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ENTRAPPED

BY  
ALICE M.  
DIEHL

Fiction (English)

not  
in



# Entrapped



# Entrapped

By  
Alice (M<sup>ary</sup>) Diehl

Author of  
'Passion's Puppets,' 'The Garden of Eden,' 'Fire,'  
etc.



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# ENTRAPPED

## CHAPTER I

WITHOUT the grand old stone house, the gale was driving dense masses of black clouds across the darkening sky, raging among the branches of the ancient elms, tossing the shrubs, and shrieking about the tall chimneys like a crew of clamouring spirits of the departed race, who had spent, or perhaps misspent, their little lives within the hoary, ivied walls.

Within, all was still in the huge mansion occupied alone by the aging Squire Quarles, his recently-recognised niece, his adopted son, and a former nurse who acted as housekeeper, with two village wenches under her whom she had trained as housemaids.

In the great, ill-lighted dining-room, which boasted a finely-carved mantelpiece, and was

hung with valuable paintings—Flemish, Dutch, Italian—a girl paced up and down in miserable impatience, clasping and unclasping her hands, and every now and again pausing to listen for the wheels of the one carriage the penurious Squire possessed—a dogcart. It had been sent to fetch the adopted son, Andrew Quarles junior, who had been despatched a few weeks before in disgrace because he and she—his beautiful pseudo-cousin Zoe—had presumed to fall in love and to dare to suggest a future marriage to their petulant tyrant.

Now, Andrew had been suddenly summoned by his adoptive father from the distant farm he had been banished to. He did not yet know why, but Zoe did, and she had before her the bitter task of telling him.

She looked miserable as the 'parlourmaid' Phœbe, a square-set young person, with a red face, vacuous black eyes, and a mass of fuzzy black hair under her cheap cap, brought in the butler's tray and began to lay the table for the seven o'clock dinner for two. But no unhappiness could mar Zoe's beauty. Tall and slender, she had a pretty head daintily set on a graceful neck and shoulders. Her

straight features, rich dark eyes, and soft, waving, golden-brown hair would have made her a lovely creature without that sweet, curved mouth and delicious, creamy skin.

‘Mrs. Slee wants to know, miss, should she take up the master’s dinner, or would you like to?’

‘Oh, tell her she had better take up the tray to-night,’ began Zoe, who dreaded a repetition of the stormy interview she had just escaped from, during which her uncle had made her writhe with his cruel incriminations and invectives. Then she suddenly stopped short. Was that a mocking whistle of that hateful wind, like the one which had set her heart beating so furiously a few minutes before; or was it ‘her boy’s’ signal when he was returning home, and wished her to run out and meet him? She did not wait to ascertain; she rushed out, and, groping her way along a short corridor and across the lofty, domed hall, where the feeble glimmer of one hanging-lamp made the armoured effigies among the trophies of weapons look as if they were moving slowly towards her, she opened the heavy hall door with an effort,

and let in a gust of wind and a young man together.

In an instant he had shut the door, and, with a passionate 'Darling!' had taken her in his arms and kissed her—forehead, lips, and the white throat which rose flower-like from her square-cut black frock. 'Oh, this is good, to come back to you again! it has seemed so cruelly long,' he said, peering into her lovely face, which even in the half-light struck him as thinner and paler than when they parted, although then it was wan and drawn with anguish. 'Come, tell me, is it all right?'

'Oh no; it is all wrong,' she moaned. 'Come into the dining-room, and I will tell you.'

'But how can it be "all wrong," my love, as he has sent for me?' asked Andrew, hanging up his coat, which fell down twice because he could not see the pegs. 'It shall be all right, anyhow,' he went on defiantly, crossing the hall with his arm round her. 'I was telling myself as I came along—this sending for me means we have won.'

She urged him gently into the dining-room. As they entered, Phœbe, with a 'Good-

evenin', zur,' went out. Zoe pulled him up to the wood-fire, which she had built up lest he should be chilled by his journey, and stood opposite him.

'I have had an awful time since you went,' she said slowly. 'Not only perpetual bullying from him, and threats if I dared to "have anything more to do with you," as he calls it, but strange things have happened. You know I told you I had seen a girl in white look out of a window of one of the shut-up rooms at me when I first came, and you said you had seen her once or twice, but said nothing because you thought she was Mrs. Slee's daughter staying with her without uncle's knowledge, and didn't see why the poor woman shouldn't have her? Well, one night I awoke hearing uncle's voice in the passage'—she glanced at the closed door and lowered her voice—'and I listened, and heard some girl or woman crying. Well, before I really had time to think, I jumped out of bed, opened the door, and saw uncle leading a girl along the corridor; he opened the baize door and pushed her in. Then I just managed to shut my door before he

turned round. Don't speak! That is not all. A few nights after that some noise outside woke me. It sounded weird, like a pistol going off just under my window. I ran to the window, and, looking out, saw a white figure dancing about on the gravel in the most fantastic way. After a minute or two it stopped dead, and rushed along the drive at such a rate that if I believed in ghosts or spirits I should have thought it was one. Wait—listen—have patience! I was naturally wide awake after that. But towards morning I fell asleep, and slept over my usual time. When I got up, I heard that uncle had gone to London; and there he stayed four days, coming home in the most awful temper, and trying to make me swear with the most frightful oaths that I would not try to marry you. Andrew darling, he has nearly driven me mad—he has indeed.'

The young man looked darkly into the blazing logs, and stretched out his delicate white hands towards the flame; and Zoe watched him with a tender glow in her beautiful eyes. She thought her uncle's adopted son the handsomest man on earth;

and there was some ground for her fatuous admiration, for young Quarles, as his name was since his adoption, was singularly gifted with the good looks which frequently find favour with the fair sex. Though slim, he was tall and broad-shouldered, erect and manly in bearing, and his dark, oval face was Italian or Spanish in contour. If his mouth was faulty, it was well hidden by a silky black moustache; and under his thoughtful, pencilled brows were a wondrous pair of eyes, which, like the sea, seldom looked alike, although in their strange depths change seldom meant loss of beauty.

‘What do I think—of that?’ he abruptly asked, turning to his love. ‘You must have been dreaming! I have been here three years, but I have never—seen—the dad—speak to a woman, except, of course, Mrs. Slee, till you came. No, dearest, it is not that I won’t believe you, but I do think you were dreaming. Anyhow, it has nothing to do with you or me; and perhaps, if there was anything, it has made uncle relent.’

‘Relent? I believe, if he had dared, he would have killed me just now before you



came !' she cried bitterly. 'Oh, Andrew, he means to separate us ! He means to alter his will unless you will swear that you will break with me. He will leave neither of us anything !'

The young man gave her a curious, searching look. Then he smiled, and, stooping ; again warmed first one hand, then the other.

'We will see about that,' he dryly said. 'I had better go up and see him, dear, and get the thing over. Say they are not to serve dinner till I tell them to, will you ?'

He went out, and Zoe, collapsing into a chair by the fire, gave a sobbing sigh and stared hopelessly at the leaping flames. Passing in review before her somewhat mockingly were the chief scenes in her chequered young life, as she crouched in the crazy old morocco chair waiting the return of her lover. Her mother Zoe had been the only sister of Squire Quarles. Many years his junior, she had been born and bred in the old home of her forefathers, and when her parents died her brother Andrew had made her his darling. For her sake he had left his country home,

taken a house in London, and had her introduced in the fashionable world. He had expected a nobleman, at least, for a brother-in-law. But when, instead of fancying any of her many eligible admirers, she chose to fall in love and run away with a certain good-looking young painter, Stephen Blount, who was painting her portrait, Quarles' love for his young sister turned to hate. He swore he would never see her again, and he never did, for when she sent for him—a widow, literally dying of grief some months after her husband's death—he refused to go to her. A former governess of Zoe Blount's, when she was in her happy youth at Heatherly Court, took the orphan babe and brought her up, educating her in the school she had bought. The child Zoe knew no other home than Newnham House School, in a favourite suburb of London. When Miss Vigors' health failed, and she sold the school to a Mrs. Mercer, Zoe remained as one of the English teachers. But Mrs. Mercer never liked the girl. She was too pretty, for one thing, and Mrs. Mercer had daughters nearly grown-up, who did not show to advantage when in the neighbourhood

of such a beauty. Then Mrs. Mercer was dissatisfied with her bargain, disappointed in the school, and considered that Miss Vigors had cheated her. So when she found out that Zoe in her good-nature was receiving letters for an important girl-pupil under cover to herself, and that, instead of being from the young lady's mother and sister, as she had declared to Miss Blount, they were love-letters from some man unknown to her family, Mrs. Mercer paid Miss Blount a quarter's salary and sent her off with a recommendation to go to her godmother, Miss Vigors. She would do nothing more for her.

But Zoe had heard tales of her forefathers, and of her mother's cruel brother, from Miss Vigors. And as that lady was seriously ill at her sister's house in Exeter, Zoe determined she would not let her know of her dismissal until she could add some pleasant news to temper the annoyance. So she went straight to the uncle who had been hitherto a bogie in her eyes, managed to secure an interview with him through the intercession of his adopted son, whom she happened to meet returning from a shooting expedition at the very door of the

house, and succeeded in gaining his somewhat grudging suffrages.

She well remembered her first meeting with the kind, attractive young fellow, and her first unpleasant interview with Squire Quarles in the library, when he nearly choked with rage alluding to her dead parents. But what was clearest, brightest, happiest, was the recollection of the hours with Andrew—wandering in the gardens, still beautiful in the early autumn, strolling about the park, sitting together in the old library through the winter evenings, when the Squire, who seemed always tired and bored to death when he was not in ‘one of his tantrums,’ as his former nurse and present housekeeper termed them, had gone off to bed in his big bedchamber between Andrew’s and Zoe’s.

She thrilled as she recalled that mystic twilight hour on a warm September eve when, after lingering in the rose-garden and watching the dying sunset in the western sky, and a silvery half-moon and glittering attendant star in the opposite gleaming pallor of greenish-blue—they were saying ‘good-night’—then suddenly looked into each other’s eyes, and,

a mutual smouldering passion, barely suppressed for many long days, leaping into flame, they fell into each other's arms and kissed.

Oh, that kiss! It had changed life for Zoe. She had come to believe—so that she smiled contemptuously at books, plays, and poetry which told of beauty and glamour even in this workaday world—that earthly life was all dreary routine, disappointment, work against the grain, and hardship. With that first kiss of passion a veil dropped from her eyes—she knew that joy so unutterable might be hers, that a lifetime of trial was cheap payment for it.

This had given her patience to endure the Squire's elaborate cruelty to her since he banished his adopted son. This resolved her to do or dare anything rather than renounce the bliss of becoming Andrew's wife. She was vaguely planning what she might possibly do if Squire Quarles proved contumacious to the bitter end of banishing and disinheriting them both, when Andrew came abruptly in. He carefully closed the door, and came up to her. He was white—or, rather, livid. His eyes glittered strangely, and wandered. It was the first

time he had looked through and beyond her, instead of gazing with that tender possessive expression into hers.

‘He is mad, or he is damned before his time!’ he hoarsely said. ‘Don’t let us talk of him or think of him, or God knows what will happen, Zoe. I could have strangled him as I stood there. Don’t look as if you could not believe me. I want you to know me as I am—to have no false notions about me. I swear to you that when he sat back in his chair, rubbing his hands and chuckling as he smiled, and told me how he had picked me up out of the gutter, and that but for him I would have been a tramp or a convict, I could have sprung upon him and crushed him to death. But that it would have lost me *you*, my darling, I firmly believe I should have done it.’

‘Hush!’ murmured Zoe warningly, just as the door was opened and Phœbe entered with the soup-tureen.

## CHAPTER II

MRS. SLEE, formerly nurse to Zoe's mother, the Squire's young sister, had clung to the family she had served and the house where her mistress had died, leaving the baby Zoe to her charge. When her beloved Miss Zoe had run away with 'the painter gentleman,' as she called Stephen Blount, she mourned, but stayed on with the angered Squire, hoping that 'all would come right' and 'Miss Zoe' be forgiven and reinstated. When her hopes remained unfulfilled, and from a handsome, imperious young man Andrew Quarles gradually changed into a misanthropic, miserly old bachelor, Mary Slee stayed on and endured as only certain rare natures with a gift of resignation can endure.

But when the son of Andrew Quarles' only love, who had jilted him, came to the door almost a beggar, and the Squire took him in,

and after some months of probation adopted him, she thanked Heaven, and did all in her power to soften the succeeding penury which made the young man's dreary life a burden to him. Then, when 'Miss Zoe's daughter' suddenly sought refuge with her unkind stranger uncle, and was allowed to stay, she really rejoiced, and secretly wove castles in the air of possible future relationships which might succeed in softening Squire Quarles' stony heart.

When Andrew and Zoe confessed their mutual affection to their uncle and adoptive father, and his rage was unreasoning as it was alarming, Mrs. Slee was utterly miserable. She did more than her utmost to make life less unendurable to the poor, much-abused girl; she pampered the Squire's failing appetite while lessening the sum total of her weekly accounts by adding money from her own little treasured hoard—a mere pittance. She contrived marvellous little dishes out of odds and ends, in almost a miraculous fashion, for both persecutor and persecuted, telling herself it was all she could do.

To-night, the little dinner she sent in to the lovers was quite dainty, although a chef-



d'œuvre of contrivance. The cream soup was made out of chicken-bone stock and milk; the stewed oxtail was soupmeat from the previous day. She had literally stolen the late French beans from the vegetable-garden before the gardener—who was authorized to sell the produce, and whose reckonings each month with his miserly employer were days of woe—was up and about. But as Zoe and Andrew sat, one at the head, the other at the side, of the long dining-table, they could not have told what or whether they ate. They were on the rack—in the throes of a great anguish against which their passionate, eager, impatient youth rebelled.

Zoe's one thought was to say what she had to say while Phœbe, the stupid, but evidently inquisitive, was out of the room. She intuitively felt that to soften her lover's righteous wrath against his unfeeling protector was impossible. So she tried to find extenuating circumstances, and told Andrew of the visit that day of some stranger man who had not given his name, yet, by sending up a blank card with 'Nemo' upon it, had obtained audience of the Squire, who seemed really ill,

though he would only acknowledge to a slight cold, and forbade the summoning of the village practitioner.

‘What was he like?’ asked Andrew in one of the brief intervals of Phœbe’s absence. To-night her master’s adopted son and real niece seemed to fascinate that young woman. She stood in the corner of the room watching them with goggle eyes and breathing hard, as if staring were exhausting work. ‘What? You did not see him?’

‘I saw his back as he walked through the park,’ returned Zoe. ‘He looked military—big, broad. It was raining, but, though he carried an umbrella, he did not put it up.’

Andrew Quarles bit his lip and frowned; then he looked rather angrily at Phœbe, who came up to her young mistress, until he heard her say, ‘Will you please go up to the master, miss?’ when his frown relaxed, and he turned to his love and, nodding, said ‘Go.’

‘What can he want her for?’ he asked himself as he told Phœbe sharply to ‘make haste and clear away.’ And while the slow girl lumberingly removed the plates and dishes, he alternately smoked and kicked the logs on

the hearth. 'Has he had a spasmodic fit of remorse, confound him?'

It seemed a long time that his love was away. He thought of her bitterly, miserably, but with longing, yearning, pitying affection, as he paced the old Turkey carpet, up and down, up and down, the ill-lighted room. 'By Jove! if he harries and abuses her as he did me, I shall come to gloat over the thought of his death and burial,' he gloomily mused. 'Ashes to ashes? It will be vermin to vermin if he insults my darling as he insulted me.'

He stopped short, his cigarette fell from his fingers, for Zoe came in, staggering rather than walking. She was pale as a ghost; her teeth chattered as she came up to him and laid an icy hand on his.

'Look here,' she said with a sob. 'He made me take it—the letter to ask Messrs. Flowerdew and Purlby to send one of the firm down to receive instructions for a new will. Slee is to take it to the post and register it.'

'Is that all you are troubled about?' he asked lightly, with a mocking laugh. 'What does it matter? He has made a dozen different wills to my knowledge since it pleased him to

annex me, chain me to his car, the Juggernaut! three years ago ; he will live to make a dozen more, and revoke them all in turn, till at last he will die intestate, and you, as next-of-kin, will walk into everything.'

He stepped forward to embrace her, but she slid away and dropped into a chair, looking ghastly. Her eyes seemed to have receded ; they looked dark with horror.

'No, no,' she incoherently said ; 'I must get over it—over that awful interview—first !' She stopped, clasped her hands to her breast, and gasped : 'It would be a mockery—love, when I am clutched—overwhelmed by hate ! Please ring the bell. I must tell poor Snee to take this at once and do as he says.'

For a few moments he gazed at her in moody surprise. Never yet—and three months' propinquity had given multitudinous opportunities—had she refused an endearment. It was her swift readiness to respond to his moods which was one of her potent charms to his refinedly sensuous nature.

'As you please,' he coldly said, ringing the bell, and staring gloomily into the fire until Phoebe answered it, when he said, 'Ask

Mrs. Slee to come, please,' and flung himself into the chair opposite that into which the white and trembling Zoe had collapsed, staring despondently at vacancy until the housekeeper came hurrying in, when he rose with a slightly sneering smile.

'My good Slee, Mr. Quarles is sending for his lawyer to disinherit us all. He has made Miss Zoe write, and now he insists upon your posting the letter,' he began equably. 'It is to be registered. Zoe, give Slee the letter.'

The housekeeper was aging; she was a spare, somewhat gaunt woman, with gray hair and kindly eyes. She paled as she listened.

'Oh dear me!' she exclaimed. 'That's bad news, sir. Don't you think we'd better wait till to-morrow? The Squire do change his mind—I will say that for 'im. And is it for us, Mr. Andrew, to help on bad actions? For if Mr. Quarles is a-going to undo the little good he's done, nothing won't count for him, will it?'

She was glancing askance at the letter, which Zoe held out to her with an attempt at a smile, when there was a scuffling noise in the corridor outside. They all turned, startled,

and stared as a young woman in a lavender print gown and cap and apron rushed in.

'He's ded—the Squire's ded! Oh my!' she gasped; then she fell on the floor in hysterics, writhing and gasping.

'You go—I'll see to her,' said Zoe, kneeling down by the struggling young woman.

Andrew gave her a horrified stare, then hurried out, followed by the frightened housekeeper, whose scared 'Oh Lord's!' and 'Oh my's!' seemed to exasperate him as he sped upstairs, Mrs. Slee at his heels.

The Squire's door was open. A lamp on the table was flaring and smoking in the draught. By the hearth was a deep old arm-chair. In it an old man lay back, mouth and eyes open, dead. There was a startled expression on his thin, lined face, as if his soul had recoiled in terror in its last moment in his body.

'Good heavens!' cried the young man.

The housekeeper shrieked, rushed to her master, chafed his hands, called him; then, as she realized the fact that he was dead, became despairingly calm.

'Go for the doctor, Mr. Andrew, and don't let Miss Zoe come up. She ain't got no

nerves for this sort of thing, pore lamb! Send up Phoebe, there's a dear young gentleman! She's got her 'ead screwed on right for a gal of her age. And whatever you do, make haste, and don't come back without Dr. Bird.'

Andrew gave her a wild stare, as if she were talking gibberish, then strode out, down the back-staircase to the offices, where Phoebe was singing 'Dysy, Dysy, give me yer hanswer true,' as she stood at a dresser rubbing up the silver: despatched the girl upstairs, then went to the stables. The old man who was the only groom had gone home, so Andrew saddled the cob which Squire Quarles used to ride until a few weeks previously, and rode off through the park into the highroad as hard as he could ride. The horse, stunted in corn, was all in a steaming sweat as he drew rein and flung himself off at the door of the doctor's little white house, where, seeing a light in the surgery, he went and unceremoniously opened the door, meeting an overpowering odour of drugs as he stepped across the threshold.

'The dad is in a fit—pray come at once!' he cried. 'Shall I tell your man to put in? I came on the cob.'

The apple-cheeked, white-haired old doctor was in the act of measuring some evil-smelling drug, a big glass bottle in one hand, a phial in the other. He set them both down on the long counter.

'A fit?' he returned. 'Not apoplexy—I think, more likely paralysis. I warned him what might happen if he persisted in starving himself months—years ago. Yes; tell Martin the black mare Sally, and I'll put on my coat and tell the wife not to expect me till she sees me. Come, tell me all about it.'

In a few moments Andrew went out into the darkness—he knew the stable yard—found Martin, the groom with the sporting proclivities, rubbing down the gray horse by the light of a stable lantern, and helped him to harness the black mare to the gig which was still standing in the yard.

'Law, sir, you're cold, aren't you?' asked the man, as Andrew, who had offered to light the carriage lamps, shook as if with sudden ague. 'Got a drop of brandy for Mr. Andrew, sir? 'E ain't well,' he added sympathetically—the 'young Squire,' as he was generally called, lent him sporting papers; he was,



indeed, generally liked round about—as the doctor came hurrying up, muffled by his careful old spouse.

But Andrew declined, and, saying he had better trot back and tell them the doctor was coming, went off, mounted the cob, and rode homewards.

‘I never felt an abject coward before,’ he told himself angrily as he trotted along the road. ‘I am a fine one to tackle life, I am, if I am frightened to death of death! What is death but a mere incident? I suppose it was better not to say we thought he was dead.’

Remorse seemed to envelop, to overwhelm, him as he rode home feeling as if in a nightmare. It was in the sighing wind, in the darkness, in the fitful gleams of a cold, reproachful moon as it shone forth now and then from between the dark, drifting clouds. Worse, it gripped his very heart and clutched at all hope within his soul.

As the horse’s hoofs clattered on the cobbles of the great empty stable-yard, as he doggedly forced himself to unsaddle the animal and settle him in his stall, as he went with laggard

steps to join the women within the vast empty mansion, a great, sudden temptation assailed him to turn and fly and leave Zoe to her fate. That such a thought could come to him at such a crisis disgusted him so much that loathing for his own weakness lent him a spurious courage.

He entered the house by the kitchen door, and went to the dining-room, intending to fortify himself with a dram of the spirits for which he was in debt to the wine-merchant in the nearest town—Broadhurst—as he also was to the tailor, haberdasher, and other of his uncle's tradesmen, who were always smilingly solicitous of orders, professedly ready to give him any length of credit, in their own opinion of his heirship. He went straight, blunderingly, into the long, dimly-lit room, and was making for the carved oak sideboard, when he started.

Zoe was crouching in the armchair by the dying fire, her face drawn and ghastly, her eyes black, shining.

'You—are not—upstairs?' he stammered, feeling both frightened and shocked; and, forgetting what he had come there for, he went to her. 'Darling, are you ill?' he asked,

not because he felt his usual passion for her, but from a vague fear of more death and misery if he failed in his devoirs; and he would have knelt by her, but she flung out her hand in a dramatic gesture of repulse.

‘I could not,’ she thickly began, struggling up and supporting herself by the mantelpiece. ‘I cannot—why should I? What good will looking at him do? He is dead.’

‘Don’t say so to the doctor. You know I was not sure of it; and if I had said it was all over he would not have hurried. There he is. I will go and take him upstairs. You had better have a glass of wine—you had indeed, Zoe! Do pull yourself together, or they will think we have a bad conscience, and I am sure we have borne and put up with more from the dad than any young people I ever heard of.’

He strode off without another glance at her. In his new, remorseful, despairing mood the sight of the object of his passion jarred, and as he opened the hall door to the doctor, and conducted him upstairs, he fortified himself by dwelling on that fact. He and Zoe had endured, if not patiently, at least pas-

sively, more than others would have borne. Of that he had not the shadow of a doubt.

He had run upstairs several shallow steps at a time to prevent his having to reply to awkward questions of the doctor's, and, hastening on, he looked into the dead man's bedroom, and satisfied himself that it was occupied alone by the corpse in the armchair and by the housekeeper, who sat gazing at her dead master with a dry-eyed, incredulous stare.

'Any change?' asked Dr. Bird, panting a little as he came up to the open door.

'I don't think so,' said Andrew, as calmly as he could. His knees were shaking under him as he watched the doctor, who had started and stood still as he saw the corpse.

For his manner was peculiar, to say the least of it. Without a word, or even a nod, to the housekeeper, as she rose and prepared to speak, he waved her aside with a peremptory gesture: he went to the dead Squire, felt his brow, his pulse, listened to his heart, then smelt at his mouth.

'Where is his glass?' he asked abruptly of Mrs. Slee. 'Oh, I mean the tumbler or wineglass he last used.'

‘I sent them down, sir, by Phoebe, an hour back,’ said Mrs. Slee brokenly. ‘I see he was dead from the very first, doctor.’ She was about to pull out her handkerchief and dab her eyes, tears having come to her relief, when she cried out ‘Oh!’ for the amiable little doctor turned quite fiercely upon her.

‘Then go down at once and bring them up—d’ye hear?’ he cried. ‘Make haste! Bring up everything in the shape of a cup or glass that he has used. I must know what he has taken.’

Mrs. Slee jumped up and ran off as if she had been galvanized. Andrew walked up to the doctor.

‘What do you mean—taken?’ he asked peremptorily.

Dr. Bird looked him full in the eyes; then he laid down the limp, dead hand.

‘Your foster-father is dead, young man,’ he somewhat roughly said. ‘Not only dead, but poisoned. That is what I mean!’

### CHAPTER III

‘POISONED? Absurd! Ridiculous! Why, of all the men I ever met, he was the very last to commit suicide,’ began Andrew. But Dr. Bird did not seem to hear him. Bending down, he seemed absorbed in a careful examination of the old man’s corpse, which had a pitiful as well as a grotesque appearance seated in the chair. Then he suddenly stood up.

‘Smell his mouth,’ he said almost contemptuously.

For a moment Andrew had a fierce struggle with himself. The cold sweat of horror and aversion stood on his pale forehead. Then, conquering his emotion, he, too, stooped down near the drawn, livid lips.

‘I certainly smell something like a pungent scent,’ he hesitatingly began. ‘My cousin, Miss Blount, had some. I forget what it was called.’

‘Tut, tut!’ impatiently exclaimed Dr. Bird. ‘That smell means but one thing, man—hydrocyanic acid. Where are his keys? In his trouser pocket?’ He moved the clenched fist of the dead Squire a little aside, and, feeling in his trouser pockets, drew out a small bunch of bright steel keys. ‘Come!’ he briefly commanded.

Andrew, hardly guessing his errand, followed him into the dressing-room, where a mahogany chest stood on a table, and watched him open it after trying several keys, and carefully move the small bottles on the shelves until he drew forth an empty one, in a kind of miserable stupor.

‘There,’ he said, opening, sniffing it—‘empty! He took enough to kill a dozen men if that bottle had half as much in it to-day as when I let him have it a few weeks back! He had been in the habit of taking a few drops now and then—his heart was not up to much—but I never dreamt of this. Come, let us see whether we can put our hands upon the glass he drank it from.’

He spoke in a new, alert, business-like way, and Andrew listened, feeling too stunned to

make a remark. He watched the little doctor thrust the bottle into his breast pocket and lock the medicine-chest, then followed him into the death chamber without a single word.

As the two men returned to the Squire's bedroom Mrs. Slee came in.

'I can't tell which is which of the cups and tumblers now, sir. Mr. Quarles had 'is soup and wine and water while Mr. Andrew and Miss Zoe was at dinner, and I fetched the tray down myself. Susan washed 'em up with the rest just before she come up to see to the bedrooms.'

Dr. Bird looked discomfited, then puzzled, for, according to Mrs. Slee, the glasses used by the Squire during the day had all come below quite half an hour before Susan, entering, had found him dead in his chair.

'Whatever he took it in must be up here still, then,' he decided. Then he began a search in the presence of the dead man's trusted housekeeper and adopted son, which was fruitless in regard to the bedroom and dressing-room tumblers, which were dry and odourless, but which led to a discovery that the



medicine-glass on the mantelpiece was missing from its morocco case.

The doctor said nothing further than that the glass must be found. Then he turned to Andrew, and asked for tape, scissors, and sealing-wax, and in the presence of the two, whose help he first demanded to lay the corpse on the bed decently before rigor mortis set in, he raked out the small fire, watching it until perfect safety was assured, took away the lamp, locked the doors, putting the keys in his pocket, and, asking Andrew to hold the lamp carefully, sealed each of the outer doors, carefully impressing the seals with his own signet ring.

‘Now, please come downstairs. Where is Miss Blount? In the dining-room? We will go there, then,’ he briskly said; and, followed by the two, Andrew scared-looking and Mrs. Slee visibly trembling, he as briskly went down and into the dining-room, where Zoe was still crouching, collapsed, in the chair.

‘How are you?’ he asked, going to her, shaking hands, but seemingly too preoccupied to notice her pallor and evident nervous prostration. Then he resolutely planted himself on the

hearthrug, back to the fire, and, after he had requested Mrs. Slee to shut the door, insisted upon both young master and old servitor being seated, because he had 'something to say.'

'These sudden deaths are always painful affairs, you see,' he began, after clearing his throat and looking at no one in particular, 'because there has to be a certain formula gone through—inquiry has to be made; it is the law of the land——'

He paused, for Andrew started up and went to him; he looked concentrated anger, his pale face was suddenly suffused with scarlet, his eyes glowed with passion.

'If by that you mean an inquest, it is shocking!' he hotly cried. 'If my uncle had a weak heart, surely you can give the certificate of death? He would have been the very last to wish himself known to be a suicide—if, indeed, he was one, which I cannot believe.'

Dr. Bird swayed a little on his small, stout feet, and, with pursed-up lips, contemplated them with raised eyebrows, and cleared his throat—a trick of his when patients were at all refractory during treatment.

‘My dear young friend, duty is duty,’ he returned in the business-like, unemotional manner he had assumed since he realized the fact of his old friend the eccentric Squire Quarles’ tragically sudden death. ‘My duty in this case is to inform the coroner, and you may be sure that no secondary motives will prevent my doing so, least of all any sentimental notions of what Mr. Quarles would have thought or felt when alive. My duty is not to Andrew Quarles living, but to Andrew Quarles dead.’

Here Zoe suddenly sat up, and looked with affrighted eyes from Dr. Bird to her lover.

‘An inquest! What for?’ she hoarsely asked, her eyes glittering. ‘Oh, doctor! surely you can save us that disgrace? Andrew, beg Dr. Bird to have pity on us.’

Her voice rang shrill, if pathetic. But the doctor, who was both puzzled and thoroughly upset in his calculations, at whose naturally simple yet shrewd mind a score of miserable doubts and suspicions were clamouring for admission, stood firm.

‘My good friends, the best thing we can do is to go to bed,’ he began. ‘I shall have

to be off before daylight, and, honestly, I feel pretty well done up by my day's work, let alone by the shock it has been to me to find my old friend dead in such a sudden and unexpected way. If you will allow me, I will lie down on that big old sofa yonder. It will not be the first time I have passed a night there—since the first, when my friend who has just died was so mad with grief at the flight of his sister that I feared for his reason.'

