

CHARLIE STUART AND HIS SISTER.

BY MRS. MAY AGNES FLEMING.

PART III.

CHAPTER I.—CONTINUED.

"Mad!" Lady Portia said, shrugging her shoulders and touching her forehead. "Mad as a March hare!"

"Mad?" Miss Howard repeated softly. "No, I can't think so. Not mad, only very, very miserable."

He replaced his hat and walked back to the shop door. There reason, memory returned. What was he going in for? What should he say? He stood still suddenly, as though gazing at the wax women in elegant ball costumes, swinging slowly and smirking round and round. He had heard a voice—he had seen a shapely hand crowned with dark, silken hair—fair, slender girl's figure—that was all. He had seen and heard such a hundred times since that fatal wedding evening, and when he had hunted them down, the illusion had vanished, and his lost love was as lost as ever. His lost Edith—his bride his darling, the wife he had loved and left—for whom all those weary, endless months he had been searching, and searching in vain. Was she living or dead? Was she in London—in England—where? He did not know—one knew. Since that dark, cold autumn morning when she had fled from Powys-place she had never been seen or heard of. She had kept her word—she had taken nothing that was his—not a farthing. Wherever she was, she might be starving to-day. He clenched his hands and teeth as he thought of it.

"Oh!" his passionate, despairing heart cried, "let me find her—let me save her, and—let me die!" He had searched for her everywhere, by night and by day. Money flowed like water—all in vain. He went to New York—he found the people there he had once known, but none of them could tell him anything of her or the Stuarts. The Stuarts had faded, were utterly ruined—it was understood that Mr. Stuart was dead—of the others they knew nothing. He went to Sandypoint in search of her father. Mr. Darrell and his family had months ago sold out and gone West. He could find none of them; he gave it up at length and returned to England. Ten months had passed; many resemblances had beguiled him, but to-day Edith was far off, as lost as ever.

The voice he had heard, the likeness he had seen, would they prove false and empty too, and leave his heart more bitter than ever? what he would do when he found her he could not consider. He only wanted to find her. His whole heart, and life, and soul were bound up in that.

He paced up and down in front of the shop; the day's work would be over presently and the workmen would come forth. Then he would see again this particular workman who had set his heart beating with a hope that turned him dizzy and sick. Six o'clock! Would they never come? Yes; even as he thought it, half mad with impatience, the door opened, and nearly a dozen girls filed forth. He drew his hat over his eyes, he kept a little in the shadow and watched them one by one with wildly eager eyes as they appeared. Four, five, six, seven—she came at last, the eighth. The tall slender figure, the waving, dark hair—he knew them at once. The gas-light fell upon her as she drew her veil over her face and walked rapidly away. Not before he had seen it, not before he had recognized it—no shadow, no myth, no illusion this time. His wife—Edith.

He caught the wife for support. For a moment the pavement beneath his feet heaved, the stony sky spun round. Then he started up, steadied himself by a mighty effort, and hurried in pursuit. She had gained upon him over thirty yards. She was always a rapid walker, and he was ailing and weak. His heart throbbed now, so thick and fast, that every breath was a pain. He did not gain upon her, he only kept her in sight. He would have known that quick, decided walk, the poise of the head and shoulders, anywhere. He followed her as fast as his strength and the throng of passers-by would let him, yet doing no more than keeping her in his sight.

Where Oxford Street near Tottenham Court Road she suddenly diverged and crossed over, turning into the latter crowded thoroughfare. Still he followed. The throng was even more dense here than in Oxford Street—to keep her in sight more difficult. For nearly ten minutes he did it, then suddenly all strength left him. For a minute or two he felt as though he must fall. There was a spasm of the heart that was like a knife thrust. He caught a lamp post. He beckoned a passing hansom by a sort of expiring effort. The cab whirled up beside him; he got in somehow, and fell back, blinded and dizzy, in the seat.

"Where to, sir?" Cobby called twice before he received an answer; then "Fenton's Hotel" came faintly to him from his ghostly-looking face. The little aperture at the top was slammed down, and the hansom rattled off.

