

She had been left an orphan when about seventeen, and with an income sufficient for all comfort and many luxuries.

Her father had died many long years before, and her mother, marrying a second time, was again a widow at her death, with one blue-eyed daughter, seven years younger than her oldest child.

When these two were left alone in the world, the strongest love of Adela Warburton's heart centred upon the little stepsister Rena.

During her girlhood every pleasure, every advantage of education was given to his blue-eyed legacy from her dead mother.

When Adela married, she stipulated that Rena should be allowed to share her new home, and Mr. Fairfield consented willingly.

The girl grew up very beautiful, a blonde with hair of brightest golden tint, and a complexion of ivory smoothness.

She was well educated, but never had rivalled her sister in a love for books.

She sang well, and she was gentle and loving to the sister and brother-in-law, who lavished upon her all the affection they would have given to children of their own, had God granted them that crowning blessing of life.

Home was a paradise to Adela Fairfield while her husband's love glorified it and Rena's sweet face made sunshine there.

And into her paradise there crept a serpent—a man handsome as an Apollo, without principle, without compunction, one whose name was familiar to men as an adventurer, a gambler, and a spendthrift.

Secretly he stole interviews with Rena, meeting her clandestinely in the woods near Fairfield Place—sometimes at the house of some friend.

Secretly he won the girl's heart, and then boldly demanded her hand.

She was sole mistress of twenty thousand pounds left her by her father, and he knew that her loving guardians had no control over her little fortune after her marriage.

John Fairfield absolutely refused him any encouragement, forbidding him the house, and openly expressing his abhorrence of his whole course of life.

Adela, horrified at her sister's deception, and indignant at her lover's presumption, was, for the first time, stern in her rebukes and bitter in her denunciations of the man who had so basely prosecuted his plans.

They meant well.

They wanted to screen the child from the effects of her own folly, and they frightened her into her lover's arms.

Never very strong-minded, poor Rena imagined she had forfeited all the love of years and in her weak misery found comfort in her lover's protestations of fidelity, meeting him whenever she could elude Adela's loving vigilance, for her sister scorned to restrain her by force, until one fatal night when she fled from home and friends, and married Mark Weston.

Six years of married unhappiness followed and she was left a widow, poor and with three children clinging to her for support.

In all these years Adela had closed her heart to every appeal for forgiveness, and when the widow crept back to A——, Mrs. Fairfield ignored her existence.

She had so hardened her heart in the years of separation that she could know Rena and Rena's children were suffering poverty's pangs, and stretch forth no hand to aid them.

Widowed herself, alone in her stately home, she passed her time in study, in embroidery, in many charitable enterprises, and if the thought of Rena came to her, she sternly told herself—

"I loved her, and she cheated me, fled from me, when she knew it was only because we wished to save her from misery that we crossed her wish. She chose her path with her eyes open; led her tread it to the end."

But after Hannah left the room, Adela Fairfield tried in vain to fasten her attention upon the book in her hand.

Letting her head fall back in the cushioned armchair in which she took her seat, she thought of Rena.

Only a few days before her carriage had rolled past the tiny cottage where Mark Weston's widow struggled for bare existence by sewing early and late.

A girl, not so old as Rena had been when her mother died, was feeding two starved-looking hens, and Adela noted, with a pang, that Rena's own childish beauty was faithfully copied in her daughter.

Two sturdy boys of seven years, Rena's twin sons, were carrying a pail of water from the well, and they, too, had their mother's blue eyes and golden curls.

As Mrs. Fairfield looked, one of the urchins cried out—

"Oh, John, see the fine carriage. Look Adela, look!"

Rena had given them loving remembrance then, since two of the children bore their names.

Was she altogether to blame, this petted, indulged child, when temptation came, that she yielded to it?

Adela could recall no fault that had ever been severely punished, or was not forgiven for a coaxing word or kiss, and Rena might not have realized the magnitude of her offence.

And yet, softening with all these memories, Adela Fairfield's heart sank at the thought of Mark Weston's widow and children in the house of John Fairfield, whose name had ever been a bye word for integrity and honor.

