

"And Clubs went for you," he continued. "Heaven bless old Clubs, but how did he find it out? Hanged if I understand it yet."

Then as his eye fell on Geraldine, who still sat in the corner, stupefied and bewildered, he shook his fist at her threateningly, bidding her tell in a minute what she knew of Esther Bennett and the confounded plot.

"Yes, Geraldine," said Mr. Thornton advancing toward her, "you may as well confess the part you had in this affair. It is useless longer to try to conceal it. Oliver heard enough to implicate you deeply, and Mrs. Thompson," turning to Hepsy, whom greatly against her will Oliver had managed to keep there, "Mrs. Thompson will, of course, tell what she knows, and to save herself from—"

"Utter disgrace," he was going to add, when poor, ignorant Hepsy, thinking he meant "fail," screamed out:

"I'll tell all I know, indeed I will, only don't send me to prison," and with the most astonishing rapidity, she repeated all the particulars of her interview with Geraldine, whose face grew purple with anger and mortification.

"She brung me that half sheet to-night," said Hepsy, in conclusion, "and told me what to do, and said how all she wanted was for Mr. Lawrence to marry Lillian. There, dear sir, that's all I know, as true as I live and draw the breath of life. Now, please let me go home, I'll give up the fifty dollars and the silk gown," and without waiting for permission, she seized her green calash, and darting from the room went tearing down the walk at a rate highly injurious to her corns, and to the "spine in her back," of which she had recently been complaining.

Thus forsaken by Hepsy, Geraldine bowed her head upon the table, but refused to speak, until Richard said to her:

"Madame, silence will avail you nothing, for unless you confess the whole, I shall to-morrow morning start in quest of Esther Bennett, who will be compelled to tell the truth."

There was something in Richard's manner which made Geraldine quail. She was afraid of him, and knowing well that Esther would be frightened in betraying her, she felt that she would rather the story should come from herself. So, after a few hysterical sobs and spasmodic attempts to speak, she began to tell how she first overheard Mr. Thornton talking to his son of Esther Bennett, and how the idea was then conceived of using that information for her own purposes if it should be necessary. Once started, it seemed as if she could not stop until her mind was fully unburdened, and almost as rapidly as

Hepsy herself she told how she had gone to New York, ostensibly to buy the wedding dress, but really in quest of Esther Bennett, who was easily found, and for a certain sum enlisted in her service.

"I was well acquainted with the particulars of Cousin Helen's marriage," she said, "well acquainted with Mildred's being left at Beechwood, and this made the matter easy, for I knew just what to say. I had also in my possession one of Helen's letters; her handwriting was much like my own, and by a little practice I produced that letter which deceived even Uncle Thornton. I told Esther what to say and do, when to come to Mayfield and how to act."

The Old Nick himself never contrived a neater trick," chimed in the Judge; "but what in Cain did you do it for?"

"For Lillian—for Lillian," answered Geraldine. "She is all I have to love in the wide world; and when I saw how her heart was set on Lawrence Thornton, I determined that she should have him if money and fraud could accomplish it!"

"Yes, my fine madame," whispered the Judge again, "but what reason had you to think Lawrence would marry Lillian, even if he were Lillian's uncle?"

"I thought," answered Geraldine, "that when recovered from his disappointment he would return to her, for he loved her once, I know."

"Don't catch me swallowing that," muttered the Judge; "he love that putty-head?"

"Hush! father," interposed Richard, and turning to Geraldine, he asked, "Did you suppose Esther and Hepsy would keep your secret always?"

"I did not much care," returned Geraldine. "If Lillian secured Lawrence, I knew the marriage could not be undone, and besides, I did not believe the old women would dare to tell; for I made them both think it was a crime punishable by imprisonment."

"And so it should be," returned the Judge. "Every one of you ought to be hung as high as Haman. What's that you are saying about Lillian?" he continued, as he heard a faint sound.

Geraldine's strength was leaving her fast but she managed to whisper:

"You must not blame Lillian. She is weak in intellect and believed all that I told her; of the fraud she knew nothing—nothing. I went to a fortune-teller in Boston, and bade her say to the young lady I would bring her that though the man she loved was engaged to another, something wonderful, the nature of which she could not exactly foretell, would occur to prevent the marriage, and she would have him yet. I