

to renounce his hope of heaven for the brief madness of possessing her.

Her vanity, however, did not blind her to the danger of playing with this powerful element, which seemed potent enough to wreck this man's soul, and compass her own destruction. "Say not so," he exclaimed. "I am mad, I know, to ask you, but I shall lose my life, my reason, and shall do something wild and desperate, if you refuse my love. Oh, say you will try to love me. Let me kiss your hand and call you mine, even for one day, and I will die content."

And he bent over the hand he still forcibly clung to, and covered it wildly and passionately with kisses, while tears, which he could not repress, ran down his cheeks.

It is dreadful to see a man weep.

A woman's tears often tend to irritate one, to make the looker-on, whom they are intended to melt, say mentally, if not aloud—

"Ory away, and may the exercise do you good."

But to see a man thus overcome with emotion is much more likely to frighten or awe than to amuse or irritate the cause of them.

This was the case with Florence Carr.

Though no coward, she was getting alarmed at the clergyman's vehemence.

But her anxiety was on her own account, not his.

In the excitement he was now laboring under he could scarcely be considered responsible for his actions.

He had frightened, he might injure her, and, worse than all, if any passer-by should see and recognize them, it probably would come to Frank Gresham's ears in some distorted form; it would shake his confidence in her, and then her brilliant prospects would all dissolve like a mirage.

Thus thinking, she resolved to rouse him to a sense of his position, if possible, and she said—

"Mr. Beltram, pray get up. Suppose anyone were to see you? Don't hold my hand so tightly either. I won't run away. Consider, a passer-by might see and ruin both of us through your folly."

"Ah, I forgot," he replied, slowly rising to his feet, while a dazed, blank expression for a second succeeded the fever of fiery passion with which his countenance had been lighted up; "but I forget everything," he added, the old look coming back again, "everything but that I love you. It is my fate and yours, and you must and shall be mine."

The next moment he held her tightly clasped in his arms, and his burning lips seemed as though they would scorch the fair face, as he pressed them so madly upon it.

Absolute terror took possession of the girl. She was in the arms of a madman, she felt assured, for no human being in his senses could act like this.

Frantically she struggled to free herself, to escape the loathed caresses.

But in vain; and then, reckless as to consequences, she began to scream.

"Are you mad?" he asked, fiercely, and trying to smother her cries.

"No, but you are," was the answer. "Let me go this moment, or I will shriek till help arrives."

But he would not release her, and once more her piercing shriek rang through the small wood.

It was answered, too.

Answered by the bark of a dog and the voice of some person calling it.

"You are mine and shall be for ever and ever," said Sidney Beltram, with an oath, as, despite her struggles, he forced a kiss upon her lips, and the next moment he was gone.

Whether it was that the girl was overcome by agitation, or the sudden loosening of her captor's hold upon her had upset her balance and caused her to fall, I cannot decide.

Be this as it may, when the dog which had answered her cry, came up to her, she was lying on the ground, almost insensible; and singularly enough, one of her hands was resting upon the very spot from which, six months before, Ben, with his master's help, had dug the precious baby, for this was Oak Clough.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### TWO STUDS.

Before Florence had revived sufficiently to rise from the ground, a dog was at her side, curiously sniffing at her garments, and a lady and gentleman, guided by its bark, had also reached her.

The girl's eyes were closed, though she had not fainted, for she heard the sweet voice of a lady say—

"Oh, Mr. Gresham, look! What a lovely case!"

The involuntary exclamation made the girl open her eyes, to look with wonder, almost alarm, into the startled eyes of John Gresham, and the fair, patrician face of Lady Helen Beltram.

John Gresham recognised her at once.

Not so his companion, however, and the extreme awkwardness of the meeting struck him as being anything but pleasant.

That the girl knew Lady Helen by sight, and appreciated the burst of admiration, might be guessed from the tinge of rose color which suffused her pale face, though she made no audible comment.

"You screamed just now; what is the matter with you?" asked the young man, bending over the prostrate girl, anxious to avoid letting his companion know who she was.

"A man attacked and—insulted me," she replied, with something like hesitation.

In fact, she did not know what to say.

