has been given to another, and I have revelled in an excess of bliss when anticipating the hour that would place the happiness of my whole future life in your keeping.”

“I have closed my course of study—I enter the world as a man. Permit my hand and heart to be my lover's first offering at the shrine it has so long worshipped. I fly to you, Edna, confident that in your gentle bosom there is neither the will nor the power to destroy my long cherished hopes. To-morrow I shall be with you and receive a confirmation of my wishes.”

“To-morrow?” repeated she sadly, “so soon? Ah! Ernest, you know not what you ask, and she pressed one small white hand over her eyes as if to shut out the future.

At this moment a slight rustling caused her to start, and turning to the entrance

her aunt stood before her. Extending a letter which she held in one hand, and with the other pointing to Edna's which had fallen to the floor in her surprise, she said, with a smile sweet and artless to those who knew her not, "these must be my apology for disturbing you at so late an hour. I have but this moment been able to peruse mine, and I see yours has shared the same fate."

Surprised and perplexed, Edna replied,—

"Then you have received an intimation of—of—his intention to return."

"And of his desire for the immediate consummation of your father's last command," continued Mrs. Trellan, weighing well the import and effect of her words.

"My father did not command me," said Edna, gently but proudly.

"Pardon me, my dear," replied Mrs. Trellan, quickly in a tone of conciliation, "I only refer to his last wish—to your betrothal. Timidity, no doubt, prevents you from speaking with me freely, but you of course are faithful to your pledge, and will appoint an early day for its fulfilment. My son expresses himself warmly, and begs the delay may be as brief as possible."

During this speech Edna's countenance had gradually assumed its wonted serenity, and she replied firmly,—

"Ernest is far too noble, too generous and confiding to be wilfully deceived. I respect, I admire him; but as yet I love him not. Without that, my hand would be a worthless bauble."

"But your pledge—you surely will redeem that," said Mrs. Trellan, earnestly, for visions of the loss of Edna's immense inheritance floated before her imagination.

"As a child," fearlessly continued the noble girl, "I loved my cousin Ernest more than anything else, but it was with a pure sister's love. Time and a deeper knowledge of my own nature have since revealed this to me. I am conscious that there is a life within, a slumbering fountain which he has never approached. Till that is accomplished I must remain free."

A frown had gradually gathered over the fair brow of the aunt, and as if fearful of her power of self-control, she bent her head for some moments upon her hand, and then said with apparent mildness and candour,—

"There is something concealed, some other attachment probably. Fear not to trust me, my love. You know I would be the last to urge you to the fulfilment of this promise, sacred though it be, and much as I know that Ernest's future happiness may his very life, may depend upon it. Come, trust your secret with me."

"I have already replied to you," said Edna, not for an instant thrown off her guard by this insinuating address. "You well know that I have no other lover. Nothing prevents my acceptance of Ernest's offer but my exalted idea of true love. Let this subject be dropped between us, I beseech you. I shall frankly express my feelings to Ernest, and I have that confidence in his honour which leaves me not a doubt that he will voluntarily relinquish a hand which will bear with it no heart."

"If he should not prove thus disinterested?" interrogated the proud woman with a keen glance of her dark eye. Edna started. She had not conceived a possibility of this. A lofty courage prompted her reply.

"Then I will gladly rid myself of the attentions of a man, who proves himself destitute of all that is noble and great—who shows that he neither loves nor knows the value of affection in another. But I know him better. He will, at my request, delay it a year or two, and in the mean-time——"

"Yes! in the mean-time what will happen?" angrily demanded her aunt.

"I shall, in loving him, decide to be his bride, or attain the age when my person and property will be independent of the control of my uncle," replied Edna.

Mrs. Trellan was surprised, disconcerted. During the eight years of Edna's residence with them she had been the pattern of submission and obedience. For the first time her actual strength and firmness were tested; and to her aunt, who had only looked for a passive instrument to her will, it was a new and wholly unprepared state of things. Ten thousand jealousies flitted across her mind, and she feared that, notwithstanding her well laid and successful plot, Edna and her fortune would escape her. But an open rupture was no part of her policy, and smothering all her vexations, she gracefully rose from the pile of cushions, on which she had

thrown herself upon her entrance, and putting back the fair curls of her husband's ward, kissed her brow, and said smilingly,—

“Fear not—all shall be as you wish—I could not find it in my heart to deny you anything. Ernest loves you so tenderly that you will not, you cannot resist the pleasure of returning it. Retire now, my love, and let him find fresh roses upon your cheeks to-morrow.”

Long and calmly reflected the young girl when once again left in solitude. She could love—she was conscious of it—yet she never had loved, and she was sure that Ernest was not destined to reveal to her that one great source of life's joy and bitterness. “To-morrow!” she again repeated slowly and sadly, as she pressed her soft pillow and sought to forget in the dreams of sleep the bitter waking reality.

The morrow came and with it Ernest Trellan. He was a fine, generous, ardent, noble youth. Nature had given him intellect, a large share of what the world calls common sense, yet withal, a glowing imagination strongly tinged with romance. This singular organisation had hitherto preserved him from the trifling, somewhat debasing, and other ruinous love affairs common to his class; for while he sought no mystery and was not vain of such exploits, he had formed and bore about in his own mind and ideal form of beauty and grace upon which he ever loved to dwell. Thus pure-hearted and sincere, as he clasped the two hands of his cousin in his own and kissed her lips affectionately, Edna felt instinctively that it was only prompted by fraternal love.

For an instant her heart was so lightened of its burden of anxiety that a sweet musical laugh rang from her lips, and she moved quickly and gaily about, like one whose happiness is suddenly completed.

“Your letters preceded you by so short a time that we were not quite prepared to receive you as we wished,” said the lady mother, glancing quickly and searchingly at Edna. Instantly her brow saddened, the colour faded little by little from her face, and the conviction returned with all its force, that he was her betrothed. That thought which should have brought with it present joy, hope for the future, with visions of love and mutual confidence, had already made her prematurely thoughtful, and threw a cloud over all her future life. Gradually she retired within herself, and at the expiration of two hours went to her cabinet, requesting Luna to see that she suffered no intrusion upon her privacy.

How keenly did she feel the loneliness of her situation! Her uncle was kind, indulgent, and fatherly, but adored his son, and regarded their engagement as a thing established beyond a doubt, of course no change could possibly be effected. He was one of those correct, upright, honourable, matter-of-fact standard men, to whom one would never appeal in an affair of the heart.

Carlotta, her adopted sister, the playmate of her childhood, the companion of the present, had a thousand reasons for desiring the union, and of course it was of no avail to appeal for her influence. Her aunt—deeply artful, intriguing, smooth and complaisant to all, yet possessing a mean, low curiosity and an insatiable desire to control the actions of others—would exert every influence, good or bad, to bring about this event.

Thus isolated from the sympathy which she should have received, there was left her but one resource. Taking a slip of paper she wrote the following sentence.

“Will my cousin Ernest bestow upon me in my cabinet, an hour of his leisure, and thus greatly oblige Edna?”

The bell summoned Luna, to whom she entrusted the note with an injunction to deliver it only to Ernest. Artless, ignorant of all intrigue, the girl received both the letter and command, utterly unconscious of the value of either. Tripping hastily over the stairs, she was about to seek for Ernest in one of the parlours, when Mrs. Trellan, whose sharp eye nothing escaped, spied a corner of the note in her hand, and caressingly smoothing her hair, while speaking a few honied words, she had taken and hastily read it, ere Luna was aware of it. Suddenly

recollecting Edna's command, she hastened to atone by her despatch for the fault of betrayal.

"I will show you where he is," said Mrs. Trellan, leading the way to her private sitting-room, at the same time murmuring to herself, "surely my plan cannot fail."



As Ernest perused the note, he rose with great politeness to comply; but there was not in his movements that quick, ardent expression indicative of a lover flying to the one beloved—it was rather an amiable desire to oblige.

Not a thought escaped the notice of his mother, and bidding Luna go, she begged the privilege of seeing the note, and as she returned it, said,—

"You see her impatience; this, therefore, confirms my statement that her affection, or rather passion for you had assumed that all-engrossing form which will ruin her, were it not actualised. You know how dear Edna is to us, how

THE DOUBLE COURTSHIP.

closely her happiness and interests are interwoven with our own, and how intense is our desire that her fortune and herself—by far the greater treasure—should never pass to a stranger. You will fulfil your engagement, my son?"

"My word has been given—I am prepared to redeem it," he replied, almost coldly, then as if recollecting himself, said,—

"Edna is lovely, surpassingly so—surely I shall love her."

"You cannot do otherwise, when she so evidently clings to you," replied the artful woman, as with a slow step and thoughtful air he left the room.

Edna received her cousin at the door of her parlour, and leading him into the cabinet, let the curtain fall after them. Retiring within the recess of the window, Edna took her favourite seat and pointed to a chair near for her friend.

"I may now be permitted a nearer station," he said, kneeling beside her, and encircling with his arm her slender form.

For a single instant her head rested upon his shoulder, as if luxuriating in the confidence and friendship so ardently desired and so long denied. Then releasing herself from his momentary embrace, she said almost tearfully,—

"Forgive this indiscretion, I have no other friend, and must confide to you that which would else remain a secret in my own bosom. I will not attempt to misunderstand the contents of your letter. It is this, in fact, which forces me to reveal the true sentiments of my heart. For years——"

"Ernest! Ernest!" resounded in loud, impatient tones throughout the house, and quick, heavy footsteps were heard approaching the cabinet. Instantly the young man started from his lowly and loving position, and putting aside the curtain met his father, who, with an expression of the greatest anxiety and haste, begged his son to come that moment to his study.

It was a small dull looking room, chosen for its quiet location, and finished with more attention to order, convenience and despatch of business, than comfort or luxury. A large table, near which stood two arm chairs, was covered with papers, the light from a single window throwing a sombre aspect over the apartment.

Seating himself hastily by the table, Major Trellan pointed to the other chair for his son, and said,—

"I cannot express to you how sincerely I regret to interrupt an interview so long and fondly anticipated, but I am compelled, by the most urgent motives. A letter has just reached me, giving the information of the probable failure of the house of Wildon, Strong and Co., Charleston, S. C., in which you know I am interested to a considerable amount. My presence there is absolutely necessary, but as an affair equally indispensable detains me in this city, you must act in my place. Can you consent to forego the pleasures of love for a season, and become the drudge of business?"

"With the greatest pleasure. I am entirely at your service," replied Ernest, with a sudden feeling of relief.

I appreciate your self-denial, I assure you, and shall not soon forget it," said Major Trellan, affectionately.

"Think not of that, my dear father, but explain to me the particulars, and command me to the utmost."

"Your departure must be immediate," continued the father, after a long list of instructions, "are you prepared for that?"

"For anything—at a moment's warning," replied his son; "let him but speak an adieu with Edna—you will make my farewell to my brother and sister."

In a moment he stood before Edna, saying, hastily,—

"I must leave you—you will pardon me. The case is an indispensable one, and my father will explain. Adieu, adieu," and he quickly kissed her fair brow, and was gone.

"Providence favours me," murmured the young girl, as looking upward, she gathered fresh courage for the future.

An after-thought caused the tears to gather in her beautiful eyes.

"His heart is a noble one," she continued, mentally, "and I fear that my coldness has wounded it. I will learn his address and write him, that on his return there may be no more disappointment."

It was a wise resolution, but it availed her little.

CHAPTER II.

LORD ELWYN.

UPON the day of the *Clementina's* arrival in New York, there might have been seen upon the wharf awaiting the landing of her passengers, a plain, dark carriage, rich in all its appearances, and drawn by two spirited animals, whose fiery impatience was easily and gracefully restrained by an accomplished groom.

Standing beside the carriage, was a man of some thirty-five years, of moderate stature, well-dressed, and whose only remarkable feature was an impenetrable countenance. He replied to the remarks of his companion, or the passing jokes of those about him, with the single word "doubtless," each time pronounced with the same inconceivable air of important pre-occupation, while his eyes were unwaveringly fixed upon some distant object.

Suddenly something very like a smile of satisfaction gleamed across his marble countenance, and raising his hand with a peculiar sign to the coachman, he darted forward, by the rapidity and ease of his movements parted the crowd without difficulty, and a moment after, bowed low, cap in hand, to a group of persons just landed.

"Ah, Lobo! all well—all right?" asked a tall, elegant man with an air of confiding kindness.

"Doubtless, my lord," replied the servant, making for them a path to the carriage.

Lord Elwyn, with gentle tenderness, lifted the sweet Lira in, and entering himself, was soon followed by a strange looking woman, assisted by Lobo.

Passing through many streets, they stopped before a new and stately mansion. Lobo arrived at the same moment, with the remainder of the suite. Lord Elwyn placed his foot upon the step, and with one glance, taking a survey of the whole, he gave his hand to Lobo as he descended, saying,—

"This is well, my friend."

Again a momentary gleam of pleasure lit up the impassable countenance, but so transient that it was evident even this was not permitted except on the most extraordinary occasions. Claspings the hand of the child in his own, to protect her from the officiousness of the servants, Lord Elwyn passed under the arched gateway, up the broad steps, and entered the ample hall, where he kindly greeted, with a look of profound interest and satisfaction, those of his household who were gathered there.

Ascending to the second floor and passing to the left wing, Lobo threw open the doors of a suite of apartments, furnished in oriental style. The first was only a closet, with mats and various conveniences for depositing wearing apparel. The next and principal room was long, low, its floor covered with the richest of Indian matting, the walls hung with silk of delicate, rose-ground and orange flowers, and from the centre was suspended a magnificent silver candelabra, upon whose tiny fingers burned a hundred wax tapers, among which were scattered numberless crystals, reflecting and varying the soft lights in a thousand different forms. Raised mats, more beautiful than the others, and piles of cushions were sufficient places for repose.

At the extremity of the apartment, folding doors of glass opened into a rich conservatory, from which Lira seemed to inhale the fragrant odours of her native land, for after glancing quickly round the room, her face became deeply flushed with an uncontrollable impulse of joy, and uttering in her own language an exclamation of delight, she released herself from Lord Elwyn, darted into the conservatory and buried her face and arms among the branches of her favourite trees.

At that instant Lobo touched what seemed to be a spring fixed in a part of the wall covered with rosewood, and there burst upon the ears of the delighted child a strain of rich melody. A moment she listened in silence, then returned to Lord Elwyn, who meanwhile had sat down, and who now opened his arms to receive her, laid her head languidly upon his bosom and soon, with a smile of ineffable sweetness sank into a profound slumber. Forgetful of himself and unmindful of the presence of Juana, her attendant, Lord Elwyn seemed completely absorbed in contemplating the sweet maiden, who had so suddenly found herself amongst flowers she loved, and in an apartment whose almost every aspect was familiar to her, and who now lay sleeping as quietly in his arms, as if he had been her guardian angel. At length he bade Juana pile up the cushions for her head, and gently releasing himself from her embrace, left the room, evidently somewhat agitated.

Preceded by Lobo, he traversed the halls, saloons, private parlours, and at length reached his own rooms in the opposite wing. Here everything bespoke the man of wealth, of genius, and of intellect. An elegant library, evidently intended for use, sitting-room, sleeping, dressing and bathing apartments, each and all presented that perfect combination of the useful, the refined and the luxurious, which is only to be found among the wealthy classes, and, alas! how seldom even there from the absence of the refinement of soul to produce it.

A dressing-room furnished with numerous complete suits of dress, of varied texture and fashion, arrested his attention, and was examined with some scrutiny. This ended, he said to Lobo,—

“I should imagine I had arranged everything myself, so perfectly am I satisfied;”

The servant bowed and replied,—

“Doubtless, my lord, your mind was in me acting.”

“And the other arrangements—the cottage—the———,” asked the master.

“Your commands are obeyed—when will your lordship see them?”

“To-morrow,” replied Lord Elwyn, carelessly, then added, “you are prince of valets, Lobo.”

“And your lordship the king of masters,” respectfully returned the man.

“This is an extraordinary occasion, and I pardon you the flattery,” said Lord Elwyn, gravely, yet kindly, and then proceeded to his bath. Dinner was soon announced, at which Lord Elwyn sat alone, Lira having requested to have hers in her own apartment.

Lord Elwyn, with a view to a protracted residence in this country, had dispatched Lobo, his confidential servant, with a few assistants, some time in advance, with orders to have everything completed upon his arrival. It was never Lobo’s custom to ask a reason, he always obeyed punctually, faithfully, the very letter and spirit of the command, without demanding why. He neither thought, felt, or lived for himself, but was, in fact, his master’s instrument, seldom speaking unless reduced to the last extremity. Such as he was he had made himself invaluable to Lord Elwyn, who was, in fact, precisely in the right, when he called him the “prince of valets.”

Lord Elwyn’s household consisted of foreign servants who had been with him sufficiently long to learn quiet and implicit obedience, but as none of them were acquainted with his past history or present plans, it was impossible that they should gossip. Well paid, and living in a degree of luxury and ease above even the middle class of artisans in this country, they were quite satisfied with their mode of life, without indulging a curiosity which they were aware would prove fatal to them.

Lobo had indeed been seized with a fit of surprise quite unusual for him, when he received orders to prepare a suit of apartments for a young mistress, and his passive, almost immovable eyes dilated a little when they rested upon her fair face, but to have spoken of her, either to his master or companions, would have seemed to him the height of extravagance.

It was on the sixth morning after Lord Elwyn's arrival, that the doors of his library were thrown open, and Mr. Montrevor announced with much ceremony. Without formality, but with dignity and grace, the noble host extended his hand, and greeted cordially the companion of his late voyage, the stranger for whom he had so generously risked his own life. There was no idle speech making between them. Each felt that in the other he had gained a true and sincere friend, with whom it was worse than useless to stand on forms. Theodore had many expressions of gratitude to offer, Lord Elwyn a variety of questions to ask, and the time glided imperceptibly by till dinner was announced. No excuse would be taken, and Theodore remained. Their conversation turned upon the cousins, and Theodore hesitated not to speak of the relation existing between Carlotta and himself.

Scarcely had Lord Elwyn dismissed the servants who waited at table, and was, with his friend, discussing a dessert of imported fruits, when the door bell rang violently, and soon the sounds of an angry altercation reached them. With a smile peculiar to himself, and full of meaning, he said,—

“Listen, you will hear how my servants fear to disobey me.”

The voices became louder, the usually suppressed and monotonous replies of Lobo grew more and more distinct till the conversation was heard without effort.

“I tell you,” said one, who seemed to have been elected speaker on the occasion, “that we have come on a visit to Lord Elwyn, your master, show us in at once.”

“I cannot—your names are not on the list, and no others are to be admitted. This is his command.”

“But we wish to see him—we honour him with a call.”

“Doubtless, sirs.”

“Then show us in—why delay?”

“I dare not disobey orders.”

“Do as we wish, and we will take the consequences upon ourselves.”

“I cannot.”

“You must.”

“I will not.”

Here was heard the sound of a slight scuffle and Lord Elwyn placed his hand upon the bell to summon some one to his assistance, but ere he accomplished it three men in plain black suits entered indiscriminately, in their haste completely overturning Lobo, who instantly recovered himself, and bowed to his master, saying in a low voice, “pardon, my lord, not my fault,” and moved near the door, to await further orders.

Meanwhile Lord Elwyn and Theodore had both risen and bowed coldly and ceremoniously to the intruders, and the latter had again seated himself, having been invited by a look from his host to do so.

With lofty dignity, Lord Elwyn said,—

“I know not why I am thus honoured. Some extraordinary circumstance alone could have induced these gentlemen to usher themselves in. I await their commands.”

These men, who on entering had entirely changed their domineering boldness, for an aspect of cringing servility, forgot to reply immediately, but continued staring at the stranger with distended eyes and impertinent curiosity, as if to inhale at one draught a full dose of foreign nobility.

At length one said vehemently, at the same time rubbing a bruised hand and pointing to Lobo, “Why do you keep such an unmannerly watch at your door? I told him that we came to call upon you—that we of course wished to see your lordship, but the fellow refused to admit us. We are not accustomed to be so treated.”

"He obeyed his orders, sirs," replied Lord Elwyn, in a tone of lofty contempt, "and will do so again. Lobo, show these gentlemen out, and if need be ring for assistance," and taking Theodore's arm, passed into another apartment.

Throwing open the door to these men, Lobo bowed low, expecting they would immediately pass out; instead of that, however, they whispered among themselves a moment, and then with determined countenances walked towards the door through which the two friends had disappeared.

The bell instantly brought five or six men from below.

"Silence!" exclaimed Lord Elwyn, as visitors and servants rushed into the apartment to which he had retreated, "Mr. Montrevor, my friend, does your acquaintance extend to these gentlemen?"

"Not my acquaintance," replied Theodore again bowing to them, "but I believe I can inform your lordship of their names."

"The servant can do that," said Lord Elwyn, quickly, "Lobo, Marcellus——"

"Excuse us, sir,—my lord, I mean—for insisting upon an interview, but we have not yet obeyed the instructions given us. There is to be a public dinner and we are a committee sent by the ——"

"Lobo—Marcellus," interrupted Lord Elwyn, with a very significant motion of the hand, "on your lives permit me not again to be disturbed." Then with a glance of icy coldness and withering hauteur, he again retired with Theodore, but this time it was to his private apartments, where a double lock effectually secured them.

"Ah," said Theodore, blushing for his native city, "we are not all thus. New York has many right noble souls who will be proud to bestow upon you their refined and sincere hospitality. You will not judge us by these impertinent intruders!"

"Fear not," replied his host, with great kindness, "there are everywhere men so lavish of their own time, that they feel not the least hesitation in making the most unwarrantable demands upon that of others. New York is by no means alone in the possession of such individuals."

Lobo came at this moment to say that all was now quiet, and was ordered to take the remainder of their dessert to the library, after which it was agreed that they should visit the cousins, Carlotta being once more able to receive visitors.

* * * * *

For the first time since the sudden shock she had received, Carlotta Trellan came below leaning upon the arm of her cousin. A slight paleness added to the delicate clearness of her complexion. Her full black eyes, which when excited, revealed a world of passion and ambition, now tranquilly reposed in their clear crystal depths, with an expression of trusting love. Her luxuriant hair, soft and black, was knotted behind with splendid diamonds, and lay in small ringlets on either cheek.

The cousins were similarly dressed in figured silk, with trimmings of blonde and the richest ornaments.

Carlotta was tall, commanding with that dignified movement and imperious gesture, which at once impressed the beholder with her fancied superiority. She had long been the acknowledged belle of the city, and it was a position in which she was perfectly at home.

Both were intellectually rich, with this difference. Carlotta dwelt with intense delight upon the glittering past, upon revelations of royalty and high life. Edna really cultivated her mind by storing it with useful knowledge, while the refined and elegant accomplishments of her station were by no means neglected. Of poetry, each was equally fond in her own way. Both were proficient in music, and while Carlotta somewhat languidly drew her fingers over her harp, Edna reclined beside her with that unaffected simplicity which in her was perfect grace.

Suddenly pausing, Carlotta said,—

"You are sad to-night, Edna. Is it possible that the sudden departure of Ernest is the cause?—His absence is not usually such an affliction?"

Something like a smothered sigh escaped the lips of the pensive girl as she replied,—

“I know not why, but I cannot avoid the feeling that some important and unexpected event is about to occur. I have a presentiment that our life, hitherto so peaceful and loving, is about to suffer some rude innovation—perhaps we shall be separated.”

“Don’t spoil your beauty by dreaming—dreamers are always pale and spiritless. Come, my love, be gay and I will play you a lively air.”

But in spite of herself, her cousin’s sadness infected her, and it died away unfinished, as she said impatiently,—

“I wonder where Theodore is to-day?”

“Here,” said a manly voice behind her, and without ceremony Theodore introduced Lord Elwyn. Laying aside her harp, and rising with a grace that displayed to advantage her elegant figure, Carlotta gave a hand to each, saying, with an expression of fervent gratitude, her eyes swimming in tears,

“I owe you much, my lord, and must for ever remain your debtor, my life even you have preserved by your success in saving that of my friend.” And then turning to Edna she added, “Permit me to present to you, my cousin, my adopted sister.”

The ceremonies of introduction being over, intelligent and refined conversation supplied their place. Acquaintance—which in unsocial or barren-minded persons would have been the result of time and many favourable circumstances—made rapid strides among these four individuals. Carlotta, accustomed ever to be the brilliant leader in all companies, was doubly animated by the presence of her lover and the distinguished stranger, who she felt instinctively, at once appreciated each sentiment that flowed from her lips, as well as every varying emotion depicted in her charming countenance. She was vain, it was not however that vanity which stoops to deception, but that which seeks to expose its whole wealth and is only repaid by the sincere admiration of every beholder. Without any fixed plan, it was evidently Carlotta’s impulse to charm Lord Elwyn, and in so doing she developed her natural character.

Theodore, confiding, ingenuous and loving, feasted upon the heightened charms of his betrothed bride, and secretly rejoiced that the anticipations he had raised in Lord Elwyn’s mind were not to be disappointed.

Edna was somewhat cast into the shade by all this display, and taking her embroidery stand retired to a low window seat, and was rather a listener than a participant in the conversation. She, however, received a glance now and then from their visitor which proved that he was not forgetful of her presence, while the sweet smile that occasionally played about her mouth, and the thoughts that he read in her eyes were more to him than all the words she would have spoken.

On the other hand, all were enchanted with Lord Elwyn. The chief charm of his conversation consisted in the delicious melody of his voice, always in exact harmony with the nerves of his hearers, and the perfect adaptation of all he said to the place, the occasion, and the persons addressed.

“And what attraction was there sufficiently powerful to bring you from the old world—to us so completely new?” asked Carlotta, with that refined curiosity permitted even in the best society, and conscious that it was a change she never should have made.

“Ah ! if I had known the attractions here !” replied Lord Elwyn, bowing to the ladies with profound admiration, but with a countenance which neither could penetrate.

“Reserve your admiration, my lord,” continued Carlotta, without noticing his concise answer, “we hope to show you our western world of beauty this day week, if you honour our ball with your presence.”

“New York is celebrated the world over for the beauty of its ladies,” said he, “but I had hardly hoped that Dame Fortune, capricious as she is, would permit me at once to behold her most lovely daughters.”

After a call, the length of which defied all fashionable rules, the gentlemen

departed.—Lord Elwyn had produced in the heart of each of the fair girls an impression strong but widely different.

“Is he not splendid?” exclaimed Carlotta, as with a flushed cheek and flashing eye she again resumed her seat by Edna. “I avow it frankly, I should adore such a man for my husband; now tell me your opinion.”

“I can hardly form one on so slight an acquaintance,” replied Edna, quietly, but I fancied I could read in every feature and expression of his countenance, a confirmation of Theodore’s statement respecting him. I think he possesses a noble soul. But,” she added thoughtfully, “will it not be wiser for us, to think little of him? A few weeks will witness your union with Theodore, and I—, I—,” here she hesitated and blushed deeply.

“And you too are betrothed, can you not speak it?” retorted Carlotta, gaily attributing her confusion to a wrong cause.

Unaccustomed to deceive, Edna’s countenance indicated a severe internal struggle, but feeling that the moment had not arrived for an unreserved statement of her sentiments, she only said abstractedly, “Yes, I, too, am betrothed,” and pushing aside her embroidery, retired to her room to write to her cousin Ernest the long dreaded and therefore delayed letter.

Carlotta, meanwhile, went to relate to her mother the particulars of the visit and express her unbounded admiration of Lord Elwyn.

CHAPTER III.

THE FATE OF A LETTER AND THE RESULTS OF A BALL.

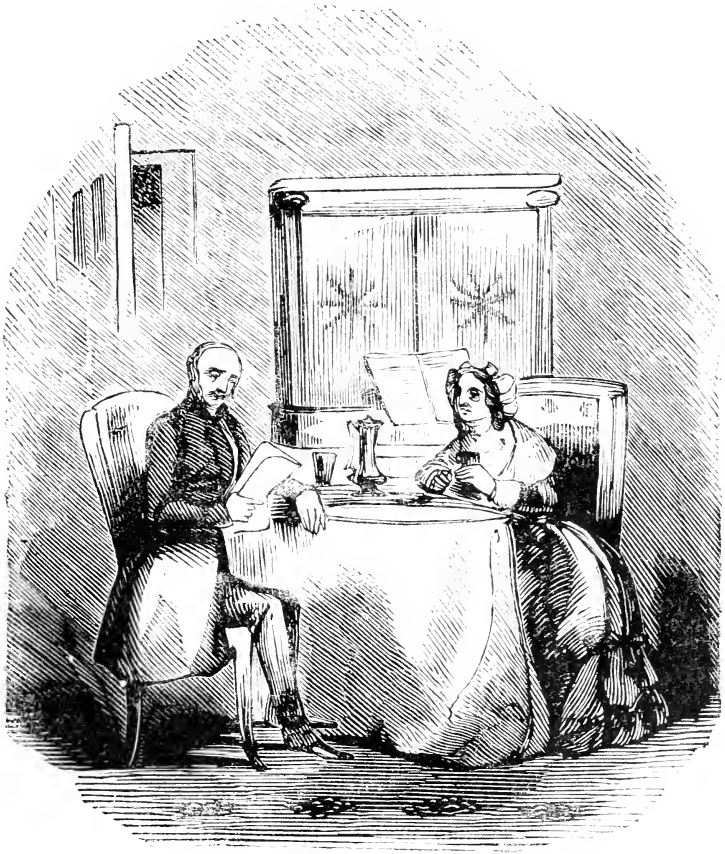
The first rays of approaching day faintly struggled through the closed curtains ere Edna finished her weary task; at length, however, two closely written sheets were folded in the envelope, firmly sealed, and the young girl summoned her attendant even at this unusual hour, entrusted it to her care, and bidding her see that she was not disturbed for several hours, threw herself upon her silken couch.

Luna slowly descended the stairs, balancing the heavy letter upon her fingers, and wondering in her own mind why her young mistress should set up all night merely to write a letter. Entering the hall which opened into the streets, she deposited it in a curiously wrought ivory basket, which always stood upon the table to receive the letters of the household, which, when collected, were conveyed to the post-office by a trusty servant. Warbling a familiar song, Luna returned with a light step to her apartment, anticipating with pleasure, the additional nap she would have ere she would be wanted.

