

UNCLE MAX.

CHAPTER XLIII.—Continued.

"If he has anything against me, and his manner tells me that he has, why does he not treat me with frankness?" I thought. "He calls himself my friend, and yet he refuses to trust in me. He breaks my heart with his changed looks and coldness, and yet he gives me no reason for his injustice. I would not treat my enemy so, and yet call the time I feel he loves me. And as I paced under the dark hanging shrub, I felt there was nothing morbid or untrue in those lines, that 'to be with you that we love does work like madness on the brain,' and that I was growing angry with Mr. Hamilton."

I had just reached a dark angle where the path dips a little, when I was startled by hearing voices close to me. There was a seat screened by some laurel-bushes that went by the name of "Conspiracy Corner," dating back from the time when Gladys and Eric were children and had hidden some fireworks among the bushes. It was there that Claude Hamilton had proposed to Lady Betty, when Gladys had found them, and the two young creatures had appealed to her to help them. The seat was so hidden and secluded by shrubs that you could pass without seeing its occupants, unless a little bit of fluttering crumple or the gleam of some gold chain or locket caught one's eye. I remembered once being very much startled when Lady Betty popped out suddenly on me as I passed.

I was just re-tracing my steps, with a sense of annoyance at finding my privacy invaded, when a sentence in Leah's voice attracted my attention:

"I tell you he was driving with them this afternoon. I heard Miss Garston tell the master so. It is no good you fretting and worrying yourself, Miss Etta, to prevent those two coming together. I've always warned you that the vicar cares more for his little finger than he does for all your fine airs and graces."

I stood as though rooted to the spot, incapable of moving a step. "You are a cruel, false woman!" returned another voice, which I recognized as Miss Darrell's, though it was broken with angry sobs. "You say that to me and make me wretched because you are in a bad temper. You are an ungrateful creature, Leah, after all my kindness; and it was you yourself who told me that he was getting tired of Gladys's whims and vagaries."

"I can't remember what I told you," replied the woman, sullenly. "There are no fools like old ones, they say, and you need not believe everything as though it is gospel truth. There is not a man in the world worth all this worry. Why don't you give it up, Miss Etta? Do you think Mr. Cunliffe will ever give you a thought? I would be too proud, if I were a lady, to fling myself under a man's feet. Do you think he would like your crooked ways about Mr. Eric?"

"Hush, Leah! for pity's sake hush! What makes you so cruel to me to-night?" "Well, now, look here, Miss Etta; I am not going to be hushed up when I choose to speak; and who is to hear us, I should like to know? Only it is your guilty conscience that is always starting up, for I am getting sick of the whole business. You are playing fast and loose with me about that money. Are you going to give it me or not?"

I drew a step nearer. Leah had mentioned Eric's name. Was it not my duty, my bounden duty, for Gladys's sake, for all their sakes, to hear what this woman had to say? Would it be dishonorable to listen when so much was at stake? Already I had been startled by a revelation that turned me cold with horror. Miss Darrell was Gladys's rival, her deadly, secret rival, and not one of us, not even Max, guessed at this unhealthy and morbid passion. That such a woman should love my pure-minded, honorable Max! I recoiled at the mere idea.

"You are so impatient, Leah," returned the other, reproachfully. "You know it is not easy for me to get the money. Giles was complaining the other day that so much was spent in the housekeeping; he never thought me extravagant before, but he seemed to say that my personal expenses were rather lavish. 'You have twice as many gowns as Gladys,' he said; 'and, though I do not grudge you things, I think you ought to keep within your allowance.'"

"I can't help all that, Miss Etta," and I could tell by the voice that the woman meant to be in earnest. "A promise is a promise, and must be kept, and poor Bob must not suffer from your procrastinating ways. You are far too slippery and shifty, Miss Etta; but I tell you that money I must and will have before this week is over, if I have to go to master myself about it."

"You had better go to him, then," with rising temper. "I don't quite know what Giles will say about retaining you in his service when he knows you have a brother at Millbank. A servant with a convict-brother is not considered generally desirable in a house. But Leah broke in upon this sneering speech in sudden fury: even in my disgust at this scene I could not but marvel at Miss Darrell's recklessness in rousing the evil spirit in this woman."

