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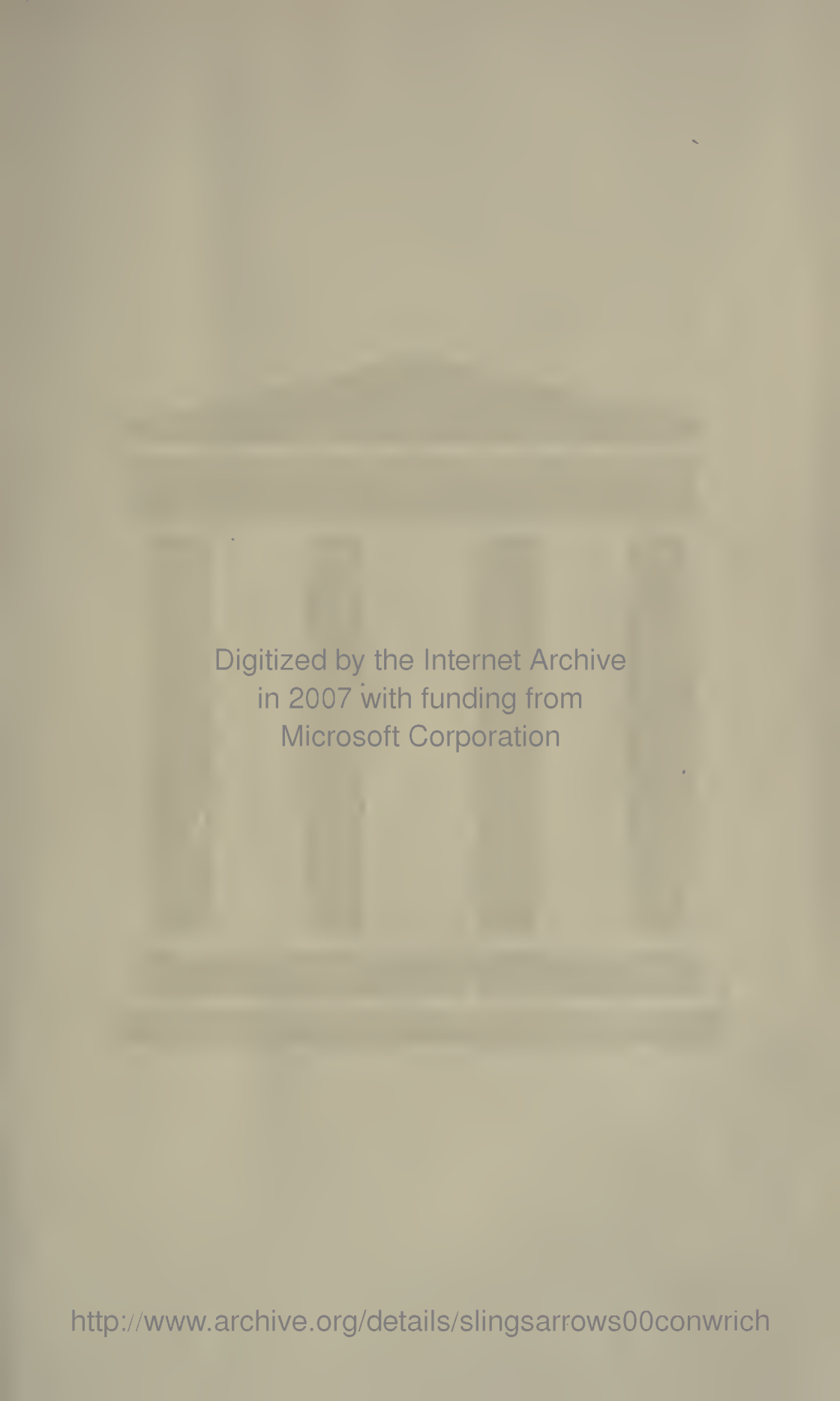
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SLINGS AND ARROWS

By Hugh Conway

Author of "Called Back"

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Slings and Arrows.

CHAPTER I.

A Cynic.

AS the tale which I am about to tell is my own: as I myself am the hero—a pitiful enough hero—of these pages, I shall, by-and-by, be forced to say so much about my own affairs that I may well begin by sparing a few lines to those of another man, a man on whose grave the grass has been growing for many a long year.

His name was Julian Loraine. His home, from the day when first I knew him to the day of his death, was Herstal Abbey, a fine old house in that part of wooded Somersetshire where railways have not yet come.

732

Although Mr. Loraine was a man of wealth, and moreover by education and, I believe, family fully entitled to take a high social position, Herstal Abbey was not his ancestral home. He had acquired it by simple right of purchase; having bought out an old, improvident, but popular county family—bought it out so completely, that if he did not literally step into its shoes, he sat in its very chairs and used its very tables.

Such a wholesale buying up of one of their own class by an unknown man always annoys, perhaps frightens, county people, and Julian Loraine's neighbours for some time looked at him askance. He took none of those steps by which a new comer may occasionally gain access to the magic county circle. He brought no introductions. He gave no large subscription to the hunt—indeed, there was not much hunting in that part. He did not, in a covert way, let his willingness to give grand enter-

tainment be known. He simply completed the purchase of Herstal Abbey and its contents; took up his abode in the old house, and troubled nothing about his neighbours, which no doubt annoyed them all the more.

Little Julian Loraine cared for this. The truth is he was one of the most unsociable men alive, and his cynicism, if distributed through the county, would have made Somersetshire a region in which life would have been unbearable. He was—I pen the words reluctantly—an utter disbeliever in humanity. Perhaps the life which he had hitherto led brought him to this state of mind.

For in a very short time his neighbours found out that he was by no means the unknown man they thought him. People who knew London life had much to say about this Julian Loraine. It was soon made clear to the countryside that the new man's social claims to the right hand of fellowship were

indisputable; but other things were also made clear.

Loraine had led a terrible life—the very fastest of the fast. The wonder was that he had survived—even greater wonder that he was still wealthy. At one time it was thought he had run through everything, for he had disappeared, and no one saw anything of him for years. But it turned out he had only been leading a roving life in far countries. Repenting, let us hope.—No; Julian Loraine was not a nice man.

But, nice or not, no one had any longer the wish to keep Mr. Loraine at arm's length. Had he cared for it, he might have enjoyed mixing with the pick of county society. But he treated civility almost as he treated coldness, with complete indifference; and it soon became understood that the owner of Herstal Abbey was a man who no longer cared to mix with his kind.

It was, of course, incomprehensible that anyone should buy a fine property and settle down to the life of a recluse: the more so, as the man was still in the prime of life, handsome, and wealthy. But Julian Loraine was an incomprehensible man. I, for one, have never been able to determine his true character. Perhaps I have shunned investigating it. Perhaps, had I tried, I should have been unable to gather trustworthy information as to his true nature, from the fact that the tales afloat concerning his early life would reach me last of all.

When he bought Herstal Abbey he was a widower with one son, a boy of seven. This boy he petted and neglected alternately. There were days when the child was with him from morn to eve; there were weeks in which he never saw him from Sunday morning to Saturday night; there were months during which Mr. Loraine went

wandering off, heaven knows where, leaving the child to the care of servants.

Whether at home or abroad, he kept up his establishment in a lavish, wasteful manner. He threw his money about in a cynical way, as one who cared not how it went. He expected his servants would rob him—no doubt they did. This he considered but human nature, and troubled nothing about it; but woe to the man or woman who in the slightest degree neglected anything which his comfort or whim demanded! His dependants soon understood their master's peculiarities, and by the exercise of due care managed to keep their places for years and years, and no doubt grew rich upon the money he wasted.

As will soon be seen, I have related all, or the greater part of the above, from hearsay. The following incident in Mr. Loraine's life I can vouch for, as I heard it from his own lips.

In the year 1853 he was returning from Australia. He did not tell me what had taken him there, but I suspect he went in search of health. He was in a sailing vessel —the *Black Swan* was her name. There were other passengers—men, women, and children. One night there was a crash, a horrible grinding sound, a recoil, and the *Black Swan* quietly settled down to the bottom of the ocean. Whether the disaster was due to a collision or to a sunken rock was never known. All was over in five minutes, and Julian Loraine found himself swimming for life, yet without a hope of saving it.

In swimming, as indeed in every manly exercise, Loraine was all but unrivalled; but even his great strength was gone when he felt a hand on his collar and was pulled all but insensible into a small boat, which, it appeared, was the only one that had been

lowered or, at any rate, had succeeded in getting away from the wreck.

The sea, fortunately, was comparatively smooth, or the tiny boat could not have outlived the night. When the morning broke, Julian Loraine saw all that survived of the ship and her freight.

Himself, four sailors, three women, and a baby in arms!

The sailors were pulling, not from the hope of reaching land, but to keep the boat's head to the waves. The mother, with her child clasped to her breast, and the two other women were crouching in the stern sheets.

In the boat were a dozen biscuits and a small keg of water.

With the light, all turned to Loraine for advice and aid. He was a man of commanding presence, to whom people of a lower organization would naturally turn in difficulties. He assumed the responsibility.

He told the men to step the mast and hoist what sail they thought safe, and then to steer as close to the wind as possible. He assured them that land was not far off. His only reason, he informed me, for taking this course was that he hated the labour of rowing. Any hope of their lives being saved he scouted.

However, before nightfall, they did reach land—a bare rock, but land.

By this time one of the women was lying in the bottom of the boat, moaning, like one in agony. Her companions of the same sex were exchanging frightened glances. The poor thing was carried ashore, and the true state of affairs communicated to the men. A tent or screen was by the aid of the sail and the oars hastily rigged up, and in an hour's time there were ten human beings instead of nine on that barren rock.

But not for long. Before the morning the

number was the same as when they landed, only that the place of one of the women was taken by a crying prematurely-born infant.

The rough men and women did what they could for the poor little wretch. The woman with the nursing baby gave it a portion of what was rightfully her own child's.

This, in Julian Loraine's opinion, was the most rash and misplaced expression of false sentiment he had ever met with.

Towards the evening of that day they scraped a grave for the mother. They did not fill it up at once, thinking that by-and-by the child must be laid in her arms.

At one time it seemed that it must be so. The sailors and the women, no doubt, thinking that a gentleman is nearer heaven than themselves, brought the poor little wailing atom to Loraine, and asked him to christen it.

With death so close at hand to all, it was

not worth while making any demur; but I can fancy the man's cynical smile, as he sprinkled water from a large shell on the child's head. He, Julian Loraine, doing a priest's duty, and doing it for the pleasure of other people!

However, so far as he knew how, he baptised the child, and thinking that a name was indispensable, with a kind of grim humour, christened him, for it was a boy, Julian.

After all, no one else died, not even the strangely-born baby. The next day a sail hove in sight. Such signals as the shipwrecked party could make were seen, and men, women and babies were soon in safety on board a homeward-bound ship.

No one, not even her fellow-passengers, knew the name or anything about the woman who had died. Her clothes, such as she wore, bore no mark. Her husband, if on

board, had gone down in the *Black Swan*. What was to become of the child?

Loraine settled this. Perhaps he thought the child had a certain ridiculous claim upon him. He was no niggard with his money. He told someone—he would not have taken the trouble to see about it himself—to find a comfortable home for the child, and to apply to him when money was wanted. Then he went his way, and lived for years as he chose.

Every now and then, when her paymaster was in town, the woman who had charge of the child ventured to bring him to see his benefactor. Sometimes the benefactor scowled, sometimes smiled his cynical smile and took notice of the little boy, who was called by his baptismal name, Master Julian. When the boy was seven years of age, Julian Loraine sent instructions that he was to be forwarded to Herstal Abbey, Somersetshire. Having been told by the good people about

him that the grand gentleman he now and again saw was his father, he addressed him by that endearing term. Julian Loraine, no doubt, stared and laughed, but he said nothing forbidding the appellation being used. So to himself and the world the boy was Master Julian, only son of Julian Loraine, of Herstal Abbey.

What strange freak induced the man to present a nameless child, of humble and unknown parents, to the world as his son I shall never know. I have tried to think it was from affection towards the child—from the need even his own nature felt of something he could love and call his own; but I cannot think so. It may have been pure cynicism. He may some day have wanted to turn round and say, "What is birth? See, I take this lowborn brat, bring him up as a gentleman, and everyone thinks him born to the station!" It may have been a

baser motive, that of revenge. I shall never know.

The boy grew up. He passed from the stage of Master Julian to that of Mr. Julian, or young Mr. Loraine; yet his reputed father kept the secret—kept it until the boy was nineteen, and, like many other boys of that age who are only sons of rich fathers, began to give himself airs. Then one summer's evening, when the man and the boy were sitting over their claret, Julian Loraine thought fit to relate, even more fully than I have given it above, the story of the wreck and the history of the child born on that rock.

And I—for I was the boy to whom he told it—turned deadly pale and gasped for breath. I believe I had never really loved the man whom I supposed to be my father; his was not a lovable nature. Often and often I had reproached myself for my lack of filial affec-

tion. But now, as I turned my dazed eyes to his face, and saw the satirical smile with which he regarded me, I all but hated him. I rose unsteadily.

"I must go and think all this over," I stammered out.

"Certainly, go and think it over."

He spoke carelessly and returned to his claret, whilst I rushed wildly from the room.

CHAPTER II.

"De Mortuis nil nisi Bonum."

IT was not until late in the afternoon of the next day that I could bring myself to meet again the man whom I had always believed to be my father. During the time whilst I held myself aloof from him I passed through many stages of sorrow, but I believe my anger was even greater than my grief. I was but nineteen years of age, but I fancy that my thoughts and ideas were in advance of my years. The curious, almost solitary, life which I had led for many years at Herstal Abbey no doubt conduced to making me older than I really was. Till the time came for me to go to Oxford, I saw little of anyone

save my supposed father, my tutor, and the servants of the house.

But latterly all had changed for the better. I had been two terms at the University. I had made many friends. Life was just opening to me; a new, fresh life, full of pleasure and excitement. I found myself fairly popular with my fellows. I was well supplied with money. I was looked upon as an only son, and heir to a fine property. In short, my lot seemed to be one in ten thousand.

And that moment Mr. Loraine had chosen to reveal to me the secret of my lowly birth. To dash me from the pedestal upon which he had placed me. To show me that I had no claim upon him—that, instead of being young Mr. Loraine of Herstal Abbey, I was no one!

I remember how, shortly before he told me the tale of the shipwreck, I had been

discoursing in a somewhat arrogant, self-satisfied, and glib manner as to the duties incumbent on old families and landed gentry; asserting that the existence of the aristocracy was an unmitigated blessing to the land. In fact, I was giving my supposed father a hash-up of a speech which I had heard at the Union. I thought my sentiments gave him satisfaction. He smiled and looked amused. No doubt he was amused, so amused that the demon of sarcasm rose within him, and hurried on the revelation which he may or may not have intended should be made. The temptation to prick the bladder inflated by my youthful arrogance must have been irresistible to Mr. Loraine. From a child I had noted this cruel trait in his character. I had noticed it with servants, such acquaintances as he had, and with myself. The way of listening, of even leading one on to talk, and then suddenly, by a

biting piece of sarcasm, crushing the unlucky speaker. It was from this and kindred actions that, even whilst I thought him my father, I did not love the man.

Nor did he love me. Had he loved me ever so little, he would have kept the secret, and spared me my present humiliation. So, in spite of all he had done for me, my anger rose and burned against Julian Loraine.

I may have been wrong; but, as will be soon discovered, I was full of faults. Perhaps the very association, more or less, during twelve years with a man of Mr. Loraine's stamp must develop faults——

There! Let me write no more to his detriment. He worked me evil, and he worked me good. He is dead. As I raise my eyes from my paper and glance through my window, I can almost see his grave.

In the afternoon I went in search of him.

I found him reading in the library. He nodded as I entered, then returned to his book and finished the paragraph.

"Well, Julian?" he said, as a signal that he was at my service.

"I have been thinking over what you told me last night, Mr. Loraine."

He raised his dark eyebrows as he heard me address him in this wise. Till now I had generally used the old-fashioned "sir;" sometimes, not often, "father."

"I hate changes, Julian," he said. "As you know, the old landed gentry are rooted to old customs."

Even at that moment he could not forego his sarcasm. My cheek flushed.

"See how you have changed life for me!" I said, hotly.

"Ah! yes; greatly, no doubt. I wonder what you would have been now?"

"Tell me what I am now."

