

quired of the clerk if the "Annie," reported lost with all hands on board, had been heard of, or any of the crew or passengers picked up.

The man referred to a huge volume, which had struck terror to many a widow and orphan's heart, and, in tones that seemed to the maddened man cruelly indifferent, replied, that neither the ship nor the living souls on board of her had been heard of.

"All perished sir, every man of them."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

DEAD!

"Aye, that's all that can be said—

That though his faults were great and many,
He that loved thee well is dead!"

The family at the Vale seated in the drawing-room. Dinner had been over an hour, and Sir Robert was sitting in his easy chair, with his eyes fixed thoughtfully upon the embers, thinking of many things past and present; and, judging from his grave face thinking sadly. Opposite him sat Lady Edith, serene as ever, now that the storm of sorrow had swept by, working the everlasting wool work; and standing apart, by the window, looking somewhat pale, but ethereally beautiful in her black dress, was Ida. She had only returned two days before from nursing Lady Mary, who still lay silent and stricken down upon the sick bed at Edgcombe, and had left her purpose only at the distinct command of the doctor, who prevailed upon her to take at least a little rest, if only to enable her to resume her loving care.

With her soft face resting upon her white hand, and her eyes fixed dreamily upon the dark night, her thoughts were sadly tracing the events of the past. How sweet the opening of her life had been—how promising the prospect! health, wealth, a circle of loving friends and relations, and the heart of the man whose image still remained enshrined in hers, set in a frame of thorns.

Now where was he? And how sadly the circle had broken! Her life, once so fair and bright, seemed now as cheerless and joyless as the night she was gazing on.

"Ida, my darling, why do you not come to the fire?" said Lady Edith. "You must be frozen out there in the cold."

"No, mamma," said Ida, but still complying with her request, and setting herself at her side.

"How pale you look, Ida!" said her father, as she did so, looking at her with affectionate eyes. "You are a good girl, but you must not overdo it at the Hall. How did Parker say Lady Mary was this morning?"

"Still the same," said Ida. "Do you know, papa, although I do not fear anything very dangerous now for poor Lady Mary, I am afraid she will never be well again. She seems to have received a very severe shock, a shock—" and she paused here, thoughtfully.

"A shock—what, my dear?" said Lady Edith.

"I fear I know," said Ida. "If I were asked to state my opinion of the mainspring of dear Lady Mary's illness, I should say that something besides poor Sir Harry's sudden and dreadful death had occasioned it."

Her father looked up curiously. "What do you mean, Ida?" he said. "I don't know, papa," she said, leaving her chair and kneeling beside him, so that she could lean her face against his heart.

"I don't know, but as I have sat watching her face I have seen flash over it an expression of sudden mental pain and agony, totally distinct from her bodily suffering, and with it a look of

surprise and terror, as one has when hearing some harrowing, terrible news."

"I understand you," said Sir Robert, slowly, looking at the fire with shaded eyes.

"I don't," said Lady Edith, innocently. "I wish Roderick were at home; I believe his presence would do more towards poor Mary's recovery than anything else."

"So do I," said Sir Robert, with a sigh, his hand stroking the fair head whose face was now hidden against his breast.

"What can have kept him from writing, I cannot think," continued Lady Edith; "he was always so fond of his mother, and so considerate and thoughtful of her, at least."

The girl's face shrank closer.

"That is just what has kept him from writing," said Sir Robert, thoughtfully. "Poor Lady Mary was always made unhappy by Sir Harry, through some freak of his; and when he went, I judged from his look—the old Edgcombe look—that we should hear nothing more of him until Sir Harry died."

"And now Sir Harry is dead," said Lady Edith, "surely he will write or come home, unless—"

Fortunately for the hidden face, the door opened, and the servant announced. "Mr. Thussington."

Sir Robert rose to meet him, and started back, with his outstretched arm fallen to his side, with astonishment.

"Good God! Arthur, are you ill?" he exclaimed, while Lady Edith and Ida gazed with speechless alarm at his white, hollow face and pale lips.

He came forward, and clutching Sir Robert's hand for a moment, sank into a chair. The ladies he did not seem to have seen.

Sir Robert went up to him and laid his hand upon his shoulder.

"My poor fellow, you are ill."

Arthur shook his head.

"Then—then you have bad news!" and he faltered and walked to the fireplace, resting his head for a moment on his hand. Then he said, without moving, "Edith, take Ida away."

Lady Edith, ever obedient, took Ida's hand, which had grown stone cold, and tried to draw her towards her, but the girl would not move.

"Come, Ida, my darling," whispered Lady Edith, sadly.

For a moment she withdrew her eyes slowly from the bent figure of Arthur Thussington, then walked to her father's side and caught the edge of his coat at the breast.

"Father," she said, in slow, distinct tones, "I will stay."

He put his arm round her.

"Better go, my darling," he said. She shook her head, and he perhaps knew instinctively that all resistance would be useless.

Lady Edith sank into her chair again, and waited, with a frightened face.

"Now, Arthur, what is it?" said Sir Robert, in an unnaturally resigned tone. "Has the mine gone?"

Arthur looked up with a puzzled expression.

"No!" he said, hoarsely.

Sir Robert breathed a sigh of relief, but suddenly paled and trembled.

"Then—then," he said, in a low, fearful voice, "you have heard of Roderick. Good God! man, speak out; don't you see this is worse than all? What have you heard?"

Arthur hid his face in his hands, and in a low, broken voice, that deceived them all—save one—said—

"I have, poor Roderick (ah! that word 'poor,' it belongs to the dead) sailed in the 'Annie,' for Melbourne. The 'Annie' was wrecked, and—and all hands were lost!"

