

books and horses, his land to look after, I am sure he has enough to content him."

"You think so, Miss Channing?" said a deep, rich voice from the foot of the stairs which the ladies were descending. "Should you be contented with these and nothing more?" and he smiled a welcome, extending his hand.

"I am contented with much less, Mr. Falconer," she rejoined.

"Yes, the case is different," he muttered. By Mrs. Falconer's order the tea-table had been laid during their tour of the house, laid for three.

"I want you to taste our raspberries, Mrs. Channing," said Mrs. Falconer. "We are country neighbours, and must not be formal."

"My dear mother, your tea-table looks decidedly informal for a hungry farmer," remarked the son.

"I did not expect 'a hungry farmer' for an hour to come," responded the mother. "Mrs. Channing, let me persuade you and your daughter to sit on the porch for a half-hour, and then share our supper before returning."

"Mr. Falconer declined my hospitality, for fear he should not like its taste," remarked Deborah; "and, besides, dear Mrs. Falconer, it is our milking time."

But Mrs. Channing was less loth to sup at "The Cedars," and Rhett said to Deborah "Please stay," in a tone that made her colour come. In short, they found themselves detained, while the cook, glad of an opportunity to display her skill, served them sumptuously within the hour.

While they were waiting Mr. Falconer took Deborah to the library, saying:

"I want to show you how hard I have worked. My books are placed and catalogued."

"I wish you could see my library," said Deborah; "it is in the garret."

"I should like to see it, but, you know—I never visit."

"Ah," said Deborah, with displeasure.

"See," he said, "here is a little niche I am making for my 'David Copperfield.'"

"Do you, then, value it so highly?"

"Yes, since the other morning when you found it in the dust."

Mrs. Channing and Deborah walked homeward in the starry twilight.

"Most agreeable people, really," remarked the elder lady. "The Dales and the Wheatons will be somewhat surprised to hear of our reception at 'The Cedars.'"

"Oh, mother, pray let us not speak of it."

"Not speak of it! But, well, I don't know but you are right. Some one appreciates you, Deborah, at last, that is evident. Ah, such a settlement as that! dear girl—"

"Mother! I implore you never to hint such a thing again."

"Silly child, of course I shall not hint it all around Hillbush. But it was so evident—his admiration. What harm in speaking of it together?"

"Mr. Falconer may admire me," returned the girl, steadily, "or what seemed admiration may be his usual manner; but—there is something, mother, something about him unlike other men."

Mr. Channing smiled in the dusk. The admiration was reciprocal she conceived.

"We will have them to drink tea with us some day," she remarked. "I think my biscuits are a little lighter, and my jelly a trifle clearer, than even their professed cook can make."

Every one, says Goethe, is drunk, once in a lifetime. Perhaps this night, of all other times, was the one when Deborah was so. A new life had come to her; her idle dreams seemed contemptible, her whole past not worth the living. Over and over again, as she lay awake, she recalled every precious word and look that Rhett Falconer had given her during that memorable afternoon. As yet she had had enough. She counted on nothing, coveted nothing but what she had experienced.

Neither was she suffered to endure the pangs of hope deferred in the coming days. Mr. Falconer did not visit, as he had said, but he contrived some intercourse between the houses for almost every day. He stopped at the gate with a string of trout, or a book, or a bunch of flowers, and, having stopped there, lingered to talk. Or a message came from Mrs. Falconer, begging Miss Channing to fetch her work over "The Cedars" for an hour of an afternoon; and the whole thing went forward so quiet that but one person, outside the two families, suspected the intimacy, or concerned themselves about the consequences.

This one person was Nicholas Dale. A man less slow, less persistent in his passion would have declared his love, and had it rejected years before; for he had adored Deborah since his earliest recollection. He had been her passive slave in their school-days—the patient victim of her caprices since. He was not over-discriminating in most things, but he knew enough not to hazard his chance upon an avowal yet. Carefully avoiding the rôle of a lover, he bided his time.

