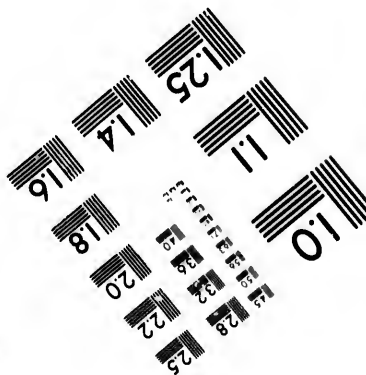
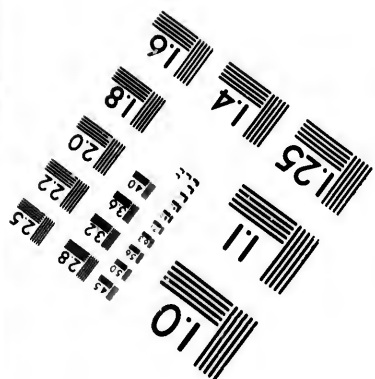
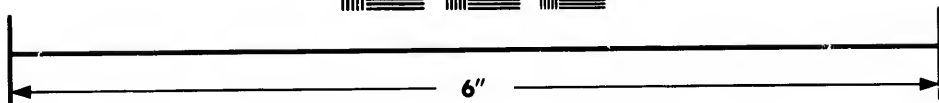
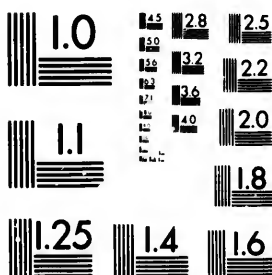


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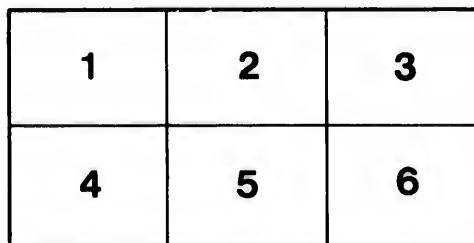
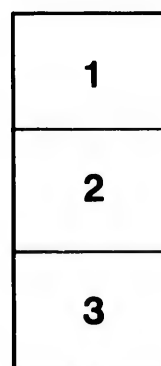
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AUTHOR OF

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BLIND FATE.

By MRS. ALEXANDER.

AUTHOR OF "THE WOOING O'T," "A LIFE INTEREST,"
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FALSE SCENT," &C., &C.

CHAPTER I.

BREAKING COVER.

The last notes of an air from the "Trovatore" were dying out over the shining sea. The crowd which had gathered on the pier to listen to the band began to move and disperse, the music being over for that afternoon, a fine glowing August afternoon, tempered by the fresh, soft air breathing across the bay, crisping the water here and there and bringing a delightful saltiness from the rippling waters.

The scene is Fordsea, a flourishing South-coast bathing place, not altogether dependant for its prosperity on summer nomads. Its attractions are of a more permanent character. Being in the close neighborhood of the naval and military station of Eastport, the officers of both services are glad to establish their families in the villas, terraces, crescents which border the grassy common intervening between them and the beach.

At the end of this pleasant common, furthest from the old gray fortifications which encircle the town, a pretty two-storied villa stood on an abrupt rising ground, from which it commanded a view over the wide bay to the towers guarding the entrance to the port, to the steeples and the tall masts over-topping the gray walls. A veran-

dah, its supports overgrown with roses and honeysuckle, ran along the side facing the sea, and a deep area, with sloping grassy sides, surrounded it, giving light and air to the basement. This verandah was evidently used as a morning-room, comfortable lounging chairs, a work-table laden with books, bright-colored silks and wools, a doll and a cup and ball lay about.

The carefully-kept garden was rich in flowers for the time of year, and opened by a rustic gate upon the common, here narrowed into a mere strip of green intervening between it and the sea.

On the beach in front of this dainty mansion a young lady was sitting on a ridge of shingle, bleached by sea and sea-water to perfect cleanliness, which afforded a comfortable resting-place. The young lady seemed much at her ease. Her skirt of blue serge was turned up over a second skirt of white and blue, and caught up at the back in what used to be called "fish-wife" fashion—the bodice fitting her slight supple figure easily, perfectly; a little foot in a dark-blue stocking, and an incomparable shoe peeped forth as she supported an open book on one knee, and a wide-brimmed sailor hat almost hid her face as she bent over the page.

A big brown boat drawn up beside her made a shelter from the level rays of the sinking sun. Altogether she presented a pretty picture of quiet enjoyment.

As the last strains of the band died away a gentleman in boating attire strolled slowly across the grass, paused, looked around as if searching for something, and then came straight over the shingle towards her.

She heard his step and looked at her book with renewed attention, nor did she move till he stood beside her. Then she raised her face, an interesting, rather than a pretty face, somewhat brunette in complexion, and pale, with a warm paleness—a small, oval face, with a delicate chin and a very slight downward curve at the corners of the soft red mouth, that gave a pathetic expression to her countenance when in repose. Her eyes, too, which were her best feature—large eyes, with long, dark lashes, had a wistful, far-away look, more suited to a saint than to their piquante owner.

The man who paused beside her was tall and slender, with a grace of movement not usual in an Englishman. He was darker, too, than ordinary Anglo-Saxons, who rarely possess such blue-black hair and flashing dark eyes as his.

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His well-cut, refined, but determined mouth was unshaded by moustaches, though a strong growth of black beard showed through his clear olive brown skin. He smiled a soft, caressing smile as he threw himself on the sand at her feet, saying: "I thought you had gone on the pier with Callander?"

"No; he has gone to the station to meet Mr. Standish, and Mabel has had the honor of a command from the Grand Duchess to drive with her."

The saintly-pathetic expression entirely disappeared, as she spoke with a swift, arch smile, and a flash of scorn from her "holy eyes."

"Ah," he returned, in an amused tone, "why did you not go to meet your beloved guardian?"

"I never meant to go. I came out of the way to listen to the band here. Music is so charming as it comes fitfully on the breeze, and I enjoy it most alone."

"Well, it is over now, so I may venture to stay?"

"Oh yes, if you like! But I am tired of sitting here. I want to match some silks. Do you mind, Mr. Egerton?"

"Not at all. As Madame de Stael says, 'etre avec ceux qu'on aime——'"

"It sounds just as well in English," she interrupted, laughing. "'To be with those we love is all-sufficient, etc., etc., etc.'—yes, it is a pretty sentiment."

"You are not in an amiable mood to-day, Miss Wynn. What book is this? Let me carry it for you. Ah, 'The Great Lone Land.'"

"Yes, it is charming—thank you," giving it to him.

"Don't you think it would be cruel to waste this lovely evening matching silks in a stuffy shop? Let us go along the common towards the pier. We may meet some of your party returning."

"Yes, let us go along by the sea." She turned as she spoke and directed her steps to a low grassy embankment which protected the common on the shore side.

They walked awhile in silence, Egerton's expression hardening as though his thoughts were not pleasant. Presently he began to speak on indifferent topics, and suddenly, after a pause, Miss Wynn asked: "Do you really think Colonel Callander seems better?"

"Yes, I do. I fancy the sunstroke which knocked him down was not severe. Good as an excuse to come home to his wife, perhaps, and——here she is," he exclaimed, in-

interrupting himself as a smart victoria and pair came up at a brisk pace and stopped beside them.

"I thought we might meet you," said the elder of the two ladies who occupied the carriage, a stately-looking woman of perhaps sixty or more, with iron-gray hair, a thin-lipped, close-shut mouth, and eyes too light for her complexion. Her companion was a beautiful young woman, exquisitely fair, with soft blue eyes and light golden-brown hair. Except on her lips she had scarce a trace of color, and her delicate face expressed pensive weariness as she lay back in the carriage.

"I thought we should meet you," repeated the elder lady, who was the Dowager Mrs. Callandar. "Now Mabel can walk home with you, for I must return to receive my niece, Henrietta Oakley. You ought to have come with us, Dorothy, but no doubt you were better engaged——"

Egerton bowed, and raised his hat as if he had received a high compliment. Dorothy smiled and gave a saucy little toss of her head as her sister alighted from the carriage.

"I hope you shall all dine with me to-morrow, to meet Miss Oakley," continued the Dowager. "May I have the pleasure of seeing you too, Mr. Egerton?"

"Certainly; I shall be delighted."

Mrs. Callandar opened and upreared a grand white, much-beflounced parasol, bowed graciously, and was whirled away to her hotel.

"You do not look much the better of your drive, Mabel!" said her sister, looking earnestly at her.

"I assure you Mrs. Callandar was unusually amiable. I don't think she stabbed me more than once or twice." She slipped her arm through Dorothy's and, turning towards home, walked on slowly between her sister and Egerton.

* * * * *

Mabel and Dorothy Wynn were the daughters of a military officer, who, in the days of purchase, never had money enough to buy the next step beyond that of captain.

When both girls were babies, Captain Wynn lost his wife, and then in consideration of his junior officers' wishes expressed in L. S. D., retired. He did not long survive the combined loss of wife and career. His daughters remained at the school where he had placed them, in order to acquire the means of adding to their diminutive income.

They had apparently no relation save their guardian,

Paul Standish. He was a distant cousin of the late Captain Wynn, and his nearest friend—he was also executor to his kinsman's will, as well as guardian to his children; and very faithfully did he fulfill the duties he had undertaken. The young orphans soon learned to look upon him as an elder brother, indeed to Dorothy, who was five years younger than her sister, he seemed in their childish days quite elderly.

One afternoon he brought a married sister to see them. This lady invited the two girls to dine, and go to the theatre. A supreme joy in itself, and productive of important consequences.

At dinner they met Colonel, then Major Callandar, a grave, sedate man, who had run the gauntlet of many garrisons without any serious affairs of the heart; and now, in the most unexpected manner, he fell utterly and absolutely fathomsdeep in love with the defunct captain's lovely daughter Mabel.

This he soon confessed to her guardian, who, though pleased at the fair prospect opening before a girl eminently unfitted to take care of herself, recommended caution in carrying out so suddenly conceived a project, especially as it met with the most furious opposition of Callandar's mother.

Mrs. Callandar senior was a woman of large fortune, who had chosen her husband from among various competitors; first, because he pleased her fancy, and was of a yielding nature; secondly, because he was of an old county family.

Herbert Callander was her only child, and she adored him with a narrow selfish love, more bent on its own gratification than the happiness of its object. Her son, however, proved not to be of the stuff women can tie to their apron strings. He had a distinct will of his own, and having inherited a moderate independence from his father, he went his own way immovably, though always treating his mother with courtesy and affectionate respect, for he was really fond of her.

When the purse-proud woman, who had all a parvenu's avidity for rank and distinction, found that her son, her only son, was going to throw himself away on a penniless nobody, worse than nobody (for Mrs. Callander had ferreted out some painful ante-nuptial story, respecting the late Mrs. Wynn), her rage and mortification knew no bounds.

Colonel Callander, however, carried out his project, and Mabel, won by his quiet kindness, and pleased at the prospect of a home which he assured her she should share with her sister, when that wilful little personage was old enough to leave school, consented with sweet frank readiness, and in about six months after their first meeting, Mabel Wynn became Mabel Callander, the object of her grave husband's profound devotion, of her overbearing mother-in-law's deepest dislike.

This event wrought a considerable change in the life of Mabel's sister. The first grief of parting (which was keen and deep) over, Dorothy found that many pleasures and advantages had come into her hitherto rather meagre existence. She had prettier frocks, more abundant bonnets, and more frequent expeditions to concert and panorama with those better-off elder girls whose superior lot she had hitherto envied.

The Christmas and Midsummer holidays, spent with Major and Mrs. Callander wherever they happened to be quartered, were glorious periods of fun and frolic, and when, nearly two years after the fortunate marriage, a little baby niece was presented to her, her joy and exultation knew no bounds. Towards her brother-in-law she felt the warmest regard, not untinged with awe, and her highest reward, when she did resist her natural tendency to idleness, and attained any school distinction, was Callander's grave approbation. This halcyon period came to a close when the baby girl was a few months old, and the regiment being ordered to India, the commanding officer retired and Callander got his step.

But a warm climate did not suit his fair wife, who was never very strong. After the birth of a boy she was ordered home.

Dorothy, now close on the serious age of 18, by Callander's wish, left school to reside with her sister. The only drawbacks to this blissful arrangement were the neighborhood and supervision of Mrs. Callander, the delicacy and depression of Mabel. This, however, seemed likely to pass away, as, in a month or two, Dorothy gladly recognised an improvement in health and spirits.

The winter was a pleasant one, for Paul Standish proved himself the best "guide, philosopher, and friend" they could have had.

The gaiety of their lives was considerably increased to-

wards Christmas by the arrival in London of Egerton, who had known Colonel and Mrs. Callander in India, where he had gone for sport and travel. He had left shortly before she did, returning by the Persian Gulf and the Euphrates, in order to visit the ruined cities on the old caravan route.

He loaded the sisters with flowers, stalls at the theatres, small presents, endless attentions, managing at the same time to stand well with the Dowager, who respected his wealth and position.

In the spring Mabel caught a severe cold, and was recommended to try the South Coast for change of air. Standish found and secured for her the pretty villa called "The Knoll," at Fordsea, where, as in a quiet pool, the current of this true tale at present seems scarcely to move.

Here their faithful squires came to and fro, and brought them the echoes of the world.

Mrs. Callander, senior, did not leave them long undisturbed, for she followed before the season was over, and established herself, her maidservants and her menservants, her horses and her carriage, at the Pier Hotel. She was, however, unusually indulgent to those sinners, Mabel and her sister, for it began to dawn upon her that Mr. Egerton of Netherleigh, was absolutely paying attention to that plain, insignificant Dorothy.

The peaceful tenor of this tranquil period was rudely broken by the news of Colonel Callander's illness. He had received a sunstroke while on some military expedition, and though he made a fairly quick recovery, he was ordered home, and had arrived about three weeks before the opening of this history.

But this long digression has out-lastcd the homeward march of the trio we left strolling towards the Knoll. At the gate leading into the grounds on the land side they found a group, consisting of Colonel Callander, another gentleman, the nurse, and children. Callander was a man about Egerton's height, and more massively built. He was dark and sunburnt, with a plain strong face, and grave earnest eyes. But his was the darkness of an Englishman; Egerton's of a foreigner. He was holding his little girl's doll, while that young person attempted to "climb up" the leg of the other man, who was their expected visitor, Standish, a fair and exceedingly Saxon-looking individual, with light reddish-brown mustaches and well-trimmed hair of the same hue. He was shorter than either of the others.

but well set up and distinguished-looking. Though by no means handsome, he had a pleasant sensible face, with a rather large jaw and well-shaped eyes of no particular color, but bright and keen. The nurse stood by, holding Master Baby in her arms, while he struggled and kicked vigorously as soon as he saw his mother.

"Don't hold that boy, he is too heavy for you, exclaimed Standish, as soon as they had exchanged greetings, for Mrs. Callander had yielded to her son's loudly-expressed claim for notice—he tried to take him as he spoke.

"Give him to his nurse," said the Colonel quickly. "How long you have been? You must be tired."

"Well, Dorothy, you are blooming as usual, but the sun has been a trifle too loving, eh?" said Standish.

"Oh, I know I am sunburnt, and so is little Doll, though we do our best to keep her sun hat on. Just look," and lifting the child's sunny curls, she showed the difference of the covered and uncovered portions of her brow.

"Fair little puss, she is the imago of her mother," and Standish lifted the child to kiss her affectionately.

"I think it is almost time to dress for dinner," remarked Callander, who had been talking with Egerton while his wife and Dorothy had devoted themselves to Standish.

"It is indeed, and I have to go back to the hotel." Raising his hat, Egerton walked briskly away towards the pier, while the others entered the house.

* * * * *

Mrs. Callander's little dinner was a greater success in her own estimation than perhaps in that of her guests. She had what she considered a distinguished party, which included an Honorable Major St. John, whose pretensions to exclusiveness and superiority were upheld by masterly taciturnity, her niece, a much-travelled and experienced young lady of good fortune, and beyond the twenties, to whom the Dowager once thought of marrying her son, and who was nothing loth, an eloquent Low Church divine, the Rev. Septimus Cole, who was her spiritual director, Egerton, sundry nonentities, naval and military, of good position, and her son with his wife, who looked provokingly elegant. Dorothy had been unceremoniously put off to make room for St. John, who was especially asked for Miss Oakley's benefit, and as Egerton, who was, Mrs. Callander thought, the greatest man there, was more silent than usual, and looked slightly bored, she began,

to fear before dinner was over that she had made a mistake in dispensing with that conceited, insignificant chit Dorothy, for really Mr. Egerton seemed to miss something and that something might be Dorothy.

The rest of the company, with the exception of Miss Oakley, "made" conversation more or less stiffly. She rattled away on all possible subjects to St. John and Egerton, between whom she sat, being divided between the desire to make an impression on the latter and animate the former. Colonel and Mrs. Callander, remained to the last, as he acted host, and when the family party were left alone, Miss Oakley took a low chair beside her cousin's wife. "I have not had the chance of a word with you," she exclaimed, "and it must be more than two years since we met. I protest you are prettier than ever, but paler and graver."

"Thank you, Henrietta. Please remember I have two babies to think of now."

"Horrid little brats! I hate children."

"Heretic, they are sweet things, but certainly troublesome. How do you think Herbert looks?"

"Oh, very well. I would not trouble about him. Tell me, how do you come to be such friends with Randal Egerton? He is the most exclusive of men, and never allows himself to be bored."

"Then I suppose we do not bore him. He was hurt when out tiger-hunting, and carried into our bungalow, where we nursed him. He fancied we saved his life. Herbert is very fond of him."

"And Dorothy? I fancy she has grown pretty. May I come to luncheon to-morrow? I promise not to murder the children if you show them to me. And so Mr. Standish is with you. Why in the world didn't my aunt ask him to dinner? He is so agreeable and so popular."

While Miss Oakley chatted on, Mrs. Callander was pouring a few grievences into his son's ear.

"I am sorry Mabel was so bored at dinner to-day, but I am quite aware of the reason."

"Indeed! Well, I did not observe her being bored, nor do I know why she should be."

"Oh, I am the offender, I did not ask Mr. Standish to join us. He is, I confess, a man I neither like or approve."

is no accounting for taste. He is a good fellow

"A mere worldling. I fear his want of faith has had an evil influence on Mabel and Dorothy."

"Oh, come! If there are no worse women in the world than my wife and little Dorothy, it would not be a bad place—Mabel, it will be late before we reach home."

The Dowager (as she liked to be called, it somehow smacked of ducal rank) bade them a glacial good-night, but Henrietta ran down stairs to see them off. "You will be at Mr. Egerton's pic-nic on Tuesday, will you not? He has asked me and Aunt Callander. Just fancy her yachting! She will bore and be bored. Mind you are at home to luncheon, Herbert, I am coming."

"Certainly, as to the pic-nic, nearly everyone is going, ourselves among the number. Good-night."

"I think Herbert looks rather glum," said Miss Oakley, when she returned to her aunt, who was sitting very straight up, with a frown on her cold face.

"You observe it too? and I am not surprised. Mabel is so greatly attached to her guardian that his word is law. Heaven knows I am the last to think evil, but I cannot forget that her mother married the late Captain Wynn during the lifetime of her first husband."

"Why, auntie!" cried Miss Oakley in a tone of delighted excitement, "you do not mean to say that she committed bigamy?"

"No, Henrietta, but what was as bad she left her husband for another man."

"Well, perhaps number one was a brute; to be sure I am not a strictly religious high-toned woman. I should scent out more wickedness if I were."

Meanwhile Colonel and Mrs. Callander drove home in silence, and found that Dorothy had gone to bed, but the lamp was still alight in the pretty drawing-room. Two or three letters, which at once by the last post, lay upon the table. Callander stood reading them beside the light. Mabel threw aside the white Indian shawl in which she had been wrapped, and watched him while he read. He had aged certainly—there was a heaviness about his brow that used not to be there. Would he ever be quite the same as he was before that unfortunate sunstroke?

Presently he laid down his letters with a sigh.

"There is nothing unpleasant in them, dear?" asked his wife, coming timidly to him, and, slipping her arm through his, pressed her fair young head against his shoulder.

"Nothing whatever, they are of no importance." He stood quite still, and Mabel still pressing against him said:

"Does anything disturb or worry you, Herbert? I cannot help fancying——" she stopped abruptly. He looked down into the sweet face uplifted to his so gravely, that she could not continue—and yet he made no movement to return her caress.

"What is there to make me unhappy?" he asked in a cold, composed voice. "I am with those I love—and who, I believe, love me. I have dear children, and a sweet wife. Oh, how sweet and fair," he exclaimed, with a sudden change of tone, and clasping her in his arms, he gazed into her eyes as if he would draw out the secrets of her soul. "Whom I love too well—too well!" She felt the strong beating of his heart as he strained her to him, and his lips clung to hers in a long passionate kiss.

Suddenly he released her. "Are you cold, that you shivered so?" he asked quickly.

"No, not at all—but—but you make me a little uneasy. Do not thrust me away as if I were a naughty child, Herbert. You know I love you!" She took his arm and put it round her.

"If I did not believe it, chaos would indeed be come again," cried Callander, gathering her to him in a close embrace. Do not mind my variability of mood, Mabel! Whatever I may seem, never doubt that you are all the world to me."

* * * * *

Paul Standish was a capital aide-de-camp in organising a picnic, and Egerton benefitted by his assistance. Standish was a man of good family, very well known and popular in certain London circles. Though generally considered a shrewd worldling, there was a kindly core to his heart, and he deeply enjoyed his quiet visit to the Knoll. His work (he was in the Foreign Office) had taken him much abroad, and he liked the repose and refinement of Mabel's home. Though no longer young, he had still all vigor and elasticity of youth, and was not yet chilled by the effects of a tolerably wide experience.

The day before that fixed for Egerton's yachting party, not finding Dorothy in the house or garden, Standish started in search of her, and knowing her haunts, was not long in discovering his ward. She was kneeling on the short, partially-bleached herbage which covered a low rising

ground at some little distance eastward from the Knoll; behind it the sun had already sunk, leaving the waters of the bay somewhat dull and mournful.

"I looked for you in vain," began Standish, when Dorothy, her hands full of the long grasses she had been gathering, started to her feet with a low cry, a startled, pathetic expression on her mobile face. "I have frightened you," said Standish smiling. "Why, where are your thoughts, Dorothy?"

"Not very far, Paul," beginning to tie her grasses together. "They are never very far from me at present."

"Hum! That might be accounted for in two ways."

"How?"

"They may be occupied by Mabel. They may possibly dwell on our fascinating friend, Egerton."

"Fascinating! Do you think him fascinating?"

"Well, I am scarcely a judge; but he is a handsome, accomplished fellow."

"Yes, he is, and you are right. I was thinking of him." She uttered these words with the utmost composure.

Standish looked at her with steady scrutiny, but she did not perceive it. "I am waiting for further confessions," he said at length.

"I have nothing to confess, Paul; at least not at present." She paused, and then went on, "Mrs. Egerton's mother was a Spaniard, was she not?"

"Yes, I believe so. He looks like a Spaniard himself,"

"He does, and I think he could be very revengeful. I feel afraid of him sometimes."

"What, do you think he will plunge a stiletto in your heart—because, oh, say because you walked with me."

A faint color rose in Dorothy's cheek, but she laughed low and exclaimed:—

"That would be too illogical. You are my guardian, and I have a sort of right to you."

"A right I shall never question, Dorothy." His voice grew soft as he spoke.

"Thank you," she said, gently. Then she made a sudden movement, "Let us go back," she exclaimed, "that dreary-looking sea makes me sad."

"My dear Dorothy, you cannot be yourself, or you would not have these sickly fancies. You have everything in the world to make you happy, so pray call up your common sense, of which you have plenty."

"I will, Paul," said Dorothy, laughing. "Come, let us walk back, and we shall be in time for tea."

An hour later Colonel Callander and his mother were taking a final turn upon the pier.

Their conversation had not been pleasant or exhilarating. Mrs. Callander looked more than usually severe, and her mouth was rigidly closed save when she opened it to speak.

Callander's face was white and set—there was a dull burning glow in his eyes.

"You may turn a deaf ear to me if you will," said the dowager—as they approached the gate which led to the Esplanade, intending to return to the Hotel—"but I am right, I know I am!"

He made no answer—and they advanced slowly—till, catching sight of a group on the Common below, Mrs. Callander paused and pointed to it. The group consisted of Mabel, Standish, and little Dolly—as they looked Mabel took her ex-guardian's arm, and slackening her pace, seemed to be conversing with profound interest. "You see," said Mrs. Callander, "they are never long apart. Be warned in time, Herbert! You know what blood she has in her veins—you know her mother's history!"

"Besilent!" he interrupted in a strange half-choked voice. "You do not know what you are saying! My wife is spotless—will be spotless so long as she lives! Never dare to touch upon this topic again. Trust my honor to myself, I know how to keep it clean."

To the imperious woman's surprise, he turned, and leaving her to make her way as she best could alone to her temporary abode, walked rapidly forward to overtake his wife.

* * * * *

The morning of the day which Egerton had fixed for his party was bright and clear, with a little more breeze than some of his guests approved. The object of the voyage was to visit the remains of an old Norman castle, which crowned some picturesque cliffs, about eight or nine miles east of Fordsea—also to inspect a curious rocky islet not far from it, on which a modern lighthouse replaced the beacon of a hermit, who in former days devoted himself to keep it alive, and, according to the legend, built himself a chapel without any human aid. The ruins of this remarkable edifice were still visible from the sea.

At breakfast a slight change of plans took place as Mabel suggested that she feared she was too indifferent a sailor to enjoy the excursion by sea, and with a pretty coaxing air asked Callander to drive her to Ravenstone, which was nearer by land than by water. He consented very readily, and Standish undertook to escort Dorothy.

The party was not very large, but bright and sociable, though Mrs. Callander, senior, who honored it with her presence, was somewhat snappish. "It was so thoughtless of Mabel to expose her husband to the glare and sun on that unsheltered road!" she said, "and for a mere whim!" Egerton, too, was rather silent, and cynical when he did speak.

There was enough breeze to give life and motion, the rippling waters glittered in the sun, and the music of a band stationed amidships, made a delightful undercurrent of harmony. Yet Dorothy looked thoughtful and pre-occupied.

"Mrs. Callander has found it more convenient to go below," said Standish, placing his camp-stool beside Dorothy as she sat in the stern, watching the shadows of the swift sailing clouds as they flitted over the water. "Miss Oakley seems to consider it her duty to rouse St. John's dormant mental energies, and the rest of the ladies are neglecting their cavaliers, to amuse and interest our fascinating host. So I beg you will devote yourself to me, Dorothy!"

"With pleasure!" she returned, smiling.

"Are you still in the dolefuls?" asked Standish, looking keenly at her.

"No—yet I am uneasy! I was so glad Mabel decided to drive with Herbert to Ravenstone, but I went into her room just before I came away, and found Nurse giving her sal-volatile—she had almost fainted! She seems to me to lose strength instead of gaining it."

"That must be your fancy, Dorothy!"

"I do not believe it is! I told her she ought to make Herbert take her quite away from everyone for a few weeks to Scotland or Switzerland, or Sweden and Norway. It would do them both so much good!"

"You are a wise little woman. I believe, too, it would be a complete cure."

"Mabel seemed to like the idea, and said she would mention——"

"Standish!" said their host, interrupting her—"Miss

Oakley is asking for you; she says you know the Legend of the Island Hermit! I think she is getting a little tired of her benevolent effort!"

Standish rose somewhat reluctantly, and Egerton took his place, which he kept for some considerable time.

When the voyage was accomplished, and the yacht glided into the small rock-enclosed creek at the foot of which nestled a few fishermen's cabins, and the inevitable tavern, they found Colonel Callander and Mabel waiting on the rude little jetty—alongside which the yacht found ample depth of water. It being luncheon time, Egerton proposed having that meal served on deck, before they attempted the steep ascent. His suggestion was adopted unanimously, and a gay repast ensued.

Mrs. Callander sat on her host's right, apparently not much the worse of her voyage, and supported on the other side by the Rev. S. Cole, with whom she exchanged from time to time a few words disapproving the fun and laughter going on around her. Ultimately she preferred a comfortable seat on deck, an early cup of tea, and the society of her favorite divine to a long fatiguing walk to inspect relics of the past which did not interest her.

The rest set forth to make their way upwards to the old towers which frowned above at so formidable a height.

Egerton took charge of Dorothy so decidedly, that they were pretty well left to themselves.

"What a strong place this was once," said the latter, looking round when they reached the grass-grown space which had once been the court yard. "Its owner must have been a king in his way. After all, a Norman baron had rather a good time of it, at least he was lord of those around him, his word was law."

"Perhaps so! but what a dreadfully bad time his people—his dependants must have had!"

"I dare say they got quite as much good out of life as the people do now! They had fewer wants, and greater respect for their rightful lord."

"And they were a trifle nearer the brute! which of course was of no consequence so long as it made matters easier for their masters."

"What! are you a raging democrat?" exclaimed Egerton with a smile. "I had no idea that Callander harbored such a dangerous character."

"Of course you think me an idiot; perhaps I am, but I can't help having some ideas about history."

"An idiot!" repeated Egerton, with a look full of admiration. "I wish I dare tell you what I think!"

"He is uncommonly handsome, and has a nice voice," thought Dorothy, but she only laughed and shook her head.

"It is a terribly ruined ruin," remarked Egerton, when they had finished their explorations, "come let us make our way down. There is a pretty nook I want to show you—you have, I know, an artist's eye for beauty."

Dorothy found then that they had lingered to the last, and that Mabel had taken her husband's arm, and was walking away between him and Standish.

Dorothy was a little vexed that her guardian had scarcely spoken to her since Egerton had interrupted their conversation in the morning; she was consequently more disposed to be friendly with her host.

About half-way between the ruins and the pier, a faintly marked footpath turned to the left, leading apparently across the face of the cliff—"Let me show you the way," said Egerton, passing her.

"Is there a footing?" asked Dorothy.

"Trust me!" he returned, and following him she soon found herself on a small projecting platform, in front of which some gorse bushes and several moss-grown stones formed a natural parapet, while a fragment of rock served for a seat—the outlook over the sea, to the lighthouse and chapel on the islet before mentioned made a delightfully tranquil, picturesque scene.

"This is charming," cried Dorothy. "How sweet and peaceful!"

"Yes, it is sweet! do sit down for a few minutes, and forgive me, if I am abrupt, but I seldom have a chance of speaking to you alone. I cannot lose this precious moment. Will you listen to me? I want to tell you what I think of you."

"Don't be too complimentary," said Dorothy, with a little uneasy laugh.

"No, I shall speak the truth. Well, then, I think you are the brightest, sauciest, most womanly girl that ever charmed a man's heart—and the desire of mine is to call you my wife, sweet Dorothy!" He tried to take her hand; she drew it hastily away, with a startled look.

"Will you not speak to me?" he continued.

"I do not know how to speak to you, Mr. Egerton," in a distressed voice. "I do not—I do not seem able to believe you!—to believe that you love me, I mean, when I do not love you, for, indeed, I do not."

"I know that only too well! But let me try to teach you? If you love no one else, I may succeed. Do you love anyone, Dorothy?"

"No! indeed, I do not! but somehow, Mr. Egerton, I do not think I should ever love you, nor do I feel that I am the sort of girl you ought to marry——" She broke off abruptly.

"I am quite old enough to know my own mind," said Egerton, abruptly. "If your heart is free, I will not accent your present 'no' as final. I am desperately persevering when my heart is set on anything, as it is now, Dorothy."

"Still, Mr. Egerton, do not think me unkind, but—but I do not think I shall ever change."

"We shall see. Now you are looking uneasy. I do not want to keep you here against your will. Remember, though, I do not accept your refusal, give me a little grace." He caught and kissed her hand, holding it for a minute in his own.

"Do not keep me, Mr. Egerton," said Dorothy, who was greatly distressed; "I am more sorry that I can say to vex you, and—and—I want to overtake Miss Oakley."

CHAPTER II.

"DUNCAN GRAY'S COME HERE TO WOO."

Egerton's words took Dorothy so completely by surprise that for some time she was unable to think clearly.

Even the next morning, when she opened her eyes, her first feeling was painful confusion.

She has been wonderfully still and silent all the way back, nestling close to Paul Standish, who, after once asking, "Are you all right, Dorothy?" had left her to herself. Egerton showed her much quiet attention, and walked with her to the Knoll, giving her hand a tender, significant pressure at parting. After a little talk with Mabel, to which Colonel Callander listened in his usual silent way, she went to her room, and tired with the long day out of doors, and the emotion of its latter half, she was soon heavily asleep.

Egerton's avowal affected her curiously—there was an odd element of fear in the mixed feeling which impelled her to reject him.

When he first appeared as a friend of her sister, she liked and admired him, but gradually a sense of distrust grew up in her heart—how and why she never dreamt of analysing. The distrust, however, was very dim and instinctive. He was still a pleasant companion. It was only when he began to pay her marked attention, and seek opportunities of being alone with her, that it took anything of a tangible form. For some occult reason she had taken it into her head that he was amusing himself at her expense, which roused her keen, sensitive pride, and kept her on the qui vive to notice the fascinating Egerton's proceedings. That he should have absolutely asked her to be his wife left no doubt of his sincerity. Still her heart was in no way softened to him—rather a subtle terror crept into it. What was his motive? Could it be really true love, when she felt so hard and distrustful towards him? Surely she would have loved him had he really loved her—would she indeed?

This question she did not answer save by a deep blush, even though alone brushing out her long hair before descending to breakfast. She longed to hear what Mabel thought of the wonderful event—she must tell Mabel; Mr. Egerton would not mind that; but to every one else she would be mute—no one should know of his rejection.

But Egerton was by no means anxious to conceal the fact that he had offered himself—his old name, his fine estate, his large investments—to this young, insignificant girl—"a mere nobody"—as the dowager Mrs. Callander was wont to remark.

He did not present himself as early as usual at "The Knoll" the next day, but meeting Standish, who had been strolling on the pier at an hour when it was chiefly in the possession of ancient mariners, he passed his arm through that of Standish with unusual familiarity, saying, "I was on my way to have a little talk with Callander. Will you come with me?"

"Yes, if you like; you'll be rather clever if you get him to talk."

He is certainly very taciturn, but he always was—more or less. He hasn't quite thrown off his late attack, and has had a touch of ague lately, which is very depressing.

But show him you want his help or advice, and he is as much alive, as soundly sensible as ever. I am just going to ask his counsel in a matter which will interest you."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, I am sure it will. Look! There goes the Ariadne," pointing to a smart little gunboat which was steaming out of the harbor. "Fortesque did not think he'd be off so soon. This afternoon, he said, would be their earliest start. I suppose he found fresh orders awaiting him when he got on board last night." Talking on various topics, with many a break—for Standish did not feel quite at ease—they approached the Knoll, at the gate of which they met Colonel Callander. He greeted them with more animation than usual.

"Where are you off to?" asked Egerton.

"I was going to have a swim. I have not felt up to one before, but to-day I think I may venture; bathing is a favorite pastime of mine."

"I don't think you are fit for it by any means," said Standish, "Take my advice; give it up for this season."

"And I want your advice in a matter very vital to me. Come down on the beach, where we are safe from listeners, and I'll unburden my heart," said Egerton, with a pleasant smile.

"Very well. I don't fancy it is a matter of life and death," returned Callander, looking at him kindly, and they went leisurely across the strip of common and sat down on one of the ridges of the shingle in front of the villa.

"Give me your ears," began Egerton, "and your best help, for you can help me if you choose. I have just been rejected by the girl I love! I want your influence to induce her to reconsider her decision, for my fate is in the hands of Miss Dorothy Wynn."

"Dorothy!" repeated Callander, "I am not quite taken by surprise. I see a good deal of what is going on about me. Well, Egerton, you have my best wishes, but as to influence, I do not think I have much." Standish was silent.

"What do you say?" added Egerton, turning to him. "I trust you, as her guardian, will not also reject me."

"Get her consent and you shall have mine," said Standish.

"Pray what reason did she allege for rejecting you?"

asked Callander, with interest. "I should have thought you rather an acceptable sort of fellow to a girl."

"She just simply said she did not like me, and she never would. She put it rather more politely, you know, but that was the gist of it, and awfully sweet she looked when she said so."

"There is a certain degree of obstinacy in her," remarked Colonel Callander, as he lit a cigar. "but she is an honest-hearted little girl, and I should be very pleased to see her married to you."

"I am afraid I was rather abrupt with her, but I have been watching for an opportunity to speak to her for a long time. I found it yesterday, and was not sufficiently cautious. A man cannot always be master of himself."

Standish muttered something the others did not catch.

"Eh! what is it?" asked Egerton.

"Nothing. But Dorothy is rather young, don't you think so, Callander?"

Perhaps. Mabel was eighteen when we married, he returned, with a queer far away look in his eyes. "But she was softer, less individual than Dorothy; she needed support and protection."

"If my ward accepts you," said Standish somewhat coldly, "I could not possibly object to you either personally or as regards your position. You are an excellent match for any woman, however high born, but Dorothy must have ample time; she must not be pressed!"

"Heaven knows!" cried Egerton, with feeling, "I think your charming ward a great deal too good for me. I am quite willing to wait her pleasure, but I want you both—one as her guardian, the other as her nearest friend—to understand my hopes—my intentions—to give me what chances you can of being with her; of urging my suit upon her, that is to say, if you approve it!"

"For my part I heartily wish you success," said Callander, warmly. "It is a marriage that would give me pleasure. I feel my own health rather uncertain—and——" He paused abruptly, gazing away out to sea with the far-away look in his eyes which touched and struck Standish.

"My dear fellow, don't croak!" cried Egerton. "I hope you will dance merrily at my wedding before many months are over. And you, too, Standish."

"As for me!" said that gentleman, "I can only repeat

that when you win Dorothy's consent—mine is at your service!"

"Thank you," returned Egerton.

"However, do not be too sure of her."

"I assure you I feel very properly uncertain."

"And you may rely on our silence respecting your hopes and wishes until——"

"I am by no means anxious that they should be kept such a profound secret," replied Egerton. "I think my taste does me credit."

"The only person to whom I feel inclined to confide so important a piece of intelligence," said the colonel thoughtfully, "is to my mother. It is right she should know, especially as it is probable we shall leave Dorothy under her care when we go away."

"Go away! Who is going away?" cried Egerton sharply, with a keen glance like a stab.

"Don't suppose I am going to do anything desperate," said Callander, with a grave smile. "Mrs. Callander and I are talking of going abroad for a month or two. I want to have a look at the battle fields on the French frontier, and to go on into Switzerland. Of course Dorothy will stay here."

"It will do you a great deal of good," said Standish,

"I am not quite sure of that," added Egerton hastily.

"The cooking at these out-of-the-way places is execrable, and may upset you. Nothing like the comforts of home when you are in a convalescent state. I would not decide on this journey rashly."

"I shall be very careful, but I intend taking the trip. Besides, Mrs. Callander seems to like the idea of it."

"Does she?" returned Egerton, with an indefinable touch of surprise in his tone. "I trust you may both be the better."

"You'll come in to luncheon, Egerton?"

"Thank you, no! I fancy Miss Wynn would rather not meet me so soon. She has not yet perhaps forgiven my abruptness. I'll keep out of sight to-day, but will you both put in a word for me? Assure her of my earnestness—my desire to wait her time, and in no way press her."

"That is quite the line you ought to take," said Callander. "Well, let us see you to-morrow, and you'll find Dorothy reasonable, I am sure. Both she and Mrs. Callander kept their rooms this morning. I have not seen them yet."

Now I am going to call on my mother," added the colonel, rising, "for I don't think there is anything more to be said or done as regards my sister-in-law at present."

"Let me come with you," said Egerton, throwing away the end of his cigar. "I don't know exactly what to do with myself."

"Come then," was Callander's reply.

"And I am going to walk to the point," said Standish.

The trio dispersed, Standish proceeding along the beach to a long, low spit which stretched far into the waters.

He moved slowly, with little of his usual firm alertness, nor did his quick, observant eye roam as usual in search of the curious or beautiful.

Egerton's proposal for his ward had disturbed him in no common degree. Of course it was a sort of thing he must expect as the guardian of an attractive girl, and there was nothing to find fault with in Egerton's straightforward honesty; yet there was something cut and dried in his tone—an absence of the glow and rapture, the eagerness and self-doubt that naturally betray themselves in a lover, ardent enough to risk confessing failure, in order, if possible, to secure co-operation.

"It will be a splendid match," he said to himself, "and I never heard anything against Egerton, yet I have a sort of idea that his amusements have not been of the most innocent description. I must try and find out more of his history. What, in Heaven's name, has kept the child from falling in love with him? He is quite a girl's ideal hero, and of late he has evidently sought her. Does she love someone else? That is the only shield I know for so young and inexperienced a girl. I wish she would speak openly to me. She is not as confiding as she used to be. But Mabel will tell me. Dorothy opens her heart to Mabel. Miss Oakley will be delighted at this fulfilment of her prophecies. She has always been declaring that Egerton is in love with Dorothy. Well, I suppose he is."

Meanwhile Callander and Egerton walked slowly towards the hotel where the Dowager had established herself. Here Egerton left him.

There had been little intercourse between Mrs. Callander and her son, since she ventured to express her suspicions of Standish so plainly; she had been secretly anxious to make matters smooth once more, but it was not easy to approach him. He was so silent and self-contained that unless she

began the subject, and that as she well knew by retracting all that she had insinuated, there was small chance of getting him beyond the merest commonplace. To retract was impossible to her. Towards her daughter-in-law she had a quiet but immovable aversion. She was a living memento of defeat, and Mrs. Callander was perpetually on the lookout for faults which she felt certain existed. Her theory was, that Mabel's soft, tranquil manner masked an iron will, profound dissimulation, and unscrupulous plotting. Without the lures of a fascinating siren, her son would never have been drawn from the allegiance due to a mother—without an amount of designing self-control Mabel could never have succeeded in avoiding a quarrel with her mother-in-law. Mrs. Callander's dearest wish was to have some legitimate cause of complaint against her son's wife, and finding it impossible to irritate her into incivility, she established severe disapprobation of her affectionate familiarity with her guardian instead.

Not that Mrs. Callander, in her heart, for a moment suspected real evil—she merely seized the only peg available on which to hang a grievance. Had her remonstrances and insinuations roused her son's wrath and jealousy, she would have been satisfied, but to see him unmoved roused her to exaggeration both of thought and word. When at last she succeeded in stirring him to speech, it was to speech of a very different kind from what she desired. In all this distortion of judgment and cruelty of heart, she never doubted her own righteousness—her own clear-sightedness and sincere desire to do kindly and justly both by her son and her daughter-in-law, nor abated by a breath the ardor of her prayers and thanksgivings, especially for not being quite as other women are.

But though she firmly believed that her feelings towards Mabel partook more of sorrow than of anger, she did not hide from herself the unmitigated dislike—nay hatred—with which she regarded Standish.

He was poor, yet perfectly independent. Coming of an ancient race and admitted into the best society, he yet had no sounding title which might be flourished in the face of the world, and for all Mrs. Callander's social circle knew, he might be a stockbroker, or a retired draper, or anything else bourgeois and obscure, without that gilding of wealth which makes any bread pill acceptable; and this nobody, .. more clerk in the Foreign Office, had a sort of ineffable

superiority that she could not away with. He was perfectly polite and well-bred—in the simplest manner—yet she felt herself—she, Mrs. Bruce Callander, with all her wealth, and church influence, and admiring evangelical friends, dwarfed into insignificance when faced with this easy-going, good-humored man, who seemed to say everything that came uppermost, yet never made a mistake, and in whose presence she felt her own elaborate dignity and careful speech, her heavy politeness and covert allusions to her grand acquaintance, and her all-sufficing wealth so much unmanageable dead weight, more likely to sink the vessel than to steady its progress.

Then the doctrines held by Standish on many points were utterly damnable. In politics an advanced Liberal—in religion a Freethinker—she even darkly doubted that he ever went to church! Yet he dared to argue with the Reverend Horace Babblington, a man whom Lord Beaconsfield came more than once to hear and invited to dinner, and was not a bit convinced by that eminent divine's assertions and inferences. In short he was a malignant of the worst type—a malignant she was afraid to tackle. Then the cool way in which he seemed to take Mabel's extraordinary good fortune as regarded her marriage—such a marriage for her—was a deadly offence. Indeed, as Mrs. Callander observed to her much enduring companion, whose lips were supposed to be hermetically sealed by the aristocratic will of her mistress, "It is impossible to trust a man whose ideas are so strange, whose views are so extremely vague! Mr. Standish is a person of no fixed principle, and perfectly without religion. It makes me shudder to think of his roaming about my poor son's house, unchecked and undetected. I earnestly pray that no serious harm may come of it."

When Colonel Callander was ushered into his mother's sitting-room he found her as usual richly and elaborately dressed, and knitting a huge coverlet, while Miss Boothby read aloud *The Times*.

She gave a cold, straight unresponsive hand to her son.

"I hope you are all right after your long day in the open air?" he said, as he drew a chair near her work-table.

"Thank you. I am as usual. I get little sleep. My mind is too anxious to permit of repose!"

"That's bad," said Colonel Callander, vaguely

"You need not stay, Miss Boothby," said the dowager,

"I wish to converse with my son." The meek companion rose with a small smile and disappeared.

"I came to ask if you have any commands, as I think of going up town to-morrow. I want to arrange one or two matters before going north."

"North! why, where are you going to now?" she asked, querulously.

"Mabel and I think of taking a trip through the Highlands, or to Switzerland. I think she wants a change as much as I do."

"There I agree with you," observed Mrs. Callander, significantly. "She has had a worn, distressed look ever since—I mean, for a considerable time."

"You think so?" said her son, with a quick, fiery, wrathful flash from his dark eyes—a warning signal that even his mother dared not disregard. "I trust she has no cause for distress or anxiety—at all events she seems to consider the panacea for her ills is a quiet journey with me."

"I am sincerely glad to hear it," with pointed emphasis—"pray when do start?"

"Early next week. May I ask what your plans are?"

"If you are going away there is no particular object in my remaining I don't suppose even when you return I shall see much of you."

"There is no reason why we should not be as much together as you like," returned the Colonel dryly. "However, if you are comfortable here, and don't mind staying, I should be glad if you would, because," he stopped and seemed to have lost the thread of his discourse—his eyes wandering to the window, and evidently preoccupied with some distant object visible to the inner sense.

"Well!" said his mother at last, looking up from her knitting with some surprise, "why do you wish me to stay?"

Her son looked at her with a bewildered aspect, and then passing his hand over his brow, exclaimed, "I beg your pardon! I forgot what I was saying! I wished you to stay. Oh! yes, I wished you to stay, because Mabel and I intend to be away about six weeks or so, and Dorothy will be here alone—that would be of no consequence, but Eger-ton has just proposed to me for her. It seems that Dorothy refused him, but he very wisely will not take a girl's first

no. So he begs to be allowed opportunities of pressing his suit—and—"

"Refused him!" said Mrs. Callander in a high key. "She must be out of her mind. He is a match for an Earl's daughter. Why, it will be quite a distinguished connection. Of course she will accept him! she must. Dorothy has her tempers, and is altogether wanting in a knowledge of what she owes to us, but I always thought there was some moral worth in her."