"You talk of my poor Bob being in Millbank, who ought to be there yourself!" she cried, in a voice hoarse and low with passion. "Are you out of your wits, Miss Etta, to taunt me with poor Bob's troubles? What is to prevent me from going to master now and saying to him—"

"Oh, hush, Leah! please forgive me; but you made me so angry."

"From saying to him," persisted Leah, remorselessly. "You are all of you wrong about Mr. Eric. You have hunted the poor boy out of the house, and driven him crazy among you; and if he has crowned himself, as folk believe, his death lies at Miss Etta's door. It was she who stole the check. I saw her take it with my own eyes, only she begged me on her knees not to betray her; and just then Mr. Eric came in with his letter, and the devil entered into me to cast the suspicion on him."

"Leah, in a voice of deadly terror, 'for God's sake be silent! if any one should hear us! There was a crackling just now in the bushes. Leah, you were good to my mother: can you be so cruel to me?'"

"It is no use your whining to me, Miss Etta," returned the same hard, dogged voice. "Bob must have that money! When I promised to keep your diabolical secret, when I stood by and helped you ruin that poor boy, and Bob cashed your check, I named my price. I wanted to keep Bob out of mischief, but his bad companions were too much for him. Now are you going to get that money for me or not?"

"I dare not ask Giles for more," replied Miss Darrell, and I could hear she was crying. "I gave you half the housekeeping money last week and the week before. If Giles looks at my accounts I am undone."

"And there was that check that you were to send Miss Gladys when she was at Bourne-mouth, and for which she sent that pretty message of thanks," interposed Leah, with a sneer. "Shall I tell master where that has gone, Miss Etta? And you speak of my poor Bob because he is at Millbank!"

"Leah, you are killing me," renewed Miss

Darrell. "I might as well die as go on living like this. You are always threatening to turn against me, and I give you money when ever you ask me. You shall have my gold bracelet with the emerald star. It was my mother's and it will fetch a good deal. I cannot get more from Giles now. He is not like himself just now, and I dare not make him angry."

"Oh, you have tried your hand there, Miss Etta. No, I am not asking you, so you need not tell me any lies. I know all about it when you sent me to Hyde Park Gate to spy on my young lady. I have worked willingly for you there. I've hated Miss Garston ever since I set eyes on her. She is a sharp one, I tell you that, Miss Etta. She means to bring these two together, and she will do it in spite of you."

"Leah, I was dead," moaned Miss Darrell. "But I did not dare to linger another moment. My heart was beating so long that I feared it would betray me. The faint stir of the bushes turned me sick, for I thought they might be moving from their seat. Not for worlds would I have confronted them alone in that dark asphalt walk. My fears were absurd, but I felt as though Leah were capable of strangling me. Granted that she is a terror as unreasonable and childish; I knew I could not breathe freely until I was within reach of Mr. Hamilton. As I crept down the path the sensation of a nightmare haunted me. I felt as though my feet were weighed with lead. My face was cold and damp, and I drew my breath painfully. I almost felt as though I must hide myself in the shrubbery until the faintness passed off; but I shook off my weakness as I remembered that I might be shut out of the house if I allowed them to go in first. As I emerged from the dark overhanging trees I grew calmer and walked on more quickly. I dared not cross the open lawn, for fear I might be seen, but took the most secluded route through the oak avenue. If they should perceive me walking down the terrace towards the conservatory they would only think that I had just left the house. I could see no signs of them, however, and gained the open door safely."

Even in my state of terror I had made my plan, and without giving myself a moment to recover my self-possession I knocked at the study door, and, at Mr. Hamilton's rather impatient "Come in," entered it with the same sort of feeling that one would enter an ark of refuge.

He laid down his pen in some surprise when he saw me, and then rose quickly from his seat. "You are ill; you have come to tell me so," in an anxious voice. "Don't try to speak this moment: sit down—Miss Garston?" but I caught his arm nervously as he seemed about to leave me. "Don't go away: I must speak to you. I am not ill: only I have had a turn. You may give me some water; for there was a bottle and glass on the table. He obeyed me at once, and watched me as I tried to take it; but my hand trembled too much: the next moment he had put it to my lips, and had wiped the moisture gently from my forehead."

