

in the water, and threw the drops smartly in her face.

"My darling Gillian!" said O'Mara, bending over her. "My wife! Look up, and speak to me."

"Your wife?" cried the baronet, pausing in his ministrations. Mr. Herbert echoed the words. Dora meantime was clinging to her mother's insensible hand, and sobbing over her.

"Yes," cried O'Mara, with a face of agony, "my dear wife! Separated all these years and now to meet like this! Oh, sir, if you are a friend of her's—if you have a heart to pity us, send a messenger at once for a doctor."

Venables leaned against the wall with a stifled moan, like a man stunned by a physical blow.

"His wife!" he repeated, wonderingly, as if the words bore no significance.

Mr. Herbert, recalling a little of his lost presence of mind, bade Dora run for Barbara. At first the child only clung the faster to her mother's hand, but after a little persuasion left the room.

"This is no place for us, Venables," he said, touching the baronet on the arm, "Come!"

He took the poor fellow by the arm, and led him, dazed and stupefied by this sudden cruel blow, from the room which, scarcely a minute before, he had entered so gaily with his affianced wife. O'Mara looked after him with a grim, soundless laugh, which changed again to an expression of harassed solicitude as Barbara entered the room with Dora.

"Eh, my poor lady!" cried the faithful servant. She went on her knees beside her, and loosed the collar of her dress, and held a bottle of smelling salts to her nostrils.

A faint colour tinged Gillian's cheeks and leaden lips. She shivered, sighed, and opened her eyes, looking round vacantly.

"Mamma!" cried Dora, "oh, mamma, don't look so. Speak to me, mamma!"

Memory returned at the sound of the loved voice, and Gillian cast her arms about the child.

"Ah!" said O'Mara, in a tone of devout gratitude, "thank God, she returns to life. Thank you, my good woman. Leave us, if you please, and take the child with you."

"And who be you?" asked Barbara, wonderingly and suspiciously.

"I am this lady's husband," answered O'Mara.

"Leave us, Barbara," said Gillian, in a low voice. "He speaks the truth. Go, my darling."

She kissed Dora with icy lips, and rising led her firmly, though with uncertain steps, to the door, and closed it on the beseeching, tear-stained little face. As she turned O'Mara came towards her with a radiant smile and hands outstretched.

"Don't touch me!" she cried, "don't come near me. The knowledge of your presence is enough!"

Her horror of the man, who after years of cruelty and desertion, had returned to dash the cup of happiness from her lips, banished her weakness.

"My darling!" cried O'Mara, in a wounded voice. "The shock has turned her brain," he added, pityingly, for the behoof of Barbara, or of any other possible listener.

"What do you want here?" asked Gillian. "How did you come?"

"By the purest accident, my dear Gillian. I entered the house and asked permission of your venerable friend the Vicar to sketch the interior of this charming room. You still retain—nay, you have positively improved upon—the exquisite taste you always possessed. While conversing with him, my child, *our* child, Gillian, came into the apartment."

He produced his handkerchief and made play with it at this moment.

"I learned from her own sweet lips that her name was Dora. My memory flew back to the time when I had possessed a cherub of that name, and even then, when yet I was ignorant that the child was mine, nature seemed to draw me to her. I half thought that I could trace in her little lineaments the features I had loved so well."

He flourished the handkerchief before his eyes. "It was too good to be true, I thought, such bliss was not for me, and yet, not only in her face, but in her voice, her manner, in her happy frankness, the

child recalled the wife I had never ceased to mourn. The little one, perhaps with a divine instinct that I had need of consolation, asked for music. This beautiful dwelling, the odour of the flowers, the sweet Englishness of the scene, the presence of the child, her name, with its remains of that happy time we spent together, too short, alas, and shortened I must own, by my own intemperate folly, which I have bitterly repented, and which, I see in your dear face, you have long since forgiven; all these influences flooded a heart which, with all its shortcomings, has ever been open to the influences of external beauty and poetic feeling. The dear old song you used to sing came back to me, 'Home, sweet Home.' Ah, I thought, as my fingers dwelt upon the keys, if this peaceful and beautiful dwelling were indeed my home, if this angelic child were the Dora I had loved and lost, if you were by my side, as in the dear dead days! And the dream is true, my Gillian, my bride!"

The strained and flimsy rhetoric, the theatrical gesticulations with which he spoke this rigmarole, contrasting with the diabolic half grin upon his face, was an epitome of the man's character. The words and voice were for the possible listeners, his gestures expressed his sense of the dramatic value of the situation, the smile bespoke a pleasant sense of humour. It is not often that a born torturer has a mere perfect chance of displaying his instincts than this that fate had just put into the hands of Mr. O'Mara.

He made a second step towards her. At his first advance she had shrunk from him in terror, but now she stood firm, drawing herself to her full height, and meeting his eyes with a look which changed his mocking regard to one of half-sullen admiration.

