THE LOST LODE. BY CHRISTIAN REID.

AND

STELLA'S DISCIPLINE. BY F. X. L.

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THE LOST LODE.

CHAPTER I.

FAR in the heart of the great Sierras that in wild and austere majesty stretch their length of tossed and broken heights along the western coast of Mexico lies the Espiritu Santo Mine. It is a mine with a wonderful history—the history of a bonanza running through more than a century, of powerful families created and enriched by its wealth, and of a flourishing town, which built upon its prosperity, fell into decay with its failure. For there came a day when even the Espiritu Santo failed. The great bonanza, which had lasted for a length of time almost unexampled even in Mexican mines, disappeared at length. Whether it was finally worked out, or whether it had only been lost, as lodes are often lost, no one could say. It was in the terrible period which the people call "the times of the revolution" that the ore ceased to pay; and in this era of confusion and blood-shed, of suffering and distress, financial collapse in all forms was too common to excite surprise or comment. It seemed altogether a thing to be expected that the great silver lode of the Espiritu Santo should have failed at this time. Had it not failed, there was then neither money nor men to work it. The money was taken by forced levies, for the support of armies and revolutionary leaders, the men died by thousands on obscure battlefields where the land was drenched in the blood of its sons.

And so, for many years, the great and once famous mine was left deserted, water rose unchecked in its dark tunnels, from whence the value of a kingdom's ransom had been drawn; and no one was bold enough to attempt to touch it. Even after the long throes of revolution were over and something like peace descended upon the exhausted land, men were too impoverished and too afraid of risking what yet remained to them, to think of the Espiritu Santo Mine. For in this case the Mexican proverb, "*Una mina quiere otra mina*" ("One mine wants another mine" to furnish means to work it), was especially true. To drain the mine and to explore its deep workings for the lost lode of fabulous richness would require a large capital—a capital so large, in fact, that no single man was likely to furnish it, and the only hope for a renewed working was in the organization of a company.

This being well known, every one was astonished when Fernando Sandoval "denounced" the mine; for nothing was a more indisputable fact than that Fernando neither had nor could command means to work it. He belonged to a family that in former times had owned a large interest and grown rich from its profits. But those riches had now taken wings, for in Mexico as in other countries, the case of the bottom rail finding itself on the top, and vice versa, was a frequent practical result of the wars. The family Sandoval were now very poor. They, who had once counted their territory by leagues rather than by acres, were now reduced to one small estate in the beautiful valley over which frowned the rugged heights and passes of the mountains within whose great purple clefts lay the opening of the mine from which they had once derived so much wealth.

It was perhaps because it lay there, dominating the poverty in which he spent his life with the suggestion of untold riches, that Fernando, the eldest son of the family, felt his heart burning with a discontent very unusual in one of his people, who, as a rule, accept the alterations of fortune with oriental stoicism. Or perhaps the fact that he wished very much to marry and could not afford to do so caused him to think by day and night of the lost lode, and to speculate upon the chances of finding it. For he knew well that unless he could reach fortune by some shortcut the soft, dark eyes of his cousin Guadalupe would never be allowed to smile for him. She was an orphan, dwelling beneath his father's roof and subject entirely to the control of his parents, who, although they had given her a home and love and kindness, when the cruel changes of war had in early childhood left her orphaned and penniless, would certainly never consent to his marrying her unless he could prove his right to do so by making money enough to enable him to do as he pleased.

But how was this to be accomplished? It is not an easy task, even in a country where opportunities for money-making abound, but in a country impoverished by revolutions, with few industries, few avenues to wealth, it becomes an almost insoluble problem. So Fernando found it, and so his thoughts turned more and more towards the romantic stories which abound in Mexico of sudden wealth yielded by the mines that from the days of Cortez to our own have surpassed in richness all others in the world. If he could but find again the lost lode of the Espiritu Santo! He began to haunt the deserted mine, to descend as far as he could into it, to gaze with passionate longing at the depths of still water that covered the old workings. Somewhere, somewhere there down there must lie the lost lode! He felt it with an intensity and a certainty that was like a consuming passion. For money to drain those dark waters and search untiringly until the lode was found, what would he not give or do! But money for such investment he neither had nor could possibly obtain. And this being so, it was necessary to put his wits to work and endeavor to accomplish by other means the end on which he had set his heart.

About this time he began to correspond with a friend in the City of Mexico, a lawyer known to have business dealings with certain English companies. The result of the correspondence was that one day Fernando went to the Mining Deputation and denounced the Espiritu Santo Mine, thus becoming its owner after the formalities of the law were complied with, but bound by law to do a certain amount of work within a certain limit of time, or to forfeit his title, in which case the mine would again revert to the state and be again open to denouncement, as the process of acquiring title is called.

It was then that his friends and acquaintances began to wonder what Fernando meant to do. They were not long left in doubt. Soon two foreigners appeared on the scene, who inspected the mine as far as inspection was possible, and then took a bond upon it. Men were at once placed at work, although no work of any real importance was possible until the mine was drained; for which purpose a powerful modern pump was necessary. In the course of a few months this arrived, the engine was put up, and soon the water of the mine was pouring in a flood through the mouth of the tunnel which was the chief entrance into it, and flowing tumultuously down the steep *arroyo* of the mountain-side.

Following upon this, a new person arrived on the scene—a young Englishman who, it was understood, was to take charge of the work now that there would be something of importance to be done. He did not seem very much like one who would stimulate or hasten work, this dark, languid young man, who, except in manner and speech, had no appearance of an Englishman; but since he carried half the alphabet after his name, in token that he belonged to half a dozen scientific societies, it is to be supposed that the new owners of the Espiritu Santo knew what they were about in sending him to look after their interests. That he was the son of one of them had perhaps as much bearing upon the case as the scientific initials; but neither fact impressed Fernando Sandoval with much belief in his practical ability. Although he did not smile when he saw him, for a Mexican has the impassive calm of an Indian together with the stately dignity of a Spaniard, he certainly thought that this bored-looking fine gentleman, with his sleepy eyes, his

English drawl, and admirably-cut London clothes, would not be likely either to find the lost lode himself, or to interfere seriously with certain plans already matured in his (Sandoval's) mind regarding it.

CHAPTER II.

THE house of La Providencia, the small estate of the Sandoval family, stands on a gentle eminence hardly large enough to be called a hill, behind which, at the distance of about half a mile, rises abruptly the steep, serrated mountain range, and before which extends the level lands of the flourishing but now decayed town that dates its era of prosperity according to the length of time when the Espiritu Santo Mine was " in bonanza."

The *casa* of La Providencia looks naturally toward the town, and from the corridor, or arcade, that extends along the front of the house, any one with an appreciation for the beautiful in nature has a charming picture spread before the gaze. The lovely valley, smiling in fertility, stretches away for at least twenty miles, so that the mountains at the farther end are like the azure battlements of heaven. On each side the great encircling sierras extend—vast purple masses in the distance, rugged, dominating heights close at hand, with forests still standing in their deep clefts and gorges, but the slope of their immense shoulders bare and brown, save in the rainy season, when a beautiful mantle of green spreads over them. In the middle distance lies the town, apparently embowered in tropical foliage, above which rises the noble tower of the church, a perfect picturesque object, as all Mexican churches are, outlined against a sky that burns ever with the blue intensity of a jewel. Broad, white roads lead from the town in various directions, and along one of these roads about four o'clock one afternoon the young English superintendent of the Espiritu Santo Mine was riding.

He did not look amiable as he walked his horse along a foot-path at the side of the road, to avoid the suffocating clouds of white dust which every step on the highway raised. He was a very foreign figure, despite the broad Mexican hat he wore to shield himself from the sun; and as he let the reins fall carelessly on his horse's neck and gazed with sombre eyes across the valley, over which, on the western side, broad, deep shadows were already lying, an observer could hardly have failed to see that he was a very dissatisfied man indeed.

And certainly, in Mr. Cecil Vyner's opinion, he had every reason for dissatisfaction. To be summarily exiled from the only life worth living—that of London in its season of gaiety and fashion—and sent, not to some foreign city where there would at least be a few social distractions, but a remote Mexican village where he was thrown literally and completely upon his own resources, and where, possessing very few of these resources, he was almost ready to cut his throat from *ennui*, was surely enough to account for the gloom of his face and the depression of his spirits. He was inwardly cursing his fate, his father, and last, but certainly not least, the Espiritu Santo Mine, as he rode along the sunlit valley, which to other eyes might have borne the aspect of a paradise, but to him was more repugnant than a desert. There was but one ray of hope before him. If he could find the lost lode his father would be so much pleased that he might condone the financial extravagance which had outraged him; and he (Vyner) might be recalled from exile and restored to the life he loved and the woman he fancied he adored. But the realization of this hope seemed to him vague and distant. He looked with lowering brows at the great deep gash in the mountain where the opening to the mine lay, and was possessed with a sense of impotent rage as he thought of the baffling secret which it held. So another man had often looked and longed, feeling as Vyner felt now, that if he could not soon wrest that secret from nature's dark depths, the woman he loved might be placed for ever beyond his reach.

But, though he might look at it with rage in his heart, it was not to the mine that the young Englishman was bound this afternoon. When he reached the gates through which a road

passed from the highway into the lands of La Providencia, he turned and entered them. Riding through wide fields, just now bare from the garnered harvest, he presently reached the gentle hill on which the house stood, and passing through another gate, surrounded by the small, dark huts of the laborers employed on the estate, rode up a sloping road to the corridor that, with its picturesque arches, overlooked the valley.

A girl seated in the shade of this corridor, with some fine needlework in her hands, had observed him ever since he turned from the highway into the fields. There was not much interest in her observation, for she knew very well who he was, and that he had a right of way across the lands of the hacienda to the mine in the heights beyond. She supposed that he was bound to the latter place until his horse's hoofs striking on the stony hillside told her that he was, instead, coming to the house. A minute later he reined up before her and uncovered.

"Good-day, señorita," he said in sufficiently fluent Spanish. "Will you do me the favor to tell me where I can find Señor Don Fernando Sandoval?" Then to himself he added, "What a beautiful girl!"

And indeed it could only have been a blind man who did not perceive the beauty of the face looking up into his—a face with purely outlined features of almost classical delicacy, large dark eyes of singular sweetness, set under the midnight shadow of sweeping lashes and perfect brows, a complexion like ivory in its softness and smoothness, a mouth of noble beauty, and rich hair waving in curling tendrils around a forehead that in proportion and form was one of the most charming features of the countenance. And with this lovely countenance were united a clear directness of gaze untinged by coquetry, and a simplicity and grace of bearing without the faintest trace of self-consciousness. All over the Mexican land, in lowest as in highest, one finds this simplicity and grace; but Vyner had never before been so struck with it as in this girl, who, seated under the shadow of what was little more than a farmhouse, answered him with the quiet courtesy of a young princess:

"I am sorry, señor, but Don Fernando is not at home. When he rose from his siesta he went out into the fields and has not returned. Pancho"—she turned to a small boy who emerged from some inner region—" do you know when Fernando will return?"

Pancho shook his head, which was covered with a mop-like growth of thick black hair. "No," he answered, "Fernando went out to the *vaqueros*, who are branding the calves. I wished much to go," he added in a tone of personal injury, "but I had no horse and Fernando would not take me behind him. He took Manuel instead."

The girl looked at the stranger. "It is very far, señor," she said, "to the place where the *vaqueros* have the cattle. If my cousin has gone there, he will not return until late, and it is not likely that you can see him to-day; but his father, Don Ignacio, is at home, if you would like to see him."

"I will go and tell him," said Pancho without waiting for a reply, and he darted into the house.

Vyner had no desire to see Don Ignacio, but the matter seemed taken out of his hands by the prompt action of the boy, and after all, when a man has nothing better to do, why should he not pause in grateful shade on a warm afternoon, and please his eyes by the sight of the most beautiful face he has seen for many days? Certainly the eyes in question remained fastened upon the face with a persistence which might have unsettled the composure of an older woman, but that had apparently no effect upon this Mexican girl.

"You will descend from your horse, señor, and sit down until my uncle comes?" she said; and then, with the graceful, oriental gesture common in the country, she clapped her hands.

A *mozo*, who looked like a bronze statue dressed in white cotton cloth and girded with a red sash, appeared, took the horse and led him away, while Vyner, entering the brick-paved corridor, the floor of which was on a level with the ground, sat down on one of the chairs of bamboo and leather placed there. Now for the first time he looked away from the girl over the

wide, beautiful picture which the arches framed, and for the first time he saw and felt the loveliness of the natural scenes around him.

"You have a charming situation here, señorita," he said. "This view of the valley and mountains is superb. Do you not admire it?"

She hesitated a moment before replying. It had never occurred to her to think whether she admired it or not. It was part of her life—almost of herself—this picture which since her earliest youth had been spread before her eyes in unchanging beauty, "Yes, it is fine—one can see all the valley from here," she said after a moment. "The señor likes our valley?"

The señor shrugged his shoulders. "It is very beautiful," he said, "but one cannot live on natural beauty—at least *I* can't. One wants a little society—a few friends. I am a stranger here, you know, and I find it very lonely," Had he been speaking in his own language, he would have added in words, as in his thoughts, "and beastly dull"; but the stately Spanish tongue does not lend itself readily to English slang, so his statement remained incomplete so far as his own sentiments were concerned—though more likely to appeal to the sympathy of his companion.

And the liquid eyes were full of this sympathy as they regarded him. He looked so oppressed by the loneliness of which he spoke, as he sat gazing out over the Arcadian valley, with its magical mountain walls; and, like all women, this girl was easily touched by the sight of unhappiness. "But is it necessary for you to be lonely?" she said. "You speak our language very well, and our people are glad to welcome strangers who come with friendly feelings toward us."

Vyner might have answered very truly that the friendly feelings were non-existent in his case, for with true Anglo-Saxon arrogance he regarded the people as belonging to an inferior race, and up to the present moment had not been troubled with the faintest desire to know any of those who inhabited this remote spot. But now things began to wear a slightly different aspect. It might be worth while to know the Sandovals, if only for the privilege of looking now and then at the lovely face before him. "You are very kind, señorita," he answered. "No doubt your people would be friendly enough—although we really have not much in common, you know—but I have not up to this time cared to make acquaintances. Now, however—"

He paused abruptly, for at this moment Don Ignacio stepped out of the house. A tall, stalwart figure, with a deeply bronzed face, clearly-cut features and piercing dark eyes, he looked what he was—a man born to wealth and command, consigned by adverse fate to poverty and obscurity, and grown somewhat morose under a discipline which, as a general rule, only benefits sweet and noble natures. A mass of iron-gray hair stood up straight from the square, olive forehead, and a short moustache, also partially gray, covered the upper lip. His dress was somewhat shabby—the short Mexican jacket of black cloth which he wore, somewhat frayed and worn—but there was no mistaking that the man was a gentleman, and even Vyner, though he had no very keen perceptions to pierce below the outward aspect of things, had not the least doubt of it as he rose to meet him.

"It is the English señor from the mine, uncle," said the girl's soft voice. "He wishes to see Fernando."

"My name is Vyner," said the young man. "Your son, Don Fernando, knows me very well, señor. I have taken the liberty of calling to see him on a matter of business; and since he is not at home, the señorita suggested that I might see yourself."

"You are very welcome, señor," answered the grave Mexican with an air of stately courtesy. "My son has often spoken of you, and I am happy to know you. My house is yours. Will you not enter?"

He waved his hand toward the great open door of the house, but Vyner had no intention of leaving the attraction which had detained him; and he made a decided negative gesture.

"Pardon me," he said, "but I shall only detain you for a few minutes and it is very delightful here, if you will allow me to remain—"

"Pray be seated, then," said Don Ignacio with another wave of the hand; and when the visitor had resumed his seat, he sat down himself. The usual interchange of courtesies then

followed between the two men, while the girl relapsed into silence and devoted herself to the stitching in her hands, her dark lashes throwing a shadow on the soft ivory of her cheeks as she looked downward. Vyner's eyes wandered persistently toward her while he answered his host's remarks rather absently, and it was with a sense of pulling himself up that he presently observed abruptly:

"As I have said, señor, I called to see your son on business, and I shall be much obliged if you will do me the favor to deliver a message to him."

Don Ignacio bowed. "I am at your service, señor," he replied. "I will deliver to my son any message with which you do me the honor to entrust me."

"I wish," said Vyner, "to ask Don Fernando if it would be possible for him to take a position at the Espiritu Santo mine. My English foreman is leaving. He does not understand the men nor they him, and a continual conflict has been the result. I therefore think it better to supply his place with a Mexican who knows his people; and it occurred to me that perhaps Don Fernando might accept the position. He will be in control of everything—though subject, of course, to my direction—and the salary is a hundred dollars a month."

He paused, and he judged rightly enough the character of the man before him not to be surprised that the dark brows knitted slightly over the deep-set eyes. Evidently it was not pleasant to Don Ignacio that his son should be asked to serve as a servant where he himself had once commanded as a master; but the courtesy of his manner did not change as he answered:

"I will deliver your message to my son, señor; but you will permit me to remind you that practically he knows little of mining. Let me suggest that in Guanajuato or some other mining town you could easily find some one trained to the business, who would serve your purpose much better."

"Not at all," answered Vyner with positiveness. "I do not need a man of very special training, because I shall direct the work myself. All that I want is some one who will see that my orders are carefully executed, and who will understand the men and manage them without difficulty. Your son will certainly be able to do these things; and I shall be much obliged if you will ask him to take my offer into consideration, and let me know his decision as soon as possible."

The Mexican bent his head. "I will tell him all you have said," he answered briefly.

"He knows where to find me in the town down there," said Vyner, nodding toward the embowered church-tower, "and I should be very happy, señor, if you would do me the favor of considering my house there as your own."

The reply was what would naturally follow in such a case, elaborate acknowledgement and an assurance of unlimited hospitality on the part of La Providencia. Vyner answered suitably, and then rose: there was no longer an excuse for lingering. Don Ignacio offered chocolate, and when it was declined, clapped his hands, at which signal *mozo* and horse promptly reappeared. Vyner walked over and offered his hand to the girl, who again lifted her dark, sweet eyes to his.

"*Adiós*, señorita, and many thanks," he said.

As he rode away the smile with which she answered simply, "*Adiós*, señor," seemed to linger with him like the perfume of a flower.

CHAPTER III.

It was on the same corridor several hours later, when the violet sky overhead was thickset, with myriads of shining stars, and the wide outspread landscape was no more than a shadowy suggestion of mountains and plain, that Fernando said to his cousin:

"My opportunity has come at last, Guadalupe. I thought that it would if I had patience enough to wait."

Guadalupe did .not answer for a moment. In the soft obscurity he could not see more than the outlines of her face; but her voice was a little thoughtful when she spoke:

"What do you mean by your opportunity, Fernando? Is it so much to you to have this position in the mine?"

He laughed shortly, a laugh which jarred as it struck on the girl's ear. "Yes," he answered, "it is much to me to have this position; but not for the sake of its paltry remuneration. My father is right about that. It would ill become a Sandoval to take a servant's place for a little money. But when a great amount of money—millions it may be—is at stake, then it is worth while to humiliate one's self for a time in order to triumph later. This is what he does not know. But you, Guadalupe, *you* must understand why I take the opportunity which this foreigner has put into my hand, and accept the place he offers."

The girl seemed to shrink a little in the depths of the chair in which she sat. Again there was a moment's pause before she spoke, and when she did her voice had a curious ring of hesitation in it. "No," she said, "I do not understand why this position should mean so much to you, or how—how, Fernando *mio*, you can serve both your own interest and that of the man who will employ and trust you."

"You are dull, then, Guadalupe, or is it that you do not wish to understand?" said Fernando a little harshly. "You know that I live but for one object, to find the lost lode of the Espiritu Santo Mine, because to find that means to win *you*. For a year past I have thought by day and dreamed by night of nothing else; and I have laid my plans well. This foreigner will never find the lode. He is not only a fool where mining is concerned, with all his assumption of science, but—well, there are other reasons, which I need not tell you, why he will never find it. At last he and the men who have sent him here will grow weary, they will abandon the mine, their costly machinery will be sold for anything it will bring. I will buy it, denounce the mine afresh, open the lode, and we are rich once more, and you are mine—mine for ever, Guadalupe!"

He put out his hand under cover of the darkness and seized hers in a strong, close clasp. What was there in the touch that seemed to suddenly fill her soul with a rush of pity and of the love which the moment before his words had chilled and shocked? The hand which touched hers was like the hand of a man in burning fever—hot and dry, with a pulse that throbbed passionately. It seemed to tell her to what a pitch of hardly accountable excitement the man was strung. She laid her other cool, soft hand upon it, and spoke with a tenderness that an instant earlier would have been impossible to her.

"I am yours forever, whether poverty or riches lie before us, Fernando. But I had far rather it were poverty than riches bought at the price of treachery. No, do not take your hand away! Listen to me—to me who love you—for one moment! You have thought of this lost lode until you are not yourself. You are like a man possessed by an evil spirit that will lead you to deeds that must stain your soul, if you do not pause. O Fernando! think of it no more. Keep faith with those to whom you have sold this mine. Let them find the lode if they can. It is enough if we have the price you have asked for the mine. You can gain no more with a clear conscience and an undefiled soul. Do not go near that mine where temptation lies in wait for you. O my love, my love! listen to me. Do not take the position this man offers, I beg, I pray you, Fernando—"

Her voice failed under the influence of the feeling which her own pleading seemed to intensify. Her tones were very low, but they thrilled with a passion of entreaty, and her small hands clasped his with a compelling force, as if she would constrain him to hear and to heed. Love has sometimes a wonderful illuminating power, and one old in the knowledge of life and sin could have felt no more strongly than this girl, in her youth and ignorance, that the man beside her stood in deadly temptation. Was it possible that her voice—the voice he loved so well—could fail to draw him from it?

Alas! in all ages is not the story told that angels, in one form or another, have pleaded in vain with men when their hearts and minds were set toward the glamour of evil ? For an instant Fernando's purpose wavered, but the next moment it was like steel again. Much as he loved

Guadalupe, what was she but a woman, a girl, full of foolish scruples and unfit to counsel a man in the serious affairs of life? He had made a mistake in speaking to her of matters beyond her comprehension. It was for a man to fight the world and win fortune with whatever weapons should seem to him best, and for a woman to accept the results without inquiry, submissive to his higher wisdom. So when he spoke there was a certain hardness in his tone that struck on her passionate mood like ice- water on heated metal.

"I see that you do not understand me, Guadalupe, and it is best that we should talk of this no further. Every man has a right to do the best that he can for his own interest. I am doing no more. If these blundering foreigners serve me without intending to do so, I am not to blame for that. Nor yet am I to blame if I take advantage of their ignorance and stupidity."

"You are deceiving yourself, Fernando," said Guadalupe sadly. "You are to blame if you should bind yourself to serve their interest, and instead you should betray it and serve your own. What would you say of another man who acted in that manner? And even now, I fear—oh! forgive me that I must say it—I fear that you are trying to gain your end by means that neither your honor nor your conscience can approve."

"That is enough," said Fernando angrily drawing his hand from her soft detaining clasp. "You insult me, you do not trust me, you can have no love for me. When a woman loves a man all that he does is right in her eyes, she thinks only of his interest, not of that of any other man; but *you*, what do you know of love?"

"So much that I would die for you, Fernando, willingly, gladly," she said, clasping her hands, and bending toward him. "But to see you do what is dishonorable in the eyes of men, and a sin in the eyes of God, how could I love you and not try with all my strength to hold you back from that?"

"If you loved me you would believe that I know best what is right," he said with passionate arrogance.

There was a moment's silence. Then, "Should I?" she asked with a quivering intonation. "I think not, Fernando; for how can any human love alter the laws of God, the laws that bind us to justice and truth? They do not depend on what you or I may think or feel toward each other, those laws. They are fixed forever, like the stars yonder, to guide us both."

Her voice dropped with the last word, and it was now Fernando's turn to be silent for a moment. Like many another man, he was angered by the opposition of the one being on whom he felt he had a right to count for support in any event. The truths which Guadalupe uttered he did not wish to hear from any one; but they were especially offensive coming from her; for he desired to deceive himself as far as practicable, and he desired her aid in doing so. He had not reckoned on the strength of integrity in that girl's nature, nor the living force which certain commandments, that he had trained himself to regard lightly enough, had for her. She was the only confidante whom he could allow himself, and he had followed an irresistible impulse in speaking to her freely; but he saw now that he must deny himself this solace, and wear a mask for her as for all the rest of the world.

"You do me great injustice," he said at length, and, despite his efforts, he could not keep a tone of sullenness out of his voice. "I am not so treacherous and dishonorable as you think. If I take the position offered me in the mine, I shall not betray any interests confined to me. My father tells me that Señor Vyner simply wishes some one to execute his orders. That I can do with a clear conscience, for I wish I were as sure of Paradise as I am that he will never find the lost lode. Now we will speak of this no more."

And indeed Guadalupe's name was at this moment called by a voice—that of her aunt—which she had no alternative but to obey promptly. "I come," she answered, and then rising, bent for an instant over Fernando as he remained seated, put both hands on his shoulders so that the sweetness of her presence seemed to envelop him, kissed him lightly on the forehead, and was gone.

She did not see him again that night, and when she asked for him the next morning one of the younger boys said that he had ridden away at daylight, without telling any one where he was going. Guadalupe sighed. Was he angry with her, or did he only mean to avoid her, fearing farther words concerning their difference? She said to herself that he need have no such fear. She had wisdom enough to perceive clearly that no words of hers had power to move him; and there was a great and unusual capability of reticence in the girl. Some day, perhaps, the opportunity would come to speak again with more effect—until then, with the deep, simple piety of her race, she could only pray.

CHAPTER IV.

Meanwhile Fernando had indeed ridden away early, before the sun appeared above the eastern mountains. The cool freshness of the dawn—never in this high region without an accompanying chill—was grateful to his fevered senses; for all night long he had tossed and turned, beset by troubled visions, and with the pulsating excitement that had been increased rather than lessened by her words. Again and again he waked from dreams in which he stood in the dark chambers of the mine beside the shining metal of the lost lode, but with Guadalupe's face and hand, like a forbidding angel's, warning him back. It was a relief to shake off such visions, to rise from his couch, mount his horse in the sharp, clear freshness of the morning, and ride away. The indescribable coolness and purity of the air seemed to quiet the fever of his brain, and lay a calming touch upon his nerves. His thoughts took more definite shape, and his face set itself in resolute lines, as he turned his horse's head toward the town.

The marvelous glow of color which heralded the sunrise had faded by the time he entered the long, oriental-like streets, lined by close-barred, flat-roofed houses, and saw the beautiful church-tower gilded by the first rays of sunlight. Birds were wheeling in and out of its open arches, and bells with clashing peal were calling men to worship God; but Fernando paid as little heed to the last as to the first. With averted face he rode quickly by the church, and took his way down the straight street toward a part of the town which, having been the site of the original Aztec village, was still altogether inhabited by Indians. It was called the Ciénega (or swampy place) from the fact that it lay somewhat lower than the town, and was therefore in less need of irrigation, from which resulted a luxurious growth of vegetation—so that the low adobe houses were embowered in tropical shade, and the gardens and fields stretching behind them were covered with a rich, deep green that was to be seen nowhere else during the dry season.

Before one of the small, dark habitations which bordered the road, Fernando drew up his horse, just as a woman appeared in the low doorway. The level rays of sunshine fell over her tall, straight figure, and made her bare neck and arms—for she wore only the cotton skirt and white *camiseta* common among the lower orders—gleam like polished bronze, while no more purely Aztec face ever met the gaze of the first conquerors of Mexico.

"Good day, Caterina," said the young man. "I want to see the *viejecito*, Rosalio. Is he at home?"

"Yes, señor," the woman answered, "he is in the house. I will call him to you unless you will do us the honor to enter." And no great lady could have invited a guest within by a more graceful gesture.

"Thanks," said Fernando. "I prefer to see him within, if you can send some one to my horse—"

"At once, señor." She turned, and a moment later a boy appeared, to whom, with a word of caution, Fernando tossed his bridle-rein, and entered the dwelling. It was a single apartment, with a floor of hard and clean-swept earth, and passing through, the young man emerged into an enclosure behind, surrounded by one or two shed-like rooms and an adobe wall, along which

cacti were creeping, and over which drooped heavy masses of plume-like foliage. Here he found an old man, spare and wiry of frame, as the elders of his race almost invariably are, with a skin like dried leather, but an eye full of brightness and intelligence, who was seated in a corner, under the shade of the projecting roof of bamboo-sticks and tiles, plaiting straw to be fashioned into the large, coarse sombreros worn by laborers.

"Ah, Rosalio, how goes it with you?" cried the young man cheerily, as soon as he perceived this figure.

"Very well, señor, that I may serve you," answered the *viejecito*, rising and evidently in no doubt who his visitor might be. "Sit down, señor, sit down"—offering his chair. "You are early on the road."

"It is necessary, for I have much to do," Fernando answered as he sat down in the offered chair. "I have come to see you again about the Espiritu Santo Mine," he went on quickly, looking up at the dark old face. "No one knows as much of it as you do, Rosalio, for I think you are the last of those who worked it in the time of the great bonanza."

"There is no other here of whom I know, señor," the old man answered. "Yes, I worked there in the days when silver was pouring out like a river; but that was long ago, before the times of fighting."

"So long ago," said Fernando, "that I know not where to find another man who has seen with his own eyes the great *veta madre*. And now I want you, Rosalio, to tell me exactly where it lay when you saw it last."

He was not looking up now, so he did not see how keen the light in the dark eyes suddenly became; but Rosalio paused for a moment, as if for consideration, before he answered. Then, "How can I tell you that, señor, when you do not know the mine?" he asked slowly.

"I know it quite well already, and I shall soon know it better," Fernando replied. "I am going to take charge of the work, and I wish to know where to seek for the lost lode."

"You!—you are going to work the mine!" the old man said with astonishment. "And you wish to find the *veta madre* for the strangers who possess it now?"

"Perhaps," said Fernando drily. "At least I wish to know where lies the best prospect of finding it; and I will pay well for the information, if you can give it to me."

There was a farther pause, and then the old man squatted down on the ground beside the chair, and looked into his visitor's face with an expression which made the heart of the latter for a moment almost cease beating, so full of meaning was it.

"Señor," said the old miner gravely, "it will be well if you speak plainly to me. It has not been long since you came and paid me to give no hint of what I knew to those who are now working the mine. If they found the great lode of themselves, you said, it was well; but there was no reason why we should give information to help them to it. I could guess your reasons for this very well; and, even had I not been able to do so, your money was good, and I have held my tongue—although, indeed, I have not been without thought that the señor gringo might pay me even better for what I know."

"You old traitor!" muttered Fernando, not without a rising fear lest that thought might have been acted upon, "I have no doubt of it."

"But," Rosalio went on, without heeding these half-inaudible words, "now you come to tell me that you wish to learn all that I know, in order to find the vein for these foreigners. It is hard to understand, señor."

"What concern of yours is it to attempt to understand it?" Fernando demanded haughtily. "If I pay you, is not that enough?"

The old man shook his head. "No, it is not enough, señor," he replied. "For I must not only be paid for what I can tell now, but I must have a share in that vein when it is found; and therefore I must deal with the man who will find *and own it*."

The young eyes and the old ones met for a minute, and the latter did not quail before the angry light which shone in the former. The steady gaze of those keen bright orbs was indeed the

thing which told Fernando that the old Indian held him in his power. Whatever his terms, they must be acceded to, or else he might carry to Vyner a tale that would sweep away all hope of his (Fernando's) ever finding the great lost lode. So, his resolve was quickly taken—Rosalio must know all, and be so closely bound by chains of interest that treachery would become impossible. Therefore it was with a strong effort to control himself that he spoke:

"Whether you understand me or not, at least I understand you, Rosalio—and that very well. And if what you can tell proves to be of real value, you shall have your terms; for when that vein is found, I or no other man, will be its owner. I wish to know where to look for it, in order that it may not be found at present. Now tell me all that you know, and I will give you a hundred dollars for the information."

"Five hundred, señor, no less," the other answered calmly, "because I do not boast, but speak the truth, when I say that I know where the *veta madre* may be found. There are tales that it came to an end, that the ore no longer paid. That is not true. Those tales were spread to save the mine in times of danger; and I was one of the three men who covered up the lode and blockaded the passages that led to it. We were sworn never to betray the secret; but all are dead now save me, both of those who ordered and those who did the work; so there is no further reason why I should keep the oath. And I have only waited to find who will be likely to pay the most for what I can tell."

"If this be true," said Fernando, who had grown very pale, there is no need of your information. We have only to clear out all the old passages and workings until we find the vein where you left it."

The old man made an indifferent gesture with his hands and shoulders. "Try," he said, laconically, "and when you have failed you will be glad to come to Rosalio. We did not do our work by halves."

"And if I believe you, and, to save time and labor, pay even the price you ask for what you can tell, are you sure enough of yourself to be certain that in all these years you have forgotten nothing?"

"Nothing!" was the firm answer. "It is clearer here"—he touched his head—"than things which happened yesterday. I have asked the men now working in the mine where they are seeking the lode, and I smiled when they told me. For they will never find it there."

"I am sure of that," said Fernando, "and it is because I wish to remain sure of it that I go into the mine. Now, understand that this is but the beginning of things between us. I will come again, and then we will arrange everything. Meanwhile take this"—there was the click of Silver—"and be as silent as if thou, too, were dead like the rest."

"I have been silent for thirty years," the old Indian answered with dignity, "and it is not likely I shall speak now without good reason."

This was so true that Fernando felt he had nothing to fear as he rode away from the door of the humble dwelling that sheltered so good a secret. And now to see Vyner! But, knowing that gentleman was not likely to be astir so early, he went to the home of a friend, breakfasted, and two hours later presented himself at the door of the house where the young Englishman had his quarters.

