WHEN THE FLOODS ARE OUT.

"Oh, lady," faltered the girl, "I was coming to tell you—I daren't tell them at the Larches; and the Squire was fond of you; wasn't he, lady?"

"Go on," said Ilma, grasping Zeph's wrist and speaking quite sternly in her agony and terror. "What has happened?"

"He's down there, lady—in uncle's cottage—drowned. Father found him——"

But Ilma waited for no more; she ran down the slope as fleetly as a deer. She had reached the bottom, and had turned to ask Zeph, who was a little way behind, where the cottage was, when a stalwart form—which even in that second she recognized as that of Job Heston—sprang out before her, and, before she could utter a cry or word, a thick shawl was thrown over her head, and she was lifted in a grasp against which her wildest struggles would have been vain. She did not struggle, she did not try to cry out—it would have been useless if she had. She perceived, even in that bewildering moment of horror never to be forgotten, that she was the victim of a terrible deception—that Job Heston and his daughter were but the tools of Roland Sabine.

"Don't hurt her, father," she heard Zeph say, as she was being borne rapidly along toward the weir; but its roar grew louder, so that Job's muttered reply was lost in the thunder of the angry waters. Were they going to throw her over? She almost wished they were. But no; she was carried on—still on, over the lock bridge. They were taking her to the mill—the mill that would be washed away that night! Where was Zeph now? Gone? Ah, Heaven, there was some sense of protection while in her presence! She was a woman, evil though Ilma knew her to be.

Ilma did not faint, not once did her keen wits desert her. Every faculty was sharpened. She quickly revolved the feasibility of an appeal to her captor, and dismissed it as worse than futile. In the first place, Heston was firmly convinced that Dark Darrell would perish in that night's floods, and therefore he would only laugh at her if she promised him a reward from her lover if he would save her; in the second place, she felt certain that though the roar of the weir prevented her from hearing anything else, Roland Sabine was close at hand, and possibly—nay, probably—armed; so that treachery on Job's part would be instantly frustrated.

Her cousin's object was, she thought, to imprison her in the Mill, and to try to force her into a promise to fly with him, leaving her, if she refused, to perish in the floods; and, horrible as this fate was, it was Elysium compared with that she had first conceived, and which even now was not beyond possibility.

Her hurried reasoning was cut short by Job pausing; then he commenced to ascend steps. He was going into the Mill! Then for the first time she heard steps following. On they went, still up; they had passed the first floor. Next a somewhat steep ladder was climbed, something was set down by the man who followed Job—the man was Roland, Ilma knew—and the next moment she was put down gently, the shawl removed, and she found herself in the disused corn-loft from the narrow window of which she had gazed a few days before, and Roland Sabine stood before her, the dim rays of a lantern shining upon his ghastly face.

Not less ghastly was the face on which he dared not look, while the large brown eyes sought his in a very agony of appeal. Even Job Heston, villain though he was, turned away, and seemed unwilling to gaze on the beautiful fragile creature he had brought to a dreadful death.

Roland first broke the terrible silence. He advanced a step towards his victim.

"Ilma," he said—and his voice sounded harsh and changed, as changed as his aspect—"you have nothing worse than death to fear. There is but one way of escape open to you."

The girl did not answer him; but he saw the look of terror pass from her eyes, and a deep long breath of ineffable relief made her breast heave for a second. The horror of the situation was too new to be yet fully comprehended, and the thought of death as something to shrink from had yet to come; it was as an angel of light that it came just now.

Before Roland could speak again, Job strode towards the large trap door that gave admittance to the loft.

"I'm off, sir," he said. "Tain't safe to stay here long; and, if you'll take my advice you won't stay long. The floods may be up any hour, with the rain falling in the mountains as it is. Good-bye, missy. You dreed your own weird when you let Dark Darrell catch your fancy with his handsome face and glozing tongue."

He uttered a harsh laugh, perhaps to hide some gleam of better feeling in his hardened nature, as he left the hapless girl to her fate; and the next moment he had disappeared through the trap and descended the ladder, whistling loudly.

Roland sprang to the window—for Ilma did not stir a step or move her ashen lips—and looked out. Was it the gleam of water that he saw immediately below? Was the river, in the few minutes that had elapsed, up to the door of the Mill? It had almost washed their feet as they entered, but now——He turned, and suddenly grasped Ilma's wrist, with a grip so strong that at any other time she must have cried out; now she seemed beyond feeling physical pain.

"Ilma," he cried hoarsely, "there are not many moments to lose; the floods may be on us directly! Do you understand? Come with me—fly with me—be my wife; refuse, and I leave you here to perish. There is no escape; and there is no relenting in me. I would kill you with my own hand"—he said those words through his teeth, his face close to hers, his hot breath on her cheek—"sooner than see you in Philip Darrell's arms—his bride. Now choose; there is no mercy. I brought you here to night to choose between life with me and death with him."

Steadily, calmly, with the awful roar of the swelling waters in her ears, the young girl looked into the face that seemed scarcely human. Low and firmly she spoke the first words she had uttered in her fatal prison-house.