"It is only faintness; it will pass off directly," he said, quietly. "I will not leave you," but I have some salt volatile in that cupboard, and I think you will be the better for it. And he mixed me some, and stood by me without speaking until the color came back to my face. "You are better now, Ursula—I mean," biting his lip—"well, never mind. Do you feel a little less shaky?"

"Yes, thank you. I did not mean to be so foolish, but it was dark, and I got frightened and nervous; and oh, Mr. Hamilton, I must not lose time, or they will be coming in."

"Who will be coming in?" he asked, rather bewildered at this. "There is no one out, is there?" "Yes, Miss Darrell and Leah. I heard them talking in 'Conspiracy Corner.' You know that seat in the asphalt walk?"

"Well," regarding me with an astonished air. "Mr. Hamilton, I am better now. I am not frightened any longer now as with you. Will you please call Leah when she comes in from the garden? I want to speak to her in your presence. I have a most serious charge to make against her and against your cousin Miss Darrell. It relates," and here I felt my lips getting white again,—"it relates to your brother Eric."

He started, and an expression of pain crossed his face, a sudden look of fear, as though he dreaded what I might have to tell him; but the next moment he was thinking only of me.

"You shall speak to Leah to-morrow," he said, gently. "It is late now, nearly ten o'clock, and you are ill, and had better go to bed and rest yourself. I can wait until to-morrow, taking my cold hand."

But I would not be silenced; I implored him earnestly to do this for me, to summon Leah into the study, but not to let Miss Darrell know.

"I suppose you think you could not sleep until you had relieved your mind," he said, looking at me attentively. "Well, they are coming in now. Leah is fastening the door. Finish that salt volatile while I fetch her."

I took it at a draught. But Mr. Hamilton's kindness had been my best restorative: I was no longer faint or miserable; he had dried and comforted me.

I heard Leah's voice approaching the study door with perfect calmness.

"Miss Etta has gone up to bed, sir," heard her say; "she has a headache; that is what makes her eyes so weak."

"I should have said myself that she was crying," returned Mr. Hamilton, dryly. "Come in here a moment, Leah: I want to speak to you."

She did not see me until the door was closed behind her, and then I saw her glance at me uneasily. Mr. Hamilton had evidently not prepared her for my presence in the study.

"Did you or Miss Garston wish to speak to me, sir?" she asked, with a veiled insolence of manner that she had shown to me lately; but I could see that no suspicion of the truth had dawned on her.

"It is I who wish to speak to you, Leah, I returned, severely; and I have asked your master to send for you that I might speak in his presence. Mr. Hamilton, I am going to repeat the conversation that I have just overheard between Leah and her mistress when they were in the study, in the asphalt walk; you shall hear it from my lips word for word."

I never saw a countenance change as Leah's did that moment: her ordinary sallow complexion became a sort of dead-white; for insolence, her manner grew arrogant, almost sullen; she looked deprived of all power of speech; only directly I began she caught hold of my gown with both hands, as though to implore me to stop; but Mr. Hamilton shook off her touch angrily, and asked her if it looked as though she were an honest woman to be so afraid of her own words. And then the sullen look came back to her face and never left it again.

I repeated every word. I do not believe I omitted a sentence, except that part that referred to Uncle Max. I could see Leah shrink and collapse as I mentioned her convict-brother, and such a gleam of fierce concentrated hatred shot from beneath her

drooping lids that Mr. Hamilton instinctively moved to my side, but a low groan escaped him when I repeated Leah's words about the check. "Good heavens! do you mean that Eric never took it?" he exclaimed, in a horror-stricken tone; but the woman merely raised her eyes and looked at him, and he was silent again until I had finished.

There was a moment's ominous silence after that: perhaps Mr. Hamilton was praying for self-control; he had grown frightfully pale, and yet he was a man who rarely changed color: the veins on his forehead were swollen, and when he spoke his voice was hoarse with repressed passion.

"What have you to say for yourself, Leah? Do you know I could indict you for conspiracy and conspiracy with theft?"

"I know that very well," returned the woman, trying to behave it out; but she could not meet his indignant look. "But it is your own flesh and blood that is in fault here. Miss Etta is more to blame than I."

