MROSE EDITION. PRICE, 50 CENTS.

Another Man's WIFE.

BY

Bertha M. Clay.

NEW YORK:
STREET & SMITH, Publishers,
31 Rose Street.

"MY LADY! FLY! FLY HOME! MY LORD HAS COME! YOU MUST HAVE BEEN WATCHED!"

PRIMROSE EDITION.

ISSUED QUARTERLY.
SUBSCRIPTION PRICE, $2.00 PER YEAR.

No. 1.—JANUARY, 1890.

Entered at the Post-Office, New York, as Second-Class Matter.

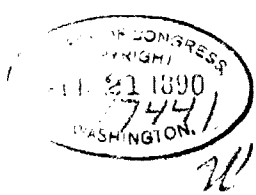
ANOTHER MAN'S WIFE.

BY

BERTHA M. CLAY

AUTHOR OF

"IN LOVE'S CRUCIBLE," "ONLY ONE SIN," "A HEART'S BITTERNESS,"
"THROWN ON THE WORLD," "FOR ANOTHER'S SIN," ETC.



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CHAPTER I.

"MARRIED—BUT NOT MINE!"

"BERYL! darling! my one only love, unsay those words! You cannot cast me off; you cannot be false to this love we own for each other—to all our vows. Tell me this is an evil dream, and you will yet be mine!"

The roses, and the myrtles, and the trailing vines in the warm, still air and dim light of the conservatory had listened in happier hours to this young pair's vows of constancy. Now they heard the desolate, heartbroken sobs of Beryl Heath, as her golden head lay on the dark plush cover of the chair-arm, and her slender, white-draped form was shaken by the storm of her woe.

"Jerome, I cannot help it. They have forced me. I owe so much to my grandmother. My father threatens to curse me. They have made me promise—they have promised for me. Oh, love, we must endure it!"

"But you have promised *me*, and a promise is sacred."

"They say you will weary of me, as you have of others; that you will hate me when, with my idle, expensive, helpless ways, I am a burden on your hands."

"It is a hideous matter of barter; it is buying and selling your flesh and blood. You have been hawked around the marriage markets of high life, as a lovely slave in an oriental bazaar. Such a marriage is degradation to you."

"But, Jerome, they say I must and shall marry. They are poor. My father, you know, has wasted all my dead mother's fortune and his own, and we depend on the Dowager Lady Heath and she says I shall and must take

this offer. You know we cannot marry. You have only the little your uncle gives you. The marquis will give my father a place in some legation."

"I said it was sale—barter! Oh, shame, shame! If I were heir of Sothronwold, they would throw you into my arms gladly enough."

"But, Jerome," said Beryl, with a fresh burst of tears at her lover's wrath, "I would not love you any better than I do, now that three lives stand between you and Sothronwold."

"You love me. Be this your dower, and my fortune—our mutual love."

"And beggary and a parent's curse! I cannot—I cannot!"

"And you will marry the Marquis of Medford—more than twenty years older than you are—who buys you as he would a statue to ornament his castle! Shame on you!"

"Jerome, I must do my duty in obeying my parents. You know you are fond of gay life, and never would settle to anything; and I have nothing to plead with them but that I love you, and they laugh that to scorn. Jerome, we must part forever; let it be in peace, not hate."

"Peace! You have ruined my life. You destroy all my faith in woman. Agree that another shall have your caresses! Never! What aim is left me? I called your love my blessing; instead, it is my curse."

"Oh, Jerome, Jerome, how can you!"

"If you do this thing, Beryl, I warn you, my ruin is at your door—my death, my dishonor. I will throw myself away."

"Jerome, this is madness. You have no right to speak so."

"The day that you make a marriage so shamefully unfitting, I will do as much. I, too, will marry without heart or fitness; and in the disgraceful spectacle you shall have a true view of yourself—Beryl Heath."

"Oh, Jerome! for my sake, be a good, brave man."

"For your sake—yours! You deceive me—cast me off. Who else has loved me, or have I loved? I have even no kin, but an old great-uncle, with son and grandsons. I am an Ishmael—an outcast in all the world."

"Jerome, only this one word. My heart is broken. I love you. Good-by forever!"

"Forever, indeed!"

This was her father's angry voice in the doorway, looking in fury on this unhappy pair.

Lord Alfred Heath had been a spendthrift and a man of fashion from his youth. His own and his wife's property being exhausted, he lived on a limited income, begrudged by his brother, the Earl of Lancaster, and the aid of his mother, the dowager Lady Heath. On the beauty, grace, and winning charms of Beryl Heath, father and grandmother had openly speculated. Lady Heath had secured for her grandchild all fashionable accomplishments, and had strained every nerve to keep her the best dressed girl in London,

This was the close of Beryl's second season. She was twenty. One love her heart had owned, Jerome Sothron; and between Jerome, in his absolute poverty, and the magnificent estates and immense income of Sothron three good lives intervened. In the eyes of the family, Beryl's love for handsome, hasty, spoiled, popular, passionate Jerome Sothron was a real madness. And Lord Alfred and his mother had accepted for Beryl a suitor of forty-five, the Marquis of Medford, unimpeachable, cold, rich, high in title, influence, and position. What nonsense was this about the girl's love for Jerome and her breaking heart? Folly! "A coronet would cure her heart-break, and Jerome was an indisputable ne'er-do-well."

Beryl Heath was her dead mother's own child. Lovely, graceful, shrinking, tenderly and ardently loving, but timid, weak, easily dominated by stronger wills, and held in deep subordination by her unscrupulous father, and the high-tempered, Roman-nosed, resolute dowager Lady Heath.

Beryl's extreme beauty and submissiveness commended her to the middle-aged bachelor marquis as the very wife he had sought for years. It never entered his mind that such a shy girl could passionately love a suitor rejected by her family. Young girls, in his creed, accepted whom their families chose, and therefore loved their husbands.

The preparations for Beryl's marriage to the marquis went briskly on. Her father and grandmother felt that nothing would be absolutely safe until the fatal words had

been spoken at the altar, that should bind her to Lord Medford and part her from Jerome forever.

One friend in her own circle she had who gave her warm sympathy in her contemned love, and often bade her end her troubles by eloping with Jerome. Beryl could not know that this friend, a brilliant young widow, Mrs. Ranleigh, had for the three years since her return to society been laboring to secure the addresses of the Marquis of Medford.

"Don't be intimate with Mrs. Ranleigh," said the shrewd old dowager. "She cannot be your friend, as she has openly tried to win the marquis for herself."

They watched her closely; she was a prisoner under their keen eyes—a prisoner, if her shackles were covered with velvet and gold. Her father filled her ears with tales about Jerome—tales that he knew were false, and which old Lady Heath wrathfully said were not fit for a young maiden's ears.

"Anything is better than her eloping with Sothron," Heath said.

Was that true? That remains to be seen.

Another friend, and, indeed, confidante, Beryl had—one who could only weep with her, and lavish humble caresses on her, and give a girl's sympathy to this miserable course of true love—Fanny Hume, her maid. Fanny had been brought up as Beryl's attendant, and twelve years of daily intercourse, and poor Beryl's desolation in her loveless home, had made them not merely mistress and maid, but friends.

Such a friend as Fanny was one danger more for Beryl; Fanny was an honest girl, but weak and giddy. It was Fanny who brought Beryl a note from Jerome. One half of the note was a wild prayer to her to fly with him as his wife; the other half, mad, reckless threats of defying her, and destroying himself by a miserable marriage. Beryl thought herself the most unhappy of girls.

There was another girl who fancied herself happy. Celia Morris, niece of the gate-keeper of Sothron Abbey.

"Come back to your sewing, Celia," said her aunt. "I know what you are looking for—a glance at Mr. Jerome. He is no game for you, nor you for him. If you don't mind, you'll go on as your sister Delia did."

Celia crimsoned with pain and rage, for Delia, her twin

sister, a year before, had run away to the city with a gay visitor at Sothron Abbey, and had been heard of no more, and Celia understood that the dear sister, so like her that even relatives could scarce tell them apart, who had slept in her cradle and grown at her side, had flung herself unutterably and forever away. She said :

"Don't worry, dear aunt, for me ; it will be a wedding-ring or nothing."

* * * * * * *

The sacrifice had been made at St. George's altar ; as much a sacrifice as if the fair little bride had been immolated to the patron saint in some heathen rite.

A great, wonderful, splendid, brilliant wedding, they said. But her heart fell, colder and colder ; and when her husband clasped his arm about her with tender words, as they drove to one of his country seats—Medford Priory, near Kew—his words sounded faint and far off, for crushed in her glove was a dreadful little paper, with the cruel words :

"Married—to Celia Morris—and the fault is *yours!*"

Married ! Thrown away, all his future ruined, and his present a cruel pain ; and through her ! Her Jerome, her love, her one love, lost ! renounced, cast away forever ! How she restrained herself that bitter day she never knew. Lights blazed, the tenantry welcomed their lord and lady with shouts and flowers, and hats flung high. But in the evening, when Fanny was undressing her, Beryl flung herself face downward on the satin sofa and wept such hot, mad, despairing tears as she had that night in the conservatory.

CHAPTER II.

"HOW CAN I LOVE ANY MAN BUT YOU?"

AFTER a week at Medford Priory, the marquis and his bride went for a tour on the Continent. In Paris it was that the marquis received a letter from his friend, young Lord Ravlin, and took care to read it aloud. because of this paragraph :

"There is no society news, except that our handsome and erratic young friend, Jerome Sothron, has finally ruined himself by marrying the daughter of the gate-keeper at Sothron Abbey. She is said to be amazingly pretty, and as ignorant as pretty, with a twin sister who lately threw herself away. So Jerome is done for."

Lady Beryl Medford, in the most dainty of blue morning robes, clusters of white violets breathing incense above her wounded heart, was toying with egg and toast, opposite the marquis, who jealously studied her downcast face as he read this item. But she had known and mourned for a fortnight over what he fancied sudden news. She said, calmly:

"I don't see, quite, why he is ruined, if the girl *is* poor."

"Do not see the ruin of such a match as that, Beryl! Why, he can never be looked at in society again. His only chance was an heiress; he is a beggar himself; and now who will give him a helping hand?"

Beryl took a sip of coffee, and remarked that French eggs were never so good as English.

"She never cared for him," said the marquis, with inward joy. "Her grandmother was right—girls do not love before marriage. She does not mind this news at all." He said aloud: "Certainly we need not waste words over a man guilty of such monstrous folly."

But Jerome Sothron seemed bound to keep himself in their minds. One evening at Turin, while they were sitting on a balcony, watching the sunset glowing over the Alps, the valet brought to the marquis the English papers, and almost the first paragraph the read wrenched an exclamation of astonishment from him.

"Sir Harry Sothron's two grandsons have been lost in a yachting accident off Cowes. Pity! pity! And if their father does not re-marry and have sons, Jerome Sothron will be heir of those immense estates, unless they disinherit him because of his wife."

"They will not do that," said Beryl, smelling at a great cluster of orange bloom, but on her breast lay a weight heavier than the Alps, and colder than their snows.

Oh, why had she not insisted on waiting? Fate might have united her to Jerome some good day.

Then, when the glory of the Bay of Naples lay spread

before the cliff-hung villa, where they whiled away June days, came another letter from Lord Ravlin; and again the marquis, anxious to know if he or another held the secret heart of this gentle bride, read it aloud:

"Sir Harry Sothron's only son died yesterday of typhoid fever. He has been given up for a week. Jerome is there. His wife has not been seen since their marriage. No one knows where she is; but old Sir Harry will not disinherit him. He says all the property must go with the blood. Sir Harry is terribly broken."

Beryl was leaning on a balustrade, feeding some tame doves. The marquis could not be sure whether the quiver that ran through the elegant form, draped in black Spanish lace, looped with blush roses, was terror, or grief, or pain—or, as she covered it with a nervous laugh, "That the doves had pecked her hands!"

Yes, all the lives—all those three strong, hopeful lives between Jerome Sothron and heirship to estates of fabulous splendor—had passed away like the mists of the morning. The bereaved old uncle, on the verge of the tomb, clung to his dashing, young, affectionate, handsome grand-nephew.

True, Jerome had made a terrible mistake in his marriage, and happiness from such wedlock was out of the question. But his lot would be hard enough without disinheritance.

Why had Jerome married a woman he evidently did not love, and would not live with? This problem the old uncle puzzled over much as he drifted down on death.

As for Jerome, in his hideous wretchedness, he cared little for estates that six months before would have given him the bliss of possessing Beryl.

But old Sir Harry died, and Jerome inherited, and the dowager, Lady Heath, and her son Alfred, wished they had heard Beryl's prayers; for Jerome—Sir Jerome Sothron, was even twice as rich as the Marquis of Medford, and would have been doubly complaisant to his wife's relatives. The marquis rather held aloof from the family of Heath. They were not to his severe patrician taste.

Yes, Jerome was Sir Jerome Sothron; and the thought of his exalted position, in connection with his rash marriage, drove him wild. He was in a frenzy against fate, against his wretched lot. He cursed himself that he had

too much moral sense to blow out his own brains, or fling himself away in a vortex of vice. The memory of his mother held him back; but he tempted death by a hundred reckless exposures; and death, swift on the track of those who fly, is often coy when pursued. But Jerome, the gay, the robust, the popular, grew cold, taciturn, bitter. His eyes were gloomy and hollow: his face was haggard and pale; his step slow; his shoulders carelessly bent; his dress reckless.

"He is going mad, or in a decline," wrote Lord Ravlin, that most industrious correspondent, to the marquis, "and in a year the Sothron estates will be begging for an heir."

Still Beryl did not flinch when it was read to her.

"She does not care, dear child, she never cared," said the marquis, who really loved his beautiful wife.

Fanny knew if she cared—Fanny, who heard her moans, and saw her long hours of bitter weeping.

It was at Biarritz they met again.

At Biarritz the marquis and his wife spent the months of November and December. There the marquis found political friends of his youth, and became much engrossed with their company. Lady Beryl, of course, had companionship in the wives and daughters of her lord's friends, and she liked to take long walks, attended by Fanny and a little groom, along the wide moors, along the cliffs, with their wonderful view. She was sitting there one day, in that balmy air, soft as milk and inspiring as wine, watching the long line of Biscayan breakers tumbling on the shore, and the groups of Basque fisherwomen, with gay kerchiefs on their heads, when a passing foot accidentally rolled a little bowlder down almost against her.

She started and looked about as the careless stranger said:

"Beg pardon!"

Again they had met!

"Jerome!"

"Beryl!"

Fanny, from a little distance, divined who he was. She accommodatingly turned her back, and instituted with the page an engrossing game of jack-stones for a ribbon.

"Oh, Jerome! how sick, how wretched you look!"

"Why not? I have all but you—and not having you, I have nothing! Oh, Beryl, if you had only waited—only

been true for three months—for less than six—I could have claimed you in the face of all the world!"

Beryl hid her face on her arms folded over her knees, and her slight form trembled with her weeping.

"Tell me, Beryl, are you happy? Speak!"

She lifted her tear-wet face.

"How can I be happy when you, Jerome, are dying?—and you lay your ruin at my door, and I know it is true. You break my heart."

"Is your husband good to you?" he cried, madly.

"Yes, very, very good! He is generous, courteous—and, I think, he cares much for me."

"Cares for you! Beryl, tell me, do you love him?"

Oh, reckless question, and most mad answer.

"Jerome, how can I love any man but you? Oh, I have tried——"

A light leaped to his eyes, as he sharply interrupted her.

"Only say it once more, Beryl."

She snatched away her hand.

"Jerome, what have I said? Oh, it was wicked. What! you ask me to repeat words that are a sin, and you would despise me for saying?"

"Beryl, they have healed a little of my misery."

"Jerome, we must not, we cannot meet again—but for my sake, promise me one thing. If you do not wish me to go insane from remorse and die in a mad-house, say that you will take back your love of life—live, be strong—get all the good you can out of life, for my sake. Oh, give me that one content, in my despair, that you are not ruined by me, but are good and happy."

He could not withstand the pleading of those gentle, lovely eyes, the quiver of the beautiful lips, the woeful entreaty of all the beloved face. He said, manfully:

"Beryl, I will."

"Oh, bless you, Jerome. You lighten my heart. Every day I will pray for your happiness. Jerome, where is your wife?"

"I have no wife," he said, angrily.

"You have—you are married."

"Only in name. It was the maddest act of all my reckless life."

"But where is she?"

"I do not care a penny for her. But she is safe. I have given her four hundred a year, a maid, good furnished apartments in London. She is her own mistress, so she lets me be."

"Oh, Jerome, that sounds so very wrong."

"No worse than your living with a man you never loved."

And they both were silent, self-condemned.

CHAPTER III.

"FOR FOLLY REAPS THE FIELDS OF CRIME."

BERYL and Jerome met once more, under favor of Fanny, at Biarritz. The sight of Beryl, his one love, had renewed to Jerome the possibility of life. Beryl, pure as a lily in all her intentions, frank as a child in action, and impressionable as wax, had only in her gentle mind the desire to undo a little of the evil she had done Jerome, and bring him to himself. His promises of patience, of cheerfulness, of hope, of usefulness, were renewed in the sweet sunshine of her smile. If between Beryl and Lord Medford there had been the tender confidence which exists between happier husbands and wives, she would have told him of her first accidental meeting with her lost lover, of her pity and fears for him, and from her husband she would have received comfort, help, guardianship in this perilious place of her life. But while the marquis really loved his young bride, he was cold and reserved in manner, and a life passed until mature middle life almost without companionship of women rendered his sympathies and his insight less keen.

Beryl should have taken it as a warning of coming danger that she was so much happier after seeing Jerome, and that her thoughts hovered about him constantly, as a flight of butterflies poised on golden wing above a hidden spring.

Christmas opened for the marquis and his lovely young wife a series of visits at elegant homes, noble castles, and country seats, where they were honored guests. Invita-

tion followed invitation until the beginning of the London season.

Meanwhile Sir Jerome Sothron seemed to have taken heart, and had returned to his former health and social life. He had always been a favorite in society for his handsome face, his buoyant spirits, his boyish frankness, his generosity. Now those who, when he was "Sothron the landless," had called him an idler and a trifler, had said he was extravagant, selfish, and hot-tempered, had no fault at all to find with the enormously rich master of all the Sothronwold estates. There was now but one thing alleged against Sir Jerome; he had married a very pretty girl, against whom nothing could be said but that she was poor and ignorant. Of Jerome's life nothing was known, except that he had never lived with her, but gave her a fair allowance, and had established her in handsome lodgings, chosen by herself, in Euston Road.

In the tour of friends' houses between Christmas and March Jerome and Beryl met more than once. On the first few occasions when they were thrown together, Lord Medford watched them with anxious scrutiny. But there was such a frank simplicity in Beryl's manner, such an innocent look in her blue eyes, such a calm pleasure in her glance as Sothron paid homage to the young beauties about her, that soon the marquis laid his suspicions aside, and saw Beryl wandering in a conservatory with Jerome, or floating through a dance borne on his arm, and no jealous fears awoke in the husband's soul. Jerome once more knew a little happiness; without a thought of harm he lived from week to week on these chance meetings with Beryl. For Beryl, she comforted herself with the fancy that she had not quite destroyed her one lover, and that he was seeing some good of his young life. Neither of these inexperienced creatures questioned where this would end. If ever it crossed Beryl's mind that it would be well for her not to see Sothron, to whom could she breath the thought but to faithful and giddy Fanny, who, full of sympathy with the parted lovers, could only say:

"Why, where's the harm, my dear lady? It only gives you a little cheer in your life, and keeps the blessed gentleman from making away with himself."

In fact, in heart, Fanny was a strong ally of the generous, smiling Sothron, who gave her sovereigns and friendly

words—and she was a sworn secret enemy of the formal, haughty marquis, who was very severe in his treatment of servants, and did not scruple to find occasional fault with his wife's manners or words, even in presence of Fanny, evidently regarding the maid no more than he would a carved image.

The London season opened with unusual gayety, and the Marquis of Medford's ancient mansion in Cavendish Square, magnificently refitted, was the center of attraction to a splendid social circle. The marquis, proud of his young wife, and lavish in his indulgence and generosity, gave orders for the most brilliant entertainments, and himself chose and ordered Worth's most exquisite costumes, to set off the beauty of his bride.

With this opening of the London season, Beryl saw more and more of Jerome Sothron. He was always in the crowd of admirers who hung about her chair; he visited her box at the opera; he, with other favored ones, came to admire her flowers and china, and costumes, at afternoon teas, he cantered beside her carriage as she drove in the park, they danced together, hour by hour, they moved unconsciously along a dangerous flower-strewn slope to—ruin.

No one noticed or seemed to notice any of these things. Jerome was popular, Beryl was a queen of society; the Marquis of Medford was one of the proudest, most self-assured peers, who ever wore coronet or bowed his stately head in the presence of royalty; it never occurred to him that through that handsome, joyous youth, Sothron, danger could come to him, the descendant of a long line of belted earls.

Among the most ardent to welcome young Lady Beryl, Countess Medford, to her dearly purchased social throne, was Mrs. Ranleigh, the dashing, handsome widow. Secretly she was cruelly jealous of Beryl, who had secured that coveted prize, the Marquis of Medford; but if she attached herself closely to Beryl, she was constantly near two men who might prove advantageous to her, the Marquis of Medford and Sir Jerome Sothron. Either of these men might become widowers, and Mrs. Ranleigh felt sure that Jerome would sooner or later break his chains by a divorce.

It was Mrs. Ranleigh who threw Jerome and Beryl so

often together. Mrs. Ranleigh who hinted to Jerome that he might give his lost idol flowers, and laughed at Beryl if she hesitated in wearing them. It was Mrs. Ranleigh who skillfully forced on this heedless pair little confidences and unexpected meetings ; she managed it that these two cruelly separated hearts should be drawn together to beat as one, and that they should be absolutely forced to sing together, to stir up passionate memories with such words as :

> "We meet, but not as once we met,
> With heartfelt throbs of jealous pain,
> And secret fears, that fond regret
> Oft kindled into joy again."

Lulled on the one hand by the utter unconsciousness of her so much more experienced husband, and by the innocence of her own intentions, on the other by the frankness and carefulness of Jerome, and the crafty words of her elder friend, Laura Ranleigh, Beryl went on and on, until the hand pressures grew longer, the glances more frequent and ardent, the meetings more intentional, the ties to her husband weaker, regrets for Jerome stronger. There had been no real wrong, even of wrong words, but there was and had been folly, and folly, alas ! reaps in the same fields as crime—and the harvest of Beryl was to be terrible.

The very last of the season, the earl had left home for a week, and Jerome had invited Beryl and Mrs. Ranleigh to come and see the paintings and relics at Sothron Abbey, lying at Earl's Court, near the city limit. At the last minute Mrs. Ranleigh pleaded illness, and at Jerome's ardent prayer the reckless Beryl went with him alone. He had driven from London in a hired carriage, and stopping at Mrs. Ranleigh's home, Myrtle Lodge, by Holland Park, took Beryl from there, by Mrs. Ranleigh's advice. Beryl knew she was doing wrong. She made a hurried tour of the house, and in passing through the portrait gallery said, heedlessly :

"Jerome, when did you see your wife ? "

"To-day. Don't call her my wife. She is no wife to me."

"To-day ! Why to-day ? " exclaimed Beryl.

"She sent for me. Say no more. I cannot think of it.

Beryl noticed that he grew pale and shuddered. A sickening darkness fell over her.

They passed out upon the noble lawn, under the shadows of the tall oaks.

The sun had set; they were in the silver gloom of twilight. The spirit of *his* wife, and of *her* husband, guiltless both, and both really wronged in heart, if not in word or deed, seemed to Beryl to pass between herself and Jerome, and with cold, shadowy hands press them far asunder. She cried out, dominated by the reproachful eyes of these wraiths, evoked by her aroused conscience:

"Jerome, we are wrong. I hate myself! I shall teach you to despise me. I will never see you alone again."

At this instant, to her wild horror and terror, her own maid, Fanny Hume, rushed over the lawn, panting out:

"My Lady! Fly! Fly home! My lord has come! You must have been watched—he is in an awful fury!"

CHAPTER IV.

"HUSH! I SHALL NEVER SEE HER AGAIN."

THE terrible sinking heart-sickness which Beryl experienced at these words of Fanny, revealed to her, as nothing else could have done, the extent of her own folly and wrong. A clear conscience is not such a coward. Her terror told her in trumpet tones, that she had risked making herself a mark for public scorn and scandal, and bringing shame and misery on her honorable and indulgent husband. Nothing could more effectually have brought Beryl to repentance.

As for Jerome, he felt the little hand he held grow damp and cold; he saw the deadly horror and fear on the face he loved; he felt the quiver as in the agonies of death, that shook the graceful, delicate form that for one instant reeled against him for support—and he took shame to himself, that led by his prayer, she had risked the ruin of that domestic peace, that honorable reputation, which every good woman holds most dear. Guiltless, he had exposed her to suffering with the guilty. She was so young, and simple, and inexperienced; he was older; he, as a man, knew more of the miserable suspicions, and the burning tongues of reproach, and he knew how, when the blood-

hounds of scandal, get on the track of a name, they pursue it to the death. He cursed his insensate, selfish folly.

"Fanny," gasped Beryl, "how did you come?"

"In a cab. I paid the man to tear along. My lord came home and asked for you, and directly I said you were gone out, he went into such a passion as I never saw, and I did not spare a minute to fly out and get here."

"Oh, what shall I do! What shall I do!" wailed Beryl.

"You may be safe yet, my lady. I told my lord you were at Mrs. Ranleigh's, and as I passed Myrtle Lodge, I made bold to give the gate-keeper a note for Mrs. Ranleigh, telling her the danger you were in, and if my lord went there for you to say you had gone home."

Beryl flushed crimson, to feel herself thus in the hands of poor Fanny, and, indeed, thus compromised by her act, While Jerome ground his teeth, and raved inwardly at Fanny's madness, in committing such a dangerous hint to paper.

"I shall go back with you, Fanny," said Beryl.

"No, indeed," said Jerome. "Let Fanny tear along home, and get in as well as she can. Here, take your lady's wrap, you will be behind her. Beryl, my carriage that we came in, stands at the gate, the horses are rested and full of fire. I'll drive you in town like lightning, in less time than it would take to get from Myrtle Lodge, and all will be right."

"Yes," cried Beryl, eagerly. "I can get in a cab at the corner of Henrietta street, and dismiss it at my door."

Fanny hastily thrust a black lace vail and a large gray cloak, which she had brought, into Sothron's hands.

They all hurried across the lawn where the early dews were glittering on the grass. Then Sothron tossed a soverign to the cab driver, and told him to get Fanny home at his best speed, and lifting Beryl into his carriage, he placed himself by her side, and the whip was not spared, until the fleet horses fairly flew along the road, sparks flashing from under their feet, and flecks of foam drifting from nostrils and shoulders.

Once a terrible thought crossed Jerome's heart, if Lord Medford had learned of this, and in fury cast out his unhappy wife, guilty of nothing but yielding folly, he, Jerome would rid himself of hated shackles, and then they two would marry and seek bliss in other lands. But one

glance at the pallid, quivering face near his shoulder, rebuked the thought.

"It would kill her—dear little dove," he said. Then Beryl's voice confirmed him. "Oh Jerome—if I ever get safe out of this. I can never, never do a thing so foolish, so weak again. We must meet no more."

"You shall run no more risks for me," said Jerome. "I should die if I never saw you again, but it shall be in society, where there is no danger of evil speech. Keep up heart, my darling."

The word cut Beryl like a sword. She was a wife, another man's wife, and this man must not use such a word, —a word, alas, she had not heard from her husband's lips. She cried impulsively:

"Jerome there is but one safety for you or me. You must live with your wife. Take her, improve her, present her. Do it for my sake."

"Hush! It is impossible!" he cried, furiously.

"No, no, it is right. Oh, Jerome, I have risked so much for you. I will be your friend, *her* friend, and she will make our safety."

"Beryl, hush! It is impossible—it is too late! I shall never see her again. I hope never to hear of her again."

He spoke with a sudden curious excitement which Beryl noted with wonder. In the mingled light of the risen moon, and the flaring gas-lamps, she could see a strange, set, bitter look in his young, handsome face. She began to cry.

"Beryl!" said Jerome, firmly, "you must not do that, for your own sake you must not. In a few minutes you will meet your husband; how will you account for your tears?"

Beryl remembered that she must be firm. She was not accustomed to deceive. She was of a guileless nature, of the straightforwardness that means no evil, and her feet were taken in tortuous paths, and a web of deceit was horribly woven about her. She panted, as if suffocated.

They reached the corner of Henrietta street. A cab stood idle. Sothron pressed Beryl despairingly in his arms, and whispered, "Heaven help you, my poor girl." Then putting her in the cab, gave the driver a guinea and bade him drive the two or three blocks to the corner of Cavendish square, and come away at once.

Every nerve in Beryl's body trembled with shame and self-reproach, as she stepped on the pavement before her lordly home. Night had fallen, no one was in sight, but it seemed as if every brick in the walls had eyes, and every stone in the street a voice to cry out, "This is Beryl, Countess of Medford, who trifles with the honor of her house, and with her own good name, as one of the foolish women."

The hall door flew open as she ran up the steps, and a footman looked out to see if he could call a newspaper boy. As he did so, he faced his mistress, and cried, "My lady!"

"Fanny is coming, she is behind me. Take my wrap. Is his lordship gone out again?" said Beryl firmly.

"My lord is in the library," said the footman.

With a failing heart, and step that she could scarce keep from tottering, Beryl walked to the library, as to execution, knocked, opened the carved, softly-swinging door.

The marquis was bending over some papers at a table. He turned his head as his young wife entered. Her dress of shimmering silk, covering waist and front with a network of iris-hued beads, flashed under the light of the chandelier; her face was pale and eager, an entreaty in her eyes, but her voice was firm, though it seemed to her that her furiously beating heart would suffocate her.

She held out her hand, saying as she went to him, "Percy, I am *so sorry* I was not home when you came! I did not expect you until to-morrow."

They had not been parted two days before, since their marriage eleven months previously, but he did not clasp her in his arms, he did not kiss her. Indeed she was glad he did not; that frantic parting pressure of Jerome made her tremble yet, but she was terrified by her husband's coldness, as he took her hand, saying:

"How did you know that I had come?"

"Fanny hurried to fetch me. She thought you were displeased at my absence."

"And she went to Mrs. Ranleigh's for you?"

"Yes," said Beryl, in agony.

"Mrs. Ranleigh must think me an exacting monster."

"Oh, no Percy; and I'm *so sorry* I was not here."

"*No doubt.* And how did you come?"

"Partly in a carriage; then the rest of the way in a cab."

"Lady Beryl Medford!" he cried.

"I was quite safe. I have often gone in cabs with Fanny before—before I was married."

"But now there is conduct becoming a Countess of Medford."

"I will never go in one again if it displeases you," said Beryl.

"Mrs. Ranleigh would willingly have sent you all the way in her coupe," said the marquis, "though it passes my comprehension why your own carriage, horses, and servant were not at your service."

"I went to Myrtle Lodge this afternoon with Mrs. Ranleigh in her coupe," said Beryl, which was quite true.

The marquis looked at her fixedly, and said, severely:

"Accept my advice, and change these methods of yours."

Beryl's blood was frozen with terror. What *did* he mean?

She heard Fanny's voice easily chatting with Thomas, the first footman, in the hall.

"It will be well for you to dress for the farewell appearance we must make at the duke's," said the marquis, coldly.

"I will. But say you are not angry with me. Indeed I have not meant to offend you, or do what you disapprove. If I must always go about with servants and in state, why, I will."

"Say no more about it, Lady Medford. Go and dress."

CHAPTER V.

"I HAVE SEEN THE CHASM UNDER MY FEET!"

THE Marquis of Medford accompanied his wife up the wide staircase, and courteously held open the door of her room, taking leave of her with a stately bow. But there was something so unusual in his cold air, that the blood of Beryl seemed frozen in her veins; she quivered

under his searching gaze as a criminal in the presence of a judge. There was nothing audacious, bold, or combative in the little countess; she wished to be good and to be approved, and anger terrified her nearly out of her senses. As the door of her dressing-room closed her in she staggered to a chair, and covering her face with her hands, burst into agonized weeping.

Fanny hurried to her with salts and cologne, and kneeling at her feet, cried, between command and entreaty:

"Don't, don't, my lady! You have nothing to gain and all to lose by crying. You must be ready for the duke's, and what will my lord say if you are in such a state? Don't anger him more to-night, my lady."

"Oh, Fanny, he knows all!"

"Knows! Oh, what has he said?"

"Nothing. But I see it, I feel it—his words are ice, his looks are swords."

"Oh, my dear lady, this is all nervousness. He *cannot* know. Was he home when you came? Then be sure he knows nothing; he could not dash out and in from Earl's Court as *we* did, my lady. He is only in a rage about something else. There—that is right; do be calm, and let me bathe your face and make you beautiful. I'll dress you just as my lord likes best. If he is angered at mercy knows what, there's nothing will bring him round so quick as to see you the loveliest woman in London, and all the world at your feet. There's nothing like beauty to bring men about. It's my mind, my lady, that you don't use yours half enough over my lord; he frightens you. With such a face and such a form, my lady, he ought to be living on your looks."

Thus Fanny rattled on as she dressed the unhappy little countess, for long years of daily living together, and, alas, the lack of sympathy and companionship which had dwarfed all poor Beryl's life, had driven her to such dependence on her faithful and foolish maid.

Well, Fanny was loyal, if she was not wise, and for this her mistress forgave her much.

"How came you to send Mrs. Ranleigh that note?" she asked, as Fanny arranged her hair.

"I fancied she might not have gone with you, and I thought, suppose neither of you had left Myrtle Lodge, or you might have come back—so I sent in the note."

"But a note is such a dangerous thing, Fanny."

"I make sure Mrs. Ranleigh can be trusted; she worships you, my lady."

"Well, Fanny, my mind is made up. Never, never will I see Sir Jerome Sothron alone again. I risk too much."

"Perhaps so. If you are to be frightened like that it will send you to your grave. You shake like a leaf. My lady, where is your courage? Do hold a firm hand over yourself. You will throw yourself away, and Sir Jerome, too. Naught is known."

Thus exhorted, Lady Beryl took some lavender and tried to command herself.

Fanny finished her work joyfully, exclaiming:

"If ever there was an angel you are one to-night."

An angel she looked indeed. Her dress was of the palest blue brocade, shot with silver, like some rare Venetian fabric of the olden time. Her face, with a delicate pallor, her eyes where a wistful hint of terror lingered in the blue depths, as a drop of dew in violet, her arms and neck of a dazzling pearly gleam that rivaled the famous clusters of Medford pearls which clasped her neck, and formed her zone, and two roses of pearl and turquois held the priceless lace draperies on her shoulders, and gathered the folds of lace high over her shimmering silken skirts. She was as the angel of a June morning, her dress the summer zenith's blue, its lace the fleecy clouds that drift over without obscuring the luster of the sky.

"Now, go to my lord," whispered Fanny, "and if he is in as big a fury as ever Nebuchadnezzar, he can't but fall down and worship you."

Beryl stole timidly to the door of her husband's dressing-room and knocked. He opened it himself.

"I am ready. Do I please you, Percy?"

But her dazzling beauty seemed to make no impression on him. He said, quietly:

"I am sorry to keep you waiting an instant, my dear. Yes; the dress looks well; I felt sure it would when it was ordered.

That was all. He closed the door. Beryl turn away to go to her own room, when a loud, strange voice in the lower hall cried:

"He *is* here. We must see him."

"No one is here," said the voice of Thomas. "Sir Jerome Sothron has not been here to-day."

Beryl caught the baluster and clung to it for support as she listened.

"He has been here. Let us in my man. We are not to be trifled with. Sir Jerome Sothron was seen coming here, at the corner of Henrietta street."

Beryl gave a low cry just as the door of her husband's dressing-room opened, and the marquis exclaimed:

"What is the matter, Lady Medford? You waiting in the hall!"

But terror overpowered all prudence in Beryl. She grasped her husband's arm, saying hurriedly:

"Oh, Percy, the most dreadful men are below!"

"Let the servants attend to them. It is their business. Do I find *you*, my lady, listening at the stair, like a chambermaid!" cried the marquis, indignantly.

But the voices below rose higher.

"We must see Sir Jerome Sothron!"

Lord Medford shook off his wife's hand and stepped upon the staircase.

"Thomas! close that door and have less noise there! There is no guest in the house!"

The chief speaker of the three strangers advanced to the foot of the stair.

"My lord, it is absolutely needful for us to see Sir Jerome!"

"You will have to find him elsewhere. He has not been here this evening."

"My lord, we are sure."

"You cannot be sure of what is not so. I give you my word, Sir Jerome is not here. You are wasting time. Will you have the goodness to leave the house?"

The strangers withdrew.

"Oh, Percy!" cried Beryl, frightened past endurance, "what do they want of Jerome Sothron? I know they were policemen!"

"What they want is no affair of ours, Beryl."

"The trouble of any of our friends is always our affair, Percy. Do you suppose this is anything serious?"

"It must be; they were very insistent."

"But, Jer—, he is too rich to be in debt."

"Then it must be *something worse,*" said the marquis coldly, but with a keen emphasis. "I am surprised at your lack of dignity. No lady would think of indulging such curiosity and excitement. I am greatly displeased with you, Lady Medford, and desire you to control yourself at once."

He opened the door of her dressing-room and said sharply, "Fanny, your lady's cloak!"

As one who, after wild terror, summons power to go calmly to execution, Beryl made a frantic and triumphant effort to control herself. She could not aid Sothron by infuriating the marquis, and by the time they arrived at the duke's mansion she was outwardly her quiet, enchanting, precious self. All eyes followed her with approbation, and the duke whispered to the Marquis of Medford.

"Your wife is always the crowning beauty of a festival. What a fortunate man you are!"

In a lull in the dancing, Beryl found herself alone for a moment, in a recess, with Mrs. Ranleigh. The black eyes of the handsome widow flashed with excitement, and her cheeks took a deeper glow from dancing, her purple velvet dress with ornaments of rose-colored cameos, gave and received new splendor contrasted with the daintily tinted draperies of Beryl, and as her fine chest rose and fell with her deep respirations, the swan's-down that depicted and set off her ivory shoulders trembled in fugitive waves of softness. She said, confidentially:

"How glad I am to see you so charming! From Fanny's note I was frightened to death. Did my lord find you out!"

Beryl flushed crimson with shame and self-condemnation.

"No."

"Blessed fortune! It would have been an affair of divorce!"

"Laura! What do you mean!" cried Beryl, blanching like snow.

"Not that you were wrong, but no end of evil might be thought."

"And you advised—*urged* me to go!" said Beryl.

"I only thought of your pleasure—and of Sothron's wishes."

"You should have rather thought of my dignity and safety."

"Bless us, my love. In such affairs every woman must think for herself," replied Mrs. Ranleigh.

"I have been heedless and wrong, Laura, but with no wrong intent, and hereafter I *will* think for, and of, myself. Never, never will I be guilty of such imprudence again. Lord Medford shall have no cause for complaint."

"Pshaw. There is no harm done, since no one knows; it was innocent enough."

"I have seen the chasm at my feet; I will not go to the brink again," said Beryl, passionately.

CHAPTER VI.

"WE ARREST YOU FOR ——"

WHILE Beryl, Countess of Medford, thus trod, with trembling, terrified steps, in perilous places, Sir Jerome Sothron walked straight and all unconsciously on horrible ruin. He could not bring himself to lose sight of Beryl till he knew she was safe; and, keeping along Henrietta street, he saw the little countess ascend the steps and enter her own home. After seeing Fanny enter almost immediately, he turned away, and took his carriage and horses to the livery where they belonged, and where he often hired or put up a turn-out.

The man asked him if he should want anything more that night, and Jerome replied sharply—very differently from his usual courtesy to inferiors, "that he never wanted anything more in this world."

Then he strode off to the Thames embankment, and out on the Westminster Bridge, and watched the tide slowly lifting the river in the broad light of the moon. He thought of Beryl. Did any trouble threaten her for her gentle pity—her yearning, innocent, but forbidden, love for him? He recalled the blessed days when for them to love had not been sin. By what a near touch of fortune had he missed that beloved bride! If death and fate had been but a quarter of a year earlier in reaping that strange harvest in the kin of Sothron; if the marquis had only delayed his proposal for a season; if poor Beryl herself had only heard his passionate prayer, and battled for her

love one poor half-year—they might have been so blessedly happy! Poor Beryl! Her yielding weakness had ruined both their lives. And in this hour of reflection Jerome saw that in her gentleness and submissiveness to the will of others, Beryl might go on for his sake to terrible exposure, and, unsinning, receive the bitter social meed of sin, and die of her self-reproach and shame. Could he be so hideously selfish as to ask that? No! by Heaven, no! a thousand times no! He would deliver her and himself from temptation; he would fly. *He* was free!

But was he free? He shuddered. He thought of his wife, as she had been that very day, speaking to him—entreating—oh! of what sins had he, in his selfish, reckless, revengeful meanness, been guilty! Oh, if he could but leap back across the chasm of that one last year, and begin again there, to do and be better, more manly! Well, it was done.

> "No backward path, and no returning;
> No second crossing that river's flow!"

And here, again, the hour of choice met him. A sacrifice was to be made, and it behooved him, as the man, to make it, to fly. To lull the fears of Beryl, the suspicions of her husband, by his departure, he would go to the ends of the earth, if need be.

France was a good point for setting forth for anywhere. He would go to France. He would send, through Mrs. Ranleigh, or Fanny, a farewell to Beryl, and that would end all. Poor little girl! he would hereafter cause her no trouble. He would save her by vanishing out of her sight. He left the bridge, and went, with a brisker step, to Pall Mall, and to his club. He loathed the thought of the solitary chambers in the Albany, where he had lived in bachelor fashion since his mad marriage. Those chambers would, to him, be full of ghosts. He had had a little breakfast there once; and Lord Ravlin and Mrs. Ranleigh, and Beryl and others, had been his laughing guests; and once *she* had come there—his wife, Celia Morris, with her wide-eyed wonder at all the luxury, her outspoken rustic admiration, and naïve wish to share all; and oh! her betrayals of utter ignorance, and her curious lack of good taste! How could he? how could he! Why had he not

left that pretty, simple wild rose to bloom in beauty for some more appreciative heart than his?

It seemed, at this moment, that he was doomed to be every woman's curse. Well, he could not go to the Albany this night, for ghosts would hide behind the mirrors and in the folds of the satin curtains. Beryl's ghost—her ghost! He went to his club.

He never dreamed that every step he took that night, every word he spoke, would next day be blazoned in all the London papers, and thereafter in half the papers of the world. He did not know he was walking in such perilous places that a thin lava crust over fire would be a calm path of safety in comparison —that he was wearing a world's wonder for next day, and that his touch should bring down that hair-hung sword of Damocles into the quivering heart of Beryl.

He entered the club, called for refreshments which he did not eat, and for wine which he did not drink, but oddly enough let fall the glass and broke it into a thousand fragments.

He did not know that his lowering brow and distrait air called attention to him, until Lord Ravlin, coming in, asked suddenly :

"Sothron, what are you looking so hipped over? You glare as if you saw demons."

"The day has been a failure, it began wrong and went wrong all through," said poor Jerome.

"Why don't you settle down, man? Take your place in politics, and renew the race of Sothron?"

"You forget—I cannot."

So. I did forget. But come now, why not make the best of the wife——"

"Don't enlarge on that. I saw the last of *her* to-day."

"Then get a divorce and try over again."

"There's no use of a divorce; the die is cast. I'm done for," said Jerome, moodily.

"No man is done for till he is dead," said Ravlin. This is no sort of a way you're living. When did you see your wife?"

"This afternoon; and the thought of it makes me sick."

He did, indeed, look fearfully white and worn.

"Take something and brace up. Wine? Coffee? Why

didn't you put in an appearance at the duke's? All the world was there. I had a heavenly dance with the Countess of Medford. She looked celestial, an idealized lily."

"She was there—with the marquis?" demanded Jerome.

"Yes. I danced with Mrs. Ranleigh; she was very brilliant; full of wit. And, as I said, Lady Medford was celestial, and when I took her back to the marquis I came away."

"The marquis was there? He is a fortunate man."

"So he is, and he knows it. Jove! what a cool, serene, self-satisfied air he has, overlooking all creation. But as for honor, and dignity, and learning, and political insight, Medford stands head and shoulders over most men. Every one thought Miss Heath made a good match, and so she did."

Jerome Sothron could not stand this. He knew it was all true; but the contrast between Medford's lot and his own was too sharp. He rose to go.

"Where now?" said the amiable Ravlin.

"'Everywhere, anywhere—
Out of the world.'"

retorted Sothron, as he dashed out of the room, and at the foot of the stairs confounded the hall porter for an idiot for giving him his own hat.

The porter had never seen Sir Jerome so before.

"Yes; the die was cast. He must get out of England as soon as possible. He dashed along to the nearest railroad station. It was one o'clock in the morning, and he demanded of the drowsy agent a ticket for the tidal train. Then he went out into the street again to wander restlessly about until the hour of departure.

He had not gone far when he found himself surrounded. A man came up close on either side, and one trod almost on his heels.

In a flash he thought of robbery, wished he had a weapon, and wondered where were the policemen of the beat.

"Sir Jerome Sothron," said one of the men.

"Yes. Step further off. You incommode me."

The man, for answer, grasped his elbow.

Jerome stepped back a little to put himself in an attitude

of defense, and the man behind laid a grasp of iron on his shoulder.

"Let me go," you villains! cried Jerome. "How dare you!" and out went his clenched right arm straight from the shoulder; but uselessly, for the third man struck it up with a blow above the elbow, and seized it fast.

"Come, come, Sir Jerome—don't make matters worse. Better go quietly. All this will tell against you."

"Tell against *me*, you scoundrel! Ho! Police!!"

"Sir Jerome, hush, for your own sake. There cannot be a rescue, and a crowd will only harm and shame you. Come quietly, if you please, sir, to the cab."

"Let go, you ruffians!"

"Hush, hush, if you please, sir! This is wild. You are our prisoner."

"Prisoner! You've mistaken your man."

"No, we haven't. You are Sir Jerome Sothron; we arrest you for murder."

"Murder! Whose murder?"

"The murder of your wife, Sir Jerome!"

CHAPTER VII.

"WHAT HAS BECOME OF HER WEDDING-RING?"

"For the murder of your wife!" Those words fell on Jerome Sothron, as a thunderbolt from a clear sky. As they were spoken he saw in the glow of the gas-light the glitter of steel, as the officer took out a pair of handcuffs.

"What!" he cried, starting back. "Will you handcuff *me* on mere idle suspicion?"

"Sir Jerome, the warrant is out for your arrest, and all the circumstances point strongly at you as guilty. We are responsible for your safe-keeping."

"Drop those disgraceful things. I will go with you. I have nothing to fear."

"So much the better. Come, give me your hand quietly."

"I give you my word of honor not to try to escape if I go as an innocent man should go."

"I must not trust the word, but the steel," said the officer, and he snapped the handcuffs fast.

They hung loosely on Sothron, being fashioned for hand and wrist of coarser make than his. Jerome had been noted for the almost feminine beauty of his hands. The touch of the disgraceful steel gave him a shiver of horror through his whole body. Fury filled him.

"You shall answer for this insult to an English knight!" he cried, madly.

"Sir Jerome, knight or beggar, all are on one level when life has been taken."

"But, you hounds! no life has been taken. My—la—*she* is not dead. She is as well as you or I. I left her at five o'clock."

"Sir Jerome, you will please recollect that you may say words dangerous to yourself, and to be used against you."

He flung a light cloak over Jerome to conceal his shackled arms, and, turning a corner, hailed a cab.

"Where are we going?" demanded Jerome.

"To the office first."

"No, no, take me *there* first, to her house, Euston road."

"What, sir!" cried the officer, astounded.

"I do not believe it. I will not believe it!"

"It's true, sir, true enough—cold and dead, poor thing."

"I will never believe it till I see it. Less than six hours ago I left her well enough."

"Sir, be careful. But there is nothing against my taking you there if you wish," and the order was given.

Celia Sothron had not lived with her husband. When they left the church of Sothronwold he had taken her back to the lodge. A mist and a darkness fell over him; he was terrified at his rash marriage. Frenzy at Beryl's desertion drove him nearly mad, and he lay ill at the abbey, threatened with brain fever. Then, in a short time, came the yachting horror; his two young cousins, in the strength and beauty of their boyhood, were drowned, and until the bodies were recovered and brought to the family vault, Jerome was at Cones with his bereaved relatives.

It was after that that he told Celia that his marriage had

been a hideous, wild attempt to revenge himself on a woman whom he had loved and lost, and that he could not bring himself to fulfill his altar vow. Celia raved and wept, her pride was up in arms to live at the abbey, and shine above her former friends as prospective Lady of Sothron. A pretty, ignorant, willful, vain child, she took such fashions with Jerome as infuriated instead of conciliating him. After stormy scenes she yielded to the inevitable, and indeed found some pleasure in the settlements he made with her. She insisted on living in London, and chose the home in Euston road, as a place where there was "some stir and life."

Jerome let her furnish her two floors as she chose, in brilliant taste; he bade her engage a maid, and settled on Celia four hundred a year. On the subject of a maid Celia differed from her husband, as she did in everything. He wished her to take an elderly woman habituated to living with ladies, and who would exercise a sort of guardianship over her.

Celia vowed she was not to be in leading strings to her maid, and engaged Sara Hunter, a woman of thirty, a sharp-faced, smooth-tongued, black-eyed person, whom Jerome much disliked.

Celia's landlady was a quiet, humble woman, who was thankful enough to live in the basement, while Mrs. Sothron had two floors and a private hall-way, and occasional lodgers had the attics. The house stood on a corner, and Celia's private door was not on Euston road, but the narrow cross street.

At first her new surroundings had kept Celia amused; then her husband became Sir Jerome Sothron, and spurred by her own ambition, and the words of her maid, Sara, Celia became so frantic to go to the abbey as its mistress that she wrote to, or sent for, Sir Jerome several times, and there were stormy scenes, Celia weeping loudly and ending in hysterics, and her maid reviling "the proud aristocrat," after his departure.

But for some months there had been a change. Jerome heard not a word of his wife until he believed she had accepted her fate and given him up forever. But this very day she had sent for him, a mild but imperative summons, saying she must see him; if he would not come to her, she must even go to the abbey to say what she had to say.

Fearing that she would come upon him during the visit he expected from Mrs. Ranleigh and Beryl, Jerome went to his wife at five, left her at six, got his horses from a livery stable farther up Euston road, drove to Mrs. Ranleigh's, took Beryl to his home, and on the sudden appearance of Fanny hurried away with the countess, and she reached her own home at half-past nine. From quarter before six until half-past nine he had been with Beryl, Countess Medford.

These things he rehearsed to himself, as he was driven rapidly to Euston road, and by the doors he had left so short a time before, was taken to the parlor of his unhappy wife.

In the hall-way stood the landlady weeping bitterly. The crowd about the door, where four policemen held guard, had convinced Jerome that some foul deed had been done, and when the landlady saw him, she burst out:

"Oh, you wretch!—oh, you monster!—to kill that sweet young thing!"

"Never! woman, never!" cried Jerome, horrified.

"You did! I saw you come in. I heard you quarreling and her a cryin', and she always cries when *you* come; and you stole out quiet, and never other soul come in till Sara screams, and she lyin' dead."

The landlady poured out these words with a rush, as Jerome and his captors went up the stairs, and the door of the sitting-room was unlocked.

The hastily summoned coroner's jury had gone. The dead woman, who had been found lying on her face in a heap on the hearth rug, had been laid on a low plush couch, with one arm. On this arm lay the pallid head of the corpse, set in strong relief by the turquois blue plush and the loosened masses of dark curly hair. The slender, girlish figure was clad in a robe of thin organdie, printed with blue morning glories. All one side of the dress was hideously wet and red with the blood that yet lay in a pool on the rug. The figure had been straightened somewhat for its death-rest—not by Sara, who was screaming and convulsed in hysterics—and the hands were folded lightly together over the breast of the corpse.

"This was your wife," said the officer, sternly, to Jerome.

The pitiful sight of that young girl foully done to death dissipated all softness toward her murderer.

Jerome bowed his head, too horror-stricken to speak.

Was this Celia, at five o'clock so strong, so full of life, indeed so fair, who had spoken, so passionately, words that would ring in his ears and stir his remorse all the days of his life? What! Celia, so cold, so still, so white! He did not know that Celia had such lines on her face, that tiny hollow in the delicately molded cheek, and that thinness on the blue-veined temple.

"You see?" said the officer, sternly.

"*What has become of her wedding-ring?*" cried Jerome, suddenly.

"No doubt you know best, you brute!" said the landlady.

"Hush!" said the officer, and led Sothron out, stupefied.

The screams of Sara Hunter rang from an adjacent room.

"That's her poor maid, as loved her, if you did not," said the landlady.

"Woman," said Jerome before Heaven, I never touched her, nor—"

He was about to say, "nor wished her ill," but he stopped, self-convicted. He had wished her ill that very day, poor girl!

"Well you may stop. Wasn't it your own handkerchief as lay blood-soaked under her? Didn't I hear her crying and complaining to you?"

"Yes; but—I left her, alive, unharmed. God is my witness!"

"Alive! and she dead since seven!"

Jerome wheeled about to the officer.

"When—when was she—"

"Murdered? By the doctor's testimony, seven or after."

"Not earlier?"

"No; and I heard her talking loud about seven, and at half-past Sara went up," said the landlady.

"But I was miles away at six—before six. I can prove——"

"Oh, if you can prove an *alibi*, Sir Jerome, you'll be all right," said the officer. Just come to the office and—done."

"Prove it. Of course. I was with—heavens!"

He stopped. Clear himself by holding Beryl Medford up to infamy! Perish the thought! He hung his head in silence.

CHAPTER VIII.

"I COMMAND YOU TO RESTRAIN YOURSELF!"

BERYL MEDFORD returned from the duke's reception all exhausted by her efforts to maintain composure and a serene exterior, when the haughty coldness of the marquis, his severe eye, seemed every minute to proclaim to her that he knew her folly, and that vengeance would fall on her.

Had she known that while she lay sleepless on her luxurious couch, Jerome had been thrust into a prisoner's cell, no doubt she would have gone mad.

She tossed in hideous unrest, her conscience and her fears alike assailing her gentle soul, ignorant that the chief of police had said to Jerome, "If you can prove an *alibi*, only say where you were—with whom." and Jerome had replied, "Never! Not to save my neck from the gallows! Do your worst!"

Ignorant, too, that the marquis had recognized in the chief speaker of the strange men at his door a very famous detective, and that his last order to his valet had been, "See that I have the papers the first thing in the morning, and take especial care that not one of them goes to Lady Medford."

But the last thing which Beryl had thought of was the morning paper. She was not given to reading daily journals. Her grandmother had considered that they contained much "not fit for young girls to know," and Beryl had grown up in a habit of ignoring *Times*, *Telegraph*, and *Gazette*.

She got a little sleep after four o'clock, and being of a healthy organization, a bath and an early cup of chocolate restored her, and she was only a little paler and quieter than usual when she went to breakfast.

The marquis and his private secretary, who was also his maternal cousin, were already in the breakfast-room. The secretary had said:

"Have you seen this horrible thing—Sir Jerome Sothron arrested for his wife's murder?"

"Yes, Lawrence; and I particularly want to keep it from the countess. We have met Sothron freely, my lady is excitable, and to-night I give my dinner to the ambassadors."

Just then Beryl entered, and going up to the marquis, held out a little cold hand, with a shy "Good-morning."

He touched her fingers, and looked scrutinizingly in her face.

"You look rather worn out this morning. I wish you would keep your room to-day, and see no one, or you will not be able to do any credit at our dinner to-night."

"I will do as you wish," said Beryl, with unusual submissiveness, "and I shall not fail you this evening."

But her heart seemed drowned in tears as she spoke. If ever she had seemed a little pale or sad, how eager Jerome had been *for her*, how pitiful of her suffering, all for her. The marquis wanted her to shine, like his silver and gold, she said, bitterly, to herself.

"Signor Anton's servants are here, with a picture, my lord," said a footman.

"Tell them to bring it in; this is a very good light," said the marquis. "I will have your opinion of it, my lady and yours, Lawrence."

Two men came in, carrying a picture. Accustomed to placing pictures, they speedily arranged two chairs in a good position, set the frame upon them, threw back the protecting velvet cover, and withdrew.

The little party at the table turned their heads to look at the marquis' new purchase. He looked to Beryl.

"I saw this at Anton's last week. I sent for it *this morning*. I did not like it when I saw it first. *I want it now.*"

"You were early, my lord. It seems a fine picture, but I do not understand the subject," said Beryl.

"It is the duel of Buckingham and Shrewsbury; that is the Countess of Shrewsbury holding a horse and looking from the wood.

"But that is a lad, a page, a young man, Percy."

"The countess, my dear, came in page's dress to see the duel. When a woman begins to throw herself away, there is no limit to the length she will go."

Beryl shivered and grew cold as ice.

"It seems to me a hideous subject," she said, trying to command herself. "They are fighting a duel, you say. You must pardon my ignorance; I am afraid all the solidities of education—as history—were neglected with me."

"This was hardly a theme a young lady need study," said Lawrence, surprised at the marquis, and fond of his lovely, kindly young kinswoman.

"This Buckingham, young, and handsome, and idle, my dear, took it into his head to fall in love with *another man's wife*. The lady, unfortunately, had more beauty than discretion. Her husband, the Earl of Shrewsbury, foolishly challenged Buckingham, and having lost his wife, lost also his life, while this worthless woman looked on at his murder."

"Oh, Percy!" cried Beryl, faintly, "how can you tell me such a story—such a hideous thing?"

"My dear, it is *fact*, and you plead ignorance. Besides, it is an old truth that *history repeats itself*."

"My lord," interposed Lawrence, "dueling is done with."

"Among all but fools, yes; and so is assassination, among reasonable people. In France, I believe, husbands yet use dagger or bullet on rivals or traitorous wives. I should suppose, instead of proclaiming their domestic infelicity to the world, the best way would be to wall the sinner in with ice—a cold, calm, never-ending watch, precluding folly and shutting her in on her own self-condemnation."

"The theme is dreadful, and shocks Lady Medford," said Lawrence, looking with compassion at Beryl.

"Oh, pardon me, Lady Medford; if we talk so long you will not recruit for dinner. So you do not admire the picture? It is wonderfully painted, and that countess in page dress is as lovely as wicked. And you do not care for it for your boudoir? Let it be hung in the library"—and passing behind her chair he dropped three words, like knives, into her ear—"*as a reminder!*"

Then, with exceeding courtesy, he held open the door; and Beryl, confounded, humiliated beyond belief, passed up to her own room, feeling as if she must fall at every step.

A few moments later the marquis sent for Fanny.

"Fanny, there is a bit of morning news you must keep from your lady, or she will be unfit for dinner to-night. Last evening, at seven, Sir Jerome Sothron murdered his wife."

"Murdered!" cried Fanny. "Never! At seven! No, no. I could testify at seven he was with——"

She stopped.

"You are not to testify anything or say anything. Your views are of no consequence. All your duty is to keep this from your lady."

"But if Sir Jerome should hang!"

"Let him hang!" said the marquis, setting his teeth.

But when Fanny left him the marquis paced the floor, crying out to himself:

"Hang? No! He cannot. Too many can prove an *alibi*—oh, Heaven, at my expense!—at the sacrifice of her reputation and my honor! Beryl, Fanny, Mrs. Ranleigh, the servants at Sothronwold Abbey—all of them will testify where he was, and would I stop their mouths, and let him die—a judicial murder? If he, for her sake, is silent, shall I accept the sacrifice for my own sake? No, I cannot!"

And the proud peer, on whose good name the shadow of dishonor had never fallen, who had in his cold, reserved way deeply loved this fair woman by whom he feared he had been betrayed, whose heart at least had wavered from its faith to him, saw before him the blackness of an advancing shame.

He nerved himself to meet it.

Beryl, shut in her chamber, wondered at the silence of the usually garrulous Fanny; but silence gave her time to ponder and repent.

She believed her husband knew all. If he spoke more plainly, she made up her mind to tell him all—all the history of her love, her folly, her fear. She would entreat his pardon. She would implore the return of his confidence. She would promise—and, oh, how she would keep that promise—to remember her honor and his forevermore.

She did not appear at lunch, not until it was time to go down to join the marquis in the drawing-room to receive her guests. She moved slowly down the great rooms, in the light that leaped and reflected over silver, glass, marble,

satin; she seemed like some pure fair lily, or like an angel wandered to this lower world, all clad in virgin white, with clusters of pearls and knots of lilies of the valley on her dress of white satin and swan's-down. Her golden hair fell in shadowy curls over her broad white brow, and lay in a gleaming knot at the back of her neck. A peerlessly lovely creature. But no word of tenderness fell from the marquis, as, drawing her hand to his arm, they stood to receive their guests.

All went well; the dinner passed to perfection; the honored guests returned to the drawing-room, and were met by a few later comers. Then, in spite of all the precautions of the marquis, some one said to her, as she sat a little apart:

"Horrible thing about Sothron's wife, was it not?"

"What? I did not hear."

"He murdered her!"

"Never! never!" cried Beryl; but all the world seemed black.

"Last night, about seven."

"No! no! At seven—why, at seven I——"

She paused, too overcome to speak; she was swooning.

"Sothron was arrested last night, and——"

The marquis took her arm in a grasp like a vise, and whispered:

"Beryl! I command you to restrain yourself!"

CHAPTER IX.

"BURN THIS, AND KEEP SILENCE!"

TERROR of her husband and the pain of the grasp on her little gloved hand, kept Beryl from insensibility.

"May I ask you to secure a glass of ice-water, or iced wine?" said the marquis to his thoughtless guest. "You have alarmed my wife; she is not accustomed to such news as this."

The young man who had been so eager to retail gossip flushed, and went for the water.

"I will have no scenes" said the marquis, in a low

"SOTHRON WAS ARRESTED LAST NIGHT, AND——"
THE MARQUIS TOOK HER ARM IN A GRIP LIKE A VISE.

tone, to his wife. "Can you fan yourself, or shall I fan you?"

"You shall have no scenes," whispered Beryl, unfurling her fan with trembling fingers.

Mrs. Ranleigh came by, her eyes shining, her face with its pomegranate bloom—"a breath of Eastern sandal-wood, a gleam of gold."

"Have you your salts?" said the marquis, shortly.

"Lady Medford has—has been near fainting."

"Goodness, my dear!" said Mrs. Ranleigh, holding out a little gold flask that dangled from her fan. "Don't make a spectacle of yourself; all London will be talking."

"My wife seems to consider little the danger of scandal," said the marquis, with concentrated bitterness.

But the ice-water had come. He took the goblet from the salver himself, and gave it to Beryl, and as he saw she felt better, said calmly:

"Suppose we walk about the conservatory for a few moments, my lady?"

In a minute the two elegant figures were lost in the shrdows of palm and fern.

"Percy," said Beryl, "I *must* speak to you. Do have mercy on me, and answer me. Indeed, I will be firm. Say, is this true about Jerome Sothron's wife?"

"It is true. She is dead—out of his way—murdered!"

"And he is accused?"

"He is accused."

"And they say it was at seven, or near that time?"

"Yes. Drop the detestable theme."

"I cannot, Percy. They cannot prove him guilty. He never did it! He was not with his wife at that time, for he——"

"Hush! It is of no consequence whether he can or cannot prove an *alibi*, for he has escaped."

"Escaped?"

"Yes; immediately after he left the office for prison—on his way, he escaped."

"Oh, Percy, how!—only tell me."

"I will tell you nothing more. The theme sickens me. The public press will tell you all. Read it, Lady Medford—read, and consider what it is to have one's name hawked about by criers, blazoned in large print, read and commented on by every blackguard. Read it,

and learn the risk one runs who stoops to folly—or to crime."

Beryl hung her head. Her husband's words filled her timid soul with awful terror.

They returned to the drawing-room.

Never in her short, uneventful life had Beryl been stirred to such dizzying thought as this evening. Instinctively, when her husband left her to entertain one of their guests, looking over a collection of choice plate-proofs, she was apparently interested and attentive, playing the part, if not of a charming conversationalist, of a most delightful listener. But while she seemed to be all engrossed with the engravings and the guest, her mind was really far away, with Jerome.

He was accused of murdering his wife, and every one knew that she was an incumbrance to him, and, as the marquis had said, death would "put her well out of his way."

He had been with her that very fatal afternoon. And then, when arrested, he had escape. Why escaped? Does not an innocent man face a foul charge, as a lion at bay faces the spear? and does not virtue triumphantly vindicate itself? Why fly?

And yet he was innocent; she herself could prove it, in establishing his *alibi*; and at once it came to her that for her sake he had fled as a criminal, that she need not convict herself in clearing him. Oh, Jerome! Jerome!

"You are very pale, Lady Medford. I weary you," said the gentleman by her side.

"Oh, no, colonel. I may be a little pale. We were at the duke's last evening; and at the end of the season dissipation begins to tell on us butterflies of society. We are going into the country presently. Do you know, I often wish some wider, nobler life was open to us. You men have war, and politics, and philosophy, and philanthropy, and art; and we ladies, most of us, have been educated only for the shining surface of life."

She knew the colonel well enough to know that these remarks would betray him into a long answer, during which she would have time to *think*.

She glanced about the room after speaking, and her eyes fell on the marquis, standing talking, with the German ambassador. Tall, stately, handsome, showing fully

his mature middle life ; his face strong, and wise, and honest in its unvarying sternness ; oh, if he in his power, could be her rock of refuge in this storm ! If she, in her ignorance and weakness, was to clear Jerome, as she must, the marquis must be the one to aid and direct her. Would he do so, or would he scorn her, and cast her out, or carry her off to some distant country-seat, a virtual prisoner ? What would be her fate ? He was a good man. Would he help her ? a just man ; would he condemn her ?

She felt that she must placate him. She would begin at once by playing the part of hostess to perfection.

She moved about among her guests, and surpassed and surprised herself.

The evening was over ; the last guest gone. The marquis, as before, ceremoniously attended her upstairs, and, opening the door of her room, bade her a stately "good-night."

She lifted her eyes in piteous entreaty to his rigid face. Oh, would he not unbend, ever so little ? give one look of compassion to her pain, one little softening glance of encouragement to humble confession, that this heavy burden of concealment—so foreign to her heart ; this hideous suspicion of crime—so odious to her innocence—might be rolled away !

No ; not one milder sign ! Did he purposely misunderstand her ? He said, frigidly :

"I will send you up the papers to-morrow morning."

He was gone—erect, strong, rigorous. With faltering step she entered her room, and dropped into a chair.

Fanny flew to her.

"My lady ! I thought you would never come up ! What an evening it has been ! and I dared not go to you, on account of my lord. Here is a note from Sir Jerome Sothron."

"From Sir Jerome !" moaned Beryl, taking the soiled, crumpled paper, and utterly unable to see to read it. "How did it come ?"

"A man asked for me—a sailor, they said. I flew down to the servants' hall ; for I have a sailor cousin. I saw in a wink he was strange to me, but his look meant something ; so, to cover all that might be, I screamed, 'I'm so glad to see you !' and he said, 'Bless me, Fan, it

heartens me up to look at you!' and, shaking hands, he left this bit of paper in my palm, whispering, 'Sir Jerome.'"

Beryl bent near the light, and read:

"Be sure and do not say where you were. I am safe. I have had a lesson to-day to sober me for all my life. I do not need your help. Burn this, and keep silence."

"And the man?" asked Beryl.

"We talked a little in a corner, friends like, so the others would not suspect. I asked him had he anything to tell me, and he said, 'Not a word.' I asked him if all the morning papers was true, and he said, 'Yes; but he was beholden to Sir Jerome, and he would stand by him. He didn't believe Sir Jerome did it; he wasn't that kind of a man.' I said, 'I know he didn't do it and could prove it.' And he said, 'He needs no proving, he's scot free.' I nearly fell, my lady. That was the first I heard he had escaped. But why did he escape, when he was innocent?"

"Fanny, you must see that it was so that it need not be brought out that I was—at Sothronwold Abbey—alone with him. Oh, Fanny, why was I so mad, so reckless? If it is made public, it would be ground for a divorce! The marquis will put me away. I shall be a disgraced, ruined woman!"

Beryl folded her arms on her dressing-table, and wept passionately a long time.

"Yes—weep, my dear lady; it will keep you from going wild. Oh, my poor angel lady, how I feel for you."

"Was any one ever so miserable!" moaned Beryl.

"Think of the poor creature that's dead, murdered by some monster," said Fanny. The sailor—Ralph Marshall, he says his name is, mate of a sailing ship—told me she was a sweet, pretty creature. He is going to see the body to-morrow morning, because he knows her twin sister, and when he sees her, she might wish to know that all was done properly for her. He says her twin sister and she were as like as two peas in a pod, or something about two topsails, that I couldn't understand, not being nautical."

"Oh, Fanny, the twin sister is nothing to me," cried Beryl.

But that twin sister was the mistress of Beryl's fate!

CHAPTER X.

THE STORY OF A CRIME.

BERYL MEDFORD that night slept the sleep of deep exhaustion.

The next morning, after Fanny had brought to her her breakfast, there was a knock at the door, and the valet of the marquis handed Fanny, for her lady, the morning and evening papers of the previous day. Beryl took them eagerly. There was nothing in that luxurious dressing-room, where the sun came broadly in through a bay-window, where lovely, freshly cut flowers filled the vases, a pair of goldfinches swung and sung in a gilded cage, and a merry little King Charles spaniel gambolled about its mistress' feet—nothing to hint that it was the scene of fierce agony, remorse, and shame.

The little lady of the room, robed in pale pink cashmere, and lying back in her richly cushioned chair, looked a creature on whom the winds of heaven had not been permitted to blow roughly, and who would guess that she was the center of a hideous social tragedy?

She lay back there in the sunshine, fragrance, beauty, luxury, reading of a horrible crime laid to the charge of a man whom she deeply loved—and not only every scene and incident of that crime seemed to point at Jerome as guilty—but her love for him she herself had made guilt by her vow to another, and now she had before her this choice—should she blacken herself, her own honor, destroy her own reputation, and live and die covered with infamy, really undeserved, or let Jerome remain a fugitive and an exile, covered with the reproach of an iniquity of which he too was guiltless?

Beryl forgot that there were any others interested in this question but Jerome and herself.

The chief witnesses against Jerome had been the landlady and Sara Hunter, Celia Sothron's maid. The landlady stated that Mrs. Sothron had seemed lonely and unhappy. She had been more and more unhappy since first coming

to the house. She was, the landlady said, a sweet young creature, and it was a cruel shame for any man to use her as Sir Jerome had, leaving her alone and refusing to live with her.

Sir Jerome had not been there for a long time till the day of the murder. Formerly when he came, there had been quarrels, and Mrs. Sothron used to cry, and scold, and recriminate loudly. On this last day, the landlady, who vaguely stated "she had happened to be in the hall," had heard Celia speaking earnestly, more and more excitedly, and at last crying passionately. Had she heard any words? She had heard her say, "You hate me; you want to get rid of me; you will destroy me; you will have to answer for it," and such words. Had she heard Sir Jerome's words? No; only now and then a mumble of his voice. She was sure it was Sir Jerome who came that day? Oh, yes, she would take her oath of that. She went down to her own room under Mrs. Sothron's sitting-room, and there was such a silence she concluded Sir Jerome had gone, when the crying and talking had begun again, wilder than ever.

Then Sara had come down, and the landlady said: "How long Sir Jerome stays," and Sara had made answer, "Yes, he'll be the death of her." And Sara said she was going out for thread to mend her mistress' lace, and asked the landlady to answer her mistress' bell if it rang. But it never rang; and Sara came back and said she was sick of life, and wanted to get her mistress quiet for the night; and so she went upstairs. That was at seven, for she looked at the clock, and it about fifteen minutes since she had heard any noise up there.

Sara went up, and in a few moments ran back, white as a ghost, holding her arms over her head, and gasping, and not able to say a word; and then she fell on the floor in fits, and the landlady screamed for help, and some one came in, and it was some minutes before they got Sara brought round. Then she just screamed till the landlady thought to go up-stairs, and there was Mrs. Sothron lying all doubled in a heap, and blood-stains over all the rug and carpet. Then the shrieks of all three women called the neighbors, and then the police and the doctors, and the promptly summoned inquest that met before ten.

Sara's testimony corroborated that of the landlady.

she said she "went first to her mistress' bedroom, and bustled about, hoping to be called. As she was not, she made bold to open the door into the parlor, and saw her mistress lying all huddled on the rug. Drawing near, she saw the blood; and, all struck dumb, she flew down stairs, but was in too much agony to speak, and fell in fits."

"Where was Sir Jerome standing when she left him and her lady together?"

"By the front window."

"And her lady?"

"On the hearth-rug."

"Where was the bedroom door?"

"Between the window and the hearth."

"Did she find it closed?"

"Oh, yes."

"Had the late Lady Sothron any friends or visitors?"

Sara and the landlady both said she had an occasional visitor—a young woman, who came so deeply vailed that they had never seen her face. Mrs. Sothron seemed to make a great secret of these visits, and always cried much after them.

For three months she had been intimate with a lady who lodged in the next house—a Mrs. Marvel, wife of a young physician. Doctor and Mrs. Marvel had left London over a week previous to the murder.

"Did Sara know what had been the reason of Sir Jerome's coming that day?"

"Yes; his wife had sent for him."

"For what?"

"Because she wanted him to take her to Sothronwold Abbey, give her her rights, and acknowledge her as his wife."

The weapon with which Celia Sothron had been killed was a small stiletto, with Sir Jerome's name on the wrought silver handle.

After this evidence, a verdict had been brought in that "Lady Celia Sothron had come to her death at the hands of her husband, Sir Jerome Sothron."

Sir Jerome Sothron had been duly arrested, just after buying a ticket for France.

This was the substance of the news in the morning papers of the day after the murder.

The late editions bore the startling news of the escape of Sir Jerome. The escape had been like the intervention of a miracle.

Sir Jerome, on refusing, with singular vehemence, to explain where or with whom he had been that fatal evening, had been taken back into his cab to be carried to prison. In the cab went the two officers who had made the arrest, and a third was on the box with the driver.

Going from Scotland Yard to the prison in Clerkenwell, the cab passed through Fleet Street. It was two o'clock in the morning. A brick building was in process of demolition, being condemned by the Board of Works as unsafe. Just as the cab dashed near, a portion of the yet standing wall gave way and fell with a tremendous crash. A flying brick knocked the driver senseless from his seat. As he fell, the officer by him tried to catch him, and plunged headlong with him, the cab passing over them both. The horse, wild with fright at the crash, dashed forward upon the debris, overturning the cab. The nearest gas-lamp was extinguished. A hastily collected crowd surrounded the broken vehicle. One man crawled out, with little assistance, saying:

"I am all right; help the others."

One officer was taken out with a broken collar-bone, insensible; the other, only slightly stunned, came quickly to himself, asking for his prisoner. He was told:

"There was no prisoner!"

"The man with handcuffs—where is he?"

"There was no man with handcuffs!"

In brief, the steel wristlets were found in the cab. Sir Jerome had practiced a trick of hand compression, a feat of his merry boyhood, had slipped off his fetters, and was gone.

"I wish I had taken his word of honor," sighed the officer.

He had utterly disappeared. Not one trace of him remained. Great was the wonder.

Overwhelming joy that he was safe, not fettered nor in prison, was Beryl's first thought. Her second was, that he had gone a fugitive, loaded with undeserved shame, bearing the horrible load for her dear sake.

She had now doubly ruined him. She had driven him to his deplorable marriage; and now, by her wild, foolish

act, to conceal her undignified, reckless conduct, he suffered to rest on him the reproach of murder! She felt that, in her heart of hearts, she loved him still. He was dearer to her than all the world beside! That love she must conquer; it had no right in her soul; she would root it out, if the process killed her. But she would do Jerome justice, and, at any sacrifice, she would clear his name.

Fanny came to her.

"My lady, my lord wishes you would ride in the Park with him this afternoon."

"Say that I shall be glad to go at the hour he may set."

CHAPTER XI.

"PERCY, I AM NOT GUILTY!"

AT THE appointed hour Beryl went down to the library to her husband. She had dressed herself with scrupulous care, to please his most exacting taste. She wore a carriage-dress of dark-green velvet, buttoned with silver balls; her gloves and boots were of leather of the natural shade, and her charming golden head was crowned with a green velvet toque, bordered with the changeable tints of a peacock's breast plumage, and trimmed with a pompon made of the green and turquois crest feathers of the royal bird. The silver-handled parasol which swung lightly in one little hand, matched the tint of her gloves, and excitement had restored the dainty arbutus bloom to her cheek, and the matchless luster to her beautiful blue eyes.

"I am ready, Percy," she said, faintly.

Oh, for one kind look or word to give her heart! She had kept her room all the morning, and Fanny had reported her suffering with headache, but he did not even ask her how she was. All he said was:

"Good-morning, Lady Medford," and rising, drew on his gloves.

Together they paced down the hall. There footmen were in waiting; she could not say a word. The marquis himself handed her into the carriage, and took his seat at her side.

She could endure it no longer. She bent her graceful form toward him, and whispered, in passionate appeal:

"Percy, are you angry with me?"

"*Why should I be angry with you?*" he asked, pointedly.

She shivered.

"Only—that you—seemed—angry, Percy."

"You seem to forget that it is not my nature to be demonstrative, and that two servants are on the box?"

Thus she was remitted to silence, as they rolled through the streets. She looked on life as in a maze.

"I WOULD RATHER NOT HEAR ANY MORE ABOUT IT," SAID THE MARQUIS.

"Madam," said the Marquis, "two carriages of our friends have passed, and you have not recognized them. I desire you to consider and keep up appearances."

"I beg your pardon, Percy," she said, humbly, and no more friends or acquaintances went by without a bow and

a smile from the charming little countess. "Percy," she said, after they had been once around the drive in Hyde Park. "I should like so much to get out and walk a little if you do not mind."

"Certainly," he said, and gave her his arm, as they paced up and down the shaven turf.

Lord Ravlin saw them, dismounted, gave his horse to his groom, and joined them, walking on one side of Beryl.

"What is the news, Lord Ravlin?" said Beryl, striving to make conversation. "We always look to you for the latest word about everything. Who is to be buried, or married?"

"It is too late in the season for more weddings or engagements," said Lord Ravlin. "I have come through another season unfettered. Since I could not find a countess as charming as my friend here has, I retain my freedom. As for news, people are thinking and speaking of nothing but Sothron."

"A poor theme," said the Marquis, quietly.

"Rather muddy? Yes. But his escape was apt and daring. A fine fellow, Jerome. What a pity he has done for himself."

"I suppose so," said the marquis.

"But if he is innocent?" ventured Beryl.

"Innocent! and ran away! And who else wanted the poor girl out of the road? No doubt she drove him to frenzy. I dare say she was a bad lot. This morning a common sort of man, a sailor, insisted on seeing the lady, said he was related to her, and fell senseless when he saw her. They are taking her to Sothronwold to bury her in the churchyard there, by her people, not in the vaults with his."

"Really, I would rather not hear any more about it; it does not suit the summer day," said the marquis, looking narrowly at his wife, and fearing she would faint. "Ravlin, we are going to leave here Monday."

"For which of your country seats?"

"For Winderton Castle. Nothing is lovelier than the lake district in the summer. You will not fail to keep your engagement with us in July?"

"Be sure I shall not. You go up alone?"

"Yes; but others will follow."

"Time enough. You feel that it is true, what the American poet sings,

"'They need no guests, they two shall be
Each other's own best company.'"

"Thank you," said the marquis, in a stately fashion. "Our earliest guest, a week after we reach the castle, will be Mrs. Ranleigh."

"Well, the charming widow will make it lively for you."

"But she never forgets herself in her pleasures," said the marquis, with intention. It seemed to poor, heart-wounded Beryl that all his words were sharp swords.

They returned home, and still Beryl had not found time or courage to say a word of what was in her heart. She owed her husband some explanation, and she owed to Jerome the clearing of his name. This she could not undertake without her lord's aid. She must cast herself upon his mercy. Only after an explanation would these terrible words and looks end—innuendoes that meant nothing to others, but so much to her. She felt that their continuance would kill her. Beryl was a tender creature, living in the approbation and affection of those around her. It was this which had made her unable to cope with the domination of her father and the Dowager Heath.

Arrived at the house, Lord Medford took leave of his wife at the foot of the stairs and went to his library. Beryl went reluctantly half way up the staircase, then finally made up her mind, took her fate in her hands, and came down.

With a timid knock she opened the library door.

"Did you leave anything in the carriage?" asked the marquis, coldly, on seeing her.

"No, no," said Beryl, quickly drawing near him and speaking rapidly, while her chest heaved, almost suffocating her. "But—I see you are angry with me, and I cannot bear it. I must speak to you, and explain."

"Explain? What can you explain? I inquire nothing."