"Blessed if I don't think the young swell's drunk, or 'aving a fit," thought the cab, as he speared his horse down Tottenham Court Road. To look for her further in his present state, Sir Victor felt would be useless. He must get to his lodgings, get some brandy, and half-an-hour's time to think what to do next. He had found her; she was alive, she was well, thank Heaven! thank Heaven for that! To-morrow would find her again at Madame Mirabeau's at work with the rest.

At work—her daily toil! He covered his wasted face with his hands, and tears that were like a woman's fell from him. He had been weak and worn out for a long time—he gave way utterly, body and mind, now.

"My darling," he sobbed; "my darling for whom I would die to make happy—whose life I have utterly ruined. To think that while I spend wealth like water, you should toil for a crust of bread—alone, poor, friendless, in this great city. How will I answer to God and man for what I have done?"

CHAPTER II.

The last night of the July day had faded out, and a hot, murky night settled down over London. The air was stifling in the city; in the suburbs you still caught a breath, fresh and sweet-scented, from the fragrant fields. At Poplar Lodge, St. John's Wood, this murky summer night, all the windows stood wide open. In the drawing-room two women sat together, the elder reading aloud, the younger busy over some feminine handicraft. A cluster of waxlights burned above them, shining full on two pale, worn faces—the faces of women to whom suffering and sorrow have long been household words. Both were deepest mourning—the elder a widow's weeds, the hair of the younger thickly streaked with gray. Now and then both raised their eyes from a book and needlowwork, and glanced expectantly at the clock on the mantel. Evidently they waited for some one

who did not come. They were Lady Helena Powys and Inez Catheron, of course. "Bright!" the elder woman said, laying down her book with a sigh as the clock struck. "If he were coming to-night he would be here before now."

"I don't give him up yet," Inez answered cheerfully. "Young men are not to be depended on, and he has often come out much later than this. We are but dull company for him, poor boy—all the world are but dull company for him at present, since she is not of them. Poor boy! poor Victor! it is very hard on him."

"I begin to think Edith will never be found," said Lady Helena, with a sigh. "My dear aunt, don't. No one is ever lost, utterly, in these days. She will be found, believe me, unless—"

"Well?" "Unless she is dead."

"She is not dead," affirmed Lady Helena; "of that I am sure. You didn't know her, Inez, or you wouldn't think it; the most superb specimen of youth and strength and handsome health I ever saw in all my life. She told me once she never remembered a sick day since she was born—you had but to look into her bright eyes and clear complexion to be sure of it. She is not dead in the natural course of things, and she isn't one of the kind that ever take their lives in their own hands. She has too much courage and too much common sense."

"Perhaps so, and yet suffering tells—look at poor Victor."

"Ah, poor Victor, indeed! But the case is different—it was only her pride, not her heart, that died. He loved her—he loves her with a blind, unreasoning passion that is a misfortune for any human creature to feel for another. And she never cared for him—not so much as you do for that sewing in your hand. This is what breaks my heart—to see him dying before my eyes for love of a girl who has no feeling left for him but hatred and contempt."

Inez sighed. "It is natural," she said. "Think how she was left—in her very bridal hour, without one word of explanation. Who could forgive it?"

"No one, perhaps; it is not for that I feel indignant with her. It is for her ever accepting him at all. She loved her cousin—he would have married her; and for title and wealth she threw him over and accepted Victor. In that way she deserved her fate. She acted heartlessly; and yet, one can't help pitying her too. I believe she would have done her best to make him a good wife, after all."

"I wish—I wish he could find her."

"She might be found readily enough," Inez answered, "if Victor would but employ the usual means—I allude, of course, to the detective police. But he won't set a detective on her track if she was never found—he persists in looking for her himself. He is wearing his life out in the search. If ever I saw death pictured in any face, I saw it in his when he was here last. If he would but consult that German doctor who is now in London, and who is so skillful in all diseases of the heart—"

"Here he is at last," she broke off suddenly. "Far off a gate had opened and shut—no one had a key to that ever-locked outer gate but Sir Victor, and the next moment the roll of his night-cab up the drive was heard. The house-door opened, his familiar step ascended the stairs, not heavy and dragging as usual, but swift and light, almost as if it used to be. Something had happened! They saw it in his face at the first glance. There was but one thing that could happen. Lady Helena dropped her book, Inez started to her feet; neither spoke, both waited breathless.