'Doctor, you will have something first,' began Andrew, hoarsely.

But Dr. Bird, cheery little old man that he looked, cherub-like in gentle innocence as his bright face and kindly blue eyes suggested that he was, was as adamant. He refused Andrew's offers of meat and drink, sent off the housekeeper for pillows and blankets, and presently had so far succeeded in his desires that a dead silence reigned throughout the big mansion. Presumably every one of its few inhabitants was in bed, if not asleep.

For himself, personally, sleep was impossible. As soon as he felt pretty secure that he had been obeyed, he quietly threw off the protecting blanket, and, rising, as quietly made up

the fire, and, intending to be seated in the chair Zoe had lately vacated, was feeling in his pocket for his pipe and tobacco-pouch, when something white caught his eye, a wisp of white between the tumbled cushion and the chair-arm.

He took it up. It was a square envelope, directed in the Squire's handwriting to 'Messrs. Flowerdew and Purlby.' It was stamped, but had evidently not been posted.

'His lawyers,' he muttered to himself. 'That's queer.' Then he started, for, turning the envelope round, he saw that it had either not been closed or had been opened. 'This will have to be given to the coroner,' he told himself, as he drew out the sheet enclosed, and read :

'DEAR SIRS,

'Circumstances oblige me to alter my last will, made two months ago, and I shall be glad if you will send or come to see about it immediately—to-morrow if possible.

'Faithfully yours,

'ANDREW QUARLES.'

\* \* \* \* \*

There was no sleep for the village Æsculapius that night. He sat up, smoking, waiting for the dawn to come, to leave the house and seek the coroner, and he had never been so thoroughly 'upset' in his life.

For he could not master his thoughts, he could not check the miserable suspicions which, in tormenting hordes, thronged his mind. He felt as powerless against them as he would have been against a crowd, a mob of accusers who were shouting denunciations of the young people who had shown such unmistakable terror.

Could their changed looks, their horrified expression, their pallor and threatened collapse, have been due to shock alone? he asked himself. He would have given worlds that night to believe that Andrew did not know more of the tragedy than he chose to tell, and Zoe also.

'The motive is so hideously plain,' he told himself. He knew the two were sweethearts—it had been common village talk since Zoe had become an inmate of her uncle's house a few months previously. He also knew something, and made a shrewd guess at more, of Squire Quarles' life; which knowledge,

although he had hardly been surprised by Quarles' adoption of his jilter's orphan son, had caused him to be considerably astonished when Zoe Blount was domiciled in Heatherly Court. 'Nothing could have been less to his mind, one would think, than the marriage of those two,' he mused. 'The girl might have knocked under — but the young man?' Dr. Bird dismally, mournfully shook his head. He did not believe in Andrew. He had never been able to trust him, although since the lad first arrived, a somewhat cringing, half-starved youth, with the deprecating air which experience had taught the doctor to associate with fraud, humbug, and even crime, he had honestly striven to overcome his prejudices.

'Thank heaven, Chinnery is one of the justest-minded men one can find anywhere!' he told himself, as he let himself out in the grey morning, carefully closed the heavy door of the house of death, and sped along the drive homewards. 'Perhaps, after all, it might have been a sudden aberration. Quarles may have taken that dose in a moment of frenzy. But that letter! If he really meant that—I know the man—the very last thing he would

have done was to end his life before he had had his revenge! If only I had not to give Chinnery that fatal letter! When I read it, I felt, somehow, it was somebody's death-warrant!



## CHAPTER IV

AFTER a sleepless night, young Andrew Quarles went below to see how the doctor had fared. Entering the dark, dismal dining-room, he found it empty. He stood gazing in ghastly misery at the chamber which now would be tenanted for the future by—whom?

The Squire had told him often and often that he was his residuary legatee, with a certain proviso, which he had said would not be divulged until after his death.

This was before Zoe's appearance—before his meeting with her, a lovely, fascinating girl with beautiful, wistful eyes—before his pleading for her to be admitted to her 'rightful home.' When the Squire had grudgingly acceded to his request, and Zoe took her legitimate place in the household, he had also pleaded, being already passionately in love,

that the Squire would make a proper provision for her by a codicil to his will.

This, he knew, had been done. Then had come the revelation to Mr. Quarles of the love between his adopted son and his niece, followed by a burst of anger, the banishment of himself, his abrupt recall, that letter to the lawyers, and the awfully sudden death of its writer.

As he remembered the letter, he wondered, with a qualm, whether it had been posted.

'Good Lord, if it has!' he exclaimed, his knees knocking together, cold drops of sweat on his brow. He began feverishly searching the room. 'The thing may have been forgotten in the rumpus,' was his thought. He had looped back the heavy curtains and opened the shutters that the light might aid him, when, as he was groping on the floor under the dining-table, thinking it might have fallen there, he heard footsteps and an exclamation, and, scrambling to his feet, saw Mrs. Slee.

As he rose up behind the table she screamed. Then she apologized.

'You shot up like a ghost, sir, and, of course, one is all of a tremble-like in such a

hateful position. I'm certain sure the doctor thinks we're all a parcel of murderers, and 'ave killed pore master! Nonsense, Mr. Andrew? It ain't nonsense—there's never no nonsense about when doctors won't give certificates and will 'ave crown's quests! Pore Miss Zoe knows that, pore dear! I've been in with her since three. I couldn't rest thinkin' of 'er all alone, pore lamb! and in such trouble. I feel a'most as if she was my grandchild, you see, sir, her pore mother havin' been with me from a baby till she run away. I went to 'er, and she do groan; it's enough to break one's 'art to 'ear 'er. She oughter see the doctor, sir, but 'ow can I arsk 'er to, when he's agin us all? I've giv 'er a little physic, as a doctor in Broadhurst once giv me when master was that difficult I thought 'e was bound to go out of 'is mind, and I didn't like to tell Dr. Bird. She's asleep as quiet as any baby now.'

Andrew impatiently paced the floor, watching Mrs. Slee tranquilly folding back the shutters and drawing down the blinds, which, once white, were now a light brown with age. He felt that he must find out what had happened to that letter. Yet, when servants

were presently to give evidence at a legal inquiry concerning the tragic death of their master, it behoved those who valued their reputations to be cautious, on guard, if not, indeed, wily.

‘This inquest seems to me the most outrageous proceeding, Slee,’ he began, as the housekeeper turned after completing the decorous arrangement of the fourth and last window, leaving the view completely hidden by the blinds, while daylight came in feebly, but with a certain determination to be felt, through the close ‘union,’ and particularly asserting itself through its myriads of tiny holes. ‘We must stick by each other like grim death. It is all we can do, for we three—you, I, and Miss Zoe—are all in the same boat. What do I mean? That Dr. Bird’s refusal to give the certificate casts an imputation upon any one of us.’

Mrs. Slee cast down her eyes with a sad smile.

‘Not me, sir,’ she said, shaking her head with evident conviction. ‘Not so long as master’s last will stands : for that’ll show what I’ve done for ’im all these years. It’ll open

some people's eyes, that will! You won't understand what I mean now, Mr. Andrew, and I ain't a-going to tell the Squire's secrets to you nor to no one else, after keepin' of them all these years. But when you do 'ear that will read, as I am sure I 'ope you will, you will 'ear somethink as 'as never entered your mind afore, or I'm very much mistaken. Did I post that letter to them lawyers, sir? I never set eyes on it since Miss Zoe held it up in her 'and. If you remember, it was just then that Susan came rushin' in tellin' us she found 'im dead.'

Overcome with emotion, Mrs. Slee hurried away. She left her young master more in the throes of torturing fears than before. Firstly, there was evidently something she knew, relating to the man whose adopted son he was, that he himself did not know, a fact which was distinctly disquieting. Secondly, there was presumably somewhat in Squire Quarles' last will which would completely exonerate Mrs. Slee in the eyes of the coroner's jury from being party to his being poisoned, if they happened to take it into their heads that it was not either a case of suicide or of mis-

adventure. Thirdly, there was that letter of the Squire's to his lawyers. What in the name of heaven, or the other place, had become of it?

He had no rest until, a few hours later, he heard that Zoe was awake. Then he crept to her room. For the first time she refused to see him.

'Oh, please go away,' was all the reply he obtained. When, at his wits' end, he boldly opened the door half-way, and asked her in a low voice what she had done with 'that letter,' she moaned: 'I don't know. Pray go away.' And that was literally the last time he heard Zoe's voice until the day of the inquest, for she kept her room and her bed, although she would not acknowledge herself ill, nor allow Dr. Bird to be summoned.

Dr. Bird had had a long and exhaustive interview with his chum of days gone by, Dr. Chinnery, the coroner who would sit at the inquiry into Mr. Quarles' sudden death. The little man was genuinely grieved that he felt such inhuman suspicions, and, with the most kindly intentions, tried to put the case before his old friend in its best light, although

honour obliged him to produce the letter he had found, the Squire's note to his lawyers expressing his intention of altering his will.

Dr. Chinnery had taken kindly to the idea of suicide until he read that letter. Then he questioned and cross-questioned Dr. Bird in a manner which sent the village medico away almost despairing, although he did all in his power to conceal his emotion from the coroner, as well as the fact that he understood the drift of his inquiries and was straining his wits to fence them.

'Which of them is it, or can it be both?' the medical practitioner asked himself as he drove home. 'No human being could or would possibly suspect Mrs. Slee. She was his nurse, and would be flayed alive for any one of the family. But, good heavens! we cannot expect the truth from her, for people have seen a girl about the place too often—she must be a subtle liar—to have had a daughter or someone belonging to her concealed in the house so constantly without Quarles' knowledge. No, if the truth comes to light it will not be through "my good Slee," as the Squire used to call her.'

He drove up to his house, and, leaving the gig to go on to the stables, avoided encountering his wife and some possible summons to rush off somewhere to somebody's baby—he suffered much from ignorant mothers, especially when first-born infants were in question—and let himself quietly into his surgery to make up physic neglected through that sudden summons the previous evening to the Court.

As he turned to shut the door, a man rose from the bench placed there for the accommodation of messengers waiting for patients' physic, and pulled an imaginary forelock.

'Well, my man, and what is the matter with you?' genially asked the doctor, recognising one of the late Squire's under-gardeners.

'This 'ere, doctor,' replied the man, who was red-haired and had narrow, shifty eyes; and, to the doctor's astonishment, he held out a medicine-glass, which to Dr. Bird looked like that which was missing from its case in the dead man's room. At the sight of it the little doctor saw stars, as if he had had a blow on the head. He gave a huge gulp as he recovered himself, which he devoutly hoped had escaped the bucolic's attention.



‘And what is it?’ he blandly asked. ‘Oh, I see—a medicine-glass. But I assure you it is not mine. Thanks for bringing it me, all the same.’

‘I know it ain’t yourn, sir,’ said the man with rough disdain. ‘It’s the glass wot the Squire wor poisoned with. I ’eerd from my gal, one of them maids, as there was a foine set-out about findin’ a glass, an’ oi was a-walkin’ just outside them windows where the bedrooms is, when oi sor suffint glitterin’ under them laurels. Oi goes and picks it oop, and it’s this ’ere. Oi’ll show yer the spot. Oi made a long scratch on the wall with my knoife, besides a-prunin’ of a bit off the s’rub it wor under. It weren’t the Squire’s winder it wor under, neither ; it wor the young lidy’s.’

‘This glass may have been lying there for months, my good man,’ exclaimed the doctor, with as much contemptuous depreciation as his sudden discomfiture would enable him to assume. ‘Take care what you say, or you may get yourself into trouble before you know where you are! The glass the Squire was poisoned with indeed!’ he added witheringly.

‘You smell it, doctor ; it’s ’ad that stuff in

it wot the Squoire giv me to poison our yard-dawg—old Nero—w'en he was that bad Mr. Quarles couldn't a-bear to see of 'im a-sufferint no more, 'e ses. I knows 'ow to poison animals, yer see.'

'How long was that ago?' impatiently asked Dr. Bird, alive with a sudden wild hope that the contents of the bottle he had foolishly trusted his patron with might be thus accounted for. 'Oh, last year! Well, I can't smell anything but laurel in this glass. I expect it has been lying under the laurel-bush through the rains, and the odour of the leaves has clung to it. That is all, my man. Is there anything I can do for you?'

'No, sir, thankye,' mumbled the man, with a wistful side-glance at the glass, which the doctor had with a natural absent manner put away somewhere behind the counter. 'But as you don't seem to set no store by that there glast, p'raps it may be the young lidy's, and her'd giv' me somethink for findin' of it.'

The next minute he was somewhat sheepishly going down the yard leading from the surgery and the doctor's stable yard, his right hand in the pocket of his working breeches,

and in that hand a half-crown. When he reached the road he took it out, and, looking sulkily at it, spat upon it.

'E may think as 'e's bluffed oi, but 'e hain't,' he sullenly murmured. 'If oi'd a-taken of it to she, her'd 'ave giv me a quid ; an' if oi'd ha' sed as oi meant to tell of 'ow I seed the young Squoire and she a-kissin' an' a-cud-dlin', her'd 'ave forked hout and set oi and Sukey hup for life, that her 'oud !'

As he was dubbing himself a fool for his pains Dr. Bird was turning over the glass with horror in his kind blue eyes.

'It was just the thing a girl might do in a frenzy of fear—chuck the thing out of window,' he miserably thought. 'It seems a mad idea, to suspect her of being capable of planning such a diabolical murder ; for if murder it is, those keys and the bottle must have been secreted. Ugh ! that people should be born and live capable of such atrocities ! Why don't the little devils of babies come into the world labelled, so that they might be drowned ? Nature has made a mistake somewhere.'

He locked up the glass resolutely, for his fingers itched to fling it on the hearthstone

and batter it to powder. But such a proceeding would only convict him of suspecting that a crime had been committed, he told himself. 'Sukey,' as her lover called the maid-servant who had found her master dead in his chair, must be well aware of the important find; besides, the man himself would be a damning witness alone.

'If I want to save either of those young people, or both, my game is to stick out for suicide,' he told himself. 'Whether it is or whether it isn't don't much matter. If she did the thing, he taunted her until she was mad—mad as a hatter.'

## CHAPTER V

THE autopsy of the late Squire Quarles had taken place. Enough prussic acid to poison a dozen strong men was pointed to by its results, still unknown to all save the doctors who made it and the coroner, Dr. Chinnery—results not altogether discouraging.

Dr. Chinnery had decided that the inquest should be held in the hall of Heatherly Court. 'If the public choose to come, there must be room for them,' was his opinion. So the jurors summoned were not as unwilling as they sometimes were to do their duty to their country.

Heatherly Court had been an eccentric miser's lair, according to public opinion in the neighbouring town of Broadhurst and the countryside, and the mysterious and sudden death of the Squire of Heatherly had been general talk since the fact was

known. Curiosity was whetted and stimulated to a degree.

The day of the inquest was gloom itself. As vehicles entered the great park, their occupants, gazing eagerly at the 'great house' and park, to which they had so often wished to be admitted, saw mists hanging about the huge elms of the long avenues which veiled the green slopes, with their crowning shrubberies, from sight, and lent a ghostly indistinctness to the lichened, venerable graystone façade, with its ivied turrets, its quaint chimneys, and its mullioned windows.

'A foine old 'ouse, and no mistake!' said a butcher from Broadhurst to the fellow-juryman, the principal grocer, who was plodding along on foot at his side. They had come in a wagonette with their wives, who were eager to be present, and had gone on in front, leaving them to refresh at the crowded village inn, the Quarles Arms. 'If the gal was that ill-treated by the old un as they says, it ain't so very astonishin' that she giv 'im a dose. I feel as I could have giv him one myself, that I do, after 'earin' as 'ow he wouldn't go to his pore sister when she was a-dyin', and

arst just to see 'im—nothin' else, bless you ! And, then, 'ow he starved them two maids and that old 'ousekeeper, let alone never spendin' hanythink for the good of local trade. I 'aven't never served them with hanythink but tripe and chitlings, and now an' agin a bullock's 'eart. If the gal 'as done it, 'e starved 'er to it : that's wot I say—'e starved 'er to it. If 'e'd 'ave fed 'er proper on good 'olesome meat, it wouldn't never 'ave 'appened, an' you may trust me as knows wot feedin' gals and women with good meat his.'

'I tell yer this much, Braine : you're jest a-talkin' of wot you don't know nothin' about,' testily returned the grocer, a tall, thin man with gray hair, a high nose, a prominent chin, spectacles, blinking eyes, and a well-known temper. 'I do. There was bound to be an 'orror sooner or later at the Court, with 'im what 'e was and them young folks a-shut up together—bound to be !'

At the door of the great hall the men, jurors or witnesses, or eager members of the inquisitive public, removed their hats with a feeling as if they were entering a dismal kind of church : for the hall, with its almost bare

tessellated floor, its high-vaulted ceiling, and those armoured effigies and trophies, was a chilly, melancholy, museum-like spot even when sunlight crept in ; and now, in the dusk of a gloomy day, with several tables put together in its centre, surrounded by all sorts and kinds of chairs, while more chairs stood against the wall at the back, it was depressing in the extreme.

The coroner stood before the great hearth, talking earnestly with Dr. Bird and the clever-looking young London doctor who had shared the local practitioner's responsibility of making a post-mortem examination of the deceased. He had dismissed the various witnesses to the different rooms set apart for them, and none of the late Squire's entourage were present among the little crowd which was fast assembling, while the twelve jurors were being sworn by the officer and the lank grocer chosen as their foreman. Then, when the jury returned from viewing the corpse in the Squire's stately bed-chamber above, Dr. Chinnery, glancing at his watch, briskly resumed his seat at the head of the amalgamated tables, and, after the ordinary preliminaries, opened the inquiry with a few



serious words to the bucolic jurymen, whom he exhorted, almost solemnly, to bring to their task minds as free from all bias, all preconceived opinion as to the personality of the man the manner of whose sudden death they were met together to determine, as possible.

‘Forget all petty gossip, which it is beneath the dignity of men to listen to,’ he added emphatically. ‘Put out of your memories what this fellow-being was, or was said to be. Let him be to us as if we had never heard tell of him in all our lives before, and were suddenly confronted with his tragic end, to do him and his justice in deciding what that end has been. You may doubtless know that any questions you wish to ask any of the witnesses—reasonable and allowable questions, of course—you are at liberty to ask. We are here in the interests of justice—justice not only to the dead, but to the living—and every other consideration but the ends of that justice must be banished and sternly put aside.’

The jury, who to a man had stared full at the commanding, square form and the comely, determined face of the coroner as he spoke, were sufficiently impressed by the intense

gravity of his speech and manner to gaze somewhat helplessly and stupidly as 'Susan White' was called, and the red-haired, puffy-faced housemaid, who had been periodically in hysterics since she went into the Squire's bedroom to arrange it for the night and found him dead, gave her evidence in a wee voice, with a halting, almost unintelligible enunciation.

Yes, her name was Susan White. She was twenty-two, and had been in Mr. Quarles' service as housemaid five years. She sometimes waited on her master, but had no notion he was very ill. She deposed to going upstairs with a pail and can of water as usual, tapping at his door, and, receiving no answer, thinking he was not there, entering.

'At the fust sight, sir, I ses to myself, "'E's asleep"; then I thort, "'E do look funny." So I goes up to 'im and touches 'is 'and; then I knowed as 'e was ded, and 'ow I got down them stairs and into that dinin'-room I couldn't tell if you was to kill me for't.'

Here the young woman began to sob so violently that the constable at the door assisted

her out and back to the place where she was to remain until the inquest was over. The long-faced grocer leant back in an important manner to whisper behind his hand to the other jurors that 'the young woman had given her evidence as well as she could, and her feeling did her credit.' With a somewhat slighting estimate of his fellow-jurymen's mental capacities, he believed in his own, and from the first had felt that *he* was the one to determine the vexed question how Squire Quarles had come to die, not they.

He listened intently to the account of the autopsy, which came next. Dr. Bird had asked that the stranger to the parties concerned might give it, so the thin, clever-looking young London medico stood up and read from notes what the result of the post-mortem had been, and as he proceeded there was a distinct impression made upon most present—a surprise manifested by his auditors.

For, although sufficient poison was to be detected to have been the cause of almost instantaneous death, the heart trouble which was known to the Squire's medical adviser proved to be only a complication. His real

disease, which threatened his dissolution at no distant period—Dr. Lethbridge said he himself thought he could not have lasted a day over six months—was a scirrhus in the mesentery. He explained concisely and clearly, if learnedly, what the suffering was which such a condition entailed, and in reply to Mr. Braine, the butcher—who meant to have his opinion in spite of ‘that Belchamber, who fancies hisself till ’e don’t know where ’e are, like the man in the song,’ as he phrased it—he admitted that if Mr. Quarles had had an idea of the physical pain inevitably before him, and its equally inevitable end, he might have committed suicide. Others had done so before him, and others would probably do so again.

‘But, then, these persons knew of their condition, or would know of it,’ he added. All through he had scorned his colleague Dr. Bird’s proposition of suicide. ‘There is sufficient evidence that Mr. Quarles did not know, as my esteemed coadjutor Dr. Bird will tell you,’ he ended by stating with conviction.

Here, amid a general murmur such as that of a distant and angry crowd, Dr. Bird stood

up. He looked so pale and distraught that many of his patients present there—men and women also, who valued and esteemed him—were quite concerned on his behalf.

‘Pore soul! ’e’s a-thinkin’ as ’e oughter ’ave known,’ the landlady of the Lion at Cowhurst, a neighbouring village, said to her husband. She was a grateful patient, as Dr. Bird had ‘seen her through her troubles’ many a time and oft.

‘If ’e could see through flesh an’ blood as if it was glass, ’e’d be with the Court and the aristocraticasy,’ returned her husband contemptuously. ‘Do shut up and let a feller ’ear!’

Dr. Bird stated his facts clearly and calmly. He was, and had been for many years past, Squire Quarles’ medical attendant. At first Mr. Quarles had enjoyed moderately good health. During the past five years, however, he had complained of certain symptoms which he (Dr. Bird) had had good reason to attribute to a weakness of the heart, which he proceeded to describe in detail. Mr. Quarles had tried many remedies which he had suggested, and, as he professed to have found benefit alone

from the drug called prussic acid—in medical parlance, hydrocyanic acid—he had continued to administer that drug to him of late at his request, furnishing him with a small bottle of the same when he complained somewhat testily of being ‘treated like a child.’

‘Then, you mean to say, sir, that you knew nothing of this scirrhus in the mesentery?’ asked Mr. Belchamber, the foreman of the jury, in a slighting tone. Being what people termed ‘near,’ he had an eye to future reduction of Dr. Bird’s charges, which he always thought excessive ‘to one as served him,’ he was wont to say with a sense of injury, ignoring the fact that he made fifty per cent. on all articles furnished by him to the little doctor, who was a punctual payer.

‘Mr. Quarles never mentioned a single symptom pointing to any trouble of the kind,’ was the doctor’s reply. Nor did Mr. Belchamber’s questioning elicit anything derogatory to the perspicacity and skill of the village practitioner.

The following witness was Mrs. Slee. She was pale, agitated, trembling, although the cause of her emotion was by no means fear

of being suspected of complicity in the administration of the fatal drug to her late master, if it was a dread of betraying his secrets before their time. She also stoutly maintained that her master had never hinted at any pain or indisposition, except weakness and difficulty of breathing. 'If he had had anythink of that sort a-growin' inside of 'im, and 'e'd 'a' known of it, Mr. Chinnery, sir, 'e'd 'ave gone mad, you may take my word for it,' she emphatically declared. She hardly proved a favourable witness for the adopted son and the restored niece. She acknowledged to the secret engagement of Andrew and Zoe, to the Squire's intense anger at its discovery, to his ill-treatment of Zoe, his banishment of Andrew, as well as to Andrew's sudden recall, and the letter to the lawyers asking that someone might be sent to assist him in altering his will.

There was a dead silence in the dark hall as Dr. Bird, recalled, admitted the finding of the letter open. Then, before people had had time to wonder at all they had heard, and what the evidence could possibly point to, 'Andrew Quarles' was called.

As the young, handsome man came in up to the table and was sworn, certain members of the jury thought that, with the blue and yellow light through a lozenge in a side-window playing on his delicate features, he looked even ghastlier than the poor corpse lying on his grand bed they had just 'viewed.' But he gave his answers clearly and succinctly. He acknowledged to have become engaged to his pseudo-cousin Zoe Blount without consulting his adoptive father; to the dead man's anger when he told him; to his banishment, and his sudden and peremptory recall. Here the foreman of the jury requested to put a question to the witness.

'Did you expect that the Squire sent for you to tell you he had relented?' he asked.

'No,' returned Andrew simply, 'I did not. I thought he would ask me to give up Miss Blount, and he did so.'

'Tell us about your interview between your arrival at the Court and the finding by Susan White of her master dead, if you please, Mr. Quarles,' said the coroner. His tone was kindly, yet firm. Dr. Bird, looking up suddenly at Andrew, noticed a spasmodic



twitch about his lips, a slight return of colour to his livid features.

‘I will, Dr. Chinnery,’ he replied. ‘I went to him, and found him in his bedroom, sitting in his chair, looking very ill. He shook hands with me, and told me to sit down. When I sat down, he said: “What do you think I sent for you for?” I knew he liked straight answers to straight questions, so I said: “I suppose you are going to ask me to give Zoe up.” He leant back, laughed a cruel sort of laugh, and said: “Oh no! Marry her if you like, by all means. But if you cannot swear to me, both of you, to give up this silly rot and remain single, I shall not leave either of you a penny piece. You can neither of you earn your own living, so you will starve. Come, now, I will give you one more chance. Give up Zoe, and I will make you my heir; you shall inherit every farthing I have, and I have a sum of nearly £100,000, as Purlby will tell you, thanks to my careful way of living and safe investments. You can have any number of sweethearts then. There’s my Bible. Fetch it, and I’ll tell you what to say.” I refused, and then he was more angry with

me than I have ever seen him, and he said a great many cruel and shocking things which I do not care to repeat. Indeed, I did not wish to listen to them, so I simply left him and went downstairs, intending to bring him to reason another time, if I could.'

Here the red-faced butcher interposed, and asked if the Squire had anything to drink while Andrew was with him, and asked it in so meaning a manner that the young man flushed, and his eyes sparkled as he answered with chilly depreciation :

'No. His dinner came up after I went downstairs.'

Belchamber, the lean foreman, gave Braine a withering look, then turned to the witness with a pompous air.

'Young gentleman, kindly answer this,' he began : 'Did you know of any will made by Mr. Quarles, and whether he had left you anything, or did you not ?'

For a moment Andrew winced, and glanced aside to where the shrivelled little, bald-headed Mr. Purlby, his adoptive father's legal adviser, sat. Then he turned to the foreman of the jury.

‘ I knew that Mr. Quarles made an entirely new will some little time after Miss Blount came to live here, because he wished to provide for her,’ he stoutly replied. ‘ But whether he left me well off, or whether, indeed, he left me anything at all, I do not know.’

He spoke in a manly, straightforward manner, and after a few more questions from the coroner he was allowed to ‘ stand down,’ and ‘ Zoe Blount ’ was called.

Every pair of eyes seemed to meet Zoe’s as she entered the hall, looking round with large eyes distended with emotion. A faint colour lingering on her fair cheeks and about her sweet, drooping lips fled ; she flinched visibly as she faced the crowd of strangers. Then, as she happened to meet the grave, anxious gaze of Dr. Bird’s kind blue eyes, she seemed to recover herself, and advanced quietly, unobtrusively, to kiss the little Book and give her evidence.

As her silvery voice was first audible in the great domed hall, a silence fell upon its auditors. The proverbial pin might have been heard to drop as she answered the questions put to her by Dr. Chinnery and the

jury. They were many and various, but she answered them all in the same sweet, low tone. She acknowledged to having been most kindly treated by her late uncle. If there had never been any estrangement between him and his sister and her husband, her parents, he could not have been more amiable to her. She answered a question from the grocer foreman, as to her knowledge, if any, of a will made in her favour, readily in the affirmative. She also said 'Yes' bravely when asked point-blank some leading questions anent the secret understanding with Andrew. She was only slightly but visibly confused when asked in a grave but benignant manner by the coroner to give an account of any interview she had had with her uncle after Andrew Quarles' return the day of his adoptive father's decease.

'Tell us exactly what happened after Mr. Andrew's return that day, if you please, Miss Blount,' began Dr. Chinnery. 'Mr. Andrew had an interview with the Squire in his bedroom—we have heard that. Did Mr. Andrew tell you what had passed between them?'

‘Oh no!’ exclaimed she emphatically. ‘He was very much upset, and because I saw he was so I did not ask him any questions.’

‘And then?’ said Dr. Chinnery suggestively.

‘We had dinner, and Mrs. Slee, the house-keeper, took up my uncle’s dinner or supper—it was broth, or something light. After dinner he sent for me, so I went up. As I went in, he looked at me very angrily, more angrily than I had ever seen him look. And then—well, he began.’

‘Began—what?’ asked the coroner.

‘To say horrible things—about my mother and father—then about others—and me. I was so overcome, I really cannot remember what he did say. I stood and listened as one listens to thunder or a frightening noise. He spoke of making a fresh will—I do remember that—and then, when I did not seem to care—I was really in such a state I don’t think I should have minded anything about money or things of that sort—he seemed to get quite wild with excitement. He said he had written to his lawyers to send one of the firm down

the next day to make a fresh will, and he gave me the letter to give to Mrs. Slee to post. It was to be registered.'

'Did you give it to Mrs. Slee?' asked the coroner.

'No,' said she in a faint voice, 'and I have never seen it since; I have not the slightest idea what has become of it. I was telling Mrs. Slee, or Mr. Andrew Quarles was—I forget which—about the letter—indeed, I was just going to hand it to her—when Susan, the housemaid, came rushing in saying she had found my uncle dead, and went into strong hysterics. The others, Mr. Andrew Quarles and Mrs. Slee, rushed away to go to uncle, and I stayed and did what I could for Susan; I quite forgot the letter. If I had remembered it afterwards, I should not have bothered about it, he being dead.'

As Dr. Chinnery had the letter in his possession, he did not trouble the beautiful, miserable girl with any further questions on the subject. He also defended her with some chivalry when the grocer asked her, point-blank, why she had not gone to see after her poor uncle, who had certainly

greater claims upon her than a hysterical housemaid.

'You need not reply to that question, Miss Blount, unless you would like to do so,' he gently suggested.

'I do like,' she cried, with passion in her great, beautiful eyes. 'I did not go because I had no idea he was really dead, and I thought, as he seemed to hate me so, that he would rather anyone came to help him but me.'

At that point Zoe was dismissed, and went out, her handkerchief at her eyes, her black dress floating behind her, a graceful, melancholy form.