"No, I know you do not; but—you suspect, and you condemn; you condemn me unheard. Oh, I know I am, and have been, very weak, and foolish, and wrong; but I have not injured you, my lord. Do not look at me so fiercely; you kill me. Forgive, I beseech you, my follies, and do not charge me with crime, for I protest to you I am not guilty."

"Guilty!" cried the marquis, in a low, concentrated voice, that sounded to the unhappy Beryl like thunder-tones. "Guilty! What can you mean, my lady? A Countess of Medford guilty! Was ever the name of Medford yoked with guilt before! And by a woman of the house! I swear to you, Lady Beryl, if I began to question guilty or not guilty of my wife, there would be no question of what course I should take. I advise you to

"I PROTEST TO YOU I AM NOT GUILTY!"

be silent. If I see you capable of childish follies and the recklessness of a girl unequal to such a position as yours, I trust I can so guard and watch you that folly hereafter shall be impossible."

"If I have been foolish, childish, reckless," said Beryl, looking down, "I have had a lesson that will warn me of such errors forever. I not only beg your pardon for all cause of displeasure you may have against me, but I

entreat you to help me and tell me what is right, for I am in serious trouble. I dare not take any step without your countenance; and yet I must do something."

"I do not understand you. You had better consider before you open any such discussions.

Beryl finally understood him. He had resolved to ignore in open speech her follies; he would not receive a confession or pronounce absolution; and yet, in his heart, he condemned her to surveillance.

She looked honestly into his eyes.

"My lord, I think you *do* understand me. I wish to speak of—Sir Jerome Sothron."

"I decline to speak of him. He has sinned himself out of the pale of decent men, whether peers or peasants. I regret that I have ever met him, or permitted you to speak to him on terms of equality."

"My lord, he is falsely accused. He is innocent!"

"He is guilty of making a wild, bravado, meaningless marriage, out of his rank, and then deserting his wife and refusing to live with her. Drop the hateful theme."

"My lord, he is accused of murdering his wife, and for that he stands in danger of his life, and of that he is innocent. And I, unhappily, can prove it; and I cast myself on your mercy to tell me how to prove this—how to save him from unmerited condemnation, and do it without —without angering you."

"Lady Medford," said the marquis, putting strong constraint on himself, though his right hand closed on an ivory paper-holder until it snapped like glass, "I don't know why you should be interested in this scoundrel. *I don't know how you could prove anything in his favor!* But I do know you belong to the house of Medford; its honor is in your hands, and that honor you shall not sully. We Medfords do not mingle ourselves in scandals. Sothron is in no danger of his life; he has escaped. If he is rearrested, be sure there are others to prove his *alibi*, and do it with honor to themselves. I know one person who can, and will, if needful; but not you. Never utter a word of this again."

"My lord," said Beryl, with a deep breath of relief, "I obey you."

"And one word more, Lady Beryl—do not lay yourself open to suspicion by any tragic looks or words. You must and shall keep up appearances."

CHAPTER XII.

"THIS IS TOO TERRIBLE A HUMILIATION."

THE Marquis and Countess of Medford were to give the closing ball of the season. Not a crush ball, but it was expected to be the very cream of the season in its assemblage of the elite. For that ball, Jerome Sothron, among others, had received cards. Who had dreamed when those white messengers of festivity had gone abroad, that when the day came Jerome would be a shame-stricken fugitive branded with the mark of Cain!

Beryl felt that her husband would watch her narrowly that evening, and be deeply displeased if she did not keep up her reputation for beauty and vivacity. Other hostesses might have on their minds some burden for the success of the entertainment as regarded the style and elegance of decoration, the perfection of service, the music, the refreshments. Beryl had no more responsibility for these than the birds or the lilies. Her grandmother had been a notable home-mistress; but, then, her grandmother had been obliged to study economy and make little seem to be much. Only in the matter of Beryl's dress had there been lavish expenditure. Beryl, Countess of Medford, had no economies to consider. A golden shower on caterers, and decorations, and musicians, was as potent to evoke a splendid entertainment as was ever the rubbing of Aladdin's lamp. So all these cares fell easily from the pretty shoulders of the young peeress; and, shut in her boudoir with the obedient Fanny, she had only to consider how to be cheerful and beautiful.

"I hope you'll put all this trouble about Sir Jerome Sothron out of your mind, my lady," said Fanny, using her liberty as her unfortunate mistress' sole confidante. "He is safe enough, and all these things blow over. One while the papers are wild over something, and in a month you hear no more; in six months it is forgotten. In a year he'll be back, as much thought of as ever. And till

then, my lady, isn't it well he is off where my lord can't be stirred up about him? Indeed, my lord has looked like a thunder-cloud ever since he came home."

"Hush, Fanny! You forget yourself. I cannot allow this."

"Dear lady, it is all in love for you. Haven't I served you since you were a little miss in short clothes? And a sweet creature you were, and many is the doll I dressed for you."

"I wish we were back at that good time, Fanny!" sighed the little countess.

"We'll see as good times again, my lady, if you'll only stop grieving and worrying for others. What shall you wear to-night, my lady?"

Fanny unlocked panel after panel in the wall of the dressing-room, and here a tall mirror swung back and revealed itself as a door, and next it a panel of elegant flower painting on satin did the same, and proved to be also a door, and these all disclosed wardrobes where hung costly dresses, and Fanny drew down the blinds, and lighted a gas-jet before each closet, that the robes might be seen as they would appear in the ball-room.

In this fairy palace of fashion and splendor Beryl sat, in her simple white wrapper, the full flood of her golden hair loosened over her shoulders, and she looked from one robe to another listlessly.

Fanny answered a knock at the boudoir door, and came back with a letter on a salver.

Then Beryl remembered that for two or three days the morning mail had not been brought to the breakfast-table. She saw in an instant the meaning of the change; the letters were ordered to the library first; her lord probably feared for her some communication with Jerome. She flushed crimson, and remembered when her father had taken the same precaution, also on account of Jerome. But she did not rebel now. She realized that she had brought this espionage upon herself by her folly. She opened her letter. As she read she grew paler, and tears came into her eyes.

"Oh I hope there's no more bad news," cried the eager Fanny, too anxious to control herself.

Beryl thrust the letter into her pocket.

"Do, my lady, rouse up to care for these dresses. Do

think how, I tell you, you will be able to do with my lord as you like, if you infatuate him enough with your beauty. Dear knows, my lady, often and often I heard my godmother say—and she was housekeeper at Lord Ravlin's for thirty years—that if ladies would only consider the taste of their husbands, and dress and be charming intentionally for them, the same as when they were just out and looking to a great match, the husbands would be fond enough, and not wandering away."

"YOURS IS A HEAD, MY LADY, THAT IS BEST DRESSED WITHOUT ANY DRESSING."

Beryl roused herself. Fanny's words were suggestions of wisdom, forming a connecting link between this most distressing letter in her pocket and the offended power down in the library. True, she should not allow her maid such freedom of speech; but Fanny, for twelve years, had been a faithful and sympathetic attendant, and in girlhood as in wifehood, Beryl remained lonely.

Fanny's words, at this juncture, indicated to her a path in her difficulties that seemed thickening each minute. She began to investigate her wardrobe with zeal.

"I've never worn this," she said, pointing to a pale blue crape, puffed over a silver tissue, and caught with clusters of myosotis of its own blue. "This, Fanny, with the pale pink cameo bracelets, necklet, and zone, Lady Heath gave me for my wedding present—poor grandmamma! They must have cost a fortune she could ill spare. And with that, Fanny, you must make my hair very fluffy. Come into the bath-room and wash my head directly, to make it fluff like spun gold."

"Now you are as you used to be," smiled Fanny, following her lady into the bath-room, with its Pompeian walls and floors, its china tubs, its mirrors, and its glasses framed in rock crystal. The marquis had spared nothing in glorifying his residences for this bride brought to houses long without a mistress.

"I do declare," said Fanny, "yours is a head, my lady, that is best dressed without any dressing—it is only a shake and it is done—I wish you could wear it to the ball this way; you look like angels and cherubs, or any other lovely creatures."

"Fanny, I think I'll go down to lunch so," said Beryl, looking at her splendid golden chevelure with approbation. "Get me that turquois merino dress made with velvet yoke and puffed sleeves, with the tucked skirt, without a train—the marquis likes that."

"Now you are doing right," said Fanny, as her lady, thus panoplied, for conquest of her lawful lord, descended at the hour of luncheon.

The marquis received her as quietly as ever, and spoke sparingly of indifferent things. He had formerly praised her dress or appearance, now and then. Now he did neither. Neither did he speak as she ardently hoped he would of that letter.

Evening came, and after careful rest all day, and resolute turning of her mind from her troubles, Beryl went down to the great drawing-room.

The decorator who had in hand the rehabilitation of the residence, had seen fit to make use of many long mirrors in Florentine style, which immensely increased the apparent size of the very large drawing-room. These mir-

rors, reduplicating flowers and statuettes, and flashing chandeliers, and all the other glories of the apartment, reduplicated also the little countess, with golden head and snowy arms and shoulders, contrasting with her blue and silver, and pink cameos.

As she moved to meet the marquis, a dozen lovely Beryls moved in harmonious accord with her graceful steps.

THE DOOR SWUNG OPEN, AND BERYL, WITH A FACE OF SHAME AND SORROW, STOOD BEFORE HIM.

How blessed were all these fictitious Beryls, in having no secretly sad heart!

The entertainments of the Marquis of Medford were always choice occasions, and whatever other invitations might be declined, the invitations of the charming countess were accepted. Smiles and wit, music, laughter, song, and dancers airily borne on the billows of sweet sound, filled the shining hours.

Beryl moved among her guests, eager to make every one happy—for she dearly loved to please—and wherever she went she was followed by admiring eyes and softly spoken praise.

Once, sitting to rest for a moment, almost hidden by a voluminous drapery drawn back from an arch-way, she heard words that swept black surges of terror over her soul.

"Yes; he's off. But what folly; he will surely be caught. Extradition will seize and deliver him up anywhere. In fact, he is known to have gone to France, and he will be brought back to stand his trial."

"Well, I'll never believe he did it."

"Nor I, though everything points that way.

Always that deadly faintness came over Beryl at this hint of danger to Jerome; but she was stung to self-command by seeing, as she never had before, Fanny near the door of the ball-room.

Lord Ravlin came near. Beryl laid her hand on his arm, and said:

"I wish to go and speak to my maid by the door."

"Fanny," she said, "my necklace catches on some of my braids."

Fanny quickly adjusted the cameos, and skillfully left a little note in her lady's hand, whispering:

"I hated to bring it, but thought I must."

Well, the ball ended, the house was quiet, the lights were out or burned low. The marquis in his study, lifting his head from a profound reverie, remembered that he must go to bed. But the door swung open, and Beryl—Beryl in her ball-dress—Beryl, with a face of pale shame and sorrow, stood before him.

"My lord—Percy! I must speak to you. But oh! how can I? This is too deep a humiliation. But, Percy, I have —I had—a letter——"

CHAPTER XIII.

"I AM SO LONESOME!"

"A LETTER!" said the marquis, sternly, looking into his wife's face. "What do you mean? Am I to be further annoyed with extravagances about that man, Jerome Sothron?"

"No, no, my lord," said Beryl, drawing her ungloved hand from the soft folds of her ball-dress, and half reluctantly holding out a letter. "This letter is from my father. At any time, my lord, it would have prostrated me with shame to show you such a letter. I should have felt humiliated to the earth to lay it before you. And now, when I feel that you are seriously offended with me —that I have disappointed you, and given you cause for complaint—to come to you with such a thing as this, rends my heart. You will wish you had never heard the name of Heath. Despise us, my lord—scorn us—we are only worthy of contempt."

"You are Countess of Medford, and contempt and scorn do not yoke with the name you bear," said the marquis, with lofty pride. "Be seated, Lady Medford."

Beryl slowly shook her head as he took the letter. In fact, she clung to the back of the chair on which she leaned, and dared not leave it, even to turn, fearing lest she might fall. Her great pitiful eyes watched her husband's darkening face as he read.

"This from your father?" he said, in profound astonishment.

"From my father," she faltered.

"Why did you not bring it to me at once?"

"I hoped, at luncheon, you would say something that would open the way; but I felt too ashamed to broach the matter, and trusted to find some way out of it."

"And now, late at night, you have changed your mind?"

"On compulsion. I could *not* have brought you that

letter, only this note was slipped into my hand this evening. I do not know where it came from, nor how."

"You seem versed in clandestine communications, Lady Medford," said the marquis, sharply, as she gave him the lines Fanny had brought to the ball-room.

"Do you wonder at anything in *his* child?" cried Beryl, in bitter agony, pointing at the letter and note in his hands.

The marquis looked at them again.

"Your father in the letter announces an indebtedness which must be immediately canceled, or he will be disgraced in Vienna, and lose in dishonor his position in the embassy. His debts are——"

"Debts of honor, you see, my lord."

"I do not recognize anything honorable about a gambling debt," said the marquis, sharply.

"There is not. It is so hideous that, after hours of thought, I felt ready to say he must endure the dishonor and dismissal he has brought on himself so needlessly. You see, he says Lady Heath will not and cannot help him. But the note——"

"Yes, in the note he says he cannot and will not survive disgrace—he will kill himself. The note forces you to come to me, Beryl."

"Yes," she said, faintly, "forces me to give you that horrible letter, where he writes as if you were bound to help him in this way, because of me; speaks as if I were your honor and pride, and worth to you all this trouble and disgrace, when I know you are angry and disappointed, and wish you had never seen me. It is put very plainly in that letter, my lord, that I was a commodity he had for sale, and that he sets on me a price much higher than I must seem worth to you, or any one else."

"He speaks of money you sent him—says it was a mere drop. What was that, Beryl?"

"Two months ago, I drew out all my year's income and sent it to him. Please do not reproach me; I felt too ashamed to tell you of such matters; you are so far above such disgraceful things, Percy."

"And since then, my lady, you have had——"

"A sovereign in my purse, for good luck, my lord," said Beryl, lowering her eyes.

"I wish you had had, from the beginning, more confidence in me, Beryl."

"I wish I had, my lord," said she, hotly. "But how could I have done so? What was my position? Did not my family calmly estimate the various matches possible to me, and discuss them for money's worth, while my face burned with shame? Was I not put in your way —scolded furiously if I did not *try* to attract you—definitely sold for so much? And now I am sent to you, bold-faced, to ask part of the price! Oh, hate me, Percy; I deserve it. You find you have a wife who is weak, and helpless, and silly, and led by every insistent voice; you have come to believe me worse than I am, and to think I have nothing but my pretty face—and pretty faces are plenty. I have, in my heedlessness, and thanks to the way I was brought up, acted so that you think me vain and heartless—even wicked. And now I come to you with this burden of disgrace, which a wife would dread to bring to a man whose life she crowned with honor."

"Beryl," said Lord Medford, quietly, "when I married you I assumed your responsibilities, your cares, and expected to divide your pleasures and your pains. I cannot blame you, child, for this vice of your father's. You have no share in that, and I am always willing to help you in any trouble *not* the result of your own foolishness, lightness, or deceit. Wrong in you I cannot tolerate, but misfortune I can help. When this first began you should have come to me, and I would have relieved you of the burden."

Oh, how Beryl wished she had! Filled with gratitude, she would not have been tempted by Laura Ranleigh to deceive this good, if stern man. He went on:

"Drop this from your mind. I will see to it, and see that your father does not err in this way again. As for the empty purse, it shall be replenished to-morrow."

"Such goodness, such generosity, such undeserved kindness!" murmured Beryl, overwhelmed, turning to leave the room.

But what she had feared happened, as she turned from the support of the chair-back. In the revulsion of feeling, at the first step she made she lost consciousness, and fell prostrate at her husband's feet.

The marquis had been writing bitter things against his

young wife; he had been steeling his heart against her. He belonged to a proud, implacable race, who made boast of neither offending nor forgiving; but when he lifted up that slender, beautiful form, and it lay helpless and unconscious upon his arm, his whole soul was moved.

He did not ring for help; he would not have even Fanny see her in this state, and question of the cause.

He carried Beryl to a sofa, and as he laid her down, the proud, middle-aged man, who felt himself rebuffed in that he had given his stern, silent love to a woman who had no love to give him, and who found in himself no forgiveness for his wife's misfortune in not being able to wrench her clinging affection from the lovor of her girlhood, pressed on Beryl's unconscious face kisses warmer than any he had ever given her—kisses such as he would not bend his pride to give her if she were conscious of them.

"Poor child!" he said; "her fate is hard. I was wild to believe that scheming old dowager, who told me the girl would learn to love me well."

He fanned Beryl and sprinkled water in her face, and finally the blue eyes opened.

"Oh, what is it? Where am I?"

"You were only a little faint, my dear," he said, calmly.

"I am always troubling you, Percy; and you are very good," she said, faintly.

Presentlp she sat up.

"It is late. I must go upstairs."

As she rose, her eyes fell on the two papers on the table, and, with a flush, she reached out her hand to them.

"Leave them to me," said her husband.

"Oh, what can I do to show you how thankful I am?" His face darkened, and he touched the note.

"Beryl, you say you do not know who brought this. You must know who gave it to you. Let me tell you, every woman lowers her dignity who receives a clandestine communication. Whoever offers you such a note, or token, insults your womanly purity and position, to say nothing of the treachery to me of bringing such messages under my roof. I fear you must be an adept in such acts of deception, that this came to you so readily. If I discover such a messenger in my household, I will banish

that one on the instant. I do not like your maid Fanny. She has been with you too long, and any attendant chosen by your family is little likely to be to my mind. I believe it would be for your good if I dismissed her."

"Oh, Percy," cried poor Beryl, clasping her hands, "do not—do not be so cruel! She has served me for twelve years; she knows all my wants and ways; she loves me. Oh, Percy, don't send her away, *I am so lonesome!*"

She looked so wan and pitiful, and these words were spoken in a wailing cry that made the marquis' heart sick. Lonesome!—so lonesome!—in shelter of his roof—within reach of his arm?

"Keep her, then," he said, briefly, turning on his heel.

CHAPTER XIV.

"A LETTER."

People had wondered, openly and secretly, how the Countess of Medford would take the scandal and disappearance of Jerome Sothron. Every one knew that a little over a year before the two had been ardent lovers. There were those who had prophesied that Beryl Heath would elope with Sothron before the day came for her to fulfill the family contract by standing with the marquis, at the altar of St. George.

But Beryl had given her hand to the marquis, a very lovely, if pale and quiet, bride, and the marquis, in his stately fashion, had been an indulgent and attentive husband. All had seemed to go well, and the Dowager Heath had never tired of telling of Beryl's married happiness and the sumptuousness of her surroundings.

When Jerome reappeared in society, suddenly became Sir Jerome, and master of one of the finest estates in England, there had been envious souls who had watched him and Beryl for some folly; but along the dizzy precipices of temptation these two had trodden with safe steps, and not a breath of slander had blown upon them. The attentive calmness of the marquis, the absolute innocence

of Beryl, which lent a frankness to all her actions, had so far made her safety.

By the care of the marquis, Beryl was prevented from exhibiting publicly any terror or anguish concerning the fugitive Jerome which would have drawn evil reflections on her. During the last few days of their stay in London, the marquis was more than ever punctiliously attentive to

WHEN THAT BEAUTIFUL FORM LAY UNCONSCIOUS UPON HIS ARM, HIS WHOLE SOUL WAS MOVED.

his wife. He attended her everywhere in public, seemed to anticipate her slightest wishes, and kept up every conversation, so that no ominous silences gave spur to invidious tongues.

Warned by her mistress of the marquis' displeasure, Fanny endeavored to make herself, in a dozen little ways, agreeable to his lordship, and to seem to be alert in his behalf. She was a skillful young woman, and soon he looked on her with a more favorable eye.

But in those few days, before leaving London, Fanny had an exciting adventure. She had been out to buy some trifles for her lady, using a cab to go about, when just as she stepped to the pavement in the causeway, the sailor who had brought the line from Sir Jerome almost ran against her.

"Oh, is it you!" said Fanny.

"Yes, mistress, said Ralph Maxwell, moving on.

"Wait a bit," said Fanny, "I want to see you."

Maxwell looked about.

"The street is a poor place for talk. But yon's a coffee house, mistress; perhaps you'd go in and have a biscuit."

They turned into the "Golden Cup," and as Maxwell looked a well-to-do man, and Fanny a pretty damsel in a black silk gown, they were put in a tiny room by themselves and served with lobster salad.

"We have not heard a word from Sir Jerome," said Fanny, "and I want you to tell me how he got off. They say he has gone to France, and the officers are after him, and he will soon be brought back."

The sailor took from his pocket a sealed letter, soiled and rumpled.

"I was at a stand," he said, "whether to post this, or take it to the house. Sir Jerome said to take it there, but I'm not fond of going to great houses."

"Blessed luck you did neither thing," said Fanny, taking the letter; "you'd have got us into worse trouble than we are in. What if I hadn't met you! But you've been slow enough! Here it's three days."

"That's so, mistress, but I had reasons. No man in London has been through more sorrow than I have this week past."

Fanny was a tender-hearted young woman, and the sailor was a goodly looking man.

"You do look terribly worn out," said Fanny. "I'm more than sorry for you. We all have our troubles, Mr. Maxwell, and I hope yours will be well over when next we meet."

Maxwell shook his head, as if to signify his troubles would never be over, and Fanny continued:

"And as I can't stop here forever, will you tell me how Sir Jerome got off?"

"You read what the paper said, mistress?"

"Oh yes."

"Well here's what lays behind the paper. When Sir Jerome crawled out of that overset cab, I chanced to be passing, and seeing some one as needed help out of the wreck, I hauled away at him, and when he got on the walk in range of light, it was Sir Jerome. I knew him for kind deeds he had done—no matter what—and he knew me. He said, 'Maxwell, I have been arrested for mur-

"THE STREET IS A POOR PLACE FOR TALK; BUT YON'S A COFFEE-HOUSE, MISTRESS."

dering my wife.' 'Eh, sir?' I said; 'you never did it. 'Certainly not,' he says; 'but, poor girl, she is murdered, and things point at me. I can clear myself easily enough, but only by bringing shame and trouble on some one dearer to me than life. I want to get away.' I said, 'Sir Jerome, are you sure you want to fly?' and he said, 'Yes; fly I must.' We had stepped into a corner to

speak, and all attention was on the men hurt in the break-up. When he spoke so decided, I said, 'Come on; I'm your man!' and I hurried him along down the docks to a ship that would sail with the tide, and got him aboard quiet."

"The first mate was on watch, a cousin of mine, and I walked the deck with him a minute, till Sir Jerome wrote the note I brought you the next evening. You need not fear he'll be caught. He went, and he has not gone to France. He's safe enough."

"Who *did* kill Mrs. Sothron, do you think?"

"Don't ask me. I think till I'm wild about it, and the more I think the blacker it looks. It is sure it was not Sir Jerome Sothron."

With this news and the letter, Fanny went home to her lady. Jerome had written the letter while his vessel waited for the tide, and mailed it inclosed in a cover to Ralph Maxwell.

The letter was to Beryl a revelation. It revealed a new Sir Jerome Sothron. His dashing, self-pleasing, thoughtless boyishness had fallen from him as the chrysalis case from an insect in its transformation, and out of it had come a new, strong, penitent man. There was no reproach to Beryl—no telling her, as he had told her at other times, that she was the cause of his errors and his woes—that she, by her weakness and perfidy, had betrayed his hope and ruined his life. There was none of this. He blamed himself bitterly on Beryl's account, and on account "of the innocent, unhappy creature who had been his wife."

"I," he wrote, "am the real cause of her death. Not that I wished her dead, or know whose hand struck the blow; but I took her from the safe shelter of her humble home, rendered love and marriage in her own rank impossible, set her in perilous places, exposed her to that unknown hate and foe by whom she fell, cruelly done to death. And, miserable that I am, the poor girl loved me—loved me, I believe, honestly and truly. You too, my gentle angel, dowered me with your love, and fate unkindly parted us; and then, in my selfishness, my craving for the sound of your voice, the glance of your eyes, I have exposed you to the scorn of society, the fury of your husband. I have dealt most unjustly by the marquis, a man far my superior in character. Beryl, forgive me. Self-condemned, I go to

expiate my errors in life-long exile from all I have held dear. I go a repentant, sobered man. I cannot come forth and disprove this terrible charge without sacrificing you and the honor of your husband's untarnished name. I accept the penalty of my recklessness. Let your pure prayers follow in his unknown banishment him whom you will never see nor hear from again.

"THE UNDESERVING JEROME."

BERYL YIELDED, AND BURNED THE LETTER—THE LAST TIE, SEEMINGLY, BETWEEN HER AND JEROME.

Beryl read this letter, with sobs and tears. She read it, and re-read it, to print it on her heart; for Fanny insisted that:

"It must be burned. My lord would surely hear of it, and it would ruin us both. Think, dear lady, what would become of you if you angered him more, and if even poor Fanny should be driven away from you."

Beryl yielded, and burned the letter. It seemed the last tie between her and Jerome.

There were other little treasures she had locked, doubly locked, in an ivory box—a curl from his dark head, a miniature—relics these of that earlier love time when such tokens were right—faded flowers, a sonnet or two—some of these given also in these later days. She guarded all these nothings jealously, as some precious treasure, and she kept the memory of her unhappy lover hidden in her heart, with a certain savageness as she thought of him driven out, dishonored, poor, homeless, friendless, all because of her. The thought aroused in her a certain fierceness foreign to her gentle nature.

In vain Fanny told her that "Sir Jerome Sothron was well enough off. Men always got on well enough; the world was full of interests and occupations; they could do anything."

Thus Fanny talked while she packed her lady's endless wardrobe and equipments, to go to Winderton Castle.

CHAPTER XV.

"I BETRAY A CONFIDENCE."

"I PROMISED Lady Lester we would appear at the Rhododendron Show—she is one of its patrons—and at the Bazaar for the Children's Hospital. The duke, and the prince and princess are to be there," said the marquis to Beryl, on Saturday morning. "I must beg you to remember it is our last appearance before going to the castle, so pray look your best. If you cannot find a little more color, I fear you will need rouge."

Thus he spoke, cold and clear, at the breakfast-table, and Beryl nerved herself up to reply:

"I think a rose-colored dress and ribbons will lend me all the color I need. Where shall we go first, my lord?"

"To see the flowers—let us say at twelve, and return here for luncheon."

"As you please. Do you remember promising Mrs. Ranleigh we would appear at her five o'clock tea?"

"Yes. Then the bazaar must come in the evening."

Was the unhappy Beryl glad or sorry that the day was to be so full of going and coming, of dressing and chatting? Which was harder, to sit and think of the wandering, unjustly condemned Jerome, and her own really unjust condemnation in her husband's soul, or to go from place to place, obliged to seem gay, and repress the miserable sorrow fighting for expression in her heart?

Beryl was quickly becoming an adept in this repression, this surface gayety, as women will. She moved among the flowers and the fashion in the rhododendron show, fairest of the fair, charmed with the flowers, making summer plans with various friends, bowing sweetly at compliments. Then home. Then out to Mrs. Ranleigh's house, Myrtle Lodge, near Holland Park.

She had last driven through that gate at Jerome's side, going to make that reckless call at Sothronwold Abbey. She shivered in a cold agony as they passed under the fanciful little archway. Then that bright little drawing-room, full of *bijouterie*, and gay faces, and lively chat; death itself seemed to grip the heart of Beryl, remembering the handsome, pleading face of Jerome, and Laura Ranleigh bidding her go with him that fatal day.

But here was Laura, receiving her guests, a piquant figure; her head was dropped a little on one side, but delivered from a lackadaisical air by the vivid flash of her black eyes, and the dimples in cheek and chin; her dress was the most hideous shade of sage green, over which her brilliant color so triumphed as to make it appear delicious. This faded-green nun's vailing, with long, straight folds, high-shouldered sleeves, a ruff, and an embroidered bag, would have been the ruin of almost any one; but Laura Ranleigh, *she* made it delectable.

"Hideous, isn't it?" she said, posing before Lord Ravlin, "but then, I'm so shockingly poor, I can only afford two or three decent gowns, and those must be worn at the assemblies of my great friends; and so at home—behold a masterpiece, at five pounds!"

"It is really a masterpiece, thanks to your taste, and—your charms," said Ravlin, bowing low.

"If his compliments had ever meant anything, said the young widow to herself, "I might have been Lady Ravlin by this time."

Mrs. Ranleigh pleased the marquis and Beryl, as her

most honored guests, one on either hand. As she said, she could not afford a staff of tall footmen ; she had instead a very pretty parlor maid, in a cap and Dolly Varden gown, and a slim black boy, brilliant in an oriental dress, and brisk in motion as a ferret. Her poverty, her bizarre servants, the flowers in the garden, the birds darting about among the shrubs before her open windows, all

"HIDEOUS, ISN'T IT !" SAID LAURA RANLEIGH, POSING BEFORE LORD RAVLIN.

afforded themes for the bright sayings of Mrs. Ranleigh. But there was a certain grace and reserve in her most brisk and startling remarks or acts. To tell the truth, the marquis had been a little afraid of her before his engagement to Beryl, but she had been one of the first and warmest in her congratulations on that event, and he had liked her better and better ever since.

"My lord," she said, handing the marquis his second

cup of tea in egg-shell china with her own pretty hands, "do you sit where you can get the view of the distant river? If I were an artist, as every one is nowadays, I would paint that view. Poor Sir Jerome Sothron liked it so well."

"Poor Sothron!" chorused Ravlin. "I cannot believe he is dead; such a dashing, fine fellow."

"Dead!" cried the dowager Heath, who was present; "what do you mean, Ravlin?"

"That he is *dead*, my lady. It seems he got off in a sailing vessel going to Holland, and there was a big blow off the Maas, and the crazy vessel foundered and every soul was lost. That ends poor Jerome, and on my soul I'm sorry. I don't believe a word said against him."

"Nearly every one is sure of his guilt," said Lady Heath.

"And since he is dead he never can come back to prove his innocence," said some one else.

"And therefore guilty of the murder of his wife will be the verdict written against his name in all time," said the dowager, calmly. Well, when he married as he did, I knew he'd come to no good end," and Lady Heath, whose vile greed had ruined the lives of Beryl and this helpless young man, coolly passed her cup for more tea.

At the words "dead," "lost," the marquis fully expected to hear a shriek from Beryl, or to see her swoon, and he nerved himself for the denouement. He did not understand that there is an extremity of anguish too deep for all outward demonstration; a horrible sharpness of pain that will not permit the blessed refuge of temporary insensibility.

Beryl happened to be looking out of the window when Ravlin spoke, and, as one struck to stone, a true Niobe she sat, still looking into the flower-set garden, while the words "dead, dead, dead, dead," pulsed with the steady beat of a trip-hammer in her brain.

The cold, cruel North Sea had him then, her tall, strong, beautiful, life-full Jerome, who, one poor week ago, had filled this room with the splendor of his young manhood like a god! Gone, gone, gone forever from the cruel tongues of men to the cruel waves of the sea.

"How well she bears it. Who would have thought she had such control, could simulate so," said Mrs. Ranleigh,

in a low voice to the marquis. "With that innocent child-face I should have expected an outburst. But, my lord, one can never understand women."

No. The marquis did not understand this stony calm, nor the quiet words Beryl spoke when she must. When they arrived at home, Beryl followed him to his dressing-room, and asked him to dismiss his valet for a little.

Standing, with both clasped hands resting on his dressing table, she looked him in the eyes.

"My lord, did you notice—Jerome Sothron is dead?"

"I heard."

"And dead, he lies under accusation of the foulest crime a man can commit—the murder of his wife."

"That is not our affair, Beryl."

"Pardon me, my lord—I think it is. All that can now be done for him is to clear his name."

"What!"

"I told you, my lord, I could prove his innocence, and you as much as admitted it to me, for you said you had one who could prove his *alibi*, if needed, at your request. Percy, in justice to the dead, produce the proof, and clear his name."

"It does not seem to me needful. It cannot help him, and no one knows how far such investigation, if started, might go. It might dishonor the living to clear the dead."

"But justice is justice, Percy. I implore you render it!"

"For the present I decline."

"Percy, I, too, know witnesses. *Must* I produce them?"

"Madam, my witness is—Mrs. Ranleigh!"

Beryl caught her breath.

"You will drive me to desperate measures, I fear," she said.

"And you will certainly drive me to desperate measures, for I shall stop at nothing to shield Medford honor. If you are sacrificed the fault will be yours."

Beryl turned and left the room. She had made up her mind; she would set before the public Jerome's name white and fair, even if hers were dragged to destruction in the act.

But night, with its calmness, brought new elements to

her counsels. Her husband's honor and name were bound with hers. Had he deserved at her hands disgrace, cruelty? Had he not been most generous, most forbearing? What had he not done lately for her poor reckless father! She rose early, resolved to go to his room and implore his help and forgiveness. As she stepped into the hall she met an unexpected face, and exclaimed:

"Sir Jonas Kent!"

It was one of the chief physicians of London.

"Why are you here? For what have you come? Speak."

He took her hand and led her back into her dressing-room, looking anxiously at her. Then he said, slowly:

"Lady Medford, in speaking the truth to you, I betray —a confidence."

CHAPTER XVI.

SHE MUST STAND BY HER HUSBAND.

THE wildest suspicions and the strangest terrors rushed over Beryl's mind at these words. At what new danger did they point? She clasped her hands.

"I entreat you, Doctor Kent, conceal nothing from me!"

"I was called early this morning by the valet of the marquis——"

"What! my husband is ill, and I am not told? Let me go to him."

"At present, no. He sleeps."

"Do you mean he is very ill? There is danger?"

"Immediate danger, no; perhaps not any even. Four years ago, and two years ago, I was called to the marquis for such an attack; the trouble is of the heart; but I did not consider it pressing. Now I find the difficulty much aggravated. It may not return for years; he may enjoy apparently perfect health. The marquis, you know, is a very reserved man, and he has a singular dislike of exciting either comment or sympathy. No one has known this trouble but his valet. But it seems to me only justice that you should know, and you, as his nearest and dear-

est, will be best able to cheer his mind, divert his thoughts, relieve his cares, and so prolong his life. I am sorry to grieve and disturb you, Lady Beryl," said the old physician, who had known her all her life; "but these are the concomitants of the wedded state. At the altar, you know, the word is, for 'better or worse,' and in marriage especially must we 'bear one another's burdens.'"

"Tell me, only tell me what to do?"

"You must conceal all knowledge of this, as he has not wished you to know. And keep him quiet and happy. Draw his mind from himself. Do not indulge in terrors about him. As I have said, he may outlive many sounder men—I mean in heart. Except for the cardiac trouble he is one of the most vigorous men I know."

The physician was gone, and Beryl stood as if turned to a statue, leaning against her toilet-table, her hands clasped before her, her beautiful hair loose over the shoulders of her rose-hued dressing-gown, and bound back from her pretty brow with a ribbon. Girlish, almost childish, she looked, and yet the weightiest cares of a woman were resting on her heart. If that attack on this Sabbath morning had proved fatal, she must inevitably have accused herself of her husband's death, as the excitement and anxiety which her wild folly had caused him must lie at the root of his dangerous symptoms. If now she disturbed or excited him in any way, his death would lie at her door.

His death! And, oh, how well he had deserved at her hands! Had he not amply fulfilled all his promises, been true, generous, more than generous, kind? That she had married him without a heart to give him, had been both her misfortune and her fault; she should have been frank with him, and true to her early love. By her weakness she had destroyed Jerome, and was now likely to destroy her husband. If she persisted in her design of vindicating Jerome at the expense of herself, she would inevitably sacrifice the marquis. The poor young creature was in a fearful strait between her duty toward the dead and the living. And she had no counsellor! But her innate good sense and conscience told her that in this choice she must stand by her husband, by the man who held her vows, whose name she bore. Yes, poor Jerome must sleep under the sea, and his name perish in black-

ness. Poor Jerome, he was safe from the woes of this life, and he would never know! Could she in any way comfort and heal the living heart that she had grieved?

It was a balmy morning, the first of June. Odors rose from the garden to her open window, as from a cup of perfumes, she took her prayer-book and sat down in the morning sunlight. All the world had changed for her since the last Sabbath. What! that day she had been planning to go to Mrs. Ranleigh's to meet Jerome. Oh, step that had ruined all her life—yes, three lives! How terrible are these beginnings of evil, how great the bad harvest from our little sinful seed.

When Fanny came she sent her to ask if she could see the marquis.

Fanny returned with word that he did not intend to go down to breakfast, and begged to decline seeing the countess that morning.

Beryl shed hot tears over that, while Fanny went to order her lady's breakfast to her room. He would not see her! He feared a distressing or dangerous scene. His wife, in whom he should find rest, was the discordant element in his life. Oh, if she were but dead.

The sun rose high, all the church bells rang out messages of mercy, but they brought no word of peace to her.

There was a tap at her door—the valet of her husband. The marquis wished to see her. She went to him trembling. He was sitting by the window of his dressing room, reading. He looked just as he ever had; to Beryl's eye, there was no mark of illness or physical pain on him. She stood before him as a culprit, when the valet left them alone.

"Beryl," said the marquis, "I have something to say to you that should be said at once."

"And I wish to speak to you, Percy. I wanted to come earlier, and I could not. I was wrong to speak as I did last night, wrong to bring up a subject displeasing to you, wrong to defy your wishes. I will not do so again."

The marquis waved his hand, as if her promises were empty air.

"I wish you distinctly to understand, that this affair of Sothron is no more to come up between us. There is

to be no more madness about vindicating his memory. Rather than have you so disgrace yourself, I will lock you up in a private asylum, as insane. For a month or two you must steel yourself to hear this discussion pro and con, and give no sign of interest. You can do it; unfortunately, you are an adept in deceiving."

"Oh, my lord!" wailed Beryl.

"I married you," said the marquis, with increasing bitterness, "for your beauty, your innocence, and your submissive disposition. I find your innocence all undermined with intrigue and deceit. Your beauty was a snare, this soft outward submissiveness covers treachery, a subtle, secret taking of your own way. I might have known that you had the faults of weak natures—secrecy, guile, trickery."

"My lord! my lord!" gasped Beryl, "have you no mercy?"

"No," said the marquis, with concentrated indignation, "words cannot tell the bitterness of the disappointment I have found in you. Your grandmother told me your feeling for Jerome Sothron was a mere passing fancy; I believed her. If it had been more, why not tell me honestly? If you loved him, had you no courage to stand up for honest love? Why come to me, and vow love, honor, obedience, while love was bestowed upon another? Honor was too strong a thing for so frail a vessel as your heart; and obedience, real loyal obedience, is to you a word in an unknown tongue!"

"Bear with me, my lord. I was a child in their hands."

"But, here, under my roof and name, you have been wife and woman, and yet you have not cast this man out of your thoughts, but these last days your whole soul has been intent on him, and for his sake you defy *me*."

"My Lord," said Beryl, "I do not resent your reproaches, for many of them are deserved, and I can see that one so strong, and honest, and fearless as you are, may not know how to pity, but only how to despise, the faults of timidity and weakness such as mine. But if you will try to pardon and help me, and give me a chance to win your confidence——"

"It is impossible I should have confidence. I am glad we have no child to heir your follies; my nephew is the son of a firm and truthful English matron."

Beryl covered her face with her hands, and wept inconsolably. She could not dream that this intense fury of the marquis against her was born of outraged, disappointed love, the jealousy of strong affection. She read in it only inextinguishable dislike. But she was in his hands. Even in his wrath he must be her refuge—she had no other. She sank on her knees before him.

"Percy, your words kill me! Do not—do not be so angry. I promise you I will be all you wish. I know I am not vain or light, or reckless by nature. I do not love to deceive. I want to be true."

"To-morrow," said the marquis, restraining himself, "we go to Winderton Castle. Do not complain if you find my watch over you exacting."

"I shall complain of nothing," said Beryl. "Only give me opportunity to get back your good opinion."

The poor child was ready to become a very Griselda, to satisfy her angry lord.

CHAPTER XVII.

"THE LIFE THOU WOULDST NOT SAVE."

THE scene in which his physician would have feared for his life had, instead, quieted the marquis. He had established the footing of the future with his wife. She understood that he should exercise surveillance over her, and she had given up her rebellion and yielded to his wishes. They would go to Winderton, and if in any investigations, any unpleasant revelations were made about Beryl, he would take her to Italy or Spain for a year or two, until the scandal died away. He took a long breath of relief when he believed that he understood his position, and had intimidated Beryl so that she would take no secret steps. He did not dream that her yielding humility was the work of an aroused conscience and a penitent heart, that not his angry words but his physician's disclosures had brought his wife to this conformity to his wishes.

As to Beryl, she felt more and more keenly the very great errors of which, both before and since her marriage, she had been guilty. She scorned and hated her weak-

ness, and in that self-scorn she began to grow stronger and nobler.

The marquis sent word that he should appear at dinner, and a note came from Mrs. Ranleigh begging leave to dine with them.

While Beryl was dressing for dinner, Mrs. Ranleigh arrived, and using the privilege of a most intimate friend, begged to be allowed to come up to the countess' boudoir. In she came, a tap of high-heeled French boots, a subtle odor of sandal-wood, a rustle of silken and lace ruffles, scarlet carnations at breast and belt, upon the dress of black net over black satin. She kissed Beryl with effusion, declaring she "looked divine," and that her dress of soft organdie, with her ornaments of turquoise, was a "delicious confection."

"How do you know how to choose among all your sets of jewels, my dear? Would I have become accustomed to the 'embarrassment of riches' if I had married the marquis, as I might, if I had had such a grandmother as yours, no doubt. I wish deeply interested grandmothers could be hired by the year by those needing their aid."

After this little thrust at her dearest friend, Mrs. Ranleigh took Beryl's small lovely hand, patted it, kissed it, and said she was "a love." Then she dashed off again:

"Did you see the evening papers about Jerome's drowning?"

"No," said Beryl, faintly, sitting down.

"It seems a sailor went to a magistrate and reported him dead, taking oath that he put him aboard the bark Elizabeth, which was an entire loss off the Maas. Then, oddly enough, the morning papers to-day have the end of it. Yesterday his body was found washed ashore. Face not recognizable, but figure and the clothes with his name, and things in his pockets to identify. Buried where found. The next heir is a distant cousin; and, after all, this talk of murder will not bring him home. He'll want to let all drop. So that's the end of Jerome Sothron."

Fanny in her intense interest in the story, had been looking fixedly at Mrs. Ranleigh. Now her eyes happened to catch her lady's reflection in the glass, and screaming "Look at her! look at her!" she sprang toher.

Beryl sat upright in her chair, her eyes wide open, her features set, her lips motionless, she seemed not to breathe, and was as one struck with catalepsy.

"Oh, my poor lady, my poor lady!" cried Fanny, sprinkling Beryl's face with cologne, and applying salts. "She is just torn in pieces by one and another, every one sitting on her like bears and lions to tear her poor heart," and Fanny looked angrily at Mrs. Ranleigh.

"Was she ever like this before?" cried Mrs. Ranleigh, thoroughly frightened, fanning Beryl, swiftly.

"No; but she'll be dead soon between you all; you and others telling her such stories, and my lord like grim death to her."

"Fanny, is the marquis angry?" whispered Mrs. Ranleigh.

"Angry is no name for it, ma'am. He's white hot with fury. He frightened the life out of the blessed angel."

"Tell me, Fanny, did he find out anything?"

"Well, he did or he didn't; I can't say which. But the way he's gone on! Oh, I know! I've eyes and ears, and he wanted to send me away too."

"Oh, that would be cruel, Fanny! You are a good, faithful girl to her, and I love you for it. Here, Fanny, get yourself something to remember me."

Fanny did not allow any vexation at Mrs. Ranleigh to hinder her slipping the sovereign into her pocket.

"And if she is in any trouble, and needs help, let me know. I'm her friend, Fanny. My house is hers."

"Oh, it will never come to *that!*" said Fanny, sharply. "I fancy a grave will be all the house she'll need after *his*," and Fanny jerked her head toward her lord's room.

"She's coming round all right. It is an attack of nerves," whispered Mrs. Ranleigh, as Beryl's chest heaved, her eyelids fell, and the blood stole slowly up in her white cheeks.

Fanny handed her a cordial.

"Have I fainted again," Beryl asked, presently.

"Why, when did you faint before?" demanded Laura Ranleigh.

Beryl shuddered.

"Never mind," said Fanny. "All ladies faint easy, at the end of the season, especially. If you don't come round right, my lady, you'll not be able to go to dinner."

Beryl heard her husband's voice in the hall. She remembered her morning resolution.

"I shall be all right in a moment," she said.

Mrs. Ranleigh chatted of indifferent things, and was full of playful affectionateness.

"Fanny, get some scarlet geraniums for my neck and hair, to give me color," said Beryl. "Now Laura, we will go down, and I shall depend upon you to keep up conversation."

Mrs. Ranleigh threw her arm about the countess' waist, and they went to join the marquis in the drawing-room. In the presence of the marquis, Laura Ranleigh was a different woman; she had none of the flippancy and gossip wherewith she favored Beryl in private. In a pleasingly modulated voice, with carefully chosen language, she followed where the marquis led in conversation; seemed interested and observant on the great questions which engrossed him, her bearing dignified, her judgments severe rather than lenient. As she talked, she covertly watched the husband and wife, alert to catch some sign of the bitterness on one hand, and the terror on the other, of which the giddy Fanny had spoken. She saw nothing of the kind. The marquis was grave, polite, deferent as he had always been; and Beryl gentle, appealing, anxious to please as she had always been. After dinner the marquis returned with the two ladies and Lawrence to the drawing-room for coffee. Then Mrs. Ranleigh said:

"This is just the time for music; shall I give you some, Lord Medford?"

"If you kindly will."

She seated herself at the magnificent piano. She played admirably, and began selections from "Elijah" and "The Creation." Then her fine contralto voice rose on the swelling chords. The marquis leaned back in his chair, and his soul was soothed and rested by the noble strains. Lawrence, a dear lover of music, hung fascinated near the performer. Beryl sat in a low chair in a window looking out on the garden. The June day was nearly at its longest, and the full rosy light of evening set the pale, exquisite face, the daintily robed form reposing against the blue brocade cushions, the listlessly folded little hands in full relief. An intense sadness and an infinite resigna-

tion pervaded her whole being. After playing some time, Mrs. Ranleigh went and sat by the marquis.

"I weary you, Lord Medford."

"No; you gratify me exceedingly. I did not know you had such marvelous talent."

"Have I hid it in a napkin? The truth is, my lord, I am always afraid of display. I have seen so many go into society as into a market, and display accomplishments as one does wares for sale, that I sickened of anything that should seem like what is so vulgarly called 'husband hunting.' To woo is not a woman's province—but to be won."

"You are, indeed, right," said the marquis.

"Here, in the intimacy of your home, where nothing can be misconstrued, I gladly make others glad with any gifts I may have. I have no relatives to exhibit me in society, as one would a prize flower. Perhaps I should be glad of that. True love matches are not so made."

"I fear not indeed," sighed Lord Medford.

"I am talking to you more frankly than I should once have dared. But you seem to understand me so well. I do not want you to fancy that this reserve of showing what I am, and can do, rises from aversion to marriage, but to what I think wrong ways of seeking marriage. My first marriage was so early—wooed at sixteen, a schoolgirl—a widow at twenty-two. I know nothing of fashionable courtship; but I believe marriage the happiest state for a woman. Oh, my lord, how blessedly safe a woman can feel sheltered in a good man's love, protected in his home, his honored name her shield and glory, his wisdom her guide, his heart her constant refuge."

The marquis sighed.

"I weary you by my words, as by my music," she said, following the direction of the marquis' eyes fixed on Beryl, who sat a picture of infinite, lovely sorrow.

"Dear Beryl," she cried, "why do you not play for us and sing? Pray, do you never favor your husband with music?"

To her surprise, Beryl quietly rose.

"Yes, indeed, when he desires it. Do you wish me to play for you, Percy?"

"If it is not an inconvenience to you, Beryl."

"Certainly not, if it will give you pleasure."

She moved toward the piano, and Lawrence hastened to arrange the stool and bring music, and turn up the light to illuminate the shadowy alcove where the piano stood. Beryl looked toward the marquis.

"Have you any choice, my lord?"

"I like your Tennyson songs much, Beryl."

"Find me—anything," said Beryl, desperately, to Lawrence.

The unconscious Lawrence set music before her. Beryl summoned all her nerve, and sang:

"Come not, when I am dead,
To drop thy foolish tears upon my grave;
To trample round my fallen head,
And vex the unhappy dust thou wouldst not save.
There let the wind sweep, and the plover cry:
But thou go by!

"Child, if it were thine error, or thy crime,
I care no longer, being all unblest;
Wed whom thou wilt, but I am sick of Time,
And I desire to rest.
Pass on, weak heart, and leave me where I lie.
Go by—go by!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

"CAN I SUCCEED WHERE YOU HAVE FAILED?"

"THAT was a very sad song, Beryl," said the marquis, as his wife, leaving the instrument, sat down by his side.

"I sang just what Lawrence selected for me," she said, quietly; "but a sad song, Percy, suits best the hour and the day. The light is fading and the spring is dead; even the roses in the garden are dropping their perfumed petals in a shower."

"Thank you for it, however, if it was sad; you sang it very sweetly. When we get to Winderton, you will have a very fine instrument there, and a grand organ that Lawrence loves well to play."

Mrs. Ranleigh could not understand these quiet amenities between this pair, whom she supposed to be in a state of deadly warfare. Fanny had told her the marquis was cruelly stern to his wife, and his wife dying of fear of him.

This did not look like it. She had every reason to feel sure that the marquis was irreconcilably angry at his wife, and that Beryl's heart was in that desolate grave on the shores of the North Sea. What did all this mean?

Mrs. Ranleigh's carriage was announced.

"We shall see you in a week?" said Beryl.

The marquis insisted on accompanying Mrs. Ranleigh to her carriage, when Fanny had brought down her hat and black lace shawl. As they moved slowly through the hall, the widow leaning on his arm, he said:

"Do not fail us. Remember, I depend on you. I shall have almost full occupation with business cares, improving my estates, and discussing important questions with the political friends who come to me. I shall be obliged to entrust Beryl wholly to you."

"Do not rely on me, my lord, too much. How can I succeed where *you have failed?*"

The marquis' heavy brows contracted, his lips set firmly.

"You will be with her constantly; you have her confidence. Beryl has had a severe lesson in the results of rashness."

"No doubt; but consider how dangerous a dower is beauty like hers. Poor child! every man who sees her falls in love with her. You do not wonder at that, my lord? And she was brought up to accept all homage, even to challenge it."

"I repeat, Mrs. Ranleigh," said the marquis, stiffly, "that I confide her to your care."

So, then, the marquis had chosen his wife's jailer. Innocent Beryl did not know that she needed one. No doubt, remitted to her own remorseful heart, she would have been far safer than under the espionage of the artful and treacherous Laura.

Laura herself doubted, as she drove to Myrtle Lodge, whether she stood on the level of a very honorable friendship with the marquis, and whether he would esteem her as an equal, while she was jailer and spy at his service.

"But the first thing is to get his intimacy, his confidential acquaintance, and then I can be ready to turn to advantage all that happens. At his age men are easily led. Besides, I'm hideously in debt, and going with the Medfords, I can rent the lodge for a year, save the expenses

of housekeeping; and suppose a great bill does come in, a few tears. But then—that would spoil my possibilities with him. Still, Beryl herself must have a liberal allowance."

So, vilely planning to live on the bounty of the trusting friend whom she betrayed daily, Mrs. Ranleigh drove into Myrtle Lodge, fairly well pleased with her prospects.

Beryl, left alone in the drawing-room, said over to herself the line she had sung:

"And vex the unhappy dust thou wouldst not save—"

That had not been true of Jerome; she would have saved him, even at the sacrifice of herself, if she could have done so. But it might be cruelly true of her husband, honorable and generous, if cold and harsh. If she failed now to him, she might soon hold herself guilty of his death. She met him as he reëntered the drawing-room.

"At what time do we start to-morrow, Percy?"

"I am afraid as early as ten."

"I shall not mind that, if you will not. I think your duties in Parliament, and going out so much with me, have tired you. I hope at Winderton you will feel much better."

"Thank you, Beryl."

"And you will tell me whom I am to invite? I do not yet know all your friends, my lord."

"Possibly you have some preferences, some friends?"

"No, Percy; I was never allowed to have intimates or friends. I have no one, and you will let me help you there at the castle, with the tenants and the schools, with anything ladies do?"

"Thank you, Beryl. I will call on you at need."

He stood stately, uncompromising.

"Good-night, Percy," said Beryl, gently.

He touched her hand and bowed; then furtively watched her graceful figure gliding up the stairs, and a sigh that was a groan reached the ear of Lawrence, putting away the music, at the piano.

* * * * * * * *

It was so late when they reached Winderton Castle, that Beryl could only get a general idea of a grand, turreted pile, stretching away on a low hill, beautified

with stately oaks and elms and spreading beech trees, and surrounded with gardens, made evident by the rich fragrance that loaded the dewy breeze. Fountains plashed; from afar, the low roar of a river came on the hollow air; white statues gleamed amid the shrubbery.

Within, all was of a stately, baronial splendor. Beryl felt smaller, lonelier, more lost than ever, under these great carved and arched ceilings, and amid these antique draperies and gigantic bronzes and marbles.

But early in the morning, invited by the exquisite beauty about her, called by birds and flowers, she went out on the terraces, all aglow with rhododendrons. All living things seemed to love Beryl. Two great hounds and a redoubtable mastiff appeared from remote quarters and followed at the new chatelaine's side; a pair of golden pheasants drew near with stately pace and attended her; a flight of snowy and purple pigeons stooped low overhead, and one tame dove lit on her shoulder and allowed itself to be nestled in her hands. A calm, singular delight came to her in such sweet new scenes. This beauty and love of innocent things soothed her.

She heard a step on the gravel. She turned. The marquis was near her.

"Oh, Percy," she said, "how peaceful one should be here, and how good! Percy, I have never been taught to live for others, and to be noble and good; will you not help me to learn it now?"

Her supplicating eyes, her sympathetic voice, half broken by a sob, her fair face suddenly lighted by a transparent flush, the young creature was the very incarnation of a prayer.

The stern marquis felt his cold indignation and reserve shaken.

CHAPTER XIX.

"A TALE OF CHIVALRY."

AFTER the excitements of the past social season, after those fierce storms of folly, disaster, and agony which had nearly wrecked her, and had possibly destroyed her husband as well as her lover, Lady Beryl Medford found herself suddenly in a port of peace. No circumstances could have been more favorable for restoring calm to her mind, substituting a serious penitence for mad remorse, and nourishing good intentions, than these enchanting surroundings and accessories of life at Winderton. Beryl had never lived in the country. Her grandmother had gone from the stir of fashionable life in Park Lane to the frivolities of Bath. Between these two seasons she divided the year. Beryl's life had been a life made up of gas-lights, opera music, caged birds, hot-house flowers, and elaborate dresses, with after-thought of wrangling over dressmakers' bills by Lady Heath. Now, for the first time, she breathed untainted air, saw wild flowers bloom, and bird, deer, and rabbit peep with curious, shy brown eyes out of the thickets. She heard the whistle of the plowboys, the hedgers and ditchers, the songs of the dairy maids, the laughter of hearty village children. Left in London, oppressed by her husband's proud anger and withdrawn confidence, Beryl might have gone mad or died, thinking of her Jerome, dead in his youth, dishonored, lying, all beauty marred, in a foreign grave. In this soothing sweetness about her, she seemed to make in her lonely, repenting heart a grave wide and deep, but beautified by tender blossoms of hope, memory, and consolation, and to leave the lost lover of her girlhood in the circle of the infinite mercy of God. She wished to live now to do right, and she hoped the marquis would understand her and help her.

Unhappily he did not understand her at all. When she sedulously repressed her grief, and strove to seem content and cheerful for his sake, because of this noble home

which he so lavishly made hers, he said to himself:

"She has an entirely idle, fickle heart. She deserted me for Sothron, because of his youth, his beauty, and his ready tongue; but now he is gone she forgets him, and her coquettish heart will turn to the first new-comer."

He did not mean to be unjust; this stern, repressed spirit could not understand this tender, flower-like nature that grew at his side. Does the granite cliff understand the airy columbine that weaves its pointed bells from its clefts? And yet both are creatures of the good God.

"All is so beautiful here, Percy," cried Beryl, "I feel as if I could never have enough of being out of doors. I want to ride or walk all the time."

"I shall be glad to attend you," said the marquis. "I can ride over the estates now, and do the work at revising accounts and estimating improvements when Mrs. Ranleigh is here to go about with you."

"But I do not wish to incommode you, Percy. Cannot I go about alone? All is safe here."

"Alone! What idea have you of the conveniences of life?"

Beryl looked down like a rebuked child, then lifted her innocent eyes.

"My grandmother always told me that married women could go about as they chose, only young girls needed chaperons."

"And that was an inducement to marriage?" he said, dryly.

"Why, yes—it seemed much nicer; grandmother was so suspicious; and I think no one ever hated to feel watched as I do."

"Some married women need chaperons more than some young girls," said the marquis. "A woman with a fine sense of her own dignity, a noble reserve, a delicate idea of honor, is always her own best guardian. Such my mother was. My ideal woman is like her; but I see no such nowadays."

Beryl winced.

"Perhaps I shall grow like her. I think in such a place as this, one cannot help growing very good and wise. And, Percy, if you do not care to stay out with me all day, why not let Lawrence take me about? He knows the place."

Six months before, the marquis would have found it very reasonable that this young kinsman should be his countess' squire. But Mrs. Ranleigh had whispered carelessly, as Lawrence turned over Beryl's music, "They look like a handsome young couple—might do for a tableau. Is that wonderful charm your wife has for all men a blessing or a curse?"

Medford's nature was proud, resentful, jealous, unforgiving, while loyal, earnest, truthful, and with great depths of tenderness, unguessed even by himself. Had he married early a woman fitted to his temperament, he would have been one of the noblest examples of a husband and father. Now he saw that his late marriage to this beautiful, carelessly trained girl was a terrible mistake, and his resentment at his unappreciated, unrequited, love, blinded him to all the beauty and exquisite charm of Beryl's real spirit. Every word she said added to her condemnation. Her grandmother had watched her sedulously. Evidently the shrewd dowager had discovered that she needed it. She lightly would resign her husband's company for that of the handsome youth, Lawrence.

While writing her down a heartless flirt, the marquis did not decline his own duties. He spent the entire day with his wife; rose earlier than his wont to walk with her in park and garden; calmly endured visits to the kennels, stables, and columbarium; for Beryl was a lover of living things, and had never before been able to indulge her fondness for animals.

He rode with her, walked with her, and spent hours explaining to her the curiosities, relics, and art treasures of the castle, and telling her the lives of the men and women of his ancient home, as he showed her their portraits in the gallery. He dwelt much on the women of the house—they had all been of lustrous virtue and grave, noble spirit—a shining line; and as he pointed out their stately semblances, one by one, to this little modern Beryl, with the head of rebellious yellow curls, and the great violet eyes, he felt as if he were giving her a lesson in morals. Indeed, Beryl felt very much as if she were once more in pinafores and going to school to an especially grave professor. She was so overawed and crushed by all this stateliness and schooling that after a week of it she was ready to welcome with rapture her dearest Laura, who

flew into her arms with enthusiastic expressions of tenderness.

With the coming of Mrs. Ranleigh matters changed a little. The marquis did not seem uneasy about his wife, so long as she was with her friend, and when they walked out in the afternoon Lawrence often came with them, and sometimes walked with the widow, but somehow it often happened that he was at the side of his kinswoman, while the widow was attended by her host.

It was so one such afternoon, and at a little turn of the road Beryl and her squire were lost to sight for a few minutes; then advancing around the curve, the marquis saw these two standing by a little dell so covered with bluebells that the earth seemed nearly as azure as the sky.

Beryl, in a childishly made dress of white, soft stuff, with a wide, white Gainesborough hat, stood with clasped hands looking at this sheet of bloom in an ecstacy of admiration; yellow and blue butterflies sailed over the bed of nodding bells.

Lawrence had advanced a few paces to gather for her a large bouquet, and Beryl, speaking to him, raised unconsciously her slender hand in a pretty, imperious fashion all her own.

"She is Arnold's Iseult all over again," said Mrs. Ranleigh, with a smile. "I think of it whenever I see her. Do you remember the lines? She was Iseult in a tableau once at her uncle the earl's house, two years ago, and Sothron was Sir Tristram, and I read the verse. You know it?"

"I—I have forgotten if I ever saw it," said he, coldly.

Mrs. Ranleigh recited finely, and with intention:

> "'Let her have her youth again;
> Let her be as she was then;
> Let her have her proud, sweet eyes,
> And her petulant, quick replies;
> Let her sweep her dazzling hand
> With her gesture of command,
> And shake back her wealth of hair
> With the old imperious air.'"

"Magnificently repeated lines, whatever the tableau was," said the marquis, whose statesman life had driven romance literature out of his mind.

Beryl came up to him with her flowers, and he drew her

hand through his arm, and left the pretty widow to return with Lawrence.

That night he looked up the story of Tristram and Iseult. He had read none of the glowing Arthurian legends since he was a lad.

He read that Tristram and Iseult had loved when both were free; but Iseult married the King of Cornwall, and yet loved Sir Tristram still; and they had met, forgetting King Mark, at *La Joyeuse Garde*, and Tristram had died a violent death, and Iseult died of sorrow.

And Peryl and Jerome had acted Tristram and Iseult.

CHAPTER XX.

"MY LADY, YOU ARE BASELY BETRAYED!"

THE dark brow of her husband frightened Beryl so that she was glad to take refuge in the society of Laura. Percy was always punctiliously polite, and Beryl scarcely ever saw him except before others.

She was sitting in her boudoir one day, at ease in a low chair—a downy nest of tawny silk, with a blue plush pillow for her fair, silken head—and reading the poem of Persephone, when Mrs. Ranleigh came to ask her to go after ferns. They went out together through the park, down to the moist, cool woods by the river, Laura moving with her usual idle pace, and Beryl flitting on before and coming back, always alert over some new mystery and beauty of the wood. Finally they sat down under a great tree.

"This is a paradisic place," said Laura; "and then you must feel so supreme, and grand, and queenly here, mistress of half a county, looked up to as a sovereign by the people for miles around, your castle once a favorite resting-place of Tudor royalty. It is worth all the price you paid for it, Beryl. I do not wonder that you are forgetting Jerome Sothron."

"I am not forgetting him!" cried Beryl, growing deadly pale, and laying her hand on her heart in a sudden way.

"Not? Poor fellow! Since I came here I thought you had lost him out of your memory, as ripples die."

"You know, Laura, in looking it all over, I saw I had been very wrong, and put myself and *him* in dangerous places; and you yourself told me as much. I erred against my duty, and it was God's mercy I did not fall into sin. I remembered, later than I should, my marriage vows, and I am trying to set all my thought and duty, where they belong, on my husband."

"That may do, since Sothron is dead," said Laura in a cynical tone. "If he were alive, the story would alter, possibly, And how, as your lord seems marvelously stiff and unimpressible, will it be if some other younger, more ardent man adores you?"

"Laura! how dare you?"

"My child, a beauty like yours is a peril. Every one of your crowd of flatterers is a peril. Are you strong?"

"I think," said Beryl, as a tear fell on her folded hands, "that I *am* safe for all my life, in having loved and—lost. Jerome Sothron was to me no 'summer pilot of an empty heart unto the shores of nothing.' I loved him, childish as I was, with a woman's love. I was wrong to allow that love to be outraged by my parents' denials, and by forming other ties. God has judged me, and Jerome is dead. As a wife, I hope to be patient, duitful, submissive, loving, if Percy will let me love him. But passion, such ardent, all-forgetting love as I had for Jerome, which was so strong that I forgot for it due reserve, will never again touch my heart—that lies in his unknown grave."

"Poor child! poor child!" said Laura, as if touched by this passionate, pitiful revelation. "You keep mementoes of him?"

"Some few, I ought not, but I do—I cannot destroy them. Laura, at night, when I am all alone, I sometimes rise and get them, and cry over them. It seems to relieve me, and make calmness possible next day."

There was a long silence. A green finch, a rare bird, came to a bough near them, and sang a lay of tremulous sweetness. The wild flowers Beryl had gathered lay fading on her lap. So hope had sung a false and fatal song, and so the sweetness of her life had faded even as she gathered it in her heedless hand.

"Let us go back, Laura. Four or five people are coming to-day—Honorable Harley Medford, the heir-prospective, and his wife, and others—and I must be all calm and

well arrayed, and do my lord credit in receiving them. I do not feel like hunting for ferns to-day."

"Yes, come back," said Mrs. Ranleigh. "Come, learn your lesson, my child, that all this splendid glitter of life must not be tarnished by such poor things as tears."

When Beryl went down to her husband in his private room to be in time to greet his guests, he started on seeing her. She wore a dress of rich Lyons velvet, all black, the sleeves lined with gold satin, and falling away at the elbows from her pearly arms. About her soft round throat and wrists were close bands of large, carved gold beads. She was a harmony in black and gold.

"Where did you get those ornaments, Beryl?" he said.

"They were in a casket you gave me last year, Percy."

"They were my mother's. You look just as she used to look."

"Oh, Percy! will I ever be like her, do you think?"

He drew her hand on his arm, and felt more forgiving and tender than he had for weeks.

All that evening, as Beryl well performed her duties to her guests, that softened mood of his lasted, and filled her with hope.

Early in the morning, she saw him walking with Laura on the terrace, and hastened to join them. But his mood was changed: he was more curt, more frigid, more keenly upbraiding of eye than ever.

That afternoon Beryl sat alone, looking over a package of choice old lace, brought from one of the cedar chests of the castle, when Fanny rushed in, in a very fury of excitement, locked the door, and flung herself on her knees before her mistress.

"My lady, you are betrayed—sold—shamefully spied on—slandered! Ah, the wretch! Ah, the traitor! I could kill her—indeed, I could! The viper! the snake!"

"Fanny! Stop this instant!" cried Beryl, letting the lace fall in a filmy heap. "What are you talking of?"

"Listen, for your life, my dear lady, or you are ruined! Mrs. Ranleigh has quarrelled with Paulette, her maid. Mrs. Ranleigh has the nastiest temper in the world. She slapped Paulette in the face."

"Fanny!"

"My lady, believe me. I saw the full mark of her hand."

"Well, Fanny, I cannot hear a repetition of gossip."

"But this is more than gossip, my lady. It is life or death to you! The Frenchwoman has told me all. You may believe if she was furious."

"I am sorry for her; but I cannot hear this, Fanny."

"But, my lady, you need hear it. It refers to you and Mr. Sothron. I must tell you, to save you."

"Well, go on," said Beryl, falling back faintly.

"My lady, it is gospel truth. She showed me letters and all. Mrs. Ranleigh, instead of being your friend, hates you out of jealousy, for she wanted my lord. She threw you with Sir Jerome, to get you to do some wild thing, as elope——"

"Fanny, hush!"

"It is so. She proposed the visit to the abbey to Sir Jerome, then wrote to let my lord know of it; and persuaded you to go alone to the abbey with Sir Jerome, so the marquis would be assured of it. She took copies of the little notes between you and Sir Jerome—no harm in them, I am sure, my lady—but goodness knows what *she* put in, and she showed them to my lord. She told him all about your poor little walks, and talks, and meetings, and flowers—things as innocent as ever two children had between them. She has spied on you here. She wrote my lord a long letter last night, and sent it to him by Paulette. But Paulette is a masterhand at opening and reading letters; that's the good of a *French maid*, my lady. And she read the letter, and told me all that was in it."

"Oh, Fanny, Fanny! I cannot believe all this."

"Well, hark, my dear lady, and see if Paulette could have made this up. She told my lord you said your heart was in Sir Jerome's grave; you could never love as you had loved him. You had loved him with a woman's best love, and had been wrong to let any one part you; and you could never forget him, and God had punished you."

Beryl was weeping wildly. How strange these words sounded in their garbling, and yet correctness, from another mouth!

"She said you told her you had relics of him, and you cried over them nights. Heaven help you, my own sweet lady, for having told your secrets like that."

"But, Fanny, my husband, the soul of honor, of truth,

can he maintain a spy, be on terms with a traitor, allow words against his wife, countenance perfidy!"

"It is the very thing I held over Paulette; how could he? but she said it was no wonder the sly way Mrs. Ranleigh did it. She pretended to love you beyond all, and feel like a sister, and hold your honor dear, and it was her sincere desire to try to help him and shield you. And mind you, my lady. She pretended to him that she always tried to hinder you, and, not succeeding, *had* to tell him. And it was when he seemed to doubt, that she thrust the note in his hand. And it was beyond any man not to get carried out of himself by jealousy, as she handled him. This letter, last night, Paulette said had such a lot of rubbish about feeling it her duty to tell him so he might know what course to take, so afraid his home would be ruined unless he understood. And she was his devoted friend, ready to lay down her life for his sake and yours. It has been her fault from first to last, my lady. She is a snake in the grass. All your trouble and Mr. Jerome's is her making. She is trying to part you and my lord. She is here, a spy under your roof. Oh, the wicked viper! I would like to tear her to pieces."

Beryl sprang up in a tumult of pride, anger, anguish.

"She shall not stay another hour under this roof!"

CHAPTER XXI.

"GOOD-BYE, MY LORD!"

In all her gentle life, perhaps, Beryl had never been thoroughly, intensely angry. She had been deeply grieved, nearly heart-broken. She had, by little troubles, been vexed or irritated, but the anguished sorrow had no resentment or fury, the vexation had died away from her sweet spirit, swiftly as die the dimples caused by a fallen leaf upon a summer pool. But the mildest natures have their possibilities of fury, and the tenderest hearts, given an all-suffering cause, can blaze into rage.

So it was now with Beryl. A storm of wrath took possession of her, and swept away all her meek submissiveness, all her good resolutions, all her fears for her husband's

health. She forgot everything but what she suffered, everything but the indignities offered to herself. The perfidious, hideous betrayal of Laura excited her to a frenzy. She had laid bare her loving and suffering soul to a traitor. The marquis, who condemned his wife's intimacy with Jerome, was then intimate with Laura, exchanged confidences and notes with her. What had she and Jerome done more? He, whom she deemed the soul of honor, received the confidences of a spy, set a spy over his own wife, was a party to her humiliation and betrayal. Knowing herself, and Laura's conduct as she did, she saw that Laura in all womanliness and honor was far below her, and yet, here was Laura approved by the marquis, entering into his friendship, placed as *her* guardian and mentor, and she was condemned. She never reflected that the marquis was utterly ignorant of Laura Ranleigh's wiles, that he never suspected that she had drawn Beryl into the very deeds that she betrayed and condemned. Beryl could not see how Laura could gloss over all her past and her character to the marquis. She only saw cruel treachery in both.

Springing away from Fanny's clasping hands, she dashed out of her room, down-stairs, and never even thinking to knock, burst into the library. It was the very method, poor child, to incense the marquis, who demanded accurate deportment on all occasions. She did not even notice that the marquis was not alone, till the sudden vanishing of the Honorable Harley Medford over and out of the window sill, where he had been sitting, brought the fact to her notice.

"My lord," she cried, "I wish to see you."

"You seem in great haste and excitement about it, madam," said the marquis, sarcastically.

"I need haste and excitement. My lord, Laura Ranleigh must leave this house, this day, this hour!"

"And why? Guests here are not accustomed to such dismissal."

"She has no right to be treated as other guests, or as a lady; she is false, black, treacherous, a vile spy!"

"Countess of Medford, this torrent of adjectives does not befit a lady."

"I cannot think of the *way* in which I express myself, my lord; I can only think of the cruel situation in which

I am placed. How can you, a man of honor, allow a spy on the actions of your wife?"

"My lady, virtue fears no spies," he said, with a flush.

"But may resent them, all the same. You, my lord, are virtuous; but would you tolerate a spy who should dog all your actions, and catch your words to give distorted reports of them? Laura Ranleigh worms herself into my confidence, beguiles me to speak, betrays me into some little correspondence, all innocently meant, and really harming no one, and then she betrays all; and you the soul of truth, will stoop to read or hear her reports, and even the letters she has stolen!"

"You put me in a difficult position, Beryl. You may feel cause to complain of the method used; but when a man has a wife who puts no confidence in him, betrays the confidence he puts in her, and gives her heart to another; to save that wife from ruin and public scorn, he may be forgiven using almost any means."

"No, my lord, he should use the only honorable means even then. And I deny I was ever in such a position, or should ever have betrayed your trust or given you real cause of complaint."

"You do not know where you would have gone if death had not crossed your way!" thundered the marquis; "and I could not tell how a merciful fate would interpose to save you from your willful self."

This was so far true, that Beryl was dumb in considering the terrible verge of sin whereon unconsciously she had stood, blinded by her clinging love for Jerome.

"Laura Ranleigh is your true friend," said the marquis. "She has wished you good and no evil. She may regret, as I do, the method, the only method, you left us by which to save you!"

"*Us!*" He joined himself to Laura against his wife!

"She is a false and wicked woman!" said Beryl. "She advised and led me into the very things of which you complain. She pressed Jerome Sothron into my society. She threw us together. She deceived us both."

"*Us!*" Here was a word which infuriated the marquis in his turn.

"All this indignation against Mrs. Ranleigh is natural when you see her interfering to save you from yourself. Beryl, I found myself, as your husband, in a strange, anom-

malous position. You could not guard yourself; you were too frivolous and weak, and you would not yield to my guardianship. Help was proffered me to save you, who bore my name; I took it. Beryl, words cannot tell how deeply I have been disappointed in you. I saw you, young, gentle, lovely. You accepted my attentions, and then my hand. I knew there were twenty-five years between us, but I knew, too, that in many instances that chasm of years had not precluded a very devoted conjugal love. I stood in grav middle age. I had looked forward only to lonely, weary, painful years. Looking on you, a new future opened. In you I believed I would get back my youth, my hope, the joy of my life; mad that I was, I dreamed of a miracle! I find you cold to me, and frivolous to others; your heart already frittered away by coquetry, by lavishly received admiration—a woman too trifling to wear the dignified name of wife."

"I am not such," cried Beryl, meekly; "that is the cruel, distorted picture of me, painted by Laura Ranleigh's wicked tongue. To me, too, something is due—it is due me, since I am your wife, that I should not be slandered to you—that you should not allow third parties to embitter you against me, your wife. If you have cause of complaint, to me you should come. Even if I had been a really guilty sinner toward you—as nothing ever would have made me—honest words, face to face, with no traitor between, you owed to me. And as all my wrong was girlish weakness, for one dear and lost, you, by a word could have brought me to myself—and I was not beyond forgiveness. True sorrow and repentance can wash away every sin and make all white and fair, and where has been only foolishness, sorrow and repentance will fully warn and prevent—and such sorrow does not rise out of spying, and treachery, and accusation, far, far greater than the fault! Be sure, my lord, if it is your command, I will never even speak to any man again but yourself or a servant. I can do anything at your bidding. You may lock me up if you choose—but that traitor, Laura Ranleigh, shall not abide in the air I breathe."

"Mrs. Ranleigh has been invited here, and she has done nothing without a good intention, without deep respect to me, and earnest regard for your welfare. She must remain as our guest."

"She cannot—I cannot suffer her, my lord."

"We proffered her the invitation; relying on it, she has rented her little home. We cannot insult her. Such a course would arouse inquiry—*inquiry would be fatal to you.*"

"I would rather *die* than have her remain here."

"My lady, I deeply regret we differ about a guest. If the invitation were pending, I should defer to your wish. It is given, and it must be adhered to. Mrs. Ranleigh must stay, and be treated with outward courtesy, at least."

"Once and for all, do you insist on her remaining?"

"I do, emphatically."

"*Good-bye, my lord.*"

Beryl straightened her little golden head, and with a flash of fire in her violet eyes, returned to her room.

"Fanny," she said, sharply, "I am going to leave here, this hour. You may go with me or not, as you choose. I go."

"Oh, my lady! think what you do."

"I do think. I should go mad or commit suicide if I remained here, to face daily at my table that monster of deceit."

"What, my lady! he will not send her away?"

"No."

"Then I believe, upon my life, he is in love with her."

"Hush; this instant! He is uprightness itself—and ice. He cannot understand how I feel. He will not see how she has acted. Where is my travelling dress? Where is my casket? Where is my purse? Where we shall go or what do I do not know, but I cannot breathe here—I must fly."

There was a tap at the door. A page with a telegram. These little yellow leaves fallen from the mystic wires, have, in their fitful silence, changed the current of many lives. They changed the current of Beryl's.

CHAPTER XXII.

BERYL RECEIVES A LEGACY.

BERYL, heated and quivering with excitement, tore open the yellow envelope, and saw these words :

"Come quickly. Lady Heath is dead."

This from her grandmother's maid, Jane Brown.

Dead !

Lady Heath had gone to Bath as usual. She had declined to come to Winderton "until there were more people there to make it lively." The dowager was a godless old creature, wedded firmly to all the "pomps and vanities of this life," which she had no recollection of having renounced in her baptism. She went from one gayety to another, her shriveled form bedizened with old-time jewels, velvets, and lace, her eagle eyes and hooked nose keen on the track of all social scandals, wealth her idol, titles her passion, no scenes gay enough to stimulate and satiate her long palled senses ; and she had gone—all alone, not one of her kin near her—gone unwarned, in hot haste, from the glare of gas-lights, the glitter of fashion, the crash of pianos, the strident clamor of violins, and the rattle of cards, to the dark silence of the grave, the cold and awful mysteries of the world beyond.

This announcement fell on Beryl's heated spirit as snow in summer. From wild indignation, from a passionate desire to avenge herself, she came down to this blank end of all, this mystery of a form in its shroud. And then, she had known no mother but this grim dowager, who had been proud of her, and kind in her way, and liberal ; and she was lying at Bath, dead, with no friend near but a servant. Alfred, the younger son, was in Vienna ; the elder son, the earl, had gone for a summer trip to Norway. All Beryl's selfish rage fell away from her heart, as a cloak falls from one's shoulders.

Naturally her refuge was her husband.

"Fanny, take this quickly to my lord," she said, bursting into tears.

Fanny hastened to the library.

The marquis was sitting in a dull, heart-sick despair, where Beryl left him. He did not feel quite satisfied with his methods. In some way, he had been wrong, and there had been a ring of truth in many of Beryl's words. But Mrs. Ranleigh had thoroughly deceived him as to her acts and character, and he could not see her as poor Beryl did, nor Beryl as she was. From his half-stupor of sorrow he was recalled by the strip of buff paper.

"Fanny, can you get your lady and yourself ready to start for Bath in half an hour?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Quickly about it then."

He looked from the window; his amiable heir was lying on his back on the terrace, playing with half a dozen dogs.

"Harley, the dowager Lady Heath is dead; I must take Beryl to Bath at once. Take charge here for me. Your wife will take Beryl's place. Mrs. Ranleigh will aid her."

He pulled a bell as he spoke, and ordered the carriage, and sent for his valet.

The Honorable Harley came to him.

"Go contented, cousin; I'll do my best for your guests, I'm sorry you are to be disturbed so, but these things happen."

"Yes. Left here, you will only be rehearsing your ultimate position, Harley," and the marquis laid his hand kindly on the young man's broad shoulder.

"Perhaps not. You are not old. My new cousin is young and fair. Do you not see in prospective a nurse-maid pacing this lawn, with the Hope of the Medfords in her arms?"

"It will be so, Harley, but the boy will be yours, not mine. God bless you, Harley, and *him*, when he comes."

With a hearty clasp of his heir's hand, the marquis went to his room.

"Grand fellow," said Harley Medford, winking his eyes rapidly. "Model man; but he's aging uncommon fast. I thought it would be just the other way. What *can* a man like Percy have to bring gray hairs and wrinkles?"

And the Honorable Harley went off to find his wife and

that pleasant Mrs. Ranleigh, to tell all the news and get what interest he could out of the evening.

The June morning was just brightening in pink and gold, when the marquis and Beryl, with their maid and valet, reached Bath. Very little had been spoken between the husband and wife during the journey, but Beryl felt that each instant she had been surrounded with constant sympathetic care. She crouched back in a corner of the first-class car, where they were alone, and cried silently, or thought thoughts that were as bitter as tears. Would everybody whom she knew die and leave her alone on the earth? Jerome was dead, and her grandmother was dead. She thought that now she would put on black, and those brilliant dresses which had seemed to mock her heart-pain for her lost love, could be laid aside. Now she would dare look sad as she felt, and no one would blame her. Now, for a little while, she need not dance, and sing, and make sparkling little speeches, with a grave and a loss seeming all the while to lie at her feet. Then she took some comfort in the thought that she had always been good and obedient to Lady Heath; she had nothing there to reproach herself with. But in this sudden fashion, as Lady Heath had gone out of time, so the marquis might go with his mysterious ailment: and then, oh, how much she must write against herself on his account! That very morning she had said things that she should not have said, and felt selfish resentments, instead of patience and humility as became her! She made more, many more, of those good resolutions we are wont to make, set face to face with death.

