

which is the best or the worst.—Don't you think so, Eleanor?"

"Certainly."

"Well I am glad you agree with me on this important point—and now to my story. You know with what calmness Lady Mornford conducted herself until the last. I declare to you, there was something in this calmness so unnatural to her—so unlike the whole of her previous character, that it overcame me more than the most violent exhibition of feeling.

"I had gone to bed, I need not tell you how, the night before. I was all unnerved in the morning. My hand trembled like an aspen leaf, and somehow or other it came into my head that she would die—die unwarned; for though Mr. West had spoken to her very seriously, we neither of us apprehended any danger; nor indeed was there any, except from her previous habits, with which we were not then sufficiently acquainted.

"Well, as I told you, the thought came over me like a flood of dark waters; I could not drive it away; and sometimes I formed the design of questioning her again about the letters from Sir James, and asking her to let me read them myself. At last, however, I adopted another plan—I made some excuse about my instruments, and, returning home, I swallowed such a draught of brandy as would have dissipated heavier thoughts than mine. When I returned, I felt capable of anything; and had the operation been begun then, I doubt not I should have gone through with it well. Unfortunately, however, poor Lady Mornford had fallen into one of her hysteric fits; and by the time she was sufficiently recovered, the whole world was dancing round me. Life and death—all things welcome and horrible, became as one; and yet, with a kind of mechanical effort, I prepared to begin my painful duty.

"I remember little more, except one circumstance, and that has been enough. I remember Mr. West snatching from me the instrument which I held in my hand, and whispered something between his teeth about 'butchery!' That evening, you know, I was sent for in great haste by Lady Mornford's maid, who knew the friendship which existed between her mistress and us. Mr. West was still there, seated near the bed on which the sufferer lay. He took little notice of my entrance, but I soon saw what was the real state of the case. The utmost caution was required. It was necessary that the house should be kept as still as death. The knockers were muffled, the servants were forbidden to enter the room, and there we sat, without speaking to each other, until midnight. The patient was restless, and she uttered not a word only a low moaning escaped her, which made the silence more dreadful; I would have given worlds for some sound, or some movement, to break that sepulchral calm; for I felt in my heart, that if Lady Mornford should die, it would be I who had murdered her.

"Ay, you may start; I believed it then; I believe it now. How could it be otherwise? The case was worse than we had anticipated. It required, however, nothing more than skill and care; I had neither; I could not even feel sure of the knife I held in my hand, for the tingling that ran through my whole frame down to the ends of my fingers.

"Well, I tell you, there we sat; and the clock had just struck one, when the rattle—I cannot call it—the roll of a carriage was heard in the distance. It came on like thunder, clash up to the steps of the door, and, almost before it stopped, there was a ring, and then a knock, enough to wake a city.

"Not a word was spoken still: but we looked at each other, Mr. West and I, for we both knew what to expect. A steady regular step was then heard ascending the stairs; the door of the room was thrown open, and Sir James Mornford walked straight up to the bed-side of his wife. She, poor creature, had neither regarded the knock nor the ring, nor the roll of the carriage, for she scarcely seemed sensible of any thing; but the moment her husband spoke to her, she uttered such a terrible shriek, that it rang through all the house; and from that moment she never spoke rationally again.

"Mr. West and I were placed in the most embarrassing circumstances; for Sir James took no notice of us whatever. He sent for a physician, and desired I him to put to us all the necessary questions. Mr. West told a straightforward story, attributing the excited state of the patient, entirely to the shock her feelings had received on the unexpected return of her husband. But I knew better how to tell the truth; and as the intoxication of the morning wore off, a horror seized upon me, such as no language can describe. I forced my services upon the poor sufferer, night and day, to the utmost stretch of human power; but what a mockery

was all this from me! I watched the countenance of her husband, which never by any chance seem to turn towards me—but what an insult was my sympathy, when the work of destruction was all mine!

"With regard to the suddenness of his return, he told us nothing. We were left to imagine, what we afterwards learned to be the truth, that on returning from an excursion, which had been prolonged from day to day, and then from week to week, he had found waiting for him at the post-office, Mr. West's letter. He hesitated not a moment as to the most prudent mode of proceeding, but set off on the instant, and pursued his melancholy journey at the utmost speed, supported all the way by the faint hope, sometimes rising to conviction, that, although his wife might plan, and talk about her plans, even to Mr. West, she would not have the resolution to carry them into effect, without some one to support her; and with this hope at its height, he had laid his hand upon the muffled knocker, which told its own story.

"Finding our attendance rather an annoyance than otherwise to Sir James, Mr. West and I both agreed to withdraw, requesting to be sent for when needed. On the night of Lady Mornford's death, Mr. West was requested to attend, but no message came to me until the morning, when I received a formal announcement, that my services would not be required again, for that all was over.

"I had believed for some days that she would die, and yet the shock seemed to come unexpectedly at last, for I had not seen her. I had not pressed her hand, merrily though it might have been, to my lips—to my heart. I had not breathed beside her one prayer, and she had been incapable of praying for herself. How did I long to visit the still chamber, to gaze upon the lifeless countenance—to kneel beside the silent bier. This too, was denied me, and justly—for was I not her murderer?"

"That Mr. West would scrupulously keep my secret. I seldom entertained any lasting doubt."

"Perhaps you were altogether mistaken," said Eleanor. "You confess you were not exactly aware of all that passed. Is it not equally probable that this horrible idea should have been entirely misapprehension?"

"Convince me of this, Eleanor, and you may yet save me; but no, it is impossible. As a proof that Mr. West was acquainted with the whole, he took that opportunity of dissolving our partnership, and placing his son in my position."

"This had been agreed upon, when you first joined him. It therefore proved nothing."

"Do you mean to say, Eleanor," exclaimed the wretched man, who had now talked himself into the full possession of his senses, "that there is the least chance of my not being guilty of Lady Mornford's death."

"I do."

He grasped her arm with a violence which seemed as if by that hold, he was clinging to his last earthly hope, while he added, "This one idea has been my daily and hourly torment for the last five years. In the dead of the night, the figure of that gay thoughtless creature has stood beside me; and when the storm has howled, I have heard the horrible shriek with which she welcomed back her husband, as loud as the thunder, and as distinctly as on that awful night.

"I thought at first that every one must know it—that Sir James was acquainted with the whole—and that I should be arraigned before a public court, and tried for my life. Every step I heard behind me in the dark, sounded like the tread of an officer of justice; and every letter I opened seemed to threaten a criminal accusation. In the agony of my soul, I had recourse to prayer. I even opened my bible, that forsaken book, but here every page condemned me, and I found it easier, for the time, to drown my conscience, than to face the phantoms with which my past and future life were haunted.

"It was in one of my broken-hearted moments, when I felt myself humbled to the dust, that I accidentally met Sir James Mornford. He saw me in the distance, and drew his hat over his eyes. Finding it impossible otherwise to avoid me, he stopped to attend to something by the way, and then turned his back to the path I had to tread. I think a sudden madness must have seized me, for such was my pity for his forlorn situation, that I forgot every thing else, and before I was aware of the act, I had addressed him by his name, while holding out my hand towards him.

"Sir" said he, with a tone of enquiry, and a look of blank astonishment, as if we had never met before. I understood his