"Ultimately she will do as she likes, but Egerton ought to have a fair chance. Now if you are here he can see her with you, under your chapronage, and Henrietta will probably also stay—otherwise—" he paused.

"I never hesitate to sacrifice myself on the altar of duty," said Mrs. Callander, in a lofty tone, "or for the good of others, for I cannot say I owe any duty to your sister-in-law, but if it be an accommodation to you, my dear son, I will remain till you return."

"You see there are no relations or friends to whom we can send Dorothy."

"I am quite aware of that," put in his mother, sharply. Callander did not heed her.

"And," he continued, "even if Standish could stay on here, he could not be the source of protection you can be."

"Nor do I suppose it likely he will remain while you are away," remarked Mrs. Callander, sweetly.

"Mother!" he cried, "do you know how cruel you are? Do you know that my life is bound up in Mabel's! in Mabel's love and truth. Nothing you say touches my faith in her—yet—yet—you torment me. She is—she always will be spotless—in the eyes of all men."

He sprang up and paced to and fro rapidly, with occasional fierce gestures.

"Spotless! my dear Herbert! I should hope so!" returned Mrs. Callander, with the obtuseness of a hard unsympathetic woman. "Do you think I meant anything beyond the necessity of attending to appearances? When a man like Mr. Standish—a man of the world in the worst sense—is seen morning, noon and night with a young woman whom some people consider handsome. Why——"

"Be silent!" he exclaimed, harshly, turning to face her, with such wrath in his eyes that even the unimaginative old woman cowered for a moment. "Understand me! unless you cease to insult me by harping on these hideous

possibilities I will never see your face again! I should have broken with you before, but that I dreaded Mabel should be outraged by the knowledge of the reason why I dropped all intercourse with my mother. God! could you think that sweet simple soul could ever be drawn from her children—from me? Is such a possibility comprehensible to you?" There was keen pain as well as burning indignation in his tone.

"The wickedness of the unregenerate heart is unfathomable," said his mother severely, "and I greatly fear Mabel does not know where to look for strength. It's impossible to say where unguarded beginnings may lead poor, weak creatures, and your wife, though an amiable woman, is no doubt easily influenced, in short, **not** what you would call a person of strong character."

"No—thank God, she is **not**! How should I have got on with a woman of strong character? I say, mother—enough of this. I feel my head dizzy. If we are to be friends——"

"I will never speak to you on this subject again," said his mother, with an injured and dignified air. "I have done my duty, my conscience is clear. I have not left you in ignorance! Now as regards Dorothy——?"

Callander was again pacing to and fro—his head bent down, lips moving slightly—as if forming unuttered words. Then, with an effort, he repeated as he paused opposite her—"Dorothy!—Ay! We must not forget Dorothy. Will you stay here and let Egerton come to and fro, and see her under your auspices?"

"I shall be happy to further an alliance calculated to reflect credit on you and yours, Herbert."

"I don't want any reflected credit," he returned impatiently. "I am obliged to you, however, and I will bid you good-bye for the present. I am going to ride with Egerton this afternoon, and dine at mess with Tolhurst, of the 175th, this evening. So I shall not see you till I return from town. Good-bye, and remember!" He took her hand coldly enough for a moment, and left the room—almost running against the Rev. Thomas Gilmore, who was coming upstairs, as he often did about lunch hour.

But the recontre did not suggest his own luncheon to Callander. He wandered away past the pier, to an old, disused landing-place, a relic of times when Fordsea was in a very primitive condition. Here he sat down, and with

fixed eyes, which saw nothing round him, he reviewed the past—or rather, the past came uncalled—and unrolled its pictures—vivid pictures!—glowing in the warm light of intense thought thrown back upon the past.

Those first exquisite days of married life—when he had to win his young wife from the slight fear which gratified even while it troubled him. Her growing confidence, her timidity—the sweet peace of their lives—the tender anxiety for her, when the languor and depression of delicate health grew upon her; the occasional dread lest he were not quite young and blithe enough for her; the agony of parting; his mother's letters, full of hints and inuendoes which he scarcely understood; the delight of returning after his illness; the gnawing, undefined fear that a year's absence had, in some degree, undone the work of the Past; that a filmy something—he knew not what—had come between them—that she turned with more confidence and familiarity to her guardian than to himself; that her old timidity had come back to her! If—if it were possible that the smallest chill had breathed on her love—how was he to endure it! He dared not dwell on such a thought—he trembled at the shadow of possible agony which fell on him at the suggestion. No! There were moments when Mabel was her old self, even more frankly loving. And this projected tour!—they would enjoy a heavenly *tete-a-tete*. He would again be all and all to her—he would try to resist these fits of irritation, which must terrify so timid a soul, even though she herself was sacred to him. His future complete recovery depended upon himself; and for the sake of those dear to him, he must regain the self-mastery once so strong. "God only knows how hard the struggle is, and will be," he muttered. "When we are alone I will tell Mabel all—all the curious strain and burning anger that beset me at times. She will be touched with heavenly pity—she will help me. Love will give her courage—for she loves me. Yes. I can believe nothing, save that she loves me well.

CHAPTER III.

"TAKING SWEET COUNSEL."

Colonel Callander had not looked so well since he returned from India as the morning he started for London.

he undertook various commissions for his sister-in-law, but his wife had said she wanted nothing.

"I have everything I want, and more than I deserve," she added, as she kissed her husband tenderly at parting.

"I do not think so! Now rest and gather strength to enjoy our ramble together, for you look pale and feeble. He was inclined to pour out words of passionate endearment, but repressed them, as a first effort of the self-control he felt it so important to regain.

Dorothy had begun to forget the disturbing effect of Egerton's avowal; and as he did not appear for two whole days, hoped he would not renew the subject.

Standish had gone to dine and sleep at a country house at some distance to meet Lord R——, his chief, so the sisters had a very tranquil day, its only disturbance being a visit from the Dowager, who came in unwonted good-humor. In the evening, a little to Dorothy's dismay, Miss Oakley walked in just before dinner, to have a little talk, she said, accompanied by Egerton and Major St. John, who was, Miss Oakley thought, immensely struck with her, whereas St. John was equally sure he had made a profound impression on Miss Oakley, and was, in consideration of her endowments, disposed to encourage her attentions.

The sisters were sitting together in sympathetic silence at that most watching hour "the gloaming."

Dorothy had of course told Mabel of the declaration with which Egerton had startled her, and was somewhat surprised at the manner in which Mabel had received her confidence. She was not amazed, she murmured something about his being nice and interesting and a good match, then she added, "are you quite sure you could not like him, dear?"

"Yes, quite sure," was Dorothy's prompt reply. "I used to like him ever so much better before. I cannot think what put it into his head to imagine he wants to marry me?"

"I don't think it is so extraordinary," said Mabel, and dropped the subject.

"Dear me! What a pair of forsaken ones!" cried Miss Oakley, when she made out the two figures sitting in the recess of the window. "To see you watching the waning light without your accustomed attendants is quite effecting.

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"I knew Herbert went off this morning, but what has become of Mr. Standish?" Mabel explained.

"Well, I am surprised at his quitting his post in that fashion," resumed Miss Oakley. "As your guardian, he ought to stay when Herbert goes."

"Considering the state of civilisation in which we live, we may possibly be able to take care of ourselves," said Dorothy, dryly.

"Oh, it is odious not to have someone to take care of you, it makes one feel so selfish," exclaimed Miss Oakley in a sentimental tone. "I don't like to be obliged to think about myself."

"That is rather weak, is it not?" said Major St. John. "Self-preservation is the first law of—of Nature."

"A law that is rarely broken," put in Egerton, carelessly; "but, Miss Oakley, you are forgetting your benevolent errand."

"No, indeed I am not. Dorothy, I am going to get up a concert in aid of the Sailor's Home, and the schools attached to it. We'll have it in the large reading-room, and persuade Colonel Tryon to send us some of the bandsmen. Now, Dorothy, I want you to sing a duet with me, and take part in a trio. Mr. Standish has a good voice—a baritone, hasn't he?"

"Sing in a concert! Oh, I don't think I am equal to that!"

"Yes you are! You shall take the second. Your voice is contralto!"

"Let me think about it."

"Think! nonsense! Come and practise with me to-morrow morning, at any rate; it will help me in my part, even if I have to find another second."

"I am quite willing to help you so far"

"I knew you would be! Then you play nicely—you could accompany some of them; everyone must help. I don't know what you can do?" turning to St. John, and contemplating him with a puzzled look.

"Beat the big drum," he returned, with an ineffable air.

"That requires a certain amount of genius," said Dorothy.

"Sell programmes at the door at sixpence a-piece," suggested Egerton.

"No, I'll be your special aid-de-camp, Miss Oakley, or orderly—and do what I am bid."

"Not a bad way to make yourself useful," she returned, with a small, approving nod. "Now, Mabel, what can you contribute?"

"Some very humble work, Henrietta. I think all I can promise is to act secretary, or under-secretary."

"Very well! do ring for lights and I will show you a rough sketch of our manifesto."

While Miss Oakley held forth with animation, and Major St. John put in a word at intervals, Egerton moved across the room to where Dorothy was sitting, and said in a low tone, "I ought not perhaps to trespass upon you, but I want to ask pardon for my precipitancy. Will you forget my ill-judged haste, and let me come and go, on the old terms? I will not offend again, not, at least, till I fancy I may do so with less chance of rebuke. I may never reach that happy conviction, but let me try."

"I have no right to interfere with you coming or going," said Dorothy, softly, "but I do not like to give you any annoyance, and I do not think I shall change."

Here both were called to share the consultations, which was rather noisy, and ended in an appointment for Dorothy to practise with Miss Oakley at noon the following day. Then she declared she would be late for dinner, a crime her aunt would never forgive.

"There is a very amusing article on the 'Æsthetics of Dress' in the 'Quarterly Review,'" said Egerton. "I forget it, but if you will let me bring it over this evening, I'll read it to you"—he stood with his back to Dorothy, speaking to her sister.

"Oh! yes, certainly—thank you!" she returned, with a little nervous catch in her voice—raising her eyes to his and then dropping them quickly.

"Till we meet, then!" He bowed and followed Miss Oakley.

"Oh! Mabel dear! Why did you let him come?" cried Dorothy, as soon as the door was closed. "I should have enjoyed a nice, quiet evening, and above all I don't want him."

"How could I refuse?" asked Mabel, pressing her hands together. "He had asked Herbert and Paul to let him come and try his chance, and Herbert told me."

"What? Did Paul agree to this?" cried Dorothy—a kind of sharp cry—"I thought he knew me better!"

"Well, dearest you know you are not obliged to marry him."

"I am quite aware of that," said Dorothy with decision, "but I object to be teased."

Mabel did not answer immediately, when she spoke it was to say: "I thought Herbert looked more like himself than usual this morning."

"Yes, he did, and you will both be all the better for your tete-a-tete tour. I see your head is bad to-day."

"It is. I feel as if one of my old neuralgic headaches were coming on a gain, but a cup of tea will do me good"

Egerton did not fail to keep his promise. He was more than usually agreeable, keeping under the strain of cynicism that often tinged his talk. He read aloud well, and his comments on the paper when he had finished it were amusing, the reminiscences it evoked of the various fine ladies, mistresses of the art of dress, interesting; he addressed most of his conversation to Mabel, who said little, lying back among her sofa cushions as if weary, while Dorothy worked diligently at a highly ornamental pinafore for her little niece, which was a blessed occupation for her eyes. At length, after a short pause, Egerton exclaimed in an altered voice:

"I am afraid I am boring you, Mrs. Callander. You are looking awfully ill."

"It is that horrid neuralgia," cried Dorothy, laying down her work and going to her sister. "She has been suffering all day. Would you like to go to bed Mabel?"

"Let me try mesmerism," urged Egerton. "You remember the relief I was able to give last spring in town. Let me try."

"Would you like to try, Mabel?"

"I would rather go to my room," said Mabel, faintly.

"She'll have an awfully bad night, Miss Wynn. I'll make a few passes. You'll see how soon the look of pain will leave her."

"I don't half like it," said Dorothy, doubtfully.

Egerton came and stood beside the sofa, his eyes fixed on Mabel, who did not make the slightest resistance. Slowly passing his hand over her face in the fashion usual with mesmerisers, the tired eyes gradually closed, the pained contracted expression passed from her face, and she slept the peaceful sleep of an infant.

"It is wonderful," whispered Dorothy, who felt an indescribable impulse of pity and tenderness towards the gentle loving sister, who seemed so mysteriously oppressed—the tears were in her eyes, and her voice faltered as she added, "I wish you could give me this power, that I might enable her to rest! She seems so helpless."

"She is," returned Egerton in a deep tone full of feeling. "But unless you have the power I could not give it to you. I did not know I possessed it till that strange, mystic Bohemian Graf in I told you about, whom I knew some years ago at Prague, assured me I had it and made me experiment on some of her people. I am half ashamed of it. I would never use my power save to give physical relief. There is a prejudice against it too. Perhaps it would be as well not to inform Mrs. Callander, for instance that I was able to give your sister some repose."

"Oh, certainly not," cried Dorothy. "The less said the better, people are so ill-natured. I hope my dear sister will not want your aid any more. I shall sit and watch her till she wakes, and so I must say good-night now."

She held out her hand as she dismissed him.

"Yes! it will be best to let her rest till she rises of her own accord. I will call early to-morrow to inquire," and in a cold absent way, as if scarcely conscious to whom she was speaking, Egerton took her hand and went noiselessly away.

Amid all her anxiety about her sister Dorothy looked after him in surprise. All trace of the lover had vanished from look and manner.

"I wish I could understand him," she thought. "I wonder what Paul really thinks. Is it possible he wishes me to marry him for the sake of money and position? It is true that he is a man of the world, but I thought he had a heart too."

She drew a chair and sat looking at her sleeping sister, her heart swelling with tender memories. How gentle and forbearing she had been to Dorothy's wayward childhood. How untiring in her patient attempts to help her in her lessons, to mend and make for her and to keep her out of scrapes, and yet she, Dorothy, in her forwardness, used to despise her a little for the awe she was in of Miss Birch, their rather rigid "Domina." Dorothy could not understand such dread of any mere human creature like herself.

Her stronger spirit could not understand the reverent, timid, self-sacrificing nature of her sister. But how deeply she loved her! How ardently she longed to be able to help her. She was at once a mother to be respected, a sweet, simple child to be guarded by her younger sister.

The big tears rose in Dorothy's eyes as she thought, and then flashes of summer lightning-like wrath struck through her as she thought of that refrigerated, funereal dowager, worrying and oppressing so delicate a soul, and she planned various retorts to be used when occasion offered.

Her meditations were interrupted by the quiet entry of Nurse.

"If you please 'm," she was beginning, when Dorothy's "Hush" stopped her.

Pointing to her sleeping sister, she said in a whisper, "She is in such a nice sleep. I think it must do her good. She was in terrible pain, but Mr. Egerton sent her to sleep with mesmeric passes."

"I only wanted to ask about the sort of tucks the missis would like in Miss Dolly's new frock, an inch or inch and a half, but it's no matter! Dear, dear, she do sleep peaceful," advancing very softly to look at her. "I hope she'll be the better of it. Mark my words, Miss Dorothy, Mrs. Callander wants a deal more doctoring than the Colonel, she is weaker by a good bit than when we first came home. Many's the time I find her crying on the quiet in her own room! Now that's weakness, for a young lady like her has nothing to cry for. Hasn't she all the world can give her?"

She paused and looked with kindly compassionate eyes at the young creature who lay all unconscious of her scrutiny.

"She is sound," resumed Nurse in a whisper, "still, I don't hold with this sort of thing—mesmerism as it's called. It ain't natural, it's a sort of witchcraft, and for all Mr. Egerton is kind and nice and a real gentleman and makes her sleep like a baby, he never does her any good."

"Well, you must remember he never tried but once before and that in fun, when we defied him. Mabel's neuralgia was not really bad then."

"Yes, Miss Dorothy, Mr. Egerton has put her to sleep oftener, twice to my certain knowledge since the Colonel come home, for he called me once to bring a pillow for her head, and to stay by her till she woke, and another time

to fetch a shawl. I never said a word to nobody I didn't, it's a queer sort of thing to talk about. But, Miss Dorothy, I don't think it does her any kind of good. You just ask Mr. Egerton not to try that kind of cure any more, for if you'll excuse me saying it, Miss, from all I can make out, he'll not refuse anything you ask him."

"Yes, I shall certainly ask him, indeed forbid him," said Dorothy very low, while an extraordinary thrill of horror shivered through her at the idea of her sister being thus reduced to helplessness by anyone—even by her husband. The idea that Egerton had exercised this power increased her aversion—her innate though unacknowledged aversion to him. "Go, dear nurse, bring me some wrap to throw over her, she must sleep her sleep out, and I shall watch by her, she shall never have another sleep of the same sort if I can prevent it."

It was more than two hours before Mrs. Callander awoke. How they passed Dorothy could not tell. A dull, impalpable sense of fear, of danger, seemed to hedge her round and hide the future from her. The future which up to the last few weeks had smiled so brightly upon her. She longed to open her heart to someone wiser than herself. Yet what had she to tell? That her sister suffered from neuralgia, and that she was vexed and uneasy that Egerton, who posed as her lover, had soothed the pain by mesmeric influence? No, she could not, and would not speak of this to mortal, she felt instinctively that Colonel Callander would be irritated if he heard of it. Then she reproached herself for being so fanciful, so ready to think, not exactly evil but in the possibility of evil. And Paul! could it be that Paul was ready and willing to give her to this man? Paul who had always seemed to understand and sympathise with her? He had been a hero in her eyes for many a day, and when he returned from a long absence when Lord R——, his chief, had sent him on some private diplomatic mission, how surprised she had been to find him so young, so full of animation. She had always thought of him before as being ever so much older than herself, now when she ran into the room ready to embrace him an indefinable something held her back, seeing which Standish had laughed good-humouredly and said: "I see you have developed into a full-fledged demoiselle, who must be treated with proper respect," then he laughed again and kissed her hand. Colonel Callander and Mabel

had laughed too at her sudded dignity. But it was not dignity, it was—she could not tell what, some inner instinct which even now brought the color to her cheeks. How happy they all were then. From that day, however, Standish had never offered her a kiss in his old elder-brotherly way, and she had to exercise a good deal of self-control to keep up the cool, unembarrassed friendliness of manner which any unexpected encounter with him always disturbed.

"But if Herbert and Mabel go away, Mr. Egerton cannot come here, and I suppose Paul's holiday is nearly over. How dull it will be. However life ought not to be all pleasure and self-indulgence. I can find plenty to do, and when we all meet again things will go on in their old happy way. Mr. Egerton will be tired of his whim of marrying me, and probably we shall see no more of him," were her final reflections. Then Mabel stirred, shivered, and opened her eyes with a look of fear in them which changed to one of relief as they fell on Dorothy. She stretched out her hand to her, murmuring her name. Dorothy stooped over and kissed her tenderly.

"Is he gone?" whispered Mabel.

"Yes, dear, Mr. Egerton is gone. You are safe with me. Are you better?"

"Yes, much better," and she burst into a fit of hysterical weeping which almost frightened Dorothy. With some difficulty she persuaded her to go to bed, and then called nurse to arrange a sofa for her own accommodation, as she determined not to leave her sister alone at night so long as Colonel Callander was absent.

* * * * *

Nrxt morning, however, the sun was shining. Mabel declared herself better, but consented to breakfast in her own room.

A pleasant letter from one of her former school-fellows, inviting her to spent October in a large, pleasant country house, where a goodly company was to be gathered for the pheasant-shooting, awaited Dorothy at breakfast, and the buoyancy of youth suggested that much of her melancholy musing of the previous evening was attributable to nervousness and nightfall.

As Mabel seemed more cheerful, and promised to drive with Paul Standish when he came as usual after breakfast, Dorothy set off to keep her appointment with Miss Oakley,

and, their diligent practice over, several idlers dropped in to lunch, among them Major St. John and Standish.

Lunch finished, Dorothy refused a pressing invitation to drive with Miss Oakley.

"Well, if you will not come, pray take this programme to your sister, and the advertisement. I have just put down what I want to say. She must polish them up; I have no turn for grammar. There," straining her neck to look out of the window (she had secured a suite of rooms on the ground floor looking to the sea), "there goes Aunt Callander in state. Lady-in-waiting, lapdog and all! I know she is going to inquire for Mabel, and inspect her proceedings! Where is Mr. Egerton to-day? I have seen nothing of him since, oh! since yesterday!"

"Well, you warned us all off the premises, as you wanted an uninterrupted morning. I was afraid to show myself, even at one o'clock, until Standish gave me a lead," returned St. John.

"Well, I must run away now! I am going to drive over to Beech Hall. I want to persuade Lady Geraldine to play the violin at my concert, she would be a great catch. Will you come with me? Do—do—Dorothy!"

"I am very sorry, but I cannot, Miss Oakley. I must go back and support Mabel,"

"What a formal little thing you are, Dorothy! I think I might be 'Henrietta' by this time. Shall you dine at home to-day?"

"Yes. That is we have dined. While Herbert is away we dine with the children."

"This indifference to the sacredness of the dinner hour is a fatal flaw in female character. Women will never be in it as they ought until they take a more personal interest in food," said Standish.

"What a low-minded speech," cried Miss Oakley. "I was going to say, Dorothy, that I would come over this evening and try that duet again, with Mabel as accompanist, then Mr. Standish might look in and we could go over the trio, too."

"We shall be delighted to see you."

"Very well, about 8.30. Are you going?"

"I will walk across the common with you," said Standish, following her into the hall.

"Yes, do please," she returned feeling a sense of strength and comfort in his companionship, and longing to be

able really to pour out her heart to him—if it ~~were~~ possible to put her vague uneasiness into words. Even if she were—but Standish was speaking.

"You are quite right to hurry back to poor Mabel's rescue. She is by no means equal to encounter her mother-in-law single handed."

"You are right. I don't think she is equal to anything," said Dorothy, sadly.

"What," he exclaimed, struck by her tone, "you are not seriously uneasy about her?"

"There is no reason I should be, but—oh, I can't explain my indefinable anxiety—I daresay you would laugh at me if I could."

Here they were interrupted by a young lieutenant of St. John's regiment, a warm, though silent, admirer of Dorothy, who turned with them unasked under the plea of imparting the project of a regimental ball, for which he hoped Miss Wynn would hold herself disengaged.

They were almost at the gate of the Knoll before he left them, and they did not resume the conversation.

"Is Mrs. Callander in?" asked Dorothy of the man who answered the bell.

"No, Miss. Mrs. Callander—the Dowager Mrs. Callander—called before she had finished luncheon—she and Mr. Egerton—and they all went out in the carriage together."

"Did not my sister drive this morning?"

"No, Miss. The mistress went out with nurse and the children. Mr. Egerton came back with her."

"It is probable she will not be back for some time," said Standish. "Let us go down on the beach, Dorothy, you look as if you too wanted to be taken care of, and the open air will do you more good than sitting in a room."

"Very well," and she turned from the house to go through the garden. "But I am quite well, only a little worn out with my practice and two whole hours of Miss Oakley's enthusiasm."

"I can imagine it. High pressure—eh?"

"Yes, very high," They walked on silently till they reached the water's edge, when Dorothy instinctively turned her back on a more frequented part of the common and exclaimed:

"Let us get as far from the madding crowd as possible."

"By all means, especially as I want a little private talk with you."

"Do you?" in an alarmed tone, "I hope not a scolding."

"Do I ever scold you?" reproachfully.

"Well, no! But just now I always anticipate evil."

"The terrors of an awakened conscience, I suppose?"

"I think I am more imperfect than wicked," said Dorothy with a sigh.

Standish laughed.

"Conscience is hard at work, I see. No, I am not going to scold—why should I? You are a really good girl, so far as I see. I am going to cross-examine you."

"That is bad enough," and Dorothy bent her head, her naturally pathetic little face looking so sad that Standish involuntarily drew closer to her.

"You don't imagine, my dear Dorothy that I would willingly distress you? I think you can trust me! Now," with a change of tone—"tell me; are you aware that I have received overtures for a matrimonial alliance with my charming ward from an exceptional parti?"

"I am," very seriously.

"It seems you have refused Egerton. May I ask the why and the wherefore?"

"I don't like him."

"But why?" urged Standish.

"Curious fool, be still! Is human love the growth of human will?" quoted Dorothy, with a wonderfully sweet, bright smile.

"What a pretty creature she is sometimes!" thought Standish, while he said, "Bad study, Byron, for young ladies! Come, Dorothy, you must have some method in your madness, for madness it would be considered by most women to refuse such a man! Handsome, fascinating, clever—yes, I decidedly think him clever, rich, young, with the world before him where to choose, wisely picking out this humble, sweet, obscure violet."

"Oh, nonsense, Paul! I am not a bit humble, and I am not a sweet violet. If I am anything in that line, I am a rose with many thorns. Now go on and do not laugh."

"I will be quite serious. I consider it my duty as your guardian to point out the advantages of such a match."

"Match! I hate the word—it only applies to lucifers and carriage horses."

"Well, marriage, then. Of course, Egerton's wife would

have a capital position, and everything the female heart can wish, including a handsome husband. Moreover, he is, I can see, rather a fascinating fellow, and as he has evidently been devoted to you for some time, I am a little puzzled how you have come to steel your heart against him."

Silence on Dorothy's part, her large, dark grey eyes looking out over the sea with a dreamy, soft expression.

"Yes, I confess myself puzzled," resumed Standish, watching her. "I don't want to force any confidence—but—is the fortress impregnable because a stronger than Egerton is already in possession?"

Dorothy started, the warm color mantling in her cheek but still she did not speak.

"I only suggest the notion, because your happiness is very precious to me, and—and—I would promote it by all means in my power. Come, my dearest Dorothy, be confidential. Can you not tell me the secret of your proud, fiery heart?"

"Yes, most of them, but, Paul, would you like to give me to this man?"

"No—by heaven, no!" cried Standish, with unnecessary energy. "I would rather have you at hand to soothe my declining years, and give me my last cup of gruel, but I am bound to place the advantages of such a marriage before you, and your indifference to what would charm most women half alarms me. Come, my dear ward, your reasons?"

"I think," began Dorothy, thoughtfully and slowly, "that Mr. Egerton might be charming—perhaps irresistible, if he loved, but somehow or other I feel quite convinced that he does not love me!"

"My dear Dorothy, what an absurd impression. Why should he ask you to marry him? Why seek you at all, were he not strongly attracted? you have no particular advantages of rank or wealth—indeed, Egerton wants nothing of that kind."

"Yes, it is all very curious, I know it seems absurd to say so, but I feel quite sure he does not care a straw for me."

"How do you know? What is at the bottom of this preposterous conviction?"

"Nothing at all that any sensible person would consider proof," returned Dorothy in a deliberate tone, dwelling on

her words, "but there is no love in his voice or his touch—or—oh, no!" breaking off suddenly, "there is no love in him for me, or I could never be so indifferent to him!"

"Do you mean to say," looking at her rather sternly "that you would love anyone whom you felt or fancied loved you?"

"No, Paul; but if I felt that a man was really in love with me, I should be sorry for him, and wish I could make him happy and——" she stopped.

"You feel none of these amiable emotions towards Egerton?"

"Not one! I do not like him. I used. I thought him delightful when we were in London, but I did not feel the least bit in love with him, you understand?"

"No, I do not—not half as well as you do. Why, how have you acquired such an extraordinary amount of heart lore?" And he looked very steadily at her with a slight smile on his lip.

"By an extensive and profound study of novels, I suppose, for I have seen very little of life."

"And instinct, my dear child! Have you not tried your prentice hand or eyes on any of the charming young fellows, red, blue and green, who abound here?"

"Why, Paul, how could I? Since Herbert came home we have never gone anywhere, nor invited anyone."

"True; but before he came, and ever since? for many a quiet game has been played, of which the lookers-on have little idea."

"Do you think so?" said Dorothy absently; then returning to the original current of her thought, she added gently, "Well, my dear guardian, I have never tried them."

"I believe so," he returned heartily. "I think you are strong enough and proud enough to steer pretty straight through the life that lies before you—all before, you happy young thing!" he added with a sigh. "But don't give away your heart too readily; the whole color of your life, of the lives of such woman as you are, depend on that first venture."

"Oh, I'll take care," said Dorothy, with an arch smile. "And now you will promise not to trouble me any more about Mr. Egerton—that is finished."

"I suppose so. I will not trouble you, Dorothy, but Egerton will; and Callrind, he is rather keen about the

affair. For my part, I am a little disposed to be on your side. Still, I think the fellow is in love with you."

"And I—though I cannot argue about it—feel sure he is not."

There was a pause. Then Standish, as if to change the subject definitely, turned to face the water, and, stretching out his hand, said, "That's some foreign craft there you see, with brown sails, tacking across the bay. She completes the picture, doesn't she?"

"Yes. How do you know she is foreign?"

"I can hardly tell you, but she doesn't look like a Britisher."

"Ah! you accept intuitions, too!" cried Dorothy, a mischievous smile changing her face completely.

"I do not act upon them," he returned, laughing. After watching the vessel for a few minutes they went back to the villa in pleasant confidential conversation.

CHAPTER IV.

"MOTHER CAREY'S CHICKENS."

Colonel Callander prolonged his stay in town for a few days, as he wished to consult Dr. B——, the great specialist for nerves, and had to wait for an appointment. His letters, however, were cheerful, and full of small details, which showed that he was fast regaining his normal condition of mind, and powers of enjoyment.

His wife wrote him every day. Long epistles which excited Dorothy's surprise. "What can she have to write about?" she said to herself. "For though it is pleasant—our life here—one day is like another."

Since her confession of doubt respecting Egerton to her guardian, she had felt happier. She was, perhaps, a little too ready to quarrel with him, but she was always restless till she made friends again.

Mabel did not rally from her attack of neuralgia as quickly or as completely as Dorothy hoped and expected.

In vain the younger sister urged her to join the Colonel in town, and avail herself of Dr. B——'s skill. She refused, with a degree of impatience that astonished Dorothy.

Meantime, the practisings and preparations for Miss Oakley's concert went on with much vigor. The Dowager called every day, and insisted that Mabel should take what

she called an "airing" in her agreeable company, and poor Mabel dared not refuse.

Egerton contrived to be a good deal with Dorothy, and as he always talked like a pleasant friend, and seemed to have laid aside the lover, she had no excuse for quarrelling with him, while she was somewhat irritated by the quiet ingenuity with which he contrived to appropriate her, while everyone else evidently made way for him, always excepting Frank Selby, the young rifleman aforementioned, who, with a certain boyish fun and audacity, boldly tried to gather all the crumbs that fell from Egerton's richer table. It pleased and amused Dorothy to assist him as much as possible.

At all this Standish looked with much interest, seeing very clearly that Dorothy did not even like Egerton as well as she once did. Indeed, the young lady's moods and conduct puzzled him a good deal at this time, and he was somehow less lenient in his judgment on her than formerly.

Miss Oakley, whose imagination never suggested a picture of repose as a thing to be enjoyed, was always "making up parties," "organising picnics," or gathering together somewhat noisy collections of young people to dine or sup. She enjoyed to the full the liberty which wealth, and wealth only, bestows on an unmarried woman. Though willing to be thought much younger, Miss Oakley supported her pretensions to originality by proclaiming aloud that at thirty a girl (!) might venture to dispense with chaperones. In many ways she was a thorn in her austere aunt's side. Nevertheless she could bear with much from a girl whose innate purity and rectitude are guaranteed by the possession of four thousand a year! And then, Herbert had behaved so heartlessly to her! In short, Mrs. Callander, senior, could not shut her heart against a creature so endowed.

"My dear Mabel," cried Miss Oakley, walking unceremoniously into the drawing room of The Knoll one cool, gray morning, as Dorothy was singing a German sleeping song to her little niece, who stood beside her, trying to join, while Mabel was playing with her boy on the sofa; "my dear Mabel, what an idyllic scene! and I am come to drag you away from your babies. I want you to come back with me to luncheon. Major St. John and Mr. Standish are coming, and we will ask Mr. Egerton if we

meet him. Then they are to escort me to the port. There is a Spanish or Portuguese ship there, and they have a wonderful parrot who speaks several languages. I want to buy it. I shall teach it English, and complete its education. I should like to get on board and see what sort of a place the ship is. Now I want you and Dorothy to come, too; it will be an expedition. I believe there are some curious old streets about the port, too."

"They are shockingly dirty," said Mabel, "and I have promised to go out with Mrs. Callander. She has deigned to ask the children, and I think Herbert would be annoyed if I refused. But Dorothy will go, I daresay."

"My dear Mabel," returned Miss Oakley, composing her round, good-humored face and restless black eyes to a serious aspect, "what do you do with yourself all day? You never join in anything or go anywhere. Do you lie on the sofa from morning till night reading novels? I do not wonder at your looking pale and woebegone! Why, you are making an old woman of yourself! Isn't she Dorothy?"

"I don't think she is very strong," said Dorothy, leaving the piano and coming to sit beside her sister; "at all events she must not be scolded. I should like to see the foreign ship, Henrietta. I will come with you. Let me go and change my dress."

"That is a good girl; don't be long."

"I hear you are as gay as the means of little Fordsea permit," said Mabel, making room for her cousin on the sofa beside her by gathering up her baby boy in her arms and hushing him gently to sleep.

"It isn't half a bad little place," returned Miss Oakley, "and there are so few people to give parties or keep the ball rolling that they are grateful to anyone who will. Everyone is very nice to me—indeed, I do very much what I like. Why, that was Mr. Egerton who passed the window, wasn't it?"

"I did not see; but very likely it was."

"Of course he is here a good deal. How are matters going on?"

"Oh! I don't know," wearily.

"Nonsense, Mabel, you must know. Surely she will not be such a goose as to refuse."

"Mr. Egerton," announced Collins, the Colonel's soldier servant.

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"Oh! we were just talking of you, Mr. Egerton. I want you to come back to lunch with me. I have two or three men guests and Dorothy. We are all going down to the port after to see what curios we can pick up from the Spanish sailors. They have a wonderful parrot on which I have set my heart. I suppose one could hardly find a real mantilla among these people? The captain would not have a wife on board who would be willing for a consideration to part with her best 'go to meeting' mantilla?"

"No, I think not," he said, turning from Mabel, with whom he had exchanged greetings. "I have seen some of these people, they are rather rough specimens, there are only a sprinkling of Spaniards, some are from Valencia, my mother's country."

"Ah! yes, to be sure! You must be our interpreter. I wish Dorothy would come, I am burning to get luncheon over and attack these people."

"I am sorry I cannot join you at lunch. I have a particular engagement with my old skipper. I have some thoughts of buying the Gitana if the owner satisfies me on one or two points."

"But you really must!"

"I am infinitely distressed to be obliged to refuse you," said Egerton, airily; "but I'll try to meet you at the dock. I believe that Portuguese schooner is lying alongside. I'll be very happy to translate for you, though my Spanish is growing rusty. I used to speak it as much as I spoke English while my poor mother lived."

"Oh thanks! a thousand thanks," cried Miss Oakley. "Then I feel sure of the parrot. Ah! here comes Dorothy. How long you have been beautifying? You must scold this obstinate man, he will not come to lunch, and Dorothy will be obliged to depend on Mr. Selby for an escort."

"No! Mr. Standish will be there, and I have a sort of vested right to my guardian," said Dorothy, laughing.

"Come," repeated Miss Oakley, kissing her hand to Mabel, "we'll bring you a fairing," and she walked briskly out of the room, while Egerton holding the door open whispered to Dorothy as she passed—

"Standish is a far more formidable rival than Selby!"

Dorothy gave him a startled glance and colored crimson, saying coldly—

"I cannot understand you."

She hurried after Miss Oakley, her veins tingling with

vexation and a sort of fear. Was it possible that Egerton perceived and dared to hint at what she herself shrunk from perceiving? That hint turned the scale, and as she walked on briskly beside Miss Oakley, hearing, without listening to, her animated chatter, she made up her mind that she both disliked and distrusted Egerton, that there was something cruel and relentless in his fine dark eyes, that he tried in some way to dominate her. At the thought, her spirit rose defiantly. He should find he had no fool to deal with! Why did he pretend to pose as her lover when he did not care a straw for her? What was his object?

The luncheon party was merry and noisy, they chaffed each other, and talked all together, and told stories, more or less credible; but Miss Oakley cut them short and expressed her anxiety to start in search of the much desired parrot.

"What's the matter Dorothy?" asked Standish, as they sallied forth. "You have neither eaten nor talked."

"Don't mind, dear," cried Miss Oakley, who overheard the remark. "He is to meet us presently, you know," and with an insufferably knowing smile she fell back to allow Major St. John joining her.

Standish laughed.

"That is what may be called delicate tact," he said; "I'm glad eyes cannot kill or it would be all over with our dear Henrietta? I never thought you could develop into such a fierce—what shall I say, warrior angel."

"Paul, you are unkind, and you do not care that I am annoyed and worried."

"Why, Dorothy, what is there to worry you?" No one can force you to do what you don't wish, and I must say your annoyance does not suggest indifference."

"Indifference," she repeated in a low, earnest tone. "No! indifference is merged in dislike."

"I never knew you unreasonable—that is, decidedly unreasonable, before."

"I suppose, on the whole that is a compliment," said Dorothy, drily. Further conversation was prevented by Mr. Selby, who attached himself to Dorothy. She was very quiet and silent, but her young admirer was quite willing to do all the talking himself.

Standish was guide. He had rambled much about the older parts of Eastport during those early hours when his usual companions were either in bed or at breakfast, and

he now led them through narrow streets of red-roofed, irregular houses with many a projecting window and deep porch thickly studded with taverns and public-houses adorned by curious, quaint signs, past a very old red-brick, two-storied church, with dormer windows in the roof and an ivy-grown square tower that boasted some fine bells, altogether a remarkable mixture of the dwelling-house and the sanctuary, past an evil-smelling fish market, where wonderful "old tars" male and female, for the fish wives were scarcely womanly, and through groups of fishy seafaring men, down to a small dock, its walls much battered and gray with age and weather, into which the sea ran at high water, receding as the tide fell and leaving an abyss of malodorous mud behind. This was the only harbor for craft unconnected with the navy, and all the small fry of vessels which brought foreign merchandise, and they were not many, went into it.

"Look on this picture—and on this," said Standish, with a slight nod in the direction of an ancient "purveyor of fish," who invited them to buy, and whose coarse, tanned upper garment was turned back, showing a much-stained striped and ragged petticoat, and then touching Dorothy's dainty costume, "The force of idealising could no further go."

"Yet that poor old thing must have been pretty once," said Dorothy glancing kindly at her. "How terrible the old age of the poor must be. When they can no longer work they become burdens, and I am afraid their relatives do not disguise the fact."

"Yet there is a wonderful amount of kindness from the poor to the poor, and granted the difference of habit and manner between social grades, I don't suppose one class is much harder to its poor old dependants than another. It is the absolute physical needs of poverty-stricken old age that are so sad. I don't think we have half enough refuges for the aged. Suggest this sort of occupation and excitement to your friend, Miss Oakley. A set of almshouses on the hill behind the town there, would look picturesque—or might look picturesque—and give comfort and rest to some poor, worn-out toilers."

"Pray mention the plan yourself; you have a good deal more influence than I have,"

"There is the dock and there is the ship. It is the same

we saw standing across the bay the other evening, you remember."

"I do. How picturesque the old place looks, and the masts and cordage against the soft grey sky, the general leaden hue, and the bright red caps of those sailors who are grouped round that gentleman. Why, it is Mr. Egerton!"

"Yes, there is Mr. Egerton," cried Miss Oakley, coming up with them as they paused. "I was sure he would be before us."

A few minutes more brought them to the spot where Egerton stood talking with some of the swarthy crew. "Well!" he exclaimed, coming forward to meet them; "I have been sounding some of my demi-semi compatriots, and they are ready to sell you everything, their ship and themselves into the bargain, but they are a little uncertain about the parrot. It belongs to a Portuguese fellow called Guiseppe, who speaks a little English, so is gone into the town to market. The crew are chiefly Portuguese, with a sprinkling of Moors and Spaniards. I must say my Spanish cousins are the only good-looking fellows among them. I am rather proud that they understand me. There, that tall sailor, who is so terribly in need of an outfit, he comes from my mother's part of the country, and recognised some of my expressions as Valencian." He signed to the man to approach, which he did, with a graceful, haughty bow.

While Egerton spoke to him, Dorothy looked earnestly at the strong, active form, the swarthy face of the sailor, with its glittering dark eyes, massive cruel jaw, and somewhat overhanging brow. The mouth was hidden by a thick jet-black moustache, through which the strong white teeth showed when he spoke and smiled.

"Yes he is good-looking—very handsome indeed; but I should be afraid of him. He looks as if he would murder anyone for sixpence."

"Sixpence! No, two-and-sixpence, perhaps," said Egerton, laughing. "But I assure you, Spanish peasants are very fine fellows. I used to like them immensely when I stayed in the country some years ago. I don't know much of the seafaring population. I don't suppose they stick to trifles,—Miss Oakley," he continued, "I have asked the men to bring any curiosities they may have out here. I don't think the ship is exactly the most cleanly or agreeable spot to drive a bargain in."

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Here some eager talk and pointing of hands towards the town among the sailors drew his attention to a short, broad man coming toward them, a net full of vegetables slung over his shoulder, a broad, brawny, good-humored faced man, with black ringles, and a smiling mouth never quite closed over his brilliantly white teeth. Hastening his steps at the general cry of "Guiseppe," he deposited his net in their midst, took off his cap and bowed with much deference.

"You ought to be more lenient to my friend Diego," said Egerton aside to Dorothy. "He has asked me who the fair, beautiful angel is; if she is my—sister."

"I am much obliged to him. Even his flattering approbation does not change my opinion."

Meantime, Miss Oakley, finding that Guiseppe spoke English, began negotiations with him at once."

The Portuguese was all that deferential politeness could demand, but asked an exorbitant price for his parrot, and stuck to it. His broken English amused Miss Oakley, and she prolonged the bargaining to make him talk. Guiseppe vowed that the bird was as dear to him as a brother; that it had a most extraordinary history. "Once," said its proud owner, "he had been wrecked, and contrived to escape to an uninhabited island, when he suddenly found himself addressed by this parrot—who was perched on a tree—in Spanish, too; rather curious Spanish—and the bird had attached itself to him—had accompanied him when he was rescued. They had never been parted since. Stay, he would fetch it to show the lady. It was a wonderful bird. No money would pay him for it." He picked up his net of vegetables and went on board the ship.

"He is going to ask a big price," said Egerton to Miss Oakley. "Don't give it."

"But I should like to have the bird," she exclaimed. "It is such a curious story. Why, it may be a hundred years old. You know they live to an immense age."

"Indeed."

"Oh, you are horribly incredulous."

"It is a picturesque group, said Standish, calmly scrutinising the figures before him; "th se dark desperadoes, the accurately dressed Englishman, Miss Oakley, and yourself, and the background of grey sea and sky. You seem to have fascinated Egerton's Valencian friend. He is gazing in wonder and admiration at you."

"I think he is very like Mr. Egerton, or rather Mr. Egerton would be very like him in the same clothes."

Standish laughed heartily. "Fancy Egerton in those rags! I cannot say I see the likeness."

"Well, I do," returned Dorothy with a shudder.

Standish looked at her surprised.

"Have you caught cold, Dorothy," he asked, with more earnestness than the occasion seemed to need.

"Yes—I suppose so—I feel chilled to the heart," said Dorothy, as if the words escaped her involuntarily. Standish looked round.

"I wish there was some wrap here to put round you," he exclaimed.

"Stand near me," murmured Dorothy. "I—you will think me foolish—but I do not like these people."

"You are far more fanciful than you used to be, but if you wish me near you, no one shall come between us," and he drew closer to her. "See," he continued, "here comes Guiseppe and his parrot. It is no great beauty to look at."

Then the chaffering began. Guiseppe vowing at last that no money would tempt him to part with his dear tried companion, but he could refuse the beautiful lady nothing, so he would give it to her, and she should give him what little token of acknowledgment she liked.

"What a nice, generous little man, she cried. "Well then, will five pounds be enough."

With a gesture of resignation he said: "Whatever the lady likes," and scratched his Poll's head with a sentimental air.

"Do find out what will satisfy him," said Miss Oakley to Egerton.

"If he is not satisfied he ought to be," he returned.

"Will you bring the parrot to me early to-morrow to the Pier Hotel," she continued. "There is my card, you and I will settle the matter between us. I will have a nice new cage ready. You must tell me what the dear thing eats and drinks! Poor Poll, pretty Poll!"—she attempted to stroke it, but the "pretty creature" made a fierce, determined attempt to bite the caressing hand, and uttered a volley of choice epithets which did credit to the resources of the Spanish tongue.

The sailors laughed unrestrainedly, and even Egerton smiled.

"'Tis because he is in my hand, signora," cried Guiseppe.

"He will love you in a week, and I leave myself to your generosity."

"It is all over with you, Miss Oakley, if you bargain with the devil single-handed."

"But don't you see there will be no bargaining. He leaves everything to me."

Egerton shrugged his shoulders, and Guiseppe, with a bow and an air of humanity, stepped back to make way for a gaunt, grizzled, Jewish-looking man, who offered an old dagger, with a curiously wrought silver hilt and scabbard, frightfully in want of plate brush and powder, while another produced some bits of gold filagree. These last Dorothy admired, and Standish bought immediately. These were all the curios that could be found, and after some further talk with the smiling, gesticulating Guiseppe Miss Oakley and party moved off, while the foreign sailors closed up and continued to talk and laugh loudly among themselves.

Egerton took his place beside Dorothy, with the evident intention of accompanying her home, and Standish, reminded by a glance of his promise to keep near her, held his position at her other side. After a friendly good-bye from Miss Oakley, and an explanation that they could not meet again that day, the party divided, and young Selby went disconsolately away to solace himself with a game of pool before dressing for dinner.

On reaching The Knoll Dorothy bid both her companions good-bye.

"I am too tired to talk any more," she said, with a pleasant, arch smile, that took all asperity from her words, "and as Mabel appears to have gone out I will not ask you to come in."

Standish shook his head. "You must remember my holiday is nearly over, I shall come to-morrow early. Why, I haven't seen Mabel to-day."

"I dare not take such liberties," said Egerton, "but I hope to have a glance of you both to-morrow."

"Auf wiedersehn," cried Dorothy, waving her hand before disappearing into the house.

The two men walked away silently for a few paces. They were by no means as congenial as before. Standish could not account for it. Egerton was always agreeable and obliging, but of late he had been less cordial—more reserved. Whenever he saw Standish installed in Mabel's

drawing-room he seemed, with all his tact in masking his feelings, to be too irritated to resist uttering stinging though veiled allusions to the extraordinary conscientiousness with which Standish performed his duties as guardian or watch dog.

"Can it be that I create any jealous feeling in his mind?" thought Standish. "Does he think that a bright, fastidious, and rather romantic young creature like Dorothy would give more than a friendly thought to a fellow old enough, or nearly old enough, to be her father?—who has been pretty well battered in the struggle for life, and with a host of not exhilarating memories behind him. God forbid that such an idea should ever be suggested to her, to tarnish the happy familiarity of our intercourse, or check her frank confidence in me! Yet in some ways she is older than Mabel, bolder, stronger, riper; she has grown more womanly of late too, very much more! Handsome, wealthy well born as he is, I doubt if Egerton is worthy of her." He glanced at his companion. His brows were knit, and his mouth set with a hard expression. Catching Standish's eyes he laughed a slight, good-humored laugh, his expression changing completely.