These were as luxurious as they could be made in such a place, and with the limited means of transportation at command. Vyner had rented one of the best houses in the town, and brought, in ox-carts, and on mule-back, the furniture which filled his rooms, from a city more than a hundred miles distant. From a flowery patio, surrounded by brick-paved, tile-roofed corridors, Fernando was shown into a *sala* the floor of which was covered with rugs, while easy-chairs and couches were placed about carelessly in a manner strange to Mexican eyes, tables were covered with books and papers, and extended in a long, cane chair by one of these, smoking and reading, was Vyner himself.

He looked up, threw down his paper, and rose with a cordial air when he saw who was his visitor. It struck Fernando that never had the usually languid and supercilious man met him so graciously before.

"Ah, Señor Sandoval," he said, "I am very glad to see you. Pray be seated, and let me offer you some refreshment after your ride."

"Many thanks, señor," Fernando replied, with the courteous gesture of the hand which signifies a negative; "I have just breakfasted. I was unfortunate in being absent from home when you called to see me yesterday, but my father delivered your message to me, and so I am here."

"To tell me, I hope, that you will accept my proposal," said Vyner. "Pray take a cigar. I can recommend them as good. I am well aware," he went on, after the cigar had been accepted, "that I may have seemed a little presumptuous in making such a proposal. But you have an interest in the mine almost as great as ours; for unless we can find the value promised, we shall not, of course, purchase it; and so it occurred to me that you might be willing to do anything that you could to insure success."

Fernando's throat seemed a little husky, so that he could not reply at once; but after a moment he answered that it was certainly very much to his interest that the present owners should succeed in working the mine, and that his best efforts were at their service to assist in securing that success.

"I had no doubt of it," said Vyner, "and therefore I offered you a position which under other circumstances I am aware that it would hardly be worth your while to accept. But, since our interest lies in the same direction, we must work together to win success as soon as possible. My people in London are urging me to find the *veta madre*, and I am sparing no effort to do so; but I need a Mexican to superintend the work, one who will understand and can manage the men, and whose interest, like my own, is to discover the lost lode as speedily as possible. Therefore I have applied to you."

Perhaps Fernando had never felt until now how difficult was the part he had undertaken to play; for it is one thing to plot treachery, and another to execute it in the face of trust. Blinded by passionate, overmastering desire, he had not thought of all the dissimulation and double-dealing involved in the course upon which he had entered. For one moment he hesitated. Even yet it was not too late; he might still decline to enter into this man's service, though keeping his own counsel regarding what he knew. Guadalupe's imploring eyes rose before him, but so strangely are human hearts constituted, that it was her image which steeled his wavering resolve. No, the road upon which he had entered was the road that led to her; and he would take it, no matter through what dark ways of deception it led, even though the foul fiend stood at the end! But in order to excuse his hesitation he said:

"There is one obstacle to my accepting the position you offer, señor I have no practical knowledge of mining."

"That is not necessary," Vyner replied, as he had already replied to the same objection from Ignacio. "I shall direct the work; you will only be required to see that my orders are faithfully executed."

A gleam came into Fernando's eyes. "You are sure that I shall have no responsibility, that no direction of the work will be thrown upon me?" he inquired.

"Not the least," Vyner answered. "Set your mind at rest on that point. I allow no one else to direct the work in a mine of which I am in charge. I shall indicate where the work is to be done, and you will see that it is done that is all."

"Then I accept the position," said the young man in a clear, resolute tone. "If I am to have no responsibility, if no direction rests with me, there is no reason why I should hesitate longer. Señor Vyner, consider me in your service"

CHAPTER V.

AND so it came to pass that, much to the surprise of his friends and acquaintances who, in Mexico as in other parts of the world, are prone to interest themselves in what does not concern them Fernando Sandoval went into the Espiritu Santo Mine as its manager, subject to Mr. Vyner. It is unnecessary to dwell upon the comments that passed freely from lip to lip, or upon the taciturn but unmistakable disapproval of his father; for the young man paid absolutely no heed to these things. A change had come over him as every one felt and not a few remarked. Once full of frank friendliness to all the world, a good comrade and pleasant companion, he was now become what the people characterize as "*corto*"—short in speech, reserved in manner, and with an air of almost moody preoccupation on his handsome face. "He is like a man under a spell," some of them said, and indeed it was the most potent spell known to earth, that had been laid upon him—the spell of an overwhelming desire for the gold which brings all things, and the possession of which, in this as in many another case, could only be compassed by the loss of honor and peace of conscience.

In these days even Guadalupe's sweet dark eyes appealed to him in vain. Ever since the night on which she had spoken so freely to him a cloud had lain between them which the girl strove in vain to lift. If not his heart, at least his mind and his purposes were locked away from her. Save for what he had in a measure revealed that night, his intentions were as much a mystery to her as to any one else—a mystery at least as far as the means by which he proposed to meet his end were concerned; but of the nature of that end she had not a moment's doubt. Many women would have deceived themselves on this point, many more would have acted on the opinion that a man's business did not concern them, and that it was more convenient not to know of methods which conscience might possibly be forced to condemn, and which would perhaps interfere with the enjoyment of results when obtained. But such convenient sophistry and blindness were not possible to this girl. She not only loved the man with a simplicity and directness of passion unknown to more complicated natures, but the very greatness of her love enabled her to see where he was weakest, and to lend an agonized strength to her desire to save him. She knew, and she alone, in what temptation he stood, what peril to his honor and his soul. She could not approach him again with words unless he gave her the opportunity to do so; but her eyes pleaded with him ceaselessly; and he, reading their meaning well, turned impatiently from glances which he did not intend to heed.

But one person, at least, was very well satisfied with the state of affairs, and that was Vyner. He had no more trouble with his miners. Fernando managed them admirably, and there were no more frictions, no more complaints, threatened insubordination and loss of valuable men to irritate him. All things went smoothly now, his orders were executed with fidelity and despatch, and if after the lapse of a month, they were no nearer finding the lost lode than they had been at first, it was not for want of diligent work, money lavishly spent, and science applied in the most praise-worthy manner. The last, however, did not meet with the approval which no doubt it deserved, from the Mexicans. They who knew but one mode to work a mine, and that is to get at the metal in the shortest way possible, regarded with a wonder not unmixed with contempt the vast amount of what they considered useless work undertaken by the young Englishman on scientific principles. "The mine has never been worked at all," he remarked more than once to Sandoval. "It has been burrowed into, and a great deal of metal extracted, no doubt; but it has never been opened so as to be really worked to any advantage."

"It has only yielded about a hundred millions," said the Mexican calmly, "which looks as if it had been worked to very great advantage. But it is not our habit to put a fortune into a mine in extensive works before we take anything out."

"Unless a mine is well opened at the first, you can never tell where you are or what you have got. It is all a matter of chance, and you are liable to lose your lode any time as it has been

lost here," Vyner replied. "Now, when I strike the vein there will be no danger of loss. The lode will be found once for all."

"Yes," said Fernando. There was no sign of amusement on his impassive face. "And when do you think that you will find it?"

"Within the next fortnight," Vyner answered confidently. "I am certain that the vein lies exactly in the direction in which we are advancing, and when we reach it we shall find a large body of metal. Put as many men as possible on the work and press forward. I am growing very impatient to be able to report that I have found this lode, for the money expended in the work has been very considerable."

Fernando permitted himself a slight, sardonic smile as the other mounted his horse—they had been standing at the entrance of the mine—and rode away. "No doubt," he said to himself, "it has been considerable; and you may spend ten, twenty, a hundred times as much, and bore through the mountain, without finding what you seek. So much for your science!"

Comfortably unconscious of this contemptuous opinion, Vyner rode down the steep mountain-path and, when he reached the valley, took the short-cut across the lands of La Providencia. It had become his habit to stop now and then at the hacienda, where a courteous welcome always awaited him. He did not pretend to disguise to himself from what source his gratification in these visits was derived. Certainly it was not from his conversations with Don Ignacio—interesting as these might have proved to a different man—nor yet from the cup of chocolate Señora Sandoval was always ready to offer him. These things would not have tempted him even once to turn aside from his road and mount the hill on which the *casa* stood; but the chance of seeing Guadalupe did tempt him again and again. Had any one suggested that he was in love with her, he would only have smiled, for he thought that all possibilities of such passion had long since been exhausted in his nature, if indeed they had ever existed there. It was a sentiment very different from anything so primitive (he would have said) which bound him in the chains of a fascination not easily characterized to a woman in distant England; but this entanglement did not interfere in the least with the fancy which filled his vacant hours for the beautiful Mexican girl, and made his visits to La Providencia so frequent.

Not that it followed by any means that he always saw her on these visits. Indeed he could not flatter himself that he ever did see her except by accident, and an accident which was evidently a matter of absolute indifference to her. The tranquillity of her manner had never varied from that of the first day he had seen her; yet if there was any one for whom Guadalupe felt a sentiment closely approaching to repugnance, it was to this Englishman, who seemed to her to stand somewhat in the guise of Fernando's tempter—an unconscious tempter, it was true; but nevertheless one who had offered him an opportunity which else he might have lacked. Therefore his visits were anything but a pleasure to her, and she shrank out of sight whenever he entered the house, if such a thing were at all possible.

But on this afternoon it was not possible. Vyner was met by one of the young men—Don Ignacio's many sons were of all ages—and introduced at once into the house, although both the heads of the family chanced to be absent. It devolved upon Guadalupe therefore, who in the default of a daughter always took the place of one, to come and offer the *merienda*, or afternoon chocolate, to the guest. He accepted it, more for the pleasure of being served by her than for any other reason, and on a table in one corner of the corridor a frothy cup of the mild, sweet beverage was soon placed, together with a tray of bread and cakes. As Vyner dawdled over the collation, at which courtesy required that Guadalupe should bear him company, although Felipe, growing tired, soon found an excuse to vanish, he felt very well repaid for his ride, of which this had really been the objective point. The corridor, or gallery, on which he sat, extended on three sides of the open court around which the house was built, the fourth side being formed by a wall, through which a door led to the corrals beyond. Over this wall a vine, bearing great clusters of purple flowers, flung itself in wild luxuriance, forming a splendid mass of color; in the midst of the patio a tall palm-tree lifted its royal crown of plumy foliage far above the house; golden roses climbed

against the white pillars that supported the roof of the corridors, and as the afternoon breeze entered the court and stirred the leaves and blossoms, a waft of almost overpowering fragrance came to Vyner from a great straggling bush of heliotrope just before him. Never after did the odor of heliotrope reach him without conjuring up the foreign, picturesque scene—the sky of burning turquoise looking down into the court so full of tropical forms and colors; the wide, shaded galleries, with large, cool rooms opening upon them; the sounds of women's voices talking voluble Spanish in the kitchen, and the beautiful, delicate face of the girl who sat opposite him, with a *rebosa* of some silky material thrown lightly over her graceful head and flung in lines of perfect drapery across her shoulders. "What a picture she would make!" thought the young man, although there was little of the artist in his soul; and then he found himself wondering what was the meaning of the intent, almost wistful gaze which he met more than once in her eyes.

"You will allow me?" he said, taking out his cigar-case after having finally finished the cup of chocolate. "It is a charming characteristic of Mexican ladies that they never object to tobacco—and I cannot resist the pleasure of resting here a little longer. The ride to the mine is a fatiguing one."

"You found everything going well at the mine, I hope," she said with the wistfulness of glance he had already noted, and a hesitation of manner new to her. "And my cousin—he executes your orders according to your wishes?"

"Admirably," answered Vyner, who felt for once disposed to make himself amiable. "He is the most capable subordinate that I have ever had; understands at once what I wish done, and sees that my orders are executed promptly and faithfully. I shall always be grateful to Don Fernando for the relief from annoyance which he has secured to me," he added, turning his face aside to let out a delicate cloud of blue, fragrant smoke from between his lips.

Because his face was turned he did not see the swift expression that crossed Guadalupe's. In truth his words of praise for Fernando smote her with a hot sense of shame and reproach, as if herself had been a traitor; and these feelings were mirrored for an instant in her sensitive countenance. But she clasped her hands together tightly in her lap, under cover of the table, and spoke with her usual quietness:

"And the lost lode—is there a prospect that you will find it?"

He smiled. "It is only a question of time finding that," he said lightly. "It was lost because there was no scientific knowledge in the method of working the mine. We are approaching the spot where I expect to strike it; and in a few days I shall be able to report how much of the old, fabulous bonanza is left."

A flash of hope came into her eyes, giving them a sudden radiance that was not lost upon Vyner, though he wondered a little what he had said to account for it. Ah, if this were but true!—if the lost lode could be found! "*Madre de Dios*, grant that it may be so!" the girl whispered to herself. Whether Fernando had failed in his plans, or whether he had abandoned them, did not matter very much so long as the mercy of Heaven saved him from actual treachery and dishonor. A wonderful sweetness was in her face as she looked at Vyner.

"I hope that it may be so, señor," she said earnestly. "I trust that you may find the lode very soon. For you must be in much suspense until it is reached, not knowing if it has been exhausted or not. My cousin does not spare himself in your service," she added, glad not to shrink from mentioning Fernando's connection with the mine. "We hardly see him at all. Night as well as day he is at the mine."

"Don Fernando is very vigilant," said Vyner, "but I am not responsible for monopolizing so much of his time, señorita. Of late we have not been working in the mine at night."

He did not think of the significance his words might bear until he was startled by their effect upon her. The light died out of her eyes as suddenly as the flame of a candle is extinguished, and she turned pale to the lips. Vyner could not doubt that his information had dealt a blow—how deep he could only guess by the expression of her face. He saw at once that Fernando had cloaked absences from home by a pretext of work in the mine that did not exist; but why Guadalupe

should be so much concerned thereat he did not know. He was only sorry that he had so abruptly enlightened her.

"It is possible," he added, hesitating a little, in his doubt what to say, "that he may have been working some of the men at night without consulting me. He, too, is very anxious to find the lode."

"Yes," said Guadalupe. Her lips felt dry and stiff, as she uttered the word that seemed to her to contain a terrible irony of assent. Anxious to find the lode! *That*, then, was what Fernando was doing in the long nights when she had lain awake, listening vainly for his coming and praying for him. Her heart turned sick with the revulsion from the hope of a moment before, and she dropped her eyes that Vyner might not read in them the fear that filled her soul.

He read enough, however, to see that she was much disturbed, and that his pleasant hour was over. With a very sincere inward malediction upon Fernando, he rose to go. "There is some mystery," he thought, as he rode away. "That cousin of hers is after some mischief, which she suspects. But what is it to her?"

CHAPTER VI.

IN the strange chances of human affairs it is sometimes difficult to say what is due to accident, and what to that powerful yet seemingly blind influence which the ancients called Fate, and for which the moderns have found no better name; but it was apparently an accident, pure and simple, that turned Vyner's conjectures regarding Guadalupe, and her concern over her cousin's absence, into the channel of suspicion regarding the mine.

It was about an hour after he had left the hacienda, as he was nearing the town, riding slowly in the short but exquisite interval between sunset and nightfall, that he overtook a man walking with long, elastic steps by the side of the road, who turned and saluted him. Vyner knew him at once as one of the miners, whose stalwart frame and intelligent face he had often remarked, and in this idle moment there seemed nothing better to do than to draw rein by his side and exchange a few words, while observing the effective picture he made as he kept step easily with the horse—a tall, straight, finely-formed figure, with head superbly poised and features of striking regularity, the clear bronze of his skin contrasting with his white cotton garments and the red blanket he carried flung over his shoulder.

"And so, Antonio," said Vyner, "you are on your way into town. It is a long walk after a day's work; do you take it every night?"

"Yes, señor," the man answered, looking up with dark, liquid eyes under the shade of his wide sombrero. "Since we no longer work in the mine at night, I prefer to go to the town. The walk is little to me—I am strong. And Don Fernando does not wish the men to remain at the mine," he added, after a pause long enough to give a shade of significance to the words.

Vyner was conscious of a sense of surprise, but he did not answer for a moment. Then he said quietly, "Why does he object to their remaining?"

The man lifted his shoulders with the gesture which signifies many different things. "*Quien sabe*?" he replied in the invariable formula of his people. "We only know that it is his wish that no one but the watchman should remain near the mine at night; so most of the men sleep in the village at the foot of the mountain, but I prefer to go to the town."

There was a moment's pause, while the man's feet and the horse's feet beat time together on the dusty road and the last fires of sunset burned above the blue mountain crests. Vyner was looking straight before him, but he did not see either the light, flame-tinted clouds, or the broad, white highway that stretched to the yellow walls and masses of green foliage which marked the town. Instead, he saw, without a conscious effort of memory, Guadalupe's pale face with its startled expression; and an instinct was borne in upon him that there was some connection

between that expression and the information he had just received. Why did she look so strangely, so like one who had received a blow, when she heard that the mine was not worked at night? And why should Fernando object to the men remaining there at night? Vyner's mind was acute enough when once roused, and although he did not leap to a conclusion sufficiently to say to himself that some treachery was on foot, he felt a defined suspicion of his accomplished subordinate which he determined to lose no time in putting to a test. He would not condescend to question the miner farther, or to allow him to suppose that matters were going on in the mine of which he (Vyner) was ignorant, although there was something in the man's glance which seemed to convey a hint of warning. But this sign of intelligence only made the young Englishman more resolved to give no opportunity for additional disclosures. Whatever was to be learned, he would learn for himself, not from servants or spies. When he spoke again, therefore, it was to ask some indifferent question connected with the progress of the work, and a few minutes later, as they were close upon the town, he touched his horse with the spur and rode on.

But it was impossible to ride away from the thoughts which had been suggested, and indeed he had no desire to do so. His languid indifference fell from him like a garment; the mere suspicion of being fooled and betrayed roused all the fire that was in his nature, and he did not look like a man who would be very pleasant to deal with as, with bent brows and set lips, he rode through the streets of the town to his own house.

There, three hours later, he sat on the corridor before the *sala*, through the open door of which a reading-lamp and table covered with books and papers showed invitingly. But these things had no attraction for him to-night. He preferred the semi-obscurity of the wide corridor, where he sat smoking and looking at the flower-filled patio flooded with lustrous moonlight, for, like a great silver balloon, the moon was riding high in the violet heaven. Of the beauty of lunar radiance in these regions, elevated so far above the surface of the earth into the tropical sky, language can give no idea. But just as the sunlight possesses here a glory which lower and colder lands never know, often weighing down the eyelids by dazzling excess of light, so moonlight becomes an almost unearthly splendor, a divine white lustre which renders the old familiar earth a veritable land of enchantment, and turns night into a fairer, sublimated day. Nothing could have been better than this brilliant light for the purpose which Vyner was meditating, and when about half-past ten o'clock a servant came to inquire if he should close the house, he was astonished to receive an order to saddle a horse.

"Two horses, señor?" the man asked, hesitating an instant.

"No," Vyner answered. "What should I want with two horses?"

"I thought that since he is going out in the night, the señor would wish me to accompany him," the *mozo* replied, with a surprise that was evidently for the question.

But Vyner, like most of his race, was physically fearless; and the thought of taking the man as a matter of precaution did not occur to him. He was going on an errand which he had no idea of confiding to any one, and he replied peremptorily that he wanted only one horse and would go alone. Alone, therefore, half an hour later he rode away, bidding the servant be on guard to admit him without delay when he returned.

The lustre of the moonlight made everything as clearly perceptible as at high noontide, when he rode along the silent streets, between close-barred, flat-roofed houses with sharply accentuated shadows, around the plaza with its empty stone benches, its motionless trees and plants, and the basin of its fountain lying like a mirror in which the sailing queen of night might see her fairness reflected, down the streets where occasional groups of people were gathered about a still open door-way, or a picturesquely draped man stood talking through the window-bars to an invisible girl within. Once a party of young men passed, singing softly with low, full-throated sounds, and touching lightly now and then the strings of a guitar which one of them held. But for the most part the streets were deserted, with only the bark of a dog or the ring of his horse's hoofs to break their stillness, as he passed on out into the open country, where the white

glory lay spread over the wide plain and encircling heights, revealing every feature of the scene with magical clearness, while not a leaf stirred or animal moved.

The air was deliciously cool and fresh, the moisture of the night sufficient to keep the light dust from rising, and the expedition began to commend itself to Vyner as a rather enjoyable experience. For reflection had almost convinced him that the suspicion which had suggested itself was absurd, that nothing could be going on at the mine of which he was ignorant. But it was as well to satisfy himself. Guadalupe's face still rose before him in disagreeable connection with the words of the miner; and if the Señor Don Fernando Sandoval was indeed playing any tricks, he should speedily discover that he (Vyner) was not a safe man to play them upon. So he rode on, along the broad, white road, through the silent valley, while the night seemed to grow more brilliant with every passing hour, so wonderful was the radiance that rested like a mantle of silver over the far-reaching landscape.

He entered as usual the gates of La Providencia, skirting the hill on which the *casa* stood, but rising to a level with it as he reached the rear of its large enclosure. Everything here was wrapped in a stillness as profound as that which rested elsewhere; and with its closed doors and high-encircling wall, the house presented the appearance of a fort. Through an air so motionless and so clear sound is carried far with wonderful distinctness, and it was not surprising that the clatter of the horse's feet on the stony hillside, which struck loud on Vyner's own ear, should have penetrated with almost as much clearness to another ear, strung tense with painful listening in the apparently sleeping house.

For Guadalupe, lying wide awake, heard the first distant hoof-stroke and sprang at once erect, saying to herself, "Fernando!" An instant carried her to the open window, and there, as the sound came nearer, she recognized that the horse-man was not approaching the house but passing by. She leaned out, listening eagerly, all her senses quickened by apprehension, and in a few moments was convinced that the rider, whoever he might be, was going to the mine, since he rode toward the mountain, and where else in those solitudes could any one be bound? Was he Fernando? No one else (except Vyner, of whom she did not think) was likely to be on horseback. If it were Fernando, where had he been, and where was he going now? Might she not intercept him and stop him, induce him to listen to her prayers and abandon the dark work he had in hand? She knew the road; it passed around the hill and after a wide curve passed near the corrals at the back of the house. Could she not speak to him there? It was at least worth while to make the effort, far better than to remain passive in powerlessness and misery. She paused only to thrust her feet into slippers and throw a shawl around her, then quickly and noiselessly sped out into the moonlight-flooded patio, where the air was heavy with the languorous perfume of flowers, through the back courts, past the stable where the mules and horses stood, through a corral where the great oxen lay sleeping heavily near their yokes and carts, into another where the cows, brought up for the evening's milking, lifted their heads and glanced at her, and so came to the wall which was the outward boundary of the premises. Here she listened for a moment. Yes, she was in time. The horseman was drawing near. Sharp and clear the horse's hoofs rang now on the stillness of the night as the rider leisurely mounted the acclivity and followed the road which would bring him within a few feet of the wall.

But how should she communicate with him through the wall, which was at least ten feet high, and in which there was no gate? This she had already settled in her mind. The wall was built of rough, unplastered adobes, very thick, but worn and broken in many places with the action of time and weather, thus offering a rough surface on the inner side which it was possible for any one with great agility, and indifference to abrasions of skin, to climb. Guadalupe felt certain that nerved by her present purpose, she could climb it. She swept one glance over the surface to ascertain the best place for her venture, and then began to climb, clutching the points offered by the rough bricks with her delicate hands, and setting her small feet with desperate energy into the cavities from which they too often slipped. At another moment she must have failed, for the effort

was indeed a desperate one; but the sound of those nearing hoof-strokes filled her with the strength and courage of despair. Another instant and Fernando must be gone beyond her reach. What did anything else matter in comparison to saying one word to him, one word which might have the power to move him! Clasping afresh the sharp and brittle points of brick, she raised herself with convulsive energy and looked over the wall. The rider was just abreast with the spot where she stood, and in the white radiance of the moonlight she saw him clearly. For a moment she hung, motionless as if suddenly carved in stone, with the words she had been about to utter frozen, as it were, on her lips. Her dark eyes distended as she looked at him; but he rode by, unconscious of their gaze, and when she saw him turn up the mountain toward the mine she dropped, heedless of her torn and bleeding hands, to the foot of the wall and lay there for an instant as if she had fainted.

But it was only for an instant. Terror roused her quickly to action and life. She grasped the situation almost without thought. Vyner had heard or suspected something, and was on his way to the mine to verify the report or suspicion. And Fernando was there! Of that she was sure. What he was doing she did not know; only an instinct assured her that it was something which would make a meeting with Vyner of terrible danger to both men. What could she do? Ah! pitying God, what could she do? Go and warn Fernando? Was that possible? Yes, she said to herself, with Heaven helping her, it was possible. Vyner, it is true, was on horseback: but the road was circuitous and very steep that wound up the mountain, and he must ride slowly, while she knew the path which the miners always followed in ascending and descending; a straight and terrible climb up the mountain's side, but counting barely two miles, while the road covered five. If she could make those two miles before Vyner accomplished his five, she might even yet save Fernando from—God alone knew what! Detection and dishonor certainly, and crime perhaps, for if the two men met who could say what result might follow?

"I can but try," she thought; and gathering herself up, she fled swiftly as she had come, passing like a spirit through the sleeping animals, through the odorous patio where the arches and pillars of the corridor lay in sharp, black outlines of shadow on the pavement, and the household slumbered peacefully behind their closed doors, and on the great front door, the massive portals of which were closely barred, while a *mozo* lay sleeping on his mat in the arched passage that led to it. This man was the only difficulty. If he waked—well, she must run the risk of that, and hope in such case to induce him to be silent, but he slept heavily, and murmuring prayers, that slipped from her lips like the beads of a rosary through the fingers, she undid the bolts and bars that at another time would have defied her strength, swung open the heavy door and darted away like a greyhound into the white, silent night, taking the lonely and difficult path that led up the mountain's steep ascent.

CHAPTER VII.

LITTLE suspecting whose eyes had been bent upon him as he passed the corrals of the hacienda, Vyner rode up the mountain pausing now and again at the turns of the winding way to cast a glance over the prospect that lay below him flooded with silver mist. The marvellous beauty of the scene, bathed in this unearthly radiance, touched even his sluggish faculty of admiration; and as he mounted higher and the wonderful panorama unrolled to its farthest mountain barriers, while the air grew fresher and the violet heaven seemed bending nearer, he admitted to himself that he was well repaid for this midnight ride even if he discovered nothing.

And when he reached the mine it did not appear as if he were likely to discover anything, or indeed as if there was anything to be discovered. All was wrapped in the deep repose of silence and absolute desertion. In the brilliant moonlight the roughly-arched entrance of the tunnel which led into the mine, with its massive door closed and locked, had something weird in its appearance;

and unimaginative as he was, Vyner thought of Old World legends of gnomes and elves and their treasures buried in the deep hearts of the mountains. He dismounted from his horse and fastening the animal, looked around for the watchman, but no sign of this functionary was visible. "Asleep, I suppose," the young man said to himself feeling more and more convinced that there was no foundation for the suspicion which had been excited in his mind. But in order to satisfy himself that the watchman was on the ground, he, walked toward a hut near the mouth of the tunnel, where the man had his quarters. The moonlight poured in at the open door and showed his recumbent form wrapped in his blanket and stretched on the mat which makes the sole bed of the laboring class of Mexico. His deep breathing was sufficient evidence that he slept heavily, and Vyner's quick sense of odor assured him that there was a special reason for this heaviness of slumber. The peculiar pungent fumes of the *vino de mescal* filled the small apartment, and testified that it might be easier to waken a log than the man who lay sleeping under its influence. Vyner stood for a moment looking down upon him. He was evidently intoxicated, oblivious and unconscious of everything; and on perceiving this suspicion again wakened in the young man's mind. With such a guardian anything was possible. He felt now that he could not leave the mine without assuring himself farther that no treachery was going on. But how could he enter? The great fortress-like door was locked, and the key was of course in the possession of Fernando Sandoval. He felt so sure of this, that it was with no intention of searching for, or hope of finding it, that his glance swept over the inside of the hut and was attracted by a gleam of metal, as the moonbeams fell upon a rude bench opposite the door. Revealed by their touch, something lay shining there that bore the appearance of one of the great keys that are fashioned in Mexico for the most ordinary locks, and, that might serve for the gates of a mediaeval city. He made a step forward and took it up. Yes, it was the key; but why it should be lying there beside the sleeping watchman raised another question in his mind. It was as if some one, entering hastily, had laid the key carelessly down and forgotten it. But who? Vyner did not pause to consider the question. With the key in his possession entrance to the mine was assured, and turning quickly he left the hut and walked toward the massive door set in the frowning rock.

As he emerged from the hut into the broad moonlight which poured full upon the spot, a breathless, hurrying figure that had just gained the edge of the forest paused with what barely escaped being a cry and shrank trembling back into the shadow of the trees. Poor Guadalupe! Not for one instant had she spared herself on the steep and terrible ascent. She who had never been outside the walls of her home without protection had not heeded the loneliness of the midnight and of the forest, had not thought of possible danger to herself, had not faltered over the exertion which would have taxed the energies of the strongest man, in hurrying without rest or pause up the almost precipitous mountain-side; yet despite all, Heaven had not heard her prayers—she came too late! The perception of this, when she saw Vyner emerge from the watchman's hut, seemed for a moment almost to annihilate her. The passionate desire to attain her end which until now had upheld her was in that instant extinguished in bitter disappointment, and her physical frame simply collapsed. She sank down on the ground and so remained in the shadow, a dark, motionless heap.

But not for long. She had indeed failed in that for which she had come; she was too late to warn Fernando, but her anxiety for him was none the less like a consuming fire. Was he here? was the meeting, the conflict she feared about to take place? She could not lie down and die from sheer exhaustion while these questions were yet unanswered. She lifted her head, dragged herself to her knees, and, sheltered behind the trunk of a large tree, watched with eyes full of burning eagerness the movements of Vyner. She saw him unlock the great door, light a candle which he had brought from the watchman's hut, and enter the mine. She followed with agonized gaze the last flicker of his light as he disappeared in the tunnel.

What would he find? She forgot to take comfort from the thought that the door having been locked, he was therefore not likely to find anything where he had gone. She only longed to

follow him, and knowing this was impossible, knelt trembling and praying in the shadow of the trees.

Vyner meanwhile had entered the tunnel, with his candle held before him, but he had not taken many steps when he was surprised by a peculiar noise somewhat like the beating of distant drums, or the sound of machinery in motion, which, coming so unexpectedly to his ears in a place where the quiet of the grave usually reigned, startled even his steady nerves that were already perhaps a little tried by the loneliness of the situation and the possible danger of the errand on which he was bound. He stood still, listening intently and conscious that his heart was beating more quickly than its wont. But in a few seconds the whirring noise came nearer and nearer, until he was encompassed by a cloud of flying objects that surrounded the light in his hand and flew in his face, nearly smothering him. He struck at them right and left, and succeeded in clearing them away sufficiently to see that they were myriads of bats which had been roused from their slumbers in the roof of the tunnel, and attracted by the light of the candle, rushed toward it. He recovered himself, smiled at his momentary dismay, and, passing on, descended the shaft which led into the mine and entered its lower levels. Here stillness reigned, broken only by the musical sound of trickling water as it percolated through the crevices of the rock, and fell into the deep pool at the bottom of the shaft which formed its receptacle, from whence the gigantic pump forced it to the surface and thus drained the mine. In these dark galleries Vyner's solitary candle made but a faint illumination, yet even its rays, striking on the sides of the rocky walls, showed now and then brilliant effects from the masses of metal, shining with moisture, in which, like jewels gleaming out of the obscurity, the glistening fragments of pyrites gave back the light. It might have been the treasure-house of the gnomes indeed, to all appearance at these moments; but Vyner paid no heed to this delusive brightness. What he sought were evidences of more real value. He was determined to discover if anything was being concealed from him with regard to the vein—if perhaps the long-lost lode had been discovered and the discovery not reported to him—for such was the definite form which his suspicion had taken. With this end in view he made his way to the farthest point where the work had penetrated, and there, holding his candle close to the wall of the rock, examined it with closest attention, foot by foot.

It was while he was thus engaged that a sound came to his ear which startled him far more than the onset of the bats had done, which, in fact, astonished him beyond measure, and almost caused him to drop the candle from his hand.

It was the echo of a dull, distant thud, regularly recurring, which only a practiced ear could have distinguished in the first place or understood in the second; but Vyner had been enough in mines to recognize at once the stroke of a miner's pick, the sound of which came faint but distinctly audible through the rock, as if from men at work far in the bowels of the earth. Lost in amazement, he stood for several minutes listening, with his sense of hearing strained to its utmost tension. Of the nature and meaning of the sound he had not an instant's doubt—but where was it? He had been through all the workings of the mine and found them absolutely deserted. If there were any other workings he was ignorant of their existence; yet such workings there must be, for he soon satisfied himself that the sound proceeded from a point in advance of where he stood, though not in the line of his drift. "By Heaven!" he said aloud, and his voice sounded strangely in his own ears, as it rang hollow from the surrounding rocks, "there is dastardly treachery here! They are working on the vein, and they have some secret entrance to the mine of which I know nothing; but I will find it!"

He turned, fierce determination in every line of his face, all thought of prudence forgotten, all recollection of the peril he would incur if, alone and unarmed, he should come upon men who might be rendered desperate by discovery. The idea of going away, and returning sensibly and safely on the morrow to search, did not for an instant occur to him. Fury possessed him—the fury of a passionate man who feels himself tricked and deceived. And one thought only filled his soul—to find those who were deceiving him.