With the fine instinct of love he now divined this new intimacy and its character. Never hasty, however, he waited and watched. Deborah herself could not have chronicled every incident with more exactitude. And yet she never suspected his jealousy, least of all its result. He continued his visits, on Sunday evenings, just as of old. He was ready and friendly, as he had always been, in neighborly offices. His self-control was the price he laid out to pay for Deborah. For he meant to have her. Nothing in heaven or earth, he said, should take her from him. He was young, good looking, well off, and Deborah had liked him for

years. Should a stranger come between them?—a stranger, who had the poorest of all records, no record at all—who might be a thief, or a gambler, or worse—should he come in and snatch the prize from a worthy and patient wooer? Nicholas Dale's whole will said, No!

The summer came to an end. The dreary, lonesome autumn weather hung heavily over "The Cedars." On one of the dreariest and most lonesome afternoons Nicholas Dale, for the first time, walked up to Mr. Falconer's door, and requested an interview with the master of the place. He was taken to the library where Mr. Falconer was reading alone. He rose and offered his visitor a seat. Nicholas waved him away.

"I have come on business which can be transacted standing. I have come, Mr. Falconer, to know if you have any intention of seeking Deborah Channing in marriage, and, if so, whether your character and antecedents entitle you to woo such a woman?"

It was plainly put, at least. Rhett Falconer almost staggered as he stood. It was so utterly unexpected; it involved what was so painful; above all, it was so coarse.

"It seems to cost you little to put your questions, Mr. Dale. May I inquire—in order that we understand each other—on whose authority you act?"

"My own."

"Upon Miss Channing's knowledge?"

"No."

"Then I deny your right to question me entirely. On what, pray, do you found it?"

"On my love for Deborah Channing, which would outweigh my love of life; and on my suspicion of you, sir, who would come between us."

"Mr. Dale, you overstep the bounds of discretion and breeding. Go you and try your fortune with Miss Channing, as I, if I see fit, will try mine, and excuse me from any farther discussion on the subject to-day."

"Mr. Falconer, you think to carry things with a high hand, but I have come here to make terms to-day. You cannot escape me"—and Nicholas Dale touched the breast pocket of his coat significantly. "I will know you and what you are, and whether or not you love Deborah Channing—or I will kill you."

Rhett Falconer stepped toward the bell-rope for reply, and as he rang Dale, maddened by jealousy and failure, drew his pistol, aimed and fired.

His victim fell, the blood spurting from his mouth.

There was a wild shriek through the house, and in an instant Mrs. Falconer was bending over the prostrate form of her son. Fright and confusion surged through the house, messengers came and went, doctors arrived, and through all Nicholas Dale, having dropped his pistol and sunk upon a couch, covered his face with his hands, and sat there impassible. Somebody thought of him at last—and shuddered. Young Dale a murderer! It was too dreadful to believe. He was taken into custody, however, to await the issue of his act.

Oh, that a waiting! Both for the one who knew now how wildly and wickedly he had acted, and how in any event he had lost Deborah, and for the others—the innocent man stricken and suffering for no fault of his, the distracted mother, watching while life and death hung in the balance.

There were weeks of terrible suspense to all involved. The physicians had little or no hope of M. Falconer's recovery from the first and, when eventually some unfavorable symptoms appeared they broke to him gently his critical condition. He smiled.

"If they knew how little I had to live for," he said to his mother, when they were gone. "But, mother," he continued, "I have a wish which it is time to indulge. I wish to see Deborah Channing."

"It is true, then, Rhett; you love her?"

"What has a dying man to do with love, mother? I am going to tell her my secret."

Deborah came. It was, oh, so cruel, that he should have suffered for her; and she faltered something to that effect.

"I do not regret it, Deborah. If I did not lie here dying I could not tell you what I mean to-day. Will it shock you, Deborah, to know that I have been an inmate of a prison for ten long years?"

It did shock her terribly. She sat silent.

"That," Rhett continued, "I might have told you any time—when I could. The rest I can only tell because I have but a few more days to live. I inherited a fortune," he went on, "and, not from necessity, but for love of business, took a clerkship, when quite young, in a bank. There was a forgery committed, and circumstances pointed to me as the forger. With proofs in my possession which would have criminated another I was tried, convicted, and sentenced."

Deborah could not control her horror. She shuddered.

