

The old man descended stiffly to greet the heir.

"Welcome to the Castle, captain," said he, sourly. "It's well you come at last, your but just in time to see her alive."

The stranger removed his hat and disclosed a thin, wary face, just now wreathed in courtly smiles.

"I have not the honor to be Captain Brand," he said. "I am merely his messenger."

"What? Heh? Captain Brand didn't come after all?" cried Mr. Purcell, recoiling from the dark, smiling face.

"Yes, he came; he will remain in Regis to-night, and when less fatigued will pay his devoirs to Mrs. Brand. He made me the bearer of a note to Miss Walsingham. Can I see her?"

The steward turned; the man looked up, his black, flashing eyes rested upon her. She stood not three feet away, looking down upon him, her white, electric face startling him in the chill radiance of the summer moon, her long garments sweeping in regal folds about her magnificent person, her blue-black hair curving in rich waves under the lace mantilla she had thrown over her head -- a woman to mark, to remember.

She stretched forth a long, white hand, with a vehement gesture.

"Give it to me," she said. "I am Miss Walsingham."

The man forgot his courtly smile and his wary watchfulness; his artificial polish cracked in all directions and exposed a terribly startled man. He gazed at Margaret Walsingham with arrested eye, and his hands strayed unconsciously to his wrists as if they would find spectral shackles there.

The envelope he held dropped to his feet, he stooped with a muttered oath, and recovering it, reached it to her outstretched hand.

She did not retire to read the missive, the moonlight saved her the necessity, and the man stood awaiting an answer, as she tore the note from its crested envelope, and in a moment had mastered its contents.

A blaze of indignation spread over her brow and cheek.

"Heartless trifler!" ejaculated she, bitterly, and read these words aloud to the steward:

"St Udo Brand presents his compliments to Miss Walsingham, and his thanks for her tearful invitations to join her in the melancholy duties of sick-nurse. Feeling that his vocation does not lie in soothing the nervous sufferings of the aged, he begs Miss Walsingham's disinterested heart to hold him excused; and confidently commends

his dear grandmother to the delicate care of her pet and *protegee* until such time as she can assure him that his presence will not bring on another attack of the vapors upon Madam Brand. Hoping that you will both enjoy a good night's rest, and that you may feel justified in receiving me some time tomorrow, I remain yours,

"ST. UDO BRAND."

"Captain Brand must come instantly," cried Margaret, and turned sharply upon the quailing ambassador. "Do you hear sir?"

She paused with a lady's instinct -- a lady's aversion to address an unknown man.

"Roland Mortlake, Miss Walsingham," murmured the stranger coming out of his fog.

"Go tell Captain Brand that Mrs. Brand is dying -- that she has but a few minutes to live, and that he must come instantly if he would hear her last words. You will remember, Mr. Mortlake? And say the will must be changed, or Captain Brand will be ruined. Tell him that. Now go, for Heaven's sake!"

The stranger turned his wrapt scrutiny of herself into a keen and crafty attention of her words. He repeated them after her, with a significant pause after each clause, as if he longed to wrest the uttermost moiety of a meaning from her scant expressions.

"Symonds shall accompany you with the carriage, and bring Captain Brand," said Margaret. "Send him, Purcell."

The steward trotted away to dispatch the coachman, and the pair were left with each other.

The man on the lowest step and the woman on the highest gazed fixedly in each other's faces. His fierce, envious, and inquisitive; hers cold, distrustful, and unflinching.

In that silent interview their souls stood forth, each revealing to the other, and doomed to future recognition under the most perfect masking which rascality could assume to compass its end, or purify devise to hide from peril.

Then Roland Mortlake bowed to the earth, and, striding back to his horse and his companion, uttered a terrible execration.

The other tossed his cigar over the low stone wall into a tulip bed, and, springing to his horse, followed his angry comrade as he galloped away.

"Gardez-tu, my friend," cried he, breezily. "You English take great news sourly, *ma foi*! you curse Mademoiselle Fortune herself when she smiles upon you the blandest."