Then Dr. Chinnery, after somewhat portentously clearing his throat, summoned 'Josiah Lee,' and the red-haired undergardener stood up, sheepishly blinking his pale, shifty eyes as he nervously played with his cap. The spectators nudged each other, especially those who knew 'Josh' Lee—the fact that he was 'walking out' with 'Sukey up at the Court'—eliciting a rustle and a faint murmur showed that the evidence he proffered, anent the finding of the medicine-glass under the young lady's window, was a

fresh and startling coincidence from the public view of the case.

‘I may add that I have that glass, handed to me by Dr. Bird shortly after it was brought to him,’ interrupted the coroner dryly. ‘Perhaps you would like to see it?’ he suggested to the jurors.

The glass was produced, closely examined, and commented upon by the jurors, Belchamber whispering with much emphasis as he leant back, and their heads bent eagerly near his. Then the foreman returned the glass to the coroner.

‘We are satisfied that this glass has nothing to do with the case,’ he said. ‘Anyone can tell that it has not been used for weeks and months—there is dust in it caked hard.’

Dr. Chinnery looked at him with a curt nod, and called ‘Phœbe Smith,’ the parlour-maid, who stolidly gave the information that, during the afternoon preceding Mr. Quarles’ sudden death, a gentleman called and asked to see him, sending up the word ‘Nemo’ on a piece of paper she brought to him, upon which he was allowed to go up to the Squire’s bedroom. He stayed about half an hour, and



let himself out. She heard the hall door slam, and, going to the dining-room window, where she had just taken the salts and peppers, she saw him walking down the drive. Asked to give some description of him, she said he was 'tall, broad, and quite horficer-like; spoke sharp, like them sergeants a-drillin' of their sodgers; but was quite the gentleman, and 'andsome. She should know him again if she sor 'im, and was certain sure she'd never set eyes on 'im afore.'

The coroner offered to recall any of the witnesses. But after some more whispering the foreman stated that they were satisfied, so he proceeded to place the matter before them.

He began by a comment upon the Squire's condition at the time of his decease. An eccentric, somewhat misanthropic man, he was in the grip of a mortal disease, which, even if he did not suspect its existence, was in itself sufficiently painful and depressing in its mental and bodily effects to drive him to some desperate act. Then to this was added a violent annoyance or disappointment in the engagement between his adopted son and his

niece, which was manifestly in opposition to his wishes. If the jury considered, weighing these facts, that it was reasonable to suppose that a sudden aberration of mind occurred, during which he took a fatal dose of a poison he was in the habit of using in minute doses as a medicine, they would return a verdict of suicide during temporary insanity. If, on the contrary, they thought that the quantity was taken by him in mistake, they would give their verdict as 'Death by misadventure.' But if, as he certainly himself did not anticipate, they considered that, either by fatality or for any other reason, some other person than the deceased administered the drug, they must frame their verdict accordingly. He felt convinced that they had given the whole attention of unbiassed minds to the evidence laid before them, and had not the shadow of a doubt but that their sound judgment would determine a vexed question in strict truth and justice.

There was some lengthy whispering and putting of heads together, although the twelve good men and true did not leave their seats, and after about ten minutes or a quarter of

an hour they returned their verdict, which was that Squire Quarles came to his death by an overdose of hydrocyanic acid, but by whom administered there was no evidence to show.

## CHAPTER VI

THE inquest over, the big hall was cleared of coroner, jury, and the rest. After Dr. Chinnery had given orders for the interment, he and Dr. Bird drove off in his brougham as they had arrived, giving a 'lift' to the London medico, the young Dr. Lethbridge, who was returning to town. The rooks cawed among the mists in the elm-tops; the house was still as the grave. In the library a *tête-à-tête* was proceeding between young Andrew Quarles, whom the solicitor, Mr. Purlby, had hailed as heir-at-law, and Mr. Purlby.

'Of course, my dear sir, I cannot disclose the contents of the will until I have the pleasure of reading it to you and the assembled household after the funeral,' said the little lawyer, who had waxed cheerful and brisk immediately after the verdict was accepted by Dr. Chinnery, and was all alertness. 'But

you are the residuary legatee of a magnificent estate, as estates go nowadays; and although certain conditions are attached to your inheritance, they will prove, I am quite sure, no very formidable restrictions.'

Then, after receiving orders for a costly if simple funeral, of which he was to take the entire management if he would, making, of course, special charges for his valuable time, Mr. Purlby departed and Andrew Quarles was alone.

For the first few moments after he had shut the great hall door upon the lawyer he felt half wild, as if his brain must give way. For some horrible minutes the men—the old groom, the gardener and his underlings—who were removing the tables and chairs in the hall, and Phoebe and Susan, who stood, brooms in hand, waiting to sweep away the dust of many feet from the stone flooring, seemed to him unreal—the gnomes or evil spirits of a nightmare. He fled out and stood in the chill spring air recovering himself. He was in the courtyard. The cobbles stood out clear below; a fluttering of pigeons above, and the kick of the Squire's cob in the stable, seemed to recall

him to himself. In an instant it was as if the clouds rolled away from his mind, the past was gone, the present stared him in the face.

‘I am free,’ he told himself in sudden, passionate elation. ‘Not only free—but rich—rich! And Zoe—Zoe is mine—for ever!’

The excitement mounted to his brain. Delirious joy at the idea sent the blood racing through his veins. He glanced askance at the closed windows of the house of death; he felt he could not bring himself to return there and behave with decorum as befitted an heir who was chief mourner. Then the idea came to him to ride out anywhere, to calm down and enable himself to assume the serious, dignified attitude befitting his position.

He went in, found Mrs. Slee, recommended Zoe to her special care, spoke a few words of the inquest, told her he must be off on business connected with the funeral, which was to take place in a few days—and, going out again, saddled the cob, and trotted soberly enough through the misty park, along the highroad, and through the village.

Then he rode uphill to Thornham Common—waste land on a small plateau, where he had

often ridden to cool the rage he dared not show the Squire—to allow his accumulated exasperation to evaporate without injury to himself.

For Andrew Quarles, as his adoptive father had elected to call him, had, unsuspected by himself, an overpowering, passionate love of self, of his own individuality. He was a born egotist, as his real father, who had won the late Squire's betrothed from him, had been before him.

When he fell in love with the newly-arrived Zoe, he was charmed with his own 'unselfish devotion,' as he termed it, and gave full rein to what was neither more nor less than as violent and ignoble a passion as those which had brought him, a sickly beggar, an outcast from the parental home, to the Squire's door.

Now, he felt that fate had treated him as he deserved. 'I put up with the old chap's vagaries and tantrums as no other fellow on earth would have done. The money is mine; I have the first and paramount right to it,' he told himself, as, after galloping across the moorland through the fresh spring, gorse-scented breeze, he drew rein and gazed back to

where the topmost boughs of the great elms in the park showed faintly above the lower slopes of the hill—the circling rooks, like specks of black dust, whirling about them. ‘What does it matter how his end came about? It was bound to come within a few months. *Le roi est mort : vive le roi—et la reine !*’

As he rode home, his sudden wild exultation calmed by physical exercise, it was hard to repress the violent impulse to speak to Zoe at once. But he was sobered enough to recognise that precipitation might retard his coveted joys instead of hastening their realization. ‘Women are different from men : when they have got what they want, they begin to be remorseful, and to quarrel with the means which brought about their coveted ends,’ he thought. And there and then he determined not to seek Zoe till after the funeral.

This was an easy matter, for Zoe kept her room. The house was ‘ghastly enough to send a fellow crazy,’ he told himself, with Mrs. Slee in a chronic state of red eyes and sniffles, and the housemaids going lazily about with long faces. He rode and walked hours every day, planning the brilliant future, when



he and Zoe would drink deep of life, as he understood life. The old clergyman, Mr. Warren, called once, failed to find him or to see Zoe, who had greatly interested him—as he had known her mother when she was ‘the beautiful Miss Quarles’—but appeared no more. Dr. Bird left them to themselves, after telling Mrs. Slee to be sure to ‘summon him, night or day, if he could be of any use.’ ‘A good job the old fellows show their cards,’ Andrew bitterly thought, telling himself that they still suspected Zoe, or himself, or perhaps both, of having been concerned in the Squire’s decease. ‘Makes it easier to disappear, when we cut the whole show!’

The funeral-day arrived. A black hearse and two ‘reformed funeral carriages’ stole quietly into the great park, then took up position near the front entrance of the big shuttered and blinded mansion so unobtrusively that even the yard-dog only rattled his chain and gave a yawn, ending in a strangled whine. The two invited guests, Mr. Purlby and Dr. Bird, walked up almost as quietly.

‘It’s just as if the pore soul ’ad done something awful, and they were ashamed of ’im,’

Mrs. Slee told herself, as she sobbed and arrayed herself in the new crape-trimmed mourning she was wearing to 'foller' in the second carriage. 'I ain't ashamed of 'im, whoever else is,' she added resentfully, when Zoe sent down a message by Phœbe that she was too weak to attend the modest obsequies.

Modest they were. A plain if massive oak coffin was placed in the simple hearse. Then Andrew Quarles, the adopted son and heir, Dr. Bird, and the lawyer, mounted into the first carriage; Mrs. Slee, alone, and sobbing behind a huge white handkerchief, was pushed into the second; and the little cortège moved off slowly down the drive, watched behind blinds by Phœbe, Sukey, and her admirer, Josh Lee, the finder of the medicine-glass, who had been hidden away until Mrs. Slee was safely out of the house.

It was a mild, early spring day. The grey clouds scudded across a pearly sky, showering at intervals. Very few were in the churchyard to see the miser buried, fewer still in the church. The old clergyman, whose poor had suffered through the Squire's parsimony, read the service with impressive emphasis, but

without emotion. The whole ceremony was cold and formal, and the sexton and his assistant hardly waited until the funeral-party were out of hearing to begin filling in the grave. As the sexton flung the earth upon the coffin with a will, Andrew heard the rattle and the thud, and for a moment his courage failed him. He felt suddenly weak and sick, thinking that the day would come when others would hear that sound, and the coffin would contain his corpse, and the grave would be his grave.

Dr. Bird said good-bye, repeating his offer to go night or day if wanted, and hurried away, looking relieved. Andrew and Mr. Purlby returned as they came; so did the housekeeper, who hastened to the kitchen to see if Susan had basted the sirloin properly and seen to the vegetables. She was determined to inaugurate the new reign by what she called 'a decent and proper lunch.'

Phœbe had laid the table for two only. 'Miss Zoe asked for some lunch to be took up,' she said.

Andrew frowned, but Mr. Purlby, warming his hands at the wood-fire, smiled indulgently.

'Young creatures are so sensitive, Mr. Quarles,' he amiably suggested. 'A day or two with the blinds up will make a world of difference.'

'Very likely,' said Andrew indifferently. He meant to be on guard with Purlby, whom he summed up in his own mind as 'a beggarly sycophant.' Meanwhile, until the will was read, it was as well to be on good terms with him. 'The foul fiend alone knows, he may be my trustee,' he told himself. So he was pleasant to the 'wretched little toady' through luncheon, himself fetching a bottle of Squire Quarles' hoarded '48 port, as well as one of a rare brand of claret and a bottle of curaçoa. Mr. Purlby's nose-tip was roseate, his eyes were moist, his loose lips wore an indulgent smile, when he proceeded to the library to read the will.

The blinds were drawn up. The Squire's worn, old-fashioned chair, where he had sat near the fire, was put away in a shady corner. Mrs. Slee had arranged the room, altering the disposal of the chairs and tables so as to save pain to the survivors from late association with the deceased.

'I think we must have them all in,' said the lawyer, who had brought his black bag, and, seating himself before an office table opposite to a row of chairs, opened it and took out bundles of documents.

'Will you kindly ring the bell, Mr. Quarles? I want not only Miss Blount, but Mrs. Slee and the two maids.'

Andrew rang the bell, gave orders, and in a few minutes three black figures, Mrs. Slee and her assistants, were seated, just as a slim figure in deep mourning seemed to glide more than to walk into the room, with a murmur and an inclination of the head, which was an inclusive salute to the two men.

Andrew, who was standing near the door, feeling, with all his bravado, sick at heart, and feverishly anxious as he awaited the object of his passion, took her hand, murmured some encouraging words, and led her to a chair facing Mr. Purlby. But Zoe did not meekly seat herself as he expected.

'Will you please put it there?' she asked, indicating a spot where her back would be to the window.

'No doubt Miss Blount's eyes have suffered

from the half-dark of the house,' said Mr. Purlby, with a wide smile and little bow, as Zoe seated herself, and, unfolding a document, he smoothed it out on the blotter and prepared to read.

He read slowly and carefully, and sometimes repeated a sentence, looking around to see if all present followed the sense. After the usual preliminaries, the late Squire left £50 each to any indoor servants who had been a year or more in his service at the time of his decease, and an income for life of £50 to Mrs. Slee, the sum realizing the amount to be invested in the funds by Mr. Purlby, his executor and trustee. There were no further small legacies, but expressions of various wishes as to the sale of certain small properties, farms, houses, also of certain shares. Then came the important subject, the disposition of the whole.

'Having no male heir and no near relative of my own,' ran the text, 'I bequeath the whole of my estate, real and personal' (here were enumerated the Squire's various possessions in land, houses, stocks, shares, and the rest), 'to my trustee for the use of my

adopted son, Andrew Quarles, provided that he accepts the guardianship of my ward, Margaret Money, and the arrangements for the said Margaret Money's future welfare contained in a document in the possession of my said trustee ; also that he pays the sum of £200 yearly to my niece, Zoe Blount, daughter of the late Stephen Blount and Zoe, his wife, formerly Zoe Quarles.'

Then followed details, but Andrew hardly heard them. He had had a blow. He was not the possessor of a fine fortune, for he had a trustee. What hard luck ! Not only that : he was to be bothered with a girl. What girl ? Anger, bitterness, raged in his stormy soul, but, with a valiant effort, he controlled their outward signs. As Mr. Purlby ended his reading, he thanked him calmly and decorously ; then, turning to Zoe, asked her in a gentle, fraternal manner if she had any questions to ask Mr. Purlby.

'None, thanks,' she said. 'I suppose I may go ?'

'You must do exactly as you like here, now and always,' he returned respectfully and chivalrously. Then he accompanied her to

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the door and held it open, as she passed out murmuring in her ear, 'I will see you later, dearest.'

Had she heard? he wondered. She had hung her head; her lovely eyes had been veiled by those sweet lids as she went away. Their eyes had not met once.

'By-and-by,' he muttered to himself as he shut the door. Mrs. Slee and her handmaidens had already disappeared. Then he returned to the table where Mr. Purlby was closely examining some documents, seemingly absorbed in technical business, and sat down on the chair lately vacated by Zoe.

'Look here, Mr. Purlby: you and I have to understand each other,' he began in a business-like tone. 'First of all, who is this girl, this future ward of mine, Margaret Money?'



## CHAPTER VII

THE solicitor did not exactly start; he was too practised a lawyer to betray himself in that absurd fashion. But he gave Andrew Quarles a long, inquiring stare over his pince-nez; then he removed them.

‘I quite expected that *you* would be able to tell *me* all about the young lady,’ he began with cautious deliberation. ‘All I know is that she is someone in whom my late client, your adoptive father, was greatly interested; that occasionally her health gives way; that she is by nature timid and a recluse; and that occasionally she has visited here, ostensibly as a guest of Mrs. Slee’s. That is really all I do know.’

‘The girl in white!’ exclaimed Andrew. ‘What do I mean? That I have seen her now and again, and set her down as some friend of Mrs. Slee’s.’

‘I dare say, then, Mrs. Slee will be able to tell you a great deal about her,’ said Mr. Purlby slowly, with a complacent smile. ‘My only concern with the young lady is this: Do you accept her as your ward? Which is tantamount to asking you whether you accept or renounce your fortune.’

‘My dear, good sir, of course I accept everything,’ returned Andrew. ‘I only wish to understand my position—that is all. Have you that letter of my—my father’s with you?’

‘It is here,’ said the lawyer, drawing a square envelope from his bag. ‘As you see, it is marked, “To be retained by Mr. Purlby after its perusal on the occasion of the reading of my will by himself and my adopted son Andrew.” Shall I break the seals and read it first?’ asked the lawyer.

Andrew readily acquiesced, so Mr. Purlby resettled his discarded pince-nez, and, carefully breaking the three black seals, which were seemingly impressed by the big gold signet ring taken from the finger of the deceased, which the undertaker had delivered to the lawyer, read the writing upon a sheet of

ordinary note-paper, contained in the envelope, with minute care and attention. Andrew watched him narrowly the while, but could not judge of the impression made upon him by the document. The expression of his face was rigidly vacuous.

Then the lawyer handed the sheet to his new client, and Andrew read :

‘ MR. PURLBY AND ANDREW,

‘ Margaret Money is to live at Appleby Grange, where she now resides, with a trustworthy housekeeper and two maid-servants. Mrs. Slee is to have the option of living with her as companion at a suitable salary. The house is to be kept in thorough repair, and Margaret is to continue to wear suitable clothing chosen by Mrs. Walters and Mrs. Slee, the bills to be defrayed by yourself. My desire is, Andrew, that you should visit her, certainly once a month—if possible, once a fortnight ; that her medical adviser should continue to visit her as heretofore ; and that Mr. Purlby himself should visit her once a month, and make the inquiries into and arrangements anent her welfare that I have

hitherto made myself. When Margaret Money dies, I wish her to be buried in the same grave as myself, or, if this is not possible, in a grave as near to mine as possible.

‘ANDREW QUARLES.’

‘You are surprised?’ asked Mr. Purlby, as Andrew handed the sheet to him in silence.

The young man shrugged his shoulders.

‘Where is Appleby Grange? The first time I heard of it was when you were reading the will,’ he returned.

‘It is in Oxfordshire—a solitary kind of place, I believe. I have not been there,’ said Mr. Purlby. ‘But now, what do you think? Had we not better have Mrs. Slee in and talk things over?’

Andrew acquiescing, the bell was rung, and a message sent to Mrs. Slee by Phœbe. Mr. Purlby had but just concluded his recommendation to Andrew not to frighten the poor woman, who would naturally feel complicity in her late master’s secrets, although it had been her bounden duty to keep them intact, when Mrs. Slee appeared at the door, looking old and tottery.

‘Come in, Mrs. Slee,’ exclaimed Mr. Purlby genially, and he rose and placed a chair for her close to his own. ‘We are not going to bother you or detain you—you are a busy person, we know. But you can help Mr. Andrew here more than anyone can in his fulfilment of poor Mr. Quarles’ wishes; and, knowing your devotion to your late master, I am sure you will be only too glad to do that.’

His careful cajolery had some effect. Still, as Mrs. Slee accepted the chair placed for her, she looked more like a victim than a ready assistant to the furtherance of the late Squire’s testamentary desires, seeing which Mr. Purlby assumed a still more cheery manner.

‘My dear Mrs. Slee, Mr. Quarles left a letter as well as a will, in which he informs us you will tell us all about his ward, Miss Margaret Money,’ he began brightly.

Mrs. Slee stiffened and bridled. She gave the lawyer a resentful glance.

‘What I know of Miss Margaret amounts to nothing at all, sir,’ she resolutely replied.

‘Oh, come now, that’s putting it a little too strong, Mrs. Slee,’ returned Mr. Purlby

in pleasant expostulation. 'It is making your late master out—well, a story-teller. He says you do know, and you say you don't. I am sure you do not wish to give a flat denial to a statement made by the dead master you so regret and honour? No, no, of course you do not! Now, suppose, to shorten matters, we put it this way: You will tell us all you do know of Miss Money—begin at the beginning, and go on to the last time you had anything to do with her.'

Mrs. Slee glanced despairingly from the lawyer to Andrew, then back to Mr. Purlby. Then she set her lips tightly, and asked if she might see the letter. This being handed to her immediately by Mr. Purlby, she put on her spectacles, read it carefully two or three times; then, apparently relieved in her mind, returned it to the solicitor.

'I am glad Miss Marg'ret's a-going to be took care of—not that she ain't been, but that, now Mr. Quarles's dead, she's about lost the only friend she seems to 'ave 'ad in all 'er life, poor soul!' she began. 'I can't tell you who she is, Mr. Purlby and Mr. Andrew, not if I wor to be killed for it next minute, that I

can't! The fust I ever heerd or see of 'er was one summer's day—a hot June day it was, nigh upon midsummer—when the Squire comes to me. “Slee,” he ses, sharp, as he used to speak—poor soul! 'is bark was allers wuss than 'is bite, as everyone knows as does 'im justice—“Slee, I want you to do some-think very partickler for me. I've got a young friend as I made acquaintance with casual-like, and I asked 'er 'ere. But you know what a country place is, and this place in partickler—'ow they'll talk, and say all sorts of things, if she's seen visitin' me. I want 'er to come 'ere private-like, just as if she was your child or niece or friend you was 'avin' to stay surreptitious-like.” I saw what 'e wanted at onst, Mr. Purlby and Mr. Andrew, and I didn't ask no further questions, 'e bein' my master and me 'is servant, but did as I was told. 'E told me to go and meet 'er in the evenin', and I did so, and brought 'er back. She was a pretty little gell then, about twelve I should say—it's eight year ago come midsummer—and she called the Squire “Guardy.” She stopped three weeks that time, and used to meet 'im about the grounds

—'e took care never to be seen with 'er. And I soon understood as 'ow she was living at the Squire's place near Oxford, called Appleby Grange, with an 'ousekeeper as 'ad been a nuss, and two woman-servants. No, sir, the child didn't seem to 'ave anyone belongin' to 'er, nor to know where she was borned—she'd been at Appleby Grange with Mrs. Walters, the 'ousekeeper, ever since she took notice-like. But that's just where it is : Miss Marg'ret ain't like other folks in her perceivin's. What do I mean? She's all right enough sometimes, though, while 'er body's growed, 'er mind ain't growed along with it. Child she was when she fust come 'ere, and child she is at this very minnit—in my belief what some calls a softy, and some calls a inner-cent. How many times 'as she bin 'ere? Well, I 'aven't, so to say, counted ; but she 'as allers come in the spring, when the buttercups and young things—calves and lambs and young chickens and ducks and such—was about. She was that partial to spring things Mr. Quarles liked to see 'er over 'em. Then she come when the rose-garden was in bloom ; she liked to live there pretty well, poor dear !



till Mr. Andrew come, when she was skeered, and didn't like to be about. I never told Mr. Quarles in so many words, Mr. Andrew, that she was frightened of you, but she was. And when Miss Zoe come, she was nearly out of 'er mind for fear of 'er. She's a pretty gell as ever was—I'll say that much for 'er—but I don't believe as goin' to see 'er, as the Squire says, 'll be much good. You see, 'e didn't rightly know 'ow strangers about frightened the pore gell. I didn't like to tell 'im, for I could see as 'e set great store by 'er, and never once thort as I thort—and other people would 'ave thought if they'd 'a' known 'er—that, poor gell! she was simple. 'E was real fond of Miss Marg'ret, was Mr. Quarles, and she of 'im—'er "Guardy," as she called 'im, pore soul!

Mrs. Slee sniffed, and dabbed her eyes with a black-bordered handkerchief, upon which, with sympathy and thanks, Mr. Purlby notified that he and Mr. Andrew were loath to trouble her any further. His last words, as he closed the door upon her retreating figure, contained complimentary allusions to her obedient devotion to the late Squire's

wishes, and hopes that she would assist him and the present Mr. Quarles in their future furtherance.

‘I’m sure I ’ope so, sir,’ she faltered, departing ; ‘for I don’t know who should think of ’im, now ’e’s gone, if I didn’t, bein’ ’is nurse from childhood up, as they say.’

Mr. Purlby cleared his throat, as he returned to where Andrew was sitting deeply in thought, and sat down once more.

‘We are hardly much wiser on the subject of your ward, Miss Margaret Money, than we were before, are we, Mr. Quarles?’ he dryly said. ‘Still, perhaps we may be better in the darkness of ignorance than with a half-knowledge of the subject. It is so well said that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing.’

Andrew made no reply or comment. Two points absorbed his attention. One was the fact that Margaret Money’s seeming mental deficiencies prevented, and apparently had hitherto prevented, any question of a matrimonial complication with himself or any other man, either now or in the future ; the other was his projected ‘squaring’ of his trustee, so as to bind him to him with hooks of steel.

‘My dear Mr. Purlby, all I wish is to carry out my late adoptive father’s wishes *in toto*—I am sure you believe that of me,’ he earnestly began, leaning forward and resting his arms on the table, as he gazed full into his legal adviser’s eyes. ‘But, somehow, I feel very incompetent to do so. I hope you will help me. Stop—wait—hear me out! No one is better aware than I am how valuable your time is, not only as a much-appreciated lawyer in your own person, but as a prominent member of a firm second to none in reputation. I do not ask you to waste your precious hours on me; I only beg this of you: arrange everything, all responsibilities left me by my late adoptive father, and charge me the extreme value of every hour spent on my behalf. No, you must not deny me this; I am determined you shall not be imposed upon by myself or anyone else. I am also determined that anyone who helps me shall not suffer for it. You will not let me fall into less scrupulous, less honourable, hands than yours, Mr. Purlby, will you? Believe me, the world is not a world of philanthropists, any more than it is a world of rascals—I am convinced of that.’

‘My dear sir, you do me honour, and yourself as well,’ said Mr. Purlby, who was not at all taken aback, nor perhaps surprised; he had formed his own estimate of the late Squire’s adopted son long ago, and one of its items was that he was very able—very able indeed. ‘I can only say this, the confidence you repose in me is not misplaced, nor will you have any cause to regret it.’

A mutual understanding established, Andrew became expansive. He told Mr. Purlby what he already knew, that he loved his supposed cousin Zoe, and intended to make her his wife.

‘I had meant this before my father’s death, and I feel I should have brought him round to my way of thinking, I assure you, Mr. Purlby; I also feel that, if anything is really true that believers tell us of a future state, he thinks very differently now of our marriage,’ he went on glibly, if not, to the attentive lawyer, convincingly — at all times James Purlby was a difficult man to convince. ‘And my intention then is doubly, trebly, my intention now, when I have good reason to know that the poor girl is wrongfully suspected of having poisoned her uncie.’

Mr. Purlby gasped.

'My God!' he exclaimed, off guard, astonished at the sudden cool assertion of what he might dimly have suggested to himself, but which was like a moral bombshell uttered in that fashion. 'Pray, pray don't say that! You must be mistaken, surely!'

Andrew shook his head with a sad air.

'I am not, Mr. Purlby, more's the pity,' he said. 'Poor girl! It is cruel, unjust, horrible, and my one desire is that she should never know of it. It would be the very last idea to cross her mind—she was such a perfect angel to him, and he was very trying at times. No! For her sake—and she deserves every consideration—I must waive everything; I must even risk shocking the pious public. There is but one course to take—to marry her at once, and, going abroad, to live the scandal down. For scandal it is, and will be, there is no help for it; that absurd verdict of those asses of jurymen insured that.'

Mr. Purlby, if surprised and a little perplexed, did not allow emotion to outbalance sober judgment. When he left Heatherly Court an hour later, he had practically acceded

to all that his new and liberal client proposed; and so 'ably,' as he termed it, had Andrew stated his propositions, that he returned to town not only with a clear conscience, but in, for him, high spirits.

His client hardly seemed in a similar humour when left to himself. He longed to see Zoe. But he had a dismal, haunting fear which held him back, a dread lest she should suspect him of—what? He dared not tell himself. He paced the library, summoning up every grain of courage he possessed to face her and fight his own battles. His heart would sink, would fail him, do what he might.

'I must take her by storm,' he moodily told himself at last. 'There is no other way—I must take her by storm.'

## CHAPTER VIII

ABOUT a quarter of an hour after Mr. Purlby left the Court, Zoe, lying miserably back in a low basket-chair opposite the wood-fire in her gaunt if handsome bedchamber, gazing moodily at the busy blue and golden flames licking the oak logs, started. There was a tap at the door.

'Who is it?' she cried uneasily, her 'heart in her mouth.'

'Mr. Andrew says, miss, will you come down for a minute or two? 'E wants to arsk you somethink pertickler,' she heard in Phœbe's vernacular.

'Tell him I will come,' was her reply.

She rose, went to the toilet-table, shivered slightly as she caught sight of the darkening, cheerless landscape without, mechanically smoothed her hair, and went slowly out of the room and down the fine old staircase, a

chill sensation about her heart seeming to stay the warm current in her veins, as if Death's bony fingers had clutched it.

She stood for a moment or two outside the closed door of the library. It seemed to her that she had only one feeling left, a sickening loathing for life, which was as well a nervous fear of death.

She opened the door with slow, quiet reluctance. But noiselessly as she turned the handle, Andrew sprang from where he sat near the blazing logs, came forward, seized her hand, kissed it repeatedly, and drew her across the room to the hearth, where he faced her open-armed.

'My darling! At last!' he murmured, with intensest love in his dark eyes. 'Zoe!'

But, instead of falling into his eager embrace, she recoiled with a horrified gaze.

'Oh no!' she cried shrilly. 'All that is—over!'

'My dearest, it is hardly begun,' he exclaimed, surprised. 'Why in the name of goodness should our love be over, when we are free—our very own—to do as we please, when and how we please?'



She looked earnestly at him, half fearfully, half inquiringly.

‘I don’t — know,’ she slowly, miserably replied. ‘At least, I do know. After all—that has been—we have only one thing to do—I feel that—to say—good-bye.’

For a few moments he stared at her down-cast eyes, her drooping head, as she stood leaning against the high mantelshelf. Then he gave a sigh which had a suggestion of impatience and derision in it.

‘My love, our poor dad’s suicide has given you a pretty severe shock; but you must really pull yourself together, and help me instead of hindering me by morbid folly,’ he began masterfully. ‘Do I think it was suicide? Of course I do. I believe he had been told he must soon die a horrible death, and that he suddenly felt he could not, would not, go through with it. Why should he? In his place, I should have done the same. Poor old fellow! I don’t even believe he meant for one moment to wrong us by revoking his legacies; I believe that letter was written simply and purely to throw dust in people’s eyes. If it had been meant really,

would he have committed suicide directly afterwards? Absurd! It was that letter alone which made those twelve idiots return that ridiculous verdict. Only one person could have given poor dad that fatal dose—himself!

‘Other people will not think that,’ said Zoe mournfully. She sank into a chair, staring miserably at the leaping flames on the hearth, and thinking that some raging despair was surging about her soul in a manner like theirs as they assailed the logs.

He gave her a long, curious stare, then went to her and took her in his arms, limp and passive as she was. As she felt his heart beating against her chest, she shuddered. His passion dominated her. What were all her despairing, dismal fears and horrors beside the response which made her answering heart leap within her, and seemed to set every nerve in her body quivering with intense and overpowering ecstasy? Her revulsion of feeling was as sudden as it was violent. She flung her arms about his neck, and murmured some wild endearment as she gazed up into his eyes. Then their lips met in a long, absorbing kiss.