With candle uplifted, ominously shining eyes under knitted brows, and grimly compressed lips, he went again through all the workings of this part of the mine, carefully examining if there were any means of access to the point beyond, from whence the sounds proceeded. But the closest scrutiny revealed no way of approach, and he finally constrained to the decision that entrance must be sought from the surface. Pausing, therefore, only long enough to locate the sound as well as possible and fix the necessary bearings in his mind, he took his way back to the upper world, and presently came out from the tunnel to the white glory of moonlight and the fresh, cool air beyond.

The contrast of the dark depths he had left to the divine beauty of earth and heaven, would at another moment have struck him deeply; but now he was too much absorbed in the one thought which possessed him to heed it at all. He did not pause a moment, but, to Guadalupe's surprise, turned sharply and strode up the mountain, which towered several hundred feet above the small plateau before the entrance of the tunnel. He remembered that higher up were the deserted mouths of many old shafts which had been used in the ancient working of the mine, but were now entirely abandoned, and he said to himself that of necessity it was by some of these that the mine had been entered. He had fixed the bearings of the betraying sounds below so well in his mind that he had no difficulty in deciding where such a shaft would probably be found; and truly enough, when he reached the spot there was the shaft; the debris, which in daytime served to conceal it, laid to one side, and its open mouth revealing the notched pole which, set on end, serves for a ladder in all but the greatest Mexican mines.

Of Vyner's prudence it is impossible to say anything, but of his courage there can be no question, for recognizing at once that this shaft was used for the purpose he suspected, he again lighted his candle and without an instant's hesitation descended into it.

CHAPTER VIII.

To Guadalupe, crouching on the edge of the forest, sick with fear and torn by cruel anxiety, time had no meaning, and minutes seemed hours while she waited for Vyner's return, unable to imagine upon what errand he had disappeared from her sight, but fearing still that he might meet Fernando, and only certain that she must see him leave the mine before she could take her homeward way.

How long she waited in the solitude of the solemn night and the silence that seemed to brood over the great mountain, she never knew nor could even conjecture. Every thought and feeling was merged in an agony of suspense while the slow moments passed. But suddenly she lifted her head like a startled fawn, for her quick ear caught the sound of footsteps coming hastily down the mountain-side from the direction in which Vyner had gone—footsteps under which twigs and bushes broke, stones clattered downward, and in the echo of which there was an indescribable suggestion of fear and flight.

She arose to her feet, prepared for anything, and, as she did so, her heart seemed to stand still, for it was Fernando whom she saw coming toward her, hurrying forward in a strange, blind haste that seemed to take no heed of obstacles, and with a pallor on his face which owed nothing to the whiteness of the moonbeams. She made a step from behind the trees which sheltered her, and confronted him as he entered the path by which she had ascended.

He recoiled at sight of her with a sharp, quick cry; and indeed he might have been pardoned for thinking that a spirit stood before him, so unearthly was her aspect as the moonlight fell over her, showing her pale face amid the shrouding folds of her drapery. "*Madre de Dios*!" he gasped, and lifted his hand instinctively to make the sign of the cross. But the next instant he knew who stood before him—for Guadalupe spoke.

"Fernando!" she said and her voice had a heart-piercing tone of entreaty in it "what has happened? What have you done?"

"What have I done?" he repeated. A strong shiver shook him from head to foot. “I have killed him, Guadalupe! God knows I did not mean to do it—but he came upon us full of rage, there were hot, bitter words, and in my passion I struck him down."

"Ah, my God, it is what I feared!" she said, smiting her hands together and then clasping them before her eyes as if to shut out the sight of which he spoke. "I came to warn you, but I knew not where to find you. Oh, if I had but known!"

"To warn me?" He looked at her with a sudden perception of the strangeness of her presence at such an hour on this lonely mountain-side. "But how did you know—anything?"

"I was wakeful, thinking of and watching for you," she answered, "when I saw Señor Vyner pass in the direction of the mine, and, fearing that you were here, I came up the mountain in the hope of warning, of saving you from violence and crime. But God did not permit me to do this. Señor Vyner had already arrived when I reached here. Even then, had I known where to find you, I might have warned you, for he entered the mine before ascending the height; but I knew nothing, so I could only wait praying, fearing. But all this matters nothing now. Tell me if there is no hope! Are you certain that you have killed him?"

"I am not certain that he is dead, but I am certain that I gave him a blow which no man could receive and live," Fernando replied. "I did not wait to see how it was with him. When he fell and lay a senseless heap"—a strong shudder shook him again—"I left him. The deed was done. Nothing can undo it now."

"But it may be that you did not kill him!" she cried with sudden, passionate hope. "How can you tell if you did not wait to see? Come, let us go back at once at once! It may be that we can save him yet."

"Are you mad?" asked Fernando, looking at her with eyes of angry wonder. "*You* go down into that shaft—it is impossible! And for me, nothing will ever take me back. I tell you that no man could receive the blow that I dealt Vyner and live."

"But you do not *know* that he is dead, and yet you would leave him there, injured and alone?" she said in an anguished tone. "Fernando, that cannot be! You must come with me, or I shall go without you."

"You shall not!" he cried. "What insanity is this? He is not alone. I had with me an old man—one of the ancient miners, who knows the locality of the lost lode. He is still there, and though old, is strong and determined. Vyner will never leave the mine alive. Be sure of that."

"Merciful God!" she shrank back as if from a blow, though no mere physical blow could have equalled the terrible significance of those words. For a moment horror held her motionless. Then the very extremity of the necessity gave her strength to speak.

"Come with me," she said and it seemed no longer Guadalupe who spoke "if you have not the soul of a coward, come and see that a murder is not done! There is not a second to lose. Come!"

"No!" he answered violently. "Not all the riches of the mine could tempt me to descend that shaft again. Besides, it is too late. The man is either dead or—You do not understand! It would be madness now to let him come forth with such a tale!"

"And so you left him, either to die or be treacherously killed!" she cried in a voice filled with a passion of feeling. "O Fernando! it is you who are mad, who know not what you are doing. You struck him down in anger, but you did not mean to kill him—you said so. Come, then, and let us save him, if he can be saved. Prove to me and to yourself that you are no murderer. If you have ever been, for one hour, the man I believed you, come with me now. For the love of God, come!"

In the extremity of her pleading she forgot the horror that a moment before possessed her, and drew near to him, laying her hand upon his arm with a gesture of entreaty. Had his guardian angel taken mortal form beside him and spoken with mortal tongue, such look and voice could

hardly have been fraught with more intense supplication, more ardent appeal, than that of Guadalupe's face as she lifted it toward him, and vibrated in the tones of her voice. But neither face nor voice had power to move the dark spirit of the man to whom she spoke. He flung off her hand with a motion of his arm, and turned upon her with words that like a deadly fire scorched the last vestige of love for him in her heart.

"It must be," he said with a furious glance, "that the man whose life you are so anxious to preserve—whose safety is so much more precious in your eyes than mine—is indeed your lover, as people have said. Do not think that I have not heard of his visits to you while I—*I* was toiling and sinning for your sake! And if it be your lover, why should you not have betrayed me to him—how else did he come here? You alone knew of my hopes and my labors. Traitress that you are, go to him if you will, but you will be too late to save him, and you may be grateful that I do not kill you with him!"

"To kill my body would be a small thing compared to killing every feeling that I have ever had for you," she answered in a tone which expressed a compassion so great that even scorn was lost in it. "Hereafter what you may think of me is less than nothing to me; but once more, in the name of God, I call upon you to come with me and save your soul from fearful crime. If you will not come, take with you the knowledge that in the sight of God you are a murderer!"

She stood before him with a dignity that was majestic, her bearing full of an almost stern command, her face white and set as if carved in stone, and her eyes burning with a fire before which he shrank. But to do that which she commanded was impossible to him. He hesitated a moment, then made a hopeless gesture and, throwing out his hands wildly, rushed down the mountain.

For an instant Guadalupe remained motionless, listening to the echo of the receding steps which alone broke the solemn silence of the night. And, as she listened, the thought that she was alone—alone to take up the burden of horror from which Fernando had fled, to descend by perilous ways into the dark recesses of the mine, to meet the awful presence of the probably murdered man and the more awful presence of the living one who kept guard over him, fell upon her with a crushing and terrible weight. She sank shuddering upon her knees and lifted her agonized face toward heaven. "Help me, my God!—help me not to fail!" was her inarticulate cry. “Give me a courage great enough for what I must do."

It was only a minute that she spent in supplication, but to those of pure heart and strong faith the Heaven upon which they call is very near, and she felt a courage great enough for all that lay before her when she rose and took her way swiftly toward the mine. She could not afterward have told what instinct led her to provide herself with the means of light—a candle and matches taken from the receptacle for such objects near the mouth of the tunnel—or which brought her steps so unerringly to the shaft where Vyner had descended. When she saw its dark mouth and the rudely notched pole which constituted the only way of descent, her heart for an instant failed but only for an instant. The heroic spirit dominated all instincts of fear, and with one swift, appealing glance toward the bending sky, she stepped downward and began the difficult and perilous descent.

Meanwhile, in a gallery that opened horizontally from the shaft, at a depth of about a hundred and fifty feet below the surface, lay the unconscious form of the man whom Fernando Sandoval had struck down when surprised in his treachery. Since the terrible blow, given with the miner's pick, had descended on his head, he had not stirred; but that he was not dead the old Indian, who bent over him, assured himself now and then by putting his ear to the slow and heavily-beating heart. It was a weird scene which the faint light of a single candle revealed in the dark and gloomy spot. The roughly excavated rock, glistening with moisture as the rays of light struck upon it, arched overhead and formed the walls that led away into blackness beyond. On the damp and muddy floor of the gallery, Vyner lay as he had fallen, with white, senseless face upturned. The old man crouched beside him, his thin, brown countenance absolutely impassive, but his dark, piercing eyes fixed intently on the motionless form, as if watching for the least sign

of life; while he kept one thin, sinewy hand buried in the loose, open folds of his shirt. The attitude was significant enough—for there could be no doubt that the object upon which that hand rested was the handle of a knife—but even more significant was the concentration of purpose on the keen face, the unrelaxing watchfulness of the shining glance. Let Vyner stir hand or foot, let his eyes but for one second unclose, and the knife would be buried in his heart. Nothing could be more certain than that. A tiger watching his prey might be expected to relent sooner than the man who watched him with that terrible, impassive face.

But while he watched, his quick ear caught a sound, faint indeed but still a sound, which conveyed unmistakably the intimation of another presence beside his own in the mine. The lean, old head on the thin, brown neck turned sharply and listened intently. Had Fernando recovered his courage and was he returning, or—could it be possible that some one else was slowly and with difficulty descending the shaft? Such a thing was wildly improbable, but it was not impossible, and rising from his crouching posture with a resolute expression, the old man seized the candle, which had been fastened on a projecting rock by a lump of mud, and with the long, nervous fingers of the hand in his bosom clutching yet more firmly the handle of the knife which lay there, he went forward to investigate.

Before he reached the end of the gallery, however, a presence—or was it an apparition?—appeared there, framed in the rough stone arch, which the light that it carried illumined, like a picture of some fair, tender saint, or of the Queen of Saints, Mary most merciful, suddenly brought to life. Like a star against the gloom and darkness, the beautiful white face appeared, and the dilated eyes shone with a lustre not of earth as they met his terrified gaze. He had not a moment's doubt of the supernatural character of the figure—for how could mortal woman appear in such a place, and when did mortal woman ever wear such an aspect? The candle dropped from his trembling hand as he fell on his knees, making the sign of the cross and crying, as Fernando had cried before him, the loved, familiar, yet now terrible name, "*Madre de Dios*!"

"Do you take me for the Mother of God, Rosalio Gallardo?" asked Guadalupe, pausing before him, "that you kneel to me like this? And yet, before you rise, thank her that I have been sent to save you from terrible crime. For he lives yet—the man whom you have stayed here to guard—is it not so? God has not permitted him to die, or you to commit the sin which has been in your heart?"

The man rose slowly to his feet. He was still trembling in every limb. The occurrence seemed to him hardly less wonderful, hardly less supernatural, now that he knew it was only a woman of the earth, not an inhabitant of the shining heavens, who spoke to him. Her appearance savored of the miraculous hardly less than if she had been a spirit, and the majesty of her bearing, the dignity of her address, impressed him as the higher nature must always impress the lower, unless the latter has lost all habit of reverence, all belief in higher things; and these no Mexican has wholly lost.

"Yes, señora," Rosalio answered, scarcely knowing what he said, "he is living yet. I was watching him. Maria Santísima knows—"

"Show me where he is," said Guadalupe, passing him by.

She had not now the faintest thought of fear, alone though she was in the depths of the earth with a half-murdered man, and one who was a murderer in intent, if not in act. Had she exhibited a single sign of timidity or the least consciousness of danger, there is no telling what the result might have been; but her manner could not have been more assured in its quiet command had she stood on the threshold of her own house, with hosts of servants within her call. Without casting a glance behind at the man she had passed, she went quickly forward, knelt down by Vyner's prostrate form, and laid her hand upon his heart. Then she looked up at Rosalio, who had drawn near and stood beside her. "Bring me some water," she said, with the same air and tone of authority.

He obeyed silently, bringing some water from a place not far distant and watching the gloomy interest while she bathed the face of the unconscious man, loosened his collar, and

pressed a few drops of the moisture between his pale lips. Presently, under this reviving influence, his respiration grew more apparent, and it was evident that life was asserting itself against the terrible blow which, but for the heavy hat he had worn, would have left no life to survive. Then again Guadalupe looked up at the statue-like figure beside her.

"Have you any stimulant?" she asked quickly "aguardiente, tequila, anything?"

There was a moment's barely perceptible hesitation before the man turned again and, going to the place from whence he had brought the water, brought now a bottle containing a colorless liquid which was no other than the fiery *vino de mescal*, locally known as tequila. But before giving the bottle into her outstretched hand he looked at her with his keen, deep-set eyes, and spoke for the first time since he had cut short his first speech.

"Would it not be well," he said, "for the señora to stop and think a moment before she brings this man back to life. I know now who the señora is. If he lives, what will become of her cousin, Fernando Sandoval?"

She glanced up at him with a gaze filled with the light of a steadfast purpose. "If by God's help I can save this man's life," she said, "I shall save my cousin from crime and undying remorse. And I shall save you, too, little as you seem to think of it. What manner of life have you lived that in your last days—for you are an old man—you can wish to lose your soul by an act of deliberate murder? Give me that bottle and lift his head."

He gave the bottle without another word, and, kneeling on Vyner's other side, obediently raised his head while she poured a few drops of the potent stimulant between his lips. Almost immediately the result was apparent in the strengthening of his before hardly perceptible pulse. Again and yet again she poured the liquid cautiously down his throat, until suddenly—oh, wonder hardly hoped for!—he gave a half-strangled gasp and, opening his eyes, looked at her.

Two hours later a faint, exhausted man lay stretched on the ground at the mouth of the shaft. As long as he lives the memory of that ascent will be to him a nightmare of horror. But for the rope fastened around his waist and held by the old man who preceded him up the primitive ladder, he could never have reached the top. More than once he had swayed, tottered, almost fallen, while a faintness as of death nearly overpowered him. But Rosalio's sustaining hand above and Guadalupe's encouraging voice below, sustained him—enabled him to fight off the black unconsciousness; and at last, after what seemed an eternity of painful effort, he felt the fresh air of the upper world, saw the white glory of the moonlight, and fell down a well-nigh senseless heap once more under the vast bending heaven.

But revival was not so difficult now when all the blessed influence of Nature aided in the work. Like a man in a dream he was conscious again of Guadalupe's hand bathing his brow, of the fiery liquid she offered to his lips, and of the urgency of her voice.

"Bring his horse," she said to Rosalio. "Have it ready here. There must be no delay, or daylight will surprise you on the road. Ah, señor, rouse yourself!—for the love of God make another effort!"

Who could withstand that piteous appeal! Vyner opened his eyes and murmured, "What do you wish me to do?"

"To mount your horse as soon as you are able," she answered. "You can ride slowly—this man will lead the animal and support you in the saddle. You *must* get home before daylight comes and people are abroad."

"Why?" he asked brokenly. “I will stay here until I can—send for a carriage."

She seized him by the shoulder in her desperation and shook him almost fiercely. "Señor," she said, "listen to me! I have saved your life; but for me you would be lying dead down there in the mine! I tell you this that you may do something for me, that you may rouse yourself for the effort I ask of you. It is hard—I know it is hard—but oh, for God's sake, for my sake, try!"

He rose and staggered to his feet. Dull and stupid as he yet felt, he understood her words and knew that they were true. But for her he would indeed be lying dead, down in the dark depths of the mine, never again to feel the sweet air of heaven or look upon the beauty of the earth.

What, then, could she ask of him that he would not, must not do? A faint stirring of life came to him—somewhat blindly he put out his hand to her.

"Do what you will with me," he said. “I am ready."

She made a quick motion to the old Indian, and between them they helped him to his saddle. Then Rosalio flung a steadying arm around him, and placed the other hand upon the bridle of the horse. “Take him to the door of his house and leave him there in charge of his servants," said Guadalupe, in a low, firm tone. “Remember, if he is not carried safely, I will tell all." Then she looked up in the face of the man who swaying slightly from weakness looked down upon her.

To his dying day he will never forget that countenance, white as carven marble, with its dark, luminous, mournful eyes, on which the moonlight fell.

"Señor," she said, "if I remind you again of what I have done for you, it is only that I ask a pledge of you. Promise me that you will be silent about the events of this night. Make what use you will of all that you have learned but tell nothing of how you learned it, or of how you have suffered. This is much to ask, but I do ask it of you in exchange for your life."

"I will be as silent as the grave from which you have saved me," he answered solemnly. "I promise you that on my honor."

He almost thought that she smiled, so sweet a relaxation came to the tense lines about her lips. She looked at him gratefully. One would have thought that it was her own life which had been saved.

"Thank you," she said softly. “God keep you and restore you soon to health."

She made a motion to the silent figure at the horse's side. Quickly the man stepped out in the long stride of his race, keeping step easily with the animal, and they passed away down the mountain, leaving her alone in the still glory of the solemn night.

CHAPTER IX.

THE little Mexican town rang next morning with the news that the English señor of the Espiritu Santo Mine had been nearly murdered, and left mysteriously in an insensible condition at his own door. The *mozo* who slept in the vestibule had been roused by a loud knocking, but by the time he had sleepily risen from his mat, shaken himself, and unbarred the heavy portals, he found no one except his master, leaning forward in a state of semi-unconsciousness on the neck of his horse, which stood motionless, as if possessing a knowledge that all was not right with the rider. Moonlight still lay white over the earth, but the first faint flush of dawn was in the eastern sky, as the astonished servant looked up and down the long, silent street and found no sign of any living figure. Whoever had given the summons which roused him had, when assured of his approach, fled swiftly and vanished completely. Wondering and foreboding, the man approached his master and lifted him from the saddle. Vyner made one last effort to do what was necessary; but nature had been taxed to its utmost. He reeled as if drunken, caught the *mozo's* arm, and would have fallen heavily had not that arm interposed and saved him. The man laid him down within the threshold and roused the other servants. Together they bore him to his bed and summoned a doctor, who found him unconscious from an injury on the head which he at once pronounced to have been caused by a blow that came narrowly near fracturing the skull, and the consequence of which might prove very serious.

That they were less serious than he anticipated reflected no discredit upon his professional foresight. The patient had a strong constitution and probably a very hard head also; for the concussion of the brain from which he suffered did not lead to brain fever, as the doctor feared it would. After a few days the stupor passed, and the mind began to act again—slowly going back over the events of the night which would henceforth stand out from all other nights in his memory.

For as he lay, weak in body and by no means strong as regarded mental processes, one face dominated all that he remembered of this night—a pale, beautiful face, at which he had gazed out of a black mist of unconsciousness like unto death, in the dark depths of the mine, and again in the white lustre of the moonbeams upon the surface of the earth. He might have thought his memory of it a delusion but for the fact that his recollection, dim enough on other points, was most clear and insistent with regard to all that Guadalupe had said and done. But how did she come to be there? What possible influence had brought the carefully guarded maiden to that lonely mountain at such an hour? Judging the strength of the influence by the peril incurred, he said to himself that it must have been powerful beyond all measure of expression. Was it for the sake of the cousin whom he had found so treacherously engaged in betraying himself? But how could her presence advantage Fernando, absorbed as he was in feverish work? Could it possibly, then, have been for *him*, Vyner, that she had set at naught all fear, risked all dangers? Had she by some strange chance learned of his peril and come to save him? It must be so—since what but the compelling force of love, that counts no obstacles and considers no dangers where the safety of the loved one is concerned, could have nerved a delicate girl to the descent into the mine where she had found him.

And as he laid this flattering belief to his heart he felt that heart beating as it had never throbbed before. He knew now how much Guadalupe's apparent indifference had held in check his passion for her, since in the thought of what she had done and dared for him it burst all bounds and seemed to pour like fire through his veins. Had he fancied that he had outlived such possibilities of feeling? Well, it was worth while to have been spared from death to be undeceived, to know once more the ardor of primitive passion, the wild, thrilling, unreasoning love before which all other feelings vanish as dry grass before flame. He absolutely forgot the existence of the woman he had loved in England, he gave not a thought to the lost lode or to Fernando's treachery. Everything was merged in one overmastering desire to see Guadalupe again, and to make her his own forever.

Meanwhile he had seen no one but the doctor, for all other visitors were by that authority sternly forbidden; but as soon as he was sufficiently recovered to permit the least conversation with safety to his health, a visitor who would not be denied came—the *jefe-politico* of the town, whose call was both of a friendly and official character. He wished to know how Señor Vyner was, and also to inquire into the particulars of what had befallen him—"since it is necessary," he had said politely, "that your assailant should be punished."

"But suppose, señor, that I had no assailant," replied Vyner quietly. "I was unfortunate enough to meet with an accident—but the nature of it only concerns myself."

The official looked at him keenly and read a mystery. "Pardon me, señor," he said, "but some accidents concern very much those whose duty it is to guard order and punish crime. I shall be very much obliged, therefore, if you will give me an account of what befell you on the night when you were absent from your house, and when you returned—or were brought back—in so sad a condition."

"I am sorry that it is altogether out of my power to oblige you," replied Vyner with equal courtesy of manner and decision of tone. "I repeat that the events of that night concern no one but myself; and I therefore decline absolutely to give any account of them."

The eyes of the two men met and rested each upon the other for a space of time measured by no more than seconds, but it was enough to convince the Mexican that nothing was to be gained by pressing his inquiries.

"I understand, señor," he said, drooping his eyes. "It was an affair of gallantry no doubt, and the consequences—well, they are not uncommon with our people. It is fortunate that you escaped a knife-thrust, which might not have been so easily healed. And there is positively no one, then, who you wish to see punished?"

"No one," replied Vyner. "I appreciate your zeal, señor, and am grateful for your solicitude in my behalf; but I can tell you nothing."

"I am sorry that you are so positive," said the other regretfully. "It is mortifying that a stranger should suffer such injuries in our midst, and that no steps should be taken to punish those who inflicted them; but if we have no information to proceed upon—"

"It is impossible for you to do anything," said Vyner in prompt conclusion. "Believe me, I recognize that fully; and I beg you to accept my thanks again for your admirable intentions."

And so the interview ended. Public curiosity and official zeal were alike destined to remain ungratified with regard to a matter which stirred both very deeply; for there was not the least clue by means of which to arrive at a knowledge of events the chief actor in which remained so determinedly silent. An affair of gallantry was an easy explanation to suggest; but it was trying, to say the least, that no one could throw the least light upon the person or persons concerned therein.

At the mine meanwhile, everything had gone on as usual; for reluctant as Fernando had been to return to his post the morning after Vyner's discovery of his treachery, a few words from Guadalupe had decided him to do so. She found him awaiting her at the foot of the mountain when she descended, for until he saw her and learned whether or not Vyner was absolutely dead, he could not decide where to go or what to do. On seeing him she paused and spoke very quietly.

"Señor Vyner lives," she said, "Thank God that I was in time to save him. He revived sufficiently to ascend the shaft, and I have sent him home in charge of the old man who knows that if he is not taken there safely, I will tell everything."

"He revived—you have sent him home!" stammered Fernando. He could only gaze at her as if fascinated. Was it indeed Guadalupe who seemed so calm, so fearless, so strangely altered from the girl he had known and loved all his life? He could hardly have felt a greater change in her had she been indeed the spirit for which he had first taken her.

"Yes, he has gone home," she repeated. "Whether to live or die God only knows. But in either case you are safe—as far as the knowledge of men is concerned. He has promised me that he will be silent regarding all that has happened this night. I think that he will keep his promise. To-morrow you must go to the mine as usual and remain there until it is possible for you to leave in an apparently natural manner."

"Go to the mine!" he repeated aghast. "I cannot do it—it is impossible!"

"Then you will proclaim everything, and bring shame upon yourself and all connected with you," she answered. "Have you no thought of your father's honorable name? Do you wish to break his heart? This is something which does not concern yourself alone. If you refuse, terrible as the necessity may be, I must speak to my uncle."

"Are you not afraid to threaten *me*?" he demanded, turning upon her. "Does your infatuation for your new lover carry you so far that you dare all things? Speak to my father by all means! It will be interesting to know what he will think of this midnight excursion of yours."

"I am not afraid that my uncle will doubt or disbelieve me when I tell him what led me out of his house alone, in the night," she answered. "But I hope that he may be spared the knowledge of how I went to save his son from being detected in treachery, and found him flying with blood upon his hand and soul. No more, Fernando—let us talk no more! The dead have no need of words, and you and I are dead to each other henceforth. Only remember that you must go to the mine to-morrow—and that if you do not I shall tell my uncle all."

She drew the shrouding folds of her drapery closer about her face and made a movement to pass on, but Fernando put out his hand and stopped her.

"One moment!" he said hoarsely. "Do you believe that Vyner will keep his promise and be silent?"

"I believe it," she answered.

"And if not—?"

"If not, could anything be worse than the confession which your own flight would make? Ah, for your father's sake, be a man, Fernando! Spare him the knowledge of that which his best-loved son, the pride of his heart, has become!"

"And you—and you, Guadalupe!" He sank suddenly on his knees on the path before her, and caught her dress with eager hands. "Have you no pity for the man whose love for you led him into dishonor and crime? God forgives the penitent and do *you* refuse to do so? I know that I have outraged and insulted you to-night—but I never believed, never meant it! Madness spoke, not I. You have saved me from a murderer's remorse and perhaps a murderer's doom—save me now from misery and despair! Bid me go to that accursed mine for your sake, and I will do it! What do I say? I would go—I have gone—to the very gates of hell for your sake!"

"And that being so, Fernando, you shall never go there nor elsewhere for me," she answered solemnly. "If I have been the unhappy cause that tempted you into dark paths, I will be so no longer. We will think no more of love, but of penitence. You, for yourself, and I for you, will beg God to pardon the sin which almost culminated to-night in the worst of crimes. Go, pray for that pardon, and resolve to bear the bitter expiation which follows all wrong-doing with the courage of one who has not forgotten that he was once a brave and an honorable man. Now I must go. If my absence is discovered, it will be ill for both of us."

"And not one word—not one word of pardon, Guadalupe?"

She looked at him with a glance in which there was the pitying pardon of an angel but where he would have sought vainly for the love of a woman. The word he craved she did not speak; but lifting her hand she made the sign of the cross over his upturned face—a beautiful mode of household blessing in Mexico—and then turned quickly and left him.

CHAPTER X.

IT was a few days after the visit of the *jefe-politico*, and when Vyner was beginning to consider whether he was not able to ride out to the hacienda, since he longed above all things for a sight of Guadalupe, that he received a call from another and most unexpected visitor. This was the *cura*, or parish priest, of the town—a tall, grave, slender man, whom Vyner had often admired as a picturesque figure when he saw him passing along the streets draped in the graceful folds of his cloak, and whose dark, delicate face and tonsured head recalled the pictures of ascetic saints with which all the world is familiar in Spanish and Italian galleries. But beyond exchanging a courteous salutation occasionally when accidentally meeting, he had no acquaintance with this interesting person; and he was, therefore, not a little surprised when his servant announced "El Señor Cura," and into the room where he reclined in semi-invalid ease the priest walked.

It appeared at first as if his visit was only of a friendly nature, to express concern at the serious injury which had befallen one who was a stranger and a foreigner, and to offer the most apparently sincere congratulations on his recovery. But as he talked, Vyner could not resist the impression that he knew the true cause of his mysterious accident; and this impression received absolute confirmation when, on preparing to take leave, the *cura* uttered a few significant words.

"It has given me pleasure to pay this visit, señor; but since I could hardly claim the honor of your acquaintance, I might not perhaps have ventured to intrude upon you had I not been asked to do so by one who takes a deep interest in your condition—the Señorita Guadalupe Sandoval."

At the sound of that name the color leaped to Vyner's cheek and a light into his eyes; but before he could speak the priest went on:

"She is not only anxious to know how you are, but she wishes much to see you. She is to-day at the *curato* with my sister. Is it possible for you to walk there and speak to her for a few minutes? She desires to see you more privately than is possible at the hacienda."

Vyner was on his feet in an instant. He forgot that he had ever been a sick man. An elixir of vitality seemed poured into his veins in the mere thought that Guadalupe wished to see him, that she had sent for him.

"I shall be delighted, señor," he managed to say. "Doña Guadalupe honors me by her request. Can I accompany you at once?"

"It will be well," answered the *cura* with a slight smile.

And so, walking as one in a dream, Vyner went with the tall, black-draped figure out into the glare of the sunlit streets. It was not very far to the *curato*, which adjoined the church, and once formed part of an ancient monastery. There was a cloistral air still about the beautiful old court into which Vyner found himself introduced, where a great brimming fountain filled the centre, in the midst of broad-leafed tropical plants, and vines that with a wealth of greenery clambered up the pillars and around the carved stone arches of the corridors which encircled the four sides of the quadrangle. All was still and full of the spirit of repose. Two or three white-plumaged pigeons were resting on the edge of the fountain, now and then dipping their beaks in the water like Pliny's doves. Some of the ancient monastic inscriptions were still visible on the walls. As Vyner sat down, while the *cura* with a few words of apology left him, he found himself half-unconsciously reading these inscriptions: "*Guardad el orden para que el orden se guarde*" *"Sin la Fe es imposible agradar á Dios*" "*Que aprovecha al hombre ganar el mundo entero si pierde su alma*." "*Si no hiciereis penitencia todos igualmente pereceréis*."

So they ran, the spirit which they breathed making a strange contrast to the mood of the man who read them. He might have been struck with this himself had not the thought of Guadalupe near at hand banished all possible reflections upon the brown-robed Franciscans who once paced these cloisters and thus reminded themselves of their renunciation of the world and all things earthly.

It seemed to him that the *cura* was long absent, but in reality only a few minutes elapsed before he returned, saying with grave courtesy, "If you will come this way, señor, Doña Guadalupe will see you."

A moment later Vyner found himself in a long, lofty room, very bare of furniture but impressive from its fine air of space, its rigorous cleanliness and noble proportions. A few religious pictures, old and dim but of evident artistic value, hung upon the walls, a number of straight-backed chairs were ranged below them. At one end of the apartment stood a table on which were books, writing materials, and a tall ivory crucifix. Near this was a small square of carpet, a narrow sofa, and two or three more comfortable chairs. To this place of honor the *cura* ceremoniously led his guest, but, before he could obey the gesture which invited him to be seated, a door at the farther end of the room opened, and Guadalupe entered.

Vyner's first sensation on seeing her was one of shocked surprise—so much had she changed since he saw her last. How pale and thin was her face, how dark the shadows beneath her beautiful eyes! She looked like one who had just arisen from a bed of sickness; and this thought found expression in his first words.

"You have been ill!" he said, taking a few impetuous steps to meet her. "It was too much for you—" He paused abruptly. He had been about to add, "that night upon the mountain when you saved me," but the *cura* was still standing by, and he suddenly remembered that he did not know how much or how little had been revealed to the latter.

"I have been ill a little," she answered, "but it did not matter. Why should you speak of anything so unimportant? I can think of nothing but my gratitude to God that I see you standing before me once more in life and health. Ah, señor, never, never can I be grateful enough that our prayers—" she glanced at the priest as if to show who was included in the plural pronoun—"have been heard, and your life has been spared."

"Señor Vyner has indeed much to thank God and you for," said the *cura* impressively. "And now I will leave you to speak to him undisturbed."

He turned and went out, closing the door carefully behind him. Guadalupe sat down on the sofa, and, leaning back with an air of weakness, invited Vyner by a gesture to take the chair nearest her. He obeyed; but so powerful was the emotion which filled his heart as he looked at her, that he was absolutely incapable of utterance, and it was she who spoke first.

"It is very good of you, señor, to come so promptly in answer to my summons. Since we have heard that you were getting better, I have troubled myself much to think how I could

possibly be sure of obtaining a few words alone with you—for they are words which it is very necessary that I should speak. But my kind friend the *cura*, came to my assistance and offered to arrange an opportunity. This is why I see you here."

"I felt your summons to be an honor," Vyner answered, "and as for my coming promptly one does not deserve much thanks for doing that which one desires to do above all things. I, too, have been troubling myself with the thought of how I could best manage to see you but it was not so much for the sake of anything I had to say, as simply to see you. And yet I have much to say, for I have my life to thank you for. I do not know how or why you came to be upon that mountain; but I know well that had you not been there, I should not be here now."

She put her hands to her face for a moment with a slight shudder, as if the memory of that to which he alluded was almost more than she could bear. Then dropping them into her lap, she looked at him steadily with her sad, lovely gaze.

"And if I did something for you that night, señor," she said, "you have fully repaid me by the strict and honorable manner in which you have observed the secrecy I asked of you. To know the truth would, I think, kill my uncle—for he has had much trouble, and he is a proud man. I am aware that I asked much of you in entreating this silence for you have been betrayed in your most important interests by one whom you trusted—betrayed, as well as almost murdered. I am bowed to the earth with shame when I think it, when I say to myself that my cousin—"

She paused, her voice choked with the emotion which for a moment she could not control. And it was then, without an instant's premeditation, that Vyner let himself go.

