

## "THE STRESS OF THE STORM"

children are not in the house to-night. You and I aren't easily frightened."

All the same, an ashen shade came through the tan of his face, as Ellen sprang up with a low cry. "Some one called! I heard them!"

Sure enough, there sounded a shrill voice in the passage: "Isaac! Isaac!"

But as though it were a summons to the powers of the night, down swept the fierce clamour of the storm in such redoubled force, that one of the tall pine-trees crashed over against the house, which seemed to rock to its foundation.

"The Lord save us!" groaned Isaac, while Ellen clung to his arm in speechless fear. As if before the elemental forces, the door of the room was hastily flung open, revealing a strange figure.

It was a woman of about fifty, whose somewhat unwieldy form was wrapped in an untidily gorgeous red silk tea-gown. Her black hair hung in confusion about the colourless face, from which the dark, shining eyes flared out.

Although the slim hand that held a lighted candle above her head did not shake, the woman was evidently in a state of extreme nervous tension, and there was no pause before she spoke quickly in a shrill voice with a perceptible foreign echo in it.

"Isaac! Ellen! Come quickly! Your master is dead! I had just raised his head and given him his medicine when he fell back with a groan, *dead*."

Ellen's terrified grasp was still upon Isaac's arm, but he silently shook her off and followed the crimson figure down the long passages and up the big staircase of the silent house to the death-chamber.