"The guilty party," said Mr. Falconer, calmly, "was a young man, but with a wife and child. What was the sacrifice of my life to his? Besides, he was my dearest friend. I would have died for him. I could certainly suffer imprisonment for him."

"But justice," murmured Deborah.

"It was accomplished. I knew that he would never sin again."

"And he has not?"

"No. He lives respected, honored, and beloved. I, since my ten years' imprisonment, have gone skulking through life. I thought here, at last, I should find peace. I shall, Deborah, the peace which passeth understanding."

"Oh, miserable 'Cedars,' would you had never seen them."

"Not so. For then, Deborah, I should never have seen you."

"Me! You must hate me!"

"No, Deborah, I love you. Remember, I speak as a dying man. I never knew I should want an untimely name, as I have wanted it to offer you. I would not offer one stained as mine is."

"Stained!" she murmured, "so then are the martyrs!"

He pressed her hand feebly.

"It is too late."

She sprang to her feet before him.

"It is not. Rhett—Rhett—I love you. Live for me."

The doctors next morning found their patient worse—much worse. The symptoms baffled them. Yet some way he gained strength in spite of them. He battled with disease; he clung to his life. And he lived.

"The Cedars" was sold in the spring, and in June there was a quiet wedding in the old Channing homestead, and then, Channings and Falconers, went away from Hillbush—the mystery deepened, not solved; and Nicholas Dale, older and sadder, knew that he deserved his loss.

Rhett Falconer was a wanderer once more, but nowise discontented with his lot. But it seemed to him that their obscure life if happy it would be irksome to Deborah.

"My wife," he said, "the man for whom I suffered once is merciful and just. If you say so, I will go to him. At my demand he will confess his fault and his deception. At his own expense he will reinstate us."

Deborah shook her head.

"Let him keep his false jewels and wear them. We know that we have the true, even if we have to wrap them in a mystery."

I WILL BE TRUE TO THEE.

In leaving thee, thou one of all,
Unto my life most dear,
No words can soothe my sorrowing heart,
Nor check the falling tear.
For 'tis to go to other lands,
Far o'er the foaming sea,
That I must say—sweetheart, farewell,
I will be true to thee.

Our love, which has still mightier grown
Each time when we have met,
Hath given joys unto my soul
It could not well forget.
And through the long and weary year
Which I must absent be,
That love shall still remain unchanged—
I will be true to thee.

One loving kiss, one sad good bye,
One tender, fond caress,
And he had gone, and all my heart
Was full of wretchedness.
But off from him a message comes,
Thrice welcome o'er the sea,
Which says in language soft and sweet,
He still is true to me.

THE TWIN BROTHERS.

There is a peaceful valley in the south of France, just at the foot of the Pyrenees, where any wearied traveller might fancy that life glided away as smoothly as a summer's day. But little life is stirring among the cottages which cluster round the bright river.

That stream is so clear that it reflects the trees upon its banks as it traverses the valley. On the mountain side, which rises up abruptly, is an old grey castle, frowning grimly, which, till within the last few years, was said to be haunted.

At the further extremity of the valley stood one of the prettiest little cottages imaginable.

It was a two-storied building, sheltered by tall, shady trees, and surrounded by grass plots redolent with bright flowers, the variety and tasteful arrangement of which seemed to turn it into a paradise.

One morning the door of the chalet opened, and a pair of deep blue eyes peeped out.

Then the sweet fresh face of a young girl emerged into the sunlight.

She stopped for a moment irresolutely under the doorway, the drooping vine leaves forming a graceful frame round her fairylike figure, and forming a marked contrast with her rich brown curls.

Then, darting away through the garden, she crossed the river by the rustic bridge and commenced to ascend the nearest mountain side.

In her ascent she stopped at intervals and listened for footsteps.

The tinkling of a goat-bell suddenly fell upon her ear, and she hastened on to the spot whence the sound had apparently come.

One turn of the rock brought her there.

On a grassy mound a girl of about her own age was seated, singing a wild mountain song, while her goats fed around her.

A scarlet kerchief was wound round the goat-herd's head, and was twisted in her black hair like a turban.

There was a tinge of sadness in her large black eyes, but when she raised them, and recognised the new comer, a joyous smile passed over her face.