It lasted after he had briefly thought and decided his plans—after he had lifted her away, and, sinking upon a wide settee, had cradled her in his arms as if she had been some frail child. When he released her she fell panting and shuddering upon his breast, spent and exhausted, if slightly delirious with the delight of her absolute surrender.

‘You won’t always kiss me like that?’ she faltered, gazing adoringly up into his face. ‘I warn you, if you do, I shall not live long, any more than a poor flower can live scorched by the hottest sun-rays at noon.’

‘I shall kiss you more than that,’ he said, looking her lovely crimsoned face over with a glance of proud possession. ‘But you will be stronger, dearest, away with me in lovely air in a beautiful spot, where I shall forbid you ever to think of all this dreadful time. It is that which makes you feel as you do—the hateful horrors, that brutal inquest. Ah, the very thought makes you shiver, and I don’t wonder! Zoe, we must be married at once, quietly—and then go abroad, and leave everything to be managed by that clever little man, Mr. Purlby.’

Sobered again by the countershock of the suggestion, Zoe writhed out of his embrace, slid to the ground, and, resting her head against his knee, gazed pitifully up into his face.

‘Andrew, I know I am at your mercy; you have conquered me. I feel I am worse than your slave; I must and cannot help obeying you,’ she began beseechingly. ‘Don’t drive me too hard. If we marry at once, we shall be execrated, and no wonder! Poor uncle!’ Her voice faltered. ‘He has left you all, and he is not cold in his grave.’

Andrew leant forward, elbow on knee. It was growing dusk; the firelight playing on his face gave a sinister strength to the passionate, imperious expression upon his dark, handsome features.

‘There is a paramount reason which I did not wish to tell you, my own, and should not have mentioned if you had allowed me to arrange our future without fighting me,’ he began in a warning tone. ‘The dad has left me guardian to a beautiful girl he has always taken care of, who paid him secret visits; it was she you saw in white at the window.’

Not only this'—he paused, drew a long breath, and went on, warily, craftily, sacrificing truth to expediency—'I have good reason to believe that a codicil exists somewhere, disinheriting me unless I marry this Margaret Money; and, between ourselves, although I would not breathe it to anyone else but you, whom I consider as already the better half of me, it was this plan of the dad's that I should marry this girl which led him to adopt me. Not only that, but it was this which led to his rage when he heard that we loved each other and intended to marry. Darling, we must cut off all possibility of my being beggared, and you cast adrift without a penny. We must—we are compelled to marry at once !'

She cowered, but, clinging closer to him, looked up at him as a fanatic gazes at his idol. She felt as well as looked like one.

'But—what—if the codicil turns up—afterwards?' she significantly asked.

'After you are mine, the deluge,' he meaningly, slowly said—'such a deluge of love, of ecstasy, that it will scorch and wither any profane intruder ! Darling, you do not know

—you cannot even imagine—what love like ours is, or you would have no fear. Come, listen! To obviate all horrid possibilities, such as finding a codicil, we will shut up the house just as it is, pay off Slee and the girls so handsomely they will adore us, and go off to London, get married, and go abroad. I shall drop the name of Quarles, which was never even mine by adoption—the dad took no steps in the matter, or, I fancy, cared—and we will take any name that comes first. You shall choose one. What? Oh, of course, I will marry you under my own name, which, although my brute of a father kicked me out because I did not play the fool or the knave when he wanted me to, he could not deprive me of. An Englishman's name is his birth-right, and as a rule he sticks to it. Now to talk over our plans, so that in a few days we shall have left damp, foggy old England far behind us, and shall be basking in the sun and enjoying the lovely flowers in the South.'

## CHAPTER IX

HER overpowering love for Andrew subjugated Zoe like some potent, stupefying drug. She seemed dead to every other feeling, only to have an existence as his creature, as if she were hypnotized by him.

After that crucial interview, the young man seemed to have gained fresh power. He showed an indomitable will, and all about him submitted more or less meekly to his commands.

His actions were as swift as his resolves. In a few days the servants were paid and were under sentence of dismissal. Mrs. Slee was to wait until the last, to help her masterful young employer to shut up the house, and then to proceed to Appleby Grange, where she had chosen to live, as recommended by her late master. She was growing in devotion to Andrew, who had fixed her salary as part-

companion to the poor young Margaret Money at £100 the year.

‘It is too much, Mr. Andrew, sir,’ she had said, choking with emotion and gratitude, when he had told her his intentions; and she had gone away his fervent admirer when, shaking hands warmly with her, he had said:

‘My dear Mrs. Slee, I have seen and felt your faithful goodness to my poor father ever since he adopted me. The little it is in my power to do to contribute to your comfort is only your due.’

During long walks about the garden and grounds with Zoe—lovely spring weather had set in, and all the sweet, fresh blossoms of early year were bursting into beauty, while the buds on trees and shrubs were swelling and expanding into brilliant green foliage—he laid down the law as to their joint future in his new, adoring, if imperious, manner.

‘I am determined that no evil tongues, no “good-natured friends,” shall spoil our lifelong honeymoon,’ he said. ‘So we shall start life immediately after our marriage as a Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton. You will be Zara instead of Zoe, and you must learn to think of, as well



as to call me by, my second name of Basil. What do you say? You were only thinking, when you found it out, that it fitted me—I was your basilisk. How sweet of you to flatter me so, my darling!

Zoe soon understood what lay immediately before her. As a Miss Bourne, she was to have rooms in a fashionable hotel in the West End of London, and to choose a trousseau as if she were an heiress in her own right. Andrew would visit her once or twice in a decorous manner, on the last occasion to take her to the registrar's and marry her both secretly and quietly. She would return to her hotel, and he would proceed to Paris, where she would follow, and their new life as Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton would begin.

At her uncle's death her kind friend and godmother had written to her, offering her the humble home she shared with her now widowed sister. This Miss Vigors was the only person to whom Zoe was in any way bound to account for herself, the only one who could or would care where she went, what she did, or what became of her. To this lady Zoe wrote a cleverly evasive letter, dictated by Andrew,

containing not one word of her future movements.

‘If she wants to know, let her find out,’ he had somewhat brutally said, as he stamped the letter with a vicious thump and pocketed it.

Many little new traits were present in Zoe’s lover during those days, but she noticed them vaguely. Her one prevailing feeling was anxiety to be away, safe, Andrew her very own, her husband. She trembled as if seized with ague that last day.

‘What is the matter with you?’ he peremptorily asked, when he was giving her the sheaf of bank-notes and the rouleaux of gold she was to spend during the next three weeks.

‘Fear,’ was her laconic reply. Then, seeing a curious light in his eyes which was hardly that of love, she hastened to add, ‘Fear of losing you, my beloved!’ and with her new abandon, flinging herself into his arms, she once more told him, with unreserved candour, what he was to her. ‘If I lost you, I should do something desperate—I know I should!’ she cried.

‘Then you won’t do anything desperate,

I can assure you,' he said—a speech which was a prelude to one of those little outbursts of passion which left her dazed, astonished, and with that peculiar passive, bewitched sensation as if her will were temporarily paralyzed. 'Come, go and lock your trunks, and say good-bye to the household,' he said presently.

In an hour Zoe was driving away in a fly, her boxes on the roof, Andrew at her side, on his way to 'see her off,' the servants having uttered their regretful good-byes in the firm belief that 'pore Miss Zoe' was returning to the obscurity she had lived in before her uncle had allowed her to take up her abode at the Court, and that 'it was a sin and a shame them two couldn't marry.' Neither Mrs. Slee nor her two handmaidens suspected the truth, that Andrew and Zoe would soon be man and wife.

An hour ago Andrew had been the passionate lover. As they drove through the park he was merely calm, friendly, brother-like. At first those extreme changes of manner had troubled Zoe; that was weeks ago, when their mutual affection had to be

hidden from the late Squire. Now she was accustomed to see Andrew either ice or fire. But when he had sent her somewhat abruptly through the station, and he was staying in the booking-office to take her ticket, she stood there feeling cruelly forlorn, even seized by that terrible feeling of being abandoned by all creatures, being utterly alone in the world, which comes to the solitary, but was strange in a bride on the eve of a happy marriage, with her purse filled lavishly by the passionately-loving husband to be, whose one insistent order had been to 'spare no expense.'

The train came up shortly after Andrew hurried out of the station with her ticket. In another minute Zoe was leaning back in the corner of a first-class carriage, in which there were three other ladies, watching the scenes—strange to her a few months back, but dear and familiar now—flit quickly by like the cloud shadows across a sunlit landscape.

Andrew did not wait long after the train started. In a very few minutes he was driving homewards, his brow knit, his lips set firm. He had been too absorbed in speed-

ing Zoe safely on her journey to notice that a man, who had been lounging in the station yard before they drove in, seemed to wait until he assisted his betrothed into the railway compartment, when he entered the next, a smoking carriage.

This man had spent a minute between the taking his ticket and following Andrew to the platform in slipping a shilling into a porter's hand, and asking him if the handsome young couple who had alighted just now from a carriage were not Miss Blount and Mr. Quarles, of Heatherly Court.

'Yessir,' answered the porter, adding a few items anent the late inquest and the rumours about the parties, which the stranger listened to indifferently, then, nodding, abruptly left him.

Zoe, utterly unconscious of being watched as she alighted from the train, chartered a cab, and was driven to her hotel, where she was met by men in uniform and others, and smiled upon by the manageress, who summoned a maid to conduct her to her rooms.

'I hope you will find everything comfortable, madam,' she graciously added. 'The

dinner ordered by wire will be ready in half an hour.'

Zoe thanked her, declined the lift, and went upstairs after her conductress. The rooms Andrew had chosen when he was in town on one of his flying visits to Mr. Purlby were bright as well as comfortable. The chambermaid switched on the electric light, and she passed through a richly-furnished sitting-room, where flowers decked the dining-table—ostentatiously laid for one—into quite a charming bedchamber, where there was ample room for her trunks, which Andrew had partly packed with old heirlooms of gold and silver, also family jewels which he had found during the explorations he had made alone, while Zoe and the maids were safe in bed and presumably fast asleep, and the great mansion was dark and silent as the grave.

Here she changed her second-best mourning frock for her best, a thin material, prettily made by the local dressmaker, and sat down to her dinner in solitary state, attended by an obsequious waiter. The menu was delicately chosen: a white soup, a morsel of the turbot which was on the *table d'hôte* list, chicken, a

cutlet, ice, and pastry ; but it was one of the hardest tasks Zoe ever had had to swallow enough of it to escape the comment of the man's dark, watchful eyes. 'All I ask of you, my darling, is to behave as much like other people as you possibly can,' Andrew had said to her. 'Escape notice—appear to be mad on dress, if you like, as the rest of your sex seem to be always.'

While she sipped her coffee, thankful that the ordeal of dinner was over, Zoe remembered that Andrew considered that dress ought to seem her motive for being in London alone, if anyone in that huge crowded hotel, where people seemed to come and go every day and all hours of the day, ever happened to notice her or give her existence a second thought. So, as soon as the waiter began to clear the table, she set to work with a notebook and pencil to make lists of the clothes she would buy at the various well-known shops Andrew had directed her to patronize.

This helped to pass the remainder of the evening. Andrew had advised her to spend at least £300. But she had a darling wish : to send as big a sum as she could save out of

what he had given her to her suffering old friend and godmother, Miss Vigors—to send it anonymously from some central post-office. Reducing her trousseau so that it should not cost more than £200 occupied the time till she thought she might reasonably retire for the night.

Then to bed she went, but not to sleep. Her calculations pursued her, and when she fell into an uneasy doze long milliners' bills troubled her brain and startled her into wakeful depression. When at last she fell soundly asleep, it was not for long. She awoke with a start by dreaming of a sudden flash of light.

Dreaming? As she struggled up in bed, she saw that the room was no longer quite dark: she could see the faint outlines of the dressing-table, chest of drawers, wardrobe; and, moreover, the longer she looked, the more distinct they appeared.

Was it daylight, or, rather, dawn? No, the curtains still darkened the window. Looking sharply aside, she started and recoiled at the strange sight which met her eyes.

A column of luminous mist seemed to rise



out of the floor. She could see the door-handle through it, which shone with reflected light.

‘The house is on fire,’ she thought, slipping out of bed to get some clothing and give the alarm, for the huge hotel was still. She heard no sound of any kind. But as she seized her dressing-gown the phosphorescent mist ascended slightly from the ground—she saw the carpeted floor intact beneath it. It reminded her of the wreaths of steam from railway-engines before they dissolved into the air.

‘What on earth is it?’ she was asking herself, staring at it, when she shrank back against the bed with a strangled cry of horror.

The column of luminous vapour wavered, then seemed to assume a shape—a human shape—and the face at the top was that of her dead uncle, gazing at her with a sad, warning look.

As she fancied the vision was moving nearer, she gave a cry, all seemed suddenly dark—she fell in a heap upon the floor.

How long she lay there unconscious she never knew. She was aroused by a persistent knocking at the door.

'Nine o'clock, ma'am. I have brought your hot water,' said a cheery voice.

Stiff, bruised, feeling more dead than alive, she struggled to her feet and unlocked the door.

'A cup of tea?' she repeated stupidly, as the woman amiably suggested it. 'Yes, thanks.' Then she turned to look at the spot where this awful thing had happened to her.

## CHAPTER X

At first, as she stared about the room where she had seen the terrible illusion, she felt unreasoning horror. Cold drops stood on her brow as she gazed at the spot where it had appeared; her hair seemed to bristle on her head.

‘Uncle came from among the dead to warn me we must never, never be married,’ she told herself, shivering.

But after she had drunk her tea, when the sunshine streamed into the room, and the ordinary cheery sounds within the hotel and without seemed to give the lie to the supernatural, she began to wonder if, after all, the thing had been a dream; or, if not an ordinary dream, if her brain—that delicate and complicated piece of human machinery—had not had one of those attacks which scientists know

of, but at present do not profess to understand.

She clutched at the idea as the proverbial drowning man at the straw. As she dressed and breakfasted she recalled tales she had read of optical illusions and delusions.

'It is as plain as possible, the explanation of it,' she told herself. 'I was worried about the cost of my trousseau. Just before I really fell asleep I was wondering what poor uncle, who was so dreadfully stingy, would have thought if he could have known that directly he was dead I should marry Andrew, and spend such a lot of his money on wedding-clothes. And I had an unusually vivid nightmare, and simply got out of bed in my sleep. It was that dinner.'

She remembered how, after a breaking-up party at her godmother's school—where, Miss Vigors being her sole friend on earth, she naturally remained during the holidays—the girls who shared her room declared she got up in the night and began to dress, and when they awakened her she had a fit of screaming.

'I will not force myself to eat again when I don't want to,' she resolved, as she drove out

in the hotel brougham from the haberdashers' to the bootmakers', from thence to the fashionable milliners' and dressmakers'. But her last purchase showed that she had not quite forgotten her nightmare. It was a box of night-lights, guaranteed to be the 'most satisfactory' by a famous firm which sold such things.

She passed the next night quietly; then the shopping, and the persuasion, to those who undertook her orders, to execute them in time, diverted her thoughts. She felt the circumstance that she was neither to write to Andrew nor to receive letters from him, acutely. But when she had suggested it he had shortly said, 'Impossible!' So she had to keep up her spirits as best she could by reading books and newspapers, and marking the lovely things which were constantly arriving, before packing them away in her new trunks.

Andrew had said that, although he might have to 'run up to town' on business connected with their marriage, he could not risk exciting suspicion in anyone's mind by staying away a minute longer than he had been accustomed to when making his periodical visits to Messrs. Flowerdew and Purlby's offices.

‘It won’t do, Zoe, and that’s all about it,’ he had said. ‘If we are to have talk, we may as well chuck the whole thing up. Our marriage will revive all people’s vile suspicions, or even worse may happen. I will try and see you in a week, and after then only when we start for the registrar’s.’

However, when Zoe came in late one afternoon, it seemed that Andrew’s patience had failed him.

‘A gentleman called to see you about half an hour ago, madam,’ said one of the hotel officials, coming forward with a deferential smile. ‘He would not leave his name. He was dark, yes—not very dark, I should say; and tall, yes—taller than I am. I said you generally came in to dinner, and if he returned later he would probably be able to see you. But he could not say whether he would be able to do so or not.’

‘Thanks,’ said Zoe, her heart beating so violently, her whole body trembling so much, that for once she overcame her prejudice, and was taken up to her floor in the lift. For the remainder of the evening she was wound up to a pitch of the most concentrated excitement.

She sat near the door, her eyes riveted upon it, listening to every footstep, every voice. But evening became night. The hotel noises diminished, then almost ceased. Midnight struck.

‘He cannot come now,’ she miserably thought ; and she went to bed.

The next few days she had hard work to rally her spirits. Then came one of those stormy days which sometimes occur in spring. The wind howled and raged about the big building, moaning in the chimney of her sitting-room, driving sheets of rain against the window-panes. She resolved not to go out. The day when he had called she had wandered about the National Gallery and the other picture-shows to kill time, when all the while *he* was in town—and while she was gazing vacantly at the picture of a forlorn girl waiting in a cottage by the sea for the lover or young husband who would never return, a picture which had affected her strangely, *he*—the only one she lived and cared for on earth, her one tie to life—had come and gone, failing to find her.

‘Fate is a strange thing,’ she thought, as

she sat and sewed, then arranged her beautiful trousseau afresh in her new boxes. 'That I should just have been late that one day! If I had come in at my usual time, and had not stopped in that wretched gallery staring at that miserable picture, I should have seen my love—my husband.'

Unbounded faith in Andrew had been hers hitherto. But as she sat that stormy afternoon re-sewing buttons on some dainty garments a sudden horrible idea flashed across her.

What if he had changed his mind? What if this sending her to London with a large sum of money were a *ruse*, that he might get safely away from her with the intention of never seeing her more. Did not his anxiety to be off and away, the shutting up of the house, the fear of their matrimonial plans leaking out, point to it?

'Oh, God, how dare I think such things of him!' she mentally cried, flinging away her work and stormily pacing the room. Then she utterly broke down. Rushing away into the bedroom, she cast herself prone upon her bed, and abandoned herself to a storm



of convulsive sobs she was powerless to control.

Just as she was growing calmer, and, rising, was mixing some sal volatile in a glass with a cold, shaking hand, she started. The door of her sitting-room opened, she heard voices.

'Miss Bourne must be out,' said a man's voice. Then she heard a reply in Andrew's beloved tones: 'I expect she is in the other room;' and a tap on her door, which was ajar, followed.

'I am coming,' she said, her joy so overpowering that it strengthened her to speak calmly. Then, hearing the sitting-room door shut, she flew out, and was in his arms, shuddering, palpitating, and evidently frightening him.

'Why, my love, what is it?' he asked, alarmed, as he held her away and gazed at her dimmed eyes and blurred features with concern. 'Has your courage failed you? It is not too late even now, my darling! I will not make you my own against your will. I am ready to swear that.'

She gave a half-maddened laugh, and, frantically kissing his coat, his hand which

held hers, she laid her head pathetically against his shoulder.

‘I think it was being out when you came, missing you when I was so longing and yearning just to hear your voice, which finished me up,’ she began. Then, seeing him frown and stare, she stopped short.

‘My dear love, what are you talking about?’ he emphatically asked, holding her away from him, and gazing sternly into her eyes. ‘You have not missed me. This is the very first time since I took these rooms for you that I have set foot in the place.’

She stared at him, perplexed.

‘Well, one thing is pretty certain: someone called to see me—some man,’ she said, a little consoled that her missed delight was not caused by her own foolishness. Then she related the circumstance, repeating the hotel official’s words as exactly as she could. The effect her communication had upon her lover was startling. He paled to an ashen grey, his eyes seemed to recede into his head, as he questioned her in a severe, judicial manner. The lover vanished, only the harassed, determined man remaining whom she had learnt to

know that he sometimes was since the ghastly sequence of events at Heatherly Court.

‘I must look into this,’ he said. ‘You must show me the waiter or porter who told you. It must be some mistake, for no one but you and myself know of these aliases of ours. But you must bathe your eyes and look a little better before we show ourselves about, or they will think I have been thrashing you.’

He laughed—a forced laugh—gave her a few hasty kisses, then sent her to her room to remove the traces of her emotion if she could. As she bathed her eyes again and again, and dressed carefully in outdoor attire, donning a thick veil as he had suggested, she heard him restlessly moving about the sitting-room.

‘That’s a little bit better,’ he said, as she returned. ‘Come, this is what we must do: go downstairs, where you will show me, as little conspicuously as you can, the man who made this extraordinary mistake. You will then go upstairs again in the lift, and wait for me here. Do you understand?’

She assured him she did, so together they made their way down the thickly-carpeted

staircase into the hall, where she suddenly halted.

‘That is the man who told me, standing by the door,’ she said in a low tone.

‘Go upstairs again, just as if you had forgotten something,’ he returned.

As she obeyed him, she wondered what could possibly have happened to make the official fall into such an absurd mistake. Could there be another lady named Bourne among the many guests? Or, more probably, was a Miss or Mrs. Bourne to arrive shortly? That was the most plausible explanation. That the man who called and asked for ‘Miss Bourne’ had anything to do with either herself or Andrew she did not believe for a single instant.

She was rejoicing in the happy calm which was gradually replacing her stormy emotion, when Andrew came abruptly into the room, and, after carefully closing the door, across to where she was sitting.

‘The man was for us, little doubt of that,’ he somewhat bitterly exclaimed. ‘Luckily, I got a special license yesterday. We can be married to-morrow.’

He took her hand, and, holding it, gazed curiously at her as she shrank back with a startled look.

‘But—oh—my frocks will not be ready till next week!’ she cried.

‘That is a very minor consideration,’ he said, springing up and beginning to pace the floor. ‘What a child you are!’

She watched him and his evident perturbation anxiously, until he suddenly came and stood before her, his hands thrust into his coat pockets.

‘Look here,’ he somewhat roughly began: ‘There is only one important thing for either of us—to get away as soon as possible, and to get away safely married. Do you want to ruin me, or do you not?’

‘Andrew!’ she cried, so piteously that he was all penitence in a moment.

After he had soothed her with all his former endearing tenderness, he became cheery, if not gay.

‘Now, understand! My idea of real life is, “Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die,”’ he said. ‘And if we are to pull together at all, you must adopt

it as well. Let the frocks go hang ; we will be off to-morrow in spite of them. And now you are coming with me for a day out. I have cut the old place—it is shut up ; I am staying at the International for to-night. I will tell you all about to-morrow by-and-by. Now we are going out to lunch, and, later on, dinner, and return for half an hour to dress for the theatre. Lock up everything, and come along.'

In another half-hour Zoe was shut into one of the hotel carriages with her beloved, and between his stolen caresses he was holding forth of the future, which he painted in such glowing colours that the past seemed to recede and vanish. She forgot all but the happy time to come.

## CHAPTER XI

It was nearing the close of the season along the Riviera. The sun, delightful enough during the first three chilly months of the year, was beginning to scorch and burn its votaries in early April. The white town of Nice, with its background of grey hills, its glaring white roads, its groves of orange and lemon trees, palms, cacti, and feathery, red-berried pepper-trees, dazzled the eyes as it reflected the sunshine. The oily Mediterranean was almost an indigo blue against a sapphire sky, where it was not rich violet—as on the horizon, where ocean and heaven seemed to meet and melt into one.

The gay crowd, with its sprinkling of pale invalids in carriages or bath-chairs, was seemingly gayer than ever, and composed of the usual picturesque cosmopolitan materials. Americans, English, French, Italians, with a

sprinkling of Orientals, it strolled along the seashore, gazing and chattering; it drove, displayed its toilettes, listened to the bands, gambled in the semi-private clubs in a refined if costly manner, or openly took the train and joined the daring and aboveboard gamblers at Monte Carlo.

In one of the giant hotels, some of whose windows commanded glimpses of the famous Promenade and the rolling blue waves on the pebbly shore, 'Basil Hamilton,' as Andrew called himself, and his wife 'Zara,' had established themselves.

Andrew had carried out his intentions. The day after he had, in his constant secret dread and anxiety, obtained a special license, the day when he heard of the visit of some strange man to Zoe at the hotel—a man who had actually asked for her by the assumed name he flattered himself could only be known by himself and his betrothed—they met at the registrar's, and the knot was tied which made them man and wife.

Then he went off at once by himself to Paris. Zoe, following alone the next day, was met by him on her arrival at the terminus.



She had expected to enjoy a few days at least in Paris. But Andrew took his bride south by the night mail. The first week was spent at Arcachon; the second at Hyères; the third found the newly-married couple established at the Nice caravanseraï, the Grand Hôtel des Pèlerins.

‘I have thought it well over,’ Andrew said abruptly, to his wife, their last day in quiet, beautiful Hyères. ‘It is better to put a bold face on everything, and face life in a crowd. We shall be more lost in one of those big hotels, darling, than if we took an *appartement* and slunk about in a self-conscious fashion. Besides, as “Basil Hamilton” I have no reference to give. I might, of course, give old Purlby; but I don’t want letters of mine to go to his office from here. I might give our bankers at Nice—but better not. It might lead to people discovering who we really are; then all the scandal would blaze—how it would blaze!’

He spoke bitterly, and Zoe felt indescribably wounded. At Arcachon and Hyères he had been the ideal bridegroom. He had simply lived for her—had been the passionate, adoring

lover. Had it not been for flashes of remorseful pain when she remembered the past, when she thought how she had dared to wish the poor uncle dead whose money was now giving her her happiness, her life would have been simply heaven on earth. But no sooner were they established at the Grand Hôtel des Pèlerins, than all his preoccupation, his fretfulness and irritability—yes, and his actual coldness in her regard—returned in full force.

She was chilled to the very core of her heart ; for she had already learnt the fact that the greatest hold her husband had upon her affections was his passion for her ; and no sooner were they married than she began to feel disillusion in regard to the marriage state.

What had she expected ? She hardly knew. She could only say to herself frankly that, if it were not for the seeming joy she gave her husband, she would find no pleasure in this constant, oppressive *tête-à-tête* with a Man. It was not that her lover's presence bored her, but that it was too much—it was overwhelming. At times, when she lay awake at night, Andrew snoring at her side in a semi-intoxi-

cated sleep—he liked French wine, and indulged freely in the most costly brands—or when she would sometimes ‘get rid of him,’ as she termed it to herself, to bathe, or be shaved, or to play a game of billiards—she would think back with longing to her life at Heatherly Court, where she had some solitude, also other companionship. She even yearned for the old days at Newnham House School, forgetting how her godmother’s successor had spent her ill-humour at finding she had made a bad bargain in its purchase, in ruling her with the proverbial rod of iron. At first it was almost a relief when Andrew became moody, abstracted, and irritable. She made no efforts to cajole him into a more complimentary humour.

‘It is better than those everlasting kisses,’ she told herself, with a shiver, little imagining, in her ignorance, the actual significance of such a shudder in the bride of less than a month.

The hotel was full. It was one more frequented by Americans, French, and other nationalities, than by English. Still, before they arrived Andrew had impressed upon her

not to make any acquaintances among the ladies.

‘You will, I dare say, arouse their curiosity, and the most inquisitive will make a dead set at you,’ he said. ‘You have your remedy: say a civil word or two, smile, and retire to your salon. That was my reason in going to the expense of taking private rooms, that you might “keep yourself to yourself,” as the saying is.’

‘And you? Will you avoid the men?’ asked Zoe innocently.

‘As far as is necessary,’ he returned, after a short pause. ‘But I hope no one would be able to “draw” me. Besides, men are not like women, my dear! They respect themselves, therefore they respect others. Women are—well, it is unnecessary for me to say any more; at all events, to you. Being a woman, you might fancy yourself insulted.’

Perhaps that conversation was the ‘little rift’ which was the commencement of a slight gulf which slowly but surely began to yawn between husband and wife.

Zoe resented Andrew’s imputation. She liked her own sex. In childhood and her

girlish days alike she had had friendships with, and had even felt very strong affection for, other children and girls. She had never felt their presence a weight, either, as she felt her husband's. She would glance wistfully at the ladies opposite when they dined at the *table d'hôte*. When some of the French and American women, who admired both herself and the lovely jewels Andrew bought for her during his brief stay in Paris, smiled and ventured upon a few introductory remarks, she gazed at them sweetly as she replied to them, but her answering smile was very sad.

'That pretty little woman has a story, I am certain of that,' said a mature American heiress to the grave, silent young Canadian whose eyes Zoe was for ever meeting, fixed upon her with a curious, perplexed expression. And Zoe's idea was, 'He has lost someone who looked like me, and I remind him of her, or he fancies he has seen me before somewhere,' as she swiftly glanced away when she happened to meet his eyes. But she felt flattered that he was interested in her. She liked his face. His eyes looked so good. 'I

don't believe that man ever did anything mean or dishonourable in his life,' she thought.

'No doubt, Miss Cartwright,' he returned. 'Has not every charming member of your sex a history, if only of a pitilessness to ours which has possibly tempted fate to revenge our injuries for us?'

'It is the first time I have heard fate mentioned as masculine,' said his acquaintance, with whom he had a mildly Platonic flirtation, as she helped herself plentifully to ice-cream. 'But that girl's fate is a male creature, or I am very much mistaken. I don't like the look of that husband of hers at all.'

Since the early days at the Hôtel des Pèlerins, when that conversation took place, Miss Cartwright, who was large, buxom, with a beaming face and a loud voice, 'made a dead set at' Zoe, as Zoe somewhat plaintively told Andrew, adding, 'What am I to do?'

'Oh, well, you may know *her*,' he somewhat roughly returned. 'That friend of hers, the Canadian chap, played billiards with me last night, and lost heavily. I shall make pots of money out of him before I've done with him, I can see that. What do you say? I don't

want money? You little innocent! It is just fellows like me who have tasted oof that long to wallow in it.'

Zoe inwardly recoiled, although she did not gather the full significance of his speech. How should she, her preparation for life having been the constant companionship of a religious schoolmistress who was also a godmother full of solicitude for her soul, then a few months' stagnation at Heatherly Court, varied by Andrew's love-making? But she was pleased to be able to know Miss Cartwright. She visited her in her handsome rooms, the finest in the hotel, admired the beautiful knick-knacks she had bought during her travels, and the profusion of lovely plants and cut flowers everywhere about; then went for a drive with her in her gay equipage with the dark Italian coachman and pair of Arab horses decked with bells. Her spirits rose with this new companionship. Miss Cartwright rattled off stories of her amazing experiences as they drove into the hilly country behind the town. She summered in her own country and wintered in the South, having spent her first years in

England, and her early womanhood in Europe, principally Florence. Zoe laughed as she listened, and her laughter enhanced her beauty, the shrewd American thought, as, driving up to the hotel front, the two men, Andrew and the Canadian, who were lounging in the entrance, smoking, gazed admiringly at her.

‘The husband had better look out, I fancy,’ she told herself as, when they alighted, Andrew came forward and introduced his companion.

‘Captain Grant, Zara,’ he said. Then he turned on his heel and walked up the steps at Miss Cartwright’s elbow.