"Aunt! cousin!" the young man cried, breathless and hoarse, "she is found!" There was a cry from his aunt. As he spoke he dropped, panting and exhausted with his speed, into a chair, and laid his hand upon his breast to still his heavy, suffocating throbs.

"Found!" exclaimed Lady Helena; "when—when—how?"

"Wait, aunt," the voice of Inez said gently; "give him time. Don't you see he can hardly fetch up a word yet, Victor—let me fetch you a glass of wine."

She brought it and he drank it. His face was quite ghastly, livid, bluish rings encircling his mouth and eyes. He certainly looked desperately ill, and more fitted for a sick bed than a breathless night ride from St. James Street to St. John's Wood. He lay back in his chair, closed his eyes, struggled with his panting breath. They sat and waited in silence, far more concerned for him than for the news he bore.

He told them at last, slowly, painfully, of his chance meeting with Lady Portia Hampton, of his enforced visit to the Oxford Street dressmaker's of his glimpse of the tall girl with the dark hair—of his waiting, of his seeing and recognizing Edith, his following her, and of his sudden giddy faintness that obliged him to give up the chase.

"You'll think me an awful nuisance," he said; "I haven't an idea how I came to be such a mollycoddle, but I give you my word I fainted dead away like a schoolgirl when I got to my room. I suppose it was partly this confounded palpitation of the heart, and partly the shock of the great surprise and joy. Janison brought me all right somehow, after a while, and then I came here. I had to do something, or I believe I should have gone clean out of my senses."

"There was a pause. The two women looked at each other then at him, his eager eyes his excited wild-looking, haggard face.

"Well," he cried impatiently, "have you nothing to say? Is it nothing to you that after all these months—months—great Heavens! it seems centuries. But I have found her at last—toiling for her living, while we—oh! I can't think of it—I dare not; it drives me mad."

He sprang up and began pacing to and fro, looking quite as much like a madman as a sane one.

"Be quiet, Victor," his aunt said. "It is madness indeed for you to excite yourself this way. Of course we rejoice in all that makes you happy. She is found—Heaven be praised for it!—she is alive and well—thank Heaven also for that. And now what next?"

"What next?" He paused and looked at her with astonishment. "You ask what next? What next can there be, except to go the first thing to-morrow morning and take her away?"

"Take her away!" Lady Helena repeated setting her lips; "take her where, Victor? To you?"

"His ghastly face turned a shade ghastlier. He caught his breath and grasped the back of the chair as though a spasm of unendurable agony had pierced his heart. In an instant his sun's arms were about him, tears streaming down her cheeks, her imploring eyes lifted to his.

"Forgive me, Victor forgive me! I ought not to have asked you that. But I did not mean, I know that can never be, my poor boy. I will do whatever you say. I will go to her, of course—I will fetch her here if she will come."

"If she will come!" he repeated hoarsely, disengaging himself from her; "what do you mean by it? There can be no if in the matter. She is my wife—she is Lady Ca-

theron—do you think she is to be left penniless and alone drugging for the bread she eats? I tell you, you must bring her; she must come!"

His passionate, suppressed excitement terrified her. In pain and fear and helplessness she looked at her niece. Inez, with that steady self-possession that is born of long and great endurance, came to the rescue at once. "Sit down, Victor!" her full, firm tone said, "and don't work yourself up to this pitch of nervous excitement. It's folly—useless folly—and its end will be prostration and a sick bed. About your wife, Aunt Helena will do what she can—but what can she do? You have no authority over her now; in leaving her you resigned it. It is unutterably painful to speak of this, but under the circumstances we must. She refused with scorn everything you offered her before; unless these ten past months have greatly altered her, she will refuse again. She seems to have been a very proud, high-spirited girl, but her hard struggle with the world may have beaten down that, and—"

"Don't!" he cried passionately; "I can't bear it. O my God! to think what I have done—what I have been forced to do! what I have made her suffer—what she must think of me—and that I live to bear it!" To think I have endured it all, when a pistol ball would have ended my torments any day!"

"When you talk such wicked folly as that," said Inez Catheron, her strong, steady eyes fixed upon his face, "I have no more to say. You did your duty once; you acted like a hero, like a martyr—it seems a pity to spoil it all by such cowardly rant as this."