"I will die. I am not afraid to die. If my time is so short, leave me alone to pray; for I am not sinless though I have done you no wrong."

Roland relaxed his grip and fell back.

"Are you mad?" he said in a hoarse whisper. "Did you comprehend me when I said 'die with him'? You shall not die alone—no, no—that were cruel!"

He laughed till the rafters rang, and the girl recoiled with a new and fearful terror in her heart. Roland's wild words when he parted from her that morning came back to her. Was he mad?

"No, no," he said again more calmly, but with a concentrated ferocity in tone and look almost more terrible than his frantic outbreak; "you shall see your handsome lover once more. He shall clasp you to his heart again and give you a parting kiss. Do you understand me?"—stopping before her, and folding his arms. "If you choose death, I shall send to Philip Darrell and tell him where you are; and I know him and his race well enough to know what he will do. He will come!"

With a cry of agony the girl flung herself at her captor's feet.

"Roland, you cannot—you will not do this! Kill me with your own hand—drag me out from here and fling me into that torrent—but, oh, spare him! Spare your own soul that added guilt, Roland!" She tried to clasp his hand in the passion of her pleading, as she saw that the very proof of her deep love for his rival hardened still more the heart she strove to soften. "Think what his grief will be when I am lost to him, and by so awful a fate! Is not that worse punishment than death? Is it not enough to have my guiltless blood on your head?"

"He must fulfil the curse," answered Roland, evading her clasp; and, with a wild gleam in his eyes, he stamped violently on the floor. "What does it say?

"'Till the waters, rising, rising,
Bring the bounden sacrificing—
Life for life for traitor's deed;
When the floods are out, take heed!'

Spare him, when every word and look of yours show how you love him! No prayer for your own life; but for his you go on your knees and pray in agony! You can save him if you choose. You have one minute to make that choice."

Ilma rose from her knees. As she stood erect before her would-be murderer, facing the narrow casement, the moon broke out suddenly from behind a bank of clouds and shot a broad shaft of light into the dreary loft, shedding a pale glory upon the marble features and the gleaming golden hair.

"I will die," said the girl, "with him!"

There was silence. The two—murderer and victim—seemed scarcely to breathe. Roland's face was shrouded now in gloom, the girl's uplifted to the light, which seemed to have come as an omen from Heaven; and she breathed a prayer for the man she loved—a prayer for time—only time—that destruction might come to her so swiftly as to shatter even the hope of his dying with her, and so save him.

Hush! Above the roar of the weir and the rushing river what was the other sound, distant and faint, but recognized by the girl's quick ear? She had heard it on the great St. Lawrence when the ice broke up. Too late! Philip was saved! The floods were upon them!

But Roland heard nothing. He knew not why that great radiance flashed into the lifted face, why the small hands were clasped over the throbbing heart. He turned—his cheeks were bloodless and his eyes wild and glassy.

"Then die," he said, his voice scarcely above a whisper—"die with your doubly accursed lover!"

He snatched up the lantern and was gone. She heard him reach the floor beneath; she heard him drag the ladder away and run it through the window, thus cutting off all chance of her escape. She heard him pass lower, and then a mighty sound rose above even the fierce rush of the weir; but it did not drown the piercing shriek of despair that rang upwards through the trembling wooden walls. Booming like thunder, tearing up trees like twigs, sweeping all before it, on came the flood!

It spread far over the meadows to left and right, carrying sheep and cattle onwards in its mad career, and vast masses of the banks were swept away.

The stout wooden piers of the bridge over which Dark Darrell had ridden on that sunny morning when Ilma had stood and dreamed above the glittering tide were broken into splinters, and the whole structure was whirled away in fragments. On, on rushed the torrent, leaping and roaring. Lock and lock-bridge were gone, and the wreck plunged madly down the vast waterfall. The water was two feet above the door of the Mill, and the old walls staggered under the shock. But it was not gone yet. The terrified villagers could still see it as they gazed from the hill on which Scarth Abbott was built, which was now surrounded by a great lake; and in the bright moonlight they could see trees, cattle and corn, and the wrecks of poor men's homes whirling down the seething tide.

One of the villagers fancied he could see at the window of the Mill, not ten feet above the rising waters, some one waving an arm with despairing gestures; but others said that he must be mistaken, or that it was some supernatural being, as Job and Zeph Heston had left the Mill long since, and that, even if it were a human being no help could reach him. But presently some one saw the face at the narrow casement higher up, and recognized it; and it spread like wildfire that Ilma Costello was in the Mill.

Alone in that awful prison, death rising to her foot by foot—perhaps to come in one mighty crash—Ilma knelt and tried to pray; but her heart would cling to him whose face she would see no more, whose voice she would hear no more. Death had lost all terror. She saw herself whirled away drowned on that boiling flood, and she did not shudder at the picture. Roland was forgotten. In a dull kind of way she wondered if that shriek was his last. But Philip, who would die for her—oh, if he should yet hear of her fate and strive to reach her! She cried aloud in the anguish of that fear, and beat her hands together in wild appeal to Heaven to save him; and before the echo of that cry had died away she had sprung to her feet, and her heart seemed to stand still within her—for the moon shone down upon a single horseman struggling with the angry waters.