"So far as I know, a young man of nineteen, thoroughly well educated, good-looking, full of Church and State principles. Why, the rector stopped me yesterday, and assured me you were one of the finest young fellows he ever knew; quite a credit to the county."

This banter seemed to stab me. "Tell me, sir," I said, "ought I to thank you for what you have done for me?"

"Personally, I hate expressions of gratitude; but if it gives you any satisfaction, thank me by all means."

"No; I do not thank you. Had you placed me in some humble position suited to my birth, and let me make my way in the world, I could have thanked you. But for years to let me be called your son: why did you do it, sir?"

"I had some reason at the time. I almost forget it."

"Mr. Loraine, I have thought it all over——"

"So you told me, Julian. Go on."

"You may laugh at me, but I consider that I have a great claim upon you."

He simply raised his eyebrows, but did not deny my assertion.

"You have kept me in ignorance for years," I continued, speaking quickly. "You have brought me up, and let me go out in the world under false colours. Now just as I enter upon manhood you tell me who I am, or rather who I am not. Why you did this, you alone know. You had some reason for it. In return, I have a right to demand something."

"Demand! A right! Never mind; go on."

I had expected an outburst of rage. His calm encouraged me.

"Yes, sir; I ask that I may be allowed to finish my course at Oxford. Then, when I

have taken my degree, I will go and earn my own living as best I can. I shall, of course, now call myself by some other name. Can you suggest one?"

Mr. Loraine laughed his curious laugh. "I like fellows who demand, better than those who beg," he said. "Go back to college by all means. As to a name, is not Julian Loraine good enough for you? You are perfectly welcome to use it."

"But it is not mine."

"Never mind; use it. I choose that you shall use it so long as you are dependent on me. I also choose you to be thought my son. No"—he saw me about to speak—"I will give no reasons; perhaps I have none. You may be sure that it will be no hindrance to your future, being thought a rich man's son. Besides, I hate changes. Now, don't talk any more. You have demanded; I have acceded. Go away."

Puzzled and dissatisfied, I left him. I had fully persuaded myself that I had a right to claim what I had claimed from him. It was also not hard for me to learn to think that if it was Mr. Loraine's wish that I should still pass as his son and bear his name, it was my duty to do so. Besides—remember, I was but a boy, and so need not be ashamed of the truth—with all my assumed independence, the thought of proclaiming my humble and unknown parentage to my friends was gall and wormwood to me. To sink from the position which I held as Mr. Loraine's son to that of no one at all was a change greater than I could picture to myself with equanimity. So I objected no more; and as Mr. Loraine sternly forbade the subjects being reopened, my life, in spite of its clouded future, went on in its accustomed groove.

Here, to avoid any misleading, I may say

that all I ever learnt about my true parentage was what Mr. Loraine told me. Who and what was my ill-fated mother, I know no more than I know for what reason my reputed father allowed me to be brought up as his son.

The terms and the vacations went by. I did not, during the latter, see a great deal of Mr. Loraine; nor did he press me to spend the time at Herstal Abbey. But a certain feeling, if not of gratitude, of what seemed right and proper, induced me to stay there on several occasions. There was really little apparent change in the relations between Mr. Loraine and myself. What change there might be was perhaps for the better. I was accepting his benefits, but accepting them because I considered I had a right to them. Moreover, I was determined that, when the time came, I would be quite independent of his favour. I en-

deavoured now and again to show him my feelings on this point; and, in spite of the mocking smile with which he received my hints, I do not think he liked me the less. I am not sure but in time a sincere friendship might have sprung up between us; for, whatever may have been Julian Loraine's inner nature, when he chose to meet anyone on terms of equality and companionship, he could make himself one of the most charming men in the world. His talk, although dangerous and bitter, was witty and brilliant.

But time would not allow this incipient feeling to grow up. Just after my twenty-first birthday I was summoned in hot haste from Oxford. Mr. Loraine was dying.

I reached Herstal Abbey just in time. My benefactor—yes, I must call him so—was just sensible, but speechless. I bent over him and took his hand. His fingers gave mine a faint pressure. Even at that solemn

moment I wondered at this show of feeling. And I wondered at the strange look in his dark eyes. They met mine yearningly, and I knew that the dying man had much he wished to say to me; yet, somehow, I knew that it was not about myself he wished to speak. I stooped down close to him. His dry lips moved, but could not articulate. He gave a faint sigh; his eyelids flickered, and all was over. Whatever were those last words he wished to speak, they remained unspoken.

I rose and left him. I walked to the room which was known as Mr. Julian's room, and, I am thankful to say, wept. After all, this man had given me much. But for him I might have been consigned to the workhouse; might now be nothing more than a mason's apprentice. Julian Loraine had at least given me the means to start fairly in life. Yes, he had been my benefactor.

My grief, if not as deep as it should have been, was really sincere. It was some time before I began to reflect as to the immediate consequences his death would bring to myself. I had money in hand, for the allowance made me by Mr. Loraine had always been an ample one—so large, indeed, that when the truth of my birth was known to me, I had asked him to reduce it. The right I presumed to claim fell far short of this. Mr. Loraine told me scornfully not to bother him about money matters; so I had been unable to follow out the plan which I had laid down, of taking from him only sufficient for my needs. Nevertheless, I had not spent the surplus, and it would now serve me in completing my education. From him I expected nothing. I had shown him, both by act and word, that I expected nothing. Who were his heirs, or to whom his wealth would be left, were matters about which I troubled

little. Now that Julian Loraine was dead, I could with a full heart thank him for all he had done for me. Then I could resign his name, and force my own way in the world.

His solicitor came down and gave instructions concerning the funeral. He did this at my request. Knowing that shortly I should be an alien in the house, I would assume no responsibility. The only order I gave was that everything should be done quietly and simply. I knew the dead man's ideas about conventional obsequies.

The funeral over, we looked for the will. I would not have a paper moved until then. We soon found it.

"Not that it makes much difference, I suspect," said the solicitor, "you being his only son."

He was opening the envelope as he spoke. I said nothing.

"Shortest will I ever read," said the

solicitor; "made by himself too, but all quite right and legal."

He handed the paper to me. I read:—

"*I bequeath all my real and personal estate to my adopted son Julian, commonly known as Julian Loraine.*"

This, duly signed and witnessed, was Mr. Loraine's will. I sank on a chair, feeling dizzy and confused. Mr. Loraine dead was a greater puzzle to me than Mr. Loraine living. By a few words—dashed off, it might be, on the spur of the moment—he had left me all his wealth. Was it from affection, sense of justice, cynicism, or what?

"I did not know you were an adopted son, Mr. Julian," said the lawyer, in tones of surprise.

"Yes," I said, collecting myself. "Do you think I shall be right in accepting this bequest?"

"Why not?"

"Are there no close relatives? Although I passed as his son, I know so little about him."

"I suspect I know less. But I never heard Mr. Loraine speak of any relatives. His adoption of you proves you entitled to the money."

I sat in deep thought. It was all so strange, so sudden.

"By-the-by, Mr. Julian," said the solicitor, "without wishing to intrude my advice, I should, if I were in your place, say nothing to let people know I was not Mr. Loraine's son. He evidently wished it to be thought you were. I fancy that by saying nothing you will best carry out his wishes. I myself shall keep silence on the matter."

I weighed his counsel, and at last, rightly or wrongly, decided to follow it. No one could be harmed by my continuing to pass

as the dead man's son. The fact of his having left me all his wealth showed, or I fancied it showed, that he looked upon me as a son; so I buried the story of the shipwreck in my own breast, and was still Mr. Loraine of Herstal Abbey.

I stayed my time at Oxford; I took my degree. After this I went abroad for many months. I let Herstal Abbey, as I had no need of such a large place. When I returned to England I led the usual life, no better nor no worse, of a young man of fortune.

Three years after the death of Julian Loraine I fell in love.

CHAPTER III.

First Love.

IT was about this time, I think, that such training as Mr. Loraine had indirectly given me began to bear its full crop of fruit. When first I stepped into the world, the novelty and freshness of all I saw had kept the evil which I had imbibed in the background. But now that I was a man, now that the glamour with which a boy surrounds everything had faded away, much of Mr. Loraine's teaching, many of his cynical axioms, came back, perhaps unawares, to me. The certainty which he had always felt as to some selfish motive being the hidden mainspring in every action of man or woman, with me became at least

suspicion. I had already met with false friends, who had, under the guise of friendship, robbed me, not only of money, but of what I valued more—trust in my fellows. After a while, I began to persuade myself that such popularity as I enjoyed was not due to my own merits, but to my worldly possessions; that I was by no means a fine fellow—merely a young man of large property.

This feeling is a danger which continually besets a rich and sensitive man, especially if his companions are poorer than himself, and his own nature is not such as can accept flattery as his due. Under such circumstances, it is easy to develop much of the cynicism of Julian Loraine.

Women had as yet done nothing to lower my self-esteem. Until now, I had not found the woman I could love. One reason for this was, that I was still of a romantic

nature, and was resolved that whomsoever I asked to be my wife should love me for myself, not for my money.

I wish, so far as possible, to keep this tale free from any sarcastic remarks of my own, but at that time I often wondered if the mothers of fair young daughters would have found me such a charming fellow had not Julian Loraine made that brief will.

But at last I was in love—hopelessly, unreservedly in love. My nature is, I believe, a passionate one, and, now that it had found its aim, I gave it full and free scope. I loved madly, blindly, and, alas! jealously.

I had set my heart upon no daughter of a wealthy or well-born family. The girl I loved was not one whom I met in society; yet I proudly thought of the day when every eye would turn and be dazzled by her beauty—when people who appraised

the charms of fair women would rank those of my wife high above all.

Of course I was partial—all lovers are—but now, as I glance from my paper to the portrait which hangs on the wall facing me, I tell myself that my love did not lead me far astray.

The soft, thick fair hair growing low down on the forehead, and swept back over the ear to join the knotted, silky mass at the back of the head. The head itself, small, well shaped, and, above all, well poised. The large, soft, dark-blue eyes. The fringe of long, straight lashes—yes, straight, not curved—falling, when the eyes are closed, literally on the cheek. The girlish, yet perfect figure. Ah! I need not look at the portrait to recall and describe my love!

For the rest, her name was Viola Keith. She was an orphan, and all but alone.

How I met her, where I met her, matters

little. Nearly all first meetings take place under prosaic circumstances. Anyway, as my eyes met hers, I told myself that I looked at the one woman whom it was possible for me to love with an eternal love.

I knew nothing of her family or her surroundings. I cared to know nothing. One question only I asked myself: Can I win her, and win her for my own sake? Here, even here, in the first flush of my new love, suspicion of motive must be guarded against.

So when, at last, I was able to tell her what name I bore, I changed it, and called myself Mr. Julian Vane. She should, if she loved me, marry me thinking she was marrying one in her own station of life.

Not that her station was anything to be ashamed of. So far as I could gather, she was one of the many whose parents leave their children a slender provision, yet large enough to live upon in respectability and

comfort. Viola, I found, lived in a small house, with a prim old dame, the pink of dignity and propriety, and who had formerly been the girl's schoolmistress: a solitary, lonely life it must have been for the girl.

I laughed as I thought how, if she loved me, I would draw her from her dull home, and show her the great world and the glories thereof.

How was I to woo her? We were not likely to meet at any mutual friend's house. I had no sister, cousin, or anyone who could do me a friendly turn in the matter. Yet every moment of suspense would be an age to me. I must do something.

So one day I waited until I saw Viola leave the house. I watched her tall, graceful form pass out of sight, and by a great effort repressed my desire to follow her. Then I walked to her house, and requested

to see Miss Rossiter, the prim old maiden lady aforesaid.

I told her in plain words the object of my calling. I spoke frankly of my great love for her companion, and I begged that my hearer would aid me to remove obstacles which stood in the way of a closer intercourse. No doubt, with a lover's cunning, I made myself most agreeable to the ancient gentlewoman. Permission was graciously accorded me to visit at the house—as a friend.

I wanted no more. I rose to take my leave, longing for to-morrow to come, as I did not like to venture two visits on the first day. Just then the door opened, and Viola appeared.

A look of surprise flashed into her face—surprise, but not displeasure. A faint blush crossed her cheek, and these signs told me I should win her.

Now that my foot was inside the citadel, I went to work fiercely, impetuously, to gain my desire. The days that followed are to me too sacred to be described; but not many passed before I knew that Viola's love was my own.

We went to the kindly spinster who was responsible for Viola's safety, and told her the glad news. The old lady dropped her knitting-needles, and looked bewildered.

"Oh, no, no!" she cried, in horrified tones; "you cannot mean it!"

Viola's blush and my words showed her we were in solemn earnest.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" sighed Miss Rossiter. "What shall I do? You have only known each other a week!"

"A day would have been long enough on my part!" I cried, looking rapturously at my lovely Viola.

"It is so sudden," continued Miss Rossiter. "I never dreamed of such a thing. In old days matters were managed much more decorously. I thought, Mr. Vane, you would be at least three months in making her acquaintance. Oh, dear! I am much to blame!"

The old soul seemed so distressed that Viola ran over and kissed her.

"Oh! what will Eustace say? He will blame me terribly. He is so masterful, you know, Viola."

"Who is Eustace?" I asked. I thought that Viola's face grew thoughtful as she heard the name.

"Mr. Grant, my guardian and good friend," she said.

"Then I must see him. Where can I find him?"

"He is away," said Miss Rossiter, plaintively. "Oh, I am much to blame! I

ought to have made all sorts of enquiries about you, Mr. Vane."

"Your friend can make them on his return. When will that be?"

"No one knows. To-morrow, perhaps; next month, next year. One never can say. Oh, dear! Oh, dear!"

I laughed and drew Viola away. We were so happy that we forgot all about Miss Rossiter's plaintive sighs, and I troubled nothing about Viola's guardian. I did not even ask what manner of man he was.

But two days afterwards I knew. In the evening I called as usual at Miss Rossiter's. Viola heard my knock and met me in the hall.

"Eustace came back to-day. He is here now," she said, joyfully.

I kissed her and followed her into the room to make the acquaintance of her guardian. Although she had called him by

his christian name, I fully expected to find him a sober, middle-aged man; but in the easy-chair, lounging as if the place belonged to him, and talking volubly to Miss Rossiter, I saw a strongly-built, sunburnt man who could be but few years my senior. He rose as I entered, and Viola shyly introduced us.

He was tall—taller than I was. His shoulders were broad; his limbs long and muscular. A man who, if not handsome, would certainly be noticed anywhere. The thought which succeeded my astonishment at his unexpected appearance was, "By what right is this man the guardian of the woman I love?"

He gave me his hand; but not, I fancied, cordially. He looked me full in the face, and I knew that he was trying to gather from my looks some knowledge of myself. Then suddenly I saw a surprised expression on his face—saw the corners of his mouth

droop as in half-suppressed scorn; and from that moment my feelings towards him were those of mistrust and dislike.

He stayed so late that I was the one to make the first move. For once I was not sorry to leave Viola. The appearance of this man among us, the close terms of intimacy upon which it was clear he stood with Miss Rossiter and Viola, cast a kind of gloom upon me. I chafed at the thought that my happiness was in any way dependent upon his favour. I grew moody and silent, and for me the evening was a dull one.

But not for my friends. This Grant was evidently a brilliant and clever talker. He narrated, in an amusing way, his experiences of some out-of-the-way Alpine village in which, for some reason which did not transpire, he had been staying. Yet at times I fancied that his merriment was forced, and again and again I saw his keen

eyes turned on me with a searching glance, which annoyed me beyond measure.

When at last I rose, he followed my example. Viola, as was her custom, accompanied me to the door of the house, but this evening I noticed, or fancied I noticed, a certain reluctance and hesitation in her manner. Eustace Grant passed on in front of us. He opened the door and stood on the step. I lingered for a moment to bid Viola a last good-night.

Presently Grant turned, as if impatient at my delay. There was a lamp exactly opposite the house, and the hall was also illumined. I could therefore see the man's face distinctly, and there was an indescribable look in his eyes which told me the whole truth. This Eustace Grant, whoever he was, loved Viola even as I loved her! All my jealous and mistrustful nature surged to the surface. I grasped Viola's hand and hastily

drew her into a little sitting-room close by. She looked at me in a startled manner.

"Viola," I said, "who is this man?"

"Dearest, I told you: Eustace Grant, my guardian!"

"What is he? what is his profession?"

"Ah! that is a secret as yet. He will tell you some day; for, Julian, you will love him like a brother when you know him."

"Never! Listen, Viola. That man is in love with you!"

