

She had determined to blot herself by her own act out of Ethel Brand's will, by disappearing alike from friend and enemy, and hiding herself in some far distant corner of England, until Captain Brand had stepped into secure possession of Castle Brand.

She believed her life to be in danger, for she had wit enough to know that there were a thousand ways of quietly putting her out of the way before the twelve months were over, provided that St. Udo Brand was villain enough to avail himself of them, and of that she had little doubt; so she made all haste to leave him master of the field.

At ten o'clock of the night she flitted down the broad oak and walnut stairs, with her valise under her cloak, and stole out of the library glass door, under the very nose of sleepy Symonds, the footman, and under thy night shades of the Norman oaks.

A man met her on the broad Waaste, where the somber pines stood one by one like specters, and Margaret sharply screamed when he came close to her and peered into her face.

"I think this is Miss Walsingham?"

"Oh, yes."

He was the letter-carrier from Regis, and held a white missive in his hand.

"Special, it says, miss, so I took it over to-night, instead of waiting for to-morrow's batch, for, says I to myself, 'Young wimmen likes to get their letters.' Night, miss."

"Good-night, Mr. Wells. Thank you for taking so much trouble this dark night."

She stood listening to his treading footsteps, and fingering the embossed seal of the letter. It seemed to be the Brand coat of arms; and yet who would use this crest when all the Brands were dead but one?

A light still burned in the lodge, down by the great gates, and she hung her valise on the iron railing and lifted the latch.

"Let me come in a moment," she asked, putting in her pale, disturbed face.

"Lord! is that you, Miss Margaret!" cried the lodge-keeper, pushing his horn glasses upon his forehead to look at her with his watery eyes. "Come in, and welcome."

"I was out walking, and met the letter-carrier, he gave me a letter, which I cannot wait longer to read, Let me read it here?"

She sat down, with the tallow candle between her and these bleared old eyes, and opened her letter. Yes, it bore the Brand crest with its fierce inscription. There was but one surviving Brand in the world, and his name signed Margaret's letter:

"MADAM:—Accept, with my profound congratulations, Ethel Brand's bequest of Seven-Oak Waaste, and all acres attached, and my bequest of your own choice of a master to the place mentioned. I have withstood the exquisite temptation of sharing your bliss, lest I should revive the pretty drama of 'Paolo Osini,' who strangled his wife in his first embrace; and with a pious blessing on the manes of poor Madam Brand, who likely enough got choked by a parasite, I depart to a land where oracles do say there are no fortune-hunters.

"Yours, admirably,

"ST. UDO BRAND."

With this second bitter insult crushed in her hand, and terrified tears washing her cheeks, Margaret Walsingham went back, in the surging night wind, to Seven-Oak Waaste.

CHAPTER III.

EVIL FOREBODINGS.

Mid-ocean, a steamer was laboring on her way, beneath a sky like glittering pearl, arching over a waste of phosphorescent billows, and with a crispy breeze behind her.

The ladies were in their berths, the gentlemen paced the deck, and beguiled the time by discussions many-themed.

But St. Udo Brand, with his hands behind him and his back to all, gazed over the sea to the distant horizon line.

A grim satisfaction illuminated his eye, though the ever-present sneer still marred his lips, as, deep in unaccustomed reverie, he examined his position on all sides.

"Inscrutable are thy ways, oh, Fortune!" mused the captain. "Thou hast given Seven-Oaks to the humble, and cast the haughty from Castle Brand into outer darkness, where there is grinding and gnashing of teeth. Yet, wherefore, oh, sard-blind Fortune! hast thou rolled the hypocritical saint in my bank-notes, and hung golden offerings upon her Medusa head, while I, the honest scoundrel, am stripped naked to supply the ovation? Well, doubtless, she has worked harder for it than ever I could, poor devil! Now for a name and fame, and may be fortune, in yon republic behind the shoulder of this world of waters! And, who knows, I may be happy yet, with my little white cat, instead of the sorceress of yonder castle."

Back and forth the groups of promenaders passed the solitary man, who thus faced his fortunes with satiric stoicism; but no one thought of interfering with his reverie, for Captain Brand had a name for exclusiveness on board the Bellerophon. He may