"Guadalupe, Guadalupe," he said, suddenly bending forward and taking the two slender hands that lay in her lap, "do not think of these things! Think only of what I am going to tell you. I love you with all my heart! What is it to me whether your cousin betrayed me or not? I thank him for nearly killing me, since it has made me owe my life—my new life—to you. If you will take this life, which is now yours and yours only, I can ask nothing better of earth. And I have said to myself of late that there may be a hope of this happiness for me if it was indeed for *my* sake that you climbed that lonely mountain in the dead of night—"

She drew her hands from his grasp with a look of something akin to terror. "Ah, my God!" she breathed, as if to herself, "what is this? Señor, what can I say to you?" she went on, looking at Vyner. "You are mistaken. It was not for your sake I went to the mine that night. It was to warn my cousin of your coming, since I saw you pass our house."

He started as if she had stung him. "What!" he said in a voice the tones of which were all jarring, "you knew, then, of his treachery, and wished to shield him from discovery?"

"I wished," she said, "to save him from possible crime, and you from possible danger—for I feared what would occur if you met. I did not know he was there, but I suspected it; and your going to the mine at such an hour made me almost certain of it. So I went—and although I was not able to prevent what I feared, by God's mercy I prevented its worse consequence."

"Ah," he said, "I remember now that your manner the day before first made me think that there might be something wrong with your cousin. I felt then that you feared or suspected something. But let that pass. How does it matter? Whether you went that night for my sake or not, you saved my life, and I love you with a passionate devotion. I can think of nothing but these things—nothing else is worth a moment's consideration. Guadalupe, will you not take the life and the devotion? Ah! if you only will—"

He leaned forward as if he would again have seized her hands, but she drew slightly away and spoke with a grave and gentle dignity, which even in that moment he thought he had never seen equalled.

"Señor." she said, "listen to me while I tell you a story. It is one which I came here to tell you, though I never thought of such a reason for it as the one you have just given me. You know, perhaps, that I have grown up in my uncle's house, and that my cousin Fernando and I have known each other from our earliest years. But you do not know that we have loved each other always—not as cousins only, but in a more tender and peculiar manner. Had things been different,

we should have been acknowledged lovers. But everything was against us—most of all our poverty. I am a child of charity, possessing nothing, and my uncle, with a large family and many cares, could give Fernando nothing. So there seemed before us only hopeless waiting, or more hopeless separation. And then came the temptation which turned Fernando from an honorable man into a traitor. His heart was set upon finding the lost lode of the Espiritu Santo Mine. Once, and once only, he spoke to me of his hopes, when first there was a question of his taking service with you. I urged him not to do so—urged him until I angered him, and never again would he speak to me on the subject. I knew nothing of what he was doing, but I lived in dread. I suspected that he was betraying your interests, and I knew not which I feared most—his conviction of treachery or his success. I could not sleep at night for thinking and watching, and so it came to pass that I saw you when you went by on that night. The sight of you seemed to confirm my worst fears, and trusting to the help of God, I took the short path up the mountain, hoping to arrive before you, warn Fernando, and avert the terrible consequences which must follow, I feared, a meeting between you. But I was too late for this—you were already there when I arrived. So I could do nothing but wait—O Mother of God! in what heart-sickening suspense!—until Fernando came rushing down the mountain like a madman, and told me he had left you injured—dying, in the mine—"

Her tones faltered, ceased—for a moment she could not continue. It was Vyner who broke the pause by speaking; but his voice sounded strangely different from that in which he had spoken before.

"And then you went down into the dark and dangerous shaft to save me! Did you not think that it might be better and safer for the man you loved to leave me there to die?"

There was something pathetic, though not reproachful, in the glance of the dark eyes as they met his own. "I only thought," she said, "that I would willingly die myself to save you, and to atone for the great wrong that had been done you. And when I asked you to meet me here, it was to tell you this story that you might understand—a little—how Fernando was tempted to so base an act."

"I can understand a man being tempted to *anything* for love of you!" said Vyner, as if the words were wrung from him.

"I forced him to return to the mine the next day," she went on, as if eager to end her story, "because if he had stayed away he would at once have been identified as your assailant. He was loath to go, but for his father's sake he compelled himself to do so. When you are able to return to the mine, he will leave it at once. All is over. He has lost everything. I hope, therefore, that you will be generous and spare him as much as possible—that you will continue to preserve the secrecy—"

"You have my promise," Vyner interposed hoarsely. "It was given you not for a week, a month, a year but for my life. Your cousin is safe from me. But God of heaven! how can you say that he has lost everything when he still has *you*?"

"No," she said quietly, "he has me no longer. All is at an end between us. I am going away—it is likely that I shall never come back. But before going, I wished to tell you this that you might understand—and I wished also to thank you for the great generosity of your silence."

"You shame me when you speak to me in that manner," he said. "But for you my lips would have been sealed in an eternal silence. Could I do less, then, than I have done—even if I did not love you? But I do love you with all the passion of my soul—you must know and feel that. What is your childish romance with your cousin to me? You have found him unworthy, you have given him up. Guadalupe, come, then, to me!—come and bless my life with your love, for I tell you that I cannot live without you."

"Oh, yes, señor!" she said with almost tender sadness, "you will live very well without me. For, indeed, I think we should prove very unlike, you and I—and when you go back to your own country you will feel this. I should be as alien to your country, your ideas, your life, as you are to my country, my life, and my religion. Still I know that love can build a bridge over greater

differences than these. But I do not love you, señor. I have loved only Fernando all my life. And although he has killed that love, I cannot put up another in his place. I have been through dark and bitter waters since the night when I met him flying with your blood upon his soul; but now the worst is over and my way is clear. I am going to offer my heart to God, if he will accept it. If not, I shall find work to do in the world. But with love, as I have known it, I am done for ever. Speak to me of it no more. "

He looked at her with an expression of mingled anguish and despair. Never before, in all his spoiled life, had he felt so hopeless, never before realized that something opposed him stronger than any force which he could bring to bear against it. Given a woman of the world—of his own world—and he would have known well what to say in such a case; but what could he say to this girl who had been moulded by influences so alien to any he had known, and in whose beautiful eyes all fires of earthly passion seemed indeed for ever quenched? He could only put out his hand with a great and bitter cry of yearning.

"Guadalupe," he said, "you break my heart! I have hoped so much, so much—and now you tell me that there is no hope!"

"None from me, señor," she answered very gently. "But remember that I shall never forget my debt of gratitude to you, and that as long as I live your name will always have a place in my prayers. Take again my heart's best thanks, and now—*Adiós*."

The sweet and solemn farewell was still sounding in his ears as he left the room, and still before his eyes he saw—for how many a long day would he not continue to see!—the last picture of Guadalupe, standing in the dim light of the old monastic chamber, with the white crucifix outlined against the wall behind her graceful head.

The *cura*, pacing to and fro in the corridor, breviary in hand, met him with something of compassion in his dark, gentle glance. Perhaps the white face of the young man told its own story to those observant eyes.

"You will rest a little longer, señor," he said kindly, "before going out again into the sun? And a glass of wine—"

But Vyner declined these friendly offers. "The sun matters nothing, señor," he said a little grimly. "It is necessary that I should return to my house. I have many preparations to make. I am leaving for England immediately."

"It is best," said the cura. "You will find that when you are once at home, your wound will cure very speedily."

Was there a double meaning in his speech? Vyner did not know. But these words too remained with him, as he passed from the cool, shaded court, with its fountain and doves, its blooming flowers and ascetic inscriptions, to the white glare and dust of the street beyond.

STELLA'S DISCIPLINE.

CHAPTER I.

"WHAT! not ready yet?" said Mr. Southgate, in a tone of disappointment, as his *fiancée*, Miss Gordon, entered the room where he had been awaiting her appearance for more than an hour. "Do you know how late it is?"

"It *is* rather late, I fear; but I am ready now," she answered, coming forward with a cloud of snowy worsted web in her hand. "Here, put this over my head," she continued, extending it toward him; "and pray be careful to place it lightly, so that my hair may not be rumpled."

He took the fleecy drapery, but held it motionless and stood looking at her doubtfully. She was in evening toilet for a musical *soirée* to which they were going, save that her hair was not dressed at all, but flowed loosely over her shoulders and far down her back, one rippling mass of gold. A magnificent *chevelure* it was; and nobody was more conscious of the fact than Mr. Southgate, or admired it more enthusiastically. But he objected to the style, then just coming into fashion, of loose tresses.

He had already protested on several occasions against Miss Gordon's appearing even in her mother's drawing-room, when guests were present, in this, which he considered, and hesitated not to call, *demi-toilette*; he had implored her not to adopt a fashion that was to him so obnoxious. And now to see that his arguments and entreaties were alike disregarded not only surprised but displeased him, as his countenance unmistakably evinced.

"What is the matter?" the young lady asked, when he paused, glancing up into his face as innocently as if she had no suspicion of the cause of his hesitation.

"Your hair," he answered. "You surely do not intend to wear it in that way, Stella, when you know how much I dislike for you to do so?"

"But why should you dislike it?" she exclaimed impatiently. "Really, Edward, it is too much for you to expect to dictate to me in an affair of this kind! Surely I have a right to wear my hair as I please."

"I am not attempting to dictate to you," said he. "I am asking as a favor that you will not do a thing which seems to me so in such bad taste, and which is so offensive to my eyes."

"Offensive to your eyes!" repeated she resentfully. "Then your eyes see very differently from those of other people! It is fashionable, and everybody says it is very becoming to me. I never heard of anything so unreasonable as your undertaking to interfere in the matter; and," she added, her color rising and her voice taking a sharp and emphatic tone, "I cannot submit to such tyranny! I like to wear my hair so, and I intend to wear it so!"

Mr. Southgate pressed the point no further. Lifting the lace-like fabric he was holding, he enveloped her head carefully, as she had requested, then, taking his hat, offered his arm.

Not a word was exchanged between them as they left the room where this altercation occurred, passing through the hall, out of the house, and along the walk which led to the gate, at which a carriage was waiting.

They had been engaged about a fortnight, and in that time each had learned several things about the other which they had not known before.

Stella discovered that her lover could be stern and was (she considered) inclined to be very arbitrary; Southgate's romantic dreams of angelic perfection in his betrothed, and ideal happiness in the future, had been rudely and utterly dispelled.

Of the two he was the more disappointed and dissatisfied. Though not pleased to meet a master where she expected to find a slave, the girl was at least as much attracted as repelled by the very severity of a character so different from any she had ever come in contact with before; and, while resenting and resisting Southgate's assumption of authority, she extravagantly admired the man himself. Notwithstanding the jars and discords between them, she was more in love with him now than when the engagement was entered into.

With Southgate it was the reverse. To find that she had a very quick, unreasonable, and perfectly uncontrolled temper, with a rather loud manner which often grated harshly on his fastidious taste, was far from agreeable; but, being sincerely devout himself, the worst shock he had received was in the gradual realization that, although nominally a Catholic, she was not in the least degree practical in her religion. The child of a non-Catholic mother, and of a father who, while calling himself of the faith and insisting upon his daughter's being baptized and educated in it, was virtually a materialist, Stella had grown up in a purely worldly atmosphere, with nothing but the most conventional moral teachings and the inevitable result of such circumstances with the most glaring defects of character.

Southgate was a sensible man and a man of calm temperament. He was also in love. Therefore, when the unwelcome indications of imperfection obtruded themselves upon his notice, he excused her on the ground both of her rearing and of the fact that she was an only child and much spoiled. It would be a labor of love as well as a work of charity to teach her to correct faults which, he was sure, were those of accident, not constitution, he said to himself.

But the evil lay deeper than he was at first willing to believe. Every day of more intimate acquaintance brought, it seemed to him, some fresh revelation of the utter worldliness and selfishness of her nature, her absolute incapacity, apparently, to appreciate or even to comprehend the mysteries of our holy faith. Not that she was entirely without good, and not that he could accuse her of having deliberately deceived him in any way. She had some natural virtues, and she was very much in love with him; and these circumstances, as he could see now looking back, had caused her to put an involuntary, possibly an unconscious, restraint upon her irritability and wilfulness so long as she was uncertain of his regard. When once he became her declared lover all motive for restraint and concealment vanished. She treated him just as she treated every one else, and
especially her own family well or ill as the whim of the moment prompted.

"And this is the woman whom I have selected to be the companion of my life, the mother of my children!" he had exclaimed mentally many times with a constantly growing regret that he had been so precipitate in engaging himself. But, uncongenial as the tie proved, the thought of dissolving it had never occurred to him until tonight. Now, however, a sudden resolve took possession of his mind.

"Self-gratification is the only law of her being," he thought. "We do not suit each other. I am sure she must feel this as clearly as I do. If she gives me an opportunity to do so with honor I will break the engagement."

This mental decision brought immediate relief to him; and perhaps it was reflected somewhat in his manner, for when he was about to hand Miss Gordon into her mother's carriage she abruptly drew back.

"I would rather walk," she said quickly. "It is such a lovely night! You need not come for me, Uncle Tim," glancing up at the coachman, who received this order with great satisfaction; "I will walk home, too."

"I think you must forget how far it is to Mrs. Allen's," said Southgate. "It is half a mile at least. Are you sure that the walk will not be too long for you?"

"I shall like it," she answered.

"But your shoes, your dress," he felt bound in duty to suggest—"are they fit for the street?"

"Oh! yes: the pavements are perfectly dry; they cannot be hurt. This quiet starlight is so beautiful that I can't endure the thought of exchanging it for the glare of gas without having enjoyed it for a little while."

As she spoke she gathered up the folds of her train with one hand, and, again placing the other on his arm, led the way down the street.

The night *was* fine, though it was near the end of November. The air was warm and very balmy, and the sky brilliant with myriads of stars that are not visible when the moon's broad disc, while illuminating the earth, dims the splendor of her sister-lights in the heavens.

Love is quick in its perceptions. The tone of Southgate's voice, in which there was a ring of cold courtesy unlike his customary familiar ease, convinced Stella that he was seriously offended. She had proposed walking on the impulse of the moment, but now she was glad of the opportunity thus afforded to smoothe and appease him, not doubting her ability to do so.

Having the opportunity, she somehow found an unexpected difficulty in speaking. She was feeling at once remorseful and aggrieved, conscious that she had been wrong in showing such entire disregard for his often-expressed wishes, and also in refusing point-blank his earnest entreaty, yet indignant at what she looked upon as an unreasonable demand on his part. After all,

she thought, he was most to blame in the dispute. If it was to be renewed she would leave him to take the initiative and would merely stand on the defensive.

He did not seem inclined to resume the subject under discussion. Half a square, a whole square, was traversed in silence. Then feminine patience could endure no more. Stella exclaimed impulsively:

"You are vexed with me!"

"No, I am not vexed," he answered, "but I am sorry indeed, it alarms me to see my wishes have so little weight with you that you will not make the slightest sacrifice of van—of your own inclination to please me."

“I think your request altogether unreasonable," she replied warmly. "Suppose I wanted to dictate to *you* how your hair should be worn, and asked you to shave all but a fringe of it off. Would you do so?

"No, because that would be to do the very thing I am objecting to your doing. It is not customary for men who live in the world to shave their heads, and if I shaved mine I should be making myself as conspicuously and undesirably singular as you are making yourself with your dishevelled hair. But if you had asked me to cut my hair longer or shorter than I usually wear it, or to part it in the middle instead of at the side as I now do, I should not have hesitated a moment in gratifying your taste, however little it agreed with my own."

It required an effort, a very strong effort, on Miss Gordon's part to control her temper as she listened to the foregoing speech. She felt that it put her at a disadvantage. It was with forced composure that, after a minute's hesitation, she said:

"You seem to forget, when you talk of my making myself conspicuous and singular, that I did not set this fashion which you dislike so much, and that I am not alone in adopting it. The style is European."

"I suppose so, as I remember to have seen it stated that the Queen of England and several other crowned heads have forbidden the presentation at court of any lady whose head is not 'properly coifed,'" he answered drily. "No doubt the style was originated by some fast English girl-of-the-period, or perhaps—"

If Stella had been his wife he would have concluded the sentence in the words that were on his lips "perhaps it comes from the *demi-monde* of Paris." A sense of propriety restraining him from relieving his mind by expressing himself thus forcibly, he paused as above recorded, and was silent.

"Certainly, you do not spare epithets!" cried Stella in an accent of angry reproach. Then, with an effort at conciliation, she added in a different tone: "I do think, Edward, that you are very unjustly severe about what is, after all, only a trifle. But since you have such a rooted prejudice against loose hair, I promise you I will never wear mine so again."

"Thank you," he said. "You may consider it a trifle; I do not. A woman cannot be too careful in avoiding all peculiarity of dress and manner, unless"—he spoke pointedly—"she wishes to attract the admiration of men whose attentions are very undesirable."

"Ah!" exclaimed Stella to herself, and she almost laughed aloud, "I understand now: Mr. Gartrell!"

CHAPTER II.

MR. GARTRELL was just now very much talked of and very much thought of in the social world to which Miss Gordon and Southgate belonged—the town of M—. He had lately come to that place as a resident, his uncle, old Mr. Gartrell, having died not long before, leaving him a large estate in the neighborhood.

It was not his newly-acquired wealth, however, that made his principal claim to attention. Of course it added to that claim—added very much. But he had been a man of note long before his uncle was obliging enough to die. A lawyer of very decided ability and rank in his profession, he was specially distinguished in social life. Most people, men as well as women, thought him fascinating—when he chose to exert himself to please, that is to say. By a few he was regarded with a sentiment approaching to disgust perhaps because he took no trouble to propitiate the good opinion of this small minority.

Up to the time of his accession of fortune he was notoriously not a marrying man. He had managed to live by his profession, and to live tolerably well; but he had never manifested, nor been suspected of entertaining, any disposition toward matrimony. Now the case was different. It seemed the most natural thing in the world, his wide circle of acquaintances thought, that he should take a wife, so well able as he was to afford that luxury. His crop of wild oats bad been an unusually plentiful one; but the season for sowing was, or ought to be, over for him. He was in age between thirty-five and forty—probably nearer the last than the first.

All circumstances considered, consequently, the social world of M— was excited over Mr. Gartrell's advent and affairs.

"An excellent match for somebody," Mrs. Allen, one of the principal society women of the town, remarked frankly. Having neither daughters nor nieces to dispose of, she felt no hesitation in saying aloud what some of her friends only said to themselves; and being both good-natured and of a match-making turn of mind, she set herself seriously to consider who among all the girls of her acquaintance would be the most suitable somebody.

To facilitate the solution of this question she determined to give a series of informal musical parties; and it was to the first one of the parties that Miss Gordon and her lover were now on their way.

Mr. Gartrell was not only, at times, a fascinating man; he was also a handsome man—undeniably a very handsome man. His least friendly critics could not deny that. He had a fine figure and a face which arrested attention at a glance. Aquiline features, flashing eyes, abundant dark hair, rich coloring that was the first impression made on the eye of a stranger. A physiognomist might observe, looking at the face deliberately, that the eyes were a line's-breadth too near together, and, on close inspection, might perceive that the nostril and lip had some curves about them that, when the face was at rest, gave a slightly sardonic expression of countenance. With the world in general these indications of character passed unnoticed.

Miss Gordon, who had never met him before, was much struck by his appearance when, shortly after her arrival, Mrs. Allen presented him to her, and she was immensely flattered by the marked attention he paid her. It was not at all his habit to bestow much notice on young ladies. It having been heretofore an understood fact that his attentions were never "serious," he had always felt at liberty to devote himself to entertaining and being entertained by married women and widows, whose society was much more to his taste than that of unfledged girlhood. The exception he now made to his general rule was, Stella felt, a distinguished compliment, and as such she a little too obviously received it.

That her lover resented this was natural, and that she secretly enjoyed the situation was equally so, perhaps. She had no intention, no thought even, of exchanging his love for Mr. Gartrell's admiration; but she was in a glow of gratified vanity, and triumphed secretly in the sense of being the principal object of interest to both men. Of course she saw plainly that Southgate was displeased. But what of that? she thought. After making himself so odiously disagreeable as he had just been doing he deserved to be tormented a little. And so the severe gravity of his manner did not deter her from pursuing what, before the evening was half over, became a decided flirtation with Mr. Gartrell.

Mrs. Allen looked on with some uneasiness. In wishing to provide Mr. Gartrell with a wife or rather to afford him the opportunity of seeking one she had by no means intended to interfere with Southgate's rights. She read more correctly than did the heedless girl who was

trifling with her own and her lover's happiness the signs on the face of the latter, and determined to interpose and prevent, if possible, a serious misunderstanding.

Accordingly, she made an excuse to interrupt the *tête-à-tête*, which had lasted too long already, she considered, between Miss Gordon and Mr.
Gartrell. Approaching the corner where they sat, accompanied by a young gentleman, a stranger, she said:

"Let me introduce a young friend of mine to you, Stella. Mr. Wayland, Miss Gordon."

Then, before the formal acknowledgement of Mr. Wayland and Miss Gordon were over, she turned to Mr. Gartrell with a smile.

"Pray give me your arm," she said, "and come with me to the dining-room. I think you have taken nothing this evening."

She had chosen her time well when the dining-room was vacant, the music, which had ceased for a while, having just begun again.

"Do you know," she asked, as they sat down to a table to which her guests came unceremoniously, one, two, or more at a time, as they needed refreshment—"do you know that you are doing mischief?"

"I was not aware of the fact," he answered.

"It is a fact, nevertheless," said she gravely. "Yes, John," to a servant who approached deferentially, "coffee and oysters. The young lady with whom you have been flirting," she went on, as the servant walked away, "is engaged."

"Ah!"

"Yes, and her *fiancée* is evidently becoming jealous of the attention she has given you this evening."

A very slight, cynical smile played for an instant round the well-cut mouth of Mr. Gartrell before he said:

"I am rather sorry to hear that the young lady is engaged. She pleases me."

"I thought you did not admire young girls?"

"Generally speaking, I do not; but this one is exceptionally pretty and attractive, I think."

"Quite pretty, certainly; but now that you know she is engaged, you will let her alone, I hope, and not run the risk of—"

"Supplanting her lover?" he said, as his companion hesitated a moment.

"Causing a lovers' quarrel, I was going to say. I have no idea that you could supplant her lover, for she is very much attached to him. But she is vain and heedless, and inclined to be a flirt, as you have seen tonight. If you persist in your attentions you may produce trouble between them, I fear."

Mr. Gartrell smiled again, more cynically than before; but he did not gainsay the opinion of his hostess in words. When he went back into the music-room however, his eye at once sought Stella's graceful form and glittering tresses.

She was standing at the opposite end of the large apartment, with her back toward him, her wealth of golden hair floating like a veil over her shoulders and far below her waist, quite concealing the slender outline of her figure.

"What hair!" Gartrell thought, while exchanging common-places about the weather, the music, and the company with a lady who took possession of him at once. "I never saw any to equal it in beauty."

At this moment she turned to speak to some one behind her, thus presenting her face in turn to his critical examination.

It was not a beautiful face, abstractly speaking. He acknowledged that. A low, smooth forehead and straight brows that might have belonged to a
Greek statue were joined to a nose slightly but unequivocally *retroussé*; a mouth which, though well shaped and not actually large, was proportionably a little too large and much too mobile to be Greek in character; and a somewhat square outline of constantly dimpling cheek and chin. It

was impossible at a first glance for any artistically educated eye not to wish that the nose was straight, and a little less expansive at the nostrils, and that the face were oval to suit the beautifully formed head.

But even an artist, if he looked long, could not but grow reconciled to the seeming incongruity of feature. The faintly pink and pearl complexion, and the full, liquid eyes but a shade darker than the hair, were very lovely—the *tout ensemble*, the gazer would admit after a while, was bewitching.

Gartrell's gaze returned to it again and again with ever-increasing admiration, and when he made his parting bow at the close of the evening he said to himself: "That girl almost fascinates me. I think I must marry her."

CHAPTER III.

JEALOUSY is not an agreeable emotion in any case, it is to be supposed, though perhaps with one naturally disposed to it there may be a certain sense of enjoyment in the indulgence of the passion with or without reason, just as a bad-tempered person finds a morbid pleasure in giving way to fits of impatience and anger. To a thoroughly reasonable mind, and when there is good and sufficient cause for the suspicion and distrust which go to make up the sentiment of jealousy in a reasonable mind, there is nothing but pain in the pangs it inflicts.

Assuredly there was nothing but pain and doubt to Southgate in the feelings with which he watched Stella's conduct during the month which followed the scenes above narrated. He could not but believe that he had just cause for jealousy; yet whenever he was conscious of a twinge of it he shrank with a sense of humiliation from what he had always regarded as a most ignoble passion.

"What ought I to do?" was the question he was constantly asking himself, and which he found it impossible for some time to answer definitely.
Again and again he would resolve to break the engagement. But it was much easier to make than to keep such a resolution. With all Stella's faults—and latterly he could see little but faults in her—she had managed to establish herself so firmly in his heart that he knew it would require a terrible wrench to tear her thence. Still, he would not have permitted this consideration alone to deter him from acting decidedly and promptly. Two other reasons influenced him also.

The first of these reasons was the belief that, notwithstanding her persistent wilfulness, she really loved him, and, as she often said herself, would, when once married to him, be a dutiful and devoted wife; the second was partly a scruple of conscience, partly a motive of charity. He entertained a hope that if he kept his troth he might gradually win her from her inordinate worship of the world to the service of God. If he left her and she should marry (as she certainly would in that case) a non-Catholic—most probably this man Gartrell, who was worldly to the heart's core—she would, he was convinced, lose even the semblance of faith she now possessed. Was it right, his conscience asked, to abandon the trust he had assumed, because labor and patience were demanded in its fulfilment? And could he find a more excellent work of charity than to rescue a soul from that dangerous state of indifferentism which is in the spiritual order what coma is in the natural—the lethargy preceding death?

He went with these difficulties to his confessor, and was encouraged by the good father to be patient and hopeful, and not to act hastily either one way or the other.

"Do not press for an early marriage, as you say you thought of doing in order to bring matters to a crisis," said the priest; "and try to be indulgent to what is more the vanity and thoughtlessness of extreme youth than anything else, I am inclined to think. Remember that this poor child has had no home-teachings. It is from the mother that the first knowledge of faith and

the first idea of duty is acquired. That the mother's influence in this case has been only negative is the best we can hope."

"It is not negative so far as I am concerned," said Southgate. "I believe she is doing her utmost to induce her daughter to break her engagement. Yet until Gartrell came into the field she was quite willing for Stella to marry me."

"Her change of sentiment is very natural under the circumstances," said Father Darcy, with a smile. "You were a good *parti*, but Mr. Gartrell is a better in point of fortune, and, I suspect, is very much more to Mrs. Gordon's taste from the fact that, like herself, he is thoroughly worldly."

"In that respect he is more to Stella's taste, too," said Southgate, gloomily.

"Patience! patience!" said the priest cheerfully.

This conversation occurred about a week after Stella's first meeting with her new admirer. Her professed admirer Mr. Gartrell at once proclaimed himself, by deed if not word, and from Mrs. Gordon, at least, received every possible encouragement, in the face of the disadvantage of her daughter's being already engaged.

The girl herself was inconceivably capricious and contradictory in her conduct. One time she would be passionate and haughty, either denying that she was flirting with Gartrell or asserting her right to do as she pleased and receive whose attentions she pleased so long as she was unmarried; at another meek and penitent, acknowledging her faults so frankly, and appealing so earnestly to her lover's forbearance, that he could not refuse the forgiveness she asked, though well knowing that she obtained forgiveness one day only to commit the very same offence over again the next.

He had followed the priest's counsel, determined that he would secure himself against all danger of after self-reproach. But as the weeks rolled away it became apparent to his rival and Mrs. Gordon that his patience was not likely to bear much longer the strain put upon it. Both these two were working diligently to bring about the catastrophe which Stella was so blind as not to see approaching, and Southgate felt must soon come.

It came on Christmas eve.

By this time the young man was convinced that his love and charity both together could not cover the multitude of sins which he was called upon constantly to condone. His love was fast changing to disgust, and his charity was, he felt, powerless to effect any good in a nature that seemed hopelessly shallow and commonplace, if not evil. Having satisfied strictly the requirements of both honor and conscience, he waited calmly the opportunity to bring matters to an issue.

"Once for all, she must choose between that man and myself!" he said mentally; and, with an unacknowledged sense of relief, he anticipated that her choice would be in favor of his rival.

The latter was equally anxious for a decisive test of strength, and took his measures accordingly.

Early in the afternoon of Christmas eve Southgate went to confession with peculiar dispositions of resignation and devotion, and afterwards remained long in prayer and meditation before the Blessed Sacrament and at the altar of Our Lady.

Who ever asked help in vain from our divine Lord or his Immaculate Mother? When he left the church, and walked slowly and thoughtfully toward Mrs. Gordon's house, the serenity of his face was reflected from a soul possessing that peace which passeth the understanding of the worldly mind.

On entering Mrs. Gordon's drawing-room he found, to his disappointment, that Stella was not alone. Her mother, several young ladies, her friends, and Mr. Gartrell were present, and were discussing with great animation a german which the latter was proposing to give that night at his house in the country.

"I am sure there will be plenty of time to let everybody know," Stella was saying eagerly, as Southgate paused an instant on the threshold—no one having noticed the opening of the door or being aware of his approach—"and, mamma, you *must* consent to go. The roads are like glass, I assure you. Aren't they, Mr. Gartrell?"

"I am afraid to endorse that statement literally," answered Mr. Gartrell, with a slight laugh. "But they really are excellent for the time of year, Mrs. Gordon. Ah! here comes a recruit, I hope," he added, when Southgate advanced.

Stella's face fell almost ludicrously as she met the gaze of her *fiancée* fastened on it, calm as that gaze was. A look of mingled fright and confusion took the place of the pleasure it had expressed the moment before. But by the time Southgate had exchanged salutations generally, and been informed about the party that was in contemplation, she had somewhat regained self-possession, though still evidently embarrassed and very quiet in manner.

"It is quite an impromptu affair," said Gartrell in explanation to Southgate. "I wish the idea had occurred to me sooner. But I never thought of anything of the kind until Miss Gordon suggested it last night. I call it her party not mine," he went on, with a smile and bow to her; "and I only hope," he added, "that she may not find it more like a picnic than a ball."

"O! so much the better for that," cried one of the other young ladies. "Picnics are pleasanter than formal parties, *always* provided there is a floor to dance the german on."

"That I can promise you at Lauderdale," said Mr. Gartrell, rising. "Now I must bid you all *au revoir* until eight o'clock shall I say, Mrs. Gordon?"

"Better leave a margin," that lady replied, with a smile. "I can't engage to be punctual with five miles to go by moonlight. Some time between eight o'clock and ten."

There was a general laugh at this candidly vague appointment. Gartrell begged that the time might be nearer to eight than to ten, if possible. Then, having bowed to the ladies, he turned to Southgate. He was always markedly courteous to the young man whose *fiancée* he was trying to take from him, and spoke even cordially now as he said: "You will come, of course, Mr. Southgate?"

Before the latter could reply his mother-in-law elect added blandly: "I can give you a seat in the carriage with Stella and myself."

"Thank you both," said Southgate, smiling; "but I shall have to deny myself the double pleasure you offer. I must remain in town to attend
Midnight Mass."

"Ah! I am sorry," said Gartrell, shrugging his shoulders slightly as he left the room.

His departure was followed immediately by that of the other guests.

"O Edward! I am so sorry; but I entirely forgot Midnight Mass when I promised to go to this party," cried Stella, coming quickly back into the drawing-room after she had taken leave of her friends at the door.

Her lover looked at her as she sank into a chair by the fire and glanced up deprecatingly into his face, and from her his eye turned to her mother, who, instead of leaving the room, as he expected her to do, continued placidly clicking her knitting-needles, apparently absorbed in counting a row of stitches. She did not mean to give him an opportunity of speaking to Stella alone, if she could help it.

He was determined to make the opportunity.

"Come and take a short walk with me, Stella, won't you?" he said gently. "The atmosphere is delightful."

"It is much too late to think of walking," said Mrs. Gordon coldly. "It is almost time to dress."

"I will not detain her long," the young man replied, and, addressing Stella, added: "I wish very much that you would come."

She half rose from her seat, but at a warning look from her mother sank back again, saying, with ill-concealed embarrassment:

"You really must excuse me, Edward, this evening."

"Then I must beg to see you for a moment in another room."

He spoke quietly but firmly. Stella turned pale; the expression of his face alarmed her. How she would have answered this request remained a matter of doubt, as Mrs. Gordon interfered a second time. A faint color rose to her cheek, and she said in a tone of frigid hauteur:

"Anything that you have to say to my daughter may be said in my presence, Mr. Southgate."

"Pardon me, madam, but your daughter has promised, with the consent of her father and of yourself—at least I so understood—to be my wife. I think this gives me the right to speak to her alone," he replied coldly but respectfully.

"There is no reason why you should not say what you have to say before mamma," said Stella half defiantly, half appealingly.

"Very well. Did I understand that you are thinking of going to the country to a party to-night?"

The tone of assured authority in which he spoke roused that instinct of opposition which was so strong in Stella's nature. Her mother saw this with a half-smile and went on with her knitting; while the girl answered with flashing eyes:

"I *am* going."

"Have you, then, forgotten that you had an engagement with me, and, moreover, that I have told you more than once that I do not wish you to receive Mr. Gartrell's attentions?"

"Really, Mr. Southgate, the tone you take is intolerable!" exclaimed Mrs. Gordon indignantly. "Stella, you have no pride, no self-respect, if you do not discard this man instantly!"