She made no answer, and by the light which passed through the half-opened door I saw a soft expression of pity and regret upon her sweet face.

"You know it?" I asked.

She sighed. "I am afraid it is so, or has been so. Poor Eustace!"

The intonation of the last two words carried comfort to my heart. It told me that I need fear no rival. I embraced Viola, and

left her. Grant was still on the doorstep. He was evidently waiting for me. I paused in the road, looking out for a vacant hansom.

"Do you mind walking a little distance with me, Mr. Vane?" said Grant.

"I have some distance to go. I would rather drive."

"I will not take you far, but I have something I must say to you."

He turned in an authoritative manner, as though fully expecting I should follow him. I hesitated; then joined him, and we walked side by side.

There was frigid silence between us; but as I glanced at the tall, manly figure by my side, as now and again by the light of the gas-lamps I saw that powerful striking face, the demon of self-distrust began to rise again. How, I asked myself, could it be possible, all things being equal, for a woman to choose me in preference to this man? And,

thanks to my concealing my name and true position, the chances apparently were that Grant had as much to offer a woman as I had.

By-and-by my companion stopped and opened the door of a house with a latch-key. He invited me to enter, and showed me into a room on the ground-floor. Once inside his own house, his manner changed. He was now host, and I was guest. He apologised for the state of confusion which reigned in the room. He had only returned to his lodgings yesterday, and had not yet got things straight. The room, although plainly furnished, showed that its tenant was a man of taste and culture. Books were scattered broadcast here, there, and everywhere. Grant swept a pile off the chair which he offered me.

"You smoke?" he said, producing a cigar case. "I can give you some brandy and soda, too."

He opened a cupboard and brought out the bottles. I declined his proffered hospitality, and awaited his communication. He stood with his back to the mantelpiece, and mechanically filled a pipe. He did not, however, light it; and, although I looked as carelessly as I could in another direction, I knew that he was attentively scanning my face. This scrutiny became unbearable.

"You have something to say to me, Mr. Grant?" I remarked.

"Yes. I am only considering how to say it. I am something of a physiognomist, and have been studying your face for my guidance."

I smiled scornfully, but said no more. He was welcome to look at me all night if he chose to do so. Suddenly, in a sharp, abrupt way, he spoke.

"Why are you passing under a false name?" he asked.

CHAPTER IV.

"O, what a tangled web we weave,
When first we practise to deceive!"

HE attack was so unexpected that I crimsoned, and for a moment was speechless. I knew that my true motive for the concealment was, in respect to Viola, if unworthily conceived, at least free from evil. This thought strengthened me, and I was able to face my interrogator. But, all the same, it was a great mortification to feel that in order to explain matters to this man I must, as it were, lay bare my most sensitive feelings.

"You know my true name?" I asked.

"No. But I have seen you somewhere—Vienna, Paris—I forget where. Then you were not called Vane."

"My name is Julian Loraine."

"Julian Loraine," he repeated, musingly. "I have heard that name in the world, and with little good attached to it. But it could not have referred to you yourself. You are too young."

"But your reason for the deception? Speak!" he said, fiercely.

I curbed my rising anger, and, as well as I could, told him why I had wooed Viola under a false name. I think he believed me, but I saw scorn on his face as he listened.

"The act of a fool," he said. "Mr. Loraine, such romantic affairs should be left to poets and novelists. Viola Keith would need neither riches nor poverty with the man she loved. I tell you, if I were to go to-morrow and make known to her your doubt of her single-heartedness, I could shatter the whole fabric of your happiness. Why should I not do so?"

"It would be the act of a fiend," I said.

He laughed, not pleasantly. "Yes, it would. I will not do it. I will even keep your secret, and let you carry out your ridiculous plan. But I will also do this: I will follow you on your wedding morning, and see with my own eyes that you have married Miss Keith in your right name. No!" he said, seeing I was ready to spring from my seat in indignation. "No! I will have no protest. You have brought this upon yourself. You have given me the right to mistrust you."

"Will you be good enough to show me the right by which you interfere at all?" I said.

"Until her twenty-first birthday I am Miss Keith's guardian."

"A very young one," I sneered.

"Yes; but older than you think. Her mother died six years ago. I was then thirty; she thought me old enough to be her child's guardian, and I will see the trust to the end."

The meaning thrown into the last sentence did not escape me. It implied that he still viewed me with distrust. My anger was thoroughly aroused.

"Perhaps, Mr. Grant," I said, "there is a nearer and a dearer right you wish to exercise over your ward—one which she herself alone can bestow."

He drew himself up to his full height. "That, sir," he said, calmly, "is ungenerous. I had hoped that my love for Miss Keith was a matter unknown to all save myself. I love her as it may be beyond your power to love a woman. I would lay down my life for her far more easily than to-day I lay down my love. Yet I do this, and to you, my rival, can say, 'Take her, and make her happy—make her happy.'"

The repetition of the last three words was not a wish; it was a command, a threat.

Grant was still standing above me, and as

I looked at him I saw that his face was pale, and on his forehead were drops of moisture. His appearance almost startled me; but I said nothing. I rose, and wished him good-night. Somehow, in spite of the dislike with which the man had inspired me, there was about him a strength and dignity which impressed me more than I cared to own. He accompanied me to the door. When it closed, I paused for a moment to light one of my own cigars. Then I crossed the road. As I did so, I glanced back. The gas was burning in the room which I had just left; the blind was drawn up. I saw Grant enter, throw himself into the chair which I had left vacant, stretch his arms out on the table, and lay his head upon them, like one in agonies of grief. He was bewailing the loss of the happiness which I had won.

I pitied him, but I hated him. It seemed to me that if this man set his heart upon a

woman's love, sooner or later, she must give it to him. What would it be if now he used all his power to rob me of Viola? I knew that until the ring was on her finger I should have no peace of mind.

The next day, when I paid my visit to Viola, I was full of the fear that I should find Eustace Grant at her side, perhaps exercising all his craft, in spite of his assumption of frankness. I believed him to be crafty, to my disadvantage. It was a fear which had no foundation. Neither on that nor on succeeding days did Grant in any way interfere with my monopoly of Viola. Once or twice I met him, apparently coming from the house. On these occasions he bowed gravely, but did not stop to speak. His visits were evidently paid at such times as did not clash with mine. I raged inwardly to think that he had the right to visit Viola at any time; but I was too proud to remon-

strate. It was some comfort to me to hear Miss Rossiter occasionally remark that they saw little or nothing of Eustace now.

Viola seldom mentioned his name. No doubt, with a woman's quickness, she understood that it was distasteful to me. Nevertheless, I knew that she held her guardian in the greatest esteem, and looked forward to the time when we should be friends. This I swore should never come. Viola once my wife, the acquaintance between her and this strong-willed, attractive man should cease.

As I said, I am indeed a pitiful hero!

But if I saw nothing of Grant, I heard from him. He wrote me, telling me he had been informed by Miss Keith that our marriage was to take place very shortly. He would be glad to know my intentions respecting the settlement of her own small fortune. There was a peremptoriness about the wording of the letter which nettled me extremely.

I wrote back that it was quite true we were to be married in a few weeks' time, but that it was not my intention to settle my wife's money upon her. The sum was too paltry to trouble about, as it would be quite lost sight of in the large *post-nuptial* settlement which I proposed making. If Mr. Grant felt any doubt as to my means, he could make inquiries of my solicitor, who had my instructions to answer all his questions fully.

To this letter he did not reply; but I heard that he made the inquiries, as I suggested. No doubt, in Viola's interest, he was right in so doing; but I liked him none the more for the action.

Yes; Viola, overcome by my impassioned prayers, had consented to an almost immediate marriage. There was, indeed, no reason why we should wait a day. She loved me, and was willing to trust her future

in my hands. I loved her, and longed for the moment which would make her mine for ever. Moreover, I longed for the time to come when I might tell her all; confess the innocent but foolish deception I had practised, and beg her forgiveness — not for mistrusting her, but her sex in general. I was sorely tempted to reveal the true state of affairs without further delay; but Grant's warning rose to my mind, and I determined that, until the irrevocable words were spoken, I would keep my secret.

We were married in the quietest way possible. Viola, it seemed to me, had no bosom friends — no relatives who would be mortified unless they were asked to the wedding. The old spinster, who looked very prim, and ready to apply her favourite word, "indecorous," to the whole proceedings; a brother, as prim as herself; and one trusted friend of my own, formed the wedding guests.

Eustace Grant had been asked to accompany us, but Viola told me that, for some reason or another, he had excused himself. At this she seemed greatly vexed.

I was also troubled by his refusal. It showed too plainly his feelings, both towards me and towards Viola.

But he was in the church; he was there even before I was. As I walked up the aisle, I caught a glimpse of his strongly-marked profile. He was in a far-off pew, and was almost the only spectator of the ceremony. Doubtless, when Viola and I left the church, man and wife, Eustace Grant walked into the vestry, and, as he had expressed his intention of doing, saw with his own eyes that I had married Viola in my true name.

We drove straight from the church to the railway-station. When alone in the carriage, almost the first words my wife said were:

"Julian, Eustace was in church; did you see him?"

"Yes, I saw him."

"Why did he not come and wish me good-bye? It was not like him. I must have offended him. I will write and ask him how."

I hated the idea of Eustace Grant being, in such a moment as this, uppermost in my wife's thoughts. "Never mind, dearest," I said; "what is Eustace Grant to us?"

"Oh, much, very much to me, Julian! He was my mother's friend. He has been my one friend ever since I can remember."

"I do not like him," I said.

"But you will like him; you must like him. He is so good, so noble, so clever. Promise me, Julian, you will like him, for my sake."

Although I would not credit him with the two first qualifications—goodness and

nobility—I was willing to believe that Eustace Grant was clever—perhaps too clever. The disadvantage at which he had held me upon that night, when I was for the time, in his eyes, an impostor, rankled in my mind. But to-day I could afford to be generous. I drew Viola close to me.

"Dearest," I said, "I will try and get rid of my prejudice. I will try and forget that this man loved you, and would have made you his wife. I will try to cease from wondering why, when he is so good, noble, and clever, you should have chosen me."

Viola laid her soft cheek against mine. "Julian, my husband," she whispered, "are you not all that Eustace Grant is—and more? I love you."

With her words all my doubt, all my fear of Eustace Grant, fled—never, I hoped, to return. With Viola's arms round me, her kisses on my lips, I could afford to pity my

unsuccessful rival. When we were installed in the compartment of the train which was, by a venal arrangement of the guard's, reserved to ourselves, I fell to considering how I should best make known to Viola that the name by which she had hitherto known me was assumed. I was beginning, or fancied I was beginning, to know something of my wife's true nature; and I told myself that the task before me was not so easy as I had once imagined it would be. My confession was hurried on by a question she herself asked me:

"Julian, what name was it you signed in the book at church?"

I had hoped that, in the agitation natural to a bride who signs her maiden name for the last time, she had not noticed my autograph. But she must have done so, although she had said nothing about it until now.

So I made the plunge and told her all.

Told her my true name; told her of the beautiful house in the west which would be ours; told her of the life, free from care and anxiety as to the future, which stretched before us. Then I besought her forgiveness for keeping her in ignorance of these things. I had, be it said, given her to understand that I was a man with an income just enough to live upon in comfort.

Grant was right. He knew Viola when he told me that, by revealing my deception, he might destroy the fabric of my happiness. She said little, but her look told me she was hurt and wounded. I verily believe her first thoughts were that she would rather I had been what I represented myself to be, than to have the power of sharing such a home and so much wealth with her. How little men understand women! perhaps because no two women are alike.

But Viola forgave me. A woman always

forgives the man she loves, but I knew that she was sad at the thought that I could have dreamed that riches might have influenced her. Nevertheless, it was days before I could get her to join me unrestrainedly in the schemes which I wove of our future life.

We went down to a quiet watering-place on the south coast. Here we stayed for a fortnight. Oh, those sweet summer days! Shall I ever forget them? For the time there seemed no cloud which could possibly shade our joy. All the cynical, suspicious, misanthropical elements seemed swept out of my nature. I told myself that the constant society of the wife I loved was making a better as well as a happier man of me.

At the end of our stay by the sea it was our intention to return to London for a couple of days, and then start for Switzerland. Here, or in what country we chose,

we were to spend months. In fact, I had as yet no home to offer my wife. The tenant of Herstal Abbey would not turn out without six months' notice; so, for the time we must be wanderers.

Eustace Grant—I had by now almost forgotten him—wrote once to my wife. She seemed overjoyed as she saw his handwriting, but vexed at the ceremonious way in which his letter began. It lies before me now. I copy it:

"*My dear Mrs. Loraine,—You will remember that next Tuesday is your twenty-first birthday.*

"*As I am going abroad very shortly, I am anxious to submit the accounts of the trust to you and, of course, Mr. Loraine. I hear that you will be in town on Tuesday. Can I call upon you anywhere, or would it be more convenient for us to meet at my solicitor's—Mr. Monk, 36 Lincoln's Inn Fields? Please let me know.*

"*Yours sincerely,*

"EUSTACE GRANT."

"He might have sent a word of congratulation," said Viola, in a vexed tone. "How shall I answer this, Julian?"

"Say we will meet him at Mr. Monk's at twelve o'clock on Tuesday."

To which effect Viola wrote. I did not read the letter, but I wondered at the length of it.

CHAPTER V.

"That it should come to this!"

WE reached town on the Monday night, and slept at an hotel. Thursday morning we were to start for the Continent. Besides the interview with Eustace Grant, there were many business matters to which I was bound to attend. I had to see my own solicitor, and give him instructions about the settlement which I wished to make on Viola. I had also to make my will, a matter which until now I had neglected; so that the Tuesday and Wednesday promised to be fully occupied. Viola also wished to pay a visit to her old friend, Miss Rossiter. The prim spinster would never forgive her if she

passed through town without calling. She did not press me to accompany her. Perhaps, in the present changed and unexpected state of affairs, she had much to say to her old friend which could not well be said in my presence.

So I suggested she should go alone to her old home, spend an hour with her friend, and meet me at Mr. Monk's at twelve o'clock. In the meantime I would go to my own solicitor's and arrange my business, the purport of which I did not make known to my wife. I hired a private brougham for her, placed her in it, and stood at the window saying adieu. It was the first time since our marriage that we had been parted for an hour. It was, moreover, her twenty-first birthday, and on her hand was a ring which I had just given her—a ring the value of which had startled her, for she had not yet realised what it was to be a rich man's wife.

As I wished her good-bye, I remembered that my own business would take some time.

"If I am not very punctual, you won't mind waiting?" I said.

"No, I shall like it. Eustace will be there, and I have so much to say to him—so much to ask him. Don't hurry, Julian."

I fancied that Viola wished to see Eustace Grant alone, if possible, in order to persuade him, as she had tried to persuade me, that we had only to know more of each other to be like brothers. She could not understand the gulf between two men who love the same woman. I thought it was well she should see him. He would make clear to her the impossibility of anything like friendship existing between us. Just as I was about to bid the coachman drive off, Viola looked at me with a little pout. I knew its meaning. I passed my head through the carriage window. My shoulders

ensured strict privacy. Then a light kiss fell upon my lips, and a word of love passed between us. I linger on these trivial evidences of affection. It will soon be seen why.

I watched the carriage which held all I loved join in the broad stream of traffic. Then I lit my cigar, and, the happiest man in England, walked over to my solicitor's.

My business took even longer than I expected it would. There was much to discuss. What stock could be settled as it stood—what should be sold out—who were to be trustees—what was to happen in the event of Viola's death: was she to have power of appointment or not? All sorts of questions like this had to be ventilated. The consequence was that when I glanced at my watch I found it was nearly one o'clock. I told my solicitor I must defer giving instructions for my will until to-morrow. I jumped into

a cab, and drove to Lincoln's Inn Fields, No. 36, ready to make the fullest apologies for my unpunctuality.

I went up the stairs, found Mr. Monk's office, and sent my name in to him by his clerk. I was invited to enter his private room. Mr. Monk was busy with some papers.

"You will find your friends in the next room, Mr. Loraine," he said. "I will join you in a moment."

The clerk opened a green-baize door, through which I passed, and found myself in another office. In it, however, were no signs of Viola and Grant. I returned to Mr. Monk, and told him they were not there.

"Then they must have grown tired of waiting for you, and have gone for a stroll. There is a door which opens into the passage. No doubt they went that way.

You must sit down and take your turn at waiting, Mr. Loraine."