For after his marriage Mark Weston sank very low,

Disappointed in obtaining an entrance to Fairfield Place, he visited his anger upon his fair, timid wife, in acts of insult and cruelty, spending her fortune in riotous living, and putting the final stone upon the monument of degradation by engaging in a brawl, where he received his death blow.

Midnight struck before Adela Fairfield went to her room, and there were traces of tears in her cold, proud eyes, and she knelt and prayed fervently before she retired.

"Mamma," John Weston said, very gravely, as he took his place at the scantily-furnished breakfast table the following morning, "do you suppose we can ever have a real Christmas?"

Mrs. Weston turned to the questioner a face that was pale by suffering, but sweeter and fairer in its subdued loveliness than it had ever been in its brightest flush of youth.

Before she could speak, Mark cried—

"John means turkey and pudding, mamma. He hasn't forgotten what you told him about

love only, that had thwarted her in her young romance.

Too late she had found the honeyed phrases used to win her young heart and little fortune, turned to coarse rebukes and taunts for her inability to conciliate her rich relations.

Bitterly she had repented of the deceit that had led to her misery, and yet all the sorrow had chastened, not soured or hardened the sweet, tender nature.

When she found the doors of her sister's house closed against her, she had made no effort to force her repentance or her sufferings upon Adela.

It was her punishment, and she accepted it with childlike resignation.

When she saw Adela in her rich dresses pass her by without recognition, she hid her tears under her veil, and silently passed on.

One kiss from Adela's lips, one loving word straight from her heart, would have lightened Rena's toil for many a long day.

Wanting these, she never coveted the wealth

"That I am their aunt?"

"Yes. Children are so impulsive; they might have spoken to you if they had known."

Adela's cheeks burned as she heard the words.

But she reached out her hands to the little ones, saying—

"The carriage is here to take you all to dine with Aunt Adela."

"Oh," cried John, "where is she?"

"I know her," said Mark; "she's mamma's beautiful, good sister, that Adie was named after."

"Will you love her, then, for mamma's sake?" asked Mrs. Fairfield.

"Be you she?" cried Mark, striding over all grammatical rules in his eagerness.

"Yes, dear, I am your Aunt Adela," said their aunt, kissing each in turn, but keeping little Adela longest in her loving embrace.

"We can keep Christmas in our hearts to-day. There little ones, run for your cloaks and hats, for there is the biggest turkey in A—— waiting for you at Fairfield Place."

"Oh," said John, in awed admiration, as a little later he wandered with his brother and sister through the wide drawing-room of Fairfield Place, "this is a real Christmas after all, ain't it, Mark?"

And Adela Fairfield, holding Rena's hand fast in her own, won her promise to leave her no more.

Rena's voice is heard once more in her old home, and the old walls echo the shouts of the twin boys.

But Adela Fairfield, loving them all, finds the happiest days of her life restored to her in her loving care for her little namesake, the shy, violet-eyed Adela, who seems her little sister given her again.



THE GITANA.—MORALES' DREAM.

being thankful for a home and food, have you, John?"

"No; but it don't seem real Christmas without something nice," said the little fellow; "last Christmas everybody had toys and things but us."

"We had a chicken," said Adela, softly, "and you are making mamma look sorry, John. Come, and I will show you a new slate puzzle I learned in school."

Rena watched the boys as their sister led them quietly from the room, and the tears welled up to her eyes as she thought of the privations of their childhood.

Winter was fairly upon her, and though she had tried faithfully to save a little money, their wants stared her in the face with cruel force.

Clothing was needed, fuel was dear, and food hard to earn.

Sorrow had taught Rena many a lesson of resignation and faith, but it needed them all to look her life in the face, and say—

"I am thankful, oh, God, for all Thy mercies."

She bowed her head upon the hard table, and the sobs would come, though she tried hard to restrain them.

Memory was busy with her own childhood. She thought of her handsome, stately sister, so proud and cold to others, so tenderly loving to herself, and her heart smote her afresh as she remembered her own return for the wealth of love lavished upon her.