All this impression was deepened in the next two weeks. Alfred Heath and the earl were summoned to England; and Lady Heath's body was carried to the ancestral vaults at the chief estate of her family. Then the house in Park lane was to be indefinitely closed, rented, perhaps, by and by; and Beryl seemed to be the only one to look after matters there. There were innumerable desks and drawers and private portfolios to be gone over, and correspondence and other papers to be made safe by burning them up. Lord Alfred had to go back to Vienna; the earl must return to Norway; his countess was in delicate health. Beryl and her husband went to Park Lane, the house where Jerome had wooed her and the marquis had

won her. It makes sad havoc in affairs when the wooing and the winning are by different ones!

The marquis was very patient and good. He bore with the cheerless house, the empty conservatory, the furniture and carpets shrouded in linen; he brought his strong, manly business sense to bear on the bills and the debts, and the confused papers of the old dowager. He took calmly, as a matter of course, that revelation of the penurious, selfish, indebted, extravagant, rowdy, contradictory life, over which Beryl blushed hotly. He brought order out of confusion, and a measure of clean respect out of shiftlessness. Amid all this renegade misery, baldness, and deceitfulness, of this blatant old life of hard selfishness, looked forth for Beryl a treasure clean and pure, and sweet and fair, as a star in stormy skies—a lily bloom among nettles. She found, unexpectedly, among bills and duns, and spicy letters of scandals and backbiting, the records of a saint! She found the pictures and the letters of her mother. Her journal of her married days, and those two or three brief years of her motherhood, even a letter addressed to herself, written by that dying hand, to be given her when she entered society, and which, alas! the renegade old dowager had forgotten. Oh, what might those pure, saintly counsels have saved her child!

Beryl spent the whole of a day reading and rereading these blessed treasures, while stately, true, full of all womanly tenderness and admirable grace, grew before her the portrait of her mother's mind and heart. Overcome at last, realizing how far she had fallen short of her mother's ideal, and how far she had unwittingly wandered from her teachings, she took the picture and the papers, with many tears, to her husband.

"You will see," she said, "how different I am from *her*, from what she wished me to be; from what I might have been if she had lived, or even if they had ever thought to give me this packet—her legacy. They gave me her jewels, but oh! how much more good *these* would have done me! They show me, Percy, how wrong I have been. I entreat your forgiveness. It is not too late for me to model myself on her pattern. I will try. Oh, if my mother had only lived!

The marquis felt grieved for her, now realizing for the

first time her irreparable loss. He looked at the ivory miniature of Lady Agnes Heath.

"This is a very lovely face, Beryl," he said. "I will tell you what I will do. I will have the best painter we have copy it in a full length, to hang in your room. Send one of her dresses with the miniature, and it can be made perfect."

CHAPTER XXIII

"THE VAPOROUS BEAUTY OF HER BLONDE HAIR."

THE marquis spoke about the picture in a generous compassion for his sorrowing little wife. But when he read the papers the grateful Beryl left with him, he admired the character they revealed, and set the Lady Agnes in his mind in a shrine beside his mother. Of late he had been telling himself that Beryl was of a selfish, vain, weak spirit—only what he might expect as child and pupil of Lady and Alfred Heath. Now he began to believe and hope better things of her. He perceived that in person she was remarkably like her lovely mother, and he noticed much similarity in disposition. Her faults were those of inexperience and careless education, and he began to hope she would conquer them.

They returned to Winderton Castle, but the gay company expected in August did not come. Harley Medford and his wife remained ; two or three elderly political friends of the marquis came—and Mrs. Ranleigh staid.

Beryl, in her repentance, after reading her mother's papers and letters, resolved to bear with Mrs. Ranleigh's presence as part of her penance. She could say no more, at least, about having her requested to leave the castle. Beryl found that her mother had patiently and silently endured all manner of ill behavior in her husband, and had only used her troubles as helps in growing better. She had found these words in her mother's journal :

> "Saint Augustine ! well hast thou said
> That of our vices we can frame
> A ladder, if we will but tread
> Under our feet each deed of shame."

Also, of our sorrows we can fashion the ladder whereby we climb to heaven.

When Beryl read these words, she considered of how little she had to complain in regard to the marquis. He had been stern to her faults, and he had been deceived by Mrs. Ranleigh. So Beryl accepted Laura as part of her penitence. The sharp wound of Laura's treachery was dulled by time and overlaid by other sorrows; its memory was less keen.

After Beryl returned to the castle, Mrs. Ranleigh sought an explanation with her, and smoothed away much of what Paulette had said. Paulette was dismissed; "she was very false, and had proved a thief." Mrs. Ranleigh utterly denied many of her statements, and softened others; she protested deep love for Beryl.

Beryl heard in silence. She said she did not wish to quarrel with any one, nor could she re-establish confidence where once it had been betrayed. On these terms even, Laura found it for her interest to remain at Winderton.

Beryl dressed now in mourning; and, permitted to have a cause of grief, could sorrow for the lost Jerome. She was in an anomalous position—at once a widow and a wife. Her heart in Jerome was forever widowed. She could never love any other man as she had loved him. To him she had given the first passionate love of her youth—the love which regards the lover only, worshiping and adoring the man himself. If her family had let her alone, she would have married him without an afterthought of terror of his poverty, without grudging the sacrifice of jewels and velvet gowns, horses, coaches, and numerous residences. That had been the sacred flame, lighted in her heart by handsome, affectionate Jerome, and it burned now in a still, unearthly light above his grave. She could never feel for the marquis anything like that, but she felt respect, gratitude, trust, and longed to please him and win his approval. Perhaps she might have succeeded only for Laura.

"Beryl is looking pale," said the marquis, uneasily, one September evening, to Laura. Beryl sat by the table in a soft circle of lamp-light, her head bent over some pretty work which she was doing for the Honorable Mrs. Harley, with whom she had a quiet friendship. Her face

was, indeed, pale and delicate, her skin transparent like alabaster. "We should do something to cheer her up," he added.

"I don't know as she cares to be cheered up, poor little darling!" said Laura, compassionately. "You know, there is a certain luxury in indulging hopeless grief. Since the dowager died, poor Beryl can show without fear her mourning for Sothron. I wish she had never seen him! She is wearing out her life over that loss. Yes, I wish we could divert her."

Now, this idea of a double mourning had never entered the honest soul of the marquis; but, having been put there, it staid and irritated him. He said to Beryl next day:

"I think you have worn that heavy mourning long enough—as long as society requires. It is three months. I prefer you should lighten it up a little."

"Certainly, Percy, if you wish," she said; and that day at dinner she appeared with a lustreless black silk with half sleeves, and cut square in the neck, with plentiful garnishing of crepe lisse at arms and bosom.

"That is better," said the marquis, "and I should be glad if you went back to your music and singing, and invited some friends and make the house more cheerful. We have no right to be selfish in sorrow, and Harley and his wife are finding it dull."

Before lunch, Beryl went to him and asked him to choose some guests to be invited for October and November.

The guests came, and in the delicious October weather the castle woke to a more joyous life. The little mistress was beloved of all. There was a wistful, pleading gentleness in her glance, a pathetic droop of her pretty mouth, a timid manner, which united to the exquisite shape, the dainty head with its golden rings and frills, the fugitive dimples, enchanted all hearts.

The guests united to do her honor. The merry Mrs. Harley Medford openly laughed at the devotion of the Honorable Harley to the little countess. Lawrence hung on the gracious looks and gentle words of his young kinswoman, and each morning had a tiny, dewy bouquet to lay on her plate. Harley read poetry to her. Lord Ravlin was the first of the autumn guests that arrived, and

he made love to Beryl's dogs, and declared himelf unconsolable if he might not sit by his hostess at every gathering at table. He went out riding on horseback with Beryl. In this fair home kingdom Beryl stood, if crownless, an unquestioned queen.

Then came a former ward of the marquis, Sir Eustace Friar, a youth not much beyond Beryl's age, a young man with a hobby always at command. The previous season he had been nothing if not a poet. He had made ballads and sonnets, and appeared in an annual, and published a thin little volume of verse in white and gold. But Poesy was no longer mistress of his soul. Painting had usurped the place of poetry. Art was now his ideal. He had a studio at the end of the portrait gallery, and he went about the grounds with a water-color box and an easel. He sketched Beryl in one pose or another from morning till night. Lady Beryl in the drawing-room, on the terrace, at the piano, feeding pheasants, knitting, reading, writing. His sketch book was a whole gallery of studies, which he supposed to be Lady Beryl, and innocently showed about as such. His artistic infatuation, his boyish frankness amused Beryl, she sat indefinitely for portraits.

Sir Eustace betimes returned to his ancient worship and indited madrigals to Lady Beryl, and read them to her in the drawing-room after dinner.

All this homage was gall and wormwood to the jealous spirit of Laura Ranleigh. If she could not stop it she could make it bitterness to the marquis and Beryl.

"How can you expect your wife to go unscathed through the furance of society life," she whispered. "She cannot avoid all this admiration, it goes to her unsought. She would be superhuman to reject it, and people seeing it, and not knowing her real simple purity, will very naturally call her a married flirt. How cruel the world is. How I pity the darling. Do see Sir Eustace Friar, toiling now at 'a Lady Beryl Medford.'"

The marquis strode up to his former ward.

"Always at the same study, Friar? Practice should make you perfect."

"No," said Friar, with amusing desperation. "Angelo himself could not catch the vaporous beauty of that blonde hair."

"Beryl, you make yourself conspicuous by accepting Friar's homage," said the marquis, aside, to her that evening.

"Why, my lord! I look at the boy almost as an infant in arms!" cried Beryl; but she bade Eustace make no more pictures of her.

Christmas was kept at Winderton Castle with stately old time splendor. Then the marquis and Beryl made some visits and prepared to return to Cavendish Square for the London season.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE QUEEN OF AN EVENING.

THAT procession of months had not been a happy time for Beryl Medford. Each passing day recalled the year before, when she had seen Jerome so freely, and had, alas! been so happy with him. She dreamed of him constantly—never of him as lost and dead, but living, loving, glorious in his youth and beauty. More than these wistful memories of Jerome, the singular bearing of her husband distressed her. No matter how submissive she was and intent on pleasing him, she could not prevent his jealous watching, and confidence seemed gone forever. It made social life hateful to her. In fact, stirred by the artful Laura, the marquis was making a mania of his distrust of his poor little wife.

In March a ball was given by the duke, and Beryl appeared at it—her first brilliant outcoming since her grandmother's death. The marquis himself was dazzled by his wife's extraordinary beauty, as she came to the drawing-room prepared to go with him.

Her dress was of royal purple velvet, with a train, cut high on the shoulders, with a stately ruff, and open in a point, revealing the pearly and very shapely neck; the bodice front and petticoat were of satin of a pure pale amethyst-purple shade. Pearls were her only ornaments. She looked most royal as she came softly forward, her head crowned with her golden hair. Fanny behind her, with a wrap, extinguished this dazzling vision in a white swan's-down cloak.

Her appearance created a furor. When she stepped from her carriage to the carpeted walk before the ducal door, there was a stir of admiration from all the onlookers. As she moved up the stairway, it was a triumph. She was the centre of all eyes from first to last. People crowded around her for a look or a word; and there was fairly a strife until her card was filled for the dances. Never had a young *debutante* made a more astonishing impression. Anxious mothers sighed in hopeless envy, and the marquis felt the glare of the eyes of dozens of younger men fixed on him. The demon of jealousy took possession of his soul.

Beryl, carried away at last by this full tide of admiration, seemed really bright and happy. Her sympathetic face only reflected the pleased looks about her. She really wished that her husband had been of her most pressing admirers, but said to herself, "That is not Percy's way."

She never guessed that the outwardly cold marquis was in a fury of jealous love and self-depreciation. He gave her no congratulations. They left the ball early, and nothing was said on the way home.

The next day they did not meet until luncheon.

"Beryl," said the marquis, "I have affairs at Winderton. I do not care to be much at the House this session. I think we must go to the castle instead of remaining in town."

"Very well, Percy. I love the castle best of all our homes."

Not a shade of regret. The marquis felt moved to a further explanation.

"Harley's son—I hope the child will be a son—will one day heir the estate, and I should like to have it born at the castle."

"Then we should go, and have them come at once, my lord," said Beryl.

"We cannot invite much company in the circumstances, and as Mrs. Medford will not be able to be with you much, I propose to you to take Mrs. Ranleigh," said the marquis, slowly.

Beryl resented this, but said, quietly:

"It is not needed."

"I think it is. *I* should not think you would wish to be left to the sole entertainment of Lawrence and other men, who will go and come there."

Then Beryl made no more remonstrance, and Mrs. Ranleigh was invited.

Beryl's ready resignation of the social life where she was such a bright, particular star, pleased the marquis. She must, then, care little for this adulation, since she so readily resigned it. She seemed to have no regrets and no backward glances, as she went from the splendors of the London season to the castle in the lake region. In truth, the castle suited Beryl far better than Cavendish Square, with an endless succession of routs, operas, dinners, balls, *fêtes*. Beryl had begun life young, and she had worn out those things; but she had never had opportunity to wear out the serene sweetness of country life; and the beauties of nature would never pall on her ingenuous heart. The quiet sweetness about the gray old castle was soothing as a low-sung lullaby. The spring came early; in April the gardens were fair to see, and in the woods and dells primroses, violets, anemones, and crocus sent a blissful floral morning brightening across the waking world.

Beryl was peaceful, but far from strong. She looked so very fragile one evening, that kindly Harley Medford, after a keen glance at her, went to his kinsman, who was leaning back in a great chair near the fireplace, which blazeb rather for pleasure than warmth.

"My cousin, I fear in doing a great kindness to my wife, you are harming your own."

"In what way?" asked the marquis.

"Your fair countess looks unusually pale and delicate. Perhaps the country spring is too damp for her, or she is lonely here or the change from the manner of life she is used to is too great. She loses her color and her vivacity."

"Are you speaking of me, Harley?" asked Beryl, coming up. "Are you saying the country is too dull, and I pine for town? Do not say that. I love this best of all; it is so comforting, so restful here."

"Beryl!" cried Mrs. Harley, from behind the window drapery, "do come and look at this wonderful effect of moonlight."

Beryl disappeared behind the curtains, and Mr. Harley Medford asked Lawrence to go with him to the billiard-room, "and knock about a ball or two."

"If I thought I was harming Beryl, I would take her back to town at once," sighed the marquis, wistfully.

"Never think of that!" cried Mrs. Ranleigh, vehemently; "happiness and health are largely affairs of our own creation. I am grieved for Beryl, and angry with her, and *so* sorry for you! Here, or in town, it would be all the same; as long as the child will insist on thinking of herself as a martyr, and sit nights mourning, and crying, and kissing over Sir Jerome Sothron's likeness, and notes and old love tokens, so long will she pine away. Why cannot she rest satisfied with the happiest lot of any woman in England?"

It was all false—false as Satan; but the marquis, who was never false, believed it; the venomous shot went home; it poisoned all his soul. All next day he was dark, silent, brooding; wounded to the heart's core, not knowing what to say or do.

That evening when the gathering in the drawing-room broke up, and Beryl had just summoned Fanny to her chamber, the marquis sent for his wife to come to him in the library. She went.

"Beryl!" he said, sternly, without looking at her, "you have some—trifles—relics of—Sir Jerome Sothron?"

"Yes, Percy," faltered Beryl.

"Why do you keep them?"

"I do not know. I could not give them away. It seemed hard to destroy them. Yet, perhaps, I should have done so. Do you bid me destroy them, Percy?"

Her voice was like a despairing cry.

"I will not have you nursing over these things a foolish regret that is nothing less than disgraceful to me, and suicidal to yourself. Bring those things to me."

Light broke on Beryl, and with it returned, like a blaze of lightning, the fury with which she first heard of Mrs. Ranleigh's treachery.

"It was Laura Ranleigh told you that!" she cried. "Still you keep her here as a spy. *I hate her!*"

"No doubt; she knows your weakness," he retorted.

"She shall never enter my presence again!"

"Lady Beryl, you instead should resolve to form yourself on her—a woman without social weaknesses."

"On her!—the traitress! Percy, once for all, choose between her and me."

"Choose? What choice is open, Lady Beryl? The law has bound us together. There was a day when I might have chosen—when I did choose, perhaps I chose wrong."

Oh, cruel words!—oh, sharp wounding swords in that gentle, lacerated heart! But the marquis was carried outside of himself, in jealous fury, over that picture Mrs. Ranleigh had drawn.

Beryl looked at him in wild-eyed agony. Then gave an inarticulate cry, and fled out of his sight. As the library door closed behind her, two ways were open to her flight—the stairs leading to her own room and Fanny, a glass door and corridor leading out into the park.

She did not take the stairs.

Fanny waited—one hour—two—and no ring from her lady. Finally she went to her room. No answer. She entered. The house was dark and silent—the room was empty!

CHAPTER XXV.

"WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH MY POOR LADY?"

FEARING she knew not what, Fanny searched every part of the house where her mistress might by any possibility be. Then she tapped at the dressing-room where North slept near his master's chamber.

"North, do you know anything of my lady! I cannot find her."

"Surely not. Is she not in the house?"

"No," said Fanny, with a sob.

The door of the marquis' room suddenly opened, and the two servants saw, by the soft glow of the porcelain night-lamp, the marquis in his dressing-gown and slippers standing before them.

"What are you saying, Fanny!" he asked, sharply.

"I can't find my mistress," faltered Fanny. "She is not in the house."

"The countess not in the house at this time of night, or morning! What new freak is this?" cried the marquis, angrily.

Fanny promptly turned the tables on him by bursting forth in evident anguish :

"You sent for her, my lord, and she has not come back. Oh, what have you done with my poor little lady?"

"I? What have I done?" said the marquis, indignantly. "No doubt she is sitting with Mrs. Harley."

"Mrs. Harley is asleep. *She* has no miseries to keep her waking—no enemies to trouble her rest," retorted Fanny, quite beside herself. "My lord, what has become of my poor innocent lady? I'd believe anything might happen to her with Mrs. Ranleigh in the house hounding her to the death!"

"Be silent, idiotic girl!" said the marquis, griping her arm.

"My lord, I can't," said Fanny, falling on her knees and clutching his dressing-robe. "I'm wild about my lady; she has come to harm."

The marquis became thoroughly alarmed. He bade North call a footman, and prepare to search the garden and terraces. When this was fruitless, more men were roused and the lines extended. Then the Honorable Harley was called, who at once headed the search. His heart misgave him. He remembered how mournful Beryl's gentle face often was; how her sweet eyes would fill with sudden tears, as if her secret heart were a well of sorrow given to tides like the sea.

"The marquis," said Harley to himself, "is all courtesy; but, by Jove, a gentle, tender, winning little girl like that needs more petting and gentleness. I don't know how Marion would take it if I were so cold."

The morning sky became tinted with red and gold. The marquis, worn out with sleepless, agonized search, sat at last in his library. Was it only five hours before that she—little lovely Beryl—had stood in that room, and turned on him such great, terrified, entreating eyes? What would he not give now to see that graceful form standing there in safety!

Mrs. Ranleigh came rushing in, in carefully arranged dishabille.

"Beryl gone, Lord Medford! I cannot believe it. The poor, dear child! Whom could she have gone with?"

"With no one!" thundered the marquis. "Mrs. Ranleigh, pardon me, I can bear to see no one to-day."

But when Mrs. Harley Medford came in, with tears on her kind face, and softly laid her cheek on his shoulder, and clasped his hand, saying, "We shall find our poor darling," he felt his heart comforted by her nearness.

Lawrence came in, disheveled and miserable.

"What are they doing now, Lawrence? What trace?"

"None. They are dragging the old moat," said Lawrence, hoarsely.

"Shall we notify the police, or send for aid?" asked Harley Medford, entering at this juncture.

"No. Search first every place and cottage for four miles around. This one day we will search alone."

* * * * * * *

It was twelve o'clock on an April night; the night, and an hour after, Beryl had fled from her husband's presence, with that passionate, despairing cry. The moon was more than half way down the sky, and the silver light fell wildly through the great branches, faintly fringed with new leaves, or struggled more freebly with the masses of evergreens. Owls called to each other from among the mantling ivies, or their broad wings went by as a shadow, as they sought their prey in the night.

Winderton village lay four miles from Winderton Castle, and on the outskirts of Winderton village stood a pretty little cottage, the home of a newly made doctor and his young wife. Doctor Marvel had been settled near Winderton a little over a year, and was making his way famously; popular from the urbanity of his manners, the bounty of his heart, and the skill and good fortune that attended his practice.

Doctor Marvel had been called out late that particular evening, and was just getting home. A robust young fellow, in all the fine vigor of twenty-seven well-spent years, the lateness of the hour made no difference to him; the beauty of the April night, the soft fragrance of the new-budding world charmed him, and he loitered along his way, humming a little song.

Suddenly, as some great white night-bird sweeps soundless by, a figure passed the loitering doctor. The figure came up behind him, unheard, and not seeming to see him, went by him with a swift, noiseless motion, like a spirit.

The doctor fairly started aside in amazement at that

quick, quiet shape. A snowy grace, going straight on, on, with an even running pace. A cloud of soft, misty draperies borne out on the light night breeze; the moonlight glinting from an uncovered head and a white face; a faint breath of heliotrope borne from the passing presence. But where this mysterious pilgrim sped along, the wide, smooth road of Winderton made an abrupt turn, and at a right angle followed the side of a deep, still pool, one of the numberless nameless meres of the lake country, lying now, glittering like a burnished shield in the moonlight.

This white and soundless fugitive never seemed to see the road, nor its course, nor its end, but went on, straight on, before the astounded doctor, and not with any leap or casting away, but simply by that straightforward, unseeing run, went into and under the mere.

And there was no sound—not a cry; nothing but the plash of a body into the water, and the water closing over it, sending a great ripple to the grassy shore, and a second and a third.

Doctor Marvel was an athlete, quick of eye and brain, prompt on an emergency. As that first ripple swept ashore his coat went off, and before the second his boots were on the grass, and in he went, down with a dash where the white figure had been lost to sight.

He came up once, with a little cry; then he went under again, and returned to the surface with a white form across his arm, as if he had gathered a treasure of lilies from the depth of the pool. Then he struck out for the shore, and presently put his burden down upon the sward.

His ear was laid against the wet face and mouth, his hand sought heart and pulse; he unfastened the white gown, squeezed water from the loosened hair and drapery, and vigorously rubbed the motionless chest and cold temples.

"Alive!" he said, with joy.

Half an hour later the doctor's strangely found patient was lying in the bed in the best room of the cottage, and waited on by two ministering angels—Anna Marvel, the doctor's wife, and a fair young creature whom they called Lelia.

"Who can she be? What a lovely face she has!" cried Lelia.

"She is none of the village people," said Anna Marvel; "these clothes are simply elegant, and the lace on her dress is real point."

"I will watch by her," said Lelia. "Surely she did not try to drown herself, doctor?"

"No. I should say, either sleep-walking, or incipient brain fever. I fear the latter."

"Poor little love," said Lelia, bending over the form on the bed, when she was left alone. "What rich wedding and engagement rings she wears! Prettier than I am, and about my age. Ah, I see troubles and pains come to all ranks."

And sitting on the side of the bed, Lelia patiently and pensively watched her patient till night grew into day.

Dr. Marvel was called out to a distant sufferer before seven that morning, and did not return till afternoon. Meanwhile Beryl was nursed according to his orders, and the little cottage was unvisited by any one, and left in the hush of the warm spring day, quiet as the palace of the Sleeping Beauty.

About two the doctor came in in haste, examined his patient with anxiety, and said:

"I am sure she is the Countess of Medford. I hear that she is missing. I shall ride over to the castle at once."

"Harry, she is very ill," said his wife.

"I know it, my dear," said the doctor.

Half an hour later the distracted marquis was consenting to appeal for further aid in the search, when a footman cried, eagerly:

"Dr. Marvel! And news of my lady!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

"MY ERRAND IS NOT DEATH, BUT LIFE," HE SAID.

"SPEAK quickly! Is she dead?" cried the marquis.

"No. She is at my house, and I hope she will live."

The marquis reeled, stretched out his arms, fell, but Lawrence caught him, and with the doctor's help laid him on the sofa.

"This is only a faint from reaction," said the doctor;

but," and he bent his head over the patient's heart, "he is one who cannot faint with impunity."

For a little time all cares were centered on the marquis. Then, as he began to revive, Doctor Marvel drew the Honorable Harley Medford on one side.

"Your relative has a form of heart disease that may at any instant become acute and fatal. He should be spared all excitement."

Harley Medford was shocked. It was no joy to him that he stood perhaps on the eve of inheritance. He sincerely liked his cousin, and wished him long life and contentment.

"His great anxiety now is about the countess. Relieve it as soon as he is fully conscious."

Doctor Marvel returned to the sofa.

"My lord, Lady Medford is at my house, in the care of my wife. I hope in a few days she will be none the worse of her accident, and able to return home."

"Accident?" said the marquis, faintly.

"She fell into, or walked into, what is called Lilly Mere.

"I cannot understand it!" cried Harley.

The doctor narrated all he knew of the facts.

"It was a severe shock or incipient brain fever; I should say the latter. Has she had any severe shock or mental trouble?"

"None," said Mr. Medford, heartily, "she is the idol of the household. Her life is a long, bright summer day."

The keen-eyed doctor saw that a quiver passed over the face of the marquis, and he judged that some secret shadow lay over the countess' life.

"I should say that she had been oppressed by some long grief or care, and it has resulted in a slight attack of brain fever."

"She must be brought home at once," said the marquis.

"If you will excuse me, her safety can only be assured by her remaining where she is, in absolute quiet, till the brain trouble abates. My house is at her service, and your own physician will be welcome," said the doctor.

"I have heard so much of Doctor Marvel's skill that I cheerfully rest on it, unless consultation is needed," said the marquis, with courtesy. "If she should not be moved, I will go to her at once."

"It is my duty to tell you," said the doctor, "that your

own state seems to me more precarious than that of your lady's, and you will do well to summon your own physician, and remain in your own apartment, in absolute quiet, for at least a week."

"Percy, I beseech you," cried Harley Medford.

"Our own physician has left home for a fortnight. I put myself in your hands," said the marquis. "Sir Jonas Kent is my physician in London."

"And some of us will go to the countess," said Harley. "Mrs. Ranleigh, for instance."

"Mrs. Ranleigh must not go near Beryl," said the marquis, with sudden heat.

Doctor Marvel considered that here lay the key of the mystery.

"I will go over to the doctor's daily, myself," said Harley.

The marquis was assisted to his room, and North received careful directions from the doctor.

"I shall run down to London to-night, and see Sir Jonas Kent," said the young doctor. "I hope for the best, but I should not be surprised if neither marquis nor countess lived the week out."

But his usual good fortune attended Doctor Marvel. His titled patients throve under his care, as did the people of the village and the farms. The dangerous symptoms of the marquis rapidly abated. His calm, reserved disposition was in his favor. The doctor and Harley each day brought him encouraging reports of Beryl.

Nothing could exceed Mrs. Ranleigh's devotion. She read to the marquis by the hour; the political news never seemed to weary her, as she read column after column of the *Times* so well that the very intonations of her voice made the heaviest disquisitions charming. She sang ballads; she brought the guitar and spent long twilight hours discoursing Spanish, or Italian, or old troubadour music; she played chess, draughts, backgammon, and dominoes; she held the marquis fascinated with many tales of her early life, in a society so different from his own—barracks life, boarding-school life—it was a new world.

The marquis thought her a most enchanting companion, and wished Beryl had her versatility of genius and her desire to please. Every day he felt that he *must* tell Mrs.

Ranleigh that her visit should close, that he could not have her longer under Beryl's roof, for soon the countess must come home, and the marquis would not encounter further risk to her life and health, by forcing Mrs. Ranleigh's presence on her. As for Laura, she audaciously resolved to make the most of her power over the marquis and not leave the castle unless she were distinctly banished.

Beryl, meanwhile, in that simple cottage home, under the care of Anna Marvel—most gracious, sweet, and sensible of women—and nursed assiduously by Lelia, who was pretty, sympathetic, and gentle, found the most blissful resting of her life thus far.

For several days she was fevered and generally unconscious; then she came back to herself, and the spotless simplicity of that cottage chamber was as a new, peaceful world. Wisterias climbed over the windows and hung their great clusters of translucent blue, swaying in breeze and sunshine; the soft spring air swept gently to and fro the full curtains of white muslin. After life-long acquaintance with velvet, satin, and plush upholstery, how very quaint and clean seemed this fantastic bamboo, with knots of ribbon, this dark, well-polished cherry, with antique brass mountings; a floor covered with matting, with velvet rugs sown on it, like islands, was also a novelty.

Then how lovely was Anna Marvel, her satin-smooth brown hair braided by her own fair hands, and how enchanting were morning dresses of pink nainsook, trimmed with pillow lace. How still was this house, served by one maid only.

Ah, what love was that that flashed from the eyes and wreathed the lips of this husband and wife? No matter how often they met, they were always so frankly glad to see each other.

Then this Lelia Barrows, Mrs. Marvel's young friend, what a pretty creature she was—soft-voiced, sad-eyed, with little *gaucheries* both of speech and manner, that were corrected with such a blushing humility. Young she was, but evidently well-known to sorrow, and so full of sympathy.

Beryl watched both these women, and loved them, loved them in gratitude, and for their goodness and sweetness. She had never been allowed close friends; her artificial

life had hindered her of such innocent, warm intimacies. Laura had been her closest confidante, and her evil genius and betrayer. But truth, noble truth, and genial wisdom, shone in every look and word of Anna Marvel.

A sick-room swiftly ripens intimacy. One day Beryl impulsively flung her arms around Anna Marvel's neck, as she bent over her, and cried :

"Oh, I love you! I want to be like you. Tell me what to do, that I, too may be happy in my home."

Anna Marvel knelt by the bedside and drew Beryl's fair head to her shoulder.

"Dear Lady Medford, is there anything I can say or do to make you happier?"

"Yes ; I have no one in the world to counsel or help me."

"My dear, you have your "husband."

But I am afraid of him, and he does not love me."

"Ah, you are mistaken. The doctor says he was most deeply agitated at your danger, and he gets news from you twice a day."

"Yes ; but—oh, Mrs. Marvel, love, deep love, is so different from courtesy merely, and pride of reputation."

"But I cannot understand a husband and wife not loving each other. Why do they marry?"

"The marquis," said Beryl, humbly, "says he married me for my beauty and my gentle disposition, and he finds my beauty not worth the trouble I am, and he is disappointed in my disposition. I get angry sometimes. I married him because I was made to do so by my family. I loved another—oh, so much!—but he is dead ; he was drowned almost a year ago. But the marquis, since he found I had loved, and could not help mourning, has been so angry, and stern, and jealous, and does not see that that was one *forever* love, that I could not help, that grew in my heart ; he seems to think I am a flirt—that hateful thing a married flirt."

"Oh, my dear, this is a pitiful story."

"It is a story of which I shall die unless you help me to make it better."

And Beryl, clasping fast her new friend's hand, told her story without mentioning Jerome's name, or fortunes, or manner of death ; she called him "THAT ONE."

"My dear," said Anna Marvel, "I think I see a way to help you."

CHAPTER XXVII.

"BUT SUPPOSE JEROME SOTHRON IS YET ALIVE."

IT was the most lonely of late April days. Lord Medford had been restless and nervous after luncheon. He had become, in the past week, so dependent on Laura Ranleigh for society; so grateful to her for her devoted attention, that he could not endure the thought of banishing her from the castle. And yet he had no question that he must do so for the sake of his wife's peace. Laura saw the struggle in his mind as clearly as if he had uttered it all. She was considering every possibility of entrenching herself in the regards of the marquis. When she found he was restless and moody that day, she insisted on singing him to sleep.

"I will sit on the balcony near your room," she said. "Lie down, and let North close the blinds, and I will sing soft tunes until you fall asleep; and then I can go down from the balcony to the garden. You can fancy you are some oriental prince, and that I am some sweet singer from the hills of Cashmere, and have learned my lays from the nightingales."

"Your voice is far richer than any nightingale's," said the marquis, "and I would rather be myself than a prince of the Orient."

"I would rather be the Marquis of Medford than any man living," said Mrs. Ranleigh, with fervor, "To be good and great as you are is a boon accorded to but few."

Then she playfully pushed the blinds together, and, sitting on the outside, sang the marquis' favorite Scotch songs: "Keen Blows the Wind O'er the Braes of Gleniffer," and "What are the Flowers of Scotland?"

When satisfied that the marquis was asleep, she went down by the balcony stairs to the garden, and took the path beside the grand drive to the lodge gate. She wanted solitude and time to think. It was very much to her, both financially and socially, to remain at the castle; and

then, notable guests whom she wished to meet were soon coming.

As she neared the great gate, a dog-cart rattled up on the outside, some one sprang out, said "Good-by," and entered by the small gate of the foot-path.

She faced the new-comer. It was Lord Alfred Heath.

"Oh, Lord Alfred!" cried Mrs. Ranleigh, holding out both hands, "how glad I am to see you. How good of you to come. So you heard? I did not know it got abroad."

"Heard what? Nothing wrong, I hope? I heard nothing. Beryl and the marquis are surely well? What do you mean?"

"Dear me!" said Laura, looking at the soft folds of her brown walking suit; "now I wish I had not spoken; but, then, you would have heard."

"Heard what, for goodness' sake, Mrs. Ranleigh?"

"Why this *fiasco* of our poor, dear impulsive Beryl!"

"By Jove, you'll drive me out of my head," cried Lord Alfred, who came with a plan which would surely miscarry if his daughter's *fiasco* were serious.

Laura put her hand through his arm.

"Don't be so excited, Lord Heath; Beryl is safe. You might as well hear it from me. I mean Beryl flinging herself into a lake and being nearly drowned!"

"Beryl! The Countess of Medford drowning herself!"

"We tried to keep it very close, but I thought you might have heard."

"Not a breath! But my child is saved and well?"

"Oh, yes, fortunately—very fortunately."

"But what on earth was the reason of it?"

"Oh, Jerome Sothron," sighed Mrs. Ranleigh, taking off the Di Vernon hat she wore, contemplating with interest the velvet-lined, turned-up brim, and putting it back coquettishly on her waves of black hair.

"Jerome Sothron!" cried Lord Alfred, impatiently; "that is an old story; and then he is dead and done with."

Mrs. Ranleigh shook her head, and carefully adjusted a great golden cluster of fresh primroses at her waist.

"Not dead! Not? I never knew you so tantalizing. He is—dead and buried."

"Sometimes I am quite sure of it," cried Laura. "Oh,

Lord Heath, I am in such anxiety of mind! I have wished dozens of times I was a good Catholic, with a father confessor who would tell me just what to do! As I have not such help, I'm so glad to see you. Let us sit down here for a little, until I tell you all that has gone on. And you, as Beryl's father, will be my best counselor."

Lord Alfred's affairs were in a very critical condition; his future depended somewhat on his noble son-in-law. Naturally he desired to bring his troubles to a harmonious household. He took his seat by Laura, as she indicated, under a beach tree, whose spreading branches were clothed in the purple mist of the young leaves. Laura was what Lord Heath called "a very fine woman," and he had no objection in life to her confidences.

Laura rapidly sketched the friendship of Jerome and Beryl, after Beryl's marriage, exaggerating their intimacy and the last meeting.

"By Jove!" said the excellent father, "that was the wildest affair I ever heard of. She might have got herself divorced. My gracious, what a horrible danger!"

"So I told her," sighed Mrs. Ranleigh; and she explained, impressively, how distracted Beryl had been over the accusation of murder laid against Jerome, and then his terrible death."

"Well, for my part," said Lord Alfred, with heat, "I'm glad he's gone. He would have been the silly child's destruction sooner or later."

"But *are* we sure he *is* gone," queried Mrs. Ranleigh. "May not this all be a scheme to distract or stop pursuit? His body never was brought home nor seen by his people."

"Oh, that is all imagination, all madness. Why, his death is certain, all attested."

"It may be just my nervousness for dear Beryl. But I keep thinking, 'Suppose he is living. Suppose she knows it, or will hereafter know it. Suppose she is in correspondence with him.' I dare not hint such a thought to the marquis, for fear of trouble, but to you I can. Why does Beryl dislike and fear me, if she is not afraid I may interfere between her and Sothron?"

"Oh, you are simply wild, Mrs. Ranleigh, over this."

Laura elaborately explained how she had "tried to guide and guard Beryl, and save her from folly," and

how grateful the marquis had been, and how resentful the countess.

"She wishes to drive me away. I cling to her; she hates me. I stop to save her. It is an ungrateful task, but I must go."

"Indeed you must not. You must stay. Stay and look after the child. She is thoughtless and means no harm, but she needs a wise woman like yourself. I shall tell Medford as much; but that idea of Jerome living is merely madness. He will think so too."

To get these double hints conveyed to the marquis had been Laura's aim in this conversation. She put her kerchief to her eyes and sighed.

"My poor darling Beryl." Then, "Oh, Lord Alfred, how I have imagined that Jerome was alive, and that some way his name would be cleared of that murder charge, and he would at once reappear in England, and our dear Beryl, out of compassion and the revulsion of her feelings, would be fonder of him than ever."

"That is all your vivid fancy," said Lord Alfred. "But I shall feel better if you stay here. Let us go up to the house."

He gave her his arm.

"We have a fine heir presumptive up there," said Mrs. Ranleigh. "Mrs. Harley Medford has a son."

"I don't see why it could not have been Beryl's boy," said Lord Alfred, much aggrieved, feeling that, in such joyful circumstances, the marquis would have been the most liberal of friends to his father-in-law.

Lord Alfred had found himself in extremities, and had seen a new way out of his troubles. He had found a German widow to marry him. She was not of rank, but she was very rich. His errand home was to present the affair comfortably to the marquis, to secure his good offices in reconciling his brother, the earl, and to persuade them both to unite in paying off certain debts, which the widow insisted must be settled before marriage. Finding Beryl and her lord on ill terms made his mission much more delicate. The marquis, however, was not a man to visit the sins of Beryl on her parent; he conceded freely all that Lord Alfred desired.

"I am sorry," said Lord Heath, "that Beryl has given you this trouble. She is fond of her own way, and rest-

ive to reproof. But she is the best little creature in the world, and if you keep such a friend as Mrs. Ranleigh with her, to give her good advice and a little looking after, so she will not do foolish little things, she will be all right, and in a year or two be as steady a little woman as there is in England. That Sothron fairly bewitched her."

The marquis winced.

"Beryl does not like Mrs. Ranleigh, I am sorry to say. I must ask her to leave us."

"Don't do it. By no means. Beryl will get over her whim. You keep Laura here. She is a woman of the world and knows the end of things."

"I shall not give my wife a jailer," said the marquis, loftily.

"Pshaw! it is only a duenna, if you like that term better."

"I shall do my duty. I will not make Beryl miserable."

"See here, Medford," said Heath, confidentially, "one never knows what will happen. You *must* keep Mrs. Ranleigh. Some people say, 'Suppose Sothron is not dead after all?'"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A FAIR AMBASSADRESS.

"'Suppose Sothron is not dead!' You amaze me," said the marquis. The idea is madness."

"You know it was for Sothron's advantage to seem dead, with that charge lying on him. Who wants to be tried for murder?"

"He never committed one, and could prove an *alibi*, if some idea of honor had not hindered."

"There was a wonderful amount of chivalry in Sothron," said Heath. "If his *alibi* would implicate any one —say some woman—he would never let it be proven; he would rather seem dead and live in exile till the real culprit turned up. I never believe people dead till I *see* them dead. Suppose he did come back? Mere reaction of feeling might cause Beryl to show too much joy, unless

some monitor like Mrs. Ranleigh were at hand. You would not like to speak. And then you will go back to society; and Beryl is very young."

"I have made up my mind to trust my wife. I shall not take any steps for which I may blame myself."

With this assurance the marquis sent Lord Heath away. Heath did not go to see his daughter. He said it would be embarrassing, and he was in haste. He might only harm Beryl by scolding her for her follies.

Anxious to be right, Lord Medford consulted Dr. Marvel.

"Lady Beryl has taken a dislike to a former friend—Mrs. Ranleigh. Do you think the presence of one whom she dislikes may be injurious to her?"

"Decidedly so," said the doctor, who had divined in Laura an element dangerous to Beryl's peace, and had read guile in the handsome widow's fine black eyes and cruelty in the curve of her red mouth. "I think Lady Medford should be kept easy and happy until her health is fully restored."

The marquis was now about the castle and grounds as usual, and the day had been set for his going to bring his wife back.

He was walking in the grounds, one day, attended, as usual, by Mrs. Ranleigh, when he saw a very graceful, lovely lady coming down the curve of the great stone steps of the main entrance. The figure stopped on the lower step to look at the beautiful view and to unfurl a gray silk parasol, which matched a gray silk dress and gray gloves.

"Who is that?" asked the marquis, fixing his eyes on the lovely face, framed in a gray bonnet, and tinted like the blush-roses which the lady wore at her throat.

"Only that Dr. Marvel's wife," said Mrs. Ranleigh, fretfully. "Mrs. Medford had the kindness to invite her over to see the baby. Mothers are never tired of showing their babies. I think it was very bad form for Mrs. Marvel to come—quite out of her station."

"I do not agree with you," said the marquis coldly. "I wish much to see Mrs. Marvel, to whom I am under deep obligations. Will you excuse me, Mrs. Ranleigh!"

With a pout, Laura turned to frighten the gold-fish by making ripples in the fountain, and the marquis went on to meet the stranger.

"I trust I have the pleasure of seeing Mrs. Marvel. I

rejoice to meet the wife of my esteemed new friend, but I have no words to express the gratitude I feel to you for your tender care of my lady."

"It has been a labor of love," said Mrs. Marvel, regarding with pleased surprise the handsome, stately presence of the marquis. She felt she was face to face with a good, true man. "I took your countess to my heart at once," she added; "and to-day nothing would satisfy her but a report of the baby boy from an eye-witness less prejudiced than a new-made father."

"A fine little fellow!" said the marquis, heartily; "but, having seen him, you will allow me to take you through the gardens and conservatories, and get you some flowers."

"With pleasure," said Mrs. Marvel. She hoped to be able to speak to him of his wife—at least to learn enough of his nature to give Beryl some of the advice she demanded with child-like confidence and humility.

Now it happened that the marquis wished nothing so much as to speak of Beryl—the ideas of both so harmonizing, it is not wonderful that the preferred theme soon opened between them. They walked through hot-houses and gardens, and then the marquis insisted on taking Mrs. Marvel to the library, and ordering lunch for her and himself.

Mrs. Marvel spoke warmly of Beryl, of her timidity, self-distrust, and innocence—her fervent desires to do right. "She is one to exaggerate to herself every little error, to condemn herself unsparingly for any folly as she would for a crime. And yet some mistakes are very natural, indeed inevitable, for one brought up as she was. I hope you will not be vexed, but a sick room begets confidence, and she has told me the manner of her early life and instructions, or rather no instructions at all, and an atmosphere of intense worldliness. I wonder she came out of it so pure, so simple, with such meekness and such a high ideal of what a woman should be."

"It does me more good than I can express to hear you speak so of Beryl," said the marquis, frankly. "Your husband has had all a physician's reticence. You kindly, generously ignore many things that have indubitably come to your knowledge, since you have so strangely been brought to share the troubles of our lives. My family

secret and misery have by these sad recent circumstances been laid bare to you, while even my heir, living under my roof, is unconscious of both. At first I grieved at this, now knowing you both, I feel relief, not humiliation."

"Oh, Lord Medford," said Mrs. Marvel, earnestly, "let me speak for her. I love her deeply. How could I help it, when I saw her lying there, so sweet a thing, all her innocent young life seeming flickering to go out like a dying light. I may say, I brought her back from that border land of death, and now her life seems partly mine. You will hear me for her. I am sure she does not crave this dangerous gay life, only accepting so much as her social position demands; she does not crave this flattery, and while she is too gentle to rebuff it, she is unhurt by it. You need not fear her death or insanity, if you will give her your confidence, your tenderness; she wishes to please you, but before sternness or rebuke her gentle spirit shrinks

'As flowers that wither in the north wind's breath.'

You love her, Lord Medford. I see it in your eyes. I too have read love's story in a tender look, and I know how sweet a thing is mutual love, how worth the winning. My lord, take her not only to your home, but to your trust and your heart. *Let no stranger come between!*"

Afraid to say too much, Mrs. Marvel rose, and Lord Medford accompanied her to her carriage.

Mrs. Ranleigh had argued ill from this long *tete-a-tete*, and as he returned through the park, she hastened to meet him.

"I hope dearest Beryl is well."

"Yes; day after to-morrow I shall go and bring her home. We have trespassed too long on the doctor's hospitality."

"I see you feel anxious and troubled—pray do not. Consider your health. I feel sure that Beryl's little errors have been of the head rather than the heart, and no doubt this trying experience will be a lesson to her—to be less restive to your control, and more careful about deserving rebuke. The sweet child has the best heart in the world."

"She is in a delicate, nervous condition, and it is my duty to keep her as calm and happy as I can.

"Such a burden to you, dear Lord Medford, when you need a wife intent on forestalling all your wishes, aiding all your plans, a second self. But Beryl will become such."

"I do not know. My present duty is to shield her. I am sorry, Mrs. Ranleigh, that Beryl has taken a prejudice in your regard, she feels uneasy with you, as if you were not her friend."

"And I have been her best, truest friend, saved her from—from herself—poor, foolish, beloved child."

"Yes, I am sorry; but we must humor, not oppose invalids, and I hope, at some future time, your visit to us can be completed. If at present you should leave us before Beryl returns, it might be better for her, while I should miss you exceedingly. You have been very kind to me in my illness, and have helped me to pass agreeably days that might have been miserable. I shall be ever your debtor,

Laura turned away her head, and bit her lips fiercely, while an ominous lightning played in her eyes.

"I understand, my lord, Beryl has turned against me."

"I trust it is but an invalid's fleeting whim."

"She had no such rancor when she thought she could make of me a tool of her designs. When I would not be of her helpers, she hates me. It is honor's reward."

"Pray do not feel such rancor; she is but a child."

"And she wishes to rid herself of me, for what? I pray, my lord, it may not be to bring shame on your head."

"Hush, Laura!" he cried, tremulously. He had never called her Laura before.

She caught his hand and kissed it.

"Wherever I am, and in whatever strait you are, remember, I am your devoted friend. Never have I honored any one as I do you! I go from this house as if banished from Eden, for your goodness has made it a paradise. I go to-morrow. My daily thoughts are with you. If you need my poor aid, one word, one sign, and it is yours. Oh, why," and she turned away her face, "why does the wife of such a man see attraction in such flattering boys as Sir Jerome, as Lawrence, these idle sons of folly!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

"OH NO, I NEVER HAD AUGHT LIKE THAT."

THE Marquis could not see Laura as Beryl did. The gold, and not the black side of this shield, was toward him. Few men are totally deaf to the voice of woman's flattery, and then his nature was jealous, and in regard to his power of gaining love he was self-distrustful.

Laura, brewing with rage and disappointment, went to her room to order the packing of her trunks, and the marquis, with his hands clasped behind him, walked slowly through the Park and into the thicker shadows of the plantation, where the trees were in all their young spring leafage ; the ferns and grass grew thick, and the primroses and anemones made patches of silver and gold.

Moving abstractedly over the soft sward he almost trod upon a figure crouched, kneeling at the foot of a tree. The woman started up and confronted him with a cry. They stood face to face.

She was a hard-featured woman with glittering eyes full of a fierce steely light. Her age it would be hard to guess, for over her had passed the horror and shadow of some awful fear, and left an ineffaceable stamp. She stood now, her hands clasped against her panting bosom, her lips blue and clenched, her cheeks pallid.

"I am sorry I frightened you, my good woman," said the marquis, with kindness. "I nearly trod on you before I saw you."

"I did not know people ever walked in this wood," faltered the woman. "I've been here before and never saw any one ; it startled me, for I did not hear your steps. Are you the steward, sir?"

"I am the Marquis of Medford."

"I beg your pardon, my lord."

As the woman spoke she changed her position, and leaned her back against the tree.

"Perhaps I ought not to be here," she said ; "but poor people have to live in crowded houses, and I can get no

time where I lodge to think, or to say my prayers, and so I came here."

"There was no wrong in that. I have never seen you before. Do you live near here?"

"I'm a stranger. Up here for my health. I lodge with Widow Porson."

"And your name is——?"

"Kate Jay."

The hollow chest, the voice sharp, strained, that terror-smitten face, moved the pity of the marquis.

"There is an excellent doctor near, Doctor Marvel, if you need advice. If there is any help you want, anything to be done for you? If you apply to the housekeeper at the castle, or the countess, who is very kind——"

"I need nothing, my lord. I am going away soon."

The marquis passed on, but the affair haunted him. As he thought of it he was convinced that the woman had not been saying her prayers, but digging in the earth. Finally, before dinner, the trifle so preyed on him that he called the under-gardener with him, and went back to the tree. The earth had certainly been disturbed.

"It's been dug out and put back, but there is naught buried here," said the young man.

He replaced the earth; but as he smoothed the surface his hand, ferreting about in last year's dead leaves, caught in something, and he drew out a small gold chain, with a medallion in blue inlaid; a common enough trinket, worth two or three pounds.

The marquis took it and went to Widow Porson's, asking for the lodger to come to the garden gate. Then holding out the trinket, he said:

"You lost this in the woods."

"Oh, no, my lord. I'm a poor woman. I never had aught like that."

"But were you not digging about under that tree this morning?"

"Yes, my lord. I was seeking roots of a thing they call beach-drops to stew for my cough."

When the marquis went home he flung the trinket in a drawer in one of the library tables.

That evening, while Laura was exerting herself to the utmost to leave a favorable impression on the marquis, Widow Porson's lodger moved to a little thatched cottage,

which had stood empty for several years, on the outskirts of Winderton village. It was a tidy and comfortable little place of three rooms, thatched, with a garden and diamond-paned windows; a sketch for an artist. But why did Kate Jay find it needful to spend the entire night getting it in order? All night the diamond-paned windows shone under the shadowing pear-trees like glow-worms under a hedge. The doctor saw them, as he went home from beside a sick bed.

In his home, Beryl, quite restored now, a faint bloom returning to her cheeks, was sleeping like a comforted child. She had talked long with Anna Marvel.

"Your husband loves you," said Anna. "I saw it clearly. You must not be so alarmed and rebuffed by his cold air; that is merely his way. His heart is all goodness."

"I know it is," said Beryl; "but he is so good that all my wrong acts seem to him terribly wicked and inexplicable."

"You must not think that. If you were more confidential and familiar, you would learn the wealth of his strong, noble heart. I know it was sad to give up one you loved, and marry one you only feared and respected; but now that other one is dead, and it is with your heart the same as if you had been widowed of some loved husband, and then married some other good man. You may not feel such absorbing love as for your first lover, but you may be happy, and make your husband happy, by a true, faithful, deep affection."

The timid hopes nourished in Beryl's heart by these words fled before the marquis, who, meaning to be kind, was as cold and reserved as ever; for the words of Lord Alfred and Mrs. Ranleigh had not failed to rankle in his soul, balancing, if not outweighing, Mrs. Marvel's assurances.

"I am so sorry to have given you so much trouble, Percy," whispered Beryl; "and here," as Lelia brought her wraps, "is my sweet nurse."

"I am under infinite obligations to her," said the marquis, with a bow, looking approbation at the sweet, sad face of the young girl.

Then Mrs. Marvel came, and Beryl saw that *she* had won at once the heartiest regard and trust of the marquis.

He begged her to come to see them frequently, several times a week—to be "Beryl's best friend."

"I am so glad you like Mrs. Marvel so much; I love her!" cried Beryl, anxious to establish conversation, as they entered the barouche.

"She is a very angel. If you love her, perhaps you will not be offended if I say I wish you might closely imitate her."

"Indeed I shall not be offended. I wish I were like her. And I was very foolish ever to be offended at your suggesting I should copy the good qualities of any one."

"I hope your friendship for Mrs. Marvel will endure," said the marquis, curtly. "I fear you are given to some fickleness in your friendships."

"Oh, I hope not, Percy; but sometimes one is deceived by a supposed friend, you know," said Beryl, looking over the landscape to hide rising tears.

"We are apt to call fickleness in ourselves deceit or offence in others," said the marquis, quietly.

Evidently the conversation was not a success. Beryl changed the theme.

"I shall be so glad to get home, to see dear Marion and the baby. What a treasure the baby will be to us all! Marion will be glad now of more company than Mrs. Ranleigh."

"Mrs. Ranleigh is not now at the castle, Beryl."

"Gone! Percy?"

"At my request. I could not keep as a guest any friend who would drive my wife to—to any extreme measures."

"Oh, Percy! I assure you—I did not know what I was doing—and—it might have been so any way. People often have brain fever—from many causes. If I had been the happiest woman in the world, I might have had it."

"I am sorry that a Countess of Medford is not the happiest of women. It seems to me Providence has endowed you with many blessings."

"I know it, Percy," said Beryl, humbly, laying her hand on his. "I am very thankful. I mean to be more thankful. And the greatest blessings I could have would be your—affection and confidence."

The marquis was touched by this gentleness. He clasped her hand warmly in his, and said, kindly:

"We will now look forward to better things, my dear."

Beryl had been at home but a few days, when the marquis said to her:

"Beryl, Harley and his wife will be going in a month to Scotland, to her mother, Lady Rosse. You need a companion. Our guests come and go. I want you to have a person different from your foolish, very foolish, maid, Fanny, to walk about with, to sit with you, and read with you; an humble friend. Do you object to such a one! Do you know a proper person?"

"I do not object at all, Percy; and I prefer you should choose a person who would be agreeable to you in the house."

"I have thought of that very pleasing young person at Mrs. Marvel's. The doctor says he has the highest esteem for her. She has had misfortunes, nobly borne."

"What, Lelia? Oh, thank you, Percy! I should like so much to have her, if Mrs. Marvel did not object."

"Mrs. Marvel and the doctor are coming to lunch; suppose we propose it to them."

"I'm afraid Anna will hate to give up Lelia."

But instead, when the matter was cautiously proposed to Mrs. Marvel, her speaking face flashed with joy.

"Do you really mean it? Oh, it would be such a great advantage for Lelia? The very thing I could wish! I have the strongest reason for desiring Lelia to see—to live—in such a place as this. But Lelia is not accomplished. She is only beginning French and music."

"I do not demand accomplishments, but goodness," said Beryl.

But the doctor said to the marquis:

"Perhaps I should tell you Lelia's sad story, if she is to come to you."

"Pray do not. I do not wish to intrude on her sorrows. If you assure me she has spotless character and refined mind, I ask no more."

"She has all that. And I hope one day to see her take a rightful position among the first in the land, though now the darkness of unmerited misfortune is about her."

CHAPTER XXX.

"GIVE ME, THEN, RUE AND PANSIES.

THE Honorable Harley Medford and his family were about to go to Scotland, they were having the last dinner together as a household. After dinner Mrs. Harley went up to give a glance at her chubby heir, and the marquis and Harley walked on the terrace.

"I do not feel," said the marquis, "at all expectant of a long life. My chief care is for Beryl. If I had had any idea of how things stood with us both, I would not have married. She will be in a dangerous position if I die. She is young, beautiful, thoughtless, I fear, and has no relatives to be responsible for her. Her father is worse than no one. I want you to be her firm friend."

"I will, indeed; but I hope you will live years yet."

"I certainly feel well at present, but I know my danger. Be such a friend to Beryl as to warn her, if needed, of her faults and dangers."

Out of the drawing-room window Lawrence stepped into the fading daylight, with Beryl leaning on his arm; a cream-colored silk, with vest and panels of crimson velvet set off her slender figure, and the rich folds trailed after her on the shaven turf, as she leaned on Lawrence.

They passed down the steps, along the flaming beds of tulips, and by the perfume-breathing springs, and stopped in the new moonlight, under a lilac loaded with spires of bloom. Here on the other walk came Harley and the marquis in close conversation, just as Lawrence's voice sounded out:

"Whatever you may say, my cousin, that fair, that divinely pensive face shall be the star of my existence. Whether happy in my love or not, at that chosen altar love lies offered forever."

"My dear Lawrence, I would not have thought you capable of such a sudden passion."

The marquis remembered what Mrs. Ranleigh had said. His face grew white; he stepped forward with an inarticulate exclamation.

But the two under the lilac did not seem disconcerted. Beryl held out her hand.

"Ah, are you there, Lord Medford? Come here, will you? Lawrence has been telling me the wildest tales. It seems our park is haunted."

"By a witch" said Harley. "I saw her, doom in her eye!"

"By an angel!" cried Lawrence.

"You hear him," said Beryl. "It seems he met by our stream the loveliest naiad, indulging in fishing. She wore a wide Swiss hat and a cambric gown; her hair had unrolled on her shoulders. He untangled her fish-line from some roots; he spoke to her; her voice was music. Who can this fairy be?"

"Let us hope for his sake, if he is so far gone in love as you describe, that she will reappear to him and tell of her dwelling," said the marquis. pleasantly, and ashamed of his hateful suspicions, drawing Beryl's arm within his own, and breaking off for her a cluster of lilacs.

The next morning Harley Medford's family had hardly gone when the first May guests appeared in Lord Ravlin and his sister, Lady Maria. Early in the morning Mrs. Marvel's phaeton had brought Lelia Barrows, who was established in a room next to Beryl's. Even Fanny received her with satisfaction.

"She's no snake," said Fanny, with unamiable reminiscences of Mrs. Ranleigh.

Fanny aided Lelia a little in the arrangement of her hair, and the adjustment of her simple white dress.

"What flowers will you wear?" asked Beryl, looking up from a basket just sent up from the conservatory.

"Pansies, if I must wear any."

"They are rather sad flowers, are they not? No others?"

"Unless rue," said Lelia. "I read of Ophelia lately; she said: 'There's pansies, that's for thoughts, and rue, that's for remembrance.' Thoughts and remembrance, Lady Beryl—those must do for me."

"But Ophelia mourned her lost lover. Do you?"

"I never had a lover, I think—a real one."

"You look sweetly enough to win several," said Beryl,

standing before her glass, while Fanny draped her lace robe with care.

"If you only knew how I dread to go down, for this first dinner, among people so different from any I have lived among!" cried Lelia.

"We are no more cultivated or better behaved than Doctor and Mrs. Marvel," smiled Beryl, as she gave her hand to her new friend. "Lord Medford said especially you were to live among us just like ourselves."

The two went to the drawing-room. Presently Lawrence came in. He flushed crimson, and moved forward eagerly.

"Miss Barrows," said Beryl, "Lord Medford's cousin, Lelia.

Presently she whispered:

"Lawrence, from the way you look, I believe this is your naiad of the stream."

"She is. Is she to live here?"

"For the time."

The others came in, and it was Lawrence's happy fate to take Lelia in to dinner, while Lord Ravlin escorted Beryl.

In the evening music was proposed. Lelia could afford no aid here, and Lady Maria Ravlin pleaded fatigue from her journey. Lawrence was an amateur of considerable skill in violin music; he played accompaniments to Beryl's piano. She was very sensitive to the effects of music, and when she played thus, she remembered how fond Sir Jerome had been of accompanying her, with flute or violin, and how he had taught her many songs. She strove with her emotion, and played unfalteringly, though she grew very pale.

Her evil genius must have inspired the lively Lord Ravlin. He cried:

"Oh, Lady Medford, do you recall that charming little song, 'Sweet maid, with eyes of violet blue'?"

"No; I've forgotten it," said Beryl, hastily.

"It is here," said the unlucky Lawrence.

"I am sure I cannot sing it," said Beryl, flushing.

"I beg you to try," insisted Lord Ravlin; "it is one of my favorites—one of the fleeting songs of an hour, but so sweet and simple. Do try it, Lady Beryl."

"I should be glad if you would favor us," said the

marquis, with his stately air, which Beryl always took as a command.

Beryl mastered herself, and began the song:

"Sweet maid, with eyes of violet blue,
And silken lash of darker hue,
And noble mien, and artless grace,
Reflected in thy beauteous face;
Should some one whisper love to thee,
And shouldst thou deem it melody,
May I be there! may I be there!"

But alas! it had been Jerome who had taught her that song—the trifle of the hour—and he had whispered that it described his lovely Beryl as if made for her. The memory overpowered her. Only two brief years since those fair days of love and hope—and he was gone!

She rose hastily, feeling as if she should faint, or burst into tears, if she taxed herself another instant.

"I—cannot—play any more," she said, with a quivering lip. "I—do not feel like music to-night."

She came from behind the piano, and passed with a hasty step down the room.

Any little thing like this irritated the dignified marquis beyond endurance. He said sharply, in a low tone, as she passed him:

"Lady Medford, do not give way to such childishness. Have you no womanly self-control?"

Poor Beryl! She felt as if she had exercised so much self-control. She drew herself behind the heavy silken drapery of the window, and leaning her forehead on the glass, tears streamed over her cheeks. Though not near her, the marquis felt that she was crying. Then Lord Ravlin came up, saying, with easy grace, the mala-propos:

"I vow, Medford, that song makes me think of poor Sothron. Let me see; did the countess know Sothron? She must have known him. Well, that was one of his favorites. Said it described the lady of his heart."

The marquis was ready to gnash his teeth in fury. He did the worst thing he could. He went to Beryl.

"What are you crying for, Lady Medford? Like a silly schoolgirl! You annoy me past bearing. It is idle to deceive me. You are mourning over that Sothron. Will nothing root him out of your heart!"

"No, my lord!" cried Beryl, in passionate pain. "I believe not even death would tear him from my heart!"

Lawrence was at the piano. He began to sing—to Lelia:

"She is coming, my own, my sweet!
Were it ever so airy a tread,
My heart would hear her and beat,
Were it earth in an earthy bed;
My dust would hear her and beat,
Had I lain for a century dead;
Would start and tremble under her feet,
And blossom in purple and red."

The marquis dropped the curtain and turned away.

* * * * * * *

Day followed day. Guests went and came. Beryl, among friends, regained her health and her bloom. The marquis, untortured by Mrs. Ranleigh's daily hints, was kind, if reserved, and almost stern. Beryl thought she saw a little love idyl going on for Lelia and Lawrence, and she smiled and sighed. Would that their love might be happier than hers. Why did Lelia shun Lawrence? Why was she herself unable to content the marquis?

One July night, when the castle seemed settling into rest, Beryl tapped at the library door, and entered with a hesitating step. A little casket was in her hands, a look of fear and resolve was on her face.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"WHAT DID YOU GIVE FOR YOUR FORTUNE, LADY?"

To the surprise of Beryl the marquis was not alone. Lelia was there. She stood with her hand on the arm of his chair, as in confidential intercourse, and the marquis had laid one of his hands over hers. To Beryl, already half hesitant over her errand, this presence of a third person seemed to offer good excuse for flight, and with a hasty "Oh, pardon, I thought you were alone," she turned to escape. But Lelia cried:

"Lady Beryl! I implore you! I am going. Oh,

stay! My errand is done," and flying past her ran up the long stair.

"Come in, Beryl," said the marquis. "What is it?"

Beryl came slowly forward. She had nerved herself to a great effort. She wished to banish, if she could, this reserve and coldness which withered her, as frosts a hot-house rose. Day after day she had questioned what she could do to regain that good opinion and confidential relation which the marquis seemed to have toward her in the first months after marriage. She remembered, at last, that there had been a question between them of those little mementoes of Jerome, and he had bade her bring them to him, and she had never done so. Several times she had said, shrinking before his grave face and reticent manner, "Are you displeased with me, Percy?" And his answer was ever the quiet, "No, Beryl."

Thinking it all over, she had concluded that her husband resented her cleaving to these mementoes of Jerome Sothron. Poor Jerome was dead, and it could not harm him; if she sacrificed these relics it might placate the living. So here she was at the library door, with this casket of treasures in her hand, as one carries a little urn of burial ashes.

"Percy," she said, "you told me once that I was to bring you these, and I have never done so; you may think me very obstinate and disobedient, but, indeed, I am not. I had mostly forgotten. Here they are, Percy."

The marquis took shame to himself that he had ever been led so far astray by jealousy as to demand this pitiful little offering. He waved his hand.

"Never mind, child. I do not want them. I had forgotten all about them."

"But, I think, perhaps, it is better for me not to keep them, Percy; and I thought, if I should die, some one would come upon them. It is better to be done with it all. Will you take them, Percy?"

"No!" cried the marquis. Not for worlds would he touch these relics of his wife's early love and loss—a love which he clearly felt had been the one profound, changeless passion of her life. "No, keep them if they are any comfort to you, poor child."

"They are no comfort," said Beryl, still standing, with her box in her hand, like a forlorn Pandora, bearing

her casket of all mortal woes. The singular look on her husband's face convinced her that these treasures were a cause of trouble between them. "If you will not take them, I will destroy them, Percy; they are no longer mine."

There was a fire always burning on the library hearth; the marquis liked it so, even when the weather was so

NOT FOR WORLDS WOULD HE TOUCH THESE RELICS OF HIS WIFE'S EARLY LOVE.

warm that the windows were open to the floor, and the draperies swayed in and out on the night breeze.

Beryl knelt down before the fire, and laid the sandal-wood box upon coal and flame. Then, with clasped hands, and white face intent, she watched it burn. All the past rose up before her. She seemed to hear Jerome's dear voice borne on the night wind; to see his handsome,

joyous face here in the gleaming fire pictures. She remembered adoring looks and passionate protestations, and her bosom heaved in its tumultuous pain, and two great tears welled over from the grieving violet eyes, and rolled down her fair cheeks.

The marquis saw them. The memory of that man was paramount yet!

Well, some men are born to be dowered with woman's deathless love!

It was not his happiness; he must submit. He turned quickly to his desk, and seemed busily writing.

Beryl rose from her knees. The last charred emblem of her offering had fallen away to ashes. She went toward the table and laid her hand on her husband's shoulder.

"You will not be angry with me any longer, Percy?"

"I am not angry with you, Beryl. Why should I be? Good-night, my dear."

She went gliding from the room like a shadow.

"Poor child!" sighed the marquis. "If *he* had lived, she would have gone on wretchedly loving him. I suppose it is her fate. I cannot quarrel with her loving of the dead."

For Beryl, she felt as one who has stood by a new-made grave. The gay laughter and the summer joys of her guests, the archery, the riding, the discussion of a Phantom Ball to be given in the park, wearied her, and when she could, next day, she stole off alone for a ramble in the plantations, for the face of nature always comforted her, like the caresses of a mother.

Wandering thus alone, she was startled by seeing some one seated under a tree, but at once perceived that it was a respectably dressed woman, bent over a pillow on which she was making very delicate lace. But as a twig broke under Beryl's tread, the woman turned a face of terror, and started, as if to rise and fly.

"Do not run away," said Beryl. "No one wishes to disturb you. What elegant work you are doing!"

"Making my living," said the woman; "and since I must work like a slave from morning to night, it is better to get a breath of fresh air and sun while I am working. The marquis said I might be here."

That her husband knew the woman and had given her

liberty of the place, afforded Beryl a sense of security.

A fallen tree-trunk had been roughly hewn into a seat, and placing herself upon it, she said, kindly:

"The marquis always likes our neighbors to have the benefit of our grounds, and I am glad it is a help to you to come here. You have certainly a very beautiful way of earning your support."

THE WOMAN TURNED A FACE OF TERROR, AND STARTED, AS IF TO RISE AND FLEE.

"If I hadn't been used shameful, I'd not need to earn a farthing!" cried the woman. "I had money, plenty of money, and it was taken away from me. What would you think, my lady, if you had schemed, and lied, and promised, and vowed, just to make you get a fortune, and then cheated you out of the whole of it?"

"I should think I had been very hardly used. But could you earn a fortune at lace-making?"

"Of course not!" said the woman, with contempt. "But—the fortune was left by—well, by an uncle."

"And stolen from you? What a pity!"

"I'll tell you!" cried the woman, eagerly. "I feel as if—if I did not speak out, I'd die—my heart will burst! These things gnaw, and gnaw, and eat me by inches. I've told these trees and grasses often, just for the sake of speaking. There was a man I knew; he said if I could get this money, him and me, we'd be married, and go to America and open a public-house, and get rich as kings in no time. Well, he put it all out plain to me, and kept at me for the money, and promising we'd be married."

"But if he made money his chief condition, you might have guessed he really did not love you."

"But I loved him!" cried the woman, madly; "and I wanted to be married. It's a fine, respectable thing to be *Mrs.* Well, I got the money—a whole thousand pounds—and he arranged all for our passage, and we were to be married in the morning and go aboard a sailing ship. Well, the night before, what does he do, but go off with the thousand pounds in a steamer, and leave me!"

"What—robbed you! Poor soul! Why did you not telegraph and have him arrested, and get at least your money back?"

"*I couldn't; he knew I couldn't when he planned it.*"

"And you were left destitute?"

"All but. I had a few pounds, and some other things, and I came away here. But I've been breaking ever since. I go over, and over, and over it in my mind all the while. I don't sleep nights. All my food tastes like ashes. I see visions—oh, hideous visions! I've got old, too. Look at me. I was quite a handsome young woman two years ago."

"I'm *so* sorry for you! But do not break your heart over a thousand pounds. A thousand pounds is not worth that, is it?"

"It is to me. Money is worth what you give for it; it is worth what it costs you. And I gave—oh, I cannot tell you what I gave for that money! You can't judge of me; such as you don't know my trials. What did you give for *your* money, my lady?"

The woman spoke as one sure that only sweet smiles and sweet words had been Beryl's price for fortune.

Poor Beryl! it came over her as a sickening revelation that she had given love, hope, happiness, Jerome's good name, career, bright young life, for this luxury and wealth that she claimed.

"I should be glad to help you," she said. "Shall I buy that lace?"

"No, my lady; it is all engaged," said the woman.

Beryl went slowly back to the castle.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"I WOULD GO IF MY LIFE WERE THE PRICE."

It had never occurred to Beryl to wonder how and why Lelia had been talking with the marquis in his study that night. Loving and trusting Lelia, and trusting her husband, no sting of mean suspicion entered her soul.

The marquis saw that, and felt shame that he never had returned such noble trust. From the first day of their marriage he had been full of doubt, and always testing Beryl.

One evening, in the drawing-room, the conversation happened to turn on jealousy.

"Jealousy," said Lady Maria, "is the wrong side of love."

"I do not think that," said Lord Ravlin, who sometimes had serious, solid ideas. "Absolute love casts out all jealousy, as it does fear."

"Then love, real love, has no fear," said Beryl, meditatively. "Yes, that is true, I know that."

The marquis felt a stab of pain. He knew Beryl feared him; but she had known a love without fear.

"Absolute indifference also has no jealousy," said Lelia, who but seldom spoke in a gathering of several persons. She seemed startled at the sound of her own voice, and returned to her netting, with a blush.

"We gather then," said Lawrence, "that true, high love has no jealousy—neither has indifference—but a lower type of love has jealousy."

The marquis looked at an engraving, but he mused. Beryl was so indifferent to him, so unjealous—he was

jealous of her, as his love for her had not the noble type of heart unison and tender oneness.

The next day Lelia, who frequently acted as scribe for the marquis, was in the library helping him, when the marquis said to her of some paper:

"Look in the drawer of the side table and see if it is not there."

THE MARQUIS HEARD A SCREAM, AND SAW LELIA HOLDING THE GOLD CHAIN AND MEDALLION.

A moment after, he heard a faint scream, and saw Lelia standing, ashen pale, and holding over her shaking hand, the thin gold chain from which dangled the blue inlaid medallion.

"Oh, is that yours, Lelia?" he said. "I found it in the plantations before you came here. Take it if it is yours. I thought it belonged to another person."

"I do not want it—it is not mine," said Lelia, flinging it from her in disgust and horror. "But what was the woman like that you thought lost it? Was she young, pretty, pleasing, as—as——"

"No; she was a death's head, and old—that is, not young. And, besides, she did not drop it, after all."

Lelia sat down, laid her face on the table, and began to cry.

"Oh, my poor girl!—oh, my poor sister!"

"What is the matter, Lelia? Have you lost any one? Shall I help you find the owner of that trinket? I can speak to the steward—but it is now some months."

"No, my lord. I beg your pardon. How wrong of me to be troubling you with this bewailing. No, if any one is to be found, Doctor Marvel is the only one that can help me. I think this is the paper."

She swept the trinket into the drawer with a look of dislike, and returned vigorously to her work.

"How strange it is," mused the marquis, "that these fair, innocent young creatures, who seem scarcely to have begun their lives, should have such burdens and sorrows on their hearts."

He thought of Beryl, and sighed.

Beryl came to the window, calling for Lelia, who was in general demand for her sweet helpfulness.

Lelia joined her.

"I promised," said the countess, "that I would ask you to go with Lawrence fishing. Three or four more are going up the glen."

"I would rather not go," said Lelia, hurriedly.

"Lelia," said Beryl, sitting down in an arbor, "I think you avoid Lawrence."

"Yes, I do," said Lelia, honestly.

"Is that kind?" asked Beryl.

"It is *right*," said Lelia.

"He is one of the best fellows in the world," said Beryl.

"Yes," said Lelia.

"And with his prospects and abilities, you could hardly hope for a better match, dear Lelia. I think——"

"Please don't say what you think," cried Lelia. "I am not thinking of any match. I never can; I am held by a promise; I am bound."

"But you told me you had never had a lover."

"I never had. Love was left out of my life, but marriage was not. Dear Lady Beryl, you will think I have been very deceitful to you, but—I am married."

"Lelia! And does Dr. Marvel know?"

"Yes; and the marquis knows. I told him that night you found me in the library. I thought his secretary paid me attention, and I felt my position was wrong, and I went and asked the marquis to let me go away. I told him I was married, and my husband had left me. I did not tell my married name; he said I need not. Only Dr. Marvel and his wife know it. The marquis would not let me go away; he said that Lawrence was not likely to trouble me. But I think of him, and—I must go away, unless you will let him know how I am set apart from others, and cannot care for other people—in that way."

"Lelia, do you love your husband?"

"No; I thought I did, perhaps, once; and when, as he will, he finally comes for me, I shall go to him. But when a man has only given one neglect and scorn, few can love on, and on, after that."

"You must be very unhappy, dear Lelia."

"No; I try to live for other people, and to improve myself."

Beryl turned and kissed her.

"I will go with Lawrence to-day."

So Beryl went. And, alone by that trout stream, she told Lawrence that the Lelia he loved belonged to another, neglectful of that treasure which Lawrence coveted.

"I will go on loving her," said Lawrence, with conviction; "if I may not as a lover, then I will as a brother; but I will love no one else—never, no, never!"

* * * * * * *

It was in October that the marquis called Beryl aside one morning after breakfast, and said:

"The doctor requests that you will not go to his house until you hear from him. Mrs. Marvel is ill, and he fears a contagious fever."

At this instant Lelia, who had been for bread for the gold-fish and pheasants, came back, and Beryl, pale with dismay, told the news.

"Then you will allow me to go at once to her," said Lelia.

"The doctor did not send for you," said the Marquis.

"You may take the fever," cried Beryl.

"That makes no difference; I would go and nurse her if my life were the price. She is my best friend. But for her I should not now be living. All I am, all I may ever be, I owe to Anna Marvel. My life is hers if she needs it."

"You are right," said the marquis. "Go to your friend."

"Yes," said Beryl, "go, Lelia. No one else can nurse her as well as you. You may save her precious life."

"The carriage shall be ready for you in half an hour," said the marquis. "Send to us for anything and everything that can do the least good. A groom shall go over for news every day."

The next day, and the next Fanny, while dressing her lady, spoke of little else but the fever that had broken out in the village and farms. This one was taken, this one was dead, another dying, another had fled away for fear; there a whole family was down.

The marquis gave the housekeeper orders to have broth, bread, jellies, clothing ready for all demands; and wrote Dr. Marvel to draw freely on the resources of the castle for his patients.

This hovering shadow of death woke new thoughts in Beryl. She felt herself so lonely and useless in the world she longed to do some good, to be really helpful and necessary to some one. She envied Lelia, so skillfully nursing her friend.

Beryl was morbid about her past. She exaggerated all that she had done wrong. She felt that she was useless. She longed by some sacrifice to atone for all the evil she had wrought. She thought of many good women who had devoted their cares to the sick and poor, and she resolved, in this crisis, to follow their example. She knew her husband would forbid it. She knew that Fanny, if she found it out, would appeal to the marquis; but Beryl had not yet learned the dangers of self-will. She was carried away by her impulses. She went to the housekeeper,

asking what articles were to be distributed among the sick.

Mrs. Dalton showed her a large supply, saying that the marquis had ordered her to give liberally to all in need.

Beryl requested the key of the store-room.

"I may want to help myself here, Mrs. Dalton."

Mrs. Dalton gave her the key, but said, anxiously:

"My lady, you'll never think of going among the sick folk yourself? It's the older, experienced, and stronger must do that."

"Why, Mrs. Dalton," said Beryl, evasively "you do not think an idle butterfly, such as I am, will run in any danger?"

But daily, while Fanny thought her with her guests, and the marquis believed her to be in her boudoir, the little countess was going about among the sick cottagers.

"What, is your Aunt Nora ill?" she said one day to a cottager, whose family had thus far escaped.

"Yes, my lady. She got home at dawn, just crawling, from Kate Jay, a lone creature in a thatched cottage at the end of the lane. Kate Jay is all alone, and terribly ill."

"I will try and find a nurse for her," said Beryl, and at once set off to see this Kate Jay.

She found, tossing and delirious from fever, the unhappy lace-maker whose pitiful story she had heard in the wood.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"I DID IT—MINE WAS THE HAND!"

KATE JAY was not only very ill, but she was the most forlorn of all Beryl's invalids, because she was absolutely without family or friends, and when she was taken ill she had refused to have the doctor summoned, saying she had a specific of her own better than all his medicine. It was was only when she became delirious from fever that a neighbor had been able to stay and nurse her; that neighbor was now ill, and Beryl's utmost efforts could only secure a totally deaf old dame, so few nurses were left in the district. Beryl had no idea that a doctor was not in attendance. The old dame was a good nurse in her way, and Beryl wrote on a slate certain directions she had gathered from a book of Miss Nightingale's. She re-

proached herself for having neglected this unhappy Kate, and determined to see her every day.

Her ministrations to the sick she had concealed from Fanny, who would have hindered them by appeal to the marquis.

But Beryl had never had better health than since she began to interest herself actively in other people. These poor folks loved her, watched for her, welcomed her. This was a balm to her wounded spirit.

She went to Kate Jay's again in a day or two; and, as she entered, the old woman, in her harsh, hurried voice, explained that she must run home for another cap, gown, and apron. She would go while madam was there, and be back in ten minutes.

Beryl was left alone in the little cottage with the emaciated sick woman, her hair straying wildly from her cap, her hands tossing aimlessly about the disturbed bed-covers. Windows and doors were open, and the pipe of quail, and plover, and lark came in on the mellow, fruity autumn air.

Beryl stood, her hands clasped before her, like a half-frightened child. What should she do if her patient became very frenzied? As if responsive to her fears, the poor creature sat up in bed, flung out her arms, and shrieked:

"Robbed! What, all gone—and I sold my soul to get it?" she sobbed for a few minutes, and then cried out:

"You would not do it! You were afraid! You left it all to me! It was for you, for you; and now you have robbed me! You made me your tool! Oh, a curse be on you! Where are the jewels? Oh, yes, there are a good many jewels. Poor fool! she loved them, she was not used to fine things. They are not family jewels; they are not marked. It will be safe enough to take them."

"Oh, horrible! horrible!" said the trembling Beryl. "Is this dreadful creature a thief? Has she robbed as well as been robbed! Is that why she has hidden away so?"

Terrified, not at the fever, but at the crime, she turned to run out into the blessed sunshine; but her motion caught the eye of the maniac.

"Come back! Is that you? What do you run for? Give me your hand, that I may feel you living. Ha, ha! I thought you dead! I saw your ghost! Wretch! how dare you haunt me? You are not a ghost; you are alive; you are red, not white; and you wear clothes, not a winding-sheet."

"WRETCH! HOW DARE YOU HAUNT ME!"

"Hush, hush!" implored Beryl, standing quivering with fear on the threshold. "Don't go on so, poor woman. No one is dead. I am alive; so is everybody. Do be quiet. Lie down, please. No one is dead."

"No one is dead!" cried the woman, in ecstasy. "No one! Why, I thought you were! Oh, horrors! I thought —I—but there—you are alive. I'll go to sleep."

She fell back on her pillow and almost instantly fell asleep.

Taking herself to task for her fears, Beryl ventured to wet a handkerchief in cologne and lay it on the patient's head. Then she moistened the burning lips in wine and water.

The old nurse came back.

"Ah, she sleeps! You are like an angel, my lady, bringing calm. This will do her worlds of good."

But for two days Beryl could not get over the terrible impression of that frenzy. She could not bring herself to return to the cottage. Then, blaming herself for weakness, and for selfishness to one so pitiable, she returned.

The muttering of the sick woman met her ear as she neared the door. She entered.

The old nurse, overcome with weariness, lay in a corner, a pillow under her head, in a sleep that seemed profound as death.

Kate Jay was sitting up in bed, her glittering eyes searching the low walls and ceiling, her hands reaching forth in fruitless clutching.