I waited half an hour, then determined to go in search of them. It was possible they had gone to look for me; so I went down into the street, and asked the driver of the brougham if he had seen the lady.

"Yes, sir; she went by about an hour ago with a tall gentleman."

"Which way?"

"I don't know, sir. I saw them hail a cab and drive off. I didn't notice in which direction they went."

Why in the world should they have taken a cab, when the brougham was at the door? I was very cross at the thought of Viola's driving about London in a cab with Eustace Grant; but, as the brougham was still waiting at No. 36, it was clear that they meant to return. After all, the best thing I could do was to wait. As yet, not a thought

of the truth had ventured to invade my brain.

So I waited on the pavement outside Mr. Monk's office for at least an hour longer. Still no sign of my wife. I grew nervous and anxious. Surely some accident must have happened—something that obliged her to go straight to the hotel. But even then Grant would have come to let me know it. Still not a thought of the dreadful truth! But where could she be?

I jumped into the brougham, and drove to the hotel. No; Mrs. Loraine was not there.

I drove to Miss Rossiter's. Viola had been there in the morning, but had left about half-past eleven o'clock. I did not see Miss Rossiter, who, I was sorry to hear, was ill in bed. As a last resource, I drove to Grant's house, and asked for him. He was out. Had not been home since the

morning. Quite uncertain when he would return.

It was now past three o'clock. Anxious and annoyed, I could do nothing but go back to the hotel and await my wife's return. Still not a thought of the truth!

I spent the rest of the afternoon and evening passing from the hotel to Miss Rossiter's, from there to Grant's lodgings, and from Grant's lodgings back to the hotel. Only at one of these three places could I hope to find tidings of Viola. Repeatedly as I had called, it was not until nearly eleven o'clock that I found Eustace Grant at home.

But by now I was in a different mood. Shall I be blamed for saying that this long and unexplained absence of Viola's, in company, it seemed, with Grant, brought a horrible dread which I scarcely dared to breathe to myself? The news that Grant

was at last at home lifted a weight from my heart. He would be able to tell me when and where he parted with Viola. No doubt he had a message for me, which would clear up everything.

But although Mr. Grant was at home, the servant informed me that he would see no one to-night. I made no comment on this denial. I simply forced the door open, and, putting the frightened servant aside, strode through the hall and entered the sitting-room, in which Grant had, on the night when first I met him, interrogated me. It was empty. I threw myself into a chair, and waited until some one made my presence known to the man whom I was bent upon seeing.

No doubt he heard the noise of my forcible entrance. In a minute the folding-door, which, as is often the case in lodgings, divided the sitting-room from

the bedroom, opened, and Eustace Grant appeared. As he did so, I caught a glimpse of the bedroom from which he emerged. An open portmanteau, apparently half-packed, was lying on the bed, and there were other evidences of preparation for a journey.

Grant advanced towards me, but he made no pretence of greeting me. He neither offered his hand, nor bade me good-evening. I rose and faced him.

He was pale, almost ghastly pale. His brows were bent, and a slight twitch of the nostril told me he was suffering from some great, though suppressed, emotion. He looked at me haughtily and angrily; but whatsoever he had wherewith to reproach himself, there was neither fear nor triumph in his gaze. I looked at him and wondered; but I felt certain that he knew all about Viola's absence.

Still, as that absence might even now be satisfactorily explained, I resolved that I would not, by evincing premature distrust or suspicion, let this man triumph over me. So I spoke with forced composure:

"Mr. Grant, I have missed my wife somewhere. Can you give me tidings of her?"

"I cannot," he replied, coldly.

"Where did you part with her? You left Mr. Monk's with her, in a cab. Where did you leave her?"

"I cannot tell you, Mr. Loraine."

"Do you mean that you are ignorant of her whereabouts?"

"You have had my answer."

My blood boiled. "You mean you will not, dare not tell me, you utter villain!" I cried. "I will know, or I will kill you!"

The table was between us, or I should have sprung at his throat.

"I care nothing for your threats, Mr. Loraine," he said with galling contempt. "Wherever Mrs. Loraine may be, she is there of her free choice."

"She is here—in this house—with you!" I exclaimed.

"Look for her—search every cupboard and cranny. I will ring; you shall be conducted over the whole building. Make it public property that you are a jealous husband, looking for a faithless wife. No; that shall not be done, for her sake. Wherever she is, she is not here."

He spoke as if expecting me to believe him. Strange to say, I did believe him. The thought that his house would be the last place in which he would hide Viola from my search, no doubt conduced to this belief. But now I could no longer doubt the horrible truth. This man, by some devilish craft, had torn my wife from me—

had taken away the woman who, a few hours ago, pressed a Judas' kiss on my lips, even as she was going to meet her lover.

Stay! Perhaps he had killed her. Such things have been done before now by men who fail to win the woman they love. Perhaps he had decoyed her away, and was detaining her against her will. Even now she might be longing for me to come and free her.

All these thoughts whirled through my brain, and for a moment unmanned me. I sank upon a chair, cold and trembling in every limb. Grant stood like a statue until I recovered myself.

"You villain!" I gasped, "I will know —I will see her! Tell me where she is?"

He leaned forward. He looked at me sternly.

"Listen!" he said in a fierce voice.

"In this room I said to you, 'Take her, and make her happy.' Have you done so?'

I laughed wildly. "If being willing to shed one's blood for her can make a false woman happy, she should have been happy. Does she expect to find bliss in a life of shame with you?"

His eyes blazed. "You had better go," he said. "Go at once!"

I laughed mockingly. Now that I had lost all hope; now that my one desire was vengeance, I could speak calmly.

"I shall stay here," I said, "until you leave to join her. I shall follow and be with you. Surely a bridegroom can claim the right of bidding his bride God-speed! Here I stay."

For reply Grant rang the bell. "Leave the front door and this door wide open," he said to the servant; "then go out of the way."

He came towards me. I started to my feet, and struck fair and full at his white, set face. He parried the fierce blow, and in a moment his arms were around me.

Although physical strength is an accident, or at the most an inheritance, no man likes to confess that another is immeasurably his superior in muscular power. So, it is with feelings of keen annoyance that I am obliged to relate the result of that hand-to-hand struggle. I was strong, and had measured my strength with many, but never with such a man as this. The moment we closed I felt that I should be conquered; that right does not always gain the victory. Grant's arms were like bars of iron, the girth of his chest almost abnormal; moreover, he stood two inches taller than I did. Had I been told that any man could have lifted me from my feet, carried me through two open doors, and

finally thrown me staggering into the centre of the roadway, I should have laughed the idea to scorn. But Eustace Grant did all this, and shut and bolted the outer door before I could recover myself.

Mad with the rage of defeat, I grasped the railings and panted for breath. I cursed Eustace Grant. I cursed my faithless wife. I cursed myself and my impotence. Such was my state that, could I have obtained a pistol, I would have waited on that doorstep and shot the man who had betrayed me, as soon as he emerged from his place of safety—shot him dead without compunction. Nor was my mind any way soothed by hearing the window thrown up, and seeing my hat tossed out contemptuously. I was fain to stoop and pick it up, in order to save myself from becoming an object of curiosity to passers-by.

What was I to do? My mind at present could only grasp one fact—that Grant had, by some diabolical means, induced Viola to leave me and give herself to him. For a while my course seemed limited to one issue: I must wait here, outside his house, until at last he came forth. Then I must dog his footsteps until they led me to the faithless woman who had ruined my life and brought me to shame. I groaned at the thought of what little more than twelve hours had done. This morning I was the happiest man in England; to-night I was the most miserable!

So, for hours I walked up and down in front of the house which held the traitor. I saw the lights extinguished. Once or twice I saw the blind drawn aside, and guessed that Grant was looking out to see if I had left my post. No, you traitor! you villain! I am still there, and shall be there until you

come out. Then I will dog you to the bitter end.

The hours went by, the dawn began to break. Still—an object of curiosity, if not suspicion, to the policeman—I kept my post, and should have kept it for hours longer, had it not all at once occurred to me that so long as I was there, so long would Grant remain where he was. I must meet craft with craft. Nevertheless, I must perforce keep watch until I could find some one to whom the task might be deputed.

At seven o'clock I was able to gain admission to an old-fashioned family and commercial inn which stood some short distance off. The bay-window of the coffee-room commanded a view of Grant's house. Here I seated myself, and, having obtained a *London Directory*, wrote and despatched a letter to a well-known private detective, requesting that a clever, trustworthy man

might at once be sent to me. Then, from the window of the hotel, I resumed my watch.

At nine o'clock, the man whom I had summoned arrived. I told him what to do. He was to wait until he saw Grant depart. He was to follow him, and, having ascertained his destination, was to telegraph to me at once. Then I left the accursed spot, went back to my hotel, and tried to sleep.

As I entered the room which Viola and I had occupied, I could almost persuade myself that I had dreamed the events of the last twenty-four hours. All her personal effects were as she left them: her gloves, her brushes, her toilet indispensables were all there. Even her watch she had left behind her. She broke the spring at the seaside, and there was no time to get it repaired before we started for the Continent;

besides, I had intended buying her a new one in Paris. To-morrow—yes, to-morrow would be Thursday — to-morrow we had purposed crossing to France. Heavens! what did it all mean?

Sleep, with my mind in this whirl, was unattainable. Later in the day, more for something to do than in pursuance of any hope, I went to Viola's old home, and asked if she had been there to-day. No, not since yesterday morning. This the servant rather wondered at, as Miss Rossiter was very ill; two doctors were with her now.

In my present frame of mind, I cared nothing for the old lady's illness; but I knew that the motive which kept Viola from her side when suffering must be a strong one. Yet, little a woman who could leave her husband, as she had left me, would reck for the ailments of a friend!

Curses on her false, fair face!

The hours passed somehow. At three o'clock a telegraphic message was brought me. I tore it open. It was sent from Folkestone, and ran so:

"*Followed him here. He left by Boulogne boat. Was joined on pier by lady. Tall, closely veiled, fair hair. Wore costly ring of diamonds. Seemed ill and upset. Did not follow to France, having no instructions to leave England.*"

The last, the very last hope was gone! Viola and Eustace Grant had fled together! I ground my teeth. I bit my lips until the blood came. I cursed the detective's stupidity at not having followed them, if needs be, half over the world. Surely I had given the fool ample instructions! For the future, I would trust no one but myself. I threw a few things into a portmanteau; I rang for a time-table. Was there a train I could catch—was there a steamer which crossed

to-night? Perhaps, at Boulogne, I might get once more on the track of the fugitives.

But before I had solved the doubt about trains and steamers, I had changed my mind. Why should I follow? Let them go, and my curse go with them. I will not take, at present, one step in pursuit. I will have vengeance, but vengeance by waiting will be the more complete. See! she must love this man madly, even as I loved her, or she would not have done this thing. He, too, must love her. Let my silence, my quietness, lull them into false security. Let them dream their dream of happiness, even as I dreamed mine. Then I will find them and strike!

For I swore that sooner or later, by fair means or foul, Eustace Grant should die by my hand!

CHAPTER VI.

A Clue.

HATE the task of describing what manner of life I led during the next two years. I hate the memory of everything connected with that time. I wish it could be blotted out from my mind. Two years which hold no action, no thought of my own, to which I can look back with any pleasure. I must write of that wretched time, but I will make its record as short as possible.

Nevertheless, I will be candid, and show myself in as bad a light as truth compels. I do not seek to excuse myself by saying that many another in my place would have

acted as I acted. I hope there are few in the world who have passed through such grief and shame as mine.

At first, without for a moment losing sight of the vengeance which I meant to take on the traitor, Eustace Grant, I set myself the task of forgetting the false woman who had fled from my side. I vowed I would destroy the love I bore her, and learn to look upon her with scorn and contempt, as the basest of her sex. If the thought of suing for a divorce entered into my head, I banished it at once. I cared not to resume my freedom. So long as I was bound to one woman there was no chance of my being cajoled and deceived by another, if ever I could be fool enough to love and trust another woman as I had loved and trusted Viola.

Besides, I shrank from the exposure; I shrank from the thought of being made a public laughing-stock, as a man whose wife

left him a fortnight after her marriage. No; I would teach myself to scorn, loathe, forget her—that was all.

But how to forget? If I cursed her by day, I dreamed of her by night. Then she came to me, sweet and pure as I thought her on the day when I made her my wife. I saw her soft eyes, her graceful form; I heard her fresh young loving voice, and in my dreams was happy, for I could never dream evil of her. But again and again, when I awoke, and remembered what she now was, I sobbed as few strong men permit themselves to sob, and then only in the dead of night, when none can hear or see them.

I would forget! I swore I would forget! So, in search of forgetfulness, I plunged into a whirl of fierce dissipation. I became to all appearance the most reckless of a reckless set. I gambled for large sums. I lost or won thousands at a sitting; yet only

proved to myself that I was as indifferent to money as I was to everything save the loss of Viola. Curiously enough, I did not ruin myself at the gambling-table. On the whole, I won largely, and so constantly that my luck became a by-word. My luck! I smiled bitterly as men spoke of me as "lucky Loraine."

I tried in every way to force the memory of Viola from my mind. For a while—I blush to say so—I drank to excess: perhaps I hoped to kill myself. In these and other unworthy ways I passed half the year.

Then came the reaction—the loathing of self—the disgust at the life I was leading. I sickened at the sight of my boon companions. Everything was weariness; nothing brought the flush of excitement to my cheek or carried me for a moment away from my grief. Suddenly I turned my back upon all my pursuits. I went down to Herstal Abbey,

which was now at my disposal, and, with as supreme a contempt for mankind as ever my predecessor felt, I buried myself even as he had done.

And people around said that eccentricity ran in families, and that young Mr. Loraine was following in his father's steps.

But why during these months had I not sought the excitement of revenging myself upon the man who had wronged me? Why had I not kept my vow of killing him when his dream of joy was at its height? Simply because I knew not where to look for him. He and his no less guilty companion had left no trace behind them—no clue that might be followed until it brought me face to face with them. I had made enquiries, and enquiries were still being made on my behalf; but as yet I had not discovered Grant's hiding-place. He seemed to be a man with, so far as I could ascertain, no

friends or connections. Miss Rossiter, with whom it is possible he or Viola might have corresponded, died two days after the elopement. Her brother I found, but he could give me no intelligence. Mr. Monk, the solicitor, acting, he said, on instructions, refused to give me any. So I could do nothing but grind my teeth, and long for the hour when my path might once more cross Eustace Grant's. I was fatalist enough to believe that, sooner or later, this must happen.

I lived on in the dreary solitude of Herstal Abbey. Each day found me more cynical and misanthropical; but each day I renewed my vow of vengeance. Its accomplishment was the only thing in life to which I could look forward. When Grant lay dead at my feet, life for me would be at an end. So the months passed. If the original Julian Loraine could have seen me, as I sat hour after hour brooding in his chair, he would

have thought the son of his adoption well worthy of his choice.

So the long months passed. Spring, summer, autumn, winter came and went, making little difference to me. Once or twice I forced myself to quit my seclusion, and pay a visit to London or Paris, in the hope of finding distraction and forgetfulness. My efforts availed nothing, and I returned to my home more moody and miserable than when I left it.

I had, for the sake of occupation, performed a task until now postponed.

I went through my reputed father's letters and private papers. I found nothing that in any way bore upon myself, except a written account of the shipwreck, and my birth on the barren rock. It was signed by the narrator. Although the existence of this paper made no difference to me, I put it away under lock and key. Yet, for all I

cared, the whole world might know that Julian Loraine was not my father. Such trivial things as accidents of birth were now matters of indifference to me.

The other papers I burned. I did not read one-half of them. They clearly showed what manner of man was Julian Loraine before he bought Herstal Abbey and settled down to the life of a recluse. My life, I told myself, was spoilt—spoilt by a woman's treachery! And yet I could not bring myself to hate her. No—let the truth be known—I loved her even now—loved her, although she was living in shame with my enemy. I hungered, I craved for a sight of her face. The touch of her hand would have thrilled me as of old. Although I told myself that, were she at my feet praying for pardon, I would spurn her and cast her from me, I knew that I lied. I knew that if Viola came to me—if my eyes once more met hers—I

should throw all manhood's pride to the winds, and—such was the strength of my passion—take this faithless woman to my heart, and hold her there until, as I told myself bitterly, some fresh lover robbed me again.