But Stella was gazing wistfully, imploringly at her lover. The glance of his eye, the tone of his voice, told her that she could no longer oppose or trifle with him, unless she wanted to lose him. Without even an attempt at her usual fencing she said meekly:

"If you insist I will not go, then."

At which ignominious surrender Mrs. Gordon uttered an exclamation of anger, rose hastily from her seat, and, with a withering look of contempt for such spiritless submission, swept out of the room.

CHAPTER IV.

IT was with mixed emotions that Southgate left the house an hour later. Never in the first days of his wooing had Stella been more winningly gentle, never in her most penitent moods had she made more fervent promises of amendment or given him more earnest assurances of love. But the distrust with which he regarded her had been growing long and steadily, and was deep-rooted. He was touched at the moment by her humility and seeming sincerity; so long as he held her hand in his, and looked into the clear depths of her golden-brown eyes, he thought that his love, which had waned almost to extinction, was revived. When he left her, however, the impression produced by her presence faded, and his doubts returned in full force. And with them came the disgust for her petulance of temper and vacillation of purpose, against which he had been struggling for weeks past.

As he walked slowly homeward his face was very grave. He admitted to himself that he was disappointed with the result of the contest just ended. Instead of breaking it had riveted his chains.

"I ought not to have been so hasty at first," he said, half aloud, as he sat down before his solitary hearth that evening—he lived alone—and gazed with a troubled air at the leaping flames of a bright wood fire.

Many an evening, not long passed by, he had sat in the same place with musings different from the gloomy pictures of matrimonial infelicity which presented themselves to his imagination now. He remembered this after a while, and with a sudden revulsion of feeling, or perhaps with an effort to produce a revulsion of feeling, rose and walked to a distant corner of the room, and, laying his hand on a large chair which was set back stiffly against the wall, rolled it forward to one corner of the fireplace—a position from which it had been banished shortly before.

The room was furnished richly, but in dark colors; this chair was covered in pale blue satin.

Taking the two facts together, there was some excuse for the shock which Southgate's friend, Mr. Brantford Townsley, received when, coming in one day, he saw a beautiful blue throne shimmering in the firelight in the midst of the dark-tinted furniture around.

"Why!" with a gasp as if his breath had been taken away, "where did that thing come from?" he exclaimed.

He was a man of culture, a man of hypercritically artistic tastes. He started dramatically as his eye fell upon the chair, and stood on the edge of the hearth-rug at the opposite side of the fire, regarding it with an unaffected stare of horror.

"It came from Bowman's," replied his friend, laughing at the expression of Mr. Townsley's face.

Bowman's was the most fashionable furniture emporium in M—.

"But what is it doing here?" demanded Mr. Townsley, gazing at it now as though he was afraid of it.

"I happened to notice it in Bowman's showroom the other day," answered Southgate, speaking gravely, but with a glitter of humor in his eye. "It struck me that it would be ornamental, so I bought it."

"Ornamental!" almost shrieked Mr. Townsley in Ruskin-like tone. "My dear Southgate, my poor fellow, are you color-blind?"

"No."

"You must be, or you never could commit such an atrocity in taste as to put dark-green and sky-blue in juxtaposition!" He shuddered. "It sets my teeth on edge to look at that color," pointing his cane scornfully at the chair, "framed in such surroundings!"

"A little learning—in this case, culture—is a misleading thing," said Southgate, with affected didacticism. "Now, when you have studied the subject of harmony in contrast as exhaustively as I have, Brant, you will be aware that the most effective of all combinations are obtained by bringing together—judiciously, of course judiciously—the most violent antipathies in color. If you don't see how admirably these two opposite tints contrast and relieve each other, why, I pity you. You are a Philistine in art."

"And if you *do* see anything but the most nauseating antagonism between them, why, I pity you still more," retorted Mr. Townsley, as he walked across the hearth-rug and established himself in the chair which was the subject of dispute.

"Halt!" exclaimed Southgate hastily. "Vacate there, if you please, my good fellow! That *fauteuil*, as I informed you, is for ornament, not use."

"Excuse me, but this is the only way to get rid of such a monstrous offence to the eye," answered his friend coolly, sinking into the soft depths he had taken possession of with a sigh of satisfaction. "It is comfortable," he remarked. "I suppose you mean to have it covered with green to match the other chairs."

"No; I don't want it to match the other chairs. I intend to leave it as it is," Southgate answered, looking, as indeed he felt, slightly annoyed.

He did not explain to Mr. Townsley that when he was alone his fancy summoned a fair presence to fill it; and that, in a certain sense, the very discordance between it and its surroundings was made harmonious to him by the fact of his regarding it from a moral instead of aesthetic point of view. It represented to him the grafting of Stella's life upon his own. He could

see her graceful form reclining in the dainty satin nest, her superb *chevelure* spread out in rolling waves of light over the tufted sides. He recognized how exquisitely becoming to her delicate loveliness was the silken sheen and soft blue tint to which Mr. Townsley so vehemently objected, and saw the flash of a diamond on a white and dimpled hand as it was thrown forward upon the arm of the chair.

The charming wraith came and sat with him every evening, talked to him, smiled on him, enchanted him!

But all this had been in the first blush of his happiness as an accepted lover. Day by day the enchantment diminished. Soon the words and glances ceased to delight, and finally they began to displease him. When the handsome but cynical face of a man appeared uninvited bending over the back of the chair, whispering inaudible flatteries that were received and responded to by the very same blushes and dimples so lately his own, the chair and its occupant were thrust back into a corner out of sight and as much as possible out of mind.

To-night, sitting and looking at it, he endeavored without success to bring back the Stella of six weeks ago. The Stella of to-day came readily enough, but did not come alone. The dark, handsome face of his rival was persistently beside hers.

The young man rose and pushed the chair away again.

"What imbecility it has been from the first!" he muttered, returning to the fire and setting himself to read until it was time for Midnight Mass, to which Stella had promised to go with him.

The volume he picked up, almost at random, interested him more than he had expected. It was with a little surprise that he suddenly laid it down on the table at his side as a clock in an adjoining room began to strike.

"Not twelve, surely!" he thought with some apprehension, taking out his watch.

No, it was only eleven o'clock. But he had told Miss Gordon, he remembered, that he would be with her early. And so he started up at once.

To let the thoughts dwell on a harassing subject too constantly is like keeping the gaze fixed too steadily and for too great a length of time on a single object. In both cases the vision becomes uncertain, the thing looked at grows blurred, indistinct, often exaggerated in proportions. Rest the mind and the eye, and the power to see clearly returns.

The two hours during which Southgate had been absorbed in his book had refreshed his faculties. He felt more cheerful and more charitably disposed toward Stella when he left the house than when he had entered it.

Yet some doubt still haunted him. "I shall not be surprised if I find my bird flown after all; nor very sorry!" he thought, as he walked along the silent streets in the starlight. The moon, which was young, had gone down an hour before.

But he was surprised when this half-fear, half-hope was verified. Stella was gone to the german.

He did not know this until he was in the sitting-room, standing beside a low, clear fire, listening to hear her step descending the stair. There was a light in the hall when he entered, and his ring had been answered at once by Stella's maid, who conducted him into the sitting-room before she said:

"Miss Stella told me to be sure and ask you in, Mr. Southgate, and give you this letter and these flowers," directing his attention to the centre-table, on which was a vase of hot-house flowers. Amid the leaves and blossoms a letter was standing conspicuously up.

The young man looked at it for an instant without touching it.

"Then Miss Gordon has gone to into the country?" he said.

"Yes, sir," answered the girl, with the air of a culprit; for she understood very well the state of affairs, and was a firm partisan of Southgate's.

The light was shaded so that she could not see his face distinctly, but the tone of his voice frightened her, it sounded so stern. She hastened, therefore, to add apologetically:

"Miss Stella didn't want to go at all, but you are leaving these, Mr. Southgate!" she interrupted her explanation to exclaim, in a startled manner, as that gentleman was moving toward the door. She snatched up the vase and followed precipitately. "Here is your letter, and the flowers."

He turned and took the letter with undisguised reluctance, unbuttoned his coat, and put it unopened into his pocket; but shook his head as the maid extended the flowers.

"Thank you, no," he said. "I will not deprive Miss Gordon of them."

But he walked back into the room, and she again followed him, inquiring with evident uneasiness: "Won't you leave a message for Miss Stella, sir—a note?"

He saw that there were writing materials on the table, placed there no doubt, for his use.

"I have no message," he answered; and the girl now perceived that he had come back to lay a piece of money on the table, both her hands being occupied with the vase which she was still holding entreatingly toward him.

"You have been sitting up waiting for me, I suppose, Louise," he said. "You must be tired."

He pointed to the silver he had just put down, with a kindly smile wished her good-night, and the next moment the hall-door had closed on his exit.

"Thank God, I am free!" was the first definite thought in his mind when he found himself out under the stars again, striding rapidly away from Stella Gordon's home. A wave of almost fierce passion stirred his heart for a moment as a vision of the girl he had regarded as his future wife rose before him, radiant in beauty, dancing the german.

But his wrath passed as quickly as it came. The last lingering shade of respect for Stella was swept away in the bitter contempt which followed his first feeling of anger; and before he reached the church whither he had mechanically directed his steps on leaving Mr. Gordon's house indifference had taken the place of contempt. He left the very recollection of her outside the door. Only as he knelt before the altar, which was a blazing pyramid of lights and bowers, there was something of individual consciousness in the fervor with which his heart responded to the canticles of joy and thanksgiving in which the church celebrates the anniversary dawn of salvation to the world.

"I am free!" was his first waking thought the next morning, and almost his first act after dressing was to write a note, which he gave to his servant with strict orders that it was to be taken to Mrs. Gordon's during the course of the morning. Then, with the reflection, "I will conclude the affair to-morrow," he dismissed all recollection of his ill-fated engagement from his mind.

As he sat at breakfast the day after, he took Stella's letter from the pocket in which it had been reposing undisturbed ever since he had thrust it there two nights before, and set himself to read it, sighing impatiently as he drew the enclosure from the envelope and saw how long it was. There were two sheets of note-paper, almost covered.

As a matter of form he compelled himself to wade, or rather stumble, through the pages; but if Stella had seen the stern brow and cold composure with which he performed this task she would have known that she might have spared her excuses.

"Do not be very angry with me, dearest pray do not!" she wrote in her huge, fashionable scrawl. "Indeed I would not go to this hateful affair if I could help myself. But mamma was furious, absolutely furious, with me after you left, and has commanded me to go. She says that, after having proposed the party myself and promised to go, it would be shamefully inexcusable to stay away; and she is sure when everything is explained to you that you will be reasonable enough to acknowledge that I could not draw back. It will be no pleasure to me to go, I assure you, darling. I shall be thinking of you all the time, and I fully mean all that I promised this afternoon. And I promise you solemnly that I will not dance once to-night. O darling! if you knew how unhappy I am in being obliged to pain you once more when I had so fully intended never to do so

again, you would not be hard on me for what I can't help. Be generous and once more forgive

"Your own

STELL
A."

On the outside page of the last sheet were a few lines, which, after some study, he conscientiously deciphered:

"I leave my flowers that Bessie Curtis gave me to wear this evening. Take them, vase and all, dearest, and if you don't want them yourself put them on Our Lady's altar. O Edward! do write one line (I leave my portfolio on the sitting-room table) just to say that you are not very angry."

Southgate smiled contemptuously at the last words.

"I am not angry at all," he said aloud. "But 'the spell is broke, the charm is flown'—this time for ever."

Folding the sheets, he replaced them in the envelope and tossed them carelessly into the fire.

CHAPTER V.

"I LOVE pleasure—oh! I do *love* pleasure," Stella had said more than once to her lover in extenuation of her addiction to flirting and dancing the german—which last offence by the way, ranked as a greater enormity in his opinion than the first even.

"Yes, I think you love it better than anything else in the world," he replied during their conversation on Christmas eve.

"No, I do not love it as much as I love you!" she answered.

And she had spoken the truth. Notwithstanding her attachment to pleasure and the german, it was with very great difficulty that she was prevailed upon to go to Mr. Gartrell's party.

At first she absolutely refused to go; but when her usually indulgent mother became seriously angry and spoke with parental authority she knew not how to resist. Naturally of a yielding temper, that had been made wilful and obstinate only by unlimited indulgence, she was intimidated by a violence so new to her.

Even now, however, she did not yield the point without a struggle. She argued, she entreated, she even came to tears, imploring her mother not to compel her to do what she knew Southgate would not easily forgive. But Mrs. Gordon, who, ever since the hope of securing Gartrell as a son-in-law first dawned on her imagination as within the limits of the possible, had been extremely anxious to break the engagement with Southgate, was inflexibly resolved not to permit such an opportunity as this to pass without using it. She interrupted Stella's pleadings by telling her, in a tone not to be disobeyed, to go and dress, as the carriage was already at the gate.

The latter, thus constrained, made a hasty and careless toilette, and then, with swollen eyes and heaving breast, wrote the letter which received such contemptuous treatment.

Seated beside her mother in the carriage, she threw herself back in her corner, and without listening to the remarks on indifferent subjects which Mrs. Gordon volunteered, or pretending to reply to them, began to think of Southgate and of what *he* would think when he called for her at midnight and heard that she was gone.

"O mamma!" she cried, suddenly bursting into tears again and sobbing convulsively, "*do* let me return home. We are not more than a mile from town, and it is very early yet. Do drive back and set me down!"

"Is it worth while to talk so nonsensically?" asked her mother coldly.

"My head aches as if it would burst. I feel really ill," sobbed Stella. "I am sure this is a sufficient excuse for my not going on, particularly as you can say that I started and had to turn back."

To this argument her mother deigned no reply.

"Mamma, I never thought you could be so cruel," cried the poor child, indignation and distress together making her almost hysterical. "You do not seem to care how much I suffer."

"Stop crying, and your head will stop aching," was the frigid reply.

"But I am thinking of Edward," Stella exclaimed passionately. "What will he say? He will believe that I am altogether unworthy of his love and trust. He will give me up in despair."

"So much the better," said Mrs. Gordon complacently. "Mr. Gartrell is much the better match of the two, and I am confident that the moment he knows your engagement is off he will propose for you."

For an instant Stella could not utter an articulate sound. Her blood tingled in her veins, and there was an aching lump in her throat that she strove in vain to swallow.

"Mamma," she exclaimed at last in a choking voice, "do you mean that you have deliberately counted on the breaking off of my engagement?"

"I have foreseen for some time that it must come to an end," was the reply in a cold, matter-of-course tone. "Considering how you have been acting during the last month, I am only surprised that Mr. Southgate has not asked you before now to release him."

"And you never uttered one word of reproof or warning, and you said distinctly that you were sure Edward was too reasonable to resent my attending this party."

"He has been so *very* 'reasonable' in overlooking what, in his place, *I* should have considered inexcusable conduct on your part that I may be pardoned for presuming his powers of forbearance to be unlimited," answered Mrs. Gordon sarcastically. "As for interfering myself, I have more regard for your best interests than to do anything which would prevent your ridding yourself of an entanglement which you may replace to-morrow by so much more advantageous a connection."

"O mother!" cried Stella, in such a tone of reproach and despair that Mrs. Gordon for a moment half regretted having compelled her to take a step which that lady believed would certainly separate her from her lover. But the regret was only momentary. When the girl once more implored passionately to be allowed to return home her mother answered authoritatively:

"Don't repeat that ridiculous proposal again, Stella, but dry your eyes and act like a rational being instead of playing the spoiled child."

"You are right," said Stella bitterly. "I have been playing the spoiled child all my life; but I have done with the role from henceforth, I promise you."

She sat up in her seat, and by the faint moonlight her mother could see that she was drying her eyes and arranging her dress, after doing which she leaned back once more and did not speak or move again until they drew up before a flight of steps over which a broad light was streaming from the brilliantly illuminated hall at Lauderdale, and Mr. Gartrell opened the carriage-door himself and assisted her to alight.

"Thank you," she said simply in reply to his impressive welcome.

Her tone and manner were so spiritless that he paused involuntarily as he was about to turn and extend his hand to Mrs. Gordon, who was still in the carriage, and looked inquiringly at her.

"I hope you are well?" he asked, noticing how pale she was.

"No," she answered quietly. "I am suffering with the worst headache I ever remember to have had in my life. Indeed," to Mrs. Gordon's great vexation she added, "but for mamma I should not be here. I tried several times to persuade her to turn back and leave me at home, but she insisted on my coming."

"The crisis!" thought Mr. Gartrell jubilantly.

He expressed his regret with evident sincerity at hearing of her indisposition, as he conducted her mother and herself into the house, and was most solicitous to secure her comfort in every way. But he did not press any marked attentions upon her. One glance at her face had informed him, almost as clearly as words could have done, that there was or would be a rupture with her betrothed as the result of her presence here to-night. He was satisfied with this knowledge, and had too much sense to risk injuring the prospect of success which seemed opening before him by injudicious haste in obtruding his suit. To do him justice, he had also too much good-nature to feel inclined to inflict the least degree of additional pain on her when it was plainly to be seen that she was already suffering very much. There was in her eyes an expression of anxiety and preoccupation of mind strangely out of place in a ball-room—so strangely out of place that early in the evening he suggested to her mother that he feared Miss Gordon ought to retire, she looked so really ill; and Mrs. Gordon, whose ambition by no means stifled natural feeling as yet, went to Stella and urged her to go to bed.

She declined to do so.

"I could not sleep, and it would be more tiresome lying awake all alone than staying here," she answered coldly.

"But I am afraid you are suffering very much, you are so pale," said her mother.

"I feel ill," she replied in the same tone as before, "but I suppose I shall be well to-morrow."

The evening was very long and wearying to her. Instead of joining in the wild whirl of the german, as Southgate's imagination pictured her, she sat quiet and languid by the fire, with that forced expression of amiability on her face which is so often the most transparent mask put on to conceal *ennui*.

"You poor child, I see that you are bored to death!" exclaimed her friend Bessie Curtis, coming to her side shortly before twelve o'clock and regarding with half-comic pity her conscientious efforts to talk to and seem amused by a heavy gentleman who "never waltzed" and was exceedingly anxious to please. "Come and go up-stairs with me! You have been acting martyr long enough."

Stella smiled more brightly than she had before during the whole evening, and rose readily.

"I am tired," she said, "and my head aches distractingly. So tired!" she continued a moment later when her friend and herself were seated beside a glowing fire in the pleasant chamber that had been assigned to them. "Every clash of that band went through and through my brain, it seemed to me. I don't think I shall ever want to hear a Strauss waltz again."

"Oh! yes, you will," said Miss Curtis, laughing—"tomorrow night, perhaps. It is to be hoped that your head will be well by that time."

"My head is not the worst of it," said Stella; and, time and place being propitious for confidence, she poured out a recital of her wrongs, the root of her headache—her lover's insistance that she should not come to this party, and her mother's insistance that she should. "I know Edward is going to be very, very angry. Yet it is not my fault that I came," she concluded.

"You can tell him so," said her friend consolingly. "And now do go to bed. You look wretched for you."

"I feel horrible," Stella answered, and followed the advice offered.

But it was not so easy to comply with the exhortation to go to sleep with which Miss Curtis left her shortly afterwards. Southgate's face, as it had looked that afternoon, stern and resolved, with a gleam of scorn in the clear gray eyes, was persistently before her.

"He knows by this time that I am here," she said half-aloud, pressing her hands to her aching temples. "He has a right to be angry and to scorn me. I wonder if he is thinking of me now! No," as a clock down-stairs struck twelve, "he is not, I am sure. He is at Midnight Mass."

On that thought she paused, and a different picture of Southgate's countenance replaced the one that had been haunting her all the evening.

This was a gentle and reverent face that she saw gazing at the altar before which she knew he was now kneeling.

"I wish, how I wish, that I was there with him!" she exclaimed under her breath. "Ah! if he will but forgive me this one time more I will try and learn to be good and devout, as he is."

She went to sleep after a while, and woke the next morning feverishly impatient to get back to town in order to see her lover and justify her conduct to him. But there was breakfast and a long delay to be endured before the moment of relief which saw her seated in the carriage and driving away from Lauderdale. It was almost noon when they reached home.

CHAPTER VI.

SOUTHGATE'S servant was coming out of the gate as they drove up to it.

"You brought a note for me, Willis?" Stella said eagerly, leaning out of the carriage-window to speak to the man.

" Yes'm," was the reply.

With a light heart she hurried into the house, to find the note addressed not to herself but to Mrs. Gordon, and to see that the vase of flowers she had left for Southgate was still on the table where she had placed it.

She met her mother and offered her the note as the latter was entering the hall.

"You can read it," said the lady, recognizing the writing.

Stella opened it and glanced at a few formal words in which the writer excused himself from dining with Mrs. Gordon that day, "as he had expected to have the honor of doing."

"What is it?" asked Mrs. Gordon a little sharply, and yet sorry for the distress visible in her daughter's face.

"It is an apology. Mr. Southgate is not coming to dinner," answered Stella coldly.

Laying the note down on the hall -table, she went to her own room, summoned her maid, and heard a detailed account of Southgate's visit of the night before.

He had received her letter unwillingly, and had put it into his pocket unopened; he had refused to take the flowers; he "had no message" for her!

That was the cheering information obtained by a very strict cross-examination of Louise. The prospect before her was not encouraging. She could not write to him again. What should she do? she asked herself.

Just at the moment she could do nothing; but in the afternoon she went to Vespers, hoping she might there meet her recusant lover.

She saw him at once on entering the church, his pew being near her own; and all through Vespers, and even as she knelt at Benediction, she was considering how she could attract his attention, and waiting with palpitating heart for the moment of leaving the church.

That moment came and went without his glancing once in her direction.

With heavy heart she returned home, and the rest of the day which ended with a large Christmas-party dragged through more wearily than ever day had for her before.

She even could not sleep when at last, long after midnight, she laid her tired head on the pillow. But when finally she did lose consciousness her slumber was deep and long.

"Mr. Southgate is down-stairs, Miss Stella," was the announcement with which Louise awoke her the next morning.

"What did you say?" she exclaimed, starting up and looking a little bewildered.

The maid repeated what she had said, and added:

"I saw him coming up the walk a minute ago and thought I had better wake you."

"Mr. Southgate here this time in the morning!" cried the young lady in amazement as she sprang out of bed.

"Oh! it's not so very early," said the maid. "Breakfast is over, but—"

"Breakfast over, and you did not wake me!"

"You know you always tell me not to disturb you early when you have been up the night before," was the answer.

A truth which Stella could not deny. Therefore she made no rejoinder, but with Louise's assistance dressed as rapidly as she could.

"Did you tell Mr. Southgate that I would be down directly?" she asked.

"No'm; I didn't speak to him. I only caught a glimpse of him, and came straight to tell you."

A few minutes afterwards Stella ran lightly down-stairs and with sparkling face opened the sitting-room door. To her surprise the room was empty. She went to the drawing-room, but that too was vacant; and, on inquiring of the servant who had seen Mr. Southgate, was told that he had asked for Mr. Gordon, not herself, and, learning that Mr. Gordon was really gone to his office, had declined to come in.

Sick to the soul with disappointment and an intuition of coming evil, she returned to her own room and waited for what was to come.

She did not have to wait long, though the time seemed long to her. In less than half an hour she received a message from her father. He wished to see her.

He was standing on the hearth with his back to the fire when she entered the sitting-room in answer to his summons, and greeted her by a very slight "Good-morning." For the first time that she remembered he had no smile for her; his face was grave, almost stern.

When she was seated and looked up questioningly he said abruptly:

"Southgate has just been with me to request to be released from the engagement of marriage which existed between him and yourself."

She was not surprised. It was what she expected. The color ebbed from her face, and her hands clasped each other convulsively; but she had prepared herself, and managed to present an appearance of calmness, though she could not command the power of speech.

After a momentary pause her father continued:

"He says that almost from the first you have acted in a manner which has gradually led him to the belief that you were mistaken in imagining you were attached to him. He is inclined to think that you discovered this and wished to get out of the affair, yet did not like to move first, and consequently have so conducted yourself as to force him to move. Believing that, under these circumstances, it would not be for the happiness of either of you to marry, he asks that the engagement be dissolved by mutual consent, though he leaves you at liberty to say that you rejected him.

"I have repeated substantially his own words; now I want to know the meaning of it all. He is not a man to be either untruthful or unreasonable; therefore I presume that his taking this step is justifiable?"

"Yes," answered Stella in a quivering voice.

"I am to understand, then," said Mr. Gordon, "that you did want to rid yourself of the engagement, and took this unworthy way to do it?"

"No," she replied emphatically, lifting her eyes and meeting his frowning gaze unflinchingly. "I have acted very badly, I confess, though I did not mean to do so—it was all my miserable folly—but I never for a moment wished to break the engagement."

"Then why did you leave that impression on Southgate's mind?" he demanded, with increasing irritation.

Partly the tone in which the question was asked—so different from her father's usual caressing manner—and partly the sense which grew momently more clear to her apprehension and more bitter to her heart that Southgate was lost to her for ever, overcame the composure she was struggling to maintain. To Mr. Gordon's equal annoyance and consternation she burst into tears, and, covering her face with her handkerchief, sobbed unrestrainedly.

While he was essaying some blundering attempts at consolation, half reproving, half soothing her distress, the door opened and his wife entered the room. He had been informed, when he came home and wished to see her before he spoke to Stella, that she was dressing to go out, and she appeared now in carriage costume. Pausing just within the threshold, she said:

"Did you want to see me, Roland?" Then, observing the disturbance of his countenance and the tears of her daughter, she advanced a step and asked: "What is the matter?"

"The matter is that your kind efforts to break my engagement and ruin the happiness of my life have succeeded, mamma!" cried Stella, springing to her feet and confronting her mother with flashing eyes from which tears were pouring in streams.

"I *told* you," she went on passionately, "that Edward would not forgive another breach of faith on my part! I *implored* you not to compel me to go to that detestable—"

"Stella!" interrupted her father sternly, "recollect yourself. How dare you speak in such a tone as that to your mother?"

"You don't know, papa, how cruelly she has treated me! It is *her* fault, not mine, that my engagement is broken off! I—"

She stopped, her voice choked in tears, and Mr. Gordon looked inquiringly to his wife for an explanation of the accusation just made.

Mrs. Gordon was buttoning her gloves—an occupation which she chose at the moment as well to prevent the exultation she felt at hearing of the success of her schemes from betraying itself in her eyes as to conceal some slight confusion which, notwithstanding her complacency, she could not entirely control. Not succeeding in meeting her eye, her husband was obliged to put his question into words.

"What is this trouble between Stella and Southgate about?" he asked, "and what does she mean by saying that it is your fault?"

"Stella, though engaged to one man, has been flirting with another for a month past, to which conduct Mr. Southgate naturally objects," answered Mrs. Gordon drily. "As to her assertion that I had anything to do with the breaking of the engagement, that is nonsense. I insisted on her going to a party on Christmas eve which was given to please her and at her special request. After asking Mr. Gartrell to give the party, and promising again and again that she would go, she wished to draw back at the last moment. This would have been such unpardonable rudeness that I would not permit it."

"I am astonished that you suffered her to act so improperly in the first place," said Mr. Gordon in a tone of displeasure. "Why did you permit her to flirt, as you call it, and to be on such familiar terms with a man like Gartrell as to be asking him to give parties? If she wanted a party could not you have given it?"

"Why did I 'permit' her to flirt with Mr. Gartrell and propose his giving a ball at Lauderdale?" repeated Mrs. Gordon quietly. "Really, if you imagine that Stella ever waits for permission to do anything she chooses to do you know very little about her character."

Mr. Gordon turned round sharply where he stood, and, taking up the tongs, punched the fire vigorously for a moment or two. Then he took several turns up and down the room, glancing at his daughter to see whether she had any further plea to enter in her defence. But she could not deny the truth of a word her mother had uttered, and did not attempt to do so. "Well," he said at last very drily, "so far as I can see, there is nothing more to be done in the matter."

"Nothing, except to return Mr. Southgate's ring," said Mrs. Gordon in a matter-of-course tone. "You had better do so at once, Stella。"

With which parting advice she went on her way rejoicing.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. GORDON was a man of easy temper and, morally speaking, indolent nature. He would not have been guilty of a dishonorable act for any earthly consideration; nothing would have induced him to commit a wilful fault even. But as to sins of omission his conscience was as easy as his temper. He was fond of his wife and daughter, and the sole principle of his life with regard to them was unlimited indulgence.

Naturally they accepted this rule kindly; and thus far it had answered very well, giving him what he desired—a quiet and harmonious life. Stella was badly spoiled, it is true; but her whims and caprices did not come much within his cognizance, and, consequently, it had never occurred to him that he was called upon to notice or correct them.

Mrs. Gordon was phlegmatically amiable. She had all she wanted in the world, and nothing to speak of that she did not want. Though profoundly selfish, she was not disposed to be unreasonable or to make herself disagreeable to anybody about trifles. And everything which did not conflict with her own comfort or wishes was a trifle in her eyes. When Stella accepted Southgate she accepted him also willingly enough. She thought at the time that he would fill the position as well or better than any other young gentleman of her acquaintance, and rather liked him personally.

But at Gartrell's appearance upon the scene, and as soon as his manner made it evident that with the slightest encouragement he would be a suitor for Stella's hand, dormant ambition awoke in her soul. Here was the man for Stella to have married. Still, while lamenting secretly the ill-chance which, in the person of Southgate, had come between her daughter and this distinguished and desirable *parti*, it was some time before the idea entered her mind that, though engaged, Stella was not yet married, and that to give up one engagement and form another was not a thing impossible.

Perhaps such an idea never would have entered her mind but for Stella's own conduct. Having obtained entrance, however, it remained.

A person of phlegmatic temperament is, according to physiological science, capable of energetic effort if once roused to action. Mrs. Gordon exemplified the truth of this opinion. She was indefatigable in her exertions to bring about the end she desired. Almost daily she managed that, one way or another, Stella should be irritated against her lover and do something to irritate him in turn. To her own surprise, she developed a decided genius for intrigue, really enjoyed the excitement of the game she was playing, and played in a perfectly dispassionate spirit. Until on Christmas eve when he so nearly defeated her by his pertinacity and resolution, she had not entertained the slightest ill-feeling toward Southgate, nor was she troubled with the least twinge of remorse for the injury she was doing him. She was acting for the advantage of her daughter, she would have said to her conscience, had she owned such an appendage and it had ventured a remonstrance.

Great was her exultation now, as, leaving Stella dissolved in tears, she drove off to do some shopping. She regarded the marriage with Gartrell as virtually accomplished.

Her husband looked at the matter in a very different light. Knowing Southgate well, and appreciating his character at its true worth, he had been more than pleased with the proposed connection, and his disappointment and regret at this termination of the affair was extreme. Added to which he was both shocked and angered at an exposure of conduct on the part of his daughter which he regarded as nothing less than false and unprincipled.

He walked up and down the floor, after his wife was gone, looking and feeling very much incensed; and as soon as Stella's sobs softened a little from their first violence he requested and obtained her version of the affair.

"Humph! You have certainly acted in a very honorable manner," he said, with stinging irony, when she concluded.

"O papa!" she cried deprecatingly.

"I thought you might possibly be able to make some explanation which I could offer to Southgate," he went on coldly; "but I see he was right in saying that your conduct is inexcusable.

I am disappointed in you, Stella—bitterly disappointed. Of course, I knew that you were spoiled and childish, but I gave you credit for having some sense and some principle. In this affair you have shown no sign of either. However," checking himself, "reproaches will do no good; nor, I am afraid, will advice. But I have one word of warning to give you. Unless you want to make a miserable life for yourself do not think of marrying Gartrell. He is not a man to be trusted."

"I would not marry him to save his life, or my own either!" she exclaimed vehemently.

"Don't talk senselessly," said her father, with frowning impatience, as he turned to leave the room.

Stella listened to his receding steps and felt that hope had departed with them. His words, "There is nothing more to be done in the matter," and her mother's addendum, "except to return Mr. Southgate's ring," seemed repeated almost audibly beside her. It had come to this, then her engagement was really at an end.

She sat for .a long time just where her father left her, without moving, almost without breathing, with something of a stunned sensation.

The entrance of a servant with two cards at last roused her.

"Why didn't you say ‘not at home,' Robert?" she exclaimed impatiently, taking the cards and glancing at them, turning her back to the man involuntarily as she did so to prevent his seeing her face, on which the traces of tears must be very visible, she feared. "You know mamma is out."

"I said so, Miss Stella, and that you were not up, I thought. Mrs. Harrison was going away then, but Miss Flora insisted on my finding out whether you could not see her. So I asked them in."

"Say, with my compliments, that I beg to be excused."

But before the servant could leave the room she stopped him. The dread idea of what the opinion of the world would be as to the breaking of her engagement, for the first time came like a shock upon her. Of course the fact would soon be known. Of course the dullest people could put two and two together—Southgate's absence from Mr. Gartrell's ball and from her mother's party the evening before, and her own low spirits on both occasions. She was sure it would be perfectly well understood that he had withdrawn from the contract, not been rejected. Her vanity writhed at the bare imagination of all that would be said on the subject. She could hear Mrs. Harrison and her daughter—who, though not ill-natured, were thoroughpaced gossips contributing their quota to the general fund of conjecture and report. "No wonder she was not to be seen this morning, poor thing!" Mrs. Harrison, she knew, would exclaim in sympathetic tone; and Flora would add, with a slight shrug of the shoulders, "I always knew how that affair would end. Stella is too incorrigible a flirt to marry the first man she was engaged to!"

Swift as a flash all these thoughts were in her mind; her pride was in arms .in an instant. A sense of indignant anger against Southgate which she had never felt before took possession of her. "She would show him that she was not heart-broken, nor even hurt, by his desertion!" she exclaimed mentally.

