



CHAPTER XLI

THE MYSTERY OF IT

WITH great difficulty I had brought my wife home and deposited her unconscious form upon the bed. And then, while her maid was doing all that could be done for her, I paced the floor in an agony of spirit that I had never suffered before.

Had it, indeed, come to this, then, that this adorable being had stained her pure soul with murder in order to gratify an ignoble and useless revenge upon a dying man? Had she adopted the black art itself in order to decoy her victim into a dark chamber and there despatch him with his own sword? Did she not know that to conceive and execute so much infamy she must destroy my love for her and fill my mind with loathing for her crime? Could she have expected that after the consummation of such a heinous design I would constrain myself to tolerate her as a wife, or even to live in the same house in daily contact with her? No! The more I passed the awful affair through my mind the more firmly grew my resolution to break with her forever. But then—oh, God!—our child!

A deep sigh from the bed drew me involuntarily to her side. Dismissing the maid, I seized her hands in