Such being my true feelings, picture my emotion when, one morning, I found a letter lying on my table—a letter addressed to me in Viola's handwriting! I tore it open with a cry of delight; I pressed it to my lips. Had not her fingers touched it? Then I read. It was but one line:

"*If you knew all, you might forgive.*"

"If I knew all!" What more was there to know? I knew that she had left me without a word or a sign of warning; that she had fled, accompanied by a man who had loved her passionately long before I ever set eyes upon her; that they were,

somewhere or other, hidden from pursuit. Heavens! what more could I wish to know?

"Forgive!" Yes—shame on my weakness for saying so—I could forgive. I could do more: I could persuade myself that this strong-willed man had forced her to fly with him, perhaps half against her wish. I could believe that she was unhappy, that she was penitent, that she loved me still. I could do more than forgive, I could take her—I should be forced to take her—again to my heart; even to trust her, and be proud of her glorious beauty. Yes, I could do this—after I had seen Eustace Grant lying lifeless at my feet. Weak as I was, it could not be until then!

Where was he? Where was she? Were they together? I turned again to the letter. It gave me no information as to the writer's whereabouts. The paper and the envelope were plain; the latter bore the London post-

mark. It was creased, which told me it had been sent under cover, to be posted in London. Sent to whom? The receipt of this scrap of paper worked a great change in me. If I had ever been approaching that state in which a man accepts the inevitable, it lifted me out of it.

It spurred me on to make fresh exertions to discover the retreat of the fugitives. That letter—the letter written by her—I carried next my heart day and night. False as my wife had been to me, I loved her; and there were times when I recalled her sweet face, and marvelled how evil could have lurked beneath such a mask.

I left Herstal Abbey, and took up my quarters in town. There, I should be ready to start on the moment I heard where Grant was to be found. But, somehow, I was beginning to think that our meeting would be brought about by pure chance. London

is the place where all chance meetings occur. There are few Englishmen who do not visit the capital, either at shorter or longer intervals. Something must bring Grant there; so I waited and hoped.

Chance, pure chance, brought about what I longed for, but not in the way I expected. I did not stumble across my foe in the street; I did not hear a chance mention of his name, and so hit upon someone who knew him. I found Eustace Grant in this wise.

This year a book, which at once took the public's fancy immensely, made its appearance. It was but a novel, yet a work the depth and research of which, combined with its pathos and humour, arrested all readers' attention. People were curious to know who was the author. The title-page bore one of those names which strike everyone as being a *nom-de-plume*. Perhaps the book

was not the less read because a certain amount of mystery was kept up as to who had really written it.

Sometimes, not often, since that crushing blow had fallen upon me, I read what happened to come in my way. This particular book was one which came in my way. I began to read it, and am bound to say that the opening chapters were written by so masterly a hand that I at once experienced something of the general interest which the tale had called forth. But before I had read it half through, my interest and excitement was such as no author has by his merits ever awakened in any reader. I gave a fierce cry of triumph. I threw the book from me as if it were a reptile. I had found Eustace Grant!

For one chapter of that book contained an account of the hero's journeying through a part of Switzerland; and the account was

the same as Grant had given his auditors on the night when first I met him, and hated and mistrusted him. Several of the most amusing and out-of-the-way incidents which he then related, and which were sufficiently droll and strange to impress themselves on my memory, were in these pages once more narrated. Eustace Grant was the author of the successful book. I thanked my memory, which had in a second brought his adventures back to my mind; and memory brought back more than this.

It brought back Viola, listening with smiles on her face to her guardian's (as she called him) amusing recital. It brought back the days when I wooed her; the day when I told her my love; the day when she was mine, as I thought, for ever; the day, the black day, when she fled—when for hours and hours I waited, and would not believe the truth. It brought back the last two

wretched years of my life. It brought back all of which Eustace Grant had robbed me, and I laughed the laugh of a devil when I thought that the time was at hand when he should pay me for his act.

I trod his book under my foot. Hypocrite, who could write of honour, virtue, and truth, yet act as he had acted! Well, his time has come at last!

But now to find him—to know where I must go, to stand face to face with him! The next morning I called on the publishers of the book. I told them I had reason for believing that its author was an old friend of mine. Would they tell me his right name?

They could not. They believed he wrote under a pseudonym; but they knew him by no other. I asked if they could show me a letter of his. Certainly. A letter was handed me. I placed it side by side with the letter

which Grant had written me just before my marriage, and which I had fortunately preserved. I compared the handwriting; then returned the author's letter to the publishers.

"Thank you," I said. "I find I am mistaken. My friend is not such a fortunate man as I hoped to find him." Then I went my way. Mistaken! No, I was not mistaken; but I feared lest, in writing to Grant, his publishers might mention the fact of my having made these enquiries. No; every doubt was now set at rest. The two letters were written by the same man—written by Eustace Grant. As I looked at the second letter, I had impressed the address upon my memory. It was dated from St. Seurin, a place which, upon enquiry, I found was little more than a fishing village on the west coast of Brittany.

They had not fled very far then! The

nearer the better! Every hour which must pass before Eustace Grant and I meet will be grudged by me. In forty-eight hours we may be face to face!

That evening I left London. My preparations for the journey were soon made. Among them was included the purchase of a pair of double-barrelled breech-loading pistols, which carried heavy bullets, and were warranted to shoot straight as a line. I had already learnt that in a hand to hand struggle my foe was my superior. I laughed as my fingers closed lovingly on the handle of the weapon which placed us on an equality.

So I started to end Eustace Grant's dream as suddenly as he had ended mine!

CHAPTER VII.

Face to Face.

HE journey to St. Seurin occupied more time than I anticipated. I reached Paris the next morning, and, without halting for rest, took the first train to Rennes. From Rennes I had to go to L'Orient, which I found was as far as the railway could carry me towards my destination.

Rennes I reached in the evening. Here I was compelled to spend the night, there being no train to L'Orient until the next morning. The morning train was a painfully slow one; it was not until late in the afternoon of the second day that I

reached the fortified port on the Bay of Biscay.

There I enquired as to the best way of getting to St. Seurin. I found the place was nearly twenty miles away. A diligence which past it left L'Orient every other morning at ten o'clock. I must wait and go by that.

I chafed at the time which must elapse before I met my enemy, and was on the point of ordering a carriage and horses to take me to St. Seurin at once. But reflection told me that the arrival of a traveller in such a way, at a village so small as I ascertained St. Seurin to be, must excite curiosity. People would gossip, and the man whom I longed to meet might hear of my arrival, and once more fly and leave no trace. So I curbed my impatience, stayed the night at L'Orient, and started in the morning by the lumbering old diligence.

Why is it, that when one is burning to reach a certain place, the sole available mode of progression seems not only the slowest, but in many cases actually is the slowest that can well be hit upon? Those twenty miles, or their equivalent in *kilomètres,* seemed longer than all the rest of the journey. True, the road was in many places steep, and the heavy vehicle not adequately horsed; and very likely no one save myself was in a hurry.

But the most wearisome journey ends at last. A snail, if allowed time, will arrive at his goal. The diligence reached St. Seurin, and as I dismounted in front of a miserable-looking little inn I could scarcely repress a cry of exultation. Eustace Grant was all but within my grasp.

I entered the inn, where I was received with joyful faces. Guests were, no doubt,

few, and their visits far between. I asked if I could have accommodation, and was assured I could count upon the best out of Paris. At another time, this grandiloquent assertion would have amused me. Now nothing amused me, and I cared for nothing so long as I could have food and drink, and a place to lay my head until I had accomplished my mission.

I dined, for I was beginning to feel the effects of the exhausting journey. Then I walked out, and took stock of my surroundings.

St. Seurin was, as I had been informed, a small decaying village. Some of the houses were picturesque in their way, but many were half in ruins. There was a church, whose size was, of course, utterly disproportioned to the village. There were the shops necessary to supply the humble

needs of the scanty population. So far as I could see, there was nothing else.

I struck my heel on the dusty, sandy path. Was it for a life in such a place as this that Viola had left me? Had she given up all the comforts and luxuries with which I would have surrounded her, to hide with the partner of her flight in a wretched hole where she could see no one save rough fishermen, peasants, and such like? If so, her love for Grant must be more than mortal to bring about such a sacrifice of all that women, from the time of Eve downwards, have been credited with longing after. These questions, and the only answer I could give to them, did not improve the state of my mind.

It was now growing dusk. I walked back to the little inn, went to my room, and asked for lights and coffee. A broad-faced, broad-shouldered Breton lass ministered to

my wants. I entered into conversation with her, and in spite of her *patois* managed to understand her.

I asked about the place and the people. She shrugged her shoulders. Ah! but the place was decaying—going down—gone down. Once, she had heard that people could live there and make money; but that was hundreds of years ago. Now, every one was poor as poor could be. Parents could not give their daughters *dots*—girls could not save them. Besides, many of the young men went away. They went to L'Orient and became sailors. It was a rare thing for a girl to get married in St. Seurin.

Were there no visitors—no English, for instance—staying in the neighbourhood? No—yes. There was one Monsieur—he was English. He lived at Pierre Boulay's farm—the farm just over the sea cliff yonder; the house nearest to the sea.

His name? Ah! she forgot those strange names. He was tall and handsome. He had been here, off and on, many months. He was a heretic, but kind to poor people. What did he do with himself in this desolate place? Ah! she knew not. True, young Jean, old Pierre's son, said that the gentleman shut himself up for hours and hours, writing. And the curé, who knew him, said he was a learned man.

It was he! My journey had not been in vain. I longed to ask the girl if a lady lived with him, but I forced the question back. When I had finished with Eustace Grant, I could then think of Viola.

Where was he to be found? Was he at the farm now? She thought not. She had not seen him for some days. Most days he came down the hill, and walked along the coast — far, far along the coast. If

Monsieur wished to meet with him, he would surely find him there.

Yes; the coast was very fine. Sometimes artists came to paint it. Perhaps Monsieur was an artist?

She glanced at me. No doubt my coming had created curiosity. The question suggested an excuse for my staying in such a place as St. Seurin.

Yes; she had guessed right. I was an artist. I had come to draw pictures of the coast. She seemed pleased at having guessed the nature of my occupation, and quickly left me, no doubt to make her discovery known to all who were interested in the matter. I needed her no longer. I had learned enough.

Fate seemed shaping everything to my hand. I had learnt that Grant was almost within stone's throw; that nearly every day he took a solitary walk along the coast.

It was on the coast, far away from fear of interruption, that I would arrange for our meeting to take place. All I now wished to guard against was a premature discovery of my presence.

The next morning I stepped out and surveyed the scene of action. Far, far away as eye could see was the stretch of smooth yellow sand running from the edge of the glorious sea to the tall, rugged cliffs, in a break of which the tiny village nestled.

I climbed the hill, and from the top, looking across the valley, could see the small farmhouse in which the object of my hatred lived. I dared not go near to it. I turned and regained the sea-coast, and walked along under the cliff, picturing with savage rapture the moment when, utterly unsuspecting of our contiguity, Eustace Grant would find himself confronted by me, and

called upon to reckon up the cost of his foul treachery.

But that day, and other days, passed without my seeing a sign of him. I spent nearly all the hours of daylight on the coast. Again and again I went through the scene which I had pictured. I stood a few paces from him, on a stretch of sand. I reproached him, and exulted in the vengeance which I was about to take. I could see myself raise my right hand, and fire. I could see the man fall lifeless. Over and over again during those weary hours of waiting I acted my part in this drama.

I gloried in the thought that he was now famous; that life held great prizes which his hands could grasp. He had cut short my dream of joy. I could do even more to him. I could kill him when the ball of success and ambition was at his feet. In the first flush of his triumph

he would find me waiting for him. Oh, it was well I had been tardy in my acts! I could now take far more than life from my foe!

So day after day I sat or lay on the coast, full of such thoughts as these. Except when looking for my foe, I spent all my time in my own room. Day after day went by, but we met not. I supposed him to be away from home. No matter. I could wait a month, a year, ten years. Had I not sweet thoughts wherewith to while away the time? I made no more enquiries about him. I was afraid he might hear of them, and guess who wanted him. I waited calmly and patiently.

One morning I stayed later than usual in my room. As I glanced through my window, which looked upon the broadest part of the dusty road running through the village, I saw that St. Seurin was in such

festival guise as it could assume. Men, women, and children were standing about, dressed in holiday clothes. Then I remembered that the girl who waited upon me had said something about to-day being a great festival of the Church. I had given little heed to her words. I watched the crowd for a few minutes, and presently saw a sight which, had my mood been happier, would have delighted me. Girls and boys came, bearing tall wicker baskets full of leaves, pulled from various flowers and green shrubs. The sandy space in front of me was cleared. A young man ran nimbly from point to point, tracing as he went lines in the dust. Then, seizing the baskets one after another, he distributed their glowing contents in such a way that in less than twenty minutes what looked like a carpet of a variegated pattern, formed of flowers, covered the dusty space.

As he hastily threw the last splash of crimson rose-leaves into its place, the procession of priests, acolytes, and choristers appeared. It paused on the fair carpet, and some ceremony, such as blessing, was gone through. Every hat was doffed, every knee was bent — all save one. There, on the outskirts of the crowd, with head uncovered, in deference to others, but standing erect, I saw the tall form of Eustace Grant.

He had returned! A thrill of delight ran through me as I gazed on the hated features of the man who had robbed me of all I cared for. I drew back into the room, and watched him through my window. My time had come!

The procession resumed its march. The people followed it: most likely to the church. The space was all but deserted. The various hues of the flower carpet were now blended together without order or

pattern. Grant replaced his hat, crossed the road, and struck down a path which could only lead to the sea. I laughed as I saw him disappear.

With grim deliberation I threw open the barrels of my pistols, and loaded them afresh. No lack of precaution on my part should aid the escape of my enemy. Then I sat down and waited. I wanted him to have a fair start, so that our meeting might take place as far up that deserted coast as possible.

When I thought I had given him sufficient grace, I sallied forth in pursuit. I turned down to the sea as he had turned. I rounded the foot of the hill which sheltered St. Seurin from the nor'-west winds, and then stood with the unbroken cliff on my right hand, and the sand stretching away in front of me for miles and miles. In the distance I could see him—a white spot on

the yellow sand. The heat was great; so he had clothed himself in dazzling white garments. He was, perhaps, half a mile in front of me, walking near to the edge of the sea. I quickened my steps, and rapidly diminished the distance between us.

I did not want to get so near that, if he turned, he might recognise me. I did not mean to overtake him. I meant to follow him until he turned to retrace his steps; then, as soon as he liked, he might discover me. My only fear was that some path up the cliff might, unknown to me, exist—a path which he might take, and so go home across the table-land.

Grant walked leisurely; so I was soon within three hundred yards of him. I noticed that his head was bent forward, as is natural to those who think as they walk. His hands were behind him, and he paced the coast with a slow but lengthy

stride. Little he guessed who was upon his traces!

Suddenly he turned aside, and struck up the beach towards the cliff. I stood still and watched him. I saw him reach the top of the beach; then, as it were, disappear into the face of the cliff. I doubled my pace and hurried on, laughing in vengeful glee. I had him now! For by this time I knew every foot of that coast line. I knew that at the spot where Grant had vanished some convulsion of Nature had torn the rocks apart; that, entering through what looked like a narrow fissure, you came upon a straight smooth space, bounded by unscalable crags, and carpeted by soft white sand. Not a cave, because it was open to the heavens; but all the same a natural *cul de sac*.

I had found this place. I had explored it. I had even longed that Eustace Grant might

be in there, whilst I stood at the entrance, and held him like a rat in a trap. And now the thing I longed for had come to pass. Perhaps to escape from the heat of the sun my enemy had chosen the one place in which I wished to meet him. I was right in saying that Fate was shaping everything to my hand. Here I should face him, force him to fight, and slay him! I had him now!

Strange to say, no thought of an issue adverse to myself entered my head. So confident, so certain I felt, that I paused for a while at the entrance to the trap, and steeled my heart by recalling all the wrongs which I had suffered. I stood there until the sun made the barrel of the pistol, which I had drawn from my breast, as hot as fire.

Then I crept between the two rocks, and went to reckon up with Eustace Grant!

The change from the brilliant sunshine to

the cool gloom of the grot, or whatever it should be called, was so sudden that for a moment I could not distinguish objects. When my eyes grew accustomed to the shade, I saw that Grant was lying on a heap of sand at the furthest end of the ravine. His broad-brimmed hat was by his side, and he seemed fast asleep. I crept towards him. My feet made no sound as they trod on the soft dry sand. I stood over him and looked down on his powerful face, strong sun-burned neck, and large, muscular limbs. He looked the type of manhood. Ah! no wonder he could win a woman's love if he strove for it!