"Ah, there you are! I see you glittering! You shine out through the chinks, behind the tiles! Come here!"

"What do you want, Kate?" demanded Beryl, desperately, as she stood in the doorway.

"Why, I want some things I hid. I shall die un'ess I count them all, to see no one has found them. Pull out that blue tile, and give me what's behind."

To satisfy the patient, Lady Medford pulled the tile out, and there was a watch and chain.

Mechanically she handed it to Kate.

"Lift up the corner hearth brick, quick! Give me the things—quick, now!"

Again Beryl did as she was bid, and as many as a dozen rings lay exposed, and were given to Kate.

"Get up on the chair," cried Kate, all afire; "run your hand in the thatch and bring them out."

Two necklaces and some ear-rings responded to her search this time.

Still Kate's burning, bony hands pointed here and there, and her imperative voice directed the search; and the deaf nurse slept on.

Beryl, as if bound by a spell, in terror, did the poor creature's bidding, until, piled on the counterpane under the clutching hands, lay a glittering heap of jewelry, none

of it very rich, but yet pretty and tasteful. A set of Geneva filigree, a set of amethysts inlaid with silver, cameos, coral, amber sets; curious enough to see in that humble cabin, on that disordered sick-bed.

Kate, with the strength of fever, turned about and crowded the treasure under the mattress on which she lay. Then, exhausted by her effort, she fell back; and Beryl, taking from her basket the lemons and grapes she had brought, was about to escape, when the closed, burning eyes flew open, and the shrill voice cried:

"Who says I'm Sara Hunter? Who does?"

That name *Sara Hunter* seemed to strike through Beryl's soul. She could not remember where she had heard or seen it; but it was connected in her mind with some awful horror.

"Sara Hunter!" she said, trembling.

"Don't say it," gasped the woman, trying to lift herself, but too weak to do so; her fitful power exhausted. "If you say Sara Hunter they may hang me. But no, they can't, as you're not dead. I'll give you back your jewels if you want them. The money—the note for a thousand pounds—was stolen from me. Ha! I took it out of your dead hand; there was a drop, one drop, of blood on it; but *he* won't care for that, nor for me. Oh, how you fell, all in one terrible heap! And the blood—how red your blood was, you country girl! it ran all in a pool—only I did not stop long to see. And oh, the fools! They said *he* did it, your husband, Jerome Sothron; and they never thought of me!"

Beryl flung her arms over her head, with a wild cry. She dashed in a frenzy out of the door, and by the mercy of Heaven rushed straight into the arms of the faithful Fanny!

Fanny had heard tales lately of her lady's benevolence, that had served to set her in pursuit. She had followed her up, and reached her at this very terrible and critical moment.

Beryl, her agony of horror passed, felt that some other should hear that awful confession, wrenched by remorse from those fevered lips. She clung to the remonstrating Fanny.

"Hush, Fanny! don't think of me. This woman, called Kate Jay, is really Sara Hunter, who was poor

Mrs. Jerome Sothron's maid, and murdered her. She has just confessed it! And poor Jerome lies under that awful shame! Come, come, Fanny—come, hear for yourself. You, too, must be able to testify that Sir Jerome died an innocent and a shamefully maligned man!"

She dragged Fanny into the cottage. She rushed to the bed.

"Speak! are you Sara Hunter?"

"Hush! Hush! Never tell it! Oh, I am! I am!"

"And you, *you*, you killed Mrs. Sothron!"

"With the little dagger! Yes! I came out of the bedroom door, with the little dagger she got at *his* chambers in the Albany one day. I went up behind her as she stood on the hearth-rug, and I drove that dagger in, just where one day I heard the doctor describe caused instant death. I drove it in; and they said he did it—Sir Jerome! Oh, the fools, the fools!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"THEN YOUR LOVER SHALL APPEAR."

Out in the clear sunlight stood Beryl and her maid. The cottage, with its open door, behind which lay this poor wretch, tortured by such demons of remorse, seemed to them as the pit of Hades. For a little time Beryl leaned against the great trunk of one of the spreading pear trees, faint and pale, dizzy with the things which she had heard. Fanny got her breath first.

"Oh, my lady, how dreadful of you to come here, among all this sickness and craziness! You might have taken the fever. Oh, what would my lord say?"

"I'm glad I came," cried Beryl, with exultation—"glad! Did you hear her, Fanny? *she* did it! Sir Jerome is innocent! He shall not lie there in strange earth, dishonored and forgotten; he shall be cleared from all blame; his name shall be made white."

"Yes, yes, my lady," said Fanny, soothingly; "that's all in good time; "but now you should come home and get over this shock, and please Heaven, you don't take the fever, or give it to all the castle!"

"I'm very careful, Fanny. I change my dress always at the lodge-keeper's. But, Fanny, some one, some magistrate, should take down what this woman says."

"Not her ravings, my lady. No one would heed that. I will have her watched, and whenever she is in her senses we'll try and get a confession. Now, my lady, do leave her to me; you must not come indeed."

Beryl went home as if a new heaven and a new earth had opened about her. The triumphant vindication she foresaw for her dead lover uplifted her over her sorrows. Instead of ovewhelming her, the occurrences of the morning seemed to fill her with a new life. She appeared at luncheon, eager, ardent, triumphant. The clearing of Jerome could be brought about without her seeming interference, without the mention of her name, and Lord Medford, as a magistrate, would be obliged to take notice of the deposition of Sara Hunter. An obvious reason for the happiness of Beryl was the news that had come that Mrs. Marvel was out of danger.

"Now that your friend is better," cried Sir Eustace Friar, "now that everybody is better, and the doctors say this fever is abating and will soon have disappeared, let us banish dull care and have revels. Let us keep Hallowe-en with all the old-time ceremonies, with magic arts and incantations."

"Yes," chimed in Lord Ravlin, "let us exhume the ancient wardrobes of the castle, and all wear garb of one or two centuries ago."

"By all means," said the marquis, anxious to make his guests happy. "I intend to have Christmas kept here this year, and New Year's and Twelfth Night, with all the magnificence I can summon. And we will begin the celebrations by Halloween observances. Lady Beryl, your guests will depend on you to arrange a grand entertainment for them."

"I fear I am poor at devising, though delighted to follow a good leader," said Beryl.

"I will tell you who is a good leader," said Sir Eustace. "Mrs. Ranleigh. She is the most wonderful person to get up entertainments. I have often thought if she were very rich she would be famous for splendid festivities, which would outshine those given under the Empire, or to Louis Fourteenth. Dear Lady Beryl, where is Mrs. Ranleigh? Do send for her."

"Very willingly, if I knew where she is," said Beryl.

"I will tell you; she is down in Kent, with the senior Mrs. Ranleigh, or Lady Ranleigh, her mother-in-law—a famously stupid place, where the only diversions are having penny-readings and soup kitchens," cried Lord Ravlin.

"Send for her by the next mail, Lady Medford; she will regard it as an invitation to paradise."

"Very well; I will, if Lord Medford agrees—or, will you write, Percy?"

"I leave it to you," said the marquis, with coldness.

The luncheon party went out upon the terraces, warm and glowing in the rich October sunlight. Beryl lingered a little by her husband.

"Are you displeased at anything, Percy, that you are so grave?"

"I like frankness," said the marquis. "You seemed as ready as any one to invite Mrs. Ranleigh, when she was dismissed because you could not live under the same roof with her. How do you mean to keep the word you have just pledged?"

"By inviting her, just as I said, and conquering as much as I can my prejudices. Laura *is* a great social genius. You like her, our guests want her; and as for me, Percy," added Beryl, with a flash of pride, "I will show you that I am not afraid to live under her eyes."

"I cannot understand you," said the marquis. "Why this unexpected change and concession?"

"I feel stronger and less nervous than I did in the spring; and as for Laura, there may be excuses for her. At all events, I know you like her, Percy, and she entertained you. You must often be lonely here, and I think, for my sake, you have exiled yourself from London—from your natural social life and political friends. You fear I may not be discreet in society? You shall see that I will. Let Mrs. Ranleigh come; her sharpest eyes shall find nothing in me of which I need blush."

"You speak as if Laura were a jailer, not a friend."

"So I do; but, all the same, I accept my jailer."

"You had no need to prove your judicious conduct to me, Beryl, so that we should go back to London in February. You know that was fixed upon."

"I do not think I am so eager for London and its gayety as you imagine, Percy. It is very lovely here."

Within a week, Laura Ranleigh was back at the castle. Very naturally, she thought that the marquis had so much missed her, that he had insisted on Beryl's invitation. She devoted herself to the entertainment of her host, and once more her sly suggestions, her looks and hints—all so subtle that he did not realize them as the source of his new disturbance—began to rouse to pain, uneasiness, and bitterness the heart that had of late become more content.

The preparation for the Halloween rout moved on with much mirth. The gentry of all the county received invitations; all the gay inmates of the castle contributed plans of magic, and witchcraft, and ancient observances. Lord Ravlin went on an exploration among the country dames, and brought back accounts of rustic Halloween love-tests. The stores of the castle furnished the masquerade costumes.

Laura Ranleigh, as mistress of the revels, declined to take any particular private share in the feats, and wore as her costume the famous dress of the Yellow Monk, making her a distinguished figure.

Beryl wore the garb of the Fair Chatelaine—a dress of ancient white silk with a short waist square cut; from her shoulders hung a crimson velvet cloak, furred with minnever; a broad sash of oriental work was knotted at her left side, and on her arms and neck shone bracelets and collar of rich ancient jewels; her lovely hair, held by a jeweled gold band, fell in gleaming waves over her shoulders.

The evening had grown late, when there was a cry that no one had been found with courage to perform one feat—to go to Sir Hillard's Room to await the vision of a lover.

Sir Hillard's Room was the first floor of a square tower, said to be haunted by an ancient Crusader Medford. The room was empty, except for a great, dim Venetian glass, and a square, moth-eaten rug, above which swung a lamp in tarnished chains.

"The feat," said Mrs. Ranleigh, "is to go and sit in an oaken chair which has been placed in Sir Hillard's Room before the glass, and there, for four minutes, brush your unbound hair; then the lover will appear behind the chair. Fair Chatelaine, you should set us the example of such courage as that."

Now, in such things Beryl was not a whit cowardly. She frequently went into Sir Hillard's Room, and had seen to having it lighted that very evening. She said :

"I will go. My lord, will you count these gay people, and pledge yourself that not one of them leaves the room till I return?"

"Yes," said the marquis, glancing over the revelers. "They are all here. Take your places, and I will lock you in here with me."

"Will you pass behind my chair, Percy?" said Beryl, as she turned to leave the room. "Where are you going, Laura?"

"Only to watch you going to the foot of the stair, to see that you do not deceive us."

The next instant the Yellow Mask glided back to the room, and stood listening against the mantel.

The gay talk, full of Halloween tales, flowed on.

Ten minutes passed.

"Lady Beryl is making preparations for a surprise," said Lord Ravlin.

"She means to vindicate her courage," said Lawrence.

"Fifteen minutes! She has been long enough," said Lord Medford. "Eustace, I depute you to go escort her back."

In a moment there was a loud call. The gay party, in sudden terror, rushed to the stairway.

There stood Sir Eustace Friar, with the Fair Chatelaine lying lifeless in his arms.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"SHE SHALL MAKE A CONFESSION."

THERE was a rush toward Eustace, a cry for Fanny, for water, for help.

Lord Medford was the first to reach his wife, and catching her from the arms of Eustace, he carried her to the library sofa. It was half an hour before Beryl was so far restored that she could be taken to her room.

"Where is Mrs. Ranleigh?" asked Mrs. Harley Medford.

"My mistress," said Mrs. Ranleigh's maid, suddenly appearing, "is so shocked at the effect these plays have had on Lady Medford, that she is nearly in hysterics. She will not come back this evening."

The company began to break up.

"A sorry ending," said Sir Eustace to Lord Ravlin.

"It is a devilish tricky ending, Friar, and I wish I knew what it meant."

"Why, nerves merely. We were all locked in there; I counted heads.

"Did you? "

Lord Ravlin moved away, with a low whistle.

When Beryl was finally left alone with Fanny, she began to sob desolately.

"Oh, Fanny, only to think! Here I am, with so much that people envy me—money, title, splendor, and not a friend near me to whom I can speak! Oh, I am so alone! so alone!"

"Dear lady," said Fanny, kneeling by her. "I'm faithful to you. Let me be your friend, since there's none other. What you saw is rankling in your mind. Tell me, my lady, and with speaking, you'll see it flees away as a dream when one rouses the sleeper."

"Fanny, I saw Sir Jerome Sothron! Alive! Alive, I tell you! It was no ghost! I saw him in the glass. I sat combing my hair, and smiling to myself, when all at once *he* passed behind my chair. I felt a living presence in the room! I dared not speak; I could not move. In the glass I looked at him! I heard his step as he moved away, and then I suppose I fell senseless."

"Oh, my lady, it was your imagination. That glass is dim; the light there was very dim. You could not see a face plain. Some one has gone there to try you, and you fancied it Sir Jerome."

"Fanny, what convinced me is this! Do you remember the tableaux at Heath Castle, three years ago, when Sir Jerome and I were Tristram and Iseult?"

"Indeed do I, my lady. I dressed you, and sweet you looked."

"Well, no one here knows of that; and to-night Sir Jerome wore that same dress of Tristram; the very same. And, Fanny, it was that night, after the tableaux, when we had gone into the cemetery, still in our costume, I

promised Sir Jerome I would never marry any one else, and would marry him. I have broken my word; and to-night he came in that same dress. The dress, the figure, the hair and whiskers I recognized fully; his casque shaded his face, and his head was bent forward as in sorrow and reproach."

"Dear lady, it was the games that brought the tableaux back; and then your mind brought him up. Do not let this wear on you, my lady."

So Fanny finally soothed her mistress to sleep.

Some while before breakfast next day the brilliant face of Mrs. Ranleigh, rosy with frosty air, looked in at the library window, her arms full of glowing chrysanthemums.

"See, Lord Medford, the splendors of October. I hope we shall find poor dear Beryl quite restored this morning. I was so shocked I fled to my room, as if I were guilty of the whole; but, really, it was Lord Ravlin proposed that feat, and I suppose Beryl's fancy did the rest. Did she tell you what alarmed her?"

"No; she declined to do so."

"That is a pity. Physicians have told me that the only danger in such alarms is concealing them, and letting them prey on the mind. As soon as one explains the secret terror it melts away like frost in sun. But of course Beryl will soon explain all to you. That is the blessing of a husband. One can go to such a friend with everything. So, pray do not look grave; Beryl will be in no mental danger, as she will make you her confidant, and you will dismiss her fears."

These hints pressed on Lord Medford's mind. For the next two or three days Beryl was pale, nervous, dejected. She had not now either Mrs. Marvel or Lelia to confide in, as intercourse with the doctor's family had not yet been resumed, Mrs. Marvel being yet very feeble. The hints of Laura—that telling a terror, like telling a dream, dissipated its power—finally induced the marquis to say to Beryl, one day, when he found her sitting alone in the morning room, her embroidery frame lying on her lap, and her eyes fixed in mournful musing on the distance:

"Beryl, you must shake off this foolish Halloween impression. I insist on knowing what terrified you."

"Percy, I saw Jerome Sothron."

"Beryl!"

"I did. It was not my imagination; he really appeared. He wore a dress that I only would know; he was dressed as Tristram, as when he and I once acted Tristram and Iseult. Percy, I know why he came; it was to reproach me—reproach me because I can clear his name from unmerited shame, and I do not do it, and let him lie in an unknown grave in a foreign land, as one too base to be numbered in an honorable home. And, Percy, he is innocent. I can prove it—I know it."

"Beryl, are you mad? Is it not enough that you forsook me for this man while he lived, but you must curse me with him now he is dead. I would not stir a finger to clear his name. He knew his course was not that of an honorable man."

"Oh, Percy, will you never forgive?" moaned Beryl.

She had risen in her eagerness, but, chilled and terrified by his anger, she now stood before him a lovely, pleading figure, with drooping arms, her fair head bent like some sweet flower beaten on by pitiless rains, needing a tender hand and comforting suns.

Angry that in all her loveliness, despite the marriage oath, she was not, and never had been fully his, the marquis, with a low exclamation of wrath and pain, stepped out of the open long window and strode off across the park.

"There is no help for Jerome's memory but in me," said Beryl. "My dear, you shall not appeal to me in vain."

"What is the news of that—that terrible woman, Fanny?" asked Beryl, as Fanny dressed her for dinner.

"She is better—much better; she is up. Folks miserable as she is don't often die. That, my lady, is one of the strange things of this world; it's the happy ones that are taken."

"But who knows who the happy ones really are, Fanny? Many whom the world thinks most happy are truly very wretched. Fanny, I must see that woman."

"Oh, don't, my lady; it will wear you all out. I'd as lief see a mad dog."

"It is my duty, Fanny. I want to get her to make a confession; then the marquis must take notice of it, and it will be known and published everywhere; and so

Jerome's good name will be established, and I shall not appear in it so as to vex Lord Medford. I think a kind Providence has just opened this way to clear the innocent."

"But my dear lady, you never can get the woman to make a confession. Why, it is clear to put her neck in a rope."

"I think I can persuade her to tell the truth—to do her duty. How can she be so wicked as to let another bear her sin and shame? I cannot conceive such a thing, Fanny."

"Just so, my lady; you cannot conceive of a woman coming to such a pass as to drive a dagger in a poor innocent, helpless young lady, who, no doubt, had been most uncommon good to her. It is all beyond the comprehension of such an angel as you are. I do entreat and beg, my dear mistress, you'll leave the thing alone. It is not for the like of you to meddle with. The woman will not speak, and my lord will be most angry to have it all opened up again. And then, you know, my dear lady, Doctor Marvel said, particularly, my lord could not bear worry and excitement. Oh, my lady, only consider what a state you'd be in if he were to be taken away."

"I know all that, Fanny, and for that reason I wish to to prevail on this woman to confess, and let it go to the nearest magistrate, and Lord Medford will have no trouble about it; and we shall not be in question. At least I am resolved to see her to-morrow. You shall go with me, Fanny. I will go out in my phaeton for an early drive, and take a basket of things to be left at the cottages, and no one will see anything strange in it."

"I wish your mind were not so set on it," sighed Fanny.

"Well, it is fully made up," said Beryl.

She went down to dinner, her usual self for the first time since Halloween. The marquis rejoiced that his remedy had been effective, and with a freer mind entered into conversation with two or three leading political men who had arrived that day.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"YES, ANOTHER MAN'S WIFE—ARE YOU SHE?

WHEN the pretty basket phaeton with Beryl and her maid stopped at the cottage of the lace-maker, the woman was sitting in the warm sunshine on the door-step.

"Don't come here, lady, please," she said, uneasily. "I've had a fever; it may be dangerous for you."

"We are not afraid of it," said the countess, going toward her. "I was here while you were very ill. Perhaps you do not remember it."

"You here!"

"Yes, several times."

"Here, and I so ill! I did not know any one was here but that deaf old woman."

"I was here. If I had not come to bring you things and to help you, I think you would have died."

"You had much better have let me die," said the woman, morosely. "I don't set such store by living."

She kept her place on the door-sill to prevent their entrance.

"My maid also was here. Will you not let us come in? We wish to talk with you."

"I've nothing to say to strangers. I am a lone woman. I've had trouble, and I keep to myself. Very likely I've said too much as it is, being sick and out of my head."

"You said many things, Sara Hunter, about which I must speak to you," said Beryl, firmly.

The woman looked at her in wide-eyed terror, and sprang to her feet.

Beryl entered the cottage.

"Sit down," she said, kindly; "you are yet weak."

The woman sat down, still as one quelled by a mighty fear.

"Sara Hunter, you were the maid of Mrs. Jerome Sothron."

The woman shut her lips firmly, resolved not to speak.

"I do not know anything about how you lived with Mrs. Sothron, but I know she was a simple, innocent, pretty young creature—a mere child. No doubt she was kind to you."

The woman began rocking herself to and fro, with a low moaning sound, as one in intense pain. The scene turned Beryl sick; her gentle face grew ghastly pale, but she went on with her self-set task.

"One day Sir Jerome was sent for—you know for what. He came; he went away. His wife stood on a rug by the mantel; behind her was the door of a bedroom, where you were. In the bedroom was a little dagger which she had taken as a memento of her husband's chambers, at the Albany. You took that weapon, softly opened the bedroom door, and saw her standing there alone, absorbed; in her hand a note for a thousand pounds. You crept up behind her and drove that cruel dagger in that gentle young heart which had never wronged you, and she fell dead, all in a heap, on the rug, which was covered with her blood. Then you took from her dead hand that note, with one red drop on it—"

Sara Hunter had listened as in a trance of terror. She flung herself now on the floor and shrieked:

"No! No! No!"

"Hear me!" said Beryl, making a little pause. "You fled with that money and your mistress' jewels—her rings, watch, bracelets, pins, necklace, and other things, and you have them *here*. I have seen them; they are between the ticks on your bed."

"They are not!" screamed Sara, leaping up, rushing to the carelessly made bed, and tearing off the covers and the feather tick.

Then, convicted of her crime, she stood, her arms flung above her head, her cry of horror frozen on her blanched lips; for there lay all poor Celia Sothron's pretty ornaments confronting her murderer.

Sara turned her dry, burning eyes on Beryl. Fanny, clinging behind her lady's chair, white and trembling, gasped:

"Oh, you wicked, wicked wretch!"

"Hush, Fanny!" said Beryl, gently; "her own heart, her own remorse condemn her enough."

At this voice of mercy Sara fell on her knees.

"Oh, my lady, it is true; my agony is greater than I can bear!"

It was the echo of Cain's cry pursuing Cain's sin.

"Sara," said Beryl, "after that dreadful act you yourself accused Sir Jerome Sothron as the murderer! You bore false witness against him! You, the guilty, laid the crime on the innocent! You murdered his reputation, as you murdered his wife! You are guilty of his death, for that accusation drove him to his death! And now his honest name is loaded with that crime, and his family are ashamed to bring his body home for burial!"

Sara groveling on her knees, was wringing her hands and crying miserably.

"Sara, there is but one thing left for you to do. You must confess your sin, you must clear Sir Jerome's name. You must take the blame yourself."

But at these words Sara became a changed woman. That terror, the gallows, from which she had been flying, stood and confronted her, and despair gave her a ferocious strength. If Beryl had gone there alone, no doubt her life would have paid the penalty of rashness; but Fanny was there, and Sara was still feeble. She vented her fury in words:

"Confess! confess! Confess what? I never did it! All I said raving was dreams, only dreams. Sir Jerome did it, and gave me the jewelry to go away. There was no thousand pounds—"

"Sara, you told me, in the wood, that you had a thousand pounds, got at a great cost, and some man robbed you of the money," said Lady Beryl.

"Lies! lies!—all lies! I never said the word. You, my lady, are an aristocrat, and you are fighting for your class, to get the stain off the man who is rich, and put it on a poor woman like me. What! ask me to confess, and hang? I never did it! It is not true!"

"Sara, it is true. We are both witnesses here, how your own mouth condemns you."

"If it was true, I would not give my life for his reputation—not I! And even if he did not do it, he hated her, I know, and often wished her dead."

"He never did; and if you will not confess," cried Beryl, "I will myself denounce you to justice."

"It is all your plot, lady—fine lady as you are!—to

save an aristocrat's name, and put the blame on me. I heard always that Sir Jerome loved a titled lady, not his wife—yes, ANOTHER MAN'S WIFE! *Are you she?* Fine example both of you set us poor folks! And to clear your lover, you come and plot against a poor woman!"

"Sara hush this raving! Once the law is set on your track, you will be convicted."

"Then I'll die by the law, and not give myself away. And who will have hunted me, a poor helpless woman, down, and given me to death, but you, another woman, if you *are* all dressed in silk, sitting there like a queen; and I am a poor, wretched soul, here at your feet, sick, in rags, and half mad."

"Sara, if you repent and confess your sin, this load of misery will be gone. God forgives the guilty."

"Yes, but man does not," said Sara, quickly.

Then changing her mind, she crept to Beryl's feet, clung to her dress, and prayed her for mercy.

"I am sick, and poor, and helpless. I do not know rightly what I say. Give me a little time. You may bring me to your mind, to end all this, and do as you say. Let me think; leave me to look at it all. Give me two or three days to grow stronger. Leave me; you are right, and I am wrong. I cannot talk, but I can write it all out, in a quiet time. And you will come to me again, my lady; you will come and teach me to do right. Leave me now for a little while; I have borne all I can."

"Poor soul! poor soul!" said Beryl, as she took up the gay silken reins and turned her white ponies toward home. "How terrible it has been! I shake like an aspen leaf. But I knew I should bring her to confess."

Fanny said nothing. She had not this great care for Sir Jerome's good name. She had a nearer feeling for this woman, whose class was more like her own. Fanny reasoned that no sentence of law could chastise this sinner beyond what her own remorse was doing. And, she argued, Sir Jerome was dead; what was a dead man's reputation beside a living woman's neck? She let her little mistress believe as she would, and kept her own expectations to herself.

And it was Fanny's expectations that were justified.

Three days later, Beryl drove back to the cottage. It was cold and empty. Sara Hunter was gone. She had

mysteriously fled the very night that Beryl had seen her. Gone, and left absolutely no trace.

"She must be found!" cried Beryl, wildly.

"My lady," asked Fanny; "can you search for her without injuring the marquis?"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"LORD RAVLIN, MAY I CONFIDE IN YOU?"

ALL the fair fabric of Beryl's hope of clearing from foul blot the beloved memory of Jerome crumbled into ashes. She, in her eagerness and inexperience, had not considered how unlucky it was that Sara Hunter should be brought to criminate herself, when her crime was so flagrant that execution would be the inevitable result. She knew so little of practical life, that it had seemed to her that Sara had only to confess, and say she was penitent, and in some way go free, self-banished from the land of her crime.

She did not remember that Sara had outraged the laws of the land, and that there is no welcome or safe shelter for the known murderer's head. Not daring to appeal to her husband, she found in Sara's flight an insuperable barrier to the vindication of Jerome.

She felt as if she could not return at once to the castle. It was filled with a gay crowd, intent on pleasure. Her room was sure to be invaded by some laughing Comus-crew, with Lady Maria Ravlin at their head, full of some new project, in which she must sympathize, and for which be full of suggestions. Or, worse still, she must meet the keen, quick gaze of Laura Ranleigh, swift to discover any change, to trace its cause, and make hostile use of it.

The day was one of the most glorious of Indian summer, the air was full of the fragrance of the ripe fruit lingering against the sunny wall, and the rich scent of the autumnal flowers, the castle gardener's pride.

"Fanny," said Beryl, "I cannot go in just now; I will walk for a little in the wood."

She gave Fanny the reins, and turned slowly down a beech-shaded walk known as "The Lover's Retreat."

Bright asters and hawks-weed starred the short soft grass along the path; the fallen beech leaves lay brown and crisp upon the way, and her silken skirts trailed over them with a soft shirring sound; her broad hat-brim, lined with deep purple velvet and turned up at one side with a buckle of brilliants, set in clear relief her beautiful face, until it looked like some exquisite, faintly pink cameo, carved with choicest skill; the long plume curling about the hat came down against the bright gold of her hair. She was a creature all grace, all beauty, richly set, and yet all sorrow and profound and hopeless grieving.

As she moved along, she saw before her on the path a dead robin, with open beak and wide-spread wings. She took it up and smoothed tenderly the crimson breast and brown back, and looked at the round, gold-rimmed eyes, still bright and clear, and somehow this dead, innocent thing opened the bitter fountain of her tears. She thought of Jerome dead, dishonored, of his helpless young wife; and, free there to weep in the silence of the woodlands, she leaned against a sheltering beech and burst into low sobs.

But Beryl was not, as she believed, alone. Lord Ravlin had been challenged to invent some new entertainment for the evening, and had retired to the beech wood to give his mind to profound meditation on so difficult a theme. But once out there, lying on his back on the dead leaves, he had forgotten his subject, and discussed another which had engrossed him since Halloween. That subject he introduced to himself with a capitalized WHY? As he thought of this, he heard a sob, and lifting himself on his elbow, saw the Countess of Medford, weeping hopelessly, with the dead bird in her hand.

Lord Ravlin was a lively trifler, merely because no great duties of life had thus far come on him. The youngest of a long list of sons, not fortunate enough to have been returned to Parliament and engrossed with political themes, rich enough, through his godfather, for an easy and luxurious life, idly looking for a wife to suit his captious taste, he was the merry monarch of a young, harmless, idle set. But at heart Lord Ravlin was chivalrous, upright, generous, trusty. He came forward promptly.

"Lady Beryl, all that sorrow cannot be for a bird."

Beryl started, and dropped the bird.

Lord Ravlin, with a kindly grace, picked the little body up, and laid it snugly on a limb of the tree.

"Mother Nature will care for her own," he said. "But, Lady Beryl, I have the deepest anxiety to know the cause of these tears." He took her hand. "Are they connected with—Halloween night? I beg of you to confide in me. I am in a conflict as to my duty."

Something in his frank, earnest gaze, the clear eyes, now black, now blue, now gray, in changeful emotions, the warm, brotherly clasp of her hand, the look of manly spirit and bold earnestness in the young nobleman, suggested to Beryl that here was the help she needed.

She clasped his hand with both hers.

"Lord Ravlin, *may* I confide in you?"

"Indeed, Lady Beryl, you do me infinite honor."

"But I must put before you a great and terrible question. These are no idle tears."

"Trust me with anything. I am all at your service."

"You knew Jerome Sothron?" said Beryl, earnestly.

Lord Ravlin started violently.

"Yes; I loved him."

"Oh, thank you for the word. Then you never believed those dreadful stories about him, that he had—had—killed his wife?"

"Certainly not. The more I looked at it, the more I thought it impossible. I knew it impossible."

"Lord Ravlin," said Beryl, looking at him with lovely frankness, "there was a time when Jerome Sothron and I were very dear to each other. He was poor, and I was poor; my family came between us; our dream ended, and I trust I am to Lord Medford a faithful wife. But such remembrances cannot perish out of the heart, and one cannot endure that black calumny should fasten on the memory of one once so dear. It is Lord Medford's misfortune that my feeling for Sir Jerome has been misrepresented to him so much that, fearing for his health, even his life—for you may have heard how dangerous excitement is to him—I cannot ask him to vindicate Jerome's honor. And yet, I not only know him innocent, but the very name of Mrs. Sothron's murderer is in my possession."

"Lady Beryl Medford!"

"Sara Hunter, her maid——"

"I suspected it from the first!"

Beryl, in earnest, graphic words, told the history of her acquaintance with Sara, her delirious confession, the display of the jewels, her visit, and Sara's flight.

"Lady Medford, is it possible that, while all of us have been idling, playing, time-killing, you have been going through these experiences? And what a shameful thing it was——" He stopped, then said: "Tell me—you were very much startled Halloween—does that rankle on your mind still?"

"No," said Beryl; "these terrible facts have banished what must have been fancies. Now, my concern is to have this woman found, and made to bear the burden of her crime, and, for Lord Medford's sake, *I* can do nothing."

"I will find her!" cried Lord Ravlin. "Trust it to me. It is a man's work. I have leisure; I have money. I can pursue the matter as Sir Jerome's friend, and your name need be never mentioned. Trust me to do the work, and keep you informed."

"I do not want all that trouble about Sir Jerome and his poor wife reopened. If the woman can be found and forced to confess—found quickly, by private search—and then not suffered to escape as now——"

"It can be done—it shall be done!"

"You give me hope and life," said Beryl.

"May I hint we had better return to the house? It is quite, or past, lunch-time," said Ravlin, recollecting himself.

They returned rather quickly. Rapid walking brought a flush to Beryl's usually pale face, and Lord Ravlin, roused from his trifling idleness, given a confidence and an object, had a look of pride, of strength, of new resolve on his handsome face.

The party at the castle were gathered on the lawn.

"You are late!" they cried. "We have waited for you."

"You look as if prepared to give us grand surprises. Lord Ravlin, it was not fair to take a partner," said Mrs. Ranleigh. "Still, we benefit by it. What is it?"

"What is what?" demanded Ravlin. He had forgotten his errand to the wood.

"Why, what is our grand entertainment this evening?"

said Lady Maria. "That is what you went to think out."

"Oh," said Ravlin, driven to desperation, "we are to have a—a soap bubble party."

"Soap bubbles!" cried Sir Eustace Friar. "What a rustic entertainment! Did you devise it, Lady Medford?"

"I never heard of it till this minute," said Beryl.

"Well! What *have* you been discussing, then?" cried Mrs. Ranleigh, who stood by the marquis.

Beryl and Lord Ravlin flushed crimson.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"THE FAIREST OF THE FAIR."

The promise of Lord Ravlin that he would interest himself in clearing the memory of Sir Jerome from dishonor, and the new, strange feeling that she had a friend, confidant, and adviser stronger, and wiser, and keener in sympathy than Fanny, filled Beryl with a sense of relief that was almost joy; and as the merry party surrounded the lunch-table, the face of the fair hostess was smiling and serene, and as she had rolled the burden of her care on stronger shoulders, she gave herself to the discussion of her guests' entertainment.

"So you have been too much occupied, or too well entertained, this morning, Lord Ravlin," said Mrs. Ranleigh, "to arrange for our amusement this evening?"

"Not at all," said Ravlin, with a quick look, that had something of anger in it. "I told you a soap-bubble party was my invention. We shall blow our bubbles in the conservatory, out of deference to Lady Medford's oriental carpets, and rugs, and upholstery. There shall be two judges, the marquis being one, and they shall award prizes for the bubbles in order of size. We must send a groom to Winderton village for unlimited clay pipes, and all you ladies must wear cotton gowns."

"Cotton gowns!" shrieked Lady Maria. "Why, we shall be hideous!"

"No, you will shine in your true beauty. Usually, we cannot tell whether we are admiring yourselves, or the rich raiment of Worth; to-night, beauty unadorned will beam upon us."

"I suggest that we have a prize for the most beautiful. The lady who can best carry off the simplicity of a cotton gown shall have a golden apple, and Ravlin shall be the Paris to award it," cried Sir Eustace.

"I know who will get it," said Lady Maria to Mrs. Ranleigh, aside.

All she meant was, that one among them would be incontestably the most beautiful. But Mrs. Ranleigh, knowing that the marquis could not avoid hearing them, replied, with intention:

"Yes, his admiration is quite evident."

Lady Maria opened widely her innocent eyes, not knowing how much this remark covered, and Mrs. Ranleigh said across the table, to Lord Ravlin:

"If I were you, I would reject the *rôle* of Paris. He has a very disreputable name. Did he not run off with *another man's wife?*"

"Her beauty pleaded his excuse," said Ravlin, lightly.

"Nothing pleads an excuse for crime," said the marquis, with such sharpness that it checked the mirth of the company, until Sir Eustace Friar cried out:

"Send that groom for his pipes quickly, and I will paint every one's pipe with an emblem, as a memento of the evening."

Evening came. In the beautifully lighted conservatory on a dozen pedestals under the palms and vines, porcelain basins of water artfully mingled to make good bubbles, and sprinkled with perfumes, were standing. The lights were in softly tinted globes, hanging as in chains among the greenery.

The ladies trooped into the drawing-room, a fair, smiling bevy, in "cotton gowns" coquettishly arranged, all but Beryl's, which was simplicity itself— a blue muslin, with yoke and sash.

Sir Eustace handed Lord Ravlin a great gilt apple.

"I feel," he said, "that I should have an apple fo every lady, all are so beautiful. It is hard to choose fairest among fairest. Lady Medford, as queen rose among the rose, will you accept the apple from the garden of the gods?"

Beryl smilingly took the gilded apple, saying:

"I think I got it, rather as the hostess, than as the fairest. Will you keep the prize for me. Percy?"

Then she went among her guests with the basket of painted pipes, and each taking one, great was the amusement at the emblems.

"Mrs. Ranleigh has *a hand holding a mask!*" cried Lord Ravlin.

"I did not need any. I am on the awarding committee with the marquis," said Laura.

"Oh, you must blow bubbles;" cried Sir Eustace.

"No. I am like Minerva, who threw her flute away because blowing it made her look grotesque."

She wheeled to the conservatory door a table covered with the prizes, little elegant trinkets hastily gathered, and seated herself beside it, with the marquis.

Soon the conservatory was a beautiful scene—the lovely, dainty forms, the smiling face, the warm, fragrant air filled with large, floating, rainbow-colored, all-reflecting balls, that rose, and drifted, and disappeared.

Lord Ravlin and Beryl stood on opposite sides of the same basin, in the center of the conservatory.

"Now watch for the great trial of skill for the first prize!" cried Ravlin; and presently all eyes were fixed on the pair, as, leaning lightly forward, each with eyes intent on the other's bubbe, with infinite care they inflated two brilliant balls, and at the same minute set them free, amid a low round of applause.

"Lady Beryl's was the larger," said Mrs. Ranleigh.

"Do you feel *very* badly at being beaten?" asked Berel, bending with a delicious smile to her antagonist.

"Not when you are victor," said Ravlin, fervently.

Laura gave a deep sigh, and looked intensely sad.

After a little, a cry rose:

"Look! Look!"

The contest had ended, but Ravlin was blowing an enormous bubble.

"A prize, a prize!" cried Harley Medford, as it sailed away.

"There is not a prize left," said Mrs Ranleigh.

"Such a *chef d'œuvre* shall not go unrewarded," said Beryl, merrily, and taking a knot of blue ribbon from her sleeve, held it out, saying, "I can spare this as an award of genius."

"Nothing could please me better," said the lively young lord, taking it with a profound bow.

"So," said Mrs. Ranleigh, later in the evening, to Mrs. Harley Medford, and seeming not to know that the marquis was on the other side of a screen near them, "the invulnerable Ravlin is captured at last. It is a pity it is not by some of our fair young maidens, that Ravlin Abbey might have a lady."

"What do you mean?" said Mrs. Medford. "Do you mean Beryl? I don't know as I like such hints about married women."

"One forgets Beryl *is* married." said Laura. "Her chains hold her so lightly, she seems to forget it herself,,

It was very natural that having such a common object and interest as they did, one that could not be spoken of at all before others, Beryl and Lord Ravlin should have little asides. He was eager to tell what he was doing in his first serious undertaking; she was eager to hear. So, sometimes, as she sat embroidering, a little apart from the rest, he came and, leaning his tall, graceful figure against the window frame behind her, talked in a low voice; or they played chess together at a little table in a corner after dinner, and evidently were interested in something besides the game. Nothing but the harpy of envy would have seen a thing to criticise; but Mrs. Ranleigh envied Beryl and feared Lord Ravlin, and wished him away from Winderton Castle. Meaning looks and shrugs, anxious watchings of "dear, innocent Beryl," a hundred little artful nothings, all directed toward the marquis and intended to rouse his unfortunate disposition to jealousy, these were Mrs. Ranleigh's ways to her end, to get up some coolness between the marquis and his guest, so that Lord Ravlin would leave the castle.

One evening, just before dinner, Beryl was leaning back in a great yellow silk fauteuil, her clustered rings of golden hair gleaming in the light of the chandelier, the firelight from the hearth flashing over her dress of pale-blue silk with a bodice of silver net; her eyes were shining, and her musical laughter rippled from her lips; for Lord Ravlin, seated on an ottoman near her, was exhibiting various little feats of necromancy, learned from his Coptic guide in travels through Egypt.

Suddenly looking up, Beryl saw in the great square glass over the chimney the reflection of her husband, standing with folded arms, sternly and sadly regarding them.

"Lord Ravlin," she said, softly and impulsively, "my husband is very sensitive about the difference in his and my ages and characteristics; he is the best man in the world, and has the strongest self-depreciation. I think it makes him unhappy—if I say very much to any one particular person. I think you and I will only talk when there are third parties with us. Our interest in one theme has, perhaps, made us seem more acquainted or confidential than we are."

"Tell me one thing only," said Ravlin, suddenly. "You said the marquis felt pained in regard to you and Jerome. Was it Mrs. Ranleigh stirred him up?"

"Yes! It was."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"IN TRANCE OF HORROR!"

LORD RAVLIN was walking in the garden. A few snowflakes were flying in the air, for it was nearly Christmas. The guests who were invited for the great holiday festivities planned by the marquis, were arriving; the castle was full of mirth and stir, and Ravlin had come out to muse a little over his non-success in finding the mysteriously disappeared Sara Hunter.

As he walked, the wind whirled, fluttering through the air a fragment of note paper, torn, as if one had stripped up a rejected written page. It drifted into Ravlin's face, and lodged on his coat lapel. He took it between his fingers to throw it off, when he saw his own name in clear script. The fragment had neither address nor signature; it was a torn sentence; but a single glance showed these words:

"Forgive me; but if you value your peace and *hers*, send Lord Ravlin away."

The face of the young man broke into a flame of honest rage and indignation. This was Mrs. Ranleigh's hand, and the reason the paper had been discarded was evident; a blot had fallen on the page.

"This is her method!" he cried, angrily, and turned at once to seek Lord Medford.

As he entered from the garden the glass corridor, now furnished with an inside door of green baize, Beryl entered from the other terrace, and Lord Medford, who had seen her pass his library window, stepped into the corridor from the great hall to meet her.

Beryl had been out to see some of her poor people. She had in her hand her little basket, and wore a simple gray flannel gown, and gray flannel cloak, and had pulled the cloak-hood over her head, to shield her neck from the flying snow.

Lord Medford was angry. He had, within an hour, heard from Mrs. Ranleigh's lips the story of Beryl's work among the sick and poor during the fever. Mrs. Ranleigh had collected the information through her maid, and did not detail it to the marquis. She seemed to suppose he knew it, or, absorbed in the paper he was reading, did not heed it.

Mrs. Ranleigh told the history to Lady Maria and Mrs. Marion Medford. She seemed lost in admiration of "dear Beryl's sweet charity, and alarmed at the terrible risk she had run of taking the fever, and giving it to all in the castle. Beryl was such an angel, she had no notion how improper it was to go alone to those terrible cottages! So childish, and like herself, to go off without consulting any one, the little love! It was all her humility not wanting her good deeds known."

Lady Maria said she thought "it would have been better to take an elderly servant."

Mrs. Medford thought no doubt "the account was exaggerated. Beryl, perhaps, had gone once, with a maid."

Lord Medford heard, and determined to rebuke his wife. Retiring to his library, he found Mrs. Ranleigh's note, and, all indignant at that craftily worded document, he looked up, and saw Beryl, flushed from snowy air, tripping in from a cottage visitation. Angrier than his wont, he stepped into the corridor, and confronted his wife, while Lord Ravlin, behind the baize door, was shaking the snow from his whiskers.

"Where have you been, Beryl!" demanded Lord Medford.

"Just to one of the cottages, Percy, to take some fruit to a poor girl, ill of consumption."

"Such a day as this it would be sensible to send a servant on your errands, Lady Medford. I do not approve of this running about to cottages. Who knows what danger you may be in! Could you not take a maid, or a groom? You seem to have so little idea of the proprieties of your position. I have just heard of your recklessness during the fever. You must be mad! And why do you wear that abominable gray gown? It looks as if you belonged to some guild. People will suppose you are doing a penance. That extreme is as bad as coquettishness. I beg you will go dress yourself properly, before our guests see you. It is time I took you back to London society."

This conjugal outburst, utterly unprecedented from the courteous, stern marquis, and only explained by his craftily roused excitement, fell like a storm on the head of poor Beryl. She grew pale, then crimson; her bosom heaved, and tears rushed to her eyes. Not daring to trust herself to speak, she ran past her lord and upstairs.

Meanwhile Lord Ravlin stood confounded, not wishing to appear before the pair, who evidently believed themselves alone in the corridor. The marquis strode back to his library, and Ravlin promptly followed him.

The marquis was already repentant of his severity.

"My lord," said Ravlin, with dignity, "this scrap of paper blew just now in my face. May I ask if you received a note bearing a similar line?"

"I did," said the marquis, stiffly.

"From Mrs. Ranleigh?"

Lord Medford bowed.

"It is a poor return for the silence which she besought me, even with tears, to observe concerning a very cruel and wicked act. I did not promise silence. I have merely waited to be guided by events. She fears I will speak, and contrives this vile charge to make a coldness or quarrel between you and myself which will cause my departure. Do you remember Halloween?"

"Yes."

"And the Yellow Mask that leaned on the mantel, silent, all the while the door was locked?"

"Mrs. Ranleigh? Yes."

"Not Mrs. Ranleigh—her maid! She had two dominoes and masks alike. Her maid, dressed in one, slipped into

the room and took her place when Mrs. Ranleigh ran to the head of the staircase. Mrs. Ranleigh, hastily dressing herself to represent Sir Jerome Sothron acting Sir Tristram, appeared to your wife, with the purpose of so alarming her that you would inquire into the cause of her terror. She tried then, as at other times, to give you a false idea of the countess' friendship for my friend Sothron. When Lady Beryl was carried from Sir Hillard's Room, I suspected some trick, and opening the panel closet, there found Mrs. Ranleigh in the Sir Tristram dress.

"She implored me frantically to keep her confidence, lest she incur your anger. I reserved my decision, waiting to see if Lady Beryl received any permanent ill impression from the cruelly contrived vision. I concluded she did not; and I should have kept silence, had not this bit of paper taught me that Lady Beryl has a relentless enemy in Mrs. Ranleigh, who is intent on destroying your married peace. It seems to me almost to insult such heavenly simplicity and purity as your wife's when I say that my acquaintance with her has always been of such reserve that it cannot even be called a close friendship. Though I admire her as a model of womanly sweetness and goodness."

Lord Medford grasped Ravlin's hand.

"My young friend, you are a physician who has brought salutary medicine to a heart poisoned by idle, weak suspicions. I see where I have been made an artful woman's tool. Hereafter this shall be my lesson."

With a hearty hand-shake Ravlin withdrew, and a few minutes after Lord Medford sent a page up with a note to his wife's room.

Beryl, standing before her glass, being dressed by Fanny, hastily ran her eyes over the words:

"My Sweet Wife:—I am and have been cruelly wrong. Forgive me! From this hour I pledge you better things, and all confidence and tenderness.

M."

"Oh, Fanny!" said Beryl, "hurry and make me just as beautiful as you can—just as Lord Medford likes to see me—so I can go down to him."

Her first impulse was to fling on a dressing robe and hasten to him, but she restrained herself, knowing his stately insistence on etiquette and dignity.

Escaped at last from Fanny's hands, a bewildering vision of rose-colored silk and cloudy white tulle, fair as a peri, her dainty garments breathing fragrance, and all perfection from the topmost curl of her golden head to the tip of her buckled pink satin slippers—her soft, dimpled snowy neck and arms rivaling the pearls that clasped them —Lady Beryl ran down to the library and knocked at the door.

No answer. Oh, he was not there! She knocked again. No doubt he had said "Come in." She opened the door. He sat at the writing-table, a pen in his hand, a parchment with a great seal, before him.

"Do I please you, now, Percy?" cried Beryl. "Look at me!"

He did not turn, and running to him, she laid her hand on his shoulder, and bent to put her pretty face near his.

Then she gave a wild, shuddering cry, and Harley Medford and Lord Ravlin rushed in, to find her in a trance of horror; her hand on the shoulder of a corpse.

The ink of his signature was hardly dry.

CHAPTER XL.

REVOKED.

ALL was horror and dismay in Winderton Castle. The guests, in pale or tearful groups, whispered here and there, dominated by that awful and unbidden Guest who had come to the castle with the falling of the night, and gone forth, leading away its lord.

In the great dining-hall the table, with its festive array, its flowers, its plate, its crystal, its fruit, flooded with light from the chandeliers, stood forgotten.

Lying on a sofa in the great drawing-room, her friends weeping about her, was that fair young widow, so strangely arrayed in splendors of rose and pearls, in her cold, quivering fingers clutching that little note which she had welcomed as the harbinger of better things, and which had proved instead his eternal farewell.

Friends and grooms carried the stately, rigid figure of

the dead man up the great oak staircase, and before they reached the top some one had addressed the Honorable Harley as "Lord Medford."

Grooms scurried here and there for doctors and to send off telegrams; the weeping of the old servants for a master just and liberal, if stern, echoed along the halls, and lights moved from room to room, as guests invited for the Christmas festivities, and feeling themselves ill-placed in the house of mourning, ordered the packing of lately unpacked boxes, to leave with the returning day.

Mrs. Ranleigh, flung on a divan in the drawing-room, wept passionately, wrung her hands, and sobbed her protests against fate.

"It is the most terrible loss I ever experienced—my friend, my benefactor, my guide! No one can tell what dear Lord Medford was to me. He advised me in all my affairs. Oh, I cannot express how precious his life was to me."

"Your conduct has been strange," said Lord Ravlin, unable to restrain himself. "As you were aware of his predisposition to heart attacks, why did you risk exciting what might have been the cause of his death? Why did you send him such a note as you did to-day?"

"You knew it!" she cried, raising herself and pushing the heavy waves of black hair from her damp brow. "You quarreled with him!"

"No. Men do not quarrel on such small occasions, madam. A copy of part of your note blew from your window into my face. I went to Medford, quietly telling him I was the victim of slander. We said a few quiet words and shook hands. The mischief was done, not in our words, but in his realization of the course you had taken toward him."

Mrs. Ranleigh re-buried her face in the cushions. She had desired to gratify spite against Beryl, and to bind Lord Medford to herself. She had debts; she was in difficulties; she looked to this intimacy to free her from her entanglements, when, as she soon intended to have done, she should allow the marquis to draw from her the cause of some evident distress.

She had perhaps herself given him the fatal blow! Her liberal friend, whose house, whose friendship, whose countenance were so useful to her, was gone. She had no

hope of ingratiating herself with the new marquis and his wife. They were fond of Beryl, and had never seemed drawn to Mrs. Ranleigh.

Ravlin himself, who was about her own age, had been on her private list of possible matches. She had done her best to please him, and that unfortunate discovery on Halloween night had ruined her cause with him. Cruel tricks, and such partnership in treacherous schemes with waiting-maids, did not suit the high-bred notions of Lord Ravlin.

The castle fell into a solemn silence. The lights were vailed, flowers were banished, except as in cross and pillow they garnished the state bed whereon the dead marquis lay. The walls were hung with black; the little Percy Medford, lately promoted to short clothes, clutched at his black sash and shoulder-knots, and remonstrated at the paraphernalia of death.

On Christmas Day, for which splendid preparations of festivity had been made, the marquis was carried in gloomy pomp to the burial vaults of the Medfords in the parish church. The gentry who had been invited to come that evening for a great ball, came instead to grace the funeral. The high feast which had been ordered for keeping Yule-tide, where wit and women were to shine, became a sad, silent dinner of men, who said low words to each other about "poor Medford."

In the evening the family and friends came together to hear the reading of the will; and Beryl, leaning on the arm of the new marquis, wore her widow's weeds for the first time.

The will left bequests to old servants and to a few charities; to Beryl, only and solely, the dower house and jointure agreed on at her marriage. All else was devised and bequeathed to Harley Medford and his heirs forever. A codicil gave fifteen thousand pounds of personal property to the marquis' friend, Laura Ranleigh. A second codicil revoked this bequest, and was signed by Percy, Marquis of Medford, at the hour of his death.

Laura Ranleigh heard all with an immovable face. When the ceremony of reading was ended, she went up to Beryl, who sat by the new countess.

"Allow me to bid you both good-by and withdraw," she said. "I shall set out for San Remo to-morrow. I

feel myself terribly shaken by the loss of my honored friend. I shall start before the usual breakfast hour. Good-by."

"She bears her disappointment well, and I think it has been a real disappointment," said Lady Marion Medford.

Lord Alfred Heath had been summoned, and had heard with anger the reading of the will.

"I cannot conceive," he said, taking his daughter aside, "why Medford did not make you a bequest of fifty thousand pounds."

"I have quite enough," said Beryl.

"Enough!" said her parent, scornfully. "One never has 'enough!' If you had found it too much you might have shared with me. I can tell you your new stepmother keeps a deucedly tight grip on the purse-strings. I tell you, Beryl, you have managed your affairs very badly. A handsome young wife like you ought to be able to do anything with her husband. You should have had a rousing legacy."

"Don't papa. I have plenty—my liberal jointure."

"And you may thank me for that, and for the dower house. What I did for you was well done. I struck while the iron was hot, and I got you good marriage settlements. If I had not looked out for you better than you do for yourself, you'd have been cut off with a shilling!"

"Percy would never have been illiberal or unjust; he was a good man," said Beryl.

Harley Medford came up to them.

"My dear cousin, I consider you my especial care. My cousin, the marquis, one day spoke to me of the event of his death, and asked me to be your steadfast friend and brother. He desired my warmest friendship for you. You had it in your own right, and doubly for his sake. I beg you rest on me in all things, confide to me your cares, make my house your chief home. Marion and I both love you warmly."

"For a little time, until I accustom myself to this new state, and have received your counsel for all my plans, I shall be glad to stay with you and Marion," said Beryl. "Then I will go to Windmere Lodge, my dower house."

"For my part," said Lord Alfred Heath, "I do not understand the will. I should have thought even moderate affection would have impelled Medford to leave his

wife something beyond what the law forced from him."

"He may have thought that a great amount of wealth would have increased Lady Medford's cares and perils," said the marquis, coldly.

"Most people are willing to take the risks of any amount of money," retorted Heath.

"Do not speak so," said Beryl, tearfully; "I am satisfied with all Lord Medford's arrangements."

"Do not stay here too long, Beryl," said Lord Alfred, as he gave her his arm to escort her up to her room. "I shall be glad to leave you in your dower house, so I can make it my headquarters, now and then, when I am sick to death of my German lady."

"Please do not speak so of her," said Beryl, with a shudder at the thought of being remitted to the protection and society of her father. "If I ask you, I ought to ask her."

"By Jove! you'll be sick of life if you do!" said Lord Alfred. "What plagues you women are! Laura Ranleigh is the only sensible one I ever met."

CHAPTER XLI.

"AND YOU ARE ONLY TWENTY-TWO."

SITTING alone in her weeds of widowhood, Beryl Medford realized how very desolate she was. Her nearest relative and protector was her selfish and reckless father; her closest friend, a handsome young nobleman who had been notably her admirer.

Doctor and Mrs. Marvel and Lelia came closely about her in this hour of trouble, and Beryl wished they were to live near her, but Windmere Lodge, which had been assigned her as her dower house, was thirty miles away.

"At least," said Mrs. Marvel, "I can give you back Lelia, and I shall visit you."

"Lelia came at once to remain with Beryl, before she changed her home.

"Who is that young woman always in your room, so I never can have any private talk with you?" said Lord Alfred one day, as he took Beryl to dinner.

"That is Lelia Burrows, my companion. If you wish to speak confidentially at any time, she can leave the room."

"I always wish to speak confidentially. As for a companion, you need some one lively to keep you *au courant* of the affairs of social life during your seclusion. Laura Ranleigh might do till the season opens. I'd like her at the dower house; she amuses me, and I shall be beastly lonesome there; but Mrs. Ranleigh must go to London when the season begins. She has her fortune to make."

"I do not like Laura, and Percy preferred Lelia for my companion," said Lelia.

The next morning Lord Alfred went to Beryl's boudoir.

"Don't go to laying out money on the dower house, Beryl. Your jointure belongs to you, out and out; but the dower house reverts to the estate when you marry, as of course you will."

"I shall not marry," said Beryl; "put that out of your calculations. As to the dower house, Harley has undertaken the arranging of it. He and Marion, and Lord Ravlin are going over there to-day, to stay for a week. I believe it is in very good order."

"Ravlin heired a big estate from his godfather, didn't he?"

"I believe he did."

"He seems to be uncommonly nice, and very friendly to you, I should say. *He* might be on your cards for a good match?"

"Father! I beseech you! My husband has not been dead three weeks," cried Beryl, in horror.

"Oh, yes; but our talk is strictly private. All widows say, during six months, that they will not re-marry. It is good form. But with you, Beryl, it is all nonsense. You are a stunning beauty, and only twenty-two or thereabouts. I remember you made no end of resistance to the idea of marrying Medford, so it is no use putting on the inconsolable. I've wished sometimes your grandmother had not hurried you so much, for Sothron and Ravlin both turned out precious good matches, within six months. But who ever thought in less than three years Medford would leave you a childless widow!"

"Father, you tear my heart. I cannot have you talk

so to me. Lord Medford was the best of men. His memory shall always be revered by me. But you know as well as I do that the one fervent love of my life was given to Jerome Sothron. You crossed that love, which would have made me a good and happy woman. It is of Jerome my heart is widowed, and as he is dead my love and my hand shall be given to no man. You cannot dominate me as you did when I was a weak, helpless girl, and you might as well cease planning matches for me."

Lord Alfred gave a long, low whistle, and, with his hands thrust in his pockets, promenaded up and down his daughter's sunny boudoir. Pictures glowed on the walls. Lelia had filled the vases with white flowers, and put a basin of amber glass, full of pansies, on the wide window seat near Beryl's chair. Beryl leaning back in the great chair, her round girlish form draped in heavy weeds, her golden curls covered with a white crape cap, the sunlight illuminating her exquisite Grange face. Her father stopped his pacing and contemplated her.

"Beryl, this is all utter folly! You are one of the women made to drive men mad! You are twice handsomer now than when you were the belle of your first season. An earl or a duke would be a match open to you, if there were such a one unmarried, when you come into society again. If I had had any idea of this happening as it has, I would not have married as I did. I should have married an English woman, capable of being your chaperon. Whom you will have now, goodness only knows."

"The time is too far off," said Beryl; "don't think of it."

"But I suppose even at the dower house, after a few months, we can invite some people, and then you should have a chaperon. Some one besides that pretty, simple little companion of yours, who embroiders poppies and reads Telemachus like a schoolgirl."

In utter weariness of spirit, Beryl said her head ached, and she must go out and walk. So she called Lelia; and the two, wrapped in fur coats, were soon pacing up and down, over the light snow covering the park, the wide, leafless branches above their heads gleaming and covered with soft rounded lines of snow. Lord Alfred watched

them from the boudoir window; already he was entirely occupied with his daughter as a marketable commodity. He saw Lord Ravlin and Lawrence meet the two slender, black-robed figures, and then they paced in pairs, Ravlin and Beryl a little in advance of Lawrence and Lelia.

Neither Beryl nor Lelia took the arm of her escort. Each moved a little apart, and on her guard; but Lawrence's whole air showed fervid devotion to the pensive, pretty creature at his side, and Lord Ravlin bent his head in earnest converse with Beryl, whose face was turned to his.

"And she says she'll never marry!" cried Lord Alfred, lifting his eyebrows and turning on his heel.

Lord Ravlin was saying:

"I think at last I have some trace of the woman Sara Hunter, or Kate Jay. Of course she has changed her name again; but she must live, and she will live on the sale of the trinkets, and I think we are on the track of those. You wish me to go on with the search, Lady Beryl?"

"Certainly," said Beryl. "Any hesitation I had before about bringing this woman to justice, and vindicating Sir Jerome Sothron's memory, arose from fear of displeasing or offending the marquis. Now that his peace can never be disturbed," concluded Beryl, as a tear rolled down her pale, delicate cheek, "I desire to carry this thing through to the end."

"And when I get any certain information for you—for as soon as Medford and I come back from Windmere I shall go to London—then?"

"Write me at Windmere. I go there next week."

"You will be very lonely there," said Ravlin, looking at her compassionately.

Beryl stopped, hesitated, pushed the wreaths of snow about with the toe of her little furred boot. They were beside some tall Norway pines, which shut them out from the world. Talk with her father had troubled the still depths of Beryl's consciousness. She had something to say—a confidence to give. True to her simple, sweet nature, she gave it ingenuously.

"Lord Ravlin, as you, happily, have never been very sad, you do not know the relief, the bitter luxury of indulging sorrow. I sorrow for Lord Medford. Every day I miss more his strong protection. I feel how desolate I

am in the world, and what a shelter to me his name and guardianship were. Believe me, I mourn, and shall mourn him much. But, buried deep in my heart, nameless as that desolate grave by the North Sea where Jerome Sothron lies, lies Jerome's memory. That is a loss I have never dared to weep, a sorrow that could never be indulged—which I was doomed to crush back, and smile and seem gay, and help others to be gay. When I was Lord Medford's wife, I could not tell you how dear Jerome had been to me—how cherished his memory. Now both are gone, and in thinking of one I do not wrong the other. Jerome Sothron was the one—the deep, wronged, hopeless love of my life. The one consolation that I can now find in this world will be in clearing his memory of a foul, undeserved stain."

"I thank you, Lady Beryl, for this confidence," said Lord Ravlin. "Believe me, I shall ever strive to deserve it."

Then they returned along the cedar walk to rejoin Lawrence and Lelia.

Beryl felt that she had set herself right with this one helpful friend. He, at least, would never misunderstand her.

Ten days later, Ravlin was in London, busy with his detectives, and Lady Beryl and Lelia had gone to Windmere Lodge, in the poor guardianship of Lord Alfred Heath.

CHAPTER XLII.

"THE WOMAN IS FOUND!"

DAY after day drifted by in the silence of the dower house. With books, and work, and kind deeds to the poor about them, Beryl and Lelia were not unhappy. Lord Alfred gave no hint of returning to his German wife, but now and again made excursions to London, and from one of these brought back to Beryl a debt of five hundred pounds—"a debt of honor."

Beryl gave him the required check, but said, firmly:

"I shall not pay another. My income will not stand such drains, and I will not get in debt."

"Tut! Mention to Harley Medford that the jointure is too small, and he would add a thousand to it—see if he would not."

"I will never do it?" cried Beryl. "Why do you not refer your debts to your wife?"

"She pay them!" cried Lord Alfred, and rolled his eyes.

Beryl began to meditate.

"Beryl," said her father, next morning, when the letters came in on a salver, "is not that Ravlin's crest I see on that letter?"

"Yes."

"And do you not get letters from him once a fortnight?"

"Yes."

"Well—it is the first of April—you have been a widow three months. Ravlin is not such a bad match."

"These are strictly business letters," said Beryl.

"Business! Then your lawyer, or I, your father, ought to attend to it."

Beryl handed him the letter.

He read it.

"This is Hebrew to me. What on earth does he mean? 'Trace of the woman'—'discovered the wretch.' Has any one been robbing you? 'The detective believes!' What does it all mean?"

Lelia had already left the table to feed the birds in cages in the little conservatory.

"Come to the library," said Beryl to her father.

"It means that Lord Ravlin is engaged for me in following up the real murderer of Jerome Sothron's wife—Sara Hunter, her maid. In bringing her to justice, Jerome's memory will be cleared."

"But what difference does that make? He is dead."

"It is justice, and it makes great difference to me. I loved him!" said Beryl, firmly.

"It is the maddest thing!" cried her father. "And you are willing to spend money and mix up your name in a lawsuit on such quixotism as that! You shall not do it! I forbid you!"

"You must remember, father, that I am not under

your control. A widow, twenty-two years old, with my own income, I am free to do this thing that I believe to be right. I only told you, that you might have no misconceptions about Lord Ravlin and myself."

"You are the most wrong-headed, perniciously obstinate, self-destroying girl I ever knew, and always were! I wonder how Medford put up with you! No wonder he left you no bequest!" cried Lord Alfred, in a frenzy. "You need a chaperon now more than you ever did in your life; and, by Jove! you shall have one. I shall bring a lady from London, and if you choose to make yourself conspicuous by turning her out of your house, and refusing proper protection, you can take the consequences."

In a very ill temper, Lord Alfred marched out to look after three or four dogs which he was keeping, under the care of the stable-boy.

Beryl, indignant and perplexed, did not know which way to turn. She judged from Lord Ravlin's letter that Sara Hunter would soon be found, and here was her father prepared to take almost any measures to hinder her carrying out her plans. Suppose she should wish to go and see Sara? Under whose guardianship could she do it? Her father was openly hostile. She had never hinted of this affair to either Lelia or Mrs. Marvel. It required too much opening up of histories, of which evidently they must know nothing, and could not understand without painful explanations. Still, no sight could have been more welcome to her that evening than the driving up of a carriage, from which looked forth the lovely, helpful face of Anna Marvel. She had not been in the house an hour before Beryl had told her of her trouble about her father's debts, his intention of bringing guests to the dower house, and, worst of all, his resolve to select for her a chaperon.

"Any woman he would select would drive me mad," said poor Beryl.

That day at dinner, and after dinner, Mrs. Marvel applied herself to the study of Lord Alfred Heath.

Weary of his isolation at Windmere, Lord Heath was ready to deliver himself up to any pretty woman who took the trouble to talk for an hour or two with him. Like most egotists, he talked of little but himself.

"My dear," said Mrs. Marvel, when she and Beryl were cozily seated by the fire in Beryl's room, for a good long talk before going to bed, "I have discovered a remedy for your troubles. Send for the present Lady Heath. Send for your step-mother."

"Do you mean it?" cried Beryl.

"Yes. I believe she is a sensible woman, and I am sure she keeps your father in order. She speaks English, and no one would think of suggesting any other chaperon for you while she is here. North, your husband's valet, your faithful *major domo*, knows the Continent as well as he does your house. Send him off early to-morrow to Vienna to bring the lady, and I will remain here and keep your father amused until she comes."

Beryl rang the bell.

"Fanny, send North to me."

Six days later Lord Alfred Heath lounged away from the lunch-table, and with a gloomy face looked out of the window upon the Lodge Terrace, where an April wealth of crocus, daffodil, and hyacinths led the armies of the spring.

"This is the stupidest hole, Beryl," he said. "I'd be glad of *anything* to stir me up. Here's a traveling carriage. By Jove, some one's coming! Who in the world has had compassion on us?"

Then he fell back from the window in deep dismay, as North, leaping down from the vehicle, opened the carriage door, and assisted out the velvet hat and cloak which voluminously enshrined Lady Heath.

"Beryl! In the name of goodness, here's your step-mother!"

Beryl, with the most radiant of smiles, ran to the hall just in time to be clasped to Lady Heath's ample bosom.

"My sweet child! My admirable Lady Beryl! I fly at your word to you. So sweet it is indeed for you to desire me. Let me look at you."

She put the girlish widow a little from her, and looked admiringly at the lovely face, the rebellious golden curls creeping from the crape cap, the softly rounded contour of the graceful Beryl.

"Ah, how lovely you are! I adore you from this minute! Where is my Alfred! Alfred, I prepare one beautiful surprise for you."

"WHY DID YOU RISK EXCITING WHAT MIGHT HAVE CAUSED HIS DEATH?"

Alfred Heath came forward and saluted his lady, He submitted to the inevitable. But when Lelia had said, "Your rooms are ready, Lady Heath, shall I take you to them?" Lord Alfred turned to his daughter:

"Did you send for her?"

"Yes."

"Why, in the name of all that is reasonable?"

"Because I preferred to choose my own chaperon."

"There was always something horridly sly about you, Beryl," said her honorable parent.

"She is a right good, kind, honest woman," whispered Anna Marvel to Beryl. "We have done well to send for her."

Beryl went up to see her stepmother.

"You sent for me, my little angel," said Lady Heath, as her maid arranged various diamond ornaments over a magnificent robe of deep-red velvet. "You could not manage my Alfred, no doubt? Leave him to me."

Night had not settled over Windmere Lodge before Beryl saw that her father might safely be left to his wife. Lord Alfred Heath—whom neither nurses, governesses, tutors, college dons, father, mother, or brother, had ever been able to control—was thoroughly well controlled by the second Lady Heath.

And Lady Heath ranged herself on the side of Beryl.

It was only a week later when Lord Ravlin dispatched these words:

"Sara Hunter is found; dying of consumption in Clapham! Do you wish to see her? I take no steps until I hear from you."

"I must go," cried Beryl.

"By no means," said Lord Alfred. "I will not hear of it. Let her die, and the affair die."

"But I *must* go," said Beryl, and explained the whole matter to her stepmother, as a judge."

"Why, surely she must go," said Lady Heath. "Her wish is right and just. I adore the simplicity of her soul, her candor, her faithfulness. My adored Alfred, how little this blessed girl is like you! I shall take her to London this day, if she chooses to go. Who shall find fault

with our daughter, Lord Heath, if her parents accompany her? It is quite evident that the memory of this poor young man must be made fair before the entire world."

CHAPTER XLIII.

"THE WOMAN IS DEAD!"

It was a warm late April day, and the windows and doors of the front room of a small house in the outskirts of Clapham were open that the balmy air, sweet with the breath of primroses and hawthorn, might come in. Here lay one who fought wearily for every breath as for untold treasure.

With gleaming eyes and hollow cheeks, where burned a red flame, Sara Hunter tossed on her death-bed.

A little group entered. Lord Ravlin, Lady Beryl, the doctor, and a notary.

"My lady, you have hunted me down at last," said Sara, with a voice full of bitterness.

"Sara, it is from no enmity to you. I do not hate you, poor creature, though your deed was dreadful. I only want you now, before you go out of the world, to repent, and undo what little you can of that great sin."

Beryl, in her deep mourning robes, her heavy black vail falling all about her dainty young face, bent over Sara Hunter.

"Poor creature, how much you must have suffered!" she cried, compassionately. "Your face shows it. You have had a hard life hiding and flying. Why did you go, Sara?"

"You asked over much of human nature to bid me put my head in a rope, to save a dead man's name," said Sara, grimly; "but I am going now, the law has naught to do with me, and I'd as lief speak. Is the lawyer there to take it down? Then write it plain. I killed Mrs. Jerome Sothron."

A little shudder ran through the group at the hard, unrelenting tone of these words.

"I did it for her money. The lady knows why I wanted it. There was one who said he'd marry me if I got that much. He robbed me, he deceived me, and here I leave him my curse!"

"Tell your story, woman," said the notary, briefly.

This fierce, bad nature had stilled the voice of sympathy.

"Sir Jerome had never lived with his wife, but he gave her income enough, and I was her maid. She had quite a box full of jewelry of different kinds. I fancied it was worth a good sum, but I've never been able to get much for it. She was very pretty, and men took a deal of notice of her living alone so, and it frightened her, for she was a good woman enough; very different from her sister. There was one man pursued her, so she could not stand it, and so she said she should send for Sir Jerome, and tell him he must take her out to Sothron Abbey to live, to keep her from being persecuted and getting talked about. And then Satan set me on, for I said, 'If he won't do that the way will be for you to get a thousand pound; that will keep you three years, and we can go to a little place I know of in France, and you can learn French, and music, and drawing, and get accomplished; for, after all is said, he must take you some time, you being his lawful wife, and he'll want an heir for the Abbey.' And I said, 'Just you write him the choice, and he will rather take you to the Abbey than to have you go off with the thousand pounds.'

"She was a foolish young thing, and believed all I said to her. But I say, solemn, here about to die, all my thought then was to start on a journey with her, and rob her of the money and the jewelry, and a trunk full of her things, for we were much the same size, and I planned to wear her things in America. I knew well he'd give her the money and let her go; for, however it was, Mrs. Sothron always acted her very worst, most foolish, and unlady-like, when her husband was around. I suppose she was born to bad luck, poor thing!

"Well, he came; and I, listening by the door, for I was in the chamber, soon found he laid it all to her 'loud manners' and 'common ways' that she attracted attentions; and he had brought the money. She cried and went on. Then, I solemnly swear, temptation first took

me to kill her. To keep it out of my head I ran out to do an errand, and staid some time. When I came back, the landlady said he hadn't gone yet; but I, looking from the bedchamber door, found he had. He must have been gone some fifteen minutes at least, for she had had time to change her dress, and put on one with blue flowers I hadn't seen on her for a good month. I noticed it some way, and ever since, day and night, waking or sleeping, sitting or walking, Mrs. Jerome Sothron has been beside me in that blue-flowered dress.

"I never stopped to think; it came on me all at once, like a hot blast burning up all my senses. That little dagger lay near my hand. I took it. She never heard nor stirred, standing there, with that big, clean note in her hand, and, just as you told me, my lady, as if you'd been there, I—I killed her. She fell without a cry.

"I hid the note and the jewels in a place under the closet floor, and then I gave the alarm. It was all laid on *him* from the first. But I did it; and I never made anything by it, but an awful life—and death."

Sara Hunter had spoken with many a lengthened pause. The day seemed to grow dark, and all the air poisoned, as she told the horrible tale. She flung up her crossed arms over her face, as if to shut out sight of humanity forever.

The notary dipped his pen in ink.

"Woman, you must sign this confession."

The doctor raised her up, and the trembling, bony hand scrawled the name, "SARA HUNTER."

Beryl went and stood outside the door. Before her seemed to stand a vision of Jerome's hastily, madly taken wife. Young, pretty, foolish, always showing her worst to the fastidious, unloving man to whom she should have showed the best. See seemed to see her, standing by the mantel, in the blue-flowered gown, holding the note in her hand, musing on her lonely state, her hopeless future! Oh, how wrong, how very wrong Jerome had been! From all the guilt of murder he might be freed, but from this wrong toward the simple young girl, who had been wife and no wife—never! never! And Beryl felt that she had driven him to this madness; she had brought down her fate on this unknown girl!

How wide are the harvests of evil!

She had dropped her vail about her, and stood in the sunshine waiting. Lord Ravlin came out from the room she had just left. His hat was crushed down over his face. He seemed much agitated.

"The woman is dead!" he said, hoarsely.

At that minute a basket phaeton came along the road, whirled by a pretty pair of ponies; a pavilion of scarlet and orange, fringed with gilt, flashed in the sun, while the white and blue harness, and the swiftly revolving red wheels made a gorgeous kaleidoscopic vision, in the tremulous light and misty warmth of April.

In the phaeton sat a brilliant lady, in a wide hat trimmed with corn-flowers and poppies; a dress of pongee silk, all puffs where it was not frills, and frills where it was not puffs; the hands cased in distracting little gauntlets handled well the blue silk reins. Beside the phaeton rode a large, florid, fast-looking man on a high-stepping roan.

"It is Laura!" cried Beryl, following with her dimmed eyes this glittering vision.

"Yes," said Lord Ravlin. "I suppose you have not heard the latest bit of news. Mrs. Ranleigh has been very brilliant this winter. Her toilets have been, they say, ravishing, but to the last excess in tightness and lack of neck and sleeves. She wore, the other night, a changeable satin trimmed with the eyes of peacocks' feathers, all about the shoulders, and about the pointed bodice and around the train. And old Lady Ranleigh had been persuaded to loan her the Ranleigh emeralds. She took all eyes, and is supposed to have made an important capture—Sir Francis Westholm Sothron, Sir Jerome's far-away cousin and heir. He is at the abbey. That gentleman on horseback is Sir Francis. They tell bad stories of him at home and abroad; but since he inherited he has settled down and ceased plunging, and shaken off his squad of low hangers-on. Mrs. Ranleigh, it seems, is likely to be lady of Sothron Abbey."

"I am sorry Sir Francis is such a man," said Beryl, "for I must see him."

"What have you planned to do now, Lady Beryl?"

"As Sir Francis is next of kin, I think he should be at once informed of this confession, and be the one to make it public. He should also at once set up for Jerome that memorial tablet that is wanting among the Sothron records

in the Abbey church. I had thought that I would go and see him about this. This notary who has taken the confession and Lady Heath could accompany me."

"Probably that would be a good way to do. I am sure Sir Francis would receive you with all kindness and courtesy; and it should be a great comfort to him to have such a blot removed from the name of his predecessor."

CHAPTER XLIV.

"IF HE LIVES, LET HIM APPEAR."

LORD ALFRED HEATH, with his wife and daughter and their three servants, had taken apartments at Clariges' Hotel for their short stay in London.

It was the day after Sara's confession, and Lord Alfred and his ladies were seated at the breakfast table. Lady Heath, with a gown of the stiffest watered purple silk, and a large lace collar, with her rubicund face and light, frizzed hair, made a glowing center of color for the whole apartment, in which Beryl was lost, as a shadow is absorbed in light.

"My adored Alfred," said Lady Heath. "I have an engagement for the morning with our daughter. I shall regret to leave you alone."

"It makes no difference," said the quenched Alfred, reviving to a little hope. "I'll drop in at the club."

"You will remember not to gamble any, my dear," said his lady, removing a German paper from close proximity to her short-sighted eyes.

Lord Alfred shrugged his shoulders.

"And you will remember, not to allow your cheerful disposition to lead you astray—to bets, for instance," added his domestic monarch, giving orders as to a small boy on a holiday.

"Can a man never amuse himself?" cried Lord Alfred.

"Not in such a way, my idol," said Lady Heath, serenely. "And you are to drink no brandy."

"I believe it is more tolerable back in Vienna!"

"So it is," returned his lady, heartily; "this England is

a villainous land. My lovely Beryl, if you take my advice, you will leave England and its sad memories, and travel upon the Continent."

"I do not know why I should not," said Beryl; "my work in England is done, and I have here many sad memories."

"To travel I abhor, being too stout," said Lady Heath;

"YOU WILL REMEMBER NOT TO ALLOW YOUR CHEERFUL DISPOSITION TO LEAD YOU ASTRAY."

"But I will take my little Alfred back to Vienna, and you shall visit us there."

The placidity with which Lady Heath disposed of Beryl's life-long tyrant caused her to break into a ripple of silvery laughter.

"Why you laugh I do not know," said her stepmother; "but I rejoice that you have not forgotten how."

Lord Alfred had gone to his club, when the carriage

was brought round, and Lady Heath, in all her splendors, and Beryl, in her weeds, were driven out to Sothron Abbey.

Beryl remembered how the last time she came along that road she had been riding at fierce speed, clinging close to the arm of Jerome Sothron. She remembered the terror, the agony of that hour, the bitterness which it had been to her noble husband, and how few more hours of life had followed it for Jerome, the eager, thoughtless, generous, loving, handsome Jerome!

They drove under the high-arched gate of the abbey. She had been here but once.

On this nobly shaded lawn she had stood with Jerome that fatal evening when night had fallen darkly about her life. There was now a festive look on this lawn. It was the first day of May. A tall May-pole, trimmed with garlands and ribbons, had been reared. A pavilion, in gayly striped canvas, a decorated band-stand, all told of some scene of mirth.

Sending in their cards, and requesting to see Sir Francis in private on business, he came out to meet them, in gala dress of blue broadcloth, with a white velvet waistcoat, and a rose in his button-hole. The same curled, florid, stout, bold man Beryl had seen riding by Mrs. Ranleigh's phaeton.

Beryl presented Lady Heath and the lawyer. This Sir Francis Westholm Sothron was not a man to whom she could lay bare any of her heart history. Here, no doubt, was a world-worn spirit with no place for sentiment—she would unfold the other side of the story.

"Last autumn, as I visited among the poor on my late husband's estates, I found a woman ill and raving with fever who confessed in her delirium that she had been Mrs. Jerome Sothron's maid, and she, and not your cousin, had murdered Mrs. Sothron."

"Then why, in the name of all that is reasonable, did he fly from investigation?" cried Sir Francis.

"I think that is not now in question. I confided the affair to Lord Ravlin, your cousin Jerome's friend. The woman made her escape before she fully recovered. Lord Ravlin pursued her traces, found her, and secured the signed confession, which we have brought you. The woman died yesterday."

Sir Francis read the paper with interest.

"I shall see to making this everywhere public through the press. You may fancy, Lady Heath, it is none too pleasant for a man to have a murder charge lying against his predecessor. This shall see light at once."

"And," said Beryl, softly, "you know that Sir Jerome's death has been ignored among the monuments of his house. You will see that his memorial stands with the rest."

Sir Francis looked curiously at her. He guessed a little of the story that might lie behind the sad, violet eyes and the widow's vail. She might be mourning two—not one.

"I will write about the tablet this very hour," he said.

"We leave all in your hands," said Beryl, rising.

He accompanied them into the hall, but their way was barred by a laughing, rainbow-robed bevy, headed by Laura Ranleigh, trooping in at the front entrance.

Laura Ranleigh stopped in amazement as she saw Beryl's black-robed figure moving beside Sir Francis. But it was never Laura's policy to quarrel, or even have a coolness, with any one. She argued that everybody might, at some time, be useful. Besides, she had lived months and months with Lady Beryl Medford. She ran up to Beryl with effusion.

"My sweet one! have you come to join us to-day? No? Are you showing the Abbey to—to—friends?" and she looked curiously at Lady Heath and the lawyer.

"No; I came on business; it is finished. You look very well and gay, Laura."

"Oh, charming! Sir Francis is good enough to give me a birthday *fete*. What a superb day it is! We are to have old English games, songs, and dances."

"What an exquisite creature that little Lady Medford is!" said Sir Francis, as he returned to Mrs. Ranleigh's side, after escorting Beryl to her carriage.

"Do you think so? I always found her too pale, and too tame in character. I'm not an adorer of snow-drops. What could she want with you, Sir Francis?" and Laura looked at him over the top of her peacock's feather fan.

"Come into the library and I will show you," said Sir Francis.

The coquettish fires in those great black eyes shining

above the brilliant feathers had carried by assault the last outworses of his—fancy.

Laura, with her fan against her smiling mouth, her head a little on one side, her pomegranate bloom heightened by expectation, the folds of her brown gold silk trailing along the floors she hoped soon to tread as mistress, entered with Sir Francis the library. She expected a declaration. This

"IT MAY ROB YOU OF YOUR FORTUNE! FRANCIS, I BEG YOU TO CONCEAL IT!"

immense fortune would be at her feet, and she meant to set no distant wedding-day.