Mr. Hamilton crossed the room and looked the door, putting the key coolly in his pocket; then he made me sit down, for I had been standing all this time, and, as though to enforce obedience, he kept his hand on my arm. I could see Leah looking about her as though she were caught in a trap: her light-colored eyes had a sinister-looking look of fear in them.

"Now, Leah," observed her master, in a terrible voice, "if you are to expect any mercy at my hand you will make a clean breast; but first you will answer my question: Has Miss Garston repeated the conversation between you and Miss Etta correctly?"

"Yes, I believe so," very sullenly.

"You saw Miss Etta take the check with your own eyes the night before Mr. Eric left home?"

"Yes." Then, as though these questions tortured her, she said, doggedly,—"Look here, sir; I am caught in a trap, and there is no getting out of it. I have lost my place and my character, thanks to Miss Garston,"—another vindictive look at me.

"If you will promise like a gentleman not to take advantage of my evidence, I will tell you all about it."

"I will make no promises," he returned, in the same stern voice; "but if you do not speak I will send for the police at once, and have you up before a magistrate. You have conspired at theft: that will be sufficient to criminate you."

"I know all about that," was the unflinching answer; "and I know for the old mistress's sake you will be glad to hush it all up: it would not be pleasant to bring your own cousin before a magistrate, especially after promising the old mistress on her death-bed to be good to Miss Etta as though she were your own sister."

I saw the shadow of some sorrowful recollection cross his face as he said this. I had heard from Max himself that he had loved his aunt and that though her daughter had wrought such evil in his life, he would still seek to shield her. Leah knew this too, and took advantage of her knowledge in her crafty manner.

"It would be best to tell you all, for Mr. Eric's sake. I know Miss Etta will be safe with you. She has done a deal of mischief since she has been under your roof. Some how crooked ways come natural to her: the old mistress knew that, for she once said to me towards the last, 'Leah, I am afraid my poor child has got some twist or warp in her nature; but I hope my nephew will never find out her want of straightforwardness.' And she begged me, with tears in her eyes, to watch over her and try to influence her, although I was only a servant; and for a little while I tried, only the devil tempted me, for the sake of poor Bob."

"Bob is the name of your brother who is at Millbank?" asked Mr. Hamilton, in the same hard voice.

"Yes, sir; he got into a bit of trouble through mixing with bad companions. But there, with a sudden fierce light in her eyes that reminded me of a tigress protecting her young,—"I am not going to talk of Bob: Leah will get into trouble sometimes. If Mr. Eric had not been so interfering at that time, ordering Bob off the premises whenever he caught sight of him, and calling him a good-for-nothing loafer and all sorts of hard names, why, he gave Bob a black eye one day when he was doing nothing but shying stones at the birds in the kitchen-garden, if it had not been for Eric's treatment of Bob I might have acted better by him."

"Will you keep to the subject, Leah?" observed her master, in a warning voice. "I wish to hear how that check was taken from my study that night."

"Well, sir, if you must know," returned Leah, reluctantly, "Miss Etta was in a bit of a worry about money just then: she had got the accounts wrong somehow, and there was a heavy butcher's bill to be paid. She had let it run on too long, and all the time I believed it was settled every week: it was partly your fault, because you so seldom looked at the accounts, and was always trusting her with large sums of money. Miss Etta did not mean to be dishonest, she was extravagant, and sometimes her dressmaker refused to wait for the money, and sometimes her milliner threatened to din her; but she would quiet them a bit with a five- or ten-pound note fished from the housekeeping, always meaning, as she said, to pay it back when she drew her quarterly allowance."

"I used to know of these doings of hers, for often and often she has sent me to pacify them with promises. I told her sometimes that she would do it one too often, but she always said it was for the last time."

"She got afraid to tell me at last, but I knew all about the butcher's bill, for Mr. Dryden had been up to the house asking to see you, as he wanted his account settled. You were out when he called, but I never saw Miss Etta in such a fright: she had a fit of hysterics in her own room after he had left the house, and I had trouble enough to pacify her. She said if you found out that Dryden's account had not been settled for three months that you would never trust her again; that she was afraid Mr. Eric suspected her, and that she did not feel safe with him; and a great deal more that I cannot remember."