A note-book lay near his left hand. Most likely he had been jotting down something which struck his fancy, when the grateful shade and the murmur of the distant sea had lulled him to sleep—a sleep from which he would awake only to sleep again for ever!

Nay, I might have placed the muzzle of the pistol next his heart, and have sent him, without awakening, from one sleep to the other. But I had no intention of murdering the man in cold blood; nor would it have suited me for him to die without knowing to whom his death was due. Besides, I meant it to be a fair duel—a duel to the death—between us. So I stooped, and laid one of my pistols near his right hand; then I walked back towards the mouth of the grot, leaned against a rock, and waited for him to awake.

Not for one moment do I attempt to disguise the devilish, vengeful feelings which could urge me in this calm manner to plan and compass this man's death. Now that years have passed since that day, I do not even ask you to bear in mind the wrong that had been done me. I simply relate what I did, and shall not murmur at

the blame which I know will be meted out to me.

The man slept soundly. I waited; but no thought of foregoing my purpose entered into my brain. I waited until the dread that we might be disturbed struck me. I had gloated over my promised victim long enough. Now let me act the crowning act.

I detached a loose morsel of rock, and tossed it towards the sleeping man. It fell on his outstretched hand. He started, rose to a sitting posture, rubbed his eyes; then, looking round, saw me, and knew why I was there. He saw the look of triumph and fell purpose on my face; he saw the pistol in my right hand; he sprang to his feet, and took a step towards me.

I raised my hand and covered him with the pistol. He must have looked almost down the muzzle. "Stand still," I said, "or I fire!"

The bravest man may well hesitate ere he rushes on certain death. Eustace Grant stopped short. My voice, my look, must have told him that my threat was no idle one. The steadiness of my hand told him that I should not miss my mark.

"You have come to murder me!" he said, in a deep voice.

"No; to kill you, not murder you. Look on the ground behind you; take the pistol which lies there: then we are equal. Take it, I say, and face me like a man. Fire when and how you choose: I can wait my turn."

He turned and saw the pistol, but did not possess himself of it. He faced me steadily, although my weapon was still aimed at his broad breast. Deadly as my hate was, I was fain to admire his courage.

"I think you are mad," he said; "but listen, I have something to say."

I stamped my foot: "Coward! villain! take that pistol, or I swear I will shoot you as you stand!"

He stooped and picked up the weapon. A wave of fierce delight ran through me. The moment of reckoning was at hand.

Yet he baulked me. He held up his hand, and fired both barrels in the air. I uttered a cry of rage.

"You are a man of honour, I suppose?" he said. "You cannot slay a defenceless man."

I thrust my left hand into my pocket, and threw a handful of cartridges towards him. He should not escape me.

He hurled the pistol from him, far over the top of the rock. My hope of killing him in fair fight was gone. I gritted my teeth, and swore that nevertheless he should not escape. "Coward!" I shouted, with my finger trembling on the trigger.

He was bold, for he still stood erect and faced me. His face grew pale. No wonder, for death was close at hand. He spoke; his voice was clear and distinct.

"Listen," he said, "one moment before you stain your soul with this crime. Viola, your wife ——"

He said no more. The sound of her name roused in me a burst of mad fury; all my enforced calm left me. "Silence, you hound!" I shouted.

Grant must have seen the change in my face, and guessed what it presaged. Doubtless life was dear, very dear to him. He sprang towards me. My finger pressed the trigger, and the report rang out. My hand as I fired was steady as a rock, and before I saw the effect of my bullet I knew that it had done its work.

The smoke cleared off. Grant was staggering to and fro. His hand was pressed

to his right breast, and the red blood was creeping through his closed fingers and dyeing his pure white coat. Suddenly he fell, and lay like a log at my feet. The thing which I had for nights and days sighed for had come to pass.

But not with the effect I had pictured. Instead of the exultation which I had promised myself, a tide of utter horror swept through me. One, only one, thought filled my brain—I had taken this man's life, and was a murderer!

CHAPTER VIII

"Tell me the truth."

RANT had fallen upon his side. His face was turned from me, and one arm, thrown out as he fell, half hid his head. For a moment I stood motionless. Now that the deed was done, the horror I felt at my own act rooted me to the spot. I felt that I could not meet that man's dying gaze—the reproachful gaze of one whom I had slain in what was little more than cold blood. Oh, if I could but undo my work!

But was he dead? I had aimed straight at his heart—had my bullet reached it? Let me learn if I was a murderer in act as well as intention. If so, my pistol had

a second bullet, and my aim, when I turned the muzzle towards myself, would be as true as before.

I dropped the fatal weapon, and ran to the fallen man. I knelt beside him, and, with the mechanical calm of despair, set to work to learn the worst.

No, thank heaven, he was not dead—not yet! The blood had flown from his sun-tanned face; his features seemed pinched and drawn with pain; but he still lived. The blood was trickling down his white coat, and falling on the thirsty white sand which formed his couch; but he was not dead.

I raised him, thinking that doing so might check the flow of blood. I placed that grand massive head on my shoulder. He sighed faintly, and his eyes opened.

"You have killed me, I think," he said. "But listen. On the oath of a man who

believes he has but a few moments to live, I swear that Viola, your wife, is pure as the day on which she married you. The truth you may never learn; but believe this."

The effort of speaking exhausted him. His eyes closed once more, and a cold chill passed over me. I would have given all I possessed for a flask of brandy. I shuddered at the thought that perhaps those eyes had closed for ever.

My agony was increased tenfold by the words he had spoken. I could not, dared not, doubt them. If, whilst I believed in his guilt, remorse at my crime sprang up and seized me, what were my feelings now that I knew I had killed a man who had not wronged me? Those dying words had carried complete conviction to my mind.

I must do something. If only to place my pistol to my head, and fall lifeless across

my victim, I must do something! I took out my knife, and ripped up the wounded man's coat and shirt. I found his handkerchief, which I knotted to my own. Then, picking up a smooth pebble, I enveloped it in a piece of linen torn from the shirt, and with these appliances made a rough tourniquet. The very pistol with which I had done the deed served to twist the bandage until its pressure checked the flow of blood. A tinge of colour came back to the ashen lips, and for the first time I hoped that Eustace Grant would not die.

But I must have assistance. Here we might wait until doomsday without a creature coming near us. There was but one chance of saving him. I must leave him, and fly for aid.

I wonder if man ever ran so fast as I ran along that stretch of sand. All the while I was haunted by the dread that

some movement of the helpless man's would shift the rough-and-ready bandage, and that, when I saw him again, I should gaze on death—death for which I was accountable. Thoughts like this are spurs which might urge the slowest to superhuman speed.

I rushed up into the village. I begged the first man I saw to get others—to procure a gate, a shutter, a plank, anything on which a wounded man could be carried, and to start at once up the coast. I tore into the little inn, seized a bottle of brandy, ordered the surgeon to be summoned at once, then ran back as wildly as I had come.

I outstripped the fishermen, who were already on their way with an extemporised ambulance. I reached the ravine, and, sick at heart, entered to learn if Grant were still alive.

Thank heaven, he lived! He lay just as I had left him. Once more I raised his

head, and then gave him a teaspoonful of stimulant. He moaned faintly, and the sound of pain went through my heart like a knife.

Presently I heard the fishermen. I called to them. Tenderly as we could, we bore Grant through the entrance to the ravine, and laid him on the stretcher. Then, at a slow pace, started on the homeward march.

About half-way we met the surgeon. He called a halt, examined the injured man, and complimented me on the way in which I applied the tourniquet. The saving of the man's life, if it could be saved, would be due to my prompt action. How little he knew that, before attempting to save it, I had done all in my power to take that life!

He gave Grant more stimulant. "How in the world did it happen?" he asked, turning to me.

I was stammering out some reply, when

I saw Grant's eyes open, and his lips move as if about to speak. The surgeon and I bent over him.

"Accident," I heard him say to the surgeon. "Shot myself—very stupid."

"Hush! don't talk," said the surgeon.

Grant said no more. His eyes met mine for an instant, and their look told me that if he died, he meant to die without accusing me. My heart was too full for me to say a word. I turned aside to hide my feelings from the rough bearers, who once more raised the prostrate form.

"Hum!" said the surgeon. "Very strange for a man to shoot himself in the right breast. Must be left-handed, I suppose."

The risk of carrying Grant up the hill was too great to be incurred, so by my instructions he was borne to the inn. There, on my own bed, was placed the man

whom I had, without one thought of compunction, that morning gone out to kill. Now, an hour later, I hung over him in speechless agony, awaiting the result of the surgeon's examination.

Briefly it was this. The bullet—my hand after all must have swerved—had entered the right breast, crashing through the framework of bones, and was now lying embedded under the shoulder-blade. It could be distinctly felt in its resting-place, and by-and-by could be cut out. It was to be hoped that no particles of clothing had been carried into the wound.

But would he live—would he ever be himself again? Undoubtedly, unless unforeseen complications arose. The cure would be a tedious affair, but he would be cured.

As I heard this favourable report, I could have thrown myself on the surgeon's neck and wept for joy. If Eustace Grant, when

he thought himself dying, could forgive me and strive to shield me, I felt certain he would forgive me when his recovery became an assured fact — forgive, and, with his solemn asseveration still echoing through my mind, I dared to hope, aid me in regaining the woman who had left me for some reason which was now veiled in mystery. But I thrust this dawning hope into the background. At present my one task must be to undo, or to use every human means to avert, the dire consequences of my murderous deed.

I left the room, saw the innkeeper and his wife, and gave such unlimited instructions for every care and comfort procurable, that the good people's eyes brightened. No doubt it seemed to them that prosperous days were dawning on St. Seurin. I ordered a messenger to be sent at once to L'Orient to request the attendance of the best sur-

geon the place boasted. I should have telegraphed to Paris for surgical aid, but I feared to waste precious time. Then I settled down to nurse my late foe as one nurses a brother. I need not give in detail the account of Grant's progress towards recovery. I need not describe the hopes and fears which shook me as each day he seemed a little better or a little worse. The anguish I felt when fever set in—and he was for a while delirious, and, as I believed, on the point of death—was a punishment I am fain to think almost commensurate to my deserts. I watched by him day and night. Such sleep as I took was snatched in a bed laid at the foot of his. All the world for me seemed to be contained in that sick-room. Even Viola was for the time almost driven from my thoughts. Until Grant grew well, I could think of no one but him.

Everything he took was from my hands. It seemed to me to be part of my atonement that I should wait upon him like a slave. Had he turned from me in disgust—had he by word or gesture shown that the constant presence of the man who had done his best to kill him was unsupportable, I think I must have gone mad.

But he suffered me to nurse him; nay, more, seemed grateful for my aid. Perhaps it was my devotion and solicitude for the sufferer which averted the suspicion which might well have fallen upon me. I believe the local surgeon guessed something of the facts of the case, but he was a discreet man and said nothing. The people at the inn were too much delighted with the windfall to be curious as to how it was brought to their feet.

As the local surgeon had predicted, the case was a long and tedious affair. Four

dreary weeks passed before I, for one, could hope that danger was at an end. Then, to my indescribable joy, Eustace Grant began to mend rapidly, so rapidly that the little surgeon swelled with pride, and plumed himself upon the successful issue brought about by his treatment.

By his own request, Grant was moved to his own house, the farm on the hill.

In a shamefaced way, I begged that I might be allowed to accompany him, and continue my duties of sick-nurse. In reply, he held out his wasted left hand, grasped my own, and so settled the matter.

Scarcely a word had yet passed between us concerning the vengeful act of mine which had so nearly proved fatal to the man towards whom I now feel as a brother. Once or twice I had stammered out some prayer for forgiveness. He had always checked me by an action, as one would

make who has forgiven, or who has nothing to forgive. As all talk likely to agitate him had been forbidden, I was obliged to let my expressions of contrition lie in abeyance. It was also part of the punishment which I meted out to myself, that during those weeks Viola's name never crossed my lips.

Grant, a great gaunt wreck of his former self, was carried up to Boulay's farm.

The journey did him no harm. The change from the sheltered village to the high, breezy table-land was a most beneficial one. In a fortnight's time he could, by leaning on my arm, creep about, and every day brought him new strength.

When he grew tired of walking, I had a couch wheeled out in front of the house. On this, under an awning made out of an old sail, he lay for hours, drinking in the fresh sea-breeze. One day he turned to me.

"Julian," he said—he often used my

Christian name now—"I feel so much stronger and better, that I must go to work again. Will you be my amanuensis?"

His right arm was still disabled. I think the tears were in my eyes as I thanked him for the suggestion.

He gave me a look full of sympathy and forgiveness. Then, at his request, I sought for and found a bundle of manuscript and writing materials. Still lying on the couch, with his eyes half closed, he dictated to me page after page of a work which has since appeared, and brought him more fame and fortune.

Except for the re-awakened desire—the craving, which grew stronger and stronger every hour—to hear tidings of Viola, those hours spent with Grant at that lonely farm-house on the edge of the sea would have been very happy ones to me. Leaving out of the question the feeling of thankfulness

that my murderous design had failed, the very charm of the man's society was such that I could have lingered for months at his side. I knew that Eustace Grant was making, not only a wiser, but a better man of me.

But Viola! I must hear of her! There is a limit to self-restraint; and Grant was now strong enough to talk on all and every subject. Sooner or later, I felt sure that he would enter upon my own troubles; that from him I should learn why my wife left me, where I could meet with her, how I could best bring her to me again. Is it any wonder that I longed for the moment when he might speak?

It came at last. One night—a night so still and calm that even the proverbially turbulent waves of the Bay of Biscay were all but at rest, Grant and I were sitting out in the moonlight. He was in a thoughtful,

silent mood, and for a while I respected the sanctity of his meditation. Then, moved by a sudden impulse, I began once more to express my deep contrition and remorse for my rash act, my joy at what I now hoped was my new friend's all but complete recovery.

He checked me quickly.

"Do you know what thought flashed through me, even as I felt the sting of the bullet? You may believe I had no wish to die; but I said to myself, Were I in that man's place—ignorant as he is of the truth—I should have done as he is doing, or even worse. If it gives you any satisfaction to hear me say that I forgive you, I say it. Now, let us never again mention the subject!"

He held out his hand, I grasped it in deep gratitude, and once more there was silence between us.

My thoughts flew to my missing love. Oh! if she were but beside me—beside us! for jealousy of Grant had left me. If we were but gazing together on that bright moon! If my arm was but around her, and my lips whispering the words of love into her ear! If her fingers, with the soft, caressing touch which I so well remembered, were resting on mine! If——

I could bear it no longer! I turned to Grant, and cried, in a voice of anguish:

"Tell me all! Tell me where she is! Give me Viola again!"

He turned at my cry. The moonlight was full on his pale face. His eyes—his features—evinced deep sympathy and compassion. A fearful thought ran through me.

"She is not dead?" I gasped out.

"No; she is not dead."

"Then where is she? For mercy's sake tell me! See! I have been patient—I have

not even asked you! But the time has come—I must know!"

I saw him knit his brows, not angrily, but as one in deep thought. My lips were trembling; my emotion so great that I could not repeat the question.

Breathlessly I waited for Grant to speak. At last, in a grave voice, he broke silence.

"You believe the words I spoke when—when I thought I was dying?"

"Could I be with you now if I did not believe them?"

"Will you believe me when I say that it will be happier for both of you, if you never meet or hear again of one another?"

"No; I will not believe that. How can I? She, the wife I loved, leaves me without one word. With my kiss still warm on her lips, she passes away from me, it seems, for ever! Let me see her—let me hear why she did this thing!"

Grant was silent; but once more he took my hand and pressed it.

"Tell me," I continued. "Remember, even after all that has recently passed, I am justified in asking you to explain your part in the flight. This is at least due to me."

"Yes, you are right, it is. All that I will tell you."

I clenched my hands, and leaned forward, eager to catch every word that fell from Grant's lips. My whole future seemed to rest on what I learned during the next few minutes. Grant began speaking in a calm and deliberate manner. It struck me even then that he was weighing every word, so as to be sure of saying no more or no less than was needed.

"Julian," he said, "in order to understand my action in the matter, you must first of all bear in mind the truth which you guessed intuitively when first we met. I loved Viola

with all the strength of my nature. I had loved her for years, and I was waiting, in the hope that some day she would be mine. It was a bitter blow to return home and find that another man was about to marry her. It needed all my power of will to hide my feelings from her, and do what I could to ensure her happiness."