"You think I am the picture of a rejected lover," he said, with an air of frank confidence. "The fact is I am both riled and disheartened. Your fascinating little ward is so resolutely cold! If I thought she had given her heart to anyone else—of course I would not annoy her by pressing my suit. But I don't think she has. She amuses herself with that boy Selby; it is the instinct of the cat-like feminine nature to torment any mouse that lets itself be caught. Why should she not fancy me? I have always got on very well with women? It's some girlish whim, and I assure you I am convinced that patience and perseverance are levers which shall lift her resistance and shiver it to atoms, especially as I am sure of your consent when I can win hers! What a dainty, charming little witch it is! Her gravity—her apparent pensiveness is so piquant when you know what a dash of the devil there is under it! To inspire such a creature as that with a real, downright passion would be worth a good deal of trouble, don't you think so?" turning sharply and looking full into his companion's face.

Standish suddenly flushed under his tanned skin, and met Egerton's eyes with a cold, grave look.

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"The love of such a woman is doubtless well worth the trouble of winning," he said, seriously. "Win it if you can."

"Do you know there's a touch of defiance in your tone?" returned Egerton, laughing. "I don't think you are as heartily on my side as Callander is."

"Why should I not be on your side? You are what all match-makers would call an unexceptional *parti*."

"Oh! there is no knowing the depths of inscrutable motive in so experienced an old fellow as you are!" Then, drawing out his watch, he went on, "Five-thirty! I'll have time to catch the six forty-five express. I think I'll run up to town for twenty-four hours. There are various things to be attended to which I have neglected. You'll excuse my leaving you so abruptly, but I have to dress and give my man some directions. Good-bye till to-morrow. Make my excuses at The Knoll." He jumped into an open fly which was crawling near and which he had hailed, and, ordering the man to "Beach House Hotel," drove rapidly away.

Standish looked after him, a curious expression contrasting his brow. "She is right," he said to himself, "he does not love her; there was not a note of love or even passion in his tones. What can his game be? And what magic has opened Dorothy's eyes to the truth? It is all beyond my comprehension."

Mrs. Callander came back from her walk looking, as Dorothy thought, unusually well—with more than her ordinary color. "I met Mrs. Markham, and we took a stroll on the beach together. She is very amusing and told me some droll stories of the people she had known at Naples and Palermo, when her husband was on the Mediterranean station. Real life seems much more extraordinary than the life of novels," said Mabel, as she sat with her sister at their evening meal.

"I dare say it is. Henrietta Oakley and I had a glimpse of the romantic—the roughly romantic—side of it to-day," and Dorothy proceeded to describe their visit to the old dock and their interview with Guiseppe.

"What quantities of money Henrietta must spend," said Mrs. Callander. "She is very generous and good-natured. But I cannot believe Mr. Egerton could be like a common sailor, Dorothy."

"He was, I assure you, but the man was not a common

sailor. He was very handsome, though wicked-looking—just like Mr. Egerton might have been if he had not been educated and trained and taught his catechism and made an English gentleman of."

"He certainly is more an English gentleman than anything else."

"Goodness knows," returned Dorothy.

There was a pause. Then, with some hesitation, Mabel said, in a soft, caressing voice, "Are you sure, dear Dorothy, that you do not—cannot love Randal Egerton?"

"Yes; quite sure," returned Dorothy, promptly. "Would you wish me to marry him?"

"I only wish for what would make you happy—happy as a dream, dear, dearest sister. Don't you know how I love you? Nearly as well as my children; but, oh, I envy you, Dorothy."

"Envy me? Why?" smiling, and stretching out her hand to her sister.

"Oh, because you are so much stronger than I am. If you do not like or approve anything you can say no. You cannot fancy how impossible it is to me to say no to a person who asks me to say yes!"

"Well, fortunately you have not much trouble in that way, Mabel, for you have all you want, and——"

"Oh, Dorothy! I have my troubles too—just now, I mean. I have been writing to say 'no' to Herbert this morning."

"What about?" asked Dorothy, startled and greatly amazed.

"About this expedition to Switzerland, or wherever he wanted to go. I really do not feel equal to it. I do not feel as if I could go."

Her big blue eyes looked imploringly at her sister. Dorothy grew very grave. "He will be awfully vexed. What has induced you to give it up?"

"Just what I told you. I cannot go."

"Dear Mabel! I wish you had talked to me first. I wish you had not done this. It will be such a blow to Herbert. A quiet journey with you would have done him so much good. Have you posted the letter?"

"Yes; he will get it this evening."

"Ah, that is the worst time. I do wish you had not written. Unless you are really unwell (and I have been

very uneasy about you) you could surely manage to bear a little travelling, and it would do you good, I am sure. You have had such a strained, dazed look lately. I am sure your neuralgia has been worse than you admit. This will be a great blow to Herbert. I feel it will be. Do telegraph to say that you will be ready to start—that you are better. Do, dear Mabel. You know in his state of health it might——”

“That is just it,” interrupted Mabel, with tremulous eagerness. “Suppose he were taken ill when I was alone with him? I should not know what to do, I should be quite unnerved.”

“Mabel, this is not like you. You ought not to have refused. I am dreadfully distressed.”

“Ah, Dorothy,” cried Mabel, pressing her hands tightly together, “you must not desert me. You must keep on my side. We have always loved each other, and you must back me up about this horrid journey. Why need Herbert go wandering about? The tranquility of his own house is better for him than noisy hotels and rapid journeys. I will do all I can for him here, and then, you know him, if he thinks I do not want to go he won’t care about it. He must be a great deal better from his report of what Dr. B. says—that a few month’s care and quiet will entirely restore him—and he was much more cheerful before he went to town.”

“That may all be true, still—oh, Mabel! how had you the heart to disappoint him?”

Mabel’s only answer was to rise, and, approaching her sister who was standing near the window, she threw her arms round her, and laying her head on her shoulder pressed her closely till Dorothy felt the strong beating of her heart, the quick, sobbing breath. “You do not know. You cannot understand.”

“I cannot, indeed, unless you tell me. Why do you keep anything from me dearest? I am not very wise, but it is well to look at things sometimes through other people’s eyes. Oh, that I had some magic to draw back that letter before it reaches Herbert’s hands. I wish you had never written it!”

CHAPTER V.

“A CHANGE IN PLAN.”

Dorothy was inclined to think that she had allowed her

imagination to cheat her into unnecessary terrors, when after two days of vague indescribable anxiety Colonel Callander wrote in reply to his wife. He simply remarked that as she was indisposed for the trip she had suggested, it was better to give it up, but that he was sorry to do so. "I shall return about the 5th," he added, "and as I have a touch of fever and ague, both of which are worse at night, you had better have my own room made ready for me."

"How thoughtful he is," cried Dorothy. "He is so afraid of disturbing you."

"Yes! He is good—very good! I am glad he thought of it, though! I am feverish and restless enough myself. I cannot breathe unless I have my window open all night."

"That is not safe, Mabel."

"Why, what could make it unsafe? With that wide area around the house it is like being on the second story."

"Oh, yes, safe enough in that way. I thought of the night air, your chest is not too strong."

"I am strong enough—physically," said Mabel with a sigh.

Callander was better than his word, and the day before the date he had fixed for his return, he presented himself at the hotel, when his mother was resting after her drive, before retiring to her room to dress for dinner.

"Why Herbert! I did not know you had returned," she exclaimed, "you were not expected till to-morrow."

"I thought I had better break away, as I have had a reminder from my old enemies fever and ague, and every day something turned up to delay me."

"I thought you were feeling much better. I can't say you look it."

"I was greatly better, but the bad nights I get now are against me. I found an empty house, so I came on here."

"Exactly, any port in a storm," said Mrs. Callander, with a dry laugh. "Yes, the whole party are out in Mr. Egerton's yacht. They are coming back to some sort of supper at your house. They generally end their very Bohemian excursions there."

"I suppose so," he returned. "Mabel ought not to send her friends empty away."

"You are a most indulgent husband, my dear son, indeed

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Mabel ought to think herself the happiest of women, probably she does. We have seen somewhat more of each other since you were away. I have frequently taken her out to drives, and I think if she were away from that very flippant sister of hers, she——"

"I see no room for improvement in my wife," returned Callander coldly. "Of course I should like her to be a daughter to you." His mother sighed obtrusively.

"I am sure I am her truest friend if she would believe it." Then Mrs. Callander wisely digressed to some other topics connected with friends and acquaintances, and got little more than monosyllabic replies to her questions.

"Mr. Egerton is still in close attendance on your sister-in-law," she said presently. "It is time I think that—that the engagement were announced, for while she is free Dorothy thinks she has a right to amuse herself with everyone and anyone. There is a young subaltern in Major St. John's regiment whom she encourages in a way I do not approve."

"I suppose all women are pretty much alike where admirers and admiration are concerned."

"No, Herbert, not all women."

"Well, look at Henrietta Oakley, she is an unlimited flirt."

"Henrietta Oakley," said Mrs. Callander, in a dignified tone, "is in a very different position from Dorothy Wynn."

"True, and considerably older into the bargain."

"She is more impulsive than I like, but she is a right minded and reliable gentlewoman for all that."

There was a pause.

"Will you join me at dinner, Herbert?" asked his mother. "You will get nothing to eat till late at home. I know the evening repast is generally ordered to be served at eight or nine o'clock by Mr. Standish, who is master of the house in your absence, and is, I must say, strangely domineering."

"Of course, as my wife's former guardian, he is naturally her referee and protector when I am away. He generally gets on very well with women, why don't you like him?" Callander who had kept his eyes on the carpet suddenly raised them and looked full at his mother, who unimaginative as she was, was startled by their expression.

"You need not be so angry, Herbert," she said. "I don't

like Mr. Standish because he thinks quite too much of himself, in the first place; and in the second, guardian though he is, he is still too young to be seen perpetually with Mabel; we know it is all right, but society will put an evil con——"

"Stop!" said Callander, putting up his hands as if boldly to repel the idea. "This is a subject on which I will not hear you. You exaggerate; it is not for me to listen. Drop this subject or we shall cease to be friends. Now, I shall leave you. The children at least will have returned, and I have brought them some presents which I should like to give them myself."

"To-morrow, then, will you and Mabel dine with me?"

"With pleasure, if she is disengaged."

The children were at tea when the Colonel reached the Knoll, and received him with rapture. Little Dolly was made quite happy because "Father" sat down beside her, and took some sips out of her cup. Then the new toys were produced, and Callander seemed a very different man from Mrs. Callander's taciturn visitor of half an hour before.

* * * * *

When, after dusk, Mabel and her guests reached home Callander was most warmly greeted by the whole party and much desultory conversation ensued, in which he took his part. Then Miss Oakley took possession of him, declaring she had some business matters to discuss, and they or rather she, talked for a considerable time in a dim corner of the drawing-room, till Standish announced that he was quite ready to escort Miss Oakley to her hotel. Callander seemed to have communicated his talent for silence to his friend Egerton, for he scarcely spoke.

Dorothy felt infinitely relieved when they were alone. As soon as she had made a few affectionate inquiries as to Callander's health, she bid them good-night, hoping that a little private talk would clear away any shadow of misunderstanding between husband and wife.

Next day Callander produced some trinkets for each sister, and after looking at the papers, went off to join the children on the beach. As soon as Dorothy was alone with her sister she asked. "Is all right with Herbert?"

"Yes, quite right. I told you he would not mind. We will try and make him as comfortable as possible now."

"Yes, of course! but, Mabel, he looks awfully bad."

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"He does, poor dear fellow. It is this horrid ague. When I bid him good-night he was trembling all over. It is some time since he had such an attack. We must get his old prescription made up. I will join him presently on the beach. What are you going to do, Dorothy?"

"Oh! there is the everlasting practice with Henrietta."

"Then I will tell Paul to go and take you away at one o'clock. Herbert would like to see you at luncheon."

Dorothy sped away with a light heart. The clouds she fancied so threatening were breaking, and behind them lay clear, blue sky.

The holiday so much enjoyed by Paul Standish was nearly over. Egerton tried to prevent anything like tete-a-tete interviews between him and his ward during the last few days, to Dorothy's great disgust. There was such a thorough sense of companionship between the two, that any third person spoiled their frank intercourse, and Egerton's third was particularly unpleasant to Dorothy.

It was, then, a great relief to her mind when Paul presented himself, unaccompanied, in Miss Oakley's sitting-room at the time appointed, and they walked leisurely back to "The Knoll," talking pleasantly of many things.

"So Callander took his disappointment about his intended second edition of the 'Honeymoon' very calmly," said Standish.

"Very kindly and calmly, though I think he was woe-fully disappointed. Perhaps he is better at home, as he has had return of fever and ague. He is a dear, I think Mabel is so lucky to have found such a husband!"

"I think she is. What shall I do when you marry too? My occupation will be o'er, without a wilful ward to manage."

"You can find some occupation in Dolly. She has a very pretty little will of her own! But don't fancy you will get rid of me so soon."

"I suspect I shall. I don't think Egerton is a man to be easily beaten, and I believe greatly in the effects of perseverance, especially where the object to be won has a warm heart, a grateful nature."

"Thanks for your good opinion," said Dorothy, coloring, "but I don't find any especial gratitude in my nature towards Mr. Egerton. You know what my belief is as regards his professions. I do not think he cares for me. If he did, some electric current of sympathy would make me

considerate for him, instead of feeling as I do as hard as flint."

"It is a most extraordinary impression, and I cannot share it," he returned, thoughtfully. "You will find out your mistake some fine day, then there will be a revolution in your mind. Keep me posted up in the interesting history, Dorothy. I shall look for your letters. If you hold out against Egerton there is but one way of accounting for it."

"You are wrong on all points," said Dorothy, hastily, shaking her head and smiling archly. "We'll discuss this when we meet in town."

"Very well. When do you they of coming up?"

"Oh, if Herbert is well enough, they are going to General Urquhart's for some shooting in November. I am to remain here until they find a house in town, and then we join forces."

"Well, I am obliged to go to Berlin to amuse myself for some little time next week. I shall be home again before you come up to town."

These words brought them to the house, and in the hall they found nurse (Mrs. McHugh) looking for one of Miss Dolly's gloves, which she had lost.

"Has Mrs. Callander come in?"

"No, Miss; she was going out to meet the Colonel early, but just as she was putting on her hat in the hall, two outlandish men came to the front door—by good luck I hadn't gone out, so I waited with the missus, for I must say they were ugly customers. They belong to that foreign ship there, and I say they ought not to be let rampage about, frightening respectable people. One was a great, tall, wild-looking fellow with eyes like a tiger, in a manner of speaking, the other, a fat little chap, with curls, both nearly as dark as niggers; the little one spoke a queer sort of English."

"What did they want, Nurse?" asked Standish.

"Well, sir, they came inside the door as bold as brass, and the little fellow, he asked for 'the other young lady.' So I up and says, 'What young lady?' for I saw my missus was frightened, and he says, 'The young lady as came to the ship with the gentleman what speaks Spanish.'

'She's not at home,' says I. 'Then,' says he, 'maybe this lady would look at what my comrade here has to show.' With that the tall one pulled off his red cap and took a

little bag all sewn with gold and silver, but that dirty, and took out a queer green stone all covered over with figures. 'This is a something,' I can't remember the word, 'a charm,' says the little man, 'that belonged to the Moors.' Now I knew that was a lie, for the Moores are an old Irish family, my mother's people, and no such thing as that ever came out of Ireland."

"What did my sister do?" asked Dorothy.

"Oh, she took it and looked at it, and asked if the young lady wanted it. So the little man said the young lady wanted curiosities, and they had none, for they had forgotten this thing, which hung round one of their filthy necks, it seems; anyhow Mrs. Callander was taken with it, but when the little man asked two pounds for it, I first told her it was throwing away good money. So we bargained a bit, and they agreed to let us have it for twenty-five shillings. Then the missus says, 'Stay here, Nursy, I'll go fetch my purse. Then, back she comes, and gives the gold piece and five shillings, with a sweet smile, and says she, so gentle and sweet, 'I hope it will bring me good luck,' says she. 'How long are you going to be here?' and the little man answers that they might sail any day. All this time the black-looking sailor never took his eyes off her. I saw him glance at her beautiful rings. I can tell you I was right glad to see the back of them."

"Poor men! why should you make up your mind they are thieves because they look shabby?"

"Well, Miss Dorothy, they looked more than that, they looked thorough cut-throats,"

"Don't say so, nurse," said Dorothy, smiling. "When I spoke to these men—I am sure they are the same—I thought the tallest very like Mr. Egerton."

"That ragamuffin," cried Nurse, indignantly. "God forgive you, Miss Dorothy, an elegant gentleman like him."

Egerton was Nurse's beau-ideal of a high bred open-handed squire of high degree, "not a bit proud, ready to say a kind word," &c., &c.

"But there, I must be going! that girl will be letting the children turn the nursery upside down."

"Servants and dogs seem to have an instinctive objection to rags," said Standish, laughing, as Mrs. McHugh walked away.

"Nurse is rather kindly and charitable to beggars. I fancy it was Mabel's fright that annoyed her. Mabel is

terribly nervous. I wish she had not paid such a high price for a thing I daresay I shall not care to have," said Dorothy.

"If it is a real Moorish amulet it is a curiosity, and worth having, even if all the Moores in Ireland repudiate it," observed Standish. "Mabel is late, it is half-past one."

"Here she is," cried Dorothy, as Mrs. Callander slowly ascended the steps and crossed the threshold.

"Is Herbert not here?" were her first words. "I missed him, I suppose, by stopping to talk to those strange sailors, and I cannot see him anywhere. We had better go to luncheon, for I am so tired I can hardly stand. Herbert will come in before we have finished. I wonder he did not wait for me." But luncheon passed, and Callander did not return.

"I must show you your amulet," said Mabel, when they returned to the drawing-room, and she took it from the drawer of her work-table. It was a dark green stone, roughly shaped in the form of a beetle, and covered with tiny hieroglyphics, and some square, primitive-looking characters. One end was perforated from side to side, as if for a chain.

"It looks Egyptian; it is very curious," said Standish, examining it. "You ought to wear it constantly, Dorothy. It may bring you untold good fortune."

"It ought, after costing such a price," said the young lady.

"Never mind, dear! Accept it as a present from me," cried Mabel.

After awhile Standish left them, to make some valedictory visits, as he was obliged to leave, he said, by the last train to-morrow, to be ready for harness early next day.

"You will come to dinner, will you not?" asked Mabel.

"Too gladly! Where else could I spend the last evening of my holiday—a holiday you have made so delightful?"

Neither of the sisters left the house any more that day, as the sky grew clouded, and a thick fine rain began to fall.

* * * * *

Colonel Callander did not reappear till close on dinner-time, when he confessed that he had forgotten his appointment with his wife, and wandered he scarce knew where.

The "last day" smiled benignly on Standish. A bright blue sky, fleeced with fleecy clouds, a flood of golden sun-

shine, a clear, invigorating atmosphere, fresh with the first crispness of autumn, made breathing a pleasure.

Dorothy readily assented to a long tete-a-tete walk, which was more easily managed because, for some reason or other Egerton did not make his appearance that morning.

Guardian and ward had a long, delightful ramble. They discussed books and people, and future plans. Standish was unusually sympathetic, and not the smallest catpaw of difference rippled the smooth surface of their confidential intercourse.

Standish parted with Dorothy at The Knolls gate, and she entered the house with a profound sense of depression weighing her down. To-morrow! How lonely and empty to-morrow would be! What months must come and go before she should enjoy another uninterrupted talk! But she was too silly and weak! She must learn to be sufficient to herself!

In an absent mood she went to her own room and laid aside her hat and mantle, and hearing from Collins that Mrs. Callander was out, she descended to the drawing-room, determined to occupy her mind by an hour's diligent practice.

As she approached the piano, which stood near one of the windows leading into the verandah, the sound of voices, speaking low, met her ear.

She thought she distinguished Egerton's, and paused to make sure, intending to retreat if convinced that it was. Then some words caught her ear, which seemed to turn her to stone, and for the moment deprived her of volition.

"You know I love you," he was saying, in low, deep tones full of passion. "But how intensely, how wildly, your nature, perhaps, forbids you to comprehend."

Then Mabel's voice murmured something, and Egerton replied, "No, Mabel; I will not be fooled! You have let me see that I am of importance to you. You have given me hope."

"I fear you, I do not think I love you," said Mabel more distinctly, "and I cannot, dare not, cut myself off from everyone, everything that makes life worth living. No, no, I cannot," her voice broke off into sobs, suppressed sobs.

"You will drive me mad! Existence is torture! The thought of your husband makes me capable of any crime, to think of you belonging to another sets my blood on fire! You are miserable, too. He is cold and indifferent. Leave

him! Listen. Rather than suffer disappointment—rather than see you his, I would crush out your life, beloved as you are!" The tone of his voice was deadly.

Dorothy's senses came back to her with a wild thrill of horror, of rage against the man who dared to insult and threaten her sister. And Mabel listened to him—had listened to him! How strange it seemed that she now felt what the formless shadow was which had lain upon her.

What should she do? She must not drive that fierce, bad man to desperation. She must appeal to Mabel, and strengthen her—save her. She stole softly away, and stood for a moment by the stair-head window.

This sudden revelation of the abyss of treachery, of baseness, of cruel sinful passion, yawning under the fair, smooth surface of their innocent daily life, made her faint and sick, as though a glimpse of some hidden hell had been forced upon her. Then her spirit rose in righteous wrath, and she felt brave enough to face the Evil One himself. She burned to speak to her sister. It was not, it could not be of her own free choice that Mabel had listened to him. No, he had exercised some devilish spell. It wanted two hours to dinner-time. If only he would go, she might have time to warn, to entreat, to insist. Oh! she did not fear the result—she would save Mabel!

Restless, fevered, she left her room, and wandered into the day-nursery, which looked to the front, there she looked round at the toys the pictures, the various nursery treasures, and thinking of those sweet, unconscious children of the generous, true-hearted father, the type of a straightforward English gentleman, she broke down, and wept bitterly.

The sound of the outer gate closing loudly roused her, and, starting to the window, she saw Egerton walk rapidly away towards the town.

Dorothy did not delay a moment. Running down-stairs, she tried to enter her sister's room. The door was locked. "Let me in, Mabel. I want you. I am ill—oh, very ill."

In another moment Mabel opened it. Dorothy closed and re-locked it, then stood an instant, gazing at her sister, whose eyes had a terrified, strained look. Her face was deadly white.

Then, clasping her closely, she exclaimed brokenly, with heaving breast, "Mabel, what are you going to do? Could

you let that devil draw you to destruction? I have heard him just now—I wish I could have struck him dead.”

“Heard—what—where,” stammered Mabel, her eyes growing vacant as if too overdone to understand anything.

“There in the drawing-room, when you were in the balcony.”

“He said there was no one there,” gasped Mabel, and she trembled so violently that Dorothy hastily led her to a chair lest she should fall.

“I came in and heard enough, Mabel! What are you going to do?”

“I wish I were dead. I do not want to yield—I—oh, Dorothy, can you bear to look at me—to touch me?”

“I love you with all my heart and soul,” cried Dorothy, kneeling down and clasping her waist, while she laid her head against her bosom, “and before that vile wretch succeeds in his sorcery, I would kill him. You are not yourself, Mabel, you are under a spell. Throw it off, defy him! What can he do? Would you forsake your own true husband for a traitor like this? Where are your senses? Forbid him to come near you. Let me be with you every moment of the day, and I will exorcise this unholy spirit.”

“I am unfit to stay with my husband—my children,” sobbed Mabel. “I ought not to have listened.”

“You are fit—quite fit, I tell you so. You are not acting by your own will, you are under the will of another.”

“I do not want to go. Oh, Dorothy! help me. Randal Egerton always interested me, and I can scarcely tell how I came to like him. I fear him now. I wish I had never let him mesmerise me. But if I refuse him, what—what will he do? anything for revenge—even something desperate to Herbert.”

“No, Mabel, he dare not. Never fear to do right. Tell him to leave you; that you have come to your senses. I will give him the letter.”

“I have written to him, yesterday, and he came, you see, all the same. Oh, you do not know him!”

“If you are true to yourself, Mabel, you can shake him off,” cried Dorothy, rising and stamping her foot. “How dare he prosecute you! How dare he practise his villainy on you! Write again, Mabel. I will give the letter into his hand.”

“Let me collect myself a little, and you shall help me to

write it. Now, if you stand by me, I shall have strength to do right. But the idea of having so far lost myself will poison all my life."

"Mabel, dear, put your hand to the plough and never look back."

"If—if only Herbert never suspects. I will devote myself to him. Oh, can I ever atone?"

Some more energetic persuasion on Dorothy's part, a few words here and there indicative of reviving hope and courage on her sister's, and they started to find how late it was.

"We must try to look as usual," said Dorothy. "If you would like to keep quiet, and not see anyone, I will darken the room and say you have a headache. I can face them all for you, sweetest, dearest, Mabel."

"Ah, yes, do, Dorothy."

With the strength and firmness which true affection gives, Dorothy prepared herself to play the part of hostess at dinner. She was infinitely helped by a message from Egerton to the effect that he could not join them.

Colonel Callander said he would not disturb his wife, as she was trying to sleep. Dorothy wished he would. A few tender words at this juncture might, she felt sure, produce a great effect.

Dinner passed heavily. Then came the moment of parting. Colonel Callander excused himself with, what Dorothy thought, cold politeness from accompanying Standish to the station.

"Good-bye, my dear ward," he said, pressing her hand in both his own. "It seems to me you have been a good deal disturbed by something. There is a tragic look in your eyes. Will you tell me when we meet again?"

"Perhaps so," said Dorothy, trying to smile. "Oh, I am so sorry you are going!" Standish bent down and kissed the wavy braids into which her hair was divided above her brow, kissed them lightly and tenderly, and was gone.

* * * * *

The next day Colonel Callander stayed indoors for the greater part of the day, writing and arranging his papers.

This gave the sisters time to study what was best and strongest to say in Mabel's note to Egerton.

"You must get it from him as soon as he reads it," was her final injunction to Dorothy as she put it in her pocket.

"Oh, Mabel; if you think this necessary, how could you dream of deserting us all for him.

"I cannot tell. I—I was not myself. I fancied I saw a change in Herbert. If he suspected me I could not face him. Ever since we spoke of that tour, Randal was like a madman."

"Don't call him by his Christian name. Did he make you refuse to go?" Mabel bent her head, and then covering her face cried quietly but bitterly.

"Do not despair, all will be well yet, Mabel, if you are firm now."

"Can I ever regain my self-respect? Oh, Dorothy, let us try never to name him again."

But Egerton did not present himself the next day, nor the next until dinner time, when he and Miss Oakely joined the party at The Knoll.

The presence and vivacity of Miss Oakley, seconded as she was by Egerton, helped to cover not only the taciturnity of the host and hostess, which was not unusual, but Dorothy's remarkable absence of mind. At last Miss Oakley had exhausted herself and her subjects, and departed.

"What a dark night," she said, as Egerton and Callander assisted to put her into her carriage. "Yes, dark as a wolf's mouth," said Egerton.

"The moon will be up later," said Callander.

"Can I give you a lift, Mr. Egerton?"

"A thousand thanks, no."

"Are you going?" asked Callander.

"Yes, I want a smoke. Something stronger than a cigarette; and, Callander, do you feel all right? You seem to me not quite yourself."

"I have rather a bad headache, but I am subject to them since I came home. A good night's rest will be, I hope, a cure."

"Then I wish you a very good night. Make my excuses to Mrs. Callander," and Egerton set out into the soft darkness of a balmy September night, and not long after the lights disappeared from the windows of The Knoll, from all at least save that of the nursery, where the careful Mrs. McHugh kept a shaded lamp burning through the silent night watches.

The next morning broke fair and bright. Colonel Callander rose, as he generally did, at cock-crow, and wrapped himself in his dressing gown, sat making entries in his

journal, and adding a few pages to a work begun long ago some military subject. Gradually the sounds of movement below told him the household was astir. Presently the Colonel's factotum brought him his early cup of tea.

Colonel Callander laid down his pen and slowly drank it. He rose and was moving towards the door, when it was suddenly larst open by Mrs. McHugh, her eyes wide open as though strained with horror, her outstretched hand shaking, her whole aspect disordered.

"Oh! my God, sir! Come, come! My dear mistress is lying dead, murdered in her sweet sleep, and us lying deaf and dull and useless all abotu her"

"Womam, you are mad!" exclaimed Callander, in deep hoarse tones.

"Come and see. Oh, would so God I were iu her place!" and turning, she went rapidly away, followed by her incredulous master.

CHAPTER VI.

"AFTER LIFE'S FITFUL FEVER."

When Callander reached his wife's room he made at once for the bed, where she lay upon her left side, with one white hand slightly clenched outside the clothes. He bent over her and looked intently into her face.

"She seems to sleep," he said hoarsely to Nurse, who had followed him. "But," touching her hand, "she is quite cold."

"Ah! cold enough. Look, sir. Don't move her. Come round here. Look where the villain struck her!" With a trembling hand she pointed to a deep wound in the back of the neck, just below the skull, from which some blood had flowed—not in any large quantity—upon her nightdress and pillow.

Callander uttered an inarticulate exclamation, and, kneeling beside the bed, gently turned back the clothes and felt her heart; then, with a wail of despair, "Oh! dead! dead! dead!" he cried. "My beautiful darling! my pearl! No evil can touch you now; none can hurt you!" He pressed his brow against the bedclothes and muttered, "None to save her, though in the midst of those who would have given their lives for her." He stopped as if choked.

"Ah, sir, it's plain enough how the wretches got in. The window is open, and we used to leave the middle bit of

the outer shutters open, with the bar across inside—she always wanted air. See! the bar is hanging loose, and there is the ladder they got across by."

Callander rose and followed her to the window—there, across the area which surrounded the house, resting on the top of the bank at one side, and the window-ledge at the other, was a ladder—a ladder which Nurse recognised as belonging to the place. Callander dropped into a chair, and, covering his face with his hands, moaned piteously. "They have made a clean sweep," she continued, looking at the dressing-table; "she laid her rings and watch and chain and purse there last night, for I brushed her hair for her, my poor, dear lamb, and they were there when I left her. Why, why did I ever leave that shutter open?" and she wrung her hands. "What are we to do, sir?" But Callander was past heeding her. He rose, and again throwing himself upon his knees beside the bed, buried his face in the clothes, while deep sobs shook his frame.

By this time the whole household had crowded into the room and stood with bated breath.

"Oh, don't stand there doing nothing," whispered Nurse, in great agitation, to Collins. "You run and tell the police. Don't you see the poor master has lost his head? And no wonder!"

"I'll run, Mrs. McHugh, and fetch the doctor, too. Here"—in a horrified voice—"Here's Miss Dorothy!"

"Ah, don't let her in, for God's sake!" but Dorothy was in their midst while she spoke.

"What can be the matter?" she asked, in her usual tone, "every one seems running. Oh, Mabel," interrupting herself, "Is Mabel ill? Why, Herbert!" Callander never moved. Before they could prevent her, Dorothy rushed forward, and laid her head on her sister's brow; then, drawing back with a look of wild terror—"is she dead? Nurse, dear nurse, is she dead?"

"Ah, my dear, it has pleased God to take her to Himself," said nurse, breathlessly, striving to keep the horrible fact of the murder from her. "It was awfully sudden, but we have sent for the doctor, and don't you stay. If you'll look after the children a bit, Miss Dorothy, for I'll want Hannah to help me."

While nurse spoke, she pushed her to the door.

"Why do you try to send me away?" cried Dorothy. "There is something you do not want me to know."

Breaking from the agitated woman, Dorothy caught sight of the blood on the pillow. With a scream, she darted to the bed, and, clasping her hands above her head, cried, "She has been murdered—basely, cruelly murdered! Oh, my sister! my sister! was there no one to save you? Oh, come back to me. Oh, Herbert, is she quite, quite dead?" Still Callander remained in a kind of stupor.

"We can't rightly tell till the doctor comes, and this is no place for you, my dear young lady. I'll tell you the minute I know what the doctor says. You can do her no good. My own head is going round, and—Mary! Mary! help me to hold her, will you?"

The awful shock, the terrible sense that the dear, dead woman might have been saved had any one of the household been near her, was too much even for Dorothy's strong vitality. With a deep sigh she sank senseless into nurse's arms, who was thankful to assist in taking her back to her own room, where she left her in charge of the children's maid.

Then, the terrible silence broken, the women servants burst into tears and exclamations. They called for justice on the murderer, and bewailed the fate of their gentle mistress.

But Colonel Callander rose from his knees, and at the sight of his ghastly, horror-struck face, they retreated, dimly conscious of being in the presence of a grief almost too great for sympathy to touch.

The leaden minutes dropped slowly away in miserable waiting. At last Collins drove up with the police inspector and the doctor.

Dorothy came gradually to her senses, and as the dreadful knowledge of her sister's tragic death returned to her she rose up and attempted to leave the room.

"Oh, no, Miss Dorothy," cried the little maid, "Mrs. McHugh said you were not to be let go down stairs. She says you'll just be breaking your heart, miss, and you can do no good. The police and the doctor are there now, and Mrs. McHugh, she'll come up as soon as she has anything to tell. Do, do lie down again."

"Ah, no; I can indeed do no good! No one can do any good," cried Dorothy, wringing her hands. "Who could have hurt her? She had not an enemy in the world. Was it some wretch who wanted to rob her."

"I heard Mrs. McHugh say that all her jewels were gone."

Dorothy walked to and fro, remembering **confusedly** the events of the last few days—the painful scenes between her sister and herself.

That the sweet sister she so dearly loved should be snatched by violence from the difficulties and dangers out of which Dorothy had hoped to deliver her was too agonizing a finale to the drama of which they had both been the centre. Then the picture of the bereaved husband, of the motherless little ones, grew distinct to her imagination, but her torn heart found no relief; horror was too strong for tears; she was too stunned by the cruel tragedy to think clearly. Life seemed at a standstill. She threw herself into a chair, and sat with wide-opened eyes gazing at the deep wound which seemed still before her. At last Nurse softly opened the door and approached her, her own eyes streaming, her face haggard. "My poor dear," she said, in low, hurried tones, "the doctor thinks she must have been dead these four or five hours. The blow, he says, must have killed her at once. It somehow struck the spine, though it looks as if it were on the back of the head. He doesn't think she felt any pain or fright. She looks like a peaceful infant. The master—God help him!—would let no one touch her but himself. His face is set like an iron mask."

"The coroner's come now, and Mr. Egerton. Ah! he has a feeling heart! I thought he'd have dropped when he came into the room, for all he is a tall, strong man, he was trembling like a leaf, and his eyes looked like to start out of his head. Oh! what a day of sorrow! My dear beautiful angel of a mistress! To think of them foreign devils stealing in on her sweet sleep to take her innocent life! and it will be hard to catch them! They say the ship was away at dawn this morning, and no one knows where."

Here nurse utterly broke down, and sinking into a seat threw her apron over her face, and rocked herself to and fro.

"Where are these blessed children? Go, Peggy, my girl," to the nursemaid, "go see to them, they'll be wanting some bread and butter. Oh, here is Miss Oakley, thank God!"

It was indeed Henrietta, pale and tearful. She ran to Dorothy, and kneeling down, clasped her arms round her.

"I have just heard. Dorothy, my dear Dorothy! Let me stay with you. It is too—too cruel," and pressing the silent, half-unconscious girl closely, she burst into hysterical weeping—for once, Henrietta Oakley forgot herself.

her "part," her pretensions to originality, everything, save the human anguish round her! Dorothy returned her embrace mechanically.

"Have they sent for Paul—Paul Standish?" she whispered.

"I don't know, dear; but Mr. Egerton is with Herbert, and he will do all he can." A convulsive shudder passed through the slight form in Henrietta's arms, and Dorothy clung to her with a sudden movement.

"Oh, send for Paul! Do not leave us defenseless here without Paul Standish! He will not have left London yet," and with feverish eagerness she pushed Henrietta from her.

"Has any one telegraphed for Mr. Standish?" she asked looking at nurse.

"I don't know, miss," said the grief-stricken woman, "I'll go and ask."

"Telegraph for him at once," said Henrietta.

"Yes, Miss Collins knows his address," and nurse went feebly from the room.

Alone with the dazed, terrified Dorothy, Henrietta was alarmed at the wild distress of her tearless eyes—if she could only bring her the solace of tears!

"Come away, dear, come to those poor little children, they will be so miserable shut up all this morning. Let us go and keep them company. The nursemaid will never stay with them when all this excitement is going on."

Dorothy, whose will and full consciousness seemed to be temporarily in abeyance, rose obediently and followed her.

The usually neat nursery was in some disorder, the remains of the children's breakfast were scattered on the table, the little girl was kneeling on the window seat beside Peggy looking at the people coming and going, the crowd which had collected about the gate and the policeman stationed beside it to prevent any unauthorised person entering, on the floor lay the baby boy laughing, and kicking in the joy of pure healthy existence, and battering a rag doll against the carpet. At the sound of the opening door, the little girl jumped down and ran to cling round her aunt.

"Where is Mammy? she has never come this morning," cried the child, "and that naughty Peggy won't let us go down stairs! I want to see dear Mammy."

Hearing this demand, the boy began to repeat, "Ma-ma,"

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most vigorously. Then the sweeter note of grief was struck, and Dorothy clasping the motherless little girl to her heart, burst into a flood of tears, her whole frame quivering with the violence of her sobs.

* * * * *

Many a page might be filled with the sad details of such a scene, the formidable police inspector unmoved by dismay and sorrow about him, made notes, and searching inquiries; the doctor, who examined the fatal wound, the coroner viewing "the body," the lingering crowd outside increasing every moment as the startling news spread, the disorganised servants wandering about tearful and excited, are they not all repetitions of what has been but too often enacted before? though to the immediate sufferers it all seemed so harrowing and desecrating, this tearing away of all that shields the sanctities of home from the rude eyes of the outer world. To the policeman there is no holy of holies into which he will not direct the vulgar glare of his bull's-eye.

The extraordinary self-mastery of Colonel Callander struck everyone. He let no hand save his own touch the fair form he loved so well, when both doctor and coroner made their examination. He seemed upheld by the marvellous force and tenderness of love. He could not be persuaded to leave the presence of the dead. His stern composure overawed the lookers on. Egerton was much more unmanned.

He seemed scarcely able to support himself when he first gazed at the sweet, calm marble face of the murdered woman. He reeled like a drunken man to a seat, and appeared to have almost lost consciousness. When he rallied he was untiring in his attentions to the bereaved husband, in his thoughtful assistance and suggestions to the police. But it was evident what the effort to be of use cost him.

No one seemed to think of sending for Standish. Callander's whole soul was centred in his wife, even the natural desire for justice, that is vengeance, on her murderers seemed merged in the tender care with which he paid the last tribute of love and respect.

While Egerton went to and fro like a man but half recovered from a severe fall, Callander was rigidly composed, and perfectly clear in his orders and directions.

As soon as a rumor of the fatal event reached Mrs. Callander, she was speedily on the scene of action.

Dorothy was quite unable, and strange to say, her son decidedly refused to see her. This appeared to agitate her greatly. She demanded an interview with Egerton, who when he came scarcely seemed to know what he was saying.

It must be admitted that the hard husk of the worldly old woman was pierced at last, and she showed more feeling than the onlookers expected, though the idea of police prowling about, of a coroner's inquest, of the details which every newspaper would set forth with morbid elaboration, was a source of bitter mortification.

After obtaining as much information as she could from Mrs. McHugh, she drove back to her hotel, and spent the rest of the day in the company of her reverend friends, who were indefatigable in their efforts to comfort and console her.

The emotion which this tragedy called forth in Henrietta Oakley seemed to make a new creature of her; the inner depth of her nature, which had hitherto lain dormant under the mass of luxuries and frivolities with which it was overlaid, was roused to activity, and for the moment her flickering follies were quenched. Dorothy shrank from encountering her brother-in-law, even though the shock and horror of the morning, the recollection of his face and its stony grief remained with her, and she feared to meet him for both their sakes. She was so near and dear to his murdered wife, how could he bear to look upon her?

But Henrietta had no such scruples, she went boldly to him, and he endured her presence, and answered her questions respecting the children. For nurse suggested their being taken to their grandmother, as the house was not a fit place for them.

Then she assisted (under Mrs. McHugh's directions) to prepare them, and herself escorted the poor motherless babies to Mrs. Callander, who willingly accepted the charge.

It was a relief to Dorothy when they were gone. The sound of their innocent laughter was too agonising when she thought of the beloved mother lying in everlasting silence—murdered—below.

The dreadful day dragged through. Mrs. Callander asked Dorothy to stay with her during this sad time, but she refused, saying that so long as her sister's lifeless form was under the roof she would not leave it.

"I do hope Herbert's brain will not give way under this cruel blow," murmured Miss Oakley, as she sat holding Dorothy's hand in the deserted nursery, while the evening grew darker and night stole on them. "He is wonderfully composed, though there is something awful in his face. Mr. Egerton is far more overcome. I only caught a glimpse of him, and he really did not look sane. It is the intense grief in Herbert's expression that affects me so. I can hardly keep back the tears when I look at him. Have you seen Egerton?"

"Oh, no—no," cried Dorothy with almost a scream of pain. "How shall I ever stand to be questioned if I am to be dragged before these dreadful people to-morrow? If I could throw any light on——"

"Miss Dorothy!" interrupted Mrs. McHugh, opening the door hastily. "Mr. Standish is below, and the master won't see him! I went and asked him myself (the others don't care to go near him), but he refused; he was quite angry when I persisted. Will you come and speak to Mr. Standish, miss. He looks terrible bad."

Oh, yes, nurse! I will come," and she rose with alacrity, then pausing, she asked tremulously. "Where—where is Mr. Egerton?"

"Gone away to his own place for a bit. I'm sure he looks that wore out. I don't know what the poor master would have done without him."

Dorothy was out of the room before she ceased to speak.

"Where is the Colonel?" asked Miss Oakeley.

"Always in the same place, beside her," returned nurse, sadly.

When Dorothy opened the door and saw her guardian standing in the window of the dimly-lighted dining-room, she forgot in her great sorrow all the womanly consciousness which used to hold her back, and darting to him she threw her arms around his neck as in her old childish days.

"My poor child," said Standish, tenderly, "What is this, horror? I had Collin's telegram about three hours ago and know nothing except that Mabel is dead—he says murdered."

"Oh, Paul, thank God you are come! It is all too terrible!" She brokenly recounted what had occurred—still clinging to him.

"I cannot understand it. Burglars seldom murder, save

in self-defence," he exclaimed, "and poor dear Mabel could be no object of fear to anyone."

"I don't know what to think, Paul. Dreadful conjectures thrust themselves upon me. Oh, if I could only stop thinking!" and she hid her face against his shoulder.

Standish gently turned her to the lamp, and his face grew very grave.

"You must not add imaginary horrors to the reality of this dreadful affair, my dear Dorothy. It is too much for you. Later on you can open your heart to me. What could be the object of this hideous crime?"

"Nurse says that her purse and the jewels which lay on the dressing-table are all gone," said Dorothy. "They might have taken those; but why put her to death?"—she withdrew her arms from him but still held his hands in both hers, as if unwilling to lose touch with one stronger than herself—"and she seemed as if lying in peaceful sleep, no look of terror or disturbance."

"Sit down, Dorothy, you can hardly stand," and he led her to a sofa. "Tell me more."

"I know so little; but what cuts me to the soul is that in the night, I don't know what hour—something woke me—I heard a noise—a dim, faint noise, a little like metal falling. I was so cruelly dull and sleepy that I was not frightened, I did not think of getting up; and they were murdering her then—my own dear sister! You know I have the room over hers. Oh, Paul, I might have saved her!"

"Or been murdered yourself!" said Standish, drawing her to him as one might a sorrowful child.

"Better me than her," returned Dorothy, with trembling lips. "Who can replace her with her children, her husband? Oh, Paul! must I tell all this to-morrow?"

"At the inquest? Yes, my dear Dorothy. You must tell the whole truth—the least omission might lead to the failure of justice—and Mrs. McHugh's theory is that one or both of the foreign sailors committed this foul deed."

"Yes, she thinks so."

"It is not improbable! some of them look equal to any villany. My God! they might have spared her life," cried Standish with deep emotion. "I should not wonder if Callander lost his reason after such a critical blow. Egerton of course has been with him. Have you seen him?"

"Oh! no, no! Do not ask me. I cannot—I will not,"

she exclaimed, breathlessly, again hiding her face against him. "You will stay with me, Paul. You will protect me, you are my only friend, except poor Herbert, and I am half afraid of him now." She trembled so violently that Standish was almost alarmed.

"Poor little soul, the shock has been too much for her," he muttered to himself.

"I shall not always be a selfish coward," she whispered, "I shall try and do what my hand finds to do diligently. But to-day I am not myself."

"That's a brave heart," said Standish, softly. "I know you are not a coward, Dorothy. You must think of the children and their desolate father." There was silence for a moment. Dorothy's small hands still clasped his arm with more force than he thought they possessed. "I suppose Callander will see me to-morrow," resumed Standish. "I almost dread meeting him. I fancied he would be glad to know I was here. But I suppose he is not at all himself. Poor fellow."

"I thought, too, he would be comforted in having you near."

"Who have you to keep you company?"

"Henrietta Oakley. She is wonderfully kind. Oh, here she is."

In fact Mrs. McHugh had some difficulty in keeping her from interrupting their interview long before.

Some further talk respecting the circumstances of the tragedy which had befallen them. Then Standish said he would leave them. "I am going to see the doctor and hear his account. Should Herbert express any wish to see me, I shall be at Egerton's hotel. I want to hear what he has to say."

When he named Egerton, Dorothy's hand closed on his with a convulsive pressure.

"I trust in heaven she will get some sleep," he said, looking at Henrietta.

"I asked the doctor to look in this evening, and prescribe a composing draught," she returned. "I don't know what will become of Dorothy unless she gets some sleep. Come away, Dorothy."

"I cannot thank you enough for your kind care of the poor child."

"You will come early to-morrow, Paul," said Dorothy, letting him go with reluctance.

"Trust me," was his reply as they left the room.

CHAPTER VII.

"THE INQUEST."

Eastport had rarely, if ever, been so shocked and excited as by the murder of the charming and admired Mrs. Herbert Callander. Though she had not mixed much with the local society, she was well known, and every one who could find standing room crowded to hear the evidence given at the inquest.

The facts of the case, as succinctly recorded by the inspector, were first read over, and the doctor's evidence taken; then Mrs. McHugh was called. The deepest interest was evinced as she advanced to the place vacated by the doctor. Many persons recognised her, for her severely respectable figure and solid black silk gown was a familiar object on pier and sands as she watched over her pretty, well-dressed charges, accompanied by her humble satellite, the nurse maid.

Not the most thrilling play ever mounted by Irving or acted by Bernhardt can stir the pulses like a trial of this description, where the question of guilt or innocence, the materials for arriving at a conclusion, the hesitations, fears, hopes, are actual realities. The mystery in the present case was an additional fascination, for gossip was disposed to reject the theory of robbery as too simple a solution.