The action was so extraordinary in Zoe’s idea that she simply turned and gave an astonished stare at the Captain. Then she blushed furiously, stammered some incoherent observation about having seen him before with Miss Cartwright, and started to follow her husband and her new friend.

‘Poor little soul!’ thought Grant, as he began to talk, saying pleasant things about Andrew’s clever billiard-playing, and asking her if she would not come in with Miss Cart-



wright after dinner and see them play five hundred up. 'If we get through; if not, it is to be continued to-morrow,' he added.

To his astonishment, Zoe gave him an indignant stare and a cool bow, and disappeared in the direction of the stairs, upon which he strolled out again, and, with a fresh cigar between his lips, paced up and down the part of the Promenade opposite the hotel.

'The ice is broken,' he told himself grimly, as he gazed alternately at the lights twinkling in the rooms he knew were the Hamiltons', and at the smoothly-rolling, darkening blue sea with its phosphorescent flashes. There was something solemn about this post-sunset hour, so dangerous to invalids and the delicate. All the gay crowd had vanished. Except for a few belated carriages and a sprinkling of 'the canaille,' as his new acquaintance, Basil Hamilton, contemptuously termed the Niçois, the white road between the avenue of palms and tree-ferns and the pink-rose-studded hedges was deserted. The marble and white stone hotels and villas looked tomb-like against the mysterious background of dusky hills and the

pale, darkening sky, where myriads of stars were glittering points like scintillating diamonds.

He thought deeply, seriously, of the task he had set himself.

‘The rescue—will it be short or long in the doing?’ he asked of his own mind. ‘Sensitive, tender, she is already somewhat disillusionized, I believe. Thank Heaven for it! To such a nature a moral blow would be worse than death—if, indeed, it did not lead to it.’

## CHAPTER XII

ZOE fled to their rooms, exasperated with Andrew for introducing her to this man, then leaving her in such a cavalier fashion after all his insistence upon her 'keeping herself strictly to herself,' as he termed it. 'It was like throwing me at the man's head, saying: "Just treat her as you please,"' was her idea as she went stormily into the sitting-room where Andrew was lounging in a chair behind the *Times*, which he had borrowed from Miss Cartwright.

'Andrew!' she cried, wildly, stamping her foot, 'how dare you?' Passion had mastered her. 'And after all you have said!'

He lowered the paper and stared at her.

'May I ask if you are rehearsing a play, and, if so, when and where it is to come off?' he coolly, contemptuously asked.

She seated herself by the round table in the centre, hating herself for her loss of self-command.

‘You know very well what I mean,’ she calmly said. If chiding was in the tone of her voice, she felt she could not command *that*. ‘You simply threatened me with all sorts of horrors if I made any acquaintances here, and then you not only introduce me to a strange man, but leave me with him, and stalk on into the hotel with Miss Cartwright! What do I complain of in that? Oh, Andrew!’

He rose and went to her.

‘What I complain of is that you seem to have lost your head!’ he harshly began. ‘How? For the first thing, you have twice called me “Andrew,” letting your bad temper stifle your common-sense. Understand, if you want to escape being dragged up on suspicion, and probably made a lasting horror of—for you may be as innocent as the daylight, yet that may happen to you—you must be guided by me. Unfortunately, you seem to have lost all faith in me and my judgment through your absurd ignorance of the simplest convention-

alities practised in decent society. How could one expect anything else from a school-girl suddenly let loose upon the world? I was mad to expect it!

As he uttered his last words with withering, bitter intensity, he began to pace the room.

For a few moments she felt balanced between perplexity at his impeachment and that steadily-growing remorse and longing which so often, since her marriage, had threatened to overwhelm her with despair. Then remorse prevailed.

'I don't understand what you mean when you talk of my being "dragged up on suspicion and made a horror of,"' she began in faltering tones, raising her head and gazing at him with dry, widened eyes that glistened in the electric light. 'I don't see why I should be "dragged up and made a horror of" any more than you! Anyone might, after that verdict — you said so yourself.'

He turned upon her savagely.

'I believe your game is to drive me mad!' he hissed.

But, alarmed at the dangerous gleam of his dark eyes, she went to him, a little frightened, and, seizing his hand, kissed it.

‘Forgive me if I have said anything. I did not mean it, darling Basil. I am ready to do anything you tell me to.’ She faltered; then she suddenly burst into tears, and flung her arms about his neck. ‘I love you—I do indeed!’ she brokenly sobbed, holding her lips up for his kiss.

‘If you did not, I should know what to do. I tell you that!’ he said, in a hard tone.

Then suddenly he took her in his arms, and kissed her so fiercely on her lips and throat that, moaning with mingled pain and fear, she staggered away and dropped upon a low chair.

‘Do you want to kill me? It looks like it!’ she miserably cried.

A swift, sudden change came over him. He went to her, imperiously but lovingly, and, bending over, took her face between his hands.

‘After all, you are such a baby one must have patience with you. But, being such a

mere infant in arms in regard to the world (Which world?—This or any other), you must positively be guided by me. You must be civil to this Canadian fellow, Zoe. He is a right-down good, honest chap, and any day and any hour, I warn you, we may want a friend, and a friend who will go through fire and water for us. For we are safe nowhere—I tell you that much—after that verdict! Do you want to see me hauled up and hanged through circumstantial evidence—which means wicked lies, generally? I thought not. Then play my game with this Captain Grant. Make yourself as pretty to him as you can, and wear that very fetching white satin dining-gown with the red bow, and your pearl and ruby set. I mean to have a headache, and to be unable to play billiards. You can play chess with him while I lounge about, as you are so deuced particular. You can't? There won't be much chess. I can see he would enjoy a mild flirtation with anyone, and you are the prettiest woman here. You are safe enough, too, by Jove! Come, be sensible—if you can.'

For that night, at least, old Squire Quarles'

adopted son hardly scored a success, as he considered success.

Zoe said no more. Her heart sank within her as she dressed for dinner in one of the few evening frocks the fashionable dressmaker had completed before she vanished from London into space. It was a rich white satin, and she wore one crimson velvet knot at her breast. With the pearl and ruby trinkets about her white throat and delicate wrists, there was a look of fashion as well as a picturesque loveliness in her appearance, which made people's eyes follow her with a new curiosity 'as she entered the big *salle* at her husband's side.

Was it accident, she wondered, or somebody's contrivance, that Miss Cartright occupied the chair on 'Basil's' left hand, and Captain Grant that on her right?

He rose as he saw her coming, gave her a grave bow, and remained standing until she was seated. Then he resumed a conversation with a Frenchman, a middle-aged man with bright black eyes, white hair, fierce black moustache, and a tiny red ribbon in his buttonhole—whom Zoe had heard the waiters



address obsequiously as 'Monsieur le Vicomte,' while on her left her husband chatted more gaily with Miss Cartwright than she thought him capable of doing. Andrew laughed, too, and frequently. Only when soup and fish had come and gone, and the more substantial viands were being handed round, did either of Zoe's neighbours notice her. Then Captain Grant turned towards her.

'I hope your husband's headache is better, Mrs. Hamilton,' he said.

Her heart gave a resentful throb. So bitter was Andrew's conduct to her—'playing her' on to this man as if she were his toy, or, rather, his tool—that she determined there and then, in a flash, to defend herself by absolute truth. To those manly, earnest eyes she would not lie.

'Has he a headache?' she returned, looking up in his face somewhat defiantly.

Was it her imagination, or did he colour? His eyes were not to be read, and there was more power in his square face than she had thought.

'I had a note from Mr. Hamilton before dinner to tell me his headache would not allow

him to accept my challenge,' he said, placidly returning to the consumption of the dainty on his plate. Zoe had noticed that he ate well. 'I was not altogether sorry, for I feared I was taking him from you, and that you would rather have spent your evening *tête-à-tête* with him. By the way, will you forgive me for that suggestion of mine that you should visit the billiard-room? I can assure you many ladies—yes, and some of them English ladies—are there every evening to see their husbands or brothers or fathers or sons play.'

'It was not that at all which made me seem rude, perhaps, to you,' said Zoe suddenly, in a low voice, in his ear. 'It was because my husband left me with you in that strange way. At least, it seemed strange to me, who have never been out in any sort of society!'

What had she said to make him pause with his fork half-way to his mouth? Not for long did that pause last. He carried it to his lips; for all Zoe knew, he not only ate, but even digested, the morsel upon it, it seemed such an age before he spoke again. And her cheeks and ears were redder than the tiny

apples in the pile of grapes, oranges, and other fruits in the high silver dish which hid her *vis-à-vis*, the gay Brazilian widow with the huge diamond earrings, and the thickly-painted, black-eyed, thick-lipped daughter, from her. And how her cheeks burned! Oh, how they burned!

‘Thank you for your frankness, Mrs. Hamilton,’ was his next speech, uttered gently in her ear. ‘You have relieved my mind more than you can possibly, at this stage of our acquaintance, imagine! I have promised to go to Monte Carlo with Monsieur le Vicomte de Bressis, my neighbour on my right, to-night. But I hope you will not cut me dead to-morrow, and henceforth, because you are not sure I am a desirable person to know?’

She gave a little start, then looked at him somewhat fearfully. If a suspicion of amusement had been betrayed by his grey eyes or the expression of his strong features, she would have frozen and been ice again. But there was so serious, so intensely anxious, a look upon his face that, for some unaccountable reason, she determined to know more of him,

in spite of that resolve to avoid 'playing her husband's game for him.'

'No,' she slowly began. 'Although there is—a reason—which makes me inclined to "keep myself to myself," as I have heard someone term it.'

For a few moments he did not reply. Then he bent his head once more nearer hers.

'Is it impertinent in me to ask what that reason is?' he almost whispered.

'I don't know whether it is. Since I married and came abroad I have felt almost as if I knew nothing, although all my life has been spent in a school—first as pupil, then as junior governess,' she glibly replied, still firm in her resolution to be absolutely frank with this man. 'But, anyhow, I will answer it. When we first came, my husband asked me not to make friends with anyone; but now he seems to wish me to do so. I hate everything like an enigma! So I am disinclined to fall in with his change of tactics.'

'I quite understand, believe me,' he earnestly assured her, still speaking cautiously, in a tone

which could hardly be overheard in the babel of voices and laughter of the eighty odd diners, the clatter of knives, forks, plates, and glasses, the rising and falling sound of a waltz—the first piece on the evening programme of the band which performed nightly in the domed conservatory, with the Oriental trees and shrubs, the chairs and *causeuses* arranged around the marble fountain, a resort where people drank their after-dinner coffee and liqueurs, smoked, and on occasion breakfasted. ‘I will not ask you anything more, but just one—little—thing. Do not change your mind about any future acquaintance between you and me. I give you my sacred word of honour that your interests shall, both in bulk and in detail, be not only as dear, but dearer to me than my own!’

It was her turn to pause. The blood seemed to rush back to her heart with unwonted violence as she listened; and this was not only because of the strangeness of this sudden expansiveness, almost assault upon her suffrages, by a total stranger, but because of a curious familiarity in the cadence of his voice as he spoke. But she was too impressed,

taken aback, startled, to try to remember whose speaking voice heard in the past, either immediate or remote, his happened to recall. She turned to him with eyes full of something akin to fear.

‘Why?’ she stammered, and, pale as death, she began to tremble in every limb.

‘Some day you shall know; but it cannot be yet,’ he returned.

Then both he and his neighbour, the Vicomte, rose and abruptly left the saloon.

The sound of the pushing back of their chairs arrested Andrew’s attention. He turned, stared after them, then looked sharply at his wife.

‘Where have those two gone?’ he asked with a blank look. ‘What! to Monte Carlo? Impossible!’

‘Evidently not,’ she dryly returned, helping herself to one of the oranges in the dessert-dish a waiter was handing to her.

Then she waited until her husband had helped himself to fruit, and the man had passed on to the left of Miss Cartwright’s chair.

‘Your friend is evidently a gambler,’ she

quietly, satirically said, peeling the little Tangerine.

'You don't know what you are talking about,' hissed Andrew, once more turning to the American heiress.

## CHAPTER XIII

‘WELL, how do you like my friend?’ Zoe was sitting on one of the basket-chairs in the circular, glass-domed conservatory, wondering at her extraordinary experience of a strange man as she listened absently to the band and gazed abstractedly at the rich subtropical grove of plants. ‘He is gone on you—quite, Mrs. Hamilton.’

Miss Cartwright laughed as she plumped her portly person down in a comfortable chair and leisurely lighted a cigarette. ‘Don’t look after the beloved spouse, my dear child, and blush like the *ingénue* you are!’ she added, as Zoe glanced, dismayed lest he should have overheard, to where Andrew had flung himself sulkily upon a lounge, and was pretending to read a French evening paper as he moodily smoked a cigar and sipped his coffee and liqueur. ‘Honestly, you should



not show that husband of yours how wildly you adore him, for he will only despise you for it. Don't look at me with those big eyes of yours as if I had no business to say such things to you! I know I am an old maid, and not supposed to know anything about these men; but there is a very true old saw, that the looker-on at the game sees more than the players. I know them! Very well in their way as friends to women, but when they become husbands, Lord protect their unfortunate victims!—unless, indeed, the worms turn, and master their masters. And the only way to do that, my dear child, is not to feign indifference, but really to feel you don't care one way or the other what they do.'

'I don't think one would marry if one felt—well, what you say,' said Zoe, whose heart had quickened unaccountably while Miss Cartwright was speaking.

'There I agree with you!' said the buxom lady, leaning back and sending little smoke-rings into the air. 'It was just that indifference I made up my mind to feel for every man, when I was a girl. I was not pretty, like you, and I was known to be well off, so I

was determined not to risk being married for money, but only to allow myself to feel friendship for men. It has answered capitally. While friends of my youth who were wives and mothers have either died of it or are old women at forty, or miserable wrecks in every way—here I am, able to enjoy life as well as if I were a man! Oh, it's splendid! You know, child—I can't help calling you "child," you are such a beautiful big baby, with those wondering eyes of yours—I have found that life, to most people, is either like boiled veal or chicken without salt, or gall and wormwood. Matrimony is bitterness, and if old-maidism is insipid like boiled veal, friendship is a most potent and delicious sauce.'

'But friends must be true,' murmured Zoe.

'If untrue, the word "friend" wouldn't fit,' said Miss Cartwright, dryly. 'But now, I did not come to talk platitudes with you, but to ask you if you and your husband will share my box at the opera to-night. It is only the "Fra," but if you have not seen it before—What? You actually mean to tell me you have

never been at the opera in your life? Heavens! you are hardly fit for this wicked world. You must have wings grown big enough to carry you to Paradise. That settles it. I will speak to your husband at once.'

She went across the marble floor to Andrew, who rose and received her with a forced smile. Zoe watched them talking—guessed, as her husband passed his hand across his brow, that he was urging headache as an excuse; then gathered from the shrugs of Miss Cartwright's ample shoulders and her emphatic gestures that she meant to have her way. She did. Andrew came up, still sulky-looking, and presently they had driven the short distance from the hotel to the theatre, and were seated in a roomy box close to the stage, a few minutes before the curtain rose for the first act of 'Fra Diavolo.'

As Zoe listened and gazed, agreeably excited by the lovely melodies, enchanted by the dainty orchestration which she was musician enough to appreciate, she forgot the strain upon her nerves, her slight differences with her husband, and began to feel a subtle

consolation, together with a certain sadness mingled with longing. If she had been asked, then and there, to 'stand and deliver' her reasons for this certain luxury of woe, she could not have given them. But happy, even mentally at ease, she was not. Still, the mingled dissatisfaction and melancholy which reigned in her soul was a delight compared with what she felt when she turned to Andrew as the curtain fell, and saw his face—white, set in a most peculiar expression of unspeakable horror or fear—as he seemed to cower behind the curtain.

She had almost cried 'Andrew!' in her dismay, but fortunately remembered in time that that familiar name was tabooed.

'I am afraid your head is very bad,' she said, leaning across to him. 'Miss Cartwright, we ought to go home—I mean, back to the hotel. My poor husband is really suffering.'

'That you shall not,' almost indignantly returned Miss Cartwright. 'Let your husband go, and welcome. When I have a headache, Mr. Hamilton, I go to bed and dare anyone to come near me, and I expect

you don't want your wife buzzing about, do you? I thought not.'

But 'Mr. Hamilton' was evidently determined to remain where he was: denied his headache, and, refusing Miss Cartwright's vinaigrette, protested that he was 'all right, and thoroughly enjoying himself.'

'Then, all I can say is you don't look like it,' returned his new American acquaintance, flatly.

Then she offered him two different sorts of granules she carried in her reticule, recommended a lemon ice, a turn outside in the fresh air, a strong cup of café noir; but he rejected all and each unconditionally.

'Wilful man must have his way, I presume,' she dryly said, as the curtain rose for the second act. 'As he is so obstinate, Mrs. Hamilton, the best thing you and I can do is to leave him to "dree his weird" there in the corner, and get the utmost enjoyment we can out of the performance.'

She made Zoe sit round facing the stage, and sat determinedly between her and Andrew. Zoe, in spite of a vague fear lest Andrew should have seen someone who knew them

both, or him alone, under their rightful name, told herself it was of no use arousing Miss Cartwright's suspicions by seemingly sharing in her husband's emotion, whatever it might be. So she determined to fight harassing fears, and throw herself as much as possible into what she was hearing and seeing.

But while her eyes were riveted on the stage, Miss Cartwright's were wandering around and 'looking at people.' And, to her amusement and slight suspicion, she found that some ladies in the opposite box were staring hard at herself and Zoe. Andrew they could not see, but they were craning their necks in a suggestive fashion.

There was something so 'fast' in their dress and appearance generally that she soon turned her eyes away again. But she smiled to herself.

'Butterflies — attracted by Monte Carlo honey. I think I understand your corpse-like colour, friend Hamilton,' she thought. And when the act was over, anxiety lest the bride should notice the obtrusive stares of the bright creatures in question

led her to do her utmost to tide over the situation.

Andrew seemed a little more at ease, and was leaning forward in the shadow conversing lightly with her, when a tap came at the box door, and the attendant entered and asked for 'a word with monsieur.'

Andrew gave him a withering look, but rose and followed him out.

'Poor unfortunate baby!' was Miss Cartwright's mental comment as she turned to Zoe, who was staring blankly at the closed door, and she said how objectionable the ways were of cajoling gentlemen to the refreshment bar. 'That man always does that,' she mendaciously added. 'He keeps English whisky for the "Eenglish milords," as he terms them, and invents excuses to coax them out for a "nip," as you English call it.'

She rattled away, one eye on the opposite box—now empty—but was vastly relieved in her mind when Andrew returned, a little less pale, and saying he had had a turn outside in the fresh air, and felt revived; he wondered how they could stand the awful stuffiness of

the wretchedly-ventilated place. He resumed his chair, which Miss Cartwright had thoughtfully moved to Zoe's elbow, where 'the butterflies' could not possibly see him. Presently the opera was at an end. They were hurried out by Andrew, who, as they drove home and had coffee afterwards in the domed conservatory, was in the highest spirits.

What was the reason of this extraordinary variation in her husband's moods? Zoe asked herself, as she lay wakeful through the dark, silent night, listening to the distant sough of the slow, tideless waves upon the pebbly shore. It was a night when the girl communed with her soul—her soul in a daring, naked, unabashed mood—and was absolutely true.

Her girl-life seemed to rise up before her in silent reproach. She had been well enough, she told herself, as junior teacher under the uncompromising Mrs. Mercer until she had become discontented, and, in companionship with the rich, spoiled pupils in the 'upper sixth,' had learnt to envy their lot.



'That was my first temptation, and I yielded to it,' she told herself, turning away from Andrew and gazing miserably at the moonlit window. 'Then came the second—to receive letters for Ruby Grant under cover to myself. From her mother and sister—did I believe that transparent lie? No, no! I see now I did not. But I enjoyed cheating Mrs. Mercer, taking mean revenge for her slights, her nastiness to me. Then, when she found it out and sent me away, I ought to have gone to godmother. But I didn't, only because I was disinclined for poverty and sick-nursing. Wretch that I was, after all that she had done for me! I yearned for "life," as I called it—ease, wealth, comfort, luxury—to be petted and spoilt like Mrs. Mercer's rich pupils. *That* was what made me appeal to uncle. And then, when I found him a miser, why did I stay? Not from any feeling of duty—oh no! Because I believed his beloved Andrew was his heir, and I wanted to marry him. Did I love Andrew?' She shivered in the warm night with exquisite mental suffering at not being able to deceive herself any more;

her pretty, pearly teeth actually chattered as she lay writhing in her self-dissection. 'No, I did not. I loved his passion for me—his petting, his money and position when the old man would die; and because I was covetous and mercenary I wished my poor old uncle dead. In the sight of God I am a murderess!'

The idea was as a sharp stab driven home to her heart; she gave an involuntary cry, and, slipping out of bed, stood gasping on the moonlit floor. And Andrew, suddenly awakened by an unaccustomed sound, started up in bed, and saw a weird white figure in the half-dusk.

'Good God! what is it?' he cried, springing out of bed and switching on the electric light. 'Zoe! are you mad?' he cried as he saw her. 'I thought you were a ghost or something—what is it?'

Terror was in his eyes, he was ashen pale, and the two, husband and wife, looked more like antagonists in deadly fear of each other as they were confronted, in night-gear, in the searching light, than partners in the solemn game of life.

She sank back upon a settee with a weak sigh and as weak a smile.

‘I was confessing—my sins—to myself,’ she said with a tearless sob. ‘I was telling myself that one cannot lie to God—that in God’s sight I am a murderess !’

Her head sank on her breast, so she did not see the swift change of expression on his pale, clear-cut face—the intense, eager look which leapt into his gleaming eyes.

For an instant he hesitated, staring at her. Then he quickly assumed his dressing-gown, which hung on a chair near the massive bed, and went over to the drooping figure, which was Niobe-like in its abandonment, crouching on the velvet-covered settee.

He sat down by her, and took her ice-cold hands in his ; then, with an exclamation, ‘ My poor love !’ he threw a wrap about her, and the next thing that she was conscious of was that he was holding a glass containing something pungent to her lips.

The scent roused her ; she feebly pushed him away.

‘ Zoe, you must drink this,’ he peremptorily

said, and his tone of marital authority seemed to compel her.

She took the glass, made a wry face, but drank, and as she drank she felt a warmth steal through her chilled frame. She sank back and wrapped herself closely in her softly-wadded dressing-gown.

‘You had a bad dream,’ he asserted, as he put aside the half-emptied glass. ‘Come, tell me: what does this nonsense mean — this mad talk of “murder”? I know you have had a shock to your nerves—the dad’s suicide—but you ought to be getting over that now. I tell you this much, and mind what I say: If you let yourself drivel as you have just been drivelling, someone or another will begin to suspect, and all the fat will be in the fire! What then? Why, unless I perjure myself, and let myself be hanged for you, that sweet white neck of yours will be encircled by the ugly rope, which will effectually blot you out—you, with all your love of life, your capacity for living! *That’s* what I mean! Now do you understand?’

‘No!’ she hoarsely cried, leaning forward and gripping his arm with both hands; ‘I

don't! I thought there was justice in England—that it was an impossibility for anyone utterly innocent to be proved guilty!

He leant back in his chair, encircled one knee with both nervous, virile hands, and gazed at her with a gaze half puzzled, half curious.

'Upon my word, I shall begin to think you out of your mind!' he almost pettishly exclaimed. 'If you are an innocent lamb, why cry out about being a black sheep? Why get out of a warm bed and, staggering about a cold room in the dead of night, shout out you are a murderess? Such a thing is enough to get you shut up at the very least. And as for me, poor devil! why, I may go hang, it seems, as far as you are concerned.'

His bitter reproach roused her. She leant forward, her lovely eyes brimming over with great crystal teardrops.

'No—no—I am your wife,' she brokenly said. 'Forgive me!'

He laughed, harshly.

'I wish you would conquer this hysterical folly of yours; it would be much better than

raving rotten rubbish, and then grovelling to be forgiven!' he said, springing up in impatience. Then, apparently mastering his annoyance, he sat down opposite, after drawing her close to him and kissing her cold brow and lips. 'Zoe, you are a great darling,' he half sadly added. 'I do think I have never cared for any woman as I have for you! Come, let us talk sense. We have but one life, each of us, haven't we? And death may come at any moment. We are mere grains of dust that fate blows away every minute of the day, just as a gust of wind catches up some sand and scatters it. And then? Nothing! We were nothing before we were born: why should we expect to be anything more when this very limited and imperfect body of ours dies? It is absurd! And anyone who grizzles and growls, and doesn't make the most of life just these few years, is the very absurdest of all the absurd—the most abjectly foolish of all fools. Zoe, we settled between ourselves to enjoy our lives. Let us enjoy the day—"let us eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow—we die!"'

She recoiled from him and shook her head.

'I once—thought—there was happiness in life: now I know there is not,' she faltered. As she spoke, a faint colour suffused her cheeks; she hung her head. 'He will know now that I do not love him, without my saying it in so many words,' she told herself. A longing to be unsparingly, even brutally, true, as she had just been to herself in that lonely night-watch, had her in its fierce, unyielding grip.

Did Andrew understand? What seemed to her an age of dead silence followed. When at last she raised her head and gazed doggedly at him, he was staring at the floor, frowning and mechanically stroking his chin with one long-fingered hand, as if appraising the condition of his rapidly-growing beard.

'Eh?' he suddenly exclaimed, starting from his reverie and giving her a dull, curious glance. 'What did you say? You did not speak?'

Then his manner changed, as if he were awakening from some dream to the full realization of his life and its surroundings. He

resolutely drew his chair nearer, and took her hand. His was stone-cold.

‘You said there was no joy in life? I swear to you there is,’ he said in low, confident tones, ‘but—only for those who seize happiness as it flies! Zoe dear, you must try to forget all the past dull, miserable wretchedness, and imitate these butterflies here who are the real philosophers. Eat, drink, talk, and try to be interested in everything. Make friends, hear music, dance, even flirt if you like—I don’t mind. I mean to be happy; I don’t intend to let trifles of that kind upset me and spoil an hour or even a minute’s pleasure. Life is too short; the great Nothing that waits to swallow us up into its blank blackness is too long.’

She opened her lips to speak, but shut them again resolutely. It was horrible, but true: this man who had been her lover, and was now her husband, was as great a stranger to her—seemed as distant, as remote, as impossible to sympathize with—as any casual visitor at the hotel whose eyes she was meeting for the first time.

She mutely allowed him to encircle her



slight form with his arm, then she mutely returned to bed and feigned fatigue, then slumber, until she really fell into a deep, exhausted sleep.

## CHAPTER XIV

ZOE slept until the sun flooded the portions of the big room it could reach through the persiennes, and the voices and laughter of the gay crowd of morning promenaders came floating upward mingled with the swish of the waves upon the beach. She was awakened by the *femme de chambre* with a tray of coffee and rolls.

‘Monsieur requested I would not awaken madame until ten,’ she amiably said. ‘Monsieur sends this note to madame.’

She opened the shutters a little way and retired, while Zoe, surprised, unfolded the twisted half-sheet on the tray, and read :

‘Am going a short distance by train with someone. Shall possibly not return till late. Make your own plans for the day ; please yourself, and you will please me.

‘B. H.’

She smiled, a scornful little smile.

'I understand, my dear "B. H.,"' she sneeringly told herself. 'You are bitten with the gambling fever. You are off to Monte Carlo to make ducks and drakes of your fortune!'

She sprang out of bed, and dressed as quickly as she could, telling herself that she probably had the clue, now, to all that had puzzled her in her husband. No doubt he had really meant what he said when they first arrived, and he adjured her not to make acquaintances and 'give herself away' to them. His change of feeling and tactics arose from that awful gambling madness, which was as incomprehensible to her as suicide itself. As she determined that she had guessed aright, a great pity arose within her for Andrew. She remembered the violence of his passion for her. He was a man of passions. The passion of play was now the demon which had replaced the wild adoration of herself.

'He must be saved,' she told herself. 'I have not influence enough—alone. Others must help me.'

As she completed her toilette, a smart tailor-

made walking-dress with toque to match, she quickly made her plans. She would follow her husband to Monte Carlo, and ascertain how far the demon of play had him in its grip.

She drank her coffee, toyed with a morsel of roll, and went below. Few people were about in the big hotel. Most people breakfasted more or less early in their rooms, and the long tables in the dining-hall were being laid for the elaborate *déjeuner*.

'The "someone" he has gone "a short distance by train" with is Captain Grant, of course,' she was telling herself, wondering, with a dry little smile, whether, if that were not the case, he would so easily have left her to 'make her own plans,' when she stopped short. As she passed the centre grove of palms in the domed hall, she came in sight of Captain Grant seated in close conversation with Miss Cartwright. His back was towards her as he sat opposite the American lady at a small round table; but, as Miss Cartwright saw her and smilingly nodded, he glanced over his shoulder, then rose and stood gravely awaiting her. To her idea he looked disturbed, annoyed.

‘Good-morning!’ she cried in as sprightly a tone as she could assume. ‘You are the very last person I expected to see this morning, Captain Grant. Why, do you ask? That is why.’ She gave him the note left by Andrew, trying to talk as usual to Miss Cartwright while he read it. ‘You don’t understand?’ she repeated, as he gravely returned the slip. ‘Why, of course I thought you were the somebody who had carried off my husband before I was awake this morning. Who else could have done so?’

When Miss Cartwright understood, she somewhat tamely suggested that the Vicomte de Bressis had ‘cajoled’ Mr. Hamilton into accompanying him somewhere or other. But at that very moment Monsieur de Bressis came up the steps of the hotel, and, seeing the group, flung away his cigarette and came up to them.

‘He has slunk away to that awful place all alone,’ thought Zoe in dismay.

She had read of the fearful sums dissipated in the beautiful building among the palm-groves by the deep blue sea, and had no mind

that her dead uncle's fortune should swell the list. So she became diplomatic, found out that none of the three, Miss Cartwright, De Bressis, or Grant, had any particular engagements that day, and suggested a visit to Monte Carlo.

De Bressis assented eagerly, and was in a feverish rapture of delight when he found that this lovely young English bride had never played for money in her life. She should play for him ; such novices always won, was his ecstatic thought. He would stake all he dared, and might recover his recent steady losses, if not win a little in addition. Grant was seemingly ready to accompany Mrs. Hamilton anywhere ; at least, he somewhat grimly assented to squire her in her husband's absence. It was Miss Cartwright who was almost indignantly averse to the plan.

'In such a place as that, a married woman should have her husband to look after her,' she asserted, her ruddy face deepening in colour. Only when Captain Grant said a few words in a low tone in her ear was she at all amenable. After that she allowed herself to

be persuaded, and an hour later the four were journeying in the train that sped under the frowning rocks, with the deep blue sea and its mimosa-covered slopes on their right, and the sheer precipices overhanging them on their left.