He sighed, and was silent for a while.

"However," he continued, "sharp as the pang was at the time, it is now a thing of the past. I have conquered myself. My love now for Viola is that of a brother to a dear sister. You will believe this, Loraine?"

I nodded. He resumed in a lighter manner.

"Yes, I have conquered it. I think I now pour all my love into my books. But at that time I worshipped her. I would have given my life to save her from grief. Her wish was to me a command. Her

smallest request an obligation to be discharged at all cost. Leaving this out of the question, her mother confided her to me. This was why I did not tell her I loved her. I forced myself to wait until she was twenty-one; then it was too late."

Another pause. I glanced at his face. Its expression was one of actual pain. If Eustace Grant had conquered his hopeless passion, the memory of it was still keen.

"Remember also," he went on, "I mistrusted you. I hesitated long before I made up my mind not to interfere. Your romantic suppression of your true name and position is accountable for the mistrust I felt. So I start with two strong emotions to sway me—love for Viola, and mistrust of the man who was to marry her. Do you understand?"

"Yes; but, for mercy's sake, let me hear what happened!"

"On Viola's twenty-first birthday," he began——

No; I will not give his story in his own words. I should be bound to break it a hundred times by the insertion of my ejaculations and expressions of wonderment. When ended, it left me as completely in the dark as before. If it cleared Viola from the accusation of vulgar infidelity, it plunged me in tenfold perplexity as to the motive which induced her to fly from me. This briefly is what Grant told me:—Upon reaching the solicitor's, according to appointment, he found that Viola had already arrived, and was waiting for him in the room into which I was afterwards shown. Grant exchanged a few words with her, then went back to Mr. Monk, and spoke about some details of business. Everything was in order, and ready for my inspection when I should arrive; so Grant rejoined my wife. He had much he wished

to say to her, many questions to ask, and, as he hoped, congratulations to offer.

She appeared strange, absent-minded and oppressed. He thought she must be ill. Suddenly, to his bewilderment, she fell at his feet, and in a passionate way besought him to take her away at once. Take her anywhere. Hide her from her husband. Let him never know where she was; never see her again. At once—this moment—before he arrived, she must go, and leave no trace! All this she prayed Grant to do—besought it absolutely on her knees.

The man's blood boiled. Here, a fortnight after her marriage, was the woman whom he loved begging him, in wild accents, to save her from her husband! He could jump at only one conclusion. I had in some way maltreated her. I was an utter villain! My wife had found out my true nature, and her only refuge was flight. Was it for the

man who loved her to urge her to return to what, from her wild and despairing prayers, he gathered must be absolute misery? No. She besought his aid. Let him fling prudence to the wind, and do her bidding without asking why or wherefore. There was no time to spare for questions. Viola seemed in an agony of fear. At any moment my step might be heard. Grant, who believed that I had, in the course of a few days, turned my wife's love into hate, felt no inclination to show me any mercy. He raised Viola, and promised to save her. He led her out through the door which opened to the outer world, called a cab, placed my wife in it, and drove off, without troubling as to direction. Her only wish at the moment was to avoid meeting me.

Once within the cab, Grant tried to induce Viola to talk rationally; to give some reasons justifying the rash step. His efforts were

unavailing. All she would say was, that never could she meet me again. She must fly—go far away. If Grant would not aid her, she must go alone. Finding her so firm, and not doubting but that my conduct had brought all this about, he consented to do as she wished. They drove straight to Charing Cross, and took the first train to Folkestone. Here he left her for the night at a quiet hotel, returned to town, made his preparations, and had the encounter, which I have already described, with me. The next morning, as my spy informed me, the fugitives crossed to Boulogne. At this point Eustace Grant finished his tale. As I have said, it increased my perplexity tenfold. Until the moment when Grant made what we both thought a dying avowal of his innocence, Viola's flight admitted of a natural, if shameful, explanation. Now that the elements of faithlessness and criminal love

were removed, the matter was simply inexplicable. Eustace Grant might have thought, might even now think, that my ill-treatment of my wife had forced her from my side; but I knew better—she knew better.

But Grant had not revealed all. "Go on," I said; "tell me more."

"I have told you all I can, Julian. I have explained the part which, rightly or wrongly, I acted. I promised nothing more."

"Tell me where she is, that I may see her, and learn all from her own lips."

"She is with good friends, who love her. I can say no more."

"Is she happy? Tell me the truth."

He hesitated. "I dare not say she is happy," he answered; "but I believe she is as happy as she can be in this world."

These unsatisfactory answers were simply maddening.

"Grant!" I said, fiercely, "for some

reason, you are concealing the truth from me. I cannot force it from you. Until I know it, I cannot say whether that reason is right or wrong; but I will work until I find out everything. But tell me this: Do you now believe that my wife left me on account of wrongs which I did her? Speak!"

He made a pause. "I cannot answer that question," he said. "Doing so, would lead to others. I have already said too much."

"You have answered it!" I cried, triumphantly. "You answered it when you threw that pistol away; you answer it every time you take my hand—every time you speak a word of friendship to me."

"So be it," he said, wearily.

"And now, knowing, as you do, all, tell me if you approve of Viola's leaving me—me, who loved her above the world—the husband who worshipped her: tell me this!"

"I can say no more. I am weary, worn out. Help me to my room."

I did so. We parted for the night. As he took my hand, he looked me straight in the face. "Julian," he said, "be wise, and ask no more. Leave this place, and forget Viola. There is no hope. All this concealment—all that has been done—is for your sake. Good-night."

CHAPTER IX.

A Farewell.

WENT to my room, and threw myself into a chair. Here, until dawn, I sat puzzling over Grant's words, and trying to turn them into a key which might unlock the secret door which stood between my wife and myself. My efforts were useless. I seemed like one surrounded by stone walls, through which there was no escape. Each way I turned, I was met by some impervious obstacle.

"For my sake!" This concealment was for my sake! I am plunged into despair. I am told there is no hope. Yet all this is for my own sake! The riddle grew more

and more difficult of solution. Grant could doubtless solve it if he chose, but would he do so?

Not he. The next day I once more attacked him. I implored, commanded, even threatened; not one word would he speak. I was on the verge of quarrelling with him; but as I fancied it was only by his direct or indirect aid I could find Viola, I restrained my very natural wrath, and on the subject of Viola a sullen silence succeeded my useless questions.

I lingered on at the farm long after Eustace Grant was well enough to dispense with my services. Where else could I go? From whom but Grant had I chance of ascertaining my wife's present abode? I must wait and watch. A chance word, a letter, anything, might put me on the track. Moreover, I had a presentiment that Viola was not far away. People, when driven to

their wit's end, put a vast amount of faith in presentiments.

Much as I had learned to love him, severe as were the twinges of remorse still felt for my murderous act, it was all I could do to force myself to believe that Grant was single-hearted in his determination of keeping me in the dark respecting my wife. The more so, as it was my conviction that, could I once meet her, my pleading would be eloquent enough to bring her back to me, to begin once more the happy life so strangely cut short. Only let me see her once more, take her by the hand, gaze into her eyes, call up the memory of those few short days when we were all the world to each other: surely I must then be told the truth, and conquer.

One morning Eustace seemed distracted and ill at ease. He answered my questions absently. Presently he said, "Do you mind making a short journey for me?"

"Certainly not. Where to?"

"I want several things not procurable here. Will you go to L'Orient for me?"

"Of course I will. But how am I to get there? The diligence does not run to-day."

"Jean could drive you in the light wagon, but that would be tedious. I will try and borrow a horse."

I favoured the horse. Twenty miles in old Boulay's wagon was not a tempting prospect. So the horse was procured, and I decided to stay at L'Orient for the night, and ride back the next day. My purchases could be sent by diligence.

Grant gave me a list of the articles he wished bought. Some of them, it struck me, seemed superfluous and trivial, and all might have been ordered by letter. Then I mounted and rode along the table-land, down the hill, through the sleepy little village, up the

other hill, and away on the dusty road to L'Orient.

It was a blazing hot day, so hot that I blamed myself for not having started on my ride either early in the morning or later on, when the power of the sun began to wane. I wondered that Grant had not suggested the latter course.

That wonder came coupled with another thought, a thought which made my heart beat. I remembered how anxious he had been that I should make the journey to-day, and contrasted that anxiety with the importance of the errand. Could it be that he was for some purpose sending me out of the way? I rode slowly on, giving this question full consideration; and the more I considered it, the more I became convinced that my errand to L'Orient was a ruse. Having determined this, my mind was at once made up. I halted at the next farmhouse, and

stating that my horse was lame, left him in charge of the good people until I could send for him. Then rapidly I retraced my steps, until I reached the top of the cliff from which once before I had gazed at the house which held the man on whom I had come to wreak vengeance. I threw myself on the turf, and for hours kept my eyes on the house or on the road which led to it.

If I saw nothing to confirm my suspicions, I could regain my horse and ride to L'Orient after nightfall. There would be a moon, and I could no doubt find my way.

So, with eager eyes, I watched and watched, until at last I saw, struggling up the hill opposite to me, a carriage, which must have passed through St. Seurin. I saw it appear and disappear, according to the bends of the road; then emerge on to the table-land, and, finally, stop in front of the farmhouse. My heart leapt with delight.

I saw Grant come out and assist some dark figures to alight. I saw them enter the house. I saw the carriage and horses taken to the stables at the back of the farm. Then I rose and went to meet what fate had in store for me.

I descended the one hill, climbed the other, and walked briskly towards the farm. I felt sure that the carriage seen by me had brought Viola to my temporary home. Grant knew that she was coming; hence the errand on which I had been sent. I chafed at the thought of how nearly I had fallen into the trap.

About a hundred yards from the house, I saw on my left hand, seated on a large stone on the edge of the cliff, the form of a woman. My heart beat so violently, that for a moment I was forced to stand still.

Changed as was her dress, unfamiliar her attitude, I should have known her among a

thousand. At last, after an interval of two years, I saw Viola! She was clothed in black—she, who formerly detested the sombre hue! She was sitting with her hands clasped round her knee; her head bent forward, in a sad, thoughtful attitude. She seemed to be gazing at the sea below, yet seeing or hearing nothing. Noiselessly, I crept over the soft turf until I was close to her.

Now that the moment for which I had longed had come, what should I do? Cover her with reproaches? Coldly demand an explanation? Insist upon her returning at once to her duty?

No; none of these. My only thought was to throw myself at her feet, to clasp her in my arms, to cover her face with kisses, to swear that, notwithstanding all the past, I loved her as of old. In another second I should have done all this.

But suddenly she turned her head and

saw me. She started to her feet, and, with a low cry which told of pain, even horror, turned and fled towards the house.

I followed, overtook her, and seized her hands. "Viola! my love! my wife!" I cried, "why do you fly from me?"

She made no reply, but struggled to free herself.

"Speak! look at me, dearest!" I pleaded. "Tell me all—I can forgive! Tell me nothing save that you love me!"

She looked at me; her eyes were full of fear. "Let me go," she said, hoarsely, "or I shall die!"

"Never!" I said, "until you have told me all. What does it mean? What am I to think?"

She laughed wildly. "Think? Think that I am false to you—that I love another—that I hate you! But let me go! Julian, let me go!"

Her voice sank to piteous entreaty as she spoke the last words.

"Never!" I repeated. I wound my arms round her, and kissed her passionately. She trembled in every fibre of her body; and when once more her eyes met mine, the look in them positively frightened me.

Suddenly, by a supreme effort, she tore herself from my arms, and fled rapidly towards the farm. I was on the point of pursuing her, when a great revulsion of feeling came to me. What had I done, that this woman should shrink from my touch—should regard me with dread and horror? I had lavished love upon her; I was willing to take her to my arms without a word of explanation, or an entreaty for pardon for the misery she had caused me. Yet she fled from me as if I were some noxious reptile. However deeply and blindly a man may love, there must be a limit to his self-abasement;

so, as I strode into the house, to find, not her, but Eustace Grant, my heart was full of black and bitter thoughts against the woman I loved.

I entered Grant's sitting-room, without either knock or warning of any sort. He was seated, and, apparently, in earnest conversation with a pale, sweet-faced woman, some ten years his senior, and who was dressed as a Sister of Charity. He started to his feet, and looked at me like one astounded.

"You here, Loraine!" he cried.

"Yes; I did not get so far as L'Orient."

Grant moved towards the door. "Excuse me," he said; "I shall be back in a moment. This is my sister." The lady bowed, and smiled pleasantly.

"You are too late, Grant," I said, somewhat coldly. "You cannot prevent the meeting; it has taken place."

"Poor girl!" he said. Then, turning to his sister, speaking in French, "You had better go and find Viola."

She rose, and left the room. Grant and I were alone.

"Well!" he said, calmly. "You have seen her?"

"Yes, in spite of your subterfuge."

"I acted but for the best. It was only this morning I knew they were coming. Some absurd report of my recent illness had reached my sister. Not having heard from me for weeks and weeks, she came to learn the truth."

"Came from where?"

"From Nantes. She is the superior of a Sisterhood there. She is my half-sister. Her mother was a Frenchwoman."

"But, Viola? Why is Viola with her?"

"She has been in her charge ever since she left you. It was to my sister I took her."

A thought crossed me. "Surely," I said, "Viola, a married woman, can bind herself by no vows? She is not one of the Sisterhood?"

"The Sisterhood is a purely charitable one. Persons can leave it at discretion. Viola has been my sister's guest—that is all."

"Grant," I said, "I am now under the same roof as my wife. She shall not leave it until I know everything. From her lips I will learn the meaning of her conduct. Go and send her to me."

He said nothing. He left the room, and in a few minutes returned, leading my wife. She sank wearily upon a chair, with her fingers nervously moving one against the other. I had now time to notice what changes the two years had made in her. Beautiful as she still was, it was not the girlish beauty which had won my heart; it

was the sad sweet beauty of a *young* woman who has suffered. Youth was still there, but the gaiety and exuberance of youth were missing. Viola's cheek was paler than of old; her figure looked slighter; altogether, she was more ethereal — more fragile-looking. For a while she kept her eyes away from me; then, finding I did not speak, she looked at me. Her eyes were full of tears.

"Eustace tells me you want to speak to me," she said. "Will you not spare me, Julian? I am very unhappy!"

"Unhappy! Spare you! How have you spared me? Think what my life has been from the day you left me—think of it, and pity me!"

She pressed her hands to her brows, and I heard her sobbing. I could not bear to witness her grief. I knelt at her side.

"Viola," I whispered, "tell me all. Let

me know what black cloud lies between us. Tell me why you left me?"

"I cannot! I cannot!" she wailed.

Heedless of Grant, who was still with us, I besought her, I implored her to enlighten me, or, at least, to say that she loved me still; that, now we had met, we should part no more. In vain! Again and again her lips formed the sad yet firm refusal. At last she said, "Ask me no more, Julian; it is for your sake that I am silent."

For my sake! Grant's parrot-cry! I rose in bitter anger, and turned to Grant.

"Tell her," I said—"tell this woman, who bears my name, and who is still my wife, that nothing can make life more terrible to me than this concealment. Tell her in what frame of mind I met you. Bid her speak. You have power over her. She will listen to you, if not to me."

"Viola," said Grant, in a strangely solemn

voice, "he is right; we are wrong. He must know the truth."

She raised her white face. "Never—never!" she moaned.

"It must be," continued Grant. "He is a man; and if there is a burden to be borne, he has a right to bear it. He must know all."

She stretched out her arms imploringly. "Eustace," she gasped, "think of the horror! Let him hate me, curse me, go away and forget me!"

"He must be told," said Grant, firmly.

She pressed her hands to her eyes, and was silent for some minutes. I steeled my heart, and neither spoke nor moved, although I saw the tears trickling through her closed fingers.

Presently she spoke: "Not until I have gone, Eustace; not until the ship has sailed."

"Sailed! What ship?" I exclaimed, turning to Grant.

"Viola sails for America next week. Some friends of her mother's live in New York: she goes to them."

I walked across to Viola. "Why do you go?" I asked, fiercely. She seemed to tremble at the change in my voice. I repeated the question.

"I am too near—too near to England," she said, in a low, pained voice.

"Too near to me, you mean."

"Yes! There must be thousands of miles between us."

I stamped in my rage. I was tried past endurance. Her one thought—her only wish seemed to be that of avoiding me.

"Go!" I cried, "and may I never gaze again on your false fair face! Go! and carry with you the memory of the life you have ruined, the hopes you have

blighted, the love you have thrown away! Go!"