Mrs. McHugh preserved a decent composure. She would as soon have brushed her hair in public as shed tears and flourished a pocket-handkerchief in the face of a jury.

She recounted very distinctly her having carried a cup of tea to her mistress as usual at 7 o'clock, and was a little surprised to see the blind unfastened. It was Mrs. Callander's habit to leave one window open and also the centre part of the outer shutter. The shutters were at once blinds and shutters; they folded in two at either side and had an iron bar which fastened within after they were closed. Mrs. Callander lay on her right side, and seemed just the same as usual.

As her mistress did not stir, witness set down the tea, and stooping over her, observed that there was more than the stillness of sleep in her attitude. She touched her mistress and found she was cold and dead.

"Did you go at once to Colonel Callander?" asked the coroner.

"No, sir. I moved the clothes a little, intending to feel her heart, when I saw blood on the pillow. Then I was afraid to touch her. I went round to the other side of the bed and perceived that her head was bent forward, and at the top of the neck, just below the hair, there was a wound. Colonel Callander was sitting at his writing-table when I went in. He didn't seem to understand me rightly when I told him; but he went away sharp to the missis' room. It was then I saw the ladder lying across the area, resting on the top of the grass bank at one side and the window-ledge on the other."

One of the jury—"Was Colonel Callander's room next his wife's?"

"No, sir; it was to the front of the house, and there was a passage between the two rooms leading to a door that opened on the stable-yard. There is a gate leading from it into the garden. Mrs. Callander's room was on the left of the house, and one window looks out over the bay."

"Was the gate between the yard and garden kept locked?"

"I don't know, sir. I daresay it was not, as we had no horses or carriage; anyway it was wide open that morning. He forgot to shut it, I suppose."

"He! Who?"

"The murderer. He must have got the ladder from the shed in the yard, where it was always kept."

"I am told some sailors came to offer curiosities for sale to your late mistress?"

"They did, sir. I was with her while she spoke to them."

"Where were you when they came?"

"In the hall."

"What passed?"

"There were two of them, sir. One spoke a little English, the other, a tall, black-browed, wicked-looking man, had a bit of stone to sell. My mistress bought it. She did not like to be left alone with them, so she went herself for her purse. She left her door open. The window is right opposite, and a little table by it where her jewel case stood. She took the purse and came back, leaving the door wide open. I saw the black-looking fellow stare after her, as if he'd draw the purse out of her hand and the rings off her fingers with his eyes."

"And you saw no more of those men?"

"No, sir; but Collins, the colonel's man, did."

Collins being called, said he remembered the day in question. He was in the pantry, which looked out on the yard, and observed two men enter it from the garden—queer-looking chaps. One, with a red cap, spoke broken English. He (Collins) came out and asked them what they wanted. The shorter of the two was very polite, and explained that they came through the garden by mistake, and wanted to be shown the way out;—thought it very strange when he heard that they had been selling things to his mistress in the hall, as the entrance to the lawn in front was opposite the door.

Mrs. McHugh, recalled, said the last person who had seen Mrs. Callander alive was the upper housemaid, Mary Stokes. She usually attended to her mistress at night, as she (Mrs. McHugh) did not leave the nursery after 9 o'clock.

Mary Stokes, who was tearful and confused, stated that on the fatal night she had, at her mistress' request, lit a night-light. Mrs. Callander did not always have a night-light, only when there was no moon,—she put it beside the bed. The bed stood near the window, which was always kept closed. Then Mrs. Callander bade her good-night. "And the dear, sweet lady never spoke again," exclaimed the girl, with a burst of tears.

The coroner asked who occupied the room over Mrs. Callander's.

"It is the day-nursery."

"The room next to that nearest Mrs. Callander's?"

"That's Miss Wynn's, the poor dear lady's sister."

Both Standish and Callander had done their best to spare Dorothy the pain of being publicly questioned, but in vain.

The coroner said he was bound to question all persons who could throw the least light upon the terrible tragedy, and possibly Miss Wynn had heard or noticed something which might give a clue, however faint, to guide the jury. Trifles often led to strange discoveries.

It was a fearful trial to Dorothy. She heard the suppressed murmur, the expectant rustle which ran through the closely packed room as she advanced, clinging to her guardian's arm, and feeling scarcely able to support herself. Miss Oakley accompanied her, but was not allowed to stand near.

Dorothy was deadly pale, the scared, grief stricken ex-

pression of her large, soft grey eyes, brought tears to those that looked at them. Her voice was very low, and at times seemed on the point of breaking; but she controlled her emotion and answered clearly. In reply to a leading question from the coroner, she said that on the night of the murder she had retired to rest as usual, and, feeling tired, soon fell asleep. After what seemed to her a long time she awoke with a sort of confused idea that a sharp noise, as if of some metal falling, had roused her. She had been dreaming that her little niece was knocking the garden-roller with a stone, for which she had had to correct her a few days previously, and, thinking that—that it was all a dream, she resisted her first startled impulse to call nurse. "If I had done so we might have saved her," she added, in a broken voice, with quivering lip.

"You think the noise was real?"

"I do. I believe it was the bar which secured the outer blinds of—of my sister's room."

"Have you any idea at what hour this occurred?"

"I have not. I had no light, and, after the first moment, I felt so sure that it was only a dream which had startled me, that I soon went to sleep again, little thinking——" she stopped abruptly, and pressed her hands tightly together.

"It is unusual for a burglar to commit violence in trying to secure booty, but I presume there could be no possible motive but theft to account for the crime?—no spiteful, discharged servant urged by morbid feelings of revenge to——"

"Oh—no—no!" interrupted Dorothy, somewhat losing her self-control; "every one loved her, she was so kind—so good! and she had all the same servants who have been with us since she came home from India last year."

"Then you believe that these foreign sailors or some other robber committed the crime?"

"What else can I think?"

At last she was released, and Standish, who understood the anguish and effort in her every tone, led her quickly away to the carriage which was waiting.

Colonel Callander was next questioned. He had little to tell, but told that little with a kind of deadly, hopeless calm which gave the hearers a profound impression of the depths out of which he spoke.

The cook was then interrogated, and even the "boy"

who came diurnally to clean boots and knives was examined respecting the ladder.

"It was not very long," he said, "not long enough to reach from the flag-stones, which surrounded the house at the bottom of the area, to the windows of the drawing and dining rooms. He had tried when they wanted cleaning. He should have said it was not long enough to reach across from the bank to the window, but it was not laid from the top though, the end of the ladder was forced into the grass and mould, and sloped to the lady's window.

"It must be difficult to approach the window in that way?"

"Well, yes, rather—but not to a sailor; they can well nigh dance on nothing."

The doctor's deposition was clear and decided. He was one of the best known practitioners in the place. He had found, he said, a deep incision at the juncture of the spine and skull, penetrating the substance termed medulla.

Death must have been inflicted while the victim slept, for the slightest resistance or movement on her part would have frustrated the attempt to stab her in that particular spot. The cavity or opening at the top of the spine is well defended by bone above and below; it was probably more accident than knowledge that guided the murderer's knife or dagger.

The instrument used must have been keen and narrow in the blade, for the wound was small and clean cut. Very little blood was drawn.—By the coroner: The deed was probably done some four or five hours before its discovery—that is about two or half-past two in the morning. Death must have been instantaneous; there was no sign of a struggle. The room was undisturbed, the bedclothes smooth and unruffled.

The whole of the evidence conveyed an idea of the peace, kindness, and harmony reigning in the fair home so cruelly broken up.

Finally the coroner, having nothing further to elicit, addressed a few words to the jury, and they found the only verdict possible was "Murder by some person or persons unknown."

It was a subject of some comment that Egerton had not appeared at the inquest. Of course the bereaved husband had an older and closer friend to stand by him in his wife's guardian, and it was rumored that Egerton, a very excit-

able man, was too seriously afflicted by the blow that had fallen on his friends to be able to bear the pain of listening to the details drawn forth in the examination of witnesses.

All Eastport and Fordsea were dreadfully disappointed and indignant at having to put up with a mere commonplace story of robbery with violence, instead of—well, they did not know what. But tremendous revelations had been expected, and when this “lame and impotent conclusion,” was arrived at every one felt him or herself shamefully cheated.

Many and various were the solutions suggested, and profound were the theories respecting the Callander tragedy, which supplied materials for many an interesting conversation among visitors at Fordsea.

Standish was fortunately able to remain for a few days with the sorrowful sister and husband, but the time when he must leave was near at hand, and he could not make up his mind to desert his young ward without finding someone to protect and support her during his absence. It was unfortunate that Egerton had raised the question of their possible marriage, as it might make Dorothy reluctant to accept his assistance or derive comfort from his society. It was strange that Egerton had absented himself from the inquest. However, it would be well to see him, and ascertain his readiness to aid his afflicted friends.

Egerton was pacing his sitting-room when Standish was shown in. His dark face was lividly pale, his large black eyes looked sunken, his whole aspect that of a man oppressed by horror as well as grief.

He seemed surprised, and not quite well pleased, when Standish came in.

“As I did not see you yesterday, I have come to consult you about our unhappy friends.”

“Yes, yes! In fact, I am so completely unmanned I could not face the hideous vulgarities of the inquest,” interrupted Egerton. “Besides I could throw no light on the matter! I only know the facts from hearsay, like yourself,” interrupted Egerton, not heeding the hand Standish held out. “In fact, the horror of the whole affair has almost shaken my reason. To think of that angel—but I must not speak of it. Tell me, what can I do?”

“You can help me in various ways. First, Callander is so completely prostrate that I cannot consult with him as

to what steps ought to be taken to trace these Spaniards, for there is strong probability that they are the murderers."

"It is quite as likely to have been English as Spanish sailors. There are scoundrels of all sorts in such a town as Eastport."

"Granted, but these are the only men of whom we have the slightest suspicion. Of course the absence of an extradition treaty with Spain would be an hindrance even should we succeed in finding the men. Still, I know our Foreign-Office people will do their best, and I know from experience that the Spanish and Portuguese authorities are by no means willing to screen a murderer. Now Mrs. Callander—the mother, I mean," for Egerton started, "wants to offer a thousand pounds reward for any information which may lead to the discovery of the murderer."

"Make it two," said Egerton, hoarsely, throwing himself into an arm-chair, and leaning his head on his hand in an attitude of utter despondency. "I would gladly give many thousands if we could punish—Oh, God, what a fearful ending of so sweet and holy a life."

Standish looked at him a good deal moved, and also surprised. His incoherency, his extraordinary forgetfulness of Dorothy, seemed as if he were off his balance.

"Yes," resumed Standish, after a moment's pause. "It is too dreadful to bear thinking about: I am fearful of the effect the tragedy will have on Dorothy. It will be long before she can shake off the impression."

This allusion to the girl he had professed such an ardent wish to marry, did not seem to reach Egerton's sense, he took no notice of it.

"I propose to send copies of this placard offering the reward to our consuls in every port in Europe, the Levant, and the Cape, with a description of the men wanted. Of course, if the fellows can be taken anywhere, not in Spain (in Hamburg for instance), we can bring them here, and try them.

"What waste time and energy it all will be," exclaimed Egerton. "We'll never find out the truth, and, if we did, would it restore her? would it atone for our irreparable loss?"

"Of course not! Still, it is our bounden duty to leave nothing undone to bring the miscreants to justice. I shall act for Callander almost without consulting him, and this

brings me to another point. I am seriously uneasy about Callander. You know he has not been in too sound a mental condition since his return, though immensely better lately, and this frightful business may have a very fatal effect. He sits for hours brooding in utter silence, he hardly eats. He will not see the children, and hardly notices Dorothy. His cousin, Miss Oakley, is the only person who can do anything with him. His mother, who is in great distress, is most anxious that he should be taken away. Will you be so kind and self-sacrificing as to go with him? he must not go alone."

"Why do you fix on me," cried Egerton, starting up, and beginning to pace the room again. "Why not go yourself with him?"

"Because he has for some time shown anything but a preference for my society; now, he always liked you, and enjoyed being with you. Then you are not connected with his poor dear wife, or his first meeting with her as I am; so in every way you are the fittest companion for him, especially as he was so ready to back you up with Dorothy."

"Dorothy—ay—Dorothy!" repeated Egerton, absently. "You set me a dreadful task," he resumed, after a short pause. "I should rather do anything else in the world. Let me think. Oh! if I must—I must, I suppose. It is all awfully hard to bear! When does Callander think of starting?"

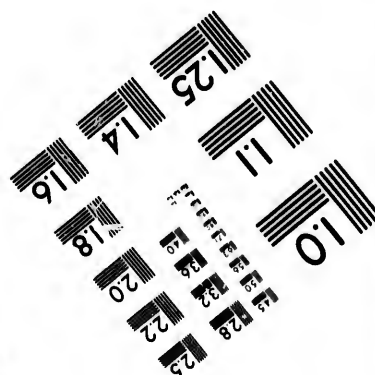
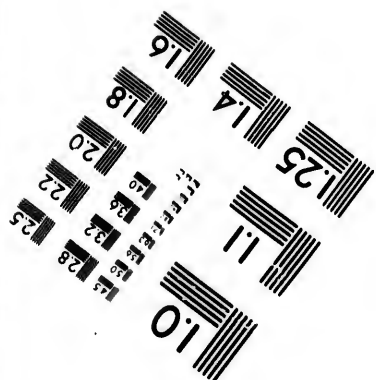
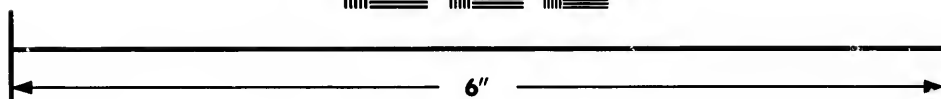
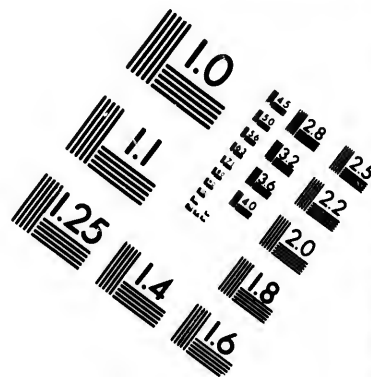
"We'll try and get him off as soon as we can, after the funeral—you know it is fixed for to-morrow, I suppose?" Egerton bent his head, and, pausing in his troubled walk, stood staring at Standish with vacant eyes, which were evidently filled with some very different image.

"Arranging for the funeral is the only thing that has roused Callander. He ordered that the grave should be prepared in a little old burial ground in which, it seems, they passed the day they drove over to Rookstone, you remember? I wish to heaven they had carried out their plan of a trip to the Highlands or anywhere. She would have been with us now, had she gone."

"How do you know that?" cried Egerton, almost fiercely. "If it were her destiny, how could she escape? What puppets we are in the grasp of fate."

"I think you want to get away yourself, Egerton," said Standish, a good deal surprised at his tone.





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"Can you expect anything else? Was ever a more tragic ending to a fair young life? I haven't your Saxon phlegm——"

"I wish I had a little more," exclaimed Standish, in a voice full of emotion. "Do you suppose it has not cost me an effort to keep my head clear, my mind composed, among such scenes as I have gone through for the last few days? But these poor souls haven't anyone to guide or assist them, save myself and—you—if I may count on your friendship. By heaven! I am almost unnerved when I look at Callander, bowed down by speechless sorrow; at Dorothy, chilled by the touch of such a horror in her sunny youth. She will outgrow it, however. My deepest sympathy is for Callander. We must do all we can for him."

Egerton sat for a moment without speaking, then he rose and moved restlessly to and fro. "You are right," he said at last, in a more collected tone than he had yet used. "I ought to be ashamed of my unstrung nerves. It is womanish to be overpowered as I am. I did not think I was such a poltroon. But the awfulness of——" He stopped short and shuddered. "Yes, I'll do what I can for Callander. Only get him out of this as soon as you can. It is punishment too much for the worst criminal (God! I can think of nothing but crime!) to stay here in this scene——" he stopped again—"the scene of our former happy life. Settle what you like. I am at your disposal."

"Thank you. I felt sure you would do your best for us. Then we must get Dorothy away. It is pitiable to see her sad, white face."

Egerton was too much absorbed in his thoughts to heed what he said.

This indifference greatly surprised Standish. "Have you seen her since——?" he was beginning, when Egerton interrupted him—"No; she absolutely refused to see me, refused most abruptly, and I shall not ask again. Did she suppose that with the shadow of such a grief over us I should have been in a mood to make love to her?"

"If you loved her you would bear with her more patiently."

"I shall never intrude on her again. I only want to get away from this wretched place."

"I must leave you now," said Standish, rising. "We shall meet to-morrow, I suppose?"

"We must; we must," returned Egerton. "I will be

present." He compressed his lips as he spoke, and his brow contracted with an expression of agony.

"I have forgotten to tell you," said Standish, looking at him with some compassion, "that as soon as I got the telegram summoning me to the sad scene, I went to find a very clever detective who has done some remarkable things. I was just in time to catch him before he undertook any other job. He is making as close an examination of the premises as he can. I am anxious to hear his report and will let you know what he says."

"A detective! What is the use of letting one of those fellows ransack the belongings of a delicate woman?" cried Egerton. "He will not bring her back to us nor find out anything fresh. Who could have had the heart to hurt her but a brutal ruffian, whose greed was excited by the sight of her jewels? Why, a detective will want to turn everything inside out!"

"There is no reason why he should. He will only look through the premises, and glean what can be learned out of doors. I agree with you that there is small chance of his tracking the murderer——"

"Don't speak of him," said Egerton, half closing his eyes.

"Come and dine with me. You are not fit company for yourself."

"Nor for anyone else," he returned. "Thank you, no. I shall be calmer to-morrow."

Standish walked slowly away to the printer who was to strike off the first supply of hand-bills offering the reward of which he had spoken. He was strongly impressed by the strange condition of mind in which he had found Egerton.

Well versed in the world's ways, and having more than once discovered what dark depths can lie hidden under the fair seeming of innocent and honest lives, he was a good deal disturbed by the ideas which Egerton's grief and agitation suggested.

The man was suffering horribly. But how was it that no thought for the girl whom a week ago he had eagerly sought seemed to occur to him? Had Mabel not been almost childlike in her guileless innocence, he might have suspected some ugly secret—but, no, that was out of the question. He turned indignantly from the base thought. Egerton was sensitive and impressionable, his blood was mixed with a fiery, eager strain—too strong for the Eng-

lishman within him to control or resist. Still, he was glad that the handsome, attractive master of Netherleigh had failed so signally to fascinate Dorothy—poor, dear, broken-hearted little Dorothy. Dorothy deserved a different kind of a mate from this grand, golden eagle. The gold for her should be rather in the heart than in the pocket. Then his thoughts turned to some of the many matters which claimed his attention, and, quickening his pace, he soon reached his destination.

* * * * *

It was already dusk when Standish returned to the villa. The burden of all that needed attention was upon him, and he was eager to complete every arrangement, as the days for which his chief had considerably spared him were slipping away, and he ardently desired to see Dorothy and Callander too removed from the scene of their cruel loss before he himself left England.

Daylight, therefore, scarcely sufficed for all he had to do. As he walked back from Eastport he thought over the terrible event which had robbed Callander of his dearly beloved wife. How happy they had been together! What a simple, sinless life, full of kind thoughts for others, they had led! Then he looked back to a passage in his own earlier days, when a beloved woman had been nearly all to him that Mabel was to Callander, save that she ended by marrying another. What would it have cost him had she been wrenched from love and life as ruthlessly? Could any vengeance have satisfied him? Yet poor Callander seemed too unmanned by grief to be capable of seeking justice. Weakened by illness, this blow had completely crushed him. Then the scenes of his own by-gone love story came back to him freshly enough. Could he be the same being who loved so passionately and suffered so acutely fifteen or sixteen years ago? Was it possible he had so completely outlived all the feelings of that remote period, which was not so very remote after all? Ah, it was a glorious time! but the awakening had been bitter enough. However, that intense early fever had secured him a fair share of immunity ever since, and now, though almost middle-aged as regarded years, he felt absurdly young—perhaps dangerously young.

"Beg your pardon, sir," said a voice at his elbow. The speaker was a slight and rather delicate-looking man of

very uncertain age, pale and freckled, with sandy hair; his quiet, almost sleepy, steel grey eyes were shaded by reddish lashes, and brows of the same color overhung them heavily.

He wore a very high, narrow hat, still glossy from its silver-paper covering, whilst his clothes, also new, and of superfine cloth, had a clumsy, solid, provincial look as to cut and fit. He was clean-shaved, and his wide, rather shapeless mouth had a soft smiling expression, suggestive of innocence and credulity.

"Can I speak with you a bit?" He said "spake," but as Irish matters, Irish members, Irish diamonds, Irish properties generally are at a discount and out of fashion, these slight Hibernian peculiarities of accent shall be left to the imagination of the reader.

"Yes, by all means, Dillon. Come on with me to the house. I have not had a minute to speak to you. What have you been doing?"

"Not much, sir. I have been loitering about the old dock inquiring if there is a decent public to be had at a fair rent, and I have picked up a trifle or two not worth talking about now—not, anyhow, till I can link them on to something more. The funeral's to be to-morrow?"

"It is."

"After that, I can examine the room—every inch of it?"

"You can."

"Then, Mr. Standish, sir, will you give strict orders that no one is to touch it or clean it, inside or out, till I have it to myself a whole day?"

"Certainly, Dillon."

"I did make so bold as to talk to Mrs. McHugh, and she promised that ne're a maid among them should lay a dust-er, even on the outside of the door."

"You could not have chosen a better ally."

"She is a responsible sort of woman," said Dillon, reflectively, "and might be a help; but then, you see, the ladies will talk, instead of letting people talk to them."

The two men walked on in silence. Then the detective said:—

"The Colonel sent for me to-day, after you had gone out. He asked me what steps I intended to take, and all to that—of course I couldn't tell him. I must make the steps before I take them. Then he ordered me to spare no expense, and seemed too tired to speak any more. Ah! he's a broken

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man, though I've seen widowers with one foot in the grave, and despair in their hearts, rally and come round in a wonderful way. This a bad case though; I never knew a worse. It isn't like these burglarious fellows to murder; they know it just sets every man's hand against them; and with a timid, real lady like this one, why, they might have gagged her, tied her to the bed post, muffled up her head, or any little thing like that, and made off with the booty; but to stab her in her sleep (if she did sleep through the unfastening and opening of them blinds)! There's something in it that sets me a-thinking. I wish I could track the blood-thirsty dogs!—begging the dogs' pardon, I ought to say wolves. But I'm afraid it won't be easy, they having been away on the high seas before anyone found it out. Pray, sir, who is the gentleman Mrs. McHugh tells me knew the men whom she suspects—who talks their lingo?"

"Oh, Mr. Egerton. An intimate friend of poor Mrs. Callander and her husband. He is frightfully cut up."

"Well, that's not to be wondered at. He might know where these sailors come from. I'd like to have a word with him and a look at him."

"Well, so you can. He will be at the funeral to-morrow."

"Thank you, sir. I am going to have a cup of tea with Mrs. McHugh in the housekeeper's room, if you should want to speak with me before I turn in for the night."

"All right," returned Standish, and he ascended the steps of the entrance, while Dillon went round to the side door before mentioned.

In the hall Dorothy awaited Standish. She was dressed in the deepest black, which made her wan face look even whiter than it really was.

"I saw you from the nursery window," she said, leaving her hand in his. "Henrietta went out to Mrs. Callander's, and I have been so awfully lonely. I get so terrified sometimes. It is weak and foolish. I must resist this dreadful feeling."

"Yes, you must, my poor, dear little girl," said Standish, tenderly. "You are trembling. You seem to be always trembling."

"No, not always, but very often."

"Come into the drawing-room, and sit by the fire with me, Dorothy. Tell me, how have you got through the day?" He drew a low chair to the fire for her, and, kneeling upon the rug, put on some logs of wood.

"I scarcely know. I have been several times to look at her! It comforts me to see her look so calm and beautiful. Paul, she could not have been hurt or frightened, or she would not look like that."

"No, certainly not," he returned, still kneeling beside her chair.

"Death without fear or pain is not dreadful. I should not mind it! And after—God is so good!" Half unconsciously she stretched out her hand for Paul's, and clung to it with both her own. "Herbert spoke to me to-day," she resumed. "He was walking to and fro in the dining-room, oh! for hours, and when he passed me, he stopped suddenly, and said, 'Poor child, poor child! You have been robbed of your best friend! But if I live, I will do my best for you, and you—you'll be good to the babies for her sake.' " She paused, and the sweet, sad mouth quivered. "I shall be better and stronger to-morrow. Oh, I dread to-morrow!"

"So do others. I have been talking to Egerton to-day, and he——"

"Is he coming too?" cried Dorothy, starting up, and grasping the mantel-shelf, the tension of her slender fingers showing how closely she gripped it. "Oh, can you not prevent him? I want to be with my darling Mabel to the very last!—but to have him, too, beside her, is more than I could bear! Dear, dear Paul, do not let him come!"

"It is impossible to prevent it, Dorothy. But I do not think you need fear his troubling you in any way."

"He! he will trouble me no more! But I do not want to see him."

"I will endeavor to keep him out of your sight, my dear. But by and by, when time has soothed your grief, you must tell me the secret of your aversion to Egerton."

For an answer, Dorothy, relaxing her grasp of the mantel-shelf, sank back in her chair, covering her face with her hands, a shudder passing through her as though she had touched some noxious thing.

"You have sorrow enough, my dear child, without letting fancies afflict you," said Paul, possessing himself again of her hand. "Try and think of the little ones to whom you can be so much."

Dorothy did not speak for a few minutes. Then she asked in an altered voice—

"Who was that man walking by you?"

"It was Dillon, the detective. If anyone can find a trail and follow it like a sleuthhound, he is the man."

"And what does he think?"

"That it is a difficult case."

"Ah, yes, how difficult, he will never—never find out the truth."

"Have you any reason, any purpose in what you say," Standish was beginning when Miss Oakley came in, and the conversation turned on the children and their grandmother. * * * *

The first act of this sad drama was closed next day by the funeral of the fair young victim.

It was long since Eastport had such a sensation. Wreaths, crosses, pyramids of flowers hid the coffin, everyone who had an equipage and the slightest acquaintance with Colonel or Mrs. Callander sent their carriage to swell the long procession. The bells tolled, and the streets through which the cortege passed were crowded with onlookers.

It was a soft grey day, as if Nature mourned tenderly for the brief young life, so ruthlessly cut off for mere base greed, in the midst of its bright morning.

The resting-place selected by Callander was the burying-ground attached to an old chapel on the hillside between Fordsea and Rookstone; an ancient grey wall, breast-high, and lichen grown, surrounded it; great masses of gorse breathed a perfume of their honey-sweet blossoms in spring from the grassy slope above, while beneath spread out the restless waters of the bay, with the towers and spires of Eastport beside them. The fresh winds from sea and land swept over it, and the blessed silence of the quiet country seemed to keep all sounds hushed, lest they should trouble the last sleep of those weary ones who found rest beneath its grassy mounds. The spectators (and many had walked or driven the dusty five miles from Fordsea) were greatly moved by the scene, and deeply impressed by the dignified self-control of Colonel Callander, by the deep despair of his set face, as well as by the pallid grief of the friend who stood beside him, whose unsteady step as he approached the grave showed how hard was the struggle not to break down.

Standish devoted himself to support Dorothy, but she bore up better than he expected.

It was all over at last, and as Dorothy drove back, her hand in Henrietta Oakley's, she felt indeed alone—worse

than alone--burdened with a secret conviction which for potent reasons she must not speak, with a bitter sense of wrong for which she must seek no sympathy.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

DUST TO DUST.

Standish found the detective awaiting him on his return from paying the last tribute of tender respect to the dead.

As soon as Colonel Callander, with a hastily expressed desire to be left alone, had retired to his own room, the two men, accompanied at Dillon's request by Mrs. M'Hugh, began the examination which the former had been so anxious to make.

"We have lost too much time," he said, in his peculiar drawling nasal voice, with every here and there strongly Irish tones. "In cases of this kind, time is everything. It would have done the poor lady no harm if I had rummaged about a bit while she lay there, she was past being disturbed."

"It would have been offensive to her sister, and to Colonel Callander," returned Standish.

"And a day or two more or less don't matter," put in Mrs. M'Hugh, "when them cruel devils have got clean off!"

"We are not sure yet who is guilty," said Dillon, dryly, and walking to the window, looked intently at the bank opposite.

"Come here," he said to Nurse. How was the window fastened when your mistress went to bed that night?"

"It was Mary, the housemaid, waited on her—not me,"

"Call Mary."

Mrs. M'Hugh went in search of her.

"The top of the bank is lower than this window," observed Dillon, "and you see the holes made by the ends of the ladder are a good bit lower still, the ladder sloped enough for a man to climb up easy."

"I see that," returned Standish.

Here Mrs. M'Hugh returned with Mary looking very uncomfortable.

"Now, my girl, come along, tell me all you can remember about your mistress when you last saw her?"

"Oh! please sir, it puts me all in a tremble when I think of it."

"Never mind, tell me what time it was when she went to bed?"

"It was close on eleven, sir, just after Mr. Egerton left, I had been shutting master's windows as look out to the front, and I saw the light of Mr. Egerton's cigar when he walked past."

"Which side did he pass?"

"Right, sir, by the Beach road!"

"Ha! where did Mr. Egerton put up?" asked Dillon.

"At the Beach Mansion Hotel," said Standish.

"Whereabouts is it?"

"At the end of Telford road, facing the sea."

"That's not to the right?"

"No, sir. I suppose he went for a turn while he smoked. for when I went to put up the shutters to the side door (the top part is glass), I saw the red of his cigar going down by the sunk fence as if he were going round by the beach."

"You went to your mistress immediately after?"

"Yes! she rang the bell just as I was turning back from the door."

"Did she seem the same as usual?"

"Well, yes. I think she had been crying. Her eyes looked like crying now and again, lately. She was weak-like and poorly."

"Do you know of anything to vex her?"

"Bless you, no, sir. Everyone loved her, poor, dear lady. Everyone tried to please her, from the Colonel down," cried the girl, tears coming to her eyes.

"Well, how did you leave her?"

"She had put on her dressing-gown, and said she would not have her hair brushed, because she was tired. She told me to light the night-light."

"The night-light? Where did you put it? Could it be seen from the outside?"

"I don't know; I stood it here by the window," going over to one which opened on the east side of the house. The bed intervened between the place indicated and the window by which the murderer had entered.

"If the light were visible from without, of course it would have been a guide. Put a similar light in the same place after dark and I will test it. Well, your mistress told you to light this watch-light?"

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"She says, 'Mary, I think I'll have a night-light, I feel so nervous and feverish,' says she, 'and open a bit of the volets' (that's what she called those shutter-blinds), 'as well as the windows,' says she, 'I don't feel able to breathe.'"

"And you opened them?"

"I did. You see the middle piece folds back, and I set it a tiny way open, fastening the bar across the inside. You see it goes right across. I'll show you——"

"Stop!" cried Dillon, grasping her arm as she made a step towards the dressing-table; "don't touch that. Has it been touched or stirred since the murder?"

"No, not that I know of," said the girl, a little frightened by his vehemence. Mrs. M'Hugh kept the key of the room ever since the coroner came, and would never let none of us come next or nigh it."

"I did that, sir," added Mrs. M'Hugh, "for Mr. Standish warned me you wanted to see the place as it was."

"Right, ma'am, Ah!" going carefully to the side of the dressing-table. "There is not much room for a man to come in here without moving this? How came the outer blinds open if this," touching the table, "has not been moved."

"I made Collins open them from the outside," said Nurse.

Dillon then looked carefully at the carpet, the portion of the painted flooring left uncovered, along the side of the bed where the murderer must have stood; he even stooped down and felt all the edge of the carpet which lay beside it. Standish saw that one of his hands was closed as he rose up.

"Have you found anything?" he asked.

Dillon shook his head.

"Only a pin," he said. "I always remember that he who sees a pin, and lets it lay, may live to want a pin another day."

"Well, that's true," said Nurse, emphatically.

For some minutes Dillon continued to search under wardrobe and chests of drawers, in corners, and all dim nooks—every possible spot where the smallest article could have been dropped or forgotten by the murderer or murderers.

"Now, my girl, I'll not keep you nor Mrs. M'Hugh any longer; you've been very helpful, and I'm obliged to you."

"I'm sure your welcome," they said in chorus and retired.

Dillon followed them to the door, and, moving it backwards and forwards, observed :

"It goes easily and silently!" then, stepping over the threshold, he seemed to look most intently on the other side. He stood in the opening so that Standish could not pass.

"Ay," he said, "it has not been touched. It's just thick with dust," and drawing out his pocket-handkerchief, he rubbed it with some force; finally, re-entering the room, he closed the door, and stood a moment, his thick eyebrows almost meeting with a frown of intense thought. Then, looking up as if some gleam of light had come to him, he walked again to the window, and, pulling the table aside, closed the outer shutters and put up the bar, leaving the centre portion slightly open.

"Will you stay here, while I get the ladder and see if I can enter without noise?"

Standish nodded.

He felt curiously affected by the exhaustive search Dillon was making. He almost shuddered at the possibility of his discovering some unexpected depths of horror greater even than what was patent.

At last Standish heard the scraping of the ladder as Dillon fixed it against the window-ledge. Next the shutter opened softly, then the bar was lifted cautiously, and as cautiously let down, but not without a certain amount of noise. Dillon appeared at the window, and, stepping in, came against the dressing-table.

"There," he said, restoring it to its place, "I defy anyone to unfasten that bar and let it down without making enough noise to waken a light sleeper. Then the dressing-table would be another source of disturbance. As to getting up here on the ladder, it was perfectly easy, but I am amazed to think the fellows left it there."

"They were so sure of getting away early next morning, I suppose they were reckless. Now, Mr. Dillon, what do you think?"

"Well, sir, I do not know what to think. It is quite possible that a murderous thief might have got in that way; I wish to God the poor lady had had a bit of a noisy pet terrier."

"Ah, I understand. Well, it so happens there is no dog about the premises. What do you propose to do next?"

Dillon stood silent, in deep meditation. Then, looking up straight into his interrogator's eyes, he said:

"I've a bit of a plan forming in my mind, sir, but I don't like to talk about it yet. Will you trust me for a while, and ask no questions? Ay, and trust me with a goodish bit of money, for I may have to cross the Channel and disappear."

"Yes, Dillon, I will."

"Thank you sir. Might I speak to Miss Wynn—the young lady as heard, or thought she heard, the bar fall?"

"Of course—only I should like to be present."

"Just as you like, Mr. Standish, but you must remember that nobody ever speaks out so confidential before two as before one, and I want to get her to speak out her thoughts and impressions quite easy. To do this I just want to come on her unawares, like—not to ask to see her formally. If you are there, well and good, but I don't want to lose an opportunity waiting for you."

"What is he at?" thought Standish; "he does not want me, that is evident. "Oh, very well," he said aloud, "only remember that Miss Wynn is in a terribly low nervous state. Be careful not to shock or startle her."

"Bless your heart, sir, do you think I never spoke to a lady before? When I got up all the evidence for the Hon. Mrs. Handcock, she always——"

"It is a very different case," interrupted Standish, sternly.

"That's true," returned the detective, relapsing into his usual collected taciturnity. He was seized with occasional outbreaks of talk, but, the least check restored his self-mastery. Loquacity was his natural tendency, but the strong necessities of his profession taught him that silence was golden.

"Have you studied the room sufficiently, or would you wish it to be kept still untouched?" asked Standish.

"I have learned all it can tell. I have quite done with it."

"Then come with me to my hotel. Miss Wynn has gone to see the children, and I hope Miss Oakley will keep her all night. This terrible affair has been too much for her strength."

"That is likely enough. They walked on a few paces

after they had seen Mrs. McHugh and given her the key of the room.

At length Dillon said: "I have found the tavern those foreign fellows used to frequent. It's a rough place. The landlord has been a seafaring man, and looks up to cutting a throat himself. He was, of course, full of the murder and the suspicions against these men. He said their looks was the worst of them, that they paid their way and spent a goodish bit. They were all together—at least most of them—the night before they sailed, at the Jolly Tar; but one, a tall fellow, very dark and glum, went away about midnight, saying he had had enough. A man they called Guiseppe followed to keep him out of mischief, he said, but they both went on board their ship, for another of the crew came in soon after and said he had left them there."

"That rather confirms our suspicion. Did this landlord know what port the ship was bound for?"

"He was not sure. They spoke of Nantes and Bordeaux; but I am not done with him yet. I need not trouble you any further, sir. When do you think of leaving?"

"In about a week."

"I am not sure how long I shall be here myself. But I have your address in Town. Are you content to leave the matter in my hands, Mr. Standish?"

"After the proofs of ability and dexterity you have given, I cannot hesitate to trust, but do not keep me in the dark longer than you can help."

"I will not, sir."

"Would you wish me to hold back the announcement of the reward from the various consuls to whom we propose to send them?"

"No, by no means. It may save a deal of trouble. Good evening, sir."

* * * * *

When Dorothy and the faithful Henrietta returned from the funeral they drove to the hotel where the poor little motherless children were staying, under their grandmother's charge.

So long as her sister's inanimate form was in the house, Dorothy could not bear to leave. But now she was desolately free, and she pined to see little Dolly's face, to hear the boy's joyous laugh. She longed, too, that the broken-hearted father should be soothed, and won back to life by their helplessness, their loving claims, their tender associa-

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tions with the past. Terribly shaken and unnerved as she was, the salt of consideration for others kept her mind sound and healthy.

She would nevertheless, gladly have avoided Mrs. Callander. Her unvarying harshness to Mabel was not to be forgiven, and in her own mind Dorothy prayed that her brother-in-law would not give his children into her care. It would only be natural that he did, but it would cut her off from her only chance of consolation and comfort in acting a mother's part to her sister's children.

The hard old woman received Dorothy with unusual cordiality, and the poor little orphans with cries of delight, but they wrung her heart by their demands to be taken back to "dear mammy."

With many a tear she tried to explain to them that mother had been taken away by the angels to a beautiful place in Heaven, where, if they were good, they should go too, and other soothing fairy tales.

When at last they were taken away by their maid, Mrs. Callander began to talk of her own deep grievances.

"I suppose my poor, unhappy son is not yet quite himself?" she said, in a high complaining key. "His mind cannot be in a sound state, or he would not refuse so persistently to see his mother. I must say it is an unnecessary aggravation of this terrible affliction. Has he said anything to you about it, Dorothy?"

"No, Mrs. Callander. He rarely speaks to me. He says more to Henrietta."

"Indeed!" returned Mrs. Callander, with a faint tinge of complacency. "Well," she continued, "I shall make another attempt to see him to-morrow, for I suppose he will leave this dreadful place as soon as he can."

"I know very little, but Paul Standish told me that Mr. Egerton was going with him somewhere."

"That is or will be the act of a true friend," said Mrs. Callander, pressing her handkerchief to her eyes. "I am quite willing to keep the poor dear children with me for the present."

Dorothy's lips quivered but she did not speak.

"Oh, aunty! they will be quite too much for you!" cried Miss Oakley. "I shall take care of them, and of Dorothy, if she will let me."

"Very well, my dear," returned Mrs. Callander with unwanted complaisance. In truth, across the gloom and thick

darkness of the last week came the consoling idea that after all, Henrietta, that pearl of great price, might replace poor, paltry, insignificant Mabel, to the dowager's infinite satisfaction,

"You had better stay with me to-night, Dorothy," continued Miss Oakley. It would be well to be out of that dreadful house."

"Thank you, dear Henrietta; but I do not like to leave Herbert quite alone. He might ask for me and find himself deserted, I am sure she would not like me to leave him, and you—you will stay with me?"

"Oh, of course! It is odd that Herbert cannot make up his mind to see Mr. Standish," said Miss Oakley.

"Can you wonder," retorted Mrs. Callander, quickly, "when he declines to see his own mother?"

After some further conversation, Dorothy returned to The Knoll, leaving Miss Oakley, who promised to follow soon, still closeted with her aunt.

It was in truth a real comfort to be with Mrs. McHugh. There was a degree of strength as well as tenderness in the good old woman's nature that seemed to support the young mourner in her hour of need more than anything else, always excepting Paul Standish.

Even to him she could not breath the horrible suspicions which ate into her soul,

The moment when she stood paralysed in the pretty bright drawing-room, and heard Egerton's voice as he avowed his mad passion to his sister unchecked, was perpetually present to her, and the question always demanding an answer was, "Did Egerton strike the fatal blow?" Mabel, who knew him best, was unmistakably afraid of him—abjectly afraid. He had never taken any notice of the appeal she said she had written to him a few days before. Had he fulfilled his own confession that he would rather crush out her life than see her living happily with her husband! and she would have turned to her husband, all would have been well had her sweet life been spared.

The daring outrage showed to Dorothy's mind such knowledge of the house, and the ways of the inhabitants, that she marvelled no one perceived the improbability of its being committed by a total stranger. Yet had not her suspicion been roased by Egerton's own words, would she not have believed with the rest that it was a pure vulgar robbery aggravated by murder? How ardently she wished

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she had never overheard that revolting confession! It seemed to have withered the youth in her heart. This vile secret must weigh upon her for ever! For her own dear weak sister's sake she must never reveal it—she must never bring the hated Egerton to justice. It would be treachery to Mabel to revenge her death at the cost of her reputation, of her husband's belief in her, of the fair fame of the children's mother!

But oh! some day—when she was strong enough neither to weep nor faint, when she had force enough to concentrate her passion of hatred and contempt for him in deadly, scornful composure—she would meet Egerton face to face, and hand him the letter she had never yet had the opportunity of giving him. She would tell him she knew he was the murderer, that the consideration for his victim alone kept her from crying aloud for justice, which, to her, meant vengeance.

Sometimes she thought, Could he have bribed his wild countryman to do the deed? There was a strong association in her mind between that fierce-looking sailor and the soft-mannered, high-bred gentleman, the favorite of society, the idol of manoeuvring mammas. Would he not be more likely to employ the hand of another than to strike with his own the creature he professed to love so ardently, in her sweet, defenceless sleep?

And she must never relieve her heart of this cruel load, this mixture of rage and shame!

Thanks to the tender care of Standish, to the persistency with which Egerton had kept in the background, she did not see him at the funeral, but the knowledge that he was there turned her grief to a fiery, galling, tumultuous agony, almost too maddening to bear.

The conflict going on in her young heart seemed to have extinguished the dawning passion which had begun to develop itself in her heart for Standish, the delicate consciousness that made her shrink from his rare brotherly caress, his kindly familiarity. Now, shattered—aching in every fibre of her being with poignant grief and bitter knowledge, bereft of her life's dear companion, alone without any near tie—she was once more the helpless child, always ready to fly to shelter to his arms, her only moments of relief were those spent beside him, her hand clasped in his.

When she reached the house of mourning, into which the bright, happy home of a week ago had been metamorphos-

ed, Mrs. McHugh met her with the words, "The master has been asking for you, Miss Dorothy."

"Indeed! I will go to him at once!" and, without removing her bonnet and heavy veil, she opened the dining room door, saying: "You wished to speak to me, Herbert?"

He was lying back in a large arm-chair, his eyes fixed on the fire which had burned low, beside him were writing materials which he had been using, for some of the paper was covered with straggling characters very unlike his ordinary clear, firm hand.

He turned his head and looked vaguely at her. "No," he said in a low, hesitating tone, "I did not want you, but as you are here, I will speak to you. I am going away, you know. This place drives me mad! You and Henrietta can do what you choose, and take care of the children; you must keep them, if I die."

"Do not speak of dying, dear Herbert, think of those dear little ones who have no one now but you? You must live for them! I am not old enough or wise enough to bring them up without your help. Your boy will need a father's guidance! I know how you must feel, but for her sake——"

She stopped to regain her self-control.

"You must know that I am—that I cannot be of use to any one. I am sore stricken! My head burns when I try to think—but I will try to do my duty—I have always tried according to my light! Perhaps I may find relief in movement! I am going to London to-morrow—I shall see my lawyers—you know them. I tried to write, but I could not say what I wanted. Then they and Henrietta and you will manage for the best."

"When do you go, Herbert?" she asked, awed by his strange, haggard look,

"To-morrow!"

"And will you not see your mother? She feels deeply for you, she will feel terribly hurt——"

"No, I will not see her? Hereafter, if I return——" He paused, and then muttered something which Dorothy could not make out.

"You will not go alone, Herbert?"

He laughed. It made her flesh creep to hear him laugh.

"Your guardian is inclined to take care of me too. Eger-ton is to be sent with me; but they need not fear, I have some work to do before I can afford to rest."

"But you will not go without seeing the children? They are asking for you to-day, and they are so sweet!"

"Do you want to drive me mad?" he cried, fiercely, and starting up began to pace the room.

"Do not try me too much, Dorothy! Poor little Dorothy!—how fond she was of you! That is why it makes my heart ache to see you! so go away now. I will write to you when I can, but go now! I can bear to speak to Henrietta better."

Dorothy took his hand in both hers, pressing it tenderly. "God help you, God bless you," she murmured, and went noiselessly away, to weep more gently and pitifully than she had yet done.

CHAPTER II.

"ON THE TRAIL."

Luke Dillon was a rare specimen of his race, a money-loving Irishman. As a woman is the most incurable of drunkards, so an Irish Celt, whose nature is so perverted as to think of to-morrow and develop a greed for gold, is the most abandoned miser. There is no limit to his passion for accumulating. Scotchmen and Englishmen can be reasonably stingy (save in a few cases of almost diseased minds), and to a love of money unite some regard for reputation, some recognition that too avert "doing" of their fellow-creatures, defeats their object and diminishes their gains. But a miserly Irishman is often too much blinded by an intense desire to grasp every possible penny to see his own real interests clearly.

It was a flaw in a very shrewd, far-seeing intellect, but as yet indulgence had not developed it to that degree of intensity which dulls perception in other directions. A few tastes still remained to Dillon not quite dwarfed by the master passion, among them a certain pleasure in his own keenness and such creature comforts as good food and drink.

The circumstances of Mrs. Callander's death exercised him a good deal.

He would have been rather disgusted to think that his task offered no greater difficulty than tracing a common seaman, a mere vulgar thief. For his own credit sake

he hoped and expected to find a far deeper, subtler motive below the apparent simplicity of the crime.

As to the guarantee of spotless character and blameless life against the possibilities of hidden shame, and cruel revenge, he gave no heed to such feather weights. No iniquity was too great for the weakness of human nature, according to his philosophy. Nor was any human being proof against the force of temptation properly applied; the difference between the purest and noblest woman and the most degraded of her sex was a mere matter of accident—of her surroundings.

If he could find the sailor, the supposed murderer, and prove him guilty, well and good, he would get a thousand pounds. If he could find a more highly-placed assassin, so much the better—he should unearth some disgraceful secret which it would be of the last importance to conceal, even at the price of immunity to the murderer. This would mean a heavy bribe to insure his own silence. Two thousand instead of one—ay more—with the possibility of retaining fees for many a year to come. With this idea Dillon applied all the force of his keen and, in some ways, imaginative mind, first to invent probabilities and then to seek proof of them, for he had often discovered very unexpected truth while following the scent of a false theory.