CHAPTER XII.

Zeph Heston was passionate and vindictive; but, like many undisciplined characters, she was better than her impulses. Scarcely had she reached the cottage in which she and her father had sought temporary shelter than the full horror of the deed to which she had been a party rushed upon her. She did not know that Roland intended to inform Sir Philip Darrell of the fate of his betrothed, in order to involve him in the same destruction; but what wrong had Ilma done her, Zeph was now compelled to ask herself, that she should be the girl's murderess? What wrong had Philip Darrell done that, in order to move some one she hated, she should rob of the woman he loved? Heston's daughter had not actually blamed Ilma because Roland Sabine loved her; but she had hated her with the unreasoning vindictiveness of a half-savage nature because Ilma was an obstacle, as the poor creature imagined, to her own possible happiness. Remorse, when it came, was bitter and overwhelming.

Perhaps too, though this came later, there was another feeling in Zeph's heart—a vague fear that Roland might have intended to play her false, and spare Ilma if she would consent to marry him. Zeph did not believe that Ilma would consent to this alternative; but it lent zest to the determination which took possession of the girl to go to Sir Philip Darrell and tell him of Ilma's danger. He might yet be in time to save her; and for herself Zeph cared little. Nor would she now shrink from sacrificing Roland—for the idea, having once entered her mind, gained strength with every passing moment—if he intended to break his word to her. Even her father's part in the deed did not deter the girl now; nor did she seem to remember at that moment that the hope of saving Ilma must needs be frustrated if the curse was to be fulfilled.

Standing at the door of the cottage, she saw her father on the lock bridge. Not a second was to be lost. The girl hastened out of the house and up the slope, and was running swiftly towards the open country by the time Job Heston had crossed the threshold of his relative's dwelling and roughly demanded where Zeph was.

Zeph knew every rood of ground within ten miles; and, dark though it now was—for the moon had not yet appeared—she made her way unerringly towards the Court. The girl had not yet run a mile, and was now on an open piece of moorland, when suddenly the moon broke through the clouds, and by its light she saw a horseman coming straight towards her at a swift gallop. She recognised Sir Philip and his horse Hassan, and, pausing, pulled the red handkerchief from her head and waved it wildly. The signal had the desired effect. Darrell reined up within a yard of the girl and descended from his horse.

"Zeph Heston, what do you want of me?" He spoke sternly; he must have read evil tidings in her face.

"Kill me if you like"—and the girl grasped the sleeve of his coat in her intense eagerness—"but believe every word I say. Look here, Sir Philip; I came after you, and you can hang me for to-night's work."

"Go on," he said almost fiercely, with a horrible fear in his heart; and if you lie, woman though you are, you shall suffer."

"I speak the truth, so help me Heaven!" went on Zeph rapidly. "The Squire came to father and me this afternoon, and said we were to get Miss Ilma into the mill. The Squire said he'd put her there, and she should be drowned to-night, for the mill would be washed away; and I ran up to the Grange garden and told Miss Ilma the Squire was drowned; and she ran down to the river, and father seized her and took her to the mill. But, oh," cried the wretched girl, cowering down, "I'd give everything to save Miss Ilma now! That's why I came after you."

Not a word did Philip Darrell speak. With livid brow and bloodless lips, he sprang upon his horse and was out of sight of Zeph in a few seconds; and, as he flew onwards, there burst upon his ears the awful sound of rushing waters—not of the weir, but of the flood.

"Life for life for traitor's deed;
When the floods are out, take heed!"

No heed took he—no thought had he but for the one dear life. He was riding a mad race with death. If too late to save his love, he might yet be in time to die with her.

In another minute the river was in full view in the moonlight. The lock was gone, and far over the opposite bank spread the lake formed by the torrent.

"On, Hassan—on!" said Darrell, his lips deathly white and his eyes fixed on the one building standing amid the flood. "Ha!"

The flying steed had dashed into the midst of a crowd of villagers. Darrell drew bridle now, and, absolutely heedless of the confusion around him, fixed his piercing eyes upon the mill, scanning every aperture. Suddenly the blood rushed to his face, and a flash of hope—almost rapture—sprang into his eyes.

"'Tis she! Ilma, my own, I will save thee, or die with thee!"

"Sir Philip," shouted an old farmer, laying no weak hand on Hassan's bridle, "you shall not attempt to cross! It is madness—certain death!"

"Who will stop me?" said Darrell, setting his teeth and snatching a pistol from his breast. "Hands off, man, or say your last prayer!"

The old man fell back; and Sir Philip dashed off along the bank, the water, which was above the horse's fetlock, flying in showers of spray from the brave steed's feet.

"The curse, the curse!" rose from the terror-stricken crowd. "He is rushing upon his death; it has come—'life for life!'"