"My duty!" he exclaimed, huskily. "Was it my duty? Sometimes I doubt it; sometimes I think if I had never left her, all might have been well. Was it my duty to make my life a hell on earth, to tear my heart from my bosom, as I did in the hour I left her, to spoil her life for her, to bring shame, reproach, and poverty upon her? If I had not left her, could the worst that might have happened have been any worse than that?"

"Much worse—ininitely worse. You are the sufferer, believe me, not she. What is all she has undergone in comparison with what you have endured? And one day she will know all, and love and honor you as you deserve."

He hid his face in his hands, and turned away from the light.

"One day," they heard him murmur; "one day—the day of my death. Pray Heaven it may be soon."

"I think," Inez said after a pause, "you had better let me go and speak instead of Aunt Helena. She has undergone so much—she isn't able, believe me, Victor, to undergo more. Let me go to your wife; all Aunt Helena can say, all she can urge, I will bring her. All I dare tell her, I will tell. But, after all, it is so little, and she is so proud. Don't hope too much."

"It is so little," he murmured again, his face still hidden; "so little, and there is so much to tell. Oh! he broke forth, with a passionate cry, "I can't bear this much longer. If she will come for nothing else, she will come for the truth, and the truth shall be told. What are a thousand promises to the living or the dead to the knowledge that she hates and scorns me?"

They said nothing to him—they knew it was useless—they knew his paroxysm would pass, as so many others had passed, and that by to-morrow he would be the last to wish to tell.

"You will surely not think of returning to St. James Street to-night?" said Inez by way of diversion. "You will remain here, and at the earliest possible hour to-morrow you will drive me to Oxford Street. I will do all I can—you believe that, my cousin, I know. And if—if I am successful, will—she paused and looked at him—"will you meet her, Victor?"

"I don't know yet; my head is in a whirl. To-night I feel as though I could do anything, brave anything—to-morrow I suppose I will feel differently. Don't ask me what I will do to-morrow until to-morrow comes. I will remain all night, and I will go to my room at once; I feel dazed and half sick. Good-night."

He left them abruptly. They heard him toll weight up to his room and lock the door. Long after the two women sat together talking, with pale, apprehensive faces.

"She won't come—I am as sure of it as that I sit here," were Lady Helena's parting words as they separated for the night. "I know her better than he does, and I am not carried away by his wild hopes. She will not come."

Sir Victor descended to breakfast, looking nuttably pallid and haggard in the morning light. Well he might; he had not slept for one moment.

But he was more composed, calm, and quiet, and there was almost as little hope in his heart as in Lady Helena's. Immediately after breakfast, Miss Catheron, closely veiled, entered the cab with him, and was driven to Oxford Street. It was a very silent drive; she was glad when it was over; and he set her down near the shop of Madame Mirabeau.

"I will wait here," he said. "If she will come with you, you will take a cab and drive back to Poplar Lodge. If she does not—"

he had to pause a moment—"then return to me, and I will take you home."

She bent her head in assent, and entered the shop. Her own heart was beating at the thought of the coming interview and its probable ending. She advanced to the counter, and, without raising her veil, inquired if Miss Stuart were come.

The girl looked inquisitively at the hidden face, and answered, "Yes, Miss Stuart had come."

"I wish to see her particularly, and in private, for a few moments. Can you manage it for me?"

She slipped a sovereign into the shop-woman's hand. There was a second curious look at the tall, veiled lady, but the sovereign was accepted. A side door opened, and she was shown into an empty room.

"You can wait here, ma'am, the girl said. "I'll send her to you."

Miss Catheron walked over to the window; that nervous heart beat quicker than ever. When had she been nervous before? The window overlooked busy, bright Oxford Street, and in the distance she saw the waiting cab and her cousin's solitary figure. The sight gave her courage. For his sake, poor fellow, she would do all human power could do.

"You wish to see me, madam?" A clear, soft voice spoke. The door had quietly opened and a young girl entered.

Inez Catheron turned round, and for the second time in her life looked in the face of her cousin's wife.

material, but fitting perfectly; linen bands at neck and throat, and a knot of cherry ribbon. And the slim finger wore no wedding ring. She took it all in, in three seconds; then she advanced.

"I wished to see you. We are not to be disturbed?"

"We are likely to be disturbed at any moment. It is the room where Madame Mirabeau tries on the dresses of her customers; and my time is very limited."