Given a beautiful young woman, separated by many a league of land and sea from a husband considerably older than herself, what more likely than a lover? And, given a lover, the amount of guilt and cruelty, deceit and treachery, depended on the strength of passion, the difficulties and provocations of the position. "There must be a confidante somewhere," mused the detective, as he strolled along the common the day after the funeral. "I wish I could find her—if it is a 'her'—I wish I could get a word with that Mr. Egerton. He is a good-looking chap, a snuff-the-moon sort of fellow, thinks no 'small potatoes' of himself. I could see that in spite of his grief—Gad, he looked as if he had lost everyone belonging to him; when I saw him get into the carriage yesterday morning he could hardly stand—yet he has a determined face, sort of boss, that could do pretty well what he liked with a woman. I must have a talk with the young sister. If she knows anything I'll get it out of her. It seems this Egerton was her sweetheart. Who was the other's?"

At this point in his meditations Dillon came upon a

gentleman who was walking slowly along the beach, and had crossed from the water's edge as if to mount some steps that led to the low embankment.

Dillon recognised Egerton, and waited till he was near.

"Beg your pardon, sir," he said, deferentially touching his hat, "I want a word or two with you."

"Who are you?" asked Egerton, haughtily.

"My name is Dillon, and I am in the employment of Mr. Standish at present."

"Ah! the detective," with a tinge of contempt in his tone. "Are you sent from Scotland Yard?"

"No, sir, I am not in any service except that of the person who engages me temporarily. I am free to do as my employer directs; to press on to full discovery or to hold my hand——"

"What do you want with me?"

"I'd make bold to ask you a question or two, if I may, sir."

"Go on, we can walk while I speak. What is it?"

"They tell me you spoke to these men, the sailors who are suspected of the murder. Now, I'd like to know what your opinion is."

"I have none. They may have done it, but there are base scoundrels of every nation who'd stab their mothers for gold and jewels."

"Maybe so, but not their sweethearts, sir."

"What do you mean?" cried Egerton, his eyes lighting up angrily, while a deep flush passed over his face, so deadly white before. "Do you think this tragedy a fit subject for vulgar jests?"

"God forbid, sir," gravely. "But you see rough men like me are not accustomed to touch things gingerly as gentlefolks do. You see it's rather hard to hunt up men that may be innocent, and waste a lot of time and money into the bargain, without looking round a bit for any other possible party."

"I think it is all wasted time," said Egerton, passionately. "We'll never catch the real murderer, though I'd give all I possess to stand by and see him die inch by inch under the grasp of a torturer; but I don't want you, or any like you, to handle and dissect the simple details of a life like —— There" stopping himself, "I am tolerably sure some blood-thirsty thief stole in and silenced her forever, some wretch who will assuredly meet his punishment sooner or

later, who is perhaps—. That is all I think about it. If you want money to prosecute your search come to me—there, take that and let me go, I don't want to talk to you again." He took out his purse and put five or six sovereigns in Dillon's ready hand, then with a gesture of infinite abhorrence turned from him and walked rapidly in the direction of the pier.

"Oh, I'm too dirty to be touched am I?" muttered the detective, looking after him with an unpleasant grin. "All the fitter to take the 'filthy lucre.' Drawing a small leather bag from his pocket, he put the sovereigns into it; carefully twisting the string round it he placed the bag in his breast pocket, and, quickening his pace, directed his steps to The Knoll.

"There is something wrong with you, my fine gentleman," he mused. "A man's not always so wild with grief about his friend's wife, unless—he's not the sort of man though to stick a knife in a woman—unless he was riled to that extent. Faith, jealousy and revenge have brought finer gentlemen than you into ugly places. She must have been a regular beauty. Now let's see what's to be done with the other one?"

The upper housemaid was the first Dillon saw on opening the side door, he rarely used the chief entrance.

"Is Mr. Standish in?"

"I don't know, sir. He was here about an hour ago, but I've not been upstairs since. Maybe he's in the drawing-room. Shall I go and see, sir?"

The servants were rather in awe of Dillon. They credited him with the power to turn them 'inside out' as cook expressed it, and clap them into prison if he doubted their truthfulness; moreover, they hoped and believed that his unerring skill could not fail to track the murderer and bring him to justice as they devoutly wished.

"No, thank you, Mary, my dear, I'll just go and look myself. Where is Mr. Collins?"

"He's gone out to do some errands. He and the Colonel go to town to-night."

"Ay, he is better out of this," and Dillon went deliberately towards the hall.

Dorothy had forced herself to sit down stairs in the drawing room that morning to answer some of the many letters which had poured in upon her since the dreadful death of her sister had been described by every newspaper

in England and some abroad—chiefly hoping to exchange a few words with Standish as he came and went.

It seemed that long years had passed since she had written letters in that room last; was it not hideously soon to be clothed and in her right mind, and able to resume anything like her ordinary ways. Was life to go on just the same without Mabel! How was Herbert to bear existence unless he could shake off something of the awful, silent grief which oppressed him? He was hardly master of himself. Then when Standish went away, how appalling her loneliness would be!

As she thought this with her elbow on the table, her cheek on her hand, a voice, a strange voice, said:

"Oh! I beg your pardon, Miss."

She started, and, turning, recognised Dillon.

"I beg your pardon, Miss," he repeated. "I thought Mr. Standish was here."

"He was here half-an-hour ago, and will return soon," she said, rising and looking earnestly at him; something in him repelled her, yet she had a curious wish to speak to him.

"Thank you, Miss, I only wanted to ask him a question or two, and maybe you could answer them as well."

"And they are—?" said Dorothy.

"Just this"—he paused to invent them, "How soon does Mr. Standish leave—leave England I mean?"

"I am not quite sure—in a week or ten days."

"Ah! then I have the information I hope to get in that time. I should like to have his address there—where is he going?"

"He will be sure to give it to you! and Mr. Dillon, do you hope to get any clue?"

"Well, miss, I may and may not. There are many points to be considered. It's all very well to offer rewards and hunt up those foreign chaps, but it's just possible others may have a hand in it. Things look black enough, I grant, against those men, still——" he stopped and looked down, as if considering deeply.

"Still, in what other way can you possibly account for the horrible crime?" asked Dorothy.

"As to accounting for it—why, that's not to be thought of yet. Then, you see, there's a heap of crimes done from spite and jealousy and revenge, besides the desire to grab booty."

"There could be no such motives in this case," returned Dorothy, trying to speak calmly, while her heart beat with most painful violence at the corroboration of her own horrible suspicions. "Who could be jealous of or wish to hurt my sister, who only lived among her own family and had no intimacies outside them?"

"Well, I suppose that's true, but you know, miss, I am a stranger, and don't know nothing of how you and she lived. Sometimes good, kind ladies manage to offend spiteful people, who don't stop at trifles; if you could remember now that she scorned anyone, or turned her back on anyone, it might be a help, and, of course, you would like to bring the villain to justice!" He kept his small, searching eyes fixed on her while he spoke, noting how the swift blood mounted almost to her brow, and then left her paler than before; how her eyes avoided his, and seemed to shrink together.

"We have lived with true, kind friends, with faithful servants, and I could think of nothing that could suggest the evil thoughts or purposes you hint at."

"Well, I'm sure it's good to hear you say so. The world's a cruel, bad place, and I have known queer things in it. Now, a beautiful lady, if she's as good as an angel, can't help bad people coming near her. Then, you know, the better she is and the prouder she is, the more she's likely to rouse the devil in some——"

"How dare you suggest such fearful possibilities?" interrupted Dorothy, hardly able to restrain from screaming aloud with terror. "You are thinking of wicked, uncivilised people, not of English gentlemen and ladies; these vile motives do not exist here, and—and you ought not to speak of them to anyone! Don't you see what frightful conclusions they point to? What a cruel construction the world we live in would put upon them. You must not speak in this way to anyone!"

"Trust me," he returned, with a hideously confidential air—while he thought, "She knows more than she chooses to tell; there's a tile off the roof here, somehow." "I have kept many a curious story quiet before this!" he said aloud. "If you trust me, miss, and just tell me every little trifle, such as, of course, you wouldn't speak out before a low, vulgar policeman, who has neither discretion nor delicacy, I'll lay my hand on the miscreant, or," with strong emphasis, "the real miscreant's tool."

Dorothy was overwhelmed. How was it that this stranger, this common man, had evolved suspicions so like her own? What clue had he gained? How did he dare—her head swam. She dreaded to think what inculpatory morsel of writing either to or from Egerton might have fallen into his hands—papers, notes, letters were so easily mislaid, so dreadfully dangerous. She made a gallant effort to pull herself together, for she felt he was trying to read her thoughts with his sly, mean eyes.

"I am so unnerved," she said, with sudden composure, "that everything frightens me. Of course a man of your experience must know much that seems impossible to me. I can but hope your skill will bring the real felon to justice. To me, of course, it is clear that robbery and the fear of detection were the only motives for the crime that has robbed us of one so dear." A sob choked her words.

Dillon stood respectfully silent.

"It was only foolish nervousness that made me speak as I did," she continued. "I am sure you know best what to say as well as to do, and my dear sister's life was so simple so kindly, so innocent, that I have no fear whatever of any construction being put upon it. You need not think of my foolish words."

"She's a plucky one," thought the detective, while he said aloud, "No, of course not, miss; but I'll be careful, all the same, and you may be sure I'll do my best to find out the real truth." He suddenly raised his eyes as he uttered the last words. Dorothy could not resist a shiver; there was, to her ear, a threat in his tone. "Now," he resumed—when to Dorothy's delight the door opened to admit Standish, who came in quickly, saying—

"You here, Dillon?"

He stopped beside Dorothy.

"Yes, sir, I just came in, thinking you were here, and was about to ask her a question or two about that bar——"

He stopped, looking at Dorothy, who made no reply.

"Well, ask them," returned Standish, somewhat impatiently. "Miss Wynn looks very much exhausted. The sooner we can leave her to rest, the better." While he spoke, Dorothy, as if unconsciously, slipped her arm through his, and drew close to him, so that he felt the beating of her heart, the tremor that occasionally ran through her slight frame.

"All right, sir. On the night of the 20th September, then, you woke up with a sound like metal falling?"

"Something woke me. I was dreaming, and am not sure whether my dream did not suggest the noise."

"Or the noise might have suggested the dream, miss? Well, it was a bold ruffian that dared to come in at that window, not knowing but that he'd find the Colonel there, with a revolver under his pillow."

"It is extraordinary," said Standish, "but probably the fellow did not know it was a bedroom." He felt Dorothy cling closer to him as he spoke.

"Ay, that might be! and the light in the room might have attracted him (I had it lit last evening, and it can be seen faintly outside). Well, miss, did the noise frighten you?"

"It startled me; but everything was so quiet after that I thought it could only be the impression of my dream."

"You haven't any idea of what o'clock it was?"

"Not the least. If I had only gone down stairs——"

She stopped with a sob.

"You would have been murdered too, very likely."

"This is enough," said Standish, sternly. "Miss Wynn has told all this before. You are distressing her unnecessarily. I do not see your drift. Go into the next room and wait for me. I am quite willing to be cross-examined."

"Very well, sir; I am sorry I disturbed the young lady." With an abrupt bow and a satisfied smile he left the room, thinking, "She could tell a good bit if she chose. She was in a proper fright when I hinted at jealousy. I suspect I sailed pretty close to the wind. She does not want his high mightiness there to know what I was driving at. She spoke up pretty quick when I began about the bar. I fancy I have a fine job in hand. She is an uncommonly pretty piece of goods. I would not mind her cuddling me up as she does that guardian. But, Lord! a big bag of sovs. is worth all that moonshine."

Meantime Standish, looking kindly into Dorothy's eyes, exclaimed, "I was afraid that fellow's questions would only open your wounds. I wanted to be with you when he came. You are looking so pale and worn, Dorothy. I must get you away from this."

Dorothy withdrew her arm from his and sat down, beginning to put her papers and letters together.

"I shall be pleased, too. The sight of this room, of every-

thing, the recollection of our happy days is insupportable."

"I have been consulting with Miss Oakley. Mrs. Callander wants you all to go to her house in London—at least, till you can get settled in an abode of your own. Miss Oakley proposes to take a house and reside with you, for the winter, at least. What do you think of this? She is kind and human."

"I should like to be with Henrietta, but not with Mrs. Callander. You must save me from Mrs. Callander, Paul."

"I will as far as I can, my dear child. Do you know, she has just gone in to pay her son an unexpected visit?"

"Indeed!" cried Dorothy, dismayed. "I am sorry—it will irritate him, and he may wound her. His dislike to the idea of seeing her almost alarms me. It is so unnatural, it is so unlike him when he is himself."

"I imagine that her unfriendly feeling to his sweet wife was a source of annoyance to him, and now she is gone he resents it as he never would have done during her life time."

Dorothy bent her head but did not reply.

"Then I have your permission to arrange so far your winter abode, at least with Miss Oakley?"

"Yes, dear Paul. Shall you be long away?"

"As short a time as I can manage—a month, perhaps. Indeed I must come back to look after you and the children, for poor Callander seems to shrink from me—from us all. He told Egerton he would leave a power of attorney with his solicitors, and would lodge money for current expenses in their hands, as he wanted to stay a long time abroad. He will, no doubt, return sooner than he expects. The first cruel keenness of his grief blunted, he will long to see his poor children."

Here a sound of voices and steps outside attracted their attention. The door was partly open and Dorothy heard Mrs. Callander's voice saying very distinctly, "No; I shall leave at once. It is insupportable."

Dorothy looked interrogatively at Standish.

"I would not go if I were you," he said, answering the glance. "She can come in here if she likes." In another minute the noise as of a carriage driving away was heard, and at the same time Miss Oakley came in looking rather scared.

"Isn't it unfortunate?" she said, throwing herself into a

chair. "He would not allow her to stay or even to sit down."

"Who? Herbert?" asked Dorothy.

"Yes. When his mother went in (quite against my advice) he stood up looking perfectly awful, and said, 'I did not ask you to come here.'"

"I know that!" she returned, quite subdued, "but I could not keep away, I longed to see you, my dear son—to see——"

"I may see you hereafter," he said in such a strange choked sort of voice. "But here, while all is fresh, I will not. You were the one enemy she had on earth. You only distrusted and disliked her, you made her shrink from you and I will neither see, nor speak with you, till God has given me grace to forgive."

"Poor Herbert," continued Miss Oakley, weeping and wiping her eyes; "he was always a religious man. I was sorry for my aunt, too, poor old thing. I wanted her to come in here and sit down, but no, she was too hurt and offended; she has gone back, and I really think I must go after her."

"Do, dear Henrietta. She was cross and disagreeable, but this is a terrible punishment—to be rejected by her own, own son!"

"Yes, and Mr. Egerton was with me this morning, and says Herbert does not wish the children to be with her. We must try and smooth him down."

"It is a relief to me that Egerton is going with Callander. This dreadful blow seems almost more than his brain can stand. Still, he was always just and reasonable. Change of scene will no doubt restore his balance, and his extraordinary antipathies will fade away," said Standish, thoughtfully.

"I wish, I do wish you were going with Herbert," said Dorothy, wringing her hands in her earnestness. There was a tone of anguish in her voice that struck Standish.

"My dear Dorothy," he said, seriously, "you have always been a sensible girl, you must not let yourself brood over imaginary trouble now, when you have so terrible a grief to contend with; you will fritter away your strength, which has been sorely tried. Egerton is an excellent companion for Callander. I do not understand your prejudice against him."

"Nor I," added Miss Oakley. "I am sure he has been like a brother to Herbert, only a great deal more brotherly

than a brother. Now, I must go to my aunt," and Henrietta, who, though truly sympathetic, was in a way exhilarated by having so much to do—real work, too—went quickly away.

"I cannot bear to leave you, my dear girl," said Standish, leaning on the back of Dorothy's chair. "I fear the effect of all this on your health. Come, you must be brave for all our sakes. You must be a mother to those poor little children, and you must not distract me, for if I leave you in this hopelessly nervous state I shall have no heart for my work, and you know my future depends on my work and how I do it. If I am haunted by a picture of Dorothy, encouraging imaginary terrors till she is hysterical and useless, I shall be restless and miserable about you."

"Ah, Paul, you do not understand," cried Dorothy. She was, indeed, sorely tried. Paul's approbation was infinitely precious to her, yet she knew how well founded were her apprehensions, though she could not bring herself to betray her dead sister's weakness to this high-minded gentleman—not now, later, perhaps—and then she would show him the letter of entreaty and remonstrance which poor Mabel had left in her hands. Besides, God only knows what line of conduct Standish might consider it his duty to pursue, perhaps to trace home the crime to Egerton and punish him, however cruel the exposure of the shameful episode she was so anxious to hide. It was all like an exaggerated story in a "penny dreadful." Oh, at any cost, she would preserve her sister's name and memory from the degrading notoriety of a criminal investigation.

It was a tremendous ordeal for so young a creature, but she nerved herself to meet it. At present it must be her task to divert suspicion from Egerton. As it was, that terrible, formidable detective was on the real scent—she would do nothing to help him. These thoughts flashed quickly through her brain; then, trying to speak calmly, she went on—

"I must seem weak and silly to you, but I will prove that I am not. You shall find me not unworthy of your goodness and friendship. I will try to be strong."

She rose and walked over to the window, through which the fatal words had come to strike with deadly knowledge

the serenity of her youthful innocence. Then she returned, and placed her hand on her guardian's shoulder.

"You shall see what a good girl I will be; you know, I always kept my promises to you long ago."

"Yes, Dorothy, I know your heart is in the right place. Write to me often; tell me everything, and when I come back I shall find time, youth, and beneficent nature doing their healing work. Life is too precious to be expended on grief, though yours is a heart that will not soon forget. Now, my sweet little ward, will you not say good-bye to Egerton before he starts? He asked if you would not see him. He deserves so much consideration from you."

As he spoke, he felt Dorothy's fingers close tightly on his shoulder. She did not answer immediately; then, speaking in low tone, she said—

"I know it is, perhaps, unkind, but will you explain to Mr. Egerton how painful it would be to us both to meet? When the first bitterness is past I will see him—yes, and I will speak to him then. I will always try to do what you wish me, Paul."

"Thank you; you are a capital girl," said Standish, taking her hands in both his own. "I will not ask you to tax your strength too much. Go and find Mrs. McHugh and bring her to me. I want to know when she can pack up and start for town. The sooner you are out of this the better. I should like to escort you and Henrietta Oakley back to town, and help you to find an abode. Mrs. McHugh can bring the children after. There is no reason why we should not go the day after to-morrow."

CHAPTER III.

MRS. CALLANDER REBUFFED.

Mrs. Callander was deeply wounded and humiliated by her son's refusal to hold any communication with her.

To her such conduct savored of insanity. She could not see anything in the past to justify such an insult to so admirable and devoted a parent as she had been. She had only warned Herbert, from motives of the highest prudence and principle, to put some restriction on the too intimate intercourse between his wife and that Mr. Standish, of whose trustworthiness she was doubtful, and whose views were those of a mere worldling, careless of

all religion, as the Rev. Mr. Gilmore observed. She (Mrs. Callander) had only done her duty in speaking plainly on the subject; and to think that it had rankled in her son's heart! That this unfortunate wife should be a source of disunion even in her premature grave!

Her first care was that no one should suspect the estrangement. For this object, under the advice of her clerical counsellor, she resolved to winter abroad, somewhere on the Riviera, where it might be supposed Colonel Callander would join her.

She spoke frankly to Henrietta Oakley, but to no one else. The sympathetic feeling for Dorothy, for her grandchildren, which seemed to soften and humanise her at first, hardened into her usual imperious coldness. Why should she distress herself about her sister and children of a woman who had so turned her son against her that the desperate grief of the mourning widower refused consolation from his own mother?

Miss Oakley found her aunt surrounded by her companion, her maid, and her right-hand man, who always travelled with her, and filled the double office of butler and courier. Miss Boothby was administering "sal volatile," while Mrs. Callander was issuing her orders.

"You had better lose no time, Harris," she was saying as her niece entered, "You may miss your train, and I wish everything to be ready for my arrival about seven to-morrow."

"Are you going, then, aunt?" cried Henrietta.

"I am. There is nothing to keep me here. Go, Miss Boothby, go, Mitchell; you can be packing and arranging with hotel people. There is plenty to do."

"I am so sorry," said her niece; "but, indeed, aunt, you ought not to mind poor Herbert. He is changed towards every one. He will hardly notice Dorothy, or——"

"I thank you for putting me on a level with his pert, empty-headed chit of a sister-in-law?" said Mrs. Callander in deep wrath. "Considering all I have done, all I have endured, for Herbert, I think I deserve different treatment. I forgave his most unpardonable marriage, and bore with his infatuation. I even hoped to influence that poor unfortunate young woman for good, and I should have done so, for since Mr. Egerton somewhat corrected the overweening presence of the guardian (a nice kind of guardian), Mabel was much more ready to be my companion. But I

knew the marriage would end badly, and you see it has."

"But, auntie, you don't mean to say that this horrid murder was the just and natural punishment of what you consider an imprudent marriage?" exclaimed Miss Oakley.

"I am not going to measure my words to please you, Henrietta," said Mrs. Callander. "I hope that no subtleties on the part of Miss Dorothy Wynn will turn you against one who has been your best friend. I am always willing to be on affectionate terms with you, but——" She paused and pressed her handkerchief to her eyes.

"You and Miss Wynn had better make what arrangements you can about the children. Of course, my son would not wish them to remain with such a monster as he fancies his own mother to be, and I have a good deal to do—letters to write—I will not, therefore, detain you."

"Good gracious, aunt! Do you intend to turn me out?"

"I repeat that I am engaged," returned Mrs. Callander, stiffly.

"I declare it is all too heart-breaking," cried Henrietta, bursting into tears. "I am sure you will not be so angry when you come to think."

"I will try to act like a Christian woman, but you must remember I have a good deal in my power," said Mrs. Callander, coldly. At this threatening speech poor Henrietta was at her wit's ends, and thinking of nothing better than to kiss her aunt rather violently, thereby disarranging her cap, and leaving the room abruptly, returned to the Knoll hoping to be in time to catch Standish.

She arrived in time to see Colonel Callander set out with his faithful follower, Collins. As Dorothy excused herself from the pain of seeing Egerton, the travellers were to meet at the station.

Callander bid both Henrietta and his sister-in-law farewell with more composure than they expected. He thanked them briefly for their kindness, and promised to write from time to time.

When he was gone, the two weeping women took counsel with Standish, Henrietta describing the dowager's unfriendly aspect. It was then decided that Dorothy should take up her abode with the children, as soon as Mrs. Callander had left the hotel, while Miss Oakley went up to town, and, with the help of Standish, should find a suitable house for the winter, as Henrietta Oakley's last original

idea was to devote herself to "that dear Dorothy and those sweet, motherless pets!" To Standish she was quite confidential, and remarked, with her usual amiable candor, "Of course, London is the best place for us. If Herbert comes back, he will, of course, come to London, and if I want a little change, I can easily go to and fro. Then Mr. Egerton, after the first wretchedness of this terrible affair is past, will probably renew his attentions to Dorothy, who had much better marry him; and London is the best place for a trousseau."

"You are looking very far ahead," returned Standish almost amused at her practical view of things, in spite of her sincere sorrow.

"It does not strike me that Egerton has much chance. Dorothy never liked him much, and now this cruel grief seems to have turned her in some inexplicable manner against him."

"How very foolish and unreasonable."

"Yes, it seems so. Where are you going to put up, Miss Oakley?"

"Oh, in Dover street, for I shall not ask Aunt Callander for hospitality, I assure you. I do want to get settled before you leave, Mr. Standish. I do not know what we shall do without you."

* * * * *

Ready money is the true Aladdin's Lamp. Before its potent touch, mountains remove themselves, and difficulties melt away.

In two days Miss Oakley had found a suitable furnished house large enough for her needs, and somewhat old-fashioned, in a street leading from Kensington Gore, near enough to Kensington Gardens to ensure the children air and exercise, and sufficiently removed from the noise of the main roadway to be quiet.

All this movement was absolute enjoyment to Henrietta. She fancied she was developing a first-rate business faculty, and constantly called on Standish to admire her skill in arranging this, that or the other. Then she would remember that she was forgetting her grief, and treat him to an outburst of sorrow.

But Standish was a keen observer, and saw that her little affectations were mere surface assumptions, but that honesty was deep-rooted in her somewhat whimsical nature.

Miss Oakley was solacing herself with a cup of tea after

a long day's shopping and transacting various business connected with the house she had taken, when Standish, who had been with her in the forenoon, was ushered into her sitting-room.

"What has happened?" was her question as soon as she looked in his face.

"Callander has given them the slip. He is off by himself to Paris. I found a note from his man of business at my rooms when I returned after leaving you at the house agent's this morning, and, on going there, heard that he had started this morning, leaving very distinct directions respecting money matters, letters, etc. He had spent many hours with them the day before yesterday. He had a short codicil put to his will, and regulated some affairs. Among other things he directed that in what concerned Dorothy I was to be consulted. Dobson, the head of the firm, quite laughed at the idea of his not being able to take care of himself. He said that, though terribly crushed and depressed, he never saw a man in a more thoroughly sane condition. Callander left an address in Paris, and will write from thence. He sent off old Collins to Fordsea. Dorothy will be horribly frightened when he arrives."

"And Mr. Egerton, what does he say?"

"Egerton seems in a bad way. I went round to see him, and found him very queer. Callander sent him a note saying that he wanted no companionship. Egerton could not, I think, have accompanied him. His man, a German, says he caught a severe chill, at any rate he is in a high fever, and more in want of control than poor Callander."

"How very dreadful!" cried Miss Oakley. "That poor Mr. Egerton has really too much feeling. One would not have expected it from him. Who is with him? He ought to have some one to take care of him."

"He has resolved to go into a hospital—into a private room, of course. He says he will be guarded there against prying relatives. He has no very near relations, but he seems nervously anxious to be shielded from them."

"How very strange! Surely he has some old housekeeper, some faithful old nurse, who could come to him."

"Probably, but not in London; he has no town house, you know."

"It is all so dreadful. Nothing but misfortune seems to follow us. I am quite frightened at the idea of Herbert going off alone."

"I am not sure after all that it may not be better for him to depend on himself, to be away from all who are associated with this terrible tragedy."

"I will get away as early as I can to-morrow, for I am sure poor dear Dorothy will be dreadfully distressed when Collins returns."

This was not, however, the effect produced on Dorothy's mind by the sudden appearance of Callander's old servant; she was supremely thankful that, anyhow, Egerton was prevented from accompanying her brother-in-law.

With her suspicions, it seemed too painful an anomaly that Egerton should be selected as the consoling friend of the bereaved husband.

* * * * *

It was with a sense of relief that Dorothy at last found herself back in London, away from the scene of death and horror that had stamped itself so indelibly in her imagination.

The neighborhood selected by Miss Oakley was new to her, as the house occupied by her sister during the previous winter was at the other side of the park, near the ponderous mansion of the dowager, in one of the Tyburnian squares.

How strange, how heart-breaking it seemed, this settling down to life again without Mabel. The children, too, had almost ceased to ask for "mammie;" this saved some pangs yet how cruel it was that the sweet mother should be forgotten.

"When they are older I will talk to them about her—and help to keep her memory green," thought Dorothy.

Miss Oakley was occupied with her new attempts at housekeeping, and took much counsel with Mrs. McHugh. She was also profoundly concerned about Egerton.

She called or sent every day to inquire at the hospital where he had insisted on being taken. His illness was severe and prolonged, for a week there was little hope, and Miss Oakley more than once reproached Dorothy with her indifference to the danger of a man who had loved her and shown even greater sympathy in the family sorrow than Standish.

"I don't think you care a straw about whether he lives or dies," she concluded one day, about a week after Paul had gone to Berlin.

"I am not indifferent, Henrietta," said Dorothy, in a low, tremulous voice. "God only knows all I feel," and she hastily left the room, to commune with her own heart.

"Does she really care for him?" thought Miss Oakley, looking after her in some surprise. "Is she concealing her liking for some absurd romantic reason? If he recovers and she loses him for a mere whim, how bitterly sorry she will be by-and-by."

Dorothy was indeed deeply moved by the judgment which seemed hanging over Egerton. Profoundly as she dreaded and hated him, it was too painful to think of his being hurried into eternity with this terrible unrepented guilt upon his soul, if he had a soul! For how could any remnant of the divine—the immortal—linger in a man whose conscience would permit him first to use his psychic force, his powers of attraction, to draw a simple guileless creature like Mabel from the husband she really loved, and then, failing in his diabolical treachery, to destroy the life he could not pervert. Every particular of Egerton's conduct since her sister's cruel death pointed to his guilt. Even the detective, without the key she held to the mystery, had gathered enough information to suggest the idea of jealousy as a motive, and having gained so much he would surely come to the true conclusion. Yes; for all their sakes, especially for Mabel's sake, it would be better that Egerton died. Yet she dared not wish it. She understood why he insisted on going into a hospital to be nursed by strangers! He feared betraying himself in the ravings of delirium. What might he not say? To what extent might he not implicate Mabel?

Haunted by these tormenting thoughts, Dorothy's soft, dark-grey eyes grew feverishly restless for want of sleep, her hands were dry and burning. Noticing these indications of mental distress, Miss Oakley changed her mind and decided that far from being heartlessly indifferent to Egerton, Dorothy was dying of anxiety about him; she therefore brought the daily report of him with much impressment to her young friend, and often tunded the conversation on him, his delightful qualities, his large fortune his good looks, his position, &c., till Dorothy was almost compelled to cry aloud for mercy, while Miss Oakley set her down as a silly sentimental! quite ridiculous with her unreasonable pride

A few days after Paul Standish had left for Berlin, Dorothy was busy writing to him (it was the one occupation which gave her pleasure), when a card was brought to her—

"Mr. L. Dillon," below which was written in pencil, "Portland Hotel."

"Show him in," said Dorothy, with an odd sensation of sickness.

"I thought you had left England," she said, when he had made his bow and stood silent before her.

"I found one or two little things to detain me," he returned in a humbly polite tone, his eyes fixed on the ground "and I made so bold as to call before starting for Paris."

"Can I do anything for you?" asked Dorothy, civilly. She felt such a coward before this man who might hold in his hand the issues of life or death.

"Not much, miss. I only thought I'd make sure of Mr. Standish before I went. Is he still in the same place?" showing her his Berlin address in his note book. "I may have to pass through, and I'd like to call if he is still there."

"Yes, as long as he is in Berlin he will be in that hotel; but what can possibly take you to Berlin? What can you find there?"

"Not much of your affair, miss, but I am working in another matter with it, so I hope to make one thing help the other."

"Is there, then, a connecting link between crime and crime, however wide apart?" asked Dorothy, sadly.

"I don't know for that, miss, but it is right down curious how often looking for one thing you light on another. I was sorry to hear Mr. Egerton was so bad," he went on, with a change of tone, "he must be a real tender-hearted gentleman."

"He is," said Dorothy, with a degree of steadiness that surprised herself. "I suppose being upset and distressed, the chill he got took greater effect on him."

"Oh, it was a chill, was it? Well, they did not say so when I called at the hospital to inquire."

"Did you see him?" asked Dorothy, quickly.

"No—no; they would not let me see him, though he is a trifle better this morning. I suppose, with all the care he has, he will recover?"

"It is hard to say."

" Well, I will not trouble you, miss, any longer, as you think Mr. Standish won't go anywhere else till he comes back, and when may that be?"

" In a fortnight or three weeks."

" Then I'll wish you good-morning—but stay—maybe you'd tell me if you ever saw anything like this before?"

He took from his pocket a very small parcel in brown paper; within was something folded in silver-paper, and when that was opened, the detective placed upon the palm of his hand a fragment of chased silver; it was like half a scallop shell, very thin and blackish, and in the centre was part of the hole, through which it had been rivetted to something.

Dorothy looked at it intently; she had a dim recollection of having seen something like it somewhere. It was certainly not strange to her, but she would not give this dreadful man a clue.

" No," she said, steadily; " I have never seen it before. Where did you find it?"

" Well, miss; for the present you must excuse my answering that question. It mayn't be of any value; if you had recognised it, why, it might have been a link. It's foreign workmanship, this, but I don't know exactly where it comes from. It might be the ornament of a dagger; a thing they stick on the scabbard to make it look pretty."

" Pretty!" echoed Dorothy, with a shudder; and then, looking straight at him, she said, quietly, " I really know nothing about it."

" Then you can say nothing. Sorry I troubled you, miss."

" Do not apologise. Of course I am anxious to give you what help I can," said Dorothy, civilly.

" Are you now?" he returned. Suddenly uplifting his eyes, he sent a glance of such intense searching inquiry into hers, that she felt as if a shaft of strongest light had pierced into the innermost recesses of her heart, and revealed all her miserable doubts and suspicions, and terror, lest her darling sister's weak tampering with evil, and its terrible outcome of crime and death, should be dragged forth before the pitiless gaze of the law and all lookers-on. With a degree of strength that surprised herself, she answered, calmly:

" Can you doubt it?"

" Well, no; I suppose not," he said, with some deliber-

ation, as he folded up the morsel of silver, and put it carefully in his large note-book.

"I hope Mrs. McHugh and the children are well, miss? Beautiful little creatures; it's enough to make even a hardened man like myself ready to break his heart to look at them."

"Thank you; the children are quite well. Mrs. McHugh is a good deal shaken, as, indeed, we all are."

"Small blame to ye," said Dillon, heartily, and he took his hat from the chair where he had placed it. "You may trust me, miss. I'll not leave a stone unturned, not one! to find the villain—the real villain, I mean—that took the dear lady's life."

Another long, searching look, and he left the room.

There was more of threat than assurance in his tone, Dorothy thought, as she sat down again to her writing-table. Resting her elbows on it, she covered her face with her hands, and thought—thought with all her mind where she had seen that morsel of silver ornament before.

It must have been some time ago since she had seen it. Was it among a variety of daggers, pistols, yataghans, arms of various kinds and countries, that Egerton had shown them—one happy afternoon she had gone with Mabel and Standish to tea at Egerton's chambers in the Albany? Yes; it must have been there she had seen some curious daggers with ornaments on their scabbards both in brass and silver; was it there she had seen something like the fragment presented by Dillon? She hoped, passionately hoped she had said nothing, admitted nothing, that men could twist into evidence against Egerton. Had Egerton been her nearest and dearest, she could not more ardently have desired to shield him.

Why was this man Dillon going away abroad when Egerton, whom he evidently suspected, was in London, and likely to remain there? Probably other business called him away, and he wished to mix up matters, so that he might appear to be occupied about the Callender tragedy as well as others. Would the day ever come when she could look back with a simple, tender grief, unmixed with terror lest the shameful secret, known only to herself, should leak out.

After thinking in profound stillness for many minutes she pulled herself together, and taking her pen added some lines to her letter:—

deliber-

"I have just had a visit from Dillon, the detective. He wanted to know if you would stay in Berlin all the time you were away. He thinks he may be going there. I cannot say how much I dislike and distrust this man. I wish this sad affair were in other hands, but you know best. Henrietta tells me that Mr. Egerton is a shade better to-day. We have not had a line from Paris since Herbert went there. I must say I am horribly uneasy about him. The children are very well, poor little dears. When are you coming back? I feel unutterably lonely when you are away, though Henrietta is kinder than I can say—quite wonderfully good. I daresay this is a stupid letter, but I am very miserable, and misery is selfish.—Always your affectionate ward,

"DOROTHY WYNN.

"P.S.—Do take care of Dillon. I somehow feel sure that if any one offered him money enough he would, and perhaps could, prove you or me or any one guilty."

This signed, sealed, and posted, Dorothy felt a little more at ease, and responded favorably to Henrietta's request that she should come out and drive.

"So you have had that clever detective here to-day?" said Miss Oakley, as they crossed the park intending to inquire for the dowager Mrs. Callander. "I wish I had seen him. They say he is extraordinary—can absolutely read your thoughts."

"I wish I could read his," returned Dorothy. "He is quite inscrutable."

"For my own part I do not believe that one man is so much cleverer than others," said Miss Oakley. "Why should he be so? I fancy it all depends on the circulation of the blood."

Mrs. Callander was at home, and graciously pleased to admit her niece and Dorothy. She was in a state of preparation for an early start next day, and was very, very cold, collected, and taciturn.

She did not ask if Dorothy or Henrietta had any news of her son, which showed that he had not communicated with her.

She said she was going to Nice, and hoped later to be joined by the Rev. Thomas Gilmore, whose overtaxed frame and mind needed rest and relaxation.

"It is in moments of mental anguish one can appre-

ciate the good counsels of a truly Christian friend," she added, with that indescribable "I-am-better-than-you" tone peculiar to the exclusively religious world.

"I can only wish you both knew where to look for peace and comfort," was her concluding sentence, spoken severely, with a stern look at both her visitors.

"I am sure, aunty, I am not a bad sort of a young woman," returned Miss Oakley, with something of her former flippancy (of late her speech had been more soft and low), "and as to comfort, can't I read my Bible as well as you?"

"Is that a becoming answer to a woman so sorely tried as I am?" returned Mrs. Callander, with dignity.

"No, it is not," cried her niece, penitently. "I am so stupid and hasty."

"Try and rule your tongue, Henrietta! Dorothy Wynn, I trust you will prove worthy the charge my son preferred entrusting to you rather than to me. Do not let any youthful volatility divert you from the duty you owe to your sister's motherless children.

"Ah! Mrs. Callander, do you think I can ever feel young again?"

"I do not know you well enough to judge."

After bidding them an icy farewell, Mrs. Callander dismissed her visitors, who were very glad to return home.

Here they found a letter awaiting them from Colonel Callander. It was brief, but clear, and fairly well written.

He was leaving Paris next day, he said; though late in the season he thought of travelling in Norway and Sweden. They should hear from him again, and he would send an address where letters might reach him. He hoped to have good news of the children, he desired his love to Dorothy. He had nothing to report of himself. He was the same as when they parted, and would be always.

The letter was addressed to Miss Oakley. Both she and Dorothy wept over it. There was an echo of desolation in it infinitely touching.

CHAPTER IV.

ANOTHER STRAND IN THE ROPE.

Egerton did not succumb to the fever which brought him near to the gate of death. He paused before its fatal threshold, and slowly, certainly, remounted the ascending steps

to light and life. His German valet wept tears of delighted surprise when the doctor declared he had taken an unexpected turn for the better.

"The English must have frames and brains of iron," he said, "after such wild raving, such mad self-accusations, such physical suffering, such desperate remedies—to recover both health and sense, it was beyond belief! His master had been a little off his head before he left Fordsea," he told the doctor who was most closely in attendance.

"The day before we came away," added the valet, "my master went out in an open sailing-boat, alone, it came on to blow with sudden heavy showers, and he was drenched through. Then, instead of coming in and changing his wet clothes, he walked away—a long way somewhere. He took a chill then, for he was feverish ever after. The doctor must warn the Herr his master to be prudent, no health or strength could withstand another such illness."

The man was really attached to Egerton, who was by no means bad to serve. Masterful and impatient, he was generous and kindly to his dependents; obey him and you were sure of consideration; moreover he had the true instinct of a gentleman, which made him courteous to those he employed, except when greatly exasperated, then he flamed out and let every one know his innate conviction that they were created for his convenience.

Once out of danger he recovered rapidly, and, after a week or ten days in his chambers, he gathered strength enough to travel north to Netherleigh.

Here, to the surprise of everyone, he invited a shooting-party, and engaged a distant cousin—a well-known, but somewhat impecunious sportsman—to act host, while he himself only joined his friends in the evening.

The strain and suffering he had endured had told upon him, men said. When neither talking or laughing there was intense gloom in his face, and a wild, distressed expression in his deep dark eyes. But he talked and laughed a good deal. People seemed to understand, however, in some occult way, that the Fordsea murder was not to be spoken of, and, in spite of first-rate sport, cooking accommodation—everything—the party was neither lively nor jovial.

Egerton himself generally roused up at night and talked a good deal. He had a positive objection to go to bed, and did his best to induce some man to sit up with him. The

guests wondered how he could stand these vigils when he had so lately thrown off a severe illness.

"You don't give yourself a chance, my good fellow," said his locum tenens, Captain Irving. "You may say what you like about having a snooze while we are out, but there's no sleep like night sleep, and you'll kill yourself, turning night into day in this fashion. I don't want to step into your shoes yet awhile, I assure you."

"You will, though, one of these days," returned Egerton, thoughtfully. They were sitting over the library fire one wet Sunday afternoon. "I mean you'll have all the land, but I'm not going to leave you more of my funded and other cash than may serve to prove my good-will. I have another destination for that."

"Pooh! You'll probaby be married before this time two years. Perhaps I shall be assisting at the rejoicings on the birth of a son and heir by that time, and probably will be presiding over the coming-of-age dinner when my parish is 'burying me dacent,' as old O'Shaughnessy used to say. Did you know O'Shaughnessy? Lord! what a cross-country man he was! Such pluck, such judgment! I believe that sort of Irishman is dying out."

"I never heard of judgment being associated with an Irishman before," said Egerton, languidly. "I don't think you have much yourself, Tom,"

"No, I don't suppose I have," said Tom, complacently.

"What are you going to do with yourself this winter?"

"Do? Well I don't know. It has been a very bad season with me, and I'm rather down on my luck."

"I shall be very glad if you will stay on here," said Egerton, indifferently. "I propose remaining—how long I don't know—but the house is at your service as long as you like to stay. There are horses in the stable and birds in the coverts."

"All right. I'm your man. Most of the fellows will be off by the end of the week. Are you going to ask any others?"

"Yes, later on. I want to look after the estate a little, with the agent and bailiff, first."

"Well, Randal, take my advice, and go to bed at a reasonable time. These late habits are positively insane after such an illness as you have had. Nothing is so necessary as rest for a disturbed brain."

"My brain is quiet enough now," returned Egerton.

Then he grew silent and abstracted, and his kinsman seeing he was not disposed to follow the conversation, left the room.

"Not bad quarters," he thought, "for a fellow so nearly cleaned out as I am; but Randal ain't exactly a lively companion. He's all wrong since that infernal fever. I wonder if he would lend me a few hundreds? I'll try before I quit. But I'll get the first part of my stay over first."

Egerton continued to gaze at the fire, his brows contracted, an occasional quiver passing over his mouth. His sight, his thoughts, far away. What visions did he see? What pangs rent his heart? Was Conscience stretching him on the terrible rack she prepares for those who disregard her warnings—who outrage her laws? Was he living over again those moments of delight when the sweet excitement of a new passion—stronger, deeper, heavenlier far than any he had ever known before, perhaps because more hedged in with difficulties, more utterly forbidden than any he had ever felt, gave fresh salt to life, more energy, more vitality to his soul? Was he tracing the course of that rising tide of overwhelming tenderness and desire which finally swept him from all considerations of honor or loyalty, or true regard for the happiness of its object? The triumph and delight which swelled his heart when he found he could dominate her will, and hold her helpless in his mental grasp. Yet this did not suffice. He was never quite sure of her affection. She had, with almost childish simplicity, played with the fire of his admiration, and showed an interest in all he said and did, but when he drew nearer still! Why did he not stop in time, why did he yield to that terrible murderous jealousy of her husband? It was so maddening, so blinding? If he could have persuaded her to leave that sullen, moody tyrant, all might have been well. He would have made her life like a fairy tale of love and happiness. Now all had ended with a hideous crime, of which he only knew the secret—the black, damning secret! If only he had met her when she was free and unshackled, how fair, and sweet, and good their lives would have been! "Am I to blame for what Fate has forced upon me?" he muttered. "I cannot even look on her sweet face for the last horrible memory that comes between me and it." He drew out the small portrait, which resembled the original closely, took one hasty glance, then, having kissed it passionately, he tore it from its case, and thrust it in the fire.

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"I must forget, or I cannot live," he said, half aloud. "Here there are no memories of her, but she haunts me. Her eyes, sweet, holy eyes, are always looking into mine. I must live it all down. For her sake the truth must never come out—never! I will occupy myself, and never be alone, and—ah! Damer, I heard you did not intend to get up till Monday morning?" This as one of the men staying in the house sauntered into the room.

"I wish I could have fulfilled the intention, but I have letters to write. The glass is at rain, and it looks to me as if we were going to have beastly weather."

"No, I don't think so. There's a haze on that hill over there, and the keepers will tell you that there are always clear skies and sunshine when old Northfell wears his cap." The other drew his chair to the fire, and Egerton, by some well-directed queries, set him talking.

In spite of his ghastly looks Egerton declared himself able to carry a gun next day, and accompany those of his guests who preferred the moors to the "meet." For Netherleigh boasted both moorland and preserves, but he did not shoot with his usual skill, and before the day was over gladly availed himself of his cousin's suggestion that the dog-cart should be sent for, as he felt himself on the verge of fainting from exhaustion.

The visitors told each other in corners out of earshot that Egerton was "devilish queer." "Looks like a galvanized corpse, by Jove!" "Would never be the same man again." "If the chill hadn't come on the top of that awful business at Fordsea, he would have been all right, but the two together were more than most men could bear," observed Irving.

In fact Colonel and Mrs. Callander were so little known in the world of gaiety and fashion, the latter led so home-staying a life that few, if any, of Egerton's companions knew how much time he had spent in the society of the fair young wife and her piquante sister.

Major St. John, indeed, was aware that Egerton had proposed to Dorothy, and suspected that he had been refused, incredible as it seemed; but he was not much of a club man. Fortune forbade his visiting London frequently, and garrison gossip was not very familiar to the men who formed Egerton's society. Later the fact oozed out, but never was fully believed.

Indeed, the Fordsea tragedy ran its usual nine days' course, a little prolonged perhaps, by the reports which cropped up at intervals of attempts to find the foreign sailors who were supposed to have committed the outrage; but a month, six weeks, two months passed, and they were still undiscovered.

Gradually Egerton grew more like his old self, yet not quite the same. He took more interest in the details of his estate, and showed a greater regard for money. His temper, too, was more irritable than formerly. If startled by being suddenly addressed, he would turn with fury on the intruder. His valet told Captain Irving that his delirium was terribly violent and exhausting, though his ravings were, on the whole, unintelligible—the impression of the murder was evidently uppermost in his mind, so much so that the poor gentleman repeatedly declared himself guilty of it.

In reply to this, Irving observed that if Egerton had been an unfortunate beggar without a sixpence, he would very likely have been taken up and tried on the strength of his own wandering words.

Letters from Standish reached him occasionally, and afforded him much interest. Paul recounted the steps taken and the communications made to the English consuls in all ports, directing them to seek for two sailors belonging to the Spanish brig *Veloz*, and announcing the large reward offered should their arrest lead to the discovery of Mrs. Callander's murderer. He also mentioned what stray items of intelligence were occasionally received of the Colonel's movements, but Standish never mentioned Dorothy.

"No doubt he hears from her often," mused Egerton, as he folded up the last letter he had received. "She never liked me. I wonder why. She did not know she had any reason to dislike me, poor little girl! How steadily she refused to see me since. God knows, she is not more averse to meeting me than I am to encounter her. What does she think? She cannot suspect! I will face her some day, and then her eyes will tell me the truth. She has wonderful eyes—not like Mabel's though. Mabel——" these thoughts came clearly enough till he came to that name, and then all was an agony of confusion. He locked away his letter and, whistling to his dogs, walked away to the Rectory, where he rejoiced the heart of the worthy Rectoress.

by munificent contributions to the various benevolent schemes patronised by her.