It was an awkward predicament to be in, to have the sister of the man against whose violence she had called for help, and the brother of the man she was engaged to marry here before her, asking questions which, even if she answered truthfully, they would not believe, and would also, no doubt, draw inferences that would be anything but to her credit.

Being a woman of quick and ready wit, she jumped at these conclusions rapidly.

She saw that Lady Helen did not know her, and though John Gresham did, for his own sake, no doubt, he would be discreet.

So rising to a sitting posture, she said—

"I think I must have fainted, or been stunned, or something of the kind. I think I am well enough to walk home now, thank you."

"Do you know the man? Would you know him again?" asked Lady Helen, who could not help feeling an interest in this girl.

"No, I don't think so. I think he must have wanted to rob me. I thank you."

By this time she had risen to her feet, and was evidently desirous of leaving them.

"Such men ought to be sent to prison," said Lady Helen, positively. "What kind of a looking man was he?"

"I—I—scarcely know. He was tall, rough-looking, and dark, but I was too frightened to notice every detail, but—"

Again she paused, this time, however, to stare at another addition to the party, no other, indeed, than Miss Stanhope, Lady Helen's aunt and chaperon, who had not, however, kept too closely to the side of her charge.

"Oh, it is only my aunt," remarked the younger lady, desiring the girl to proceed.

"I was only going to say that he had a small scar on the side of his face, on the left cheek, I think. And now I must go; I am dreadfully late already. Thank you for coming to help me. Good morning."

And with a bow, which was that of one lady to another, rather than that of an inferior to a superior, she turned and resolutely walked away.

"Whatever were you talking to that girl for? A mill hand, too?" asked Miss Stanhope, disdainfully.

She knew Florence well enough, though she might not care to proclaim her knowledge.

"A mill girl! You are mistaken, aunt. She speaks and looks quite like a lady. She has been attacked by some ruffian who wanted to rob her. Carlo heard her scream, and rushed to the rescue, but the man was gone."

"Then you haven't seen the would-be robber?"

"No; don't I tell you he was gone?"

"I should be inclined to think he never existed."

"Wh, what are you talking of, aunt? The girl was lying on the ground; and there are marks of a struggle on the grass. See."

And she pointed to it.

Suddenly her eye caught the glimmer of something bright among the grass, and she stooped and picked it up.

It was a stud, a gold wrist stud, with a monogram in blue and enamel on.

The letters were but two in number—"S. B." The pair had been Lady Helen's Christmas present to her brother.

"Sidney's stud!" she said, in surprise. "How strange! However could it have come here?"

"Perhaps it is not his," said John, across whose mind one or two vague stories seemed to flash, and who would, if possible, have spared even a doubt from being cast upon his friend, and the brother of the woman he loved.

"Or perhaps that busy stole it," suggested Miss Stanhope.

"No; she would never have done that," said John, inconspicuously.

"Why, then, you know her?" asked Lady Helen, suspiciously, turning to the young ironmaster.

"No; I never spoke to her before."

"But you know who she is?" queried the young lady, impatiently.

"I know her name—little more," he replied, doubtfully.

"What is it?"

"I would rather not talk about her."

"But I wish to know. Surely there can be no harm in my hearing her name; I don't read the *Newgate Calendar*, so if she is notoriously bad, I shan't know or recognise it. Besides, she is so very beautiful, I wish to know it."

"You think her beautiful?" asked the young man, gazing with eyes that said more than tongue dare frame, into her own fair face.

"Yes, I do; marvelously beautiful. Such beauty as I, were I a man, should fall down and worship."

"Goodness gracious! Lady Helen Beltram, what are you talking about?"

The voice, as no doubt you have guessed, was Miss Stanhope's.

"I call her," continued the same speaker, "a common-looking thing."

"My dear aunt, you are prejudiced; but I think her a perfect beauty. What do you think, Mr. Gresham?"

"She is good-looking," was the doubtful reply; "not a style of beauty which fascinates me, however."

"But your brother is not so invulnerable," sneered Miss Stanhope.

Lady Helen's eyes opened at her aunt's incautious speech.

"Is that the young lady, Mr. Gresham?" she asked calmly enough, though the color on her cheek flattered.

"I—I—"

"Tell me, please," she demanded positively.

"Yes," was the reluctant reply.

"Thank you."