The slope of the ground on this side of the river had rendered the overflow comparatively slight, the flood spending itself over the flat meadows on the opposite bank. Sir Philip Darrell's object was to reach a point where a crossing might possibly be effected. To attempt to cross immediately below the weir would be simply suicide.

The crowd followed breathlessly on the top of the bank, watching the daring rider below. Not one man or woman there had the faintest hope that he would reach the center of the stream alive. True, the river had spent its greatest fury now that it was released from its narrow bounds; but the current was still swift and strong, and branches of trees and wreckage were being swept along. No man, the villagers thought, unless aided by supernatural power, could live in that stream.

Sir Philip had paused now. He bent over his horse and patted his neck, and then lifted his right hand toward the heavens. The next moment the noble steed plunged into the river, and a great cry went up from those who saw the gallant deed; and the women fell upon their knees and prayed aloud for the doomed lord of Darrell.

It did indeed seem as if Philip Darrell had merely rushed upon death. The strong current swept horse and rider downwards for some distance, and it was only with difficulty that the brave animal could hold his own.

"Bear up, my Hassan!" cried Darrell encouragingly, caressing the arching neck.

The Arab obeyed the guiding hand and turned athwart stream; they were half-way to the center now, and Hassan was panting, but struggling valiantly. Darrell called to the noble horse to strive yet a little while. When they had reached mid-stream, Hassan's powers were failing, and his breathing was labored and distressed.

"My brave steed, my hope, my life, do not fail me now!" cried Darrell, in agony. "A little longer, Hassan! There—another effort! We shall reach the bank—we shall save her, my Hassan!"

Clouds had veiled the moon, and the people on the Scarth Abbot shore could no longer see the two battling with the waters. The dark eyes that saw them from the Mill for a moment after the first plunge lost sight of them when the tide carried them down, and Ilma prayed fervently that her lover might be saved from the terrors of the flood.

The moon came out again. Where were they? the villagers asked themselves. Had horse and rider been engulfed in the rushing river? Was the curse fulfilled thus, and had the life of the last Darrell paid the exacted tribute? No; they could see that horse and rider had reached what had been the bank that morning. The horse was swimming still; but the water was only just above the saddle-girths. In another moment the horse stopped with drooping head. They could see Dark Darrell bending over him. He seemed to clasp his arms about the horse's neck, and a cry of joy and thanksgiving went up. It reached the brave rider's ears, and he sent up an answering shout of triumph. The horse's feet had touched ground. He had won the mighty battle; and, trembling and exhausted, he had stopped to rest and gather fresh strength.

But the peril was not yet past. The Mill had to be reached. It was still standing. For only a moment did Sir Philip suffer the horse to halt; then, turning him back towards the Mill, he rode onwards, the water still washing up to the saddle girths. It was impossible to exceed a walking pace; and in every second Darrell lived an hour of agony. At any moment the Mill might collapse before his eyes, carrying with it its hapless prisoner.

As he drew nearer, Sir Philip perceived that it would be necessary to swim again to reach the Mill. The current too grew stronger every minute, augmented here by the weir. Was he to lose all when it was nearly within his grasp? Hassan's great powers of endurance had been taxed to their utmost. The brave animal could do little more. He could scarcely keep his feet against the wash of the flood; but he struggled on, still on, urged by his master's voice and cheered by his loving touch.

"One moment more, my Hassan—one moment! Oh, Heaven, have mercy yet, and spare her till I come! Hassan, my brave, my faithful, you cannot fail me! Strive still, my noblest, my best! So, once more! Ah, Heaven, give us aid!"

The horse was off his feet, swimming once more for dear life. He had no breath for the answering whinny to the voice he heard but faintly, for his powers were fast failing. Horse and rider were close now; the Mill was above them. Darrell rose in the stirrups, and putting up his hand, he found that he could almost touch the lintel of the first-story window. He shouted aloud. Was that an answering cry from within—her voice? The brave steed seemed to know his errand, and made one more effort. Now Darrell grasped the lintel, raised himself, and stood on the sill. Yet even in that anxious moment his noble companion was not forgotten. A bitter sob burst from the man's heart as the pathetic eyes of the gallant steed looked up at him, and then the flood carried Hassan downwards. He could strive against it no longer; but still with the instinct of self-preservation, he struggled to keep afloat; and Darrell raised his locked hands to Heaven and uttered a passionate prayer for the brave and faithful life that had been almost spent for him.

Then Sir Philip—it was scarcely a second that he paused—sprang down into the Mill, and called Ilma's name; and the answer came back—

"Philip, Philip, I am here!"

He dashed up the narrow stairway to the floor above. What was that that flashed across the broad shaft of moonlight pouring through the unguarded window? A man's figure, crouching, hiding, and ready to spring!

CHAPTER XIII.

"Roland Sabine, take this!"

With a spring like a panther, Darrell was upon the would-be murderer; and so swift and so sure was the fierce blow of the clubbed pistol that without a cry or groan the wretched man fell with a crash to the floor and lay motionless.

