

# THE FORT OF ST. JOHN'S.\*

A TALE OF THE NEW WORLD.

BY H. V. C.

## CHAPTER XIII.

ON the evening of that eventful day, which witnessed Miss de Courcy's perilous adventure, she sat at an open window, looking thoughtfully on the restless stream, which had so nearly borne her to destruction. Her recent alarm might still be traced in her pale cheek and languid eye, and in the perfect repose, which lent a new charm to her expressive features. Her fair brow rested on one slender hand, the other lay caressingly on the head of Hero, who sat erect beside her, as if conscious that his late intrepid conduct entitled him to peculiar privileges.

Madame la Tour was seated at a short distance from the window, and evidently suffering from that extreme lassitude which follows strong excitement. The silence, which neither seemed inclined to interrupt, was at length abruptly broken, by an exclamation from Miss de Courcy, of "Father Gilbert!" uttered in an accent so quick and startling, that Madame la Tour sprang involuntarily from her musing posture, and even the dog leaped on his feet, and looked enquiringly in his mistress's face.

"Poor Hero!" said Lucie, patting her dumb favorite, and smiling at the excitement she had so unwarily produced.

"Father Gilbert!" repeated Madame la Tour, "and is he coming hither again?"

"No, I saw him but an instant," said Lucie, and he has now disappeared behind the buttress yonder. But methinks that even you, dear aunt," she added with some hesitation, "begin to feel the strange influence of this mysterious priest."

"Your imagination has greatly magnified the mystery, Lucie," she replied; "and it is now time for me to attempt some explanation, which I could not have done till very recently, when some facts came to my knowledge, which have surprised and greatly agitated me. But I must first beg you to close the window; the air grows cool, and I have grown very sensitive of late."

Lucie obeyed in silence; and taking a low seat close to her aunt, listened with deep interest to her, as she thus proceeded:

"The explanation to which I referred, Lucie, leads me back to the period of your mother's marriage; and I must briefly relate the unhappy circumstances, which so soon deprived you of her protecting love. You will no longer be surprised that I have repressed your natural curiosity on this subject; and I would still spare you the painful feelings it must excite, had not a recent disclosure rendered the relation of facts unavoidable."

"The subject agitates you, dear aunt," said Lucie, remarking her changing complexion with anxiety; "you are indeed too ill this evening to make any exertion, and I would rather wait till another day, when you may be better able to bear it."

"No, I am better now," she replied, "and will not keep you in suspense." She then resumed:

"Your mother, Lucie, had the innocence and purity of angel. She was gay, beautiful and accomplished—the idol of her friends, the admiration of all who saw her. That picture which you so often gaze on with delight, is but a faint resemblance of what she was. The lineaments are indeed true to life, but no artist could catch the ever varying expression, or embody the unrivalled grace which threw a charm around her, more captivating even than her faultless beauty. She was just four years older than myself; but affection united us in close companionship, and the difference of age was scarcely recognized. We lived much in retirement; my father was devoted to literary pursuits, and himself directed our education; and your aunt Rouville, who was many years our senior, affectionately supplied the place of our mother, who died a few days after my birth.

"Your mother, Lucie, was scarcely sixteen, when she first saw Monsieur de Courcy. Chance introduced him to our acquaintance, as he was travelling through the province where we then resided; her loveliness attracted his admiration, and he soon avowed a deeper and more impassioned sentiment. Till then she had not dreamed of love; it was reserved for him to awaken its first emotions in a heart susceptible of the most