"It ended with her making up her mind to pawn most of her jewelry, and we arranged that Bob should manage the business. He was up at the cottage for a night or two, though no one was aware of that fact, for he kept close, for fear Mr. Eric should spy upon him."

"He slept at the cottage the very night the check was stolen from the study," said Leah, paused here. Mr. Hamilton lifted his head from his hands and bade her impatiently go on with the history of that night.

CHAPTER XLIV.

LEAH'S CONFESSION.

"You know what happened that day, sir," observed Leah, hesitating a moment, for even her hard nature felt some compunction at the look of suffering on her master's face. She had eaten his bread for years, and had deceived and duped him; but she must have felt remorse stirring in her as she saw him drop his head on his clasped hands again, as though he were compelling himself to listen without interruption.

"You had been talking to Mr. Eric a long time in the study, Miss Etta told me; he had been going on like mad about Mr. Edgar Brown, and having to go to Mr. Armstrong's office; but you had been very firm, and had refused to hear any more, and he had flung off to his own room in one of his passions. Miss Gladys had followed him, and I heard him telling her that he had forgotten himself out of the study, and that he was in difficulties and must have money for Mr. Edgar."

"You heard this by listening at Mr. Eric's door, for Miss Gladys saw you," I observed, not willing to let this pass.

"What has that got to do with it?" she returned, rudely. "I am speaking to the master, not you!" but she grew a shade paler as I spoke. "You were up late that night, sir; I was waiting to speak to Miss Etta, and encountered you in the passage. I went back to my own room for a little while, and then I knocked at her door; but there was no answer. I could see the room was dark, but I could hardly believe she was asleep: I went to the bed and called Miss Etta, but I very soon found she was not there: her gown was on the couch and her dressing-gown hanging from its place."

"I had a notion that I might as well follow her, for somehow I had guessed that she had gone to the study; but I was certainly not prepared to see Mr. Eric stooping over your desk. He had a letter in his hand, and had just put down his chamber candlestick. All at once it flashed upon my mind that Miss Etta had told me that you had received a large check that night, and that you were going up to London the next day to cash it, and she hoped Dryden would not call again before you went. She said it quite casually, and I am sure that she had not thought of helping herself. Then the thought must have come to her all of a sudden."

"I remembered the check, and for an instant I suspected Mr. Eric. But as I was watching him I saw the curtain of one of the windows move, and I had a glimpse of yellow embroidery that certainly belonged to Miss Etta's dressing-gown. In a moment I grasped the truth: she had taken the check to settle Dryden's bill. But I must make myself certain of the fact: so I asked Mr. Eric, rather roughly, what he was doing, and he retorted by bidding me mind my own business."

"He had laid his letter on the desk, but when he had gone I walked up straight to the window, and nearly frightened Miss Etta into a fit by asking her what she had done with the check. She was grovelling on her knees before me in a moment, calling me her dear Leah and imploring me to shield her. I was very fierce with her at first, and was for her putting it back again, until she told me, trembling all over, that she had enticed it. She had copied your writing, and only an eye could have told the difference."

"It is too late, Leah," she kept saying; "we cannot hide it from Giles now, and must have the money, and you must help me to get it. And then she whispered that I should have some of it for Bob."

"It is a nasty bit of business, Miss Etta," I replied, for I did not want to spy her out; "it is forgery, that is what they would call it in a court of law; but she would not let me finish, but flung herself upon me with a suppressed scream, and I could not shake her off. She kept saying that she would destroy herself if I would not help her: so I turned it over in my mind. I wanted money for Bob, and—well, sir, the devil had a deal to do with that night's business. I had settled it all before an hour was over. Bob would go up to London with the check, and cash it at the bank: he was tall and fair, and a son of Mr. Eric's old clothes would make him quite the gentleman, and no one would notice the scar; when he was safely off and you missed the check there would be little trouble in casting the blame on Mr. Eric. I had taken care to place the letter in the desk, and I had plenty of circumstantial evidence to offer."