I turned on my heel, but in the small mirror over the fireplace I saw Viola rise, pale and tottering. I saw Grant place his arm round her and support her.

"I cannot bear it," I heard her say. "I can bear all for his sake, except his reproaches. Eustace, when I am gone let him know all. Not until I am gone. Julian, farewell!"

I turned at the last words. Viola was passing through the doorway. I sprang forward, but Grant checked me. The tears were rolling down his cheeks.

"No," he said. "Leave her. No good can be done. You will kill her if you see her again. Julian, leave the house for an hour: they will be gone by then. Trust me —believe me, it is better so."

"But I am to be told everything?"

"Yes, when she has left England."

"No, now! Tell me now! Whatever it may be that divides us, I can sweep it away. I can hinder her from going. I can hold her to my heart and keep her. Speak! If you are sworn to keep her secret awhile, for my sake, for her sake, break that vow, and let me know everything this moment!"

He laid his hand on my shoulder. "Julian, my poor fellow," he said in a voice full of feeling, "if you have any hope, abandon it. No love, no power on earth can bring Viola back to you!"

His words seemed to turn my heart into lead. I said no more, but, obeying his request, left the house. But I waited at the roadside for the carriage to pass: I would catch one more glimpse of Viola before she left me, as Grant predicted, for ever.

At last the carriage passed me. Viola saw me; our eyes met. Her look was one of hopeless, yearning misery. She made a faint

movement as if about to stretch out her arms, then in a moment passed from my gaze. And this was our farewell!

Conquering the impulse which urged me to rush after the carriage, tear my wife from it, and swear she should not leave me, I turned away and struck down towards the coast.

Here I wandered about until late at night. Then, weary and miserable, I dragged myself back to the farm.

Grant, with a face full of anxiety, was awaiting my return. I threw myself into a chair, buried my face in my hands, and, I believe, sobbed. The disappointments of the day, the threatened hopelessness of the future, had completely broken me down.

I felt as a man must feel who is on the verge of suicide.

"Eustace," I cried, "can you give me no hope?"

"My poor boy, it would be cruel to deceive you—none!"

I groaned. "Let us go away," I said. "Come with me to England—to London. I shall go mad, and throw myself over the cliff, if I stay here!"

The next morning we started for England.

CHAPTER X.

"It has been a dream, let us forget it."

CURIOUS as it may seem, I pressed Grant no more to make a premature revelation of the mystery. His warning words, his solemn assertion that I had nothing to hope for, when joined to the remembrance of Viola's grief and persistency in seeking to avoid me, had exercised a great effect upon me; so great that I began to dread the promised disclosure. Until it was made, I could at least tell myself that some day matters would come right. The look I had seen the last in Viola's eyes haunted me day and night. The last words I had heard her speak, "Julian, farewell!" rang in my ears. Both

look and words told me that she loved me, but told me that hopeless misery was to be our lot. No wonder I began to wish to postpone the knowledge of the worst!

We went to an hotel in London. I was moody and miserable—a cheerless companion to the man to whom I now clung as for support and strength. Somehow, Eustace Grant seemed to be the only creature to whom I could turn in my trouble for sympathy and aid. He was very good to me in those days. He was more than a friend, more than a brother. But, in spite of the compassion which I knew he felt for me, no word which encouraged the faintest hope passed his lips. Sympathy is precious, but I wanted hope.

The days went by until I guessed that Viola's departure must be near at hand. I grew nervous and sleepless. Wild thoughts of flying back to France and

seeing her once more shot through me. To see her, touch even her hand once more, before I learned the fatal secret which I had by now brought myself to believe would part us for ever.

"When does she sail?" I asked Grant abruptly one night.

"The day after to-morrow."

"From where?"

"From Havre."

In forty-eight hours she would be gone. In forty-eight hours I should know why she had left me.

"Eustace," I said, "before I learn what there is to learn, there is something I should like to do. Viola is my wife. Whether she has acted rightly or wrongly, I shall soon know; but I must make some provision for her future."

"Yes," said Grant. "That you should most certainly do."

"Come with me to my solicitor's to-morrow. I will give him instructions."

Grant nodded; so I wrote at once and made the appointment.

I resolved to do all I had purposed doing before Viola left. By this act I could at least show her that, whatever the pending revelation might be, I loved and trusted her. I told Grant of my intentions, and wondered he expressed so little surprise at what, under the circumstances, might be well called generous, if not quixotic.

"It will be just and fair," he said quietly. "Do it, as you suggest, at once."

The next afternoon found us at my solicitor's. The large tin box, labelled "Julian Loraine, Esq.," was pulled down, dusted and opened. The notes which, two years ago, had been taken respecting the settlement were looked up and produced. It was arranged that Grant should be one

trustee; and my solicitor, in whom I put great faith, the other. All was to be done with as little delay as possible. I smiled sadly, perhaps bitterly, as I thought it was to be done for the sake of one who was eager to put thousands of miles between us.

I was looking through some papers, amongst which I found one endorsed "Copy of Julian Loraine's will." I drew it out, opened it, and held it towards Grant. "See," I said, "there is my title to all I possess. What a difference those few lines made to me at the time! Now, little good, after all, they have done me!"

"Shortest will I ever read, Mr. Grant," said the solicitor. "If every one made so simple a will as that, lawyers would starve."

Grant, without much show of interest, took the paper in his hand and ran his eye over it. Suddenly he stopped short, and stared at it like one who sees a ghost.

Never before had I seen a man's face and bearing so changed in a single second. I was positively frightened.

"What is the matter?" I cried.

He turned to the solicitor. "Will you leave us alone for one minute?" he said; "only one minute?"

The solicitor looked surprised at the brusque request; but, nevertheless, courteously vacated the office.

Grant seized my arm with a grip of iron.

"What does it mean—this?" he asked, in a voice full of wild excitement. As he spoke, he laid his forefinger on the words "adopted son!"

"Mean! It is English. It means what it says."

"You are not that man's son?"

"No more than you are. I have always passed as such, and never troubled to correct the error. Perhaps, as my origin

is a humble one, I was ashamed to do so," I added, with a faint laugh.

He took no notice of my self-deprecation.

"Tell me all about yourself—as short as possible, but pass over nothing."

So in a few words I told him the story which, years ago, Julian Loraine had told me.

How I was born in mid-ocean, and in a curious way established some sort of claim on Mr. Loraine. My tale was but half finished when Grant left me, and I heard him in the outer office shouting for telegraph forms in a way which scandalised the decorous clerks. He wrote two messages rapidly, threw down a sovereign, and asked for some one to go at once to the telegraph office. Then he seized me by the arm.

"Come!" he cried; "all that trash"—meaning the business papers—"can wait. Come with me."

He swept me out of the office like a whirl-

wind, down the stairs, into the street. He shouted for a cab, and in a moment we were tearing at full speed towards our hotel. Had I not guessed that something deeper, something concerning my own fate lay under his excitement, I should have thought Eustace Grant had suddenly gone mad. No; I knew that he had made some discovery which wrought a great change in everything.

"What is it? Tell me," I said.

"I cannot. I cannot speak. Wait one minute."

"Tell me that it means good to Viola and to me."

He grasped my hand. "Julian," he said, "it means everything."

I sank back speechless. For a minute or two I was willing to rest content with this bold assertion, and ask no more questions. I said no more until we reached the hotel.

Grant carelessly threw money to the

cabman, passed his arm through mine, and led me to our sitting-room at a rate which made us the observed of all. Once there, he grasped both my hands and shook them vigorously. Then he left me.

In a minute he was back again. He held two letters in his hand. He gave me one.

"She wrote this," he said; "it is a farewell, and was to have been given you when you had learned all."

I snatched it, and would have opened it.

"Stop a moment," he said. "This one is a letter which on her death-bed Viola's mother told me to give her daughter on her twenty-first birthday. Your wife read it in Mr. Monk's office whilst she was waiting for you, and whilst I was talking to Mr. Monk. When you read it, picture her feelings, and you will understand everything."

Grant turned away and left me alone with the letters.

Which should I open first? Viola's, of course. Sad though it might be, it would contain some word of love which would be precious to me. I kissed it and tore it open. Here it is:—

"*Dearest,—You will read this, knowing all. Had we not met—had you even believed me faithless to you, I could have carried the dreadful secret to the grave, and you at least might one day have found yourself happy again. You have forced the truth from me, and the truth shows you that this letter is an eternal farewell. At times I thought, when years and years have passed, we might meet again. Dearest, it can never be. Even that hope is denied us. Julian, fate has been cruel, and seems even crueller now that you must share the sorrow and the shame. Farewell.*"

I laid her letter on the table, and opened the second packet. Another letter in woman's writing; also two long narrow strips of paper. I read the letter.

"My Daughter,—If I am dead, this will be given you on your twenty-first birthday. The name under which I pass is not my own. I am the wife—you are the daughter of Julian Loraine, of Herstal Abbey, Somersetshire. How he treated me, why I left him, are matters upon which I need not speak. He was a fiend in human shape. I shall never see him again. He does not know whether I am alive or dead. I tell you this, not that you may seek him and claim the rights of a daughter, but that you may shun and avoid any one bearing his wicked name. He is rich, but riches do not bring happiness. Live your own sweet life, marry a good honest man, and let your true name, or the relationship you bear to the man who so cruelly wronged me, never pass your lips. If ever you feel tempted to go to this man, and say, 'I am your daughter,' think of me and the years of suffering he has caused me. Let him die without knowing he has a child so fair and loving as yourself.

"Your affectionate mother,

"MARGARET LORAINE."

The slips of paper were certificates—one of the marriage of Julian Loraine and Margaret, the other of the birth of Viola.

Now I knew all—I rested still and pictured my poor girl's unspeakable horror when she read that fatal letter, and learned that her husband was her father's son by what she supposed was a former wife. I seemed to see her struck down in the first flush of her wedded happiness, even as I had been struck down. I seemed to enter into her thoughts, to feel that it was impossible she could meet me again. I could hear her agonised entreaties to Grant to bear her away and hide her from me. I could understand now why she took no steps to clear her name in my eyes. How she even wished me to think her perjured and faithless, so long as the secret could be kept from me—so long as I did not suffer as she suffered. Yes! I could understand

what, rightly or wrongly, she and Grant had striven to do for my sake!

On what a chance a life turns! Why had I never told Viola the story of my birth and strange adoption? Why had I never told Grant? It would have cleared matters in a second.

Strange to say, it had never occurred to me to mention it to either of them. After I had succeeded to my reputed father's wealth, my position was so assured—it seemed to me so natural to be thought and called the dead man's son—that in sober truth my real origin had all but faded from my mind. For years I had scarcely given it a thought. But I ground my teeth now, as I reflected how a simple chance might have made me speak, and so saved my wife and myself from more than two years of misery!

Then the idea came to me that every moment which elapsed before Viola learnt

the news was one of sorrow to her. I sprang to my feet, and went in search of Grant.

Good fellow! I found he had already packed his portmanteau, and was busily engaged on mine.

"If you make haste, we shall just catch the Southampton train," he said.

I thanked him by a look. I tossed things into my portmanteau higgledy-piggledy, and in three minutes we were on our way back to France.

We were in plenty of time. Indeed, as the boat did not leave Southampton until nearly midnight, we might have waited for a later train. It was better as it was. Although starting from London at once meant pacing for hours the quay at Southampton, I had the satisfaction of being so many miles nearer to Viola.

Shall I ever forget that crossing! The

night was fair. No thought of sleep came to me. I sat on deck all night, gazing out over the sea: looking out for the two great lights on Cap de la Hève; listening to the steady, monotonous thump, thump, thump of the engines, and knowing that every revolution of the paddle-wheels was bearing me nearer to Viola; or I leaned over the side of the boat, and watched the hissing water flying behind in a foaming white track. I felt that I was being borne away from all my troubles, and that the path the sturdy ship ploughed through the moonlit sea was one which led me to unspeakable happiness. I was alone with my thoughts nearly all the time. Grant, like a wise man, had gone below to court sleep. Perhaps, in spite of the joy he felt in the approaching happiness of his friends, my ceaseless and oft-repeated questions became a trifle monotonous. He had to asssure me a thouand times that one,

at least, of his messages would reach Viola in time to stay her departure. He had telegraphed to the steamer, as well as to the Hotel de l'Europe, at which he knew she was staying. He had simply said, "On no account go to-morrow," and felt certain she would countermand her journey, and await explanations.

Would she? Would a few words from him change her plans? What should I do if we reached Havre after the American steamer had sailed, and found that after all Viola had gone in her?

"Do?" said Grant. "Take the next boat and follow her. It will be but the delay of a week, and the voyage will do you good."

But I could not contemplate with equanimity the thought of Viola's spending another week in ignorance of the truth. So Grant had again and again to assure me

that we should certainly find her at Havre with his sister, who accompanied her thither and had promised to see her safely on board the steamer.

I had other questions to ask him; among them, when he first learnt the true reason of my wife's sudden flight—how he learnt it. He was silent for a while, then he said gravely:

"Loraine, I will once for all make a clean breast to you. A month after I had placed Viola in my sister's hands I said to myself, 'This man, who should have made her life happy, has by his treatment forced her to leave him. Why should she waste her life in grief? I love her!' So I wrote to her—I could not have spoken the words—I wrote and told her I loved her. I asked her what the voice of the world mattered to us. The law might free her from you, and we might be happy! Her answer was to send me

back my letter, accompanied by the papers which I gave you to-day. She knew that I would guard the secret. I knew that she left you, not because your love had waned. The hate I felt towards you, the passion I felt towards Viola, turned into the deepest pity. Now you know all."

It was just after saying this that Grant bade me good-night, and left me to my own reflections. So I watched and watched until morning dawned, then broke broad and bright; until the sun was well up; until at last we steamed into Havre, and I could step on the broad quay, and tell myself that in a few minutes my wife would be weeping in my arms.

We reached the hotel. We learnt that the ladies were still there. Grant's telegram had done its work. My impulse was to rush in search of my wife, but Grant checked me. As he said, she knew nothing: his message

had given no information as to the discovery he had made. Let him see her first, and convince her that I was, without a shadow of a doubt, Julian Loraine's adopted son. Then I might see her as soon as I liked.

I consented, and curbed my impatience. I sat in the courtyard of the hotel counting the minutes. Grant must have told her by now. She must know what joy is awaiting us. She must be longing to throw herself into my arms. Why am I not summoned? Perhaps the joy has killed her! I will wait no longer!

I rose, but at that moment Grant appeared. His face told me that the good tidings had worked no evil. I ran towards him. He grasped my hand.

"Stay yet a few minutes," he said; "she wishes it."

"She is well? There is nothing wrong?"

"She is well and happy. In ten minutes you shall see her."

Somewhat sullenly I reseated myself. Presently, we were joined by the sweet-faced Sister of Charity, who had for the time discarded the spotless linen insignia of her calling, and was dressed in simple black. She talked on various subjects; but if I answered at all, I did so mechanically: her voice bearing no meaning to my ears. At last she rose, and I understood that she wished me to follow her. Grant wrung my hand as I passed him.

With a beating heart I followed his sister up the wide stairs, followed her until she paused before a door, and placed her hand on the handle. Then, turning to me, she whispered:

"Mr. Loraine, I know all the sad story of the last two years. I know what this poor child has suffered. There are some griefs which are too acute to bear even the mention of. Take her to your arms as if you had

parted with her but an hour ago, and until she speaks of it let no word of the last two years pass between you."

She made the sign of the cross, opened the door and left me free to enter.

What did I see? Viola, even as she left that morning so soon after our wedding. Viola, in the very dress she wore that day. How well I remembered it—remembered its hue, its very material. Long afterwards she told me that during those months of separation she had treasured up and kept always near her everything that reminded her of the few happy days she had spent with me, before the fatal mistake crushed her to the earth. Yes, I saw Viola as of old—even down to the sparkling ring which I had, it almost seemed to me that morning, given her. Viola, my love, my wife!

The door closed softly behind me—the Sister's care must have done that. I opened

my arms. With a cry of rapturous delight Viola ran towards me, and in a moment was sobbing and laughing on my breast.

"Dearest," she whispered, when at last we found speech for more than ejaculations and broken words of love, "dearest, it has been a dream—a black cruel dream!"

She shuddered as she spoke. Once more I pressed my lips to hers.

"Let us forget it," I said.

Then, hand in hand, out of that long night of dark dreams we passed into the full daylight of the joy which life can only know when brightened by such love as ours!

THE END.

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