Zoe was impatient. She was as sure that at that very moment Andrew was seated in one of those dreadful rooms watching his wild stakes raked in by the croupier—Andrew's stakes were sure to be wild, extravagant, mad—as if she could pierce the rocks with her eyes, and, defying distance, see him, haggard, staring, livid, at the tables. When, as they arrived, Captain Grant suggested a stroll in the beautiful grounds, where the sunshine glorified sea, sky, and shore, and the basking flowers were masses of lovely colour among the aloes and ferns under the palms, she frowned in dismay, and De Bressis nodded and grinned at her approvingly.

‘Mon ami! you expect madame to be a nun, not a daughter of our Mother Eve!’ he exclaimed. ‘Come, madame; I will procure our little passports. We will visit the tables.’

And presently Zoe, flushed with her inward fear as to how she would find her husband—whether he would be like one of the horrible, pitiable beings she remembered in some realistic picture of a gambling-hell—had passed the portals, and was in the splendid, warm, silent palace of Play.

She hardly noted the magnificence of draperies, carpets, decorations, the mirrors, the artistic beauty of the great salons. She saw the tables with the still, eager crowd of gamblers about them, alone. She stood, her eyes travelling eagerly from man to man, expecting momentarily to recognise her husband. But although there were several who were apparently English, there was no one at either the roulette or the trente-et-quarante tables in the least resembling Andrew.

‘Will madame oblige me?’ insinuatingly whispered the Vicomte.

And as she glanced blankly at him, dazed with the, to her, astounding fact that Andrew was not among the gamblers, she saw that his white, trembling hands were clutching notes and gold.

‘What do you mean?’ she almost irritably



asked. 'Put your stakes on the cloth for you? In one of the other rooms. Not here.'

'There are no other tables,' said Captain Grant, in a low tone. 'You have seen all, and enough, too, to swallow up almost any capital or fortune that enters those doors!'

Did she understand that he had read her thoughts, and saw that her husband was not there? She looked fiercely, almost wildly, into his eyes; then, turning away, said something to the Vicomte, who turned with gestures of delight, and led her to the trente-et-quarante table, where he elbowed a place for her among the line of those standing behind the seated players.

Captain Grant frowned, and bit his lip, starting as Miss Cartwright touched his arm and said:

'You were quite right. Wherever the man may be at this moment, he is not here.'

What was the matter with her Canadian friend? He gave her a look of mingled horror and fear. His firm lips twitched convulsively. His square, stern features were deadly pale.

‘I must tell you—you must help me,’ he whispered hoarsely. Then, hardly hearing her stammered assent, assuming her readiness to help him with a confidence which, as she was a woman of the world, she felt was a real tribute to her worth, he laid his hand on her arm, and piloted her to a distant, deserted corner of the vast chamber, where a Louis Quinze settee was artfully placed by heavy velvet curtains, which would deaden any low-pitched voices in their neighbourhood.

‘I have hinted much to you; but I know you have no idea of what I am going to say,’ he whispered, leaning towards her after he had seated himself at her elbow. ‘Prepare for a shock.’

‘My dear friend, I have lived all over the world—and knew it before you were born or thought of—I am not so easily shocked as you think,’ she replied, with an easy smile.

But as he spoke a few sentences in low, distinct tones in her ear, Miss Cartwright’s placid expression fled—she grew first crimson, then pale.

‘Impossible!’ she faltered. ‘Such outrageous infamy is inconceivable!’

Her prominent chin quivered. Her eyes stared into his with startled incredulity.

‘What I say is true,’ he slowly, earnestly said. ‘Listen to what I mean to do to save further infamy. Your expression was right—infamy it is!’

For a few minutes he spoke, calmly, in measured accents, to his friend, and she leant back with closed eyelids, listening. Only the constant effort to swallow, the attempt to moisten her dry lips, and the quivering of those lids, would have told an observer, who happened to know Miss Cartwright, that she was the prey of some vivid if not intense emotion.

‘You will help me?’ was Captain Grant’s final sentence.

Then Miss Cartwright, blinking, her lips twitching, turned to him, and, with a seemingly irresistible impulse, laid her gloved hand on his arm.

‘I will swear it if you want me to,’ she impulsively said. ‘Good men are few, but you are one of them.’

‘Thanks,’ he returned.

And just then two persons, man and

woman, left the table at the other end of the room, and, after looking about, espied them and crossed the thick carpet. They were Zoe and the Vicomte. He looked gloom himself; she seemed to be expostulating or apologizing.

‘He has lost again, poor devil, in spite of his superstitions,’ said Grant.

‘Don’t pity him; anything which will tear him from these terrible tables will be a signal mercy!’ returned Miss Cartwright. ‘You don’t look like breaking the bank, either of you,’ she added, as Zoe, who looked less distraught, having felt her own worries less since she had innocently aided in bringing trouble upon someone else, seated herself at the American lady’s left on the long settee.

‘It was not my fault. I only did just what he told me; but he has lost every farthing of what he gave me to stake, as they call it,’ she ruefully said. ‘It was horrid! Other people’s stakes remained, or they got paid a lot; but every time I put his notes or gold on the places he told me to, that awful rake came and clawed them in! It was not my fault in any way—now, was it?’

I told him what it would be, and he would not believe me.'

'Your fault, child? Don't talk nonsense! Perhaps it will do him good—a capital thing if it does!' exclaimed Miss Cartwright.

Then she turned to Grant, who, as he consulted his watch, proposed luncheon in one of the hotel gardens before the favourite resort was crowded, and briskly seconded him.

'Come along, Monsieur le Vicomte: While there's life there's hope, is a good old saying,' said Miss Cartwright, and in another minute Zoe and Grant were following the couple on their way to recruit at the restaurant chosen by the American heiress, who meant to be giver of the feast.

The anxiety, anticipation as she had staked for the Vicomte, then the suspense and repeated disappointments, had turned Zoe's thoughts into another channel. As she felt the cool fresh air meeting them when they left the tropical atmosphere of the gambling-rooms, she gave a deep sigh of relief. Wherever Andrew might happen to be, any place was better than this! That was her principal thought and feeling.

'You sigh?' asked her companion abruptly, as they followed the other couple, who seemed arguing, along the white, pebbly path leading to their chosen restaurant.

'I only sigh because I feel relieved not to find my husband here,' she candidly said, with a kindly glance up into his eyes, determined to carry out her resolve to speak the truth, and nothing but the truth, to this new friend in whom she instinctively trusted. 'It is an awful place!'

'It is,' he dryly returned.

Then he became silent. He felt as one who might be positively forewarned of some terrific cataclysm, but who dared not divulge his foreknowledge to others of the doomed. If only, if only, this pure, sweet young creature could know what he knew, how puerile, how banal and utterly trivial, would all else seem to her! The thought was sickening, overwhelming. For some few bad moments he told himself he could not go through the wretched farce of this luncheon, which, with his intention to begin her enlightenment as to the real facts of her life, seemed, in his eyes, akin to the ironical breakfast served, it ap-

peared to him in cruel mockery, to those who immediately afterwards were to be 'hanged by the neck until they were dead.' Then he rallied himself for a coward.

'I mean her future life to be as happy as I can make it, sweet little soul!' he told himself. 'It is as well she should rehearse being happy before she is overwhelmed by the knowledge of her position.'

And with that he turned to her, his hard face softened by a singularly sweet and tender smile.

'It seems to me that the only real common-sense is to enjoy our life whenever and however we can,' he brightly said. 'Forget this gambling pandemonium, Mrs. Hamilton! Thank your lucky stars that you have not found your husband among that miserable crowd, and enjoy the exquisite loveliness of the place, and the goods they provide—the music, the flowers. . . .'

His voice faltered. She glanced at him curiously. At that moment she felt as if she could have clasped his hand to her breast, then kissed it in some instinctive gratitude.

'I am sure you wish me well, Captain

Grant,' she slowly said, 'and I know, I am certain, that you understand life a hundred times better than I do, so I will take your advice—I will forget everything if I can, and try to enjoy to-day. . . .'

'That's a brave girl,' said he encouragingly, although such a pang seemed to pierce his heart that for the moment he could hardly see. He stumbled against the lowest marble step of the hotel. 'If only she knew!' he was thinking miserably. 'If only, poor, sweet, lovely, winning thing, it was not my hideous doom to have to tell her!'



## CHAPTER XV

THERE was a certain feverishness about the spurious gaiety of the *partie carrée* seemingly enjoying their dainty champagne luncheon under the tree-ferns and pepper-trees of the hotel garden.

Miss Cartwright was secretly horror-stricken, aghast, at the revelation whispered in her ear as she sat on the settee in the trente-et-quarante room by a man she had hitherto regarded as a mere honest-hearted, simple-minded Canadian officer.

Captain Grant feared that his courage was ebbing as the bad moment of Zoe's enlightenment approached. A subtle temptation to postpone it assailed him which it needed his strong sense of right and wrong to combat.

The Vicomte de Bressis needed all his *amour propre* to conceal his chagrin at being

cruelly used by a Fate which made him an exception to her rule of smiling upon the stakes of absolute novices.

Perhaps Zoe, although inwardly perturbed and excited by her curious, contradictory position in life, was the least stormily emotional of the four.

Suppressed excitement and entire lack of appetite were the rule with the patrons of the restaurant, as well as demands for the finest brands of wine and liqueurs, so the waiters whisked away barely-tasted *plats*, and brought others in a matter-of-course manner, which assisted the outward calm of the little party, which presently divided, Miss Cartwright having come to the Vicomte's rescue, offering to sink her prejudices and to try his and her combined luck at the tables. She waived his half-hearted refusal on account of his emptied purse—she was so anxious to leave Grant and Zoe *tête-à-tête* that she would have made any concessions almost to leave the Captain free to pursue his elected campaign—and insisted on lending him her dainty gold-net *porte-monnaie*.

‘If it all goes, so much the better!’ she

cried, as they rose and strolled towards the Casino. 'It will mean that I am never to try again. But it would seem absurd if I did not have one fling—you will admit that, Vicomte? Captain Grant, take Zoe about, and be sure to escort her to the concert, and give her some tea. Expect us when you see us.'

Seemingly—at all events to the Vicomte, who suspected nothing of a tragic mystery underlying the stalwart Canadian's interest in young 'Madame Hamil-tone,' as he called Zoe—Miss Cartwright was bitten by the gambling fever. As she waved her hand to Zoe and almost strode off, the Vicomte trotting eagerly by her side, like a puppy by a big, shaggy dog, even Zoe was puzzled.

'I shall never understand anyone,' she said, with a hopeless little sigh, as she agreed to 'take a turn on the terrace,' as her companion termed it, and strolled along a narrow path leading to the terrace overlooking the sea.

'No?' he said absently. Then he recalled his wandering thoughts. He must lead up to all he had to say, he told himself, or he would crush this tender creature with his horrible

facts. 'You mean, you cannot quite understand Miss Cartwright? I can. She is one of those happy persons who have lived honestly, straightly, because they have not been tempted to do anything else. As a child she had anxious parents, nurses, doctors, friends; as a girl everyone was at her feet, for, besides being an heiress, she was kind, good, a real woman.' Then he stopped short and drew a long breath. 'Such a one can live for the day and hour,' he meaningly added, 'a boon denied to those who, like myself, are haunted by a past.'

They were nearing the marble balustrade. He left her, and, leaning his arms on the broad coping, gazed out to sea. Zoe, a little startled and greatly surprised by his sudden change of manner and speech, went a little bashfully nearer until she stood by his side.

For some moments both stared at the deep blue, tranquil waves in absolute silence. He was the first to move and speak. He glanced down at her lovely waxen profile.

'You are not inquisitive, like most of your sex!' he exclaimed, somewhat taken aback by

a fact which would add to the difficulty of his self-imposed task.

She glanced quickly up, crimsoning.

‘I cannot afford to be,’ she bitterly returned. ‘It is not that I am not—interested—for I am. You said things to me—which made me wonder——’

She turned away her head. He gave a sigh of intense relief. At all events, he had made some sort of impression upon her; the preliminaries were less formidable in consequence.

‘You wondered — why — I said your interests would rank with me before my very own?’ he asked, leaning back against the balustrade, and gazing steadfastly at her. ‘You can hardly comprehend, unless I tell you the story of my life. Shall I?’

‘Oh, please!’ she pleaded, her eyes kindling.

So she felt some sort of interest in him, he told himself. What a signal mercy!

‘I will not bore you with more than the main facts,’ he began. ‘As soon as I was old enough to understand, I knew that my mother had sprung from a lower class than my father,

who did not live with us, but only stayed for a day or two now and then. We lived near London, mother and I. She was a capricious woman, but she did not deserve her fate. My father distrusted and ill-used her ; ignored their two children ; then neglected and reproached her until she died, literally of a broken heart.'

Zoe gave a sympathetic murmur. He did not seem to hear it.

'What became of my little sister I cannot tell—at least, I happen to know now, but I did not then,' he went on. 'But as far as I am concerned, boy though I was, I bitterly resented my father's conduct ; and I found out where he really lived, and went to him, giving scorn for scorn, and, when he dared to asperse my mother's character to me, shaking the dust of his miserable house from my feet and leaving him for ever. I was a waif in the great, heartless city—first a beggar urchin, then an errand-boy, then a cabin-boy on a little trader, whose captain took a fancy to me because I was like his only son who had lately died. He was my benefactor. He found out I was educated as a gentleman's son, and when we arrived

in Canada got me a place as a junior in the office of a merchant friend in Montreal. There I rose—pretty rapidly—and saved and speculated with such luck that before I was twenty I had a small fortune. Then I said good-bye to the counting-house, and volunteered for the army, passed my exams, and, after going through a good deal, got my captaincy. At that point I began to feel restless. I wanted to know about my poor little sister. I returned to England, saw my father, and was reconciled with him. He is dead now. Perhaps you wonder what this story of mine has to do with what I said—that I should ever consider your interests before my own ?’

Zoe flushed, then paled. As he told his story, there was a tone in his voice which seemed curiously familiar ; yet how could he and she be anything more than chance acquaintances, drawn together by a common sympathy — that sympathy at first sight, between strangers who have not previously known of each other’s existence, which is one of the puzzles short-sighted humanity vainly tries to solve ?

‘Then—he made up for his neglect—he

left you everything?' she asked, more as something to say than because she cared to know one way or the other.

'No,' he shortly returned; 'that is another story altogether. But I did not want to tell you my life-story alone, Mrs. Hamilton. It was merely the preface to my asking your advice on a matter which—and I am not exaggerating—is to me literally a matter of life and death! Will you give it me?'

She stared at him, then recoiled a little. She had thought his strong features, with the broad brow, close-shut mouth, massive chin, short, prominent nose and deep-set eyes, somewhat cold and expressionless. How she had been mistaken! At that moment there was such an intensity of passion in those eyes, about his somewhat drawn and quivering lips, that she felt almost a slight fear of him.

'Oh!' she stammered. Then she gave a short, embarrassed laugh. 'My advice! Why, I know simply nothing of the world, living all my life with my godmother, a maiden lady who kept a school, and when her health broke down, and she sold it, staying as junior governess until her successor, who



seemed to hate me, sent me away, and I took refuge with an old uncle, and got engaged to my husband, who was his adopted son. I know nothing of people, of society, of anything. I think I told you this before.'

'So much the better,' he gently returned, plucking some dying leaves from a climbing geranium which crept about the marble balustrade, and casting them upon the rocks below. 'Your sense of right and wrong has not been dimmed. Come, let us rest on that very Italian-looking bench, and let me tell you what it is I want your advice about.'

First crimson to the roots of her hair, as her conscience reproached her, then paling until she was white as the fragrant blossoms on a neighbouring orange-tree, Zoe somewhat reluctantly accompanied him to a marble bench under a spreading pepper-tree. Behind this a bank covered with aloes, cactus, and subtropical shrubs concealed them from possible eavesdroppers or onlookers. They two could scarcely have found a greater solitude.

'I hardly know how to put the case to you,' he began thoughtfully. 'But—let me begin

by telling you that the girl concerned is a very dear young cousin of mine. Seas, continents, separated us in childhood and youth. While I was working in Canada she was in England. We never met. The first I heard of her after she was grown up was that she had married a man I had heard no good of. In fact, a curious chain of circumstances had brought to my knowledge a rumour that he had been thought to be the husband of a notoriously disreputable woman. Then I saw my cousin and this man, and felt it my duty, as her nearest male relative, to pursue inquiries. I found the rumour that the man was already married only too true. That poor, innocent young creature is living with a man who has a wife already. He may be ignorant of the fact that his first wife is still alive—or may have been until now. But—what do you think? Ought I not to tell her the truth?"

Zoe, listening with all her ears, had felt a strange sense of chill, of vague disappointment, as he spoke. More, she was slightly resentful that he had, as she felt, merely paid court to her because, as a young woman, she

would be a fair judge of the feelings of this 'wonderful cousin of his.'

'Captain Grant,' she began a little impatiently, 'excuse me if I cannot feel much sympathy with you in this meddling with your cousin's matrimonial affairs. Suppose she loves this husband of hers? It may be such an awful blow to her to find it her duty to separate from him that it may be the death of her, or send her mad! And it is not her fault. If she is ignorant of the case, *she* is doing no wrong.'

He gave her a scared, intent glance.

'N-no,' he slowly said. 'Still, right is right, and wrong is wrong, is it not?'

'And love is love!' she cried, almost defiantly. 'Love justifies many things, Captain Grant, just as it is answerable for a good deal of everything which happens—our feelings, thoughts, actions. But there can be a selfish, mistaken love. Remember that! I said I would speak the truth to you, did I not? I will. I fancy you are in love yourself with this cousin of yours, and that this, not your conscience, is urging you to separate her from her supposed husband! How do you know whether she is not as well aware of

the complication as you are yourself? She may be.'

He made no reply to her hotly-spoken words. He sat dumbly gazing out to sea. Then suddenly he rose, and stood before her, pale, frowning.

'I thank you for your candour, Mrs. Hamilton,' he stiffly said. 'Meanwhile, your idea that an innocent girl would remain one hour with a man who had another wife alive, who possibly tricked and cheated her into marrying him while fully aware of the fact—I can't tell—is a shock to me. It is hard to believe—a bitter pill to swallow.'

'You forget that a girl does not marry a man unless she thinks him wonderful, unless she loves him, perhaps adores him,' she somewhat scornfully returned, as she rose and strolled at his side along the terrace. 'And if your cousin does, will she not remember that, in the case you mention, the first wife is a "notoriously disreputable woman"? How would she be able to leave the man she loved to such a fate as that? In such a case divorce seems the only rescue. The husband could surely divorce an unworthy woman.'

'A man who wants a divorce has to go into court with clean hands,' he began ; then, as if suddenly exasperated, he added, in stern, almost contemptuous tones : ' Enough ! The discussion is closed. Forget this conversation, Mrs. Hamilton, if you please. Will you come and hear the concert ? It must be beginning, I think.'

' Certainly,' she somewhat distantly replied, coolly, although her heart gave a sick, miserable throb as he took out his watch and gazed gravely at it. Then she accompanied him along the pebbly path into the Casino.

## CHAPTER XVI

ZOE glanced vaguely about her — at the crimson fauteuils in the exquisitely-decorated *salle*; at the platform, half hidden by the tropical foliage and blossoms of scores of exotic plants in pots; at the young, good-looking men of a justly-praised band, with their spruce, handsome, white-gloved *chef d'orchestre*; then obediently seated herself in the chair chosen by her escort, and, just as the conductor gave the preliminary tap with his bâton on the music-desk, accepted a programme from an attentive attendant, who appeared greatly interested in the sparse audience, who were possibly the friends of the gamblers of both sexes whose reckless stakes at the tables were such a prolific source of income to his employers.

‘It seems a pretty good programme this

afternoon,' said Captain Grant politely, turning his head slightly towards her.

'Yes,' returned Zoe, with chilly civility.

Then, as the orchestra struck up no less ambitious a first number than the overture to 'Tannhäuser,' the two sat silently side by side, apparently either inertly apathetic or listening in intense absorption. Lookers-on would have set them down either as the usual impassive and imperturbable Britons, or as a couple to whom music was an abstract term, and who had never melted in the sweet, appealing presence of the 'heav'nly Maid.' No one, as human eyes fail to see aught but material appearances, would have guessed that beneath those quiet exteriors blazed volcanic passion.

Zoe had never felt so inwardly wild since she could remember. As she sat listening to the almost savage cries and wails of the violins in their exciting, clamorous accompaniment to the noble chorale representing the Pilgrims' Hymn, she wondered what had happened to her. It was as if a tigerish passion had sprung up unbidden and unexpected within her young, ignorant soul,

and the moment when it had leapt into being was that when this mere acquaintance of weeks alone, Captain Grant, had, with an ingenuousness she would hardly have expected in a man who had travelled and seen the world, told her in so many words of his love for a girl who believed herself a wife, but was not.

‘Why should I care?’ she asked herself, as the majestic theme, suggesting the sturdy faith of the God-loving pilgrims, waxed louder and more convincing, and the wild shrieks of the ‘strings’ ebbed and died away like the waves when the wind drops and fails. ‘What is it to me if Captain Grant is in love, or is not? He seems more congenial to me than anyone I have ever met—I admit that. But a few days ago we were strangers, and after this we may never meet again. But I won’t like him more than I do. I won’t, or I shall suffer horribly when I say good-bye—horribly!’

Great, stinging tears forced themselves into her eyes. In her effort to stem them, she clenched her teeth and clutched at the arms of her velvet fauteuil. Then



a dread of his happening to suspect that those tears were caused by her disappointment to find that he, whom she believed to be her admiring friend, was possessed by a devouring and overpowering affection for another woman, lent her strength to subdue the outward signs of emotion.

And he? His whole nature was in a turmoil. To him the music was torture, as music often is to those in suspense or trouble. Both were enduring an earthly purgatory as they forced themselves to sit still while an attractive programme was gone through—to sit still and speak coolly to each other of the various pieces which, for aught they knew, might have been wails and howls of suffering spirits in the nether regions. When Captain Grant once more glanced at his watch, consulted the programme, and said, 'There is really nothing else worth your hearing: would you like some tea?' her whole being leapt with such intense relief that it was equivalent to joy.

After the warmth and the torturing music, the outer air, freshened by a rising sea-breeze, was reviving to Zoe. The remainder of the

Monte Carlo expedition passed more like a dream than reality. As she and Grant sat silently at their tea-table, Miss Cartwright and her cavalier burst upon them, she in fits of laughter at the Vicomte's ill-luck.

'Every sou gone; you must give me some tea of your charity, Captain Grant,' she began, proceeding to tease and rally the crest-fallen Frenchman.

She had no mercy upon him, and talked for the whole party during their homeward journey and until they were all safely housed in their hotel, when she sought her own room, and, flinging herself in a low chair, told herself it had been one of the most hard-working days of her life.

'Lord! what a thing it is to be good-natured!' she mused. 'I detest Frenchmen and loathe gambling, and don't ever wish to be mixed up with doubtful love-affairs. I almost wish I had been born without this interest in my fellow-creatures, who seem to be mostly people "fallen among thieves!"'

Curiously enough, Zoe's disappointment in Captain Grant, and what she termed to herself her 'distaste' for his peculiar love-confidences,

softened her feelings considerably in Andrew's regard. When, entering their private sitting-room, she saw him lying back in an armchair near the open window, smoking, she went up to him with a welcoming smile.

'I am sorry you were in first,' she amiably began. 'You said I should please you if I spent the day as I liked, so I accompanied Miss Cartwright, the Vicomte de Bressis, and Captain Grant, to Monte Carlo.'

A faint blush, which she would have given much to repress, rose to her cheek as she spoke. Andrew had gazed intently at her. Would he be angry—jealous? She almost started when he gave a light little laugh.

'The very last thing in the world I should have expected you to do!' he exclaimed. 'Well, did you win? I shall demand half, you know. That's only fair.'

She began to explain, and he led her on and questioned and cross-questioned her until, the clock on the mantelpiece chiming the half-hour, he sprang up saying he had barely time to dress for dinner, or she either, and went off, inwardly congratulating himself on his perspicacity in confining the subject of

their conversation to her doings, and thereby preventing her from inquiring as to how his day had been spent.

‘If the devil is the father of lies, as they say, every lie saved is something gained,’ he told himself with grim sarcasm, as he tied his cravat before the big mirror nearest the light, and wondered he could look so fresh after his stormy experiences during the past day.

Meanwhile Miss Cartwright, descending to the hall in her black-lace dinner-dress, was met by Captain Grant, who looked both moody and anxious.

‘Don’t ask me anything; I am bungling my affairs like the idiot I am,’ he said to her as, by common consent, they seated themselves near the fountain. ‘No, all is not yet lost, and won’t be if you will come to the rescue, like the good, kind woman you are, and do me just a little favour.’

Miss Cartwright was taken aback and somewhat rueful until she heard his request, when she readily promised to accede to it, and, being relieved in mind, brightened up into quite her ordinary genial self, consoling her

neighbour at dinner, the Captain, who somewhat whimsically confided to her his chagrin that his neighbour on his right, Zoe, would hardly speak to him.

Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton, indeed, were, as a spirited English girl, who was their *vis-à-vis* and who 'wondered what the men saw in that big-eyed scrap of a woman,' termed it, 'quite the love-birds' that night at the dinner-table, indulging in meaning smiles and confidential whispers.

'Poor little soul! he is playing some game of his own, and throwing dust in those pretty eyes of hers,' thought the young lady's sympathetic mother, who had married an amiable roué who died of decline shortly after her daughter's birth, and who had remained a contented widow for the two-and-twenty years which had elapsed since she saw him laid in the grave, in which she also buried her recollections of his evil deeds.

Somewhat the same reflection crossed Captain Grant's uneasy mind as he assumed his opera-hat and light overcoat, and, lighting a cigar, watched Zoe, Andrew, and Miss Cartwright seated at after-dinner coffee in the

vestibule where the band was playing, then turned with a sigh and went down the marble steps into the clear, warm night.

'I would rather have done—well, anything, almost than this,' he gloomily mused, as he left the Place Masséna, the Jardin Publique, and the wide white, palm-bordered road of the famous Promenade behind him, and strolled into the dusk of the older streets.

His destination was an insignificant house near the Ponchettes. It was one of a row, and, as he glanced up at the shuttered fronts, he felt a misgiving lest the personage he sought would not be indoors, and was only partially reassured by seeing a light in an open window of No. 89.

'The *appartement* is *au troisième*,' he told himself. Then, throwing away his cigar-end, he entered the still open door, and made his way up the handsome, if dirty, stone staircase—for in former days of Italian rule this had been a house for the superior class of flat-occupiers—and, reaching the third-floor, found and rang the electric bell.

For almost a minute all within seemed still as death. Then, just as he was about to

press the button a second time, he heard the sound of footsteps, the door was hurriedly opened, and he saw, under the electric lamp in the hall, a big, fair, beautiful woman loosely wrapped in a blue teagown lavishly trimmed with lace. Her golden hair hung loosely on her shoulders ; she looked radiant with expectancy, and had almost flung herself upon him, when her expression changed to one of defiant anger.

‘ Who are you ? You must have made a mistake, monsieur ! ’ she stammered, her fine, if somewhat bloodshot, blue eyes gleaming like jewels with vivid emotion of some kind.

‘ I have not made a mistake, I think, ’ returned Captain Grant. Then he stepped boldly into the little hall, where a bust of Voltaire leered sneeringly aside from the summit of a black marble pedestal, and an old carved high-backed chair on the tessellated floor suggested a relic of days past and gone, when impecunious nobles nourished their pride on meagre risotto and polenta, varied with a little fish bought from the fishermen on the beach below at sunrise, and carried home by stealth before prying eyes opened upon the

new day, but kept their dwellings rigidly artistic. 'I am a friend, madame! If you will allow me an interview, I have that to tell you which will bring your husband to your feet.'

'You—are a policeman—a detective! I know you!' she gasped, barring his entrance by claspng the door and its lintel with her strong white arms. 'What husband?' she hissed defiantly, seeing a fatal mistake in her admission. 'I have no husband! Everyone knows that!'

Captain Grant gave her a steady, half-pitying glance; then he leant forward and whispered something in her ear.

'You had better hear what I have to say,' he added, aloud, as she fell back and gazed at him, terror-stricken.

'You mean—to ruin him!' she hissed. 'And you ask me to help——'

'My dear lady, everything is his. I want nothing. I have more money than I know what to do with,' he impatiently returned. 'All I want is to see you reinstated—with him—and then to return whence I came, and leave you both in full possession of your own.'



'Come in,' she miserably said, her head hung low, her voice reduced to a sickly murmur. And, locking the heavy old door, she led him through the ill-lighted hall into a large room furnished with a few old chairs and a venerable table, where she switched on the electric light and motioned him to be seated.

## CHAPTER XVII

ZOE had felt the sudden exhilaration of an unsuspected passion. In an inward whirlwind of jealousy—jealousy of a stranger who had possessed himself of her sympathies, how or when she knew not—she had flirted and coquetted with her own husband, who of late had been almost obnoxious to her ; she had outwardly played the part of the enamoured wife.

Why ? As, the *table-d'hôte* dinner over, and Captain Grant no longer present, she sat at coffee in the hotel vestibule with her husband and Miss Cartwright, she asked herself what was the potent cause of this astonishing behaviour of hers. She had not intended to be amiable to her husband in public ; she had been forced into a display of pretty bridelike affection by some intensely strong, even overpowering, instinct.

As the evening wore off—Andrew had gone to the billiard-room with some recently-arrived Englishmen, and she was left to the companionship of Miss Cartwright, who amused her, or thought she was amusing her, by scanning all the available newspapers and reading out paragraphs which she considered ‘tit-bits’ of information—Zoe’s soul seemed to darken—darken—darken. All the surrounding ordinary life lost its actuality. It was a vague, wild dream, so it appeared—the lively hotel, with its heterogeneous visitors, the charming arrangements, the pretty music. As she sat by Miss Cartwright, making violent endeavours to fight her wild sensations, to cling hard to common-sense, she asked herself passionately what it all meant.

And as her soul was pure, as she had never willingly harmed a living creature, even as she asked the question her soul was flooded with the answer.

‘Oh, God, I love him!’ cried her whole being in utter prostration, in complete and absolute abandonment. ‘I love that man, and I am Andrew’s wife!’

She clutched viciously at the satin cushions

as she set her teeth and forced herself to listen to Miss Cartwright's readings and comments, as, newspaper in hand, the American lady leant back against her chair-back and puffed at a cigarette as a consoler to herself during her valiant efforts 'to pass the time for that poor unfortunate child.' But she was suffering agony on a mental rack—agony caused by being confronted with the awful fact that she was chained, tied, to a man she neither cared for nor respected, of whom at certain moments she felt vague, but awful, suspicions; and she loved another with all her heart, soul, and being.

'I am lost, body and soul,' was the thought wrung from her by her great anguish. It seemed to her that she saw her whole future life before her—black, hopeless, like some vast dark cave she had to enter—and there was no hope—not a gleam—that she might avoid it, turn back into the sunshine.