And she walked on a few paces, holding the stud in her hand, not thinking even of it.

"I am not surprised," she said, a few seconds after; "and as for this stud, no doubt Sidney has passed through here and dropped it."

And so saying, she put the stud in her purse, and then continued their walk, making no allusion to Florence Carr.

It had become an ordinary thing for the young ironmaster to spend even more of his time at the rectory than he had done when his brother was welcomed there, though Sidney Beltram had of late shunned him, evidently preferring solitude to the society of any friend.

Lady Helen and Miss Stanhope were always pleased to see him.

Consequently, it was not at all an unusual thing to find John Gresham with the two ladies from the rectory, and his dog, Carlo, indulging in somewhat long walks.

"Were you in the Oak Clough to-day, Sidney?" asked Lady Helen, some two or three hours later.

"No," was the immediate reply. "Who said I was?"

"No one. I only thought you might have been."

"But what made you think it? You must have some reason for asking."

"I asked because we were there ourselves in the morning."

"But you didn't see me?"

"How could we if you were not there?"

"True, but you have a reason for asking me which you have not given. I insist upon knowing it."

The clergyman had become very positive and irritable lately, the saintly patience and sweetness which had previously characterised him being now altogether wanting.

A sister is not always the best person in the world, however sweet her temper and disposition may naturally be, for a brother to visit his spleen and sulks upon, and Lady Helen, not being accustomed to be dictated to, showed signs of rebellion at the tone in which her brother addressed her.

"I don't think it necessary to explain the reason of every question I ask," she replied haughtily, and rising to leave the room. "If you were not in the Oak Clough, and did not lose anything there, I am satisfied."

She had left the room with this parting shot, and Sidney Beltram's face became red and white by turns.

"What does she mean, aunt?" he asked turning to Miss Stanhope anxiously.

"I suppose she means that we found a wrist stud, which Helen declares to have been yours, in the Oak Clough this morning. The young woman that Gresham the mill owner is going to marry, if report be true, seems to have screamed for help against some rough fellow who was annoying her. Carlo, Helen, and John Gresham ran to the rescue, and scarcely had the girl left us when the stud was found on the ground, but of course it could not have been yours."

"Of course not," observed Sidney, in a relieved tone, but with a strangely pale face, as he too rose and left the room.

"Curious on the girl's curious on my own madness and folly!" he muttered passionately, when he had locked himself in his own study.

"She did not betray me to them, it seems," he went on, after pacing up and down the room impatiently; "but then, that was for her own sake, not mine," he added bitterly.

"I don't believe the girl possesses a heart, or has one spark of feeling for anything living or breathing beyond herself. And yet how madly, how passionately I love her. Oh, God, that I should have fallen so low as this!"

Presently the struggle passed, as so many struggles of the kind had done, leaving him neither a better nor a wiser man.

"I must hide this stud," he muttered, taking it from his sleeve, "until I can get a pair like it. It is annoying that Helen and John Gresham found it, but it cannot be helped, any more than the lie I was obliged to tell."

And so thinking, he took it from his sleeve and put it, he believed, in his pocket.

So he did.

But there being a hole in his pocket, the stud soon slipped through it on to the floor, where it lay until seen by a visitor who soon after came into the study.

"This may come in useful," thought Job Brindley, as his eye caught the "S. B." enamelled on the trinket, and, unperceived by its owner, he placed his foot upon it, succeeding before he went away in transferring it to his own pocket.

"We've no time to lose," he remarked, aloud, in continuation of his conversation, "they'll be getting spoiled before another fortnight's over, and then it'll be too late."

"True. But as the time approaches, I get nervous, and something seems to warn me it is useless. She is so positive and obstinate that it is encountering danger and disgrace for nothing."

"Well, I'm blest if I didn't think you'd more pin it in you," replied Bob, with a sneer.

"I alter said persons war a frightened lot, but I thort, as yo' come of a picky family, mayhap yo'd got a bit of a man in yo'."

There had been a time when Sidney Beltram would have had pluck enough in him to have ordered a man who had thus dared to address him to leave the house quietly by the door, or have pitched him out of the window.

Actual crime, however, levels all distinctions,

and he winced under the rough brute's contemptuous sneers.