When all was again still, a side door gently opened, and an individual appeared, who, either for her good or bad qualities, deserves a moment’s consideration. In person she was rather tall, and possessed that kind of second-rate gentility which arises from seeing, but not mingling with really genteel society, that artificial refinement which is only a cloak to the actual vulgarity of the mind. Her features were not bad, though sharp, and her eyes evinced a thorough knowledge of at least, the wickedness of the world. They were black, restless, piercing, and could be made, at times, to assume a soft, coquettish languor. Beneath their assumed expression of frankness and simplicity, there existed a deep-rooted, cunning selfishness.

When dressed with her usual gaiety, she seemed not more than twenty years of age, but now, in the most vulgar dishabille, and in the grey morning light, she looked thirty-five. She had been startled from her light slumbers by Edna’s bell at so unusual an hour, and through the key-hole had seen Luna deposit a letter in the basket.

With a smile of triumph she eagerly seized it, and quickly returning, muttered to herself, "I will serve myself first this time, at least." Kindling a fire in her apartment, she quickly produced some boiling water, and suspending the letter over it, the wafer soon parted; after which she began patiently to peruse its closely written pages. This personage was Mrs. Trellan's maid, Bertha, a servant peculiarly suited to the mistress.



"I have a double part to play," she soliloquised, "but as for Miss Edna's money, it shall not all go to these proud people, though I must seem to work for it, or I lose my place. The period that I have been so long anticipating is fast approaching. This new lord, too, I must watch; such characters are always fortune hunters, and soon learn which of the girls have full purses. I have toiled sixteen years for an object which seems now almost within my grasp, and I will not be disappointed.

In such disinterested cogitations the morning wore away, till Mrs. Trellan's bell summoned her. Taking the letter which she had again neatly sealed, she proceeded to the luxurious dressing room of that lady.—It was perfectly in keeping with her character.

Mrs. Trellan was indolent, extravagant, and ambitious. The first and the last these characteristics were in a constant state of antagonism. To gratify the remaining one,—her boundless love of display,—she must have money, and to get it she descended to every mean artifice. Edna's immense property—descended to her through her mother, a noble English lady, who died at her birth, and somewhat improved by her father in mercantile speculations,—was a theme which never slept in her mind. The agonies of death would not have been more unendurable to her, than even the distant prospect of its passing to another than a member of her own family.

To accomplish the union between her son and her niece was, therefore, her darling scheme, and nothing was left undone to secure the prize.

Letters had been intercepted, read, and others of a character more congenial substituted in their places. To each had been urged the all-engrossing passion of the other, and the sacredness of the pledge won from them when mere children, and under the most trying circumstances. Long separated, with no means of free, ingenuous intercourse and confidence, they were mutually deceived, each fearing to fatally wound the heart of the other by a full disclosure of their real sentiments. To keep them thus ignorant was now the aim of the artful woman, assisted by one who, as we have seen, would or would not labour to accomplish this object, as it did or did not suit her private purposes.

It was with pleasure, therefore, that Mrs. Trellan received the newly intercepted epistle from the hands of this woman, who had been for years a successful imitator of writing, and never yet been detected.

"Here will be work for you, Bertha," said the worthy mistress, after perusing it, "this must never go; it would ruin all our plans. I thank you much for bringing it; you shall have this bracelet, only don't wear it at present, because my daughter has one like it and perhaps she would disapprove."

A bright red spot glowed upon Bertha's cheek, and turning away she murmured to herself, "I am not bought so."

Nevertheless her mistress's eyes were upon the letter, and she saw nought of all this, but continued,

"In a fortnight this must reach him, and that will please me; meanwhile there are a thousand preparations to be completed for our ball, which I can trust to no one but you," and she went on giving directions with the ease and nobility of one accustomed to be obeyed. But the woman was sullen; she had not been well paid, and resolved to let the next letter pass without interference.

The long anticipated day at length arrived and immense preparations were made for the reception of the world, so called. The brilliantly lighted apartments,—the gaily dressed groups each moment arriving—the enchanting music a little in the distance—the lovers wandering arm in arm forgetful of all but themselves—the political papas in earnest discussion upon the tariff and free trade—the ambitious mammas so delighted to sit in a row and admire their young charges, and the well-trained servants moving noiselessly here and there to execute the multiplicity of commands—were but parts in this grand panorama of life, gaiety, and beauty.

A distinguished foreigner was announced. Instantaneously each gentleman assumed the most dignified attitude, and each lady put on her most becoming and graceful smiles. Whatever was expected, Lord Elwyn proved to be merely a well-bred, unostentatious man, simply dressed in a suit of brown, with a prettily flowered Indian scarf tied carelessly about his neck, leaving his collar to fall as it would, and his throat exposed to the night air. To the infinite surprise of all, he came on foot and unattended.

Cordially exchanging salutations with Major Trellan and his lady, he passed to Theodore and Carlotta, who welcomed him with many assurances of pleasure, and thence to Edna, who was endeavouring to amuse a group of young girls as

yet destitute of beaux. A slight blush overspread her sweet countenance, as she extended her hand, and with perfect self-possession replied to his remarks. At length he said, "I am a stranger here; your cousin is engaged; will you allow me a general claim upon your hand whenever you wish to dance?"

For a moment, Edna was pleased with the preference, but her next thought was of the envy she should excite, and her pure heart shrunk from it. Raising her eyes to his, which were bent upon her with an expression strangely undefinable, she replied,

"You will readily believe, my lord, that I will do all I can consistently to render the evening a pleasant one to you, but you will pardon me if I hesitate to arrogate to myself so enviable a distinction. I will give you my hand for two dances provided you ask my cousin for the same number."

"Then I will dance but four times," he replied with that quiet decision, which one would seldom, if ever, dispute.

"How can you make such an assertion," said Edna, gaily, "with all these eyes glancing so wishfully about you?"

"I must decline the honour to-night at least—you will oblige me by relieving me from any formal introductions;" then drawing her arm within his own, they passed slowly through the different rooms, stopping to admire and remark upon whatever was beautiful in design or execution.

Some splendid pictures, with a few marble busts in one apartment, occupied him a long time, not that they were wholly new, but Lord Elwyn had an artist's soul and possessed a most lively sympathy with nature, whether revealing itself in customary forms, or being revealed by the genius of man.

Never had Edna so enjoyed an intellectual conversation; it was a new and exquisite source of pleasure, to have her thoughts spread out before her by one so highly gifted. But she was not permitted this happiness unalloyed, for at every turn she encountered the jealous, watchful eyes of her aunt, fixed upon her with an expression of angry surprise, which she vainly attempted to conceal under flattering attentions to their comfort.

At length, with a smile of much sweetness, she approached them and said,

"Edna, my love, this will never do; yesterday you were sadly ill, and now you are standing all the evening. Really, my lord, you must excuse my over anxiety for the sweet child, she is so very dear to us, and is soon, you know, to become doubly our own. My daughter will be happy to relieve her, for you must permit Edna some rest;" and in spite of the many protestations of her niece, that she never was better in her life, Mrs. Trellan led her off to a seat between two old ladies, to whom she entrusted her darling Edna, with many injunctions to exercise their authority upon her, "for, at least, an hour, all for her own best good, and she would come to them as often as the ceremonies of hostess would permit."

Lord Elwyn and Carlotta were left standing in the middle of the apartment, where he could do no less than offer his arm, which was accepted, but his first inquiries were,—"Is your cousin really ill, and have I caused her to be more so? Let us go and see."

"Not seriously so, my lord," said Carlotta quickly, for she perceived that her mother had overdone the matter, "only a little unwell yesterday, and mamma is so careful of her for my brother's sake."

A slight frown passed over Lord Elwyn's brow at this second allusion to Edna's marriage. "Nevertheless, we will inquire of herself," he said, and with a manner, the indescribable grace of which redeemed its exceeding firmness, he moved off in the direction which Mrs. Trellan had taken.

But the crowd was dense; at every turn were obstructions; for, though Carlotta knew perfectly well the remote corner where she might find her cousin, it gratified her foolish pride to be seen hanging upon his arm, and she allowed him to proceed in all directions but the right one.

After a long time they accidentally came upon the old ladies with whom she was left, and found that she had gone to her own room some moments previous with violent headache. Mrs. Trellan joined them at that moment, and declared that

she would go herself, and see if Edna's maid was rendering her every assistance. Lord Elwyn, with a serious countenance, begged her to ask if he might not bid her adieu in person before he left the city.

The lady readily promised to do the message, but declared that she feared Edna was too ill—could he not send his adieu by her?

"No; if she permits me, I will see her," he replied, decidedly.

Mrs. Trellan soon returned, declaring that Edna was very ill, and expressed much regret that it was impossible for her to see his lordship again that night.

After a moment's thought, Lord Elwyn tenderly placed Carlotta's hand in that of Theodore, and, drawing Mrs. Trellan aside, said in a low calm tone,—

"Madam, I offer thanks for your exceeding kindness; permit me one more favour," and placing his hand upon the gilt tassel, he added, "I will ring—will you have the goodness to summon the young lady's maid?"

"With the greatest pleasure," she replied, with practised politeness, beneath which her anger and fear were quite visible.

When Luna appeared, he simply said, "Conduct me to your mistress's parlour," and, upon arriving at the door, continued, "Go in, and see if Miss Trellan will receive Lord Elwyn for a few moments."

Almost instantly she returned, and begged him to enter. So far from being ill, he had never seen her half so beautiful as when she rose from the easy chair in her cabinet, and advanced beneath the raised curtain to meet him. A single tear glistened in her eye, and cast a saddened expression over her whole face, her long curls scarcely permitting to be revealed the charms of a neck otherwise exposed by the low bodice of a rose-coloured satin dress, and the beautifully turned arms, from which she had drawn her long gloves, laid slightly upon each other.

Lord Elwyn's first impulse was to clasp her in his arms, but he was not a creature of impulse, and tenderly taking her hands in his own, he said, in a sweet musical voice, whose perfect harmony, so different from his ordinary tone, thrilled her whole soul, "I have been forced to be very rude to you to-night; I trust I am already pardoned, but permit me to ask if I have been in any way accessory to your illness."

"No, indeed," she replied, smilingly; "my illness has only existed in my aunt's imagination, but I grew weary of being a spectator and a prisoner too, and came here in search of friends that are always true," and she pointed to her library.

"I have a favour to request," said Lord Elwyn, having for a moment contemplated her with a look of surprise and admiration. "Will you return with me? I think I can now secure to ourselves another pleasant hour, and I shall ever be grateful."

Edna hesitated; she understood the reasons for her aunt's contrivance, and knew that she would be very angry, but she had already commenced a career of opposition, and the present was a good opportunity to show her independence; besides, she would really love to oblige him.

"Bring my gloves," she said to Luna, who remained in the cabinet, and, giving her hand to Lord Elwyn, they silently made their way to the spot where their conversation was interrupted, he only acknowledging her kindness by a gentle pressure of the hand he held.

Lord Elwyn proceeded, as if nothing had occurred, to remark upon a family group, exquisitely done on canvas.

"That was brought from England," said Edna. "The lady leaning and weeping upon the bosom of the aged man was my mother; it was the last time she wept upon the bosom of her father; they both died soon after. The young boy gazing so thoughtfully and sorrowfully upon her was my cousin, and that tall stern man his father."

Lord Elwyn gazed long and earnestly, and his mind seemed to be wandering far back on memory's tide to catch, if possible, some faintly-glimmering recollection.

"Those friends, where are they?" he asked, at length.

"I have never seen them," she replied; "I do not know their names. I have no recollection of my mother, and only think of her as she is here represented."

"Ah, my love, have you recovered so soon? How very fortunate!" suddenly exclaimed a voice behind them, and Mrs. Trellan came, with her gayest smiles, and kissed Edna's cheek. "You are pale yet," she continued, with a volubility that defied interruption, "and Lord Elwyn must have been a powerful magnet to have drawn you from your sick room. I only hope we shall not have cause to repent the indiscretion."

"Mrs. Trellan," said Lord Elwyn, "I found this lady quite well, and enjoying a book, which she relinquished for my gratification; if it is indiscreet, I will assume the consequences," and with a withering look he passed on.

Some two hours after this, Lord Elwyn parted from Edna with a friendly grasp of the hand, having obtained permission to become an occasional and unceremonious visitor. Upon retiring, Edna was conscious of an unwonted feeling of pleasure, which, accustomed as she was to analyze her feelings, was attributed to its true source. Not that she for a moment supposed that Lord Elwyn had, in a few interviews, fallen in love with her or that he intended to do so. With all her wealth and beauty, Edna was neither proud nor vain, but had an uncommon share of retiring modesty,—in fact, an humble opinion of herself. She had been very happy with Lord Elwyn, but feared that in being so, she had created for herself bitter enemies, and she fell asleep, not in dreaming of her brilliant conquests, but in forming plans of reconciliation with those whom she feared she had offended.

The night wore away, and at three the house was deserted. Late, or rather early—as it was, Carlotta begged admission to her mother's dressing-room. Each looked at the other for an instant, like two baffled diplomatists. The proud, impatient girl could restrain herself no longer.

"Is it to be endured?" she demanded, her eyes flashing unwonted fire; "Is it to be endured?"

"Tush! my love—he is a lord, and men like him will do what they please in spite of us. But listen—it is useless to be angry, we must manage deeper. I know that Edna has refused your brother, and presume that she intends to captivate this same gentleman; but it must not be—no—no indeed; we cannot do without her money, and your brother will be ruined if she marry another. If Lord Elwyn stands in the way of our success, it only remains for you to renounce the obstacle."

"For me!" exclaimed the passionate girl, quickly. "How?"

For a moment the intriguing mother scanned her daughter's face, and then with a voice and manner which plainly showed that the deep waters of affection had never rippled over her heart, said,—

"Can you love none but Theodore?"

"And violate my plighted word? never—never!"

"But the circumstances, my child—consider them well, you are free to choose."

"Mother! mother!" and the young girl passed her small hands to her head as if to repress its wild, unnatural throbbings.

"Think calmly, my love. Have you no ambition for a title—no desire for the boundless wealth he is said to possess? In short, Carlotta, could you not forget Theodore Montrevor, the plain American citizen, in being the bride of Lord Elwyn, the foreign nobleman?"

"And Theodore?" gasped the excited girl.

A low laugh caused her to start.

"And so you fancy that because Theodore declares that he could not live without you, that he is in earnest—is it so?" the mother asked with a slight sneer which at once defeated her object, for nothing aroused Carlotta like contempt or opposition—and she exclaimed,—

"He has been true and faithful to me. No—I cannot—I will not give him up."

"Well then—the effect of all this romancing be upon your own head. A fine dash they will cut when Edna's fortune shall be united to Lord Elwyn's, and she the mistress of his splendid mansion. You might be all this, but you refuse—so good night—I wish you joy of your decision." And the amiable matron went to her sleeping apartment.

It had been a sultry autumnal day, and the air of the house was heavy with the perfume of an immense quantity of flowers scattered in every direction; to Carlotta it was oppressive, and throwing open a window in her parlour, she stepped out upon the balcony to cool her feverish brow in the clear night breeze. "It is all true," she said mentally in reply to her mother's last remark; "I, who have been idolized for years, could not brook to see her take the precedence. I have loved her it is true, and when her gentle eyes are upon me, and I feel how pure her spirit is, there is a momentary wish to be like her—but no! impossible! This night has called forth my evil nature, and henceforth, though I must speak only honied words, there will be revenge and hatred in my heart. To-night he chose to linger at her side. It shall not again be thus. But Theodore—ah, well, let the future decide. How true, Edna was your vision—the future cannot be as the past. Thank Heaven I can mould it somewhat to my will. But Edna—Edna—beware how you cross my path!" and entering her dressing-room, she slowly unbound the jewels from her hair, and then laid herself all robed as she was, upon her gilded couch.

CHAPTER IV.

MANY EXCITING INCIDENTS.

WE must, for a brief space, leave our friends in New York, occupied with their various and often contending interests, and enter a large, airy, and richly furnished apartment in Charleston, S. C. Beside an open window sits a young man of one-and-twenty. His face is fair and beautiful, and though tinged with sadness, there rests upon it the hallowed expression of a generous and noble soul. Benevolence is indeed its prominent feature.

"I could wish much to hear from home," he soliloquised, "to know all are well, ere I communicate to them these sad tidings, and yet, I ought not to delay. And my cousin Edna! what shall I say to her? How check her heart's first love? How crush her young hopes, and break the solemn pledge we took beside her dying father? Impossible! and yet"—he continued after a moment's silent thought—"all this were better than to deceive, to mock her trusting love with hopes which can never be realised, to wed and wear the bright gem of her heart's first, truest affection, and have nought to give in return, but the uncertain and often wavering confidence of duty or benevolence. Heaven knows that I would spare her this grief if possible," and a large tear falls upon the open but unread page before him.

At this moment his servant enters with letters, and he discovers among them two which fully occupy his attention. The first, is a business letter from his father, Major Treilan, short, concise, and quickly read; the second should have been two closely written sheets in one envelope, deposited by Luna for the post-office. But alas! deception was still at work, and instead of the pages which had cost Edna so much labour, and so many struggles between honour and benevolence, he now holds in his hand a genuine love-letter, evidently written under the influence of devoted affection, warm passions, and undoubted trust in his continued love, and alluding to the future as though but one thing were possible—their marriage. The letter falls from his hand, and he again soliloquises.

"How shall I disturb her unbounded confidence? How awaken from its dream of love this passionate heart? Were it different—would she but refuse me—how happy should I be. If I fulfil this engagement, I could not love her as she should be loved—or not at least till the bright vision which so constantly floats before my imagination is dispelled," and with a smile which proves how suddenly all other thoughts are driven out by love, his head again falls upon his hand, and he yields

himself to the remembrance of that one blissful vision, which once—only once has met his eye.

There are moments in life, in which seem to be concentrated all the blessedness of the past, and every possible anticipation for the future. Such a moment had once been Ernest's, and in the recollection of its beauty and brightness he now revels.

Ernest Trellan was of an age and character to love deeply, devotedly, and passionately. Unfitted for active life by a sensitive and peculiarly tender organization, circumstances had hitherto favoured him, and he had lived in a world of his own creation, among the dreams of philosophers and the songs of poets. But the sorrows of life were stealing upon him, and he began to feel the stern necessity of action.

"No! I cannot, I will not marry her," he exclaimed, suddenly starting from his recumbent position, and seizing a pen with an energy quite unusual to him, "I will no longer trust to fortune and circumstances. I will write without delay."

In the meantime several causes, which we must notice, were producing serious changes in the family of Major Trellan.

Lord Elwyn had become a frequent and an unceremonious visitor. To Edna he displayed all the kindness of a brother, and as he never touched upon tender subjects, she had learned to feel at ease with him, and by degrees, to display, as occasion demanded, her varied and superior talents and acquirements. Till formally released from her engagement with Ernest, she would not allow herself to think of love to another, but as yet she only hoped for the time when he would make her free, with a mingled feeling of sadness and delight.

With Carlotta, the case was widely different. From the night of the ball, she had become an altered being. As she herself said, her evil nature had gained the ascendancy. With Edna she was cold and haughty—with her lover nervous and irritable, but with Lord Elwyn brilliant and beautiful. Theodore, as usual, spent his evenings with her, and Lord Elwyn would sometimes bestow upon her a look of admiration which seemed to say, "I too could adore you." Theodore, though unwavering in his confidence in Lord Elwyn, had become somewhat eagle-eyed of late, and none of these glances were lost upon him; he was affected by them and the demonstrations of Carlotta's indifference, and resolved to speak openly with her upon the matter. Having heard Lord Elwyn make an appointment to go out with Edna, upon a certain evening, he resolved to improve the opportunity for an explanation.

He accordingly entered the apartment where they usually sat, somewhat later than ordinary, and found the proud beauty leaning over the arm of the sofa, looking very gloomy, with a settled frown upon her brow.

"How is this, Carlotta?" he asked, "what cloud is brooding over your spirit to-night?" and sitting down by her, he gently lifted her head, and was about to press his lips to her beautiful brow, when suddenly raising her hand, she said "No, no—at least not to-night."

"Why not to-night?" he asked, with a sternness quite unusual to him, but instantly relaxing to his accustomed kindness, he added, "How have I offended you, my love? Let nothing be concealed."

But her eyes were averted, her lips compressed, and her whole aspect that of one who makes a violent effort to resist the powerful impulses of a passionate and affectionate nature, and in so doing finds no safeguard but in haughty coldness and silence. With a quick penetration the lover saw the ruin of all his hopes, and for a few moments paced the floor in silent, sorrowful thought. Then again seating himself, he spoke firmly, though his cheek was pale and his lips trembled from suppressed emotions.

"Carlotta, it is now more than three years since, in this very room, we declared our affection and pledged our mutual faith. Thus far we have been true, and my heart's wildest dreams have been more than realized in your unchanging, devoted love. Of myself I have no need to speak; you well know that at any moment I would have sacrificed all that makes life dear had you demanded it—all, except

your love. I came to-night to urge you to appoint an early day for the celebration of that ceremony, which, the eyes of the world, makes our union sacred, and you received me with a coldness—a haughtiness, which I cannot in the least appreciate. I will not conceal from you that at times I have been a little jealous of our friend Lord Elwyn, but no doubt I was wrong, and I am now ready to assure you of my unwavering confidence in your affection. Do but speak to me, Carlotta. This moody silence is worse than the harshest words.”

“Mr. Montrevor,” coldly replied Carlotta, “I fear my words will be less acceptable to you than my silence. True, I promised to be yours, but I knew not my own heart. You took advantage of my youth to secure a pledge, the value of which I have recently learned,”

“That is to say, since Lord Elwyn honoured you with his visits. I was not then wrong in my suspicions,” interrupted Theodore, his passionate nature revealing itself in his quickly changing countenance.

“Whether the discovery has been made through Lord Elwyn’s means or not, cannot possibly interest you,” haughtily replied the fair betrothed. “I give you back your pledge, and leave you to make such inferences as you choose.”

“Such as I am forced to make rather,” he replied, gloomily, a poisoned arrow fixed in his bosom. “Well, be it so. I take the gift, and may Heaven forgive you the anguish you have this night inflicted upon my heart. Permit me, as a seal upon the blessedness of the past, to part from you kindly,” and he extended his hand.

For an instant Carlotta’s eyes were fixed upon the hand which had so often clasped hers in fervent affection, and her better nature struggled for indulgence; but it was smothered, and as if fearful of trusting herself, she bowed politely and retired to her own apartment.

To say the truth, Carlotta would gladly have parted from her lover kindly, but in the violent struggle between ambition and love, it was impossible for her to pursue any middle course; she must be all or nothing to him. To secure Lord Elwyn, she had determined to risk everything. Tortured by his attentions to Edna, fearful of seeing herself in a secondary position in life, and continually urged by a scheming and ambitious mother, she had resolved in a moment of passion to reject her lover, destroy the hopes of years, and to seek in every possible way to win the affections of their distinguished guest. This resolution she had unfortunately communicated to her mother, or the violent struggle might have dispelled it. As it was, she had already started upon the troubled waters of ambition, and strong in the power of her own heart, she was determined, at all events, to triumph. To accomplish this, however, she was aware that much—indeed extreme caution was necessary. A few tears, the result of an affection not yet destroyed, followed the departure of Theodore; but reflecting that these would assist in delaying her conquest, she brushed them away, bathed her eyes in rose-water, called her maid to put the finishing touch upon her hair and dress, and again descended to the parlour.

Lord Elwyn soon returned with her cousin, and they were greatly surprised to find Carlotta alone.

“My dear Edna,” said she after their return, “there is a person awaiting your return in your apartment; she desired to see you immediately.”

Edna at once excused herself, saying that she knew who it was, and she should be engaged for the remainder of the evening. Carlotta saw her close the door with extreme pleasure.

“Where is Theodore to-night?” demanded Lord Elwyn, looking around for the accustomed visitor.

“Mr. Montrevor does not visit us now,” replied Carlotta with a slight expression of disdain. “Indeed our engagement was one formed in childhood comparatively, and it has never been deemed a very suitable alliance by my parents.”

“Then why has it been permitted to exist till the present time?” asked Lord Elwyn, with an air of indifference.

“Circumstances have favoured it ; indeed we have regarded its consummation as a thing so very distant that we have bestowed few thoughts upon it.”

“But as it approaches—”

“As it approaches,” interrupted Carlotta, “I find in myself an absolute repugnance to it. It is therefore right that all such anticipations should be destroyed at once, is it not?”



“Quite right that one should not marry where one does not love,” he replied, adding mentally, “and equally right that one should be punished for disobeying their noblest impulses.”

Conversation languished for a few moments, during which Lord Elwyn remained in deep thought. Then suddenly aroused by the light touch of a finger upon his

arm, he turned his eyes upon Carlotta, who gaily exclaimed, "you are dreaming my lord; you forget my presence."

"True; I beg your pardon," he replied, arousing himself, and for an hour they forgot—or seem to forget—all the world in their own enjoyment. Carlotta knew that she had never been more brilliant, and fancied that she was making a deep impression. Golden visions already began to flit before her mind's eye, and in imagination she saw herself in one evening far on towards the summit of her hopes. Lord Elwyn neither assisted nor retarded her plans; he seemed like one who would say, "I take no interest whatever in the result; here is my heart; if you can win it, well—if not, equally well."

At length he rose to depart; Carlotta would have detained him with a look, but he was firm, and taking his hat and cane passed into the street. Carlotta remained a moment before a mirror, admiring her beautiful person so richly adorned, and murmuring, "Yes—yes, he will be mine at last." She hastened to her mother's dressing-room, where a scene met her view, which she had little anticipated.

At the usual hour that evening the letters and papers were deposited in the hall. Bertha, as usual, was the first to examine them. One of them alone seemed to interest her, and she took it from the basket and turned in the direction of her own apartment—suddenly she paused and said quite low,—

"I will not—I have not been paid—I toil for promises—let Miss Edna get this as it is. If it mar my mistress's plans, so much the better. I shall be well paid the next time, or, if there is reproach and revenge, I have only to reveal the long-treasured secret—no, I will not have it," and replacing the letter, she carried the basket into the sitting-room, and placed it beside Major Trellan with an air of triumph which seemed to say,—

"I have two strings to my bow; break which you will, the other must prove useful to me."

"Here are two letters from my son, one for Edna, the other for myself," said the major, breaking the seal of the letter, and glancing over it with the sharp, quick eye of the man of business. But his face grew a shade paler, and he became agitated as he proceeded. "Twelve thousand dollars—four of them belonging to Edna," he slowly repeated in a voice scarcely above a whisper, "I trust this is not the beginning of misfortunes; a dozen such losses would ruin me."

Mrs. Trellan had been dozing in an easy chair by the fire, but at the word "ruin," opened her eyes and languishly demanded, "what was in ruins?"

"Your husband will be soon, madam," responded the irritated man, "and you will regulate your domestic matters accordingly."

"Me! are you speaking to me, Major Trellan?" contemptuously demanded his wife; "and what do you suppose I have to do with the domestic affairs of our house? You surely have been dreaming."

"No, no—it is you who have been dreaming," vociferously ejaculated the husband, who was seldom angry, excepting with the loss of money. Having laboured a lifetime to earn the title of *millionaire* it was certainly hard—very hard that disappointment should occur when so near the summit of his ambition. "I tell you, madam," he continued, "that some reduction must be made in our establishment, and as I do not choose that the world should discover this loss, we will dismiss such domestics as can be spared; Carlotta's maid, for instance; Bertha will serve you both; the new footman whom you hired but yesterday must go, and with him the stable groom. Do not remonstrate, it will be ineffectual, tears too will be utterly useless."

"Uncle," interrupted Edna, who had in the meantime entered and read her letter, uncle, have I your permission to read a few lines from my letter? it is from Ernest, and you may as well hear it at once if you will."

"You may read it if you will; but I care not to hear his nonsense."

"I think you will not call it such when I have read it."

"The time has arrived, Edna, when I must undeceive you as to my affection for you. Forgive me, if I cause you to be miserable; honour demands that I should no longer allow you to waste your early and devoted love upon one who never has

—nor ever can return it. It is no easy task, Edna, to bring misery upon the head, or to blight the heart of one so beautiful and good, and I trust that you will not utterly reject my sympathy. My sorrow too is deep and sincere. But you would not wed me, Edna, surely you would not, while my heart secretly longs for another; you could not bear to learn then that I bore you a brother's love—that a feeling for which I cannot account has hitherto destroyed every desire for any dearer relation to you than that of brother."

"Stop!" sternly exclaimed Major Trellan. "The boy is infatuated—mad. And, by the way, there is something of this same nonsense in a P. S. to mine; it is supremely ridiculous. 'I cannot fulfil my engagement with Edna,—my heart is not in it.'"

"Uncle," said Edna, mildly, after waiting a moment, for the cooling of his passion,—

"Ernest is not alone in these sentiments, I do not love him. I do not wish to marry him."

"You, too! you!" and he looked at Edna, with a strangely mingled expression of anger, surprise, and mirthfulness.

Here the conversation was interrupted by a something between a groan and a shriek from Mrs. Trellan. Edna sprang to her aunt, while her husband condescended to pull the silken cord which summoned the maid. A moment after Carlotta entered highly flushed with excitement, but started back on beholding her mother extended upon the sofa in violent hysterics, Edna, and Bertha bending over her, while her father sat by reading his letters, with a sour and angry countenance. At length she obtained a brief explanation from Edna, together with news that Adela, her maid, was to be dismissed the following day.

Extremely angry, she flew to her father saying,—

"Well, papa, what is this you are going to do? I shall not let Adela go."

"She must go. Bertha shall wait upon you," he replied firmly.

"She shall not go; you have my word for it," continued this very respectful daughter, who having been idolized from childhood was far more accustomed to obey the dictates of her own will than the commands of her parents, particularly when opposed to her inclination. "You shall see, sir, if she will go," and ringing she ordered Adela to come to her.

"Adela," said she to the bright-eyed girl who obeyed instantly, "do you acknowledge any other master or masters than myself?"

"No, ma'am."

"Do I pay you well?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Do you wish to leave me?"

"No, ma'am."

"Well, then, they talk of sending you away." Adela began to cry. "But you shall not go. Listen, and do as I bid you. Go to my dressing-room, lock the door and remain there till I release you. Go," and Adela disappeared.

"There, sir, you will not send her away; do you not see?" she added, looking sharply at her father. She was a girl of iron will; her father knew it, for he had fought many a battle with her in her younger days, in which she was invariably triumphant. This scene was, therefore, by no means new, indeed it might well have been anticipated by him.