Miss Cartwright noticed all, and smiled, but said not one word. For her own reasons, she was genuinely pleased to see that Zoe was deeply moved.

The one redeeming feature of intense mental

suffering is that its victim, if sane, is forced to seek some remedy, if only in self-condolence and consolation. When Zoe lay sleepless through the small hours, self-pity became reasoning with her emotions, and attempting to reduce them to something nearer common-sense.

'Life is short,' she mused, 'and the glorious life which I have caught a glimpse of—a life of love with a being one could respect, obey, worship—is impossible. I must give up all idea of it. What is that proverb *Made-moiselle* at the school was so fond of quoting, with that peculiar grin and shrug of her thin shoulders? Something about, if one cannot have what one loves, the best thing one can do is to love what one has. I must try and resuscitate my love for Andrew! Was it love? Oh, no, no; but whatever it was, I must try to dig it up and make it live again somehow.'

With that idea she fell asleep. Towards morning she dreamt. Her mind was impressed with the Southern scenery, with the grey-green olives on the terraced slopes, the deep blue sea meeting as deep an azure sky;

white roads glaring hotly in the vivid sunlight ; gay crowds of frivolous visitors, rows of palms, marble hotels and villas, and orchards of trees like bridal bouquets of yellow oranges among the white, waxen, heavily-perfumed blossoms. But it was not of her immediate surroundings she dreamt. She was wandering in an English hayfield, under a paler sky, gathering the frail white roses from among their thorns on a high hedge ; and at her side was Captain Grant—he was talking : then suddenly she glanced up at him—their eyes met—he took her in his arms, to his heart, and her longing lips met his in a passionate, lingering kiss.

She awoke, half in horror, half in fear, to hear a tapping at the door. Andrew sat up, and, hearing that there was a letter for him, sprang out of bed, and, going to the bedroom door, took something from the messenger, tore it open, and stood reading it with his back to her.

‘ What is it ? ’ she asked drowsily, in an apologetic tone ; the wickedness of that abandoned dream humiliated her.

‘ Oh, nothing, ’ he returned lightly, crushing

the letter or despatch in his hand. 'Only the fellow I was with yesterday wants to see me this morning, and I suppose I must go. You can do without me? Go for that drive to Villefranche Miss Cartwright was so hot upon last night. She wanted to start early, if you remember, the sun being a terror now at noon.'

Zoe acquiesced with a relief sufficiently intense to horrify her, and as, dressed for walking, having swallowed her coffee and roll in what she felt to be quite indecent haste, she made her way to Miss Cartwright's rooms, she blamed herself bitterly for being so thankful for the prospect of another day away from her husband.

Miss Cartwright was breakfasting in her handsome salon, and seemed gratified at Zoe having changed her mind, for as they parted the previous evening Mrs. Hamilton had gratefully but decidedly declined the proposed excursion.

'My dear child, don't apologize for changing your mind, pray!' she genially exclaimed, when Zoe made shamefaced excuses. 'It is only those foolish persons called in Scripture

“the proud”—I always have enjoyed that expression thoroughly—who are ashamed of changing their minds. The wise never are—they change their minds a dozen times a day, if they can better matters by doing it.’

Miss Cartwright seemed in such high spirits that Zoe was cheered, and presently started with her in the pretty victoria with the pair of horses jingling their bells, and the rakish Niçois coachman seated on his high seat, grateful for the small mercy of a day alone with a sympathetic woman, to whom she clung in spirit more insistently each hour that passed, although she wondered at herself for so doing.

She felt terribly spent and exhausted as they drove merrily away from the great white town, up and down the slopes by the blue sea, Miss Cartwright searching the horizon through a field-glass for a glimpse of the faint violet line on the indigo horizon which meant Corsica. It was hard work rallying her energies.

‘It seems as if I were dying, and dying of starvation,’ she told herself, as she refused Miss Cartwright’s offer to have a look at Corsica through the glass—‘soul-starvation.



My poor soul seems a nothing—an abject thing which a breath from the powers would dissipate in space.’

As she thought this, the horror of being dispersed, of dying, lent her power. It seemed to her that life and death came mockingly on either side—Life, which meant hope, happiness ; and Death, a grinning skeleton leaning on his scythe. In the sudden excitement of the vision she turned and gripped Miss Cartwright’s arm.

‘Oh, if your heart is not a heart of stone, save me!’ she piteously said. ‘I don’t know what it is, but I feel there is some dreadful thing I ought to be saved from, and that you can do it!’

‘My dearest girl, pull yourself together, and don’t be a fool!’ exclaimed Miss Cartwright valiantly, sitting up and gazing somewhat irascibly at her limp companion. ‘Of course I will see you through anything and everything. Look here : unless you swear to me you don’t want me, I won’t leave you for an instant, day or night! There! Will that do?’

‘You are—well, I have no words for what you are,’ stammered Zoe, as she leant back.

And at that moment the coachman suddenly reined in his horses.

‘Un monsieur qui veut parler avec madame,’ he obsequiously said.

And as he concluded his remark a man came to the side of the carriage opposite Zoe. It was Captain Grant.

‘I meant to have walked to Villefranche, but this sun is awful,’ he began, lifting his hat with a deferential smile as his eyes met Zoe’s. ‘Will you be a good Samaritan, Miss Cartwright, and give me a lift back?’

‘No,’ laughed Miss Cartwright, ‘I cannot; for Mrs. Hamilton and I are lunching at Villefranche, and mean to stroll in the famous olive-orchards afterwards. But if you will come with us we shall be charmed.’

‘Thank you,’ said Captain Grant almost devoutly, and a few moments later they were driving on, the Canadian seated opposite Miss Cartwright, who was chattering so briskly no one could have put in a word, had he or she wished to speak.

But Zoe was thankful to be silent, to escape notice. Strangely enough, the Captain’s unexpected appearance and acceptance of her

American friend's invitation had acted like a cold douche upon her unstrung nerves. She felt inward shame at her emotions, her jealousy of him, her incipient passion, inward disgust with herself for her lack of ordinary common-sense.

'I must really try to feel and think and behave reasonably,' she told herself, as the Arab horses trotted showily into the French, once Italian, townlet. And when the trio alighted at the hotel, and lunched almost alone at one of the white tables in the big *salle*—people were leaving the Riviera daily, and the waiters spoke of their own imminent migration to Paris or London—Zoe seemed more cheerfully commonplace than Miss Cartwright had as yet seen her. It was hard to identify the girl, so ready to laugh and be amused, the brightness of whose eyes and blush-rose cheeks and lips contradicted the deep lines of pain upon her lovely face, with the passionately despairing being who had made an *ad misericordiam* appeal to her but a minute or two before Captain Grant's sudden appearance.

Miss Cartwright was puzzled; then perplexity produced uneasiness. As luncheon

progressed—it was not a very distinguished menu: visitors were fast disappearing, and the chef had left—she became thoughtful, then silent. Then she almost resentfully grumbled to her companions.

‘I will tell you what this “scratch” meal, dreadfully badly cooked, has done for me,’ she said to them as dessert, coffee, and liqueurs followed courses of cutlets and fries and omelettes: ‘it has set up a most abominable neuralgia.’

Both Zoe and the Captain were sympathetic, and recommended various remedies—black coffee, chartreuse, eau-de-vie neat—but Miss Cartwright smiled derisively.

‘Children that you are, both of you! do you think I have not tried everything and anything?’ she almost contemptuously returned. ‘Nothing ever does me any good, unless I can lie down and get to sleep. Now, if you will take Zara out, Captain Grant, I will ask for a south room and lie down. They do give one decent tea here, for a wonder, and if you will come back between four and five I dare say a doze, then a cup of tea, will brace me for the drive back.’

‘Let us go back now, at once, dear Miss Cartwright; then you could go to bed at once and nurse yourself. I am sure that would be the best for you,’ began Zoe in a sudden inward panic at the prospect of a *tête-à-tête* with the man she loved, but had no right to love.

But both Miss Cartwright and Captain Grant appeared to regard her suggestion as so brutal, under the circumstances, that she felt completely snubbed, and presently, after seeing Miss Cartwright comfortably established on a large sofa in a south room, with an eiderdown quilt cosily tucked about her, she succumbed to the inevitable, and, fastening on her dainty hat, went out into the sunshine with the Captain, according to the promise extracted by the American, who said ‘there was no hope for her getting rid of the pain if Mrs. Hamilton would not see the olive-gardens.’

‘As if I cared to see the olive-gardens,’ said Zoe disconsolately, as she opened her large white silk umbrella and descended the glaring white steps of the hotel. ‘It is much too hot to be out of doors. The natives know

better than we do : this is the time they take their siesta, curled up in shady corners.'

Captain Grant turned and faced her. His straw hat was tilted over his forehead, but his eyes gleamed in the shade as with living light.

'All right! I should prefer staying indoors,' he said in low, meaning tones.

'No ; we must obey our hostess and keep our promise,' cried Zoe, scared by those eyes, and she started to walk through the glare. 'There must be shade in the orchards,' she added, glancing back over her shoulder at him.

## CHAPTER XVIII

‘ I DON’T remember much shade in the olive-orchards, but there is a garden leading to one where the yews and cypresses give one a little covert from this scorching southern sun,’ said he quietly. ‘ We had better go there. Can we? Oh, I met the proprietor years ago ; we know each other well. I have, as one might put it, the freedom of the place. We get to it by this lane. Will you come?’

She acquiesced, and followed him up one of the narrow water-courses—at the end of April bone-dry, and merely the roughest of pebbly mountain paths between stone walls—picking her way carefully with the potent dread of being saved from stumbling by his ever-ready arm or hand. If only, she thought, she were safely through the ordeal of this *tête-à-tête* ramble with him ! Her fear of him

was growing every moment. She told herself miserably that if he were to take her in his arms she would be too paralyzed to resist. If it entered that splendid, virile head of his to say, 'Do you love me?' she would stammer 'Yes'—or, even worse, she might forget everything and fling herself into his arms.

'Let me help you,' he gently said, as she made a false step when she neared the top, and loose white stones went clattering down. But she recovered her balance and laughed.

'No, thanks,' she cried. 'And is that your friend's garden? It looks like a cemetery, with all those cypresses and things.'

'I know a spot after we pass by the "cypresses and things" where there is a splendid view,' he said, holding open a roughly-made wooden gate for her to enter. 'This is very "South of France," is it not? They are so primitive here in all their carpentering.'

He talked on—a monologue, comparing the immature, undeveloped mechanism of the South of Europe with that of the newest, most primeval of settlements in the New



World—as they passed along a rough shingle path between two stately groves of ilex, cypress, laurel, and other evergreen trees and shrubs. It was cool there, that hot spring day, and there was something grateful to Zoe in the damp, aromatic air. But when they emerged upon a field where the green blades of the young corn waved in the wind among the twisted, gnarled, old, grey-green olives, she drew in deep breaths of the fresh, salted sea-breeze with a feeling of exhilaration and relief.

‘Come and look at the view,’ he kindly said. He seemed to speak in a more distant, less appealing tone, and Zoe felt safer accordingly. ‘Look at Antibes,’ he went on, pointing to a faintly outlined promontory on their right. ‘And there, beyond those great rocks with the railway-tunnel, that yellow coast rising so high above the beach is Italy.’

He pointed out the irregular outline of Ventimiglia crowning the yellow heights, and commented upon the monotonous blue of sea and sky.

‘After all, the hardest thing to bear in

life is bore, ennui, monotony,' he said. 'Don't you yourself think so?'

They were leaning against a fence of piled-up stones, somewhat resembling the stone walls of Ireland and Gloucestershire, gazing at the indigo expanse of sea stretching away until it met the serene blue of the cloudless spring southern sky.

'Perhaps,' she answered thoughtfully. 'But, of course, any monotony is better than painful, bitter things.'

'Certainly,' he assented. 'But you are not one of those to object to sudden changes — shocks, perhaps — if those shocks and changes make for future happiness — are you?'

His voice trembled. Zoe, glancing aside, saw that his face was drawn and lividly pale. In consternation — with sudden, swift enlightenment — she turned and faced him.

'You have something to tell me!' she gasped, and she blanched, her eyes seemed to recede into her head. 'Tell me — quick! Have some mercy — some!'

He turned slowly, and, gazing at her with eyes which looked like lamps in his lined,

anxious face, grasped her hands and held them tightly in his.

‘Oh, my poor little Zoe, I am your cousin, Andrew Quarles!’ he stammered. ‘I know all, of course. Your supposed husband is my poor father’s adopted son; but I am your uncle Quarles’ own, only real son. Do you understand?’

‘No!’ she cried passionately, wrenching away her hands in fear and anguish. The past rose up before her—her uncle’s death, the suspicion cast upon her, and that wretched, miserable husband of hers. ‘I do not understand! How—I mean why—do you think that I am—your cousin?’ She gazed at him deliriously; she felt delirious. ‘And what do you mean by talking of my husband as my “supposed” husband? No marriage ever celebrated, or perpetrated, or whatever it is, could possibly be more legal than ours has been!’

He turned aside; he looked as he felt—almost distracted.

‘It was true, then, what you told me when I was trying to break the facts of the case to you at Monte Carlo—you love that

unfortunate man?' he hoarsely said, turning to her.

Zoe quailed; she felt giddy with the inward horror caused by that word 'unfortunate.' There had been awful moments when she had wondered whether Andrew's unusual conduct since the death of Squire Quarles meant that he knew more of the catastrophe than he ought—that in some way his conscience was not clear. Once more her very soul was wrung with that awful dread, that maddening suspicion.

'Don't torment me by speaking in riddles; say what you have to say!' she cried passionately, and her eyes blazed as she gazed wildly into his. 'Why do you call my husband unfortunate?'

'Because—he is not legally your husband,' he returned almost roughly, goaded by the belief that she loved his father's adopted son. 'When he married you he had a wife alive, and she is here at Nice. Zoe, you must not return to that man. As your nearest relative, I will not allow it. All is prepared for you to return to England; I have everything in train. Your godmother knows all, and is

expecting you. I broke it all as gently to her as I could. You will be a good child, will you not—a good woman? You will not break a commandment——’

He stopped short, for she gave a wild, hysteric laugh.

‘Good?’ she cried shrilly. ‘I have been outraged, injured, ruined, body and soul, and you ask me to be good!’ She gripped at the stones on the low wall. ‘Oh, where shall I hide myself? I am a thing—a wretched creature; there is no rightful place for me anywhere!’

She panted, and looked madly around like some hunted wild animal at bay.

‘My dear, dear girl, you are as pure as snow, as white in heart and soul as an angel!’ he earnestly said, possessing himself of her poor convulsed hands and gazing at her with tearful eyes. I am ready to be your slave, your humble, devoted servant. I can tell you it has cost me much to break your heart like this.’

‘Break my heart—for *him*?’ she resentfully cried. ‘For a man who dared deceive me, treat me as he has treated me? Tell me all,’

she deliriously besought him—‘all! First, who is the woman? Where did he marry her? How did you come to know?’

‘When I discovered that my poor father—I pity him now, he has gone to his account—had adopted the son of the woman who jilted him, I made inquiries about the young man,’ he began, seeing it was best to tell her as much as he could as shortly as possible. ‘And I found that his own father had turned him out of doors some time before, and it seemed he had fallen very low. He had married a person who was formerly a tenth-rate actress, and she had gone to the colonies and had been reported to be dead. Well, I knew this when I went to see my father the day of his death, when we were reconciled—in fact, he told me he would alter his will and reinstate me; but, not knowing of your engagement, I said nothing to him, as I might otherwise have done. But when I heard—quite haphazard—that you were to be married, I was disturbed in my mind, for I had heard the actress still lived. I tracked you to your hotel, and tried to see you. The next thing I heard was that you had left. At this point I set detectives

to work ; I could not let you, my cousin, be at large with a married man without trying to protect you. When I found it was too late I bided my time. The time has come, Zoe, for you to begin your life again as Zoe Blount with good Miss Vigors, who has been such a mother to you. I will take you away to-night by the express ; she is waiting impatiently for your arrival. And now to show you documents to prove what I say. Come, you can hardly stand ; we will sit down on that bench.'

He loosed her hands, and, taking one within his arm, half led, half supported, her to a bench the proprietor of the garden had erected where the view was finest, under a gnarled old olive in the shade. As she fell back limply against the arm she groaned.

'I would rather have died,' she said bitterly. 'How can I ever look anyone in the face again ? I have nothing left—but death !'

He had nerved himself, forced himself to absolute self-command, before he began his campaign of rescue. But at that moment he was near the loss of self-control ; he felt so desperately tempted to take her in his arms

and tell her how he had loved her, had felt the first passion of his life, since he first saw her standing on the platform at the Broadhurst station when she was starting for her ill-fated journey to London. Only reverence, respect for her in her anomalous position—neither maid, wife, nor widow—balanced the almost overpowering impulse.

‘You have all your life before you,’ he earnestly said, standing up so that she might, as it were, see him in his strength and manhood—her protector. ‘You have—yourself. Oh, my darling child, if you could see yourself, know yourself, as others see and know you, you would have courage to face the future! I promise you that as far as I can make it bright for you it shall be; I will live for nothing else. I am independent, I have wealth, and I lay it all at your feet——’

She interrupted him with a despairing gesture.

‘Don’t! I cannot bear it!’ she bitterly cried. ‘Show me—those dreadful papers, whatever they are; let me get it over!’

Her voice broke. Obediently he took out some folded papers fastened together from his



breast pocket, and detached the clip. She watched him and the papers as if fascinated.

‘The certificate of marriage,’ he said, handing her an official slip which confirmed his statement that her husband had married a certain Louise Deller under his own paternal and rightful name some six years previously.

As she first glanced it over, then silently returned it to him, he offered her a note in Andrew’s handwriting.

‘It will hurt you, I fear,’ he said compassionately. ‘It was written to his wife after he met her unexpectedly at the theatre the night you were both there with Miss Cartwright.’

As Zoe scanned the letter her brain reeled. It was dated the Hôtel des Pèlerins that very night mentioned by ‘Captain Grant,’ and ran as follows :

‘MY LOUISE,

‘To-morrow—I hardly can wait for it—you will once more be in my arms, my heart. I never doubted but that it was

you who had died ; if I had, nothing, nothing would have kept me from you. Happily, it is not too late. I must let that poor young creature down gently—you yourself wish that—and your clever head will devise how. Till to-morrow !

‘ Your loving husband,  
‘ A. Q.’

Zoe read it—twice, thrice ; then, suddenly calm with a white heat of mingled anger, misery, and shame, she returned that document also to her cousin.

‘ I cannot hear any more of that now—tell me, what am I to do ? ’ she hoarsely asked, her eyes cast down, her drawn face pale as death.

‘ You will stay at this hotel below with Miss Cartwright,’ he replied with a gentle authority, which calmed her, roused a slight but comforting sense of safety within her. ‘ Just until I have had time to rush back to Nice, see *him*, and extract a confession to you on paper. He will not ask you to forgive him, never fear,’ he added quickly, as she set her teeth and gave a long, hissing sigh.

‘That is for the future. For the present, you and I have only one thing to think of—to get back to England as soon as we can. Come, do you think you can walk back to the hotel? I will help you as much as possible—I would carry you willingly, if necessary: my arms are strong.’

Her pride leapt up at that.

‘And so am I—strong!’ she cried, rising and confronting him, as if at bay. ‘Let us go. But what—what shall I say to Miss Cartwright? I cannot tell her the plight I am in—I would rather, far rather, fling myself into the sea.’

‘Say nothing,’ he said, flushing a little with annoyance that he had not anticipated such intense sensitiveness, and had honestly told his American friend all, exactly as it was, although, of course, unless he had done so she would not have aided and abetted Zoe’s rescue as eagerly as she had done. ‘I have hinted and told of complications, an awkward situation, a difficulty in the marriage ceremony, which makes it my duty, as your next-of-kin, to take you to your godmother in England until affairs are properly arranged. Don’t

discuss it with her. Try to rest, for we have a night-journey before us, and we must travel straight through to England.'

Zoe accomplished the distance between the garden where she had learnt the chief horror of her life, and the hotel, bravely. She was able to leave this hitherto unsuspected new cousin at the entrance, and proceed upstairs to the room in which she had left Miss Cartwright, as seemingly self-possessed as if no moral tragedy had afflicted her tortured soul. But no sooner had she entered the room and closed the door than there was a rushing sound in her ears, a blackness before her eyes, and she fell limply upon the floor.

Miss Cartwright sprang up with a celerity astonishing in one prostrate with neuralgia, and, with a pitying murmur, arranged a cushion under the poor girl's head, loosened her dress-collar, then stood wondering whether she should summon someone and take active measures to restore consciousness.

'No, I will wait a little,' she mournfully said, and two warm tears welled up and trickled down her cheeks. 'If one has to

do as one would be done by, I must. For if I were in her wretched position, I should not thank anyone who helped to bring me back from merciful oblivion of it all.'

## CHAPTER XIX

WHEN Zoe recovered consciousness, she struggled to sit up, and smiled faintly at her friend, stammering apologies.

‘Captain Grant told me some bad news, which upset me—I have to return to England to-night,’ she said. ‘Oh dear, my hair is all anyhow!’

‘We will soon arrange that, my dear, when you are a little better; I can manage nicely with my pocket-comb,’ returned Miss Cartwright cheerfully. ‘Our friend hinted as much to me. Your aunt is ill, and wants to see you at once—indeed, she may be dying, I fear, poor soul! Oh, your god-mother, is it? She brought you up? My dear, it is your duty to go without delay.’

Then, to cover the awkwardness of the situation, she rang for the *femme de chambre*, ordered tea and coffee to be brought up, and

began fussing with the girl until the sun was sinking low in the sky, and, to her relief, she heard a carriage dash up wildly to the hotel front. Looking out of window, she saw Grant alight, and ran down to meet him.

‘Everything is arranged,’ he shortly said. ‘But I must see her alone—at once.’

‘I will bring her down—there is not a soul in the salon; there is hardly a visitor left in the hotel,’ replied Miss Cartwright. ‘Go in there; we shall not be long. She was just a little faint, but is all right now. You are taking her to England by the mail? Splendid! The journey will be a break.’

She ran off, and Andrew John Quarles—who had adopted the name of Grant, which was his maternal grandfather’s, when he rebelled against and left his unnatural and eccentric father as a boy—paced the huge salon, with its parqueted floor and mirrors and gilding, frowning and miserable.

‘I must not mince matters; it must be fact that I tell her, bitter though the truth will be to her, poor darling!’ he told himself.

‘What an accursed task—to be a brutal mental surgeon, and cut and slash at the wounded spirit of the creature I love far, far better than myself! I never dreamt that man’s love for woman was like this—absorbing, devouring, tyrannical, seizing one as in a vice, and compelling one to this and that which one would almost rather be shot than do.’

Minutes passed which seemed ages to him. Then suddenly he heard the door open, and Zoe came in, pale but calm.

‘Well?’ she inquiringly said, standing still and gazing searchingly at him as if she tried to read her fate in his face, his eyes.

‘Come and sit here, dear, and I will tell you just what happened. Our interview was short and to the purpose,’ he began, leading her gently to one of the velvet settees against the wall, and seating himself on a light chair opposite her. ‘The spurious Andrew Quarles was taken aback by the fact of my existence, and thought at first I was scheming to rob him of the fortune which is legally his, my poor father having died before he altered his will. As soon as he found I wanted nothing,



that I had enough of my own, also that I had made myself acquainted with his life-history as far as it could be tracked, he cringed to me—he even blessed me for my action in the affair, Zoe. Don't waste a regret on him—for God's sake don't—he is not worthy of it. You, dear innocent child, cannot imagine what bad men can be and do, and, believe me, he is a bad man! But now, before I say one word more, read this.'

He drew an undirected envelope from his breast pocket, and gave it to her. She opened it in silence, and read :

'ZOE,

'I swear to you that until two or three days ago I had no idea that my poor wife, whom I believed to be dead, was alive. I married you in absolute ignorance of the fact, so you must not blame me. I have been passionately fond of you—have I not?—and I thought, as you were generally suspected of being my poor adopted father's murderess, the very noblest thing I could do was to protect you, and show my belief in your innocence by making you my wife.

'As I have lately felt that you did not care for me at all, I have no fear that you will fret. You are so spotlessly innocent that you will begin life afresh as if our few weeks' companionship had never been.

'You have the best of protectors in Mr. Andrew Quarles (alias Captain Grant). He is certainly one of the finest fellows I have ever met, and as your nearest male relative he undertakes to see you made as happy as possible for the future. Accompany him to England with a light heart, Zoe: my best wishes follow you. If forgetting me would add to your future comfort and well-being, pray forget that such an individual exists as your misguided cousin (by adoption),

'ANDREW BASIL QUARLES.'

As she read the heartless, cold-blooded words of a man who had been, almost from their first meeting, a persistent, passionate wooer, and who in the first weeks of their honeymoon had bid fair almost to alienate her liking for him by his uxorious devotion, Zoe felt half paralyzed with horror that such things could be. She began to shiver slightly,

and the livid pallor of her lovely face alarmed her cousin.

‘You are ill,’ he anxiously began. But she stammered feebly that she was not.

‘Should I be human if reading that did not make me feel half dead with shame?’ she faltered. ‘For I once believed I loved him—loved—*that!*’

She shuddered afresh. Then she handed him the letter, asking him to read it, sank back, closed her eyes, and strove to face the hideous facts of her life.

Strung up as he was—on the rack with anguish on her account, his ‘spotless lily’ smirched by being dragged through the mire by that worthless, selfish schemer—he scanned the miserable document rapidly, contemptuously, then seated himself by her. He would have taken her hand, but knightly reverence for an outraged and insulted lady forbade.

‘My dear cousin, I told you the man was worthless. What else can you expect from him except this?’ he gently said. ‘He does not deserve a second thought of yours, a

passing remembrance, and his only redeeming feature is that he admits it. Come, let us think of what we have to do. He had the grace to undertake the packing of your trunks, which will be at the station, addressed to Miss Vigors in England, in good time for the train; and I brought your dressing-bag and "hold-all"—they are in the hall. If you wish to change your dress for the night-journey, Miss Cartwright has that room upstairs. You will have a *coupé-lit* to yourself; I have seen to that. I shall travel in a smoking-carriage, and keep an eye on you when we have a few minutes' halt now and then on the way.'

It was not long before Zoe, dazed and weak, but composed, was driving with Miss Cartwright and her cousin to the *gare* at Nice. After she had clung in a warm, silent embrace to her kind American stranger friend, she mounted to her *coupé*, and in a few moments was being carried away from the scene of that honeymoon of hers, which was no real honeymoon, and from that awful hour of revelation when she learned that, wife

as she had been, she was yet no wife, but 'a nondescript,' as she called herself. Then, dusk giving place to darkness, she flung herself on the cushions of her bed-carriage, and cried her heart out like a disappointed, frightened child.

## CHAPTER XX

THAT journey from the Riviera to England was like a dream to Zoe. She only seemed to awaken when, after it appeared to her as if she had lived in trains, and cabins of vessels for weeks, watched over from afar by her cousin—who manifested his solicitude by a dozen different delicate attentions—he said with a certain triumph, as the train halted at the station he told her they would alight at, and he opened the door of their reserved compartment and sprang out :

‘ Welcome, my dearest cousin, to your new home !’

He had purposely planned the words to rouse her ; for she seemed to have sunk into a mental apathy, which, when he had joined her at Dover and travelled in the same carriage, had considerably alarmed him. And, with a thrill of satisfaction, he noted that

they brought a more living look into her dulled eyes.

‘Home? Where? What home do you mean? I have none,’ she almost angrily returned. Anger awakened memory and reason. ‘I beg your pardon,’ she pathetically said. ‘I am terribly ungrateful.’

‘You are everything you ought to be, dear,’ said Quarles, assisting her to alight.

Then, after hailing a sleepy-looking porter and giving directions for the luggage which the guard was hauling out to be brought down, he gave her his arm.

‘Your godmother is in a different position now, fortunately,’ he told her, as he escorted her down a wooden staircase to the station yard, where a smart-looking brougham was in waiting, and he signed to the coachman. ‘I will tell you as we are driving to the Grange.’

The clouds seemed to disperse from Zoe’s weary brain. Suddenly she awakened to the actual surroundings of her changed life. She saw the brave-looking, stalwart form of her protector-cousin as he leisurely talked with the coachman in fawn livery who had climbed

down from his driving-seat, and who emphasized his replies by repeated touches of his hat. She thought what a 'tower of strength' he looked to lean against. Then she glanced at the elms budding greenly above the blossoming hedges; she heard the distant rumble of the train as a diapason accompaniment to the songs of some thrushes in the garden of the stationmaster's cottage. How pretty it was—the white cottage with the red-tiled roof! She sniffed at the scent of the lilac-trees and the hyacinths in the well-kept garden. She knew it was the stationmaster's. He came down the stairs, and, after a word with her cousin, opened the little wooden gate and passed in. The red-faced porter came down, her trunks—how she loathed the sight of them!—on his back. They were hauled into a light cart by a youth sitting patiently on the seat. What did it all mean?

'Come, dear,' said her cousin, offering her his arm, and leading her to the brougham door like some precious creature which could crumble into dust at a breath.

Then he helped her in, took his seat at her



side, and they drove briskly off. Leaning back against the cushions, inhaling the sweet, cool, spring breath of English fields, hedges, blossoming orchards and gardens, a new love of life seemed to kindle within her.

‘It is like a fairy-tale,’ she told herself with inward passion; ‘and he—he is the prince!’

No sooner had the thought crossed her mind than she severely rebuked herself. She, an abandoned wife, an outraged woman, to dream of joys? Some ancestral legacy of Puritan austerity stifled her incipient heartening, awakened by the joy-laden spring atmosphere and the unconscious delight within her—delightful comfort, rather—of the welcome surprise of her dear, suffering godmother’s good fortune. She turned to Quarles as they drove between the high hedges of the country road.

‘What do you mean—my godmother is in a “different position”?’ she sharply asked.

‘What I say, my dear child,’ he returned, gazing honestly into her troubled eyes. ‘Do you think I should have taken you to a penurious establishment, such as she herself

told me hers had been, with her widowed sister? They are both in different circumstances. They have a very charming little place, called Redwood Grange—your future home. This is their carriage. If you want to know the why and wherefore, they will tell you better than I can. Look! that is the house. I did not know you could see it from here.'

He pulled the check-string, and ordered the coachman to halt. Then he pointed out a grey stone gabled house, just visible between the trees, with ivy and magnolia climbing about its walls and around the mullioned windows. A grey column of smoke rose steadily from one of the tall chimneys. About the house were laurels, yews, box-trees, clipped into quaint shapes. A cedar half hid the frontage. It was a typical old English home.

'Do you like it?' he asked, turning to her.

Tears were in her eyes; her heart melted with the joy of knowing the good woman who had been her devoted protectress housed in so congenial a fashion. Still, she was inwardly rebellious, because she was suspicious.