For his part, Sir Francis was ready to propose. This was why he intended to confide in her, and make the declaration of Jerome's innocence the prelude to his own declaration of love.

"Fancy how glad I am to know," he said, "that the name of Sothron is not smirched with stain of murder!

Lady Medford has brought me this signed and duly witnessed confession, which clears my cousin's memory."

Laura almost snatched it from his hand.

"Beryl brought you this!" she cried.

"Yes. As head—indeed, the only representative of the house—it is my right to make it known to the world."

"You will never, never do that!" she exclaimed.

"Not! Why, of course, and at once. I like a clean family name as well as any, if I have been a little fast."

"Do not—do not meddle with it. All is forgotten."

"What can you mean? Such things are never forgotten. I bear my predecessor no grudge. Poor fellow! I owe him something for dropping off in his early prime, and leaving a poor devil living on his wits one of the neatest fortunes in England. This goes to the papers!"

"It may rob you of this fortune—may set you back in that poverty you hate. Francis, I beg you, conceal it."

"What *do* you—what *can* you mean? Lose my fortune!"

"I mean that Jerome has never been seen dead by one who knew his face. Are you *sure* he is dead? Is any one? They think they are sure; but may he not be in hiding from this charge, to reappear as soon as he is fully vindicated? Beryl Medford brings you this. Beryl loved him. Beryl possibly knows he lives, and takes this way of calling him from hiding. Oh, think what you do!"

"Think! Laura, if this man lives, he will surely return some day, even if I keep silent. If he is alive, I want to know it. I want to sit in no other man's chair. Now, I will test this. If he lives, he is cleared; let him return."

CHAPTER XLV.

"I DEMAND OF YOU MY SISTER."

THAT offer which Laura expected died on the lips of Sir Francis Westholm Sothron.

Her own hasty words had filled him with a fear, an uneasiness, which for the time drove matrimony far from his thoughts. If Jerome were living and should return, then Sir Francis, with only his wits to maintain him, would be

the memorial tablet that had been let into the wall recording the name and death of Sir Jerome Sothron. As he went down the aisle of the silent church he saw a woman leaning on the chancel rail and looking at the tablet. This person, draped in a long gray circular cloak, her face closely covered with a thick gray vail, had entered the

"FRANCIS WESTHOLM, I DEMAND OF YOU MY SISTER!"

church from the village. She stood now, her cloak fallen from her shoulders and her vail thrown back.

Sir Francis looked at her with an eager start; then dashed down the aisle, crying:

"Delia! Delia!"

The young woman wheeled about. A pallor as of death invaded her face. Then a flush of crimson dyed her from throat to brow; fire leaped from her tear-wet eyes. She gathered her cloak about her with one hand, and stepping forward with an imperious gesture, said, in a voice vibrant with scorn and hate:

"Francis Westholm! I demand of you my sister!"

CHAPTER XLVI.

"WAIT FOR ME HERE A TWELVEMONTH AND A DAY."

"DELIA! Delia!" cried Sir Francis, pressing forward, "are you here? I have looked for you everywhere!"

"How dare you call me Delia! I am not Delia!"

"You are! But stay—you are not. You are, and you are not. You are her double. What is this?"

"Yes, I am her double," said the young woman, drawing her cloak about her, and covering her face again with her vail closely; "and ghostly creatures such as doubles cannot bear the light of day. I demand of you my sister! How came you here, Francis Westholm? How dare you come to the scene of your crime, which Heaven will lay to your charge to all eternity! I thought you were forever forbidden this place, when you disgraced it by using your visit here to lure away to ruin a girl as sweet, as good——"

She turned away, bowed her head, covered her face with both hands, and her sobs filled the lonely silence of the gray old church.

"I am here," said the baronet, "because fate brought me back where my people banished me. One by one, they all died who heired, or should heir, before me. My cousin Jerome was drowned, and I am Sir Francis Westholm Sothron."

"Then fate is wicked and unjust, to bring you back in honor where you went out in dishonor! Then fate is deaf, not to hear the curses I heaped on your head!"

"I vow I loved Delia!" said Sir Francis.

"Loved! What love is that that ruins and casts away? Loved, as a girl loves a rose she tears to pieces, or a child the toy he destroys! Francis Westholm, worst of men, I demand of you my sister!"

"If you mean Delia—and you are not Delia—and as Delia never could be so angry, you may not be she—I do not know where Delia is. I wish I did; for I think

in my soul, I will never love any other woman half as well!"

"Love! and you would not marry her!"

"But consider—I was poor and in debt; I could not."

"You promised."

"A man promises much when he is in love."

"But a man, fit to be called a man, *keeps* his promises. If you had loved her, you would have married her and worked, worked daily with your hands, to maintain her."

"Upon my soul," said Sir Francis, shrugging his shoulders, "it sounds well, but there was not one thing I knew how to do—not even to dig. If I had known that in three years I'd be Sir Francis of Sothronwold, you may believe I would have married her, fast enough, and lived on the Jews till I got my fortune. But one never can tell how these things will go. If she had only staid with me, I'd have married her as soon as I got my good news, by Jove I would! But she left me. Was it my fault?"

"Yes, it was. She left you because you would not keep your promise and marry her. She was not a bad girl. You deceived her; but she meant to do right."

"Well, she left me, and married another man."

"Because *he* would marry her and work for her. He was poor, but he was a man of his word. And then you would not leave her alone, but followed her up and tried to get her back."

"And I thought she was coming back. She promised. I expected her. She never came."

"She did go to you. I don't believe a word of your story. What have you done with her?"

"I swear to you I have never seen her face since one morning I met her in Hyde Park, and she agreed to meet me at Temple Gardens at eight that evening. I waited for her till ten. She never came; and a week later I was Sir Francis Sothron."

"Then thank Heaven I did keep her from the crime of returning to you. But where is she?"

"I protest to you," said Sir Francis, "that if she were here, and her husband were dead, I would marry her at this altar, and she should be Lady Sothron of the Abbey in the face of all the world. There was never any one like Delia. I half believe you are she. If not, you rise

before me as her lovely wraith, and you revive all my love for her. Your voice, your figure, your face—this gleaming mass of your hair"—and he looked at the head bowed on the tall back of the carved abbey pew—"all are here, and beside them all other beauty fades away. Tell me, are you Delia?—have you come to reproach me, to try me? I vow I love you, Delia. Give me your hand. I will never marry another woman while I live. If your husband is dead, you, and you only, shall be my wife."

The gray-clad figure shuddered from head to foot. Once and again she strove to speak. Then the slender hand in a gray silk glove grasped tightly that of Sir Francis.

"How long will you keep that vow?"

"Forever!"

She turned and led him along beside the chancel until they came to a tomb of one of the earliest Sothrons—a full-length effigy in stone under a black marble canopy.

"Lay your hand on this, your ancestor's tomb, Sir Francis, and make solemn oath that for a year and a day you will marry no woman but Delia, and if in a year and a day she comes to you, free to marry, you will make her your wedded wife."

"I solemnly swear," faltered Sir Francis.

"Wait then for a year and a day. For her husband is dead."

She dropped his hand and fled, fleet-footed, to a little door beside the vestry.

"Come back! come back, Delia!" he cried. "Why doom me to wait so long?"

But the door opened, letting in the May sunshine, and the song of birds, and breath of blossoms blooming on the grassy graves, and letting out into the world of spring-time life, that gray-clad form—and then the door clanged to, and left Sir Francis Sothron alone in the ancient church beside the cold stone of his ancestor's tomb.

He went back to the house. As he passed along the great carriage drive, a whirr of wheels, the rhythm of eight small hoofs, a ripple of laughter. He looked up from his moody dream, and there was Laura Ranleigh's kaleidoscope phæton, and Laura and her friend of the hour.

Laura was repairing her errors of the *fête* day.

"Oh, Sir Francis, we want a *fleur de lise* to paint, and there are such lovely ones down by the spring beyond the first meadow. You see, I know all about your place. May we have some? Will you go there to get some with us?"

"Certainly, if you will return here to lunch with me," said Sir Francis, giving them his hand to alight.

He went down to the low moist ground, where the "blue lilies" grew, and Laura said all the pretty things she could think of, and rolled her eyes, and was witty and dashing.

But it was a place ill-chosen for her. Here first he had seen the lovely Delia, fair as Proserpine, gathering flowers. Over such a sheaf of "blue lilies" he had first bent to kiss the red lips of the cottage maid. Here, with their feet among these blooms, they had stood when she had, also, consented to fly, trusting to the promise which he most basely broke. All that was not utterly ruined in his nature rose up in revolt at this memory of treachery, and he renewed in his soul a vow to wait for the lost Delia a twelve-month and a day, and never to marry any other woman than Delia.

* * * * * * * * *

Through the pretty gardens of the dower house walked Beryl. It was a warm May afternoon. She had so far lightened her heavy mourning so as to be wearing black nuns' vailing instead of bombazine, and as she came up through the gardens she broke off a spray of white Persian lilac, and was about to put it in her hat; but she remembered that these were marriage flowers, and marriage flowers she should never wear again, so she flung them away. She had been with Lawrence to the gate, and wished him a kind good-by, as he rode away on his handsome bay along the bridle-path leading about the mere. Within the lodge all was bustle, for Madame Heath was superintending the packing of her endless wardrobe, returning next day toward her beloved Vienna.

Beryl had reached the doorway, and stood looking back over the perfect beauty of the spring afternoon, when she saw a carriage coming up the drive. She waited to welcome any friends who might be calling on her, when forth from the carriage looked Anna Marvel and Lelia.

Beryl welcomed them both, and then Lelia ran up-

stairs carrying Mrs. Marvel's wraps, and Anna and Beryl stood holding each other's hands in the sunshine.

"I brought her back," said Mrs. Marvel. "Why should the dear child not be happy? Hers has been a sad, sad story; but it is ended. Her unloving husband is dead. Why should she not love Lawrence?"

CHAPTER XLVII.

"THERE, FOOLISH GIRL! I SAID HOW IT WOULD BE."

"THAT confession and story about Sir Jerome Sothron are all out," cried Lord Alfred Heath leaning back in his chair at breakfast, and refolding his *Telegraph*. "The papers are wild over it. It is going everywhere with endless additions, and your name, Beryl, is connected with it. There, you foolish girl! I said how it would be."

He tossed the paper toward her, angrily.

Lord Alfred, his wife, and daughter were alone. Mrs. Marvel and Lelia had breakfast early to walk to see a friend before the day grew hot.

"Well, my adored, why should not her name appear? What harm in seeing your name in print? Mine has been in two marriage notices. It has not hurt me."

"It will be a jolly good hindrance to *her* getting into a real high life marriage, such as she might look to, having this gossip," said Lord Alfred, moodily.

"There is nothing to be said," suggested Beryl.

"People do not confine themselves to what *is* too fast; they expatiate into the manner of fancies, once set them going. If we were not to leave at eleven o'clock, I should say, come to the Continent with us."

"I shall take Lady Heath's advice, I think, and in a few weeks go to the Continent, and wander through the small pleasant towns. Probably I should like it."

As a very young girl she had been in France and Italy with her father and grandmother, and the memory was not pleasant; there had been a mingling of ostentation and meannesss that had been a moral gall to her delicate taste.

Undeniably Windmere Lodge seemed a pleasanter place to its mistress that day when she was alone there with Mrs. Marvel and Lelia.

That evening, when Lelia came to her dressing-room, Beryl took her hand.

"Dear Lelia, may I tell Lawrence to come back?"

Lelia bowed her pretty face on her friend's shoulder, but it was a very resolute "No" which came from the rosy lips.

"And why not?" asked Beryl.

"I have a double task to do first, before I see him, again. Dearest Lady Beryl. I want to tell you my story."

It was a balmy night, on the very verge of June. The nightingales were singing in the hedges. Down by the mere the whip-poor-will lifted its quavering cry. The scent of the lilies and syringas was in all the air. In Beryl's pretty room there sat two persons—Beryl in her white, down trimmed wrapper, leaning back in the blue brocade cushions of a great chair, and Lelia at her feet, clasping her friend's hand, her brown eyes cast down, as she told her story.

"I have never told you—I think I had better not tell you—my husband's name. He was ashamed of our marriage, and ashamed of me. He felt that it lowered his good old line, and now he is dead, and you, Lady Beryl, may perhaps often meet his family, I will not tell you who they were. He repented of his marriage before even the register was signed—he left me before the ink was dry."

"Then he was a hard-hearted monster," said Beryl, "and he was ridiculously fastidious. You, Lelia, are good and sweet, and pretty enough for any man."

"You are good to say so," said, Lelia, humbly; "but you do not know how I am changed, improved I hope, since my marriage. You cannot guess what Anna Marvel has done for me. I must not give you too harsh an impression of *him*. He was used to ladies all grace, accomplishments, who knew well how to talk, who had read many books, and who knew just the right way to dress. Now, my manners—you know how much I err now in little points—were bad; oh, yes, decidedly bad. I was apt to make mistakes in my grammar; I did not know the half of the time what he was talking about; I

had never read anything but novels, I mean poor, cheap novels, such as ignorant girls read; I could not play a note; I knew no French; I could not dance, only rude country dances. And then I had no self-control; when I was pleased I laughed loud, very loud. But, indeed, I laughed little after my marriage, I was so grieved and disappointed. When I felt badly I burst into tears without any self-control; when I was angry—and I got angry easily, Lady Beryl—I scolded and said rude, wild things, I know I did. And some way I was always my very worst when my husband was near me.

"I had married him from ambition and vanity, and the wish to be a great lady, for I did not realize then that refinement, and education, and generous feelings are what make ladies. I fancied, too, his face, his voice, his elegant ways. I wanted to be introduced to the world as his wife, not thinking how I would shame him. Oh, indeed, it hurt me to find that he was sick and ashamed of me! Never, never, Lady Beryl, could I live through such an experience again. He was liberal to me; and with means to gratify my untrained taste, I only disgusted him more. I chose such gaudy furnishing, such tawdry clothes, such trifling baubles to wear."

"Lelia, I do not believe it!—you, whose taste is so simple and refined."

"From copying Anna, from having learned to hate from association the things that once I loved. Oh, I was all I tell you; and in my desertion and abandonment I should have grown to be worse—wild, wicked, may be—only one day I was so ill with my head that Doctor Marvel was sent for. As I had no self-control, and was hysterical, I poured out all my story to him. He was so touched that he brought that angel, his wife, to me that very day; and from that she was my friend. She taught me to hope; she told me to educate myself; for some day my husband must claim me. She was my teacher. And when at last affairs that I need not tell, and hate to think of, drove me to despair, she took me to her home—a true charity—for I had only a little over a hundred pounds. You know what she has been to me. She has looked forward to fitting me for my place as his wife. Dear Lady Beryl, only the day I left your house I learned that, instead, I was his widow. I do not shame to tell you

that. I have never seen any man who seemed to me so good and lovable as Lawrence. I believe he loves me, but my mind is made up. I will shame no man again by being less than he needs and deserves in a wife. The marquis told me that Lawrence was likely to become a useful leading man—to go some day to Parliament. Now, I will not be his clog and his disgrace."

"You can never be that, dear Lelia. Whatever you may have been, you are now a most lovely woman."

"Not what I should be—that he may never blush for me, Lady Beryl. I am going to tax your kindness; I ask a great thing of you, freely. I want you to put me in some school in France, where I may stay for a year. After that, only after that, I will see Lawrence. If his love lasts until then, why——"

And Lelia hid her blushing face.

"If this is really your wish, Lelia, gladly, indeed, will I do what you ask. But is it kind to Lawrence?"

"I married in foolish haste, the first time," said Lelia; "now I will be prudent. And there is another task that I must complete. I had for it a twelve month and a day. I wish to find a sister who went to live in France. I shall find her by advertising in some cities where I think she would be."

In the morning Beryl talked with Mrs. Marvel, and found her in favor of Lelia's plans.

"Then the sooner they are entered on the better," said Beryl. "When I was in Biarritz with the marquis, soon after our marriage, I heard of a very good finishing school there. I have always wanted to go back to Biarritz. I have some sweet, sad memories of the place," and Beryl looked far, far away, and thought of Jerome, and how she had met him there on the wide, high moors above the Biscayan sea.

A few weeks of preparation followed, and then Beryl closed Windmere Lodge and went to the Continent for an indefinite period.

"No wonder," commented Laura Ranleigh to Sir Francis Sothron, whose society she was trying to engross at a country house, "no wonder poor Beryl goes. She is in such deep mourning she cannot go into society; a year ago she was one of the leading countesses; and now, what is a dowager? On a jointure, too, that was certainly

not munificent. A pretty young thing enough, but too sad; her title, her fortune, her leading position all gone, condemned to a certain seclusion. She might as well be a nun, or perform suttee, and be done with it. But as neither course is open to her, she goes to hide in some small Continental town. I think it serves her right for marrying where she did not love."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

"I RAN INTO THE MAN'S ARMS."

THE little town of Biarritz was in all the height of its August gayety. The long streets were filled with fine equipages that most of the year rolled and glittered on the Bois de Boulogne. All the summer cottages and the hotels were crowded with lively and fashionable guests from Paris and London. The cottages of residents were rented to the visitors, and the owners camped in tents on the hills and the edges of the sunny moors. Casinos, and theatres, and shops were brilliant and busy; all along the shore singers, troubadours, wandering jugglers, musicians Punch and Judy, showed off; every cove was full of bathing machines, and every still nook of water was filled with flat open boats, wherein people in gay bathing costumes floated like beds of bright living flowers.

Among all these dashing, chattering, laughing, brilliant people passed, calm, silent for the most part, but peaceful and serene, a slender young creature in mourning, unanimously granted to be the most beautiful woman in Biarritz—Lady Beryl Medford.

To live in greater quiet she had rented from its English owner a very lovely little villa near the sea, where the path of ascent to the moors began. Never at the gay places of resorts, but constantly out of doors on moor or beach, now talking to a group of Biscayan fishers, now watching the play of the numerous little ones, or scattering toys among them, always attended by the valet North and the rosy maid Fanny; sometimes, on Saturday, with Lelia by her side, Lady Beryl spent her time, knowing the most peaceful and independent hours of her life thus far.

One of Beryl's favorite walks was along the limestone rocks, where sea-urchins of all colors lie in the hollows of the stone, gay as beds of asters. She was there one day, amusing herself, wandering up and down, while North and his newspaper in a corner, and Fanny under a great umbrella sat knitting lace, when a rapid step drew near, and some one said :

"Lady Medford !"

She turned hastily. It was Sir Francis Westholm Sothron.

Certainly she was not pleased to see Sir Francis. Biarritz looked less pleasant for his being there.

He came near in friendly fashion.

"I have been to your home, Lady Medford, and have followed you here; in fact, I have followed you here all the way from London."

"Indeed !" said Beryl, in cold surprise, letting her hand fall listlessly from his clasp.

"I wish to say something to you, to ask you a very frank question. I believe, Lady Medford, you are frankness itself, and honor, and will reply to me freely. Will you?"

"If I possibly can," said Beryl, and sat down in the shadow of a rock, while Sir Francis faced her close by. Beryl's silk sun umbrella was in her hand, and open ; she idly rolled it to and fro.

"Lady Medford," said Sir Francis, "I ask you, with all the earnestness of my heart, have you any reason to suppose my cousin, Jerome Sothron, living?"

Beryl gave a low cry, her face blanched, she leaned back against the rock, the umbrella rolled out of her hand, and trundled down the beach. Neither Sir Francis nor Beryl thought of it.

"Jerome living !" gasped Beryl. "*I* think Jerome living? Oh, how can you ask me that, when I *know* that he is dead !"

"You know that ?" cried Sir Francis, as in intense relief, but Beryl never noticed the tone, very natural to the heir of a cousin's great property.

"Why should I not know it ? Does not all the world know it ? Have you not inherited ?"

"Yes ; but it has been said to me, that the charge laid against Jerome would make it more convenient for him to

seem dead. And now that he is amply exonerated from any responsibility of that murder, he might come back. Indeed, it has been hinted that you, as his friend, secured that evidence, and that you believed its wide publication would meet his eye and bring him home."

"Oh, who could say such things?"

"It is much to me, Lady Medford, to know if there is the faintest shade of truth in these suspicions. If Jerome lives, I am using revenues not mine, and may be called to sharp account for my administration of the Sothron property. If you have any lightest evidence or thought that way, tell me."

"I have none," said Beryl. "Sir Jerome went on the bark Elizabeth, which sailed for Holland. It was lost with all on board. I had, after he died, a letter written on board the Elizabeth, and sent me through the man who took him on that vessel. I do not know his name; if I heard it, in my sorrow, it was quite forgotten. But I had the letter, and the bark went down with all on board."

"With all on board?—yes, I know that," said Sir Francis, "not one was saved. I have lately secured the cerificate of the death of Ralph Marshall, first mate of the Elizabeth, and while I secured that, I thought of what I had heard, and that Jerome might never have gone on that vessel, and you, perhaps, had hint he did not; and I came here to ask you frankly, for I must know."

"I have answered you frankly. Jerome wrote me from the Elizabeth the night she sailed. And then you know he was found; his clothing was identified."

She stopped, and bent her face to her knees sobbing.

"Pardon me; I feel that I am cruel; I did not know; you will forgive me, knowing all I have at stake."

"I understand. But who suggested these cruel thoughts? Who could infer that Jerome had fled and pretended death, and I was cognizant of it, and making a way for his return?"

"It was hinted, not clearly charged, but no secret, as far as I could see. It was your friend Mrs. Ranleigh. Lately we were at the Friars together, with others, and she hinted—well, that Jerome might communicate with you here."

Beryl flashed at him.

"If he lived, he would come out plainly, and so would I."

"You will not be angry with me?" said Sir Francis.

"No; he has gone; and if you had known him as I did—known how generous, kind, gay, sympathetic, he was, how lonely, how often unhappy—oh, you would feel as I do for him. Oh, Jerome! Jerome!"

"Dear Lady Medford," said Sir Francis, after a pained silence, "forgive me for stirring these depths of grief."

Beryl recovered herself after a time.

"If you want to know the name of the sailor who brought the letter, perhaps my maid will remember. I will ask her to-night."

"Pray do not trouble yourself. I do not need it. He looked in his breast-pocket for some papers. Here is the statement of the death of mate Ralph Marshall, lost at the same time."

Beryl looked at it vaguely.

That evening, when Fanny was brushing her lady's hair, she said:

"You look to have a headache, dear mistress."

"Yes," said Beryl, and in a few words told her of the interview with Sir Francis, adding, "He showed me the certificate of the death of the mate, Ralph Marshall, lost with Sir Jerome on the Elizabeth."

Fanny dropped the hair brush.

"If Sir Jerome was no more dead than Ralph Marshall, my lady, Sir Francis would soon be out of the Abbey, for Ralph Marshall is as alive and well as any man that ever sailed seas."

"What do you mean, Fanny?"

"Why, I mean that I met him to-day on the beach, when I went for your umbrella, my lady. I found it right in his hands. I fairly ran into the man's arms, as I skipped down the rock, and we sat and talked some time down there."

"What! one saved from the Elizabeth!—one! Then——"

"No, my dear lady," said Fanny, gently, "No one was saved. He escaped by not going on board. He had need to hide ashore, and at the last hour he put another man in his place for the voyage. It was Ralph Marshall, my lady, brought me the two notes from Sir Jerome Sothron to you. You forgot because of all the troubles you had then."

"And you met him to-day, Fanny?"

"Yes," said Fanny, leaning against the toilet table, and rolling her lavender cap string about her finger. "Yes, my lady, I saw him, and a very handsome sailor he is, and told me the memory of my kind words, when I saw him in trouble, had never left him, and he had remembered me gratefully ever since, and he had laid up a shawl for me in China, hoping to see me some day, and to-morrow he would bring it, he being here quite by accident."

CHAPTER XLIX.

"THIS STONE SHALL BEAT OUT HIS BRAINS!"

"WHY, bless my life! who ever thought of seeing *you* here!" Thus Fanny, rosy as a June morning and sparkling as the sea, running down the terrace and through the arches chiseled by the water in the green sand rocks, until they looked like relics of some ancient and forgotten Gothic church. Slipping into one of these arches, Fanny faced that very goodly-looking sailor, Ralph Marshall. "You here!" cries Fanny, with sweet simplicity. "I made sure you were off for England."

Yet Fanny had put on that very pink chintz gown, and the small apron with the ravishing little pockets, all because she had a moral certainty of seeing the big, blonde-whiskered son of Neptune on the beach.

"I had no mind to go away till I saw more of *you*, my lass," said Ralph.

"La! the ship won't wait on my account."

"Nor on mine, for I've left her, having promise of a new ship—a trim-built brig running to Bermuda."

"Goodness, what a ways! And you'll be captain?"

"Ay. Will you like me more on that account, missis?"

"More? Well, that means some, to begin with. I don't yet know as I like you any," said Fanny.

"That's hard news, my lass, for I've thought of you—honest!—walking the deck keeping watch."

"Now I think of it, I heard you were dead. Your drowning on the bark Elizabeth was certified to."

"Well, I had neither kith nor kin to cry over me. I belonged on the Elizabeth, but did not sail on her. I had to settle some matters for my wife; and, as I made mention formerly, she died, and I was left a lone man. I hope you felt a bit bad, hearin' of my death, missis?"

"Not I," said Fanny, with a laugh, "especially as I heard it yesterday evening, having seen you here safe and sound. Sir Francis Westholm-Sothron told my lady he had been to get the death certified."

"Sir Francis!" said Ralph, fiercely. "A curse on him! I would give a year out of my life to have the chance of knocking him about the head with a belaying pin."

"If you got your chance, I think you'd be in the way of hanging for your pains," said Fanny.

"If I'd come across *him* on the beach yesterday instead of *you*, my lass, there'd have been a lively scrimmage, I promise you. I owe Sir Francis a cruel settling; and, peer or pauper, he'll get it, mind."

"I shouldn't mind, I'm sure," said Fanny, with a toss.

"And you are with the same mistress as before—Lady Medford?"

"Yes, indeed; I never lived with any other."

"That speaks well of your faithfulness, my lass. Would you be as faithful in love?"

"I don't know," says Fanny, poking her toe in the sand. "Ask them I jilted."

"I shouldn't wish to be one of them, my lass. If you don't mean me well, don't smile on me, for I am a man as has had trouble enough. I saw your lady last evening, walking about the piazza. She is a very beautiful young lady, and sad-looking, and dressed in black. No doubt she has lost a child?"

"She never had one. She is in mourning for her husband. The marquis died nine months back."

"The marquis dead! Well, I know what she feels; I pity her. But, then, I was a true heart, and she may not have been so fond of her husband. It struck me curious, you know—the two letters carried secret to another man's wife, and from a married man!"

"Don't go to flinging suspicions," said Fanny, in a flame at once. "Never were two such true lovers as she and Sir Jerome Sothron were. I know what they felt for each other, and what a beautiful pair they were; and when

her folks tore them apart it was that cruel and destroying as if one tore a flower in two halves, and required either of them halves to live. I went through it all with her. They married her to the marquis, and Sir Jerome flung himself away on some one out of pure madness that he would not live with."

"I know. It was hard voyaging that, my lass. It is few love stories that run fair on trade winds."

"And whenever they met again it was as two friends —dear, loving friends, and no more; or two children, or two lovers, such as in books, that die of love, and are turned into angels. And who would be so evil-minded as to fling suspicion, because he sent her word of his affairs in such a strait as most never a gentleman of England got into, and he with no family, and she his truest friend."

"Far be it from me to fling suspicion," said Ralph. "I knew Sir Jerome for a good, true man, though rash in his voyaging, and given to running over close to the wind. And the lady, as I mentioned to you, looked like an angel. Being forced, as you say, to marry the marquis, no doubt she has not broken her heart grieving for him."

"She has grieved, as is right and proper, and as a lady ought," said Fanny, throwing up her head. "She was a good wife to the marquis; better than he deserved, in my mind, for I didn't like him, I promise you, and he threatening to have me turned away."

"The old pirate!" cried Ralph Marshall.

"Not so bad as that," said Fanny. "He had his kind of goodness, and she had her feelings for him, and she mourns him as becoming; but I'll be glad of the day when I get that mourning off her, and she goes back in society. It was a fair pleasure to dress her for a ball; and as for her dresses, Captain Marshall, they'd make you open your eyes; whole closets full of the most beautiful dresses that ever was put together."

"I shouldn't desire a prettier gown, nor one better becoming, than the one you have on this minute," said Ralph, gallantly.

Fanny thrust a neat little hand into each of her apron pockets, and contemplated, with pleasure, the toes of her black slippers, under the hem of her pink frock.

"I'll be bound," said Ralph, "that your mistress took on about the bark Elizabeth and them that went down in

"You may believe it. She nearly died. Ah, there was when she was truly made a widow! for Sir Jerome was the choice of her heart. Ah, that was the true love what she had for poor dear Sir Jerome! I shouldn't speak of her, or it, to you like this, only you were brought into it by means of those letters."

Then, too, though Fanny did not mention it, it was a safe, delightful way to talk of love to this blue-eyed Viking; to talk of the love of other people.

"To be sure I was brought in it," said Ralph. "And a deal more than you know. There was a side to that story that you would never suspect, and I will tell it to you some day, my lass."

"Tell me now," said Fanny, eagerly.

"No, no, my lass; we will wait till we see more of each other, for that part of the story brings me and Sir Jerome and his cousin, Sir Francis, together in a fearsome way you never suspect."

"Oh, *do* tell me!" cried Fanny, clasping her hands and looking into his face beseechingly.

But Ralph was keen enough to keep his secret as a bait to further interviews with the charming Fanny. He shook his head, saying, like an oracle:

"Wait!"

Fanny pouted.

"If Sir Francis was here yesterday he is here now," said Ralph. "If he is here he will be at a wine shop or casino. I know his ways. And I'll go find him and pick a quarrel, and let him feel what weight is in a British tar's arm."

"Oh, don't! don't!" cried Fanny.

"Ay, but I must," said Ralph. "It's a debt I owe."

"Don't," said Fanny, catching him by the arm. "You might kill him, you are so fearful strong."

"And what matter to you if he is killed?"

"Oh, no matter of him; he's not the man I like to see in Sir Jerome's shoes, or sporting his fortune."

"What, lass? Do you mean he inherited?"

"Yes, sure. Wasn't he next of kin."

"And I am letting him, the villain, roll in all those riches, and wear honor and all that? When I could, and yet I can't, fling him out of all he's got. Let me alone, lass, if he enjoys the Sothron fortune, he has to enjoy it with a broken back, or less his eyes."

"Don't!" entreated Fanny, "please don't. You will get into prison, you might get hung! oh, Ralph, don't!"

"I'd do anything in life to please you, my lass," said Ralph, loosing her clasp, and stooping to pick up a good smooth pebble the size of a pomegranate, "but this bit of rock has to hammer out Sir Francis Sothron's brains, if I swing as high as heaven for it."

He strode off in such a heat and fury that Fanny began to cry with terror, and running back toward the house met Lelia on the walk.

"Why, Fanny, what is the matter?"

"Oh, Sir Francis Sothron is at the Hotel Gardere, and a great man like a giant is looking him up to kill him!"

CHAPTER L.

"I FELT AS IF WE BREATHED ONCE MORE THE SAME AIR.

LELIA caught Fanny's hand.

"Going to kill Sir Francis!"

"Yes, indeed. Oh! oh!"

"Well, he deserves it," said Lelia, her gentle face becoming hard and dark, in the uprising of bitter memories. "But then," she added, as if to herself, "when he is dead he can neither repent nor atone, and if one does not try to prevent a murder, one is, before God, guilty of blood!"

"Oh, Miss Lelia! The man that is going to kill him is a giant, and so mad as never you saw, and he has with him what will beat out Sir Francis' brains."

Lelia, the simple and sweet companion of Anna Marvel and Lady Beryl, was now in the light of a young lady pupil at the Biarritz French Finishing School. As a parlor boarder she had her privileges to go ahead without a teacher, being one. But she could not go out alone, and a boy in the school livery was attendant on her steps. Lelia took a card from her case, wrote a few words on it, and giving it to the boy, told him to fly to the Hotel Gardere, deliver it to its address, and return for her to the villa. Quickened by the reception of a franc, the boy ran off.

"Do not tell your lady of this, Fanny; she has had worries and troubles enough. We want her to get quite well and glad again. I see she is looking much stronger and happier, and yesterday she had white flowers at her throat and belt."

"And yesterday Sir Francis Sothron came from England to see her, and stirred her up to crying."

"What!" cried Lelia. "Sir Francis! Would he dare, do you think he would dare to make love to her, to try to marry her, Fanny?" and a fierce look flamed in Lelia's brown eyes.

"I know she wouldn't listen to him," said Fanny.

They had reached the front steps of the villa.

"She is round in the arbor," said Fanny.

Lelia went round the gravel walk, and saw Beryl sitting in an arbor draped with passion flowers and the airy foliage and fiery bloom of the cypress vine. She was embroidering a rich piece of gold thread, and as she held her frame a little from her to note the effect of her work, she leaned back her golden head against the arbor's masses of bloom, and in a sweet voice sang a little fragment:

> "The birds, the birds of mine own land,
> I heard in Brittany;
> And as they sung they seemed to me
> The very birds I heard with thee.
> Thou at my side again might be!"

"Dear Lady Beryl, you are happy to-day!" cried Lelia.

Beryl started and looked about at the garden, at Lelia, with a sort of wonder. She made room for Lelia at her side.

"Yes, I was happy; I had been able to forget—to return to a time gone by. Do you know, Lelia, that sometimes a gush of remembered perfume, or the return of a strain of music heard long ago, seems a sort of chariot, in which the heart is carried away through space and time to some hour of dear delight? It was so with me. I heard the song of a bird that sometimes wanders over into Sussex, and at the same time I breathed a mingled odor of heather and tall white lilies; and at once the two carried me back to the one sweet crowning hour of my life, when first I knew I was loved and that I loved again! Oh,

Lelia, I had forgotten all that here. I was back in Sussex at my uncle's seat, and I heard whispers and saw adoring looks that have held my life fast ever since."

Beryl spoke with a certain passionate exaltation that Lelia had never seen in her. She seemed carried away by ardent memories. She was living in a world evoked by song and perfume, and her sweet face flushed, and her violet eyes glowed with that intense love that for her could never die.

Lelia recognized the emotion; she saw that this was love; but whether an old love or a new she could not tell. She trembled with a great fear. She softly took Beryl's hand and kissed it.

"You are so young," she whispered, "and so lovely, that love will come to you again. Wooers will come to your feet; once more you will be a bride."

"No, Lelia," said Beryl, gently, falling back into sad quiet. "My dream is out, my love romance burned to ashes, months ago."

"Do not say so," said Lelia. "But tell me one thing—if any one loves you and asks your hand, will you let me know? If I *am* only your companion, you can say, 'This man is my suitor.'"

"You are my friend," said Beryl, patting her cheek; "I would tell you all; but I shall never have such a story to tell you. The man I loved, as I think no one ever loved before, because my love grew and grew after I was cruelly parted from him, is dead; he died a sudden, cruel death. No words can tell how I loved him. When he lived I could not say to him how dear I held him. But now, now that I am alone in the world, I hold his memory to my heart, and I say to it over and over again, 'I love you, I love you, I love you!"

"Oh, Lady Beryl, could you so love and love?".

"I so loved and I lost, in the cruelest way love ever was lost, I think. To-day, when I heard that song, and breathed that mingled sweet and spicy fragrance, do you know I felt as if he were no longer dead, but living, living, and near! I felt as if the same golden sunshine shut us in as a globe of quivering light, as if the same music filled both our ears; as if we both breathed the sweetness of those lilies; as if I had only to hold out my arms into the emptiness that has been so long about me, and they would clasp him, my beloved and my own!"

Lelia had knelt before her friend, and clasping both arms around her waist, and laying her tear-wet face against her lap, sobbed :

"Oh, this is a far crueller fate than mine! I knew no love like this. I think I could never know it. But I believe you are to me the dearest love of my life. Oh, my friend, my angel, why is it that a soul cannot be removed back from the grave by the going down of some living one to death? Oh, then I would go to that world that lies beyond this, for in this world I hold so little by anything, and there I would stay, and send your lover back in my place to crown your life with joy! I would do all that for you, I love you so. I would, and yet—I can do nothing."

"You can, dear Lelia," said Beryl, with a quivering lip. "Your sympathy comforts me."

The garden gate clanged, and Lelia, rising, resumed her place beside Beryl.

The little page appeared.

"I forgot, mademoiselle, to give you the satchel I carried for you. I wait for you before the gate on the bench. The gentleman has already gone from Biarritz."

Lelia took the little embroidered velvet bag and the Russia music-roll from the page.

"I brought my new piece to play for you that you may see if I improve. And here is some new embroidery. I think it is done well. I used to have no taste in such work. I was so careless. But now—is there a little art in this?"

"It is very beautiful," said Beryl.

"And here," said Lelia, emptying the velvet bag on the bench, "is such a charming new pattern, and a new kind of working silk."

But with the things on the bench fell out a tarnished velvet case.

"Lawrence's picture?" questioned Beryl, pointing to it, with a smile.

Lelia turned very pale.

"Why, how did that get in my bag! No, Lady Beryl, it is my late husband's picture. I cannot conceive how it came there."

"Ah. May I see it?" said Beryl, holding out her hand.

"Yes." And Lelia laid the fateful case in her palm. But Beryl had all the most exquisite sensibilities of a lady. She

felt the reluctance which Lelia felt in uttering that lingering "yes."

"No," she said, "I would rather *not* see it. I should not like him. Put it in the bag, so. Now, Lelia, destroy it when you go home. You will feel better. We remember our woes enough at best. Come in and play your new music for me."

"I wish you would play and sing, Lady Beryl," said Lelia. "Why not begin your natural ways? The blackness and silence have lasted long enough."

Beryl's hands strayed over the keys. She sang:

"I am to blame! Why should I sing?
My lays 'twere better to forget;
Each day to others joy may bring,
They can but give to me regret.
Love makes my heart so full of woe
That naught can please or soothe me now.
I am to blame! I am to blame!"

CHAPTER LI.

"IT WAS MY OWN WIFE, DELIA MARSHALL!"

"FANNY," said Lady Beryl, "when I was walking along the rocks this morning, I thought I saw you talking with a tall man; and yesterday, it was the same. I hope you will not allow yourself to become entangled with any foreigner. I have had so much trouble, that I feel old and wise enough to advise you, Fanny."

"And very ready I am, my lady, for any advice you may give me. But this is no foreign scamp—it is an Englishman—a sailor. It is Ralph Marshall, my lady."

"Oh," said Beryl, with a shadow sweeping over her mobile face. "I hope he is a good man and means you well, Fanny. It would be very hard for me to lose you, but I cannot expect to keep a pretty and pleasing girl, such as you are, forever. Love is your right."

"My lady, there's no man that lives can get me away from you, so long as you keep me. I know when I'm well off."

"Then, Fanny, do not be cruel and trifle with the man.

Oh, Fanny, remember how I suffered from having wounded and driven away one who loved me. It is a fearful thing to drive a man to despair."

"Oh, this man will not be hurt so easy, my lady," said the naughty Fanny, quilling a piece of lace into a jabot with great skill. "He has had his experiences. He has been married once."

"Then, as he has suffered, you should be doubly careful not to cause him more grief. If you do not mean any kindness to him, do not encourage him."

"But the man is tantalizing me with a secret, my lady. He has a secret that I'm bound to know. He has promised to tell me, and he keeps putting me off till next day, until I am wild. And then it is pleasant to have a nice tall man to buy one fruit, and he has been giving me some mighty pretty shells and a string of bangles."

"Fanny, I warn you, do not take his presents, unless you mean to return his love."

"Oh, I like him. Might I put a bit of cream or lavender ribbon in this jabot for you, my lady? Do be pleased to lighten up your mourning. I could have danced for joy, last week, when I saw the cap off your beautiful head —it is just as bright and curly as when I first brushed it for you—me in my first long frock, and you standing hugging the doll-baby you would not lay down."

Fanny was fond of these reminiscences.

"Yes, I like the man very much, my lady. If, after he has told me his secret, I like him more yet, would you mind my being engaged to him a year or two?"

"I should, if you jilted him in the end," said Beryl, looking up from the book on her lap.

"Possibly, if he sailed the seas all the time, I might content him by marrying him, so he would have some one to spend his wages on, and bring things to, and I could be your maid all the same, my lady."

"Fanny, I shall never hinder you of any real honest love. I know too well what it is to part two fond hearts."

"You will not be displeased if I walk on the sands a bit with him, my lady?"

"No," said Beryl, kindly.

"Well, I'm bound he shall tell me his secret," said Fanny, to herself, as she finished the jabot and laid out her lady's dress for dinner.

All the time she was dressing her lady, who had invited four or five English friends to dine with her, Fanny was considering by what acts she could beguile from Ralph Marshall this secret which concerned Sir Jerome Sothron and her lady. Fanny was a girl exceedingly given to curiosity.

When Lady Beryl had gone to her pretty little drawing-room to receive her guests, Fanny, with a final peep in the glass, which assured her that she was quite fascinating enough to wile secrets from Ralph, as a bird-charmer is to beguile birds from a bush, ran down to the beach. She found Marshall sitting under the fantastic arches, and flicking little pebbles into the water.

Ralph had provided himself with a knot of cherry ribbon, a box of bonbons, and a little silver pencil. All these he laid at Fanny's shrine.

"I don't think I'd better take them," said Fanny, with apparent indifference. "When a man don't give me what I want, he has small call to bring me what I don't want."

"I wish I thought it was Ralph Marshall himself you wanted, my lass, and you should have him in a minute. What would you think of me as a husband, Fanny?"

"Not much good; you'd not be enough confidential."

"Why, yes I would," said Ralph.

"To my mind, a man that don't tell his wife his secrets isn't worth having."

"Oh, if you come to that, my lass——"

"If you loved me you'd tell me all your secrets, and you know there's one about Sir Francis and Sir Jerome, that you're keeping back."

Ralph looked at the waves, in a brown study.

"And," said Fanny, "I only came here to-day to tell you not to expect me again. It may make trouble for me meeting you here, when it is all to come to nothing, because you don't truly love me, nor talk confidential to me."

"Come now, my lass, if you make it a point, I'll tell you all I know; for I'm not going to throw away happiness, keeping other folks' secrets."

Whereupon, Fanny sat down, leaned a little against Ralph, and favored him with a smile and her strict attention.

"The first thing I have to tell you, my lass, is that Sir

Jerome's wife, Celia Morris, had a sister Delia; and they two, being twins, was so like, almost no one could tell 'em apart. It took real love to know one from the other. Sir Francis Westholm Sothron, visiting at the abbey, took a notion to Delia—Celia being then living with an aunt in Lambeth; and finally, under promise of marriage, he got her to go off with him; and, as usually falls out in such cases, then he would not marry."

"Oh, the brute!" said Fanny. "I wish I had not said a word against your breaking his head!"

"I shall do it yet," said Ralph, firmly; "it's my mission!"

"And Delia?" said Fanny.

"Well, she went into despair finally—so far she left Sir Francis, for she was a girl ashamed of doing wrong, and desiring to do right, and in her sorrow she was about to throw herself off London Bridge. Now that was just after Sir Jerome had married her sister, and it happened he was crossing the bridge, and seeing what the young woman was at, he caught her in time. Then, turning her to the light, he thought it was his own wife, and shocked, he says, 'Celia! is it you?' When he found it was Delia, he felt very pitiful to her, and he took her to a decent woman that kept a lodging, and he got fifty pounds for her somewhere, for then he was poor. In a day or two after, he was rich. He told Delia to go see her sister, and he gave her money to live quiet.

"At that time I saw Delia, and I went wild in love of her at sight, and I wanted to marry her. And Sir Jerome, he told her, 'Marry an honest man if he loves you so as to overlook all.' And her sister, she begged and begged her to marry me, and finally she did. But I tell you truth, my lass, the love was all on my side; and though she behaved as well as a woman could, she did not care a penny for me, and she had cared, and did care, for Sir Francis. And I'll pay him out for it.

"Now that is as affairs stood when I come home from a voyage, and looking for my wife, met, in the middle of the night, Sir Jerome flying from the police under suspicion of having murdered his wife. I, knowing him so well, knew that he never had done that same, and so I helped him off in the bark Elizabeth going on to Rotterdam with half her lading. Knowing Delia would be heart-broke for her sister, I remained ashore to look to her. Well, I

thought Delia would be glad if I had seen Celia's body, and knew how and where she would be buried; and so I went up to the house I knew so well, and up to the room where the body lay.

"Ah, my lass, that was a hard sight! A low lounge in the middle of the room, and a linen sheet on it, hanging to the floor, over *something* all slender, straight, and still! And they lifted away the sheet, and, my lass, here she lay, as pretty a piece of marble as ever was cut out; scarce eighteen year old, murdered by a cruel hand. But, my lass, the secret is—*it was not Mrs. Jerome Sothron at all!* No, it was not Celia. Where Celia is I don't know. But, in a blue-flowered gown that Celia had given her, there lay dead before my eyes, not Sir Jerome's wife at all. but my own wife, Delia Marshall!"

CHAPTER LIII.

"WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL THE TRUTH?"

FANNY gave a scream, and caught Ralph's arm.

"Do you mean to say it was *not* Mrs. Jerome was killed?"

"Just that, missis; it was her sister."

"Well, who killed her, and why?"

"I can't tell you. I don't know."

"And why didn't you tell the truth at the time, man?"

"For several reasons. I could not bear to have poor Delia's name and all her follies put in all the papers, as it would if all had been told; for Delia was not a girl that took to wickedness. Then, again, I had been very lavish to Delia, and I had not a pound to bury her as she ought to be buried. And, last of all, I knew Delia would have wanted to be put in the Abbey church-yard alongside of her father and mother. I'd often heard her say she wished she was by them. But her relations was proudish people, and they would never have let her as ran away with Sir Francis, sleep in peace among 'em, though Celia, that married Sir Jerome, would be welcome, so I let it go that it was Celia to get my girl the burying she needed. I haunted about and followed the funeral, and was at it,

and after they set her up a grave-stone, with CELIA in big letters along the top, I spent a moonlight night chiseling out with my knife the true name, DELIA, down among the grass on the bottom of the stone."

"I believe," said Fanny, tearfully, "that you are a right good man."

"Well, my lass, I try to be. If you take me you'll find how near I sail by my intentions. "I'm a man that wants a wife. I don't want you to think I've no feelings to give you, for Delia's dead, and, moreover, she never cared for me, and it is not my nature to go on giving my feelings forever, and getting none back."

"But no one would have suspected Sir Jerome of murdering *your* wife," said Fanny.

"You see, I should have let Sir Jerome know how it stood, but then the bark Elizabeth that I put him on went down with all on board; and so it made no difference, as I could see, and being heart-sick I went off on a long voyage the day after I saw you. But when my feelings eased down a little I called you into my mind, and there you've been ever since."

The fact of the clearing of Sir Jerome's memory from the stain of murder had made little impression on Fanny. She could see that charge of crime made a great difference to a living person, but she could not see that it made any difference to the dead. To be punished for evil was the great trouble, in Fanny's mind. To her the chief thing was to escape punishment, the second thing was to be free from guilt. Fanny's nature was not high enough to set innocence first. So little did she regard the legal clearing of Sir Jerome's name, that she never had thought, did not now think of mentioning it. All the singular circumstances about Sara Hunter lost themselves in the to her greater interest of the fact that Mrs. Sothron was not dead.

"What had become of her? Where was she? No one had ever seen her since. Did she dislike her sister?"

"Oh, you'd never ask it if you'd seen the two. Why they were like as two peas, and loving as two doves. They held each other dear."

"But no one has ever seen Mrs. Jerome Sothron since."

"That is strange where she is, to be sure. She may be dead."

"And who wanted to murder your wife?"

"There again you have me. It is a fearful mystery. Some one must have mistaken her for her sister."

"Now it is clear," said Fanny. "It was Sara Hunter, the maid, did it, for money. She thought it was her mistress. Delia must have come in after Sir Jerome went out, and her sister must have given her the bank-note to look at or keep, and then Mrs. Sothron must have gone out, and Sara, taking your wife for her mistress, killed her."

"Yes, that is pretty plain. But where did Mrs. Sothron go? She must have seen the news of the murder in the papers. Why did she not speak?"

"I've heard of people hiding themselves in London for years and years, and if she wanted to hide, no way was better than letting it go that she was dead."

"That is plain," said Ralph.

"I've made up my mind not to tell my lady," said Fanny. "She is just getting more cheerful, and I won't harrow up her mind with all this dreadful story. I can't see as it makes any difference to her, Sir Jerome's wife living. If Sir Jerome was alive, then it would be different. But he has gone, and I hope to see her live down all her troubles and get some good of her life. The less said soonest mended."

"In which case, I had better have said nothing."

"Oh, no; I wanted to know what you meant," said Fanny; and as she had pinned the knot of ribbon at her breast, and opened the box of bonbons, Ralph accepted it as a good augury for his suit.

"And because I had ill fortune about my first wife, you won't say me no for a second, my lass?"

"Perhaps not—after awhile," said Fanny, coyly.

"But you'll give me a good answer right soon?"

"I'll think about it," said Fanny. "It is time I went back to the house; my lady may need me."

She rose up from the rock where she had been sitting, shook out her dress, and turned about.

"There! If there is not that snake again! What mischief does she mean now?"

"There's no snakes on the sea sand," said Ralph.

"Well, you look ahead, and if you don't see a snake coming this way, in a scarlet crape bonnet trimmed with jet poppies, and a black silk dress covered with bugle

net, and a scarlet satin parasol with black lace, my name isn't Fanny Hume."

"Which I hope soon will be Fanny Marshall."

"No matter what you hope," said Fanny, brusquely. "I'd give my best bonnet to know what that Mrs. Ranleigh is doing here! I just hate her!"

Then Fanny, in a perfectly artless manner, moved along the sands, and exhibited her hate by smiling in a very sweet and humble fashion at Mrs. Ranleigh as soon as that lady's black eyes fell on her, and she said;

"Why, Fanny, how are you, my good girl? And how is your lady?"

"She is well, ma'am," said Fanny, leaving her rosy cheeks to speak in her own behalf.

"Which is the nearest way to her villa, Fanny?"

"The nearest way is up those steps, ma'am."

"Then I will go that way, and I won't tell her I met you, Fanny," said Laura, tripping on.

"Consider the artfulness of her," said the ingenuous Fanny. "She won't tell! She thinks I'd be afraid to have my lady know I was here with you, and if she says she won't tell she'll put me in her interest, and make me afraid to go against her. I don't have secrets from my lady."

"And I hope you'll have none from me, Fanny."

"That depends whether you have any from me. But you have been fair enough to-day, and so, good-by," said Fanny, going up the steps where Mrs. Ranleigh had just passed.

She saw Laura's slender figure moving up the villa walk, erect, graceful; she saw her all at ease, furl her parasol, go up the steps to the piazza where Beryl had brought her guests after dinner; she saw her fold Beryl in her arms, and say:

"My own sweetest Beryl, it is heavenly to see you again!"

Then Fanny entered at the side door, and went up stairs to look over her lady's lace, and make to herself very unpleasant remarks about Mrs. Ranleigh.

The guests had gone. Beryl and Laura Ranleigh sat alone in the moonlight, listening to the lapping sea.

"Dear Beryl," said Laura, in the sweetest tones, "I know you cherish hard feelings toward me. You feel

that I have given you cause for complaint. Yours is the very gentlest heart in the world, but you are so good you are easily imposed on. There was a time, when in pity for your feelings, I could not speak, but now the hour is come to set myself right with you. You were first put against me by the falsehoods of a discharged maid. Dear Beryl, is it just for a lady to take the gossip of an angry servant as testimony against her best friend? Then I know, Beryl, the marquis said and did things to make you feel I was unfair to you. Oh, believe me, Beryl, I never said one word or gave one hint that he did not wrest from me by sharp, close questions, and his jealousy over you made him unconsciously exaggerate to you and to himself every word I uttered. I *always* spoke *for* you, darling Beryl. It was because I blamed his jealousy and upheld you, that he revoked that codicil. And I am glad I upheld you, for I love you, though my truth caused me loss of what would have saved me from desperate embarrassments. Beryl, I am in the most terrible distress. I have been obliged to rent my home and resign half my income to my creditors. And then, Beryl, Sir Francis Sothron paid me attentions that, as he has not offered himself, as every one thought he would, place me in the most unhappy position. Dear Beryl, by you, ever my unconscious enemy and rival, I have lost my competence and my lover. Oh, Beryl, pity me!" And Laura, in a passion of tears, knelt at Beryl's feet.

CHAPTER LIV.

"I'LL LEAVE HEAVEN TO RECKON WITH YOU."

THE light, graceful pillars of the veranda were wreathed with clematis and passion-flowers that passed in a fragile and fragrant curtain from one to another. Screened thus by leaf and flower, Beryl and Laura were unseen by passers-by, and they themselves did not see a portly figure stopping at the entrance gate, hesitant about coming in, and finally passing on. Laura would at once have known this figure for Sir Francis. But Sir Francis felt that the beautiful Beryl shrank from him, and that his call would

be unwelcome. The sunset red was yet lingering, and Sir Francis, wandering idly along, passed the new modern cottages of Biarritz, and came to an open space, which lies between them and the ancient town, clustering about several large buildings once convents. Passing before him on this little moor Sir Francis saw a graceful young figure, in a floating blue dress and white shawl, and followed by a page-boy, who carried a leather music-roll. This was Lelia, who had been with Lady Beryl, and was slowly returning home. At sight of her Sothron's bored look vanished, his face lighted, his step became rapid, he pressed by the lad, and said, in a low tone:

"Delia!"

The girl turned and looked fixedly at him.

"I implore you," said Sir Francis, trembling, "to tell me who you are! You are, and you are not, Delia."

"I am her sister."

"Her sister! And so like."

"Her twin."

"She never told me she had such a sister."

"No doubt the poor girl could not mention to you a family heart-broken over her errors. When her soul was sick with longing for those she had loved and deserted, would she be likely to speak of *us*, whom you would despise as you did her and her tears?"

"I did not despise her. I swear to you it was only my poverty——"

"Hush! It was your selfishness, your cruelty, your laziness, that would not take and support a wife, according to your promise."

"Do not be too hard on me. I am ready to atone—to share with her my name and all that I have."

They were walking slowly on.

"I cannot be walking or speaking with you out here," said Lelia. "I am at school here. This is my gate. As a parlor boarder I can receive a caller. If you have any news, or can help me in searching for my sister, you may in half an hour ring this bell and call for me, for the first and last time."

Her tone was severe and firm; she passed within the low, heavily arched gate, and Sir Francis strolled out toward the sea to wait his half-hour. When he rang at the little door he was led to a small, neat parlor, where a

piano, a stand of books, an embroidery frame, and pots of flowers gave a homelike air. Lelia was reading at a table by a softly shaded lamp; in a low chair not far from her an elderly woman in black sat knitting.

Lelia rose and bowed coldly to Sir Francis, pointing him to a chair.

"We are not alone," said Sir Francis, in a low tone. "I wished to speak of private affairs."

"Speak. She understands only Spanish."

But Sir Francis found it hard to speak. He found himself before this fair girl in the position of a criminal before a severe judge.

"You are very like your sister," he faltered. "How are you named?"

"Lelia."

"And your names are like?"

"Because we were so alike, they named us so."

Sir Francis sat thinking, his face bowed. He distinctly remembered that his cousin, Jerome, had married one of those Morris girls, with a name ending in *lia*. She had died a terrible death. He could not hint of that terrible tragedy. So, this pensive, lovely creature, so full of dignity and simplicity, watched him with high rebuke on her face. As he was silent she spoke:

"Can you give me any clew toward finding Delia?"

"No—none. But one thing I can tell you, Ralph Marshall—the man she married, is dead. I have the statement of his perishing when his ship went down with all on board. If Delia is found, she is free to be my wife, and she shall be. I have looked for her diligently in London."

"She was not in London. She meant to come to the Continent. She knew if she remained where she could see you, she would be again persuaded to fly with you. She fled from temptation."

"A pity she did," said Sir Francis, bitterly. "If she had come to me, the way would soon have been cleared to my marrying her."

"It is never better to sin," said Lelia.

"But to send her to the Continent was to drive her to ruin; she had nothing to live on."

"She did. It was in my power to give her plenty of money, and I gave it to her. An elderly French woman

that lodged where she did, was going with her. To save her, I gave her gladly all I had. I loved my sister. And," she added, in the deep voice of growing passion, "as I loved her, I hate you—I hate you, Francis Sothron, destroyer of my sister, with an utter hatred. And I call on you vengeance! And it will come! Mark my words, if there is one point where you can be wounded and driven to despair, there the dagger shall enter your soul. Evil, and not good, shall follow you all the days of your life!"

"I am ready to repair any wrong," faltered Sir Francis.

"Some wrongs can *never* be repaired! This is one. I believe my sister is dead, for I cannot find her, although I have extended inquiries everywhere. Her death, then, lies at your door, and God will require her blood at your hands."

"Do you give up the search?"

"No. I shall seek her, my best loved one; and for a year and a day I hold your promise, and when the year and the day are ended I will meet you at the tomb in the Abbey church."

Sir Francis found his way out of Lelia's presence, feeling as if he had made some strange tryst with death.

Lelia went up to her room, and panting and overpowered with excitement, threw open her window and sat down on the ledge. Her face, clearly revealed in the light of the lamp, came under the full gaze of Ralph Marshal.

"It is Mrs. Sothron! and I'll prove it!" said the sailor; and finding his way round the large building to the gate, he asked for Mrs. Sothron.

An English speaking servant explained to him that "No Mrs. Sothron was there. It was a school for demoiselles; there was no madame in the house but old madame, the chief of the establishment, and the cook, a widow. No gentlemen were admitted, and Ralph must not disturb the peace of the establishment by asking for some one not there."

"Curious how like people can be," said Ralph, going away, shaking his head. "I made sure it was Mrs. Sothron."

As he went back to the town, his head down, his hands in his pockets, he heard a cry from the moor for "Help!"

Springing along in the direction of the cry, he saw in the moonlight three men struggling with one.

"Fair play!" roared Ralph, but as he came dashing up the central figure fell under a heavy blow. The others had not time to accomplish their purpose of robbery, for Ralph, standing astride the fallen body, and jerking a club from one of the assailants, so heavily laid about him that one fell stunned, and the other two fled.

"Now, my hearty," said Ralph, bending over the unconscious figure he had defended, "let us see if you are dead or stunned."

He turned the body over, and the wide white moonlight fell on the motionless, bloody face, of the man whom he had sworn to destroy, Sir Francis Sothron!

His enemy was in his hands, white and helpless.

Ralph staggered back. Could he lift his hand against an unconscious foe?

To execute vengeance now would be sheer murder. Francis Sothron's face had been well photographed on his jealous heart, in the days of his love for the dead Delia. This was surely he.

And Delia had loved him, and her love had blighted all her life, and sent her down to a terrible death.

The brown fingers of Ralph tightened on Sir Francis Sothron's throat. Then they relaxed. He rose from his bending posture.

"No, no," he said, "it is not for an Englishman and an honest tar to take vengeance on a man lying between life and death. For this time I'll leave God to reckon with you, Sir Francis." And he strode away, leaving two figures lying on the heath.

CHAPTER LV.

"I SAW HIM AN HOUR AGO. HERE IN BIARRITZ."

BERYL was the tenderest, most forgiving, most easily moved of women. Traitorous as Laura had been, when Beryl saw her weeping on her knees, all her heart was touched, and clasping her satin-smooth arms around Laura's neck, she bowed her fair face to that brilliant dark one, saying:

"Oh, Laura! Do not kneel before me. Indeed, I never hindered you of either legacy or lover."

"You never meant to, Beryl! but, oh, you have!" cried Laura, clinging to her hands. Beryl, I lay my heart bare to you. I am not a women to live alone. I have a warm heart; I want a home and wedded love. I married so early, and was widowed so soon, that it is like a dream; and my heart was left, free as a young girl's, for a choice. Oh, Beryl, you know how good and noble the marquis was. His one blemish was jealousy, and that never would have developed married to a woman who loved him better than all the world beside. You know that, Beryl."

"I know," said Beryl, faintly, for this was to her a keen remorse.

"Oh, Beryl, I was that woman. I loved, I adored the marquis. He cared for me, Beryl, till your sweet child-face, your gentle mien, came between us. But for you, poor child—say, rather, but for your family—I should have been Percy's wife; and Percy would, I believe, to-day, have been a happy husband."

Here poor Beryl, artfully placed as a criminal, whose lack of adaptability had shortened her husband's life, burst into bitter weeping. She remembered the words of the marquis, "Perhaps I chose wrong." Oh, why had he not saved all this misery by choosing right?

"Darling," said Laura, generously, "I don't blame you: you did the best you could. I love you. But feeling as I did for Percy, I *could not* refuse to answer what he asked for. But I never, never betrayed you. Well, Beryl, that is passed. I am now a wretched woman; my beauty and popularity with men gave me enemies in bitter-tongued dowagers, who have daughters to marry. I am poor; miserably in debt. My few relations are angry because Sir Francis' attentions have ended as they have, in nothing definite. In my joy, for I really care for him, Beryl, I had given up Percy. I know it would have been wicked to care for *another woman's husband*"—(at this stab poor Beryl winced)—"and, indeed, I care for Francis. I would make him the best of wives. In my joy, I was too lavish, and I am in a terrible strait. Oh, Beryl, I come to you for love, pity, and help."

"What can I do for you,—Laura? And then, what did

you tell Sir Francis?—that I believed Jerome alive, and care here to find him?"

"No, no, my love. Either you misunderstood him, or he misunderstood me. I never said that. But men like Francis are so hasty, and apprehend so strangely. I should be glad if Jerome lived, for your sake, love. Francis, as heir, took the alarm, but he would not begrudge Jerome his life, though, of course, he is gone. But, somehow, Beryl, you have rivaled me, or set Sir Francis against me, for from the day you went to the abbey, I have lost his affection. He came here to see you—he is here now."

"No, he is not. Did you come for that, Laura?"

"Oh, how cruel, you are! Beryl, I came to you to save me."

"I? What can I do for you, Laura?"

"You can love me—you can be my friend. I hunger for love. I am so heart lonely, Beryl. You, too, are alone. Oh, let me stay with you. Your position, your name, your character, can be my shield, my stay, my defence, from cruel, triumphing tongues. I cast myself on your bounty. Help me! Save me! Love me! If you have anything against me, forgive me! But, indeed, indeed, I never knowingly did you wrong."

Beryl, so innocent and guileless, so tender and forgiving, relented toward her former friend. Laura's passion of protestation carried her away, and made her feel that she herself, in some way, had been wrong, and Laura right. She drew Laura closer, kissed her, and said:

"Dear Laura, I will do anything—everything I can for you!"

"Oh, you blessed angel!" said Laura. "Whatever comes over, if you will only love me, and be true to me, Beryl, I can have courage and be happy. Dear, I know you have been dull and lonely. We will be as two sisters. We shall be happy together, will we not?"

How surprised was Fanny, next day, to find that this unexpected guest remained in the villa all night, and that Mrs. Ranleigh's trunks arrived, and Mrs. Ranleigh, on the level of the warmest days of her intimacy, remained with Lady Medford.

It is true that the warmth, the intensity, of these suddenly renewed relations belonged to Laura; Beryl was

hesitant and troubled. But Laura ignored this, and was all effusion, brightness, caresses.

The shrewd Fanny detected one motive of Mrs. Ranleigh's movements. Reduced to sharp straits by her extravagance, and criticised for her light conduct, she took refuge under the wealth and dignity of Beryl. A reason, unknown to Fanny, was that Laura believed that, living with Beryl, she should see her truant love, Sir Francis, and not let him escape a third time.

Fanny, who loathed dullness, and longed to see her lady back in society, appreciated what would be Mrs. Ranleigh's success in this direction, and to Beryl's surprise, very amiably offered to be maid to both.

"You are the best of girls, Fanny," said her lady; "for I know you do not like Mrs. Ranleigh, but I think we have both misjudged her."

Fanny said nothing; but as she went into the wardrobe for a black net dress with a delicate trimming of lavender ribbons, smiled to herself as she considered that serving as maid would give her opportunity to keep Mrs. Ranleigh closely watched.

There was no harm, thought Fanny, in letting Mrs. Ranleigh think that she only was cognizant of those beach meetings with Ralph Marshall. If Laura thought the maid in her power, she would be less guarded before her.

The presence of Laura brightened the little villa. Beryl went out much more now that Laura was with her. With a "tiger" on a perch behind them, they drove about the lonely moors and the roads, all fruit-bordered and glowing under September suns.

That gave Fanny time, which she was nothing loth to improve, to take her sewing to the beach and talk with Ralph, who yet lingered about Biarritz unwilling to leave his Fanny.

He hastened to meet her, as she tripped down the rocks to a favorite seat under the cliff.

"I was nearly coming up to the villa to see you, my lass," said Ralph; "I was in such haste for you."

"Why, dear me!" cried Fanny, "*I* never care so much to see you, Ralph!"

"You would, my lass, if you knew what I had to tell you to-day."

"Eh? More secrets?" said Fanny, all attention.

"Ay, more and more. The queerest ever I heard."

"About?"

"About Sir Jerome Sothron."

"Oh, tell me quickly!"

"The fact is, my lass, he wasn't on the bark Elizabeth at all!"

Fanny gave a scream.

"Consequently he couldn't have sunk in her, as he wasn't on her. And, moreover, he may be alive at this minute, seeing he wasn't drowned then."

"Oh, Ralph, speak out plain! Don't tantalize me!"

"I *am* speaking plain. Moored next the Elizabeth that night lay the Mary Anne, going with the tide to sail for the Azores. On the Mary Anne, whose captain I knew, was his brother, a devil-may-care leaving England. Whether Sir Jerome distrusted me or not, I dont' know, but he stepped on the Mary Anne, changed coats and vest with the captain's brother, gave him his watch and his pocket-book, with a hundred pounds in it, and changed berths with him, and so Sir Jerome went to the Azores, and the captain's brother was drowned off the Maas and buried for Sir Jerome."

"How did you hear it?"

"I met the captain of the Mary Anne yesterday, and he told me."

"And where is Sir Jerome?"

"He left him at Fayal, and never saw him since."

"Then he may be alive."

"Very likely he is alive."

"And his wife is alive. All is back where it was. Heaven send my lady never hears of either of them more. Ralph, you must keep quiet."

"And let Sir Francis inherit? Not I."

"But for my lady's sake!"

"But for Delia's sake!"

* * * * * * *

The next morning Fanny was cutting roses, when Ralph came up and seized her arm.

"Hark you, lass. Sir Jerome is alive, I saw him an hour ago, here in Biarritz."

CHAPTER LV.

"OH, WHAT AN ESCAPE

"You could knock me down with a feather!" So said Fanny, dropping her roses.

"I don't want to knock you down with anything," said the matter-of-fact Ralph, picking up the flowers.

"You saw him?"

"Yes; down in the Casino. There was a great crowd, when who should I see across the room but Sir Jerome. I was taken all aback—regular caught in a flaw and ready to capsize. But I'd know his handsome face anywhere. And then I'm bound to serve Sir Francis the worst turn I can. So I began to tack along, working my way through the crowd, elbowing along—here, there—till I got where he was——"

"And then!"

"Then he was gone!"

"Gone! And where?"

"More'n I can tell you, missus."

"And you didn't see him nor speak to him at all?"

"No. I looked. I couldn't find him in the Casino; and when I sailed into the street on a clear course, he wasn't in sight, and I cruised around for two hours without seeing him. And then, my lass, I came to you, for I know you wish to keep this from your lady, and I'm anxious to deal fair and honest, and show the flag I sail under. I'm bound to make Sir Jerome show himself, and drive out that villain, Sir Francis. And if Sir Jerome won't speak, I'm bound to speak for him. I owe it to Sir Francis because of his treatment of Delia, and I'll pay it, sure."

Fanny was in great distress.

"What will become of us? My lady loves him just as deep as ever she did, and if she hears he is alive. she will be wild to see him—and then her heart is bound to break for him again, if his wife is alive. And here you say maybe his wife *is* alive."

"I *know* she is."

"Know?"

"Yes; or else she's dead, and I saw her ghost, or I saw Delia's ghost."

"You'll drive me mad with your ghosts and your Delias. You know there's no ghosts, man."

"Well, we sailors are pretty superstitious, my lass. It is the sea makes us so. If, as you say, there's none, then his wife is alive, and I saw her Sunday."

"Then, perhaps he's here after her."

"So he may be," said Ralph, with conviction. "I never thought of that."

"I wish you could tell me a straight story," said Fanny, ready to cry.

"Well, my lass, I vow I'm telling as straight a story as I can, and I never spun so many yarns in my life as I have for you. Here's the whole of it. Sunday, I strolled into a church, and in the crowd I stared at a face just like Delia's, and as Delia is dead, I knew it was Celia. So I watched, but the crowd and carriages made such a throng, I lost her entirely. But just along toward evening, strolling up by the moor, I caught sight of a head, and shoulders, and gait just like her again, below, and I hurried after, but lost her in some of the houses at the other end of the town—the ones with walled gardens."

"The old convents?"

"Ay."

"Well, then," said Fanny, "the end of all is, Sir Jerome is alive, and here. His wife is alive, and here. If my lady sees him, it is only to break her heart, and she will see him if she stays. I must get her away. Who knows what will turn up? I'll gain time, and give her a few more easy days, any way."

"Why, if she goes, you'll go, and I can't see you!" cried Marshall, in dismay.

"That's your lookout," said Fanny, angrily, blaming poor Ralph for Jerome's existence, and for his wife's.

Fanny's heart was just then all on her adored lady. She hurried in with her roses, distracted to find a plan for getting her mistress from Biarritz.

In the parlor was Mrs. Ranleigh. She had in her hand a Paris paper, and seemed in perplexity. She looked up as Fanny began to fill the vases.

"Fanny, don't you think your dear lady looks badly?"

"I don't know," said Fanny, discreet at once, though she knew Beryl looked wonderfully well.

"I know the climate here is too relaxing. She needs a higher altitude. She needs mountain air. She has been by the sea too long. She needs Switzerland, now in the grape harvest—Swiss air, Swiss milk, Swiss exercise."

Fanny saw light. She thrust her roses pell-mell into a vase. She approached Mrs. Ranleigh.

"Madam, for some reason *I* don't know, you wish to get my lady away from here. For a reason *you* do not know, I wish to get her away—now, at once, to-morrow! Let us work together. Oh, tell me, is there any way of getting my lady off to-morrow morning—for Switzerland or anywhere?"

"I know you only desire your lady's good," cried Laura, eagerly. "Plan for her good. I will help you, Fanny."

Her Paris paper had informed her that Sir Francis Sothron had started for Lausanne. She said:

"Could you get her to go to Lausanne?"

"I'm willing to tell the wickedest lie of my life," said Fanny, in great excitement, "to get her away."

"It would not be wicked, my good girl."

"My sister is maid to the Lady Maria Ravlin. I'll say I had a telegram that she is very ill at Lausanne, and I want to see her. You propose that we all make a start to Lausanne. You praise it well. I'll cry. You propose that North stays and shuts this house and comes after us, and I'll beg to leave on the morning train, and I'll offer to pack all the boxes to-day."

"Fanny, you are a jewel! You are the best, shrewdest, most devoted creature! You are worth your weight in gold!"

Even from Mrs. Ranleigh, praise was sweet to Fanny.

"Well, ma'am, if you'll go up to her and begin to talk Switzerland and your longings, I'll come up in a minute with my story. Heaven forgive me, and not send death on my family to punish me!"

Fanny wished to see North. Of late there had been a coolness between North and Fanny because of Ralph Marshall, and Fanny had remarked to North "that there was no sense in forever and ever sweetheartin' without idea of marrying."

She had now in hand to engage North to keep Jerome Sothron, his card, or his letter from her lady if it happened that either of the three should assail the villa. She and North had so high a personal battle, and Fanny was forced to tell so much of her lady's history, and he so very impressive, before she could win North's consent to act Cerberus, that she was trembling, flushed, and drowned in tears when, her victory over North won, she rushed up stairs and proclaimed her sister at the point of death in Lausanne.

Beryl Medford, straightforward and generous, was as wax in the hands of these conspirators. She agreed to go to Lausanne next morning for an indefinite stay. She allowed Fanny to go down and say that her lady was "not at home" to any one.

All that day was spent in diligent preparations. Fanny wept—from various causes, Ralph being one. Mrs. Ranleigh sang the praises of Switzerland. A busy day; early retirement; early breakfast—these made the dangerous time short, while Fanny trembled at every peal of the bell and at every footfall.

At evening Fanny slid out into the moonlight to bid Ralph good-by. He said he had looked everywhere for Sir Jerome, but had not found him. He should seek further for him, and for Mrs. Sothron, but in four days he must go to England, or lose his ship.

"Mind you don't lose the ship, else how can we be married next year?" said Fanny. "And write to me if you see Sir Jerome."

Four days! Perhaps four days would go by without danger.

The next morning, Beryl insisted that Fanny, as she was in trouble for her sister, should go in the compartment with Mrs. Ranleigh and herself. Fanny lingered, the last one to enter, to speak with Ralph. She saw Sir Jerome Sothron enter the last of the second-class compartments on the same train. Ralph did not see him; his whole attention was on the rosy Fanny.

Fanny, in desperate anxiety, cried all the way to the station where they changed trains. But, to her great joy. Sir Jerome did not leave his compartment, nor change his train, and Fanny's spirits rose as they whirled away, and she realized that the dreaded Sir Jerome was whirling in quite a contrary direction.

CHAPTER LVI.

"WAS IT A PROPOSAL TO-DAY?"

FANNY afterward looked back to those four days as the bad dream of her life. She dreaded at every turn of the road to see Sir Jerome appear to face her adored lady, and she always pictured him with his wife leaning on his arm. She had also to make the best she could of the fact that on arriving at Lausanne she found her sister, Lady Maria's maid, perfectly well. She made some lame excuse about a trick played on her, but never felt that Lady Beryl was quite satisfied there with.

However, the four days passed; they were charmingly settled in a hotel on the bluff overlooking the deep, blue waters of Lake Geneva, and Ralph Marshall had not been heard from—Fanny hoped that he was well on the way to Bermuda.

On the second afternoon of their stay, Mrs. Ranleigh proposed a promenade along the green, shaded alleys of Montbenon. It was as a triumphal procession for Laura; she felt that she looked admirable in her walking-suit of green velvet, buttoned with silver balls; she shared the admiration which followed the singular beauty of Beryl; and then, it was worth much to walk out followed by the stately valet, North, the rosy maid, Fanny, and a page in blue-and-canary livery. The Montbenon promenade was crowded with cheerful groups, laughing along under the trees, or stopping to get the exquisite views of the lake glittering in the sun beneath the line of cliffs.

As Beryl and Laura stopped for one of these views, they saw some one sitting on the terrace a little below them—an Englishman, evidently, from his travelling costume. A tall greyhound was standing with his head on his master's knee.

"There is Sir Francis!" cried Laura, in subdued delight; and breaking off a little branch from a lime tree overhead, she tossed it so that it fell almost into his hand.

He looked up. A flash of pleasure went over his face, and he at once joined them.

"Who would have thought," said Laura, "to see the gay Sir Francis sitting in melancholy mood alone?"

"And who would have thought that such blissful society was coming to his rescue?" cried Sir Francis.

"I am charmed that you are here," said Laura; but whoever would have thought of seeing you in such an out-of-the-way resort? Lausanne is utterly unfashionable."

"Then how did it lure two queens of London society?"

"You remember I am not in society just now, and I am pursuing a quiet life," said Beryl.

"To come forth like a Venus new dipped in Paphian wells, for the destruction of English mankind, when your seclusion is completed," said Sir Francis.

Beryl did not like this bald style of compliment. She did not like Sir Francis, and she also remembered that Laura had complained that she rivalled her with her lovers. She moved slowly, a little in advance of the other two, along the aisles of green.

"For my part," said Laura, "I came here because I felt sad and lonely, and I wanted the sweet comfort of nature. Have you ever felt that need, Sir Francis? I think you must; else why did I find you sitting alone here?"

"The idea," said Sir Francis, uneasily, "of the gay Mrs. Ranleigh ever feeling sad, or flying back to mother nature. !"

"Ah, but I do. I was once the gayest of the gay. Do you remember my birthday, when you gave me a *fête* at that lovely abbey? That morning I was the happiest of the happy; and then I do not know what it was—some omen, no doubt, that this would be a sad year in my life, came to me. A shadow fell over the day and over my heart. I think it fell on you, too. Do you remember that day?"

"Yes, I remember," said Sir Francis, briefly, flecking little pebbles out of the walk with the ferrule of his cane.

"And do you remember a day or two after—such a lovely day—when we went down to the brook-meadow for iris? I could have sworn that you had that day a secret grief—a burden on your heart."

"So I had."

"Will you not tell me what it is?" said Laura, in a soft, entreating voice, laying her little gloved hand on his arm. "You have no sisters; sorrow is so much lessened when it is shared; and then there is sometimes no counsel so good as a lo—as a friendly woman's, Sir Francis! Try me!'

"I had taken that morning," said Sir Francis, "a solemn vow for a twelvemonth and a day. For that time I am bound to drift and wait—simply to live, to see what that period will bring me."

"And then!" cried Mrs. Ranleigh.

"Then either the whole current of my life will be changed, or I will take it up again, as far as I can, from what it was the first of May, your *fête* day."

"I believe you are a modern Don Quixote."

"Perhaps I am."

"Let me tell you why you took that vow. You had taken a fancy, from a very foolish and unguarded speech of mine, that your Cousin Jerome might not be dead. You have vowed to give him that time to appear and claim his own."

"It is true I have given the *lost*—I shall not say whom—time to reappear and claim amends."

"You belong to the age of chivalry, Sir Francis, not to modern sharpness," said Laura, in her most flattering tones. "You are like a knight, vowed to a pilgrimage or a penance. But do you know it would seem to me such a hard and cruel thing, for a man to inherit as you have, to suit himself to a great property, to lay his plans, to fashion his life, and then have to resign all! I think there should be a law that when a man seems dead, and is accounted dead, he must *stay* dead! Not seven years, but seven months, is dead long enough to obliterate a personality, in my idea."

They had stopped in the walk in the earnestness of their speech. They looked up. Beryl stood at the end of the avenue waiting for them. The greyhound was by her side, and she was reaching up after a spray of leaves over her head.

"That is looking at it from the heir's view," said Sir Francis Sothron.

"Well, I cannot look at it from other views than yours,"

said Laura. "I feel for *you*. I suppose Beryl would feel for your cousin; but we must not mention him before her. Poor Beryl, her weeds are for the marquis, her tears for Sir Jerome!" With which thrust at her dearest friend, on whom the eyes of Sir Francis had fallen with evident admiration, they rejoined Lady Medford.

"Now you are here," said Laura, "we shall make you our squire, we shall be *dames sans merci* in making excursions. We have set to-morrow for going to Vevay to follow the scenes of Rousseau's New Heloise. Perhaps those 'burning pages' will teach us world-worn moderns how to admire."

"Well, Laura," said Beryl, as her friend came to her room that night to chat by the fire. "Was it a proposal to-day? As you stood together in the path, I confess it looked like it."

"Well, no, not exactly. It seems this new Knight of the Round Table has made some kind of a vow, which runs out about the fourth of next May. But he as good as said that then he should be at liberty to take up life where he left it, and lay his heart and hand at my feet. I suppose I can wait."

"You seem to have such a strange way of love-making, Laura," said poor Beryl, wistfully.

"Not very emotional? Well, dear, the practicalities of life have hardened me a little. But I'm *very* fond of you, and I'm very anxious to be Lady of Sothronwold Abbey, and I think I shall."

They went to Vevay, and Laura quoted select bits of the New Heloise. The day after they went to Chillon to visit "those loop-hole grates where captives weep," Laura leaning tenderly on Sir Francis' arm.

Beryl never leaned on Sir Francis' arm. She had an undefined horror of him, and wished he would go away from Lausanne. She would have moved on to Geneva, only she believed Laura would arrange to have him follow them. She had never heard the evil stories of Sir Francis that Laura knew and tolerated, but the man was odious to her, and that not because he reigned in Jerome's place. If that was the will of Heaven, Beryl could submit to it. She felt a real relief when Lord Ravlin and Sir Eustace Friar appeared from a trip to Norway. She could now make her parties larger and escape Sir Francis.

CHAPTER LVII.

"MORE BEAUTIFUL THAN EVER!"

"WHAT, Beryl! You are going to give up the excursion to Hauteville and Bloney. Giving it up, too, at the last minute," cried Laura, half angrily, a week or ten days later.

"I'm rather tired of excursions, Laura; and then, I do not like to go out so much always with the same company. Remember I am still in my first year's mourning. There will be enough of you. Lady Friar and her daughter, Lady Maria Ravlin and her aunt, and the three gentlemen."