"Now, papa," said Carlotta, after looking at her mother for a moment, and assuring herself that she was no worse than she had seen her many times, "I come here with some good news; would you like to hear it?"

"No," almost growled the angry parent.

"But you shall nevertheless, and it will do you good. How would you fancy Lord Elwyn for a son-in-law?"

A smile in spite of himself, lit up his dark countenance and he quickly replied,—

"How—what do you mean?"

"Simply this, I have discarded Theodore, and Lord Elwyn at present pays me the most serious attentions."

"But your word was given to Montrevor," interrupted her father.

"No matter," she replied, and for a moment her lips trembled and her bosom heaved with some unexpressed emotion; but it was again subdued by the all-powerful will, and she added, "one cannot always keep one's promises. I suppose you will not object to the change?"

"Let me alone; don't make me responsible for the evil resulting from any such changes," he replied with a kind of good-natured petulance, through which Carlotta plainly saw that he was well pleased.

Major Trellan returned to his letters, and after a few moments bade his wife a hasty good night, recommended her to "come out of her hysterics as rapidly as possible," and retired to his study. There he sat a long time in deep thought, but at last said to himself, "I have it." A few sentences will explain the value and import of the phrase.

For the better security of Edna's fortune, but a small portion had been placed in her uncle's hands—the remainder in various responsible houses in that and other cities. Major Trellan was, in the world's estimation, at least, an upright and honourable man, but exceedingly careful of his pecuniary interests. A long course of successful speculation had somewhat blunted his sense of right and wrong, and he saw no objection to the withdrawal of a portion of Edna's money—equal to his own loss—from its place of deposit, to be employed as his own capital. This decision gave rise to the exclamation, "I have it," and he forthwith proceeded to deliberate upon other matters, among which Ernest's marriage was not the least in importance.

Carlotta sat by her mother a few moments, hoping for an opportunity to communicate the same important change to her, but perceiving that there was no prospect of a rational interval, she withdrew to her own apartment.

Edna soon followed her example, as she could render no farther assistance to her aunt. Having reached her cabinet, she again perused Ernest's long letter, and while she blessed him for his goodness of heart, she yet could not solve the mystery. It was so like her own, and yet no reply to it! "Could he have been vexed at her letter and choose to be the rejecting, than the rejected one?" She could not retain that idea, it was unworthy of him. "Did he pursue this course that the blame might rest upon him, and she remain uncensured?" This was more probable, but did not satisfy her; and she fell asleep without arriving at any decision, little dreaming that her own letter, to which she supposed this a copy, was quietly reposing in the private drawer of her aunt's dressing-table.

* * * * *

Carlotta and Edna had no sooner disappeared from Mrs. Trellan's sitting room, than that lady immediately proved the propriety of her husband's advice, and began to sob and moan with less energy. Evincing at the same time, that however real her disease might have been, it had not deprived her of her power of speech.

"Bertha," said she at length, pushing aside the handkerchiefs wet in spirits, the essences, and the smelling-bottles, which lay in such profusion about her. "Bertha, why did you not prevent Miss Edna from receiving that fatal letter? It will prove the ruin of all our plans."

"What letter, madam?" asked Bertha, with great simplicity.

"One direct from my son Ernest, in which he refuses to marry her. You examined the basket before bringing it in—you always do," said Mrs. Trellan, looking sternly at the woman. Bertha's countenance was immovable and inexpressive as she replied,—

"I did examine it as you ordered, but the letter you mention escaped my notice."

The mistress knew too well the insatiable curiosity of the servant to believe her, but soon saw that something was wrong, and that Bertha had allowed the letter to pass without inspection, doubtless to gratify some private revenge. It was therefore necessary for her to discover the motive from which she acted.

"Bertha," said she, after a pause, in which the woman had been engaged in

twirling a long gilt chain about her fingers, "supposing I send you from my house, for this act of disobedience—refuse to pay you what I promised upon Ernest's marriage with Edna, and prevent you from being admitted into another fashionable family in the city!"

"You will not do this, madam; I am too useful to you," said the woman, boldly; "besides there are other reasons. I know the part you have acted towards your son and niece, even while you are acquainted with, and have proofs of a fact which ought to prevent their marriage; you will not, therefore, risk the exposure of that secret by depriving me of a home. You know, madam, for I told you years ago, that I would work as I was paid; of late you have grown miserly, and it occurs to me that Miss Edna will give me as much to reveal to her the long-cherished secret, as you have promised me not to reveal it. I wish for the money, and I care not how it comes to me."

Mrs. Trellan had carefully scrutinized the countenance of her maid during this deliberate speech, and its plain matter-of-fact style enraged her beyond expression.

"What would you have?" she asked, sternly. "You came to me nearly a beggar—just look at yourself in that mirror—many a lady would be proud of the dress you wear. In my house, too, you take the utmost freedom; you receive company when you choose, you order my servants, you control everything to your wish, and at last presume to interfere with the plans which I have laboured years to mature. This is your gratitude!"

"I know nothing of gratitude or ingratitude," replied Bertha, pertly. "I work for money. I am well assured that Edna would give a thousand dollars to learn my secret. You have promised me six hundred upon the week of their marriage; if you will secure to me one thousand instead, I will be silent; if not, I will tell her all."

The proud mistress groaned aloud. Bertha was invaluable to her; she must not go, she must not reveal all to Edna; but then, the money! And she looked once more into the impenetrable countenance of the woman.

"I will promise," she said, with an effort.

Bertha brought writing materials, saying,—

"It must be a written promise."

The promise was written; Bertha's strong will had once more prevailed.

* * * * *

Theodore Montrevor left the mansion of Major Trellan after his unexpected repulse from Carlotta, and walked home slowly and much dispirited. He had for years regarded his union with her as something settled, fixed beyond a possibility of any change, save that of death—so that the present exigency found him wholly unprepared.

Unexpectedly, he met two young friends, who drew him into a club-room, in spite of his remonstrances, and, after submitting for an hour or two to their most untimely jokes upon the unusual gravity of his countenance, he returned home to complete the extraordinary events of the evening by receiving a note from Lord Elwyn, requesting his presence on the following morning upon the most urgent business.

The appointed hour saw him enter Lord Elwyn's library, where he found his worthy rival stretched upon a sofa, in a silk dressing-gown, the last new novel in his hand, with coffee and refreshments beside him. It was a position of fashionable and indulgent repose in which Theodore had never before seen him, but he was too thoroughly polite to express the surprise he felt. Nevertheless, Lord Elwyn read it in his countenance, and languidly extending his hand, which Theodore coldly touched with his fingers, said, with an air of gaiety, which strongly contrasted with the gloomy brow of his visitor,—

"It was hardly worth the while that I should become your preserver from a watery grave to rob you afterwards of the affections of your lady-love. I confess I did not anticipate so great an honour."

"At least, my lord," he replied, his whole face flushed with anger, "I might

have been spared the exercise of your mirthfulness upon a subject which violates the happiness of my whole life. Hitherto I have regarded you as the embodiment of nobleness ; you have been my standard for all that is called great and good in the world ; but I am undeceived—I will no longer have confidence in any one. Nothing but the gratitude I owe you, as my preserver, prevents me from challenging you."

"Ah, indeed!" replied Lord Elwyn, with mock gravity ; "you forget my rank—it would be impossible for me to accept."

Theodore was too angry to speak, and, walking to the window, began to pull the leaves from a beautiful exotic which was then in full bloom, Lord Elwyn watched him for a moment, then, springing up, he caught the hands of the young man, saying,—

"Come, exhaust your anger upon me, not upon Lira's poor rose ; she will never forgive, and I shall."

"Lord Elwyn," said Theodore, with a powerful effort at self-control, "will you do me the honour to communicate the business upon which you desired my presence this morning—my time is not wholly at my command."

"Ah, true, I had something to say," his manner instantly changing to one of heart-felt kindness and sympathy, "and as I am not accustomed to make mysteries where none are required, we will speak plainly upon the subject of Miss Trellan's change of mind, for believe me, that is the only change."

"That subject again, sir!" said Theodore, fiercely.

"Calm yourself, my good friend," replied Lord Elwyn, with genuine good nature. "Miss Trellan loves you, and only you ; but her eyes are dazzled, her judgment misled, and her imagination excited by my title, my foreign birth, and my reported wealth. To my person, bereft of these external appendages, she is indifferent."

"Are you sure of that?" asked Theodore, a little more mildly.

"Yes, perfectly sure. But she has imposed a life-long separation, has she not? You were not to visit her again, she assured me."

"True," replied the high-spirited lover, again angry at being thus questioned.

"Well, I have a simple plan to propose to you. Leave the city, engage in some active employment or amusement to preserve you from melancholy, and allow me to cure Miss Trellan of her sudden whim, for I can give it no better name. Depend upon it, all will yet end well."

"Then you do not love her," exclaimed Theodore, rising and clasping the hand of his friend, with an expression of relief beaming through the clouds.

Lord Elwyn's clear brilliant eye rested for a moment upon Theodore, a sweet peculiar smile played about his mouth, and in a low solemn voice he said,—

"I never trifle with the human heart, and in mine is enclosed an image far too blessed to admit another."

"Do you trust her with me? Have you perfect confidence in my honour?" he asked, after a moment's pause, during which their former friendship was wholly restored.

"Perfect," Theodore replied ; "but how do you propose to cure her infatuation?"

"Ah, that is my secret ; time will reveal all. Do you consent?"

"With the greatest pleasure," answered the happy Theodore, "and I shall depend upon you one day restoring her to me as she was before your arrival."

"With a little experience added to her present stock," said Lord Elwyn, and they parted the best of friends.

CHAPTER V.

THE DEPARTURE.—A NEW ACTOR.

SOME time after the events last mentioned, as Lord Elwyn sat musing by the fire of his library, always his favourite room, a low, slight tap was heard at his door, and he immediately bade the person enter. The entrance of Juanna, the immediate attendant of the beautiful Lira, created in him some surprise, as she had never before entered his apartments.

"My Lord will pardon me," she said, in her native tongue, for she had not yet learned to speak English, "but the case is so urgent."

"Well, speak Juanna," he kindly replied in the same language; "what has happened? no misfortune to your mistress, I hope." A shudder passed over the slight form of the woman, and tears gathered in her large dark eyes. "It is of the sweet flower I would speak, if my lord permits," she replied. "She is withering—drooping, and the music of her voice will soon be hushed for ever. She pines under these heavy skies, these chilly winds. She mourns for the orange bowers—the bright sun—the fragrant flowers—the singing playmates of her own home. Let us return," added the woman, beseechingly, and for the first time raising her turbaned head, which till now had drooped upon her bosom. Lord Elwyn started from his chair, uttered the single word "come," and turned with hasty steps towards the apartment of the child. Arriving at her door, he paused a moment for Juanna to apprise Lira of his visit. He found her reclining upon cushions, wrapped in large India shawls—her long black hair flowing loosely about her shoulders—her hands almost purple with chillness, and her eyes heavy and tearful.

Her two young attendants were endeavouring to amuse her with music and stories—legends of their own clime—but she turned sorrowfully away from all, murmuring in her native tongue "my home—my home."

Even the birds that nestled among the flowers of her conservatory, seemed to partake of her home-sickness, for their wings drooped, and their merry warblings had for a few days ceased altogether.

Upon Lord Elwyn's entrance, Lira languidly arose and suffered him to take her in his arms as he was accustomed to do. He spoke to her cheerfully—even gaily—talked of a sunny home to which he would soon carry her—called her pets around her, and for two hours sought by every means in his power to arouse her—but in vain; she only looked at him from the depths of her large melancholy eyes, with an expression which still said, my "home—my home."

At length he summoned her attendants, and bade them prepare for instant departure—even that day. The eyes of the young girl brightened, and quickly raising her hand, she pointed to the east with an earnest and pleading countenance. "We shall see—we shall see," replied her friend, and embracing her tenderly, he withdrew to give the necessary orders. About four hours after Lord Elwyn lifted the gentle Lira into a well-cushioned travelling carriage, entered himself and was followed by Juanna. Another carriage accompanied this, conveying two men, and Lira's two young servants, all natives of her own clime. The silent Lobo stood upon the steps of the mansion, giving with brief and significant gestures of the hand, the last orders in place of his master, and upon returning to the house closed and locked the apartments appropriated to the use of Lord Elwyn and Lira.

Five days after the sudden departure of Lord Elwyn, his unwonted absence from the mansion of Major Trellan became—among its inmates—a matter of surprise conjecture, and discussion. It was at last supposed that he had left the city, though he had not communicated his intention of so doing. The tenth day arrived and the brow of the mother portended a storm, that of the daughter grew haughty

and repulsive, while Edna endeavoured to soothe and quiet their agitated spirits, though in reality far more interested in Lord Elwyn's absence than the others.

Fifteen weary days had at length passed, and Carlotta's nervous impatience exceeded anything she had ever manifested. She consulted with her mother, and it was agreed that Bertha should go to his residence to ascertain if he was ill—absent from the city, or any other facts she could gather which would interest them,

The woman was well suited for the commission, for she had long desired to get a peep behind the clouds of mystery, in which this incomprehensible man enveloped his domestic life. Besides, what food for gossip!

Lobo answered the smart pull she gave the bell, but only opened the door to show a moiety of his face, stern and impenetrable as ever.

"Can I see Lord Elwyn?" she asked pertly, hoping to awe him into a more complaisant manner.

"Doubtless," he replied gravely, but without opening the door an inch wider.

"Well, you say that I can see him; I wish to do so," she continued, seeing that he did not move to admit her, and she had as yet only obtained the least possible glimpse of a well-polished stair-case. It was no small part of her errand to carry to Mrs. Trellan an accurate account of the interior of a mansion, in which she anticipated Carlotta's instalment as mistress.

"I understand," replied the man slowly and monotonously pronouncing the syllables.

"You do! Well, will you not say to Lord Elwyn that I am commissioned to see him immediately?"

"He could not hear me."

"What do you mean?" she exclaimed, the rage showing itself in her flashing eye and flushed cheek. "Where is your master?"

"I have not been informed."

"I have not been informed!" she repeated contemptuously; "do you not see him every day?"

"When he is to be seen."

"Then he is at present invisible?"

"Not to those near him."

"Once for all," she demanded fiercely, "is Lord Elwyn in or out of the city?"

"My orders do not enable me to say."

"You are a most provoking fool!" she exclaimed by way of revenge for her want of success, and turning to depart.

"Doubtless, madam," responded Lobo, bowing and closing the door.

The woman returned to the anxiously waiting mother and daughter in a high rage.

"I declare," she said after exhausting her invectives upon the servant Lobo. "I will disguise myself this very evening, and gain an admittance into the servants' hall, where I shall be sure to learn all you wish to know."

Her plan was approved, and with the first shades of evening she presented herself, completely disguised, at the door of the basement. "The statue," as she denominated Lobo, was doomed to prove her tormentor everywhere.

"Good evening, my dear sir," said Bertha, in the blandest tones, as she again appeared; "we like to form acquaintances among our neighbours, and I have ventured to introduce myself; my name is Ashley."

"I wait your commands, Mr. Ashley," replied the imperturbable Lobo, shutting the door after him, and seating himself upon the stone steps, at the same time inviting his guest by a look, follow his example.

"Do you not receive visitors in your hall or kitchen?"

"I have no orders to that effect."

"But do you never enjoy yourselves?"

"Doubtless, sir."

"Well, friend, are you or are you not disposed to admit me to chat with you and your companions for an hour?"

“No orders.”

With surprising quickness she sprang up, and ere Lobo was aware, Bertha had gained an entrance. A single glance was sufficient to reveal several men, an elderly woman and a young girl; more she could not see, for Lobo exclaimed, “Giovana—Marcellus,” and in an instant she felt herself clasped in the arms of



the giants, and bore into the street. Completely baffled, and somewhat frightened, the angry woman quickly reached her home, to be received with frowns and harsh words, which in no measure tended to allay the domestic storm.

“Ah! the gratitude of these selfish people!” exclaimed the indignant Bertha aloud, as she slammed the door of Mrs. Trellan’s dressing-room, and retired her own.

* * * * *

It was a cold bright morning in the early part of the winter, that a tall, finely
No. 5,

developed young man, plainly dressed in a suit of black, substantial, but far from rich, was seen moving industriously from one shop to another apparently in search of employment. He was evidently a foreigner—perhaps a German—for though his errand was each time communicated in strictly grammatical English, it was with a strong and apparently unconquerable accent. Though his various applications were unsuccessful, he seemed in no way discouraged, but walked on each time with an expression of fresh hope and unshaken courage, following, as his guide, some memoranda upon a slip of paper.

“It will prove a singular coincidence if I succeed in this house,” he said mentally, as he was shown into the counting room of Major Trellan, and requested to wait till that gentleman should have leisure to attend to his business.

A peculiar but almost imperceptible smile played about the mouth of the young stranger, as he brushed back the rich brown curls from his noble brow, folded his arms across his ample chest, and gazed with an air of genuine independence upon the scene before him.

Major Trellan occupied an immense old-fashioned arm chair, and before him was a table covered with green baize, upon which were a multitude of papers, some tied in bundles with red tape, others lying loose and half open about him. Two men—with the sharp, lean visages, bent forms, over-hanging brows, and small, flashing, brilliant eyes of those who have built up their own fortunes, but with whom the habit of bargaining is so strong, that it has become a part of their existence—were engaged with him in an animated discussion, upon what was apparently a life interest. The stranger listened; it proved to be the reduction of a clerk's wages. “A fine beginning,” he said to himself, as he closely scrutinized the hard countenances of these men—princes in point of wealth—lopping off a shilling from the well-earned, but often incompetent salaries of those whose daily toil had placed the millionaire upon his giddy height. “Is there no justice in the earth?” continued the stranger mentally. “That he who labours should exist upon a meagre pittance, and he who plans and bids that labour to be performed should roll in wealth and luxury, teaching his family to despise the humble instruments of that wealth?” and he looked with touching sympathy upon the pale face, slight half-developed figure of a young man who occupied a clerk's stool and desk in a distant corner of the room, and who never rested from his weary task, but to give utterance to a subdued cough, and place his hand for a moment upon his side. Steadily moved his pen, at regular intervals dipped in the large brown ink-stand. He had become a machine to move a quill, and spirits, health, life were oozing out with every drop of liquid consumed upon the point of it.

But all these considerations were quite out of place in a counting-room, as the stranger was made to feel, when the sharp eyes of Major Trellan rested upon him, and his stern voice demanded his business, desiring him to be as brief as possible.

“I seek the situation of counting-room clerk,” replied the young man, who gave his name as George De Montfort, with much assurance.

“Ah! that is quite fortunate for you, Mr. Benson,” said the master, addressing the distant clerk; “if the applicant proves worthy of the situation, you can be released and take care of yourself.”

De Montfort saw that the young man was deeply agitated; he turned partly round in his chair, a hectic glow upon his cheek, and a large pearly tear rested in the corner of one eye as he replied, “It will be of no use now, and I would rather remain as long as I can, sir.” As he uttered these words, an expression of suppressed internal anguish passed over his pale features, but he only pressed his thin hand upon his side a little longer than usual, and patiently waited a reply.

“You grow miserly, Benson, I must not allow it, and if we can find another clerk as faithful in Mr. De Montfort, I must discharge you, for you really ought to do something for yourself.”

There was no reply; the young man bowed as if he well knew the utility of remonstrance, and after closing his eyes with his hand for a moment to hide his emotion, proceeded with his copying.

"You look trusty," said the man of business after a long and very close scrutiny of De Montfort's countenance, during which his full, clear eye neither quailed nor cowed beneath the searching glance of the merchant, "what can you tell me of yourself and where do you reside—your references also, we never admit a clerk without the best of those?"

"I am a comparative stranger in this city, having been here but a few months," replied the applicant in a rich, manly voice, "and reside in a cottage of my own in Orton-street. As to references, I have only one, and that is from Lord Elwyn," and he drew a paper from a small black morocco pocket-book.

"From Lord Elwyn! Have you ever been employed in his service?"

"He knew me in my own country sir," replied the young man, avoiding the question, "and considers me worthy the place which I desire."

The terms were discussed, and it was agreed that De Montfort should be accepted on trial for a few days; he therefore went to Benson ostensibly to learn the duties of his office, upon which he wished to enter immediately, but after a few necessary directions De Montfort replied, "I understand perfectly; now tell when and where I may hold a little private conversation with you, and let it be as soon as possible."

"My time expires in ten minutes," said the clerk, looking at a large silver watch, apparently some relic of antiquity; if you choose to wait that time, here are the last papers to amuse yourself with. I must not stop longer.

De Montfort took the papers and helped himself to a chair, not having had one offered, the master not condescending—the clerk not daring to do so. But it was not to read. He watched each motion of the sick man with a constantly increasing interest, but could not understand his repugnance to a removal. Having finished the necessary writing for the day, Benson examined one by one each article contained in the old service room desk; the heavy books with their coarse leather bindings, the letters, the papers, the ink-stand, the sand dish, even the brown blotting paper, seemed to have some memory of joy or pain connected with it. It was evident that he was parting with old friends, valued not so much for themselves, as for the remembrances connected with them. He had sat their for years—the desk and its appendages were a part of his being—who shall wonder that he sighed as he gazed upon them for the last time?

"Come," said De Montfort at last, "it is time for your release, and I have much to say to you."

The young man started. Was it possible that any one was interested in his fate? It was something so new, that the voice of sympathy was like balto his wounded spirit.

"Benson," said the merchant, taking out an immense pocket book, "come for your salary before you go. It is not the regular day, but I will make an exception in your case. You have been a faithful clerk," and he handed him a roll of bills after having counted them twice.

"Count them, sir, and see if all is right," said the merchant somewhat sternly, as Benson was putting them in his pocket.

As the clerk tremblingly laid one bill after another upon the table, the major repeatedly opened and shut his pocket-book, as if tempted to add a gift to his salary, and his lips moved nervously in the struggle between benevolence and avarice, but at last he shut it firmly, placed it in a black leather trunk the key of which he put in his pocket muttering "nonsense? I have paid his due," and turning to Benson said, "take care of yourself and your money too, young man, it may be long before you earn so much again," and bowing to the young gentlemen, they both left him.

Major Trellan might indeed, in all probability, have had a heart once, but it had been divided into shares and distributed among stocks, interest money, importation and exportation bills, rise and fall of merchants, insurance companies, bank dividends, &c, &c, till none of it remained for charity.

De Montfort offered an arm to Benson as they left Major Trellan's office, walked slowly in the direction chosen by the latter. After a moment's

the former said, "Our acquaintance has been so brief that I feel much hesitation in asking something of your history, but if I do not offend you, pray tell me why you were so reluctant to leave an employment which is evidently injuring you?"

"Oh it is a very simple matter," replied Benson endeavouring to be calm, "I have a mother and only sister depending upon my salary—only four hundred at the most—but we manage it with great economy. Some months ago I felt my health breaking down from such intense application, and I requested permission to resign, trusting to Providence for another situation after I should have recovered."

"Well, it was granted of course."

"Oh no! on the contrary I was told that it was impossible for me to leave till another was secured in my place. No one has offered till you came to day."

"And you would have preferred that I should have been refused—I saw it in your countenance. This is what I wished to understand."

"I am very selfish I acknowledge, but the thought of those loved ones at home without money, without resources, lay heavy upon my heart. I know that I must die—that nothing now can save me—I might have lived, but now it is impossible, and I had resolved to work till the last."

"Brave heart!" exclaimed De Montfort; "and it is I who have prevented the accomplishment of this heroic resolution. But in return for that, I ought to be of some service to you—let me reflect."

At this moment they arrived before a large uncomfortable looking building at which Benson paused, and said as rapidly as his difficult breathing would allow, "This is my home, sir; if you have more to say to me, will you come in? I am too much fatigued to walk farther." De Montfort readily accepted the invitation ascending two flights of stairs, during which Benson had often to pause, they entered a low small room, and were received by a matron of fifty years and a little girl of twelve, the mother and sister of Benson.

De Montfort expressed great sympathy for his friend, and assured him that he would do everything in his power to assist him and his relatives. He desired them to make his cottage their future residence, where he would send a physician to attend upon Herman Benson. This offer was gratefully accepted.

Mrs. Benson thanked De Montfort for his kindness, both to herself and her son and daughter; and De Montfort soon after left, to prepare for his new occupation.

De Montfort being employed by the major on confidential business was occasionally sent to his private residence. He was there one day when the following conversation took place:—

"There is Lord Elwyn's carriage," exclaimed Carlotta in high glee. "He has come at last! How I wish papa would send away that young man in the hall. I do not like his lordship to see such vulgar people about the house."

"Hush! He will hear you and his feelings will be wounded," replied a voice so low that it scarcely reached De Montfort; "your father says that young gentleman is his new clerk and he respects him much."

"This is not Lord Elwyn after all," interrupted Carlotta, in a disappointed tone. "But see, he has a note. How I wish that clerk would go. I dislike to have even the servant see him here."

But there he stood, passive as a machine, and saw the proud girl receive the note from the hands of the servant, press it to her lips, and eagerly peruse it with flashing eyes and burning cheeks. It simply announced the return of the writer, and requested permission to visit her.

"Say to Lord Elywn that I am at home this evening," was the commission she gave the servant, who bowed and departed.

"Good!" thought De Montfort, "I am not recognised by Marcellus. One more trial and I shall be quite satisfied."

At the same moment Edna entered the hall and politely requested him to walk into the parlour, as he must be much fatigued with standing.

"Thank you, Lady," he said in a low, musical voice which caused her to star.

and endeavour to recal the time, the place, when that same sweet sound had fallen upon her ear.

"This is Mr. De Montfort," she said, her natural kindness causing her to be at times regardless of ceremony. "I have to-day heard my uncle speak very highly of you."

The stranger bowed with exceeding grace, and replied, "It is an honour I had not anticipated to receive the encomiums of Major Trellan; but a happiness far greater than my utmost expectations could reach, to hear those praises echoed by the fair lips of his beautiful niece."

"You know me then," she said, drawing her work-table towards her, and feeling quite at her ease after this unceremonious introduction.

"Only as the beautiful and the good are always known," he replied, letting the light of his clear, brilliant eyes fall upon her with a joyous, grateful expression. "I last night heard Miss Edna Trellan's name repeated with overflowing hearts and tears of gratitude, for she had restored to one humble dwelling its light—its idol."

Edna blushed, for she had not supposed her deed of benevolence known. "He, too, visits the cottages of the suffering," she thought, and it was an invisible bond of sympathy between them. One topic led to another, till Edna found herself imperceptibly becoming deeply interested in the rich and varied conversation of the young clerk, and rather regretted than otherwise to see her uncle enter the parlour. After a few moments conversation with him, Mr. De Montfort arose to depart. Edna arose, saying, "my dear uncle, with your permission I would invite Mr. De Montfort to share with us now and then an hour of his leisure."

"Certainly, child, certainly, whenever he wishes; he is welcome."

Pleasure sparkled in the fine eyes of the stranger clerk as he replied, "They will be the happiest hours of my life."

An early hour that evening brought Lord Elwyn, who was overwhelmed with inquiries as to his absence, congratulations upon his return, and protestations of delight upon his again making one of their evening visitors. To Edna he had never seemed so much the creature of fashion, of what the world calls nobility; his dress, his hair, his ornaments, his manner, each and all inspired her with a slight but unconquerable feeling of contempt. The distance had never seemed so great between them, and she quietly contrasted the rich hour of social, intellectual intercourse, unburdened by ceremonies, which she had so recently enjoyed, with the important fashionable nothings—the cutting sarcasms and the shafts of wit exchanging between himself and her cousin.

Carlotta laboured to be brilliant, and was successful. Lord Elwyn's only happiness seemed to be in calling forth more and more her peculiar and widely acknowledged powers of fascination; time, however, has revealed a higher, nobler motive for action, and this proved to be but one item in the part he had to play with the intriguing mother and ambitious daughter.

At length they began to rally Edna upon her silence. "She is dreaming of the young clerk," said Carlotta mischevously. "He was presuming enough to come here, and she condescended to talk with him."

"Which you would never do?" said Lord Elwyn inquiringly.

"Never!" she replied haughtily. "But see! it must be as I say—she blushes." Truly she did blush till her fair neck was a glowing crimson, as an undefinable glance from Lord Elwyn's eye met hers, seeming to pervade in one instant her whole being.

Recovering herself in a moment she said firmly,—“However you may ridicule the idea, I have never met with a more perfect gentleman, or one whose thorough and well-bred politeness is more a part of his being, than Mr. De Montfort's, and I announce to you that I promise myself many delicious hours in his society. There are many topics upon which I wish to converse with him, sure that I shall in every way prove the gainer. I only hope that he will not forget his promise.”

"No! lady, no!" she distinctly heard behind her at this moment, and sprang from her seat to ascertain from whence that sweet sound came, but there was only

Lord Elwyn lounging upon a sofa, and Carlotta, who had heard nothing, exclaimed in great surprise, "What! is our clerk to visit here?"

"With your father's permission I have invited him," quietly replied Edna, her thoughts still dwelling upon that voice.

An expression of scorn and contempt curled the lips and bent the brow of the proud girl as she replied, "Ah! one would not think that she was descended from the aristocracy of England and America!" A moment after their conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Major Trellan and his lady, accompanied by several friends to whom they were proud to say that Lord Elwyn had returned at the expected time, and was their constant visitor. Some introductions took place, the conversation became general, and at a late hour Lord Elwyn departed, but not till he had bestowed upon Edna one of those sweet smiles which lay for week's afterwards like a life-giving sunbeam in her path, but which it was equally impossible for her to forget or understand.

CHAPTER VI.

AN IMPORTANT DISCOVERY.

WHEN George De Montfort (for under his assumed character we will use his accustomed name) entered the very respectable mercantile house of Trellan & Co. it was as a part of the agreement between that gentleman and himself, that his duties in the counting room should be limited to four hours each day. When a wish to this effect was first expressed by De Montfort, the worthy merchant was puzzled to comprehend its design, but acceded to it upon the condition of a corresponding reduction of wages. The motive, however, will be quite plain to the reader. So much leisure served to make De Montfort an object of suspicion and dislike to some eight or ten fellow clerks in and about the warehouse.

These young men were accustomed to live together with that kind of vulgar familiarity to which De Montfort with his lofty nature found it impossible to descend. They perceived his superiority at once, and determined to act upon the levelling principle so common among all classes; it was impossible to go up to him, he must, therefore, of necessity, come down to them—at least that was their view of the matter.

