

THE UNSEEN BRIDEGROOM.

CHAPTER I

THE WALRAVEN BALL.

A DARK November afternoon—wet, and windy, and wild. The New York streets were at their worst—sloppy, slippery, and sodden; the sky lowering over those murky streets one uniform pall of inky gloom. A bad, desolate, blood-chilling November-afternoon.

And yet Mrs. Walraven's ball was to come off to-night, and it was rather hard upon Mrs. Walraven that the elements should make a dead set at her after this fashion.

The ball was to be one of the most brilliant affairs of the season, and all Fifth Avenue was to be there in its glory.

Fifth Avenue was above caring for anything so commonplace as the weather, of course; but still it would have been pleasanter, and only a handsome thing in the clerk of the weather, considering Mrs. Walraven had not given a ball for twenty years before, to have burnished up the sun, and brushed away the clouds, and shut up that icy army of winter winds, and turned out as neat an article of weather as it is possible in the nature of November to turn out.

Of course, Mrs. Walraven dwelt on New York's stateliest avenue, in a big brown-stone palace that was like a palace in an Eastern story, with its velvet carpets, its arabesques, its filigree work, its chairs, and tables, and sofas touched up and inlaid with gold, and cushioned in silks of gorgeous dyes.

And in all Fifth Avenue, and in all New York City, there were not half a dozen old women of sixty half so rich, half so arrogant, or half so ill-tempered as Mrs. Ferdinand Walraven.

On this bad November afternoon, while the rain and sleet lashed the lofty windows, and the shrill winds whistled around the gables, Mrs. Ferdinand Walraven's only son sat in his chamber, staring out of the window, and smoking no end of cigars.