Laura was not really very sorry of a day when, in her new mountain toilet, she should shine without the contrast of Beryl's serene enchaining beauty. She said, amiably:

"Well, perhaps you are not so strong as the rest of us. I don't wish to wear you out, you little darling!"

Beryl stood on the balcony before her room, and waved her hand toward the two carriage loads of excursionists as they drove off early from the hotel. She had her own little plans for the day. She loved short, secluded, romantic excursions on foot, when she could follow undisturbed her own thoughts, listen in a sweet trance to birds, or watch their flight, gather flowers, and talk to peasants at her ease. A Swiss lad of fourteen and his twin sister were her guides and companions in these walks. The boy had his big dog; they all carried alpenstocks. Fanny confided to the boy a hamper of lunch, and the little party would set off in great content, and be gone four or five hours. For such an expedition now Beryl proceeded to be dressed, and as Fanny remarked her soft bloom, her fugitive dimples, she secretly rejoiced that she had not disturbed her lady's growing peace with any brighter tales about Sir Jerome and his wife. In a

short tailor-made black broadcloth dress, with a cap to match, set upon her lovely golden curled head, the prettiest of little gloves and boots, her alpenstock in her hand, her big dog at her side, and the picturesque Swiss lad and lass following her very respectfully. Beryl enjoying to the full the glorious September morning when all the bracing air was loaded with the rich scent of the ripe grapes, went through the grand lime-tree avenue, over the ruins of ancient Lausanne, flooded into ruins thirteen hundred years ago, and so into a little wooded gorge among the hills.

The Swiss lad caught some fish from the lake, and his sister proposed to cook them, wrapped in leaves, on a fire of coals. Pending this simple repast Beryl wandered up the gorge. She was half a mile from her attendants, the great dog her sole companion, when she saw beyond the little stream that ran down the ravine a splendid cluster of flowers which she at once greatly wished to obtain. The water-course did not seem deep. Stones rose up above the surface here and there. She concluded to cross. The dog dashed over and waited.

From stone to stone to the middle of the stream she went. But the next stone was farther off than the others had been—farther than she could well step. The sun came through the branches on the bank she faced, and blinded her eyes so she could not see her footing. She lowered her little black parasol close to her face and considered. Then there was a brisk step on the stones between her and her desire, and a voice said :

"May I aid you?"

A hand was held out to her, and from under the parasol she could see a man's figure from feet to breast. Low, square-toed shoes with buckles, seal-brown hose, seal-brown velvet knickerbockers, and Norfolk jacket belted at the waist ; an immaculately gloved and cuffed hand held out. She put her own in it, and took the three or four further steps in safety.

"Thank you!" she said, withdrawing her hand and removing her parasol. She was now out of the sun so she could look up freely.

"*Beryl!*"

"*Jerome!*"

She threw herself into his arms. She laid her golden

head on the brown velvet jacket, and clasped her arms about this lost, found, never less than passionately loved lover. Hers was the ardent abandon of love. She knew that she was free ; she knew that he was free ; had she not seen Sara Hunter's sworn confession ?

She clasped him fast, with tears, crying :

"Jerome, dear, dear Jerome !"

Never had man done bitterer penance for folly than Jerome for cherishing admiration for another man's wife. He had repented and eschewed his sins. But though he had never heard of Lord Medford's death, what could he do in the first mad joy of reunion with the idol of his soul, when she was weeping in his arms, but kiss her over and over again, before he thought whether he ought or not?

But Beryl suddenly released herself from his clasp. Divine blushes covered her face.

"To see you again when I had long believed you dead, Jerome, it was too much !" she faltered.

"One moment of heaven !" sighed Jerome. Then, looking at her narrowly, he continued, "How came you here alone? And—and—are you not all in black, Beryl ?"

Beryl's joy-lit face grew grave.

"For—the marquis ; he has been dead nine months. He—was very good to me, Jerome."

But it was now Jerome's turn to abandon himself to the full tide of his love. He clasped her again in his arms.

"Oh, Beryl, Beryl! Is it true that to love you is neither madness nor crime? Dream of my life ! my consolation, in my exile ! sole love and treasure of my heart ! are you near me, are you mine ?"

The rapture of those two young, long-severed hearts would have touched the coldest, melted the sternest. If, back to the boundaries of this world, the marquis' spirit could return from those limitless regions where he had become a citizen, he himself must have smiled well pleased at a love so full, so innocent, so exultant as this.

The flowers Beryl had craved grew unheeded on the banks ; the dog dashed in and out of the water and shook himself, sending a shower of drops around ; Beryl's forgotten parasol floated off down stream ; and they heeded none of these things, infolded like the "Huguenot lovers," but for meeting, not for parting.

The moments fled, while they cared only to look into each other's eyes.

"More beautiful than ever!" cried Jerome, gazing down at her.

"Oh, Jerome! I was just thinking were you *always* so very, *very* handsome as you are now?"

And they both broke into a glad laugh that made melody with the stir of the leaves and the ripple of the brook.

"Jerome, where have you been?"

"Over all the world. Why should I return? You were lost to me. My honor was assailed, and only by harming you could I clear myself. But you, you, my Beryl, knew I was not guilty."

"But you have seen Sara Hunter's dying confession that she alone did that hideous deed?"

"No! Confessed! Is it so?"

"Over six months ago. It was published in almost all the world, I think."

"At that time I was sailing far off among the coral islands of the Pacific. I never heard of it."

"And how did you come here, Jerome?"

"Beryl, lured, I suppose, by thought of you; to get into the air you breathed, where your name is heard. Like the moth to the flame, I have been flying in shorter and shorter circles about England—finding it alike agony never to see you, and to see you the wife of another."

"That was my wicked fault!" said Beryl, hiding her face. "Jerome, did you know you were thought dead? Your body was supposed to be found and buried, and your cousin, Sir Francis Westholm Sothron, inherited."

"He is not fit to inherit a place whose hospitalities he desecrated by an act of wanton wickedness!" cried Jerome.

So they talked, and told the tale of the past, and at last bethought themselves of return because they heard the shouts of the two little guides, looking for their lady.

The guides were hungry, the fish were burned to a cinder, the fire was out. Beryl opened the hamper, and provided for the appetites of the boy, the girl, and the dog. For Jerome and herself, they heard each other's words, looked into each other's eyes, and feasted on nectar and ambrosia, like the gods of Hellas.

Toward the middle of the afternoon Fanny went upon the balcony to look out for her mistress. From the linden

walk she saw her coming, rosy, elate, with face all glorified with joy, walking as on air, superior to all sorrows, in a full heaven of delight, walking by the side of Sir Jerome Sothron!

CHAPTER LVIII.

THIS IS THE HEIR.

When Fanny saw those two figures coming out of the lime-tree avenue, so elate, so absorbed in each other, forgetful as two children of all about them, and feeling, rather than two mortals, like two beatific gods caught up on clouds between earth and sky; she realizing, as they could not, the terrible extent of their situation, reeled and almost fell. She was saved from fainting by her temple striking on the sharp side of the doorway, and the stinging pain kept her in her senses. She staggered to the dressing-room and began bathing her face. She was in a tumult of terror, horror, despair. She heard feet coming along the corridor and entering the adjacent drawing-room of Lady Beryl's suite. Then she cast herself, face downward, on a couch; she could not meet her lady's eyes.

Presently Beryl entered. Then stopped suddenly.

"Why, Fanny! Fanny! what is this?—what is wrong?"

"Nothing, my lady," said Fanny, in a stifled tone, "only I struck my face. It will be better soon."

"Oh, poor girl! Can I do anything for you? Let me see; is it much hurt, Fanny?"

"No, ma'am, no," groaned Fanny, hiding her face more deeply.

"Fanny, are you in too much pain to hear the best, most wonderful news that ever was in this world? Oh, Fanny, you have always been true to me; you love me, my good girl; I must tell you of my joy. Fanny—how can I say it?—I am so very happy, I feel as if I were above this world, as if I had wings! Oh, can you guess it? Sir Jerome did not die. He is alive, Fanny—alive and well! He is here!"

The musical voice rose in sweetest exultation; the tones thrilled the prostrate Fanny. Never, never had

she heard such joy in any words. Must she, could she poison this exuberant happiness at its spring by telling Lady Beryl that this restored lover was not for her—was forever parted from her—was the husband of another?

She sat up, brushed back the hair from her moist, flushed face, and strove to meet her lady's looks.

The Beryl standing before her was so like the fair, sweet child Beryl—exultant in some new joy, some new doll, some Arab pony, some unexpected treat; only the happy child was now the blissful woman, and the child-joy was glorified to the fullest happiness of a loving and satisfied heart.

"Oh," said Fanny to herself, "I could tear myself in little bits, gladly, if that would make it right for her."

Speak! she could not speak. Tell the bitter truth? No; she dared not. Cast down from the celestial heights of her love and joy, this exquisite creature, living in her love, would perish in an instant, as some crystal vase crushed into atoms by an untimely blow.

Fanny was dumb. If she were to tell the truth, it must be some other day, some hour when the ecstasy of joy was less keen, when the fall would be from less lofty pinnacles; it must be slowly, by degrees; or some other voice, not hers, must tell the tale. Was it for Fanny, idolatrously loving this charge of her life, to remand to misery this heart now opening to the full sunshine of love?

Fanny was utterly incapable of so great and terrible a task. Had she ever denied Beryl, as a child, any secret excursion in the woods or to a pantomime? Had she ever hindered her of surreptitious sweets or forbidden fruits? And now, when her face was rosy as the dawn, and her beautiful eyes were as a summer noon in the full light of love, could Fanny close for her the gates of paradise? No, no, no! Instead, she fell on her knees, kissed Beryl's hands, hid her face in her black robes, and relieved herself by a flood of tears and incoherent sobs.

"Oh, my lady, what an angel you look! How sweet, how heavenly, how happy!"

"Poor Fanny, with that blow and surprise you are quite hysterical. Where are the salts? Here, Fanny, bathe your face with cologne. There—Sir Jerome is waiting for me. Sit by the window; I will dress myself.

I am all dusty with my walk; and my boots got wet; look at them; and *he* is waiting for me. Oh, Fanny, to think he is in the next room! Oh, joy! joy! We shall dine together, he and I, in my parlor, Fanny; I gave the order as I came up."

Thus Beryl, nervously pulling off hat, gloves, walking dress, and even her own dusty little boots, until a celestial image, with bare pearly shoulders and arms, short white petticoats, the lace and cambric draperies of a half-dressed wax doll, she darted into her bath-room, and the door closed on her lovely vision.

"May heaven bless her!" cried Fanny, picking up the abandoned garments. "Let her take her happiness where she can get it. She's had little enough so far. And how she takes to love and happiness, like a flower to sun! I'll not be the wretch to break her heart. Who can tell but that poor Mrs. Sothron is dead any way. No doubt she is. What did she have to live for? I'll let things take their course—what harm in being happy, and having a little innocent love making? She'll not think of marrying this good while, and before that, who knows? That will be time enough to speak."

Fanny had barely reached this laudable conclusion of her difficulties, when the bath-room door opened, and out came a wet and curly golden head, a pair of moist pink shoulders, rising out of a white flannel peignor, held folded together by a pair of round, dimpled, satin-smooth arms; a pair of daintily molded pink feet thrust into white lamb's skin slippers.

"Fanny, are you better? I don't believe I can ever get my hair done."

"My blessed lady, do you think I'd leave you to dress yourself?" cried Fanny, spreading out a great Russia towel, and flying to capture, rub and dry the drenched golden locks. "Your hair was not half-fastened, my lady, and here it is all rolled down, and is drenched!"

Beryl laughed like a joyous child. To-day all things made her happy. Between her rosy lips, her white teeth showed their tiny even edges in a perpetual smile.

"Hurry, Fanny, hurry. I've been such an age!"

The "age" had lasted twenty minutes.

The dressing was finished. Beryl stood before the glass. Every rebellious curl was just where it should be to make

her captivating—her face, all transfigured with joy and dimples, had never been lovelier. Her white cashmere dress, high in the neck and long in the sleeves, was made up of delicate little tucks, a broad lusterless black sash drawn about her waist, hung in loops with long ends that reached to the hem of her dress, the lisse ruche about her pearly throat was held in place by a close round collar of small pansies carved out of clear black jade.

"Goodness!" said Fanny, "if you were in velvet and diamonds as I hope to see you a year from now—you would not look lovelier."

And out of the dressing-room door this charming figure slid under the purple portiere to rejoice the eager eyes of the waiting Sir Jerome, who, wild with delight, did not scruple to rush and fold her to his bosom, and with ardent kisses compensate himself for his love's long privations.

"Jerome," cried Beryl, "if you will behave in this way I shall have to keep a companion. She is now in Biarritz. Shall I send for her?"

"I will be good," said Jerome, folding his hands; "but consider what a new joy this is to see you—to know that we love—that we *may* love each other."

The click of silver and glass in the little dainty salon next them proclaimed the laying of dinner. Presently North at the door, in stately fashion, announced that "dinner was served." Waited on by North, and the page in blue and canary, Jerome and Beryl could only look unutterable joy at each other.

Alas, that in this fallen world of ours even purest love and most innocent joy are selfish! But can we blame these two that they forgot the fearful disappointment stored up for the recent heir of Sothronwold and for Laura Ranleigh? They never once thought of either of them until, left alone with coffee in Sevres china before them and a glorious basket of roses between them, the door flew open, and in rushed Lord Ravlin, Lady Maria, Laura Ranleigh, and Francis Westholm-Sothron.

CHAPTER LIX.

"THEN I WOULD MAKE A REMEDY."

In the days when Jerome Sothron had neither possessed an estate nor expected to inherit one, his poverty, until it had hindered his marriage with Beryl, had sat lightly upon him. His was a wholesome, unmercenary nature; he lived in his affections. After such sore trials as he had undergone—the loss of the woman he adored, exile, accusation of murder—the mere loss of an estate did not seem to him very terrible; and it never entered his honest mind that the sight of himself, sitting handsome and happy at the head of the board, the light striking out of his rich brown velvet suit strong shadows and points of brightness as he leaned forward and looked at Beryl across the flowers, would be to Francis Westholm-Sothron as an apparition of death and final judgment.

He sprang to his feet as the little excursion party entered, and holding out both hands, went to meet them.

"Ravlin, my friend, I am here! Francis, how are you! Mrs. Ranleigh, these three years must have been to you a day! Lady Maria, how beautiful it is to see fair English faces once more!"

Here was one risen from the dead! They were mute.

Then Beryl remembered that talk with Sir Francis on the rocks of Biarritz.

"It is *really* Sir Jerome," she said, coming forward. "Are you too surprised to speak?"

They crowded about him then. Sir Francis grown deadly pale, realizing all he lost in the resurrection of the heir, but fighting to maintain his calm; the Ravlins very glad; Lord Ravlin looking from Beryl to Sir Jerome and back, remembering all she had told him of the wealth of love treasured for this man, and thinking how happy they must be.

Malign fires glowed in Laura Ranleigh's eyes, a fury possessed her, but she dropped her long-lashed lids and taught her lips to smile, while deadly mischief lurked unformed in her heart.

Beryl rang for more coffee, and they all gathered round the table. In her radiant joy the young hostess tried to make all happy. She described eagerly how she and Jerome had met in the ravine beyond old Lausanne.

"He, it seems, was walking along the Aubonne bank, and I was walking straight to meet him."

"A wonderful coincidence! Quite a fairy tale," said Laura, in her tone a bitterness which she could not conceal.

"Come, Jerome," said Lord Ravlin, when they had finished their coffee, "remember, you have been dead and buried and resurrected, and are now a new man. We are to be your social sponsors, so come into the drawing-room, and tell us your adventures. Sindbad the Sailor will have a rival in you."

"Or Munchausen," said Laura. "When a man is dead one day and alive the next, what can we believe about him? I think he should consider himself quite another and a new person."

"We are all able to swear to his identity," said Lord Ravlin, dryly. "The handsomest man in London is hardly likely to be mistaken for some one else."

"Now, Sir Jerome," said Lady Maria, laying her hand lightly on his arm, "take this chair where we can gather around you, and explain yourself from the beginning."

"That is," said Lord Ravlin, thoughtfully, "from your *not* being on board the Elizabeth. Why you left, and how falsely you were accused, Sir Jerome, we all know; it is the latest newspaper sensation, and all London is ready to welcome you back as a martyr and make you the lion of the hour."

"Mr. Sothron," said Lady Maria to Francis, "why are you standing?"

He bit his lip and sat down. An hour before she had called him *Sir Francis!* He had lost in so short a time title and fortune."

"I was not in the Elizabeth," said Jerome, "because, moved by a sudden impulse, I stepped over her bulwarks to the deck of the Mary Anne, bound for the Azores, changed identity with the captain's brother, and went to Fayal. I had changed my name as I had my coat. I had for my entire fortune fifty pounds in my pocket, and a diamond ring."

"Why did you go to the Azores or leave the Elizabeth?" demanded Laura, a cross-questioning sharpness in her tone.

"Simply because I remembered that I could speak Portuguese and could not speak Dutch. I had my living to earn, and luckily commended myself to a Fayal trader, who sent me to Java and New Guinea. Returning, our ship was wrecked off the Cape of Good Hope, but, after drifting three days in an open boat, we were picked up, and I landed in Africa with nothing but my ring and a ruined suit of clothes. By the time I was rested and reclad, I was invited to join a party going to the diamond fields. I had there extraordinary good fortune, and in a year made fifty thousand pounds. Then, sick of Africa, for no place was pleasant far from England and those I loved," and he looked at Beryl with a great light in his eyes. "I went to Brazil. There I entered into some speculations which increased my means. But restless still, I went to the United States, crossed to the Pacific, visited some of the Pacific Islands, went to China and Japan then to India, thence by Suez Canal to the Mediterranean, and drawn by England as by a mighty magnet, I came through Italy into Switzerland, and even if I had not there met you all, blessed as the angels Jacob saw in his dream, no doubt I should have moved on, on, into the dear island home and to the blessed shades of the Abbey once more."

Francis Westholm started up, and went out upon the balcony; the others, except Laura, were too entranced with the tale and with the questions that thronged to their lips, to notice when he went out.

Beryl bent forward in a low chair, her earnest, lovely eyes fixed on Jerome, her small hands lightly clasped upon her knee, her rosy lips just touching, gave a deep sigh of heartfelt content, and then her eager questions broke forth. Had he many storms at sea? Were those far islands of the tropics like Eden in its prime? Had he brought back tokens from those wonderful countries where he had wandered?

Jerome, stirred by her enchanting face, answered with eloquence.

"It is a new Desdemona and Othello," cried Laura, rising.

"Wherein I spoke of most disastrous chances,
Of moving accidents by flood and field.
* * * * * * * *
These things to hear,
Would Desdemona seriously incline:
* * * * * * * *
'Twas pitiful, 'twas wondrous pitiful,
She wished she had not heard it, yet she wished
That Heaven had made her such a man. She thanked me,
And bade me, if I had a friend that loved her,
I should but teach him how to tell my story,
And that would woo her.
* * * * * * * *
She loved me for the dangers I had passed,
And I loved her that she did pity them."

Laura had a fine voice, a natural talent for the stage. She held the little audience till the last syllable fell from her lips, and went out, leaving Beryl covered with crimson blushes.

Lady Maria patted her hand.

"It is a witching story, Beryl. I wish Viscount Hampton could tell me such a tale."

In two months Lady Maria was to marry the viscount.

Laura went upon the balcony beside Francis Sothron. His cause she felt was hers. She had hoped to share this inheritance which he had lost. She resented the loss as personal.

"I cannot feel that this is right," she cried. "He heired the estate and held it; you have done the same. Why can he dispossess you?"

"He is, by accident of birth, the nearer heir."

"Have you never heard of false identity? Have there not been those who personated the dead so well that even brothers and mothers, or wives acknowledged them? Why is not this a new Tichborne case?"

Francis Westholm laughed bitterly.

"This is no false Sir Jerome. Could any one doubt that easy air, that handsome audacity? No, no, I should myself be obliged to swear to his identity! He is one of fortune's darlings. He comes home to wealth, and loaded with wealth, picked up as other men would pick up pebbles. He comes in triumph. I must give way. There is no remedy."

Laura's black brows straightened, her lips set firm.

"I would *make* a remedy!" she said, fiercely.

CHAPTER LX.

OVER THE PARAPET—UNDER THE WAVE.

THE little party broke up at a late hour. They were too excited to think of rest.

"Ravlin, I must get a room at your hotel," said Sir Jerome, "and to-morrow I will send over for my traps, my man, and my luggage."

Mrs. Ranleigh and Lady Maria were standing near each other.

"Beryl staid at home to good purpose to-day," said Laura, in a low tone. "I could not imagine why she refused this excursion at the last minute."

"Why, what can you mean?" cried Lady Maria.

"Of course she had heard from him; helped him plan this little surprise."

"Of course she had *not*, since she says it was equal surprise to her. Beryl is transparent truth itself."

"She could be an adept in such a little scheme as this. She and Sothron were engaged ages ago. The marquis has been dead nine or ten months. She would not like to seem to have been in correspondence with Sir Jerome before now. Believe me she knew it. I have suspected this, and warned Sir Francis. Ask him. It is hard on him, isn't it?"

"I do not know that it is any harder or as hard as it was on Sir Jerome; and it seems to me that Sir Jerome is the nobler man for the place."

"Well, to me it seems that giving one's self out for dead should constitute a crime or legal death. This dying and coming to life again can cover too much, and bring too much trouble on others."

Fanny came with Lady Maria's wraps, and Laura went to her room. She could not control herself to stay and talk with Beryl that night; the sight of her complete happiness was hateful. Beryl would expect to be congratulated. Laura went to her room, not to sleep, but to indulge in a fury of passion; to fall into a wild chaos of impossible planning. She felt a burning hatred toward the joyous, triumphant Jerome, and to Beryl in her ravish-

ing happiness. She had a little ivory portrait of Beryl on her toilet-table. She flung it on the floor, and trampled on it in her impotent fury.

Lord Ravlin accompanied Jerome to his room. The course he had taken in defending Jerome dead bound him to Jerome living. They sat down by the glowing sea-coal fire and talked.

"You must tell me all that has passed in England since I vanished," said Jerome.

"You mean in *your* England. What of your history, and what of Lady Beryl? No man can tell you better."

With warm words Lord Ravlin sketched the past. He told of the autumn hour, about a year before, when he had seen Beryl weeping in the Winderton woods, and had received her confidence.

"Heaven send those angelic eyes may never shed another tear!" said Jerome, fervently.

Then Lord Ravlin told of that further confidence given in the snowy park that January day; of the April afternoon when she had gone with him to Sara Hunter's dying bed; of the confession; of Beryl's visit to Sir Francis; and how Francis had widely scattered that confession which exonerated his kinsman.

"I owe Francis something for that," said Jerome.

"Your unexpected return will be uncommonly hard on Francis," said Lord Ravlin.

"Why, how? It leaves him where it found him."

"Pshaw, Jerome, it does not. Consider, man. For two years and more he has been rich. He is remanded to poverty. He has been a leading baronet, chief of the hereditary baronets, and he falls back to plain Mr. Sothron, with the usurers at his heels. You know the lines:

> "'Tis better to have loved and lost
> Than never to have loved at all.'

"You can't make them hold good about heirship. He is left with a burden of new habits and bitter contrasts, and he is responsible to you for the Abbey income while he held it."

"I'll give him a legal quittance of all such claim before I am a day older," said Jerome easily.

"Even with that, and overjoyed as I am to see you, I say Sothron is in a deucedly unpleasant position. So is Mrs. Ranleigh; she has been setting her cap at him;

in fact, I think they are engaged. But how can they marry? They are both paupers."

"I know how that goes," said Sir Jerome. "I'm sorry for Francis, or would be, only for one thing. That stands in my way of feeling like giving him a hand. But I'll talk with him to-morrow. It is not for as happy a man as I am to be too sharp on other sinners."

The next morning about nine two figures were pacing along the terrace in front of the cathedral—Francis Sothron, and Laura Ranleigh. The wide paved esplanade with its wonderful outlook, was empty but for them, and a beggar crouching at the church door, waiting for alms when service should begin.

"To go now," said Laura, with heat, "is to give up all!"

"And what can one keep by staying?"

"There is always the chance that something may occur. It is the unexpected that happens. If one only knows how to profit by opportunities! Your cousin may die some time, and *stay dead!*" and she gave a hard laugh.

"He is the picture of health," said Francis, gloomily. "Very naturally the bare sight of him just now drives me into a frenzy. And then—yesterday I was rich—to-day I am poor. Yesterday I could lavish what I chose, to-day I must count sovereigns. Better go back to obscurity, dismiss valet, and grooms, and carriages, and seek cheap lodgings!"

And he struck his ungloved hand on the parapet until the blood came.

"Do not fly at once," said Laura; "that would be to proclaim defeat. This is a mysterious appearance. How do you know what will prove to be wrapped up in it? Stay."

They wheeled about to take another turn on the terrace, and faced a little page in white and scarlet.

"What now, monkey!" cried Francis to his small servitor.

"This card was to be given to you at once. The gentleman will wait breakfast until you join him."

"I won't go," said Francis, looking at the card.

"Go," said Laura; "face your enemy."

"But is he my enemy?"

"Yes! Since by him you lose title and fortune."

"If I go, I must leave you."

"Leave me. I can see you again. I go to breakfast with the future Lady of Sothronwold Abbey. Do you know this parapet reminds me of a scene? I think at the Coliseum, in a book called 'The Marble Faun,' where a man —falls—let us say he falls opportunely out of life, and out of the story, over the wall."

"Then," said Francis, sharply, "look out on the lake and it may remind you of Daniel Deronda, the scene where Gwendolen's inconvenient husband goes over the boat, and under the water, and never comes up, to trouble the story. But we, Mrs. Ranleigh, live in fact, not fiction. The Heir eats his breakfast down yonder in safety, and the Disinherited goes to share his toast and his coffee."

Half an hour later the two cousins were taking a joint breakfast in apparent amity.

"I don't know but my return is hard on you, Francis," said Sir Jerome. "Naturally I was so glad to be back that I never thought of you at first. To be honest with you, if it were not *for one thing*, I should feel very sorry to dispossess you of the Abbey. But you know what I mean, and it does not suit the justice of Heaven that you should reign where you used power so disastrously."

"You mean about Delia?"

"Yes, I *do* mean about Delia."

"Well, Jerome, I loved that girl. I would have married her, only for my poverty."

"What did you take her away for, then?"

"Passion, man—headlong passion! But I love her still, and I have a person looking for her, and if she was found I was to marry her and make her Lady of the the Abbey. She married, you know, and her husband is drowned; and I give you my word I had made a vow to tie myself to no one till the sixth of next May, and if she was found by then, she was to be my wife."

"Well, there! I'll shake hands and call you cousin, if you were bent on repairing a wicked deed."

"Well, I was. And now I am in the same poverty-struck case. But, come; if the girl is found, I'll marry her if I don't own a shilling."

"And if you find her, Francis, and marry her, I'll give

you thirty thousand pounds of my run of good fortune in the diamond fields. I have enough with Sothronwold. Take it and Delia; go to Australia or Canada, and become a millionaire. Until the sixth of next May, I make you free of the Abbey."

Jerome held his hand across the table.

Francis took the offered hand. As he touched it, he thought of the parapet and of the depths of Lake Leman.

CHAPTER LXI.

"WILL NOT READ WHAT I SEE!"

THE arrival of Sir Jerome Sothron spread a new life in the party of friends gathered at Lausanne. His joy overflowed to all. He was compensating himself for a life's disasters. There seemed to be no elements of discord in this company. Laura Ranleigh concealed so well her inner rage and envy, that Beryl believed she had hitherto done Laura cruel wrong, and that she was a tender and sympathizing friend. Francis Sothron could not but feel some struggling gratitude for his cousin's munificent offers, and at least he was free of present pressure, and Francis was one of those men who live in the present.

"To-morrow," cried Sir Eustace Friar, "let us have a picnic in the chestnut woods of St. Saphorin. All that Lausanne is fit for is to be a departing point for excursions."

"Lausanne is to me," said Sir Jerome, "the paradise of Swiss towns. I shall remember it as the one bright shining point of my life. Where, out of darkness, I came into light."

The next morning they were ready for a start. Sir Jerome's trap led the way. He was driving, with Beryl at his side, and a groom in the white and scarlet liveries of the Sothrons sitting statuesque behind. As Jerome handed Beryl to her place she trembled and grew suddenly deathly pale.

"What is it!" whispered Sir Jerome, quick to catch every turn of that beloved face. "Are you ill, my darling?"

"It is nothing, nothing," said Beryl, taking her place. But the truth was that she had remembered, with panoramic vividness, the last time she had entered a carriage with Sir Jerome, that frightful evening when Fanny came for her to Sothronwold. But now she could ride by Jerome's side in all the safety of permitted love. Neither for her nor for Jerome any shadow sat between. But Fanny, leaning over the balcony, to watch that merry setting forth, saw between the beautiful and happy pair in the trap, the form of the real Lady Sothron.

Poor Fanny! too weak and too ignorant of the necessity to do right, could only ring her hands and cry, and follow the gay excursion with her anxious eyes, and then go with blinding tears to court forgetfulness in arranging her lady's dresses.

After Sir Jerome's trap followed a barouche with Francis Sothron, Mrs. Ranleigh, Lady Maria, and the viscount, who had arrived. Then the others in various vehicles, a gay cavalcade, which brought out gazers from all the cottages as they passed—the horses' heads all heavy with bright cockades, the grooms in their brilliant liveries—the ladies in admirable toilets. And so up to the chestnut wood. They scattered about among the trees, treading the rustling new-fallen leaves—they bought baskets of luscious white grapes, and finally sat down on rugs, laid on the ground, to share their feast.

As they were finishing the repast, and leaning back in various attitudes, a dark, handsome young woman, with a babe asleep in her arms, was seen coming down one of the aisles of the wood. A scarlet kerchief covered her black hair; her short skirt was of deep blue, her bodice scarlet, with gilt fringe; her flashing dark eyes and her nut-brown skin, proclaimed the gipsy.

"What a beautiful picture!" cried Lady Maria.

"She shall tell all our fortunes!" exclaimed Sir Eustace Friar, beckoning to her.

These dark eyes had been watching them for an hour unseen—these attentive ears had perhaps caught stray words.

Nothing loth, the gipsy wife drew near, and held out a fine, shapely hand for crossing with silver. With a laugh showing all her sharp white teeth, she foretold for Lady Maria a handsome nobleman for a husband, and half a

dozen fine children ; and Lady Maria, smiling and blushing, drew back, and feigned to be lost in the mysteries of glove buttons. It took little skill to tell the laughing Sir Eustace that he loved at every shrine, but would find his match at last.

"What will you promise *me* ?" asked Lord Ravlin.

"You have seen one woman so peerless, so above all others, fair sir, that you will hereafter be hard to please. But yours is a loyal heart, and you have done great service to this lady, who will never be your wife, and after this she will need you, more than ever she has done. So keep near her, and do not leave her, for she is in peril."

The woman spoke this warning in a low, quick tone, intended only for Lord Ravlin's ear.

"Tell me something," said Sir Jerome ; "and as I cannot endure the idea of evil, I cross your hand with gold !" He laid a half-sovereign on the brown palm.

The woman studied the fine flexible hand he held out.

"This hand has been in strange perils by land and sea," she said.

"Foretell no more of them for me," interrupted Jerome.

"And you are now in greater peril, and will soon see more trouble than ever in your life before."

"Remember ! I gave you gold. I fear you think it was only a new ha'penny !" laughed Sir Jerome.

The gipsy bit her lip. "Do not jest with me, sir. I swear by this innocent head that sleeps on my breast, that you are in peril, and must look to yourself. Be on your guard !"

"Oh, tell me how it will end !" cried Beryl, in unfeigned terror, leaning over his shoulder.

"I have lived in Islam," said the gipsy, "and the we learn of a bridge thin and sharp as a Damascus blad over which those who fly in safety, above a great gulf, reach rest and paradise, and gardens of delight. Before this handsome young man lie two such bridges ; if he passes them both, his life will then be a long, glad summer."

"You shall pass them both, my Jerome, for I will help you," said she, softly, in English.

The gipsy bent her keen eyes on her, and said also in English :

"Alas, my lady, you are in greater peril than he !"

"Beryl, is she telling your fortune? What is your fortune?" cried Laura Ranleigh, leaning forward.

"No, no, I am afraid to have my fortune told," said Beryl, hiding her hands behind her.

"I will read it in your face," said the gipsy. "You are a widow, and you expect to marry your first, your only love!"

"And will she marry him?" cried Sir Jerome.

"Yes, if good triumphs over evil."

She moved away, and stood before Laura and Francis. Laura held out her hand.

"Yours, lady, is a life current, much crossed, and mingled. Here are many straight lines that end in nothing. But I see at the end a rich husband—"

"Delightful!" laughed Laura.

"*Whom you will hate and fear.*"

"Tell me," said Laura, softly, pointing at Sir Jerome, secretly, "had he a long life line?"

The gipsy looked at her fixedly.

"If he is not cut off by violence he will wear hoary hair."

"Here is another hand," said Laura, touching Francis Sothron.

The woman bent over it, then with a shiver turned away.

"Take back your silver. I will not read what I see."

"Keep the silver," said Sothron, coolly. "What is to be will be, whether you read it or not."

"I feel," said Lady Maria, her eyes following the gipsy out of sight, "as if the shade of Mephistopheles had passed by."

Two evenings after the party were afloat on Lake Geneva. The sunset dyed the waters with red and gold. They were in an elegant open boat, with rowers wearing Sir Jerome's colors, and over their heads was a canopy of purple and orange. A fantastically dressed Greek boy, with a guitar, sat in the prow, and sang wild sweet troubadour lays. In the stern of the boat Beryl leaned back against cushions of gold colored damask, giving her the bright tints her black garb lacked, but her lovely face was bright as a summer's day, reflecting the joy that shone in the eyes of Jerome sitting at her feet. The rest of the merry party were grouped in the center of the boat.

"Do you know," said Beryl, looking with her wonderful violet eyes toward the snowy Alps lifting in the distance, "I long—yes, *long*—to reach those glorious mountains! They so bewitch me, that I feel as if I could *never* be content till I touched that line of eternal snows. Oh, look at them now! See how those glaciers gleam with a light between blue and silver, like burnished steel! See how those mantles of snow are rosy in the sunshine, or purple, or gold! See the majesty of those white peaks! They seem not mountains, but mighty gods!" and she held out her hands to them as drawn by an infinite longing.

"You shall go there!" cried the adoring Jerome. "You shall be denied nothing. Friends, let us make a pilgrimage to Zermatt, and go up to the snowline."

"To Zermatt! to Zermatt!" cried all the others.

CHAPTER LXII.

"IT IS SWEETER TO DIE WITH YOU!"

"I HAVE telegraphed to Zermatt to see if we could get accommodations and guides at Randa to go up above the snow-line on Mischabel, and they say yes, but to come promptly, as it is late, and new snow may fall any day."

So said Sir Jerome to Lord Ravlin the next day.

"Are we not rash to try it the tenth of September?"

"The season is uncommonly late and warm. We will not go very far up—only satisfy the ladies with a short ascent and a sight of perpetual snow."

"I suppose if it is not safe they will tell us at Randa?"

"Yes. But I hope we can do it. I cannot bear to deny Lady Beryl anything. Did you notice the lovely look of intense longing in her eyes when we spoke of going?"

"Yes. How strange we mortals are! As soon as we get all that we want, we want something else."

"Just a very little luggage, Fanny, and warm things," said Beryl, she overlooked Fanny's packing for a start for Zermatt next day. "My warmest dress, a sealskin cap and jacket, and those long sealskin boots and gloves."

"Oh, my lady, how can you go up those mountains! You'll freeze!" cried Fanny, packing a basket.

"Nonsense, Fanny! We shall be back before you know we have started for Randa. Oh, how delightful to rise and breakfast before daylight, and start off!"

Fanny laughed.

"It is a delight, my lady, that poor folks get plenty of for nothing, and don't prize much."

"Beryl," cried Laura, who was arranging her own portmanteau, "why wouldn't you have your fortune told the other day? Then you might have known if you'd get back safe from this trip."

"Do you believe in fortune-telling, Laura?"

"No; but really that woman was uncannily wise."

"If she had been able to tell. I should not have wished to hear. I would rather go blindfold on my fate, whatever it is. Evidently we mortals are not meant to foreknow the future—and Heaven is wise.

"Do you really mean, my lady, you would rather *not* know, only what comes out plain to you?" asked Fanny.

"Yes, child, I do," said Beryl, carelessly, looking over her jewel cases and locking them up.

Foolish Fanny took comfort in that. Her conscience troubled her for the fearful secret she concealed, and she hugged to her heart the notion that she was doing as her mistress would have preferred.

When the very next day, in the darkness of a warm September morning, before the sun had risen, Fanny saw her pretty little mistress setting forth with her party on her curious pilgrimage—the Randa porter loaded with the ladies' furs, the mighty Alpine guides marching before and behind, Beryl all sweet confidence, holding her alpenstock and resting on Sir Jerome's ready arm, instead of joying in her mistress' joy, Fanny burst into a deluge of tears and confided to the hotel chambermaid that she "knew they were going to their death."

Lady Maria, Laura, and Beryl all entered fully into the joy of this adventure. The pure mountain air sent the blood leaping through their veins. To Beryl here was the fulfillment of a secret life-long dream.

Her keen, fresh, healthy ecstasy inspired all the party. Through the dark sweet pine woods they made their way, and in three hours were at the Pierre Pont hut, where the

advanced guides had prepared coffee. Here the cold began to be felt, and the ladies put on their furs, and sweetly the lovely face of Beryl looked, fair as a pink crocus, looking out of the warm brown enveloping seal-skins.

She was in a state of quiet rapture; it was a joy to see her joy. Sir Jerome felt that he was looking at happiness through her beautiful eyes.

"I declare," cried the charmed Sir Jerome, "I did not know, Beryl, you were so strong, and so plucky too. Why, how cheerfully you go on! It's capital!"

"It is delightful!" cried Beryl, pausing to take breath. "Oh, I feel as if I *lived* for the first time in my life. What air, what excitement, what a glorious white world!"

"I would not have missed this for a fortune!" said Lord Ravlin. "To see such happiness and enthusiasm is worth a fortune!"

"Hark!" cried the first guide. "Stand firm together and look! An avalanche is coming down to the left! We are quite safe!"

His ear, accustomed to all mountain sounds, had detected the far-off release of that burden of the peaks, and hissing, smoking, rushing, roaring, came the mighty body of snow and ice.

As a bird cowers frightened in its nest, Beryl, her eyes wide and her face pale with awe and wonder at the tremendous spectacle, shrank into the arms of Sir Jerome, and there, shielded, looked out, fresh as a child, on the fascinating terror.

Up, up, and now at last, by three in the afternoon, they reached the limit prescribed by the guides for the adventure. And there was a hut on a snowy ledge, and store of fuel within, and a pile of skins, for some parties sleep there before farther ascent.

"Here we rest, dine and return," said Lord Ravlin, as the guides cleared a place for a fire to heat soup.

"Oh, why cannot we go on?" said Beryl.

"No, no, we must be at Randa by dark. The return will be swift and easy," said Francis Sothron.

"New snow has fallen above, the season is late, and with these ladies in the party, oh, we must return," said the oldest guide, firmly.

The meal was ready. They ate it, high on that solemn and mighty peak, with snow above and about, and the

awful void below. The firelight flickered on the white gleaming walls, the ramparts of eternal frost. Then all at once one of the guides began to sing. With his loud, rough, storm-beaten voice, that resounded far along those desolate spaces, he sang one of the old Luther hymns that the Swiss peasants love. All the group, awed and subdued as if in a temple, listened with bowed heads and hands clasped, as the mighty notes rose and fell across that sea of snow.

Then he was silent. All drew a deep breath. Then, with a pallid face, the second guide leaped up.

"It comes!" he cried, lifting both hands over his head. "The avalanche! Into the hut—it is our only chance for life!"

Already that roar, more awful than any thunder, filled the air. The sunny day of those solitary slopes grew dark. With one dash, they were all in the hut. The great fir door was shut. The mountains seemed to quiver, as with an earthquake. They felt the lately wide horizon of their life shut in. They knew before one word was spoken that they were covered from all the world—out of sight and sound, buried under the mass of fallen snow.

"Thank heaven!" cried the oldest guide, in a solemn voice, "the hut has held, or we should have all been lost."

"And there are the wives and babes below," said the second guide, whose home had been but two days made glad with his first-born son.

A sob went through the hut, for those buried there remembered mothers, fathers, sisters, friends, in that outer world where the sun shone.

Laura Ranleigh gave a shriek of fear.

"Hush!" said the guide; "the least sound or motion may disturb the snow. We listen for a second fall."

The viscount in silence took Lady Maria's hand. Far off in England their wedding preparations were going on. Beryl uttered no sound audible to any but him she loved. She shrank into his enfolding arms, clasped her hands about his bent neck, and whispered:

"My Jerome! it is far sweeter to die with you than to live without you!"

"There is no second avalanche," said the guide, at last.

After a while he struck a light, and by its dim gleam they disposed themselves as comfortably as they could in

the hut. Then the guides took a long pole of many joints, and thrusting it into the wide, rude, stone chimney, and tying a red kerchief on the top, they pushed it up into the soft snow—up, up, adding another joint—when all at once it went free.

"We shall be saved. They will search for us from Randa," said the guide. "Our rod has reached the air, The fall has been light. We shall be dug out. Our signal will be seen."

A cry, a low, thankful cry went round.

"The gentlemen will wind their watches, and make the ladies as comfortable with the rugs and skins as possible," said the guide. "When it is nine at night we will take food. Twice I have been lost under the snow. It is well to pass the time as one can; we tell stories and histories; we sleep, but not too much."

"We shall smother," said Lady Maria.

"No, madam; there is much air in the hut, and we shall enlarge the opening through the snow. Perhaps we can make another."

"I hope we are not likely to starve," said Francis Sothron.

CHAPTER LXIII.

"THEN TO-MORROW SOTHRONWOLD WILL BE YOURS!"

"Do we really see Randa again! Oh, Jerome, it seems as if we had died, and been buried together!"

"And it is but two days, my precious. You are a little pale, but I think you are quite safe, Beryl."

"Quite; and—and I was so happy, even up there with *you!*"

"Let us take it as an omen that we shall live together, die together, lie in one tomb," said Jerome.

"I ask nothing better," said Beryl, softly.

"Back!" said Mrs. Ranleigh, as they came in sight of the inn, and she and Francis were side by side. "Do you know, I thought, up there, how easy it would be for one person to lose himself on the Alps!"

All the inn people were out to welcome them, as with the rescuing party they came back.

"I have laid a great feast," said the landlord—"WELCOME!"

"Oh, madam," said the landlady to Beryl, "your maid has been in hysterics all the time, and says this is a judgment on her for her sins."

But if Fanny when she was in trouble, had made any vows, as soon as her lady was restored, she forgot them as the chief butler forgot Joseph.

"Why are you going on so, Fanny?" said Beryl, "I was not unhappy. I was happy, I was with Sir Jerome; nothing can grieve me that leaves me *him*."

After which profession by her mistress, Fanny turned her back on penitence, and remarked to herself that, "Speak, and break that dear heart, she could not; she would die in her sins,"

How was it, who was it, that when they returned to Zarmatt arranged another ascent!

Probably the glamour of the Alps was over all the men; at all events in a day or two, a plan had been made for going up the Theodule Pass.

"Oh, why did they think of such a thing?" cried Beryl.

"Why should they not think of it?" said Laura, "they do not wish to be always dancing attendance on us women, and admiring our embroidery."

"You know yourself, Beryl, how fascinating an Alp climb is. I never saw any one more enthusiastic," observed Lady Maria.

"I know," said Beryl, "and yet I feel an unutterable horror of this excursion. I know something evil will happen. I shall beg Jerome not to go."

"And then he will not go," said Laura. "but mark my words, he will begrudge the compliance, and how foolish it will make him look. All Englishmen climb mountains. If you keep him from it, every one will laugh at him. It will show but poorly for his position when he is married."

Beryl looked down, flushed and reluctant.

"Come, child," said Lady Maria, "the Theodule Pass is mere child's play. Every one goes up and down there as a pair of stairs. I should not think of asking Hampton to refrain from the trip."

"You are nervous, and men hate nerves," said Laura.

So Beryl was shamed and argued into hiding her fears,

though with a wildly beating heart, she heard the plans for the excursion.

The four gentlemen were to go with the two best guides of Zermatt. They would start about four in the morning of Wednesday.

"It seems an age before I shall see you again," said Beryl to Jerome, as she sat by him on the little balcony, before the hotel parlor on Tuesday evening.

"Only until Thursday morning, or, stay, to-morrow evening this time, we will be at home."

"That is a great while," sighed Beryl.

"My sweet, it is lovely of you to say so ; but why so sad ? I will not go if it grieves you."

Beryl started, hesitated, remembered, whispered :

"Go."

And yet when Jerome had retired early, to be ready for next morning's before daybreak start, he recalled what Ravlin had said in Lausanne, how strange it was that as soon as people had all that they wanted, they wanted something else. And he remembered how, in all those months of his dreary exile, he would have felt it a heaven of joy to hear Beryl's voice and see her smile ; and here he was ready to divorce himself for a whole day from her side ! He was about to refuse to go. But then it might break up the party, and how Francis and the marquis would laugh at his folly.

"It is only for twenty-four hours," said Jerome, "and I will plan no more excursions."

In the darkness, before the first streak of dawn, the party of six left the inn. All the ladies but one were calmly sleeping. Beryl, in a furred wrapper, was leaning out into the darkness from her open window. She had no light, and she knew she could not be seen. She hoped some flaring torchlight would gleam, if only for an instant, over the face she loved ; that she might hear again the voice that was so dear. And when the lamp had shone, and she had heard the full, mellow voice cheerily speaking to a guide, and the last echoes of their footsteps had passed up the steep street, she crept back to her bed and wept bitterly.

Should she ever see that face and hear that voice again ? Jerome seemed to have passed out of her life and left her doubly desolate.

The excursion party made their ascent with good speed, and in high spirits started on their return. The guides were explaining that the descent had never been easier, when a loud noise was followed by a shower of stones.

"Under shelter!" cried the guides, and the party hid under the ledges, while four or five explosions followed swiftly.

Unfortunately, a large fragment struck the foot of the viscount, and he was disabled from walking alone. The guides hastily arranged a sort of hammock of ropes to carry him, and they were about to start, when Francis Sothron was missed.

"Can he have been knocked down?" said Jerome.

"He was behind us," said the guides. "No doubt he is safe; any one can get down easily from here."

But Jerome would not leave his cousin alone on the waste.

"I will look for him," he said. "I feel sure of my way. Ravlin, you go on with the viscount; and if Francis and I do not get in by the time we ought, bring out some men for us, if by chance he should be hurt."

Sir Jerome retraced the way they had come. There was a place where the path had divided, and his cousin might there have turned aside. He saw that he could save a climb and reach that road by going round a jutting rock, by clambering along a narrow shelf of ice and snow. Beating a path with his baton, and holding to the rock, Jerome made three steps safely. Three steps more would bring him round. But the treacherous ledge, warmed by the August suns, and lightly covered with September snow, gave way. He fell. The slope was steep. His axe-armed baton flew from his hand; his vailed hat leaped into the air: his knapsack, by its weight, dragged him head first; and, with arms wildly clutching, he went down the sheer descent of two hundred feet, striking twice on the projecting ice, and on the edge of a chasm of eight hundred feet, he lay prostrate and senseless—his knapsack under his head having prevented the dashing out of his brains.

And Francis, who had lost his way a little; Francis, whom he had periled his life to find, just beyond the cliff, that had proved so fatal, saw him fall.

Far down the hideous descent, on the verge of utter

ruin, he saw the heir of Sothronwold and the lover of Beryl lying.

In the village was help. It might be brought in time. Francis dashed down the comparatively easy and short path, like a staircase, on toward Zermatt. The path ended in a pine wood, and through the tall tree-stems shone the red sunset.

He was rushing on, when a figure, idly rambling among the pines, barred his way.

"Mrs. Ranleigh!"

"You! alone, and in such a state! What has happened? Where are the guides?"

"On another road, carrying the viscount, I believe. Jerome and I were left alone, or rather, each separately, and he has fallen down a great gully."

"Were you with him?"

"No; but I saw him fall. I know where he lies. If help does not come quickly, he is lost. Let me pass. I am hurrying for help."

"And if you do not, to-morrow Sothronwold will be yours."

CHAPTER LXIV.

HIS, AT THE PRICE OF BLOOD!

"My lady! My lady! Wake up! I cannot bear to see you so! Wake!"

Beryl, in a loose dressing-robe, was lying on a couch in her bedroom. A fire burned cheerily on the hearth; the sun shone in at the windows. All was peace, but the face of Beryl. Her arms were tossing; her lovely features were contorted with the horror of some hideous dream. Beside her knelt Fanny, trying to rouse her.

The spell was broken. Beryl opened her eyes, with a long, quivering sigh, and sprang to her feet.

"Where am I? What has happened? Oh, was it all a dream?—only a dream?"

"You are in your room, my dear lady. Nothing has happened. Yes, it was only a dream. Whatever it was, you are too tired. You have not rested enough to-day."

"Are they back, Fanny?"

"No, my lady. It is only five. I came to dress you."

"Be quick then. I want to go out—to see people—to ask questions. Oh, such a dreadful dream! I saw Sir Jerome fall down a great crevasse, and all the blue ice was sprinkled with his blood, and he lay dead—dead, and buried in the snow, and hideous birds wheeled and screamed above him. Oh, Fanny, it was horrible! horrible!"

"But only a dream; only a dream," said Fanny, bathing her mistress' face with cologne. "Let me dress you, and by that time they will have come, or be in sight."

Beryl was all ready but buttoning her dress, when voices and feet were heard in the lower hall.

"Fanny, run! See what it is! I know something has happened!"

Fanny came back."

"It is nothing, my lady. Let me fasten your dress. How you tremble! You are as white as snow. It is only a bit of stone has hurt the viscount's foot. He'll be right in a day or two. Oh, my lady, you need another ribbon on——"

But Beryl was away. She met Lord Ravlin.

"Where is Jerome? Is he hurt?"

"No no, indeed; he is all right," and he hastily explained the accident, and how Jerome had remained to look for Francis Westholm Sothron.

"Then you have left Jerome, and you do not know how he is, or where? Oh, Lord Ravlin, I implore you, find him!"

"Dear Lady Medford, he is all safe, surely."

"No, no; he is not. I have had the most dreadful dream! He has fallen! He is wounded—dying—in a great gully! I saw it clearly. Oh, seek him! take the guides—I will pay them anything if they will go. Do, do lead a search, or I shall go mad!"

"Anything, anything, if you will be calm. In an hour you will be laughing at your fears," cried Ravlin.

She clung to his hands.

"You are so good! You have always helped me! Remember what the gipsy said. Do not smile at my fears—I tell you he is in a terrible strait. Oh, take men—all the men in Zermatt, and go, before I die of terror!"

"I go at once," said Lord Ravlin. "I will get men, and go and meet Sir Jerome, to please you. Be calm, dear Lady Beryl. Indeed he is safe!"

"You will go without delay? Go as for a man wounded—dying. Go—go with help!"

Moved and terrified by her excitement, Lord Ravlin called the two guides, and several stout mountaineers who were hanging near the inn, and explained what he wanted.

"Oh, the gentleman is safe," said the guides. "He will be either coming down where we came, or he will be coming down the West Stair, or he will, which is unlikely, be coming by the Herd's Hut above the last pasture land. There are only those ways."

"Come, then—a pound a piece for all who will go out. Since there are three ways, let three guides make three bands, several in each. Only find him, needful or not, for a lady here is much distressed about him. Have you torches and other things? Let us be off at once. Casnet, I go with you."

"I take the way by the Herd's Hut," said Casnet.

"And I," said the other guide who had been with them all day, "shall go through the pine wood, up the West Stair."

* * * * * * *

When Laura Ranleigh said those terrible words, "Then to-morrow you will be lord of Sothronwold," Francis Westholm saw Satan standing at his right hand to buy his soul. Sothronwold could be his; the price was Jerome's blood.

He had heard Jerome calling him; he knew he had turned back to find and help him; he was living on Jerome's lavish generosity. But the promise of wealth made by Jerome was undoubtedly conditioned on his finding and marrying Delia, to whose family Jerome evidently felt that he owed much; and Francis had begun to believe that Delia was dead. Sothronwold and the title might be his—his if he only kept silence and never told of that form lying on the edge of the gully. Who could accuse him? Had they been together? No. Only to keep silence—only to remain here and not go into Zermatt till the night had fallen.

"*I* shall never say I saw you here!" cried Laura; and

she turned and fled down the path between the pines, afraid of herself, afraid of him, afraid of that ghastly secret that lay between them.

One minute Francis started forward to run to Zermatt and shout for help. The next he held back, and saw in vision beautiful Sothronwold and its enormous revenues, and the envied title was written in the air as in golden letters, and a seat in parliament loomed high before him.

Still, between going and staying, he hung back, and darkness gathered in the pine wood, the precious minutes fled, the sun had set. Then hurrying feet came up the path. The morning guide confronted him.

"Oh, Mr. Sothron! Here? Safe? Where is Sir Jerome?"

Fatal moment! Last chance to do right! Alas!

"Is he not down in the town?" said Francis.

"No. Where is he? Did you meet—did he find you?"

"No. I have not seen him."

Francis' die was cast!

"He is, then, lost!" cried the guide.

"Shall I help you look for him?"

"No; you would hinder us. Better go back to the inn."

So that party went on, and the central party went up the way they brought down the Viscount of Hampton, and from Zermatt they saw their torches shine along the heights, and their voices were borne back on the hollow air of night.

The third party went up by the Herd's Hut, where the men gathered in for shelter were settling themselves for sleep. They had seen nothing of a stranger. On, then, up four hundred steps.

"There is a ledge," said Casnet, "but he could only have got there by a terrific fall; and if he fell, not one chance in a thousand but he would go on down the gorge to certain death."

"Out there, then!" exclaimed Ravlin; "and if there is sign of a fall, we will go down the gorge with ropes. I'll go myself."

He thought of Beryl's dream, and a chill struck his heart.

There was a shout; they had found a vailed hat.

"It is his!" cried Ravlin.

"Then he fell from the cliff," said the guide.

There was a silence of horror, and they moved in solemn file along the edge. There was a loud cry from Casnet. He leaped forward. Quiet on the dizzy verge of danger lay a dark form. He seized it by the feet and drew it through the snow to him, and then they all clustered about.

The face of Sir Jerome was white and still as the snow about him, and his curly hair was wet with blood · blood lay on the snow.

"Is he dead?"

"Not dead," said the guide. "Take him up to the hut. Throw a cloak over him. Pour something down his throat, run ahead to stir up the fire, and get hot water, hot blankets."

Lord Ravlin dashed forward. He felt that he had Beryl's life to save as well as Jerome's. He remembered her face of agony. He knew she could not live without him.

Laid in the hut before a blazing fire, Jerome was treated to the rude doctoring of the Alpine guides. His cut head was washed with sour wine, salted. This sour wine, heated was poured down his throat, he was rubbed, rolled in blankets, hot water was poured over his hands and feet. Lord Ravlin stood aghast at the treatment of the sturdy mountaineers, but Jerome revived under it, opened his eyes, the faint color stole back into his lips and cheeks.

"He is safe; he will be all right after a few days in bed," said the guides. "Let some one give word, while we carry him to the hotel."

CHAPTER LXV.

"SURELY YOU DID NOT PUSH HIM DOWN!"

In the parlor of the inn sat Lady Maria, in a large, low chair near the fire. Francis Sothron, his excursion garb changed for dinner dress, stood opposite her, with folded arms, and a lowering brow. Mrs. Ranleigh tripped in at ease, and smiling.

"All ready, Lady Maria," she said. "You here, Mr.

Sothron? So, you have all come in; or did you come alone?"

"Alone; I strayed from the rest on the mountain," said Francis, inwardly amazed at her ease and calm.

"How very foolish of you! You might have got lost," said Laura, drawing near to Lady Maria, asking if she had found the day dull.

"For me, having no maid, I have been reduced to the hideous necessity of mending my own dresses. Oh, blessed poverty!"

"Sir Jerome is missing," said Lady Maria, "and my brother has taken out a dozen men to search for him."

"They'll find him," said Laura, easily. "Who ever heard of anything happening on the Theodule Pass."

"And the viscount's foot was hurt so that he was carried home."

"Dear! dear! How sorry I am!"

"I think they have finished dressing it by this time. I should like to go and ask how he finds himself, if you will go with me, Laura," said Lady Maria.

"Oh, with pleasure," said Mrs. Ranleigh. And as she passed Francis she just touched his hand.

They went by Beryl's door.

"Beryl is wild with terror," said Lady Maria, "the landlady and Fanny are with her, and that rector and his wife, who are staying here. Poor child!"

"It is such nonsense!" said Laura, sharply. "How could anything happen? Mr. Sothron came down safe, alone. Sir Jerome has stopped to chat with the herdmen."

But while Lady Maria spoke with the viscount, Laura stood by the window looking out at the torches along the mountain, and wandering what the report would be. Could he have escaped? And in the parlor, Francis Sothron in a tumult of fear, remorse, shame, paced in disorder, up and down. Would his dastardly crime—for crime it surely was—make him Lord of Sothronwold? If it did, could he ever see other sight before his mental eye, than that form lying on the edge of an abyss—the man he *would not save*? Or, while guilty still, of that most foul intent, would he see his cousin rescued, and his own soul so blackly stained for naught? He thought of Laura, her cool audacity in crime, Laura his evil angel, his temp-

tress, he loathed the thought of her, yet, if this thing came to pass—if now he was Lord of Sothronwold—he must marry Laura, and no other—Laura, his companion in that cruel deed—Laura, whose word could ruin him, make him loathed and scorned in all England! Laura, whom now he hated, because she had not fulfilled woman's mission of lifting a man toward heaven, but had dragged him down to sheol. Sothronwold and Laura—he hated the thought; he did not want Sothronwold. The door opened and Laura glided in. She stood beside him. She assumed that they were one in interest, one in destiny.

"Keep a clear face," she whispered.

"*I cannot!*" he said, pensively. "Till this night I have been bad enough; but I have not had blood on my hands!"

"Hush! Surely you did not push him down?"

"Before Heaven, no!"

"And how do you know but he was dead when he reached the ledge?"

"Would to Heaven I had hurried men up there! If he were dead, my hands would be clean!"

"It is too late to go back. A man should be his own first concern. You have done absolutely *nothing*. One cannot be blamed for doing nothing."

A loud, coarse voice, swearing roundly, echoed in the hall. The door burst open. A short, immensely stout man, his size increased by multitudinous garments, a huge red face, with little red, fiery eyes and thin red whiskers, came pounding in in loud complaint against the landlord. Behind him came a courier, a valet, a guide, a groom, the whole atmosphere seemed at once surcharged with brutal ostentation, vulgar wealth.

The overbearing stranger was shouting furious indignation that rooms had not been reserved for him when his little keen, narrow eyes fell on the elegant form of Laura, in her black silk and jet dress, her pomegranate bloom, scarlet ribbons at her throat, jewels gleaming on her shapely white hand. He pulled off his fur cap, made a heavy, clumsy bow, and mumbled a pardon.

The landlord continued explanations, the various servants gathered about him to relieve him of his outer garments. He kept his gaze fixed on Laura, whose jet black hair and eyes, well set head, clean cut features, and haughty lips, seemed to fascinate him.

"I should fancy it was a stableman or chop-house keeper turned millionaire," said Laura, in her lowest tone, to Francis. "Ah! his presence makes me sick! Let us go to supper."

They turned, and as she swept out of the room, her rustling, trailing garments, with their faint fragrance of sandal wood, almost touched the irate new comer.

"Who is she?" he demanded, eagerly of the landlord.

"Mrs. Ranleigh."

"And that is her husband?"

"No; she has no husband here with her."

"By George! she's the finest woman I ever saw in my life!" he cried, holding his hands to the fire, while his little knot of servants began chuckling and winking at each other, a proceeding which he seemed to think rather complimentary than otherwise.

Laura and Sothron turned into the main hall, leading to the room where supper had long been waiting them, but a group barred their way.

In a sort of hammock, made of blankets and ropes, and covered with bearskin rugs, was a quiet figure, carefully borne. The whisper went around:

"It is Sir Jerome!"

The tongue of Francis seemed paralyzed; but Laura said, in a sharp whisper:

"Dead?"

"No," said Lord Ravlin, who, at the head of the patient, had been administering ammonia and cordials during the careful down trip. "No! We hope for the best."

They moved up the stairs. Francis reeled against the wall. The victim lived! but he felt the foul stain of murder still.

Laura Ranleigh gave a shiver, and looked about. A pair of little red, eager eyes were fixed on her, and the detestable big face, the coarse, cruel mouth of the newly arrived guest were close behind her shoulder.

* * * * * * *

"Dear Lady Medford, Sir Jerome is found," so said the gentle voice of a lady, who had been a ministering angel to Beryl, in her hours of terror.

"Found, but dead! Oh, I know, I know."

"Not dead—not even dying. A little hurt; we cannot tell how much, but not seriously, we are sure. He has

spoken of you. He says you are not to worry, all is right. Think, think, my dear, it is your justly roused anxiety that has saved his life, by sending out searchers so soon, and you will be the one to cheer his recovery with your smiles, if you do not make yourself ill by this terror. Think, think, if he hears you are ill—if you cannot go to see him to-morrow—he will be made worse by trouble for you. Come, my love, thank Heaven who has spared him."

Beryl clasped the kind, motherly hands that held hers. These words touched and calmed her.

"Tell me, tell me, he is safe!"

"As far as anything can now be known, he is safe!"

"And he is taken care of well? Let me go to him."

"The doctor, the landlady, and a good nurse are doing the best possible. My husband will sit by him all night. To see you would excite him. Do, my dear, just be trustful and thankful, say your prayers and go to sleep, and see him to-morrow."

Calmed at last by such kindly words, Beryl, worn out with her troubles, slept like a tired child.

"She is not half undressed," said Fanny, anxiously.

"Never mind; throw a down quilt over her, and turn down the light. Have some chocolate or beef tea for her when she wakes. The poor little thing is fairly worn out with her terrors."

"I never, never, saw any one love another so in my life," sobbed Fanny, with terror in her soul. "It seems to me almost dreadful, the way her heart is set on him, and more every day."

"But for him, she is alone in the world," said the lady. "It is evident she would die, if she lost him."

"Then to take him from her would be murder, and I won't do it," whispered Fanny to herself.

CHAPTER LXVI.

"WHAT IS THE GIPSY'S OTHER BRIDGE?"

"Oh, Jerome," said Beryl, with a little sob, "I thought I should never see you again!"

"Fate would not be so cruel as that to us, my dear, after all we had suffered," said Jerome, with a smile.

"But, oh, Jerome, what a narrow escape!"

"I thought of you as I fell."

"Ah! but you must not speak of it. You turn pale. I am a poor nurse if I let you talk so much! If I could only have fallen with you, it would not have been so bad, my Jerome!" and with a heavenly smile she clasped both her little hands about the hand of Jerome which lay upon the side of his bed.

"I'm quite comfortable," said Jerome, "and more than happy, if you are to sit by me."

"But only for half an hour in the morning, and half an hour in the evening. Oh, Jerome, how long before you will be quite well?"

"The doctor says I can start back to Lausanne on Monday if all goes well. It seems I am a wonderfully sound fellow, and recover like a miracle."

"To-morrow you shall lie on the lounge, and I will stay two hours and read to you. The next day you shall sit in the easy-chair, and I will dine with you."

"Every one is very kind; they have all been to ask for me."

"Laura says your Cousin Francis felt terribly when he found you were missing. The viscount's foot is better. How unfortunate Zermatt has proved! I long to return to Lausanne."

Meanwhile Laura was in Beryl's room, and Fanny was making some slight changes in a dress for her.

"You have a very stylish touch, Fanny," said Laura, turning round and round before the inconveniently small glass. "I shall stay here with dear Lady Beryl this morn-

ing. The parlor is intolerable, for a hideous, coarse monster of a man, who stares inconceivably."

"He's a brewer—Mr. Rubble. Rich is no name for him, his valet was telling me. Why, he has millions, and means to be alderman, and hopes to be lord mayor. Why, his man says he is up to millions."

"Ah! the valet has fallen a prey to your eyes, has he, Fanny, to the obliteration of that fine-looking sailor? I fear you are a flirt, Fanny," said Laura, nothing loth to hear all the news possible.

Fanny laughed and was flattered.

"He is a widower," said Fanny; "his first wife died before he got so rich; for he started poor, and made all his money. His valet says he is very fond of ladies."

"Fie, fie, Fanny! What an imprudent valet!"

"And that last night he saw some lady in this house that he just raved over. I wonder if it was Lady Maria;" and Fanny bent to bite off a thread.

"No doubt it was," said Laura, calmly. "Lady Maria is very pretty, and the newly rich adore blood and titles."

"And the man—Kimes his name is—says Mr. Rubble can give away diamonds like pebbles; and he gave a ruby set to an opera dancer, a set a princess might have been proud of!"

"Oh, Fanny, what wretched gossip! Beware of Kimes."

"There, that draping suits your figure to a wonder, ma'am," said Fanny. "Dear, dear, what a near miss Mr. Sothron made last night of being Sir Francis for good and all!"

"Yes, but it *was a miss*," and Laura, as she thought of it, had less faith in the future of Mr. Sothron, and as she turned round before the glass, she said to herself:

"Millions! Diamonds like pebbles!"

The titled, well-born guests at this Zermatt inn, had been very quiet, unpretentious people, entertaining themselves, the viscount making no noise about his title, Lord Ravlin boasting nothing of his long descent, Sir Jerome innocent of the glamour of his wealth. But Mr. Rubble filled the house with the noise and ostension of his millions. His servants, his coach, his luggage, his demands, made more uproar than all the other guests put together. The fall of fresh snow on the mountains, the mist that

hung over the heights, the accidents that had overtaken Sir Jerome and the viscount, deterred Mr. Rubble from his proposed mountaineering, and yet he did not depart from Zermatt. Fanny had exchanged gossip with the brewer's valet. As she never gossiped about her lady, she talked about Mrs. Ranleigh. Kimes was able to inform his master that the dark enchantress was a widow, a "high life widow." "Hand-in-glove with the nobility." "Looking for a match." 'Lots of admirers." "Knew her own value." "Mr. Sothron mad for her." "Had been promised a rich husband by a gipsy, lately."

Mr. Rubble remained at Zermatt, and hung about Laura. He had managed to make acquaintance. He talked of his country-seat—once owned by a duke," of his "house in Portland square," of his horses, his dogs, his stocks. He murdered the English language cruelly sometimes, now and then blundered into an oath, had the graces of an elephant, and the manners of a cockfighter, and showed his infatuation for Laura in a way that shocked the dainty Beryl, and sent merry Lady Maria into silvery peals of laughter. Laura, on her part, allowed just enough of his homage to keep him from flight, and in her high disdain, her cool scorn, her calm indifference, by turns, made him frantic with despair and baffled desire. Thus Monday came, and the party set out for Lausanne.

"Good-by," said Laura to Mr. Rubble. "Take my advice, stay here until next spring. The cold and the diet will bring down your flesh and put you in a good condition for climbing, and in the early summer you can make yourself famous by some perilous Alpine ascent."

"Do you think after this I could ever live where I could not at least see your name in the papers? I shall be in London as soon as you are!" replied Mr. Rubble.

The second day after they reached Lausanne, the millionaire, however, was established in the best suite in the hotel where Lady Medford staid with Laura. Sir Jerome and Francis had a suite in the same house.

But the very sight of Jerome was a terror to Francis Every kind tone, every touch of his hand, every look of the pale, handsome face, over which hung yet the shadow of that near touch with death, was a reproach and a remorse, that seemed to wrap the whole soul of Francis in fire. He could not stay where Jerome was.

Meanwhile he avoided Laura. She had led him to endeavor to commit a hideous crime ; as his accomplice he feared and condemned her. She saw the ties between them severed ; but she realized also that Francis was unlikely ever to be other than unprovided Mr. Sothron. It was Sothronwold Abbey she had desired ; if that slid out of her grasp perhaps some other estate equally rich might be had, and fortune might make her lady somebody, if only as lady of a city knight. Estates, bank accounts, diamonds, *and* Rubble ! Could she endure it ? "

The Ravlins and their relatives and the Viscount Hampton must return home, for the date of Lady Maria's marriage drew near. Sir Jerome could not yet travel, but Francis made it evident that he had better go back to the Abbey, to arrange affairs, and pursue the search for Delia. Laura wished to go with the Ravlins, she had made herself very agreeable, and been invited to the wedding. The physicians advised Sir Jerome to go to Nice until March was passed. Sir Jerome vowed he could not and would not go, unless Beryl went, and how could Beryl go ?

But where Jerome's entire restoration was at stake, Beryl could arouse to shrewd planning. She remembered that she had she most amiable of stepmothers, and while Lady Maria and her aunt yet remained at Lausanne, Beryl dispatched North, for the second time, to Vienna.

" It is all planned, Jerome," she said, as with Lord Ravlin and his cousin they drove slowly along the Vevay road. " I have sent for my father and Lady Heath. They will stay here a week, and then I will go to Nice with them and after a fortnight or three weeks, you can come to Nice also. Then in March, I will go to London with my father and Lady Heath, and in April, you will come. I will return to society at the beginning of the season, and my stepmother shall be my chaperon. She is goodness itself if she is odd."

" And your father— he used to hate me ? "

" He will love you now "—said Beryl, laughing—" You or Sothronwold ; but *I*, love you, Jerome ! "

" May heaven bless you for an angel ! and in June—will you say in June—you will marry me ? We have waited so long ! "

" Oh, Jerome ! " cried Beryl, turning very pale. " What do you suppose is the gipsy's other bridge ? "

CHAPTER LXVII.

"THE EDGE OF A PRECIPICE."

OCTOBER smiled over Lausanne. The vintage was gathered; the new snows lay on the heights; the lake was blue as the sky; the leaves were falling in showers with every frosty morning; the air was full of life and strength.

"You might as well be at Nice as anywhere, since you cannot go into society yet," said Fanny, dressing her lady's fair hair; "but as for Sir Jerome needing it, I don't believe a word of it. Never a gentleman looked so well as he does."

"Indeed he does look well," said Beryl, with a radiant face.

"And you'll be happy enough at Nice, I'll warrant." said Fanny, going to the wardrobe for a dress. "I hope we'll be done with these black gowns some time. Here has Sir Jerome sent you a whole basket of the loveliest pansies. I shall put a bunch at your throat, and one at your belt, my lady. What luck for you that your father married such a kind-hearted lady, and here she is, ready to do anything for you. Indeed, my lord, your father, is fond enough of Sir Jerome now; and yet I remember well when he was ready to take my head off for just suspecting I had taken you a note from Mr. Jerome Sothron."

"Fanny! Fanny! you talk altogether too much."

"It is habit, my lady; you've always been so kind. It is only yesterday that Mrs. Ranleigh went off with Lord Ravlin's party; and this morning early off went Mr. Rubble, and his crowd of servants, full chase for England. Kimes, his man, tells me his master is fairly mad for Mrs. Ranleigh, and I believe it will be a match."

"Fanny!" cried Beryl, in infinite disgust. "That coarse, horrible man! Why, I saw him kick a dog cruelly, just because it ran against him; and he stepped right straight on a lovely white rose that lay in his path, and crushed the beautiful wonder to atoms; and he swore at

a poor beggar woman, and cuffed a poor little boy that tried to sell him carvings. Oh, he is too horrible!"

"But he is no end rich," said Fanny, fastening the last knot of pansies in her lady's belt. "You'll see she'll take him before midsummer."

"Ah-h-h! Fanny, the gipsy said fear and hate—a rich husband that she would fear and hate! Poor Laura! Oh, what a strange gipsy that was! I am sick with fear, Fanny, when I think how she foretold two terrible, strange perils for Sir Jerome. One is passed, and so close by death; and the second—oh! what will the second be?"

She clasped Fanny's arm, pale and trembling.

"Nothing; the gipsy must be wrong. How could she know things, my lady? Oh, it is real sinful to believe in her!"

But Fanny, in her heart, felt what was the worst and most deadly peril that was coming to meet this young, loving, much-tried pair in the stormy course of their true love. She felt so glad that Lady Heath came in to divert Beryl's attention from her alarmed, anxious face.

"My cherub, how sweet you look! A true wonder, with the fine gold of your hair, and your eyes like the pansies in your belt! Are you ready for dinner, my pet? My angelic Alfred has asked Sir Jerome to dine with us. Ah, my child, how your good father rejoices that you will be lady of Sothronwold Abbey! He says you are worthy of one of the finest fortunes in England, and here it is at your charming little feet! But it is the man I think of, my child—the man! And, oh, what a man it is! I that speak to you know. I have experience of three. This Sir Jerome is a pearl, a topaz, an emerald of men!"

Beryl laughed. The chatter of her stepmother always made her laugh, while the goodness of her heart made her love her.

"Come, then; I am ready," she said. "Do I look well?"

And with love's harmless vanity about being beautiful to the beloved, she turned slowly round before the admiring Lady Heath and Fanny. Her dress of black silk grenadine, with the clusters of pansies, was plain enough surely, but harmonized with Beryl's white-and-gold, and the soft, shadowy eyes, brimful of happy love. Perhaps

she appeared all the more enchanting contrasted with her her stout relative in vivid blue, with abundance of white lace.

"She must get off that black soon," said Fanny.

"Yes, indeed. I never wore black over one year," said Lady Heath.

Some of these remarks of the good woman were irksome to Beryl. She flitted away into the drawing-room with a song on her lips.

"How happy she is!" said Fanny; "and I've seen the time when I thought she would die of grief. She was wasted to a little shadow."

"Ah, Fanny," cried Lady Heath, "she lives in the affections of the heart! She is the kind to die of grief. I have noticed her. If this Sir Jerome died—if anything parted her from him—she would melt away as a snow-wreath in the sun. She is all soul. Now, I have a corner of my nature for my clothes, for my horses, for my dinners. She takes all such things as mere accidents, and in love is her life. Although I adore my admirable Alfred, I should never die on his account. It is there where I differ from Lady Beryl."

"Everything sets one way," sighed Fanny, as she put the dressing-room in order. "If I tell her that its more than likely Sir Jerome's wife is living, then she'll die and I'll be the murderer. I can't do it. I *won't* do it. She is not thinking of marriage yet. I'll let her be happy while she can."

The echo of Beryl's voice came to her from the drawing-room. She was singing for Sir Jerome. Fanny loved to hear that sweet round voice, so perfect in all its modulations. She drew near the open door of the dressing-room, and looked between the folds of the portiere. Sir Jerome was leaning on the piano with the adoring look of one who worships at a shrine, and Beryl sang:

> "Nor is it yet the spirit of the season,
> The summer-time, that makes my heart so gay;
> But softer thoughts, and yet, a sweeter reason,
> Love, that o'er all my happy heart hath sway!"

Lord Alfred came in as Beryl was singing.

"Come! This looks like old times!" cried Lord Alfred, ignoring that in the old times he would wrathfully have broken up the pretty scene on the spot.

The little page appeared with a silver salver bearing letters.

Sir Jerome took them from him, and selecting two or three for Beryl, was handing them to her, when the writing of the address on the top letter caught his eye. He turned pale, gave a shiver, and exclaimed :

"Beryl, where is that from?"

"Oh, that is from my companion. You know, the one I threatened to send for, to keep you in order, only she is not old and stern enough to impress outsiders! It is Lelia Barrows, a sweet creature. I put her, at her own request, in a school at Biarritz. See her letter, Jerome, what a nice long one."

"Yes. The handwriting had little peculiarities that reminded me of a script I knew, but this is a much more cultivated hand, I see."

"I shall invite her to Nice for Christmas holidays, I think. She is so good, and innocent, and sweet."

"No doubt; but don't invite her. It is sweeter to be *just two.*"

"And, Jerome, her story is romantic, and her object is so touching and earnest. Let me tell you about her. Her husband—I don't know his——"

"Dinner is served!" proclaimed North, majestically.

Thus Beryl ever skirted blindfold the edge of a precipice.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

"OH, JEROME! HOW YOU MUST DESPISE ME!"

THE first of January had come, and Nice was in the flood-tide of its winter glory. The quarter of the Marble Cross was full of foreign visitors, and the quay along the river was crowded with loungers, while splendid carriages with coats of arms, and servants in livery dashed up to and left the handsome residences in the *Jardin Public.* In one of the handsomest and sunniest of these Lord Alfred Heath and his wife and daughter were established. Lord Alfred's German wife, being nobly lavish in all that she esteemed suitable expenses. Lord Alfred had an elegant

residence, plenty of servants, fine turn-outs, rode as good a horse as any one in Nice, but found himself sadly restricted in regard to Monaco and its green tables, the betting wherein his soul delighted, and the brandy which madame expressly prohibited.

"My adorable Alfred, brandy will kill you. Your death would break my heart. My angel, I find it necessary for you to exist without brandy." And by some occult means, madame governed her "admirable Alfred" so well that he raved against her restrictions and submitted to them.

Jerome Sothron had arrived in Nice shortly after the Heaths, and established himself in lodgings in the Rue Droite. It is not to be denied that he spent much of his time in the hotel of the Heaths, and under the auspices of the amiable stepmother Beryl and Jerome found the days of their courtship an idyl of delight.

On this first morning of the year Sir Jerome had come to breakfast at Lady Heath's, bringing for Beryl an exquisite bouquet of roses. He stood in the sunny window of the breakfast-room waiting for his idol.

The door opened, and in came Beryl, but a Beryl that at first he scarcely recognized. During the last two months Beryl's black had changed to lavender, and now over a year had passed since the death of the marquis, and that morning Fanny had been in the height of joy, dressing her dear little lady once more in colors.

Beryl wore a dress of pale blue cashmere; the open sleeves and the slashed draperies were lined with delicate pink satin. The robe was cut in a point over the neck, and under a filmy vail of lace gleamed the soft, pearly throat, and a cluster of blush roses and forget-me-nots nestled lovingly against the warm, soft chest. Her fluffy golden hair was like a radiant crown; laughter dimpled all her dainty face; a subtle fragrance of mignonette diffused from her garments.

She poised like a bird on the threshold, to read in Jerome's eyes the impression which she made, then rippled into a laugh like a bird's nesting song, and fluttered into his open arms, with a long sigh of sweet content in finding her heart's true rest.

"My angel! my darling!" cried Jerome, pressing her again and again to his heart, in all the pride of his true

and deep love, half wild with joy at claiming as all his own so sweet a thing. "My love! my life! my own!"

Beryl wound one fair arm about his neck, and laid her warm, sweet lips on his in a long kiss.

"There, my Jerome! that kiss, and—and this dress—this *blue* dress are your New Year's gifts from me."

"Heavenly gifts indeed!" said Jerome. "Now I feel as if the past had been all a dream, and you are mine, truly mine, sweet Beryl. Now crown the joy of this blessed New Year by telling me when we may be married."

Beryl hung her pretty head.

"Speak, Beryl! Tell me the lovely day, the crown of my life!"

"Then, if nothing happens——"

"Don't say that. What *can* happen, Beryl?"

"If nothing happens," repeated Beryl, "it shall be the twenty-eighth of June."

"So long!" cried Jerome, in dismay.

"Less than six months," said Beryl, hiding her rosy face on his arm.

"Well, as we shall not be parted in that time, I can *live*, I suppose, even that long," he said, with a sigh.

"And Jerome, I would *rather* the engagement should not be announced until May."

"The announcement is nothing, so I know my joy myself," said Jerome, valiantly. "Here is my New Year's offering."

Beryl took the fragrant bouquet of choice roses in both hands, kissed the flowers, and laid her warm cheek against the cool, delicate petals. Then looking at each bud and blossom separately, for itself, she cried out:

"Oh, Jerome, here is something in the center—a note! a little box! Oh, this quite makes me feel as if I were a prima donna! They get such bouquets."

"You are the prima donna of my heart!" said Jerome.

"Ah! but I must be more than that. I claim to be *only* lady of your heart."

"You are, indeed; else you would not find *that* in your bouquet," replied Jerome, as Beryl untied the little white ribbons that bound the white velvet box, and opening it, beheld a medallion richly set with pearls and turquoises.

She touched the spring, and the handsome face of Jerome, exquisitely painted on ivory, met her eye. She kissed the picture with rapture.

Jerome possessed himself of her left hand. The taper fingers were without any ring. The evening before, when she took off her last remnants of mourning, she had, with a soft sigh, laid in a secret receptacle of her jewel-case, two rings given her by the Marquis of Medford. Jerome slipped on the pretty finger a diamond engagement-ring.

As Beryl threw the slender chain of the medallion about her neck, and the two stood gazing at each other in a happy trance of love, the door opened, and Lady Heath entered in her New Year's splendor, with the "adorable Alfred" in her train.

