

some arrangements for you, and you shall soon be very differently placed."

"But you will not stay long away from me, will you? I feel as if I could not let you go." And Laura held her tight with her burning hands.

"Only a very little while; do not be afraid; and I shall send back Justine, my maid, to you, almost immediately, with some fruit and nourishing food, and she shall stay with you till I come again."

"Oh then, I can bear it," said Lurline. "If I am not left alone any more with that cruel old woman!" and she relaxed her hold. Mary stooped to kiss her, and then quietly left the room.

## CHAPTER LII.

Swiftly, as if her feet were winged, Mary de L'Isle ran up the long staircase at the hotel, and into the private sitting-room where Bertrand was waiting for her, apparently with no small impatience, as he was pacing discontentedly to and fro, glancing out of the window every moment.

"Ah, my darling, here you are at last!" he exclaimed, catching hold of her hands; "I cannot think how I ever managed to live without you, Mary, though it is not long, certainly, since I have had you for my own. It has seemed to me such an immense time since you went away this morning."

"I wanted so much to come back sooner, dearest, but I could not leave poor unhappy Laura. Oh, Bertrand, I am so glad we are rich!"

"That means that we are to pay a great deal for this very undeserving Lorelei, I am sure," said Bertrand, with a smile.

"I do not think she is undeserving now," said Mary; "she is so miserable, and she blames herself in all ways, as much as any one could do."

"She has some reason," said Bertrand, sternly; "but, Mary, is she really dying?"

"No, I think not, although she believes it herself; but she will require great care and good nursing. You never saw anything so hopelessly wretched as her present position."

"And of course you have been making all sorts of plans for her relief?" said Bertrand.

"Yes, indeed; for I am sure she would die if she were left there neglected and forsaken. She says herself she has no one in the world now except ourselves. No doubt her father is dead."

"And Mrs. Windham gone back to live with her brother; I heard she meant to do so. She will not trouble herself about her step-daughter, and to say the truth, Lurline does not deserve much mercy at her hands, any more than she does at yours or mine."

"But we are going to help her?" said Mary, coaxingly, as she passed her hands round Bertrand's arm, and drew him down to a seat beside her. "Come and sit down, darling Bertrand, and let me tell you all I want to do for her."

"I hope you are not going to tell me that you mean to nurse her yourself, Mary. You will be sacrificing me altogether if you do."

"As if I could ever sacrifice you!" she answered, tenderly. "You first, Bertrand, ever and in all ways; so long as life lasts you will find it so with me, and I never thought of leaving you to go to Lurline for more than a few hours each day."

"But I am due at Chateau de l'Isle next week, little wife, and I am not going there without you."

"I should be very unhappy if you did," she said, smiling up into his troubled face.

"Now listen, Bertrand mine, and you will see how nicely it can all be managed.

Poor Laura must not be left a day longer under the care of that Italian woman, who is quite cruel to her, and in that miserable place. I wish that we should at once take rooms for her in some quiet respectable house, and move her there this afternoon, having first taken a doctor to see her, that he may authorise her removal, and I am sure any sensible medical man would. Then we must get him to send in a proper nurse, and Justine, who is with her now, can stay till she comes. And then, Bertrand—and this is the most important part of it—I want you to telegraph to nurse Parry, and ask her to come and take care of poor Lurline when we go home next week."

"Ah, that is an excellent idea, Mary; what a wise little woman you are! But will the Brunot's consent to part with her?"

"Oh yes; she is really not required there now, I believe, as Madame Brunot is getting quite well in the atmosphere of happiness which has surrounded her since her husband's return."

"And I suppose the dear old nurse herself would always do anything in the world we liked to ask her, though she used to anathematise the Wyndhams with all her heart!" said Bertrand, laughing.

"That is all because she thought I was not happy with them; but she is tolerably well satisfied about me now, Bertrand, and she will only be very sorry for poor miserable Lurline."

"And what is to happen next? Are nurse Parry and Mrs. Brant to live all their lives in rooms provided for them in this city by your humble servant?"

"No, I do not mean to tax your good-nature quite so long as that," said Mary, laughing. "I hope that eventually Laura will return to her husband. She can only be happy if she does her duty to him and to her child; but before she can be brought to that, I know she must change very much from what she is now, although she is already as different as possible from the brilliant Lorelei you knew."