"Listen," she said quietly. "I know the powers you have, the privileges the law gives you. I know that all I have is yours, that it is just as much in your power to-day to strip me of all I possess as it was to rob me seven years ago. You are welcome to do so. Take all I have—I shall speak no word of complaint, make no effort to assert the right—I know God recognizes though the law denies it. But try to do no more. Lay a hand upon me, advance one step towards me, and you will find that I am not unprotected. I have but to raise my voice to have you thrown out of this house like the thing and cur you are. You will be wise not to provoke me to such a measure. Go, and leave me to myself for awhile."

Her calm did more than any raving denunciation of him could have done. The quiet contempt of her words and look left him quite untouched, but he recognized the force that lay behind them, and gave way, marking his retreat in his usual flowery glances.

"I comprehend, Gillian. You want quiet to accustom yourself to these changed circumstances. I can understand that my sudden apparition is something of a shock to you. I am not here to rob you, as you call it. You do me injustice in thinking that the prosperity of your circumstances adds one iota to the joy I feel in finding you. It is not your wealth I want, it is only yourself, the affection you once had for me I would revive. Try not to think too harshly of me, Gillian. I was not blameless in that past time, I admit my faults, my errors, I confess them with tears. I leave you for a time, your better nature will conquer—I am sure of it. You will forget and forgive the errors I deplore, you will hear the call of duty and affection. We shall be reunited. Here, in this delicious spot, I shall taste the felicity which in my foolish youth—I confess it, Gillian—I threw aside. God bless you, darling, and our dear little one. I will return presently to meet, I hope, the reception dear to a husband and a father."

He left the house, and walked towards the village, his face grown hard with lines of calculation.

"I shall have trouble with her," he said to himself. "Gad! how infernally handsome she is. These last seven years have improved her prodigiously. She used to be a little thin. I arrive *apropos*. That burly baronet was hard hit when I proclaimed my identity, but I don't suppose I shall have much trouble with him. I have made one friend already in that thick-witted old parson, and

to have the clergy on one's side is half the battle with women. But that fellow, Bream, will be the *clou* of the situation, I'm afraid."

He reached the "Pig and Whistle," where Stokes was smoking his pipe in the porch. O'Mara passed him with a slight sideward motion of the head, and went upstairs to a room overlooking the street. A minute later Stokes knocked and entered.

"Well?" he asked eagerly.

"Your penetration was not at fault," said O'Mara, "Mrs. Dartmouth is my wife."

"You've seen her?"

"Yes, and she has seen me."

"What did she say?"

"Nothing you would be the wiser for knowing, or that I should care to repeat."

"I can believe that," said Stokes, "if you treated her as you did the others out yonder," with a jerk of the head in the supposed direction of America. "I could find it in my heart to wish as I'd never told you anything about Mr. Bream and the scrap-book."

"Never mind what you could find in your heart, my good Stokes. See if you can find a bottle of drinkable brandy in your bar."

Stokes went and returned with the brandy. O'Mara motioned him to a seat on the other side of the table.

"Just to get things straight in my mind," he said, "I will tell you the morning's adventures."

He told them, plainly and succinctly, as he could speak when he chose, and Stokes listened.

"What do you make of that?" he asked, when he had finished.

"She's going to bolt," said Stokes, "and she'll most likely take the kid with her."

"That is my reading of the situation also," said O'Mara. "I shall want your help, Stokes."

"Then I wish you didn't," said the publican, uneasily, nerving himself with a gulp of spirit, "and I've a——good mind as you should do without it."

O'Mara, with his hand on the table, and a cigar stuck in the corner of his mouth, looked at him with a smile of dry contemptuous enquiry.

"I'm sick o' being made a tool and catpaw of, I had enough o' being your jackal, out yonder. Nice jobs as you put me on, too! If I'd ha' held my jor about that pargraph, as likely as not you'd ha' gone away from here no wiser than you'd come. And if I'd ha' known as Sir George was sweet on her, I'd ha' seen you——[Mr. Stokes's language was remarkably forcible at this point] afore I'd ha' said a word."

"You are really shockingly immoral, Stokes," said O'Mara.

"Go it, go it!" said Stokes, disgustedly. "I mean it, though. Mrs. Dartmouth's a lady. When I was down with the rheumatic a queen couldn't ha' been kinder than she was to me. Jelly and port wine, every day she sent me. The poor man's Providence—that's the name they give her hereabout. A nice Providence you'll be to anybody, won't you? And Sir George is a good sort, too; he's going to rebuild this place and give me a new lease on the old terms."

"Bucolic Philistine!" said O'Mara, "why can't he leave the house alone? It's charmingly picturesque. I am afraid, Stokes, that you didn't shed many tears over that paragraph announcing my untimely decease."

"I shouldn't cry over better men nor you, Mr. O'Mara."

"Won'erful are the ways of Providence," said O'Mara. "When that infernal ruffian left me on that beastly hill, twenty miles from anywhere, I little thought what a good turn he was doing me. I wonder why he kept the letters, though, for the matter of that I don't quite know why I had kept them myself. I'm glad he did keep them. I wasn't popular in that part of the States, and his death with those letters on his person was a god-send to me."

"Yes," said Stokes, "the devil's mindful of his own."

(To be continued.)