Jerome took Beryl's hand and led her to meet them.

"The twenty-eighth of June is to crown my wishes," he said, in triumph.

"I adore engagements, weddings, trousseaus!" cried Lady Heath. "Beryl, my cherub, my New Year's gift shall be to dispatch Fanny to Paris to bring you three of Worth's best gowns. I pine for your re-entrance to society. The days will be long until the first of April."

"They will be short as minutes," asserted Jerome; "and *then* detestable society will ingulf her in operas, balls, dinners, suppers, theatres, *fêtes*, other partners, until I tear my hair with rage."

"My seraph, rely on me for a splendid wedding-gift. I shall outdo myself," said Lady Heath.

"I wish it were in a more needy direction," whispered her Alfred in her ear.

"My blessed Alfred you have *me!* What *can* you wish for more?" said Lady Heath, tranquilly moving to her place at the enormous silver urns of tea and coffee.

New Year's gifts, New Year's greetings filled up the day. At noon came a great number of letters from friends in England and elsewhere.

"Oh!" cried Beryl, in a tone of regret, as she opened a letter.

"What is it, dear?" asked Jerome.

"From Lelia Barrows. I wrote for her to come here for a rest and visit, and she begs to be excused. She says she needs to spend every day in improving herself, and that she must go to England the first of May. She has an engagement there that cannot be broken."

"Bless her for not coming here!" cried Jerome.

"Oh, Jerome! You would have liked her, I am sure."

"I would like no one who deprived me of your society,' said Jerome, stoutly.

"She writes with a tone of sadness, poor child! Hers is a pitiful history. I must tell it to you as soon as I finish these letters;" and Beryl broke a seal bearing the Friar arms.

"Oh, oh!" she cried, in dismay and irritation.

"What is that 'oh' for?" demanded Jerome, looking up from his letters.

"Ah, Jerome, it is from Sir Eustace; all full of news, and enthusiasm for something or another, and *gossip*—yes, downright gossip, Sir Eustace is guilty of. He says—he really says—that Laura Ranleigh is accepting attentions from that *odious* Mr. Rubble. By wealth and political influence he has secured invitations to houses where Laura is visiting, and he is paying her very open attention, and she is accepting it."

"Only what I should expect," said Sir Jerome. "I am losing all faith in and regard for Mrs. Ranleigh. I suspect she is treacherous—I *know* she is—and she is an open fortune-hunter. Suppose Rubble is vulgar, coarse, hard, cruel; he is rich—wondrous rich. She will marry his houses, his turn-outs, his huge income."

"And you will despise her for it?" said Beryl, looking at him with deep, entreating eyes.

"Certainly. Why not? How could one do less?"

"Oh, Jerome!" cried Beryl, a sudden whiteness invading her lovely face, and cruel sorrow looking from her blue eyes. "Oh, Jerome, how you must despise *me!*"

"You, my darling! What do you mean?"

"I—I did that!" sobbed Beryl hiding her face; "and, too, when—when I loved you all the time!"

"Poor, innocent little one, forced by others—do you think I can blame you for that?" he cried, catching her in his arms.

CHAPTER LXIX.

"I LEAVE YOU AN ERRAND FOR ME."

"WHY do you and Beryl not go out horseback riding?" asked Lord Alfred, one morning, of Jerome. "The roads are fine and so is the weather. There's nothing to hinder; you used to be wild enough to go, when you couldn't."

Sir Jerome did not know whether to laugh or to choke his future father-in-law, who was always referring with infinite *sang froid* to that past, wherein his own past from any honorable point of view had been anything but praiseworthy.

"I should enjoy it of all things," said Jerome. "Beryl, will you go?"

"I shall be glad enough to accompany you," said Lord Alfred. "Riding is one of the few pleasures left me."

"My adorable Alfred," said his wife," calmly, "you have quite as many pleasures as are good for you. Beryl, my rosebud, if you wish, I will buy you the handsomest horse in Nice this very day."

"There is a snow white beauty, just the creature for you, Beryl. Could be hired for three months," interrupted her father.

"And let your riding-dress be blue; order one at once," cried Lady Heath.

After that many happy mornings were spent in excursions on horseback. Beryl and Jerome cantering through the streets, Beryl in dark blue on her snow white horse, and Jerome riding a splendid creature black as jet and smooth as satin. Lord Alfred, or North, went with them, and reaching some ruin, cathedral, or ancient convent, which they wished to see, they would dismount and wander about in the wide sunshine among the heaped up relics of "The Fairies' Bath," "The Temple of Apollo," or the "Camp of Charlemagne."

"What a charming sky and charming view," said Beryl, one day, as they paced up and down an avenue

lined with ilex trees. "Are you noticing it, Jerome?"

"The fact is," said Jerome, rousing himself. "I am often lost in a sweet day-dream, or castle-building, of what our life shall be together, when we live at Sothronwold Abbey. Sothronwold is so marvellously beautiful, Beryl."

"Yes, I know," said Beryl, with a faint sigh.

Jerome knew what she was thinking of; he drew her left hand under his arm, as she carried her long habit-skirt gathered over her right. He whispered:

"We shall be so happy there that every sad association and thought shall die. It has its sad memories for me, too, Beryl, to be charmed away by your smile."

"*She* is buried there?" said Beryl, gently.

"Yes, poor girl!"

"I am glad you said *that*," said Beryl, drawing closer to him. "I could not love you so well, Jerome, if I thought you had hard thoughts toward her. She was not to blame for marrying you. How could she do otherwise when you asked her? I think she loved you, Jerome."

"She fancied me, no doubt. Real love, my Beryl, must have more solid grounds. I was cruelly to blame to marry a young creature out of mere rage and spite against my fate. I only explain it by thinking that I was not in my right mind, that my approaching brain fever had already laid hold of my intellect. I *could not* love her, I *could not* live with her; but I do deeply pity her, and deplore her terrible end. Yet I did my best to make her part with that maid, Sara. I suspected her. But, you see, I had no authority or right, taking the position I did from the first."

"Her family live there still?" queried Beryl.

"No. I sent them away; that is, they wanted to go to Nova Scotia, and I gave them funds to go—a thousand pounds—soon after I inherited."

"That was so liberal of you, Jerome!"

"You would think it barely justice, Beryl, if you knew all the wrong they had suffered at Sothron hands. And yet they were our people—good old tenants for generations. Celia had a sister, Delia, a twin, so like her that they could not be known apart. Francis Sothron, about eighteen months before I heired, was visiting my uncle,

and, under promise of marriage, got poor Delia to run away with him. He did not marry her, and she left him, because she was at heart a good girl and wanted to do well. She married an honest man. I did something for them. But he is dead, poor fellow, and Delia has vanished somewhere, always, I suppose, feeling the burden and shame of that first fault."

"Oh, how cruel! how cruel!" sighed Beryl.

"My uncle forbade Francis the place, little thinking that he would soon be there as heir. Then, four good lives stood between."

"He should *never* be there. He desecrated the place. Oh, how can you tolerate him there, Jerome?"

"One tolerates the penitent, my dear. I hope Francis is penitent. I believe he really loved Delia, and Delia only. He has been looking for her since he supposed he was Sir Francis—looking for her, to repair his wrong toward her by marriage."

"Ah! then I think better of him."

"So do I. He has others looking for Delia, and he has taken a vow, up to some day next spring, to look for her, and hold himself ready to marry her. He is searching for her everywhere. I sent him back to the Abbey, hoping that through old friends of the Morris family he might learn Delia's whereabouts."

"And then?" questioned Beryl, with a deep sigh over the many woes of fallen humanity.

"Then, my dear, when she is found they will marry, and Francis is to go to Canada, and I am to give him a fortune, out of what I made so oddly when I was a fugitive and a wanderer, with the mark of Cain."

"Unmerited, my Jerome."

"No, never so bad as that. But I owe a good Providence a thank-offering, and suffering humanity some help. And I think, my Beryl, our bridal days will be all the happier for knowing an old wrong repaired, as far as any wrong can be; and then, too, it seems to me an expiation of some sort toward poor Celia, to help the sister she loved so well."

Jerome loved to call this dear young creature "my Beryl." What agonies he suffered in the days when she was another man's Beryl!

"You have much to forgive me, my Beryl," he said, clasping the little fingers that lay on his arm.

"And you much to forgive me. Ah, Jerome, perhaps it is just as well that all this forgiving is not on one side," and she lifted the blue eyes to his with a look of trust and tenderness.

"And in spite of all the past, my dear, the Abbey will have smiles and flowers for us, and be the home of our hearts, when we go there, having done what we can to make the crooked straight."

January passed delightfully with Lady Beryl. Sir Jerome treasured every day, and begrudged its passing, because in the middle of March the Heaths were going to London, and he must loose sight of his Beryl "for a whole intolerable fortnight."

"I will plan something for you to do for me," said Beryl, laughing, "and the time will not seem so long."

With the last days of February the flowers came back, and jonquils, hepaticas, and daffodils bloomed in all the sheltered nooks; the garden borders were gay, and the sweet breath of the hyacinths floated on the air. There is a pretty excursion to a place called "The valley of Hepaticas," where in white, blue, pink, purple, these delicate blossoms spread a sheet of bloom. They went there one day, Lady Heath going in the phaeton, sleeping all the way, and vowing that the "view was transcendental!"

"This mass of flowers, all of one kind," said Jerome, "makes me think of a spot I shall show you one day, the Iris field at the abbey; it is a mass of blue lilies."

Oh, little did Sir Jerome think of the horrors that should surround the hour when again he looked on the spot beloved of his boyhood.

"Laura has told me of that place; she knew it well," said Beryl. "But I cannot bear to think of Laura any more."

"Why not? On account of Mr. Rubble?"

"Yes; I had a letter from Lady Maria. She says it will certainly be a match. He lavishes gifts—costly gifts—on her, and she takes them, and he follows her everywhere. And yet, Lady Maria says she knows, Laura fears and hates him. She has seen Laura shudder and turn pale when he came near her. The idea of marriage with such feelings is hideous!"

But this thought of Laura did not often cross the happy

hours that followed each other "rosy-footed," until the middle of March came, and Lady Heath carried her lovely step-daughter back to London society.

"Jerome, to occupy these two weeks I leave you an errand for me. Biarritz is lonely, make a trip there. See the house where I lived, see my dear Lelia Barrows for me. Perhaps you can bring her to England with you."

CHAPTER LXX.

"BUT YOUR LELIA IS NOTHING TO ME.

JEROME SOTHRON did not obey his liege lady and go to Biarritz. He had no interest at all in taking Miss Barrows with him to England. When he saw his Beryl again, could he spare her for one five minutes to Miss Barrows, or Miss Anybody? No, indeed! Besides, his time was occupied. He heard from Francis, that the French woman with whom he believed Delia to have left England, had gone to Potigny in Normandy, and was a Madame Fleury. Possibly she might give information concerning Delia. Therefore, Sir Jerome hurried off from Nice, no longer attractive, and took Potigny in his way to London, and after some search found Madame Fleury. She had not seen Delia since one afternoon when she left the house, saying that she would be back by eight, and she never came. She did not return during the two weeks madam had lingered in England. Madam was afraid the poor, lonely, misguided young woman had gone back to a former lover, which would be a great sin and shame, as she had a kind, liberal, honest husband. But, alas! did not care for him, more was the pity.

So, baffled in this search, Jerome after securing an agent or two to look for Delia, went to London, and in the glad meeting with Beryl forgot his troubles about Delia. Francis and Jerome had had few words about the girl. Francis had never ventured to mention to Jerome his unfortunate wife. The Morris girls had been orphans scattered among relations: and Francis, knowing only Delia, concluded there might have been several of the

girls—Delia, the sister married to Sir Jerome, and the sister whom he had seen in Biarritz, and who seemed to have fallen in with friends who afforded her abundant means. This girl Francis had never mentioned to Sir Jerome.

She was evidently very hostile to Francis himself, and knew that he had nearly succeeded in persuading Delia to abandon her husband and return to himself. That was an episode that Francis did not wish Sir Jerome to know.

In London Lady Heath had leased the house in Park Lane belonging to the Heath family, and formerly occupied by Beryl's grandmother. Beryl was thus once more in the home of her girlhood ; but the home was changed, and so was Beryl. The new Lady Heath had the house refurnished in her own lavish and florid taste, somewhat chastened by the more cultivated ideas of a London upholsterer.

All was brilliant with gilding, mirrors, flowers, cut glass, pictures, draperies, china. Lady Heath was in the height of her glory. Reports of her wealth had gone as heralds before her ; she was a foreigner, and everything "odd" could be forgiven to a foreigner. And then Lady Heath was bringing back Lady Beryl Medford, who had risen over London society as a bright particular star, that set all too soon. And so no sooner were the Heaths "at home" than Park Lane was thronged with the carriages of those who came to welcome them or do them honor, and a continual procession seemed to pass in and out of their drawing-rooms, while a shower of cards and invitations fell upon their tables.

And if the house, with its brilliant refitting, its new servants, new carriages, abundant table, and air of liberal wealth, far above all subterfuge and meanness, was changed, so and more changed was Beryl, the daughter of the house. She had still the cloudy eyes and the golden hair that might have been painted by Paul Veronese, and had marked the girl Beryl, the timid *debutante*. But in those days, dominated by her selfish father and her fierce grandmother, the girl had looked out on life with fear, and had not dared to call her soul her own. Now, as Lady Medford, she was independent in fortune and position, and mistress of her own future. But oh, how dearly had that independence been bought !

Whereas once her father had considered his child a commodity to be disposed of for his own benefit, now in the favor of her rank and of her coming fortune, he was the humblest of her subjects, while instead of having over her the fierce, eagle-beaked old dowager, ordering her here and there without regard to her wishes, Beryl had for chaperon the stout, effusive stepmother, who was to Beryl as a broad, bright, fostering, summer day. Beryl often wondered where Lady Heath found the endless admiring names which she bestowed on her and the "adorable Alfred"—whole strings and chains of names!

Lady Heath was just getting out of her coupé, wherein she had an endless heap of little parcels, results of a morning's pilgrimage among the shops, when she faced Sir Jerome, who, arrived that morning at his chambers at the Albany, was hastening to see Beryl. Lady Heath grasped his hand.

"Welcome, Sir Jerome, my pride of men! Ah, I know what eyes will be like two suns to see you. Come, *she* is always in the conservatory at this hour; *she* loves to arrange her own flowers; fly, my Prince Jerome; what is more opportune than to find love among the roses?"

The conservatory! Well did Sir Jerome know the spot where had sounded, between sobs and tears, when he was poor Mr. Sothron, the knell of his fate. There he and Beryl had wept together when she had told him that her hand had been, against her entreaties and protestations, bestowed on the marquis. And here he found her now.

She was bending above a beautiful crape myrtle, a sheet of rosy bloom, while beside her a Daphne odorata poured incense on the air. But at the softly breathed "Beryl!" she flew into his arms.

"Jerome! Jerome! are you here?"

"Yes, my darling. This fortnight has seemed long, but now we meet never, never to part. I feel as if all our lives lay before us, bright as this April day, all flooded with its sunshine. It is an omen!"

"April, I call my month," said Beryl, smiling. "It seems to me like my life; I am either all happy, or all wretched; I am either laughing or crying. When—when I am parted from *you*, when sorrows are between us, I am bursting into tears all the times and when you are near me, I am smiling and laughing, because all the world, and everything in it, looks so lovely to me."

"My darling you shall never shed any more tears!" cried Sir Jerome, fondly, drawing her closer to him—she was so sweet and artless in the clear simplicity of her love.

Never any more tears! And yet the terrible crisis of their fate drew near apace; and on they went, gay as two children tripping over a flowery plain, to meet that crucial hour.

The gipsy's prophecy had almost passed out of Beryl's mind—been crowded out by happiness. Jerome had come to her again, all the world smiled on them. Two months, and a little more, would bring the wedding-day. Beryl remembered no longer the fateful words about the second bridge. And why should she? These prophecies were mere shrewd guessing set to work, a keen character-reading, and quickly caught words and hints.

"And you did not go for my Lelia, after all!" cried Beryl. "Oh, shameless knight! But she is coming to England in about three weeks."

"Ah, I do not care a penny about your Lelia," said Sir Jerome, laughing.

"Fie, now! I believe you are jealous of her. I really love her."

"You love everybody; it is one of your sweet traits. But, indeed, you fill the whole circle of my heart. I love so well, I have no room for jealousy; and your Lelia is really nothing to me."

Sir Jerome came back to be the lion of the hour, as Beryl had come to be the belle of the season. She surpassed all the newly introduced beauties. Her loveliness was admitted to be as incomparable as Jerome's history was unmatchable. The news of his long adventures, his return, following, as it did, so soon after the remarkable confession of Sara Hunter, which had been scattered over the whole civilized world, had made Jerome the object of curiosity, astonishment, and admiration.

CHAPTER LXXI.

HAD THE TERRIBLE HOUR COME?

AMONG the first to welcome Beryl back to social life were the new Marquis of Medford and his wife, the Countess Marion. They had taken possession of their home in Cavendish square, where Beryl had reigned briefly and unhappily. The Countess Marion, owing to the birth of her child and the death of the late marquis, had been two years or more in seclusion. She now returned to the high circle where her sweetness and accomplishments had made her ever a favorite, and where she now shone with new *éclat.* She was about to give a very splendid ball. She came to Beryl the morning after Jerome's arrival.

"Dearest Beryl, you know I love you as a sister, and I sympathize with you now in your new happiness. I wish very much that you should make my ball the occasion of your most brilliant appearance this season, and that there your engagement to Sir Jerome should be announced. It will not grieve you, will it, dearest, to come to the house that was once yours?"

"No, dear Marion. It seems to me that nothing can ever grieve me while I have--Jerome," said Beryl, looking up with a blush and her ingenuous smile.

The countess patted her cheek, with a bright look.

"I want every one to feel that we, Harley and I, are glad of your happiness, and are nearest friends to you and Sir Jerome."

"You are so good," said Beryl—"you *always* were so good to me, Marion. In sorrow and in joy, ever the same."

"I see no reason why I should be otherwise, Beryl. You were sweetness itself to me and my baby when you were in the place I hold now. So you are to be the crowning glory of my ball. I want it a real social success. It will be the twenty-sixth."

"Rely on me, Lady Medford," said Lady Heath, who had entered the drawing-room. "I am resolved that Beryl shall shine. There is nothing I love like beauty. As I see none when I look in the glass, I delight in fixing my eyes on sweet, fair faces like yours and my angelic Beryl's. As I say to my adorable Alfred, 'Since I am without beauty, I have the joy of feeling that you married me for more solid charms.' And I am solid enough, goodness knows," added Lady Heath, calmly surveying her portly figure.

Beryl, as usual, at the maternal remarks, broke into a low, silvery peal of laughter. For the life of her, she could not help it. There was something to her intensely amusing in Lady Heath.

"Oh, I know," said Lady Heath, good-naturedly. "I love to hear you laugh, my cherub! You were so sad when I first met you, it made me heart-sick. Yes, I know what were the solid charms which won my adorable Alfred. *They are in the bank*, my pet. And why not? What is more convenient to a man like my adorable Alfred than money, which he is *not* allowed to devastate? And Alfred *is* adorable. I always worshipped a man with just that shape of the nose; and as for his whiskers, properly dyed, they are the most ecstatic whiskers—except Sir Jerome's and the Marquis of Medford's—that ever I saw."

Having thus done justice to the two young ladies, Lady Heath folded her arms complacently and looked about, while heart-happy Beryl laughed till the tears came.

"Indeed, mamma," she said, "you must be more careful what you say to make me laugh. You will ruin my reputation for good manners if you set me into these ridiculous fits of laughter. You know I ought never to be *much* amused at anything."

"I know no such nonsense at all," said Lady Heath. "To laugh and be happy is a good thing, and prepares us in time to meet trouble. I have found it so."

But Beryl felt as if no trouble was ever coming to *her*. Had she not Jerome?

Radiant with beauty and promise, all her life lying before her and about her as a summer land, made glad by the sunshine of abundant love, Lady Beryl Medford appeared at the countess' ball. Her dress was a brocade of most delicate blue, wrought with silver thread which

glittered and shimmered with every motion like the frost sparkles of snow. A film of costly lace covered her neck and arms, making them seem more brilliantly and delicately white, and this lace was held about her waist with a broad belt of wrought silver filigree. She had no ornaments but the rings Jerome had given her, and a rich crescent of diamonds that rose and fell upon her breast in undulating light. Her full and trailing skirt was entirely plain, but for the slightly revealed under frill of lace, from which peeped out a pair of small feet in blue brocade slippers, with buckles of brilliants. She entered the reception-room, preceded and followed by a hum of admiration, and accompanied by the handsome Sir Jerome, at that hour the rage of London, as one risen from the dead.

"I see," whispered a stately duchess, who graced the occasion, to the rosy Viscountess Maria Hampton, "this is to be a match, and a very suitable one. Lady Beryl is far too young and lovely to be abandoned to her widowhood. Her stepmother is a good creature, but *not* the chaperon or guardian for so sensitive and exquisite a being; and her father. Oh!"

"I admit," said the merry Lady Maria, "that dear Beryl did not show her native good taste in the choice of relatives; but for a lover, could she have chosen better?"

"Indeed, no," said the duchess. "I never saw a more magnificent couple in my life. It is like seeing the choicest of pictures to look at them."

Beryl, meanwhile, receiving the greeting of many friends, and the homage of the throng in the room, happening to lift her eyes, saw entering the door, Mr. Rubble. She felt really shocked; he was so repulsive to her.

"Oh, Marion!" she whispered to the countess, "have you invited him? And you are so fastidious."

"I could not help it, my dear," whispered the fair hostess from behind her fan, eying, with some disfavor, the portly guest slowly making his way toward her. "If you only knew the amount of county he owns, and the hundreds of votes he controls. He is a power, my love—a tyrannical, odious power—and is forcing his way into the selectest circles. Our political husbands *have* to invite him."

The dancing was well in progress, when Beryl and Sir

Jerome stood opposite in a set to Laura and Sir Eustace Friar. Mr. Rubble did not dance, but he stood near the wall, and watched Laura with a jealous, angry eye.

Beryl glanced from the brilliant face of Laura to that of the lowering despot near the wall, and shivered. A little later she found Laura in the conservatory. Mr. Rubble had gone for a sherbet. Beryl wistfully clasped her friend's hand.

"Laura, dear Laura, tell me it is not true."

".What is not true?"

"That you are to marry Mr. Rubble."

"But I am. Possibly the sixteenth of June."

"Oh Laura, how can you?"—you do not love him."

"There was no Sir Jerome to offer to *me*," said Laura, shortly. "Suppose I do not love him! Did *you* love Medford? How can I? Why, my good child, I am almost at my last pound, and I hate poverty, even worse than I hate Rubble?"

"Laura," cried the shocked Beryl, "when the hour comes when you fear as well as hate, how terrible your life will be."

* * * * * * *

"Ah, my lady," said Fanny that night, as she was brushing Beryl's hair, "I need not ask if you had a happy evening, for your face shows it. How glad you look."

"Yes, Fanny," said Beryl, "I am very glad. This evening my engagement to Sir Jerome Sothron was announced."

The brush nearly fell from Fanny's hand. Had the terrible hour come!

"Oh, my lady," she said, faintly, "and when—when is it to be?"

"The twenty-sixth of June, Fanny."

Fanny went to another table, and seemed to seek another brush.

"Two months and ten days," she said.

"Yes," said Lady Beryl, admiring the medallion portrait of Jerome. Then she lifted her eyes, and saw Fanny's ghastly face in the glass. "Why, Fanny, are you ill? How strangely you look!"

CHAPTER LXXII.

"MRS. JEROME! HAVE YOU SEEN HER?"

ABOUT noon, the day after the Medford ball, a trim, pretty young woman, dressed in a brown serge, with plentiful pink ribbons, went up one of the dingiest stairways of Gray's Inn, to a legal den at the very top of the building. Being bidden to enter, she saw a boy valiantly and noisily writing with a quill at a desk by a window, and a small, keen, gray man, with one pair of spectacles on his nose and one on the top of his head, reading in a great office chair. The old gentleman, hearing a light footfall, brought the upper glasses down over the first, studied his visitor for a minute, and said, cordially:

"Why, this is Fanny Hume! Fresh as ever, and prettier than ever. Eh, Fanny? How is your family?"

"Very well, thank you, Mr. Crane."

"And the brother I got the damages for when he was hurt?"

"He is doing very well, sir."

"You were a good sister to him. I remember you for it. You pledged all your savings to get him counsel, and you have paid it too, willingly."

"That was only right, sir."

"All people do not do right though, Fanny. Now, my girl, what do you want to-day? More damages?"

"Only a few questions, Mr. Crane. To know the law—the rights of very important matters."

"Very good. Put your questions. I'll make the law plain to you."

Fanny drew near to the old lawyer's chair. She looked fixedly at her toes and nervously rolled one of her pink ribbons with her fingers.

"It is about marriage laws, sir."

"Oh, oh, want some settlements, eh?" laughed the old gentleman."

"If you'd please not joke me, Mr. Crane, this is very important—to me—and more. We'll fancy, if you please,

sir, that a young man and a young woman married, so hasty and foolish as never was, and that they never lived together, no, not a day, nor an hour, Mr. Crane."

Mr. Crane shook his head in grave disapproval of such proceedings. Fanny went on :

"And you'll please to consider that, not living together, the young man heard that the girl he married was dead, and buried, and tombstone set up, say of a fever. And then, Mr. Crane, we'll say, he goes to sea, and is wrecked, and is given out drowned ; but is saved, say by cannibals, or some such."

"You make a novel, really, Fanny."

"Oh, please, sir, it's true every word, nearly. And we will fancy, sir that passing for dead over two years, he drifts back to England again. And as he believes, and is sure, the one he married is dead, he sees one whom he loves with all his heart, and mind, and soul, as it is in the prayer-book, so true as never was ; and—they get married."

"Married, Fanny ! Let us see. Was this one he married before dead, really, or not ? "

"No, she was not dead. It was a mistake."

"Then he cannot marry any one else."

"But, sir, was she—never loved nor lived with—truly his wife."

"Oh, yes, indeed, Fanny, in the eye of God and the law. And this young man's business is to get his lawful wife and live with her, and think no more of any one else. There's law and gospel for that, my girl."

"But suppose he marries the other—the one he loves ? "

"He can't. Going through the form will not make a legal marriage. He is guilty of bigamy."

"If you please, what is bigamy ? "

"A crime he will go to prison for."

"Oh, sir, suppose he does not know ? He thinks he is free ! "

"Thinking does not make it so. Wherever the real wife finds him she can claim him."

"And this other one, what is her case, sir ? "

"I can hardly imagine a worse one for a good woman to be in. She is not a wife at all."

"And suppose she has children, Mr. Crane ? "

"Oh, worse and worse ! They will not be legitimate ; they will have no name, and cannot inherit."

"And suppose, sir, that none of these three people, the young man or the two young women, knew the rights of the case, and there was one person that did, and stood by and said nothing?"

"That would be a truly fiendish, diabolical act, Fanny, wrecking three lives! Such a person can have no excuse for not speaking and preventing wrong-doing and endless consequences of evil!"

Fanny began to tremble very much. Her rosy face grew pale, great tears rolled down her cheeks, she twisted her pink ribbons with nervous fingers. The old lawyer regarded her with interest and sympathy.

"Is this your case? Are you one of these very unfortunate young women, Fanny?"

"Oh, my, no, sir—no! no!"

"Are you thinking of getting married, Fanny?"

"Indeed I am not," responded Fanny, with considerable spirit. "If there's one thing in this world which makes me truly out of patience, sick and disgusted, after all the worry I've gone through, it is the idea of getting married! No, Mr. Crane, I'm *not* thinking of it."

"I cannot understand with what object you have put to me a case evidently clearly stated to your own mind, and in which you are obviously interested. But what I have told you is good law, and nothing can alter it. When a man takes a woman for his wife, by legal ceremony, only death or divorce can part them, and divorce will be granted only if she is evidently false to her marriage vows. If that cannot be proved, he has to keep her for better or worse, and nothing can make his union with a second woman lawful, in the life of the first. And the case of the second woman would be infinitely deplorable."

"Well, Mr. Crane," said Fanny, with a concluding sob, "you've made it plain to me—and thank you very much—and my mind's made up."

So saying, Fanny went back down the dingy stairway, and all the birds were singing in Gray's Inn Garden, and the grass was springing up green and soft, the old dingy trees were putting on their fresh leaves—all seemed glad and free except the heart of Fanny Hume. Her mind was made up. She must make known somehow, to her lady, the continued existence of Sir Jerome's first wife.

How to do it, when to do it, she could not tell. She shrank from dealing this death-blow to her idolized lady. She told herself she must wait a little, she must prepare her, something would happen. Two months and nine days; that was a long, long time, no doubt before all that time passed the way would be made plain, and the task would grow easier.

Thus Fanny went on arguing for a delay of duty, when a loud, cordial, glad voice fell on her ear.

"Ho there, my lass! Is it you, Fanny, to give me a welcome the moment I land?"

There he stood, that great blonde viking, Ralph Marshall, all aglow with the joy of meeting Miss Fanny Hume wandering aimlessly along the causeway.

In the misery of her mind, Fanny was cross with herself and with every one else. She very unjustly laid all her troubles, especially the survival of Jerome's first wife to poor Ralph Marshall. She said, snappishly:

"Well, suppose I am here? I never thought to meet you, and you needn't tell all the street my name's Fanny."

"Avast there, lass. What's in the wind now? You are as savage on me, and more, as Mrs. Jerome Sothron was two weeks past, at Biarritz, I seem to be out of favor with women, worse luck to me."

"Mrs. Jerome!" gasped Fanny; have you seen *her?*

"I have—and more. I spoke to her on the quay."

"Did you mention Sir Jerome to her?" cried Fanny, eagerly.

"Ah, lass, you're readier to ask questions than to give a man a fair greeting. No, I did *not* mention Sir Jerome. I knew naught about him, how nor where he was; and, moreover, she gave me no time. Says I, 'Mrs. Sothron! Is it you?' 'Why, Ralph Marshall,' says she; 'you alive? Oh, I thought you were dead.' 'No, I'm alive, and here's my ship just starting for old England.'

"'My poor sister!' cries she, and bursts into crying, and away she goes as if my looks was poison. Fanny, where are you now? I must come see you, my dear lass."

If he came to see her, he might face Sir Jerome or Lady Beryl, and blurt out the whole affair too suddenly.

Fanny Hume indulged in a lie.

"I am here only for a day. We are at Winderton Castle, in the lake district," she said.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

"DO YOU WANT ME TO BREAK HER HEART?"

Miss Fanny Hume was not such an unutterable fibber that she was quite without remorse of conscience when she indulged in a falsehood. Moreover, she had considerable affection for her sailor lover, whom she had maltreated and deceived. He could not see her, he would run after some other lass, and Fanny would be forgotten. These wretched feelings, added to the burden laid on her by Mr. Crane's earnest words of warning, wrecked Fanny's happiness for the day: she was pale and full of sighs, her eyes were red and swollen, and tears kept chasing each other over her round cheeks.

"What is the matter with you, Fanny?" cried Lady Beryl. "I never saw you so before. Have you any secret trouble? Tell me, and let me help you."

"Oh, it's not me, my dear lady, it is for you. Oh, I can't abide to think of your being married. Don't, don't do it, my lady. You are so happy as you are."

"Why, you silly girl! Was I one bit happy before Sir Jerome came back? Am I not now so happy just because I am to marry the man I love? Why, if I were not to marry Sir Jerome I should die. I would not live a week!"

Fanny sobbed furiously. She knew she could not tell what was on her mind. Bury her lady in a week!

"The fact is, Fanny," said Beryl, casting a critical eye on the dress she was to wear at Lady Friar's afternoon tea, from which she was going with Sir Jerome to a lecture, "the fact is, you must be ill. As soon as I go out, I wish you to go and revive yourself by a walk in the park, and if you are not better to-morrow, I shall send for a doctor."

The prescription of a walk was certainly more agreeable than a prescription of pills or syrups. Besides, the sweet air and soft beauty of an April evening are far more likely to revive a sick heart than are any tonics.

Fanny returned to the brown serge and pink ribbons, and betook herself for a walk to Hyde Park. She was returning to a faint tearful interest in toilets, draperies, and styles of hair dressing, and inwardly condemning the work of many other ladies' maids, when the same voice that had greeted her in the morning, fell again on her ear, and sent joy and tremor through her soul.

"Why, my lass, I did not think I'd have the luck to meet you again. I thought you must be off to Winderton Castle by this."

Then did Miss Hume realize

"Oh, what a tangled web we weave
When first we practice to deceive."

The lie of the morning had begotten half a dozen by evening

"I missed the train," said Fanny, boldly, "waiting for a new bonnet for my lady, and I'm going to stop over night with a friend that has a place in Park Lane."

"Then, just now, my lass, you've naught to do but sit down and talk with me, so I'm in luck; and we'll find a bench for an hour or so, for I don't see why I shouldn't have my share of courting as well as uglier men," said the jovial Ralph.

Whereupon Ralph Marshall masterfully led the way to a seat, and beckoning a flower-seller, bought for Fanny a nice bouquet.

To sit with a fine-looking man on a bench, to hold a bouquet, and be conscious of becoming pink ribbons, was not the worst fate in the world, so Fanny cheered up a little, and asked, affably:

"How did you come over to the West End, Mr. Marshall?"

But no sooner did Fanny thus take wing a little above her woes, than the storm of fate beat her back. Her rising spirits fell, when Ralph promptly responded:

"I came clear over here, holding a stern chase after Sir Jerome Sothron, and I lost him in some of these crowded aristocratic streets an hour back, and I cruised along here to see if he had run in."

"Oh, you were misfaken. You could not have seen him."

"No, my lass, I was not mistaken. I never am mistaken in faces nor weather. I've a keen eye, my lass."

"Well, where did you see him?"

"Coming out of what you call the Temple. Kind of a shipyard where they build or fit out lawyers, my lass. I was well away, but I says, 'There's Sir Jerome,' and I bore down on him as fast as I could; but he mounted a horse and away he went. And I had only my own legs to trust to, for a horse is a kind of craft I never sail, though most sailors like them."

"And suppose you *had* come up with him," said Fanny, desperately, "what would you have done?"

"Why, I'd have said square truth. 'Sir Jerome,' I'd say, 'I'm glad to see you alone; and it's my duty to tell you also your wife is alive, and living in Biarritz. I feel for her, Sir Jerome,' I'd say, 'because of her loving her poor sister, and looking like her.' Also I should say to him, 'She believing you dead, and you the same of her, you are each of you likely to do a great wrong in thinking of marrying some other one. And so, Sir Jerome, I would say, go back to your wife and do your honest part, for well do I know what it is to see a poor young thing lying forlorn and dead when it is too late to mend matters.' Now, lass, that's what I want to say to Sir Jerome, and I *will* see him and say it, sure as I'm Ralph Marshall."

Fanny, hearing all this warm statement of the case, was crying heartily. The disclosure which she dreaded as certain to be the death of her lady was hurrying on apace. In her excitement she made sure that as soon as this thunderbolt fell on Jerome, he would either drop down dead or fly out and kill himself in his despair.

"My lass, I be main sorry to see thee crying," said Ralph, fervently, "and yet I love thee for being so soft-hearted over this pitiful story; over her that lives and over her that is dead. But cheer up, my lass, and don't ruin those pretty eyes."

Fanny wiped her eyes and smelled her bouquet, her mind in a tumult of planning how to keep Sir Jerome and Ralph from meeting. She knew that all this mystery should be cleared up. She vowed that it should some time, even at the last minute, if her lady and Sir Jerome were at the altar. But she kept deferring and deferring, vainly hoping for some way of escape, some easy, nice way of truth-telling.

"Didn't you tell me, my lass," spoke out Ralph, sud-

denly, "that your lady and Sir Jerome were true lovers? Be sure then they'll meet, and may take to the old sweethearting. Think how fearful wrong that would be. Be sure you tell her, lass, that I saw *his* wife in Biarritz, and spoke to her."

"Oh, my goodness!" screamed Fanny, unawares, "do you want *me* to break her heart?"

"What, lass! Is there then anything between them? Then you *must* tell her, and if you don't I will. Yes, if I have to break my way through locked doors!"

"Oh, I will, I will!" cried Fanny; "of course I will. But why don't you think of other things? Do you remember that Sir Jerome's coming to life will crush Sir Francis? He was where we were last fall, and the lady he wanted to marry jilted him, when he left Sothronwold, and she's going to marry a very rich man, but ugly enough to frighten one."

"I'm glad Francis Sothron is jilted—I'm glad he's ousted!" said Ralph, fiercely. "I've his head to break yet, or his brains to blow out! Where is the scoundrel?"

"He's at Sothronwold," said Fanny, desperately, thinking if Ralph got on the track of Francis he would let Sir Jerome and her lady rest for awhile.

Ralph sat shaking his head threateningly.

"I must go home," said Fanny, rising. "It is a queer way you have of sweethearting, Mr. Marshall, to sit and talk of other people, alive and dead, and of breaking heads."

"But I'm main fond of you, all the same," said Ralph; "and you speak the word, missis, and I'm ready to be spliced, fast as fast, in any parish church you name."

"I've got enough on my mind, without thinking of splicing or any other kind of knot-making," said Fanny.

"But you'll let me come and see you while I'm ashore this fortnight?"

"Well, I'll write you," said Fanny, hurriedly. "I must go. Don't come beyond the Park gates with me, for the people where I'm stopping overnight are very sharp about followers."

"Followers!" cried Ralph, angrily. "I'm no *follower*. I'm Captain Ralph Marshall, of the brig Lucky Rogue, and I sail square alongside, and there's no 'longshore sneaking in me, my lass. Speak your word and set your

day, and you'll find Ralph Marshall as good a husband as any other man."

"Yes, yes, I'm sure of it, or I'd not write you, Ralph. I'll write. Good-by. Thank you for the flowers."

And away hurried Fanny, followed by Ralph's admiring remark that she was "a trim little craft." As for Fanny, she got home and concluded—to do nothing. All was right *just now*. For her, the future was always far away, and life was—*now*.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

"WHEN LELIA COMES!"

"OH, now, I'm sorry—real sorry!" cried Beryl, at the breakfast-table.

"My dear, what is the matter?" said Jerome, who had been asked by the good-natured Lady Heath to breakfast, and was looking over his paper while Beryl was reading her letters. "What mars your happiness this morning of the first of May?"

"Nothing seems to mar it very much," said Beryl, brightly, "but I am really sorry for this. Here is a letter from my dear Lelia. I had written her to come right here to me, as she was coming to England, to reach here to-day or to-morrow. She writes me that she *must* go elsewhere first. That she cannot come to me until the ninth. She has a duty to fulfill—a promise to keep. Lelia is very scrupulous, and always has some duty on hand. Still, she is going to Anna Marvel, and Anna was her first, best friend."

"But why do you want Lelia, when you have *me*?" demanded Sir Jerome, with a laugh.

"Oh, she could not take your place, nor you hers. Jerome, I want her to think of things for me, and to go about for me, and to help see that all my things are right now for—for my——"

"Oh, yes, happy word—for your trousseau?"

"You see, Lady Heath gets tired out going to shops with me——"

"My dove!" cried Lady Heath. "I would be tired out twice over for you, willingly."

"Well, I don't want you to lose all your breath, mamma, climbing in and out of carriages for me," said Beryl. "It will be a great relief when Lelia comes the ninth. She loves pretty things. I shall have a charming time showing her mine."

"I begin to be curious to see your *rara avis* of a Lelia," said Sir Jerome. "Remember, we are to have a horseback ride this morning, and Medford and Lady Marion are going."

When Fanny had seen her mistress go downstairs in hat and habit, her gold-mounted whip in her hand, her tan-colored gauntlets matching the feather in the cap with leather, hand, and buckle, she returned to the drawing-room to set the tables in order. She felt better satisfied that morning. She had put off the evil day, and that was much; and she had concluded on what shoulders to cast her burden, and that was more.

Lady Beryl had told her that Lelia Barrows was coming to help with the trousseau.

"It will all be a surprise to Lelia," said Beryl, gayly. "I have not hinted a word, nor named Sir Jerome. I shall introduce her to him, and then afterward I shall say to her, 'Dear Lelia, is he not the very handsomest man in the world?' And then I shall say, 'And I am to be married to him the twenty-sixth of June, and now we shall be busy day and night with my trousseau! Think how astonished and charmed good little Lelia will be!"

And Beryl had been so enchanted with this scheme that she was nearly as hard to dress as when, a child, she had a new doll propped up on some divan, to which she must make excursions to kiss and caress.

So Miss Barrows was coming the ninth! Well, Fanny made up her mind to take her aside and say, "Did you ever see in Biarritz a Mrs. Sothron? Could you find her for me?" and then tell her the whole of this terrible story. For Fanny knew that Lelia had the moral principle which she lacked, and that Lelia would not allow Lady Beryl to move unwarned along a flowery way to ruin. Right would be done, and Fanny was not at all ambitious to be the one to do it.

"Good for me it is," said Fanny, "that I made Ralph believe I was way up at Winderton Castle, where it is too far for him to go. He would be coming here and catch-

ing sight of Sir Jerome, or seeing him and my lady together, and the very look of her eyes would tell the whole story. And then he'd blurt it out, like firing a gun, and kill her dead. But Miss Barrows will know how to manage it."

But Fanny had entirely misjudged Ralph when she fancied that Winderton Castle would be too far for him to go for the sake of her bright eyes. If she had declared residence at the north coast of Scotland, Ralph was capable of travelling thither to do some of that "sweethearting" which he had so shamefully neglected sitting in Hyde Park. He had his pocket full of money, and leisure while ashore. He bought a case of perfumery, and some kerchiefs, with pink borders, and he set off to Winderton Castle to see Fanny Hume, and arrived there the third day of May.

Fearing no man, he made his way to the castle. He found it for the most part closed up, the family absent. The housekeeper, however, received him civilly.

"Fanny Hume! Why, yes, she is the dowager Lady Medford's maid, widow of Lord Percy that is dead. *She* has not lived at the castle since January last a year, when my lord died."

"Well, what did Fanny tell me that for?" demanded Marshall, waxing wroth.

"Very likely you misunderstood her. Lady Beryl's dower house was Windmere Lodge, about thirty miles from here, and perhaps they are there. I do not know, but very likely she is, as she was not left rich enough to keep a house in London."

"Then the mistake is mine," said Ralph, more cheerfully, "and I'll go over to Windmere Lodge."

"There's a carrier's cart goes there through Winderton village Tuesday nights, and this is Tuesday. I'd advise you to go in that. You take this road through the park, and you'll come out near the carrier's house."

"Thank ye kindly, missis; so I will," said Ralph.

He set out with a rapid, rolling gait through the park, glorious in its May beauty, and so into the woods, and through these same woods Lelia was coming straight to meet him. Next day Lelia was going to the home of her childhood, Sothronwold, to the Abbey church, to keep that tryst with Sir Francis Sothron. She felt miserably

anxious and unhappy. She could not find Delia, and, moreover she had *seen* Delia's husband, Ralph, and so if Delia lived all was over between her and Sir Francis. Lelia was grieving that she had allowed herself to be too excited and overcome in Biarritz, when she had met Ralph on the quay, to question him. She had been inquiring about her passage to England, and met him with the suddenness with which the dead Samuel rose up before Saul and the Witch of Endor.

Being restless and sad, Lelia, who had told all to Anna Marvel, was advised by her to take a walk to calm her nerves. Setting out she chose the familiar path along the castle woods, and there, about half way, met Ralph Marshall face to face.

"Ralph Marshall! Is it you, alive?"

"Ay, missis. Why not? I've a word with you, Mrs. Sothron, as I was too startled to speak out the other day."

"And I have many words to say to you, Mr. Marshall," said Lelia, with a tremble in her voice.

"Since there's a vast of talking to be done," said Ralph, "and you look terrible pale and feeble-like, Mrs. Sothron, I'm sorry to see, suppose we sit down; and here's a bench convenient."

Lelia, or really Celia Sothron, sat down on the bench and leaned back against a tree. She was pale and thin. The confinement of incessant self-imposed study had worn on the strength of the village girl, and anxiety about the erring sister, who had been the half of her heart, had taxed her nerves and her vitality, so that both Doctor and Mrs. Marvel had been grieved to see her frail appearance.

She looked at Ralph wistfully for some minutes. He, tracing the likeness of the woman who had been his first love, his romance, was silent.

Celia, looking at him, wondered why the truant Delia could not have felt gratitude and love for this fine-looking, thoroughly honest, kindly man. And in her heart rose up a new defiant hate to Francis Westholm Sothron, who had so bewitched and beguiled poor Delia to her ruin. She wished that some judgment would fall on him; at the thought her eyes burned with new fires, and a deep red glow settled itself on the smooth cheek where a little hollow was beginning to show itself. She gave a deep

sigh. Ah, how hard to speak of the sins of one beloved!

"Ralph Marshall," she said suddenly, spurring herself to what must be done, "Where is Delia?"

"Where is Delia!" cried Ralph, in amazement, leaping to his feet. "Don't you know Delia is dead?—that Delia was murdered?"

CHAPTER LXXV.

"YOU'LL REMEMBER—I LOVED HER."

YES, just as the shrewd Fanny suspected, this sailor was a terrible fellow to blurt out matters. He saw how he had erred, when Celia Sothron, with a wild shriek, "My sister murdered!" flung up her arms and fell in a dead swoon.

"Blast me for a fool! Now *I've* killed *her!*" cried Ralph, giving himself a furious blow on his head with his clenched fist, and wishing it were a marline-spike, that he might better get his dues.

The chastisement relieved his mind a little, and lifting Celia up, he held her head on his arm, and rubbed her brow and fanned her with his hat. Then he remembered Fanny's perfumery, and he emptied a bottle of that, lavishly, on Celia.

Finally she opened her eyes.

"Missis, I've been a rough fool, not considering that what was long known to me, was new to you, and you'd take it as I did, when first it came. Forgive me, Mrs. Sothron, and let me take you home, wherever that is."

"No, no!" said Celia, faintly, sitting up and drawing long breaths. "I must know all—I am better now, Mr. Marshall. I thought I was hardened to all kind of troubles, but I see I am not. Still, I must know all about my sister. Tell me her story. Dead! Poor Delia! Murdered! My sister!"

"Now, you'll faint again, missis."

"No, I will not, I must not. I am stronger now."

"And you knew nothing of it?" said Ralph.

"Not a word. I have looked for her everywhere. Let me tell you all that I know, Ralph Marshall. You remember how you put Delia in a good, comfortable lodging

house, when you went off on that voyage, in the Elizabeth! Well, I did not see her much; she would not come to me; and I had so many troubles of my own. But I heard that Mr. Francis Westholm Sothron had been seen with her——"

("He has *me* to settle with yet," muttered Ralph.)

"And I sent for her," continued Celia. "I need not tell you the new trouble that I had had, and how I had made one noble friend, Mrs Marvel. That very day I had seen Sir Jerome, and we had agreed I was to go to the Continent and live, to escape some people, and he gave me a note for a thousand pounds to keep me for three years, and he told me to put it in safe hands next day. He had just gone out, when Delia let herself in my private door and came up to me. She looked lovely in a blue flowered organdie I had given her. She was excited. She admitted, when I pressed her very hard, that she had seen Francis Sothron, and agreed to meet him in Temple Gardens and that the end would be they would go to Havre together!"

"Kill him! I'll kill him like a mad dog for that!" roared Ralph.

"Oh, listen. I cried, I plead, I got on my knees, I threatened, I reminded her of our dead mother, I was in agony, I felt as if I should die. I told her she could have all my clothes and jewels and my maid, and the thousand pounds, if she would give up that plan and go straight to France to Potigny, not letting Francis Sothron know of her place. Well, I succeeded. She cried, she kissed me, she laid her hand on the Bible and on her heart, and swore by our mother's memory that she would never see Mr. Francis Sothron more, and would go to France next morning by the early tidal train. So to make all sure and give no chance for retreat, I put in my pocket a hundred pounds that I had saved, took a little toilet bag and my hat, and in the same merino dress I had worn all day, I ran out of the side door, down the street, called a hansom, got to the station and at the first change, threw myself on the mercy and protection of my good friend, Mrs. Marvel, who was on her road to meet her husband, the doctor, who had just bought the practice at Winderton. I told her nothing of my poor sister. I merely told her Sir Jerome would not live with me and that I had no hope, no safety, but in her; I would be her servant, anything, so she would

let me live with her. And like an angel she comforted me, and made a sister of me."

"It was that thousand pounds that did the business," said Ralph, in his brusque way. "Your sister, as like you as your face in the glass, dressed in one of your own gowns, stood by the mantel, the money in her hand, thinking over it all, when that woman, Hunter, your maid, knowing there was to be money, came softly in by the bedroom door, saw the whole thing in the mirror before her, and Satan put her up to murder. There was a little dagger handy; she killed her at one blow, without a cry, hid the note and the jewels, and gave the alarm. Three hours after, Sir Jerome was arrested for murdering you."

"Sir Jerome! for murder!" groaned the pallid Celia. "What madness! Any cruelty or crime was impossible to him. Oh, Delia, Delia, what a cruel death! And Sir Jerome?"

"They took him to see the body. He thought it was you."

"He did not know me!" she cried, bitterly.

"And he protested his innocence. They started with him to prison, and on the way he escaped."

"But he was innocent! Why not prove it? Why escape?"

"I've a great guess at the cause," said Ralph. "I think that he could clear himself by an *alibi*, but he had spent the time after he left you with some one who would be harmed, somehow, if that came out on a trial, and so he fled, to keep that some one from unpleasant notoriety."

"Who was it? Do you know such a person?" cried Celia, jealously.

"Well, I have my idea, and I make no doubt it was Lady— But hold hard, missis, I've no right to tell my guess. If so be, I should; but it would not be right; the secret is not yours nor mine. It is not our part to know whom he was shielding. If any lady is mixed in it, it is not my part to blurt it out. We'll drop that, missis, as I'm an honest man."

"You are right," moaned Celia; "you are a gentleman."

"It was I met Sir Jerome, I having just come ashore. I put him on the bark Elizabeth, and then I went post-haste to see the body; and I saw it was Delia—our poor Delia!"

"Ah, you knew her?"

"Why not, missis?" said Ralph, simply; "you'll mind *I loved her!*"

Celia burst into tears.

"And you told who she was?"

"No, I didn't. I knew if I did, all her story would be put in the papers, blackening the name of the poor dear girl. Then I'd let her draw my wages, and I could not bury her as I should, and I wanted her laid by her mother, and that wouldn't have been if the folks had known it was poor Delia. So I just held my tongue, and she was put where she ought to be."

"And I, not Delia, am supposed to be dead?"

"Yes, missis."

"Oh, I wish I were, I wish I were!"

"And as for Sir Jerome, the bark Elizabeth went down with all on board, and a body was found swept in on Holland shore, disfigured but identified, and——"

"Stop, stop!" cried Celia, rising and spreading forth her hands. "I cannot bear another word. Don't say a syllable more, or I shall die. *I know all about Sir Jerome.* Oh, me! oh, me!"

She fell back on the bench, rocked herself to and fro, and broke into a stormy passion of sobs and tears that alarmed Ralph greatly, though doubtless they saved her life or her reason. Finally this violence of misery calmed a little.

"Missis," said Ralph, "I can't understand how you didn't hear aught of this. It was in all the papers about Mrs. Sothron's murder, and Sir Jerome's escape and drowning, and then, later, Sara Hunter's confession of how and why she killed her mistress; and——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Celia; "but we came right away here. We were moving and settling, and the doctor was driven with a large new practice. He never reads nor takes anything but medical journals and works. I was never brought up to look at a paper. Winderton village lies apart from the world. Mrs. Marvel is a great reader of books and of her church paper, but she hates the horrors that fill daily papers. We were the last persons in the world to hear of these things. Not a word or hint of it came to us. I have looked for Delia everywhere. We believed you were drowned in the Elizabeth, and

Francis Sothron has been looking for Delia—to marry her."

"I have him to settle with," said Ralph, darkly.

"Leave me," said Celia; "leave me alone to think, to pray, or I shall go mad!"

CHAPTER LXXVI.

"HE RECOGNIZED AT ONCE—LADY BERYL."

ALL night long Ralph Marshall jogged toward Windmere Lodge in the carrier's cart. His soul was divided between great pity for Celia Sothron, desire to see the winsome Fanny, and sad memories of the misguided and ill-fated Delia. He considered that in the excitement of the interview with Mrs. Celia Sothron, which had so unexpectedly turned upon Delia and her miserable death, he had quite failed in the thing he most desired—a conversation with Celia about her relations to her husband.

However, Ralph now knew that Celia was living at Winderton Village with Mrs. Marvel. Armed with the pathos of his interview with her, he meant to go to Sir Jerome, and tell him all her painful case, and urge him to take her under his protection, as became his position as her lawful husband. He made no doubt that Sir Jerome would do what was right; at least he would be prevented from doing what would be greatly wrong.

In the pink May morning Ralph reached the little village near Windmere Lodge. He took a nap, shaved, bathed, breakfasted, put on his best necktie and vest, ruefully beheld the one empty bottle in Miss Hume's perfume case, and as early as was likely to be favorable for a call, set off at a stout pace for Windmere Lodge. He found the lodge in possession of the gardener and his wife, who lived in the dairy building. The gardener's wife was not busy, and she loved a little gossip.

"Why, man, the lodge has been shut this year. Lady Medford has not been back since she started for the Continent, a year ago. Not that she has staid all this while in foreign parts. She is in London now. Oh, it was

Fanny you were looking for? Miss Hume, in course she isn't here. She stays where her lady is. In London? Yes, certain."

"And whereabouts in London might it be, missis?"

"Well, I don't rightly know. It's from Lord Medford we gets any orders. I suppose Lady Medford, the widow, is too busy to give any; we do hear from North, who is with her, that was my lord's valet. He wrote that my lady had made a wonderful stir in London; people were wild over her, as the greatest beauty ever was; and she's likely to be married; and shortly, too!"

"Oh, married! Did you hear who was in the luck to get her, missis?" said Ralph, concluding that he was involved in crooked ways, and each one should be followed to its end.

"Well, yes; a mighty rich man, and handsome; the one the papers made so much of, as having been dead and come alive again. By that token, North sent us a paper marked about it. Yes, the gentleman—won't you have another glass of my gooseberry shrub, sir? As good as any you ever tasted, if I do say it; and you are not touching the sweet biscuit!—he is Sir Jerome Sothron."

Ralph rose to his feet.

"Missis, do I make out your bearings rightly? The Lady Medford is to be married *soon* to Sir Jerome Sothron, of Sothronwold Abbey?"

"Ay," said the good wife, "that is so; but here is the paper, where my man laid it. Now if you're interested, you can see for yourself. It is no secret, certain, if it has been printed."

Ralph read the marked paragraph of society news. Then he slowly looked at the date of the paper. It was the date of his meeting Fanny in Hyde Park.

Then it dawned on Ralph's slow and honest mind, that he had been played with as a puppet by the rosy and wily Miss Hume. She lived in London. She did not wish him to see her and she had told that unmitigated lie about being at Winderton Castle, which had set him off on this wild-goose chase, to Winderton and Windmere. His rage burned so hotly, that mechanically he poured out a whole goblet of gooseberry shrub to cool it, and yet his rage was not cooled one whit. Instead, he happened to wonder *why* Miss Hume had wanted to get him away,

and he considered that it was so he should not tell the truth about Mrs. Sothron to either Lady Beryl or Sir Jerome.

"The little jade!" said Ralph to himself, "does she want to be partner to a cruel crime, to the ruin of her lady, and the destruction of that sweet young soul, Mrs. Sothron?" Well, Miss Fanny Hume! If I keep my ship in port a whole week extra, I'll have it out with you, and make you hear reason. Isn't there a woman in the world that don't sail under false colors?"

So Ralph very gloomy and angry, set off by the quickest way for London. Going first to look after his ship he found that the owners would detain her in port three weeks, instead of two.

This rejoiced him greatly, as it gave him more time to settle with the wicked Miss Hume. The next thing was to find her, and here Ralph was baffled. Neither Lady Beryl's name nor Fanny's was on the directory lists. Ralph knew nothing of the name of Heath. He had no knowledge of any ways of inquiry which would have suggested themselves to an acute landsman. He had all a sailor's suspicions of lawyers and policemen; the only way he knew for finding Fanny was by a persevering personal search. He argued that she was at the West End, "and the West End wasn't as big as the Atlantic Ocean." His great wrath against Fanny and his resolve to find her and defeat her tricks, put out of his mind that other great wrath against Francis Westholm Sothron. He adjourned the settlement with him, until he had found Lady Beryl, whose face he well remembered, or Sir Jerome Sothron. Sir Jerome was not in the directory, and Ralph knew nothing of club lists or other ways of finding noble strays. From early morning until late night Ralph searched the West End streets and windows and parks.

Two days went by—but on the second evening he stopped with a crowd where an awning and carpets over the sidewalk told of a festivity in progress. Carriages came up and set down splendidly dressed guests. Ralph stopped to see the show. From one carriage issued a man-like a tailor's wax figure, a stout rubicund dame in a cloak of quilted crimson satin, and a snow-white graceful creature with the sweetest of dimpled chins and the fluffiest of golden hair, nestled in abundant swan'-down. He knew her at once—Lady Beryl!

Ralph Marshall was wise in his generation. He withdrew from the crowd, followed up the carriage, and after making an innocent civil inquiry or so about streets, invited the coachman to come and call for what he liked at a convenient inn. Over a deal of lemon and ice and spice, and a dash of something stronger, Ralph learned that Lady Beryl Medford lived with her father, Lord Alfred Heath, in Park Lane, and that her maid, Fanny Hume, was there also.

Lady Beryl, happily dancing with Sir Jerome, had no dream of impending doom.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

A TRYST WITH DEATH.

THAT same night, Celia Sothron, in a little room at Shepherd's Bush, was unpacking a small leather hand-bag. The next morning was the one on which she would keep her tryst at the Abbey church with Francis Westholm, and tell him of her sister's death. Mrs. Marvel knew the story now, as far as Celia knew it. There had never been any concealments between them. Celia would go, and Anna Marvel thought she might be easier for going.

In the gray of the morning, when Laura had fallen asleep, and Celia who had waked early, haunted by the coming duty, was on the express, Francis Westholm came out of his club-house to go to the Abbey, and keep in the church his tryst of a year and a day.

As he got into a cab, he fell under the eye of Ralph. Marshall at once went into the club and asked where that man lived, and was told at Sothronwold Abbey. Then Ralph went to his ship, set affairs there in order, and possessed himself, in business-like fashion, of a marline-spike. The sailor was one fury of revenge. He knew nothing of knives nor of pistols, but he did know what virtue resides in marline-spikes. The talk he had fallen into about Delia, and the passionate grief of Mrs. Sothron, had driven Sir Jerome and Fanny out of Ralph's mind at the interview in the wood. The next day, his sense of Fanny's treachery, and Lady Beryl's danger, displaced the idea of Francis

Sothron; but now in the early morning, the sight of Francis expelled from the mind of Ralph all ideas but the one of vengeance for the wrongs of poor Delia. He made no question of life or death for Francis; all he considered was "to pay him out fairly."

The porter at the club had told him that Mr. Sothron was going to Sothronwold Abbey, and there Ralph Marshall arrived about nine o'clock in the morning. No one had seen the master of the house; all agreed in saying that he had been absent for some days.

Ralph lingered about, intent on finding his enemy, and waiting with the long patience born of a life of wrestling with baffling winds, and long, idle calms, and the solemn silence of the wide sea.

But when Ralph reached the Abbey, Francis Westholm Sothron, without entering the immediate grounds of the abbey proper, had gone into the village, and so to the village church, which was always unlocked from sunrise to sunset.

He did not know at what hour Delia's sister would come to him, but he was prepared to wait for her from morning to evening; he was prepared, indeed, to see her bring Delia to him, or to tell him where he could find her near at hand; and then he was ready to marry her as speedily as possible, and, taking the fortune his cousin would bestow, to go away from the home-land, where he had conducted life very badly, to some newer land where perhaps he should do better. His life in England was ended. Sir Jerome had told him that repairs and improvements would begin at the abbey at once, so that it should be ready for him and his wife, Lady Beryl, when they returned from their wedding trip, about the first of August.

From the glowing sunshine, the loud bird-songs, the splendor and perfume of the flowers, Francis Westholm Sothron entered the gray old church where his far-away ancestors were buried. He leaned upon the great stone tomb where the crusading Sothron had long ago become dust. In that solemn gloom all his life rose up before him, all its waste and its wickedness challenged him. He seemed to hear ghostly voices echoing though those empty aisles the words repeated every Sabbath day, "We have done those things which we ought not to have done; we have left undone those things which we ought to have

done." Alone with his conscience, let us hope that at that hour he deeply and honestly repented. But who can tell the mysteries of the spirit?

He lifted his head and saw a slender figure coming in at the great arched door of the church. This figure, in a misty gray garb, came toward him, till only the great carved tomb was between, then drew away the vail that shrouded her face and looked him in the eyes.

Not Delia, but so very, very like Delia. But this face lacked the coquettish mutiny that had played on Delia's lips, and Delia's eyes had never met his with such a cold, despairing hostility. Then, too, he had never seen Delia so thin, so pale, with such a look of sleepless woe as this accusing face wore.

"Where is Delia?" he cried. "You have found her?"

"And if I have found her, what then?"

"I shall keep my word. I shall marry her to-morrow if I can and we shall leave England at once. Where is she?"

"If I could place her now—here, where I stand—you could make her no reparation. Her husband, Ralph Marshall is not dead; he is living! I saw him two days ago."

"Marshall living! And is Delia with him?"

"Delia is dead!"

Francis turned pale and bowed his head. There is some things very terrible in the death of one we have cruelly wronged.

"Delia is dead?" he faltered.

"Yes; and more than that—she was murdered! It was Delia who was murdered, and not Mrs. Sothron. They two were so alike, and Delia standing in her sister's place, wearing her sister's dress, holding in her hand her sister's money, it was Delia who was murdered."

This horrible idea about Delia quite crowded out of Francis Westholm Sothron's mind the fact that his cousin's wife might then be living. He did not think of the one who had escaped, but of the one who died.

"I charge you with her death!" said Delia's pale double, standing on the other side of this tomb.

"I? I had nothing to do with it, before Heaven!"

"You had. You tempted and disturbed her last hours on earth; it was to fly from you that that fatal money was

put in her hand? but for you she would not have been in that place of danger. You in all the evil of her life are the chief one guilty. You found her happy and innocent; you left her guilty and miserable!"

Francis bowed his head upon the carved tomb. He did not contradict this burning charge. Let us hope he wept.

"Come with me," said his accuser. "I will show you Delia's grave."

They went out across the threshold but the day without was now no brighter than the day within the church, for thick clouds were rolling up across the sky. They went across the church-yard. There were the low murmur of grasses and leaves, and the sharp chirp of birds going before an electric storm. These two did not notice this. The face of nature was so in harmony with their own hearts that its ominous presages were not read.

"Here," said Celia, sternly, pointing to a low grave where low grasses rose and fell under the wind. "Here lies my twin—here lies my sister, really done to death by *your* hand. Here she sleeps, beside our mother, who at the judgment day will charge you, Francis Westholm Sothron, with the ruin of her child. Yes, Delia, my darling, my lovely sister, here you are dust, dishonored dust, when you should be in the bright morning of your life. And for you, Francis Westholm Sothron, I leave you to the great vengeance of God, which will surely fall on you!"

She turned, and in the gathering darkness and the rising wind, fled away from her sister's grave and her sister's dishonor.

Francis Westholm Sothron stood by the grave as one stunned. This was the year and the day when he had pledged himself to be ready to meet Delia, and here he had kept his tryst by her untimely grave. He seemed to see her, as she was when he had met her first at such time of year as this, all life and beauty, down in the meadow, standing, naiad-like, among the iris bloom. He turned and out of the church-yard, and across the park he went down over the sloping meadows to the low lying lands where the blue lilies bloom.

A boy saw him going down that way, heedless of the coming storm. The boy had received a shilling from a sailor, and, promptly finding the sailor, sent him by a

nearer way, so that, as Francis Westholm Sothron came down to that fatal spot where he had first met Delia, Ralph, armed with his marline-spike, was glaring at him with flaming eyes from the thick, low growth of willows beyond the lilies. There was something so strangely disordered in Francis' appearance that Ralph staid a minute to watch him, standing among the myriad, blue blooms as a man in madness or agony. At that instant the storm burst. A fearful roar of thunder, a wind that bent the blossoms down to the waters where they had their birth, which rocked the willows where Ralph hid; a deluge of rain, and then blaze after blaze of lightning over all the sky, and the thunder warring as the lightning flashed.

Used as he was to storms, even stout Ralph Marshall was staid in his purpose, breathless and appalled by this unprecedented storm. While the heavens and the earth were so at strife was not the time for man to vent his fury on a fellow-man.

Then came a roar and a vivid blaze, and prone among the swaying blue flowers fell Francis Westholm Sothron. Then there was silence; then more distant peals. The storm had done its work.

Marshall came out of his covert, lifted up the fallen form, laid it on its back among the flowers.

"Heaven has taken vengeance. It was not for me," he muttered, and walked away amazed.

The hour had come and gone, and Francis had kept his tryst with death.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

AN IMPORTUNATE LOVER.

CELIA Sothron, leaving Francis by the grave of the hapless Delia, hurried out upon the high-road. There was no one in the little village nestled about the Abbey and the church for her to see. Her near kin of the Morris family had gone over the seas; she had grown away from the playmates of her childhood; her story and the story of her sister had filled the annals of village gossip.

She drew her vail closely about her face, and holding down her head, walked swiftly on, intent only on getting away from places associated with so much pain.

She trembled with the violent excitement of her interview with Francis Sothron—Sir Francis of the Abbey she supposed him, for she knew nothing of the fact that Sir Jerome, her husband, was yet alive. She had not that day noticed that his memorial in the church wall had been removed and a plain slab put in its place. She trembled as she pressed on, her breath came fitfully, and the close air, loaded with electricity, oppressed her so she could scarcely breathe; one minute she was burning with heat, the next icy cold.

She had spent the previous night in a quiet lodging house at Shepherd's Bush, intending to remain there the next day and return to Winderton by the evening train, for a feeling of weakness that had been increasing of late had made her averse to too much excitement.

She pressed on driven by excitement and fear of the rising storm. She felt that her work, all her work for Delia, was forever done. Thenceforth, that interest and care having gone out of her life, could she turn her heart to other things? Now she only felt the great void.

As thus over-heated, over-wearied, wildly excited, she flew along, the thunder-storm broke upon her in all its fury. In a few minutes she was drenched to the skin, the water running from her hair down her neck and back, and her boots feeling as if a little cold rivulet was coursing through them. She was not five minutes from her lodging, and she hurried on.

She bade the maid make a fire and bring her hot water and hot tea. Then she went to bed while her clothes were dried and restored to order. But she could not get warm. A feeling of weight and fever oppressed her, and a great pain filled every nerve.

She longed for her own little room, for the wise care of Doctor Marvel, the tender voice and touch, the sisterly love of Anna Marvel. She realized that if she delayed overnight she might become increasingly ill, and not be able to reach her refuge at all.

Could she lie ill in this lodging, or be sent to a hospital? She rang for the maid and told her to hurry with the clothes, and call a cab so she might reach the afternoon train for Winderton.

How long those wretched miles appeared! The way was an agony. She feared her aching brain would prove treacherous. Each breath was drawn with difficulty.

It was midnight when her last strength was used in being helped from a chaise to Anna Marvel's door, and, panting and almost senseless, she fell into the arms of her faithful friend.

That same midnight Ralph Marshall paced up and down the deck of his vessel, lying at her dock. The marline-spike was back in its place; he was glad it was not wet with a fellow-creature's blood. He thought of that body, struck so suddenly out of life, lying there among the blue and gold and purple flowers. He wondered if it had been found? How signally had that death been the work of Heaven!

The storm was all gone now. The skies were wonderfully clear and beautiful, and the dazzling hosts of the stars looked down.

Laura Ranleigh did not see the stars; but she told the long hours by the gleam of a porcelain night-lamp, that shed a softened pink light through her room. She was wakeful because she felt that she was at the crisis of her fate. To-morrow would decide for her. She had sent a note to Francis Westholm Sothron. It had gone to the club, and from there had been sent out to the Abbey. She had set for Francis a time and a place for meeting. Eleven the next morning, in the Iris Meadow. She would drive there, as she had a year before, in her gay phaeton; but she would go alone. She wished no one near when she threw herself upon the sympathy of Francis Westholm Sothron.

Laura had small appetite for breakfast next morning. On the tray with her egg and toast came up the usual number of bills. One drawer of her bureau was full of bills now. She wondered why people kept sending the bills, that she paid no attention to. She wondered if she could successfully forge any one's name, and get a thousand pounds in ready money. If she were to be married, where would she get a trousseau? Not a shop would trust her; she had run on this ruinous way so long. She had hard work to persuade the stable-keeper to give her her horses and phaeton for that dash to the Abbey. Hers? He really smiled when she called them hers, for the

horses had eaten their heads off long ago, and thereafter eaten up the phaeton and harness, and the stableman claimed them all! She drew a writing-pad toward her and began practicing writing Beryl Medford's name. Where were some of Beryl's little notes? She had none. But a line would draw a reply signed "BERYL MEDFORD." And she could practice copying that. Beryl Medford would not prosecute her even if the forgery were discovered; she would pay the check and admit that it was hers, rather than overwhelm with ignominy the woman whom she had once called her friend! Well, that was for to-morrow. She must dress now for the expedition to Sothronwold Abbey. She put on a chocolate-colored homespun, with light sleeves and waist; a wide-brimmed hat of chocolate velvet, with a feather curling round and drooping to her shoulder. London could hardly match that feather, held in place by an aigrette of brilliants. Then, with gloves and boots of chocolate-colored dogskin, she was a very stately and elegant figure to see, and so down the stairs, for the phaeton was waiting. But, alas! here was Mr. Rubble waiting at the foot of the stairs.

"Oh, good-morning!" cried Laura; "what a pity I am just going out!"

"But I want to see you for a little, and I must."

"Some other time. So sorry," cried Laura, smiling.

But he barred her way.

"Let me speak to you now, or go with you in the phaeton."

"Oh, impossible, my dear man! I go to congratulate a friend on an heir; you would really be *de trop!*"

"Then you must wait a little now," he said, opening the door of a drawing-room, and taking her by the arm. "Consider, I did not see you yesterday; you said you were ill."

"So I was. But one day is but a short time of absence."

"It is long to me," said Mr. Rubble, putting himself between her and the door—"long when matters so very important to me are in suspense. A few weeks ago you were willing to consider the middle of June time for our marriage, and now you scarcely seem to think of any marriage at all."

"Oh, but there is time enough," said Laura, faintly.

"Not for me. It does not suit me to be always expecting to lose you—to have a crowd hanging about you, and my claim ignored."

"Claim, sir!" cried Mrs. Ranleigh, angrily, for she felt rising in her a renewed abhorrence, "what claim?"

"What claim! Why you have kept me hanging after you, publicly, for eight or nine months. I have been arranging my affairs, and refitting my houses *for you*, and you ask what claim! There are plenty of women who would be glad to have as much claim on me as you have."

Laura was just ready to cry, "Go! I loathe you!" when she saw through the window the cockaded heads of her ponies, and considered how soon she must go afoot, when, if she married this man, she would have vehicles and money in plenty. She spoke more gently.

"Why, we are almost quarreling this lovely, sunny day, and what is it all about?"

"About your not setting the wedding-day. Set it now, Laura, and I shall be satisfied," he retorted.

"Ah," said Laura, looking down, "it needs so much thought."

"You have had time for plenty already."

Time! She realized that she had had five or six years seeking what she considered an eligible offer. She spoke more gravely.

"Mr. Rubble, I must think over a great many things. Give me one more day. To-morrow evening I will go to the opera with you—come and take tea with me at seven. Then I will be ready with the answer you wish."

One more day. If she succeeded with Francis, by the next day evening, she would be in Sussex, leaving a letter of dismissal to Mr. Rubble.

He knew nothing of that *chance*, and answered, "That will do."

CHAPTER LXXIX.

LYING AMONG THE BLUE LILIES.

LAURA'S ponies flew along the road to Sothronwold Abbey. She held the reins, and the sunshine and the fresh morning air sent a glow to her cheeks. Her little gayly clad page on the seat behind sat perched like a brightly painted wooden image. As Laura fixed her eyes on her ponies' heads, her mind was fixed on Mr. Rubble, and she was wondering if she *could* marry him. If the choice was between him and his poverty, which should it be? If she married Francis should she get money for her trousseau by that fatal method of forging Beryl Medford's name? Old friendship and family ties would prevent any exposure. If she was driven to marry Mr. Rubble he should give her the thousand pounds, as one of the preliminaries. No one seeing this stylish, handsome woman, driving along the wide roads, her page sitting behind, her little turn-out so fine and showy, with its silk reins and silver mountings, would have guessed the mean, bitter, wicked thoughts that raged in her soul.

She drove in at the abbey gate, and then at a part of the drive where there was a circle, she gave the reins to the boy and alighted. Unfurling her chocolate silk parasol, with its heavy fringe, she went through a green alley of the park, and over a stile, and along a meadow, all rich and dark with the-clover that had not yet begun to bloom, and through a little wicket into the lush meadow, along whose lower edge the widening river ran, and where the blue lilies grew. Looking down across this meadow, which sloped in every way from her, and where nothing obstructed the vision, she saw no sign of Francis. A deep, angry flush mounted to her cheek. Would he ignore her note, refuse her tryst? Had the coldness and backwardness of the past few months had some foundation other than his altered circumstances? But she would go on. She would venture all on this last throw. She would go to the appointed spot, wait the full hour,

and, if Francis did not come, she would accept Mr. Rubble the next evening.

So on down the sunny field, where the dragon flies, and the swallows, and the blackbirds skimmed over the watery places.

But what was this! Did she see Francis Westholm Sothron waiting her there, lying in a bed of blue lilies? Why did he not come to meet her? Why lie there on that marshy bit of grass land? Was the man mad?

A minute more and he was lying at her feet; his eyes wide open, staring blankly at the sky, his face set in death—that stony stare of death that has held possession now hours and hours!

Only one look was enough to show her that he was really dead, and had lain there dead all night. She whirled about, and ran up the meadow, shrieking wildly like a maniac.

Those shrill screams reached laborers in the fields and keepers in the woodlands, and cottage women going on errands, and Sir Jerome Sothron coming with his steward through the park; directing him where to have an opening made to give a view which Lady Beryl would like, and to build at the knoll at the height a little summer home, where she could sit to enjoy the view.

On hearing those frenzied screams all ran in their direction, and there was Laura Ranleigh, wild with terror, gesticulating, incapable of connected speech. At length she gasped:

"Mr. Sothron—dead—by the water!"

Jerome sent the men and the steward down to the spot she pointed out, and he took the excited Laura to the house, and seating her in the library, rang for the housekeeper to attend to her. Then he sent a groom, post-haste, for a physician.

"Are you sure, Mrs. Ranleigh, that it was Francis?" asked Sir Jerome.

"Sure! sure! Oh, I was close upon him!"

She shuddered and moaned. Then she tried to brace herself up.

"I see, Sir Jerome, you are wondering how I came to be there. I can trust you. You will keep my secret. I went there to meet *him!*"

"I—thought you were—engaged to Mr. Rubble!" cried Sir Jerome, in his surprise.

And Laura, after a few moments' hesitation, answered: "So I am!" The die was cast.

There was a tread of many feet up the wide steps. They were carrying in the body of Francis.

It was laid in the steward's office. Laura cowered away, so as neither to see nor hear.

"I want to stay," she said to Sir Jerome, "until I hear how it happened, what it means, and get a little more composed. Then I will go home. Of course, it will be known that I found him—it will get out—and the best way will be to say that I had gone down to the meadow, as I do every year, to gather the iris which grows there in remarkable beauty. You will see that it is properly put, Sir Jerome."

"He was killed by yesterday's lightning," said Sir Jerome, an hour later. "There is no mistake; the mark of the electric fluid is very plain. He must have been walking there when the storm broke."

"Now I will go, said Laura, gathering her powers together as well as she could. It was nearly three o'clock. She knew that it was with no thought of her that Francis had wandered when he met his death, for she had found her note, sealed, on the library table, and had retaken possession of it.

* * * * *

The next evening Fanny was arranging Lady Beryl's dress for a quiet home dinner. Lady Beryl's gay life met a pause here, while Francis Sothron lay dead at the abbey.

Fanny was taking heart of grace. Possibly the wedding which Fanny so dreaded would be deferred for some months, and the evil day when Fanny must tell a terrible secret would be deferred with it.

"My lady, will the wedding day be set off till autumn now?" she asked, as she bent to fasten Beryl's boots.

"No, Fanny. I proposed deferring it until October, but Sir Jerome entirely refuses. Mr. Sothron was only a distant relative, a third or fourth cousin, and they had never been intimate. It is still over six weeks until the twenty-sixth of June. We shall not alter the date."

Fanny's blood grew cold at hearing the happy assurance of her lady's voice. She remembered Mr. Crane's words: "I can hardly imagine a worse position for a good

woman. * * * * To conceal these facts would be a cruel, wicked, demoniacal act."

But while Beryl, in her quiet gray silk, went down to sit with Jerome in a charming bow window overlooking the little garden, and shut by satin draperies from the drawing-room, Laura Ranleigh was standing by a dainty little tea-table, waiting for Mr. Rubble.

Laura, dressing that afternoon, had needed the aids of art to conceal the heaviness of her eyes, and the sallow pallor of her cheeks, after hours of torture.

She wore a tea-gown of pongee silk with a vest and front panel of claret-colored velvet. A set of garnets in antique setting, furnished her sole ornaments, until Mr. Rubble, entering, brought her a cluster of roses of the choicest varieties, and accepting them, she put three in her belt.

"I take that as a good omen, Laura," said Mr. Rubble.

"I am sure I should not wish to give you anything but a good omen," said Laura, mindful of the facts that the stable keeper had notified her that he could not send her the phaeton again, and that her maid had set a week as the utmost limit which she could wait for her long unpaid wages.

Mr. Rubble came round the little table, and took her hand.

"Then, Laura, you end my suspense, and set a day for the marriage. Say the sixteenth of June."

Laura made her last desperate cast for freedom, driven between need and dread.

"Mr. Rubble, perhaps I would say that—but—I am wholly bankrupt, beggared. I am in too desperate straits to arrange for my marriage."

Mr. Rubble smiled tranquilly.

"Do you not suppose that I know to a sixpence your entire financial condition? Do you not suppose I understand that it is to that condition I owe the hand of one of the finest women in England?"

Then Laura Ranleigh, for the first time, feared Mr. Rubble. She held down her face in utter silence, as they sat by the tea-table. He reached over and laid a slip of paper on her plate—a check for a thousand pounds.

In a week Beryl Medford received cards for the marriage of Laura Ranleigh and Mr. Rubble.

CHAPTER LXXX.

"GIVE ME A WEEK? ONLY JUST ONE WEEK!"

FANNY HUME now made her hope rest on the coming of Lady Beryl's young friend, whom she knew as Lelia Barrows. Fanny resolved to tell the case of her mistress to Lelia, and make Lelia take the burden of explanation. She was impatient, therefore, when the ninth of May brought no word of Lelia's coming. She ventured to recall it to her lady.

"Indeed, when there is so much to be seen to, I wish Miss Barrows would come, she is so handy and obliging, and never forgets anything. Do, my lady, send for her immediately."

"I cannot understand her delay," said Lady Beryl, who was just about to set off with Lady Heath on a shopping excursion. She drew off her gloves. "Fanny, get me my writing-case, I will send her a line to bring her here quickly. I will tell her I have great need of her, and to come if she loves me."

She had only a moment to spare, as Lady Heath was already standing at the boudoir door. She only wrote:

"DEAREST LELIA:—Why do you delay so in coming to me? Come to me at once, please—I need you more than I can tell. And, oh, I have such very lovely news for you, and hearing it shall be your reward of merit when you come without delay to

"Your loving friend,
"BERYL MEDFORD."

The arrangements for the burial of the unhappy Francis Westholm Sothron occupied much of Sir Jerome's time that week. Added to that he had much business to see to, concerning the re-fitting of the abbey. Things which he had meant Francis to do for him, now fell upon him, and took him much of the time from Beryl.

"It is very unfair," said Beryl, with a little pout. "The

Abbey is well enough as it is. I would rather have it less fine, and not lose you so much. Two weeks ago you were not willing to give me time to try on a gown or order a trousseau; now you leave me all day. Your love is growing cold, sir!"

"Love to you, my sweet, can never grow cold. I grudge every hour spent away from you," he said, drawing her to his side.

He had breakfasted with them, as he often did, and now was going to the Abbey, and would not return, except for a call about nine in the evening.

"I shall revenge myself on you," said Beryl, lifting her sunny eyes to his loving face. "I have written for my Lelia, and when she comes, then see if I will be lonely without you."