"I suppose she has lost her factitious beauty, which was never real, and has grown old and ugly," said Bertrand, who was certainly not disposed to think charitably of the woman who had deceived him. "And there is all the difference: I do not believe she can change her false selfish nature."

"But the grace of God can," said Mary, softly; "and this is the part of the whole matter concerning which I am most anxious, Bertrand; we shall do very little for poor Lurline if we only remove her from her temporal miseries, unless we can also help her to find the only source of real happiness and hope."

"Well, Mary, I have no doubt you could do more than most people in the way of converting sinners, but I do not think you will ever make a Christian of Laura Wyndham."

"I shall incur a grievous responsibility, and fail in a mission most solemnly confided to me, if I do not," said Mary, in a tremulous tone.

"What do you mean, my dear child?" said Bertrand, surprised; "you speak as if you had been appointed to some office in the Church for the reformation of careless and ungodly women. What special responsibility can you have with regard to Lurline, excepting the fact that she has injured you?"

"I have been given a charge almost from the other world, as it seems to me, with regard to her, and I have longed so much for an opportunity of acquitting myself of it, and now I believe it has been almost miraculously sent to me."

"You are speaking in riddles, Mary; do explain yourself."

"Yes, dear Bertrand. I wish I had told

you before, as I fully meant to do; but it was a subject I felt to be almost sacred, and we have been so gay and happy, I did not care to allude to it. Now, you shall hear it all, from beginning to end. I am sure, glad and all as I should be to make her happier, I would not wish to assume any responsibility with regard to her from which I could escape, but it is in the name of poor John Pemberton that I am called to act."

"Did he really still think of her when you saw him in Paris, in spite of all her cruel treatment of him?"

"Oh yes, as far as this world was concerned; she was to the last his one thought, his one care. I am not sure if you know all his inner history, Bertrand—the history of his soul, in fact?"

"Probably I do not; he never gave me his confidence, and I suppose he did to you, most fully."

"I think he did," said Mary, simply; "we were together very often in our care of the sick and poor, and we were both brought so near to death during that terrible siege, that we could hardly bear to talk of anything but matters which concerned the life to come. Gradually I came to understand John's hidden existence quite well, though he never actually explained it all to me in detail. Before he ever saw Lurline, he believed himself to have been drawn in very special love to his Saviour, and to have received from Him a call to devote himself wholly to the service of God in the sacred ministry. Into the pure peace and joy which this self-dedication gave him, his passionate affection for Laura came like a fiery blast of the hot simoom, drying up all the springs of heavenly aspiration, and withering his generous impulses to a life of toil and glorious abnegation. He forgot all for her; he ceased to desire aught on earth but her love, or to have any other purpose but to win her at whatever cost. He became faithless, even to that which he believed to be a God-given vocation, and then the mercy of his Lord struck suddenly across his downward path, and she betrayed him. At once he learned what she was, what he himself had been, and all that he had lost through her fatal fascination. He never saw her face again, but he turned back to his God straightway, with—oh, Bertrand, how can I tell you, with what heart-wrung penitence, what deep humility, what intense overwhelming desire to enter once more into a living union with Him who was his only and eternal joy, and whom in a brief madness he had forsaken! His remorse, his agony cannot be told. He did not feel that he dared to offer himself to the ministry till he had proved the reality of his repentance by a service of suffering. For this reason he came to Paris, and there, Bertrand, he so lived night and day in heart at the feet of his Lord, even while with all his strength he was toiling for Him in the outer world, that he won to himself the great blessing of a power of love to his Master which seemed actually to draw him out of life into the arms of Christ. You will think me fanciful, I know, my husband, but his longing to pass into the immediate presence of his Saviour was so intense that I really believe it attracted to him the bullets which freed his soul from its earthly prison. And so, in like manner, with regard to Lurline: I believe that it has been his prayers which have brought me to her side this day; for he had but one desire, so far as this world was concerned, and that was the intense longing that Laura might herself be turned from darkness unto light. He spoke to me of this shortly before his death. He knew that to him it could never be given to do more than pray for her, as he did unceas-