Darrell turned, the pistol fell from his hand, and his foot was on the ladder-like stairs that led up to the next floor, when a white garment fluttered through the gloom above.

"Philip!"—and in another moment Ilma had thrown herself into her lover's open arms.

Voiceless, tearless, was that wild close embrace at the awful gate of eternity, that agony of joy, that agony of woe, lip to lip, heart to heart, once more, for the last time. What years of anguish he had seemed to live while he fought with the floods for her dear sake! What years of anguish she had seemed to pass while she waited and waited in the darkness of dread, and knew not whether he had been swept down the rushing stream to a fearful death! And now they had met, and her prayer at least was answered—he might die with her, if he could not save her.

For two minutes all was forgotten in their wild rapture, and then Darrell spoke hurriedly:

"Ilma, there is still hope; I will not despair till Death's hand is upon us. Come with me."

There was no hope in Ilma's dark eyes, which were raised to her lover's face; but death had no terrors now, for he was with her. He half led, half carried her to the floor below, and passed straight to the only aperture, the window by which he had entered. The waters flowed a few feet beneath them, bathed in the silvery moonlight. After one look, Darrell folded his arms closely round the girl's fragile form and set his teeth, hope almost dying in his heart. He bent over the sweet face that rested upon his breast, and his burning tears fell upon the girl's brow.

"Oh, Ilma, Ilma, I have brought woe and death to you!"

"Philip"—oh, the pain in her trembling voice!—"was it not truth that I spoke to you in the sunshine yesterday? Shall I say to you again now—so near the grave—that one hour of happiness is better than years of dull content? To have won your love—love that more than risked life only to die with me"—and her face lighted up with a glorious brightness—"oh, my heart, is not this more than a thousand years could give me, never knowing such love?"

He could not answer her. The quivering lips that pressed hers were silent; and the waters rushed on, leaping and bounding. After a few moments, two more victims would be carried away towards the sea. The curse was fulfilled to the uttermost—"life for life."

"Philip"—and Ilma's voice was very low and almost pleading—"you have not killed him?"

The fierce passion that prompted the deadly blow leaped like lightning into Darrell's dark eyes.

"I struck him with a death-blow. Would you have had me spare such a villain?"

The girl trembled and hid her face.

"Let me pray for strength to forgive him, Philip. He offered me life if I would be his wife. I chose death. Then he said—" Here she paused.

"Go on," said Darrell hoarsely; "let me know all."

"He said that he would send to you and tell you my fate; for he knew you would come to die with me. My prayers to spare you only angered him the more, for he saw how I loved you."

"You humbled yourself to him who dared give you choice between his base passion and death? You, my betrothed wife, kneel to him, and for me? Oh Heaven," said Philip Darrell, raising his clenched right hand and his livid face to the moonlit sky, "thou dost not claim from mortal man pardon for crime so black, for wrong so foul as this hand avenged to-night!"

The girl trembled at that awful appeal on the brink of death; yet her own passionate soul had almost echoed it.

"Philip," she whispered, after a few moments' silence, "let there be no stern memory even of him in your heart or mine now. See, the waters are rising, and the foundations of the Mill shake beneath us! The time is so short, Philip, before—before the last struggle!"

Her voice faltered, and the golden head sank upon his breast. The strong man ground his teeth in the impotence of despair as his dark eyes sought in vain over the surface of the flood for any chance of escape. If he could see some object near enough to give the faintest hope of reaching it by swimming, he would risk all on that hope; but, after all, it was not certain that the Mill's foundations would yield; and he knew that to trust himself and Ilma to the swollen tide in the expectation of reaching either shore would be madness. Alone he could not, though a strong and expert swimmer, hope to resist the force of the current; how then could he with Ilma?

The drops of agony stood on his brow as he bent over his darling, doomed by his fatal love to an awful death; and the words of the curse seemed to ring back in his ears—

"Till the waters, rising, rising
Bring the bounden sacrificing—
Life for life for traitor's deed!"

The moon was veiled, and darkness fell over the water. In vain did Darrell strive to pierce the gloom. Oh, for a ray of light! The cloud was passing, its edges gleamed with silver; the moon peeped out, and suddenly Darrell uttered a cry. Ilma started, and followed his gaze.

A dark heavy mass lay athwart the stream, rolling and rocking in the angry waters. Darrell at once perceived that it was the greater portion of one of the piers of the famous bridge that Anneris Darrell had refused to cross. Quick as lightning his practised eye measured the distance between the Mill and the mass of timber, and he calculated the chances of reaching it. At the moment something crashed below, and the old Mill shivered and shook.

"Ilma," said Sir Philip rapidly, "there is one hope—it lies there. If we can reach that pier before it swings round—"

He said no more, but sprang to the sill, clasping the slight form firmly with his left arm.

"Cling to me, darling—so. Now Heaven be our help!"

He dropped into the tide which was only a few feet beneath the window. Not a cry broke from the brave girl; not for one second did she lose presence of mind as the cruel waters seized their prey; but she held her lover as he had told her, so as to leave him almost free. The pier lay not a hundred yards distant; if Darrell could keep afloat for one minute, he and his precious burden must be driven up against the pier, and he could climb to almost certain safety.