His quick perception required no assistance in detecting and appreciating the true state of the case, but he chose rather than to reveal himself, to endure their scorn and ill-natured remarks, taking occasion only to remove his writing-desk opposite a large crack where he could both see and hear the operations and remarks of his enemies. At length, headed by two of the most reckless, they resolved to follow him and ascertain where and to what purpose he bestowed such unwonted leisure. The plan was deemed so desirable and promised such satisfactory results, that it was thought best to put it in operation without delay.

Their business was completed for the day, the windows were closed, and grouped about the door they awaited with much impatience his appearance from an inner room which had no other outlet than through the one they were in. A delay quite unusual on the part of De Montfort caused them to be somewhat irritable, which they were venting in no very set phrases upon each other, when the door of the counting room opened, and a middle-aged and somewhat care-worn man stepped among them, in a harsh tone demanding.

"Where is the head clerk? I have been waiting more than an hour—where he, I say?"

Their surprise was so great that they regarded first him and then the door, and finally each other, the boldest exclaiming,—

“And we, too, were waiting for him,” while the more timid walked silently away.

“Is not Mr. De Montford in the counting-room?” at length one ventured to ask.

“I tell you,” said the man gruffly, “I have been alone there for an hour; it is no light matter to be obliged to waste one’s time in this manner,” and he went away grumbling.

After turning two or three corners, he relaxed the muscles of his face, pulled his hair from behind his ears, unbuttoned and threw back his coat, took off an extra neckcloth, and De Montford proceeded merrily on his way, leaving, as usual, a mystery behind him.

“Ah, my dear Herman, how are you to-night?” he asked of the young invalid, as he entered Violet Cottage, and drew a chair beside him.

“Better, I think, or it is this comfortable home and bed-room without the effort of ascending stairs, and these easy chairs and stuffed sofa, in place of my hard stool at the office, and an amusing book with your pretty flowers, instead of those monstrous ledgers and four bare walls which makes me feel so; at any rate, I am better, and I owe it all to you,” and tears gathered in his soft blue eyes.

“O, it is nothing, my friend. I am as much the gainer as you. Instead of a solitary home where I had to make my own tea and coffee, here is now a fine domestic circle to welcome, of which little Mary is, by no means, the least,” and he drew the child upon his knee to share with her the mirthfulness of her kitten.

“There is only one objection to our mode of life here,” said Mrs. Benson, seriously, “but I confess it is one which weighs heavily upon my heart, saddened as it has been, by the sorrows of the past.”

“What is it, my good lady?” asked De Montfort, somewhat surprised, as his mind ran rapidly over the many luxuries which the cottage contained.

“It is the thought,” she replied sadly, like one whom long necessity had taught to look only upon the dark side of every object, “that some time we must leave it, and return to our old habitation; which, in comparison, seems more gloomy than ever, or,” she added in a lower tone, “perhaps we shall then be reduced to a worse one.”

“Ah! it is such a comfort to me that you find no fault with my cottage,” replied De Montfort, gaily. “I should not bear even an insinuation peaceably, for you see, I take great pride in its arrangement, and as to your objection, it has not the least weight. Shall I be willing to live by myself again after awhile? Do you mean to manage so badly as to compel me to drive you out?” and he laughed heartily, at which the good woman smiled, and cheerfulness seemed about to be restored, when De Montfort touched upon another topic which again threw a sadness over the little party.

“What said the physician whom I sent?” he asked of Herman.

“The only hopes he has of my recovery are founded on my removal to a warmer climate.”

“How very fortunate! That idea had occurred to me to-day, and I resolved to propose it immediately; now you cannot hesitate. Come, I will propose a plan. I have a little business, very urgent and special, though, to be transacted with an individual near Charleston, S. C. I do not like to trust the mail, and have feared that I should be forced to go myself for want of a faithful agent. You are just the person; it will serve you as an errand, and as you go for me, I shall of course be responsible for the expense. All is arranged, you see, and as I am in some little haste, you will be ready to start in a week, and in a few months return to us quite well and stout. These are happy thoughts, are they not?” he added, looking cheerfully around.

But it was no light task to persuade the anxious mother to part with her only son, whom she regarded as little better than already buried. De Montfort, however, would take no refusal, and from that moment began to settle preliminaries as if the matter would not admit another doubt.

A week from that day, Violet Cottage was the scene of a parting which clouded with anguish three human hearts—three hearts bound together by intense love, isolation from the world, the sufferings of the past, and faint glimmerings of hope for the future. The deep, burning withering agony of the mother, which dried up even her tears, the unrestrained weeping of the sister, the mournful sadness of the young man, who feared that he was going from his home but to die, and from long habit concealed his sorrow in his own bosom, the trunk ready packed, the unconquerable restlessness which invariably precedes a departure upon a long journey, were the characteristics of the scene.

"The weather is intensely cold," said De Montfort, entering as the invalid drew on an over-coat which had seen much wear and many repairs, "and you will wear this for my sake," taking from his own person a new substantial cloak, one of the warmest material, with a quilted lining beneath its broad velvet facings, "and these, too, must go with the cloak," he added, as he fastened a heavy fur collar about the neck of the young man, and placed in his hands a pair of gloves of the same material. "Here are few things which will be useful or serve for your amusement," and he placed upon a table a morocco case, which Benson afterwards found to contain some ordinary medicines with directions for using them, writing materials, the pocket edition of Shakspeare, beautifully bound in purple silk and gold, with a few lighter works, all of the miniature size, and last of all a sum of money, which seemed to him quite extravagant, but which proved that his friend understood travelling far better than himself.

Their generous benefactor would have been overwhelmed with thanks, had he not prevented them by a look which seemed to say, "It is my affair after all."

The moment of departure came at last, and Herman Benson entered the carriage that was to take him a short distance, with a face smiling through its tears, for his tender heart had been thoroughly affected by so much unexpected kindness.

"Remember you are to write to me regularly," were the last words of De Montfort, as he pressed the hand of his friend through the window of the carriage, and then began bustling about very busily that he might not appear to notice the tears of the widowed mother and the lone sister.

"Mrs. Benson," said he at last, with considerable energy, as if a new thought had just occurred to him, "I can see that it will be exceedingly inconvenient for you to manage all these affairs without some assistance, and I shall send a man to you regularly every day, to do whatever you wish; you need not fear to trust him in everything, and should you wish for me at any time, he will always know where I am to be found." This was said with so natural an air, that it never occurred to the good woman that there was any mystery connected with the matter. "Good morning; I shall dine with you," he said, opening the street door.

The visits of the young clerk at Major Trellan's had by this time become a general topic of remark and discussion in the extensive circle of their fashionable acquaintance. Edna's superior loveliness, with her large fortune, would have made her an especial object of attention in the match-making world, had it not been everywhere known that she was betrothed to the only son of Major Trellan when both were children, and that their marriage was looked upon as a settled thing. It created, therefore, no little surprise when the news flew from mouth to mouth that De Montfort was allowed to pay her the most undoubted attention.

"Do you love him, Edna?" I asked, looking directly in her beautiful face, for about this time a singular concurrence of circumstances made us the best of friends. "Do you love him?"

"I do not know," she replied, after a moment's thought; "I am happier with him than with any other, but he seems to me too much enveloped in mystery."

"That is to say, you have not learned to trust him entirely."

"I suppose it is so, and yet he is a very exalted being. I believe I reverence more than I love him," she replied artlessly,

"Does he love you?"

"He has never told me so," but the bright blush that mantled her cheek, and the merry twinkle of her blue eye, revealed the secret more than her words. It was as yet an unrevealed love, but as true and lasting as if it had been spoken in vows, and ratified by the marriage ceremony.

That evening Lord Elwyn was cold and thoughtful, and suddenly interrupted Carlotta in the midst of an animated description of a recent ball to request a short



private interview with Edna. Somewhat composed, she led the way to another parlour, and by accident to the one where hung the family portrait already alluded to as having engrossed so much of his attention upon the night of the ball.

Lord Elwyn stood a moment before the picture with closed arms, fixed eyes, in an attitude of deep thought, mournfully, yet tenderly, gazing upon the lady, who

was weeping, and the young boy who was watching her, his lips slightly parted as if to catch the least sound. Suddenly turning, he clasped Edna's hands in his own, saying,—

"You are like your mother—I remember her."

"You!" exclaimed Edna. "You knew my mother!"

"And that boy"—continued Lord Elwyn regardless of her astonishment.

"Was you? Oh I see it—how very like," interrupted Edna, as for a moment this countenance assumed the juvenile expression of the boy on the canvass. It was but momentary however, and had passed so quickly as to be more like a dream than a reality. Edna turned her eyes alternately from the portrait to her visitor, and back again in that strange bewilderment where one almost doubts the evidence of one's own senses, and Lord Elwyn neither spoke nor moved, but allowed her time to recover from her surprise. "Yes, I remember the lady Isabel and I loved her," he said at last, in that monotonous tone that indicated the recalling of some reminiscence, rather than the recital of facts to another. "She married an American—a man without name or fortune, speculator—and her father was deeply angry. He was a nobleman whose pride was excessive, but he idolized his daughter and that my intercession forgave her, but notwithstanding all I could say, he withheld her fortune. But he was afterwards just to her. The Lady Isabel was my cousin, and young as I was, trusted and implored my influence. Her grief was mine" and he stopped suddenly, evidently forgetful or regardless of the presence of Edna, his eyes resting upon the lady of the portrait till tears gathered in them and rolled down his manly face. "Child of Isabel!" he exclaimed, clasping her in his arms, and she felt, as she leaned on his bosom, that it heaved with some strong emotion not yet revealed. Can you keep a secret?" he asked, putting her *from* him, and smiling sweetly.

"It being the first favour which, as my cousin, you ask of me, I shall at least try," she replied.

"Then say nothing of our relationship, at least not at present," he said, looking in her eye for consent to his wish.

"This is a strange request my lord," she replied, her face flushed with indignation that he should be unwilling to acknowledge her as a relative.

"I know it, but there are reasons so weighty as to overcome my repugnance to making it. Wait a little, have patience with me a few weeks or months as the case may require, and all shall be explained."

"Then you will not trust me," said Edna with some spirit.

"The way is not yet clear," said Edna; it involves more than you dream of; give me this one promise of secrecy, and you shall have my sincere gratitude."

"You have it my lord; no one shall learn the subject of our interview from me."

"Let us drop titles when alone; call me simply cousin. I have one more promise to exact from you. There are many dangers in life for one so young, so beautiful, and above all so rich, and, besides the friends with whom you reside, and who I think are not altogether disinterested, you have no relative but myself. A rupture may occur—I do not say that it will, but all things are possible—and I would provide against it. Promise me, then, that in any exigency whatever you will confide in me."

"You have been very kind to me and my gratitude,—"

"No—no, that will not do," he continued gravely. "I may see many difficulties in your path which you do not—promise me then, that should any doubt arise, should your confidence in others suddenly be shaken and you wish for a true confiding friend, you will come or write to me. Do not trust to appearances. I have many more thoughts of you than my general indifference would seem to indicate. Will you promise?" and his noble soul shone out from his clear dark eyes with such radiance and lofty benevolence, that she felt all her first impressions respecting him revive.

"I promise," she said slowly, giving him her hand, but he drew her towards him and kissed her forehead, saying, "the compact is now sealed. Move steadily on

in the path dictated by honour or love, and fear not; trust ever and implicitly in the powerful arm which shall protect you."

Edna blushed deeply, for she fancied that Lord Elwyn had discovered her love-secret.

"I suppose," he continued gayly after a moment's pause, "that you would hardly accept my hand if I were to offer it now?"

"Do not speak of it," she said quickly, "unless you wish at once to destroy all the delightful sensations that I feel on finding you so near a relative, and compel me to regret my promise."

"Ah, well I could not urge it; be true to the love which fills your soul, and may God so prosper me as I am true to your happiness." The last words were spoken with indescribable tenderness, and with a smile so sweet that Edna felt that it must be a token of coming good; he then led her into the hall and bidding her make his peace with Carlotta, and be silent on their interview he departed.

CHAPTER VII.

A DOMESTIC SCENE—LOVE REVEALED.

IMMEDIATELY after Lord Elwyn retired with Edna for a private conversation, Carlotta indignantly flew to her mother's sitting room where, that lady was as usual dozing away her evening; it was her common practice when not at the theatre or a ball. Carlotta entered at once upon a history of the insult offered her, the whole blame to which, she had no hesitation in at once laying upon Edna, declaring it to be her solemn conviction that it was a deliberate plan, and previously communicated to Lord Elwyn. Major Trellan was summoned from his study to the family council, Edna's downright refusal of Ernest in the intercepted letter communicated to him, the visits of De Montfort dwelt upon, and finally the interview then in progress.

Mrs. Trellan, as usual, recommended extreme caution and management—but her husband and daughter were resolved to pursue the opposite course of open warfare. Scarcely therefore, had Edna ascended to her cabinet, where she wished to contemplate in silence the singular event of the evening with the consequences necessarily involved, when a servant entered to request her presence with the family. Somewhat disturbed, but still having no ostensible reason for a refusal, she obeyed. Her heart fluttered a little as she entered and saw the stern, lowering brow of her uncle, the cunning yet somewhat triumphant smile of her aunt, and the hatred and malicious desire for revenge in the countenance of Carlotta.

Edna possessed in reality a true and lofty courage which had as yet scarcely been proved, and of which, those who persecuted her were little aware. She did not proceed to a seat as under other circumstances she would have done, but advancing to about the centre of the room, she turned her eye slowly and tranquilly on each, finishing with her uncle, to whom she said quietly.—"One would suppose from the ominous appearances that you had summoned me as a culprit to answer for some serious offence. For what purpose is my presence desired?"

This address, so much in contrast with her universal amiability, created surprise in all, but in none more than her uncle, because it was always a matter of astonishment when any one seriously opposed his wishes.

"I learn," he said regarding her with a fierce expression as if he could if he would annihilate her, "that you have dared to refuse to fulfil the contract made by your father with myself—that you have unconditionally declared this refusal to my son,

not content with that, you have laid deep plans to win the affections of Lord Elwyn from my daughter, intending to marry him your son. Instead of commanding or punishing you, as I doubtless could, I condescend to reason and expostulate with you. What do you reply to all this?"

"Nothing," replied Edna with the same imperturbable coolness.

"Ah! my love, you forget" began her aunt, diplomatically.

"Silence!" exclaimed the uncle, "I wish to speak. These are serious charges" very serious. Why then do you answer me with the word nothing?"

"Simply because there is nothing to be said," returned Edna firmly. "You say that you are aware of the fact that I have refused to marry your son. I read to you some day's since his refusal to marry me. It is a settled thing—we cannot marry—more than that, we WILL NOT marry. All this sir, by your own statement you already knew; it is plain then that I had in reality nothing to say."

"But the last command of your dying father," again commenced Mrs. Trellan, who secretly trembled under Edna's firm, courageous expression, and saw in this determined will the loss of a fortune, and the failure of her plans.

"I have already told you, madam, that my father did not command me. I admit that it was his wish that we should be thus betrothed, and I acceded to that wish for two reasons. I was far too young to understand the value or import of the ceremony! of course it is not now binding upon me. Again, my only parent was dying, and had he then asked the sacrifice of my life at a certain age, the request would as soon have been granted. But this is useless. Ernest and myself have not that exalted and fate defying affection for each other that I deem necessary to secure our mutual happiness, and without this I will never marry."

"Affection!" repeated the hard-hearted merchant with a sneer. "I did not send for you to preach to me about affection; it is all a humbug. I had once some such idle notion myself, but the wear and tear of the world takes it all away."

"But when did you make this important discovery of a want of affection for Ernest?" demanded her aunt quizzingly.

"When Lord Elwyn began to visit us doubtless," interrupted Carlotta with a malicious smile.

"It opened itself upon me by degrees," replied Edna with a forced calmness, and allowing the insolence of her cousin to pass unnoticed, "as the subject of our marriage became a familiar theme for conversation. Then came the consideration of its duties and its pleasures, and my heart told me plainly that I could neither undertake the former with a courage animated by love, or enjoy the latter with a cheerfulness made enduring by mutual sympathy. In fact I love Ernest as my brother; no deeper love for him has even animated my bosom. Do you understand me, madam, and you, sir?" and she regarded each deliberately.

"I understand nothing of all this," replied her uncle gruffly, "but the fact remains the same, that you are pledged to marry my son and no earthly power shall prevent it. You are in your minority, and your person and property are in my possession. Perhaps that circumstance did not occur to you while so bravely asserting your independence."

"I knew the fact very well," quietly responded Edna, "but it does not in the least degree alter my intentions."

Edna's unshaken courage made two hearts tremble for the success of their favorite plan, and Major Trellan, supposing there must be a motive for what he termed "unheard of obstinacy," resolved to attack her at another point.

"What was the subject of your interview with Lord Elwyn to-night?" he demanded sternly,

This was a more difficult position for Edna. It suited well with her ingenuous frankness to take the fearless, definite position she had done with regard to her marriage, but on this point her honor was involved; she would keep her promise at any risk, though she perceived at once that she was liable to the worst suspicions, and with a little agitation she replied, "I cannot tell you, sir?"

"That is," interrupted the aunt, "you will not tell. It was doubtless a plan

Previously arranged by you and communicated to him, in which his politeness prompted him to accede to your wishes. No wonder then that you do not choose to reveal what is so much against yourself," and an intelligent expression quickly passed between the worthy matron and her daughter.

"A promise suddenly becomes very sacred," said Carlotta with a disagreeable laugh.

Edna's eyes, with unruffled calmness, rested a moment on her cousin's face as she replied, "I understand you. I disregarded the promise made to Ernest—I fulfil that made to Lord Elwyn. It is because I choose to do thus."

"Answer me one question," said Major Trellan sternly. "Did Lord Elwyn ask you to become his wife?"

"Not directly sir," replied Edna without the least apparent confusion.

Carlotta meanwhile had regarded her cousin searchingly and with the instinctive jealousy of a woman who fears to find a rival, she discovered what all the formal questions of her father could not—that is, that she did not love Lord Elwyn.

"Papa," said she quickly, "let me assist you. Did not your new clerk, Mr. De Montfort, state that he had a reference from Lord Elwyn? I think I heard you say so. Perhaps Miss Edna wished to consult him upon the character and prospects of one who occupies so many of her thoughts, and so much of her leisure. Ah! I have guessed right—see! how beautifully the detection of this secret colours her cheek!"

For the first time during this strange conference, Edna's heart throbbed violently, her eyes turned restlessly in their sockets, the colour came and left her cheeks so rapidly as to cause a constant change of complexion, and the firm assurance she had manifested till now, seemed at once to forsake her.

"Is there any engagement between yourself and De Montfort?" asked the merchant, who saw no way to arrive at his object but by plain questions.

"There is none," said Edna quickly, glad to deal with him rather than her more subtle aunt and cousin, and wishing, with all the timidity of a first love, to conceal it within her bosom.

"Nevertheless papa she loves him," interrupted Carlotta, "and this love is the mountain—the impassible barrier that stands between herself and Ernest. It will be a proud alliance," she continued exultingly, "both for my nobly descended cousin, and for our family. Edna must feel herself highly honoured in being chosen by an unknown fortune hunter. No doubt he revels in the prospect of enjoying her fine fortune."

These words, uttered in a tone of bitter sarcasm, filled the heart of Edna with mournful sadness. It was then demonstrated to a certainty that she had not a friend in her uncle's house. Each one tormented her in the way best suited to them, and with this conviction she sank upon a chair and pressed her hand convulsively upon her forehead, while a shade of deeper agony passed over her fine features.

"It is well," said her uncle fiercely, "that no engagement has been formed between my clerk and yourself. My clerk indeed! that comes of my leniency. I have been a fool to trust you so much. From this hour De Montfort shall be forbidden the house, and in less than a week Ernest shall be summoned to meet his bride. The wedding is fixed for this day month, and in the mean time you will be too much occupied with preparations to receive my clerk; I shall take care that he knows it."

"Is that your fixed resolution, sir?" asked Edna, once more rising, as with a calm and dignified air she confronted her uncle.

"Fixed! who ever knew me to change my mind?" and he regarded her with an expression of contempt.

"Then you will discover sir, in time, that I too am capable of an unchanging determination," and she left the apartment so rapidly as to see distinctly the garments of a retreating figure. Bertha had listened to the whole conversation.

"Well, that is what I anticipated," exclaimed Mrs. Trellan, enraged at the result: "you have driven her too far; she will now prove troublesome to you. If I

had managed it—" Here Major Trellan suddenly picked up a book he had previously been using, and retired abruptly to his study, not condescending to notice in the least the remark of his lady.

"There is a chance of success with Lord Elwyn," began Carlotta after her father's disappearance, "I will question him about Edna if he comes to-morrow night for I cannot endure this suspense." But she calculated badly; nearly a week passed ere she again saw him, and in that disastrous week, gloom and sorrow were spread through the house.

"We shall lose her fortune at last! I feel it!" exclaimed Mrs. Trellan with some vehemence and more bitterness, forgetful of her daughter's presence; "after playing the hypocrite so many years—after concealing in my bosom a secret I would give worlds not to know—after—"

"A secret! what is it? no secrets from me I hope," and the sound of Carlotta's voice caused her to tremble, but she did not lose her presence of mind.

"It simply relates to Edna's fortune. It is much larger than she supposes, and we have concealed the fact that it might not have a bad influence upon the child," replied this pattern of a mother in the most natural tone.

"A fine story to put me off with," murmured Carlotta as she slowly ascended the stairs to the parlour occupied by herself and cousin. Slightly raising the curtain which concealed the entrance of Edna's cabinet, she saw the young girl upon a low cushion near the fire, her head resting upon her hand, but the profusion of curls which had escaped from their confinement and fell over her face, prevented the expression from being seen. Many conflicting thoughts agitated her bosom. She saw plainly that it was her uncle's intention to force her marriage with Ernest. Her promise to Lord Elwyn occurred to her, and this seemed a time for its fulfilment. For a moment she resolved to see or write to him immediately, and freely communicate her position. But De Montfort had never addressed her in the language of love. Here then was a new difficulty. She could not say to Lord Elwyn, "I love De Montfort, and I will at all events marry him; assist me to do so," perhaps he, after all, would not choose to marry her; perhaps he would be unwilling to contend with the opposition that lay in their path. These doubts and fears drove away all tendency to sleep, and the first glimmering of morning found her slowly pacing the little room, as yet unable to form any settled plan for the future. At ten, the following note was brought to her by a stranger. It proved to be from De Montfort, and she perused it with mingled emotions of pride, joy, and love.

"I have dared to love," he wrote. "It is presumption—it may be madness, but who could bask for hours, as I have done, in the sunlight of those blessed smiles and not desire to dwell forever beneath their radiance! I have fancied too, at times, that the heightened colour in your cheek, and the flashing gleam from your eye, were messengers of love from your heart. Is it so? Am I indeed loved? There is rapture—Heaven itself in the thought. But I have so very little besides a strong hand and a loving heart to offer you, and what I have, is already shared with friends whom I cannot desert. Will you become the light, the joy of my humble home? Can you renounce accustomed luxuries, and receive instead a heart all devoted to you? It involves much, Edna; for my sake, and for your own, do not decide rashly. Your uncle has forbidden me his house, and tells me you are soon to be married, not a word of which will I believe till it is confirmed by your own lips. You have a friend in whom we can confide. If there is that in your heart which responds to mine, meet me there this evening, I have much to say. The man who leaves this shall call at three o'clock for a reply. G. D. M."

At seven that evening Edna came to me with that letter in her hand, and amid tears and blushes told me the story of her love, begging of me a parlour for the evening. It was strange to see the beautiful heiress—one who could have commanded the most splendid establishments in the city—asking of a friend a place to meet her lover; and yet her pure-heartedness was so apparent that not a suspicion of impropriety could attach itself to her for an instant.

She was standing near the fire when De Montfort entered, and in an attitude

upon which she had not bestowed a thought, but the exceeding grace of which I have never seen equalled. I arose to meet him at the door, but he simply pressed my hand without speaking, and going to her, neither bowed nor used the accustomed salutations, but clasping her hand in his own, looked upward for an instant, then with unutterable tenderness and in the low, sweet voice which had twice before thrilled her soul with its heavenly music, he said, "Lady, my whole future life shall repay this one kindness," and regardless of my presence, he folded her in his arms and kissed her lips, her eyes and forehead.

"She is my bride now," he said turning to me; then placing her upon the sofa, he held one little hand in his, and began talking in the most naturally quiet way imaginable. Edna had not yet spoken, but her face was one bright ray of joy. Assured that all would go well, I requested them to turn the key to secure themselves from intrusion, and retired to my own room.

At ten she came to seek me, and laying her head upon my shoulder wept from excess of happiness. "Some other time I will tell you all," she said "but the carriage is waiting now, and I would not leave without saying good night." We descended together; her lover lifted her into the carriage which she had ordered at that hour, carefully wrapped her in cloak and furs about her and bade her adieu deeply regretting that she would not allow him to accompany her.

It was severely cold, and he returned for a moment to the fire. "Lord Elwyn," said I, "you do not seek Edna's love to trifle with it?"

"On my life," he replied, "which is bound up in hers, I will strive ever for her happiness."

"Then why do you woo her in this disguise?" I inquired, somewhat anxiously.

"Allow me one question," he said in return. Had you, all your life been surrounded by the titles and gilded trappings of nobility, courted, caressed and served only for your name or your wealth, would you not desire above all else, one heart in the wide universe to love you for your own sake?" It was quite plain.

"But you will remove this disguise at the right time,?"

"Could you for a moment believe otherwise?" and his full, clear, dark eyes rested upon me with that peculiar light (for no other term will express it,) which at once gave me the most perfect assurance. There was that in his eye which he chose, which would have produced conviction in the most unbelieving and suspicious minds.

"But it is reported in the fashionable world, that in your own character, you are encouraging matrimonial anticipations in the head and heart of Major Trellan's daughter."

"In the head, perhaps," he answered quickly, "but not in the heart. Her heart is one that needs the severest storms of life to purify it, and remove the thick folds of ambition in which it is wrapped. Believe me, it will not easily break."

"But do you not fear strong opposition from Major Trellan? It is said that he is determined to secure Edna's fortune for his son,"

"I expect but I do not fear it," and with this assertion he drew on his gloves and departed.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CONFLAGRATION,—DR. HUNTLY,—THE DOUBLE COURTSHIP.

THE lovers did not soon meet. The following day saw the commencement of that scene of cruel devastation by fire which will never be forgotten by the inhabitants of New York. The warehouses of Trellan and Co., were among the first

offerings to the fiery demon. The only articles saved were a few books borne away by De Monfort at the risk of his life, the only thanks for which, were the jeers of his fellow clerks upon saving property on which he had no claim. The night passed—the morning—the day—another night—the second morning—and still the work of destruction progressed. Building after building fell—block after block—square after square—street after street became desolated, and many a happy family were driven from a luxurions home during a day and night of freezing coldness, without shelter to their heads—a garment for their persons, or a remnant of food or furniture.

Sorrow and mourning were universal ; a cloud hung over the city which months scarcely dissipated. Each day brought with it a more perfect knowledge of the distress and ruin that had been produced.

Gloomy and dejected, Major Trellan sat, day after day, in his dark study, dreaming of his misfortune, without an effort to overcome them, and ignorant of De Montfort's heroic act. Brooding, as usual, in melancholy silence, he was upon the fifth day after the extermination of the fire, much surprised by the entrance of a stranger, carrying six of his most valuable books in a black leather case, with the following note, during the perusal of which the stranger, still standing closely, watched each expression of his countenance.

"SIR,—You have forbidden me your house, or I would ere this, in person, have presented these books which I know are exceedingly valuable to you. Please receive my respects and my assurance, that though they were recovered at the risk of my life, I do not in the least regret the act, but am at your service whenever you wish for assistance in re-establishing your business,

"Very respectfully, G. De MONTFORT."

"Well soliloquised the man of the world, in a low, murmuring voice, the least sound of which the stranger caught, "I suppose this was intended as a polite hint to me to open my doors to him again; but who has any right to dictate or even to hint to me! No—no—I will not understand it. It was after all, but an act of common justice to rescue these books which are worth their weight in gold to me, and I cannot now afford to run the chance of loosing Edna and her fortune. In addition to my other losses this would complete my ruin." Then turning to the stranger, who had preserved through the whole an impenetrable, stolid countenance, he continued. "Tell Mr. De Montfort that I am very grateful for the return of these books, though it is a matter of surprise that he did not send them sooner, and that when ever I require his assistance, I will send for him," and ringing, he ordered the servant who appeared to show the man out.

Some four hours afterwards, Lord Elwyn's carriage appeared at Major Trellan's door. It was for the first time since the fire had deprived the merchant of a considerable portion of his property, and it had begun to be feared that such a misfortune would altogether disappoint the hopes founded upon their illustrious visitor. The carriage was therefore greeted as a happy omen, and the father in his study—the mother in her sitting-room, and the daughter in the parlour, waited with throbbing hearts to see who should emerge from it. It was a stranger. He announced himself as Lord Elwyn's servant, and delivered his message to this effect.

"That his master, after many assurances of sympathy, offered him the use of any sum of money his present exigencies required; it would be no inconvenience to his master, but, on the contrary, would confer a kindness upon Lord Elwyn to allow him to render the unfortunate merchant a temporary assistance."

Major Trellan was overwhelmed with gratitude, and begged the man to say to his master that he would do himself the honour to call the following day to express his thanks, and transact the necessary business connected with a loan. From that hour his hopes revived and he regarded his misfortunes as having now reached their climax, consequently, he saw in the future only those days of smiling prosperity to which he had been so long accustomed as to deem them his by right—which, in fact, had become as habitual with him, as the clouds of adversity with a greater part of the human race. But we will leave him to weave together the golden links of his broken fortunes, and follow awhile the traces of misery that abounded on every side.

Many, very many were the scenes of wretchedness, the bowed heads, the humbled and despairing hearts, the crushed hopes, the blasted prospects, the separations of loved ones, the family altars made desolate, the merry voices hushed, the bright eyes and fairy footsteps made sad and weary by that distressing conflagration. The haughty retired within themselves, scarcely forgiving the fate that subjected them at the same time to two misfortunes, nearly, if not quite, equal in



their view—the loss of their homes and the pity of the world. There were those who endured the evils attendant upon the former in silence and solitude, relieved only by death, rather than be subjected to the latter.

