

her like an angel out of heaven,—“take me somewhere, or I shall die——”

The poor needlewoman stood wondering at her door; and into her poor little room Lady Longueville was taken,—half conscious only of all that was happening to her. What a strange, sudden, miserable nightmare it seemed, after the quiet and peace of the morning!—pain of body, pain of heart, anguish which made her cry aloud, and a sick despair, which quenched and silenced every hope and wish in her. There was no time to ask questions, or to send for those who should have been by her in her suffering. Alice was the only support, the only help she had in heaven and earth. She clung to her, refusing to leave her hold.

“I want no one—no one but Alice,” she said, when they spoke to her of her husband and of her friends. And in this poor little house it was that the last hope of the Longuevilles perished and came to nothing—that which had given Innocent new importance in the family, and was to afford her a new beginning, as everybody hoped both in the family and the world.

Meanwhile Sir Alexis’ servants went wandering far and near, seeking for her. They went to The Elms first of all, and roused that peaceful house into anxiety and wonder.

“This time my lady has gone clean off her head altogether, as I always expected,” the messenger said to the servants of the house, who shook their heads as he drank his beer, and agreed with him that they too had always expected it. I cannot describe the tumult, the vain searching, the runnings to and fro which ensued. It was late at night before any one remarked that Alice had not come home, a discovery which, mysterious as it was, gave a little comfort to the Eastwoods, at least. Nelly and her mother consulted together, and set out immediately on foot to the needlewoman’s whom Alice had gone to visit, hoping to hear some news of her, some indications which they could follow out; and there they lighted quite simply, unawares upon Innocent, lying like one dead, speechless, colourless, the ghost of herself, with eyes which never brightened at sight of them, which seemed as if they could make any interchange of kindness ever more with other tender human eyes.

This new catastrophe fell upon them all like lightning from a cloudless sky—like the storm which bursts without warning or sign of evil. Sir Alexis, it is true, who lay at home in a state indescribable, took the blame entirely on himself, and accused himself of cruelty and barbarous folly, such as his attendants would have laughed to hear of, had they not been so much frightened by the condition into which remorse and excitement drove him, calling back his half-departed malady with a hundred cruel aggravations. He moaned over his poor Innocent in all the paroxysms of his disorder in a way that was pitiful to hear.

“Bring her back to me, and I will be better to her than I have