* * * * *

Standish was reluctantly obliged to prolong his absence beyond the time he had hoped to return. Though the mission on which he had been sent was both difficult and delicate, he managed to accomplish it satisfactorily, in spite of the many wandering thoughts he bestowed on his ward. However busy, he always contrived to answer her frequent letters. They had become of the deepest interest to him. She evidently poured out all her heart, all her mind, in them, and he noticed with pleasure that care and affection for her nephew and niece were giving something of color and warmth to her life. The sayings and doings of the children always filled a portion of the letter. "Little Dolly was learning the alphabet, and showed great intelligence. The boy was beginning to speak, which was much sooner, Mrs. McHugh said than the generality of boys."

"She has a motherly heart," thought Standish. "She will be an awful loss to those poor babies when she marries, as I suppose she will. Not too soon, I hope. It is much better for girls not to marry till they are four or five and twenty—that is, let me see, not for six years hence. I wonder if Egerton will ever return to the charge. I hope not, for he might win her; perseverance does so much with women, and somehow I do not fancy Egerton for my dear little Dorothy." Then he smiled at himself. "My Dorothy sounds rather absurd. I do not, certainly, feel like a father, and in no other but a filial sense will she ever be my Dorothy. I always took to her most, but what a sweet creature Mabel was! I don't wonder that poor Callander is nearly out of his mind at losing her so suddenly, so cruelly—in the room next him, absolutely within his reach. It is the most wonderful case I ever knew. Thank God I can get away next week. I long to see my sorrowful ward, and that good soul, Henrietta Oakley."

In the meantime Henrietta Oakley was trying the soul of his ward by her restlessness and ennui.

While anything was to be done Miss Oakley was the most considerate and sympathetic of friends, but to sit down and "weep tear for tear," or share the quiet occupations, the tranquil monotony, which was gradually calming Dorothy's spirit, and helping her to be resigned, was quite impossible to her. So long as there was loud wailing, pro-

found indignation, active efforts for discovery or revenge to be done, Miss Oakley was ready to be foremost and untiring. But this active phase over she must supply the vacuum with some fresh activity.

Dorothy had perceived a change in her, an anxiety to induce her depressed companion to go here and there just for a little variety, she said—that she was less interested in the children than at first, though always kind to them. It was therefore no very great surprise to her when Miss Oakley came in after an afternoon spent among shops of Regent and Bond streets, one deary drizzling day early in February, and after kissing her effusively, and describing a lovely doll's house she had bought for Dolly, while she took off her furs, she exclaimed quickly:

"I have been and gone and done something which will not vex you I hope, dear."

"What is it, Henrietta?"

"Well, you see, I met Lady Brinkworth at Howell & James', she is only in town for a few days, and as she was always so kind and attentive to me in Rome, I could not possibly avoid asking her to dinner."

"No, of course, you have a right to ask who you like, I need not dine with you. There is no reason why you should not ask your friends to dine with you."

"But you must appear, Dorothy. I insist on it, it will do you good. You are moping yourself to death, and you know it is quite six months since—since——"

"Not six months, Henrietta. Oh, do not be vexed with me or think me unkind, but I cannot meet strangers yet, I should be like the skeleton at the feast. It is quite natural you should wish to see your friends, and I would not prevent you, for you have been so kind and good; what should I have done without you? But do not ask me to sit down with strangers so soon—so soon."

"But, Dorothy, this is all so morbid and unwise; you are absolutely killing yourself! You do not know how ghastly you look. Mr. Standish will think I have not taken any care of you when he comes, and he will be here soon from what he says in his last letter. I hear that Major St. John is in town, and I shall ask him. Then old Major Treden is called the other day; he knows the Brinkworths, so that will make a nice little party of six. I really feel I must see some one! In this quiet, friendly, impromptu way there can be no disrespect."

"Not the least, dear Henrietta, from you. From me it would be quite different. Do not mind me at all, I can have tea with the children and a tough book after they have gone to bed; nothing draws me out of myself like a really tough book."

"How extraordinary! When I am miserable nothing comforts me like a thrilling novel—with lots of love in it—a delightful dangerous desperado of a hero, ready to kill off everyone who stands between him and the object of—"

"Oh, hush, Henrietta!" whispered Dorothy, raising her hands before her eyes, as if to shut out some dreadful sight.

"What a stupid, heedless wretch I am to mention such things to you, my poor dear! Do forgive me! It must seem so heartless!" embracing her. "You shall do what you like about the dinner; only I shall be miserable without you. Now I must look out for a sixth, and there is scarcely a soul in town."

"You will find somebody, no doubt."

"I must try. Oh! I had a letter from Mrs. Callander just now. She writes rather graciously. Some friends of hers met Mr. Standish in Berlin. He was going to leave almost immediately. She asked if we have any news of Herbert. I really do not think he is acting properly towards his mother."

"No, he is not; but one is inclined to forgive him anything. I am quite sorry for Mrs. Callander."

Though Dorothy was too just to feel angry with Miss Oakley wishing to entertain her friends while the shadow of a tragic crime still lay upon herself and her immediate relatives, the idea was shocking to her.

It seemed to her that she, herself could never again be as she had been, that the weight could never be lifted off her heart, the nervous horror from her spirit. The idea that had she roused herself when the clang of metal, real or unreal, penetrated through her sleep, she might have saved her sister never left her. This, and the horrible belief that she knew the murderer—that she must not denounce him though doubly dyed in guilt, haunted her night and day. Her sleep was broken by distressing dreams. If her rest was tolerably calm, she lived over again her childish days of loving dependence on Mabel, and awoke, only to weep freshly bitter tears over her cruel bereavement.

As in the day time she was quiet and uncomplaining, Henrietta Oakley—the keen edge already worn off her sincere sorrow—fancied she was recovering her composure, and that soon she would be able to resume her former ways of life.

The day that Miss Oakley was to receive her friends, Dorothy went out with Nurse and the children, keeping away until it was almost dusk. Then to their great delight she shared their nursery tea, and assisted to put them to bed. Finally, she established herself in a small room on the ground floor dignified by the name of the "library," a pretty comfortable apartment, with soft easy chairs, and lit by a moonlight-looking lamp, she drew a seat to the fire, and took a volume of Essays, but could not fix her attention upon it.

The footsteps of the servants as they came to and fro serving the dinner; the idea that life, even the life that touched her own, was returning to its old channels, that the waves of the world were closing over the memory of the sister she loved so well, and soon that dear, gentle being whose every act showed kindness and consideration for others would be forgotten by all save herself, that to the children she would cease to be anything save a dream, and not even that to her son.

How long she sat there thinking in deepest melancholy she could not tell; suddenly the door was opened by Collins, who, with a brighter look than he had worn for many a day, exclaimed:

"Here is Mr. Standish, Miss Dorothy."

Whereupon her guardian entered looking more embrowned than usual. He was in evening dress, which became him as it does well-made men, and besides his air of high breeding he had that indescribable alertness and decision of movement which is the outward and visible sign of inward strength of character. There was a look of pleasure in his eyes which lent them light and depth of color, and he seemed to Dorothy an embodiment of vital power sent to draw her from the gloomy depths of sorrow in which she was sunk.

"Oh, Paul; dear Paul!" she cried, starting up and stretching out her arms to him. "I thought you would never come."

"I came as soon as I could, my dear child," he returned,

drawing her to him and gently kissing her cheek. "Let me look at you. Why, Dorothy, you are but a ghost of yourself! My dear, you look tenfold worse than when I left you. Your very hands are thin, and your poor eyes are worn with weeping. This will never do."

He laid his hands on the braids of her glossy, wavy hair, and pressed back her head while he looked into her eyes with grave, compassionate tenderness.

"Oh, Paul! I cannot help it; I am so wretched," she said, but even as she said it a soft glow seemed to revive her heart, a sweet warmth caught from his eyes, and some faint color came again to her cheek.

"You must not let your life ebb from you, Dorothy," he continued, pressing her hand in both his own. "We want you, my dear little girl, your guardian most of all. What would life be to me without a wilful ward to take care of?"

"It is a sort of haunting fear as well as sorrow that takes all life and energy from me, Paul. In the day I can bear it, but at night"—she shivered—"I wake constantly and listen for the sound of that falling bar. I dread that the children may be hurt, or—or you," and she drew closer to him as they still stood together in the full light of the lamp. "I scarcely know what I fear, but—shall I ever feel safe again, Paul?"

"Yes, Dorothy; you must. Time will soothe these terrors," he said, pressing her hand unconsciously against his heart. (How strongly it beat, she thought.) "You have someone with you at night, have you not? You ought not to be alone."

"Oh, no! I could not be alone. Henrietta is so kind as to sleep in my room; but she sleeps so soundly. It is no use to speak to her; indeed, it would be cruel to rouse her."

Standish did not speak for a moment, then he said, "Now tell me all your news," and led her back to her seat by the fire, drawing his own chair close. He had too much sense to attempt arguing about the folly of her fears; the best remedy for them was to change the current of her thoughts.

"I wrote so much to you, Paul, that I do not think there is anything left to tell. There has been but little variety."

"Yes, you were a good girl. I looked for your letters, I assure you. It was most annoying my having been sent

on to Vienna, but had I been able to return sooner I could have done nothing for you."

"Yes; you could have talked to me."

"Standish smiled.

"And you have no further tidings of Callander?"

Dorothy shook her head. "We only know he is alive, because Henrietta called at his lawyers' and finds that his cheques of quite recent dates have been cashed in different places. He was at Munich last—about a fortnight ago."

"Perhaps he is going to join Mrs. Callander at Nice, He has never addressed a line to me; but I have heard from Egerton, who has buried himself in his own place."

Dorothy turned her face slightly from him and looked at the fire while he said this. "He seems disposed to stay there, and wants me to run down and see him."

"Shall you go?" she asked, almost in a whisper.

"No, certainly not for a considerable time. So Henrietta Oakley is giving a dinner?"

"Hardly that. She has two or three intimate friends who happen to be passing through town."

"Even that is rather soon."

"Oh, Paul, it seems dreadful to me. But I know Henrietta. She cannot live without company or excitement. It is not that she is unfeeling, but nothing—no emotion lasts long with her. She is, I believe, very true to her friendships, but she could not grieve long. Then she did not know and love Mabel as I did." She stopped suddenly, her lips quivering.

"It is wise and generous to think in this way, Dorothy," remarked Standish. "Now—would you not like to hear what I have been doing?"

"Yes, indeed I should," and he began to describe some of his experiences, which interested Dorothy and drew her from her ordinary groove of thought.

She was glad to feel at ease with him once more, as of old, that his rare, gentle, brotherly caresses did not move her to draw back and tremble as they used. She was always ashamed of the strange, uneasy feeling which had begun to develop in her heart, her pulses, towards this kind friend, so superior to herself, who treated her as a petted child, and who would no doubt have been surprised at the unworthy emotion he had unconsciously called forth.

Now the storm of sorrow and terror which had "beat vehemently" upon her had swept all that disturbing fever,

and Paul was once more her dear, good friend and guardian, to whom she could tell everything, and under whose tender protection she could feel safe and at rest.

The moments flew while Paul spoke. Then suddenly Henrietta flew in. "They are all gone, thank goodness! Collins never told me you were here till this moment, Mr. Standish. I am so delighted to see you. When did you arrive?"

CHAPTER V.

"ON THE BRINK."

The presence of Standish in London made a considerable difference in the lives of both Henrietta and Dorothy.

He devoted himself to them, especially the latter. He spent nearly every evening with them, and whenever he could spare an afternoon from his work, insisted on taking her to walk or drive.

Dorothy was amazed to find how great a change this constant intercourse with a mind stronger and broader, but not less warmly sympathetic than her own, created in her views and feelings. Life seemed possible to her once more, and she began to see that she might even enjoy it, while with joy or grief, action or repose, the loving thought of her dead sister might be intertwined. Her whole existence might be "sacred to the memory" of the beloved one, and yet its duties might be cheerfully fulfilled, its troubles bravely borne, its rewards gratefully accepted. Besides, she must live to be a mother to Mabel's dear children.

The one source of bitter, implacable distress was Egerton. The idea that he should go unpunished, threw her, when she thought of it, into a paroxysm of fury and despair.

Not even to Standish must she confide a syllable that would lower her sister in his estimation.

This suppression on one subject gave a somewhat puzzling variation to her moods and manner, which both exercised and interested Standish. There were some depths in this young creature, whom he had seen grow up, which defied his penetration. There was mixed with her delightful frankness, a dainty reserve, like the cool sprinkling of a silver fountain over the half-open blossoms of a fair garden. The contrast between her frankness and Henrietta's

outspoken expansiveness, two extremes of the same quality, would have amused Standish, had not the atmosphere of sorrow which enwrapped his sweet ward forbidden such a tendency.

Miss Oakley never hesitated to say everything. Utterly indulged from her youth up, she would have been unendurable had not beneficent Nature endowed her with a sound, kind heart. The sentence on good Queen Bess might have been reversed in its application to Henrietta, for the instincts of her heart went far to correct the follies of her head.

The cold bleak days of March were now upon them, and Dillon had made no sign for several weeks.

His communications had been few and far between, and Standish felt a good deal in the dark as to his proceedings.

Dillon had avowed that he intended to work in another search with the hunt for Mrs Callander's murderers. What it was he of course kept to himself. Standish was inclined to think that he was spinning out the job, with a view to filling his pocket; he mentioned this to Miss Oakley, who was always eagerly on the look-out for some surprising discovery. Indeed, Standish avoided the past and its tragic memories as much as possible when with Dorothy. He was careful to keep her thoughts in smoother channels as much as possible.

About this time, however, a communication from the English Consul at Palermo reached Standish.

The Spanish ship *Veloz*, answering to the description in the bill or manifesto offering the reward before mentioned, had put into that port, and the Consul had interviewed the captain, who seemed a respectable man, and bore a good character with the firm which occasionally employed him to ply between Palermo and Cadiz. He very willingly gave what information he could respecting the two men who had been among his crew when they lay at Eastport—one, the cook Guisepppe, had left him to go on board an American steamer at Bordeaux, and he knew no more of him. The other must have been, he thought from the description, a man from the South, called Pedro, he did not know his other name. He was a fierce, quarrelsome fellow, and had left at the end of his voyage to go into the country and see his people.

The captain was not inclined to think Guisepppe the sort of man to commit a murder. He was quiet, steady, givin

to making money, and to keep clear of scrapes. His informant, the Consul added, did not know the name of the steamer to which the cook transferred his services.

This information, scanty as it was, Standish thought right to tell Dorothy. She received it with an apathy that amazed him.

"I must say," he observed, "that I should like to bring the scoundrel, whoever he was, to justice. It is infamous that the perpetrator of such an outrage should escape."

"Yet he will," said Dorothy, looking fixedly at the fire.

"Why are you so sure about it, Dorothy?" asked Miss Oakley.

"I cannot tell, but I feel he will."

"These instinctive convictions are not to be trusted. This certainty of yours, Dorothy, really arises from your impatience for justice, or rather revenge—which is wild justice," said Standish.

"Can you wonder?" she returned. "Yet when I think that no discovery, or justice, or revenge can bring her back it sometimes seems not to matter——"

"It is of the last consequence that he should be brought to justice, and he shall be! I am in correspondence with our Consul at Valencia, from which province, I daresay you may remember, Egerton said this fellow came. I have written to Egerton to stir up some relatives he holds intercourse with occasionally; they might give us important assistance, but he is slow in answering." Standish spoke with sharpness and decision.

Dorothy looked up at him with a curious expression, a sort of compassionating despondency, as though she knew his efforts would be all in vain.

This conversation took place as they sat round the fire one stormy night in Miss Oakley's pleasant drawing room, to which her ornaments, books, pictures, and plenty of ferns, broad-leaved eastern plants, and hot-house flowers, had given a home-like aspect, very unlike the ordinary "furnished house" look.

Standish had come in after dining at his club, as he often did, to tell the latest talk, political and literary, the whispers of changes at home and abroad—anything to draw Dorothy from her thoughts—to interest her in the world without her.

Henrietta went out occasionally to intimate friends, and

in a very quiet way, not thereby interfering in any way with Dorothy, and Standish often found his ward alone when their talk took a graver, deeper tone than when Miss Oakley shared it. Dorothy could then speak unreservedly of her increasing anxiety about Callander. It seemed to her unnatural, his prolonged absence, his indifference to his children; but Standish always said he thought that terrible a shock as he had sustained, when weakened as he had been by previous bad health, was sufficient to account for any eccentricity.

On the present occasion a short silence had followed Paul's last remark, and then Miss Oakley said, as if out of her thoughts: "Perhaps Mr. Egerton is coming to town."

"He has said nothing to me about it," returned Standish.

"He mentioned something about being in town about Christmas," she replied. "He has written to me two or three times, chiefly to ask for Dorothy, but as she does not seem to care about hearing of him, I have said nothing. When he does come I shall be very happy to see him."

"No one could have shown greater feeling in our misfortune than Egerton," said Standish thoughtfully. "I sincerely wish he had gone with Callander. Consenting to his companion was a real act of friendship."

"Why did he not follow him then?" cried Dorothy, though she could not keep back the words.

"When Callander literally ran away, Egerton could hardly follow him," returned Standish, looking at Dorothy as if surprised at her enmity to her admirer.

"Well, for my part I like Mr. Egerton—I always did. He has shown himself to be full of good feeling and refinement. He sees that he is not acceptable to Dorothy, so he keeps out of the way," said Miss Oakley. "Now, I think Dorothy is a goose; what she wants I can't imagine. Mr. Egerton is quite fit to be the hero of a novel—and so was off! If he ever comes forward again, I shall be very vexed if you do not accept him. I am sure you'd be angry with her too, Mr. Standish?"

"I," exclaimed Standish, smiling; "I should not dare to interfere. You do not know what a small volcano Dorothy is."

Sue did not speak. Her pale cheek flushed, than grew whiter than before.

"I am very tired," she said; "my eyes ache. I must say

night. If I can only go to sleep while I am sleepy it will be delightful."

She rose, and left the room without further farewell.

"What a curious, implacable little thing she is," said Miss Oakley, looking after her. "I do wonder what her attraction to Mr. Egerton can be! Is she in love with any one else?"

"How can I tell?" exclaimed Standish impatiently. "You are more likely to know than I am!—at least she is more likely to confide in you than in me. I suppose it does not inevitably follow that, because a man happens to be good-looking, smooth-tongued, rich, that he must be irresistible to all women."

"Perhaps not to every woman, but to a large majority. Do not think you like Randal Egerton somehow, your friend, Mr. Standish."

"I certainly do not dislike or like him, Miss Oakley, and I have been a good deal struck by the kind feeling he has shown poor Callander. But I have met fellows that are more companionable to me."

"There is no accounting for taste," returned Miss Oakley, in a philosophic tone; "now, I confess that if Mr. Egerton were to make love to me, I don't think I should be very hard-hearted to him."

"Shall I tell him so?" asked Standish, laughing at her candor. "It is a pity he should lose a chance."

"Oh, nonsense," said she, good-humoredly. "Mr. Egerton will never lose a chance he cares to seize. I am not his only one. Now, he is, or was, really fond of little Dorothy. It would be such an excellent settlement for her. Her poor father's death has broken up her home. I don't fancy Herbert will settle anywhere. He will go back to India. He may marry. She hates Mrs. Callander, who wouldn't have her at any price. You are not old enough to set up housekeeping with her, and if you marry, your wife would be sure to hate Dorothy, so——"

"What a string of impossibilities," interrupted Standish, with a rather forced laugh. "According to you there is no refuge for Dorothy but marriage with Egerton."

"Not a bad alternative," cried Henrietta.

"As to myself," continued Standish, "As soon as I can get a few weeks' leave, I shall go to Spain myself. I cannot sit down quietly while the blood-thirsty villain that robbed us of Mabel is at liberty. I don't allow myself to

speaking of him or of the terrible catastrophe before Dorothy but nothing in my whole life has cut me up as this has. She was an angel, the sweetest soul that ever breathed! I wonder poor Callander can know a moment's rest till he has had the murderer hung. His extraordinary apathy proves he is not in a normal condition. After him, I am his wife's nearest friend, and I feel that the duty of tracking the murderous devil devolves upon me."

* * * * *

The first lengthening days of spring have a saddening effect on those who have suffered. To Dorothy, and, indeed to her affectionate friend, Henrietta, it was a melancholy period. The little ones had ceased to ask for "Papa," or "Mamma," and her guardian's visits were the only bits of sunshine in Dorothy's life. She watched with almost motherly interest the growth of the baby-boy, the unfolding of the little girl's intelligence. But the supreme solace was the warm, thoughtful sympathy of Standish. Their conversations were always a source of tranquil pleasure, but when he did not come for two or three days, her sense of desolation was almost insupportable.

Meanwhile, Standish found his position improved, his prospects brightening, since his successful conduct of the business confided to him in Berlin and Vienna, also the amount of work he had to attend to was greatly increased, so the time he could place at his ward's disposal was less than formerly.

Hastening, one dim afternoon, up Pall Mall, and looking out for an empty hansom, he came face to face with Egerton.

He knew the figure and bearing, but was almost uncertain as to the identity of the face, so changed was it in many ways.

The large eyes were sunken, and had a pained, haunted expression. The cheeks looked hollow, the clear olive tint had become a dusky pallor, a large mustache hid his mouth and altered him still more.

"Why, Egerton!"

"Standish! I was on my way to leave my card at your lodgings to let you know I was in town."

"I am very glad to see you. When did you come up?"

"Yesterday. I am putting up at Long's. I have given up my rooms in the Albany. I am thinking of trying a

little elephant-shooting in Africa if Callander does not want me. I had a letter from him a couple of days ago. Which way are you going? I will come with you."

"Dorothy had a few lines from him, too, last week," said Standish, as they walked on. "He has been to see his mother at Nice, and spoke of returning to England."

"So he does to me. He is, for the first time, anxious to know what success has attended our efforts. I trust he will return quite himself."

There was an indescribable melancholy in Egerton's voice that struck Standish, and he felt some surprise as well as increased interest in his companion.

"How is Miss Wynn?" continued Egerton. "I have heard of her now and then from Miss Oakley, and I should greatly like to see her before I leave England, if she will see me."

This was said in a constrained voice, with pauses and breaks, as though he forced himself to utter the words mechanically.

"Just now I am sure that Dorothy will not see you or any one. The boy is rather seriously ill with bronchitis, rather a bad business for so small a chap. His aunt never leaves him. It would be an awful shock to Callander to arrive and find no son. It is all very hard on such a mere girl as Dorothy. But she has more of a backbone than her sweet, pretty sister had——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Egerton, hastily. "Tell me how is it that flighty Miss Oakley has stuck so steadily to her role of comforter?"

"Her heart is better than her head," returned Standish. "Henrietta Oakley has proved herself a capital woman; I have grown quite fond of her. She would make an admirable wife to any man who knew how to manage her."

"Oh, indeed," with a languid smile. "Tell me more about the report of that Consul of which you wrote to me. I don't understand why they have not made more diligent search for that fellow you all suspect—Pedro."

"We suspect? Don't you? Come and dine with me at the club to-night, and we will discuss it all, now I must go on to Miss Oakley's. I have not heard how the boy is to-day."

"Let me come with you, I must see them again. "It seemed to Standish from the tone of his voice that the necessity was not an agreeable one.

"Come by all means," he returned. They were soon bowling along towards Kensington.

Miss Oakley was not at home when they reached the house. But Collins, who remained as the factotum, protector, and semi-dictator of the joint household, said that she would soon be in.

The gentlemen were therefore shown up to the drawing-room, where a tea-table was set ready for the absent mistress.

"I will go and see Dorothy, if you don't mind, Egerton," said Standish, after moving somewhat restlessly to and fro, looking at the papers and periodicals that lay about. "She generally mounts guard about this time when the nurse—you remember, Mrs. McHugh," Egerton nodding his head with a slightly impatient movement—"goes to tea."

"Don't mount me," returned the other.

Standish had hardly left the room, when Miss Oakley entered it; she was richly dressed, with abundance of black fur on her cloak and round her throat, and looked very handsome.

"Oh! dear me, Mr. Egerton, I am so glad to see you. I could hardly believe my ears when Collins said you were here. But do you know you are looking frightfully ill? You don't mind my saying so, do you? You ought to go away to some warm, cheerful place. Really the gloominess of winter in England is quite suicidal, don't you think so?"

"I cannot return the compliment, Miss Oakley! You are looking remarkably well! It is an age since we met. I am sorry I cannot see Miss Wynn, and for the cause—the little boy, Standish tells me, is seriously ill?"

"He is, indeed, but he is a shade better, to-day. Dorothy has been so unhappy about him. It would have been terrible if Herbert had returned to find no baby-boy, and aunt Callander would have been sure to say he died from neglect. I am very fond of Aunt Callander, she has many good points, but she does fancy such queer things! I am dying to see Herbert again! Of course, it has been an awful blow, but men don't grieve for ever. He is really a young man, and ought to throw himself into his career. And he is such a good fellow! You know my deep interest in him is of old date; won't you take a cup of tea?"

"No--no thank you," and Egerton, who had started up and gone to the fire-place while she spoke, now sat down and kept very still while Henrietta insisted on giving him some tea, and cross-examined him as to his health, his life at his country seat, and a dozen other topics, while he answered in monosyllables and looked as if he were on the rack.

Meantime, Standish mounted the stair to the day nursery where he had generally spoken to Dorothy during the boy's illness. The little fellow had taken a severe cold, which turned to bronchitis.

"Oh, Paul, he is better!" exclaimed Dorothy, from the inner room, as soon as she heard his knock at the door.

"That's right, I thought the little fellow would pull through, he is a regular Trojan."

"He was in great danger yesterday, but the night was better, and now he breathes much more freely."

"And now, I hope you will take some care of yourself, Dorothy! You look as if you had not slept for a week."

"Not so long as that, but I should like a nice, quiet sleep without dreams," and she sighed.

"Are you still so frightened at night?" asked Standish, looking down into her eyes with a glance so wistfully compassionate that Dorothy felt the delightful sense of his affectionate sympathy send a thrill of pleasure shivering through her.

"No, I am less frightened, but I dream continuously."

"I have left a visitor with Miss Oakley," resumed Standish, placing a chair for Dorothy, while he stood by the high fender. "A visitor who wishes to see you."

Dorothy looked up with a startled expression. "Who is it?"

"Egerton! I met him just now by accident, and he came on here with me."

Dorothy rose, and came beside Standish before she replied then she said in a low rapid tone, "I cannot see him, Paul, you will not ask me, it is quite--quite impossible."

"I shall not ask you to do anything you don't like, Dorothy, but later on you must really get over this prejudice. You must see Egerton some day."

"I will try," she said, with a kind of slight shiver, "but you must give me time."

"You will tell me your reasons, for it is quite unintelligible this reluctance of yours to meet him."

"You see," she continued, looking down and drawing her handkerchief nervously through her fingers, "he would remind me so of everything, and I never did like him, not, at least, after just the first——"

"He was very fascinating at first, certainly," said Standish, with a faint smile. "I remember your comparing him to various heroes—let me see—Don John of Austria, Sir Philip Sidney, and——"

"Oh, do not talk of that time, Paul, it was too—too happy."

"Forgive me, dear Dorothy," taking her hand, "I will not tease you to do anything you do not like; promise to come for a long walk with me to-morrow, if the boy continues to hold his ground. You must not play tricks with your health, you are not exactly a giant, my dear ward."

Dorothy made no reply, she stood very still, her hand in that of Standish, while he looked with grave, thoughtful consideration at the slight girlish figure, the half-averted pathetic face, the sweet quivering mouth. It was sad to see the traces of sorrow on so young a creature, especially as there was some element in her sorrow which he could not quite make out. Standish sighed a short deep sigh, at which Dorothy started from her thoughts, and withdrew her hand.

"I suppose I must go," said Standish. "If it is fine to-morrow, you will be ready for me at two? We will have a ramble round the gardens."

"Very well, thank you. You are very good to me, Paul. Can I ever show you how grateful I am?"

"Don't talk of gratitude. There can be no question of such a thing between us."

"Good-bye, for the present, Paul—till to-morrow."

Dinner passed heavily enough. Whatever subject Standish started Egerton let drop, though occasionally he seemed to spur himself to talk. It appeared to Standish the longest meal of which he had ever partaken. The waiter had placed the dessert before them when a telegram was handed to Standish, who, glancing over the lines, of which there were several, exclaimed with some excitement, "By Heaven! we may get a clue at last! It is from Eastport. 'Some important evidence offered by a newly-arrived sailor. Come if possible.'"

CHAPTER VI.

"A VOICE FROM THE SEA."

When Standish finished, Egerton did not speak for a moment or two. He stared at his companion in an odd, bewildered way, and crumbled the bread which lay beside him, as if unconscious of what he was about.

"I wonder what this fellow can have to tell?" he exclaimed, at last. "I suppose he is some pal of the suspected Spaniard, turning King's evidence." Egerton poured out a glass of wine, and drank it off as soon as he had spoken. "I should like to hear what he has to say, and judge for myself. I shall run down to Eastport to-morrow."

"So shall I," returned Standish. "There's a grain at eight-thirty. It will land us at Eastport by eleven to-morrow morning. I'll telegraph to Briggs to have the man at his office to meet us."

"If you cannot get away easily, I'll do the best I can and report to you," said Egerton, glancing sharply at him, and dropping his eyes again.

"I think I can manage it. I shall look in at Lady R's—to-night, and say a word to my chief. I shall see Sydney, too, a man who sometimes takes my work. Lord R—is greatly interested in this business, and there is nothing very special going on. I can be very well spared."

"If it is necessary, then, for both to go——"

"I think it is decidedly necessary," interrupted Standish. "In Callander's absence I am the nearest friend to the murdered woman." Egerton did not reply for some minutes, during which Standish called for and filled in a telegram form. "Send it at once. It will be delivered at cock-crow to-morrow if it be too late to-night. Now, Egerton, I must write a few letters, and excuse myself to Dorothy Wynn, with whom I promised to walk to-morrow. The poor little soul is fretting her life out. I shall not give her the least clue to the real reason why I am obliged to leave town to-morrow. I must say I am fiercely anxious to ascertain what this man's revelations may lead up to. I wonder what has become of Dillon. I wish we could slip him at the new witness."

"He was in town a day or two ago. He called at my rooms, but I had not come to town. Bauer, my man, was there, (I sent him on first, to have things ready), so he paid him a visit, and seems to have inspected the premises, for Bauer was much displeased; he said he had no business to pry and ask questions about a gentleman like me. But I told him it was only the force of habit."

"I think I will send him a line to his address. I should like him to be with us to-morrow. He is an amazingly shrewd fellow, but I have an unpleasant feeling that an opposite party, if there were an opposite party, could generally induce him to see what they wished, by the application of a golden salve to the palm of his hand."

"You think so?" asked Egerton, gravely.

"Yes; I may do him injustice, but that is my impression."

Egerton thought for an instant, and then said, "I will leave you to your letters, Standish. I want to write some myself before I go to bed. We'll meet, then, at the Waterloo to-morrow morning. But, should anything occur to prevent you, I shall go on alone."

"Oh! I'll be there."

"By the way," resumed Egerton, "as I have Dillon's address, why should I not look him up? I can explain matters, and arrange for him to accompany us."

"You might try," said Standish, "but I fancy it is not easy to find him in, nor do I think he likes following the trail in company."

Egerton took the card, and put it in his note-book, then, nodding good-night to his host, went away with a rapid step.

"I am sorry to disappoint Dorothy," thought Standish, as he placed paper and ink before him on the library-table. "Life would be very dull to me without her and Henrietta Oakley. What an improvement a touch of real feeling has been to Henrietta—even physically. She looks uncommonly handsome sometimes," and he applied himself to his letters.

* * * * *

The next morning was wild and gloomy, with bursts of wind and lashes of sudden, heavy rain. Egerton did not fail to join Standish at Waterloo, and they accomplished the journey almost in silence, after the latter had informed him that he had failed to find Dillon. The porter at the hotel informed him that Dillon had been there that morn-

ing, and would probably call the next, but his coming and going were extremely uncertain. Egerton had therefore left a note for him.

When they reached Eastport, the well-known common was half hidden by thick sheets of rain sweeping before a wild southeaster, while the heavy, leaden-colored, threatening waves thundered along the beach.

Neither uttered the thoughts which the sight of the familiar place conjured up in both. Once a sigh so deep as to be almost a moan, broke from Egerton, and he said in a hoarse tone, "what an ending to it all."

After a short halt at the hotel, they drove to the office of the lawyer who had been instructed to act for Colonel Callander, should his offer of a reward produce any result.

Mr. Briggs was a short, dumpy man, with whiskers meeting under his chin, and a round, jovial face. He rolled somewhat in his walk—indeed, gave strangers the impression of being a "sea-going solicitor."

He was a little exalted in his own esteem by being mixed up with such swells as Standish and Egerton, and by the sort of halo the whole business had cast around him. He received them cordially.

"Very glad to see you, gentleman. The man—Tom Ritson—about whom I wrote, has not come yet, but he will be here presently. I don't know that what he has to tell of much importance. Step into my private office."

As he threw an inner door open, a sailor of ordinary type presented himself at the entrance of the office.

"Oh, there you are, Ritson! Come along."

They all went into the private office, where Standish at once took a chair. Egerton remained standing, and the lawyer retreated to his usual fortress, the arm chair behind the knee-hole table.

The sailor, holding his cap in both hands somewhat nervously, but with an air of some importance, kept rather near the door.

"Come, Ritson," said the lawyer, "tell these gentlemen your story."

Ritson shifted from one foot to the other. "Well, sir," he began, "this was the way of it. You see, I'm an Eastport man, and I shipped aboard the *Macedonia*, one of the Commercial Steam Navigation Company's ships, in London dock on September last. We put in here for a day and a night, and I had leave to go and see some of my friends as

live out Westdene way, but I was to be at my post at seven next morning as we were to sail with the tide."

Egerton muttered a half-inarticulate exclamation of impatience, and Briggs said aloud, "Come, get on, my man."

"I must tell it you all from beginning to end," he said, "or I can't do it no way."

"Give him his head," murmured Standish, in a low tone.

"So," continued Ritson, as my aunt's husband was a jovial, hospitable chap, I thought I'd not stay there all night, for maybe I'd drink a drop too much, and oversleep myself. We sat talkin' and chattin' till past midnight. Then I says goodbye. and started to walk into Eastport. I had a drop, but only a drop. I knew what I was about. It was dark when I set out, but by an' by the moon rose, and by the time I struck the top of the common there was plenty of light, though every now and then a big cloud would come sailing across the moon. When I got alongside a pretty bit of a house, the first you come to after crossing the sand-hills from Westdene, I thought how quiet and comfortable everything looked, and thought there was a faint glimmer of light in one of the lower windows nigh the near end of the house. While I was looking and thinking, a figure comes out of a gate at the side of the house, carrying a short ladder on his shoulder. He put it down and stood with one arm round it, through the rungs, as if thinking what he'd do next. There was something so quiet and steadfast in his way that it never struck me he could be after any mischief, though it did seem a bit queer his being there with a ladder at that hour. Just then the Eastport clocks chimed out three-quarters—I guessed it must be quarter to two, and that I had best make for the town as fast as I could. When I got a few paces off, I turned and looked back, but not a sign of the man or the ladder could I see. I got into the old Mermaid Tavern, and to bed. Next morning we sailed."

"Do you remember the date of this occurrence?" asked Briggs.

"I do, sir. It was the twenty-second of September, and the birthday of my aunt's youngest boy, so we drank an extra glass of grog to his health. Of course I thought no more about it. We had an uncommon rough passage across the bay, and were obliged to put into Gibraltar to refit. Then we went on to Constantinople, from that to Port Said, and back, and I was left behind in hospital. Alto-

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gether I have been over six months out of England, for I came home as third officer of a small sailing ship, and it was terrible slow tub."

"When did you land here?" asked Standish.

"Four days ago, sir. Then I hear of the murder, and the reward, so I came along here to tell what I had seen that night, and you can take it for what it is worth."

"What was the man like—the man you saw with the ladder?" continued Standish.

"A tall, straight kind of a chap, about——" He paused, and gazed hard at Egerton—"about this gentleman's height and build."

Egerton drew himself up to his full stature, and looked straight at the speaker, with a stern, set expression, as if nerving himself to face some imminent danger.

"Look well," he said. "Much may depend on the apparent height and size of the figure you saw."

"Yes," returned Ritson, slowly. "He was about your height, but a trifle broader it seems to me now."

"How was he dressed?" asked Standish.

"In a longish jacket—something like a seaman's jacket; but what I noticed most was that he had neither hat nor cap on. Clothes and head and all looked dark. Of course I could not see very clear—the light was shifty, and there was the garden and strip of common between me and him."

"Did he look like a seafaring man?" asked Briggs.

"Well, sir, he warn't unlike one. You see I didn't take time to look much, for, as I said before, it didn't strike me as he hadn't a right to be there—he moved deliberate like."

"It sounds rather corroborative of our suspicions," said Standish to Egerton. "You are certainly like that Spanish sailor in height and figure. He would not have worn his red cap on such an errand, either."

Egerton bent his head in acquiescence, but did not speak.

"I heard tell of that Spanish chap," resumed Ritson, "and I well remember passing a foreign-looking craft a couple of hours after we weighed anchor. She was on much the same tack as we were, but the breeze had failed her, and we soon showed her our heels. I read her name as we passed, *Veloz*."

"I'm afraid we can't get much help out of this," said Briggs, as he made a note or two on the paper before him.

"Not at present, but it may come in usefully hereafter," observed Standish. "I should like this good fellow's

evidence taken down and duly sworn to, that it may be available in his absence."

"That is quite right, Mr. Standish. I'll see to it."

"Can you remember anything else that might possibly lead to the identification of this man?"

"I don't think I can, sir. I did fancy, when he was turned half towards me, that there was something reddish under his jacket or facing the jacket."

Egerton compressed his lips, and made a slight movement as if going to step towards the speakers, but checked himself, and continued profoundly still.

"Ha!" cried Briggs, "I remember those vagabonds generally wore red bands or sashes under their jackets. I think this thickens the case against the Spaniard."

"Yes, it looks like it," said Standish, thoughtfully. "I hope and trust is that the poor girl never caught a glimpse of her murderer—that she never woke. God! it is too terrible to think of!" he added, with sudden emotion.

Egerton grasped the back of a huge high-backed chair near him, saying, in a low, fierce tone, "And he saved his lives!" He drew out his purse, and put some money into Ritson's hand. "That's for your trouble," he added. "Standish, there is no more to learn. You will find me at the hotel," and hastily left the room.

"He's been pretty bad," said Mr. Briggs, looking at him. "I heard he had fever. He hasn't picked up much since."

"No; the winter is against him," said Standish. After arranging with Briggs to have Ritson's deposition properly taken and attested; also that he should inform the lawyer what vessel he joined, and her destination, invited Briggs to luncheon, which he was reluctantly obliged to decline, so Standish departed, glad to be free to return to town the evening.

First, however, wrapping himself in his ulster, he faced the rain and storm to walk round the pretty villa, where he had spent such tranquil, happy hours. With a heavy heart he contrasted that picture and this. What weighed most upon his mind was a strong conviction that something sadder was yet to come. He feared the effects of the terrible strain on Callander's nervous system. His lonely wanderings would increase his natural depression. The best chance for healing his wounds was in the remembrance

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vided by nature in the love and care due to his children.
Standish thought with infinite compassion of the bereaved
band. He seemed to realise with extraordinary force
at the loss of a sweet, beloved wife must be. It would
almost impossible to bear up under such a trial. After
an old bachelor's life is almost unavoidably poverty-
stricken. Then he wondered vaguely what crotchets had
ruined Callander from the friendly, hearty confidence he
had always shown to his wife's guardian, to the silent es-
trangement of the last few months. On this puzzle he had
often meditated, and had as often been obliged to give it
as inexplicable.

When he reached the hotel he found Egerton impatiently
awaiting him. He was walking up and down the room,
where luncheon was laid, and on the table stood a carafe of
brandy, more than half empty. The sight of it reminded
Standish that he thought Egerton had drunk an unusual
amount of wine the night before.

"We shall scarcely catch the train," said Egerton, as
he sat down to a hasty meal, of which he hardly ate any-
thing.

He was very silent during the hour which ensued, and
scarcely seemed to hear the comments Standish made on
Higgs's story, his assertion that there was but one man
about the premises. He only remarked abruptly, "No; I
never thought there was more than one in it, and I fear—
I feel sure he will not soon be caught."

The first part of the return journey was passed in nearly
complete silence. Then Egerton, who had been looking at
Continental Bradshaw, exclaimed:

"Standish, I will go to Spain, and hunt up this Pedro
myself."

"Indeed! Wha. has——"

"I have frequently thought of doing it," interrupted
Egerton. "The fact is, I have not felt strong enough to
undertake the journey hitherto. But I am the right man
to look for him; I speak the language; and he is probably
working in my mother's country. I knew most of the in-
fluential families in Valencia when I was there not many
years ago. They will not have quite forgotten me. Yes;
I think I can get off the day after to-morrow. Too much
has been lost already."

"My dear fellow," cried Standish, "do not be rash.
Consult your medical adviser. Even your success will not

bring poor Mabel back to life, will not restore the charm of his existence to Callander, nor——"

"Give back the color and savor to mine," interrupted Egerton, impulsively. "I assure you, Standish, that in my present mood I see little or no charm in life. If I could bring this—— There, I cannot talk about it. You do not dream of the extraordinary mixture of feelings which distract me." He stopped abruptly, and then went on in a forced tone, "I am not quite an Englishman, you see. I feel more acutely, none of you consider me an out-and-out Englishman. See how Dorothy Wynn refused me; she couldn't bear me."

"The whim of a very young girl," urged Standish.

Egerton shook his head.

There is wonderful ripeness and decision about Miss Wynn," he said. "She is more like twenty-nine than nineteen. She disliked me with her intellect as well as her heart. However, I shall never offend again in the same way. Yes, I'll go to Spain. It has no associations with the immediate past, and I shall go alone."

"You had better go with Dillon. I fancy he is free just now." Egerton made no reply, nor did Standish press the question.

They discussed Egerton's plans till they neared the Metropolis, and Standish remarked how clear and defined they were. They had evidently not been thought out on the spur of the moment. When they spoke of Callander's probable return, Standish fancied he could trace a certain reluctance on his companion's part to meet his friend.

"He shrinks from the pain of seeing him," thought Standish. "It is natural enough, especially as he is evidently weakened and depressed."

At Waterloo they parted, each going their own way. Standish found various letters, invitations, and notes awaiting him, amongst them one from Miss Oakley.

"Do come and see us as soon as you can. We have heard that you went down to Eastport, and are dying to know the reason why. Have you found out anything?"

"Imagine! Mrs. Callander is to arrive the day after tomorrow. I had a letter from Miss Boothby. The poor old thing seems quite worn-out, for my aunt has been very unwell, and you may imagine what that means to her attendants.

"If Mr. Egerton is with you, pray bring him. He is more interesting than ever. "Yours truly,

"HENRIETTA OAKLEY."

"I hope to Heaven Miss Oakley has not communicated her knowledge or suspicions to Dorothy," said Standish to himself, when he finished this epistle. "I do not want her to be disturbed with any fresh information, she is in a pitiable state of nervous depression as it is, I wish Henrietta Oakley would take her and the children abroad, to some place quite unconnected with the past. I must talk to her about this."

Looking at his watch he found it would not be too late to present himself after dinner.

He felt somewhat uneasy until he had seen Dorothy, and was certain the first glance at her face would tell him how much she knew.

"The ladies had left the dinner-table and were in the drawing-room," Collins informed the late, but welcome visitor, when he opened the door.

Miss Oakley was at the piano when Standish was shown in, and Dorothy sitting on a low chair by the fire; the dancing light played upon the red golden brown of her hair, the pale oval of her delicate pensive face; she was more dressed than he had yet seen her, that is, her black dress was opened in a long V, an inner edging of white crape almost filling up the space, her elbow sleeves showed her slight white arms. Standish was almost frightened to see how fragile, how fairy-like she looked, she ought now to be looking more like her own bright self. The recuperative powers of youth ought to assert themselves by this time.

At the first syllable of his name, she started up and ran to meet him.

"How good of you to come at once, Paul! I knew you would."

"Mr. Standish! This is delightful! I am dying to hear what took you away to that wretched place," cried Miss Oakley, coming over to shake hands with him.

"Yes, Paul, tell us everything," echoed Dorothy, "but first for my piece of good news. I had quite a nice letter from the Colonel. He will be home in a week or two."

"Ha! that is good, indeed! Now I have a little, a very little to tell you. It leads, well really to nothing, and it is painful—do you still wish to hear it?"

"I do," said Dorothy in a stifled voice.

"Yes, of course we do," cried Henrietta, drawing a low easy chair by the fire. Dorothy nestled into the corner of a sofa which was partially in shadow, while Standish placed himself on an ottoman at Miss Oakley's left.

He described the meeting with Ritson and gave a brief summary of his communication. He could not well make out what effect the narrative had upon Dorothy, as her face was almost hidden from him, but when he came to that part of the story where Ritson said the man he had seen with the ladder was about the same height and size as Egerton, she uttered an inarticulate exclamation and leaned forward as if startled.

"How extraordinary," cried Henrietta Oakley. "I call this very important, it proves to me, that the deed must have been done by that dreadful horrid sailor. He certainly was very like Mr. Egerton. It seems such a shame. How dreadfully ill and worn he looks, poor fellow! I feel quite sorry to see him. Do you know, I feel so convinced it was one of those blood-thirsty monsters who committed the murder, that I have told Collins to take that wretched parrot and sell it for what he likes. Don't you remember, Dorothy, how I exclaimed at the strange likeness to Mr. Egerton? Dorothy, what is the matter, Dorothy? Oh, Mr. Standish, what——"

But Standish was already beside her. Her head had fallen back among the cushions, her hands, cold and death-like, lay helplessly at either side.

"She is gone! She has fainted!" cried Standish, in despairing tones. "For God's sake, call nurse! I don't know what to do for her," and he began to chafe her hand gently.

Henrietta rushed first to the bell, which she rang furiously, and then to the door, where she called loudly for every servant in the house, till the room was half full.

"Just stand back every one of you, and leave the room this minute," cried Mrs. McHugh, authoritatively, "all she wants is air—and quiet."

CHAPTER VII.

DOROTHY SPEAKS.

Dorothy's faintness soon passed away, an open window and nurse's steady gentle fanning brought her to herself.

"I wish to heaven you had not said anything about our going to Fordsea, I did not mean to tell her, she cannot stand any allusion to the dreadful shock she sustained there! Who told you we had gone?" said Standish impatiently aside to Miss Oakley.

"Collins did, he heard it from Mr. Egerton's man. Why? Do you think it was that made her faint? I believe it was over-fatigue."

"Hush!" said Mrs. McHugh. The next moment Dorothy opened her eyes and asked feebly:

"What is the matter! Oh, nurse!"—she stopped, puzzled to find her there.

"You have given us such a fright, Dorothy," exclaimed Miss Oakley. "Mr. Standish was just telling us everything and you——"

A ferocious shake of the head from Mrs. McHugh arrested her words.

"Oh, yes, I remember it all now" said Dorothy, a look of fear and pain mixed passing over her face.