The superstitious viewed it as Noah did the flood—a punishment for the sins of the people, while the more humble and resigned sought to console and minister to each other so far as individual sufferings would permit. In short, there was misery at every turn; and the gentle hand of charity never had more ample em-

ployment than during the winter of '35 and '36. Many were burned and bruised—many became ill from cold, hunger and cruel anxiety, and others still broken spirited from the loss of loved ones, fainted and faded from the world, scarcely missed from the crowd of wretched sufferers.

Among these miserable ones, ministering to their pain-tortured bodies and despairing souls with a strong hand—nerves of iron and a patience never wearied, was a man apparently about the middle age, though he evidently would have appeared much younger had he relieved his clear undimmed eyes of the gold mounted spectacles which he constantly wore. His gold-headed cane might also have been dispensed with, for his erect bearing, and ample chest, were proofs sufficient that time and circumstances had not fallen heavily upon him. His features had that bold regularity of outline which our fancy is accustomed to bestow upon the ancient heroes of fame, but the intellectual, heroic beauty of his countenance was now deeply chastened by anxiety and compassion.

Dr. Huntly, for so the benevolent stranger styled himself, was everywhere welcomed with the look and smile of gratitude, and had evidently become an expected visitor. His daily visits and unostentatious charity elicited therefore little remark, save a wonder now and then among the more curious and least occupied, why, day after day, he sought the crowded rooms—the wretched hovels—the out-of-the-way places where these bereaved sufferers had bestowed themselves or been confined. It could not be for remuneration, for he was genteelly dressed and always accompanied by a servant carrying a basket with food and medicine, and would never receive a cent of the very few who had a trifle to offer.

“I come for my own pleasure and to do you good,” he would sometimes smilingly reply, as an allusion was made to his constant but unrequited professional visits, and well was he repaid in that for which he most wished—the undisguised confidence of the human heart; for if there is one before whom the mask of worldliness and deception is thrown aside, it is the truly benevolent physician. He comes to us when the pride of our natures is somewhat subdued by hopeless illness, and without thought of consequences, we repose in him a familiar and uncompromising trust.

Thus Dr. Huntly moved among his patients, learning from them many a lesson of human pride subdued—of sorrowing patience—of calm endurance and Christian fortitude. True, his servant was sometimes questioned as to their place of residence, and many trifling matters that interest the curious, but he invariably turned his eyes upon his master with an expression of reverence which emphatically said, “he is there; ask him,” but he was never heard to speak, and when addressed by the doctor, was well known to reply only by a low bow or an expressive gesture of the eye or hand.

But Dr. Huntly was by no means alone in his work of charity. Among those who, though strangers, had unconsciously become his assistants in this noble employment, he had often noticed a sweet girl of sixteen or seventeen years, with bright soft blue eyes, which seemed at times almost to melt away with the expression of deep sympathy that was so abiding as to prove its foundation to be the kindness and goodness of her nature. He sought no introduction to her, indeed it would have been useless; she seemed as much a stranger as himself. But he frequently lingered about the bed of a sick patient giving directions, which her little delicate hand performed with the ease and accuracy of an experienced nurse, but with the air of one nurtured in the circles of wealth and fashion.

“My kind young lady,” he said to her one morning as both met in a private hospital, he had caused to be prepared for the most extreme sufferers, “my kind young lady, will you assist me to raise this poor woman a little on her pillow? I think she cannot survive long, and if it is not too much, I would ask you to watch with me beside her, till the last struggle is over.”

“Certainly, sir, if I can render you any assistance,” was her answer, but her own lips became nearly as white as those of the dying woman, and the doctor felt her hand tremble as it came in contact with his beneath the pillow. Having elevated her to the right position, he supported her on his arm begging his fair

assistant to force a few drops of wine into her mouth, hoping—though it seemed a fruitless effort—to revive her once more. Edna, for it was no other, did as she was directed, and both were surprised to see the eyes of the dying woman languidly open, and after a moment rest upon her fair nurse with an expression of eager, intense hope. She had not spoken for hours—her limbs were cold and stiff—her breath came heavily and at long intervals; it was evidently the struggle of a powerful nature with death, and the former was apparently gaining the victory. During half an hour, in which her large eyes now glassy and unnaturally brilliant, never turned from Edna, she seemed to be making the most powerful efforts to speak, but as yet had not succeeded.

“More wine,” said the physician.

Edna placed the spoon between her rigid lips and closed teeth, and in a moment more the expression of gratitude in the eyes of the sick woman was apparent.

“It does her good, she will live,” said Edna, and the patient smiled faintly. At length her lips moved, and Edna, placing her ear quite close, caught the words pronounced at long intervals, “my child.”

“You have a child living; you wish to communicate something respecting it, do you not?” inquired Dr. Huntly.

Another smile appeared, but this time it covered her whole rigid and almost distorted countenance, and she cast her eyes slightly down and made an effort to raise her hand as if she wished for something in her bosom. Edna anticipated her wish, and passing her hand among the folds of the faded calico dressing gown, she was infinitely surprised to find a miniature, elegantly set in gold, of a boy of two years, with a fair face tinged with melancholy, large, liquid eyes, and light brown hair.

“Beautiful creature!” exclaimed Edna involuntarily, as she held it before the eyes of the woman, “how very like a friend of mine!” Dr. Huntly took the miniature in his hand and gazed long and earnestly upon it. When he again laid it in her motionless fingers, it was with a powerful effort that his countenance was inexpressive and his voice calm. However, he simply asked Edna to go to the next room and take the place of his servant for a moment, while he came to him. She complied instantly, pleased with a change even for an instant. When she was beyond hearing, Dr. Huntly clasped the hands of the woman in his own and throwing his whole soul into his eyes that he might, if possible, animate her, placed his face directly before hers and said in a low but thrilling voice, “Will you live if I will bring your son to you?” A violent spasm convulsed the whole frame of the sufferer, and he feared that he had gone too far. Redoubling his exertions, he at length succeeded in restoring her tranquillity; she was even better than before, and proved that she understood and remembered his question by slowly articulating “yes—yes.”

“In twelve days, madam, it shall be. Be patient—be calm. Do nothing to prevent or retard your recovery; events, important almost as life and death, depend upon it. I will be near you. I will watch over you, and when you are able, I have much to communicate and to hear from you.”

The servant appeared and was dispatched upon an errand; meanwhile Dr. Huntly penned a few lines, having always writing materials about him, and sealed the letter.

Again he turned to the invalid and fixing his eyes upon her, said, “you recognize the young lady who stood beside you?” “Yes,” was once more indistinctly uttered through her closed teeth. “It is well,” he replied.

A woman entered at this moment accompanied by the servant. Dr. Huntly first gave the letter to the man, accompanied by a few positive and definite orders. A low bow was the only reply, and he darted off with the rapidity of lightning. It was now twelve o'clock. At precisely a quarter past twelve, it was observed by the neighbours, who always noted such events, that a travelling carriage with four powerful horses, and two men upon the driver's box, drove out of Lord Elwyn's stables with great rapidity.

Meanwhile, Dr. Huntly had drawn aside the young woman who entered with

his servant and said, "You see that old lady who seems already more dead than alive? Well, she must live at all events. I know you to be an experienced and benevolent nurse. What money will induce you to remain beside her night and day till she is past all danger?"

"I would gladly do it for the poor sufferer," replied the young woman, "but I am restrained by more powerful duties—those of a mother—my children must suffer if I remain."

Dr. Huntly drew a purse from his pocket, saying, "here are fifty dollars. You have friends whom who can tempt with a portion of that, to assume your duties. If this woman recover under your care, I will give you as much more. Go—arrange your affairs and return to me in an hour," and he led her to the street door.

The servant returned and Edna relinquished her post—that of distributing food and cordials—and again joined the physician and the aged patient in whom she had become deeply interested.

Dr. Huntly had heard Edna, upon her entrance, request the servant to come at one, and the nurse having already appeared and received directions with a positive order to send for him if she becomes even slightly worse—he prepared to depart at the same time.

Following her into the small room which led into the street, he fastened her cloak about her, and assisted in putting on her fur shoes with an assiduity quite becoming in a younger man than he at present professed to be. Ready for her return Edna opened the door, and glancing both up and down the street, exclaimed somewhat impatiently, "No servant! I do not understand." "I will go and inquire," said the doctor very naturally, to which Edna bowed assent. Scarcely two minutes had passed ere Edna—who was standing near the top of a flight of steps—felt her arm lightly touched by some one from the opposite direction to that in which she was looking, and turning she beheld De Montfort to her great surprise and joy.

She involuntarily blushed as he pressed the little gloved hand in his inquired why she was there, and insisted upon seeing her home. She consented after pencilling a line upon a card to account to Dr. Huntly for her sudden departure. Slowly descending the steps, she did not perceive that De Montfort snatched the card from the table, while closing the door, and hastily concealed it in his pocket. A peculiar smile crossed the features of the handsome clerk as he drew Edna's arm within his own, and notwithstanding the cold walked slowly away in the direction of her uncle's dwelling.

A few minutes afterwards, Lobo departed from the same building, with a dark, sober looking coat upon his arm and a grave, broad brimmed hat dangling from his fingers. Passing through many streets, he drew a key from his pocket, entered a brick house, closed and fastened the door, ascending a flight of stair, entered a beautiful furnished suite of apartments. The first was a sitting-room, the second a sleeping, and the third a dressing-room, hung with every possible variety of clothing, while the dressing table was covered with wigs, and whiskers of various colours, several pairs of spectacles, a profusion of jewellery in cases, perfumes, &c., &c.

Lighting a fire in each apartment, Lobo proceeded to arranged upon a small table a dinner for one, which was scarcely done ere the bell announced a fresh arrival.

Lobo hastened to open the door, and De Montfort entered with a unusual flush of excitement upon his countenance, which might have been produced by the cold, or by the unexpected pleasure of meeting his beloved. "Ah! my lord;" was the servant's only ejaculation as his master entered and bent over the fire, but it was evident that there was something repressed.

"Well, Lobo, speak out," he replied somewhat more familiarly than usual.

"It is a sad business, my lord," he said, evidently making a powerful effort to overcome his natural taciturnity.

"Give me some dinner, my good friend, and I will then hear what you are talking about," said his master, drawing his chair to the table.

Standing at a respectful distance while De Montfort partook the light meal to

which he was oftened accustomed, Lobo commenced with what seemed to him extravagant volubility.

"They gossip about you, my lord, at the cottage."

"Well, is that strange?" asked De Montfort rather amused than otherwise to see Lobo struggle between his long habit of silence and his present desire to talk.

"Perhaps not, my lord, but extremely unpleasant for me to hear so good a master slandered."

"What do they say of me?"

"I do not wish to offend you, my lord, but—" and the man again hesitated.

"It will not offend me, Lobo. I am well aware that in the many characters which I assume, there is not only a possibility, but a strong probability that the curiosity of idle persons will often be excited, and the mass of the people, unaccustomed to restrain their thoughts or feelings, gossip continually about whatever arrests their attention. Tell me therefore what they say."

"That no honest man would be gone from home three-fourths of the time, that it is altogether improbable that your lordship gets a respectable living, and some have even hinted that you knew more than you would care to reveal about a gang of forgers of which the police have lately got track, and I accidentally learned that—"

"That they talk of arresting me," said De Montfort, finishing the sentence and laughing heartily.

"You are merry, my lord; is it then so very agreeable?"

"Not agreeable—no, but amusing."

"I thought it a serious and dangerous affair. If any evil should come—"

"Never fear man, never fear, they would not touch a hair of Lord Elwyr's head, though they might think they were doing the world a service in arresting the clerk De Montfort, simply because they do not understand all his movements."

Lobo still looked doubtful, which was unusual for him, for he had ever followed his master's thoughts, and obeyed his words without a doubt as to their infallibility.

"Time will prove to you that I am right," said De Montfort, correctly interpreting Lobo's countenance. "Bring the letters now, and then take your own dinner."

The servant obeyed with alacrity, his confidence fully restored, while De Montfort retired to his dressing room to peruse his letters and mature his plans in solitude. There were three letters; the first he opened was from Lira; it was like herself—soft, beautiful, loving, but wild, irregular, and unrestrained, and proved that her new home possessed already a thousand charms for her: she was living again, and his heart throbbed with rapture that his mind's eye could rest upon her and truly say, "I have created this happiness for her."

The second letter was as follows, and was dated several days previous.

"Some of the difficulties which you foresaw in our interview, have assumed a tangible form. I have met them with a firmness which has surprised myself, notwithstanding which I am constantly subject to the most petty and annoying persecutions. The same evening that you gave me so much pleasure by revealing to me our relationship, witnessed a domestic scene so disgraceful to the actors, that I would if possible forget it myself, but it is necessary that I speak of it. My uncle, for the first time, became convinced that Ernest and myself would really oppose the marriage so long projected, and declared his intention to send for him immediately, and to have the ceremony performed in one month. Our interview was also used as a weapon against me, and the secret which reposed in my inmost heart cruelly drawn forth and exposed to ridicule. I stood alone, but strong in myself, and in the promise of your protection, I distinctly and solemnly refused to fulfil our childish pledge. I am convinced that it is my money they seek, and have thought of making a compromise. What is your opinion? is it better to purchase my liberty, or take it by force? I shall be guided entirely by your advice,

I would conceal these troubles from De Montfort that I may not cause him unhappiness.
EDNA."

Having folded the letter he pressed it to his lips murmuring, "Sweet girl! she little dreams how fully De Montfort is acquainted with her life," and placed it in his bosom.

The remaining letter was from young Benson. He had rapidly improved during every stage of his journey, had successfully transacted the business entrusted to him, and was about to become a temporary member of a family with whose past history were connected some interesting and melancholy incidents, a relation of which had been promised him, and which he would note down for the amusement of his friends at home. His communication closed with many expressions of gratitude and sincere friendship.

"This will produce smiles at the cottage," he said, folding the letter and placing it with Lira's in a small cabinet. "Now let me reflect," and he sat another hour with his noble head slightly bent in an attitude of deep thought, but his countenance was impenetrable.

At the expiration of that hour he rang and Lobo appeared.

"I want another cottage similar to the one I now have, but furnished somewhat in the southern style. How much time do you require?"

"As much as is allowed me."

"Take a week then, and let everything be accomplished silently but thoroughly, and with true elegance."

"Has your lordship any preference for the location?"

"None, excepting a clean, healthy, quiet situation."

"Anything else, sir?"

"Order my carriage here at eight—that is all."

Ringing a short time after at Major Trellan's door, Mr. De Montfort requested to see Miss Edna. The servant who knew him well, refused to admit him, it being contrary to his master's orders. He then requested the man to take a note to her; this too, was among the interdicted things. He next asked to see Major Trellan. The servant requested him to stop a moment in the hall while he obtained permission for him to come in. No sooner had he disappeared in the direction of his master's study, than with one light bound De Montfort sprang up the broad stairs, and in an instant tapped lightly at the door of Edna's parlour. Fortune favoured him, she was alone.

"George!" she exclaimed as her eyes fell upon him, "George! are you mad?"

"No—far from it, my love. I trust that will never be the case so long as I am permitted to fold you in my arms," and with a corresponding action he clasped her to his heart in one long embrace.

"Do you know, George, that you are disobeying my uncle's orders in coming here, and I in receiving you?" asked Edna.

"Nevertheless I came. I am no longer his clerk. We shall now meet as man with man, and we shall see who gains the victory. He contends for money—I for my right, and what is dearer to me than my own heart's blood," and he drew himself up with an expression of pride and conscious dignity which Edna had never before seen upon her lover's face.

At this moment Major Trellan abruptly entered. With a withering and haughty frown, he measured the young man from head to foot, exclaiming,

"You here sir, you!"

"I am here," coolly answered De Montfort, returning contempt for contempt in ample quantity.

"And how came you here?"

"On my feet, sir, guided by my head, as every honest man should go."

"Then go as you came; there is the door."

"I am as well acquainted with the location of the door as yourself, sir, but I am not ready to avail myself of it; when I am, I shall follow your advice—not because it is your advice, but because I choose to do so. Before I go, however, I

will do myself the honour to ask your consent to the engagement existing between myself and this lady."

"Never!" exclaimed the major, enraged at the coolness of the other. "Marry my niece—the proud heiress—to a clerk! never!"

"I am no longer your clerk, sir."

"And you may soon be able to say the same of every mercantile house in the city, for I will effectually prevent you from being received into any, unless you at once relinquish all claim upon Edna's hand and all attempts to visit her."

"Never!" exclaimed De Montfort, "while a drop of blood flows through my heart. I asked your approval of it as her guardian! you refuse—very well, my course will be the same notwithstanding. We shall marry at all events. I give you my word as a man of honour, that it will be so."

"Is that your determination?"

"Can you doubt it?" asked De Montfort, with the air of a man who moves a world at pleasure.

"Then listen," returned Major Trellan solemnly. "Edna has been for years betrothed to my only son. It will be impossible for her to be false to her pledge, for it is in my power to compel its fulfilment. The wedding is fixed on the twentieth of next month, and I invite you to be present that you may witness how easily and perfectly I perform what I promise."

"And I accept the invitation," replied De Montfort proudly, "that you also may see with what perfect ease I do what I choose."

Then turning to Edna, he clasped her hands in his, saying,—

"Be firm, my love; do not allow yourself to be disturbed by these threats, they cannot harm you. Confide in my affection—in my faith, and believe me you will never marry him—there are indeed excellent reasons why you should do so," and unmindful of the presence of the indignant guardian, he kissed each hand, tenderly bade her "good night," and departed with a very polite bow to the angry gentleman as he deliberately passed through the door.

At five minutes past eight, Lord Elwyn rang, and was ushered into the drawing-room with that officious politeness which always attends a guest distinguished either for wealth, or an exalted station in society. It was with pleasure that he perceived Edna had not joined the family circle, as it was indeed not at all her habit of late.

"You are very grave, to-night, my friend," said their visitor to his host after chatting a few moments with Carlotta; "has any new misfortune occurred to disturb your tranquillity!"

In reply, he received the particulars of the late scene in Edna's parlour, with the varied comments each chose to bestow upon it, in which they heaped every abuse upon De Montfort.

"It cannot be remedied, sir—it cannot be remedied," was the reply; "better allow the young people their own way in such matters."

"I will not!" exclaimed Major Trellan, somewhat irritated by such advice, even from his illustrious guest. "The wedding is already arranged, and I trust you will honour it with your presence."

"On one condition," said Lord Elwyn, "that I may be allowed to select the officiating clergyman."

"The request is so very singular, that I cannot but grant it with pleasure."

"But why do you desire that?" asked Mrs. Trellan.

"Oh, a fancy—nothing more. But I came to-night to propose another marriage," and he cast a somewhat tender glance at Carlotta, who, as in duty bound, blushed, examined the carpet very attentively, and said, in a half-supplicating tone,—

"Oh, my lord!" while Mrs. Trellan looked the delighted mother to perfection.

"I fancy Miss Trellan's heart is mine already," he continued, taking Carlotta's hand respectfully, though it must be confessed, not exactly in the style approved

by ardent and anxious lovers, "and we imagined that we have but to ask your approval."

"You do us much honour in soliciting our daughter for your bride," replied Major Trellan, still somewhat ruffled, "but I think it is but a few evenings since your lordship desired a private interview with my niece, and I was led to suppose that the proposal you now make for Carlotta, was then offered for her acceptance."

"Miss Edna would not hear a word of it, she refused me without ceremony," replied the noble suitor with indifference. "Such homage one must always pay to the beautiful. But I trust I shall be more successful here," and he smiled mechanically.

"Edna was right in refusing you. I wish I could believe it had been from the proper motive," replied the father, his anger again excited.

"But our daughter will prove herself worthy of so noble a husband, and I trust you will ever be proud of your choice," interposed Mrs. Trellan, who feared that between her husband's irritation, and Lord Elwyn's coldness, the whole affair would fall through.

"Do you consent then?" he asked gravely.

"Certainly," replied Major Trellan, his good nature somewhat restored by this definite question; "did you anticipate opposition to your wishes? We are happy to oblige you," he continued, with genuine satisfaction as the many benefits resulting from this alliance rushed through his mind.

"But there are conditions to which I beg your attention," again commenced his lordship, in the same solemn tone.

A slight frown settled upon the brow of the lady mother, and there were misgivings at her heart, while the father bent his head as if listening.

"I am peculiar," he continued, regardless of any appearances, "and my chief pleasure consists in the full and immediate gratification of every fancy which takes possession of my thoughts. It is selfish, I allow; but selfishness, I find is the order of the day. These whims are productive of so much satisfaction to myself, that I am resolved not to cure myself of them, for happiness after all is what we seek. The continual gratification of these sudden impulse, may, upon fuller acquaintance, prove disagreeable to Miss Trellan, I will therefore allow her an opportunity to retract honourably. Be so good then as to be my witnesses, that three months from this day, my hand and fortune are at your daughter's disposal, provided she does not refuse them. Is all this satisfactory to you?"

"Perfectly," replied both parents, well assured that Carlotta would never refuse such a match, "and it does credit to your frankness, sincerity and honourable intentions.

"Does Miss Trellan also approve?" asked Lord Elwyn, turning to Carlotta who sat by quite pale with contending emotions, for with a quick perception, she saw or fancied she saw beneath this pretended frankness, the most deliberate preparations for a system of domestic tyranny.

"I have consented to be your bride," she replied coldly, her heart swelling with some recollections of the past, "and I shall never recal it."

"Better make your promise conditional as I have done," he said quickly, "for you do not know how disagreeable I am at times."

Carlotta bit her lip with vexation.

"s this scene never to end?" she asked with her eyes.

Lord Elwyn apparently understood her, for he immediately said, rising,—

"Permit me to bid you adieu," and touching his lips to the tips of her delicate fingers, he bowed and went out.

"He is secured at last," said the mother to her daughter after the departure of Lord Elwyn. "I congratulate you upon your success, my love; your silence and your beauty were perfectly irresistible—far more eloquent than words."

Carlotta escaped as quickly as possible from the flattery of her mother, for she had never before felt the greatness of her voluntary sacrifice, and she longed to be alone.

"It is true," she wrote that night, in the record of her thoughts which she was accustomed to keep, "that I have secured an engagement which the world will pronounce brilliant—a nobleman—handsome—immensely rich—how could it be surpassed! Ah! they little know that in exchange I have buried love, pure, devoted self-denying love—the first fresh impulses of a heart that believed in the possibility of goodness—a friendship whose altar has been sacred, and whose light



has led only to happiness for three long years—they little dream that this superb match is built upon these ruins, that while they surround me with congratulations, my heart will be desolate and sad. Another source of misery I have too, in the reflection, that proud as I am, I shall seem to hear it ringing in my ears, that another was preferred to me. Bitter thought! Ah Edna! in spite of my better judgment, I shall constantly be seeking revenge. You love—you obey the impulses of that love—you refuse to fulfil a contract made for you—you walk steadily
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and firmly towards the point where dwell honor and affection! I admire you! I respect you! But notwithstanding, I would, without hesitation, crush you if possible, for with every glance at you, the remembrance of this humiliation will rankle in my bosom and cry out for revenge. Well, the compact is sealed—the decision is made, and Lord Elwyn coldly raised my fingers to his lips as if there was a contamination in the contract. Oh! how different from the fervent clasp—the glowing cheek—the half uttered sentences—the impassioned kiss, with which he avowed his love for me, and sought mine in return.

“Ah, Theodore! Theodore! Do you deem yourself forgotten—betrayed by her you trusted! Do you suppose that the beautiful light you threw around her path is all quenched, and that she to whom you consecrated your early hopes moves on forgetful of that first and only love! Why are you not beside me, that I might now and forever sunder these ties of ambition, and proclaim the love which is consuming me?”

The wretched girl paused, and paced her small cabinet with hurried steps, her hands firmly knit together, and her head drooping upon her bosom. Five months only had passed since her introduction to Lord Elwyn, and she felt that in that time a complete “change had come o’er the spirit of her dream.” The pale cheeks—the contracted lips—the excited restlessness of the eyes—the somewhat attenuated form—were indications far too plain, that her soul was unsatisfied with the exchange which ambition had prompted.

“Fool that I am!” she continued after a few moments, “it is my own work. No one shall suspect that beneath a calm and elegant exterior, is buried a consuming passion. I must exchange the romance of early youth for the stern and crushing realities of life. I will forget the past, and quench these heart yearnings in the ambitious dreams which are now nearly realized,” and with an expression of proud determination she threw aside her pen.

Since De Montfort’s abrupt entrance and departure, Edna had been alone in her cabinet. Crouched among the cushions of her easy chair, which she slowly and mechanically moved to and fro beneath the suspended lamp, she had evidently forgotten all external things in absorbing thought. The sound of her lover’s footsteps had long since died away upon the staircase, but there remained with her a consciousness of happiness so rich, so full, that its light rays had, for the time, scattered the clouds which for a few weeks had enveloped her in gloom. De Montfort’s words had inspired her with fresh courage and a confidence in him wholly unknown to her before. He had never appeared to her so noble, so worthy of reverence. “I can but be strong ‘n my love,” she murmured, “while such a heart holds mine in its embrace.” A dream like vision of the past and future, in which were scattered the richest gems of beauty and happiness, completely enthralled her senses. Her head was thrown gracefully back among the cushions—her eyes half closed—her lips slightly parted—her rich curls fell carelessly over her heaving bosom—and her small white hands with their rose-tints lay clasped among the folds of her velvet dress.

It was Edna’s first love; never again could she yield herself thus to the same flowery vision. Though in after years friendships may spring up in our paths, ardent, sincere and dear to the heart, they are mingled with some portion of worldly care, and the world is received as a compensation for their disappointment.

But the first joyous awakening of the slumbering heart! The first pure, unworldly, unselfish, spiritual vision from which we are aroused all too soon by life’s stern mandates! There are few who have arrived at mature age, and cannot recall from its dim obscurity this transient glimpse of heaven. Oh! would it could remain to cheer the desolate, and sustain the fainting heart amid life’s after storms.

Edna dreamed on, nor deemed it possible in that blessed hour that any change should come. A light touch upon her arm, and her name pronounced in a low voice dispelled her bright dream. Presenting a sealed note, Luna merely said th

it had been left by a man who had departed without desiring any answer. Hastily breaking the seal, she was much disappointed to find that it was neither from her lover nor Lord Elwyn's reply to the one she had that morning sent him. It was without signature or date, and as usual with anonymous epistles, was written by some self constituted "friend" and ran thus :

"Is Miss Trellan aware that in receiving the attentions of the young foreigner, called George De Montfort, she is bestowing her heart upon one who will only sow in it the seeds of bitterness, the food for many sorrowful years? Does she know aught of him save the very little he has chosen to reveal of himself? Does she ever reflect that she is trusting a nameless adventurer, who neither declares his country or his birth. Do no regrets ever arise in her bosom for one, who though far away, is said to be pining in silent grief for her unfaithfulness? Do no doubts or suspicions ever occur to her concerning his honour, his integrity, his past life? What if Mr. De Montfort should prove, as is now suspected by many, an accomplished villain? The writer does not wish to alarm Miss Trellan unnecessarily, but feeling a deep interest in her, thinks it a duty to suggest these thoughts to her consideration."

Ere she had finished the perusal of this, the curtain was again pushed aside, and two smaller notes were placed beside her. Crushing the first convulsively in her hand, she immediately opened one which proved to be a line in great haste from De Montfort.

"A few days will unavoidably pass, ere I can again see you my love; meanwhile, confide in me, and be not troubled by any reports which may reach you.

Yours fondly and truly, G."

A groan of bitter anguish escaped her lips, her head drooped upon her bosom, and the scalding tears fell one by one, as she softly murmured, "there is truth in that letter. I had thought it false. Suffer, oh my God! this bitter cup of sorrow to pass from me." She endeavoured to reason—she reflected long what circumstances connected with De Montfort could excite suspicion. She could recall none, for she had yet to learn that the world must be intimately acquainted with a man's deeds, motives and intentions, ere it will pronounce him honest. "I will not wound his noble soul by even a suspicion," she said at length, and rising firmly from her chair, she laid the anonymous letter upon the grate, and watched it with a steady eye till it was consumed. With the same determined air she again seated herself, and tore open the last note fearing some new misfortune.

"Can you offer congratulations, my charming cousin," wrote Lord Elwyn, "on the occasion of our engagement? I am to be married this day three months hence, provided your fair cousin does not in the meantime refuse my hand and fortune. The heart is quite omitted in these preliminaries, excepting now and then—in your case for instance. You have kept your promise to open your heart to me—I will surely keep mine, and prove a friend when you are most in need of one; love on and be strong in that love; it will prove a protection from many evils."

"All is mystery, she exclaimed as she completed the perusal of the last, and again sank into a revery, from which she was only aroused by the clock striking the hour of midnight. As the last sound died away, her lamp suddenly expired, and she remained in darkness, save the faint light from the burning coals, which is so favourable to the exercise of the imagination. "These clouds—these doubts—oh would I could remove them—had I one friend who possessed the right to guide, to dictate even—" Suddenly a slight mist enveloped her; she became conscious of a presence besides her own; her soul suddenly communicated with another soul, and raising her head to ascertain if she was indeed dreaming, she saw, bending over her in the attitude of intense affection, a female form, a countenance so sweet, so angelic that all she had ever read or heard of "ministering spirits," at once crowded her memory. Edna was rather timid than otherwise, and her heart beat violently, but there was so little that was terrific in the appearance, that she was resolved to avoid alarming any one if possible. Still she placed her hand upon the bell cord, but as she did so, the fair form moved a little, as if it would leave if others were summoned.

"You have something to say to me," she demanded at once.

A sweet smile was the only reply.

"And you wish me not to fear, though we remain here alone—is it not so?" continued Edna.

Another smile more angelic than the first lit up the radiant countenance, when Edna suddenly exclaimed,

"My mother! speak to me—assure me of your happiness, and tell me if you are permitted to guard your child from evil."

No voice proceeded from the lips of the visitor, but a thin, white hand lay caressingly on the head of her only child, and the face was raised to Heaven as if to invoke its blessing.

"Mother, I long to hear your voice—can you not speak—are you not permitted?"

An expression of sorrowful regret was the only reply.

"Then by some sign answer me one question. I am betrothed to my cousin Ernest—ought I to keep the pledge—do not let me misunderstand you."