The dark, grave eyes were fixed upon the close veil expectantly. Inez Catheron threw it back.

"Edith!" she said—and at the sound of her name the girl recoiled—"you don't know me, but I think you will know my name. I am Inez Catheron."

She recoiled a step farther, her dark face paling and growing set—her dark eyes seeming to darken and dilate—her lips setting themselves in a tense line. "Well?" was all she said.

Inez stretched out her hands with an imploring gesture, drawing near as the other retreated.

"Oh Edith you know what I have come for."

The dark, deep eyes met hers, full, cold, hard, and bright as diamonds.

"I don't in the least know what you have come for. I haven't an idea who can have sent you. I know who you are. You are Sir Victor Catheron's cousin."

Without falter or flinch she spoke his name—with a face of stone she waited for the answer. If any hope had lingered in the breast of Inez, it died out as she looked at her now.

"Yes," she said sadly; "I am Victor Catheron's cousin, and there could be but one to send me here—Victor Catheron himself."

"And why has Sir Victor Catheron given you that trouble?"

"Oh, Edith," again that imploring gesture, "let me call you so—need you ask? All these months he has been searching for you, losing health and rest in the fruitless quest—wearing himself to a very shadow looking for you. He has been to New York, he has hunted London—it has brought him almost to the verge of death, this long, vain, miserable search."

Her perfect lips curled scornfully, but her eyes shot forth gleams of contempt, but her voice was very quiet.

"And again I ask why—why has Sir Victor Catheron given himself all this unnecessary trouble?"

"Unnecessary! You call it that! A husband's search for a lost wife!"

"Stop, Miss Catheron!" she lifted her hand, and her eyes flashed. "You make a mistake. Sir Victor Catheron's wife I am not—never will be. The ceremony was went through, ten months ago, down in Cheshire, means nothing, since a bridegroom who desert his bride on her wedding day resigns all right to the name and authority of husband. Mind, I don't regret it now; I would not have it otherwise if I could. And this is not bravado, Miss Catheron; I mean it. In the hour I married your cousin he was no more to me than one of his own footmen—I say it to my own shame and lasting dishonor; and I thank Heaven most sincerely now, that whether he were mad or sane, he deserted me as he did. At last I am free—not bound for life to a man that by this time I might have grown to loathe. For I think my indifference then would have grown to hate. Now I simply scorn him in a degree less than I scorn myself. I never wish to hear his name—but I also would not go an inch out of my way to avoid him. He is simply nothing to me—nothing. If I were dead and in my grave, I could not be one whit more lost to him than I am. Why he has presumed to search for me is beyond my comprehension. How he has had the audacity to hunt me down, and send you here, surpasses belief. I wonder you came, Miss Catheron! As you have come, let me give you this word of advice; make your first visit your last. Don't come again to see me—don't let Sir Victor Catheron dog my steps or in any way interfere with me. I never was a very good or patient sort of person—I have not become more so of late. I am only a girl, alone and poor; but, her eyes flashed fire—literally fire—and her hands clenched. "I warn him—it will not be safe."

Inez drew back. What she had expected she hardly knew—certainly not this.

"As I said before," Edith went on, "my time is limited. Madame does not allow her working-girls to receive visitors in working hours. Miss Catheron, I have the honor to wish you good-morning."

"Stay!" Inez cried, "for the love of Heaven. Oh, what shall I say? how shall I soften her? Edith, you don't understand. I wish—I wish I dared tell you the secret that took Victor from your side that day! He loves you—no, that is too poor a word to express what he feels; his life is paying the penalty of his loss. He is dying, Edith, dying of heart disease, brought on by what he has suffered in losing you. In his dying hour he will tell you all; and his one prayer is for death, that he may tell you, that you may cease to wrong and hate him as you do. O Edith, listen to me—pity me—pity him who is dying for you! Don't be so hard. See, I kneel to you!—as you hope for mercy in your own dying hour, Edith Catheron, have mercy on him!"

She flung herself on her knees, tears pouring over her face, and held up her clasped hands.

"For pity's sake, Edith—for your own sake—don't harden your heart; try and believe, though you may not understand. I tell you he loves you—that he is a dying man. We are all sinners; as you hope for pity and mercy, have pity and mercy on him now."