"I am weak and foolish. I am very sorry to give all this trouble,"—she sighed, and passing her hand over her brow, made a feeble attempt to put back her long thick wavy hair, which had got into some disorder.

"Never mind it now Miss Dorothy, my dear. I'll put it right, you come away to your bed—that will be best for you—I'll sit by you till Miss Oakley comes up. A good sleep will make you all right."

"You can't walk upstairs, Dorothy. Let me carry you," said Standish. "You know I've carried you many a time."

"Long ago, Paul!" she returned, a color coming into her cheek. "I can walk quite well, and nurse will be with me," rising and steadying herself with one hand on the end of the sofa."

"I will try and come up to-morrow afternoon. Good-night, dear, good-night." Dorothy half turned to him, but seemed so unsteady on her feet, that Standish, without more words, put his arm round her and supported her upstairs—followed by Mrs. McHugh. "Send me word how she is to-morrow, nurse," he said kindly. "I shall be very anxious till I have your report."

"Never fear, sir," said Nurse, then as he went down the stairs again, she looked after him and added, as if to herself: "Athen! if there were more like you in it, this world

would be a better place. Come, now, get to your bed as quick as you can, Miss Dorothy."

Henrietta was closing the piano when Standish returned to the room.

"I really don't know what we should do without nurse," she began immediately she had a listener. "She is a tower of refuge in every emergency, but she is a bit of a tyrant into the bargain."

"These attacks are very alarming," said Standish, who had taken his position on the hearth, and did not even seem to see the lady of the house.

"Attacks! she never fainted before, except indeed the morning she found herself face to face with her poor dead sister, and that would have made even me faint," cried Henrietta.

"Still, allowing for all the terrible shock, there is something not quite natural in her grief, considering her age. She always seems oppressed with some dread and fear of what is coming."

And Standish tried to calm the perturbation of his spirit by walking to and fro.

"Not more than you might expect after all she has gone through. I think she has been terribly anxious too about Herbert. When he returns she will probably be more at rest. Poor Herbert! I am sure we are both ready to devote ourselves to him; but no doubt we shall find him greatly recovered and in due time he will look out for another wife. Men have so little constancy—Heigho!"

"She was always a fanciful, imaginative creature," resumed Standish, continuing his walk. "As a child she was much more distressed about visionary wrongs than her sister, though she——"

"Dear me, Mr. Standish, I wish you would sit down. It worries me to see anyone 'walking the quarter deck' in a room."

"I beg your pardon," he returned, smiling, and sitting down on the sofa beside her.

"I protest you are as anxious and watchful of Dorothy as if she were the sole daughter of your house and heart," continued Miss Oakley, with just a touch of peevishness in her tone.

Standish turned to her with something of surprise in his look.

"Do I seem such an old fogley to you, Miss Oakley?" he

asked. "It is a just rebuff to my conceit! I flattered myself that I was not quite obsolete in your estimation."

"Oh, I am not going to reveal what my opinion of you is," she replied, holding up her fan and peeping over the top of it, for Henrietta was ready for flirtation on the shortest notice and under the greatest difficulty.

"Then I shall continue to flatter myself that I stand on the highest pinnacle of your favor, and trouble you with even more numerous visits than I have yet inflicted on you, though I am now reluctantly obliged to say good-night. I am sure Dorothy will be looking for you. I can never forget all you have been to my poor little ward."

"I am sure I am as fond of her as possible, she is a dear thing. Must you go, Mr. Standish? Will you come to dinner to-morrow? And oh, here! here is Herbert's letter, I know Dorothy intended to give it to you. Good-night."

"Till to-morrow, good-bye," said Standish.

"Really," mused Miss Oakley, as the door closed upon him, "I think Mr. Standish is developing quite a fancy for me. I am sure I have no objection, there is something very attractive about him, he is so self-possessed and decided."

* * * * *

Dorothy shook off her indisposition completely, indeed she seemed to enjoy a walk with her guardian on the two days succeeding her attack of faintness. He had intended making an attempt to draw from her the secret reason, if any, of the kind of nervous dread from which she seemed to suffer, but she baffled him by speaking more cheerfully than usual on abstract subjects, the only personal matter on which she dwelt was Egerton's intention of going to Spain, which seemed to give her a certain satisfaction. On the third afternoon a few lines from Standish told her that his engagements would not allow of his seeing her till late the following day, so Dorothy went for a brisk walk with the children in Kensington Gardens.

On her return, Collins told her that Miss Oakley was not at home, so Dorothy went to take off her out-door garment before entering the drawing-room. On her way she met Miss Oakley's maid, who said her mistress had gone out again on foot to take some books to the Miss Blackburns', some young ladies in the near neighbourhood.

With a comfortable sense of fatigue Dorothy settled herself to read, but found her own thoughts more interesting than the pages before her.

Braced by the air and exercise she had enjoyed, she made a strong and wise effort to reason herself out of the cruel morbidness which had laid its chill grasp upon her.

Should she not be more faithful to her sister by striving to fulfil the duties from which she had been torn, than by letting herself brood over her sickening sense of Egerton's treachery and murderous revenge, the maddening desire to punish him, abortive as it was to dream of so doing, save at the price of her beloved sister's reputation? Then when the bereaved husband returned should she not have a fresh and absorbing object in trying to comfort him and make his life endurable—and those poor dear children! They need all the care a sound healthy mind could bestow, and how was hers to remain either sound or healthy if it were to be always haunted by the thought that she herself was compromised by her silence regarding her conviction as to the murderer. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." Yes! in the hands of the All Wise she would leave the matter; it was not for her to interfere, nor permit herself to dwindle into a useless hysterical mourner, refusing to be comforted.

Then she thought of the dear children. How thankful she was that the boy had rallied and was rapidly recovering his healthy look again. Once Herbert was among them he would surely be drawn back to life by the faces, the loving ways of his children. "He will lose that awful look of hopeless indifference that used to chill my heart. It is nearly four months since I saw him. How has he lived through the terrible desolation of those months? He would have been better with us. I wonder if Dolly's strong likeness to her mother will please or shock him? Oh! I hope he will leave Dolly with me always, she is such a darling!"

Then she thought of Callander's curious aversion to Standish. He had never mentioned his name in any of the few letters he had addressed to her or to Henrietta, not even in the last, which was the fullest, the most hopeful of any.

It would be too dreadful if he took some unreasonable dislike to Standish and forbade him the house. Then it came to her, like a swift piercing painful ray of light, how intolerable the days would be without Standish. She used to think of him formerly a good deal, but quite differently, she used to be impatient and offended if he neglected her, and fluttered if he showed a decided preference to her so-

ciety, blushing and disturbed when he occasionally manœuvred to have her all to himself. Now all these fantasies were chased away by the dark solemn shadow that had fallen on them.

All the tremulous disturbance was stilled into utter unresisting dependance on him. His voice soothed her, his touch gave her strength. He was so patient, so considerate! She looked for his coming as the one bit of color in her existence. If she could only have him always beside her, no ill would be quite unendurable, but of course she could not expect that. So clever and experienced and infinitely well-informed a man would require a far different companion from herself, so one day he would no doubt marry a very superior woman.

A superior woman! How awful it sounded! It made Dorothy quite long to be twenty-one, though it seemed very old, rather than be under the wing of such a guardiansess.

How long the afternoon would be; for Henrietta would be sure to stay to tea with the Miss Blackburns.

As she thought thus the door opened and she heard Collins say:—

"If you'll sit down a moment, sir, I will tell Miss Oakley."

Dorothy was lost to sight in the depths of a large arm-chair, and did not perceive who had come in; but, starting up with her usual dread of meeting any stranger, she found herself face to face with Egerton.

Both stood quite still, their eyes fixed on each other—a determined, sullen look gradually hardening Egerton's face while Dorothy's large, thoughtful eyes flamed out with such fire as none had ever seen in them before.

Egerton was the first to speak.

"Had I known you were here, Miss Wynn, I should not have intruded, as you seem, from some unaccountable reason, to dislike meeting me."

"No," said Dorothy, advancing very slowly a step or two nearer, all her resolutions of a moment before thrown to the winds, her whole soul burning with the fiercest hatred against the foe before her, her veins throbbing with a tempest of anger. "No, I am glad to meet you, glad to speak to you, so long as there is no one else to hear me." She spoke deliberately, her eyes holding his.

Egerton's countenance changed.

"I am most ready to listen."

"Yes," she returned, grasping the top of a high-backed chair near her as if to steady herself, "you must and shall listen. Do you remember," she continued, "one day, not a week before she was—murdered, you were talking with Mabel in the verandah, when you urged her to leave her husband, and swore you would rather crush out her life than see her live happily with him. I was near the open window and heard you."

She paused.

"Then," exclaimed Egerton, in a strange, stifled voice, "if you have a human heart you must have some pity for the most miserable of men. Nothing but the dread of the world's inferences, the world's talk, the reverence I have for her memory, has kept me from ending an existence that is a curse to me!"

"Better you did than pay the forfeit due to justice," returned Dorothy, with indescribable menace. "Knowing all I do, what has kept me from denouncing you save my love for her—consideration for my darling's fame? Here, face to face, I accuse you of destroying her happiness for the gratification of the poisonous venom you called love, and her life, either by——"

"For God's sake, be merciful! You do not know what tortures my own conscience inflicts. I know how guilty I am—I know how base; but," with a despairing gesture, "you cannot dream what the madness of a love like mine was!" He began to pace the room in profound agitation. "If she would have listened to me, and left that insensible tyrant, her husband, it would have been but a nine days' wonder, and think of the bliss that awaited us both! I could have made her life one long, bright dream of joy, a palace of enchantment."

"Founded on a brave, true man's broken heart and the contempt of her own children," added Dorothy. "How dare you speak such words to me? Has wickedness so darkened your understanding that you cannot see the vile selfishness, the unholy degradation of such a scheme? Listen! She would never have gone from him to you! She did not love you—she feared you; you had, by your base, unmanly tricks, obtained a terrible mastery over her gentle, innocent heart. I have a letter from her, imploring you to set her free, to leave her to her true affection and duty—but I found no opportunity to give it to you."

"Give it to me now! It was written at your suggestion," cried Egerton, turning on her fiercely.

"Then, seeing she was about to escape from your toils," continued Dorothy, with deadly composure, "you carry out your threat, and murder her—if not by your own hand, by——"

"Great God!" exclaimed Egerton, with a groan, "do you believe this?"

He sank into a chair, and covered his face with his hands.

"I do, as firmly as if saw the knife in your hands, or saw you put it into the hands of another."

"What do you mean? Not that I would touch a creature dearer to me than my own life a thousand times, to destroy her?"

He grew ghastly white as he spoke; his dark eyes, dilated with horror, were fixed upon the slight figure of his daughterless accuser.

"I mean," she said, with pitiless deliberation, "that, either by your own hand or that of another, you—murdered—her!"

There was silence for a moment.

"Do not fear," resumed Dorothy, with bitter contempt. "I shall not publish my conviction; the forfeit of your miserable life would but poorly pay for any discredit thrown upon the memory, the character of the beloved dead."

"My God!" exclaimed Egerton, "do you not see yourself the injustice of your accusation? Such an act is impossible to me! Don't let your indignation and hatred carry you to such insane lengths. Don't you see my hands are tied? I cannot take any steps to prove my innocence."

"That I quite believe, as I believe the search you have undertaken for the supposed murderer will not be successful."

"With so bitter a prejudice, so extraordinary an accusation, it is impossible to deal," said Egerton, resuming his troubled walk. "I deserve almost all you say, but not this! You always hated me, and I confess you had reason. If you knew more of life—of men's lives, you would not think me so unparalleled a ruffian! With this fixed idea you will never be able to keep silence. You will gradually let out your suspicions——"

"My conviction," interposed Dorothy.

"Your conviction, then, and I shall be blackened with the blight of indefinable calumny."

"My motives for keeping silence are too strong——" Dorothy was beginning, when Collins suddenly threw the door open, exclaiming joyously—

"Here's the colonel himself coming up with Miss Oakley."

"For Heaven's sake, be composed," whispered Dorothy in a quick, emphatic whisper. The next moment Henrietta, radiant, exultant, entered, followed by a gentleman, slightly bent, with gray hair and moustache and beard of a darker tinge, all wild and untrimmed, a pair of dark, dull eyes, very quiet and dreamy, his clothes thrown on unbrushed, and a general air of negligence about his appearance. Could this be the well set up, carefully attired, soldierly Callander? Dorothy, already dazed by the fierce emotion of her scene with Egerton, felt dizzy and almost unable to speak. She was overwhelmed at the sight of such havoc as a few short months had wrought.

"There!" cried Miss Oakley. "I was driving down Piccadilly when I saw Herbert turning out of Dover street, so I pounced upon him at once, and here he is! I think he needs a little home care. Hasn't he grown gray?"

This seemed, indeed, to Dorothy an exemplification of the assertion that fools rush in where angels fear to tread. The tenderness, the awe, which filled her heart as she gazed at the wreck of what her brother-in-law had been, were unfelt by Henrietta, her slighter and more surface nature just saw that her cousin Callander looked older and grayer, and thought a little petting and feeding up would remedy all that.

Dorothy, still quivering with the cruel shock which had shaken her nerves flew to embrace Callander as she used in her school-days.

"Dorothy! How do you do, my dear," said Callander kindly, but by no means moved. "It seems a long time since we met. Ah, Egerton; I did not know you were in town"—he held out his hand. How horrible it seemed to Dorothy that Callander should touch him."

"Sit down by me, Dorothy," he continued, "I am pleased to see you again, and Henrietta——"

"And we have longed for you to return," said Dorothy, bravely choking down her tears. "You will want to see the children, Herbert. They have looked for you, they are such dears."

"Yes," he said, with a heavy sigh, "I must see them. My little Dolly, my poor boy——"

"I will bring them," cried Dorothy, hastening to the door, but passing Egerton, who looked stunned, and, it seemed to her, guilty, she looked into his eyes—a look at once warning and defiant. She ran to her room and seized the moment to bathe her burning eyes, which were tearless but felt like balls of fire. Then she summoned Mrs. McHugh to bring the boy, while she, herself, led Dolly. "I do hope they will not be frightened—that they will know him," almost prayed Dorothy, while nurse kept up a running fire of "ifs." "If she had only known the poor dear master would ask for the children all of a sudden she would have put on their other frocks." "If that stupid fellow, Collins, had sent her even the wind of a word she might have curled Master Bertie's top-knot."

But the sense of her words did not reach Dorothy's understanding. She trembled for the effect of this meeting with his children, on Callander's nerves. She had hoped so much for his return, and to have the terrible presence of the man she loathed and dreaded to desecrate this sad, solemn reunion!

Trembling in every limb, she nerved herself to prepare the little girl.

"Dear father has come at last," she said, holding the child's tiny hand. "You will run and kiss him, and tell him you will be his good little girl."

"Yes, auntie. Will he carry me up to bed, as he used?"

"He will, dear." They were at the door. Dorothy pushed it open. To her infinite relief Egerton was gone.

"Go, darling; run to father," she said, loosing the little hand. But Dolly hesitated. To her, the gray-haired gentleman was a total stranger. She looked at Callander, and Callander at her. Then he said, low and soft:

"Dolly; my little Dolly," and held out his hand.

The child went up to him, but slowly, with an awestruck expression in her big, blue eyes.

Callander lifted her on his knee, then slowly, gently, pressed her head to him, one hand covering her soft cheek, while he bent down his own till his grizzled beard mingled with her golden locks. As he sat thus, his dark eyes woke up from their dull apathy, and looked wildly away, as if at some distant, dreadful, object, with a strained, agonised expression, infinitely distressing. Dorothy gazed at father

and child with an aching heart, while Henrietta burst out crying, and the boy—too young to remember, to fear, to mourn—called out noisily, "Pa—pa, papa!"

Then Callander, roused from his vision, clasping his little girl tightly to his heart, kissed her passionately over and over again, till the child looked half-frightened to her aunt for protection. Then the boy, thinking his sister was having more than her share of notice, struggled from nurse to his father, who, laying his hand on the child's head, looked intently at him, and kissed his brow.

Then setting Dolly down, he stretched forth his hands, palms out, in token that he wished to be alone.

"It is altogether the most heartrending sight!" sobbed Henrietta, as they left the room. "How awfully aged he is!"

CHAPTER VII.

"BEATING ABOUT THE BUSH."

Egerton found that he could not leave London as soon as he intended, and Colonel Callander's return further delayed him.

Callander constantly sought him, as constantly as he avoided Standish. The latter soon perceived this, and relinquished his visits to Prince's place, Kensington, although Callander continued to live at the hotel in Dover street, where he went on his arrival. Henrietta loudly complained of Paul's enforced absence, and even remonstrated with her cousin both for feeling and showing such an unreasonable dislike. He replied so sternly, not admitting or refuting her accusation, but asserting his own liberty of action, that Henrietta was startled, and ran to consult Dorothy.

Dorothy thought that at present it would be useless and imprudent to contradict him. "We must induce him to come here as much as possible," she said. "His only chance of comfort is in taking an interest in the children, now they give him as much pain as pleasure. He almost shrinks from being with them, I can see that. If he could only get accustomed to them, they would draw him from himself."

"You are right, I suppose you are right, but it is a great nuisance to lose Mr. Standish. He is so pleasant, able to tell one everything, and do everything one wants."

Meanwhile, Mrs. Callander was by no means an agreeable addition to their society. Her son could not be induced to stay in her house or pay her more than the briefest visits. This kept her in a state of chronic irritation, which Henrietta's obstinacy, in setting up house with Dorothy, helped to increase.

If Henrietta openly avowed her annoyance at being cut off from the society of Standish, Dorothy felt its loss far more deeply.

Her affection for him had grown calm and sisterly, she thought, yet his absence seemed to take away more than half her life. It frightened her to perceive how blank and desolate the world seemed without him. Must she learn to live alone, without the constant soul-satisfying help and care of Paul Standish?

If so, she could not begin the cruel lesson too soon.

Egerton, meantime, betrayed to Paul's keen eyes a remarkable degree of impatience to get away. He was obliged to wait for one or two introductions to the local authorities in that part of Spain where he intended to pursue his researches, but so soon as he obtained these he would start. He was evidently reluctant to be with Callander, Standish thought, and counted the days until he could turn his back on London.

The day before he was to start, he was dressed to go out, and was giving some directions to his German valet Bauer when the door-bell rang.

"It is the detective Dillon, sir," said Bauer, returning. "I have asked him to sit down while I enquired whether you could see him."

"I do not want to see the fellow," exclaimed Egerton, "but I don't care to refuse, he's a d—d dangerous sneak. I'll not stay long, even if I am obliged to leave him in your hands. If I do, mind you don't let him turn you inside out, or pump you about what I said in my ravings."

"He turn me inside out! Ah, well, that is not just very likely," returned the German, with a superior smile, as he left the room, and the next moment ushered in Mr. Dillon.

"Ah, Mr. Dillon! To what do I owe the pleasure of seeing you?" said Egerton, stiffly, and still standing. "I am sorry I am obliged to go out, but I am somewhat pressed for time."

"So I suppose, sir. I heard you were going to do a bit of detective work in Spain and thought I'd just have a

word or two with you before you started."

"All right, Mr. Dillon, pray speak."

"First and foremost, do you think you have much chance of tracking the chap you—that is we—suspect?"

"I cannot say; I can but do my best," returned Egerton, walking to the fireplace, where he stood with his back to the light, as if he were uneasy under the keen steady glance of Dillon's ferrit-like eyes.

"Well, you speak the language, sir, which is an advantage, but I have been over the ground, and I don't think you'll find out what I couldn't."

"Do you speak the language?"

"No sir, but I have a sworn interpreter with me."

"Every additional inquirer lessens your chance of discovery," returned Egerton. "I, at least, need no interpreter, moreover, I know the place and the people."

"True, for you, sir; I wish you had been able to come with me, together we might have done something."

"Come with me now," cried Egerton, "I'll stand all expenses."

Dillon looked down meditatively, a slight subtle smile playing round his lips, and after a moment's pause, said: "No, thank you, sir; I have a trifle of scent I'm hunting up here, and I'll do more good by staying where I am."

"Ah!" said Egerton—rather a quick "ah!"—"something connected with that fellow who saw the man with a ladder?"

Dillon nodded.

"I don't see that that can lead to much," remarked Egerton.

"It may, or it may not," said Dillon, oracularly. "Mr. Standish sent for me and told me to see this seaman. I went over the ground with him, but what he has to say counts for very little—no, I fancy I have hold of another thread, a very slight one."

"Did you come to tell me about it?"

"Well, no, sir—not yet."

"Then I am afraid I cannot wait. I have a lot of things to do, and—you'll excuse me?"

"Of course, sir, only if you don't mind I'll go outside and sit down a bit, I've turned giddy and faint-like in the last few minutes, fact is, I didn't get my usual breakfast this morning. There was some kind of bobbery in the house where I live, and I hadn't time to wait."

"Oh, sit down by all means, and my man shall give you a biscuit and a glass of wine. But I must bid you good morning. Here, Bauer," with a haughty bend of his head, Egerton passed out into the small entrance or passage of his apartment.

"Give him wine and biscuits," he said to his valet, "and be prudent. I do not quite know what he is up to."

"Ach! you look very bad, my friend," exclaimed Bauer, coming back to Dillon after he had closed the door on his master. "I will give you something to do you good. What shall it be, sherry, cognac, moselle?"

"You are most obliging! I'll just take a glass of water with a sketch of cognac in it."

"Very well." The valet went across to where a richly ornamented liqueur case stood on the sideboard, and produced the beverage chosen, leaving it to Dillon to compound his own mixture, observing "that schnap won't hurt you. Now as it's not civil to let a man drink alone, I will accompany you, and he added a very strong "sketch" to his own glass of cold water.

"Ah! that quite sets me up," said Dillon, putting down his tumbler, and smacking his lips. "Ain't you going with him?" pointing his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the door.

"No; not this turn."

"How will he get on without you?"

"Anyhow, he thinks he can, and, truth to tell, he isn't what one might call very helpless for a gentleman like him. I'm not sorry, for I believe Spain is an ill-provided, uncomfortable country, ain't it?"

Dillon stared at him without speaking for half a minute, and then ejaculated: "The devil's own hole of a place. But I suppose Mr. Egerton understands it and the people?"

"Ach! that he does. He knows most things and places. He is always going about; looking for queer things and collecting. The money he throws away is enough to feed a town."

"Just so. May I have a weed?"

"Bless your soul, yes! I'll give you a prime one." Silence ensued while they lit up.

"All them queer-looking daggers and swords and things hanging along there must have cost a power of money," observed Dillon, puffing diligently.

"They have. I've been with Mr. Egerton when he bought most of them."

"Just so! Now I have rather a taste for those kind of things myself. This seems a beauty," rising and going over to touch a long, slender knife with an elaborately-chased ebony and silver handle, and silver ornaments on its black leather sheath. "May I look at it?"

"Yes, to be sure," returned this accommodating valet. Dillon drew out the long, fine, keen, blue blade and felt the point. "It's a murderous weapon, for all its delicate lines. Where did he get this now?"

"Well, I wasn't with him when he got that, but I have heard him tell he bought it at Damascus."

"I never saw anything quite like it," said Dillon, carefully examining the ornaments.

"I dare say not. Mr. Egerton had another almost exactly the same when he engaged me in Bombay, but he gave one of them away. He is a very free-handed gentleman."

"Is he now? Well, that makes things pleasant. To think of his giving away a beauty like this to a friend! I believe Attonborough would have given a small fortune for it. It must have been some one he was uncommonly fond of. Do you know what friend he gave it to?"

"Well, no! I can't say I do. It was either while we were in India or soon after we came back; for I remember when we were putting this place to rights, just before he was taken ill, and I asked him where the other eastern knife was (he calls it by some outlandish name), and he said, 'Don't you remember I gave it away?' But I could not remember. Anyhow, we hung that short, broad dagger in its place to correspond."

"Well, I'm sure they are arranged elegantly—never saw anything better. No, not a drop! Many thanks, all the same!" as Bauer made a movement as if to fill his glass, and Dillon slowly thrust back the long, cruel-looking knife into its sheath, and, with a lingering glance, hung it in its place.

"And you can't think what became of the other?" he said, in a slow, reflective voice.

"No; I cannot. Why, Mr. Egerton was always giving things away to people who showed him attention, and that means nearly everyone he knows. When we were in London last winter, there was scarcely a day I was not carrying

flowers and fruit and books and letters to the poor lady that was murdered and her sister, when they were living in quite a poor, insignificant house in Connaught square."

"Oh, indeed!" ejaculated Dillon. The men's eyes met significantly.

"It was all perfectly right," resumed the German, with great gravity. "All in the way of honorable friendship. Nicer and more gracious ladies never lived. They do say Mr. Egerton wanted to marry Miss Wynn. Well, he might or he might not; I was never quite sure. If he had been in real earnest, why, from what I have seen and known of him, she would have been Mrs. Egerton by now."

"Maybe she wouldn't say yes," suggested Dillon.

The valet smiled incredulously. "He is not the sort of man women say 'no' to, I can tell you."

"Ay! that's true enough, I dare say; anyhow, your master and the ladies were regular chums?"

"They were that. It was a nice, peaceful time, regular as clockwork. Early to bed, breakfast at nine, no racketty suppers. I got a stone heavier in those months. We were not quite so steady when they were away at the seaside. You see, they went before the season was half over, and Mr. Egerton could not refuse all the invitations; besides, he did not seem able to keep quiet. Then there was racing to and fro. I was glad when we went down to stay. I am a peace-loving man, and I also love the beauty of the sea and sky, and——"

"Faith! you are a philosopher spoilt," interrupted Dillon. "It's making poetry and talking metaphysics you ought to be, instead of laying out coats and folding up trousers." There was a touch of contempt in his tone.

"Excuse me," returned the valet, with dignity; "however humble one's work in life, one may cultivate the inner soul and dignify existence by——"

"Ah! just so; by lining your pockets. Ye see, I am spending too much time here. It's always my way; I can't tear myself away from pleasant company. I feel a new man since you gave me that sketch of spirits. If you have time to come as far as Dale street, Pimlico, any evening about nine, I have a tidy lodging enough, and I'll be proud to smoke a cigarette with you; but I must be off now. Remember, 11 A, Dale street, not ten minutes walk from the Metropolitan station."

"You are very obliging. I shall be most happy——"

Dillon nodded. "Good day and good luck to you," he said, and had almost passed through the door when he paused, turned, and said: "If you should happen to remember or find out what became of that Damascus dagger, you'll let me know? I have a client that will give a long price for it."

The German said something in reply, but Dillon did not listen. He closed the door noisily, and walked, with quick, firm steps out of Vigo street.

"I wonder what became of that knife," he thought, his eyes glittering with a mixture of eagerness and cunning. "Ay! go to Spain if you like. The secret lies nearer home, Mr. Egerton. I believe I have nearly enough evidence to hang you, my fine gentleman. It would pay better to have disguised your contempt of the detective you are obliged to use, instead of letting eyes and mouth speak as they have done. Now, which line shall I take? which will profit me most?" * * * * *

Though Standish was quite willing to humor Colonel Callander's whim concerning himself to a certain length, he felt he must in justice to himself seek some explanation of the strange dislike Callander evinced. He would not submit to be banished from his ward.

He had called several times at the hotel where the Colonel had established himself, but he was never at home. He therefore resumed his visits to Prince's place, and one day he succeeded in finding Callander alone in the dining-room, when all the rest were out.

The Colonel received him coldly, perhaps, but calmly, looking at him with a curious, interrogative stare.

"I am glad to meet you at last, Callander," he said, in his usual frank, pleasant tones, "and alone—for I want you to tell me what I have done to deserve your displeasure—we used to be such chums, and now you avoid me? If I have unconsciously done anything to annoy or offend you, tell me, I am sure I can explain it—for—"

"I cannot tell you—not now," returned Callander. "There is a reason, and one day you shall fully understand it." These last words were spoken with the most deliberate emphasis, as if he wished to drive them into his hearer's mind. "I am unwell, and unequal to talk—to explain anything—you must not ask me." Something in the dull, descending voice of the broken man before him moved Paul's infinite pity."

"Do as you will, Callander," he said, kindly, "I can afford to wait your time, for I know I have always been straight with you, and a quiet conscience——"

"Conscience!" repeated Callander, a sudden glare flaming out in his eyes, and then he laughed a wild, harsh laugh. "Oh, yes, your conscience is quite tranquil I daresay, but it will wake up by and by—Oh, yes—I will waken it up. I will explain with such force that you will not be able to resist conviction."

"The poor fellow is off his head," thought Standish, "grief and horror have been too much for him! Well, I will wait your time, Callander," he said aloud, very gravely. "I have faith in you, if you have not in me!—when you are in your right mind, and you will hear me——"

"Ha! You want to make me out a lunatic, you and my mother," cried Callander furiously.

"You misinterpret me, Callander. I meant when I used the expression 'right mind,' your unprejudiced mind. I will not force myself upon you any longer. I must, however, say that it is awkward and inconvenient to be separated, in consequence of your peculiar frame of mind towards me, from Dorothy, who has really no friend or guardian save myself."

"I do not want to separate you—you can come here and see her. What is it all to me!" he said with pitiable indifference.

"Very well, Callander, I will intrude no longer." Without another word Standish left the house.

It was a dry, grey day, and pleasant for exercise. He felt the necessity for thinking out the problem of Callander's dislike and its consequence; so he crossed to Kensington Gardens, and entering by the small gate near the palace, walked leisurely under the leafless trees toward the round pond.

As to the cause of his friend's sudden prepossession against him, that did not trouble him long. His conscience being perfectly clear, he did not hesitate to attribute it to a certain loss of mental balance. The effect of his illness in India had scarcely worn off before this sudden blow fell upon him, then came several months' lonely wanderings, sufficient to account for much eccentricity; still there was nothing in his condition to forbid hope of complete restoration. But in the meantime, while under the influence of

these hallucinations, he might do incalculable mischief. Who had a right to restrain him? Might he not be a serious affliction to Dorothy?—that delicate, sensitive, nervous creature who had not yet recovered the frightful shock of her sister's awful death. How bright and strong she used to be!—even through her natural terrors she had preserved a degree of self-control which argued a brave spirit. If Callander eventually required restraint, and his children fell into their grandmother's keeping, Dorothy would be in a very desolate position. "For, of course," mused Standish, "Henrietta Oakley will marry—may marry any day—then Dorothy will be homeless, and her means are too small to make her comfortable anywhere by mere paying! I wish I could get a sound professional opinion on Callander's mental and physical condition. But that I cannot do. The less he sees of me the better in his present state. I will ask Henrietta to do what she can with him. I wish they would go and spend a few months abroad—the children, Callander, all of them! Dorothy surely wants a change of scene. I wish the ridiculous world would permit me to take the poor little girl under my own wing. It makes my heart ache to see how sad and drooping she looks. I wonder how long that fellow Dillon intends to keep up the farce of looking for the murderer? We have small chance of finding him! I fancy Mr. Dillon is making a good thing out of us; I cannot say I see any indication of his wonderful cleverness. There is something mysterious about him. By George! there's something mysterious about the whole business—an odd sort of uneasy doubt that the affair is not as simple as it seems at first sight grows upon me. Callander's objection to me can only be caused by temporary insanity, but Dorothy's profound, immovable dislike to Egerton is inexplicable. She has something on her mind, too. I wish she would speak out to me."

Here he was roused from his reflections by a child's hoop, which was bowled with some force against his legs, and, looking down he recognised a little golden-haired creature in a black pelisse and hat.

"Ha, Dollie!" he exclaimed, "where is auntie?"

"Auntie is coming!" As she spoke Dorothy came round a clump of evergreens. The cold, dry air had given her color, and she looked a little like her former self.

"This is a lucky rencontre, Dorothy!" cried Standish.

taking the hand she held out. "I was thinking of you, and wishing to talk to you."

"Thanks! I am very glad, too!" She looked up in his face with one of her old, quick, sweet glances. "Let us walk round by the Bayswater side to the ride and the monument. The days are lengthening so fast we shall have light enough, and Mrs. McHugh will take the children back."

To this Dolly objected, and the boy, who was now beginning to walk quite well, backed his sister vigorously. Standish and Dorothy lingered with them awhile, until Mrs. McHugh resolutely set her face towards home, when they turned down a side path and escaped.

"I had an interview with Callander just now," began Standish, when they had walked a few paces in silence.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Dorothy, turning to him with eager interest. "What did he say? How did he seem?"

"Most moody and unfriendly. He made mysterious allusions to my conscience, &c., but I stayed a very short time, for I saw my presence only irritated him, while reasoning was out of the question. He is under some hallucination."

"He is, indeed!" said Dorothy, with a sigh. "Paul, I am terribly uneasy about Herbert. He is so changed—he is so variable! Sometimes he will have the children with him and almost shed tears over them. Sometimes he scarcely notices them, but sits silent and half asleep in his chair for hours. He rarely talks to any one but Henrietta. What do you think of his state?"

"He is not right in any way! I wish you could get him to see some specialist for brain disease. I do not think he has been quite right since—since the terrible blow fell on him."

"Nor I. We quite dread Mrs. Callander's coming when he is in the house. The sight of her seems to annoy him beyond everything. And how well he was going on before dear Mabel's death!"

"Time may bring him round. He would be better any where than here. I wish he would take you all abroad to Pau or Biarritz for the rest of the cold weather."

"Would that do him good? I would rather not go so far away from you, Paul!"

"My dear girl, you would be all right with Henrietta Oakley. She is really a capital woman. The more I see of her the more I see her value. Her flightiness is a mere

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surface coating; there is sound stuff below. And do you observe how serious interests and an unselfish care for others improves her very appearance? She is looking handsome. She has so much more expression!" cried Standish, enthusiastically.

"She was always rather handsome," returned Dorothy, with great composure, "and I am sure she has been infinitely kind to me; but I imagine she will get tired of her life with us sooner or later."

"Why, you don't suppose she is going to sacrifice her whole existence to Callander and his children?"

"No, Paul, that would be too much to expect, though I shall only be too thankful to do so, if he will let me."

"My dear Dorothy," said Standish, coming closer, and drawing her hand through his arm, "you must not let yourself think that, because you have been robbed of the one you loved best under circumstances of peculiar horror, life is therefore over for you at 19! Without any disloyalty to your dear sister's memory, you will, I trust, have many happy days, and I shall yet relinquish my duties, contentedly though reluctantly, when I give you to some good fellow who has been lucky in softening that hard heart of yours. You will not be always as obdurate as you were to poor Egerton?"

Dorothy withdrew her arm quickly. "We need not speak of him," she said, in a low voice.

"Very well."

They walked on for a minute or two in silence, then Standish looked down into her face, drawing her eyes to him, as he always did, and thinking what a wonderful depth of expression there was in those dark-grey, wistful, holy eyes of hers, asked gravely, "You have some profound aversion to Egerton, the reason of which you do not choose to tell me, Dorothy?"

Still looking straight at him and growing a little pale, she said steadily, "Yes, Paul."

"And will you never tell me?"

"I am not sure. Perhaps, one day—by-and-bye, one day in the coming years—I may. I should like to tell you, but there are considerations which hold me back."

"Then you must take your own time. But, Dorothy, I think you might trust me."

"Trust you!" she cried, her eyes filling with tears of earnestness. "I would trust you with my life!"

"With your life! My precious little ward that is a big thing!" Something in his tone, his smile, brought back the color to Dorothy's cheeks, but she made no reply, and Standish changing the subject, they spoke on other topics for the remainder of the way.

END OF VOL. II.

PART III.

CHAPTER I.

▲ TANGLED SKEIN.

This was a very trying time to Standish. He had an uneasy sense of being surrounded and played upon by forces he did not understand and could not control.

Unless Callander was absolutely insane, there must be some color of reason under his sudden and extraordinary enmity against himself, and, seek as he might in all the holes and corners of his memory, Standish could not find the faintest shadow of a cause, even for fancied offence. Then, although not a little ashamed of giving heed to the whims of a young creature like Dorothy, he could not quite steel his mind against the effect of her profound dislike and distrust of Egerton. What could have caused it? It was provoking of her not to confess all her reasons, if she had any, to him.

Finally, that somewhat tricky fellow, Dillon, was playing "fast and loose" with him in an audacious manner.

At any rate, he would bring him to book at once.

It was well, perhaps, that Standish was greatly occupied at the time, as, in addition to his work as precis writer to Lord R——, he had been promoted, which threw more upon his hands than he had to do before.

This did not allow too much time for brooding over unsatisfactory puzzles, which seemed to grow more involved the longer he looked at them.

A line to Dillon brought that wily personage to Paul's lodgings in St. James' place one evening, soon after the conversation last recorded.

Standish had returned from dining at his club in as bad a temper as his strong self-control would allow to take possession of him. He had an irritating notion that Dillon

was the worst man he could have employed, that he had not taken any interest in the case, and had let any thread which might have led to detection slip through his fingers.

He had hardly taken off his coat and begun to look at an evening paper when Dillon was ushered in.

"Well," began Standish, rather impatiently, "I suppose that, as usual, you have no news for me?"

"No sir—not yet," returned Dillon, giving him a quick, searching glance.

"Come now—do you think there is any use in going on with the game? It has cost a good deal, and I see no chance of any result."

"Don't you, sir?"

"No—do you?"

"Yes! If I didn't do you think I would go on taking your money, or Colonel Callander's money? That's not my usual course—no play, no pay, is my maxim."

"Then, have you any traces?"

"Traces! Ah, the scent is breast-high. Even if Mr. Egerton had not gone to Spain, I——"

"Then you think he'll catch the fellow?" interrupted Standish, eagerly.

"Well, he may find the man he has gone in search of, or he may not. I've the threads in my hand. When I get just the one link that's wanting, I'll lay the whole evidence before you, Mr. Standish; but until I have it, not one word will I speak."

"You are a cautious fellow," returned Standish, looking hard at him, and thinking what a shrewd but low type of face he had. "If you can do this, I'll believe you are the cunning dog you are reported to be."

"Ay, I'll have the big reward yet, sir, and it won't be too big."

"Tell me—have you tracked this scoundrel, Pedro, through his wanderings?"

"Yes; I have tracked the murderer, and I can put my finger on him; but there is no use in doing that till my evidence is complete."

"Then, why did you let Egerton undertake this wild-geese chase to Spain?"

"Why shouldn't I?" with a sneering smile. "It's just a play for a rich, idle man like him. What he'll find out is neither here nor there. He'll not find Pedro, and he knows it."

"Knows it?" echoed Standish. "What do you mean?"

"That Mr. Egerton was glad to get away from the talk and the bother of this wretched business, just to be quit of it all, and so he has shown you a clean pair of heels."

"I think you wrong him. No one could have shown more feeling and deeper interest than he has."

"Oh, I'll go bail, he is interested enough. Isn't he going to give a thousand himself when we catch the murderer? Maybe it's a trifle more he'll be adding."

"By heaven!" cried Standish, struck by the man's malignant smile, "you seem to suspect Egerton himself. What confounded rubbish you are talking."

"Suspect? Suspect an elegant, high bred honorable gentleman, too proud almost to speak to the mere commonality? Oh, no, I'm not quite so foolish; but you see, sir, it's my duty to suspect every living man, woman or child in or about the place on the night of the murder, and I have looked after every one of them."

"Myself included?" added Standish, with a slight derisive smile.

"You were in London," replied the detective coolly. "Of course you might have bribed the Spanish fellow, but things don't look like it. You don't suppose I'd ever find out much if I didn't think all men from the saintliest parson up to the most noble dukes and earls, from the ploughman to the archbishop, capable of murdering any one belonging to them if they had a strong enough motive. The very man you'd never suspect is, nine times out of ten the real criminal. Human nature is a queer thing."

"What a ghastly doctrine," said Standish, slowly pulling his moustache.

"It's that sir. But these kind of searches and speculations are uncommon interesting. If I were to write down all I have seen and known, everyone would cry out, 'What lies he is telling.'"

"You ought to write your memoirs, Dillon. It would be a valuable volume. Bentley or Longman would give you a long price for it."

"They will have to give it to my executors, then, for whatever I have jotted down, it shan't see the light till I am under the sod."

"A prudent resolve no doubt. Well, then, Dillon, I am still to leave matters in your hands, unquestioned, until you are pleased to reveal all you know?"



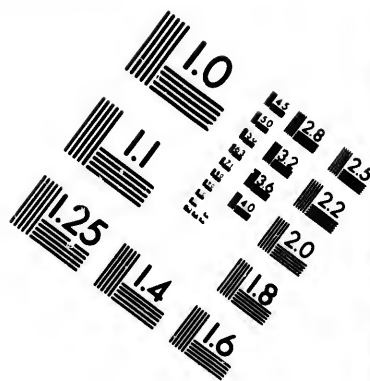
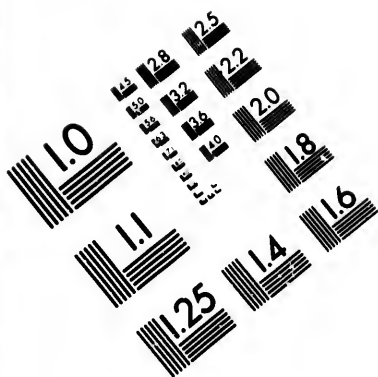
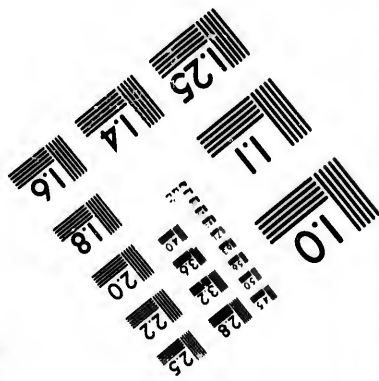
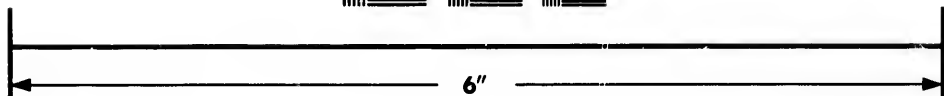
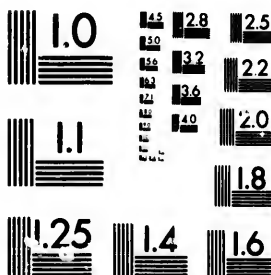


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"Just so, sir. It won't be long, but I cannot fix a time. I may get at what I want to know to-morrow or next day. I may not hit it off for three weeks or a month; but, sooner or later, I'll have the whole story clear."

"Do you expect us to be greatly surprised?"

"Well, I would rather not say, sir."

"Have you seen Colonel Callander since his return?"

"Yes, just once."

"He is terribly broken."

"Ay, that he is," and something like a gleam of compassion shot across his hard face. "He will never be the same man again."

"I fear not! He is thinking of going to Fordsea, I find."

"Is he?" with sharp, suddenly roused attention. "That's a trip won't do him much good. Do you know when he goes down?"

"I am not sure, he may take the whim any day."

Dillon thought for a moment in silence, and Standish said, "You did not think the evidence of that sailor, Ritson, of any consequence?"

"Not much," replied Dillon, rousing himself from his meditations. "He only told us what we knew before. We certainly got at the size and look of the man who laid the ladder across, but if it was the Spanish chap, why, you all say he was like Mr. Egerton in size and build,"

"True," and Standish did not speak again for a few seconds, then he exclaimed, "I have detained you long enough, and I ought to dress and go out."

"All right, Mr. Standish, it's me that is keeping you." He rose as he spoke from the chair where he had been sitting at what might be termed a civil distance from Standish. "By the bye," he resumed, pausing, "How is the young lady?"

"Which young lady."

"The little brown-haired lady with the eyes that tell you everything without her opening her lips," he ended, with a low peculiar laugh.

Standish frowned. "You mean Miss Wynn, pray, is she among your suspected?"

"Not now. She is an uncommon shrewd young lady she is," continued the detective. "Ah! she took it all desperate hard, and she doesn't like me a bit too well. She

looks at me, half afraid, like a startled fawn. One might think she was frightened for what I might find out."

"That is an imaginative flight on your part, Mr. Dillon. I must wish you good evening."

"Good evening, sir, I'll let you know the minute I have anything clear and satisfactory to tell."

"Satisfactory," repeated Standish, when he was alone. "He has a curious idea of what is satisfactory. He is like a ghoul, revelling among the ghastly skeletons of his ungodly secrets! I wonder what he is at? It is absurd, but I am half inclined to share the fright he attributes to Dorothy. But what can he find out, except the miserable scoundrel who cut off Mabel's fair life for the sake of her few jewels."

Instead of dressing to go out, Standish donned a smoking jacket, and sat down to think.

His interview with Dillon had disturbed him out of all proportion to anything that had transpired during it, and at last, growing feverish, he turned from the subject by a strong effort of will, and applied himself to write an abstract of some papers for his chief. It was a serious deprivation to him to be cut off from his almost daily visits to Prince's place. But so long as there was any risk of encountering Callander, he thought it right to abstain from going there. It was astonishing what a blank this created in his life. He had been quite comfortable and contented for years, and now a strange restlessness and dissatisfaction had fastened upon him. He must get rid of these morbid feelings. The painful death of his young ward had unhinged him. He must not yield to this sort of womanish weakness.

It was the day after this interview that Mrs. Callander honored her niece with a visit. Henrietta was dressed to go out when the Dowager's carriage drove up. With a little grimace expressive of resignation she took off her fur lined cloak and laid it over a chair as Mrs. Callander was announced, and that lady entered attired in the richest and blackest mourning that could be invented.

"My dear Aunt! I am delighted to see you—so glad I had not gone out, do sit down by the fire."

"Not too near, thank you! I never have accustomed myself to indulgence! I intended to have called upon you sooner, Henrietta. I wished to see how you were placed. You are well aware I never approved of this scheme of

yours of living by yourself with so insignificant a companion as Dorothy Wynn."

"Well, I don't see what else I could have done. Those poor children wanted a home—and——"

"You could have joined me with them," interrupted Mrs. Callander.

"And left poor Dorothy alone? No—that would never have done! You forget that Herbert wished her to be with them."

"Herbert's infatuation is something I cannot understand! He seems to think that mere girl more deserving consideration than his mother. Every one is thought of in preference to me!" and her voice rose to a shrill tone of distress.

"Is very curious," returned Henrietta, sympathetically, but perceiving all her exclamation admitted.

"I suppose that is the reason my grandchildren are never sent to see me," continued the old lady, querulously.

"Poor old thing! how grey and miserable she looks!" thought her niece. "But they went to Somerset square last week," she said aloud.

"Last week, Henrietta! Am I to be put off with a stated weekly visit? Do you think that my son's children are not always welcome to me, though their mother was the last person I should have wished him to marry?"

"Poor dear Mabel! Well, aunt, she will never offend you more."

"I know what you mean, Henrietta! that I was hard and unkind to her. But I was only just and honest. I am terribly shaken by her awful end, though I am sure if we could get at the truth, you would find it was greatly her own fault! Her careless, reckless way of leaving her jewels and valuables about for wandering vagabonds to see! In fact, she was not accustomed to such things, and did not know how to take care of them."

"How can you talk in that way, aunt? Hush! here is Dorothy."

Mrs. Callander drew herself up as Dorothy came in. Her pale face, sad earnest eyes, and slight fragile figure might have touched Mrs. Callander's not very impressionable heart, but for the idea of the preference shown by her son for his sister-in-law, this made her adamant to Dorothy and almost to her favorite niece.