"Courage!" he whispered, though even in that wild moment he knew the exhortation was needless; for the steadfast eyes were fearless.

A whirling mass of water, a deafening roar in their ears, something huge and black before their eyes, and Darrell's right hand was clutching with an iron grip a beam of the pier. His fragile burden seemed less than feather-weight as he swung her upwards and she grasped the next beam. In another moment they were on the pier, and Philip Darrell had clasped the girl, trembling and breathless, to his breast.

Saved, saved—almost, but not quite! There was danger yet. If the Mill should fall before the pier swung round, its fragments, dashing up against the pier, might turn it over, and death would then be certain and instantaneous. Meanwhile the position of the fugitives was secure; and even in their great peril both gazed in awe and admiration upon the magnificent spectacle before them.

The villagers on the bank had seen them; and a mighty shout went up, and hats and handkerchiefs were waved. The shout came to them faintly through the roar of the weir, and Darrell waved his hand; but he never moved his eyes from the Mill save once, when he looked down into the starlike eyes fixed, like his, on the white walls, and pressed one kiss on the half-parted lips.

Slowly the ark of refuge began to move. The current had caught one end, and the unwieldy mass swung round. Darrell watched the slow, gradual movement in deathlike silence. Clasped so closely to him, Ilma could feel every heavy throb of his heart, and silently she offered up a prayer for both.

After three minutes of suspense, the pier swung clean round, and drifted off rapidly with the swift current. Then Ilma, with a passionate sob, hid her face on her lover's breast. He could not speak—he could only press his trembling lips to the golden curls. Were they saved? Straight down midstream sped the strange bark; and the crowd—running, leaping, shouting, waving hats and handkerchiefs—as if such demonstrations could aid the fugitives—kept pace along the bank. In three minutes more the Mill was far distant.

"And the landscape sped away behind,
Like an ocean flying before the wind."

"Would to Heaven," said Darrell, looking back, "I could know if my brave Hassan's life was saved!"

They had passed the last straggling house in Scarth Abbot, and now the stream flowed less rapidly, and the moving panorama glided by more gently.

"Bear up still, darling," whispered Darrell; "Heaven will not desert us at the last. The life has been given, the life saved. The prophecy is fulfilled indeed."

"I know we are saved, Philip!"—and she raised her face with a trusting smile. She looked back. "The Mill is still standing—see!"

Darrell looked back and saw the Mill standing, tall and white, in the moonlight, but as he gazed the walls tottered, and, for the first time that awful night, Ilma shrieked aloud as the mass of woodwork fell over into the river.

In awe Philip Darrell and his companion gazed still towards where the Mill had once stood. The thoughts of both turned to the guilty being swept away with the ruin to a terrible retribution; and even Darrell's stern wrath was softened, for he held his darling to his breast—saved—while the dead man's mother would weep in vain for the son who should never greet her again.

A roar of many voices from the bank made Sir Philip and Ilma turn quickly. Driven by a cross current, their craft had altered her course, and was drifting rapidly inland. What a shout rang back from Dark Darrell to the frantic crowd! It seemed as if all the villages within ten miles round had sent forth their populations; for Scarth Abbot could not bring together such a throng. Darrell could now distinguish several of the Court servants and others whom he knew; and some one shouted in stentorian tones that there was a carriage near; but for the most part the spectators could only shout inarticulately and weep and laugh together for very joy.

Nearer yet! There were stalwart villagers and farmers up to their knees in water; and one old man was sobbing aloud and crying out brokenly—

"Yes, 'tis fulfilled. That was it—we've read it all wrong! He's saved the life, and the curse is turned to blessing!"

A loud shout was raised by the onlookers. The bridge pier was aground. They were saved, saved by the love that gave all for love's sake. The life was yielded, and both lives were redeemed; and thus was Ingelhard's fell deed blotted out and the curse turned back from Darrell's house.

How the people leaped, wept, and shouted for joy! How they called down blessings on Ilma's golden head, and on the valiant lover who had breasted the raging floods for her sake, and borne her in safety through all! Strong arms and gentle would have relieved him of his charge; but he would not loose his clasp. Bewildered now, dazed, like one brought suddenly from darkness into brilliant light, Ilma clung convulsively to her preserver, and only whispered—

"Not to the Larches, Philip, not to the Larches."

"No, my darling—home to the Grange."

Through all he was perfectly collected and strangely calm—there was need of calmness amid all this excitement. Once had he spoken hurriedly, and had almost broken down, when he turned to one of his servants and asked—

"Tell me—in Heaven's name answer truly—have you—has any one seen Hassan? Was he saved?"

"He got to shore!" a dozen voices cried aloud. "He drifted down the current, and got to shore and galloped away. It's true, Sir Philip!"

"Heaven be praised!"

That was all he said, but it came in a deep sob from the depths of his soul. It would have been a bitter drop in his cup of happiness if the brave horse had perished that night.

