

His clipped English rang out gaily on the summer breeze, and those careless words, listened to by Margaret Walsingham on that eventful night with unheeding ears, came back one day through the mists of forgetfulness, and took their place in the wild drama with strange significance.

Once more Margaret returned to her dying patroness, and met her eager, questioning eyes with mute looks of anguish.

Utterly silent now, she held her poor friend's fluttering hand, and wiped the foam from her voiceless lips, and the kind old doctor turned away his brimming eyes, that he might not witness the harrowing spectacle of the woman's love and grief while performing these last gentle ministrations.

The housekeeper sat at the foot of the bed, shaking with her sobs. A few of the old retainers of the household grouped near the door, stifling their lamentations as best they might. But never a word spoke poor Margaret, as she watched her last and only friend sinking from her clinging arms into the mysteries of death.

The minutes sped; the doctor laid his watch upon the table; Margaret's eyes left the pallid face of the dying to watch his swift circling hands, with a tightening of the heart-strings.

"I give them thirty minutes to go and return from Regis," she murmured to the doctor at last. "Will she live thirty minutes?"

Dr. Gay answered nothing; but the vampire Death, fanning the sinking mortal into immortality, answered, by her convulsive face and twitching hands.

"No!"

Ten, fifteen minutes passed, still the shrouded chest rose and fell in intermittent respirations; still the cold fingers sought Margaret's; still the swimming eyes turned on hers with the dumb agony of the last pang. Twenty minutes, twenty-five, twenty-six, the closing eyes flew wide open, the relaxing chin took its comely place once more, the toiling breath ceased in a long, full sigh.

She looked long and tenderly at her poor Margaret Walsingham, then beyond her into the shadowy world she was entering, and a wondering smile broke dazzlingly over her whole countenance.

"Lift me up," she sighed, like a weary child.

Margaret lifted her to her breast.

"Higher," whispered she. "Ah! this is rest—rest!"

And as Margaret lifted the smiling face to her shoulder, the last thrill ran through the kind old heart, stopped, and she entered the everlasting gates.

So she went on her dim, mystic journey, not sped by the hands of her kindred; nor mourned by the hearts of her kindred; un comforted and alone, save for the love of Margaret Walsingham—good, impulsive, generous Mrs. Brand.

Margaret laid her down and closed her sightless eyes; then arose from her finished watch and turned away.

She looked blankly about; her eyes fell upon the watch still lying upon the table, and noticed the hand resting upon the thirtieth minute, and immediately the clang of horses' hoofs and the roll of the carriage wheels stole to her ear. She put her hand suddenly to her forehead like one in physical pain; it fell to her bosom, and pressed convulsively there. She uttered a piercing cry, flung up her hands, and fell forward like one stabbed to the heart.

St. Udo Brand had come at last, and he was too late.

CHAPTER II.

READING OF THE WILL.

Mrs. Brand, in her lead coffin, in its rose-wood shell, was slumbering in the stately vault of her ancestors, and Mr. Davenport held in his hands the last will of her whose will had in her life ever been law, and glanced around to see that all the legatees were there.

St. Udo Brand, the tardy heir, was present, quietly waiting to hear the reading of the will with that decorous gravity with which we wait to bear our honors.

Dr. Gay was there, because his departed friend had requested him to do so.

It was in the library; the walls of books glittered in calf and gilt in the pleasant April sunlight; the glass door was opened upon the perfumed garden walks; and the twitter of the busy birds came sweetly over beds of crocuses and early blossoms to break the silence.

"Where is Miss Walsingham? Shouldn't she be here?" asked the doctor.

"I don't think she'll come down, sir," said the housekeeper.

Mr. Davenport cleared his throat.

"Better send for her, eh?" said he to Captain Brand.

The heir-expectant turned a dark face, disfigured by impatience, upon the lawyer.

"It can't make much difference," he answered, dryly. "She can hear her part of it again. Go on."

"On the contrary, it makes all the difference in the world," retorted the lawyer, with unexpected heat; "and I refuse to break these seals until Margaret Walsingham is present."