"Well, you know the rest, sir,—how you called Miss Etta into your study, and how she begged you to send for me. I had my 'very ready'—my fear of thieves, and how I saw Mr. Eric standing with his hand in your desk, of course he could not not find it: no one believed the poor young gentleman's ravings, especially after his talk with Miss Gladys. We took care that the telegram should not be sent too soon. Bob was on his way back by then, and before evening Dryden had his money, and Bob was safe in Clerkenwell. What is the good of my repeating it all? I shielded Miss Etta at Mr. Eric's expense; and, though I was sorry enough to drive him away from his home, we had to look to our own safety, and Miss Etta was nearly out of her mind with remorse and terror. But here Mr. Hamilton's voice interrupted her harshly."

"Wait a moment, woman: have you ever since that day heard anything of that unfortunate boy?"

"To my surprise Leah hesitated. 'Miss Etta believes that he is dead, sir; but I could not help differing from her, though I never told her the reason; but I have fancied more than once,—indeed I am speaking the truth now, sir,' as he darted a meaning look at her, 'I have no motive to do otherwise. I have fancied that I have seen some one very like Mr. Eric lurking about the road on a dark night. Once I was nearly sure it was Mr. Eric, though he wore a workman's dress as a disguise. He was looking at the windows; the blind was up in the study, and Miss Gladys was there with Mr. Cunliffe; he had made a dash about something. It was a warm night, and rather wet, and the window was open. I was just about to go in when I caught sight of him, and nearly called out; but he turned away quickly, and hid himself in the shrubbery, and though I went out to look for him I was too late, for I could see him walking down the road.'"

"You are sure it was Mr. Eric," Oh, the look of intense relief on Mr. Hamilton's face! He must have believed him dead all this time. "I am nearly sure, sir. I saw him again in town. I was passing the Albert Memorial when I looked up at one of the fine houses opposite, and saw a young workman on the balcony with a painter's brush in his hand: the sun was shining full on his face. I saw him plainly then."

"Mr. Hamilton started from his seat. 'If this be true—I my father's son gaining his bread as a house-painter?'"

"It is true," I whispered; "for I saw him myself, and told Gladys."

"You saw him—I you!" with an air of utter incredulity.

"Yes; and I tried to speak to him. He was so like the picture in Gladys's room, I thought it must be Eric. But he would not hear me, and in a moment he was gone. The men called him Jack Poynter, and said he was a gentleman, but no one knew where he lived. Oh, I have tried so hard to find him for you, but he will not be found."

"And you did not tell me of this?" very reproachfully.

"Gladys would not let me tell you," I turned. "We could not be sure, and—"

But he put up his hand to stop me. "That will do," in a tone of suppressed grief that went to my heart. "I will not wrong you if I can help it; no doubt you did it for the best; you did not willingly deceive me."

"Never! I have never deceived you, Mr. Hamilton."

"Not intentionally. I will do you justice even now; but oh,—and here he clinched

his right hand, and I saw the veins on it stand out like whipcord,—how he had been betrayed! Those I have trusted have brought trouble and confusion in my household; and, good God, they are women, and I cannot curse them!"

I saw Leah quail beneath this burst of most righteous indignation. The blinding tears rushed to my eyes, and I heard him, in spite of his sternness, he had been so simple and so unassuming. I hated people like that, and yet, the woman he loved had played him false, and the pitiful cry that he had uttered under his roof had hatched this conspiracy against his peace."

"You can leave me now," he continued, harshly, turning to Leah. "I will not trust myself to say more to you. If you receive mercy and not justice at my hands, I will consider your confederate a more guilty than you. I cannot spare the one without letting the other go unpunished. To-morrow morning, before the household is up, you and everything belonging to you shall leave this house. If you ever set foot in Heathfield again it will be at your own peril. Go up to your own room now and pack your boxes. I shall take the precaution of turning the key in your door to prevent your holding communication with any member of my household."

"I give you my word, sir," began Leah, turning visibly pale at the idea of finding herself a prisoner.

"Your word?" was the disdainful reply; and then he pointed to the door. "Go at once!" But she still lingered. There was a spark of good even in this woman. She was unwilling to quit her presence without knowing what was to become of her mistress. "You will not be hard on Miss Etta, sir? She has done wrong, but she is a poor creature, and—"

But Mr. Hamilton walked to the door and threw it open with a gesture that compelled obedience.