It was the Grange carriage that stood in the road, and, as Darrell carried Ilma towards it, one of the servants told him that all was in readiness at that place. Miss Durnford had "borne up splendidly" when she heard that Miss Ilma was imprisoned in the Mill and Sir Philip was gone to save her. The man had brought a change of raiment from the Court for his master, and even now a messenger had ridden forward to tell the joyful news.

"Drive for your life!" was Darrell's order to the coachman as he entered the carriage.

And away, followed by the shrieking, rejoicing crowd, sped the carriage to Scarth Abbot. Ilma lay motionless on her lover's breast. The tension was over; the noble, fearless spirit had borne up while death and life hung in the balance; but now it was past—all the dread, the anguish, the awful suspense—and the over wrought system gave way in the deep swoon of sheer exhaustion.

CHAPTER XIV., AND LAST.

The first thing Ilma remembered was a vague sense of rest, then a gentle touch on her brow, and a voice saying very softly, "She is reviving!"—and she knew that voice before she heard the yet softer-spoken "Ilma, my darling!" She opened her eyes and looked into Philip Darrell's dark face. She was in her own room, and he was kneeling by her, with his arm round her and her head pillowed on his breast.

"Philip!" she whispered, looking at him intently. Then, as he bent lower yet, tenderly kissing her brow, memory rushed back her, and, with a smothered cry, she clung to him. "Is it all passed? You are saved Philip!" she said, gasping. "There is no more danger?"

"No more, sweetheart," he answered. "This is your own room, and here is aunt Rachel."

"Dear aunt Rachel!"

The girl turned suddenly, stretching out her hand, and Darrell rose to make way for Miss Durnford, who now wept freely as she clasped Ilma in her arms.

"Dear auntie," said the girl, after a long silence, "it has been like an awful dream I cannot bear to think of it yet."

"And I would rather you did not, my child. I am content to wait. Now take a little of this wine, and I will go and get you some tea; and Sir Philip will take care of you till I come back." And she went out, leaving them alone together.

Then Ilma told her lover more of the details of all that had passed before he had reached the Mill, and how Roland had removed the ladder from the loft where she was imprisoned, so as to cut off her escape; but he had forgotten the shawl in which Job Heston had wrapped her head, and by fastening this to a ring in the floor she was able to descend. And Roland? Had nothing been heard of him? Had not his sisters made inquiry?

"Rose came about ten minutes ago, Ilma," said Darrell, "to ask about us both, and if anything was known of Roland. Zeph Heston must have spread the news that he was in the Mill, for every one seemed to know it. Nothing had been heard of Roland by the river. I did not see Rose, of course; but I sent my groom, who is here, to make inquiries."

Ilma hid her face, sobbing.

"Oh, Philip, aunt Sabine need never know the truth!"

"She must indeed, for your sake, my heart. Cannot have it supposed that you met Roland Sabine in the Mill of your own accord. Another guilty soul beside his, Ilma, has gone to its account for this night's work."

"Job Heston?"

"Ay. The first rush of the flood washed away the cottage where he and Zept had taken refuge. Heston was swept across the weir and drowned before the eyes of hundreds."

Ilma shuddered violently.

"And Zeph?" she said after a long pause. "Was it Zeph who told you where I was, Philip?"

"Yes, dear one. I was riding toward Scarth Abbot—more in a vague fear for you than with any definite thought—when I met her. She seemed to have repented her part almost immediately."

Some idea of Zeph's reason for hating her evidently flashed across Ilma's mind, for her color rose; but she said nothing, only nestling to her lover's breast. Presently she said slowly—

"Philip, it seems so strange that the fulfilment of the prophecy has come about as I always hoped it would; and yet it was by a blind faith in only one possible meaning attaching to the words that the true meaning was made manifest."

In silence Darrell bowed his face on the golden head. Love, peace, happiness! All the dark clouds that had shrouded his life were swept away suddenly by the little hand that clung to his—the hand that should yet caress his children. Yesterday he had been a doomed man, and he had cursed the fatal love that had brought woe and death to the woman he loved; to-day, snatched by that love from death, saved; but life laid down for hers, that woman rested on his breast; and before them both stretched the golden years, bright with dazzling light that now he could not meet. For the first time during that night of passion and anguish, of wild hope, of ineffable dread, of terrible and sustained effort, and blessed certainty of happiness, the stong spirit gave way, and Philip Darrell wept aloud.

* * * * * *

Up the little village street was borne on a hastily-improvised stretcher a bruised, shattered form, still breathing. It was laid down in the common room of the inn. Messengers had already run on to tell Roland's mother and to fetch a doctor, and the doctor was quickly on the spot. He looked down at the disfigured form in pity.

"I can do nothing," he said; "it is useless to disturb him. He has not five minutes to live."

The doctor bent down to the dying man. From a ghastly gash in his forehead blood was slowly trickling. Roland tried to speak—

"Ilma—Dark Darrell—the curse."

"They are saved," said the doctor, his voice trembling with emotion. "Sir Philip saved her. They are at the Grange."