"Still I will not decide to-night," he said, after a pause, and somewhat more resolutely than he had previously spoken. "I will give her one more chance, and if that fails, we will act as you suggest."

In no amiable mood, Bob Brindley rose to his feet. His words, however, were civil enough, though the flash of his eye was threatening.

"Yo' know yo' own business best, I a'pose," he replied, sulkily; "and when yo' wants me agin, p'raps yo'll send."

And so saying without further adieu, he left the room and the house.

Once outside of it however, the expression of his heavy, square countenance looked fierce and dangerous, and he put his hand again in his pocket to assure himself that the singular stud was there, with a look on his face which boded ill for the safety or welfare of its rightful owner.

(To be continued.)

## PROPINQUITY.

"By George, here's luck!"

"What is luck?" This in a faint voice from the sofa, a man's voice, full of that querulous weakness so much more pathetic when it comes from deep manly tones than from womanly treble.

"Hollo, Ned; did I wake you up?" and the speaker began crossing the room on a shuffling tiptoe, meant to be noiseless, but by reason of resonant boots and undue deliberation, producing a series of linked squeakings long drawn out, which were exasperating in the last degree to sensitive nerves.

Then, as the invalid gave a groan, Perry said, "There, there, dear boy!" in precisely the tone with which nurses hush fractious babies; and catching at the back of a chair as he passed, he brought it whack against the little table which stood by the sofa. Bottles rattled, a spoon fell on the floor, and another groaned from the recumbent figure.

Perry Long was the best fellow in the world, and the pleasantest, anywhere except in a sick-room; there he was as completely out of place and destructive as an elephant in a china shop, a bull in a nursery, Mars at a peace congress, or any other man! What Ned Fisher had endured from his well-meant attentions during the slow convalescence following an attack of typhoid pneumonia can only be computed by those who have experienced the like. Yet, lonely bachelor that he was, without a blood-relation nearer than certain far-off cousins in New Orleans, who hardly recognized his existence, he would have been forlorn enough without this same kind, blundering Perry. He reminded himself of this twenty times a day.

(N. B.—It was always when Perry happened to be out of the room. The moment that he returned with his heavy tread and squeaky boots, and the inevitable bang of the door, Ned forgot merits and services alike, and wished his devoted henchman in Botany Bay. Perry was one of those centrifugal forces from which all light and movable articles of furniture seem instinctively to fly and ricochet and racket off into distant corners. And sick men can not always be either grateful or reasonable.)

However, this little misadventure with the table was the last for that time, and, seating himself gingerly in the hard-won chair, Perry proceeded to unfold a letter and expound his bit of "good luck."

"It's from Tom Vane, Ned. He's been off for a run into Vermont to see some aunt of his who was staying at a place called Burnet, and he says it's the very thing for you. High ground, breezy, cool, and all that, and a first-rate house. Hear what he writes:

"I don't believe the old boy could do better. It's dead quiet, but that's the thing for him just now, I suppose, and the air is exactly what the doctor recommended—high and dry. No river fogs. Up clear above everything in this region. There's a view too. I don't profess to understand views, but my aunt raves over this, and I can see that there is a good deal of it. First-rate table—battered chicken, cream (think of cream in the country!), and a motherly sort of an old landlady, who asks nothing better than to pet and cosset every body who comes in her way. I advise you to pack Ned off at once. I'm sure it's the thing for him. He'll never pick up as he ought in that city street. I've taken the refusal till Thursday next of a big southeast corner room in the wing. It's the quietest part of the house, only one other room in it, and that is taken by a lady boarder. Ned can be as still as he likes, and sleep all day, and all night too, if so inclined."

"There!" ended Perry, bringing the extract to a triumphant conclusion; "if that ain't what you call a special Providence, I don't know what is. You'll go, won't you?"

"I suppose so," said Ned, distantly. "As well there as somewhere else. Murder! what's that?" for Perry, in the exuberance of his satisfaction at this hardly wrung consent, had given the table another knock, and every cup and glass and tea-spoon was jingling in unison.

"The table, indeed! One would suppose that the furniture of this room was bewitched. I never imagined that inanimate things could be so noisy."

And closing his mouth, Ned lay crossly silent for the next hour. But Perry observed, or thought he observed, a little more relish for supper, a little less languor in the deep-sunken