With her hand on the door, with Inez Catheron clinging to her dress, she paused, moved, distressed, softened in spite of herself.

"Go up, Miss Catheron," she said, "you must not kneel to me. What do you want? What is it you ask me to do?"

"I ask you to give up this life of toil—come home with me. Lady Helena awaits you. Make your home with her and with me—take the name and wealth that are yours. For Victor—poor heart-broken boy!—you will not have long to wait."

Her voice broke—her sobs filled the room. The distressed look was still on Edith's face, but it was as resolute as ever.

"What you ask is impossible," she said, "utterly and absolutely impossible. What you say about your cousin may be true. I don't understand—I never could read riddles—but it does not alter my determination in the least. What! live on the bounty of a man who deserts me on my wedding-day—who makes me an outcast—an object of scorn and disgrace! I would die first! I would face starvation and death in this great city. I know what I am saying. I would sweep a crossing like that beggar in rags round here. Let me go, Miss Catheron, I beg of you; you only distress me unnecessarily. If you pleaded for ever it could not avail. Give my love to Lady Helena; but I will never go back—I will never accept a farthing from Sir Victor Catheron. Don't come here more—don't let him come. Again her eyes gleamed.

"There is neither sorrow nor pity for him in

my heart. It is like a stone where he is concerned, and always will be—always, though he lay dying before me—Now, farewell!"

Then the door opened and closed, and she was gone.

CHAPTER III.

HOW THEY MET.

Miss Stuart went back to the work-room, and to the dozen or more young women there assembled. If she was a shade paler than her wont, they were not likely to notice it, if she was more silent even than usual, why silence was always Miss Stuart's forte. Only the young person to whom Miss Catheron had given the sovereign looked at her curiously, and said point blank:

"I say, Miss Stuart, who was that? What did she want? And the dark, haughty eyes of Miss Stuart had lifted from the peach satin on which she worked, and fixed themselves loquaciously on her interrogator:

"It was a lady I never saw before," she answered frigidly. "What she wanted is certainly no business of yours, Miss Hutton."

Miss Hutton flounced off with a muttered reply; but there was that about Edith's aspect and distance that none of them could over-reach. Besides, she was a favorite with madame and the forewoman. So silently industrious, so tastefully neat, so perfectly trustworthy in her work. Her companions disliked and distrusted her; she held herself aloof from them all; she had something on her mind—there was an air of mystery about her; they doubted her being an English girl at all. She would have none of their companionship; if she had a secret she kept it well; in their noisy, busy midst she was as much alone as though she were in Robinson Crusoe's desert island. Outwardly those ten months had changed her little—her brilliant, dusk beauty was scarcely dimmed—inwardly it had changed her greatly, and hardly for the better.

There had been a long and bitter struggle before she found herself in this safe haven. For months she had drifted about without rudder or compass or pilot, on the dark, turbid sea of London. She had come to the great city friendless and alone, with very little money, and very little knowledge of city life. She found lodgings easily enough, cheap and clean, and had at once set about searching for work. On the way up she had decided what she must do—she would become a nursery governess or companion to some elderly lady or she would teach music. But it was one thing to resolve, another to do. There were dozens of nursery governesses and companions to old ladies wanting in the columns of the Times, but they were not for her. "Where are your references?" was the terrible question that met her at every turn. She had no references, and the doors of the genteel second and third-rate houses were shut quietly in her face.

Young and pretty, without references, money or friends, how was she ever to succeed? If she had been thirty and pockmarked she might have triumphed even over the reference business; as it was, her case seemed hopeless. It was long, however, before her indomitable spirit would yield. Her money ran low, she pawned several articles of jewelry and dress to pay for food and lodging. She grew wan and hollow-eyed in this terrible time—all her life long she could never recall it without a shudder.