A cold shudder passed over the airy form of the mother, and her large spiritual eyes rested upon her child with a look of entreaty that pierced her to the heart.

"It is well mother. I do not wish to keep it, my whole nature recoils when I think of it."

The mother extended her hands as if to embrace her child, and Edna, sustained by extreme excitement, wound her arms around the spirit-form, at the same moment that she fainted and consciousness ceased.

* * * * *

The following day, every one was surprised to find Carlotta pale, languid, and out of humor. The truth was, quite early in the morning Lord Elwyn has sent to ask her to ride in his carriage, and half an hour afterwards had sent to excuse himself, saying that a sudden fancy had seized him to leave the city; he should return sometime, it was impossible to say when. "One of his whims" said Mrs. Trellan to her daughter, "which you must endure with a good grace for three months, but of which, when you are Lady Elwyn, you must thoroughly cure him."

CHAPTER XI.

GOSSIPING.—DE MONTFORT'S ARREST.—ERNEST'S RETURN.

"I wish Mr. De Montfort would return, or at least that I was sure of his safety," exclaimed the old lady who superintended domestic affairs at Violet Cottage, after having looked for half an hour over her spectacles, at two stout, ill-looking men, who were lounging on the opposite side of the street, evidently making her residence a subject of remark.

"For whom are these men waiting?" asked a neighbour who had just dropped in.

"That is just what I have been trying to make out," replied the old lady.

"Well can't you guess?" continued the neighbour with a sneer. "It is as plain as day to me. You know when some folks are considered no better than they should be, people get dreadful suspicious of them in these wicked times. I have a great deal of charity for everybody, as does bad things, if they don't keep so mighty shy of every body, but I must say, that it looks dreadful dark to see people go about their business every day, and never give any account of themselves. I tell you what, Mrs. Benson, I never trusts anybody much that doesn't tell me about their concerns."

"Mr. De Montfort is an excellent young man," said the old lady, her eyes

filling with tears at the recollection of all his goodness to herself and absent son, "and I would sooner suffer myself, than that any harm should come to him."

"He makes you think he is good, but us neighbours don't like him much. We should like to ask him where he was born, how he was brought up, what his folks did for a living, and a great many such questions, but he steers straight along, taking no notice of us."

At this moment the door of the apartment was thrown open with a considerable jar, and a sharp-featured, middle-aged woman suddenly entered, while uttering the following preamble. "I thought I never should have got here. Good gracious, Mrs. Benson—I had such a time. I went round on the back side of our house—crept through Miss Parsons's well-room—climbed over the fence—dodged the corner of your wood house—sprung through your sink-room, and here I am, safe at last."

"And you had all this labour for what?" inquired Mrs. Benson, with an expression of simple surprise.

"For what!" exclaimed the new comer, "why, haven't you seen those men standing over the street and watching you all day? See! they are actually coming in," and her black eyes glistened with the prospect of "something going to happen."

The old lady became very pale as she saw them advance across the street. "Why don't you send for Mr. De Montfort?" asked the first neighbour.

"I don't know where to send," was the hurried reply, as one man knocked loudly.

"So much for living with people that don't know where they keep themselves, nor what they do," whispered the black-eyed visitor, both of them feasting on the food for gossip, that their fear was in the whole affair; there was, that there would not be enough, though certainly appearances did at this time promise well.

The old lady had tremblingly opened the door, and in answer to their inquiries, told them that De Montfort had neither been at home that day nor the one previous, and, indeed, she could not tell where he was, but that they were welcome to enter if they chose.

They very civilly replied that they supposed he would be at home some time, and as it was not cold they preferred to wait out of doors,

"We both pity you very much," said one of these women, as Mrs. Benson returned from the door, her features agitated beyond control, for she had learned to love De Montfort as a son, and the appearance of these men had produced a thousand indefinite fears.

"I thank you for your sympathy," she replied, "but I trust he will not return at present. The men are civil, and it is evident that they intend no harm for us."

Two romping girls burst into the room at this moment exclaiming in one breath, "Do tell us what those men want; we had half a mind to ask them?" but before Mrs. Benson could reply, the appearance of Lobo coming up the street at his usual moderate pace arrested their attention, and in spite of the cold and the old lady's remonstrances, they threw open a window and leaned out of it to listen to his conversation with the strangers.

The possession of a man servant was a luxury which none other in that neighbourhood could afford, and he had consequently been an object of dislike and envy.

"The man could tell us, if he would, where his master is and what is going on," said one of the girls.

"I don't like him—indeed I hate him," rejoined the other "he never talks, and people that don't talk are always ugly."

"He is a very kind, good man though," quietly observed Mrs. Benson.

"Good! yes, you think so, and little prim Miss Mary too, no doubt," and they joined in one broad laugh which made the building ring with its noise, and sickened the heart of the anxious woman. It was suppressed to a vulgar, tittering on the approach of Lobo, and the inquiry of the women as to what they heard.

Mrs. Benson and Mary drew near the fire, while these impertinent neighbours gathered about the open window and listened to the conversation.

Lobo was stopped by the inquiry, "Are you George De Montfort?"

"I have not that honor," he returned solemnly,

"Do you know him?"

"Doubtless."

"Do you know where he is?"

"Certainly."—"Will you show us where we may find him?"

"Yes."

Here one of the men was about to slip a bright coin into his hand, probably as a motive to faithfulness, but the servant started back as if he had trodden upon a snake, muttering, "I have had orders." Motioning the men to follow him, he proceeded as he had been directed.

The visitors remained some time, evidently disappointed that nothing had occurred of a very, serious nature, and departed promising to run in again in the course of the day. "If they do not come a dozen times, I shall be most agreeably disappointed," observed the old lady, after they had closed the door, and she had shut the window, which they had omitted to do. Mrs. Benson had taken a hearty dislike to the gossips of the neighbourhood, for, since their first arrival at the cottage, they had been the constant subject of remark, abuse, and false report. If these persons had contented themselves with slander, she would have been better satisfied, but many reports had been circulated which had no foundation whatever, and so often repeated as finally to be believed among themselves. There was something too, extremely repugnant to her naturally refined feelings, in their unceremonious entrance into her house at all hours of the day, and commenting with vulgar familiarity upon all they saw, even the domestic arrangements.

When the good woman had reduced her apartment to its wonted order and neatness, she drew an easy chair to the window, wiped the tears from her eyes, and said in a subdued tone, "We will wait."

Lobo conducted the two men to a brick building previously mentioned, and ushered them into the sitting-room. They advanced a step beyond the door, evidently astonished at what they saw.

The floor of the apartment was covered with a beautifully flowered carpet, and the walls decorated with the finest and richest specimens of beauty and art. A large table was drawn near the fire, and covered with volumes of an immense size, many of which were open. There were also writing materials, and some manuscripts in a fine manly hand.

A gentleman, apparently of forty-five years, with deep lines of thought upon his brow, and his frame bent by intense study, was carefully examining one volume.

"Master, master," said Lobo with great respect, "these gentlemen—"

"My good friend," interrupted the gentleman without raising his eyes, "will you be so good as to examine these five volumes, and find the sentence which I shall read to you."

"But, master, these gentlemen—"

"I think you will find it in the three hundred and fifty-fourth canto of the thirtieth book of—"

"Master, these men—"

"It will no doubt occupy you some time, but should you find it, the result—Don't tease me," he added, pettishly, as one would brush off a fly, or trample upon an insect, for one of the men had advanced and laid his hand lightly upon the student's shoulder.

"As I was a saying, the result would amply—"

"Sir," said the other man, who had advanced to the assistance of his companion,

"Sir, we would speak with you."

This was spoken in a bold, decided tone, and the man of books apparently heard, for the first time, and slowly elevating his eyes, regarded first one and then the other, unable to comprehend their strange presence.

"Abraham, my friend, who are these men, and why are they here?" he inquired, with great surprise at the unwonted intrusion.

"I had been telling your reverence for some time, that they were desiring your notice," replied the servant.

"Seventeenth canto—fifty-first book," he murmured impatiently, and placed his finger upon the passage; then turning a little, he added, "Well, my friends you see my time is precious—be brief."

"Sir," said the oldest man, "is your name George De Montfort?"

"Yes."

"Do you live in the house called Violet Cottage, in Orton street?"

"Yes."

"Sometime clerk to the mercantile house of Trellan and Co?"

"Yes."

"So far, it agrees with the account given us," muttered one, "but the person—" and he threw a sharp glance at his companion, who took a soiled paper from his pocket, and began reading in an under tone, "twenty-five or twenty-six years old—fair complexion—handsome blue eyes—brown curls—gay, familiar manner, and rich, fashionable dress."

"Not exactly to the point I think," replied the first speaker as his eye glanced over the long, straight hair, originally black, but now interspersed with white locks and very thin—an extremely grave countenance—eyes, which through their ample green glasses seemed dark and heavy, and the tall bent figure wrapped in a silk dressing gown.

"There must be some mistake," replied the other, with an expression in which mirthfulness stoutly contended with professional dignity. "Yes sir," he added, addressing the gentleman who was again at his books, "there is a grave mistake somewhere. We were sent to arrest you for forgery."

These words arrested the attention of the student, and rising from his arm chair, he leaned slightly forward on his cane with an air of a man who only knew crime and wickedness by the most distant report. He deliberately measured them from head to foot with a look of surprise and contempt, that would have withered ordinary men, slowly articulating, "Me! a forger! truly there is no accounting for the ridiculous fancies which people take to themselves in these days. But go! I parpon you!" and with a majestic wave of the hand he motioned them to the door, out of which they were politely bowed by Lobo.

"There, dispose of this trumpery," exclaimed Lord Elwyn, with a hearty laugh, as he pushed aside the table, pulled the glasses from his eyes, the wig from his head and disrobed himself of fifteen or twenty yards of black lustring. "Now, Lobo, go home, order dinner, and send the carriage for me at two."

The servant bowed and went out, while the master returned to the cottage, to allay the fears of Mrs. Benson and bewilder her gossiping neighbours.

The day appointed for the marriage of Edna and Ernest, rapidly approached. Three weeks had already expired, and Edna began to feel her courage relaxing, spite of Lord Elwyn's assurance that there was really no cause for fear. Continually reminded by her aunt and cousin, of the splendid preparations which she ought to make for the occasion, and troubled by her uncle's continual assertion—that he never altered his mind, she became languid and dispirited, from which she was only aroused by occasional stolen interviews with De Montfort, and a strong consciousness that her union with him was approved by one, who though unseen, watched over her. She therefore persisted in daily visits among the poor and suffering, where she never failed to meet the approving smile of Dr. Huntly; he was already enrolled on her list of friends. For two days she had missed the sick woman whom she had assisted to recal from death, and upon inquiry, learned from the doctor simply that she had been provided with a home, and taken to it, and that he would accompany her on a visit to it whenever she liked.

Had Edna been less engrossed than she was with her own somewhat complicated affairs, she would have analyzed and endeavoured to trace to its source, the peculiar interest with which this woman watched her every movement, as she hovered around with acts of kindness, such as the sick only can appreciate—as it was, it often occurred to her, but only as a transient thought.

It was at this time—that is, a week previous to the day of the wedding—that a

carriage the same that had left it so suddenly, entered the court surrounding Lord Elwyn's dwelling about midnight.

Starting from a reverie into which he had fallen, he rang and ordered that the person who had arrived should be shown into his library, where supper was to be served as quickly as possible. Having given this order, he threw open the door and waited to welcome the stranger. A young man entered, thoroughly wrapped in cloaks and furs, of which, with some assistance, divested himself, when Lord Elwyn extended his hand saying, "You will pardon this haste, I am sure, when you shall be fully acquainted with the reasons. You have travelled rapidly?"

"Day and night," replied the stranger; "I have only slept in the carriage, as you requested."

"Come then," said the host, "we will take supper which I am sure you need, and I will explain a little why I interfere so directly in your affairs; for I am sure it must seem quite strange to you, whom I have only met once before."

"I am far better acquainted with you my lord, than you imagine," returned the other, "for every letter from my friends has been filled with your praises, except indeed Edna's," and his voice was soft and sad as he mentioned her name.

"I too can tell you much of your history. In early youth you were betrothed to Edna, because Major Trellan saw no other way to get entire control of Edna's property—as children neither of you opposed it. Years have passed since, and you have each discovered that you have only for the other that natural affection that binds the brother to the sister. You have both been deceived; your letters have been intercepted, detained, and others substituted in their places; to each the unlimited affection of the other has been proclaimed, for those most interested were resolved to accomplish this union, even by means of a crime too black to name. Do not shudder; be courageous; you have much to hear—much to endure, but not all now. Edna loves another whose heart is all her own. This love was discovered, and you were summoned to put an end to it, as they vainly imagine, by fulfilling your pledge. Major Trellan's letter found you sighing over the transient glimpse you once obtained of a lovely face."

"My lord, how do you know this?" interrupted Ernest fiercely, "surely my secret—"

"Shall be respected; my dear friend, believe me, only permit me to proceed. What would you give to look again upon that face?"

"My life!" replied Ernest, solemnly, "for if Heaven was open to me for a few brief moments and then for ever shut out from my sight, my life would be of no value."

"Well, listen to me, and obey me for a few days, even blindly if need be, and you shall not only feast your eyes upon her beautiful face, but win her noble heart."

"What power have you, my lord, to promise all this?" exclaimed the young man with thrilling energy.

"That is my secret," returned Lord Elwyn, smiling. "I have given my word."

"And I have faith in it," replied Ernest, his countenance beaming with that undoubting confidence which was a part of his nature.

"Let us then proceed," continued Lord Elwyn. "You and Edna cannot accommodate those selfish friends by marrying, and yet you must offer to consent. Offer no opposition—suffer the preparations to proceed—lead her to the altar and—trust in me. Do you promise this?"

"Willingly my lord," and he extended his hand.

"Sleep here to-night, and to-morrow occupy yourself in holding an unreserved conversation with Edna, so that you may fully understand each other, endeavour to ascertain who was the interceptor and writer of your letters; it will furnish you ample employment. Come to me the day after. I shall have much to say to you then, for which you are not prepared; good night," and embracing him Lord Elwyn rang for some one to show him to his room.

In spite of all circumstances and romances to the contrary, Ernest Trellan slept soundly after the fatiguing and rapid journey. It was past ten when he pre-

sent himself in Lord Elwyn's breakfast room, and was informed by a servant that his host had breakfasted and gone out, leaving no message. After a slight meal he sent for a carriage, and entering it with his baggage, desired to be driven to Major Trellan's. His sudden appearance surprised and delighted his parents, who now fancied that every obstacle was removed.

"How did you travel?" asked his father.



"By land, sir," replied his son frankly.

"And are you aware that happiness awaits you almost immediately," interrupted his mother; "you know that your wedding is appointed on Tuesday; to-day is Thursday. There will scarcely be time for the natural impatience which usually precedes these happy events." Ernest smiled, but replied not; as soon as circum-
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stances would allow, he sought Edna's cabinet, having permission to visit her there. She rose to meet him.

"Now that all danger of misunderstanding each other is past," he said, "you will not refuse the embrace which is dictated by the purest fraternal affection," and he folded his arms about her, kissing her forehead tenderly.

"Edna," he asked, "do you know all the deception which has been practised upon us?"

"Perhaps not all, but much—enough surely."

"Then you have never loved me, as was again and again written me?"

"Never."

"It is criminal," he replied, "to torture one thus. I have wept for hours over the necessity, as I supposed it, of inflicting pain upon you who are so dear to me."

"And I too," replied Edna, her eyes glistening with tears, "have at times almost believed I ought to sacrifice myself to the passionate love I was taught to believe that you bore me. Your own experience only can give you an idea of the misery which my first letter after your departure cost me. It was hardly worth while to have devoted two sheets to the explanation of the faithlessness, the knowledge of which was only to cause you pleasure."

"Two sheets!" exclaimed Ernest. "That reminds me that our letters have not always been allowed to proceed quietly on their course; they have sometimes been intercepted."

"I was sure of it," replied Edna. "For instance, I wrote you refusing to fulfil our pledge, and clearly stating my reasons. Some weeks after, I received one from you, much the same, but shorter, and making no allusion whatever to mine. It was for a time a source of much conjecture, but one day suddenly entered the apartment of Bertha, your mother's maid, and caught a glimpse of the superscription of a letter, which I could almost have asserted on oath belonged to you, and was my own writing. The letter was open, but apparently heavy. She quickly removed it, and commenced talking with great volubility."

"Have you ever spoken of this?"

"Never. I have no friend in this house."

"True; those who should have watched over our happiness, even with their lives, have proved our worst enemies."

"Ernest, I trust you will not be offended, but this seems a time above all others, for perfect frankness. I am accustomed to look everywhere for motives. I am therefore led to believe that my money has been the secret source of all our difficulties, and I am sometimes tempted to wish myself among those poorer or more obscure persons, who are allowed to live and marry as their affections dictate. You, Ernest, have alone proved noble and generous. I am led to believe that your mother is more deeply concerned than any other in this plot against our happiness."

"My mother! Well, Edna, be assured that such a title shall not screen her. I am fully determined to sift this matter thoroughly. But I wish to be alone. I must reflect. Meet me in my mother's sitting-room this evening, and all shall be settled."

Evening came, and the family were as usual gathered about the fire. Edna having sought a shady corner of the sofa, quite retired from observation, and was reflecting with sorrow upon the approaching scene.

Ernest Trellan was one of those straightforward, unbending characters, when any object was to be accomplished that deeply interested him—who never swerve from justice wherever it may touch, but underneath, there was a soft pleading heart, which made him at times almost a child, so truly did he sigh for the gentle ministrings of love. It was one of his days of action, and as he entered the room, there was in his movements the pride of conscious integrity. With folded arms he stationed himself before his mother, and bent upon her a look such as few would dare to endure who had been guilty of injustice to him.

"Why do you look at me thus Ernest?" she inquired.

He beckoned Edna to his side, took her hand in his, and in a voice that revealed the troubled emotions of his soul, replied,—

“Madam! you have long deceived us. Edna and myself have been to each other the most confiding of brothers and sisters. Thus have we loved in the past, and thus only do we now love. This is too holy an affection to mingle with any other. My heart has been deeply pained when you dwelt upon her absorbing passion for me, and no doubt she has suffered the same. This was not true; you knew that it was not, still you continued the deception. More than that—to make sure your purposes, you prevented the interchange of confidence—you intercepted our letters, and signed our names to assertions and sentiments very far from being our own. You will not deny this.”

An angry frown rested on the brow of the father, and a deep crimson flush burned the cheek of the mother.

“Is this true?” demanded Major Trellan of his wife, for it was new to him.

“No!” she replied angrily. “I have never intercepted their letters; he cannot prove it.”

“Madam, listen to me,” continued Ernest impressively. “In consequence of these feelings and sentiments, Edna has distinctly and unconditionally refused to ratify the pledge you choose to force upon us, and had I been here, I should have done the same.”

“Impossible!” groaned the father.

“Do not interrupt me, sir, I beg of you. I was about to say, that notwithstanding our decided refusal, we will retract; we will promise to unite our hands at the altar upon the night appointed by you, provided nothing beyond our control prevents, upon one condition.”

“Name it,” exclaimed Major Trellan quickly, his hope reviving.

“That you, madam, answer me these questions. Do you consent?”

“I supposed my son better versed in the rules of politeness, than to catechize his mother,” replied the angry woman, evasively.

He replied sternly. “When that mother has done me injustice for years, she becomes to me the same as any other human being in like circumstances. Do you consent to reply to these questions?”

“Certainly she does,” rejoined her husband.

“You cannot force me to speak, sir, when I do not choose.”

“I can induce you to do so,” he replied promptly, and rising, he whispered a few words in her ear. They proved effectual, for in a voice low from suppressed rage, she simply said,—

“Proceed.”

“Do you,” continued Ernest, “swear by my father’s honour to answer correctly?”

“Why not by my own?” she demanded indignantly.

“If you have been guilty, as I suppose, you have no honour. Do you promise?”

“I do,” she replied faintly.

“Did you detain, or cause to be detained, Edna’s letter of two sheets, written soon after my departure?”

“I gave no directions, but it was detained, and I read it.”

“Did you write a substitute?”

“No.”

“Who was the writer of it?”

Here Mrs. Trellan became very pale and hesitated; there was a secret power over her which she feared to provoke, but an implacable glance from her husband’s eye impelled her; there was no escape, and she pronounced the name of “Bertha.”

Ernest turned quickly, and ringing, ordered the woman in.

“Bertha,” he exclaimed in a loud and commanding voice, of which, in his calmer moments, he seemed utterly incapable, “Bertha, bring me instantly the double letter written by Miss Trellan, and detained by you. Quick! I command you!”

The artful and generally self-possessed woman was thunderstruck at the extraordinary appearance of the usually mild young gentleman, and for once was awed into obedience. She had but one thought—to get the fatal letter; that she hoped would allay the storm. Taking it from her, he gave her the one she had substituted, exclaiming in a voice which left no room for disobedience, “Take your trash—now begone! Let not an hour hence find you here!” Mrs. Trellan attempted to interpose, but in vain. “It is too vile—too degrading,” he said; “if you had done it alone—mean, contemptible, loathsome as it is, to secretly peruse another’s letter—I could have pardoned it; but to make a confidant—an accomplice of her, is too degrading!”

But Mrs. Trellan managed to exchange one glance with Bertha, ere she left the apartment; it was sufficient for each.

“Margaret!” said Major Trellan, sternly addressing his wife, “leave me; your presence is burdensome. I could not have believed that you would so far have forgotten yourself, as to have engaged in this system of deception. I trust you, my son, and you, Edna will do me the justice to believe that I was a stranger to all this. However unflinching I may be in my resolution to exact the fulfilment of your pledge, I would never have resorted to these measures, nor do I approve them.”

“You are yourself guilty of deception,” angrily exclaimed the wife.

“Beware!” ejaculated the husband in a voice of thunder; and exerting himself to assume a calm exterior, he added, “All obstacles are now removed, I trust, and this union, for which I have so long hoped, will at last be consummated. Remember that your promise was voluntary.”

“We shall not forget it, sir,” replied Ernest respectfully, “and I again repeat it, that if no obstacle occurs beyond our control, we will accede to your wish.”

“Thank you, my children! it is all as I wish—no obstacle can occur—it is impossible. Good night—I wish to be alone,” and he went to his study, threw himself into his arm chair, and thus soliloquised. “If there is no obstacle—how strange to dwell upon that! what obstacle can there be? If he should learn that—but no—impossible! who can tell him, who knows it? It is hard to force them, but they will be happy, and—it must be so. Now, at least, I cannot give it up. Ruin stares me in the face, and upon her fortune I must again build my own. It is sure—nothing can prevent it.”

After the departure of his father and mother, Ernest drew Edna’s arm within his own, and led her to the door of her cabinet. Brushing aside the curtain, she begged him to enter a few moments.

“You have seen Lord Elwyn?” she inquired.

“Yes,” he replied thoughtfully, wishing but fearing to inform her of all.

“Have you perfect confidence in him?”

“The utmost.”

“You are confident, then, that he will not fail in his promise?”

“Certainly—let your heart be at rest.”

“Oh! would it was,” she sighed, bursting into tears, for the continual excitement of her present life was overpowering her.

Ernest gently drew the weeping girl to his bosom, saying in the low, soft voice of true affection, “You are my sister now; let me be in all respects to you a brother,” and she wept afresh, but this time it was for joy that she had found a true, a sincere, a familiar friend. She told him the story of her love, and received from him that sympathy which is so refreshing to the loving heart.

When the house was again in a state of repose, Bertha crept from the closet of her mistress’ dressing-room, Mrs. Trellan having set up for her. We will not attempt to describe the scene which followed. Each concealed in her own bosom a secret which involved the happiness and purity of two noble beings; each knew that the keeping of the secret was above all things wicked; each therefore made it a point of attack upon the other. Then followed exclamations, accusations, burning, angry words, savage looks, threats of exposure, tears of anger, cutting

sarcasms, and vows of revenge. At last, they became somewhat cool, and each saw that she could not afford to have the other for an enemy; they therefore must be friends.

It was evident, however, that Bertha must not remain in the house; neither Ernest nor his father would allow it. It was therefore concluded that she should go to the house of one of her friends, on pretence of ill health, where Mrs. Trelan should pay for her board, until Ernest's marriage enabled her to redeem the written promise, which Bertha had wrung from her.

The same evening on which these events occurred, Lobo entered Lord Elwyn's library, with a letter and a note, both sealed. The latter was first opened, and he was surprised to find it was from Carlotta—his betrothed bride. Reproaches for neglect, and fears of his want of affection, were its contents. "It has commenced" he said mentally—"no fears for the result." The second letter was more satisfactory. It was from Benson, and contained the narrative which he had promised in his last.

"The father," he wrote after some preliminaries, "is an aged man, apparently bending over the grave, to which he goes sorrowfully and unwillingly, for he mourns the loss of an only child. She married many years since, was divorced from her husband soon after the birth of a lovely boy, was treated with great harshness by her friends for her marriage—it being considered somewhat beneath her—and she eventually went away no one knew whither. His regrets came at last, though too late, and the man of wealth and power became almost a maniac. Remorse consumed the strength of his being, but he could not rest; he dragged himself everywhere, that he might once more behold her face, and that of her child, whom he wished to constitute his heir. A singular circumstance—or one at least that attracted my attention—is that the name of this lady is now Trelan, that being the name of her divorced husband. The child, if now living, must be a young man of twenty-one years. My heart aches for him, as he sits day after day in his arm chair, leaning forward upon a substantial staff, and ever watching a particular turn in the road from the same window. They tell me, that is the spot where he last saw her, and he seems to anticipate her return by the same place. His lips are in continual motion, though he seldom speaks aloud, and it is said, that he is ever repeating her name to himself, lest he should forget it. Poor old man! how would his heart expand, and his eyes brighten beneath the assurance that she is living, and will yet visit him."

"How unfortunate!" exclaimed Lord Elwyn, "that this should come to me to-night. I cannot doubt to whom this narrative refers. The aged father's arms shall once more encircle the child of his love. Indeed the ways of Providence are mysterious, but more mysterious still is often the revelation of them. After all Benson is but the unconscious instrument of my will."

CHAPTER X.

THE RE-UNION.

ON Friday, the day appointed, Ernest again visited Lord Elwyn, and was received by him with that extreme kindness, that almost paternal tenderness, which had previously won his heart, and now increased his confidence in him.

"I employed my time yesterday, as you recommended my lord," said Ernest, taking the offered chair, "and I find that neither my happiness nor Edna's has been an object of much anxiety in my father's house."

"In Major Trellan's house you mean," replied Lord Elwyn with a peculiar emphasis.

"Very well," returned Ernest smiling. "Major Trellan is my father, is he not? I suppose among all other curious incidents of the times, no one will undertake to dispute my parentage."

"Every point is disputable, you know, until proved. But what discoveries did you make?"

Ernest hesitated. The honour of his mother was dear to him, notwithstanding the stern justice he had rendered her, and his cheek burned at the recollection of her meanness. His friend relieved him.

"Some hours hence," said he kindly, "you may have less hesitation in speaking of her guilt. At present I know all. You found Mrs. Trellan had been engaged with that woman Bertha, in a system of deception degrading to herself, and unjust to you. It is past—we will speak of it no more. In the course of the conversation, was no allusion made to a fact concealed from you? reflect—do not let your memory prove treacherous."

"I think there was; though it attracted little attention from me at the moment. I believe that my mother declared to my father, that he too was deceiving me, but it was by way of revenge, and I considered it undeserving of a thought."

"Words uttered from the impulse of the moment," replied Lord Elwyn gravely, "have often a deeper meaning than meditated sentences. Does it interest you to know this secret?"

"How can this secret to which you allude, interest me?"

"In many ways. Events frequently happen previous to one's recollection which may colour all their future lives. Who knows what may have happened to you in those years, when the memory was too feeble to retain the course of events? Would you like to penetrate the past? Would you hold in your hands the weapon wherewith to sever the pledge between yourself and Edna?"

"There is that in your words, and in your manner, my lord, that alarms me. I would know this secret. Do not keep me in suspense."

"It is not my province to reveal it. But are you quite sure that you are prepared for any change; that you could assimilate yourself to circumstances widely different from those in which you have been reared?"

"Your manner has induced me to believe in all possibilities. But how am I to ascertain the truth?"

"Remain here for half an hour; amuse yourself as you will. My leisure has expired, and I must leave you. At the expiration of that time, enter my carriage, which you will find waiting, and order the coachman to leave you at the office of which you have the address on this note. You will be received by Dr. Huntly, an intimate friend of mine, who will soon be the same to you. This note is a written introduction, for my engagements prevent me from introducing you in person. He will accompany you on a visit to one of his patients."

"And this person——"

"Is—but no! you will soon learn all. To-morrow I shall, in return, expect from you an introduction to this person. Come for me at twelve."

"But in the meantime shall I not see you?" asked Ernest quickly.

"You will be fully occupied, I have no doubt. Good morning."

This half hour was an eternity to Ernest, during which his imagination, ever fruitful, travelled with lightning speed through all the possible and impossible scenes which romance had ever presented to him. But it passed at length, and nearly insane with excitement, he drove to Dr. Huntly's office. That gentleman received him at his door, perused the note, and extending his hand said politely,—

"From the introduction of my friend Lord Elwyn, I suppose I address Mr. Trellan?"

"And I, Dr. Huntly," replied Ernest. The physician bowed, and he continued, "I was informed by him that you wished me to visit one of your patients with

you ; I am prepared to do so ; the carriage waits, and I am, as you see, almost dying with excitement and suspense."

The doctor deliberately drew out two chairs, and occupying one, he offered the other to Ernest, saying calmly, "Sit down, sir."

"But we are not going to delay, I trust," exclaimed Ernest impatiently, and still standing, "when so much of, I knew not what, depends upon this interview."

"For that reason," coolly returned the doctor, "I shall not allow you to kill my patient at the onset ; we should then be in a fine predicament to discover long hidden secrets. No, sir, sit down, I say, and compose yourself to a state as near indifference as possible."

"Indifference !" mentally exclaimed the indignant young man, as he perceived the physician employ himself in folding several small powders. Some moments passed in silence, during which Ernest's irritation subsided. He had evidently to deal with a man who would not be driven.

"Would you not like to know something of this person who you are so anxious to see ?" quietly asked Dr. Huntley.

"Certainly, sir," replied Ernest more calmly than he had before spoken.