‘It is absurd to ask me. Of course I do!’ she almost pettishly replied.

Would he never lose patience with her? she wondered—as, without resenting her asperity or seeming aware of it, he gave his order to Miss Vigors’ coachman to proceed. Then they halted before a gate. The coachman clambered down, opened it, and, climbing to his seat again, drove in along a gravelled drive, halting before a porch decked with hanging trails of ivy, where a little lady in widow’s weeds stood, looking anxious, her lined, working features a direct contrast to the smooth, pleasant face of a white-capped maid-servant in the background.

‘My dearest Zoe, Susan will be so happy! Thank you so much, Mr. Quarles, for bringing her,’ uttered the little widow brokenly, and, clasping one of Zoe’s hands with two birdlike little claws, she drew her gently through a low-ceiled hall, furnished with old oak, to a corridor ending in a stained-glass window, from which ascended the shallow old staircase with its broad balustrade. Here she opened a door.

Zoe found herself in a long, low-ceiled room.

The broad beams told of age as well as the oak-panelled walls, on which hung oil-paintings of long ago. She only noted vaguely that the rich Persian carpet, the carved high-backed chairs, the massive table, the sideboard crowded with plate, made up a picture fit for an artist's brush, when, at the end of the room where there was a wide bay-window, she saw a recumbent figure on a big couch, and on the pile of cushions the sweet, pale, thin, and wistful face of her godmother, Miss Vigors.

As Miss Vigors' soft brown eyes met hers, as her thin arms were stretched out yearningly to meet her, the girl seemed to collapse, mind and body. Kneeling by the side of the only mother she had ever known, she poured out the history of her troublous young life since they parted a brief two years before with sobs and inarticulate cries. Then, suddenly stricken with remorse that she should have heartlessly burdened Miss Vigors' already heavily-laden life with her woes and wrongs, she begged her pardon for her selfishness.

'You see, I have no one in the world—but you,' she asseverated. 'I never had.'

Miss Vigors was, happily, less sensibly

affected by her god-daughter's recital than if she had not had previous visits from the real Andrew Quarles. Her calm, her tenderness, were as balm to Zoe's wounded pride; her sanguine view of future happiness even in this vale of tears, fortified Zoe's drooping spirits. Both godmother and godchild failed to notice how minutes passed, then hours. The entrance of the parlourmaid to lay the table for luncheon astonished them.

'You see, I have to be carried down and up again, so it saves trouble if I spend my day here,' said Miss Vigors cheerfully. 'And here is Sister Dorcas, who will take you to your room.'

'Dorcas' was Mrs. Rankin, the widowed sister, who came bustling in, and after one anxious glance at the invalid, who was slowly dying of internal disease, looked reassured, and with a cheerful smile suggested that Zoe should see her room.

'Your luggage has gone up. I am sure you must want your luncheon,' she said, offering to send a maid to unpack, which Zoe declined.

She looked gloomily at those wedding-

trunks as Mrs. Rankin left her to herself, wondering how she would nerve herself to go through the wardrobe she had believed to be her marriage trousseau. Even the delightful bedchamber, with its panelled walls and polished floor, its white drapery, its antique furniture and quaint old pictures, failed to please her while those boxes of hers stared her in the face.

She groaned as she bathed her face and buried it in the delicate lavender-scented towel. She sighed—a bitter, sobbing sigh—as she looked out of her casement window at the shrubbery, with the green fields and their sleek, grazing cows beyond, and the light tufts of clouds almost resting on the blue hill-tops in the background.

Then she suddenly started. The warm blood crimsoned her cheeks. She heard her cousin Andrew's voice below.

‘I had quite forgotten him,’ she told herself gladly, for she was annoyed that the mere sound of his voice should bring colour to her cheeks in that fashion. ‘What a good thing! I shall be able to do without him for the future. I must! I must lead an anchorite’s

life here, or I shall never forgive myself. I have my disgraceful haste in marrying that miserable creature to atone for. Months, years, of a strict, hardworking life will be necessary to make up for that.'

She felt as coldly virtuous, as severely aloof in spirit from the opposite sex, as a Roman matron—as she left her bedroom and went down in obedience to the summons of a gong in the hall. What should she say to her cousin in thanks? she wondered, as she arrived at the quaint old corridor and heard the feminine voices in the dining-room.

She pictured him as silent from intensity of feeling as he sat watching for her appearance. The thought of his love—she knew he loved her well enough—repelled her. She determined to frown upon him in advance, lest he should give any sign of caring for her in a manner more than cousinly.

Entering the dining-room slowly, she gave a disdainful glance at the table, then halted in surprise. But one person was seated, and at its head, carving a chicken with minute care. Only two covers were laid. The chicken-carver was Mrs. Rankin.

‘Ah, that’s right ; come and sit here, dear,’ she said warmly, waving the carving-knife towards a high-backed chair at her right. ‘I must see after Susy first. She eats the tiniest bit of the breast, poor dear !’

A little table was at the invalid’s side. Glancing towards it as the maid carried the little tray with the plate and the glass of claret to the end of the room, it seemed to Zoe as if everything about her rocked and swayed. She was grateful to Mrs. Rankin for being a voluble talker. Only when the second course of delicate puddings was on the table did she summon courage to inquire for her cousin, who seemed as ignored by the two ladies as if he had never been.

‘Is not my cousin coming to luncheon?’ she asked, steadying her voice with an effort.

‘Why, my dear, surely you know : he must have told you that he had to catch the 1.30 express?’ asked Mrs. Rankin, staring at her in surprise.

‘Zoe,’ said the invalid—and as she raised her voice to be heard at the other end of the room it sounded shrill and almost querulous—



‘Mr. Quarles did not like to disturb you to say good-bye. He will write to-night, if possible, he said. I was to make his farewells for him.’

‘Oh,’ said Zoe shortly. For the first few minutes the shock of finding herself abandoned by the man she loved, the man to whom she owed her capacity for loving, her knowledge of what love really was, affected her so deeply that she was hardly conscious of her surroundings. She could only fight feebly but desperately against the growing faintness which brought black shadows before her eyes and caused the horrible singing and buzzing in her ears. As soon as she could evade the tender attentions of the good ladies, who seemed full to the brim of solicitous sympathy, she escaped into the garden.

It was a beautiful flower-garden, green with the first spring verdure, bright and sweet with blossoming borders of tender flowers, the infants of the passing year. Birds sang joyously among the lilacs, laburnums, and budding may-trees. Sunbeams seemed playing hide-and-seek about the shrubs and across the lawns, as, far away

above, the majestic white cumuli sailed athwart the blue expanse like stately swans upon a translucent lake. In an access of desperation Zoe saw and noted it all, and felt each detail as a needle-touch upon her smarting mental being. She fled along until she reached the end of the grounds, a grass-walk bordered by groves of shrubs and ending in a rustic arbour with wicker chairs and table, an ideal and absolutely sequestered retreat.

Here, alone, she sank upon a wicker settee and abandoned herself to the blackest of black moods of hopelessness and despair. It seemed to her that in the beautiful, smiling world awakening joyously, riotously, to the abandonment and glory of a renewed life after its winter hibernation, she was the only discordant unit.

‘The scapegoat!’ she bitterly thought. ‘They are all more or less happy. That wretched man who dared to marry me, and his real wife. Miss Cartwright, because she lives her own life—a peaceful one. These two poor dear things, godmother and her sister, because they were poor, and can enjoy

being comparatively rich. Uncle Andrew Quarles—because he is dead !’

The birds sang, the nestlings twittered, the leaves rustled happily in the spring breeze, but Zoe’s soul was dark as night. She, however, would not return to the house until the terrible depression lifted somewhat ; and by degrees she worked to dispel it until she was able to take a slightly less saturnine view of life in general and her own in particular.

And the means she employed to attain a scrap of contentment were—anticipation of her new cousin’s promised letter.

‘ He will write and explain why he forsook me. He is a man of honour ; and oh, he must have a tender as well as a generous heart, or he could not have been so good and dear,’ she mournfully thought. In the very recollection of his presence there seemed some sort of comfort. She dwelt upon the memory of him hour after hour until evening came—and when she suddenly awakened in the night.

Then came morning and the anticipation of his letter.

‘ When does the post come in, Barton ?’

she asked of the maid when she brought the hot water and tea. 'At nine? How late!'

'Everything seems late and cur'ous here, m'm, after London,' said the demure Barton, as she arranged the tray leisurely on a little table by the bedside. 'I often wonder how ladies like my mistress and Miss Vigors can bear to live in a place of this sort. The church on Sundays is half full of labouring folk, tramping in in those dreadful hobnail boots. And them corduroys!—and a good many come in them—well, there's not much smell of violets and things about them.'

Barton sniffed and departed, and Zoe, slightly distracted by the diversion, sprang up, dressed, and was down in the dining-room before the parlourmaid brought in the silver urn with the air of carrying a victorious trophy, followed by a neat housemaid with a butler's tray of breakfast dishes. Then came the bringing down of Miss Vigors—who would not give up her ordinary habits—in an invalid carrying-chair. Just as her god-mother was being settled on her sofa, Zoe heard an important ring. She started.

‘The postman?’ she almost deliriously asked. ‘May I go?’

‘My dear, Barton will bring the letters in,’ said Mrs. Rankin, with slightly surprised dignity. And the girl had to endure, her fingers clenched, her teeth set, while the unconscious parlourmaid retired with graceful slowness into the hall, and, after what seemed a protracted parleying with a gruff-voiced personage at the door, returned with letters on a salver, which she presented to her mistress, who scanned them shortsightedly and doled them out. Five were for Miss Vigors; her pupils seemed to remember her now—Zoe recognised some handwritings familiar in school-days as Mrs. Rankin placed them in a row on the table-cloth. One was left, its face downward.

‘That is for me,’ cried Zoe impatiently; ‘I am sure it is.’

‘No,’ said Mrs. Rankin, with a calm which was maddening to Zoe, peering at the address: ‘“Mrs. Rankin.” It is for me. Oh, I see—*Care of Mrs. Rankin!*’

Zoe took it with trembling fingers, and was about to open it, when she caught sight of

the words, 'Very private. Be quite alone to read this.'

Was that a good or a bad omen in regard to its contents? she asked herself, as she thrust it into her pocket and nerved herself to be patient during the slow breakfast hour. As soon as she could escape without exciting comment, she sped into the grounds.

## CHAPTER XXI

AT first the agitated girl walked leisurely along the gravelled path, under the arches which would soon be covered with climbing roses—already the tiny green leaves disclosed buds which waxed daily plumper—but as she distanced the gabled house, and, turning a corner, was shielded by a little grove of conifers from any possible prying eyes, she literally took to her heels, and ran along the grass walk to the arbour like a young fawn. There she flung herself into a basket-chair, tore open her cousin's letter with feverish haste, and read :

‘ ZOE,

‘ While you were in such a cruel position, I could not tell you of that which would pain you. Now, as you are in England, I have to do so, that you may regard the

Grange as a hiding-place until I have succeeded in proving your absolute innocence of your uncle and my father's death by poison.

'If you had not been shielded by your doctor, you might have been arrested and charged with murder, for a glass containing traces of the poison which caused his death was found under your window, in a position where it could only have been if thrown from that window, and brought to him. Convinced of your integrity, that good man Dr. Bird changed that glass for another. It was a daring, desperate act born of chivalry.

'Although even this was done to shield you, public feeling has been excited, and both you and my poor father's adopted son are suspected.

'I am now about to prove both your innocence and his. I, and I alone, can explain how, why, and when my father died.

'This is the first grave topic I have to write you about. The second concerns you and myself alone.

'Zoe, I love you. I loved you at first



sight. I never loved before—I shall never love again.

‘ But I have determined not to ask *you* to marry *me*. I have watched you narrowly, continuously. Yours is an emotional, therefore a vacillating, temperament. You are exquisitely beautiful, and men will flock about you as wasps about an open jar of honey. You think you like me—I know that. But we met when you were in an exceptional position—neglected by a man who was your husband in name, but not in reality. Your clinging to my sympathy meant nothing under the circumstances. I have determined not to offer myself to you as your husband, although to possess you as my beloved and cherished wife is the one and only thing I wish and crave for. I only say this: If you care for me sufficiently to marry me, the one word “Come,” written or wired, will bring me; and for that word from you I am content to wait patiently until the word is said by Another, my God and Lord, at death.

‘ Meanwhile, under no position in your regard but that of your betrothed husband, called to you by your own will, unaided

and unbiassed, will I ever look upon you again.

‘Yours for ever,

‘ANDREW QUARLES.’

Stunned and sickened by the first awful sentences of the letter, Zoe hardly grasped the remainder of its contents. Seated staring vacantly at the green grass, at the laurels, hardly knowing where she was, that dreadful day of her uncle's death seemed to return from the past and confront her. His senile rage when she would not consent to give up all idea of marriage with his adopted son ; his horrible, grotesque appearance as—his pale eyes like spots of fire in his shrunken face—he shook his trembling, clenched, attenuated fist at her, and shrieked, in that weird, toneless voice of dying age : ‘ I will be revenged ; you will remember me, my girl, I tell you that ! ’ How often those last words of his, a climax to his vituperative denunciation of her dead parents, had echoed in her ears between sleeping and waking, bringing a vague terror to her soul, forcing the chill sweat from her young body !

Could that medicine-glass found under her window have been flung there by him? It was true that he was weak that day, but not too weak to open his window and throw a glass, first primed with drops of the poison which killed him, among the bushes under her windows.

‘What a hideous idea to have!’ she told herself. ‘How can I suspect the poor old man of such a wicked thing? No; it was some hateful chance. But how terrible to be suspected of such a crime!’

If Quarles had skilfully planned a counter-shock to that she had received, to find herself betrayed as ‘Andrew’ had betrayed her, he could not have been more successful.

In the overpowering anguish of finding herself suspected of, at least, complicity in her uncle’s death, her mock marriage became a secondary trouble. Horror at being thought so base braced, nerved her, roused the fighting instincts that are the basis of all natures, however weak and frail.

After the first numbness—and the consequent agony of mind as it passed away—had come and gone, Zoe was really another

creature — a being more like the brave, cheerful girl, whose only fault was an extra bold and independent spirit, and who had been the popular young governess at Newnham House.

She read Quarles' letter calmly, deliberately several times. Then she soberly thought about its contents.

Her overpowering desire was to rush wildly off to the place where she had been maligned, to assert her innocence in some public way. This she resolutely repressed.

'No,' she told herself. 'Let him do as he says—clear both myself and that poor, miserable wretch.' (She closed her eyes and gave a slight shudder of inward loathing and disgust as she remembered the man she had believed to be her husband.) "Men must work, women must weep." I will not "weep" over my troubles, but I will bear them, and alone. How could he think that, after I had been trodden underfoot in the dirt, I would marry him—not only marry him, but ask him to marry me? How low his opinion is of me! He has been very good, kind, noble, but I will be dead to him

from this very hour, and he shall be dead to me !'

Braced by the ascetic sternness of her idea, she paced the grass walk, backwards and forwards, up and down, nerving herself for her monotonous future—how dreary it would be when she shut Andrew out of her life she well knew—as deliberately and coolly as if she were an architect mentally sketching the initial plans of his future dwelling.

'He said I must begin life again as Zoe Blount here,' she said with a pale smile. 'I will not only begin it, but go on with it until I am as prim an old maid as godmother, and shall meet him, perhaps, as a doddering, grey-haired old man, boring people with anecdotes of his grandchildren.'

However, even that thought of him melted her ; her eyes smarted with rising tears : it was necessary to use the cautery to this absurd passion of hers ; this deep yearning for him must be cut out like some deadly cancer.

She read the letter again with the distrust and suspicion of an enemy, and found that it could be read as one of the most subtly-

planned dismissals of a friend or lover ever conceived by an unscrupulous diplomatist of daily life.

‘The woman who could marry him on those terms would be the lowest of her sex—would not have a rag of self-respect left!’ she told herself. ‘He is not the true knight I thought him. It was a “pose.” I have done with him, and with the whole of his sex! Fortunately, no man except godmother’s doctor and parson would care to come to Redwood Grange!’

And with this feeling as her staff and support she returned to the house, ‘clothed and in her right mind,’ as she termed it to herself, to begin an entirely new life.

## CHAPTER XXII

At first Zoe started her new life bravely, perhaps with a courage which was somewhat too ostentatious. Choosing an opportunity on a day when Miss Vigors had one of her brief rallies, she was open with her.

‘It has cost me a struggle—a great struggle—to take up my cross, dear, but I have done it,’ she almost triumphantly told her. ‘I mean to regard my life since the time when you sold the school, and poor me with it, to Mrs. Mercer, and this when I have come back to you again as Zoe Blount, as a blank. Pray, pray never mention it, or anything connected with it, to me again! You will not? I thought you would be ready to help me. You always have been. Well, that is settled. The next thing is—my future, my new life with you. I have not come here to be dependent upon you, yet I cannot bring

myself to accept anything from that cruel wretch who has ruined my life.'

'My dear, dear child, you shall not!' Miss Vigors replied, taking the slim white hand of the girl she had brought up from infancy to beautiful womanhood between hers, and clasping it tightly. 'But do be reasonable. Your poor uncle left a provision for you. You have a right to it. You dislike having anything to do with that adopted son of his? Then you shall not.'

During Miss Vigors' tender sayings, her cooing murmurs of her affection for her Zoe and of her hopes for future happy days together—which were touching, considering their impossibility as far as she, a dying woman, was concerned—a transient wonder as to the source of this new wealth of her godmother and her widowed sister flashed, unwelcomed, unexpected, upon Zoe's mind. She had never heard of any expectations of theirs. Indeed, Miss Vigors had fretted on the subject of her possible poverty. She had confessed that her 'bogie' had been her death in some workhouse infirmary.

It was on the tip of Zoe's tongue to ask



the cause of the sisters' changed fortunes ; but she repressed the inclination. To speak of such things then seemed to her the worst possible taste.

But when she had settled down at the Grange, and was leading a simple but useful life as youthful companion to the dying spinster and the nervous widow, she contrived to steer a conversation with Mrs. Rankin in the direction of their present circumstances.

She had no success. Mrs. Rankin did not appear to understand her, and began to speak of other things.

Brave though Zoe was, lovely though the smiling country, green with springtide, golden in sunshine, seemed to her even in her fits of depression, the days were very long, the weeks lagged and dragged wearily away.

Her flow of spirits ebbed. She blamed herself severely for feeling her luxurious life, so free from harass and worry, monotonous to the verge of irritation, almost desperation. But as the spring went slowly by, and glowing, luscious summer was imminent, she began to wonder how long she would bear the burden of this dreary, tedious round of

insignificant details in the mockingly-beautiful world.

‘Everything is so smooth,’ she told herself— ‘the cup of tea, the morning tub, the delicate breakfast served to a nicety. Then the talk with godmother, and that dreadful wandering about the village with Mrs. Rankin, asking after Johnny Pavitt’s whooping-cough and Sarah Jane Smith’s broken arm ; poking one’s nose into people’s cottages, which are as much their castles as any palace its prince’s.’

Then the well-cooked luncheon ; another talk with her godmother ; afternoon tea, and perhaps a drive in Mrs. Rankin’s pony-carriage ; then dinner, and deadly bore for the rest of the evening.

‘It would be almost better in prison,’ she sometimes thought. ‘The fight to please the authorities, the struggle to get through one’s work, and the very rage with one’s self at having got one’s self into such a place, would prevent this awful feeling of death in life !’

Then came a hot, bright June. Pink spots upon the green hedges under the leafy trees were the budding wild-roses. The

scent of one of the earliest hay harvests on record was in the sweet, clear air. One morning Zoe, awakening in the sunshine to hear the whole rural world astir—the pigeons cooing in the copse close by, the hens loudly proclaiming the arrival of their latest egg, a thrush carolling in a bush under her window—felt suddenly a rebel.

‘I cannot stand it any longer,’ she panted, springing out of bed and holding both hands over her wildly-beating heart. ‘I cannot sit still and endure while every other creature is awake, alive, at work. I must *do* something! But I am chained here while my dear deputy-mother is alive! I cannot go away—find something to do elsewhere. It must be here, on the spot. And—there is nothing, nothing!’

Her beautiful head with its wealth of floating hair drooped on her breast as she gave a great sigh and stretched herself with longing to be no longer such a chrysalis, but to *live*, to work—anyhow, in any way.

And just as she was disconsolately telling herself that there was no hope—that she must make up her mind to continue the

dreary 'trivial round,' which seemed driving her literally mad—the sweet scent of new-mown hay floating in at the open casement assailed her nostrils and suggested an idea.

'I might go and make hay,' she thought. 'I remember godmother's tales of how she and her sisters went into the hayfields and worked, and delighted in it; she cannot refuse me.'

The need of vigorous physical exercise had, unconsciously, grown upon her as her young strength was fed by the pure air and the good, regular aliment. It was a relief to her when, after an argument between Mrs. Rankin and her sister, the invalid, who sided with Zoe, she triumphed as usual through her very weakness.

'Take her to Mrs. Trott at the Mill Farm, Dorcas, this morning,' said Miss Vigors as autocratically as her faint voice would allow. 'I would take her myself if I could, poor dear child! Such an innocent notion, to make hay.'

'My dearest Susan, I am going to take her as fast as I can, if you will only just

allow me time enough to give the orders to cook,' was Mrs. Rankin's injured reply.

But she said no more until she was trying to keep pace with Zoe's quick, vigorous footsteps as, a young Atalanta in a white frock and broad straw hat, wreathed with pink to match her waistband, she hastened along the lanes and across the churchyard to the Mill Farm, whose wide fields, dotted with moving figures among the lines of new-mown hay, stretched away to the foot of richly-wooded slopes.

Then she querulously compared the young women of the passing era to the girls of her day, of course to the disadvantage of the latest developments in womanhood.

'All that you girls seem to aim at in these days is to be imitation men, with your games and your athletics, and your degrees and caps and gowns, and the tailor-made things, and cycling and motoring, and generally making spectacles of yourselves the angels must weep at,' was her angry peroration, after which, breathless, she gave a gasp and stood still to recover herself.

'I hope the angels won't weep to see me haymaking,' said Zoe demurely. 'Myself, if

there are any angels as we imagine them, I am quite sure they have something far better to do.'

'Don't be profane, pray,' snapped Mrs. Rankin.

Then they came upon the Mill Farm, a rural homestead with a big old barn, picturesque outbuildings, orchards, and gardens. Walking up the neat path between blossoming borders, and knocking the brass knocker on the open door, the farmer's wife herself, wearing a white bibbed apron, came to the door, and ushered them into her best parlour, which boasted a wealth of objects under glass shades, a brand-new suite in tapestry, a gay Brussels carpet, and many interesting oleographs issued with special numbers of weekly illustrated papers, and which had a curious composite perfume of burnt wood, apples, sweet cake, and mice, all of which might well have been present in the low-ceiled apartment at one time or another.

'Of course Mr. Trott will be delighted to see you in the hayfield, miss,' said Mrs. Trott genially, when she heard what was asked by one of 'the new ladies at the Grange, who

were so kind to the poor old folks in the village.' 'If you'll go straight down the path to the right, after you are out of the garden-gate, it'll take you to Five-acre Field, where you'll see my husbin near to one of the hedges. He'll find you a light rake, miss, and a shady corner out of the worst of the sun.'

'Oh, I like the sun; I have been in the South of Europe this winter,' said Zoe, reddening.

'Well, that is odd, miss; so 'as my sister,' returned Mrs. Trott, interested. 'She's maid to Lady Whiteford, and wrote to me as where she was the oranges and orange-blossoms grows together on the trees out in the fields, and the hedges was covered with pink roses when we here was under two foot of snow. I'll show you the fotergrarf she sent me of the place.'

Mrs. Trottlumbered up, and, finding the photograph on the walnut centre table among the gay cloth-covered books which surrounded some wax water-lilies on a looking-glass under a big round glass shade, handed it proudly to Zoe.

She stared at it with a pang. It was the part of the Promenade at Nice opposite the Hôtel des Pèlerins, and showed the very windows of her and that false husband's rooms.

For the next few moments she forgot where she was. All surged back. Her fancied love for her uncle's adopted son, which she now knew had been the effect of 'propinquity,' when they had no companions but each other in the forlorn old mansion; her uncle's sudden death; the inquest; her flight to London; her and 'Andrew's' marriage; their journey to Nice; then—the man she loved. Oh! if she had ever doubted her deep, passionate love for her real cousin, she recognised it now, and the revelation made her feel sick at heart.

As she listened to Mrs. Trott's prattle, then accompanied her through the garden, out of the gate, and strolled down to the Five-acre Field by Mrs. Rankin's side, she felt desperately inclined to give up this haymaking idea, to go straight to the telegraph-office then and there, and wire 'Come.'

'Thank Heaven I am prevented from de-



grading myself by the conclusive obstacle—I don't know where he is,' she devoutly thought as the red-faced farmer, looking as surprised as if the two ladies had been a couple of the angels Mrs. Rankin talked about, came a little way to meet them, lifting his straw hat.

'You'll find it 'otter than you think, missie,' he smilingly said as he mopped his bald head with a red handkerchief before replacing his hat. 'But I'm never one to say nay to young ladies' fancies. I'll find you a rake up at the house what Miss Viner, our Rector's daughter, uses when they has a haymakin' tea sometimes, and bring it down to ye if you'll wait 'ere in the shade for a few minutes. 'Ere, you! help me to make a seat for the young lady under the tree.'

The man addressed left his work; Farmer Trott took up armfuls of fragrant hay, his myrmidon imitated him, and in less time than Zoe could have described the process there was a hay throne awaiting her under a tall old elm which sheltered the road also on the other side of the hedge.

Thanking Mr. Trott, she accepted her seat,

and, with one eye on the haymakers, watched Mrs. Rankin's little figure ambling along at the big man's side as he went up to the farm for the promised rake. Then, seeing some pink and white spots on a distant hedge which looked like dog-roses, she said to herself, 'Anything is better than sitting grizzling and worrying here,' and, rising, strolled off to look at them.

As so often happens, when she arrived at the spot she saw far better blooms on another hedge. This was in the very next field, connected with the Five-acre by a gate. She forgot the rake and Farmer Trott in her eagerness for the roses, and was speedily through the gate and standing opposite the hedge, gathering them.

'What does this remind me of?' she asked herself suddenly as a weird sensation swept across her mind like a cold breeze. Then she remembered: it was a dream—at Nice—and *he* had been in it.

'Shall I never get away from the past—never be myself, pure and simple?' she thought in exasperation.

She began picking the roses again, ruth-

lessly, viciously. The thorns ran into her fingers, but she did not care. Suddenly she started and gave a stifled cry, recoiling in alarm.

Her cousin, the real Andrew Quarles, was walking towards her. He was dressed in a grey shooting suit, and swung a cane. She stood and watched him, incredulous, fascinated as he neared her, looking calm and unconcerned—so much so that in furious haste she struggled for equanimity.

‘I did not expect to see you here, I must say,’ she said with a valiant attempt at nonchalance, holding out her hand. ‘Take care; I am all over deep-seated thorns. I shall never get them out.’

‘So am I, all over deep-seated thorns, which, I fear, will never be extracted; so we are companions in misfortune,’ he returned with an easy laugh. ‘But you ask how I came? By rail. Then, hearing where you were—first from Miss Vigors, secondly from that very typical farmer I met leaving the house, after my interview with his wife—I walked.’

‘But—why have you come?’ she asked

resentfully. 'I thought you meant to take no further notice of me until I sent for you. Well, of course I am grateful to you for your kindness and all that; but to expect me to degrade myself like that, knowing how I am indebted to you, was, I do think, the very most ungenerous thing I ever heard of.'

She turned from him, her rosy lips pressed to her bleeding palm, and took out a white wisp of handkerchief seemingly absorbed in wrapping up her wounded hand. He gazed at her with a sad smile. How exquisitely lovely was the tall, slight, willowy figure against the grey-green of that second, smaller hayfield, where the cut hay had been left to dry! How charming was the pose of the little head on the beautiful, slender neck! And—she was not for him.

'Well, I have capitulated as far as this,' he began, seriously. 'I have volunteered for South Africa, and sail next week. I may be killed—the lists are somewhat astonishing—and I thought that if you heard I was smashed to pieces, or my head blown off, or something, you might reproach yourself that you had let me go without your good wishes. So I have

come to fetch them. You cannot say *I* have any false pride.'

She turned slowly round, and gave him a look he never afterwards forgot. It was that of a soul, slowly sinking into an abode of torture, mutely appealing for help. The blossoms dropped from her hands. She hardly knew it.

'You—are going—to the war? Why?' she whispered, her awestricken eyes riveted upon his.

'Because—well, I have no home, you see,' he somewhat roughly answered. 'As you may have guessed, I have given my home away. And, dear, I wanted to tell you that I have left every rood of land, every farthing I possess, to you, just as if you were my own dear wife.'

She blanched to the whiteness of the poor crushed flowers she was unconsciously treading underfoot.

'As I may have guessed, you have given——' she began slowly, as one speaking in a trance.

Then her eyes flashed. She saw it all.

'*You* are my godmother's fortune! The

Grange is yours!' she cried passionately. 'Oh, my cousin—do not go! Take back your home! Only stay!'

She was swaying as she stood, holding out pale hands to keep her balance.

But he thrust his hands in his pockets, and stood there, grim and irresponsible.

'I can only stay—with a wife,' he sternly said. 'If a woman loved me, and asked me to stay for her sake——'

She turned to him with her hands joined, like some little child in prayer.

'Please will you marry me?' she sobbed. 'I know I am not worthy, but if you will, I will try to make up to you——'

Her last words were stayed by his passionate kiss. She was in his arms, on his heart.

After a few minutes of such rapture that neither really knew whether they had been transported to Paradise, or were dead and in the Elysian fields, or, indeed, what was happening, Farmer Trott, wondering 'where the young lady had got to,' suddenly espied a gleam of white in the next field, and approached the gate to see Zoe in her lover's arms.

‘Oh, my God!’ he exclaimed, retreating hastily.

He was not astonished when, a few weeks later, there was considerable excitement in the village. The church bells pealed, the folk assembled in the churchyard, and a quiet wedding was celebrated within the ancient walls—the marriage of Squire Quarles’ real son and his niece Zoe.

\* \* \* \* \*

In long and pleasant wanderings later on, Andrew Quarles told his bride the story of his life.

One item concerned her nearly—the interview between the estranged parent and his only son a few hours before the former’s death.

‘I never dreamt of any foul play, for a very good reason,’ Zoe’s husband told her. ‘He told me that he meant to die. Some little time before, he had visited a great specialist in London, who candidly warned him he had not long to live, but much to suffer. I was not surprised to hear he was gone. I believe he meant to right me, but got suddenly dead sick of everything, and

took that fatal dose. He knew I did not want his money.'

'Nor do I,' said Zoe, nestling happily against him. 'I want nothing—but *you*.'

THE END





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