"Lelia is my bugbear," laughed Jerome. "I know she is hideous, and I shall hate her. Some evening I shall come in and find you two sitting on one of these divans, like a pair of roses on one stem, or 'like a double cherry seeming parted,' and I shall look daggers at Lelia, inasmuch as I cannot say to her, in stage style, 'Villain! draw, and defend thyself!'"

"Ah, who can ever make up to me for *you?*" said Beryl, nestling back contentedly in the strong arms that held her. "But you need not be jealous of Lelia, or think that she is to mar your peace, for I hope to buy her trousseau when I buy my own, and to persuade her to a quiet little wedding at Anna Marvel's, while we are on our tour. Oh, Jerome, one thing is sure—we must *not* meet Laura and that dreadful, rude, bad-looking Mr. Rubble, when we are on our trip; he would spoil my happiness."

"No, no; we won't meet him, my pet. So Lelia is to be married? Lucky for me!"

"I *hope* she will be married," said Beryl. "Lawrence, a distant cousin of the Medfords, a very fine young man, loves her dearly, and I am sure Lelia cares for him, though her sad experiences have made her, I think, wary and quiet in love—not impetuous and foolish, as I am."

"You are just right, my sweet," he said, bending his face to hers.

"*Don't* you want to stay right here in this window seat, while I tell you all about Lelia? I never told you her history; there is a fatality in it, surely."

"How gladly would I stay—though I think a certain other little woman's love-story would interest me more than Miss Barrows'. But I said half-past ten for my painter, and it is now the quarter-past."

"Well, go then, since you must."

She watched her handsome lover down the street, and then went into the conservatory to select a little cluster of flowers. The glass was open above the garden, and she went to look out upon the carefully-tended fragrant spot, when she saw that the gate was open, and the lad whose business it was to attend it was in controversy with someone outside.

"I tell you, youngster," said a decisive, manly voice, "I won't stir from here till I see Miss Hume. I've called three times, and that story 'she's not at home' won't go down with me. She is home, and if not, I'll wait till she comes."

"Oh, come now," drawled the boy, "what are you making a fuss for? There's more girls than one in the world, and if Fanny don't want to see you, let her alone."

"No, I won't, shipmate—that's fixed. I've got to see Fanny Hume, and see her I will."

"Oh, ain't you ashamed?" said the boy. "Fanny is not allowed to see visitors, and if you insist on staying, you'll get her into trouble with her lady, and make her lose her place."

This fearful lie angered Beryl so that she leaned out of the window and said, sternly:

"James, why are you uttering such falsehoods? Fanny is allowed to see her friends. Open that gate properly, and let the person in at once."

James, hanging his head, swung back the gate and admitted a tall, stalwart, blonde, seafaring man, whom Beryl at once guessed to be the Ralph Marshall whom she understood to have been her Jerome's friend, and who was Fanny's favored suitor.

"I'm sure you are Captain Marshall," she said, kindly, leaning a beauteous vision, from the vine-draped window, as the stranger bowed with an honest grace.

Charmed with her beauty and her melodious voice, Ralph stood silent. He knew he had come to save her from a terrible fate, and yet, in so saving her, he must break her heart and blight her life. His honest heart was

wrung with compassion for this sweet and happy creature's condition. But Beryl never dreamed of these thoughts, that were racking his soul. She said in her clear, imperious, sweet way :

"That is a very naughty boy. I cannot think why he told you such stories. You shall be looked after, James. I cannot permit such deception."

"Fanny herself told me to," blubbered the boy ; "*she* don't want to see *him!*"

"Shame on you, James ! That is not possible. I know better. If you are not wilfully bad, you have made some stupid mistake. Go at once and call Fanny."

The boy marched off, and Beryl still looked down from her flowery position on Ralph Marshall.

"I am sure Fanny wants to see you. She has told me of you," she said. "The boy mistook you, probably."

At this minute Miss Hume gave guarantee to her lady's words, by running down the steps and seeming charmed to behold her sailor. But Fanny *had* given close orders that Ralph Marshall should not be admitted, and her present effusion was to stop his talk with her lady.

"Take your friend into the India-room, Fanny," said Lady Beryl, and disappeared from the window.

The India-room looked on the garden and was seldom entered. It contained India curiosities, a hobby of a former Lord Heath.

"Did you mean to shut me out?" demanded Ralph, fiercely.

"No, indeed, no Ralph, not *you!*" cried Fanny, sweetly.

"But why have you hid away, and deceived me so?"

"It wasn't from lack of liking *you*, Ralph," said Fanny, "but I'm busy and might be talked about, and—and——"

"There, that's enough," said Ralph, "my mind is not clear about your ways, Fanny. But that is neither here nor there. I came on your lady's account. I have seen Mrs. Sothron again. She is here in England. Your lady and Sir Jerome can't be married ; they must be told, and the sooner the better."

"Yes, yes ; but wait a little," faltered Fanny.

"Every day makes it worse," said Ralph. "Now, now ! I've come to tell her, and I will—it's my duty."

"It will kill her," sobbed Fanny. "You will blurt it

out so, she will die. Tell Sir Jerome—or, Ralph, wait, wait only one week, until her friend Miss Barrows gets here, and she shall tell all—I swear to you."

"It ought not to be delayed a day," said Ralph, but inwardly reluctant to face that sweet creature with such news.

"Only one week, I beg you, give me just that week," implored Fanny.

"A week from to-day, then, my last day ashore, and it shall be done before I sail. Mark that, my lass."

CHAPTER LXXXI.

"THE DEATH-WARRANT OF BERYL'S LOVE."

"DOESN'T she look like a rosebud, a genuine rosebud?" said the admiring Lady Heath to Sir Jerome, looking at Beryl, who, having given her hand to her lover and tapped her step-mamma on the shoulder, was passing about the table to take her place at breakfast.

It was a cool May morning, and Beryl was in a dress of peach-colored merino, shirred. Her golden hair was bright and fluffy from an early washing; her cheeks bloomed with a dainty, flower-like tint; she justified Lady Heath's remark that she was a veritable rosebud.

"The conservatory at Sothronwold is now full of roses," said Sir Jerome, "and I want you to drive over with me this morning and see it, and see all the improvements, and make suggestions. There will be an architect's clerk there, with drawings of summer-houses, and I want you, Beryl, to select one, just while you are on the spot, where it will be placed. I think, all things considered, Beryl, we shall feel happier and more natural if you are at the Abbey now and then while alterations are being made."

Beryl knew what he meant. There were some sad memories hanging about the Abbey for them both, and they had better confront them together now, and not have some sudden, saddening shadow fall over their home-coming.

Francis Westholm Sothron had been buried at the abbey church, and the plain slab on the wall now bore a name.

The silence that for a few days had hung over the Abbey had passed, and now all the windows were open, workmen of various trades were passing to and fro, vans were coming up loaded with materials for work or with new furnishings. The gardeners, men and boys, whistled and sung as they made gardens, shrubberies, and conservatories neat and beautiful for the bride that was to be; and the housekeeper and her bevy of maids hurried about all the rooms, that nothing might be wanting to insure the perfection of their order.

Beryl gave a thought to Celia Morris as she passed the porter's lodge, where she knew that Celia's rosy face must have often watched for the passing of Jerome. She thought that sometimes she would go to the rural churchyard and lay flowers on Celia's low grave. Then she thought of Celia's sister, and she said to Jerome, as they walked up and down the terrace, while Lady Heath was admiring with the housekeeper the wonders of the linen-closet:

"Jerome, now that young cousin is dead, what will that poor Delia do if she is found?"

"We should provide for her, Beryl. But I think she will never be found; very careful search has been made for her."

That little thought was the only shadow on the day. It was a lovely day, and they only got back to London in time to dress for Lady Heath's afternoon tea.

Jerome and Beryl explored all the wonders of the Abbey like a pair of merry children. They went from the high, curious, crooked attics to the strong vaults and deep decents of the cellars, and finally the butler served them a luncheon in an arbor all draped in passion-flowers and clematis veins, and the scarlet tubes of scentless honeysuckle.

But the evening mail, handed to Beryl just after dinner, brought a shadow to her face and tears to her pretty eyes. It was from Anna Marvel.

"What is the matter, my pearl of beauty?" cried Lady Heath. "Have some of your dresses gone wrong?"

"I should not shed a tear over a dress," said Beryl, with scorn, brushing a drop from her cheek. "My dear Lelia is ill."

"Ah! that is a real trouble, to have people ill," said

Lady Heath, with much placidity. "How ill is she, my child?"

"She has been very ill, indeed," said Beryl, looking at the letter. "She was out, it seems, in that fearful storm that prevailed everywhere when Mr. Francis Westholm Sothron was killed. She was wet and chilled, and taken severely with pneumonia. Doctor Marvel feared she would die—despaired of her, indeed; but she is now better. They thought of sending to me, but it is not best that I should go to her now. They sent for Lawrence, and he is staying there for two or three weeks. She sits up now. I fear she will not get here before my wedding."

Every one, seeing that Beryl was grieved, said that they were very sorry, and Lady Heath, who had taken a strong liking for Lelia, began to recall her many virtues.

"She is an admirable creature, Sir Jerome! She is very gentle, modest, thoughtful. She is neat as a wax doll, and delicate in her taste; she is quiet, but very sensible. She strives to improve herself. She is so thoughtful, so helpful, so affectionate! She loves Lawrence very truly. She should have been married long ago, without this nonsense of more education. Beryl, she must marry Lawrence, as soon as she regains a little strength; then they should go to Jersey, or the Isle of Wight, or some of your good places, and next winter to the South of France, and she will be quite strong. Write and tell her that I will buy her trousseau, and bid Mrs. Marvel come down for a few days to help me select it."

"Yes, I will. She and Lawrence must be married. I shall write to her all about my marriage. I have never told them yet. I was keeping it for such a delightful surprise when we met. But now I will write all about it, and it will help to make her well, to think how happy I am. Or, I will write Anna Marvel all about it, and she can deal it out in bits to Lelia, like sugar-plums, as she is able to bear it."

Beryl was amazed at Fanny's singular excitement and distress at learning of Lelia's illness, and that her visit must be indefinitely deferred. She burst into tears, and protested that she would "far, far rather have been ill herself, and that she did *not* see how she was ever to get on, if she could not have Miss Barrows there."

"I did not know you were so fond of her!" cried Beryl.

"I never in my life wanted so much to see any one," replied Fanny, trying to check her tears.

Well might Fanny indulge her grief. The week which, with tears and protestations, she had wrested from Ralph Marshall, was passing—only the third day from then, at noon, he would come to inquire if Fanny had kept her word, and explained affairs, and if she had not, he would not leave Park Lane until the whole story was out—so that he might sail for the Caribbean Sea in the evening, with the clear conscience of a man who does not leave neglected duty behind him.

Beryl was so roused up by Fanny's laments that she sat down and wrote her letter to Mrs. Marvel that evening, and gave it to Fanny to take down to the mail bag on the hall table, so it would go in the morning. But Miss Hume skipped out to the nearest letter box, so it would be well on its way North before breakfast time. She hoped that letter would bring Mrs. Marvel, if it did not Lelia, and she would cast the responsibility of explanation on her. Fanny simply said that for herself she *could not* tell what would blight two happy hearts. Lord Alfred was not to be relied on in any particular, Lady Heath would go into incoherence and hysterics, Ralph would blurt out his truth, in some terrible way, to make the blow worse than ever. Thus Fanny reasoned—as if spoken by the soft and tender voice of Anna or Lelia, the death-warrant of Beryl's love could be any less terrible.

The next day, while Sir Jerome overlooked the beautifying of Beryl's especial rooms at the Abbey, and Beryl herself was much of the time at her dressmaker's, trying on robes, and Lady Heath, full of importance, was buying handkerchiefs, and hose, and white goods for Lelia, and looking at dress fabrics, Miss Fanny Hume, with a distracting headache, was studying Bradshaw's guide, and considering at what time the letter would reach Mrs. Marvel, and at what hour the telegram, she meant to send to Anna, would get there. She concluded to let the wedding news arrive that day, and the next day send a dispatch to Mrs. Marvel, "Come at once! My lady is in terrible trouble!" And she would meet Mrs. Marvel at the train, and explain the trouble.

But the next day Fanny Hume sent no dispatch. She was so ill she could not rise from her bed, her excitement had been too much for her.

Thus the third day dawned, and Fanny, in a dull horror, rose from her bed, to see Ralph, when he should come to bring on Lady Beryl's fate.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

"THIS TRUTH MUST BE TOLD AT ONCE."

THE lovely cottage home of Doctor Marvel had never been so charming as it was that warm, flower-crowned May. A very black shadow had hung there for two or three days, when they thought that their young friend and *protégé* would die. But now she was better, and cheering up in the light and peace of Lawrence's love. She was able to sit up all day, or lie in the invalid's chair by the windows, in the sun, and Lawrence sat by her, and read, or talked, or sung, and brought her flowers, and planned for her getting better, so they should be married in the autumn, and spend the winter in some sweet nook on the south coast.

Into this scene of thankful peace came Beryl's letter, meant to be the bearer of joy. The errand-boy brought it to Anna as she stood by the door to see her husband start off on his morning rounds. He preferred to go on horseback, and was tightening his saddle-girth, and Anna took that one minute to break the seal and peep into Beryl's letter. She saw the name, "Sir Jerome Sothron."

"Stop, Harry!" she cried out, as the doctor was about to spring to his seat.

"I *had* kissed you good-morning, dear," said the doctor, turning, with a smile; and then he saw his wife deadly pale, and staring at the open letter. He went toward her.

"Bad news, Anna?"

She fairly reeled as she began to gather in some of the horror of it. Her lips were white.

"Harry, come up to our room—out of hearing—with me. Softly now, for Lelia's sake!"

He put his arm around her and led her upstairs, and there, together, they read, with anguish, the letter which Beryl had believed would make them so glad. It was such a sweet artless letter, so overflowing with confidence, and happy love, and pride in her lover!

She began by saying that she had reserved good news, the very best news of her life, to crown her meeting with Lelia, but as Lelia was ill, and could not come, she would send this supreme news, to add to the happiness of her convalescence, and hasten complete return to health.

Then came the weighty sentence that had first caught Anna's eye:

"On the twenty-sixth of June I am to be married to Sir Jerome Sothron, of Sothronwold Abbey, and my dear Lelia must try and be with me on that happy day. You, too, will come, my Anna, and the doctor. You are my best friends. The cards will reach you about the sixth of June. Oh, come, and make happy that happy, happy day!"

Then she went on to tell, in warm, innocent words, how Jerome had been the one love of her life; how they had been parted, and now were to be united forever.

"I know," she wrote, "I did very wrong in allowing them to part us. I should have died first! But you know what a weak creature I am. It drove him to wrong. Half out of his mind with trouble and incipient illness, he married a young girl, good and pretty, one of the Abbey tenants—Celia Morris. Oh, it was so sad! They never lived together."

And then she told briefly that pitiful episode in Jerome's life.

"Lelia will understand it," she said. "Her story was a little like that; it was that which made me feel it so; but hers ended better—this was so terrible! Poor Mrs. Sothron was murdered!" And she drew, in a few words, the story that Ralph had told Lelia, and she had brought to them. But what Ralph had been turned aside from telling, Beryl told—her Jerome's escape, his years of exile, almost three, his return to Europe, and his meeting her near Lausanne.

"I was a widow—and his poor wife had been all that time in her early grave. We had each other to forgive, each other to comfort—and we loved as well—no, ten

times better than when we were so cruelly severed. Oh, do you wonder that by deepest love we have each tried to atone for a cruel past? Perhaps you will wonder that we are both so deeply, so strangely happy with such shadows on our past. But we are happy—happy in our wonderful love, our devotion. And when you see Sir Jerome, and see how generous, how tender, how handsome, how noble in every way he is, you will see that safe in his love, I cannot help being the happiest woman in all England! Lelia will think that she, with Lawrence at her side, is the happiest! Oh, I do hope and pray that every blessing may crown her life, for she, too, has suffered so deeply!"

Anna Marvel was sobbing and crying wildly on her husband's shoulder as they finished this letter. Tears, too, were streaming down the doctor's face, for there, in the room below them, sat Jerome's true wife, who must rise up an unwilling and potent bar to his union with the beloved Beryl. Oh, what a terrible tragic tangle of bitterness was here!

"There is but one thing to be done; the truth must be made known," said the doctor, in a solemn voice.

"But to tell this now to Mrs. Sothron, just as she is coming out of a nearly fatal illness, that will kill her," sobbed Anna.

"Lelia is the one who can learn it last," said the doctor. "I must tell Lawrence, and he must go away; he can frame an excuse about being needed at Windmere. I have three patients whom I cannot leave without abandoning duty. You, Anna, must go to London and break this to Lady Beryl."

"Harry, I cannot!"

"You must. The voice of woman's friendship will do all that can be done to soften this fearful revelation. You can find Sir Jerome, and tell him first, if your heart prompts you to that. Poor Lady Beryl has no relations to be relied on at this crisis. You, Anna, must go to-morrow night, at the latest. You must explain your going as you can to Lelia, and your going will necessitate Lawrence's. I shall tell him as I take him to the station. This is our burden, and we must bear it. Do not say you cannot. We *can* always do what is right to do."

"Must I go to-morrow?"

"Yes. Consider every day makes this position more

terrible for Lady Beryl. Her wedding invitations will soon be sent. You must, at least, hinder that. Go to her, and, believe me, when you come to the hour of need, words and ways will be given you to perform your duty."

And, so on the next evening, a change had fallen on the doctor's home. Mrs. Marvel had started for London, Lawrence, with a stout face, had said good-by; but, on his way to the station, with the doctor, he had learned the terrible truth—that the woman he loved, and hoped soon to marry, was another man's wife.

Then, the next day, Mrs. Marvel was in London. She had thought of seeing Sir Jerome first, but he was not at his chambers at the Albany, and she gave up her search for him finally, and concluded to go to Beryl and see how affairs stood, and then, as her heart prompted, to speak first to her, or to Sir Jerome. In her distress, Anna had not been able to follow her husband's careful directions. She had not slept during the night, nor had she taken two or three hours' rest in the morning. She had not been able to take any breakfast; she was in a state of excitement and weakness, such as her tranquil nature had never known, when she reached Lady Heath's house in Park Lane.

The tall footman perceived that Mrs. Marvel was not a visitor that had been at the house before. He was alive to the fact that she came in a four-wheeled cab, and not in a private carriage. He replied to Mrs. Marvel's inquiry by saying that he "believed Lady Medford was engaged."

In fact, he knew that she was then sitting with Sir Jerome in a little boudoir at the end of the hall, a charming little spot, overlooking the garden. The footman knew that Sir Jerome would prefer not to be disturbed—and he was devoted to Sir Jerome, who was liberal.

"It is important that I should see Lady Medford," said Mrs. Marvel, "even if she is engaged; she will be glad to see *me*. Take her my card."

"Would not another hour do as well? Or perhaps Lady Heath, who *is* at home," began the man.

But Mrs. Marvel was intent on her purpose. She said in a voice unconsciously raised:

"I *must* see Lady Beryl Medford at once."

The door of the little boudoir was ajar, and these words penetrated the stillness of the mansion, and reached

Beryl's ears as she sat by her lover's side. She recognized the voice of Anna Marvel, and, springing up all joy, she darted in her impulsive way into the hall to meet her beloved friend.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

"I WILL KNOW THE MEANING OF THOSE WORDS!"

THE footman, stiffly erect, with Mrs. Marvel's card on a salver, was just showing the lady to the drawing-room, when a fragrant little hurricane, embodied in gold, pink, pearl, smiles, and blue ribbons, passed him, and Lady Beryl's arms were clasped about Mrs. Marvel's waist, and her sweet, rippling voice poured out welcomes.

"Oh, my dear, good Anna! Are you here? How kind, how sweet! You got my letter! And you came to me at once! Ah, now I know that you love me! There are some things that must be *said*, they cannot be told on paper, can they? And how is Lelia?"

"Better, my dearest Lady Beryl," faltered Anna, kissing the impulsive young being who clung to her.

"My dear Anna! How fearfully pale you are! What dark rings are under your eyes. Your hand shakes. You are over-tired, and your trip was for me! I shall see to your comfort at once. My dear, Sir Jerome is in this room. Just come with me, one second, and speak to my Jerome, and then I will send him away until evening, and take you to my room, and devote myself to you for the rest of the day. James, where is Fanny?"

"My lady, she has just gone to the India room, to see a sailor who called on her."

"Oh, Marshall. Very well. She will be up presently. Now, my dear Anna, just a look at Sir Jerome while I excuse myself, and then I belong *all* to you, for the day."

With her arm around Anna's waist she led her to the little gold and blue room, where Sir Jerome rose at their entrance.

"Mrs. Marvel, this is Sir Jerome Sothron. *My Jerome*," said Beryl with a sweet, shy smile, a rosy flush mounting over her happy face, as she presented her lover.

Anna Marvel controlled herself to hold out her hand, and look Sir Jerome in the face. This was the man she must see privately, before nightfall. She was surprised and bewildered by the face that met hers. So singularly handsome, so triumphantly happy, a face full of such chivalric adoration, as it turned to the lovely Beryl—a face so frank, generous, clear! Oh, she had had far other conception of the truant husband of poor Celia Morris!

"I am so proud," cried the impulsive Beryl, "to show you my sweetheart, and to tell you how very happy I am. And it seems, dear Anna, as if you had come to add even to perfect joy."

To add to her joy? Ah, she had come to destroy it, to crush it forever. She, the loving friend, had come to break this trusting, loving heart. And here was this proud lover, with the smiling eyes fixed on his idol's face. What would it be to tell him that the wife he had never loved had come out of the grave of years, to stand between him and this darling of his heart?

The task crushed Anna Marvel. She looked in a wild way from one to the other, her white lips made some inarticulate murmurings, and consciousness left her.

Jerome caught her as she reeled and placing her in a large chair began fanning her. Beryl handed him her vinaigrette and hastened to bring a goblet of water from a pitcher standing on a little inlaid table in a corner.

"Do not be alarmed," said Jerome. "She looks fatigued; it is doubtless her hasty journey. She will be better in a few minutes."

"I will go for Fanny," said Beryl; "she is in the India-room at the end of the hall. Fanny always knows just what to do."

"Yes," said Jerome, "better bring her quietly, and not ring any bells or make any trouble; all the lady needs is to lie down for an hour or two. She is recovering. I will keep on fanning her."

Beryl went for Fanny. Mrs. Marvel opened her eyes and found herself alone with Sir Jerome. She held out her hand and tried to fashion some words. He handed her Beryl's smelling salts. She gasped something, inarticulate still, and the puzzled Sir Jerome held another glass of water to her lips. She was trying to tell her message while Beryl was gone!

Beryl, gliding with her usual light step down the hall, found the door of the India-room ajar.

Simply because she was mistress and Fanny maid, Beryl, who was a thorough lady, did not fail in such little courtesies as she would render to another. She knew that Fanny was receiving a call from a lover, and she tapped on the door. Neither of the two within heard her. A man's voice was speaking rapidly and loudly from excitement.

"I tell you it is worse than murder! It shall be done. I will not leave England till it is done! I sail to night. It shall be done to day."

"It will be murder to do it," said Fanny, evidently weeping; "she will die."

Beryl, cold with amazement and terror at such unexpected words, tremulously struck the door again, but was unheard, for the man's voice was rising stormily.

"It is you, yourself, have let it go on, Fanny Hume! You are a wicked, deceiving girl. There are things as bad as murder. Bigamy is one—and you'd let Sir Jerome be arrested for bigamy, would you? And a pretty kind of love this is for your lady, you know she can't be Sir Jerome's wife. You'd have let her go on to marry him, you little traitor, and you'd ruin her. Ain't you ashamed of yourself! I will see her! Where is she? I'll see her this hour!"

Half as much said might have sent Beryl into a fainting fit; but here was a horrible torrent of hideous words, so crowded with agony that very excess of pain kept her in her senses.

It came upon her like a great blaze of fire leaping from somewhere that the man who said these things was about to come out at her like some wild beast leaping from a lair, and pour more dreadful words on her unsheltered head. She only knew one refuge, her lover. She turned about and fled up the hall, and into the sunny, fragrant room, where she had left him, and flinging herself into his arms, clasped him fast, panting:

"Jerome! Jerome! save me!"

Jerome Sothron thought that all the world must be going mad. Here was Mrs. Marvel fainting in a chair, and Beryl clinging to him imploring safety.

"My love, my love!" he said, soothingly, "what is it?"

Beryl leaned back, her distracted eyes fixed on his face as he clasped her in his arms.

"Oh, Jerome, there is a man saying such dreadful things in there to Fanny! I heard him. About you. He says I shall not marry you; that it is bigamy! Oh, he said worse than that! Oh, Jerome!"

"Beryl! Beryl!" whispered Anna Marvel, hoarsely, plucking at Lady Medford's dress.

But Beryl heard nothing, saw nothing, but Jerome's honestly amazed face. She sobbed:

"Come to him, Jerome. Make him stop those horrible words. Make him take them back."

Back! "Where is the wretch? I'll crowd the words down his throat!" shouted Jerome.

Beryl, holding him by hand and arm, was pulling him to the door. He passed his arm about her waist, and went with her. Only a step or two down the hall, empty but for them, they saw the stalwart figure of the sailor, violently dragged at by Fanny, who clung to his coat and pulled, as she dared not disturb the house by screaming out.

"It is he! it is he! Speak to him!" cried Beryl.

But the sailor and Fanny saw the lovers. Fanny, letting go her hold of Ralph, threw her apron over head to shut out the sight of her lady, and in breathless suspense waited for the final bursting of the storm.

Ralph Marshall, in conscious good faith, strode forward.

"Why, Marshall!" cried Sir Jerome, recognizing him whom he supposed to be dead, "is it you? You are surely never here making any trouble. What is this, my good fellow?"

"Sir Jerome, I must speak to you. Here is my last chance. Stop crying, girl. What must be done is better done at once."

Fanny, pulling her apron from her face, cried out:

"Not in the hall! Ralph, you shall not speak in the hall for all the house to hear."

Ralph saw the open door out of which Sir Jerome had come.

"We'll go in there," he said, striding forward.

All together the group burst into the boudoir, where Anna Marvel was still lying back in the great chair.

Fanny, alive to "the circumstances" always, pushed shut the door. Beryl caught the sailor by the arm.

"Man! I heard what you said down there! Speak! I will know what you mean!"

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

"SIR JEROME, YOUR WIFE LIVES."

RALPH MARSHALL, intent on his purpose, and knowing that he was right, was yet daunted by his position. He had *thought* he could say quietly to Lady Beryl, "Lady, there has been a sad mistake; your lover's wife yet lives, and you cannot marry him!" He had fancied he could say this, mildly and quietly, and she would mildly and quietly accept it—perhaps with some tears! He had fancied he could find Sir Jerome and say to him: "Sir, your wife is living. She is very lonely, and delicate, and unhappy; do, sir, go back to her, since it is clear you can't marry any other," and that Sir Jerome would yield to the inevitable and go!

But here he saw this pair together, Sir Jerome's arm about Lady Beryl, as if defying the world to take her from him, and Lady Beryl clinging to Sir Jerome, and looking with frightened, agonized eyes at Ralph, and the sailor began to think it true, as Fanny said, that his story would be a dagger thrust into that gentle heart, and she would drop down dead; it was like firing straight between the eyes of some gentle doe or fawn that stands looking helpless, timid, reproachful at the destroyer. And Ralph Marshall was a very tender-hearted man. Behind Lady Beryl stood Fanny, weeping and wrathful and condemnatory, shaking her fist at Ralph to stay his tongue. His words did not come as he fancied they would. He opened his mouth once or twice. Then he stammered,

"Sir Jerome, I'd better speak with you away from women folks," for here he saw Anna Marvel, a strange lady, looking very much overcome.

"No!" spoke Lady Beryl. "I will not wait. I heard you say dreadful words—wicked words. You must say them again right here, or take them back."

"I don't know what you heard, my lady," said Ralph respectfully; "but I do know I never said a word I can take back."

"Be still!" spoke out Fanny. "Ralph, be still! Here is Mrs. Marvel from Winderton. She is the one you went to see. Talk to her. Oh, my lady, do go away, you and Sir Jerome, and let him speak to Mrs. Marvel."

"Is that Mrs. Marvel?" said Ralph, bowing low. "Then if it is, *she* knows I'm speaking holy truth."

"I will not go away," cried Beryl. "Fanny, hush! Speak, you wicked man; repeat the terrible words you said, if you dare, looking at Sir Jerome and me."

"Oh, my lady," said Ralph, in an imploring voice, "you speak as if I came here as an enemy, to hurt either of you. Oh, I wish I had a better story to tell. But I cannot help solemn truth."

"Ralph, speak out," said Sir Jerome. "There is some mistake, and you torture Lady Beryl by suspense. Out with it, man. Is it about Delia?"

"Sir Jerome, Delia is dead."

"I'm sorry, Ralph, very sorry. But why come here to Lady Beryl about that? Why not come to me?"

"She was murdered, sir," went on Ralph resolutely.

"Delia was! Where? When?"

"Murdered, Sir Jerome, in her sister's room, in her sister's clothes, by her sister's maid, for her sister's money—three years ago! Oh, Sir Jerome, Sir Jerome, *it was not your wife, but mine!*"

Beryl gave a wild cry, and Jerome a deep groan; but they clung closer and closer to each other with blanched faces and quivering limbs, held now in fast, despairing clasp.

"Sir Jerome," cried Ralph, hurrying with his task, "it was not Celia who perished. Celia is living, sir—Celia, your wife, is living."

"You are mad, Marshall," shouted Sir Jerome, "I saw her dead."

"You saw my wife, sir, not yours. Oh, I knew; I *loved Delia*. And your wife, sir, is alive. I met her, I spoke with her, I think, the second day of May. Don't look at me so, you two, as if I murdered you, to amuse a cruel heart. Oh, I had to speak. I could not keep quiet, for you two to marry would be a crime—would be no

marriage. Sir Jerome, you know the rights of it—the law, sir! What would become of your children? What would happen to her?"

Slowly Sir Jerome's clasped arms loosened from the slender form they could hold as his no longer. A mist seemed between his eyes and the beloved face—a cold sweat like the dews of death stood in drops on his white brow.

With the unclasping of his arms Beryl felt herself cut off from refuge and shelter and hope—abandoned alone to the world. Where was the woman, the remorseless woman who stood between her and happiness; where was the cruel Celia who robbed her of her Jerome—where was she, who hidden three years, then came out to deal a death-blow, almost at the marriage altar! She cried out!

"Where is she? Where is she? I cannot believe you; where is his wife?"

That cry, full of anguish, entered the heart of Anna Marvell, and a woe so far greater than her own or than Celia's suddenly gave her the strength of sympathy and compassion. She rose and opened her arms.

"Come to me, my child, come to me. His wife is innocent of all blame—it is our poor, unfortunate Lelia."

"*Lelia!—his wife!*" cried Beryl, a flood of realization sweeping over her and lighting up dark places, and half confidences, and making vivid all the past and the horrors of the present. But fallen on the bosom of her friend. she found the relief of unconsciousness.

Mrs. Marvel laid her on the sofa.

"Let her alone," she said. "She will come back to her misery soon enough."

They stood about that still, death-like form, and a great silence fell upon them.

"Ralph," said Sir Jerome, "explain this, now *she* cannot hear."

Ralph, as hastily as possible, told his story, ending, "And this lady, Mrs. Marvel, is the one your wife has lived with since that time."

"Do you mean," said Sir Jerome, looking at Anna, "that my—that Celia is the one that Lady Medford has loved, and befriended, and educated?"

"You've done mischief enough, Ralph Marshall," said Fanny, furiously. "You'd better go."

"Hush, you foolish girl," said Sir Jerome, sternly, "he

has done his duty. It is a pity you have not done yours."

Fanny began to cry wildly.

"It is the soft-heartedness of the girl," said Ralph, compassionately. "She meant well enough, but—it takes a good sailor to sail a ship through a bad channel in a bad storm!"

Sir Jerome shook Ralph's hand. "You have prevented a great wrong," he said, "and it is not your fault that our hearts are broken."

Fanny took Ralph away, through the garden.

Sir Jerome knelt by Beryl, holding her unconscious hand. He fixed his burning eyes on Mrs. Marvel, who was bending over Beryl's golden head.

"Now, that she cannot hear, tell me what you know."

She softly filled out the story of the unfortunate Celia.

"It has been a singular web of mistakes and mysteries," she said. "At any minute a chance word, a single name uttered would have cleared all up, and just on the verge of discovery, we have lived on in ignorance almost until it was too late."

"And now," said Sir Jerome, "all our care must be to shield, as far as we can, this dear unhappy creature here, who is destroyed by these misfortunes and faults of others. You must think for her, for us. Her father and mother will be worse than useless; Beryl must not be made the theme of talk. This story must be kept quiet. Marshall sails to-day; Fanny will be silent. I cannot face Beryl when she comes back to consciousness. I leave her with you. I shall go to Sothronwold Abbey, and stay there until I hear from you. You must think for us all. We seem to have so few friends to rely on in this extremity!"

"Promise me one thing, Sir Jerome, which I know will be first on Beryl's mind when she can think. Once in a sad strait you took refuge in a fearfully rash act. Promise me, that now you will bear this burden quietly, like a good man, that we may have no fears of your injuring yourself, or flying or hiding, but when we wish to see you, or write to you, you will be there at Sothronwold to hear our plans."

"I promise," said Sir Jerome. "I know I have been greatly wrong in regard to Celia, in the time long past. What to do now I cannot tell. My heart is set on Beryl, and yet from Beryl I must part. I await your counsel and her wishes."

CHAPTER LXXXV.

"IT IS NOT YOUR FAULT THAT OUR HEARTS ARE BROKEN."

SIR JEROME SOTHRON entered his chambers at the Albany that May day an old, an altered man. His eyes were hollow, a gray tint settled on his face, a strange look of misery clung about him. His step was shuffling and slow, his shoulders bent; his life seemed crushed within him.

He lay in the silent, closed, dusty room on a sofa all day. The shutters were fastened, and only two or three narrow bars of light came in, and in them the motes danced up and down as on ladders of gold. When night had fallen he sent for a cab and went out to the Abbey. He heard the door there close behind him, and he felt shut in, as one who enters a prison to come out only for execution. He could not think any line of thought out straight to its end; everything baffled and confused him.

Celia! Poor Celia! Sinned against, and innocent, and suffering, and unloved—a modern Leah—what should he do with or for Celia?

Beryl—beautiful, loved, loving, most unhappy Beryl, to whom every fiber of his soul clung with passionate fondness—what should he do with or for Beryl?

No, he could think out nothing. He paced up and down the rooms at night, the woods by day; he was feverish and haggard. He slept little; he ate almost nothing. He let the workmen go on, because to check proceedings might make a talk. But the old servants shook their heads, and said, "Master was in sore trouble, and who would have thought that he would take Mr. Francis' death to heart like that?"

For Beryl, she seemed to lie passive and in a semi-conscious condition that first day and night.

Lord Alfred had taken advantage of his wife's engagement in trousseaus to slip off to Margate. Lady Heath was easily quieted with remarks that Lady Beryl had

been overtaxed and worried, and had better be left entirely quiet, to the care of Mrs. Marvel and Fanny. If there was one place in the world that Lady Heath avoided, it was anything like a sick-room. She felt out of place there, with her chattering, full-blown life.

Mrs. Marvel was a rare good nurse, and with a keen judgment and knowledge of sickness that fitted her to deal with Beryl's case. Instead of summoning doctors and rousing excitement, she dealt skillfully with mind and body, and, after some thirty hours, she was able to see a clear question in Beryl's eyes, and answer it clearly.

"Sir Jerome is at Sothronwold Abbey. We send him a note twice a day. He promises to stay there and take the best care of himself, until we all know what is to be done."

Then, a little later:

"Beryl, all can be kept quiet for a little. There will be no confusion, no scandals, no raking up old sad stories. Remember there were no cards out, no orders given. Mr. Francis Sothron is but just buried. There is time—time to consider, time to settle all, time to do right by all. Dear, there is never a place so dark and narrow in our lives but Heaven can give us a way out. The way of doing right is always possible."

And so silence till the next morning. And then Beryl, propped up on her pillows, told Anna that she wanted to hear that whole story, "Celia's story from her lips, as Celia knew it and told it."

Anna Marvel was not an unfaithful historian. She gave the story fairly, kindly, to every one.

"And Celia—Lelia, as she seems to me—does not know?" said Beryl, wistfully.

"She will know by to-night. I telegraphed to the doctor that she must be told all."

Beryl looked piteously in her friend's face.

"If we cannot all be happy, dear Anna, we can all do what is right."

She looked like some sweet young martyr, accepting her destiny. And Mrs. Marvel thought of her own home, and the simple sweet girl there, who also had been a martyr, and for years had meekly accepted her destiny.

"Anna," said Beryl, "I do not want to stay here. I cannot get any courage to face people. I cannot go with

Lady Heath, to all these gay engagements, such life would kill me. I cannot stay so near him, Anna; I want to go to your house."

"To my house!" cried Anna, in surprise.

"Yes. I want to see Lelia. I loved Lelia, I love her still; this is not her fault. I want to see her. I want to do something for her. Perhaps I could make her happy; and then, I could die in peace. For it seems to me, Anna, that there is no way out of this but for one of us two to die; and I should be that one, for she is his wife. She must have her place!"

"Beryl," cried Anna.

Surely Beryl was saying what was right and just; but there was a strange self renunciation in her way of saying it. The more Mrs. Marvel looked at the question, the worse it looked. Here were Jerome and Beryl passionately attached, in every way fitted for each other, absolutely parted. Here were Jerome and Celia, utterly indifferent, entirely unfitted, and firmly bound together. And there was Lawrence, one more sad and wounded heart, and one more ruined life.

"Cannot I go to your house, Anna?" said poor little Beryl reproachfully.

"Yes, yes, a thousand times yes!" cried Anna. "You can do what you like with me and mine."

"Day after to-morrow, then, I will be able to go. Tell Lady Heath I want the Winderton air, and I will let her know from there when she will see me. And let him know I am going home with you, and he is to wait until I send him word."

"Yes, yes," said Mrs. Marvel, soothingly.

"I shall see him again once more," said Beryl, slowly, "I will make all right between them. I will tell him then to come for her—his wife. Yes, he will do right. This may be hard, but it is right. Then, when he comes for her—we will say good-by." And here she burst into a wild storm of tears, the first she had shed since that fatal morning.

Anna Marvel needed all her diplomatic talent to secure Beryl's quiet departure with her to Winderton. Lady Heath was much excited.

"Why had not the noble, the devoted, delightful Sir

Jerome been at the house for three days, while the angelical Beryl was ill?"

"Oh, *he* was not well."

"Then how could Beryl, her pearl and her rosebud, go away off to Winderton while her lover was ill?"

The trousseau affairs would go to ruin, if Beryl left.

Then Beryl roused up, saying:

"Mamma, there will be time, more than time—that is all put off."

At this word "put off" Lady Heath was frantic.

Then, to prevent suspicion and hasty remarks that should reveal prematurely all poor Beryl's wounds, Anna Marvel laid much stress on the death of Francis Sothron, on the lingering of repairs at the Abbey, and on Beryl's needed change of air.

"As for Sir Jerome he is to be sent for to Winderton."

"I give these admirable English up. I can never understand them, not even my adorable Alfred," said Lady Heath.

"After the season, mamma," said Beril, "you will come out to my house at Windmere, and then I think you will understand all better. Bid me good-by now, for I must try and sleep, and to-morrow I must be off before you are up."

Lady Heath kissed "her cherub, her treasure, her dove," with sighs about the strangeness of the British temperament, and sighing, gave up the problem—Beryl.

Anna Marvel herself wondered a little at the fevered eagerness of Beryl to see the ill-fated Celia, who was and who was not her rival. She understood that in her present terrible position, a nature such as Beryl's could not endure the glitter and common-places of society, but like a wounded doe, must long only for some sweet retreat. She did not quite understand that Beryl hoped to gain from the sight of the pensive, gentle, meek face of Celia Sothron new strength to do right, and herself strive to unite the never-united husband and wife.

"It is right—it can be done!" This was her simple logic.

"Dear Beryl," said Anna, as they set forth, "I fear this will be too much for you—it is a long journey."

"There will be rest at the end," sighed Beryl, laying her hot trembling hand on that of her friend. "Do you

remember how once before, in a great storm of trouble, your home was my refuge—was a heaven of peace where I got strength to do right?"

The cottage was reached at last. Doctor Marvel met them.

"Where is she? Where is Lelia?" cried Beryl.

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

"EVER MY HEART'S BEST LOVE, GOOD-BYE."

THE doctor pointed to a little parlor at the right of the hall.

"She is there."

"Let me see her alone," said Beryl, panting.

She opened the door. Doctor Marvel and his wife turned away, and went on to the dining-room, to talk of this strange coil of events.

Beryl stood on the parlor threshold, her face snow pale, her large dusky eyes fixed on Celia. Celia rose from her great reclining chair. She was a mere shadow of her former self, fragile, transparent, in a long white dressing robe. She made one step forward, holding out her hands as in appeal.

Thus these two women, bound to Jerome Sothron, the one by love and the other by law, faced each other—and the next minute they were clasped in each other's arms, and sobbing, each over the other's woes! Each saw the desolation of the other, each saw the ruin and misery wrought by this wretched crossing of their lives.

"Oh, Beryl, it is all my fault, all my folly!" cried Celia. "If I had not been vain, foolish, hasty, and then so secret, all would have gone well. Why—why was I not more wise at first—more frank at last."

"Poor Lelia, poor child, who could blame you? Oh, I was to blame. Why was I so weak, so foolish? Why in those other years was I not true to myself and to *him*?" Oh, that made all the trouble, all yours, all mine?"

Thus, each blamed herself, and neither of them blamed him! And yet of all, Jerome, in making his angry, resentful marriage, was the most to blame, unless it were true

that his mind was astray with trouble when he took that fatal step.

"You tremble, poor girl," said Beryl, compassionately, "you are yet weak and ill," and she led her back to her chair, and drawing up an ottoman sat down by her side. With trembling fingers she loosed her hat and wrap, letting them fall to the floor.

"You look terribly ill, Lelia; you will not mind my calling you Lelia? I always knew you by that name."

"Call me anything you like. I should never have taken another name. Anna did not wish that. Ah, whenever I have had my own way, it has been a wrong way. Yes, I have been very ill. Oh, how I wish it had pleased Heaven that I should not get well! I ought to die—and be away, away—no longer troubling any one!"

"Hush, dear! It is your right to live; to live and be happy. All that is left me now in this world, dear, is to help every one to get right and do right; and then I hope I shall go to sleep and never wake up, because, you know, I cannot live, loving with all my heart another woman's husband. It would be wicked, very wicked, and yet I cannot help loving Jerome all the time. When I pull the fibers of my heart away from him they go right back, Lelia, and cling faster than ever."

Lelia gently wiped away the large tears coursing down Beryl's wan cheeks.

"Oh, Beryl, Beryl, angel of goodness! what a sweet friend you have been to me! And now I break your heart by living. Sometimes, Beryl, I think of those philosophies that teach, when we do a harm by living, it is our right to die!"

"Oh, Lelia!" cried Beryl, starting in horror, "never, never harbor such a wicked thought! We all must live as long as Heaven wills, for all our living here is to train us for hereafter, and we do not know what is best, only that to do right is always best. And," she continued, gaining energy, "you are married to Jerome, and so it is right that you—that he—right that you be as husband and wife, and try and help each other!"

"Beryl, you forget that he does not love me, and I do not love him. What love my heart can know belongs to Lawrence."

Beryl bowed her head for a time, too overcome to speak. Then she lifted herself again, and said, firmly:

"Lelia, I have learned that one thing is even higher than love, and that is duty. It is by that only that all goes well. If we had followed that highest duty—all of us always—we should not have been here now. You would have been happy. I should have been—his wife."

There was such a pathos, such a longing tenderness in her voice, that Lelia, who in two days past had wept until it seemed as if she had no more tears, broke into dry convulsive sobs.

"Oh, if I could make you his now!"

"You cannot, dear. Do not admit the thought. That is ended. We must show each other how to be brave. You, too, give up a loved one. Have you heard from Lawrence since he knew?"

Lelia took out a little note. Only a few days since it was written, yet it was already worn with much unfolding and dim with tears.

"Ever my heart's best love, good-by!" That was all.

"If I should be dying he would come," said Lelia.

"Hush! You have no right to such thoughts!" said Beryl, firmly.

"Dear Beryl, since I know all, and that you were coming, I have been going over and over in my mind the story of the past—all my sad heart's history, and I want to tell it to you."

"Not now," said Beryl. "You are excited, you are so feeble. Wait until to-morrow."

"I cannot sleep; I cannot rest until it is said. I keep going over it all in my heart. Do let me tell you all, Beryl. Will you hear?"

"Yes," said Beryl, drearily. "Say all that is in your mind," and to escape looking at Lelia, or having Lelia read her face, she bent her aching head on the arm of Lelia's chair.

Lelia, in low tones, began the history of her heart from her early girlhood. She did not spare her own pride, her vanity and folly. She went on and told the story of her hasty marriage, her miserable married life, Anna's influence, Delia's history. As she continued she spoke with more energy and rapidity; her words came fast and feverish. She told the story of her endeavor to improve, to fit herself to be a less displeasing wife to Sir Jerome, if he came back. Then of her seeing his death stated in Burke's Peerage, and her hasty flight to Sothronwold, and seeing

the burial tablets that told that she was free, and how, hindered it is true by the disturbance about Delia, love had grown in her heart for the faithful Lawrence. Her words grew more and more eager, but Beryl, almost in a stupor from her long agony, heard them as one who scarcely understands.

Dr. Marvel knew that this interview was lasting too long. Once he knocked at the door unheeded, then Anna went, but found the talk still going on. At last the doctor said:

"Go, Anna, and bring Lady Beryl away. I cannot answer for Lelia in such a long conference. I know she is utterly unfit for it."

Anna went into the room. Lelia had just finished speaking.

"I must part you," said Anna, putting her arm around Beryl, and almost lifting her up. "Dear Lady Medford, come. Fanny must put you to bed, and give you some beef tea, or we shall have another patient. Lelia, dear, I am coming back at once to give you your tonic."

She took Beryl upstairs to Fanny, and lingered a little, struck by her curious heaviness and apathy. Then she went back to the little parlor. Lelia was already asleep. Her hands lay clasped in her lap, she slept as one exhausted, lying back in the lowered reclining chair. Mrs. Marvel threw an Afghan over her, and drew the curtains.

Half an hour later, Dr. Marvel stepped in and felt her pulse.

"A little feverish," he said to himself. "I will give her half an hour more of sleep, and see then."

His wife was walking in the garden among her roses and lilies, when he came out to join her.

"Fanny says her lady is sound asleep," she said.

"So is Lelia. Lady Beryl has an admirable constitution, and she has entered this conflict in full health. Lelia has also a strong constitution, but one that has been for months breaking down under unnatural pressure."

"Do you fear for her life?" demanded Anna.

"Not immediately, unless some other trouble supervenes."

The sunset lay red across the garden, when again Doctor Marvel entered the little parlor and, drawing back the drapery that caused a deep twilight, looked at his patient.

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

"GOOD-BY! GOOD-BY!"

"ANNA!" the voice of Doctor Marvel rang out loud and sharp. Then he remembered Beryl, and stepped toward the door, but his wife had heard and met him. Lelia still lay back, apparently asleep, but the soft, white dressing-robe was all deep, ominous crimson from the neck to the lap.

"Hemorrhage," said the doctor.

"Dead?"

"No. But unconscious; it has been very heavy."

That was a long, wakeful night at the cottage.

Doctor Marvel sent for another physician for consultation.

Through all the stir of that night, the coming and going, Beryl slept profoundly, while Fanny watched at the door of her room. Beryl had reached reaction after long unrest. She had seen her path of duty plain, she had entered it, and a sudden peace fell on her in the midst of her profound sorrow, a peace that allowed nature to claim her rights, and so she slept like an over-wearied child.

Fanny Hume sat up and wept for other people's suffering and for her own sins. Fanny made a curious figure—she sat on the floor in the hall by Beryl's door, a big crimson shawl was wrapped about her, and a little porcelain lamp burning at her side sent here a light and there a line of shadow across her crouching figure. She had offered her services for Mrs. Sothron, but Mrs. Marvel had told her to watch over her lady. There was little that could be done for Lelia, as they slowly nursed back her flickering life, and the more quietly she was kept the better.

Fanny sat therefore repenting of the various concealments of her life, and the various falsehoods she had found it convenient to tell. She considered that Ralph

Marshall had left her in indignation and anger, and she would never see him more, and she grieved over that to the very depth of her heart, and felt that if Ralph would only come back to her she would speak the truth forever.

Beryl was taking her breakfast in her room next morning when Anna came to her.

"I hope you are eating something, my dear?"

"She's picking like a canary bird," said Fanny.

"I am doing very well. How is Lelia? Is she better? Did the excitement of our meeting overcome her? I want to see her as soon as I can. When I have seen her I shall write to *him*. She will tell me when she can see him, and I will write him what is duty, and he must come and take it up. He will. He is a good man. He will do what is right. So will I. I will go to Windmere before he comes—it will be best, you know—I had better not see him. I, he, we—ah—none of us are quite strong enough for that!" She spoke hurriedly, nervously, pushing her plate from her, and fixing her eyes, full of entreaty, on Anna's face.

"Oh, make it easy for me," she said, when Mrs. Marvel was still silent. "Tell me that I had better go to Windmere to-morrow, and—all will be done. He will come when I am gone."

"Dear Lady Beryl, you do not know that poor Lelia is very ill."

"Worse!" cried Beryl. "Oh, tell me, did I harm her, did I disturb her? Oh, was it my coming?"

"No, no. Do not think it, it is only what the doctor apprehended for some time; he thought, perhaps, the danger was past, but it was not. A heavy hem rrhage."

"Oh, let me go to her. Indeed I will be very quiet. Let me go beg her to get better."

"My dear, we all do what we can; but—"

Beryl rose and went quickly to Lelia's room. She bent over her and kissed her pale forehead.

"Lelia, Lelia, get better, oh, try and get better, and be happy!"

"Hush!" said Doctor Marvel, touching her arm. "She *is* happy; you see that in her face."

"Because—I will not be better," whispered Lelia.

Beryl turned her face in terrified entreaty to the doctor.

"Lelia understands me. She asked me and I told her," he said, gravely. "This is the end. She cannot live a week."

"Content," whispered Lelia, and she laid her pallid hand on the small warm hand of Beryl.

Beryl, without a word, sank into a chair, and rested her golden head against Lelia's pillow.

Beryl had that morning gathered up her courage to live, and Lelia had found courage to die.

"It is better so; it is the only way out," said Doctor Marvel, as he stood with his wife among the roses and lilies in the sunny garden. "It is impossible now that the broken threads of life could be gathered up for her and for Sir Jerome; there is no love between them; there never was, and on the one hand his heart cleaves to Lady Beryl, and hers to Lawrence. They would all, no doubt, have strength to do right; but it would be to live in martyrdom. But the end impatient spirits might seek for themselves, here comes from heaven."

It was evening when Lady Beryl found Doctor Marvel alone in the porch. The red sunset was fading away, the moon had risen low and full, the glow-worms were creeping along the grass, the nightingales were singing in the thicket, a sweet fragrance loaded all the mild evening air.

"Doctor," she said touching his arm, "I want to send for him, for Sir Jerome. This is his wife that is dying, and while there is yet time he should be able to say kind words to her—to ask her pardon for all the pain and trouble his rashness has caused. It is true I was the most to blame. My weakness began it. But I have told her that, and she has forgiven me. He will feel more comforted all his life if he sees her now, and knows how good and sweet she is; how the real Lelia is not like the rash girl he used to know."

"Yes, yes, I think he should come."

"It will be well for you to write and tell him all: and tell him to lose no time. Can you post the letter to-night?"

"I will."

"And then is it not the right of Lawrence to come? He loves her, she loves him. Lelia is now close to that other world, where people are as God's angels, that neither marry nor are given in marriage; there will be no wrong

in giving him the memory of her last look, her last words, her last smile."

"I will send for him to-morrow."

Beryl had changed in these hours. All personal thoughts, all personal loves, hopes, sorrows seemed to have been put out of sight. She thought only for others; for Lelia, over whom she hung in a compassionate tenderness, where any remorse for the part she had had in Lelia's sad fate was lost in Lelia's deep peace.

Calm, grave, sympathizing, tender, a ministering spirit rather than a human creature, she stood by Lelia, and she met Jerome and Lawrence. The same greeting was bestowed on each—a soft touch of the hand, the soft words:

"It was right to come; she expects you. Come to her."

And so the last day in Lelia's life came, and they faced the solemn mystery of death.

On a low pallet in the center of the room lay Celia Sothron, drifting out of the narrowness of this life into the wideness of the world beyond.

The man who had loved her and never married her, the man who had married her and never loved her, stood on either side.

Lady Beryl sat on the edge of the low bed, tears raining from her dusky violet eyes. In that hour it seemed so pitiful that this friend should die so young. Mrs. Sothron took Lady Beryl's hand.

"Beryl, you have been the sweetest of friends to me. More than a sister, since first we met, when we did not know how closely our lives touched! Do you remember that summer day in Biarritz when I said to you that I would gladly go through the gates of death to be a hostage for the man you loved and mourned? Darling Beryl, more than most mortals I have had my wish—my dying shall buy your happiness! Strange that I can give you what I never had nor claimed! Jerome, accuse yourself of nothing. All our lives go on in ways we cannot understand. Our lessons are for a world to come. Where is your hand, Jerome? yours, Beryl? The day grows dim. So now I join your two hands, as they shall be joined at the altar, and as your hearts are joined; and may blessings follow you forever, and nothing put you two asunder! Lawrence, all earthly loves and cares fall from me; but as

I go away, I think of you as the purest, truest, dearest heart that ever I met. Anna, Doctor, brother, and sister, friend to the friendless, shelter to the desolate, you two will surely in all your lives reap a harvest of blessings, because you have been so good to me. Good-by, good-by!"

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

"WHERE WILL SHE BE MARRIED?"

It was two weeks from that sunny May morning when Ralph Marshall, bold in doing what he was sure was right, told his story to Sir Jerome. It was June now. The day was equally sunny and sweet; but the summer had come instead of the spring, and the story had rolled on to its end. Its end was here in the quiet grass-grown graveyard of the Abbey church, where a grave was opened beside the one where Marshall's wife had been laid.

A little funeral party—Sir Jerome Sothron, two gentlemen quite unknown to the few Sothronwold villagers who had curiously gathered; two ladies just as unknown, and closely vailed—though some guessers concluded one to be Lady Beryl Medford—and a ladies' maid who was in black like the others and cried a great deal—made up the little company which had arrived by train at Shepherd's Bush.

The village people said this was the Delia Morris who ran away, come to be buried by her kindred.

A few days after, some of them, wandering back, found two new white stones by these graves, and on one was,

DELIA MORRIS,
Wife of Ralph Marshall.

On the other,

CELIA MORRIS,
Wife of Jerome Sothron.

But on the Abbey church was also set a small tablet bearing the words,

CELIA SOTHRON,
Aged 22.

No one heeded or understood the little notice of the

death, at Winderton, of a Mrs. Celia Sothron. That was all that was said, for Beryl's sake.

But people did wonder, and wonder much, why that grand wedding did not come off at St. George's, which society really felt had been promised, and society was consequently defrauded cruelly. Lady Heath exhausted all her voluble English and all her adjectives in explaining that Lady Beryl and Sir Jerome would not be married so soon after Francis Sothron's death. This was all the reason that Lady Heath ever knew for deferring, and she was free to state that she thought it a very idle one. But she added that "her lovely child was also out of spirits, having lost a dear friend, and wedding-bells should not ring when the heart was lamenting."

The marriage of Mrs. Ranleigh and Mr. Rubble was a very grand affair, but did not console people for not seeing the beautiful Lady Beryl again at the altar. Mr. Rubble found that he was not quite as well acquainted with Laura's affairs as he had fancied, for he had several huge bills to pay which he had not expected. He took his bride off to the Continent, and there was talk of Norway and Switzerland, and not coming back until winter.

Lady Beryl went with her father and his wife to Windmere Lodge, and after a little the roses rebloomed on her cheeks, and the happy light filled her sweet eyes, and to Lady Heath's intense joy the wedding preparations were resumed, and two or three more costumes were needed, because the wedding was to be in October and not in June.

Sir Jerome, at Sothronwold, finished the restorations, and gradually he, too, found his lost color, his vigor, the clear ring to his voice, and the spring to his step; but that furnace of fire for two weeks had left Sir Jerome a graver if no less ardent man.

August had come. All the doors and windows of Windmere Lodge were open to the warm, flower-scented air. The breakfast-table was spread, Lord Alfred was in his place with his paper, and Lady Heath at her place by the silver urns. And in came Beryl. Once more she was a creature of the summer; clusters of roses at the throat and belt of her white dress, her eyes shining, her hair a bewildering maze, like a fluff of spun gold.

"Ah, *ma belle*, now you are once more like yourself,"

said Lady Heath. "How much more charming this is than the dull things—black, gray, and lavender—you have been wearing lately."

"You know Jerome is coming to-day, and I have not seen him for two months—not since he and the Marvels brought me here, the day before you came," said Beryl.

"It is time he made an appearance," said Lord Alfred, crossly. "I remember days when he did not need two invitations, nor even one, to come and see you. There is no need to talk about the repairs and work at the abbey, and the house in town, nor about his cousin Francis' death—there is more in it than that—I don't know just how to make Sothron out."

"You can make him out, just as he is, and just as I think him," said Beryl, with spirit, "a good, true, dear, generous, noble man. The very best that ever was; and whatever he does is just right!"

"Yes, yes, my angel, quite so," said Lady Heath, "I am sure that is what my adorable Alfred means."

"I mean what I say," replied the adorable Alf[illegible], "that this putting the wedding off was absurd. Th[illegible] of October for a marriage! Where will she be married? Here in this little box, with a parish church that is crowded by two hundred people? At London, where there is positively not a living soul in October? At Winderton? That would be absurd. At Sothronwold? Just as ridiculous. I don't see how she is to be married at all—it is impossible."

"Why, my adorable Alfred," said his lady, "all that is really necessary for a marriage is a bride and groom, and some one to give the bride away; and, of course, the minister to marry them."

"Do not worry, my good papa," said Beryl, laughing. "My uncle, the earl, had solved the difficulty. I had a letter from him last night, and he wishes me to be married the same day as my cousin Amelia and Sir Eustace Friar. Surely you know the great church near Heatherton Castle will hold all the world; and as for guests, the castle will be crowded."

"What could be better?" cried Lady Heath, "that is the home of your family. The earl is the head of the house."

Hitherto, Lady Heath had not been asked to the castle,

though in London she had been among the guests at a dinner and a ball given by the earl. This proposal for Beryl's marriage at the castle opened the way to intercourse and recognition for which Lady Heath was longing.

"So his lordship is coming round?" growled Alfred.

"He is better pleased with you, papa, since Lady Heath took you in charge," said Beryl, mischievously. "Here come the letters. There will be one for each of you about the plan, and—as soon as I have spoken of it to Sir Jerome, I shall write my uncle 'yes.'"

When breakfast ended, Beryl took a wide garden hat and set off to the spot where she had agreed to meet Sir Jerome as he walked from the station. She had not seen him for two months—she did not wish to meet him in the midst of the great group of servants surrounding Lord and Lady Heath.

He knew the spot she had designated, a little rustic bridge, above a stream that brawled noisily in a narrow bed of rocks, fringed with bracken and mosses, and long drooping alders and willows. The sun sifted through the trees that shaded the stream, birds skimmed along the water, all the world seemed glad, in harmony with the heart of Beryl. Then, along the little wood path, she saw him coming, erect, eager, at a rapid pace, and down the path she flew to meet him, and the next instant was folded in his arms.

"Oh, Jerome, what a long, long time since I saw you!"

"My darling, I thought it would never end!" said he. They sat down under a great beech tree.

"It seemed as if you must have changed, it is so long!" sighed Beryl, looking in his eyes. "But I cannot see that you have."

"Oh, but I have—in my feelings. I love you ten times better than ever before. How terrible it is to do without you!"

Beryl laughed, a low, pleased, rippling laugh.

"And now, to comfort me, dear Beryl, after my miseries, set the day when I may take you away from every one, and keep you all to myself."

"My uncle has taken that upon himself," said Beryl, drawing the earl's letter from her pocket, and leaning her golden head against his shoulder as he read it.

"The eighth of October! Why did he not say the first?"

"Oh, hard-to-please, he might have said the thirtieth!"

It was almost lunch-time when they thought to go to the house.

Hand in hand, they went over the bridge. Then Beryl remembered. She stopped, and looked into her lover's face.

"The gipsy's second bridge!" she said. "There were two great perils; those passed, all would be safe. Ah, Jerome, there were two!"

"Don't believe in gipsies, dear," said Jerome. "But in this the gipsy was right—we shall be happy ever after."

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

A MATRIMONIAL CONTRAST.

"But where is she, the bridal flower
That must be made a bride ere noon
She enters, glowing with the moon
Of Eden on its bridal bower."—IN MEMORIAM.

Nature is never lovelier than in Sussex under the mellow October sun, and never sun shone clearer than that which rose on Beryl's wedding-day. The splendid castle was full of noble guests; the bright faces of bevies of young girls were to be seen in every room, and the music of glad young voices rippled through the halls. From the turrets of the castle banners flew, the silken folds waving out above the woods of oak, chestnut, and linden, that had not begun to lose their leafy honors. Arches of flowers and evergreens were raised across the broad road leading from the castle to the grand old church. Along the wayside stood smiling little girls in white, pink, and blue, with baskets full of flowers to scatter before the brides. Far and wide over the Sussex downs the bells of the castle and of the old church rang wedding chimes.

It was a most beautiful sight when the two wedding parties, dividing in the vestibule, moved up the two wide aisles to the chancel, where Sir Jerome Sothron and Sir Eustace Friar waited on either side, with their attendants. The church was filled with waiting, sympathizing friends,

Lord Harley Medford and his wife were there, and the Hamptons, and that stanch friend, Ravlin, and many more; and the organ pealed the wedding-march, and all looked, in proud, fond greeting, at the coming brides. Lady Amelia Heath, a handsome girl, wearing white satin, with a sumptuous veil that was an almost priceless heirloom in her family, crowned with orange flowers, came with her father and mother, and attended by six bridemaids in pale blue brocade.

Up the other aisle came Beryl Medford, with her father, attended by her friends, and preceded by four tiny maidens of six in delicate rose-color—smiling little cherubs, among whom Beryl looked, in her dress of foamy white lace and her matchless pearls, like Venus surrounded by Loves. She moved down the great aisle as in a dream; the heavy brocade train under the lace weighed nothing upon her; she had wings. Her lowered violet eyes saw nothing but the aisle she trod. She was too lost in her great happiness to hear the hum of admiration that arose on every hand. To her forever after the incense of white hyacinths meant the crowning peace, the perfect joy of that hour of her heart's true marriage.

Her hands lightly clasped as she came forward gave something strangely saintly to her mien. For her all this luxury about her meant nothing. She had been born in luxury; it was the natural unnoticed surrounding of her life, and her life itself was in the affections of her heart. For her the world did not exist. She lifted her eyes once with a flash of joy and adoring love to the face of Jerome, as he met her at the altar. They were a royal couple standing there in their remarkable beauty, triumphant at last over the long sorrows of their lives. Pure and sweet as her own white hyacinths, she stood by Jerome's side as the last notes of the wedding-march quivered on the air.

Lord Ravlin, standing near, thought of the sweet words—

> "On me she bends her blissful eyes,
> And then on thee; they meet thy look,
> And brighten like the star that shook
> Betwixt the palms of Paradise!"

Four days later, the eyes of visitors at the Louvre gallery were drawn rather to a very noble and beautiful

pair who were passing slowly through the rooms than to the pictures on the wall. No face among all these masterpieces of art was sweeter and lovelier than that of this radiant creature in heliotrope tints and dusky purple, setting off her golden hair and pearly skin.

Beryl had been at the galleries of the Louvre before, but now she seemed for the first time to see them, because she was now looking at them through Jerome's eyes. That day they had taken leave of Lady Heath, who was taking her adorable Alfred back to that beloved Vienna from which, for Beryl's sake, she had suffered a year of exile.

The laughter roused by Lady Heath's parting benedictions had scarcely rippled away from Beryl's lovely lips, as she paused before picture after picture, and alas for the artists! she only really admired pictures where there was some face or figure that seemed to her to bear a trace of Jerome; and he was no better art critic, for he only admired the pictures that showed such golden meshes of hair, or such dusky violet eyes, or such exquisite dimpled chin as he saw in Beryl. He had at Sothronwold Abbey a gallery of many valuable pictures; he was willing to add to the collection if Beryl desired it; but, for himself, he thought that his eyes would never need the recreation of pictures, as the lovely face of Beryl surpassed all the trophies of art.

"Beryl," said Jerome, softly, in her ear, "look there in the archway to the next room. That is surely Lawrence."

A slender, erect figure in black stood there, holding a hat with a wide mourning band. They went toward him. The face of Lawrence lit up in welcome. Lawrence looked a little older, graver, more reserved, but he was brave and interested still.

"How good to meet you! To say good-by, too, before a long journey. I have joined an expedition into the heart of Africa. I hope to learn or do something there, that shall be of some service to the world."

"But we shall see you for some days yet," said Beryl.

"No. I start to-night. I have been here getting a few needed scientific instruments. I have seen almost no one that I know—only, by the way, I saw Mr. and Mrs. Rubble."

"Oh, are they here?" said Beryl, doubtfully.

"They left to-day. They were at the ambassador's ball, and Madam Rubble so roused the wrath of her lord, by dancing with various amiable *attachés*, that he ordered trunks packed forthwith."

"What, does he not allow Laura to dance? And she is so fond of it," cried Beryl.

"I think she may dance now and then, with such partners as he chooses; but he is terribly jealous and dominant, and I pitied her from my heart. She is an altered woman. I do not know whether she regards her husband with more fear or more hate, for I saw both in her face."

"Oh, what a dreadful fate!" cried Beryl, leaning closer on the arm she loved so well. "I do hope we shall not meet them. Between dislike of Mr. Rubble, and pity for poor Laura, it would make me very uncomfortable."

But they did meet them, in November, in Venice. It was sunset, and the water was all gold, purple, and crimson reflections, and deep trembling shadows, and in a blue and gilt gondola, like a fairy boat very different from the throng of black gondolas, floating about them, Jerome and Beryl were drifting, seated side by side, mingling all that was beautiful in their surroundings, with the sweet dreams of their confident love, when sweeping down across the still waters of the lagoon, came what for ostentatious splendor might have been Cleopatra's barge. The rowers were in orange and blue, the cushions and curtains were of plush of crimson and purple, with gilt fringes; the two passengers sat as far apart as the length of the gondola; the short, coarse, fat, bull-necked man, with his great hands on his knees, his little scintillating eyes remorselessly fixed on the woman who lounged among the cushions at the farther end of the boat.

In an embossed velvet of gold and black, with a black velvet hat with a great gold colored plume, large diamonds shining in her ears, and in the bracelets on her wrists, Laura made a striking figure—brilliant, handsome, unrestful. The first glance showed that art had given the pomegranate hue to her cheeks and the lustre to her eyes that once had been her native dower.

As the two gondolas neared, Beryl saw Laura's parasol suddenly lowered between herself and the watching Rubble, and Laura made a sign to a uniformed Italian officer, in a gondola near. Very likely Mr. Rubble saw or sus-

pected as much. He coolly crossed the space between, jerked the elaborate parasol from his wife's hand and tossed it into the lagoon. Turning he recognized Sir Jerome, and ordered the gondoliers to bring them together. A greeting was inevitable. Laura braced herself to meet it.

"My dear Beryl, one can see by your beautiful face that you are yet in the honeymoon."

"I trust her face will always be as beautiful," said Jerome.

"Then her fate will be quite exceptional," said Laura, and as the boats drifted apart, her low mocking laugh was borne to them across the waters.

CHAPTER XC.

"ANOTHER MAN'S WIFE IS NOW MY OWN WIFE."

ONCE more it is July, and for the second time since her marriage Beryl has gladly come from their home in Hyde Park Gardens, with all its London-season glitter and gayety, to what she calls her "blissful home"—Sothronwold Abbey. That summer-house upon which Jerome bestowed so much thought, standing on a knoll rising above the velvet grass and noble trees of the great park, and commanding a wide view where openings have been judiciously made among the foliage in every direction, is with Beryl a favorite resort. She is here now. On the table lie book and work hastily abandoned, for Beryl is kneeling on the summer-house floor, her eyes fixed on the little king of Sothronwold, a potent sovereign not quite a year old. Beryl in her blue silk morning robe, her curls as free and sunny as in her childhood, her smooth white dimpled arms stretched out, with the loose sleeves falling back from their round softness, her violet eyes all overflowing with love and pride, the most adoring of smiles on her enchanting face, woos to her bosom the plump, laughing, riotous little Cupid, who holds fast one finger of his rosy nurse, and looks longingly into the eyes of his mother. Then he looks down at his pink, plump legs, and takes courage from their evident fitness for walking.

He takes one forward step; his nurse dextrously withdraws her finger, and then with a shout he makes the perilous journey, and buries his happy little countenance in the warm, loving bosom of his mother.

What, then, is Beryl's pride? Did ever child walk so well before! But her joy is incomplete unless shared by him who to her crowns and compasses all joy. She looks about; she seems to be one of those fortunate women, even, whose smallest and lightest wish is ever abundantly satisfied; for here, close at hand, is Sir Jerome, coming toward the summer-house with Anne Marvel and Anne's little girl trotting proudly between them. Beryl springs up and darts to meet them. In all her ways she is as impulsive and enthusiastic as ever.

"Jerome, the boy can walk! He walks beautifully. You must see him at once. Don't go nearer, or he will insist on getting on your shoulder, and will not walk at all. Gracie, run there, dear, and let baby walk to you."

While this important arrangement is being made Beryl tranquilly rests against her husband, and leans her head back on his bosom as his arms clasp about her waist.

"You are a perfect image of happiness, Beryl," says Anna Marvel. "I think that really you are the happiest-looking woman I ever saw."

"Do you know that is a great compliment to me?" said Sir Jerome. "I think you say in a sentence all the best that can be said of a man, when you say he makes his wife entirely happy."

"Who could help being happy with *you*, Jerome?" says Beryl, reaching up her white arms to clasp about his neck, a yoke that is the delight of his heart. "You are the best, dearest, handsomest——"

Sir Jerome cuts short the eulogy by a shout of laughter, and at the jovial sound the baby, instead of walking, sits down.

"Why, you wicked man, you've spoiled all," says Beryl. "Can you never learn to behave?" and the wreathing arms tighten, until his face rests on her curly head.

At this minute the Centre of Observation picks himself up from the floor, and in six firm steps reaches little Grace Marvel, and tries to take forcible possession of her corals. The young freebooter is rewarded by a ride on his father's

shoulders, and a triumphal procession moves to the house where the Hamptons and Sir Eustace Friar and his wife are amusing themselves at a game of lawn tennis, and where that afternoon they expect to greet that long incorrigible bachelor, Lord Ravlin, who is finally finishing his wedding tour and his honeymoon.

It was on this same July morning that Fanny Hume, having laid out her lady's dinner dress, and concluded her other duties, went down through the gardens and gathering a store of iris and roses, passed through the park to the churchyard, and laid her offerings on the grave of Delia Marshall.

Every week during summer Fanny brought flowers to Delia's grave—perhaps it was her way of imitating her mistress, who kept fresh flowers always on that other low, green grave, where slumbered Celia Sothron, the Lelia of her love. When Fanny had arranged her flowers, and pulled up a little weed or two that marred the spot, she stood thinking, not so much of Delia as of the blonde viking, who had sailed long ago to the Caribbean Seas.

She heard the church gate click, and looking up she saw Ralph Marshall himself coming toward her. Straight on he came among the graves, with long, swinging steps. Fanny flushed, and looked steadfastly down. She was recalling Ralph's scorn of her naughty habit of lying.

"Thou here, lass!" cried Ralph. "Well, come then, let's make up, for I've sailed well round the world since last I set eyes on thee, my lass, and never have I seen any one half so much to my liking as a lass named Fanny Hume."

"I thought you hated me for good and all," said Fanny, turning her head on one side.

"Not I. I hate fibbing, my lass; but I do love a faithful heart, and you are so faithful to your lady, I make sure we are once spliced, you'll be true as steel to Ralph Marshall, and in token of that same, I brought along a wedding ring. See if it fits, my lass."

"How did you know I wasn't married?" demanded Fanny. "If I'm so good-looking as you say, it stands to reason I'd have lovers plenty," but she coyly fitted on the ring.

"I've heard from Sir Jerome more than once or twice, and he loaned me money to finish out buying my

ship, and he'll lease me a snug little cottage hard by the Abbey, my lass. So come along; I'm going down to the Abbey to see Sir Jerome, and we'll mention to your lady that you'll be Fanny Marshall this time three weeks."

"Well, you *are* masterful!" cried Fanny, between a pout and a laugh, as he pulled her hand under his arm.

"Yes, my lass," quoth Ralph, "and so I lay out to be, and as loving as they make 'em."

"Well, I declare I wouldn't marry you, nor any other man, if I had not seen from my lady and Sir Jerome how like a pair of blessed angels two folks can get along."

"There's not exactly the making of angels in us, lass," said Ralph; "but we'll get on well—very well."

But not only to Fanny and Marshall had the home-light of Beryl's and Jerome's love been as a beacon. When the Abbey guests and their hosts gathered, in the cool, fragrant evening, on the terrace—a charming assembly!—Lord Ravlin looked toward Beryl, in her white brocade, walking up and down with his own fair bride, and said to Sir Jerome:

"It was the sight of your wonderful happiness, your devotion to each other, your goodness to everybody, your home a centre of all that is best and noblest, that made me resolve to seek just such a love, and just such a home for myself."

"I think," said Jerome, "I am the happiest man in the world. I consider my great blessedness, and I wonder at it; and I look back, trembling and amazed, to certain hours of anguish when, torn between good and evil, I despaired of all things, finding my heart in the possession of ANOTHER MAN'S WIFE. Thank Heaven, the days of anguish and despair are ended, and she, my darling, my life's dear crown, is now MY OWN WIFE!"

[THE END.]

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The public are at last permitted to take a peep into the wonderful and mysterious art of

"HOW TO BE BEAUTIFUL."

We will soon become a nation of Beauty. Read how, in the table of

CONTENTS:

THE VALUE OF PERSONAL BEAUTY.—This chapter relates to the beauty in "Genius," "Strength," "Religion," "Poetry," and "Chivalry."

THE HISTORY OF BEAUTY.—Mode of acquiring it by the people of different nations. What people are the most beautiful?

VARIOUS STANDARDS OF BEAUTY.—Tastes of civilized and uncivilized people. The French definition of beauty

THE BEST STANDARD OF BEAUTY.—Defines the Head, Hair, Eyes, Cheeks, Ears, Nose, Mouth, Bosom, Limbs, and in fact every part of the human form.

HOW TO RAISE BEAUTIFUL CHILDREN.—To newly married people, and those who contemplate entering the conjugal state, this chapter alone is well worth the price of the book.

HOW TO BE BEAUTIFUL.—This chapter is full of information, as it not only tells how to beautify every part of the form and features, but gives recipes and cures for all the ailments which tend to mar or blemish.

BEAUTY SLEEP.—To be beautiful it is not necessary to be like the bird that seeks its nest at sunset and goes forth again at sunrise. You will here find the required time to be spent in bed, the positions most conducive to health, facts regarding ventilation, bed-clothes, adornments, and other useful hints.

BEAUTY FOOD.—Instructs how, when, and where to eat, and also treats of Digestion, Complexion, Foods which color the skin, etc.

HOW TO BE FAT.—The information imparted in this chapter will be a boon to thin, delicate women, as it tells what to eat and what to avoid, also what to drink and how to dress when plumpness is desirable.

HOW TO BE LEAN.—If corpulent women will carefully follow the instructions herein, they will be happy and enjoy life.

BEAUTY BATHING AND EXERCISE.—This chapter is intended for *every one* to read and profit by. There is no truer saying than "Cleanliness is next to Godliness."

EFFECTS OF MENTAL EMOTIONS ON BEAUTY.—After you read this, we feel safe in saying that you will not give way to anger, surprise, fright, grief, vexation, etc., but will at all times strive to be cheerful and make the best of life.

HOW BEAUTY IS DESTROYED.—The women are warned in this chapter against quack doctors and their nostrums, the dangers of overdosing, and irregular habits.

HOW TO REMAIN BEAUTIFUL.—It is just as easy for those that are beautiful to remain so as to allow themselves to fade away like a flower which only blooms for a season.

HOW TO ACQUIRE GRACE AND STYLE.—Without grace and style beauty is lost. They are as essential as a beautiful face. To walk ungracefully or awkwardly is not only vulgar but detrimental to the health.

THE LANGUAGE OF BEAUTY.—This chapter will enable you to read a person and learn his or her character, without the use of a phrenological chart.

CORSETS.—When and what kind should be worn. How they were originated, and by whom.

CYCLING.—The latest craze for ladies is fully described in this chapter.

WOMEN'S SECRETS; or, How to be Beautiful.

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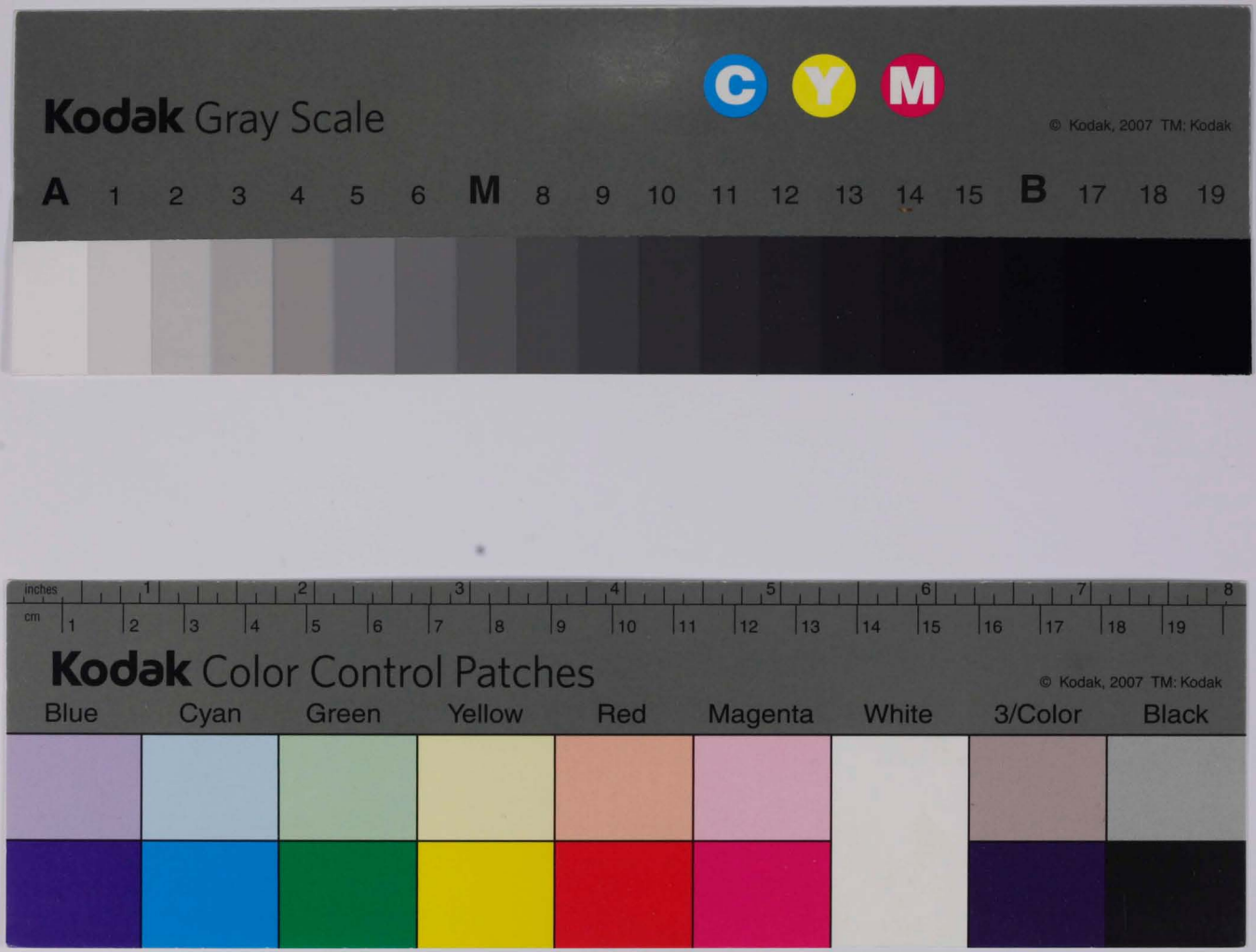
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