"Very well, that is the tone I like," pursued the physician, preparing a box of small pills. "Do endeavour to preserve your self-possession. The individual you will see, is a lady of forty years. I say a lady, because—though I found her in the humble walks of life, and evidently poor, she is thoroughly, and in every respect, a lady, and has apparently passed through many years of suffering and external degradation, without being contaminated by those vulgar thoughts, words, and habits, with which she must continually have come in contact. My acquaintance with her commenced in the gratuitous professional visits which, after the late fire, I daily made among the sufferers ; she was one of the worst, but by the most persevering efforts, I have succeeded in restoring her to life, which I found, after all, was no kindness, unless I could restore to her one whom she had long wished to see. At my suggestion, Lord Elwyn sent for you, and I am about to present you to her. Are you ready ?" and he placed the powders and pills in his pocket, arranged his spectacles, drew on his gloves, and opened the door. As Ernest went out, the doctor pulled a cord and unseen by Ernest, Lobo—the ever-present Lobo—entered to secure the office from intrusion.

"But what interest has this lady in me ?" asked Ernest eagerly, after they had entered the carriage.

"Perhaps your nurse, perhaps—but many things are supposable : I have a little more to say. Becoming deeply interested in her, I communicated her situation to Lord Elwyn, who immediately purchased and had her removed to a new and pretty dwelling, entirely at her command."

"She must have been grateful," exclaimed Ernest.

"Ah yes, she wept tears of gratitude ; but here we are," and Ernest was surprised to see that they were stopping before a neat elegant cottage, which he had often admired as he ascended the steps of the chapel where he was accustomed to worship ; it was scarcely a dozen yards from it. Dr. Huntly entered with a key of his own, and, throwing open the door upon the left, requested Ernest to wait for him a moment. He cast his eyes around the apartment—all was new, beautiful, even luxurious ; and a fresh fire burned in the grate, the brasses of which were like polished gold. Evidently some person of taste and elegance presided in this little dwelling. It was plain, then, that, with the gift of a home, Lord Elwyn had furnished her with the means of living suitably to her wishes.

Dr. Huntly again entered, and drew the hand of the young man within his arm.

"Be calm," he said, "you will soon be wiser than now."

Pale, but resolute, Ernest crossed the entry with him, and entered the opposite parlour. One glance showed that it was furnished similar to the other, but in its arrangement had been adapted to the wants of an invalid. A broad sofa was

drawn to the centre of the apartment, and beside it was a table, on which were fruit, a glass of wine, books, and work.

Supported by the cushions of the sofa, was the lady whom they visited. Her head was high and intellectual, and her features rather large, but so regular as to be called handsome. They were now deadly pale, save the hectic flush that played upon her cheeks. Time, sorrow, and penury had wrought their usual work upon her external appearance, but had been powerless over the large piercing black eyes, and the expression of intrepid, fearless courage, that ever rested upon the thin, firmly closed lips. Her person was tall, and her familiar expression one of commanding dignity.

Dr. Huntly proceeded with his friend to the side of the couch, saying,—

“Here, my dear madam, is the young gentleman whom you so much wished to see.”

The lady extended her emaciated hand, and, clasping that of Ernest, gazed eagerly into his face, while large tears gathered in her eyes, and her proud, firm lip trembled with suppressed emotion.

“You do not recognise me,” she said, at length.

“How should I, madam?” exclaimed Ernest, in an agony of suspense.

“Is there, then,” she asked, in a low, plaintive voice, “no natural language from heart to heart? Is the voice of nature, so strong and imperious on one side, for ever hushed on the other? Is there nothing about me that speaks to you of the past—the long, long past?”

“Ah, yes; that voice! If I could but recal —,” and Ernest pressed his hand to his forehead, while his memory wandered far back to the earliest scenes of childhood. Suddenly he exclaimed, “There was an arbour—there were trees and flowers—and there was a voice; yes, it was *that* voice. Madam, who are you?”

“Make one more effort,” said the lady, soothingly; “can you recal no face, no form?”

“Yes, a pale handsome face—a tall form in a white robe; and there were tears—yes, I remember the tears well—and those eyes that looked upon me—these recollections come to me, one by one, from the dim obscurity where they have so long dwelt. Where was I, madam, and where were you?” he demanded.

“We were together,” she replied, calmly.

“Yes—I stood upon that lady’s knee, and reached a bunch of grapes, which I crushed in my hand till the purple stream coloured her dress, and —”

“Then?” asked the lady.

“Then those eyes reproached me. Yes, it was *her* eyes—let me see *yours*, madam.”

For an instant she threw her whole soul into them, and, with an expression that was at once loving and reproachful, gazed intently into his face.

“It was you, lady; it could be no other. But who are you?”

“I am—your mother;” and for the first time she gave vent to the uncontrollable emotions which filled her soul upon addressing her son, after a separation of eighteen years.

“My mother,” slowly repeated the young man; “my mother!”

“Yes, my son, it is your mother, whom you recal when you wander into the past—your mother, who caressed and gathered flowers for you—your mother’s tears that you remember—your mother, who reproached you for the crushed fruit.”

“Then who is she whom I have called mother?”

“A stranger.”

“That is why I could look upon her so sternly—why I could speak, without faltering, those bitter words. Had you been guilty, like her, I should have wept and pardoned, but never have spoken thus to you. But tell me where you have been through these long years—why I was left with strangers I do not comprehend. Was it not cruel thus to desert your child?”

“Ernest, listen to me,” said the mother, brushing away the tears, and clasping his hand. “Ernest, you recal my tears; you know, then, that I suffered; it was for you. I married one who was my inferior in birth, in station, in wealth, in in

telleet, but with a strange infatuation, I loved him—I love him now. But it was against the opposition of all my friends that I married this man—your father—and it has procured for me a life of mourning. At length a slight difference occurred between us—my family took occasion to make a quarrel, and I finally gave my consent for a divorce. Oh, how bitterly have I repented it! for in that moment I bartered the happiness of a life. You only were left me; but you were hated,



despised, by my proud relatives, because you were *his* child. For your good, I resolved to part with you awhile—for a few years—that you might be educated free and independent, and at length return, a man, to assert and maintain your rights. But I was deceived—you have been also, and an accident—no, not an accident, but Providence restored you to me. I see that you have a thousand questions to ask—these things are yet mysterious to you—but there rapidly ap-
No. 10.

proaches an event which will reveal all. Will you have a lesson of patience, my son—such patience as I have learned, when you have passed me, day after day, on your walk to and from school, never dreaming that I was any more to you than any other poor and needy stranger—such patience as I have had, when I stood beside you in the crowd, and refrained from pressing you to a mother's yearning bosom. I have waited long for the day that is now so near—will you, too, wait?"

Ernest dropped his head upon his mother's shoulder and wept—at last their tears were mingled, and their hearts united in one.

The mother was the first to recover her self-possession.

"You will remain with me now, Ernest?" she asked.

"Certainly," he replied, striving to be calm.

"You see that I am still feeble," she continued, "and for your sake I must gain strength. I have yet to meet one more trouble; your presence will support and assure me; but let us not converse much upon the past—tell me rather of yourself, of your hopes, of your future. To-morrow you will introduce to me Lord Elwyn—he to whom I am so largely indebted. What interest this mysterious man has in our destiny, I know not, but to him I owe my son; but for him, you would have been involved in an act which would have been fatal to your happiness. Edna, too, I know. I have watched her from childhood, and she it was, who appeared to me, like a redeeming angel, when I first awoke to consciousness, after that long, death-like dream," and here she paused, again overcome by her powerful emotions.

Dr. Huntly again entered (having gone out, how or when, neither knew, and enjoining repose—a command which both mother and son felt must be obeyed.—Ernest therefore retired to a distant part of the room, to write to Edna a brief account of this interview, while his mother sought strength in silence.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MARRIAGE.

THE intervening period between the interview last mentioned and the day appointed for the celebration of the marriage ceremony, passed slowly to some and rapidly to others, of the persons most deeply interested, as hope or fear predominated. The eventful day arrived at last. Notwithstanding the protestations of Ernest and Edna, an immense party had been invited to witness the happiness of the bride, and partake of the bridal cake and wine. The ceremony was to be performed in the chapel where they worshipped at ten in the morning, and the family only were to be present, excepting De Montfort, whom Major Trellan had so strangely invited, and by whom he wished his triumph to be witnessed.

Ernest was playfully scolded for his protracted absence at such a period, but his pale face, and his stern, inexplicable countenance put an end to all trifling, and he led Edna to the carriage with the air of one joining his own funeral procession.

To Edna only was he gentle. He had been with her nearly an hour before their departure, entreating her to lock up her jewels, and whatever was most valuable to her, so that they could be easily removed if necessity required.

At ten all were assembled in church. Major Trellan and his wife occupied a seat at the right, and Lord Elwyn, with Carlotta at the left of the altar, while before it stood Ernest still pale and stern, and Edna leaning upon his arm, beautiful, but white as the satin robe she wore, or the pearls that bound her hair; behind it was a venerable clergyman—a stranger to all but Lord Elwyn, who, it will be recollected, had been allowed to invite him.

Major Trellan and his lady seemed to have forgotten their late disagreeable interview, and were now enjoying their triumph, and happy in the near prospect of securing the prize so long desired.

Carlotta looked cold and formal, for a week had passed since Lord Elwyn had visited her; he had not condescended to reply to her note, and now seemed wholly occupied with something foreign to herself; his countenance was impenetrable as usual.

The silence was at length broken by the clear, silvery voice of the venerable clergyman, as he commenced the ceremony. The customary questions were asked and answered, until it was inquired if any one objected to the union. Here Lord Elwyn arose with the dignity and grace of one accustomed to command, removed the dark silken locks from his ample brow, slightly bowed, and said that he wished to state a few facts; if the lady and gentleman were then disposed to proceed, he had nothing to object. Motioning them with his eyes, to sit for a few moments, he commenced,—

“I am the son of Lord Elwyn, of — county, England. Miss Edna Trellan’s mother was the daughter of the Earl of Charwick, my father’s elder brother; consequently the young lady present and myself are cousins. She is the only representative of her noble house, and I, of mine. We are the last of our race;” and for a moment the noble speaker bent his eyes upon the floor with an expression of unutterable sadness, as if suddenly overwhelmed by some overpowering recollections. He proceeded: “In my own country it is customary upon the betrothal of a young maiden, for her near relatives to meet and approve or object. Excepting Major Trellan and his family she knows no kindred nearer than myself. I therefore take upon me the responsibility of remonstrating against this union, which has no foundation in the affections of either—this marriage of the hand but not of the soul—which, because it is forced upon them by interested friends can never be blessed on earth or ratified in Heaven. Do you still insist,” he demanded turning his clear, flashing eyes directly upon Major Trellan and his lady, whose perplexity was distinctly to be seen, “do you still insist that two fresh young hearts shall tread together the same path in life, while all the impulses of their noble souls cry out against it?”

The frowning gentleman whom he addressed arose and replied: “Besides their pledge, which is of itself sufficiently binding, they have voluntarily promised to marry upon this day; let the ceremony therefore proceed!”

“Allow me a little longer,” said Lord Elwyn. “There are two powerful reasons why this union should not be consummated, which, as you will not listen to the pleadings of affection, I am compelled to bring forward. The first will be particularly interesting to you, and perhaps will be sufficient to induce you to relinquish your purpose.”

Taking two papers from his pocket, he proceeded. “You are well aware that the Earl of Charwick was so displeased with the marriage of his daughter, the lady Isabel, to a poor, untitled foreigner, that he withheld her fortune for a time. It was only upon the birth of the little Edna that he rendered her justice in making this will which I now hold. It was too late to benefit the lady Isabel, but gave to her child an immense property, to be at the disposal of her father or guardian till she shall have passed her minority, after which, to be used at her own discretion, so long as she does not marry! My worthy uncle had a strong and doubtless very unjustifiable prejudice against Americans, which fully determined him that they should never be benefited by his property. In event of the marriage, continued the will, her fortune returns to the nearest relative upon her mother’s side, allowing her to retain whatever she may have accumulated of her yearly income. I am the only surviving heir, and the moment that this ceremony is performed her fortune is mine. It is but generous to acquaint you with this, as the consummation of this marriage involves a serious disappointment in the object at which you aim—her money.”

Major Trellan’s countenance grew dark, and for the first time his accustomed reverence for Lord Elwyn was banished by an expression of anger and defiance,

and he again addressed the clergyman with, "Proceed sir, in spite of all this the additions which my brother made to his fortune are still hers."

Again he who ministered at the altar raised his hand, and was about to commence anew, when he was once more interrupted by Lord Elwyn. His countenance was now sad and mournful.

"I would have spared you this," he said, "but you force me to it."

Going to the door of the chapel, he almost instantly returned with a lady dressed entirely in black, her long crape veil falling to her feet. She was tall and dignified, and though still feeble, moved with grace and assurance. Lord Elwyn led her to the altar, upon which she leaned with one arm, while he supported the other.

"Permit me lady," he said, "respectfully throwing back her veil, "to reveal a face which must assure those present that we are not to be trifled with."

Then bowing he added,

"Allow me to introduce to you the daughter of Judge Carson of South Carolina, and the mother of our friend Ernest Trellan."

Nothing could have burst upon the guilty man and his still more guilty wife, with greater power than this announcement. It involved a long black catalogue of sins which could no longer be kept within their own bosoms. Major Trellan's lips were livid with suppressed rage, and his wife bit hers between her teeth till small drops of blood oozed from them. Carlotta, too, proud-spirited and accustomed to homage, could not endure the dishonour of her parents, she silently resolved to be revenged, at the same time expressing by look and gesture the highest indignation.

Edna, awed by so strange a scene, the dark countenances about her, Lord Elwyn's tone of command, and the revelation of so many startling facts, moved nearer to Earnest, and seemed to seek protection in a firm clasp of the hand.

"Lady," said Lord Elwyn, "you have objections to offer to this long contemplated marriage; these persons will no doubt listen, if not with pleasure at least with politeness."

She spoke in a low, beautifully modulated but impressive voice. "To you, sir, and you, madam, I address myself. It is now eighteen years since I visited your dwelling in Charlestown, S. C. You have not forgotten the circumstance. You were poor, and inhabited a house which now you would scorn to enter. But I had a reason for seeking you notwithstanding all this. You were both ambitious; you would do anything for money. I had a child from whose father I was then divorced, and I desired that my boy should be brought far away from the scene of his birth. I sold my jewels, reduced myself to penury, to furnish you the means to remove to this city, and establish you in business here. The money that I paid you for the removal of my child was the foundation of your present wealth. The arrangement between us was this: I concealed the name of his father for my own reasons; it could not concern you. You were to give him your own name, and allow him to consider himself your son, till he arrived at a certain age, when he was to be informed of his real history, allowed to seek his relatives and assert his claims upon my father's property.

"In the meantime the little Edna became an heiress, and you saw no way to get the controul of her fortune, but to allow Ernest to grow up considering himself your son, and to make all sure, to exact from them a pledge to marry whenever you saw fit. Against their wishes, their entreaties, their firmest decisions, you have dragged them to the altar.

"I have watched these events for years.—Lonely and deserted after the departure of my child, I sought this city, resolved to know how faithfully you performed your promise. I have known. I have hovered around your path all unseen by you; not an event has occurred in your house unknown to me.

"You, sir, have been the lest guilty; you have been deceived as well as deceiving—You, madam, have long been aware of the relation existing between Ernest and Edna. You would have married the brother to the sister! Ernest's father was

your brother sir, and ere he obtained the hand of that noble English lady, married and was divorced from me."

"You cannot prove this," exclaimed Major Trellan, angrily.

"I do not come here," she replied calmly, "to make assertions merely; I have sufficient proofs;" and she turned to the aged minister, saying, "You, my dear sir, have a certificate of our marriage."

Lord Elwyn rapped twice upon the altar, when the church door again opened, and a woman was led in by two men. They retired, and she, compelled by Lord Elwyn's eye, advanced to the altar.

"Bertha," he demanded, sternly, "do you swear to speak the truth?"

"I do," she replied, thoroughly awed by his manner.

Here Mrs. Trellan shrieked, and would have fallen into violent hysterics, had not her husband given her an angry push, which proved to her that this was no time for such a proceeding; she therefore contented herself with trying to catch the eye of her maid, that she might exchange some sign of intelligence with her, but in vain.

"It is evident that she is paid a higher price for looking another way than I could now give her for turning her eyes upon me," said she, mentally.

"Bertha," asked the lady in black, "were you present at my marriage?"

"I was."

"The name of my husband?"

"Edward Trellan, the brother of Major Trellan."

"Does this agree with the certificate?" asked Lord Elwyn of the clergyman. He read it aloud in a slow and emphatic manner.

"You were then aware," demanded Lord Elwyn of Bertha, "that this young lady and gentleman were related by having the same father?"

"I have always known it."

"Was it known to any other person?"

"I told my mistress," she replied, with a triumphant air.

"What, then, has induced you to keep it so long a secret?"

"She promised me a thousand dollars to do so. It was to be paid upon the day of their marriage."

"I trust, sir—indeed I am confident—that you must now relinquish your intention; if, however, you persist, after these extraordinary disclosures, there are other matters to urge upon you which I would gladly conceal, anticipating, as I do, the honour of an alliance with your family," and with a smile peculiar, and full of meaning, he bowed to Carlotta.

"No, my lord; not through me will you have any such honour. I reject with scorn the addresses of a man who could thus tear secrets from bosoms, where they have lain for years, to dishonour and ruin our family."

"I must submit," he replied, with an air of gallantry that caused the indignant girl to tremble with rage. "If I were but a man," she murmured, and, taking her mother's arm, they went out, and a moment after a departing carriage was heard.

Edna was presented to Ernest by his mother—the embrace was affectionate and cordial on the part of each.

The little party then adjourned to the cottage, where it was decided that Edna should remain for the present.

"But my dear Edna," said Lord Elwyn to her, "are not you and I to quarrel when I seize upon your fortune?"

"Ah, no," replied the young girl, smilingly, "I shall be so very happy here, that I shall never think of it. I really care very little for money."

"I believe it; but I have a thousand uses for it, and therefore like it."

In the evening Lord Elwyn departed, pleading engagements; but his place was soon supplied by De Montford, who seemed only the more happy when he learned that he was to take Edna portionless.

"The only obstacle is now removed," he said; "I have a shop of my own, in which I am master, instead of clerk; I shall open it to-morrow. My house, too, is ready; is there any cause for delay?"

"I know of none," she replied, blushing deeply.

"Let this day week, then, be our wedding-day;" and with brows unclouded, and hearts invigorated with hope, they parted.

Upon her return, Mrs. Trellan was obliged to recel three hundred invitations, on the plea of "indisposition."

CHAPTER XII.

MANY CHANGES.

NOTHING could equal the joy of Ernest on suddenly discovering that he had really a mother of whom he could justly be proud; that she was a being to be loved and revered; that her intellectual powers, her strong and self-relying judgment, and her moral greatness, placed her above the women with whom he had been accustomed to associate, and realised to his mind, better than any other, his ever-present ideal of female perfection. Seldom absent from her side, she had now accustomed herself to expect from him those little nameless, but, after all, important acts of affection, of which she had so long been deprived, during those years of lonely poverty, and which Ernest delighted to perform. Again and again would he kneel beside his mother, press her hand to his lips, assure her of his devoted and unchanging affection, and beg to be trusted with all her secret sorrows, for evidently some burden rested upon her mind.

"I believe I ought to be perfectly happy," she replied one day to his ceaseless inquiries, "in the restoration of my son, and in the sudden acquisition of friends so powerful in removing my misfortunes, and so kind in ministering to all my wants; but one recollection comes like a cloud between my vision and every passing ray of brightness. I have a father, Ernest, whom I loved dearly, but whom I forsook to follow and watch over you. It was essential that my place of residence should be unknown to him, and I therefore denied myself the luxury of written intercourse. At times I have feared that I was wrong, and in moments of great despondency I have imagined him weeping over the absence of his only child, as I wept over the sad necessity of a separation from you. I was his idol, Ernest; and when our hearts are bound up in one being, and our memories rest ever upon its real or imagined perfections, and our love, feeding upon itself, grows day by day, it is hard—oh, how hard!—to believe ourselves forgotten or forsaken by that being. Thus lived my love for you, and thus, I firmly believe, existed his affection for me."

"But, my dear mother," asked Ernest, "did he not oppose your marriage, and consequently drive you from him?"

"It is true," she replied, sadly, "but he was much influenced by others. He had been from childhood accustomed to the luxuries of wealth, and feared to see me contending with poverty; besides," she added gravely, "there cannot be much love in the heart, if one fault cannot find forgiveness. It was the only sorrow he ever caused me."

She was at this moment interrupted by the entrance of Lord Elwyn, who had become a frequent and welcome visitor.

"Your countenance indicates some agreeable intelligence," said the lady, brushing away the tears that this brief conversation had caused, and smiling with sweetness on one so much her friend.

"Then my countenance is for once a true telegraph," he replied, gaily. "I have news, good news, of one from whom it will rejoice you much to hear."

“My father?” she asked faintly, her eyes firmly rivetted upon his lips.

“Yes, madam, I am so happy as to be able to say to you that he lives—is comparatively well, and above all things desires to see you. Indeed, though it must seem much like hoping against all hope, his constant expectation of your return alone preserves his life.”

“And for eighteen years he has nourished this hope in his bosom in spite of all circumstances to the contrary,” said the lady, more in soliloquy than in reply to Lord Elwyn, but he closely watched her features.

“You will go to him, madam?” he inquired at length.

“If I could, if I had the means to go,” she replied quickly, with an expression of bitter anguish, such as a proud spirit contending with poverty often suffers.

“Nothing is easier,” he said, taking out a well filled pocket-book. “My father died still owing a debt of honour to yours, which he enjoined me to repay. I do not know the exact amount, but here are some hundreds which will serve you for the present; meanwhile I will ascertain the sum and release myself from obligation.”

“And is this really the payment of a debt, or are you conferring upon us another gift,” asked Ernest, his fine countenance beaming with noble friendship.

“A debt, be assured my friend,” replied Lord Elwyn; “time will prove it to you.”

“We will accept it. God sends it to us my son,” said the lady with that firm trust in Providence only acquired by a long and intimate acquaintance with sorrow.

“Your father desires to see your son, madam,” continued the visitor, “that he may establish him in his rights so far as regards his property. Would it not be well to hasten your departure?”

“There is no cause for delay,” she replied, with a promptness which characterised her. “I feel that my native air will do more than anything else to establish my recovery; but even that is to me doubtful,” she continued, looking tenderly at her son.

A sudden paleness overspread his features as he sprang to her side, and clasping her hand, exclaimed, “Mother—mother—you will not die!”

“Not till I am assured of your happiness,” was the confident reply, and she smiled as only the trustful can do.

Lord Elwyn contemplated them a moment in silence, and then inquired for Edna, who had resided there since the unhappy scene in the chapel. She was summoned and almost immediately entered. Lord Elwyn arose, took her hand and led her to a seat beside him, saying in a voice of deep tenderness,

“Edna, I am going away. For the sake of one very dear to me I have to go to a distant part of the country. As I have already told you, I would have made you my bride—I would have perpetuated our noble race by our marriage—but you refused because your heart’s first love had been given to another. I have too much faith in that love to seek to displace it by an affection for me. He, the chosen one is humble, poor in the estimation of the world, but I know him well, and time will prove the wisdom of your choice. You will be happy—I foresee it. You will be married to-morrow. Will it be a joyous day? Is there no lingering regret? Tell me frankly, Edna—as you would speak to your mother, for I am her representative—if you could honourably withdraw from this union with De Montford, would you do so?”

Ernest, and his mother, with great delicacy, had withdrawn to another room upon Edna’s entrance, and they were now alone.

The sweet girl blushed slightly, but raising her eyes to his, replied firmly and truthfully, “It will be a happy day; I have not pledged myself to him blindly. I know how scornfully the world will regard me; my property gone, and married to an humble shop-keeper! yes, it will be repeated far and wide, but I, meanwhile, shall be with him I love. The words, the scorn, the storms of the world cannot reach my heart when protected by his love. Do not imagine that I feel a regret. You are my cousin—you seem to me to have come from my mother’s tomb to guard me from evil, and I am tenderly attached to you, but not as I love him.

Oh no!" and she seemed for a moment to forget the presence of another in the contemplation of her own happiness.

"I cannot witness your marriage to-morrow, as I could have wished," he said at length.

"What! do you leave us so soon?" she asked, aroused by his remark from the reverie into which she had fallen.

"Yes, to-day even; you know I always move suddenly and without any apparent premeditation. Your fortune has already been transferred to me by your guardian, and I only wait the payment of a loan from Major Trellan which becomes due at twelve to-day. But do not fear—we shall meet again, and I leave you willingly, now that I am confident of your happiness. I almost feared that there might be a lingering regret.

"Not one!" interrupted Edna, with a radiant countenance.

"Well, then, adieu—adieu," and he clasped her to his bosom, and kissed her lips tenderly. A moment more and he was gone.

At precisely four o'clock of the same day, Lord Elwyn's establishment was closed and his household departed, no one knew whither. Lobo alone remained, and took up his residence at the apartment already mentioned, from which place he executed the private orders of his master.

"I have good news for you," said De Montfort, as he drew his chair to Mrs. Benson's tea-table upon that afternoon. "I am to be married to-morrow, and your son Herman will arrive the day following."

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed, quickly setting down a eup of tea. "Are you in earnest, Mr. De Montfort! You married! Herman coming home!"

"It is even so, my good friend. Here is a line from Herman, in which he writes to that effect, and if Mary will examine that basket upon the table she will find a loaf of wedding cake for you, and a present for herself, which will confirm the former part of my statement."

Mary flew to the basket and took out first a beautiful frosted loaf, afterwards an ivory work-box completely filled with the necessary implements of female industry, her own name being marked upon a silver plate on the top of the cover. The little girl danced about for joy, while the good woman between tears and smiles managed to congratulate De Montfort and express her hope of seeing him whenever his leisure permitted.

De Montfort informed her that she was to give herself no uneasiness about a removal, for he had prepared another dwelling for himself; and she was to remain, free from rent, so long as she pleased. He then hastily bade her good-night to escape the torrent of gratitude which was about to overwhelm him.

* * * * *

The morrow came, and a few of us were gathered in De Montfort's exquisitely furnished little parlour to witness the ceremony which was to make Edna a bride. I had never seen her so beautiful. A plain white silk, over which fell her long rich curls, bound only by a garland of orange blossoms which Lord Elwyn had sent from his conservatory, well became the unostentatious manner in which the ceremony was performed. It was the true union of hearts—a festival of joyous feelings, kindred sympathies, and exalted sentiments,

De Montfort was manly, intellectual, noble; Edna was beautiful, loving, trustful. This was their first love. What dreams of happiness then could come amiss as we gazed upon them! What blessings could not be invoked upon their heads with the assurance of their being received and richly deserved!

* * * * *

Herman Benson arrived at the appointed time, with a healthy glow of excitement in place of the hectic flush, which had tinged his otherwise pale cheeks for months previous to his departure.

A little timely assistance, with a consciousness of possessing a sincere friend, had restored him from an apparently inevitable death to the arms of a tender mother and loving sister.

"Times are singularly changed," said De Montfort to him a week or two after his return. "I have lately come in possession of an immense fortune which will require the utmost limits of my time, and my residence must be far away from here. My new shop is therefore useless to me. You can now become a merchant on your own score, for here is the legal instrument which makes you sole possessor of the shop over which you will find your own name, and also the cottage in which



you live. No thanks, my friend—none, they weary me; only one favour do I ask—never forget that the life of a clerk is one of toilsome, soul-wearying drudgery, and deserves a recompense beyond the bare necessities of life."

"I shall only forget that when I cease to remember my own life," replied Benson with tears in his eyes, as they entered the beautiful, though moderately No.11.

THE DOUBLE COURTSHIP.

small warehouse, and Benson found two young clerks ready to acknowledge and obey their new master.

* * * * *

"Edna, my love," said De Montfort to his young bride about a month after their marriage, "are you willing to leave this city?—Some important affairs require my presence at the south, and I am anxious to show my heart's treasure to those who love me in my own country. Will you go with me, Edna?"

The request was a simple one, and could not well be refused. A week from that day they departed, leaving Lobo, who, after having disposed of these temporary residences, followed with two other persons in Lord Elwyn's travelling carriage.

Ernest and his mother had taken their departure some three weeks previous leaving their cottage for the present closed and unoccupied.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RUINED MERCHANT.

It was on a cold and rainy day, in the early spring, that a young gentleman, well dressed, and thoroughly protected from the weather, walked briskly through the crowded streets of New York, and rang at the door of Major Trellan's mansion, with the air of one fully determined to enter at all hazards. Again and again he rang but there was no response. "They are here and I will see them," he murmured, attentively examining the external appearance of the building, and he gave a louder, longer pull than ever. Soon after there were footsteps heard in the hall—then the lock flew back, the door opened a small distance, and the persevering visitor recognised an old servant who had lived in the family many years.

"Ah! Jonas, you know me, do you not—open the door and let me in."

"For Heaven's sake, don't come in, sir, though I know you, sir, and am sure you are a friend, yet my master will not think so, and will abuse you as he does every body else; no—no—do not come in, sir, I pray you."

"He cannot injure me, Jonas, and I say I will go in." Suiting the action to the word, the young stranger resolutely opened the door, entered, and was proceeding as if he was perfectly at home, when the servant respectfully detained him, saying, "Let me go first at least, sir," and leading the way through many large and richly furnished, but now cold and deserted apartments, about which every thing was scattered in the greatest confusion, they at length found themselves at the door of Mrs. Trellan's dressing-room, the only apartment now occupied besides the kitchen and sleeping rooms.

One hasty glance was sufficient to prove that it was the abode of wretchedness. Ten years of ordinary misery could not have wrought a greater change in the appearance of the merchant and his wife. The former occupied a distant part of the room, and sat before a table covered with papers, and large books in leather bindings, his head leaning despairingly upon his hands, and his elbows resting upon the table. His hair, which for a few months had been slightly silvered with the marks of age, was now almost wholly grey; his features were sharper, the furrows deeper, the complexion sallow, the cheeks sunken, and his whole expression, that of a man in the last stage of despair.

The lady sat by the fire as usual, in her easy chair, but there were sufficient indications of the presence of misfortune in her careless dress, soiled cap, and neglect of those mysteries of the toilet—artificial complexion and false hair—which upon her first introduction to our readers, gave her a fair and youthful appearance. She was now haggard, pale, and suffering deeply, not from the consciousness of

wrong deeds, but from a remembrance of their discovery, and from her double disappointment.