Sir Robert tottered and groined,

Lady Edith shrank and cowered into the chair, but the figure of the girl remained stone-like from head to foot. Turning her eyes on him, she opened her lips, as if with pain, and uttered the words—

"You lie!"

He turned his face towards her, with a look that told her she spoke the truth, and, in an instant, she sprang towards him, and clutched his arm, crying in a voice of agony: "Not dead! not dead! Anything else, but not dead! A thousand miles away, wounded, ill dying! but not dead! Oh, God, not dead!"

He shook his head, and hid his eyes; and she fell into her father's arms, wailing; "And I loved him so! I loved him so!"

Then, staring, with burning, tearless eyes, she started from Sir Robert's arms, and threw up her own, wildly.

"His blood be upon your heads! You drove him from home! You killed him! What had he ever done to merit death? Why did God let him die, when I loved him so, and there were so many wicked men to kill? God—my God—was always good to all, even to me, who treated him so cruelly! Dead! dead! dead! and I scorned him and hurt him with hard words! He, the noblest, gentlest man that ever woman loved. Oh! God has punished me for my pride—punished me fearfully. You don't know all—none of you—how I cut him with hard, cold looks, and froze him with bitter words."

And he stood so calm and stern, hearing every word I said, and did nothing—not even strike me—said not a word when he should have felled me to the ground for daring to speak so to him—my darling! my god! And now you tell me he is dead—dead, and I, sinful wretch, am left to live. Oh, God! I pray God, if you are near Him, to let me die and come to you. Dead! dead!" Pouring out the words in quick, spasmodic cries, ever dwelling on the sad refrain, "I loved him so. Dead! dead!" she at last fell, before they could catch her, full length upon the floor—her white hands clenched above her head, like a woman martyr of old.

CHAPTER XL.

SIR ARTHUR THUSSINGTON.

"Revenge is sweet."

"The weakest goes to the wall."

"Though this may be play to you, 'tis death to me."

Leaving the sorrowing family at the Vale, Sir Arthur Thussington, as we will now call him, walked quickly through the avenue in the direction of the Hall, his head lowered upon his breast, and his hands folded behind him. Every step he took, and every stick and stone his eyes rested on, he kept repeating to himself, were his. His! Three days had passed since the discovery of the wreck of the "Annie," and the sudden shock had been succeeded by a dead numbness, born of his great joy, that had whitened his face and threatened to unseat his reason. He was feverish and ill, confused and bewildered; but he could not wait another day for a certain revenge, the picture of which he had been painting in his mind's eye for three long days.

He would have liked, nay, he thirsted, to proclaim his title and wealth to all the world at once—that moment—but he dared not.

Appearances must be attended to. Lady Mary lay ill, and though he cared nothing for the effect the news of her son's death might have on her, he dreaded the censure of the world on his heedlessness, and, most of all, feared to create a further bad opinion on Ida Valor's mind.

For there the man's hope was fixed. Even the new glory of his wealth and title paled before his love for the woman

who he felt mistrusted him. Yet he hoped, even against hope, that the Hall—his Hall—might have for its mistress, Roderick's lover—beautiful Ida Valor. But though he determined to bridle his impatience for a few days longer, he could not resist the savage joy of discomforting the steward.

So, passing up the silent avenue, he tried to devise some plan by which he could oust Startel from his position, without compromising his character of generosity. The door was opened by the old servant, who greeted him respectfully, and to whom Arthur nodded graciously, replying to his enquiries, "Thank you, very well, James."

"Lady Mary, I hope, is better; is she well enough for me to see her?"

"I think so, sir," said the man. "I will go and see," and he opened the drawing-room door to show Arthur in, but Arthur said, quietly—

"I will go into the library," and walking across the hall, he entered the old room. James looked surprised at the unusual tone, and turned off to inquire if Lady Mary was well enough to see him.

Meanwhile Arthur had walked to the table, and commenced turning over one or two of the papers lying on it. They were mostly accounts and business letters, some of them in Mr. Startel's handwriting, and others in Sir Harry's.

As he handled them one by one, a sardonic smile upon his face, his eye fell upon a document, headed, "Isaac Levy's account against Roderick," which, it will be remembered, was paid and receipted, and he laid his hand upon it, but before he had scarcely opened it, the door opened, and he put down that, which, if he had seen, would have been a powerful weapon in his hands in future years, and Startel entered. A look of savage hatred crossed his face, as he saw the tall figure standing by the table, and advancing in his crooked way, he said—

"Good morning, Mr. Thussington, glad to see you've honored the Hall again; do you intend making a long stay?"

Arthur Thussington walked to the fireplace and stood before the fire, the keen, glittering little eyes of the steward following him.

"Have you come from Lady Mary?" said Arthur Thussington.

"No, Mr. Thussington," replied Startel; "but I met James and brought her ladyship's message; she is not well enough to see you."

"Is that the truth, or a lie?" said Arthur Thussington, leaning his arms in an easy attitude on the mantel-shelf.

The steward's face whitened with passion, and he said between his clenched teeth, with an evil smile—

"People in glass houses should not throw stones, Mr. Thussington."

Arthur Thussington quickly, without moving his position, reached the bell-rope, and as James entered, said in a tone of command—

"Mr. Startel tells me, James, that Lady Mary is too unwell to see me; is that the truth?"

The man stared first at him, and then at the mocking face of the steward.

"Is that the truth?" repeated Arthur.

"Yes, sir," said James.

"Thank you," said Arthur; then turning towards the steward, he said, in a measured tone—

"When I was here last, Mr. Startel, in addition to refusing me the keys of the various papers of the late Sir Harry, you volunteered the information that you had been in my uncle's service for a great number of years."

The man stood astounded and speechless, sharp-witted as he was, he had not a glimmering of the real state of the case, and could not understand the altered tone and manner of the man whom he had always seen so pliant and humble.