"Stay, Robert!" she cried, almost in the same breath with the apology she had just delivered, and before Robert had taken a step toward the door.

Turning rapidly to a mirror, she scrutinized her face. It was not so hopelessly unpresentable as she had expected to see it; and, bidding the man say she would be down presently, she hurried to her chamber, bathed her eyes, manipulated her flushed cheeks gently with a powder-puff, and then made a very deliberate toilette. By the time this was completed scarcely a trace of her late distress was discernible even by herself, and to her friends in the drawing-room she looked quite as usual. They had no suspicion that they had been kept waiting so long from any other reason than the one she apologetically alleged—her having been late in rising, and always taking a long time to dress.

Mrs. Gordon was amazed, on her return, to hear voices and laughter as she entered the hall, and to find Stella, in her best looks and spirits, entertaining visitors. Here was a transformation as unlooked for as it was welcome. She had expected to have no slight trouble,

and that it would require skilful management, to induce her daughter to "act reasonably" in the matter of her broken engagement. Her relief and pleasure were great at perceiving that the girl herself had as she considered, taken so sensible an attitude.

And Stella was as much pleased with herself as her mother was pleased with her, when she found how well she was acting her hastily-adopted role. She made an engagement for the evening with Mrs. Harrison, and, while the two elderly ladies were exchanging parting civilities when Mrs. Harrison and her daughter rose to go, remarked to her friend Flora, apropos of observing the latter's gaze fixed on her hand:

"I see you miss my ring. I was tired of it, it had so many sharp edges and was always cutting or scratching me. So I have taken it off for good."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Miss Harrison, surprised. "You mean you have discarded Mr. Southgate?"

Stella winced at this point-blank question. She would have been willing to convey indirectly the impression just expressed, Southgate having requested that she would give to the world her own version of the affair ; but her capability of deception was not robust enough to commit a positive breach of veracity. Therefore she laughed and answered:

"Oh! no. The affair had become mutually unbearable, and we determined to be happy apart instead of miserable together. Don't you think we were right?"

CHAPTER VIII.

CHANCE has often more to do with the shaping of human action than the actor himself is aware. In the present case the mere circumstance of an inopportune visit caused Stella to take a line of conduct which would not probably have been her choice had time been afforded her for consideration. She could not permit the Harrisons to think she was in agonies of regret at the loss of her lover—that, she was aware, would be the inference drawn from her denying herself to them as soon as the fact of her break with Southgate became known—and so she constrained herself to put aside the pain she felt and affect indifference. Then, on the impulse of the moment, she gave Miss Harrison (whom she knew to be a good publishing medium) an explanation of the affair the truth of which she afterwards felt bound to substantiate by her conduct.

A sense of womanly pride, aided by her epicurean nature, which turned instinctively from everything painful and seized instinctively every possibility of amusement and enjoyment the passing moment afforded, enabled her to succeed fairly well in her self-appointed task. If she felt her lover's defection to be anything but a relief she betrayed no sign to that effect, unless a more feverish pursuit of pleasure than she had indulged before even might be construed so. She flirted and danced the german *ad libitum* now, and became so very "fast" that her mother interfered—or, more properly speaking, attempted to interfere, but without result.

"You destroyed the happiness of my life, mamma, and you must allow me to take all the pleasure I can get in place of it," she said coldly in reply to Mrs. Gordon's remonstrances and reproofs, and went her way with utter indifference to everything but the gratification of her own will.

Smarting under an accusation that was but half true, Mrs. Gordon soon began to wish that she had not undertaken to order Stella's life, but had acquiesced in what fate and Stella herself had elected as fitting.

It was not only that the latter's resentment seemed inappeasable, manifesting itself in a frigid distance of manner and studied avoidance of her presence which wounded even more than provoked her. She had incurred her husband's displeasure also. He blamed her severely, she could see. Though he said only a few words on the subject once, and did not recur to it afterwards, he was cold, almost stern, in his manner to her as well as to their daughter. She was obliged to admit

to herself that the result of her labors at match-breaking and match making was altogether infelicitous. She had brought a cloud upon her marital life and had estranged her daughter's affection.

That was not all; for when, early in the new-year, Gartrell fulfilled her prediction by proposing to Stella, he received a prompt and decided refusal—a refusal so prompt and decided that most men would have accepted it as final.

Not so Gartrell. He never, like the rest of Stella's friends and acquaintance, was deceived by her affected indifference and rattling gayety into the belief that she had thrown over Southgate for his—Gartrell's—sake and was ready to marry him at a word. Having read with tolerable accuracy the whole course of her conduct, he understood much better than Southgate did that she was sincerely attached to the latter, and that the faults which to her lover seemed grave and inherent defects of character were simply the volatility of extreme youth and an exuberance of animal spirits which she had not yet learned to control. He was not surprised, scarcely disappointed, and certainly not discouraged, by the issue of his first proposal, considering it a first step only, a breaking ground, so to speak, and not expecting a different answer.

But he was just the man to be animated instead of dismayed by obstacles. That which was difficult of attainment he most desired; and, apart from this very common sentiment of mankind he was really fascinated by Stella's beauty and vivacity. Above all, his vanity was enlisted in the pursuit. She was the first woman he had ever asked to be his wife, and she had declined that much-coveted honor. Such a failure must be retrieved, he felt. Time would reconcile her to the loss of her lover, he doubted not. He would wait awhile, perhaps, before renewing his addresses; but, at whatever cost of effort and management, he must win her, he was resolved.

No doubt he was more encouraged than he would otherwise have been to persevere in his object by the fact that Southgate left M— a few days after the rupture of his engagement, for, he informed his friends, a stay of considerable time in Europe. He had a brother, a student of the Propaganda, whom he had been intending to visit during the autumn just past. His engagement having prevented the fulfilment of that intention, Stella had consented to be married in April, and they were to sail at once for the Old World. He now went alone; and Gartrell considered him well out of the way, and, like Mrs. Gordon, regarded his own success to be simply a matter of time.

He would not have been so sanguine had he known what Stella's feelings toward him were. He had injured her by tempting her to flirt with him and thereby provoke her lover to break with her; she had injured him by being induced to flirt with him and thus lead him to suppose she would marry him. So the proposition stood in her mind. Mutually sinning and sinned against, they were quits, she thought; and, on her part, she wished she might henceforth and forever be quit of him and his admiration. She had never imagined or desired that this admiration would take the practical form of a declaration of love and proposal of marriage. A little incense to her vanity was all she had wanted from him.

His proposal gratified her in one way only. In the bitterness of her anger against her mother she was pleased to be able (metaphorically speaking) to trample on that lady's ambitious hopes, and to let her see that her intriguing had done nothing but mischief. Too eager and anxious not to be observant, Mrs. Gordon divined at once by Gartrell's manner, when she returned to the drawing-room one morning after having absented herself for a time in order to give him the opportunity, which she hoped and believed he desired, of speaking to her daughter, that he had put his fate to the touch—and lost.

"Did not Mr. Gartrell offer himself this morning, Stella?" she inquired the first moment she obtained for speaking to Stella privately, which, thanks to an influx of visitors at the time and the manoeuvres of the latter afterwards, was not until she had endured some hours of suspense.

"He did me that honor," answered Stella, with just the faintest inflection of irony in her voice.

"And you?" said her mother, outwardly calm, but inwardly palpitating with alarm at the bare suspicion which began to dawn upon her.

"I declined the honor."

"You mean to tell me that you *refused* him?" cried Mrs. Gordon in a tone of violent anger.

"Certainly," was the cool reply.

It seemed at the moment as if mother and daughter had changed characters. Mrs. Gordon, who had all her life been so imperturbably tranquil in manner, was now excited beyond the power of self-control. Her ample chest heaved with passion; her light blue eyes, which were too cold to flash, had a dull glow in them; she was absolutely inarticulate as she gazed into her daughter's face, on which was a look almost cruel, such utter indifference did it express. She had come into Stella's room in the afternoon while the latter was dressing for a short journey she was about to take, had sent Louise away, and abruptly asked the question which was thus answered so much to her disappointment; and it was not only disappointment and rage that she now felt, but a sort of startled wonder at the change in Stella. The singular immobility of the countenance habitually all flashing vivacity, the perfect quiet of the attitude in which the girl stood beside the toilet-table facing her mother, with her hands resting on the marble, as motionless as if they had been part of it, struck Mrs. Gordon as so unnatural that she was half-bewildered. A thrill of pain, almost remorse, shot through her heart; but it was followed the next instant by a rush of angry indignation.

"You must have lost your senses!" she exclaimed, regaining the power of speech. "Silly and spoiled as you always were, I never thought you could be capable of the idiocy of refusing such a man as this!"

"Tastes differ," said Stella carelessly. "Some people admire Mr. Gartrell—you, mamma, for instance. I do not. I never should have thought of marrying him, even if he had not been the cause of my not being permitted to marry the man I loved."

"I am ashamed to hear you speak in this way!" cried Mrs. Gordon with vehement reproach. "I am ashamed that my daughter has so little pride, is so destitute of the faintest sentiment of self-respect, as to boast of her love for a man who left her—who *rejected* her—instead of despising and forgetting him!"

"It is only the despicable whom it is possible to despise," answered Stella quietly. "Mr. Southgate treated me as I deserved—I confess that.
And as to forgetting him, I am not breaking my heart about him. No one would accuse me of that, I am sure," she added, with a cynical smile that looked very much out of place on her lips.

"Everybody will believe it, if you show so little sense as to refuse Mr. Gartrell."

Stella shrugged her shoulders. "It is a matter of indifference to me what everybody believes," she said.

"And pray whom do you expect to marry, if you throw away such an offer as this?" demanded her mother, in despair.

"Nobody, probably. But I manage to amuse myself well enough, and that is all I care about for the present. The future can take care of itself. And if I am at last left an old maid on your hands, mamma, why, you will have only yourself to thank for it, you know."

There was a ring of bitterness in the last words which silenced the burst of anger with which Mrs. Gordon's heart was swelling. She turned and left the room without making any reply to the reproach; and Stella rang for her maid and resumed the interrupted labors of her toilette.

An hour afterwards, having taken a cold leave of her mother, she was on her way to visit a friend in W—, a neighboring town, half a day's journey away by rail.

CHAPTER IX.

IN the fresh fields and pastures new to which she had betaken herself Stella found everything enjoyable. She was charmed to be with her friend

Gertrude Ingoldsby; she was pleased with the parents of her friend—kind, genial people, whose acquaintance she had never made before; and, best of all to her, in the society of W— there was plenty of food for powder—plenty of young gentlemen who, without permanent injury to their hearts, offered her that incense of admiration which she craved as the inebriate does brandy.

Chief among the number of these admirers was Tom Ingoldsby, a brother of her friend, who met her at the station on her arrival, and straightway flung himself down and licked the dust of her chariot-wheels. She appreciated such unhesitating and unreserved fealty, and accepted it graciously. As she often assured her friend, her time passed delightfully.

For a week. But circumstance, alas! is mutable. At the end of that short period there suddenly appeared a Mardochai sitting in the gate of triumphs.

There was an elder son of the house of Ingoldsby, who had been absent from home when she arrived. He returned one night, made his appearance at breakfast the next morning, and her peace of mind, as well as his brother Tom's, was gone.

He did not bow down and offer involuntary homage of eye and smile to her beauty, as most men did when they met her first. Not being what is called a ladies' man, it was a matter of no concern to him that a young lady was domiciled for the time in the house. He was courteous but indifferent in manner when introduced to her. "A pretty girl," he thought carelessly; but the piquant face which many men considered so bewitching had no special attraction to him. Had he been in the way of admiring women his ideal would have been different.

Stella was at first amazed at his insensibility, then disgusted, then piqued, finally put upon her mettle. If Mr. Ferroll Ingoldsby had been aware of the counsel she took with her pillow on the first opportunity she had for consulting that sole available friend (she could not, of course, discuss with his sister the subject of his intractability to the power of her charms) he might have trembled at his danger, or he might have smiled.

She had never intentionally been a coquette, only a flirt. To excite admiration, not to inspire love, had been her amusement hitherto. But she felt bloodthirsty now.

"I should like to make that man love me," she said to her confidant, the pillow, as she laid her head down upon it. "And why not? Shall I try? A whole day in the same house, and he has bowed to me three times? Not a word beyond the most commonplace of social civilities; not a look which he might not as well have bestowed on the poker. Shall I submit to such treatment? I think not. Let me see: I have been here a week, and I came to stay a month. Mrs. Ingoldsby said yesterday that she would not hear of my staying *only* a month; but mamma may interfere and insist on my returning home. At all events I have weeks to count on and that is long enough to do a great deal in, particularly with mine enemy at such close quarters. Well, Mr. Ferroll Ingoldsby, we shall see."

Mr. Ferroll Ingoldsby did see, what she vainly flattered herself she was successfully concealing, that she was endeavoring to attract him. And he was amused. He saw also that the face he had at first considered merely pretty became much more than that when daily association developed to his preception each detail of its exquisite loveliness. He might have fallen wilfully into the snare laid for him had not his growing admiration been checked by one little circumstance—the suspicion, which indeed might be called a conviction, that Tom's young affections had been trifled with.

Tom was desperately in love and desperately miserable—that was evident at a glance; and, judging Stella by her effort to captivate himself,
Ferroll blamed her for this more than she deserved. Tom's infatuation had been instantaneous and voluntary—or, more properly speaking, perhaps, involuntary; her only fault in the matter being that, partly from vanity, partly from good-nature, she received his adoration too kindly, thus fostering instead of repressing it. Regarding him as a mere boy, she treated him with a familiarity which he found intoxicating until it was contrasted with her very different manner to his brother. He saw then that she gave his love no serious thought, and the discovery was very wounding to his *amour propre*. He had been gravely considering of the responsibilities of married life; and to

be pulled up thus abruptly in his dreams rendered him as sentimentally unhappy as a conjunction of extreme youth and unsuccessful love generally makes a man.

His brother, while looking upon his fancied wretchedness as a folly worthy only of a smile, was nevertheless sufficiently sorry for him to feel a little irritated against Stella; and, determined not to afford her vanity any farther gratification he carefully refrained from paying her the slightest attention not demanded by the common courtesy due to a guest in his father's house.

And so day after day passed, and Stella could not flatter herself that she was making the slightest progress toward her object—had produced the least impression on this most unimpressionable of men.

"What is he made of?" she thought, as he sat opposite her one morning at breakfast, reading his newspaper, and never once looking up from its columns, though he had only to lift his eyes in order to take in the beautiful vision before him. She was glancing at a paper herself, but was not so much interested in its contents as to be deaf to the conversation around her.

"Ferroll," said Mrs. Ingoldsby suddenly, "I hope you are going to the ball to-night?"

"I did not think of it," he said, lowering the sheet he held and turning to her, "I rarely go to balls, you know."

"But that is not saying you ought not to go to them," Mrs. Ingoldsby remarked in a highly moral tone. "I wish you were more social in your habits. Suppose everybody ignored the duties of social life as you do. What would the world come to?"

"My dear mother," said Ferroll, with a slight laugh, "your supposition demands a stretch of imagination of which my ideal faculties are incapable. The great majority of mankind are gregarious in nature. And especially in this stirring age of the world there is not the least danger of too many people becoming eremitical in life."

"It is your life I am thinking of," answered his mother, "not the lives of other people."

"As to that," he said, with a smile and tone which took the rough edge off the words he was about to utter, "I am afraid you will have to take me as I am. And really I think you are a little unreasonable. Of your three children two are eminently social in instinct; and two to one ought to satisfy you. Here are Tom and Gertrude, who would willingly go to a ball every night, and who are going to-night, I am sure. So I think—don't you, father?—that I may be excused."

"I think that your place will be so well supplied in the family party to-night," replied Mr. Ingoldsby, with a smile and slight bow toward Stella—he was a courtly old gentleman—"that, certainly, you may be excused."

With a flash of humor in his eyes Ferroll glanced triumphantly at his mother, who smiled gravely.

"You are a bad case," she said. "Your father always spoiled you."

There is something very contagious in any sentiment shared by numbers, albeit only an affair of a social gathering. Ferroll Ingoldsby smiled to himself that evening as he was conscious of a faint inclination to join the family party going to the ball. He even went so far as to say to his mother, as he wrapped her shawl around her in the hall:

"Pray present my compliments and apologies to Mrs. Ross. Perhaps I may look in for a few minutes during the course of the evening."

"I shall be very much gratified if you do," said his mother earnestly.

But Gertrude laughed and exclaimed: "Don't flatter yourself that he will remember that promise a minute after you are out of sight, mamma."

Her prognostication would have been fulfilled but for the occurrence of an unlooked-for circumstance, Ferroll had established himself comfortably in dressing-gown and slippers, and, utterly oblivious of the promise, was holding pleasant converse with one of the friends he loved—a solid-looking volume—when there was a loud ring of the door-bell.

It being late, he did not summon a servant, but opened the door himself and found a telegraphic messenger waiting.

"Any answer, Mr. Ingoldsby?" the man said, as he delivered the black-lettered yellow envelope the unexpected sight of which is always a little startling to the soundest nerves.

"I don't know," Mr. Ingoldsby replied when he had glanced at the address on it. "But I will ascertain at once, and will send an answer to the office in less than half an hour, if one is required."

The message was for Miss Gordon.

When the man was gone Ferroll, after a momentary pause of deliberation, decided to carry the despatch to his mother and let her decide whether it should be given to Miss Gordon immediately. It might be of importance, or it might not. He would not take the responsibility of withholding it. And having engaged to appear for a short time among Mrs. Ross' guests, he thought this necessary errand an apropos reminder to him. He made a hurried toilet, and a minute's walk brought him to the house of Mrs. Ross, which was near by.

The night was so mild that the front door was wide open: he heard the clash of music and sound of dancing as he approached. His intention was that, as soon as he had made his compliments to his hostess, he would find his mother and give the telegram to her. But it is often as impossible to control circumstances in small things as in great ones. He found it so in the present instance. Stella, who with one or two favored attendants was established high up on the staircase, from which there was a good view of the hall-door, saw him as he entered. To his surprise and that of her companions, she started up and hurried down-stairs to meet him.

There was nothing in his face to have excited her alarm, for at the moment he was not thinking of the telegram. Nevertheless, one of those inexplicable intuitions which sometimes present themselves to the mind, not as possibilities but as certainties, took possession of Stella at sight of him.

"Is anything the matter, Mr. Ingoldsby?" she asked abruptly as she came to his side.

"Why should you think so?" he said, with a smile. But a sense of uneasiness communicated itself to him as he saw that she had grown a little pale; and neither his voice nor his smile was so reassuring as he intended it to be. "I promised my mother, you know, to—"

"Something is the matter, I am sure," she interrupted; and, laying her hand on his arm, she drew him into an unoccupied room on the opposite side of the hall. "Now tell me!" she exclaimed, looking up in his face firmly, though the blood kept ebbing from her face, leaving it momently paler and paler.

"My dear Miss Gordon," said Ferroll, shrinking, it must be confessed, from the scene he feared might be impending, and feeling that his mother, not he, was the proper person to face it, yet unable to resist the questioning of her eye, "you are alarming yourself without cause, I hope. A telegram for you was delivered a few minutes ago, and I thought I would bring it to my mother—"

He paused, as Stella extended her hand with an imperative motion not to be disobeyed, and, taking the dispatch from his pocket, gave it to her.

With trembling fingers, she tore open the envelope and unfolded the enclosure.

As her eyes fell on the words it contained everything grew dark before her sight; she reeled, and would have fallen if Mr. Ingoldsby had not caught her in his arms and supported her to a seat.

"What is it?" he asked, forgetting ceremony in the excitement of the moment.

She lifted her hand as if with difficulty, and held toward him the unfolded paper. He took it hastily, and read:

"Mrs. Gordon has met with an accident which may prove fatal.

"JAMES MCDONALD."

CHAPTER X.

WITHOUT a word of comment Ferroll pulled out his watch, gave one glance at it, and said quickly but quietly:

"We shall have time to catch the twelve-o'clock train, if you will come home at once and change your dress."

She started to her feet, and was turning blindly to rush away when he seized her hand and stopped her.

"I must get something to put around you," he said.

"No, no! No need to wait for that. It is only a few steps," she answered.

As this was true and time was pressing, he did not insist on staying to procure a wrap, but, drawing her hand within his arm, led her without delay through a side entrance into the street, crossing which they soon reached their destination.

As they entered the hall both looked up at the tall clock, the ticking of which reminded them that it was there.

"Oh ! it is nearly twelve o'clock," cried Stella in an agony. "I shall not get to the station in time! Let us go at once—let us go at once! My dress makes no difference."

"The train is not due till 12.20, and that clock is always fast. We shall have full time," answered Ferroll. "Only be quick in changing your dress while I order the carriage. I will see if I can find a servant to send to you."

"Never mind that," she answered, running upstairs.

The gas was burning low in the room she entered, and, attempting to turn it up, in her nervous haste she turned it off, leaving herself in darkness. Shaking her hands and exclaiming with impatient terror, she groped about in search of a box of matches which she knew was somewhere about. "Somewhere!" she kept repeating to herself as she knocked over toilet-bottles and stumbled against chairs, consuming precious minutes before she at last succeeded in finding them. Just as she lighted the gas again the clock struck twelve.

"Oh!" she cried despairingly, and began, as well as the trembling of her hands would permit, to unfasten her dress, but stopped on hearing Ferroll's step upon the stairs.

"Are you ready?" he called to her as he approached the door.

"I will be there in an instant," she responded.

Looking around desperately, she snatched up an ulster which chanced to catch her eye, seized a hat and veil, and ran out to him.

He was surprised to see her still in her ball- dress, but, shocked by her white, scared look, ventured no remark on the subject. Leading the way down-stairs, he paused an instant before leaving the house to put the ulster on her and to place her hat on her head. She had been carrying both in her hand. A moment later they were in the carriage, dashing furiously along toward the station.

Before they were half way there the distant rumble of the train as it was approaching became audible. Stella grasped her companion's arm with a force that almost drew an exclamation of pain from him.

"Don't be alarmed. We shall be in time," he said encouragingly.

But the rush of the train grew clearer and louder every second; they could hear the stroke of the engine now, and knew by its diminishing speed that it had nearly reached the station; now the whistle sounded.

Stella uttered a sharp cry. I shall be left! I shall be left!" she exclaimed distractedly.

"No; here we are!"

He put out his hand and unfastened the carriage-door, and, the instant they drew up with a jerk at the end of the station-platform, flung it open and sprang to the ground, Stella following him almost before he could turn to assist her. A train was standing puffing and snorting before them, and he was leading Stella toward it when he bethought him that this was the wrong direction for the engine of the train he was looking for to be.

"Where is the down-train?" he asked rapidly of a negro boy standing near.

"Yonder, sir, in front, the other side of this one," was the reply.

Ferroll seized Stella's hand. "We must hurry," he said. "It stops only three minutes."

Before his last words were uttered they were literally running down the long platform. As they started Stella's train caught on a splinter of the flooring and held her fast, but Ferroll tore it off with an audible rending of silk, and, to prevent a repetition of the accident, carried it with one hand, while with the other he grasped Stella's fingers, and they ran on. Both uttered a silent ejaculation of thanksgiving when they came to the end of the train that shut them off from the one they were seeking; side by side they sprang from the platform to the ground, crossed the intervening track, and found themselves at last beside the down-train, which, fortunately, was still stationary. Ferroll was out of breath himself and Stella was gasping when he half-lifted, half-dragged her up the high steps to the platform of the first car they came to.

She pressed his hand with a look of gratitude more expressive than words when he had placed her in a seat. "Give my love to Gertrude," she commenced falteringly, "and—"

"I am going with you" he said.

"Oh! pray do not. I have caused you trouble enough already. Indeed I can go alone perfectly now."

"But—" he began in a tone of remonstrance, then checked himself, said "Very well," and left her.

Retiring a little distance behind, he flung himself into a seat with a deep breath of relief as the train, with a sudden movement almost like the bound of an impatient horse, was off.

Stella sat like a statue where she had been placed. So long as she was goaded on by the necessity for action she had been able to exert herself and to control her thoughts somewhat. She felt perfectly nerveless now, and her brain was in a whirl.

"An accident which may prove fatal—an accident which may prove fatal—an accident which may prove fatal—"

If she had possessed the muscular power to lift her hands she would have held them over her ears to shut out the sound of these terrible words that seemed ringing through them. An accident! What sort of accident? The term represented only one idea to her mind—fire. Oh! was her mother writhing in the indescribable agonies caused by burning? Or perhaps—but no; that thought was *too* horrible! She turned from it with an inarticulate gasp which would have been a cry, if her tongue had not been like lead in her mouth. A strong, convulsive shudder seized her; she shook so perceptively that Ferroll noticed it, sprang up involuntarily and made a step forward, but stood still then, doubtful whether to go to her or not.

He thought it no wonder that she was cold. A ball-dress is not very well adapted to the exigencies of night travel in January, even in a warm climate and well-heated car; and the wrap she wore was a very light one. Mr. Ingoldsby was much concerned, therefore, as, standing tall and solitary in the aisle of the car, he looked across two or three seats, the occupants of which were reclining doubled up in various attitudes of slumber, to where she sat bolt up-right and shivering.

His precipitate movement when he left his place disturbed his opposite neighbor, a young man who was dozing uneasily, with his feet resting on the arm of the seat and his head and shoulders propped against the side of the car. With something like a groan of discomfort he made a little change in his position, and was about to compose himself again to his slumbers when, by

an impulse, he opened his eyes and looked at the figure standing motionless near him. As he looked his eye quickened with recognition.

"Ingoldsby!" he exclaimed.

Ferroll turned at the sound of his name, and took the hand which the other, who had started to a sitting posture, held out, shaking it warmly.

"Haralson! I am delighted to see you. Where did you drop from? How are you?" he said.

"I am on my way home from Richmond, and I am as stiff as a poker," answered Mr. Haralson categorically.

He pushed back the tumbled little crisps of light brown hair from his very handsome forehead and with a grimace of impatience tore off a white silk handkerchief that was tied carelessly about his throat.

"How warm it is!" he exclaimed—"quite a different temperature from the one I left a few hours ago. And how uncomfortable it is to try to sleep on one of these seats! But I can't stand being stifled in a sleeping-car in this latitude."

"I wish I had happened to get into the sleeping-car," said Ferroll, turning his head to glance at Stella. "But we were fortunate to have hit this one; we might have struck the smoking-car."

Seeing that his friend's glance had followed his own with an expression of curiosity, and now fixed itself with surprise on his evening dress, he leant over and explained where and on what errand he was going; then, having despoiled Mr. Haralson of a heavy overcoat which had made that gentleman's pillow, and the handkerchief just taken off, he rather hesitatingly approached Stella.

"Forgive me for disturbing you," he said very gently, "but pray let me try to make you a little less uncomfortable than I am sure you must be. You are chilled. Come nearer the stove."

Stella, yielding more to the tone than the words, allowed him to lead her to a seat beside the stove. As he was tying the handkerchief around her neck and buttoning her ulster, which hung carelessly open, said:

"I am not cold, but oh! I am so wretched."

The words seemed to burst from her lips suddenly, almost without volition on her part.

"It is natural that you should be distressed," said Ferroll kindly; "but you are more alarmed than I should be were I in your place. There is always so much excitement felt about an accident, particularly at first, that one must allow a wide margin for exaggeration of speech."

"Do you think so?" she said eagerly.

"I really do."

"But the telegram?" she suggested in a tone of sickening apprehension.

"That was written and sent hastily, no doubt. Who sent it, by the way?"

"Our family physician, Dr. McDonald. That is why I am so alarmed."

"What sort of man is he—sanguine or despondent generally about his patients?"

"Very despondent."

"And you allow yourself to be so frightened? Why, my dear Miss Gordon, I feel quite reassured since you tell me this. Stop and think a moment, and you will remember that the greater number of accidents you ever heard of were considered worse at first than they afterwards proved to be. A slight one is thought serious, and a serious one desperate, as a rule. And since Dr. McDonald is not, you say, a cheerful man in the way of viewing medical matters, I have no doubt he has unintentionally exaggerated the gravity of this accident. Try to go to sleep, or you will be quite exhausted when you reach M— at day-light."

He tucked her up carefully in the overcoat and left her a little comforted. Recalling what he had said, she thought it very reasonable; and, moreover, the first stunning effect of the shock being over by this time, there came a natural reaction of hopefulness. She had never in her life had a serious grief or misfortune, and was therefore unable to realize the possibility of such a thing. Then Ferroll's care had made her very comfortable in a bodily sense, and the excitements

of the evening, both pleasurable and painful, had greatly tired her. Without any premonition sleep fell suddenly on her eyelids.

An hour afterwards she was awakened by the sound of the whistle as the train drew up at a station. There was the usual slight stir among the slumbering passengers, a few sleepy exclamations and sighs, a few words exchanged, and then everybody became silent and still again.

Everybody but Stella. She had slept soundly and was refreshed; and the moment she was awake her first alarm returned in full force. She felt impatient of the loss of an instant's time, and seemed to her that the prescribed three minutes for the stopping of the train were lengthening themselves indefinitely. Could it be only three minutes, she wondered presently, since she had been wakened by the whistle and the sudden cessation of movement? Surely it was more than that. She started up, and, bending toward the light, examined her watch. It had stopped. Rising from her seat, she looked about her in search of Ferroll, but he was not to be seen. She walked to the door at the rear end of the car and glanced out. Darkness and the sleeping-car were all that met her sight.

Turning, she passed between the two rows of seats and their unconscious occupants to the opposite door, and at last her perseverance was rewarded. As she pulled the door noiselessly open she heard Ferroll's voice inquiring in a tone of concern:

"And how long shall we be detained?"

"She'll be up in about a quarter of an hour now. The conductor's this minute got a telegram," was the reply of a train-hand who was passing the car as he spoke.

Ferroll stood just outside the door, but with his back to it, so that he did not see Stella, and she was about to address him when a puff of cigar-smoke floated into her face and another voice near him exclaimed:

"Just my luck! The same thing happened as I went on. Ned Southgate, who was on his way to Baltimore to take the Allan Line steamer, was very much afraid he would lose his passage, we were so much behind-time. By the way, what has Miss Gordon done with Gartrell? You know, of course, that she broke with Southgate on Gartrell's account."

"Did she?" said Ferroll in a tone evincing no great interest. "I have little acquaintance with her; never met her until about a week ago. She is a friend of my sister, whom she has been visiting. That is all I know about her."

"It is a wonder you don't know a good deal more after being in the same house with her a week," remarked Mr. Haralson. "She has the character of being a consummate flirt and coquette."

"He who runs may read that," said his friend. "But flirting or being flirted with is a thing not in my line."

"She didn't pay you the compliment of riddling you, then?"

"No," answered Ingoldsby, with a slight laugh. "I fancy she had as much on her hands as she could attend to before I appeared upon the scene. She made mincemeat of poor Tom and half a dozen others, I believe."

"I should like to exchange broadsides with her," observed Mr. Haralson, in a tone which indicated that he had no fear of what the result in that case would be as regarded himself. "I went to M— twice on purpose to see her, but she was from home both times. She must be out of the common to have tackled Gartrell successfully."

"She would need to be so much out of the common to have done that," said Ingoldsby, "that I am incredulous of the alleged fact. Gartrell is the last man in the world not to be able to hold his own with any woman in an affair of this kind. That he could be made a fool of by a girl like this—almost a child—is inconceivable. It is much more probable that he was trifling with her than she with him."

"There's no telling," said Mr. Haralson, sending another whiff of smoke into Stella's face, as she stood unconsciously riveted to the spot, forgetting for the instant even her anxiety about her mother in the pungent mortification she felt at hearing herself spoken of in such a manner.

"Brant Townsley, who was my informant in the matter, don't believe that she discarded Southgate, as reported. He thinks the hitch was the other way, though he says he could not make Southgate admit this. But he suspects that she did reject Gartrell. "

Stella stayed to hear no more. Softly closing the door, which she had been holding very slightly ajar, she returned in haste to her place beside the stove with an additional and all but intolerable pain gnawing at her heart. The sense of mortified vanity of which she had been sensible when she heard Ferroll's laugh at Mr. Haralson's question, and knew by its ring of amusement that, though he was too dignified to say so, he had perceived her attempt to captivate him, was lost in a much stronger emotion—remorse for the anger and coldness she had shown to her mother. Haralson's careless, gossiping remarks about Southgate and Gartrell brought it all back so vividly to her recollection, and she saw so plainly now how entirely the whole affair—her quarrel with Southgate and her mother's advocacy of Gartrell's suit—had originated in her own inordinate vanity and self-will.

She was reclining very much as Ferroll had left her, with her eyes wide open and fixed in a sort of hopeless gaze on vacancy, when he came to her side a few minutes afterwards, followed by a servant carrying a salver.

"What is the matter that we are stopping so long?" she exclaimed in a despairing tone when she saw him.

"The train from the other direction was not on time," he explained; "but it will be up in a few minutes now, the conductor says. I scarcely regret the detention, since it has enabled me to get you some supper. If you do not take something," he added, seeing her about to decline it, "you will have a violent headache to-morrow after such a night as you have passed. Let me prevail on you to drink this coffee, at least."

She received the cup he offered, and drank the coffee as if it had been a draught prescribed by a physician, but shook her head when he further suggested a biscuit.

"I feel as if food would choke me," she said.

The remaining hours of the night seemed to her interminably long. Yet when the end of her journey was approaching, when suspense would soon be succeeded by she knew not what horrible certainty, she almost wished to prolong even her present suffering. She felt faint to the tips of her fingers. When Ferroll joined her, as the train began to slacken speed, it was almost a matter of doubt with her whether she would be able to rise from her seat and walk out of the car.