The stranger saw all this in the moment that he stood before the open door, while Jonas announced his presence to his master, adding, "I beg your pardon, sir, but he would come in."

"And who would come in! who has dared to enter my house against my will?" exclaimed the master, fixing his eyes, in which raged all the fires of insanity, upon the trembling servant.

"It is I," said the stranger, stepping forward and extending his hand. "It is I—surely you have not forgotten me."

"You! Theodore Montrevor! And you too, who are the first cause of all our misfortunes, have you come at last to witness and exult in our final degradation? Well, sir, you are satisfied now—you see our misery—our poverty, but you had better have waited twenty-four hours, and you would have found us without the trouble of forcing your way into a house, which will to-morrow acknowledge another owner. Go, sir, go—I cannot take your hand," and the wretched man turned away bitterly.

"But you mistake the object of my visit, sir," replied Theodore, perseveringly; "I come not to wound your feelings—to exult in your ruin. God forbid that such a thought should enter my bosom. I have been absent from the city for months; and when, upon my return, two hours since, I learned that you were unfortunate, I hastened to you, hoping, at least, to be allowed to sympathise with and assist you."

"Sympathy!" repeated the fallen man, sneeringly. "What have I to do with your sympathy? Will it restore my unbounded credit? Will it re-establish my flourishing business? Will it save my dwelling and my costly furniture from the auctioneer? Will it shield us from the scorn of the world? Will it extract the poisoned arrow from a guilty bosom? No!—you know it, sir. Then away with your sympathy—return to your splendid home, and forget us."

"It may do all this," replied the young man, quietly; "but if you will listen to me, I can save you at least from poverty. Madam," he continued, approaching Mrs. Trellan for the first time, and with evident reluctance; "will you not assist me in persuading your husband that I come as a friend? I have that to communicate which will relieve your present wants."

"But why should you come to us at all?" she asked, fixing her large eyes searchingly, but with a suspicious look, upon his countenance.

"Madam, I have repeatedly said that I come to console—it may be to assist you. I have never wronged you—I am in no wise the cause of your misfortunes, excepting so far as resulted from your introduction to Lord Elwyn."

"Infamous man!—name him not!" exclaimed Mrs. Trellan, interrupting him; "I am sure that his only object in coming here was to ruin and expose us. You see that he departs as soon as that is accomplished."

"You are mistaken, madam," replied Theodore, firmly; "there was never given to human being a nobler soul—a more generous heart than his. True, he exposed your crime, for I can call it by no softer name, but it was to prevent a marriage, against which nature loudly protested—it was to restore a mourning, but excellent mother to her son; and, finally, it was to give to that son his rights, by making glad the heart of an aged and dying father in their re-union to him. You became the sufferer because you had committed the wrong. And while I say that this is just, God is my witness that, for the sorrows inflicted upon my heart, by means of your counsels, I have treasured no hatred—no revenge. I desire to do you good, and will do it, at any rate."

The miserable woman bowed her head, and turned away in silence. The husband, however, was apparently touched by the stern truths he uttered, and approaching, with a dejected air extended his hand, saying,—

"You are right, sir; I feel that you are. I will try to believe that you are a

friend. Communicate what you have to say, but be brief, for I have still much to do before the morning dawns."

Theodore drew from his pocket a letter, addressed to Major Trellan, by Ernest, previous to his departure. It contained many thanks for his kindness, a few remarks on the past, and ended by requesting his acceptance of the cottage recently occupied by himself and his mother. This, he assured him, would be useless to himself, entering as he should very soon into the possession of a large estate from his maternal grandfather. It closed with a kind farewell to himself and Carlotta, which he chose rather to write than to express in person, as an interview must be painful to all. In the whole letter he had not once alluded to Mrs. Trellan. For this, her husband was in the heart grateful, but he said nothing. Folding the letter, he seemed disposed to digest its contents in silence, which Theodore interrupted, by asking,—

"Do you accept the gift, sir?"

"I do," responded the merchant, firmly; his better feelings gaining the victory.

"Here, then, is another gift, which, I trust, will meet with the same reception," and Theodore placed a slip of paper before him.

It was to secure to him the very moderate income, annually, of six hundred dollars, to be demanded monthly of Theodore Montrevor.

"The gift is so trifling," closed the note; "that it is hoped no false pride will stand in the way of its acceptance." There was no signature, which Theodore explained, by saying, that he was not the giver, but simply the instrument of the gift—the individual wished to remain unknown.

There was a severe struggle in the breast of the iron-hearted man, between the pride of independence, and the ghastly stare of poverty. It was like receiving charity; but his wife and daughter, with all their helplessness, were objects of consideration, and for their sakes he consented. But when that consent was given in words, they were hollow and broken, as if wrung from him by the last agonies of despair.

"This is well, sir," replied Theodore; "you can now surround yourself with, at least, the comforts of life; and I trust I shall ever be admitted to your new residence with the confidence which you once reposed in me."

"As often as you choose to step out of your own brilliant path into the shadow of our fallen fortunes, you may be sure of a welcome," replied he, dejectedly.

Theodore grasped his hand warmly, bowed sternly to the lady, and withdrew. Meeting Jonas in the hall, he inquired for Carlotta, and was informed that she was in her own room.

"Go and tell her that I wish to see her there; I will wait here."

"I will go, sir, but it will be useless—she will not see you," said the servant, ascending the stairs.

A moment more, and he returned to confirm his prediction.

"Is she engaged in any occupation requiring strict privacy?" asked Theodore.

"She is packing her books," replied the servant.

"Then I will see her," and he turned in the direction which years of intimacy had rendered as familiar as his own home. As he approached the door of the well-remembered parlour on the outside, he heard light steps rapidly advancing towards it upon the inside. With one bound, he caught the knob, and turning it, threw the door open before it could be locked.

This very sudden entrance caused Carlotta to pause, with a movement of indignant surprise, in the centre of the room.

"Am not I, even in my own apartment, safe from intrusion?" she demanded; her dark eyes flashing with unwonted fire.

"If you sincerely wish it," replied Theodore, calmly, and apparently unmoved by her anger; "Carlotta, I am true to you still—your image alone dwells in my heart, but if you bid me go, I shall obey you."

The proud girl was humbled—she would have spoken, but the words died upon

her lips, she grew very pale, her limbs trembled, and with a smothered utterance, between a groan and a sigh, she fell into the arms of her friend.

"Carlotta—dearest—have I found you to kill you with my imprudence," he exclaimed, as he hung over her lifeless form, and bathed her temples and hands with water; "Oh, this is too much! Speak to me once more, if but to pardon this outrage. Will you forgive me?" he asked, as she slowly opened her eyes, and endeavoured to sit up.

"Forgive!" she repeated slowly and faintly; "I forgive! I, whose blind ambition has caused you so much unhappiness. Oh! it is you who must pardon, if you can do so," and burying her face in her hands, she wept bitterly.

"Carlotta, do not weep," he said, tenderly, raising her head till it rested upon his bosom; "let us forget the past; if you still love me, there is a pure and abiding happiness in the future, which will erase it from our recollection."

"Can it be? Will years to come possess the redeeming power? Ah! Theodore, will you believe me when I tell you that amid all my follies—when the glittering cup was all but pressed to my lips—there was a constant and wearing struggle between ambition and my love for you? But this is not the time for words like these. We are poor, deserted, forgotten, or remembered only to be the objects of the world's contempt."

"Not so, Carlotta. Listen to me. Were you a thousand times more wretched than you are, my love for you is so much a part of my nature, that it would only increase with a knowledge of your misery. I know your temptations—I know also that you have only injured yourself, and surely your sufferings have been sufficient atonement. Your parents are provided for; how, you will learn from them. For myself, I have no happiness but in you. Our love pledge is still sacred with me, and with all the sincerity of an affection, which has outlived a long separation, the ocean's tempest—a rival's power—and a total change of fortune—I once more ask you to share with me the blessings and the ills of life."

"It is too humiliating, Theodore. You could not regard me with contempt."

The young lover arose, bent one knee beside her, clasped her hands in his own, and with eyes raised to heaven, said solemnly, "God so deal with me as I cause you to lose all recollection of the past, in the flowers of true affection, which I shall hereafter strew in your path!"

Carlotta gently unclasped her hands from his, took his head between them, and kissed his lips without affectation or coquetry.

"You will be mine?" he asked.

"Yes."

"When?"

"Whenever you wish."

"To-night then. Robe yourself simply—I will meanwhile summon a carriage, and the ceremony shall be immediately performed. We will then return and inform your parents."

"But Theodore, where are we to live? This house—"

"Will be sold to-morrow," he continued firmly. "Well, be it so, there are more ho uses than one."

"Then you will not tell me."

"No," he replied gaily. "It is now four o'clock, I will be with you at five."

As he descended the stairs, he again met Jonas. "I am going out an hour hence," he said to the servant, "with Miss Trellan. Immediately after my departure, I wish you to pack all the articles which she most values, and send them to this address," giving him a card, and at the same time slipping a gold piece into his hand, adding, "Be very secret about it." The servant bowed and opened the door. "I shall be here at five; admit me without ringing," and Theodore rapidly descended the steps, carrying a lighter heart than he had done for months.

At the appointed hour he returned, threw a beautifully embroidered satin cloak over Carlotta's white robe of figured silk, lifted her into the carriage and sat beside her. A few moments brought them to the house of a respected clergyman, were they were married in the presence of two witnesses.

"We will go to our own home, my love," said the happy Theodore.

"Where is our home?" asked the young bride somewhat anxiously.

"Here."

"But this is—"

"Was you mean—yes, it was Lord Elwyn's residence—it is now ours. It was his parting gift to me. Come, you see all is prepared for us," and seizing her trembling hand, he lifted her out, and almost carried her up the steps. The furniture in most of the rooms remained the same. Lord Elwyn's dressing-room, and Lira's conservatory were unfurnished. A supper was already spread in the library, the contents of which, had been left entire. Many recollections were connected with this apartment where Lord Elwyn had always received his intimate friends, and which promised well to become the favorite room with Theodore, and his delighted bride.

"Where are these to be located, Carlotta," asked the young husband the following morning, as he pointed to the books, her harp, her music, her flowers and jewels, which according to his order had been left the night previous.

Carlotta selected a little room joining Theodore's dressing-room, into which she gave him permission to enter at all times. Theodore rang and ordered up the lady's maid. Adela, the little girl to whom she was so much attached, entered. Carlotta started with surprise, and giving way to an impulse of joy, caught the child in her arms, and kissed both cheeks.

"This is very undignified," exclaimed the husband with mock gravity.

"Not when you consider that Adela and I have lived together nine years, and that two weeks ago, when she learned that she must really go, we wept together for the whole day. Now that she is here, I am sure all will go on right."

"But where is Luna, Adela's twin sister?" asked Theodore.

"Indeed, I do not know. Edna disposed of her upon her own marriage, fancying she could not afford the luxury of a maid; she went to live with a friend, but soon after, that is, in the course of a month from Edna's marriage, she disappeared very suddenly and mysteriously, from the house where she lived. Adela has greatly mourned her absence.

At length in accordance with Carlotta's earnest desire, Theodore accompanied her to the dwelling of her parents—not to the elegant mansion where we have hitherto found them, but to the pretty cottage—the gift of Ernest to his uncle.

"Will never wonders cease?" exclaimed Carlotta, as she entered one of the parlours and found her parents at tea, much more cheerful and happy, than she had of late seen them.

Theodore cordially greeted his new parents, with a warmth in which there was no trace of the sternness of the preceding night, and gave as his reason for persuading Carlotta to commit matrimony without their knowledge, that it had taken so long to convince them that he was really a friend, that he feared the whole evening would be too short to induce them to receive him as a son-in-law.

"Well Carlotta," said her mother at parting, "it is something to be mistress of Lord Elwyn's mansion, if not of his purse."

"Hush!" replied the daughter quickly, and sternly. "For Heaven's sake do not recal the past, which I am so earnestly striving to forget."

"Carlotta," said her husband on their return, "we are really married, but the world will be unwilling to be convinced of the fact till we throw open our doors, and regale it for an evening with cake, wine and music; please, therefore, settle the preliminaries with the cook, while I direct and send this immense pile of reception cards. You will soon see that you have not lost your station in the fashionable world by a few months seclusion; you will indeed be more than ever admired."

Theodore's prediction proved true. The bride was never more beautiful, of more flattered; but a smile of contempt passed over her lovely features, as she thought how soon her parents were forgotten by the same fashion-worshipper. "They too were courted and admired at the splendid ball they gave some month since—" and she suddenly paused, for the ardent gaze of her husband was fixed

upon her. "How he loves me," she said mentally; "I will strive to become more and more worthy of such affection."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE RETURN.—DEATH.—LIRA.—HOME.

SOME months after Edna's departure from New York, I received from her the following letter. It was dated Layon Castle, Acara, Greece.

* * * * *

"To you, who so long watched the progress of certain events in my native city, it is due to unfold the progress and developments of those mysteries which so deeply interested you. I will therefore, proceed in the order of events, and where I was not an eye-witness, will call to my aid the statements of others.

You will recollect that Ernest and his mother, left New York two weeks previous to ourselves. It is therefore, proper that I first follow them, and relate the story of their return as I learned it from him.

It was towards the close of a lovely day in the spring, that a carriage stopped before the avenue leading to the mansion of Judge Carson. The old gentleman as usual had his arm chair near the window, and was the first to see it. A sudden tremor seized him; he attempted to rise and approach the door, but almost immediately fell backwards. He was instantly raised and supported by his attendants to his chair, but so intent was he upon the persons now distinctly seen through the windings of the path, that though no announcement had been made of the return of his daughter, he insisted upon being carried to meet her. They obeyed, and a moment after, the father and daughter were locked in an embrace, to which a sorrowful separation of eighteen years added its long accumulating and conflicting emotions. Ernest, fearful of the shock upon his mother's shattered constitution, attempted to separate them, but was horror-stricken to find that both had fainted, and were about to fall to the ground. Calling loudly for assistance, a small army of servants rushed from the house, and bore the two insensible forms within a large, low, and what we should consider at the north, almost unfurnished apartment. A respectable house-keeper, apparently the only white woman in the establishment, took the direction of affairs, dismissed all but the two personal attendants of the old gentleman, and devoted herself, with the assistance of Ernest, to the lady.

In a brief space, the latter revived, and in spite of all the entreaties of her son, was carried to her father's couch, which she never left. Her own countenance of a marble whiteness, her thin lips almost livid, and her eyes fixed and glassy, she yet remained beside her only parent, to catch his first reviving breath. At length consciousness returned—he opened his eyes feebly, and gazed upon the mother and son alternately, as if striving to comprehend the scene.

"My daughter—my son"—he said at last, in hollow accents, extending to each a hand, "I have waited long for this. I knew that you would return—that you would come to see me die. All is prepared—my estate is given to you. You will find it there," he added as his eyes wandered to an old secretary near his couch.

"Father," said the lady in a low, sweet voice, "I go with you—I shall never more be parted from you, but ere we enter the unknown mysteries of a future existence, say that you pardon my desertion—that you have still confidence in my affection."

"Mother—talk not of dying—leave me not a stranger—an orphan," exclaimed he weeping son, as he knelt beside the object of his devotion, and bathed her hands in tears.

"My mission is ended—I have brought my son to the home of his ancestors—to his own home," she said solemnly—then after a moment's reflection she added, "Father, will you bless us now—the time was, when you deemed it right to refuse it," and she bowed her head upon his bosom.

"Recal it not—God has permitted me to atone for that sin," replied the dying man, laying a hand upon the head of each, "God bless you!" he added in a voice which seemed to come from the tomb.

But the aged man did not remove his hand, and a sudden fear seized Ernest, as he felt its unwonted pressure. He carefully removed it, and rising, endeavoured to lift his mother's head which he feared was too much for the breast of a dying man. Scarcely had his eyes rested upon their countenances, ere he fell prostrate, with one wild heart-rendering shriek.

They were dead. The once mistaken, but repenting and affectionate father, and the loving, trusting, strong-hearted daughter.

* * * * *

I must now demand your attention to my own affairs. First, however, it is but right that I should scold you for your part of the deception practised upon me in my marriage—but no—upon second thoughts, it was a part of the play, and if I was a dupe, it was a happy one.

Our journey was a most delightful one—all new to me, but one with which I found my husband perfectly familiar, although a foreigner. At length we arrived in Charleston, and were set down at a splendid mansion, which I did not for an instant imagine to be our residence. With some curiosity therefore I gazed from the window of the carriage, when De Montfort seized my hand, lifted me out, and before I had time to recover from my surprise, had led me up to the steps, and through a group of servants into a side parlour, where Luna, her pretty face all smiles and dimples, stood ready to receive me.

"Where are we?" I exclaimed, catching De Montfort's hand.

"At home, my love," he replied with much gravity.

"But I do not like the expression of your countenance," I said, "you are hoaxing me—this establishment cannot be yours."

"Indeed," he observed quietly, "we will ascertain that." Pulling the bell violently, a man immediately entered, whose strange and impenetrable countenance recalled some indistinct impressions. I was sure I had seen him somewhere.

"Lobo," said my husband sternly, "have you purchased, or hired this establishment."

"Purchased it my lord," replied the servant, "you lordship never lives in hired houses."

"Very well," said De Montfort, and the man went out.

"My lord!" Here was a new puzzle. Putting my arms coaxingly around his neck and kissing him, I exclaimed, "Do tell me, George who and what you are—shall I never find my way out of this mystery?"

"Yes, come with me," he replied laughing, and he led me away to his dressing-room, which at first sight, seemed to me a regular clothing shop. Requesting me to wait in a small ante-room, I threw myself into a window seat, and in spite of the mystery I had come to investigate, I fell into a reverie. A few seconds or an hour might have elapsed, when I was aroused by a light tap upon the shoulder. I started to my feet—Lord Elwyn stood beside me with the same sweet smile playing upon his lips that had so often charmed me in my husband. I pressed his hand warmly, asking a thousand questions of how, or whence he came, when he put me at a little distance from him, saying in an earnest voice.

"Edna, do you not recognise me?"

"Recognise you!" I repeated seriously, for I began to fear that we were all insane, "I know that you are Lord Elwyn—my mother's cousin, and my own friend."

"Your own husband also, am I not?" he asked, taking off the glossy black wig and whiskers which I had so often admired, and shaking down the rich curls that

are so much in unison with De Montfort's gay, laughing air. The face—the eyes—the coat each underwent somechange, I know not what. A moment after, my husband clasped me to his bosom exclaiming,—

“And you have married Lord Elwyn, after all!”

“Ah! George,” I said, “how could you deceive me so?” but he only stopped my mouth with kisses, and led me away to supper.



“Well, Edna,” said he after our slight repast, for I was too much excited to eat, “you can have a choice of companions to travel with you the rugged journey of life. I am still George De Montfort, Lord Elwyn, which name and title I received from my father. I am also Dr. Huntly, whom you have so often assisted in caring for the suffering,” I am sure that I blushed. “You knew me then,” I asked.

"Yes, and loved you."

"But why," I inquired, "do you assume so many characters?"

"Sometimes to do good—at others to accomplish my own purposes. But there are other titles on the list, which you will learn by, and by."

"No matter," I replied, clasping my hands over the arms that encircled me, "to me you will ever be George De Montfort—no other—I will only know you by that name. Nevertheless, we must among our servants, and in the fashionable world, submit to the titles of Lord and Lady Elwyn."

"Submit! yes, that is exactly the word, my friend, for I assure you, who will readily believe me, that I should have been very lonely and unhappy when I first learned my real station, had it not been for the constant and unwavering kindness of my husband. I now understand him so perfectly, that I wonder at my own blindness in never having detected him beneath his disguises."

"Would you not like to visit Ernest?" he inquired one morning during our first week's residence in Charlestown.

"Yes, above all things," I replied readily, "but where is he?"

"His estate is about four miles from the city—a pleasant drive."

In less than an hour, we left the main road for an avenue leading to a large irregular and time-worn mansion, originally composed of stone, but to which many additions of brick and wood had been made at different periods. The spot seemed still and lonely to me, having always lived in the bustle of a large city, but was none the less attractive. We left the carriage to enjoy a short walk beneath the large old trees that for centuries had reared their tops to heaven, and whose branches had become so interwoven as to form a complete covering. Scarcely had we wandered half the length of this fine avenue, when a low sob reached us, and caused us to stop simultaneously. Again it was repeated, and seemed to come from the earth. My husband placed his ear to the ground a moment, during which we heard it for the third time, then sought my hand and darted into a narrow path that emerged from the principal one. A few winding brought us to the door of a large tomb. It was open, and he did not hesitate to enter.

I heard him descend the steps, then smothered voices, and finally two persons ascending. In a moment I was clasped in the arms of my brother Ernest, whose custom we found it was to weep over the graves of those so dear to him. Seated upon the rich turf at the foot of an aged tree, he related to us the story of his griefs, and we mingled our tears with his.

I, in turn, related the discoveries I had made with regard to my husband, after which he smiled a little, but it was so sad, that it afflicted me more than his tears.

At length George laid his hand upon my brother's arm, with that peculiar grace which I have never seen in any other, saying, "Ernest, have you forgotten the beautiful face of which you once caught a momentary glimpse, in one of the streets of Boston?"

A deep crimson glowed upon his previously pale cheek, as he pressed his hand to his heart and smiled hopelessly.

"Would you see her again?"

Ernest sprung to his feet. "Do not trifle with me, sir; at this moment, I am not responsible for any act I may commit."

George caressingly encircled him with one arm, and motioning me to walk upon the other side of him, we quietly retraced our steps to the carriage.

"Where are you taking me?" suddenly inquired Ernest, as we stooped before it.

"Where there is a sweet face, and flowers and music—in short where you may love and be happy if you choose."

Half an hour brought us to the termination of our ride, in front of a villa with Venetian blinds, piazza running all around it, and a wide lawn, such as one sometimes sees upon the banks of the Hudson. It was literally covered with

woodbine and clematis. The doors were open, but the fairy dwelling seemed quite uninhabited. Taking from his bosom a little silver whistle which I had never before seen my husband gave a signal to some one. Presently from the depths of an adjoining forest, there issued a form which surpassed in loveliness all that I had ever seen. I could catch but a passing ray from her bright countenance, as she passed me and threw herself into my husband's arms. I am ashamed to own it, but for an instant a pang of jealousy shot through my heart. It seemed impossible that he should ever again smile upon me while possessing her love. It vanished in an instant, when he turned her towards me, saying,—

“Edna, have you room in your heart for Lira—my little sister?”

My first impulse was to kneel before the angelic creature, but restraining myself, I was about to clasp her hand, when she threw her arms about me, saying, in pretty, broken English,—

“My brother says that you will love me, Edna.”

This appeal was sufficient, and I embraced and kissed her cordially.

The introduction to Ernest seemed more difficult. He had stood from the moment of her appearance, like one wrapped in some heavenly vision. His features, always expressive of the loftiest sentiments, now became radiant with a long-concealed and glowing love. Lira had not yet perceived him. My husband took her from my arms to lead her to him. They had advanced but a few steps, when suddenly her face and neck were deeply crimsoned, and with a rapid movement, she buried her head in his bosom, and wept. As if the same impulse had seized both, Ernest sprang to her, knelt beside her, pressing her hand to his lips.

“Lira, do you love him?” her brother asked, in a sweetly modulated voice. A long, deep sigh was the only response.

“Ernest!” he continued. Instantly my brother stood before him. “Ernest, the world has given us few lessons like this—guard it with your life,” and placing the fairy form of the weeping girl in his arms, he caught my hand, and hastily drew me into the house.

“Have they met before?” I inquired, when we had seated ourselves upon one of Lira's cushions.

“Yes. We landed in Boston previously to our arrival in New York, where a transient glance produced in both the love which time has had no power to destroy. I, at one time, feared that it would prove fatal to Lira's delicate nature; but a removal here, and the very slight encouragement which I had given her from time to time, have dispelled my fears.”

“The world would laugh at such love,” I observed.

“No matter. The world laughs at much which it will gladly seize upon or imitate the first opportunity. There are few hearts so pure as to be capable of the love which animated *their* souls.”

“Tell me something of Lira.”

“She is my half-sister. After my father's death, my mother, who was descended from a union of two noble families,—one French, the other Austrian—married a Greek. Lira is their daughter. When about five years of age, her parents both died of a malignant fever, having confided her person and fortune to me.”

“She never appeared with you in New York.”

“Certainly not—it was no part of my plan to expose one so beautiful, but so utterly unversed in the world's ways, to the unhealthy admiration of the public. I firmly believe in nature, and while I have sought to educate Lira's intellect, I have allowed the free indulgence of her impulses, so far as they were noble and good. You will perceive that she is a creature of feeling—that her whole life consists in loving and being loved.”

From that hour Ernest forgot his sorrows, or, if they were remembered, it was only when absent from Lira's side.

At length we began to talk seriously of our voyage to Europe, as it was Lira's

wish to celebrate her marriage amid the companions of her childhood's home, and Ernest had no wish but to live continually in her presence.

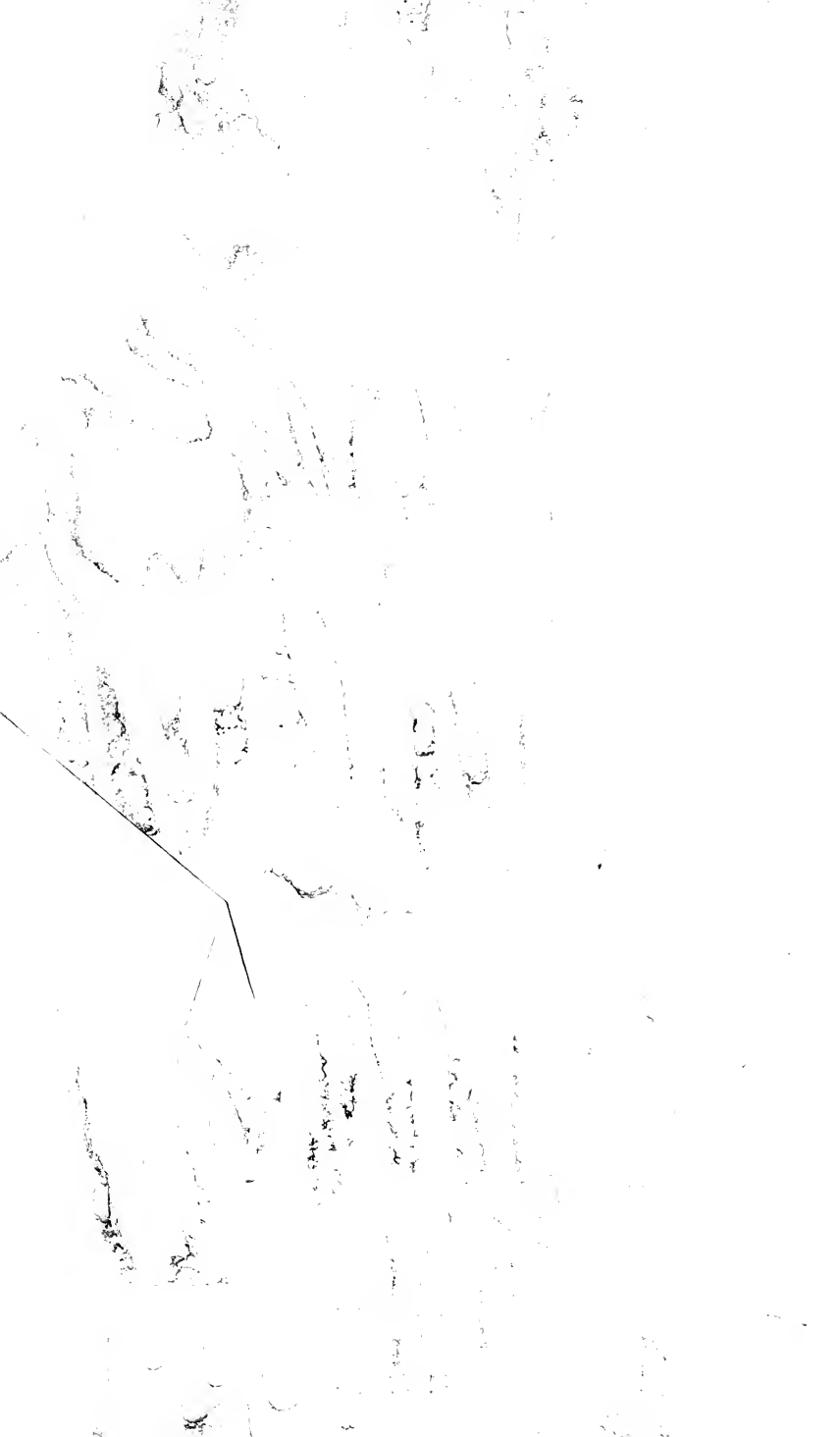
The estate inherited by Ernest from his grandfather had rapidly decreased in value during the protracted illness of the old gentleman, and now scarcely yielded a living to the hundred idle servants attached to it. By my husband's advice, their freedom was given to them, and the plantation sold, as it was very evident that my brother would never make a successful speculator in cotton and rice.

After a three months' residence in Charleston and its vicinity, we found ourselves upon the broad ocean, borne towards the land of heroes and of song—the birth-place of the gentle Lira, whose tongue never wearied of its praises. Her return was anticipated, and herself welcomed with every demonstration of joy by the dependents of her noble house. A group of young friends surrounded her, with smiles and tears, as our beautiful barge, with its silken streamers, which bore us from the ship, touched the strand, and led her up the marble steps of her father's castle with wild and joyous greetings. A saloon, decorated with flowers, as for a festival, was open for our reception, and beneath a green and fragrant canopy these two loving hearts entered into that solemn betrothment which precedes, by a few days, the last outward ceremony of marriage.

"Ah, clearing up mysteries, are you?" exclaimed Lord Elwyn, looking over my shoulder; "a fine task you will set yourself, if you undertake that, wherever we go; for my life is one of deep thought and unwearied action, wherein I hold myself not accountable to man—only to God. Nevertheless, say to her, who so kindly received the homeless clerk and the friendless maiden, that she constantly lives in my affection and my gratitude."

Of my own love, there needs no assurance; it is proof against time and absence, and must therefore be enduring. Adieu, adieu.

THE END.



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