"Ah! it is you, Miss Jeannette," she began. "It is some time since you have come to see me. I began to think that, like the village people, you were beginning to shun me."

"No, indeed, Marie, that is not true; but I always go to the other side of the mountain now for—"

And Jeannette stopped short, while a blush suffused her face.

"Because Don Castro rides that way every morning. Is it not so?" interrupted Marie.

"Well, perhaps it is because the prettiest flowers grow there," replied Jeannette, laughingly; "but what do you think of the handsome strangers, Don Castro and his uncle?"

"I fear them," moodily replied Marie.

"And what can you find to fear in one so accomplished, so noble as Don Castro? His uncle certainly looks severe, but to me the nephew is perfection. Think how different he is to Jacques, our doctor's son, or to Louis, the farmer, who stammer out the few words they can speak."

"At least we know them to be honest men; but as you value your happiness, beware of making even a friend of the uncle or nephew."

"You speak in riddles, Marie; what do you mean? My father respects and like them, and you who, like myself, have never left this village, how can you judge?"

"If I tell you a secret, are you sure you will keep it?" asked Marie.

"Yes, indeed I will. I promise," answered Jeannette.

"Then sit here beside me, and I will tell you one that will startle you."

Jeannette, trembling, took the place that Marie had made for her on the grass.

They knew no distinction of class in his out-of-the-world village, so that the daughter of peasant and proprietor were often fast friends.

"You know," began Marie, "that years ago my grandfather fought in the French army."

"He went to the war with a young count, who was his foster-brother, and whose servant he had been in his native village in Normandy."

"The Spaniards were very bitter against the French, as neighbors often are, but the count, even after the war, stayed in a distant town called Madrid."

"But my grandfather soon found out the reason."

"A beautiful young lady, belonging to a great proud Spanish family, lived near the house they were stopping at, and many an evening did the count and she risk their lives to meet each other, while my grandfather watched as sentinel."

"But as this could not last long, and the count entreated her to become his wife, and fly with him to France."

"She at first refused it seems, and told him with tears that her brother, who was her guardian would probably kill him, and prefer to see her dead to marrying a Frenchman."

"At last she acceded to his entreaties."

"It was arranged that the count should seek a priest, and that he and a faithful maid of the young lady's should be the only witnesses to the marriage."

"Well, the appointed day came, and all had gone on smoothly so far."

"The priest had consented to keep their secret and to marry them."

"A carriage and swift horses would be there to convey them to the French frontier, and once there, all would be well."

"They had met in the young lady's room at daybreak, and were just about to leave for the chapel."

"Suddenly a loud noise was heard at the door."

"It was forced open."

"The dreaded brother, with four armed men, rushed into the chamber."

"Before the count or my grandfather could speak, they were seized and thrown down. Whether they had been betrayed, or merely suspected, no one ever could tell."

"The brother reproached his sister in scathing terms. Then, notwithstanding her piteous screams and cries for mercy, he stabbed the count over and over again."

"Though the wounded man was still living, he ordered his body to be thrown into the river."

"My grandfather had seen all without being able to help his master, and no doubt he would soon have been treated just as cruelly. At that moment the maid passed a sign, and slipped him behind a curtain concealing a door at the far end of the room. She led him through a private entrance into the street."

"They rushed off to the French consul, and placed themselves under his protection. A few days after both were sent off to France."

"A party of French officers went immediately to the scene of the murder, but no one could be found. The place was deserted."

"Now comes the most dreadful part of the story."

"My grandfather has seen Don Castro and his uncle, and he is perfectly certain that the uncle, who now calls himself Don Urbano, is no other than the cruel Duke de la Sostra, who murdered the young count, and who, no doubt is hiding here for this and other crimes."

"Though this Don Castro looks so sleek and good, he is merely a tool and an accomplice of the duke's. He, too, has blood-stained hands. The duke had no nephew; the broken-hearted sister died in a convent. But, Jeannette, you are sobbing."

"Oh, your story is a dreadful one. But your grandfather may have been mistaken about Don Urbano."

"His voice is the same," said Marie, emphatically, "and grandfather's terror of him has