It was just after daylight as, more supported than led by her kind escort, she left the train.

“Come into the waiting-room a minute," Ferroll said, "and I will get you a glass of water."

She was permitting him to take her there for she almost feared, as he did, that she might faint when a gentleman approached hastily.

"Stella!" said her father's voice, and she turned with a scarcely articulate cry of "Papa!"

"Your mother is a little better," Mr. Gordon said at once, in answer to the unspoken question in her eyes.

"Thank God!" she exclaimed, and a flood of tears, the first she had shed, poured suddenly down her cheeks. But she controlled herself almost immediately and said:

"This is Mr. Ingoldsby, papa. You must thank him for me, he has been so very, very kind."

CHAPTER XL

LATE in the afternoon of the day before Mrs. Gordon was driving near a railway track, and her horses, which were young and not thoroughly broken to the sound of a steam-whistle, ran

away. Had she remained quietly in her seat no harm would have happened to her, as the driver soon succeeded in controlling the animals. But being alone in the carriage and extremely frightened, she managed to open the door and throw herself out.

She fell heavily to the ground, striking her head against the sharp edge of a stone, which cut a deep gash in her temple near the artery, causing profuse loss of blood; added to which one of her ankles was so bruised and fractured as to make it a question with the medical men of M—, the principal of whom were soon surrounding her, whether immediate amputation of the limb was not absolutely necessary.

Having decided, on a hasty consultation upon the spot where the accident occurred, to defer such an extreme measure, for the time at least, the unfortunate lady was conveyed home slowly and with great difficulty. It was not considered safe to administer an anesthetic, and hours passed before she could be brought under the influence of opium. At last, however, her groans of agony ceased to rack the ear of her husband, and then he remembered Stella.

Just as the thought of her occurred to him his sister-in-law, Mrs. Rainsforth, laid her hand on his arm and said:

"That poor child, Roland! Have you telegraphed her yet?"

"No, I did not think of her until a minute ago," he answered. "I will ask McDonald, who is going home for an hour or two, to call at the office and send a message. If it is too late for her to receive it in time to take the night train, it will be delivered very early in the morning."

"It is a good thing that she has escaped all she would have suffered if she had been here this evening," remarked Mrs. Rainsforth, pressing her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Yes; I am glad she was not at home," responded Mr. Gordon.

Dr. McDonald went farther than this in his feeling on the subject the next day. He wished that she had not been permitted to come home, and bluntly suggested to her father and her aunt that she should be sent to the house of the latter, and kept there, he added, emphatically, as long as Mrs. Gordon continued in her present critical state.

"I have no patience with such folly!" he said angrily to Mrs. Rainsforth, as they stood together beside Stella's bed the morning after her return. "If she don't choose to make herself useful, as she ought, she might at least keep quiet and not be distracting your attention and mine from the care that her mother's desperate condition requires."

"Hush, hush, doctor!" said his companion a little indignantly. "She will hear you. You must remember what a shock it was to her to find her mother in such a state."

Before the doctor could reply Stella opened her eyes, that looked large and hollow out of a face as white as marble, and fixed them on Mrs. Rainsforth's. "O Aunt Isabella! is mamma no better?" she said faintly.

"Not much, my dear," replied her aunt, pushing the hair back gently from her forehead; "but I hope you are. Won't you try and take some breakfast this morning?"

"Yes. I heard what Dr. McDonald said," she went on meekly. "I suppose I ought not to have been so weak but—"

"You could not help it," said Mrs. Rainsforth soothingly. "We all know that."

"I will try to control myself. Can't you give me something?" she asked, looking up at the doctor wistfully. "I feel so faint."

"I will send you a draught," he answered ungraciously. "But you must stop crying, and take your breakfast if you want to gain strength."

"I will," she answered.

"How long have I been at home?" she inquired of her maid presently while trying to take a little food. "Only since yesterday morning! It seems to me a century instead of twenty-four hours!"

She felt as if she was in a horrible dream. All seemed indistinct, inconsistent, incredible, yet she knew it was a monstrous reality. She could dimly recollect having made a terrible scene at her mother's bedside when, on entering the darkened chamber, she had found Mrs. Gordon lying

colorless, motionless, unconscious of her presence, deaf to her passionate adjurations. She could see as through a mist the fiery glance of Dr. McDonald, and feel the fierce grip of his bony hands as, seizing her by the shoulders, he forcibly removed her from the room, asking harshly, while hurrying her along, if she "wanted to kill her mother," that she was acting in this irrational manner! Then came a succession of confused memories of having been rescued from the irate physician by feminine tongues and hands, and, with much expression of sympathy and no slight resistance on her part, taken to her own room; of frantic grief and hysterical weeping; of her father's standing beside her with a glass of wine which he insisted on her drinking, and which turned out not to be wine after all when she did drink it, but a draught bitter as the tears she was shedding; of being very sleepy and struggling against the influence of the opiate she had been made to swallow; of waking from deep unconsciousness with horrible sensations of nausea and exhaustion, and being sent off to sleep again by another anodyne, from which sleep she was now just awakened.

Very dark to Mrs. Gordon's household were the days which followed—days lengthening into weeks, until more than a month passed before the physicians gave any definite hope that her life was safe.

In all this period Stella, having once recovered from the stupefaction of her first shock, was capable and energetic, untiring in her devotion to her mother; for the first time in her life forgetting herself utterly in thought for the sufferer. Anxious waitings for the appearance of the doctors, solicitous pains in the preparation of bandages, and all the numerous cares required by desperate illness occupied fully each minute as it came and went; and when she could snatch a few hours for sleep at irregular intervals overwearied nature sank at once into dreamless and refreshing slumber.

But after the crisis was past, when the medical opinion pronounced that the danger was over, that time, care, and patience would restore to Mrs. Gordon the use of her ankle and reestablish her general health (which was very much deranged by the shock to her nerves and the quantities of opium she had been obliged to take), then came to Stella the inevitable reaction after such unusual and prolonged exertion—bodily exhaustion and a listlessness of spirit amounting almost to despair.

Worldly, shallow, and selfish when in health, Mrs. Gordon was intolerably irritable, egotistical, and exacting now. She demanded constant amusement, yet was capricious and hard to please about it; and she resented as an outrage and cruelty the slightest contradiction of her will or opinion. Still suffering severely, it seemed as if she was determined that every one around her should, though in a different way, suffer also.

Stella's patience and temper were sorely tried. The change from a life of absolute freedom and unchecked indulgence to what she felt a galling bondage, this subjection to the fretful caprices of her mother, had been so sudden that she often asked herself how it could be possible that she, Stella, the petted and spoiled child, whose every whim was wont to be gratified as soon as expressed, should have fallen on such evil days! She was weary even unto death of the existence that had closed around her; and nothing but a vivid remembrance of the remorse she had already endured for her conduct to her mother enabled her to support it uncomplainingly.

But when at length Mrs. Gordon finding her unquestioningly submissive in everything else, began to agitate the subject of Mr. Gartrell's suit—evidently expecting submission here, too—Stella's spirit revived and asserted itself.

"If you think it likely, as you say, mamma, that Mr. Gartrell has any idea of offering himself again, it would be an act of friendship in you, who seem to have so great a regard for him, to warn him not to think of it," she said one day in reply to some suggestion on the subject from her mother.

"But why?" cried Mrs. Gordon sharply. "You cannot possibly expect ever to make a more advantageous marriage."

This was an argument that had been so often repeated that Stella's patience was threadbare at the sound. A spark of vivid anger leapt to her eyes, and bitter words were on her lips, when the entrance of a visitor—a kindly gossip who pleased herself and lightened the tedium of Mrs. Gordon's sick-room by coming often to sit with her—prevented the threatened explosion of wrath. Heartily glad of the respite afforded by Mrs. Austin's presence, Stella hurried to her own room and sat down to think.

"This is but the beginning," she said to herself. "It will go on and on interminably, I know. And am I sure that I shall have the resolution to resist the constant persecution I must expect? I feel angry now and quite capable of defiance; but I am afraid it may be with this as it has been with so many other things lately. I grow so tired of being always on the defensive, always on a strain of resistance. After all, my temper is not so bad as it used to seem. I find it easier to yield a point than to take the trouble to contest it. If I had ever been taught how to control myself I think I might have been different always. But it is too late now to regret what is past. There is no good in thinking of it."

She rose abruptly, went to a set of bookshelves, and began carelessly to look for something to read. Chance, perhaps or perhaps her guardian angel directed her attention to a small black volume which she had not seen for some time, the very existence of which, in fact, she had forgotten. It had been thrust back to the wall out of sight, on the top of some larger books, in taking out one of which it was displaced and fell to the floor at her feet.

As she stooped to pick it up her heart gave a quick, painful bound. It was a Manual of Devotion to the Sacred Heart, which had been given to her by Southgate.

CHAPTER XII.

LATTERLY her mind had been so fully occupied with other things that she had thought of Southgate rarely if at all. But a throng of recollections crowded on her now. How well she remembered the expression of his face, the intonations of his voice, the very words he had spoken, when he gave the little Manual to her, and begged her to use it and to try to realize that there was another world than this which alone seemed to engross her thoughts! How earnestly he had endeavored to rouse her to some sense of devotion, some recognition of the fact that she possessed a soul! And how signally he had failed in the attempt, seemingly!

Had he really failed? "*That which thou sowest is not quickened except it die first*," said the great Apostle of the Gentiles. The seed so laboriously cast upon a soil which had never been loosened by early culture lay dead until the ploughshare of affliction passed and broke the crust of selfishness that made the surface of Stella's character. But when her thoughts were drawn from the sole consideration of her own wishes, will, and pleasure by grief at her mother's accident and sympathy with the suffering it entailed, the apparently lifeless germs became vivified, and slowly, imperceptibly even to herself, they had been growing.

She had often found in the atmosphere of her lover's presence a certain calm of spirit which she attributed at the time to the pleasure that his presence gave her, but which now she began to understand was the reflected tranquillity of a soul unruffled by worldly thoughts and interests. "Oh!" was the aspiration of her soul at this moment, "for one hour of that calm, that peace, which she had known for so short a time, but remembered with such inexpressible longing." Sitting down, she opened the Manual at the first fly-leaf, on which she knew Southgate had written her name. She wanted some tangible association to bring him, as it were, close to her not as a lover, but as an influence, a guide to her tired spirit. Beneath her name and the date appended was transcribed a verse from Isaias, to which he had directed her attention, she recollected.

"Is it not beautiful?" he said.

" ' A man shall be as when one is hid from the wind, and hideth himself from the storm; as rivers of waters in drought, and the shadow of a rock that standeth out in a desert land,' " she read aloud. Then, after a momentary pause, "Very beautiful, very poetical," she replied. "But to tell you the truth, Edward, I do not quite understand its significance."

"Is it possible you do not!" Southgate had exclaimed, with such a shocked expression of countenance that she laughed heartily.

Looking at this magnificent prophecy now, she not only understood but felt it deeply. As suddenly as the rays of the sun flash over the earth when day dawns in the tropics, the light of faith illuminated her hitherto unenlightened mind. She prayed that night before she slept, not merely with her lips but with her heart; the next morning she rose and went to early Mass; in the afternoon she went to the priest. In a word, she became from this time in reality what before she had been in name only a Catholic.

The change in her was very great. She grew gentle and patient in manner, quiet and resolute in character, habitually cheerful instead of capriciously gay.

But though noticeable from the first, the transformation was gradual. The science of the saints is not acquired in a day. It is with pain and struggle that the soul casts off the habits and tramples upon the impulses of the natural man. Like a child's first tottering attempts to walk, or the faltering steps of one who has been ill almost unto death, are the first efforts of a newly-awakened conscience in the paths of holiness. Spirit and flesh are at war, and sometimes the one and sometimes the other gains a momentary advantage.

Thus it was with Stella. There were brief seasons when she was ineffably calm and happy; but oftener she was all but despairing, all but inclined to turn from the narrow, rugged, steeply ascending path which bruised and wounded her silken-sandalled feet to the broad, smooth way that sloped so gently downward and was so familiar to her tread. One thing by which she was particularly discouraged was her disinclination to devotional practices and reading. She was subject to constant distractions during prayer and meditation, and even while assisting at the Holy Sacrifice.

"You need not be discouraged by this," her confessor said when she laid her trouble before him, "or at all surprised. Read the lives of the saints and you will find that on the road to perfection of life, as in everything else, the first steps are always the hardest. Have patience, and the way will grow more easy and your strength will increase. If you encounter no difficulties where would be your merit? You must distinguish, too, between wilful transgressions and those errors and shortcomings which result from our natural human infirmity. Call upon Our Lady for her all-powerful help. Even among the saints her special clients are pre-eminent in holiness. I think you told me that you have *The Spiritual Combat*? Well, it is exactly what you need. Study it daily. Most of all, remember the dream of St. Simeon Stylites. Dig deep, deep, deep your foundation of humility."

Reassured and reanimated by such counsels as these, Stella pressed on with fervor in her spiritual life. But many times she found the cross very heavy.

So long as Mrs. Gordon was confined to her own room, and obliged to restrict herself, as regarded social amusements, within certain limits laid down by her autocrat for the time, Dr. McDonald, matters were not so bad. She had lady friends in numbers, and, for a part of each day at least, Stella was relieved by some visitor from the duty of entertaining the exigent invalid. But the moment that it was possible for her to be moved—even before she could help herself by the aid of crutches—she migrated to the back drawing-room, which she had caused to be fitted up temporarily as a chamber. Here, reclining on a sofa placed immediately before the folding-doors that opened into the front drawing-room, and flanked by an immense cretonne screen, she received all the world of M— (all her world), individually and collectively, with rapturous delight at her emancipation from what she called her late solitary confinement. And unsparing as her demands upon Stella's time and attention had been from the first, she was now, if possible, more unreasonable than ever in requiring her constant presence. The motive of this soon became

obvious. Among her earliest and most frequent visitors was Mr. Gartrell; and Stella found herself the victim of a tacit conspiracy between her mother and this pertinacious suitor to commit her to an apparently voluntary acceptance of his attentions again.

Miss Gordon's health was suffering, he feared, for want of exercise; she was looking pale, he was sorry to perceive, Mr. Gartrell said, with respectful interest, the first day he was admitted to a personal interview with Mrs. Gordon, at which interview Miss Gordon was compelled most unwillingly to assist. Might he be permitted to suggest a drive? His horses were at the gate; would not Mrs. Gordon support his position by her influence?

Mrs. Gordon smiled graciously.

"By all means go, Stella," she said. "A breath of fresh air will do you good. Put on your things and go at once, my dear, while it is early and the sun is warm."

But Stella excused herself. "You are very kind, but I assure you my health is not suffering," she said to Mr. Gartrell; "and"—turning to Mrs. Gordon—"if you can spare me, mamma, I will go and answer some letters that have been haunting me for a week past."

She had to encounter a storm from her mother on Gartrell's departure, and many succeeding storms as the days and weeks dragged on without that gentleman's making any progress whatever in her favor. He was as much in earnest in his determination to win his suit as Mrs. Gordon could possibly desire. But he did not make himself in the least disagreeable in consequence. After receiving one or two distant rebuffs he let Stella alone, to all appearance. He discontinued asking her to ride or drive, he never joined her if he met her walking, yet at the same time managed to convey to her, by a certain tone of manner imperceptible to any one but herself, the expression of his unalterable resolve to make her his wife in the end.

Meanwhile his regard for Mrs. Gordon manifested itself almost daily in the elegant forms of flowers, fruits, books, or more substantially in fish and game. And that lady, deeply touched by these evidences of his eligibility as a son-in-law, was in despair and in rage at her daughter's obstinate folly in having lost, as she supposed, such a *parti*.

Naturally she attributed this folly on Stella's part to a lingering regard for her faithless lover—it was by that title that Mrs. Gordon was in the habit of designating Southgate in her frequent allusions to him; and the Catholic faith was so inseparably associated with Southgate that her dislike to him soon began to cause with her a feeling of enmity toward the church strongly in contrast to the passive good-will she had heretofore entertained toward it. The change in Stella from frivolous worldliness to earnest piety vexed and disgusted her beyond measure; and she never let pass an opportunity to express her opinion on the subject, either privately or publicly.

She supposed, she said dryly one day when, Mrs. Allen, Gartrell, and two or three other people chanced to meet at one of her informal afternoon receptions, or "teas," as she called them after the English fashion—she supposed Farther Darcy disapproved of social amusement in any form, as Stella had quite dropped out of the world since she put herself under his " direction " as (pronouncing the last word with emphasis) she believed it was called.

"Oh! I am sure Father Darcy has nothing to do with Stella's remaining at home," said Mrs. Allen, who had brought this animadversion on her young friend by scolding her for not going out more. "She was too good a child to leave you when you were so ill, and one could not expect it of her. But now that you are almost well again, and do not, I suppose, need her to read to you at night, she ought not to forget the rest of the world entirely. I hope, my dear," she added, turning to Stella, "that I shall see you at my *soirée* to-morrow night. We have missed you very much all this long time that you have been absent."

"I will come, thanks, with pleasure," said Stella pleasantly. She felt inclined to laugh at the discomfiture visible in her mother's countenance at having had the tables completely turned upon her; for Mrs. Allen's friendly reproaches in the first place had been directed much more against Mrs. Gordon than herself, the selfishness of that lady in keeping her daughter in such close attendance on her being generally talked of and condemned.

CHAPTER XIII.

"I FEEL as if it was selfish to leave you, mamma," said Stella the next evening, entering her mother's room after she was dressed for Mrs.
Allen's *soirée*. "I think I will write an apolo—"

"Nonsense!" interrupted Mrs. Gordon languidly. "There is no reason why you should not go. The McDonalds and your father will be here presently to play whist."

And in fact, as she spoke, Dr. McDonald and his wife were ushered in, Mr. Gordon making his appearance an instant later.

After salutations and inquiries had been exchanged the whist-table was wheeled to the side of the invalid's sofa, seats were arranged, and the rugged face of the doctor looked almost benign as he shuffled the cards, and, casting for deal, had the pleasure of finding that fortune favored himself. While his great brown hand flashed round and round in a short circle, dealing with great rapidity, his wife's eyes followed Stella, who, having seen her mother's comfort and amusement for the evening thus secured, was leaving the room.

There was something of compassion as well as admiration in Mrs. McDonald's kindly gaze; and Mr. Gordon, glancing up by accident, caught the expression and involuntarily turned to see what had caused it.

For the first time then he noticed that Stella, as Gartrell had remarked, looked pale and—n as Gartrell had not remarked—a little thin; and for the first time it occurred to him with a sense of self-reproach that her health had suffered from her long and fatiguing attendance upon her mother.

"I ought to have paid some attention to this," he thought, and beginning to consider what he could do to correct the evil, was so preoccupied in mind during the first game that was played as to excite the wonder and dissatisfaction of his wife and the doctor; perceiving which he put the matter out of his thoughts for the time and applied himself to his cards.

But he did not forget it, and a second examination of Stella's face at the breakfast-table the next morning added to his concern.

"What are you looking at, papa?" she said at last with a half-laugh, observing that his eye rested on her face again and again with an expression of grave scrutiny. "Is anything the matter with my face or my dress?"

She glanced down over her person while speaking.

"Yes," answered her father, smiling lightly as he saw her look of rather startled surprise at this reply. "Your face is much paler than it ought to be, and your dress is a little loose on you, I observe. You have lost flesh."

"Is that all?" she said lightly. "It is nothing to look grave about."

"You have been too closely confined to the house and have endured too much fatigue since your mother's accident," Mr. Gordon went on. "I am afraid your health has suffered."

"Not at all, I assure you, papa."

"You feel quite well?"

"Perfectly well."

"Yet it seems to me that, in addition to your pallid looks, you move languidly. I noticed this last night, and again when you came down-stairs awhile ago."

"I have felt a little languid lately, since the change of season. But I am not alone in that. Everybody is feeling the enervating effect of the spring temperature."

Mr. Gordon was silent for a few minutes, then resumed:

"You need change of air, and rest," he said decidedly.

"It is impossible that I can leave mamma," Stella answered. "Please don't say anything about it, papa. Indeed I am quite well."

"You may be so at present, but you will not remain well if such an unaccustomed strain upon your strength continues much longer. I must find some way of putting a stop to it."

"I beg that you will not say anything to mamma on the subject!" said Stella earnestly, looking quite distressed. "Pray do not, papa!"

"Since you request it, I will not," he answered. "But I cannot permit such a state of affairs to go on. Think of it and see if you can suggest a remedy. Meanwhile I will talk to the doctor about it."

The opportunity to do this occurred sooner than he expected. He had scarcely entered the private room of his law-office on going down-street that morning, and had not settled himself to work, but was still thinking of Stella's pale face and languid eyes, when one of his clerks knocked at the door and informed him that Dr. McDonald wished to speak to him.

"I was just wishing to speak to you" he said, as the doctor entered and shut the door. "Sit down. Nothing is the matter, I hope?"

"No, not exactly. Would it be very inconvenient to you to leave home for six months or a year?"

Mr. Gordon seemed as much surprised as it was possible for a man so dignified and self-contained to look. "It would be inconvenient, certainly," he answered after a momentary pause, "but in a case of necessity I could disregard that."

"I think it would be well, then, for you to take Mrs. Gordon and Miss Stella to spend the approaching summer in Switzerland or the Bavarian
Highlands, and the winter in France or Italy."

"But is Mrs. Gordon in a condition to undertake such a journey?" his hearer asked doubtfully. "She has scarcely left her sofa yet, and don't seem to be able to do much in the way of walking, even across the room, with her crutch."

"There it is!" said the doctor. "She will never learn to use her crutch and move about enough to regain her strength unless she has a motive for exertion—is, in a manner, compelled to exert herself. It won't do for her to remain in this climate during the summer; and I have been trying for some time past to think where she had better go. Now, there is nothing like an ocean voyage to restore tone and vigor to an impaired constitution. I thought of the Bermudas. But it is easier to go to Europe than to get there; and, in fact, it would be better in every way with the advantage, too, that it would do Miss Stella as much good as her mother."

"Ah! Stella," said Mr. Gordon quickly; "I was intending to consult you about her. I am not very observant, or I should have noticed before last night how thin and pale she is looking. Her strength has been overtasked."

"A little, perhaps, but not seriously. Still, it would be well to give her relaxation in time; and this plan I propose seems to me the best thing that could be done, if Mrs. Gordon will consent to it."

“Have you spoken to her on the subject? What does she think of it?"

"No; I have not mentioned it to her yet. I thought I would first speak to you."

"Ascertain what she thinks of it. I suppose you will see her this morning?"

"Yes, I am on my way now to your house."

"Very well. If she will go, settle with her what time it is likely she may be able to travel, and I will make my arrangements accordingly."

Though it was, as he had said, inconvenient to him to leave home, Mr. Gordon, having made up his mind to do so, was more and more pleased with Dr. McDonald's suggestion the more he thought of it. To have an ailing, fretful wife was new and not at all agreeable to him, and the reestablishment of her health was an object for which he was glad to make any sacrifice. In addition to this he felt that Stella's health certainly needed attention, and would, the doctor assured him, be greatly benefited by the voyage; and for himself, he was not disinclined to a temporary change from his usual laborious life.

Somewhat to his surprise he found, on going home, that neither Mrs. Gordon nor Stella regarded the scheme favorably. The first was subdued to reluctant acquiescence by the doctor's strenuous, in fact peremptory, arguments; and Stella, in consequence to the medical dictum that change not only of air but of continent was absolutely necessary to the recovery of her mother's health, refrained from the expression of her opinion. But the feelings of both were exceedingly opposed to the idea of going to Europe, and, strange to say, for the same reason an apprehension, in the first place, of meeting Southgate, and, in the second place, of being suspected of going there to meet him.

Mrs. Gordon was silent as to this reason and its corollary despair of ever obtaining Gartrell as a son-in-law; but when Mr. Gordon requested Stella to tell him why she seemed so averse to the plan proposed by Dr. McDonald she replied frankly and truthfully.

"I scarcely think Mr. Southgate himself would think anything of the kind; he is not a vain man," she added, seeing by the expression of her father's face that he considered this objection reasonless. "But I am sure the gossips here will make ill-natured remarks; and I am coward enough, I confess, to shrink from giving them the opportunity."

"But I suppose you would not think it well to sacrifice the restoration of your mother's health to this fear of gossip?" said Mr. Gordon.

"No, certainly not, papa. You know I have not said a word voluntarily on the subject. You asked the point-blank question why I did not like the idea of going, and I could only tell the truth."

"Is this your only objection?"

"Yes. Otherwise I should be delighted at the prospect."

"You may set your mind at rest, then, about the gossip you are afraid of. Southgate will not be in Europe when we get there or while we are there. He has already gone to Jerusalem to spend Lent, and intends remaining in the East two or three years."

"Ah!" said Stella in a tone of evident relief. "I am glad of that, if you are sure that it is so."

"There can be no doubt of it. I met Brantford Townsley this morning with a letter in his hand which he had just received from Southgate, who was starting for Jerusalem the day he wrote."

"I am very glad," said Stella again. "And when shall we start, papa?"

Her face was quite bright now.

"As soon as your mother is able to travel. The doctor thinks she will be well enough in six weeks to undertake the voyage. That will bring us to the first of May—a very good season for crossing the ocean."

CHAPTER XIV.

DR. McDonald was mistaken in thinking that he could either convince or persuade Mrs. Gordon to believe herself well enough to travel by the first of May. The summer solstice was fast approaching before the weary task of combating her objections and satisfying her requirements in the way of preparation was accomplished and the voyage begun; and the last sun of June was blazing in the heavens as Stella sat one afternoon on the deck of the steamer that for nearly a fortnight had been *terra firma* to her and many others, and, with sensations too mingled and too strong for utterance, looked over the limitless expanse of glittering blue water around. Far away on the scarce discernible verge of the horizon, where sea and sky melted together, lay a faint, very faint white line, to the eye hardly more than a point. This, she was told, was the Irish coast.

Her father and several of their fellow passengers had just left the deck, after welcoming with rejoicing the first sight of land; but she remained, and was glad to be alone. She was so

young that history, in the pages of which she had so lately been living, was, with all its actors and tragedies, as vividly familiar and real to her as the events of yesterday are to older people—people to whom years and the memories of their own lives have dimmed the enthusiasms of youth, and even the very recollection of the lives that went before them. What a host of shadows gathered about her, as, leaning back in her deck-chair, her gaze fastened itself on that little, vapor-like speck which was imperceptibly enlarging and growing more distinct while she gazed! She could not have put into words—words that would not have seemed tame and altogether unworthy their theme—one of the thoughts that were crowding on her. Only the inspiration of the poet can analyze and clothe in language emotions which less gifted souls feel—it might almost be said suffer—but cannot express. Stella sat dumb and motionless. The grand Old World of story and of song was here, in her very sight. All its mighty past lay spread out, as it were, like a map before her imagination.

She was startled suddenly by a voice at her side.

"Dinner is ready," said her father, offering his arm to take her in.

"I do not care for dinner, papa," she answered. "I would rather stay here, if you will tell the steward to send me a sandwich and glass of wine."

"Come to the table," insisted Mr. Gordon. "The Isle of Saints will not vanish while you are away," he added, with a smile. "On the contrary, we shall be an hour nearer to it when you return, and you will be able to see it more clearly than you do now."

"I hate to lose one moment of such an evening and such a view as this," she said, but rose from her seat while speaking. "I do believe you are a devout Catholic at heart, papa," she continued, as they turned to leave the deck, "though you don't seem so."

"At heart I am certainly a Catholic," he answered seriously. "It is only in practice that I am not one."

"And is that right?" asked Stella gently. "I have often been tempted to speak to you on the subject, papa, but hesitated, I scarcely know why. But the first sight of Ireland ought to inspire one not only with devotion but with courage to do anything for God. You have always confessed your faith; why don't you practise it, dear papa?"

Perhaps Mr. Gordon was not sorry to be spared the necessity of answering this question. They entered the saloon at the moment, and nothing more was said on the subject. When they rose from the table he conducted Stella back to her seat on deck, and then returned to the saloon for dutiful attendance on his wife and her whist-table.

The Isle of Saints had, in nautical phrase, risen a little out of the water when Stella's eyes turned to it again after her absence of an hour from the deck. A good many people besides herself were now gathered there, watching the land they were approaching, as it became more and more distinct to view in the glorified atmosphere which the sun's parting rays were pouring over it.

The scene was very beautiful. The coast lay like a flake of dull gold on the burnished surface of sun-gilded water, outlined faintly against a pale pink sky that was misty from distance, but transparently clear in tint. There was not a cloud in the heavens, not the thinnest vapor, to catch and refract the rays of light that were beginning to bathe the whole sea-line in sunset effulgence only the land itself. That changed momently as the level beams of the sun touched it, wrapping it in a haze of dazzling light, which deepened rapidly to burning gold, and from gold to orange-rose, and from rose to crimson.

Then the colors commenced fading, dying down from shade to shade. Dull-red, purple, violet, soft, dark, sombre blue, followed each other in swift succession as the sunset radiance retreated from the eastern horizon and came creeping across the water toward the ship, the shades of evening falling like a veil behind it.

Stella scarcely heard the exclamations of admiration and pleasure from those around her. She was thinking of Southgate, of what he would feel if he was by her side looking for the first time at the shore that was now disappearing in the twilight. He was not much inclined to

enthusiasm ordinarily, but his eye always lighted and his words and tones warmed when he spoke of Ireland. To be so near it reminded her of all that they had intended to do and see there together.

"We must land at Queenstown," he had more than once said when they were discussing the details of their intended visit to Europe. "I should feel it impossible to pass Ireland without pausing to touch this soil which has been made sacred by the blood and tears of so many generations of saints and martyrs. We will hear one Mass in Cork or Dublin, and go on then to Rome. But as we return we must stay some time and make a great many pilgrimages."

Stella smiled sadly to herself as she remembered how little interest she had felt at the time in the idea of the pilgrimages, and how much more she was thinking of seeing London and Paris than of hearing Mass anywhere! Now she would have been very glad to land in Queenstown and stay in Ireland a few days. She had even proposed it to her father, who was not unwilling to gratify her wish, had not Mrs. Gordon objected to the delay and preferred to land in Liverpool and proceed at once to London.

The weather was unusually fine, and, as Mrs. Gordon found herself much fatigued by her voyage, they decided to remain awhile in England instead of going on at once to the Continent according to their original intention. A few days after their arrival, therefore, they were established in lodgings in that pleasantest part of suburban London, Kensington.

CHAPTER XV.

"WHAT can be the matter that your father does not return?" exclaimed Mrs. Gordon anxiously the day after that on which they were settled in their lodgings. The dinner-hour was striking, and Mr. Gordon, who had gone out immediately after breakfast to see his banker, had not yet appeared.

"I don't suppose anything serious is the matter," said Stella, speaking more cheerfully than she felt, in order to reassure her mother, who was evidently becoming very impatient and not a little uneasy. "He may have lost his way in this great London town, or—"

At this moment a welcome ring of the door-bell sounded, and she paused to see if it was her father. Yes, that was his step on the stair, she was sure; and when the door opened she looked up with a smile and a jesting reproof on her lips.

She did not utter the last. Mr. Gordon came in hastily, looking grave and a little nervous, it seemed to her.

"I hope I have not kept dinner waiting or made you uneasy, Margaret," he said, glancing anxiously at his wife. "I was detained unavoidably by business. I will be ready in a moment, however."

He passed into an adjoining apartment.

"How worried he looks!" observed his wife. "I can't imagine what business there is that could disturb him so."

"I suppose he was afraid you would be nervous and alarmed by his absence," said Stella.

"Yes, very likely. I was beginning to feel quite anxious. I wish I had your nerves."

She would not have wished so if she had known what a state Stella's nerves were in at that moment, quiet as she appeared. "Something is the matter," she was thinking, "and something very serious, I am sure. I never in my life saw papa look so strangely excited."

Her apprehensions were somewhat dissipated when Mr. Gordon reappeared after arranging his toilet for dinner. He bestowed his usual care in making his wife comfortable, and listened with his usual patience to her report of her symptoms during the morning. But, that subject exhausted, a preoccupied expression stole over his face; and Stella observed that although he accounted for his unusual silence and gravity by saying that he was very tired, he ate little. In his whole air and manner there was a certain quietude too marked to be quite natural.

She was alarmed. "Something dreadful has happened!" she thought again, while her mother was asking innumerable questions relevant to nothing in particular. "Papa must have received letters at the bank. Oh! I wish dinner was over; he is dreadfully worried about something. Perhaps he is called home by business, and will have to leave us."

This idea took entire possession of her mind, and all the while they sat at table, and during the two hours which followed, she was tormenting herself with anticipations of how wretched she should be if her fears were verified and she had to see her father return home alone. The fact that he said nothing before her mother made her more uneasy than she would otherwise have been even, and more impatient to know the trouble, whatever that trouble might prove to be.

Mrs. Gordon, who still kept invalid hours, finally rose to retire, and her husband gave her his arm to assist her to her chamber.

"Is anything the matter, papa?" Stella asked the moment he entered the room on his return. "Did you get any letters from home?"

"None," he answered. "It is too soon to expect letters from home. But yes, something is the matter. I heard some very bad news this morning."

"I knew it! I felt sure of it!" she exclaimed. "You received a telegram, I suppose? What—"

"I heard nothing from home," he interrupted. "This news is about Southgate."

"He is married!" she thought, with a sharp pang. But womanly pride gave her self-possession. "Ah!" she forced herself to say steadily. "What did you hear about him?"

Her look of inquiry was so composed, if not indifferent, that her father answered at once briefly: "He is dead."

There was a long pause. Mr. Gordon was inexpressibly shocked as well as astonished at the effect his words produced. Stella's face grew as white as marble, her form seemed to stiffen as she sat, and her eyes had a wild, glazed expression that alarmed him.