The next moment, however, he recoiled with a low exclamation of horror; for there, drawn up against the wall, in a strange halting attitude, as though petrified with terror, was his miserable cousin.

"I heard Leah's shocked 'Miss Etta! How could you be so mad?' And then Mr. Hamilton put out his hand, as though to forbid approach; but with a cry of despair Miss Darrell seemed to sink to the ground, and held him convulsively round the knees, so that he could not free himself.

"Get up, Etta," he said, indignantly. "It is not to me you have to kneel; for he thought her attitude one of supplication. But I knew better. She had not strength to stand or support herself, and I passed behind him quickly and went to her help."

"You cannot speak to him like that, Miss Darrell. He will not hear you." But, though Leah assisted me, we had some difficulty in inducing her to relax her frantic grip. And when we placed her in a chair she seemed as though she would sink again on the ground. She was trembling all over, her teeth chattering; the muscles of her face worked convulsively.

"Giles, Giles," she screamed, as he seemed about to leave her, "you may kill me if you like, but you shall not look at me like this. But, without vouchsafing her any answer, he turned to me.

"Will you wait with my cousin a moment? I will be back directly." I nodded assent. I knew he wished to see Leah safely in her room, but a closed door Miss Darrell clutched my arm. She seemed really beside herself.

"Where has he gone? Will he fetch the police, Miss Garston? Will they put me in prison for it?"

"No," I returned, sternly. "You know you are safe with him. He will not hurt a hair of your head, because you are a woman, and his own flesh and blood."

"But he will banish me from his house!" she moaned. "He will never forgive me or let me see his face again. He will tell—oh, I cannot bear it!"—her words strangled by a fierce scream. "I cannot and will not bear it."

I put my hand on her shoulder. "You must control yourself," I said, coldly. "Would you wish Mr. Hamilton to treat you as a mad woman? Listen to me, Miss Darrell. One part of your secret is safe with me. Try and restrain yourself, and I will promise you that it shall never pass my lips."

Even in her hysterical excitement she understood me, and a more human expression came into her hard, glaring eyes. "Say it again; promise me," she moaned. "I hate you, but I know you are to be trusted."

"If you behave yourself and try to control your feelings a little," I returned, slowly. "I will say nothing about Uncle Max." But at the name she covered her face with her hands and roared herself in agony. In spite of all her sobs I pitied her then.

At that moment Mr. Hamilton returned; but before he could speak I said, quickly,—"Your cousin is not in a condition to listen to you to-night, and it is very late; I am going to take her up to her room and do what I can to help her. Will you allow us to go?"

He looked at her and then at me. His face was hard and sombre; there was no relenting there. "Perhaps it will be better," he returned, slowly. "Yes, you may go, but do not stay long with her. I may want to speak to you to-morrow."

"Not to-night," I remonstrated; for I could see he was oblivious of the time, and it was near midnight. "To-morrow morning, as early as you like; but I cannot come down again."

"Oh, I see," the meaning of my words dawning upon him. "To-morrow morning, then. Take her away now." And, without another glance, he walked away to his study table.

"Come, Miss Darrell," I whispered, touching her; and she rose reluctantly. "Giles,—let me say one word to him," said she, trying to follow him feebly, but I recalled her sternly and made her follow me. I had no fear of her now. Leah, whom I dreaded, was looked safely in her room, and this poor miserable woman was harmless enough.

She broke into hysterical sobs and moans when I got her into her own room. I was afraid Gladys might hear her, and I insisted on her showing more self-control. My sharp words had their effect after a time, but it was impossible to induce her to undress or go to bed. She had flung herself across the foot and lay crouched up in a heap, with all the delicate embroidery of her French dressing-gown crushed under her. When she was quiet I put pillows under her head and covered her up warmly, and then sat down to watch her.

I was about to leave the room once to fetch something I wanted, when she suddenly struggled into a sitting posture, and begged me, in a voice of horror, not to leave her.

"Leah will murder me if you do!" she cried. "She has frightened me often,—she says such things,—oh, you do not know! I should never have been so bad; but for Leah!"