A sharp spasm contracted the dying man's livid features. He tried to speak again, and in the effort a rush of blood stopped speech and life at once. At the same moment Mrs. Sabine and her two daughters hastened breathlessly through the crowd.

"Keep her back!" cried the doctor, hastily drawing a mantle over the crushed form. "This is no sight for his mother!"

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A great fragment of the ruined Mill had been washed ashore nearly a mile down the river, and a man was seen clinging to it. Sir Philip Darrell's groom and another had ridden into the water and rescued the hapless creature—Roland Sabine—and the groom then rode on to the Grange to tell his master what had happened.

At one o'clock in the morning the village was still astir, and hardly a house was closed. Another servant from the Court rode into Scarth Abbott and up to the Grange with the joyful news that Hassan had galloped into the courtyard half an hour before. The animal must have gone miles down the river before he could find a bridge, for that below the Mill had been washed away by the flood, and he had made his way unerringly to his home.

An hour later Sir Philip himself went out to see what damage had been done, and to ascertain if any lives besides those he already knew of had been lost, and especially to make inquiry about Zeph Heston.

"She was one of them that stood by when we got the Squire ashore," said an old farmer. "I didn't see her after that, Sir Philip.

One or two others thought she had been outside the inn when the unhappy man was laid on his bier within. At doubt was set at rest three hours later, when Zeph's body was cast ashore ten miles below Scarth Abbot. The poor girl had evidently flung herself into the river; and with her perished the last of the tenants of the Wier Mill.

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The violets were blooming along the banks of the Coalmere when Ilma Costello became Dark Darrell's bride; and now the vacant place beside the portrait of the last Darrell is filled by a picture of a lady with golden hair and soft dark eyes; and there are gay doings at the Court, and old Marsh's heart rejoices. But people cannot call handsome Sir Philip the last of his race any longer; for a winsome lad, not three years old, with the true Darrell beauty, is laughing gleefully in the sunshine while riding round the courtyard on Hassan's back. The noble animal seems proud of his tiny burden, as if he knew he carried the heir of an ancient race and his loved master's son; and the golden haired mother looks on smiling. She has no fear for the little one—for her husband's hand is on the child, and Hassan walks as gently as a lamb.

When he is older, Philip Darrell's heir will learn the story of the famous curse, and how his father's great love redeemed it on that awful night "WHEN THE FLOODS WERE OUT."

—It is reported that the deposed Khedive of Egypt has been entering into secret negotiations with the Albanians and Greeks with a view to contingencies. Ismail is crafty, rich, ambitious and unscrupulous. To such a man in such a position the present disturbed condition of Eastern affairs offers many opportunities, and in attempting to forcast the possible issues of a war the ex-Khedive should never be left entirely out of account.

ROASTED ALIVE.

The Terrible Death of Eight Persons in an Ohio Town—A Father's Fearful Jump.

PITTSBURG, Pa., Feb. 23.—East Liverpool, Ohio, is a small town on the bank of the Ohio river, forty four miles below Pittsburg. It is a thriving place, built up and sustained by large potteries which are there located. To this place in last September or October came William Sloan, from Harrison county, Ohio. He started a drug store in a four storey frame building on the corner of Broadway and Sixth street, did a thriving business, and lived happily in the midst of his large family. The building in which his store and dwelling were located was owned by Frank Stewart, who used a part of it as a feed store and storehouse for hay and grain. Another portion of the building was used by Mr. George, a grocer. A few days ago Wilbur Skeels, a brother of Mrs. Sloan, came to visit his sister for a few days, and he increased the number of the family to ten persons.

A DREADFUL AWAKENING.

Shortly after one o'clock this morning Sloan was aroused by some noise, and on getting out of bed and opening the door of his room he found that the hallway was full of smoke. Sloan hurriedly aroused the members of his family and told them to follow him. Picking up a tiny little blonde haired girl in his arms, he tried to go down stairs. The stairways were by this time burned away, and escape by that means was cut off. Turning to the front of the building he told his children and his wife (who had a babe in her arms) to follow him, and leaped to the ground. The wife and the children were either overcome with the flames and stifling fumes from the drug store, or Mrs. Sloan, failing to get the children to jump, preferred death with them to life without them. Mr. Sloan hoped by jumping first to be able to catch the others and break the force of the fall; and although he broke his leg in the leap, hobbled around, crying out piteously for the others. The little girl he took with him was saved unharmed.

The building was erected last summer, and was a perfect fire trap, having numerous elevators running up through to the fourth floor, which opened an inviting pathway for the flames, and as nearly every floor was filled with hay, they spread with frightful rapidity. In twenty or thirty minutes the entire structure was consumed. The firemen by heroic work confined the fire to Stewart's building and a small adjoining frame house.

FINDING OF THE DEAD.

Seven of the bodies have already been recovered from the ruins, but the eighth, that of one of the children, has not been found. The headless and limbless trunks have been carried to a storeroom in the immediate vicinity, and covered from sight with heavy wr