Too late she had realized that it was love, and

that would have made the future so easy for her fair girl and brave boys.

Unconsciously, as she still bent her head in tearful thought, she spoke the words in her heart—

"Oh, Adela, if only you could forgive me and love me, I could bear all the rest of my burdens patiently."

And, as if in answer to her words, she felt a gentle hand placed upon her shoulder, and heard the rich, sweet voice of her sister say—

"Rena, look up and tell me you forgive me for my harshness."

She could not speak in her first rapture and surprise.

She could only cling to her sister, sobbing and calling her name, while Adela pressed tender kisses upon the upturned, tearful face, and wondered how she could have shut the sweet countenance out of her life for so long.

"You do forgive me, Rena?" Adela said.

"Forgive you! I forgive you! Oh, Adela, if you knew how I have longed and prayed for your forgiveness, in all these years, you would not be sorry you have brought it to me!"

"Hush, darling, hush! We will bury the past, and be sisters again."

"Oh, mamma," cried a chorus of voices, "such a splendid carriage, and two horses!"

And the excited trio entered, to stand confused at the apparition of the tall lady in their poor room.

"Shall I tell them?" Rena whispered; "I thought you might not like them to know."

OUR EVENING PARTY.

I thought, said Miller, there was something in the wind that cold Monday night when I got back from the city and found a double supply of my favourite hot buttered muffins awaiting me, and my slippers so nicely aired on the hearth. But I was sure of it when my wife said smiling, "I hope you like the tea, dear; I put an extra spoonful in, because it's such a bleak night for you;" and when my eldest daughter Molly laughed so very heartily at my old story of the Chinese Missionary, which I think so good that I take every opportunity of repeating it.

"Now, Molly," said I, as I took down my meerschaum after tea; "now, Molly, what is it?"

"What is what, papa?" said Molly; but she blushed and laughed a conscious little laugh all the same.

"Come," I retorted, "let us have it. What is it you want to coax out of me now?"

"Well, Molly, as papa seems so cunning at finding us out, I think we had better tell him what he have been talking about," said my wife with a slightly nervous titter.

"A great deal better, you most artful of women," said I, with all the sternness I could muster; "and no more compliments to my superior wisdom, if you please. I am quite aware you are only oiling the machinery to make it run round your own way. All attempts too to bribe the court with more muffins will only injure your case. Proceed, therefore."

"Well, James," replied my wife, "the girls and I have been talking all the afternoon, and, ahem!"

"And all the morning too, I have no doubt. So far the court quite agrees with you, madam," I interrupted, blowing out one of my most sarcastic wreaths of smoke.

"These poor things, James, do so want you to give them an evening party—something a little stylish, you know,—like other people," my wife continued, hurrying on like the stream when it has come to the brink of the precipice.

"An evening party!" I repeated in amazement.

"Oh yes! do, papa," said Molly, sitting down on the hassock at my feet, and putting her rosy cheek on my knee. She is an admirable hand at coaxing, is Molly.

"Yes, dear, why should we not be like our neighbours, at least sometimes—like Mrs. Vyner, for instances?" pursued my wife skillfully singling out an acquaintance who was my pet aversion.

"Well, because we can't, if we tried; we haven't got the money," I replied. "You must surely see what nonsense it is to talk of our being like Vyner, when his partnership in Double X brings him in a couple of thousands a year, and I have barely as many hundreds."

"Well, but we might just show Mrs. Vyner we know what's what."

It was a mean advantage which my wife Jane was taking, and she knew it. Mrs. Vyner was from the same county town as myself, and on the strength of her father having had a thousand a year in land (and heaven knows how much more in rustic stupidity!) had always considered herself entitled to play the part of a superior being towards us. Nor was she content with thinking this, but was determined we should admit her glorious supremacy in style, house furniture and belongings. In a word, she was my special abhorrence; and if there was one thing I should have liked, it would have been to see Mrs. V. 'brought down a peg.' Jane knew this weakness of mine very well, and I consider it an ungenerous action on her part to have appealed to it. However, for the present I resisted the temptation firmly.

In truth the notion of our giving an evening