

have been up for nights past, and they have it down there that Clive hasn't eaten for three days, though he puts such a calm front on it."

"Why didn't he try to retrench a little. They gave a ball at his place only last night, that must have cost a good round sum of money."

"The fact is, he has been embarrassed only quite lately. His wife, too, might not have liked it. They can live for a time on the price of her diamonds. I noticed them to-night, and was calculating what they would bring."

"Stone, you are hard—hard as your name!"

"And you, old fellow, are too soft. I admire and respect, as much as any man can do, a woman worthy of the old God-given name of help-mate, but I despise the whole tribe of selfish, ribbon-bedecked puppets who have no aim beyond that of being considered fashionables: who dress, flirt, dance, whilst husbands and fathers toil for them, and never cherish for these same toilers one sentiment of gratitude or love in the depths of their barren hearts. Just like that vain wife of poor Weston's, who is staring it here to-night, whilst he is eating his heart out in despair at home, thinking perhaps of running away from her for ever, as I would do in his place, or it may be of cutting his own throat."

"Say what you will, cynic that you are, I maintain that there is good in many of those you condemn wholesale, and circumstances would develop that good."

"Have it so! We shall soon see what good lies dormant in Mrs. Clive Weston."

"That we shall, my friend, and I would be willing to take a heavy bet on the result, for she possesses a mind capable of great things."

"Tis not mind and intellect that are wanting. I tell you it is heart. Still I'll hope against hope; but let us go back for another waltz."

Truly had she heard enough, that pale, breathless woman who sat listening there—a great horror looking out of the distended violet eyes. When the voices of the speakers ceased she tremblingly rose and passed into the dressing-room, which was empty with the exception of a maid in attendance. "Call Mrs. Westor's carriage?" It soon came round, and Virginia sprang into it, pronouncing in a low, agitated tone, the one word "Home."

CHAPTER IX.

WE must now go back to Clive Weston. It wanted a half hour to midnight when he let himself in with his latch key, and ascended at once to the small smoking-room at the back of the house. His step was not more rapid than usual, the hand that opened the intricate lock was perfectly steady, but there was that in his ghastly face, compressed ashen lips and glittering eyes, that would have appalled any one who crossed his path. It was that saddest, most terrible of all expressions looking out from a human face—utter despair. Locking the door inside, he lit the gas and then sat down for a few moments. Suddenly he rose, took from a drawer a pistol, loaded it, and then laid it on the table. A knock at the door was followed by the voice of his manservant asking if his services were wanted.

Schooling his voice to its usual calmness, he told the man he might go to bed, and then enquired if Mrs. Weston was out.

Yes, she had gone to Mrs. Markland's.

Well, he must wait a little later. He wanted no crowd of curious, horrified servants hurrying in to assist at the end of the tragedy. After a while he said, as if seeking to re-assure himself:

"I have no alternative left. Bankrupt in fortune, pride, affection—to live would be impossible! Ah, creditors I could face, for my course though unfortunate has been honourable; but the wife I have beggared,