He uttered an exclamation of dismay. "I have been too abrupt!" he said. "But I thought from your manner that you were indifferent to him."

Her lips quivered; there was a convulsive movement in her throat, as if she was trying to speak. But the effort was abortive. She was aware of a strange, double consciousness—a burning pain tearing her heart, with, at the same time, an apathetic recognition of her position and surrounding circumstances.

"I thought so, too," she managed at last to articulate in reply to her father's exclamation. "But you see we were both mistaken."

After another silence she cried suddenly: "You mean it, papa?—you really mean that he is *dead*?"

"Yes; he is dead."

"How do you know it? How did you hear it?"

"I have seen his body," was the reply.

She asked no more questions at the moment, but sat staring vacantly before her, trying to realize, trying to make herself believe, what she had been told.

Southgate dead! It was the first time that the idea of his dying had ever entered her mind. She had thought of his marriage, had prepared herself to hear of this, and, had she heard of it, would have accepted the inevitable with becoming resignation. Not without a pang, certainly; but that pang would have been the death -throe of her love.

To see the extinction of his life was another thing—a life that she believed to be so full of promise. A mingled sense of amaze, of vehement protest, of intolerable regret assailed her. Almost forgetting herself in generous pity for him, she felt like crying out against the cruelty of Heaven.

The entrance of a servant, who came into the room on some trifling errand, roused her from her vain questioning of Omnipotent wisdom, and, glancing at her father, the expression of his face further recalled her to a consciousness of the necessity of self-control.

"I am very, very sorry papa, to hear this sad news," she said quietly when the man left the room. "I was awfully shocked at first, for"—her voice faltered slightly—"I did care a great deal for him. But you know I have no *right* to care now. You need not be afraid of my making myself seriously unhappy. But I am so, so sorry! How sad it is for any one to die so young! How did you hear it?"

Mr. Gordon's face cleared when he perceived that she intended to take the matter in this sensible way, as he considered it, and he proceeded to explain how by a mere accident, as it seemed, the fact came to his knowledge. He had gone to the banking-house to which he brought letters, to have a check cashed, and, wishing to make his financial arrangements for the period during which he would be on the Continent, requested speech with one of the heads of the house. The banker was engaged just then, he was informed, but would probably be at leisure to see him in half an hour, or less time, if he could wait. In much less time than that specified, at the distant tinkle of a bell, the clerk to whom he had given his card rose quickly and, requesting him to follow, led the way down a long corridor to a door, unclosed it, motioned him to enter, and retired.

As he was about to cross the threshold he was met by a man coming out, whose face struck him at a passing glance as singularly pale and haggard so much so that it remained a picture in his mind all the while he was transacting his business.

"May I ask, Mr. Gordon, if you were acquainted with a countryman of your own, a Mr. Southgate?" inquired Mr. L—, the banker, when he rose to leave.

"I am intimately acquainted with a Mr. Edward Southgate, who was in London about the first of this year, if he is the man you speak of," was the reply. "He went from here to Italy, and thence to Jerusalem, I believe."

"The same, the same man," said the banker. "He intended to spend two years in Eastern travel he told me, perhaps longer. Unfortunately for him, as it turned out, he changed his mind, was returning to England, it seems, and last night he lost his life, I understand, by the sinking of the steamer he was on."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Gordon. "Is it possible? This is most deplorable intelligence to me! How did you obtain your information, Mr. L—, may I inquire? Is it to be relied on?"

"There can be no mistake as to the fact, I regret to say," answered the other. "My informant was a fellow-passenger of Mr. Southgate's—the man you met as you came in a few minutes ago. He is a gentleman well known to me, and barely escaped with his own life—was picked up by a boat while struggling in the water."

"And he told you that Southgate was on board the vessel with him, and was lost?"

"He saw his body among a number of others that came on shore with the tide this morning."

"Can I follow and speak to him?" asked Mr. Gordon hastily. "I should like to learn all the particulars of the accident and take charge of the body."

Mr. L— shook his head. "He has left town by this time, having merely called here on his way to take the 12.30 train at the Northwestern terminus. He is off before now. But I can give you the particulars of the accident in a general way, which he told me, and direct you to the place where the bodies will no doubt be kept during the day for identification by friends. Pray sit down again."

Mr. Gordon did so, and learned that one steamer had run into another the night before on the river a little below Greenwich, and that the smaller vessel, a passenger-boat bound from some Mediterranean port to London, was struck amidships and sank almost immediately. Most of the passengers being in their berths at the time of the collision, the loss of life was very great. Some few were picked up by the boats of the larger vessel, but the greater number perished. A good many bodies had already been washed ashore by the tide that came in at daylight, and were deposited in a boat-house on the spot.

This was the substance of what Mr. Gordon heard, Mr. L— adding that his informant had mentioned Southgate's name incidentally among that of others, but seemed to have had a very slight acquaintance with him, only knowing that he was an American, that he had lately been in Syria, and was evidently but just recovering from what must from his appearance have been a very serious illness.

Taking leave of the banker with many thanks for the information he had received, distressing as it was to him, Mr. Gordon proceeded at once to the place to which he had been directed, some distance below Greenwich.

It was a feeling akin to physical pain that he shrank, as he drew near to his destination, from the thought of seeing Southgate's lifeless body, if Southgate's body it proved to be. He felt that ocular demonstration could destroy his hope to the contrary.

A crowd surrounded the boat-house; many people were entering and leaving momently. Some of them, it was evident, came on the same sad errand as himself, with even a closer interest; for he heard more than one burst of heartrending grief as he paused an instant outside the door to brace his resolution before going in. Others were impelled by that strange morbid curiosity, so common to human nature, which makes suffering and death an entertaining spectacle.

To these last the scene in the boat-house was no doubt weirdly attractive; to Mr. Gordon it was horrible. He gave but one glance at the row of cold effigies of humanity that lay waiting recognition or unknown burial, and, seeing none which he thought could by any possibility be that he was seeking, turned away and addressed one of the men wearing the badge of the London police who were in official attendance. Taking out his pocket-book with the air of a man who expects to pay for what he gets, he did get civil answers to his questions, but no information that was at all satisfactory. The policeman, who belonged to the reserve force kept for special service, had been on duty but half an hour, he said, and knew nothing whatever about the accident or its victims. He suggested, however, as he condescended to accept the coin extended by Mr. Gordon, that any of the boatmen loitering outside could tell the gentleman all that there was to tell about it.

When Mr. Gordon, glad to escape from proximity to the ghastly company within, hurried out into the sunshine and looked about for one Jim Dodson, who was recommended by the policeman as the "best party to apply to," he fortunately found that individual at his service, ready to "tell what he knowed," if the gentleman would make it worth his while.

The gentleman made it so well worth his while that he was inclined to tell not only all he knew, but more besides, the former suspected. Sifting as well as he could, by a rigid cross-examination, the truth from its embellishments, Mr. Gordon possessed himself of what seemed to him a few probable facts. Among the bodies that had come ashore with the tide there *was* one, Mr. Dodson stated, which an officer and a passenger of the lost vessel had recognized as that of an American gentleman, they said—a young man with dark hair, tall, looking as if he had consumption. "Came ashore in his trousers and shirt, no coat nor—"

Mr. Gordon here interposed. There was no body answering the description in the boat-house, he suggested.

"Not now," the boatman replied, "'cause it was took away about a hour ago."

"Taken away!" repeated Mr. Gordon in surprise. "Who took it?"

That Mr. Dodson was not prepared to say. In fact, he did not know. Undertaker people. But of course there was somebody behind *them*. All he knowed was that the officer of the ship he spoke about before had came down with the undertaker's men, and the undertaker's men had carried off two bodies—the gentleman they was speaking of and another young gentleman. That was all he knowed.

"And where is the officer of the ship?" Mr. Gordon inquired. "You say he came down; from where?"

"From the inn up yonder," answered the boat-man.

Up to the inn, some few hundred yards distant, Mr. Gordon went in haste; and after a few minutes conversation with the man he sought, who proved to be the second officer of the

unfortunate vessel, he returned to London and spent some time in searching through the advertising columns of the *Times* and other papers for the address of an undertaker to whom he had been referred by the officer for certain information which the latter himself was unable to give. Succeeding at last in his quest, he saw the undertaker, and from him obtained the address of a gentleman, to whom he at once went.

CHAPTER XVI.

ALL these journeyings to and fro occupied so much time as to make him late for dinner. He described his adventures to Stella in few words until he came to the latter part of his narrative, when he spoke more at length.

"I was astonished to hear that the body had been removed," he said, "and began to indulge a hope that, after all, the drowned man might not be our friend, but somebody else of the same name. The possibility—it even seemed to me a probability—of this being the case increased my anxiety to find out by whom the body had been taken, and to what place.

"To my disappointment, the officer to whom I applied as soon as I learned his whereabouts could give me little available information. He remembered that one of the passengers was a Mr. Southgate, an American, who seemed in ill health; recollected to have heard Mr. Southgate remark that he was still suffering from the effects of an attack of fever which he had in Syria, and had noticed that he appeared to be much affected by the heat, which was intense during the whole passage.

"The vessel touched at Gibraltar, and two young Englishmen, one of whom was accompanied by his wife, embarked there, he said. Mr. Southgate and the younger of these two gentlemen seemed to take a fancy to each other at once. They were together a great deal, and were in the habit of walking the deck together at night. If it had not been that the bodies came on shore only half dressed he should have thought they must have been on deck when the collision occurred, late as it was after midnight. Southgate's right hand was grasping the Englishman's shoulder, while the Englishman's right hand was clasped around Southgate's left arm just above the wrist. The elder Mr. Willoughby—Willoughby was the name of the Englishman—was saved, and so was his wife. In claiming his brother's body he requested permission to take Southgate's also, saying something which the officer did not understand, about Southgate's having lost his own life in trying to save that of his friend. Mr. Willoughby also said that he was a Catholic, and knew Southgate to have been one, and that he would take on himself the burial of the body.

"The officer thinking that as Southgate was a foreigner, and of course a stranger, it was not likely any one else would claim the body, very readily consented to its being given up to Mr. Willoughby. He went down to the boat-house and so instructed the men in charge. When I spoke to him shortly afterwards he was afraid, I could see, that he had done wrong. I soon reassured him, telling him that he had acted with good judgment in the matter, and that all I asked was Mr. Willoughby's address. He could not give me this, or any clue by which to find it; and I had just decided that I should have to advertise in the evening and morning papers when a boat-man to whom I had been talking came to my assistance, giving me the name of the undertaker who had removed the bodies. I looked up the man's advertisement, in that way found him, and learned that Mr. Willoughby was at his house in town to-day, the bodies having been temporarily carried there also.

"I went to the house at once. The blinds were down, and the porter assured me that his master could see no one, being in great distress at the death of his brother. I had some difficulty in getting the man to take my card, on which I had written a line explaining my business. He did take or send it in at last, however; and Mr. Willoughby received me immediately in the most courteous, indeed cordial, manner. He had taken the liberty, he said, of charging himself with the

care and burial of Mr. Southgate's body, feeling that, short as their acquaintance had been, gratitude gave him a claim to render every respect and consideration in his power to the memory of a man who had saved his life and that of his wife, and had perished while endeavoring to render the same service to his brother. He could not deny my right as a countryman and friend of Mr. Southgate to have a voice as to the disposal of the body; but he earnestly hoped that I would consent to its temporary burial, at least, with that of his brother. If Mr. Southgate's family wished its removal hereafter, very well; he could make no objection. But now—

"I interposed here and assured him that I not only consented willingly to his kind proposal, but thanked him heartily for it and could desire nothing better; and that I would only ask further to see the body, in order to be certain it was really that of my friend. I still entertained a faint hope to the contrary.

"He led the way at once from the room in which he had received me to a drawing-room up-stairs where the two bodies lay."

Mr. Gordon's voice sank a little as he uttered the last words, and there was a moment's silence, which was measured to Stella by the heavy, sickening throbs of her heart. She would have preferred to hear no more. Almost she felt as if she could not listen to another word. But what matter a few pangs more or less? she thought. The cup of bitterness was at her lips; she might as well drink every drop.

"I should scarcely have recognized the face if I had seen it accidentally without knowing whose it was," Mr. Gordon went on in a tone of much feeling, "though I am sure I should have ,been struck by its resemblance to Southgate. The forehead, hair, and brows look quite natural, except that the temples are very sunken. But the features are perfectly emaciated, and have the sharpness and lividness which death almost invariably gives, particularly after a long illness. Added to this, the face is clean shaven. As he always wore a beard and moustache, this gives it a very unfamiliar appearance. The first glance convinced me that it was Southgate, and yet I found it difficult to realize that it was he who lay before me.

“I stayed but a moment; for, painful as the interview was to myself, it was evidently even more so to Mr. Willoughby. He is a great, broad-chested, broad-cheeked Englishman, with a face that looks as if it was made only to laugh; but there were tears in his eyes, and I saw that he could not control his voice as he put his hand on his brother's hair and looked from one of the dead faces to the other."

Stella said nothing, and it was an inexpressible relief to her when her father took out his watch and began to wind it up. She knew that this was his preliminary to saying good-night.

Before the watch was closed and returned to its place the door-bell rang.

"Strange, at this hour," said Mr. Gordon, and looked inquiringly at the servant who appeared a moment after having answered the bell.

"A person at the door wishes to speak to you, sir," the man said.

"Let him come up," was the reply.

The person declined to do so. He wanted to speak to the gentleman alone.

"Take him into the dining-room, then. I will see him there," Mr. Gordon said, and followed the man as the latter left the room.

He was not gone long. There was a short silence in the house, then movements down-stairs, the shutting of the house door, and Mr. Gordon reappeared.

He had something in his hand, Stella perceived, as he advanced to a table on which was a light, and instinctively she joined him. A cold chill ran through her veins as she saw what it was that he held—a Russia-leather pocket book, damp and discolored. Before he spoke she knew what he was going to tell her.

"A boatman to whom I was talking to-day brought it to me," he said. "No doubt it was taken from the body and the money it contained abstracted, though the fellow, of course, tells a different story."

He opened it slowly, with the reluctance a man feels in addressing himself to a task which he knows will be a painful one.

The outside was still damp; the inside was wringing wet. There was no money, nothing of any value; simply a number of memoranda leaves and a few letters, all so thoroughly soaked with salt water as to be mere paper pulp with blotty discolorations over the surface, and so pasted together as to defy any effort to take the leaves apart or open the letters without breaking them to pieces. If he had not suspected the fact already Mr. Gordon would have been satisfied, from the disordered and soiled condition of the contents, that the book had been ransacked before it came into his hands. One of the letters had obviously been dropped into the mud and washed off, losing part of its edges in the process. In fact, all of the papers were more wet than would have been possible had the pocket-book remained unopened.

After examining the whole very carefully Mr. Gordon shook his head in disappointment.

"There is nothing by which to judge whether it even belonged to Southgate," he said. "The boat-man's story is that it fell from his pocket as his body was lifted out of the shallow tide-water where it lodged—"

"I think," interrupted Stella desperately, feeling that to hear such details dwelt on was beyond her powers of endurance—"I think, papa, you did not examine the innermost pocket. There may be something in that."

Mr. Gordon opened the book again and saw that he had not noticed the pocket she alluded to. He unfolded the extreme end and exposed to view two flaps, lifting which he discovered a small pocket.

"Yes, here is a letter or note," he said, "and it has been so well protected by the leather that it is scarcely damp, which shows I was right in believing that the other papers have been tampered with. Here are some finger-marks on it, but it has no address," he added, turning it over.

It had an enclosure, however, he found a *carte-de-visite* photograph. He took it out of the envelope, and when he saw what it was would have been very glad if he could have concealed it from Stella. But she had recognized it at a glance, he knew by her quick movement and gasping breath. It was her own likeness.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT breakfast the next morning Mr. Gordon was very glad to see Stella in her accustomed place behind the urn. Except that she looked grave and pale, her manner was quite as usual. She even smiled faintly in answer to his greeting; but after the morning salutations scarcely a word was exchanged. Neither of the two was inclined to talk, and neither felt under any constraint in remaining silent. Mrs. Gordon, since her illness, always breakfasted in her own room.

"I told Mr. Willoughby that I would be with him this morning," said Mr. Gordon when he had finished breakfast, "but the visit will not detain me long, probably. Of course I shall insist on seeing to the funeral expenses. Willoughby intended to defray them himself, the undertaker told me; but I cannot allow that, even temporarily. It is totally unnecessary."

He rose and was leaving the room, but paused suddenly as he reached the door, and said:

"I promised your mother to look up the D—s to-day. You can tell her why I am unable to—"

"O papa!" cried Stella impulsively, "if it is necessary that she should be told, cannot *you* tell her? I could not endure to hear any harsh remarks *now*. I am afraid I should lose all self-restraint and retort very bitterly."

"You do her injustice, if you think she would be capable of saying anything harsh," answered Mr. Gordon gravely. "But if you do not wish to speak on the subject I had better do so.

She will see the account of the accident in the morning papers, and wonder that it was not mentioned to her. I will ring and inquire if I can see her before I go out."

"I know," said Stella, speaking rapidly and passionately, "that I have no right to blame her, having myself acted so badly. But I feel that we are his murderers."

"It is worse than folly to entertain such an idea as that!" said Mr. Gordon a little sternly. "What had either of you to do with his death?"

"If he had not been forced in self-respect to break with me everything would have been different," she answered. "He would not have been on that ship, papa. You cannot deny that."

"I do deny that you are in any degree accountable for his having lost his life by an accident with which you had no concern whatever," said her father, crossing the room to ring the bell.

"Inquire of Mrs. Gordon's maid if her mistress is awake and can see me," he said to the servant who answered his summons.

Mrs. Gordon could not see him, the maid returned. She had a headache and bad cold, and had given orders that she was not to be disturbed.

"Thank heaven!" said Stella involuntarily beneath her breath; then, observing that her father had heard the exclamation and looked both surprised and displeased, she added quickly: "I did not mean that I was glad mamma had a headache! No, indeed! It is a great relief to me to be able to be alone—that is what I was thinking of. I will go and pray in that church we saw the other day, papa, and you shall find me in better dispositions when you return. I promise you I will try not to be wicked and impatient again."

She kept her word. During the few following days she was very grave and silent, but scrupulously attentive to her mother and not less companionable than usual to her father. The latter at first spoke of Southgate as they sat alone in the evening after Mrs. Gordon retired. He repeated Mr. Willoughby's account of the loss of the vessel, and description of the saving of himself and his wife by Southgate, who burst open the door of their state-room, which was jammed so tightly by the crushing of the side of the boat in the collision that it could not be moved from within. Stella listened with interest to this recital, but asked no questions; and her father, seeing that she shrank from the subject, discontinued alluding to it. Only on the morning of the funeral he said as she was pouring out his coffee:

"If you would like to go with me there is no reason why you should not. There is to be a solemn Requiem High Mass, and a sermon by the cardinal. Willoughby told me that his wife intends to be present at the Mass, and that they will be pleased for you to come out with me this morning to the Manor and accompany her to the chapel."

She shook her head. "No. I will pray during the time in the church here," she answered. "They are very kind; you must thank them and make my excuses. And say, please, that I sent these flowers" she pointed to a side-table. "You will remember, won't you, papa, that they are for both the coffins?"

"Of course. I am very glad you thought of it," said Mr. Gordon.

"I suppose," said Stella, "that it is a growing custom in England for women to attend funerals, particularly Catholic funerals, where there is Mass. But I never liked the idea, even at home, where it is universal."

Mrs. Gordon made no harsh remarks when she heard of Southgate's death. Her husband, in communicating the intelligence to her, requested that she would not allude to the subject to or before Stella—a superfluous precaution on his part; she was never inclined to dwell upon anything either painful or disagreeable, and the recollection of her own conduct in the matter of Stella's engagement was both the one and the other, as read now in the light of this tragic end of one of the lives concerned. Stella's pale face and subdued manner were an unceasing reminder that she had inflicted great pain on her only child without having accomplished her proposed object. She was willing to let her blunder and the failure she had made rest in silence, and even consented not ungraciously to Mr. Gordon's proposal that they should leave London at once. He

hoped that change of scene and unavoidable distractions of travel might divert Stella's thought from dwelling on the recollection of her former lover's death.

"But the D—s!" cried Mrs. Gordon suddenly. "We must wait for them, if they decide to go with us; and I am almost sure they will. They are to dine here to-morrow and let me know certainly."

The D—s were some friends, people from their own State, with whom she wished to join parties.

"Papa," said Stella that same evening, "before we leave London I should like to visit Edward's grave. You told me, I think, that the Willoughby's were to leave home to-day?"

"Yes, to join Mr. Willoughby's mother."

"I wonder if strangers are permitted to drive through the park to the chapel?"

"I don't know about strangers in general, but Willoughby's people would recognize me and make no difficulty about my going. I can take you there tomorrow afternoon, if you like."

"I thought I might go alone," she said; adding frankly, "I should prefer it."

"Go alone!" repeated Mr. Gordon in surprise, "Impossible! You forget—"

"I do not mean quite alone," she interposed quickly. "I could take Charlotte with me. You have no idea how useful I have found her. She is very clever and capable, understands dealing with these troublesome London cabmen, getting railway-tickets, and everything of the kind. I should not at all mind going, if I thought the lodge-keeper at Willoughby Manor would let me in. And if you do not object, papa."

"No. I suppose there would be no impropriety in your going, if you take this girl with you. But you need not pass through the park; you can go by the village, which is in sight of the railway station, a mile nearer than the lodge. The chapel is not far from the park-palings that bound the village green. Several of the villagers are Catholics, and for their convenience there is a gate opening into the park. You cannot mistake it, and a path leads from the gate to the chapel. You will find the two graves under the very wall of the church on the east side the side next the open park toward the house. Standing at the foot of them, the one at the right-hand side is Southgate's."

Stella left London later than she had intended, and the sun, though not near the horizon, was sufficiently declined from the meridian to throw a very golden light on the village-green as, attended by her landlady's daughter (the girl of whom she had spoken to her father), she crossed it on her way to the gate which gave entrance to Willoughby Manor Park. Some children playing on the far side of the broad sweep of velvet sward stared at the unusual apparition of two such figures passing there; otherwise there were few signs of life to be observed. The village seemed sunk in the drowsy stillness of a summer afternoon.

Tired as well as heated by her walk, short as it was, from the station, Stella was glad to plunge into the deep shade of a park, the coolness of which was most refreshing. Not only the trees but the undergrowth also remained very much as nature had made them. But for the absence of dead leaves and broken branches from the ground she could almost have fancied herself in one of her own native forests, so still and green and dark was everything around as she followed the narrow, winding path that was leading her apparently into the depths of a dense wood, and did lead to a little brook, at which she stopped.

She sat down on the roots of a rugged old beech-tree, and, taking the basket of flowers which her companion carried, drew off one of her gloves, and, dipping her hand in the water, sprinkled the blossoms until they looked as fresh as if they had just been gathered with the morning-dew upon them.

"Sit down, Charlotte," she said then, rising and lifting the basket from the ground, "and wait for me here. I shall not be gone long."

Walking lightly over a rustic foot-bridge that was thrown across the brook a little lower down on its course, she soon disappeared from Charlotte's view along the path which wound through the thick growth fringing the water-course.

After continuing its way through the copse a short distance farther the path suddenly emerged into an open space, in the centre of which stood the chapel—a small beautiful Gothic structure.

Stella paused with a thrill of indescribable emotion. Here, then was Southgate's resting-place.

"I am glad that he sleeps in such a lovely spot!" she thought. "But oh! it is terrible to conceive that he is down in the cold darkness—"

She shrank and hesitated, and half turned away with the feeling that she could not bear to go nearer. But the heavy basket of flowers in her hands reminded her of the purpose for which she came. She would not permit herself to yield to the weakness that assailed her. "Let me make this last offering to him, and be near him once more for the very last time," she thought sadly.

She moved forward, approaching the church from the western side, which was all aglow with the broad beams of the July sun shining from a cloudless sky. Standing in this lonely spot, the chapel could not be left open, and the Blessed Sacrament could not, of course, be reserved. She was, therefore, denied the consolation of prostrating herself before the altar; but she knelt on the steps of the front entrance, and prayed long and fervently for the repose of the two souls that had been snatched so suddenly from life and all the joys of youth to the cold darkness of the tomb. With her, as with the dead Mr. Willoughby's relatives, there would always, she felt, be two souls to be remembered together.

Her prayers ended, she lifted her basket once more and walked slowly round to the east side of the building.

It was all shadow here—the deep shades cast by the high walls and roof, which were outlined sharply and in exaggerated length on the velvet green, that stretched away in this direction, smooth and level as a well-kept lawn, for a long distance into the park. A few trees were scattered about, one of which, a picturesque hawthorn, stood very close to the building and extended its luxuriant branches protectingly, as it were, over the two graves that lay between its gnarled trunk and the church wall.

After having placed her offering upon the graves Stella sat down on the grass beside the one which her father said was Southgate's, and looked at it with a strange regard. Could it be, she exclaimed silently, that he was so near to her? So near, yet gone for ever from all but her memory and her regret! But a few feet of earth divided them the eye whose gaze she so well remembered, the hand that had so often clasped her own! Down there in the cold darkness they were lying, sleeping the unawaking sleep of mortality. This mound of clay was all that remained on earth of the graceful presence which she had thought would be beside her during all her life.

With her head drooped low and her ungloved hand resting on the grave she sat for a long time in silent meditation. How different her life might have been, she reflected, if she had not lost Southgate's heart by what seemed to her, in looking back, the most incomprehensible folly! Love of pleasure and admiration, self-will, and a hasty, uncontrolled temper—these faults had appeared slight and venial in her eyes at the time. Now she saw them in another light: saw that trifling defects of character and conduct are not trifling in their sequences, but that each separate act is one step either on the right road or the wrong one, and that every fault, however apparently small in itself, is a germ of evil which may develop into sins of startling magnitude, or may directly or indirectly, lead to the most unexpected and calamitous results. With no more serious intention of wrong-doing than that with which a spoiled child misuses and breaks its toys, she had flung away happiness the worth of which she did not then know, but had since learned to appreciate. And not happiness only. Despite what her father had said to the contrary, she could not feel that she was entirely guiltless, as regarded Southgate's death. Morally guiltless, of course; but was it not incontestably true that if she had acted differently circumstances would have fallen out differently? "Yet God knows best," she said humbly. "He has been very merciful to me in sending the discipline I needed; and how dare I think that his mercy has been less to one who was so much more worthy of it!" Still, to her human sight, it seemed grievous that such a life should have

ended so prematurely. But could it have ended more worthily? Self-forgetful to the last, he had died in the performance of an act of charity. Surely a soul so upright and self-sacrificing would not be doomed to stay long in that abode the pains of which are softened by the presence of Hope, and may be shortened by the prayers of the living. She had said many prayers already, but at the thought of purgatory she rose from where she sat on the grass, and, kneeling, began to repeat the *De Profundis*: *Out of the depths I have cried to thee, Lord! Lord, hear*—"

Suddenly her voice ceased; a magnetic consciousness made her aware that she was not alone. She lifted both hands, and, hastily throwing back her veil, the folds of which had fallen far over her face, looked up.

But a few feet from her, at the head of the grave over which she was offering a prayer for the repose of his soul, stood Edward Southgate.

She saw him, heard him utter her name, and then consciousness left her.

Southgate—for it was he in his natural body, not, as Stella thought, a spiritual one—was as much shocked when he saw her fall back insensible as he had been surprised the moment before to recognize her face. He sprang to her assistance, laid her down on the soft grass, and hastily took off her hat. What to do next he did not know. To leave her alone while he went more than a mile to the lodge or manor-house for help was not to be thought of. He had come by the way of the lodge, and knew no other way of approach nor nearer place to seek assistance. He looked at Stella's bloodless face and groaned. What was he to do? He lifted her hand and put his finger on her pulse, and as he did so a luminous idea flashed upon him. She was in the habit, he remembered, of carrying a vinaigrette in her pocket. He proceeded to search for it.

With masculine awkwardness he sought vainly for some time in the folds of her dress for the pocket itself in the first place. When at last he found it, and had succeeded in extracting the smelling-bottle from its depths, he was in such haste in applying the open mouth of the bottle to her nostrils as almost to strangle her with the powerful aromatic odor. It was with a gasping cry of pain that she opened her eyes.

"You are better, thank Heaven!" ejaculated Southgate.

She did not answer, but gazed at him with a look which astonished him. Incredulity, terror, horror was what it seemed to express. He was so struck by it that he did not attempt to raise her from the ground, but remained motionless, regarding her almost as wonderfully as she was regarding him.

For an instant, or not much longer, they thus stared at each other before Southgate exclaimed, rising from the ground as he spoke:

"Why do you look at me so strangely, Stella? Surely you do not altogether hate me! Since I find you here at my brother's grave—"

"*Your brother's* grave!" cried Stella. "Then then you are not—" A great shuddering sigh heaved her whole frame. "I thought it was *your* grave," she said.

"Mine!" he repeated in surprise. "No; it is Eugene's; Eugene's grave!"

The last words were spoken as if more to himself than to her. His eyes fell and rested on the mound of earth with an expression which made Stella avert her face, while her own eyes filled with tears. She felt as if her presence was an intrusion; and, starting up so quickly that Southgate's attention was not attracted until she had gained her feet, she was moving away when his voice arrested her.

"Stella!" he said, taking a step toward her and extending his hand.

"Are you going to leave me alone in my desolation?" his eyes asked when she turned and met them or so, at least, she interpreted the sad gaze fixed on her.

"I am very sorry for you," her own eyes answered to that mute appeal; and he drew still nearer and took her hand in his own.

They sat down silently, and it was some minutes before a word was exchanged. Then in hushed tones, as if their voices might disturb the rest of the two slumberers beside them, their

mutual explanation was made. A few sentences sufficed for Stella's; Southgate's was necessarily less brief.

"When I reached Rome last January," he said, "I found Eugene looking wretchedly. His health had not been good for some months, and latterly had failed so much that, by the advice of his physicians, supported by the command of the superiors, he had been compelled to suspend his studies altogether for the time being.

"This was a great trial to him, for it involved the delay of a year, probably, as to the time of his ordination. In order to turn the period of enforced inactivity to the best account, as well as to regain as soon as possible his lost health, he proposed spending Lent in Jerusalem, and, then, as the season advanced, coming to England and devoting the summer to visiting all the holy places of England, Scotland, and Ireland. I willingly agreed to go with him to Jerusalem, and determined to excuse myself from keeping an engagement I had made with two Englishmen to join a party they were getting up for several years' travel in the East, and return with him to Europe after Easter. But when Easter came he was so much better that he insisted on my joining the Englishmen in their first expedition at least, which was through the interior of Palestine. He accompanied me to Damascus—our place of rendezvous—and there I parted from him."

The speaker paused here and was silent for a little time, sitting with his gaze fastened on the grave of his brother. His eyes were dim with tears when at last he turned to Stella, and, half shaking his head, exclaimed:

"Some time in the future, when I have learned to feel the resignation which now I can only desire to offer to God, I will tell you about him," his voice faltered. "You know I always did tell you that if there was any good in me, any aspiration after good, I owed it entirely to his example and exhortations."

"I remember," said Stella. "You always said that he was saintly in character."

"He was truly so. His confessor in Rome said to me, 'Do not think of him as dead, but as transplanted, translated. In all my life I have never known such a beautiful and pure soul as his. I do not hesitate to say that I believe he is in heaven.' "

"Surely this is very consoling," said Stella gently.

"Yes. I ought to be satisfied, since it is God's will. But nature is weak. There were so many reasons why I wished him to live—"

He started up abruptly, and, walking some distance away, stood leaning against a tree for a few minutes, looking vacantly toward the green depths of shade in the park before him. Presently he came back and sat down again.

"I blame myself for having been persuaded to leave him," he said, "for having let him a moment out of my sight. It was with great reluctance that I did so; and every day of absence increased my uneasiness, until at last I left my party and returned much sooner than I intended to Jerusalem, where he was to wait for me. I did not find him. A few days previous to my arrival he had started for Europe, but left a letter for me begging me not to be at all anxious about him, as he felt assured that a fever from which he was recovering when he wrote had revolutionized his system so thoroughly that he was now really regaining his health. The English physician who had attended him during his illness told me the same thing.

"I lost no time in following him, however, but did not succeed in overtaking him. Not knowing the route he had taken, I went via Venice to Rome, hoping to find him there. Instead of that I was met by the news of his death. His friends had seen in the English telegraphic news accounts of the loss of the vessel on which they knew he had taken passage, had telegraphed to friends of theirs in London and heard all the particulars—" he pointed to the two graves. "Several telegrams and letters addressed to him were given me, but I did not even look at them. No doubt the ones which you say Mr. Gordon sent were among them."

After another silence he went on with evident effort: "I cannot talk of him yet, but hereafter I must teach you to know him well. I want you to feel as if you had known him. When we were first engaged I sent him your photograph, and while we were together he often looked at

it, saying what a charming face it was and blaming me for not having had patience enough with what he felt sure was only girlish volatility. He saw, what I was very loath to admit even to myself at first, that instead of forgetting you, as, when I left home, I believed I should, I regretted more and more as time wore on that I had been so implacable. I shrank at the sight of letters from home, expecting each time that I opened one to hear that you were lost to me. ‘Never fear,' he said once as he saw me hesitate to break the seal of a letter in my hand; ‘I am sure you will not find the bad news you are afraid of. I have an intuition that Stella has no more forgotten you than you have forgotten her, and in the autumn I am going to take you home and see if I cannot persuade her to forgive you.'"

The speaker paused once more, and, taking Stella's hand again, laid it, clasped in his own, upon the grave, saying:

"Let me think that it is he who has spoken to your heart for me now."

The End
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