Five months passed; despair, black and awful, filled her soul at last. The choice seemed to lie between going out as an ordinary servant and starving. Even as a housemaid she would want this not-to-be-got-over reference. In this darkest-hour before the dawn she saw Madame Mirabeau's advertisement for sewing girls, and in sheer despair applied. Tall, handsome girls of good address were just what madame required, and someone—it was the mercy of the good God, no doubt—she was taken. For weeks after she was kept in close surveillance; she was so very unlike the young women who filled such situations—then the conviction became a certainty that Miss Stuart had no sinister designs on the ruby velvets, the snowy satins, and priceless robes of her aristocratic customers—that she really wanted work and was thoroughly capable of doing it. Nature had made Edith an artist in dressmaking; her taste was excellent; madame became convinced she had found a treasure. Only one thing Miss Stuart steadfastly refused to do—that was to wait in the shop. "I have reasons of my own for keeping perfectly quiet," she said, looking madame unflinchingly in the eyes. "If I stay in the shop I may—though it is not likely—be recognized; and then I should be under the necessity of leaving you immediately."

Madame had no wish to lose her very best seamstress, so Miss Stuart had her way. The sentimental Frenchwoman's own idea was that Miss Stuart was a young person of rank and position, who owing to some ill-starred love affair had been obliged to run away and hide herself from her friends. However, as her hopeless position in no way interfered with her dressmaking ability, madame kept her suspicions to herself and retained her in the work-room.

And so after weary months of pain, and shame, and despair, Edith had come safely to land at last. For the past five months her life had flowed along smoothly, duly, uneventfully—going to her work in the morning, returning to her lodgings at night—sometimes indulging in a short walk in the summer twilight after her tea; at other times too weary out in body and mind to do other than lie down on the little hard bed, and sleep the spent sleep of exhaustion. That was her outer life; of her inner life what shall I say? She could hardly have told in the after-days herself. Somehow strength is given us to bear all things and live on. Of the man she had married she could not dare think, her heart and soul filled with such dark and deadly hatred. She abhorred him—it is not too much to say that. The packet of treasured letters written in New York so long—oh, so long ago! it seemed—became the one spot of sunshine in her sunless life. She read them until the words lost all meaning—until she knew every one by heart. She looked at the picture with the half-smiling eyes and lips seemed to nicker her as she gazed. The little turquoise brooch with the likeness, she wore in her bosom night and day—the first thing to be kissed in the morning—the last at night. Wrong, wrong, wrong you say; but the girl was desperate and reckless—she did not care. Right and wrong were all confounded in her warped mind; only this was clear—she loved Charlie as she had never loved him before she became Sir Victor Catheron's bride. He scorned and despised her; she would never look upon his face again—it did not matter; she would go to her grave loving him, his pictured face over her heart, his name the last upon her lips.

Sometimes sitting alone in the dingy London twilight, there rose before her a vision of what might have been; Charlie poor as he was now, and she Charlie's wife, he working for her, somewhere and somehow, as she knew he gladly would, she keeping their two or three airy rooms in order, and waiting, with her best dress on, as evening came, to hear his step at the door. She would think until thought became torture—until thought be-

came actual physical pain. His words spoken to her that last night she had ever spent at Sandypoint, came back to her full of bitter meaning now. "Whatever the future brings, don't blame me." The future had brought loneliness and poverty, and despair—all her worst sting of all—it was her own work from first to last. She had dreaded poverty, she had dreaded her heart, her life, and him in her never dreamed of had come upon her. If heart, what a happy creature she might have been to-day.

But these times of torture were mercifully rare. Her heart seemed numb—she wearily too hard to think much—at night she would dead tired to spend the hours in fruitless anguish and tears. Her life went on in a sort of treadmill existence; and until the coming of Inez Catheron nothing had occurred to disturb it.

Her heart was full of bitter tumult and revolt as she went back to her work. The dark, how dared he? He was dying, Inez Catheron had said, and for love of her. But she could have laughed in her bitter scorn—what a mockery it was! If it were true, why, let him die! The sooner the better—then let something—heart-compassion—in the pain and forgiving in her nature seemed wholly to have died out. He had wronged her beyond all reparation—the only reparation he could make was to die and leave her free.

Madame's young women were detained half an hour later than usual that evening. A great Belgravian ball came off next night, and there was a glut of work. They got away at last, half fagged to death, only to find a dull drizzling rain falling, and the murky darkness of early night settling down over the gas-lit highways of London. Miss Stuart bade her companion a brief good night, raised her umbrella, and hurried on her way. She did not observe the waiting figure, met from the rain and hidden by an umbrella, that had been watching for her, and who instantly followed her steps. She hurried on rapidly and came at last to a part of the street where it was necessary she should cross. She paused