"How do you, Mrs. Callander," said Dorothy, advancing

to her, her eyes full of kindly feeling, for she deeply sympathised with the proud old woman in the mortification her son's avoidance must inflict.

"I am not quite well, I thank you. Indeed I doubt if I shall ever be myself again. Few mothers have been more sorely tried," and she pressed her black-bordered handkerchief to her eyes.

"I am so sorry," Dorothy was beginning, when Henrietta broke in. "My aunt is vexed because the children do not go often enough to see her."

"Oh, Mrs. Callander, they shall go as often as ever you like. I thought they might give you more trouble than pleasure or they should have gone every other day!"

"I see no reason for your concluding that I was indifferent to my son's children," testily. "Indeed the more proper and natural arrangement would be to have given the poor children into my care! You must feel yourself that you are too young."

"Ah! Mrs. Callander, I feel old enough for anything," exclaimed Dorothy, "and my dear lost sister would have chosen me before anyone else to take her place with her little ones, but I know that you have a claim too—only don't try to take them from me! They are all I have left," and her big eyes filled with tears.

"Take her place," repeated Mrs. Callander to herself. "Thank God that horrid, blasphemous, revolting 'deceased wife's sister's bill' will never pass, or heaven only knows what would happen," She only said: "You are very good, I am sure, to admit I have any 'claim' as you call it, whatever."

Dorothy sighed. She could not answer this cruelly disappointing, unjust, exacting woman sharply—she felt too much for her.

"I am sorry the children are out, but they shall go to you to-morrow. Would you like them before or after luncheon?"

"Send them before luncheon and I will bring them back, or Miss Boothby will," returned the dowager, a little softened.

"Now, Henrietta, I must say you have a very indifferent house. The entrance is decidedly mean and the stair is dark."

"Well, Aunt Callander, it costs quite enough, and you

know I had to think of Herbert's pocket as well as my own, still I flatter myself the drawing room is pretty."

"It is full of twopenny-halfpenny decorations I grant; now you ought to have reception rooms adorned with few but massive and valuable ornaments, not frippery like this."

"Well, I don't like that kind of funeral chamber. Dorothy and I have been miserable enough to value brightness even in such humble guise as a sixpenny fan or two."

Mrs. Callander elevated her chin contemptuously.

"I should like to see the children's apartments," she said haughtily.

"Oh, yes, Henrietta, will you take Mrs. Callander to the nursery?" said Dorothy, hesitating whether she should go or stay, and deciding that it would be more agreeable to the dowager if her niece only accompanied her.

She drew near the fire, and leaning her head against the mantelpiece, she thought how terrible it would be if Herbert were ever persuaded to give the children into Mrs. Callander's care. What would become of her? for to live with them in the dowager's house would be impossible. And she could not trust poor Herbert in his present condition. If he took such an amazing unaccountable dislike to Paul Standish, why she herself might be the next object of his aversion. How uncertain her own future seemed! If—if only she could keep with the children, she might settle into resignation and content. As to Mrs. Callander, odious and disagreeable as she made herself, she could not help compassionating her, for it must be a great trial to see a son, a beloved son, turn from you with scarcely veiled coldness—nay, more, with positive repulsion. Surely she was punished for any unkindness she had shown to Mabel.

"They are decidedly poky, stuffy rooms," observed Mrs. Callander, returning, followed by Henrietta. "Now, in my house they might have a whole floor—light, airy, dry, suitable in every way. It is useless, however to say anything. My son—ah, there he is!" Seizing a photograph which stood on Henrietta's table, she sat down and gazed at it for a moment, then she exclaimed in trembling tones: "Ah! it is too—too hard to think of the way he has treated me through all this time of his sorrow—as if I were unworthy to share it!" and threw the photograph from her, with difficulty restraining her tears.

"You ought to consider how changed he is," said Do-

rothy, softly. "I am sure that his late illness and overwhelming grief have changed him a great deal. He is not like himself. See how he has turned against Mr. Standish, who used to be such a favorite with him, and is always—"

"I do not consider that a mark of insanity," interrupted Mrs. Callander; I never thought Mr. Standish a good companion nor a good influence for Herbert. He is a cold, selfish, atheistical worldling, ready to scoff at everyone and everything superior to himself. I always deplored his intimacy and familiarity in Herbert's house, a man of whose principles I am more than doubtful, and——"

"Mrs. Callander," said Dorothy, gravely, "you must not speak against my guardian before me! He is the best and only friend I have, and I cannot listen to anything against him. He has been a father to Mabel and to me. A truer gentleman in every sense does not exist. I never could understand why you disliked him."

"Perhaps it is better at your age that you should not," returned Mrs. Callander, significantly.

Dorothy gazed at her, puzzled and amazed.

"Indeed, aunt, Paul Standish is a capital fellow. I think you are very unjust to him," cried Henrietta.

"I repeat that my opinion is fixed and well-founded, but if neither of you like the expression of it, I need not trespass any longer on you. Your obstinacy and incredulity passes the ordinary folly of young people."

"I should be sorry to fail in the respect due to you, Mrs. Callander," said Dorothy, firmly though her heart beat fast, "but I will never listen to a word against Mr. Standish."

"Your respect or disrespect is of small moment," returned the Dowager, rising. "Your insignificance is—is such that I do not care to answer you." She rose, and turning to her niece, said shortly, "I wish to see the children about eleven to-morrow morning, and without further speech she left the room."

"What a cantankerous old soul she is to be sure," cried Miss Oakley, looking out of the window to see the Dowager's equipage drive off.

"Yes, but how ill and broken she looks," said Dorothy. "Why does she despise me so much?"

"Oh, it is only her cross-grained way of talking, you should not mind her."

"I do not, indeed. My self-esteem is strong enough to

withstand such attacks, but her dislike to Paul is quite inexplicable. What did she mean by saying I had better not understand?"

"Heaven knows! But, Dorothy, you are a loyal plucky little soul. I was delighted with you for standing up to her highness so gallantly in defence of Mr. Standish," and Henrietta put her arm round Dorothy's neck.

"Yes, of course. What else could I do?"

Henrietta did not answer immediately, she began to play with the ends of her black sash, and removed her arm from Dorothy's neck. They were standing on the hearthrug, Dorothy having her back to the light. Henrietta seemed in deep thought, and was looking down, with a slight, peculiar smile playing round her mouth. Something in her expression made Dorothy wonder what she was thinking of.

"Tell me," exclaimed Henrietta so suddenly that Dorothy started; "have you observed any change in Mr. Standish of late?"

"A change? How do you mean?"

"I mean in his manner, his style his looks generally."

"No, Henrietta; I do not think I have. Why?"

"Well I suppose you would be the last to perceive it. I suppose he seems quite old to you; and always looking on him as a sort of father, it would never occur to you that he could fall in love?"

"No, certainly it never did occur to me, but, of course, there is no reason why he should not."

"Exactly. Now who do you think he has fallen in love with?"

"How can I tell? I never see him in society."

"Why, Dorothy, what a little goose you are! I have seen for some time that he is rather smitten with myself! Now do you see?"

"Well no, Henrietta, not exactly. To be sure I have not had such pleasant thoughts in my mind as love and lovers!"

"For some weeks," resumed Henrietta, "I have noticed a great change in his way of speaking and looking, and— Sit down by me here on the sofa, and I will tell you everything. I have the greatest confidence in your good sense, young as you are, Dorothy. It was about a week ago, after Mr. Standish had tried to get an explanation from

Herbert, and he was standing there with his elbow on the mantel-piece, looking glum and solemn (you were out shopping with nurse), so I said, 'What are you thinking of Mr. Standish?' He turned to me with such a look! He hasn't what are called handsome eyes, but they can speak, and said he: 'You must know very well what I am thinking of, Miss Oakley. How utterly miserable this whim of Callander's makes me! I had grown so used to come in here and feel at home, that I seem lost without this delightful asylum,—or words to that effect. Then I began to understand other words and looks of his that had puzzled me a good deal. I only said that we missed him dreadfully, and that he ought not to mind Callander. At this he went on to talk of the influence I had over poor Herbert in a sort of half jealous strain. Wasn't that remarkable?"

"I think it is natural enough," said Dorothy, seeing she paused for a reply.

"You dear little soul! You think too much of me," kissing her. "Well, be that as it may, I have noticed many little things since that quite convince me he is rapidly falling in love with me. It is a way men have. You would be surprised how many people have proposed to me, or, let me see, they would like to propose. Oh! I know how ill-natured people say it is because I have a tolerable fortune, but, candidly speaking, I really do not think it is. I am no beauty, I know that quite well, but I can't help feeling that there is a certain charm about me. Now, as to Paul Standish, I am sure he is perfectly disinterested, and after hesitating over endless suitors, I don't think I could do better than take him. He is quite charming, and old Sir Mark Pounceford told me the other day that he is a very rising man. Now you can't do much or rise high without money, and my fortune will be of the greatest use to him. I should enjoy being an ambassador one of these days; so you see, it would be a very suitable marriage."

"Yes," said Dorothy, rather mechanically, and, remembering Paul's eulogium on her friend in their last confidential walk, she added, "I believe he does love you."

"Then even you see it!" cried Henrietta, joyfully. "I thought I knew the symptoms too well to be deceived. You'll see, Dorothy, what a nice, kind, pleasant guardian

(that's a good word) I will be to you. I dare say it seems very strange that I should take a fancy to Paul Standish, he must seem quite elderly to you; but I really have. You see he is very distingue, and he seems so nice and devoted that I feel quite fluttered when he comes into the room. Of course, I am much nearer his age than you are. I don't mind confessing to you that I am a little past thirty. Imagine! I was more than ten years old when you were born. Yes, indeed! Let me see. Who was my governess, then? Oh, Mademoiselle Delaporte! She was rather nice. Oh, I have had such a string of governesses. I fancy I gave them all a great deal of trouble. One thing we are all alike in, Dorothy. We never knew what it was to have a mother. We were just shunted about from one deputy parent to another—at least, I was."

"Oh! how delightful it must be to have a mother—even to remember a mother," said Dorothy, in a low, dreamy tone, "I felt that whenever I saw sweet, dear Mabel with the babies. The very way she touched them and looked at them was so different from Mrs. McHugh and Peggy, kind and good as they are. Can I ever fill her place to her children?"

"To be sure you can! You are the tenderest-hearted girl I ever met, except, indeed, to poor Mr. Egerton," cried Henrietta, lightly. "Never mind, dear, Paul Standish and I will find you an ideal husband, rich and handsome and debonnaire, and all that Dorothy's spouse ought to be. Now, I have stayed talking much too late. I promised the Blackburns to be with them about four. Good-bye for the present. Mind, all I have said is under the rose—oh! a dozen roses."

Dorothy remained sitting where Henrietta left her for some minutes, with one arm outstretched and resting on the end of the sofa, the hand drooping, the other hand pressed against her cheek. For some moments her thoughts were all in painful confusion. Gradually the full sense of all Henrietta had been saying dawned upon her. Yes, it was all quite true. They were well suited in age, position and circumstances.

Henrietta's fortune would be a great help to Paul, and Paul was evidently fond of her. She had been much struck by the heartiness of his praise the last time they had spoken of her—and Henrietta was good, and

generous, and kind. Oh! yes; but how—how would Paul bear her endless, thoughtless chatter about herself, her doings, her dress, her careless, inconsequent flights from subject?—all this would distract him. Yet Henrietta must know what she was talking about. Oh! how could she talk so when everything was yet uncertain? If they married, how earnestly Dorothy hoped they would be happy. But for herself, what an awful sense of desolation fell upon her. Henceforth, she would be quite alone, a mere secondary object to everyone, even the children might be taken from her, and Paul, her dear, kind guardian, would no longer have the same thought or tenderness to bestow upon her. He would be kind and true always, but the full feast of his confidence, his care, his unstinted sympathy, could be hers no longer. She must accept as thankfully as she could what crumbs might fall from Henrietta's amply furnished table. She rose noiselessly, and, creeping away to her own room, wept long and bitterly, till shame at her own prostration lent her strength to compose herself.

CHAPTER II.

"IN THE DEPTHS."

Since Colonel Callander returned to London, Collins, his soldier servant, contrived, with more or less success, to serve two masters, or rather a master and a mistress.

He generally addressed Miss Oakley at breakfast two or three times a week, with "if you please ma'am, I'm going over 'to do' for the Colonel this morning," or "if you have any message, ma'am, I'll be at the hotel between eleven and twelve." He never pretended to ask leave. The Colonel's service was, in his mind, a supreme duty which swallowed up all others.

Collins would have laid down his life for his master. He thought him the truest of men, the finest of gentlemen. Nor was Collins alone in his opinion. The unhappy man, who at this period of his history was overweighted with a broken heart and diminished brain power, had always been best loved by those who knew him longest, and no one, perhaps, save his faithful attendant, perceived how profound was the change which sorrow and suffering had wrought in his revered master.

He fully shared the dread with which Dorothy contemplated her brother-in-law's intended visit to Fordsea, and,

impelled by a dim anticipation of possible danger, had ventured to ask permission to accompany him. This was immediately refused, so Collins was fain to satisfy himself by packing his master's valise, and re-arranging his belongings, as Miss Oakley had persuaded Callander to establish himself in an hotel much nearer to her abode than Dover street. He resolutely rejected both her own and his mother's offers of hospitality.

Collins therefore betook himself earlier than usual on the morning of the day Callander was to leave town, and had been in time to take a few instructions from his master and hand him his hat and gloves.

"Ah! he'll never be like himself again," thought Collins, when he closed the door after him and began to empty the contents of a wardrobe and a large box on the bed and a table at its foot. "He treats me like a stranger, he sometimes doesn't seem to know who he is speaking to—Ay! those devils took more than a few rings and bracelets, they stole a brave fellow's heart and smashed it up the night they murdered my poor dear lady! I'd like to half hang 'em, cut 'em down, and hang 'em over again, I would!" He was proceeding to "sort" his master's things as he thought thus—and, had the Spanish sailor who had committed the crime suddenly appeared, his shift would have been a short one.

"Come in!" shouted Collins almost angrily, still under the influence of these thoughts, as a tap on the door caught his ear. It opened, and Dillon, the detective, presented himself.

His appearance at that moment was most welcome to Collins, who, laying down the coat he was folding, greeted him warmly.

"The Colonel has just gone out, Mr. Dillon. I wonder you didn't run up against him."

"The porter was not quite sure whether he had gone out or no, so I just stepped up to see. I am sorry I missed him. I'll call again in the evening."

"Then you'll not see him, Mr. Dillon, for he's off by the six train for Fordsea!"

"For Fordsea!" echoed the detective, and he seemed to think very seriously. "Are you going with him?"

"No, worse luck. I think he'd be the better of a careful man beside him! May I make so bold as to ask if you have any news to tell?"

"Well, not much," taking a chair and eyeing the varied collection of clothes, books, impediments of all kinds, spread out before him, keenly, "and that, much or little, I can only tell by-and-bye. It is perfectly amazing how mere whispers ooze out."

"That's true—you'll not mind me going on with my work. I want to finish up and pay up before one o'clock to get back for my young lady's lunch."

"Oh, don't mind me, Mr. Collins. I'm sure it's pleasant to see how fine and orderly you settle them all. What a lot of fine things! Does your boss always carry an arsenal like that about with him? I suppose they are curiosities?"

"Not the pistols, they are in prime working order—some of these are things he has bought abroad, I daresay," pointing to one or two small scimitars, etc., which he was about to put in the bottom of a large trunk.

"You see," continued Collins, "the gentry must be doing something, and when they are travelling, between the journeys and going through the churches, and eating at the table d'hôte, they have nothing to fill up the time with, but going into dusty, fusty shops, and buying everything they can lay their hands on."

"That's true! It's easy to see you have not gone about with your eyes shut. Didn't some of these come from India?"

"Ay, the pistols did, and that 'ere crooked sword, the others he brought back from Germany just now. I never saw them before."

"The Germans mostly put a mark on them," said the detective, taking one up and carrying it to the window, where he examined it for a minute or two and returned it carelessly to Collins. "Yes, it's German make, and very old," he said,

"I suppose you have seen most things," observed Collins, admiringly. "Have you found out many murders, may I make so bold as to ask?"

"Ay, a goodish few! I could write a curious book about them."

"That you could, I'll go bail. It would be fine reading."

"Yes, it might if the subject were treated philosophical? There's a great deal of character in the way people set about a murder! I think I could tell pretty nearly from a

man's face and build how he would set about his murders!"

"Would you now?" said Collins, pausing in the act of wrapping up a pair of boot trees, and listening with awe.

"Yes, there is yourself," looking sharply at him. "It would be a 'draw and defend yourself' sort of business with you. Then you'd fight fierce enough, till one or the other was done for."

"Well, Mr. Dillon, I wouldn't call that murder! Would you?"

"Cut West we'd call it—not murder—certainly, but in England they would be apt to hang you for it! Then there's a class of men who stick you in the back, others make believe their victims kill themselves, that's what you might call the intelligent class of murder, it takes just a pile of planning and thinking out. I have had some very interesting cases of that kind through my hands! Women go in largely for poisoning. Lord! how long and carefully and delicately they'll contrive—ay, for months and months—before they finish their business! You see nature has given some of 'em cunning and invention to make up for want of strength."

"Bless my heart! it makes me feel creepy to hear you talk! Well, the man that struck our poor lady must have been a cowardly villain. How he could hurt her in her sleep!"

"Probably she began to stir, and he thought she would wake and scream, and he would be caught! so he silenced her for ever. Burglars seldom take life if they can help it, but this fellow was a stranger probably, and did not know the ways of the place."

Here the door again opened—this time to admit Mrs. McHugh, who had a parcel in her hands and a displeased look on her face.

"Oh! good morning, Mr. Dillon!" then turning sharply on Collins she went on. "Sure you were in an extra hurry this morning to go off and never remember to come up to me for the master's shirts, there wasn't a button left on them by that limb of a laundress. Now I have had to come the whole way myself. For I was not sure what time he would set out, and as to trusting that girl!—" Only a sudden pause could express the depths of her deficiencies.

"Well, ma'am, it's an ill wind that blows nobody good," said the detective, gallantly. "If you hadn't been obliged

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to come around I should not have had the pleasure of seeing you."

"You're very polite, I am sure!" returned Mrs. McHugh with an audible sniff, "and I am glad to have an opportunity of asking you if you have done anything or if you intend to do anything? I am sure, from all Mr. Standish said of you to Miss Dorothy and me, I thought you'd catch the cunningest thief of a murderer that ever burrowed under the earth or dived under the sea! and here, near six months have passed and you haven't laid your finger on him yet! Considering we know, in a manner of speaking who the cruel scoundrel is—it isn't such a tremendous task to find him."

Mrs. McHugh, from extreme awe of, and faith in, Dillon's untried powers, had passed to the opposite extreme of doubt, deepening into utter distrust and contempt.

"I'm sorry to see you have such a poor opinion of me, ma'am," said Dillon, with mock humility, which enraged his interlocutor, who was too shrewd not to perceive his real indifference to her opinion. "However, I'm not quite done with the business."

"No, I don't suppose you will be till Mr. Egerton finds the wretch in Spain."

"Well, ma'am, you'll admit that Mr. Egerton has a few advantages over me. Yet, somehow, I don't think he'll have any better success. Come, now, what'll you bet that I land the fish first?"

"Betting is not in my line, and I think too highly of a kind, good, generous gentleman like Mr. Egerton, to make a bet about him."

"Ay, just so! he is all that. Remarkably open-handed, and highly moral, a man you'd trust your life to, hey?"

"Yes, I would," said Mrs. McHugh, looking at him sternly, "and I'm sure I don't know what you mean by talking in a sneering way of such a gentleman, a gentleman whose money you know the touch of, I'll go bail!"

To her mortification the detective burst out laughing.

"No, ma'am, not yet! but I dare say I may have the handling of some of it before the year is much older. Now, I am afraid I must tear myself away from pleasant company. Ain't I unlucky, Mr. Collins, to miss the Colonel? However, I can wait a bit to see him. Good morning Mrs. McHugh! I hope I'll recover my place in your opinion be-

fore I die. Good morning Mr. Collins." With a nod and a curious triumphant chuckle, Dillon left the room.

"Well, he is unlucky," said Collins, opening the parcel Mrs. McHugh had brought. "He has been six or seven times if he has been once to see the Colonel, but he is never in."

"Then mark my words, Collins. He don't want to find him."

"I think your wrong, Mrs. McHugh, and you'll excuse my mentioning it, but I would not speak so sharp to him if I was you. He's a wonderful man, that Dillon. He knows what's inside your head a'most before you do yourself. He'd tell you the sort of murder you'd commit by looking in your face. He——"

"He would turn you inside out, I daresay" said Mrs. McHugh, loftily "but I'd like to hear him tell me the sort of murder I'd commit! Set him up! It's pretty plain the sort of company he is used to. I'm surprised at a clever man like Mr. Standish believing in him. He is just hanging on, spending the master's money, eating and drinking of the best, and pretending he's that deep that no one can fathom him. If anyone ever catches that bloodthirsty villain, it will be Mr. Egerton, and Dillon knows it; that's why he is so spiteful against him. To be waiting full six months for justice on the wretch that robbed those precious children of their sweet mother! Don't tell me that a detective that is so long settling a job is worth his salt, I'll never know a peaceful hour till I see that monster hung. Yes, I'd go to see him swing!"

"Well, I don't blame you, Mrs. McHugh. Still, I think Dillon knows a good bit. It's my belief he's playing a deep game, and he'll surprise you some day, no—no—he is wide awake. Look at his eyes——"

"I'd rather not. They are like ferret's. Well, there are the shirts, a dozen, and not a button wanting to one of them. Ah, Collins! It makes my heart ache to look at the poor dear master! He is that loving to the children one minute, and can't bear the sight of them the next! It was too happy we were. To see the poor mistress and Miss Dorothy, just like angels, and the Colonel and Mr. Standish like brothers; sure, the cruel, envious, evil spirits must have got the upper hand for an unlucky hour, to blight it

all with their devilish spite. I must get back for the children's dinner. I suppose you won't be long."

"Well, it will be a good half-hour, but I'll come as soon as I can."

* * * * *

Standish naturally took advantage of Colonel Callander's absence to renew his visits to Prince's Place. He was far too sensible to take offence at the whims of a man so evidently out of mental harmony, and he was anxious to see as much as he could of his interesting ward whose mood puzzled and distressed him. In all her grief and depression, she had always spoken to him with the utmost confidence, with a degree of unreserve which showed how glad she was to open her heart to him. But for the last week she had grown silent, reserved, hesitating—she seemed to think before speaking to him.

This change worried him more that he confessed even to himself. It set him thinking of the time, before their great sorrow, when she had peremptorily refused Egerton, and revived the question which had then frequently presented itself: "Has Dorothy any girlish fancy for anyone, who perhaps does not return it, or who has amused himself and passed by?" He had in some occult way always felt Dorothy to be more companionable, more mature than her elder sister. He often found unexpected depths in her quickly developing mind, and felt sure that, though proud and maidenly enough, she was sufficiently individual to form a decided liking apart from that waiting "to be chosen" which is the conventional type of womanly feeling, but she was sufficiently strong also to hide it, though not to trample it down without suffering, and he loved his lonely little ward too well to contemplate such a possibility without keen distress.

Yet he knew her simple life so well, that he wondered he could not fix upon the man who had attracted her. Could it have been that pleasant young sailor who was of their party to Rookstone? She saw so very little of him, she could hardly have much feeling about him. Should he ask her? Standish knew human nature well enough to be aware that confidence is rarely given in reply to a point blank question. No, he must try and win it. "If there are any difficulties between her and the man she may possibly love, I will do what I can to smooth them. I trust

in God she hasn't given her heart to a scamp! It is quite possible. Love is an awfully dangerous game for so young a creature. Why Dorothy will not be twenty till the end of July, and it seems but yesterday that she came with pride to show me her first long frock. If I had made a boyish marriage, which, thank God, I did not, she might have been my daughter.

So pondering, Standish reached Prince's Place, and was shown upstairs to the drawing room, where he found Miss Oakley.

Still further upstairs Dorothy was amusing her little nephew and niece, as the chill February afternoon was too showery and east-windy to allow of their going out. Mrs. McHugh sat at her needle-work, while "auntie" built up card houses for "Boy" to knock down.

"Isn't he silly?" cried Dolly, as the riotous little fellow held his chubby hands ready to level the structure before the second storey was finished. "Be quiet, you naughty boy; let us see if auntie can make it much—much higher."

"Naughty! Dolly naughty!" he exclaimed, rising on the footboard of his chair to slap his sister with right good will.

"For shame, Master Herbert! to strike your sister. That's not like a gentleman."

"Let me build one quite high house, darling, and you shall knock down the rest," and the process went on for a few minutes.

And is there no news at all of Mr. Egerton?" asked Nurse, breaking a tolerably long silence, while she threaded her needle.

"Mr. Standish had one letter from him, soon after he had reached Valencia, before he had time to do anything, but he has not written since, though he promised to do so!"

"Well, to my mind, he is the likeliest man to do any good. Why that wonderful detective has just been making fools of us!"

"Mr. Egerton promised to write again soon, when he had anything to tell. Mr. Standish may have a letter any day."

"Perhaps he has, to-day. I fancy he has come, too, for I heard the door-bell a few moments ago."

"Miss Oakley is in the drawing room," said Dorothy, without stirring.

"I wish the Colonel was back, Miss Dorothy. He'll be wandering about over the old places and to that lonely little churchyard, breaking his heart, if that can be done twice over. That's where he used to go every time he went out, before he went away with Mr. Egerton. Many a time I've heard the front door open softly, and got up to watch him steal out in the grey of the morning."

"How do you know he went there, Nurse?"

"Because he always took the Rookstone road, and you'll remember a bit of a boy that used to bring us new-laid eggs sometimes? Well, he told me how he had been herding sheep on the hillside behind the little chapel, and saw the poor gentleman in the early morning once gathering the heather there and laying himself down on the ground in his grief."

"Ah, what he must have suffered, and how wonderfully he controls himself in our sight!"

"True for you, Miss Dorothy."

"You never mentioned this before, Nurse."

"No; why should I? Hadn't you enough to distract you? But I wish that decent, sensible man, Collins, had gone with him. He'll be terrible lonesome. Come now, my dears, I must clear that table, and get tea. Let Miss Dorothy go; she is wanted downstairs."

"And when you have finished tea, you shall come down too," said Dorothy, escaping with some difficulty.

Descending slowly, Dorothy found the drawing room door ajar, and, entering softly, saw Henrietta and Standish in the recess formed by a bay window; their backs were to her. He held Henrietta's hand, and, as Dorothy passed, uncertain as to her next movement, Standish exclaimed, warmly, "My dear Henrietta, how can I ever thank you enough?" and kissed the hand he held.

Dorothy slipped away as noiselessly as she had entered, and went down to a small study, where she selected a book; then, feeling strangely tremulous, she sat down and tried to clear her thoughts from the painful haze which seemed to dim them. Soon, very soon it seemed to her, Collins came in and said, "Miss Oakley desired me to say that tea is ready, miss."

"Very well; I will come."

The cosy tea-table was set close by the fire; Henrietta held the teapot, and Standish stood on the rug.

"Where have you been, Dorothy?" cried the tea-maker, "I have sent up and down to find you. Mr. Standish has a letter from Mr. Egerton, he wanted to show you."

"There is very little in it," said Standish. He had shaken hands with his ward, looking kindly and anxiously into her face, and then drawn over a chair for her.

"I never expected much from him," returned Dorothy.

"He certainly is not sparing himself," returned Standish. "Here is his letter." Dorothy took it and laid it on the table.

Standish watched her with some curiosity, and Henrietta, who seemed in high spirits, launched into a description of her Aunt Callander's unreasonableness about his children, about the trouble they gave when they did go to see her, and the terribly bad system on which they were brought up.

Then, looking at her watch, she exclaimed, "Oh! I must go out. I promised my aunt to see her to-day. She has a bad cold. Indeed, I do not think she is at all well. I am quite sorry about her, poor old thing! You can tell Dorothy what we have been talking about, Mr. Standish. Ring the bell, please, and tell Collins to get me a cab. Good-bye," she added to Standish, "I suppose you will be gone by the time I come back."

As soon as they were alone, Standish, after looking very earnestly at Dorothy, sat down on the sofa behind her.

"Don't you care to read the letter?" he asked.

"I should prefer hearing its contents from you." Her voice sounded dull and despondent.

"Well then," taking it up, "Egerton, after much searching, has found an old muleteer whose nephew Pedro is a sailor, and was, the old man thinks, on board a vessel that traded between Cadiz and the Levant, and sometimes went further. The muleteer does not know where he is now, but he appeared last December at Alicant, and seemed very flush of cash. Since then he has gone to sea again, and his return is problematical."

"Yes, I suppose it is—very," returned Dorothy, quietly.

"My dear Dorothy, something is working in your mind which you hide from me. It is tormenting and distressing you. Don't you think you had better open your heart to me?"

As he spoke, Collins came in to clear away the tea-things, and until he was gone neither of them spoke.

Then Standish repeated: "Don't you think so, Dorothy?"

"No, Paul. It would be of no use. In fact I have ceased to look back; all I care for now is to win poor Herbert back to something like his old self."

"Well, Dorothy, I cannot force you to speak if you do not choose to do so. But what have I done that you shut up your heart from me? You have shrunk from all our old confidential communications. Have I slipped out of my former place in your esteem? Eh, Dorothy?"

Her heart swelled with an intense longing to throw her arms around his neck, as she used when in former years she flew to him with any childish complaint against her teachers; but, with a remarkable effort of self-control, she smiled sweetly, in his face, and said, a little unsteadily—

"Dear Paul! as if I could ever change to you, my best friend! I shall have heaps of confidences to pour into your sympathetic ear from time to time, if you have patience to hear them?"

She held out her hand in her old frank way. Standish held it for a moment between his own, looking very grave.

"I am always ready to listen to you, dear Dorothy, and wish you would trust me for your own sake,"

"What is it Henrietta told you to tell me?"

"We have been arranging a scheme for Callander and all of you. We propose that when the time for which you took this house is up—that is in about a fortnight, I think—you should set up your headquarters in Brussels. There are picture, and churches, and the field of Waterloo for Callander to meditate upon, and you are en route for everywhere. Henrietta, I mean Miss Oakley, thinks that if you persuade Callander that you cannot travel without him, he will consent to live with you, and then the children and yourselves being constantly with him, will draw him gradually out of himself. He has sent in his papers and given up the army, I am sorry to say, though I quite expected it."

Yes! Oh, he could hardly go back to the regiment, I think the idea of getting him away to a totally different life is very good. If he will only agree to that plan! I do wish he was all right with you! It will be trying to Henrietta if you cannot go and come as you used.

"To Henrietta! Yes, and to me, too; and, pray, don't you care to see me any more?"

The question was put playfully, but, strive as she would, Dorothy could not respond in the same tone.

"Not wish to see you?" she repeated, with quivering lips, while her eyes filled with sudden tears; "What should I do without you?"

"My dear little Dorothy," exclaimed Standish, sitting down by her on the sofa; and, putting his arm around her, he tried to draw her close to him.

But Dorothy struggled to free herself with an impetuosity which amazed him, and he immediately let her go.

"I beg you a thousand pardons for forgetting you are a grand, grown-up young lady," he said with a novel sense of awkwardness. "You see, I used to be so accustomed to kiss away your tears, that I was on the point of repeating the panacea. If you but knew how it pains me to see your pale sad face, you would not be vexed with the lapse of my good manners."

"Vexed! oh, no; not vexed!" murmured Dorothy, confusedly. Then, in a tone of relief: "Here are the children!"

Dolly and "Boy" were warmly welcomed.

Standish gave the latter endless rides on his foot, and let Dolly clamber about him, take out his watch, rearrange his chain, and generally do what she liked.

In the intervals of these amusements, he contrived to ask Dorothy what she had been reading, to recommend her some books, and offer to send them to her; to ask her if she had summoned courage to touch the piano once more, and to beg her to make the effort to resume her old way of life. But there was an indefinable change in his tone. He seemed suddenly to have gone a long way off.

At last he was obliged to leave. He had barely left himself time to dress for dinner.

"Then you like and approve of our Brussels scheme?" he said.

"Yes, I think it is the best thing to be done."

"Then you can discuss it with Henrietta this evening and I shall see you to-morrow, when I hope there will be some tidings of Callander. Good evening, my dear ward."

A noisy farewell from the children, and he was gone.

"Why did he kiss Henrietta's hand? and what was it he thanked her for so enthuſiſtically?"

She went to sleep with this unanswered question preying on her heart.

CHAPTER III.

"THE LETTER."

They—that is, Mrs. Callander, Henrietta, and Dorothy—waited in vain for a letter from the Colonel.

A week had passed, and he made no sign. Dorothy was very uneasy, much more so than Henrietta or his mother, neither of whom shared her profound foreboding of evil. To them, his abstraction, his indifference to all that formerly interested him, the distressed expression of his eyes, sometimes so dull, sometimes so wild and restless, were only marks of natural but unusually deep grief. To Dorothy they were indications of mental anguish too strong for the control of reason.

She had written more than one letter to the hotel at Fordsea, where she believed Callander had put up, but he took no notice of them.

It was, therefore, with a sense of infinite relief she heard Collins tap at the door, as she was changing her warm outdoor dress for one of lighter material. and say, in a brisk, cheerful tone—

"If you please, Miss, the Colonel has come. He is in the drawing room, and I am going to bring Miss Dolly and Master Bertie."

"Yes, do, Collins. I will come directly. Oh, thank God!" she ejaculated to herself, and hastened to finish dressing.

Callander was sitting by the fire in a large arm chair, his hand on Dolly's head. Both children were standing by him most demurely, gazing with wondering awed eyes at their now half-forgotten father. All seemed silent.

"Dear Herbert, I am so delighted to see you!" cried Dorothy, running to greet and embrace him. He smiled absently, and stretched out his hand to her. "Why did you not write? I felt so anxious about you."

"I was quite well. I had nothing to write about. Where is Henrietta?"

She has gone to spend the afternoon and dine with some friends who are passing through on their way to Algeria. But you will dine with me, will you not?"

"Yes. I came here for my dinner."

"Don't you find the children looking well? Boy has quite recovered his looks and strength."

Callender looked earnestly at little Dolly, and suddenly lifting her, hugged her close to his breast and smothered her with kisses, till the child, half-frightened, struggled to get down.

"Me too—me too!" cried the boy, eager, as usual, to be noticed. Callender took him up more soberly, and kissed him.

"How old is the little fellow?" he asked, in a dreamy voice.

"Nearly two years. Is he not a big boy?" Callender did not reply. He let the child tug at his chain.

But Dolly, with some vague instinct of pity, nestled close to her father, and taking his hand, which hung listlessly down, put it round her neck.

"My little darling!" he said, softly, in a tone more like his old natural voice than Dorothy had heard for some time. The next moment he said to her, almost in a whisper—

Send them away, Dorothy—do send them away!"

The children were not particularly reluctant to retire when Mrs. McHugh appeared, and said good-night demurely.

The tete-a-tete which ensued was very trying. Callender sat quite still, answering the observations she forced herself to make from time to time with monosyllables, or the briefest possible sentences. She thought dinner would never be announced. When, at length, they were at table she was surprised at her brother-in-law's voracious appetite. Collins waited on him with evident delight, no doubt thinking that nothing can be far wrong when a man can take his meals heartily. It increased Dorothy's uneasiness to observe how utterly oblivious Callender was of all the little attentions he used to pay his convives with such kindly politeness. He was absorbed in what he was eating, and drank eagerly the claret-and-water supplied him by his watchful attendant.

How Dorothy longed for Standish. She was growing nervous—foolishly nervous.

When they returned to the drawing room Callender again took the large easy chair. Dorothy began some needlework and sat opposite him, in token of her readiness to converse,

if he was so inclined. He kept silent so long that Dorothy thought he was asleep.

Suddenly he sat upright and exclaimed, "You are not like her, and yet you are. You haven't her beauty!"

"I know that well, Herbert," she returned, hoping he would relieve his mind by talking of the dear dead.

"Still, she looks out of your eyes at me sometimes, Dorothy, and then I don't know whether I hate or love you. You used to be like a daughter to me, and you are a good kind girl. You must always take care of those poor children."

"Yes, I will, to the best of my ability," said Dorothy, with difficulty keeping back her tears.

"You must never let my mother get hold of them, mind that."

"I hope you will stay with them and order what is to be done for them. As to Mrs. Callander, why are you so unkind to her? She is very unhappy."

"Because I cannot forget how unkind she was to my lost darling," he returned, sternly. "And you should not forget it either. I can never forgive her. And she wants to make out that I am weak—weak in brain! She sent that fellow Dillon, to dog my steps down at Fordsea."

"Indeed, I am sure she did not. He often goes down to Eastport in his endless search for traces of—of——" she hesitated.

"Of the murderer," added Callander, with composure. "Ah, he may search, but I—I alone must punish, I tell you. I may wait, but I will have my revenge—by my own hand."

Dorothy felt uneasy, but she wisely avoided contradicting him, and so kept silence. Callander, now fully roused, stood up and began to pace the room.

"What has Egerton being doing? Has he written?"

"Yes—he thinks he has found some traces."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Callander—rather a terrible laugh. "He will never find the murderer away there!—never!" and he paused opposite her.

"At all events he said in his letter to Paul Standish —"

"Standish!" repeated Callander, with a deadly, bitter tone, that made the word sound like a curse. "Why do you speak his name to me? I wonder you dare!" And he re-

umed his restless walk. This seemed to Dorothy an opportunity for asking an explanation of his mysterious dislike to her guardian.

"I do not know why I should not name him, Herbert. Tell me why you dislike him. It might relieve your mind."

"Tell you?" he repeated, "tell you? I have sometimes wished to tell you, that you might know what a subtle devil——" He broke off, and muttered something to himself. "There," he resumed, "you loved her well. You would shield her memory well."

"I would do anything for her sake—anything to comfort you!" cried poor Dorothy, unable to restrain her tears.

Callander paced the room in silence for another minute, then he suddenly sat down by her on the sofa, which was her usual seat, and, taking both her hands, which he held tightly, he said, low and quick: "I will tell you all—all! I found it out before—just before—we lost her. It was my mother who pointed it out! But before that, before I left India—there was a change, a faint change, in her letters. You would not have seen it—no one would have seen it but a lover such as I was! I felt and knew that something had come between us." Dorothy sat listening, motionless, with curdling blood. Had he indeed discovered the truth?

"My mother wrote that Standish almost lived with her and you, but I would not notice her insinuations. Then I came home, and I knew there was a change. Still, she had some love for me, but he was always at her ear! He would not let her come away with me alone! That would have made all right. So I determined to have his life; but she—she——" His voice failed him, and he paused, panting, big drops standing on his brow.

"Paul Standish!" cried Dorothy, wrenching her hands from him, all her force and courage returning, "Paul Standish is as innocent as I am. What—who put this horrible idea into your head? You did not believe your mother, who told you this horrible lie?"

"It is no lie!" he said, with a moan like that of a creature in pain. "I saw it in her own writing."

"She never wrote anything to Paul Standish which the whole world might not see. Who has imposed upon you?"

"Ah! you do not know. Neither she nor he would speak of such evil things to you. But, Dorothy, I will have patience, subtlety as profound as his, and patience. I

will punish him yet, cruelly, unrelentingly. God! I feel my hand on his throat now!" and he clenched both of his own, looking awfully wild, the fine, strong face she knew so well distorted by passion to a demon-like expression.

Dorothy felt as if Paul's doom was fixed, that nothing could save him. She—she only could undeceive the wretched man before her.

"You are wrong, Herbert!" she said, bravely and steadily. "I can prove that you are wrong; I can prove that Mabel always loved you, that you do Paul Standish the greatest injustice. Will you wait here for a few minutes, and will you read what I bring you?"

Callander, checked and astonished by her words and impressive manner, stopped, silent and still. "What do you mean?" he stammered.

"You shall see," she cried, and flew away upstairs to where, in the secret drawer of her old dressing-case, enclosed in a blank envelope, lay the letter she had never been able to deliver into Egerton's hands. All fear, all hesitation was gone. What matter any danger to herself from the fury of the excited man she had left behind? What matter the desperate retribution she might bring down on the real offender? Everything was secondary to the proving that Mabel was really true to her husband, that Standish was innocent of the hideous treachery attributed to him—all consequences were swallowed up in this overpowering motive.

Almost breathless she returned to the drawing-room. Callander was standing exactly where she had left him.

He stretched out his hand eagerly.

"One moment, Herbert. There are one or two things to tell first." Rapidly, yet with a prudence which was almost inspiration, she told of the curious mesmeric power which Egerton had gained over her sister, of her dread that Callander might be suspicious, of Mabel's confession of her unhappiness and fear of Egerton's violence should she show affection to her husband. "Then she determined to end this wretched, contemptible state of things, and wrote this, which I was to give to him, but I never had a chance, for she died dreadfully a few days after." She took the note from its outer cover and gave it to Callander. He took it, and looked curiously at the address with dilated, horror-struck eyes. His hands trembled while he tore it open. She watched him eagerly as he read the contents, every word of which was engraven on her memory—all fear, all

ersonal feeling lost in the intense desire to clear the two people she loved best from the terrible accusation in which Callander believed.

"I cannot bear my life," so ran the letter, "if you continue to exercise the extraordinary power I have let you gain over me. I told you this before in the last lines I wrote. Now I will break my fetters, and dare to act as my heart and conscience dictate. My husband loves me; in spite of all you say I believe he loves me, and I really love him. I only fear you, Randal, and I cannot understand how you gained the power over me which you have. I am determined to resist it. If you ever cared for me, if you have any principle, any sense of honor, leave me to regain peace and happiness. You can never persuade me leave my dear, good husband. I shudder to think I ever listened to you for a moment. Show that you have some real regard for me by going far away, and earn the gratitude of

"M. C."

Callander's chest heaved. He drew his breath in gasps. When he came to the end he looked up with wild, angry eyes, and, crushing the paper in his hand, said, in fierce, quick tones—

"Egerton was your lover—he wanted to marry you!"

"He pretended it."

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed Callander, in a tone of anguish that thrilled Dorothy's heart, and he dropped into a chair as if shot, sitting upright, motionless, like a creature turned to stone.

Dorothy was terrified at the effect of her confession. What should she do?

"Oh, Herbert! speak to me."

He stared at her as if not understanding what she said, and covered his face with his hands, leaning forward until his brow almost touched his knees. Then he stood up, began smoothing out the letter, and kissed it. "She loved me," he said, brokenly—"she loved me still. I cannot speak to you, my poor child. I must go. I dare not speak. To-morrow—to-morrow!" He staggered towards the door.

"Oh, Herbert! Let me call Collins to go with you, you are not fit to be alone, dear Herbert." He made a motion of refusal with his hand.

"At least you see that Paul Standish is not to blame."

"I have wronged him, but I will write. Let me go, for God's sake let me go." He rushed from the room.

Dorothy rang violently, and then ran downstairs.

"Oh, Collins, get your hat and follow him, there is something dreadful in his face," and Collins flew to obey her.

"Have I done right or wrong," asked Dorothy of herself, while she wrung her hands in despair. "What shall I do? Where can I turn? Oh, I must tell Paul everything. What will Herbert say or do when he has time to think, and connects this letter with the awful result? I did so hope to keep all a secret for my poor darling's sake. Will he attack Randal Egerton legally, and blazon out the whole dreadful story. I must see Paul, and he will be out now. It is nearly nine o'clock. He will be away, goodness knows where. Still, Henrietta is safe away, it will be eleven or more before she returns. Perhaps Paul may be at his rooms. I will go to him. I don't want to tell Henrietta more than I can help, but I must tell someone. Nurse will not say a word if I ask her," and she mounted rapidly to the peaceful nursery, where Mrs. McHugh, spectacles on nose, was reading a newspaper with a stern aspect, as if sitting in judgment on the world. "Dear Nurse, the Colonel has just rushed out of the house in such a state of excitement that I am frightened to death."

"What's put him out?" asked Mrs. McHugh, rising.

"We were talking of—of the past, and he spoke of Mabel, almost for the first time since we lost her, and got into a state of despair! I have sent Collins to try and find him. Now I want to see Mr. Standish. Oh! nurse, I must see him at once, I am going to him. Will you get a cab for me? I must go."

"Stay a bit, Miss Dorothy, it's just a chance if he be at home. You stay here, I'll go," beginning to take off her cap as she spoke. "I'll bring him back if he is to be found. You write a line for me to leave."

"But nurse, I don't want Miss Oakley to know."

"All right Miss Dorothy, more reason I should go. No one will tell on me, but Brown" (the lady's maid) "would be sure to say you had gone out by yourself—go write, my dear young lady."

"I will, and I will watch the children. You need not send Peggy up."

A short appeal to Standish to come to her early next day, at eight if he liked, was quickly penned, and then there was nothing for it but to wait,

"Nothing but to wait." What a terrible task, to be still and helpless while others were casting the shuttle of your life through the threads of inexorable circumstance. To count the leaden moments and wear out thought, striving to forecast the turn of the tide in your affairs—to divine the "trifles light as air," which may influence the decision of some all potent friend or patron for or against the aim of your existence, the desire of your heart—to wait while another pleads your cause, while the "yes" or "no" which will make or mar you depends on no effort of your own. This is perhaps the most severe test to which human courage and endurance can be put. The pluck of ordinary men can carry them gallantly through the excitement of a dashing charge—when motion gives fire to the blood and action disguises the individual's danger—but to those who can stand still and firm to bear the shock of the onset they see coming against them, these are the true heroes.

True, Dorothy was quite certain that Standish would come to her as soon as he possibly could, but what would he say to the tale she had to tell? Had she done right in giving that letter to Caillander? Yes. The more she reflected, the more satisfied she became that it was right to deceive him.

How slowly the minutes went by! She sat watching the hands of the clock on the mantel-piece. Did time ever drive so slowly. She took up the newspaper Mrs. McHugh had thrown down, it was a weekly paper, brim-full of horrors, murders, maimings of wives by their husbands, vitriol-throwing by wives over husbands and rivals, fights, suicides—this last was a terribly suggestive item. When? When would Collins come back? She laid down the paper and glanced again at the clock. Even that very temporary occupation had helped her over many minutes.

At last steps approached, the door opened and Mrs. McHugh appeared, a little breathless.

"Well, I've been pretty quick, haven't I? But I am vexed he was out. He had gone down with Lord R—to some place down the Great Northern line, and won't be home till to-morrow evening."

Dorothy uttered a faint cry, and sank into a chair.

"Don't take on so, my dear! I just got his address and sent on your note."

"Thank you, nurse! but he will not get it till mid-day in the country. I must telegraph the first thing in the morning, that is all I can do."

"I suppose so! Write the telegram then, Miss Dorothy. I'll see it goes as soon as the office is open. Hasn't Collins come back?"

Dorothy shook her head.

"Dear, dear, that's bad."

"Yes, very bad, I fear."

"I'll go down and watch for him, and send Peggy up. It's time she went to bed."

"I think I'll go and wait for him in the drawing room," said Dorothy, faintly. "I do hope he will come in before Henrietta."

This seemed a little strange to Nurse, but she made no remark upon it.

Dorothy went to get a telegraph form, and wrote an entreaty to Standish to return at once.

"Don't go to bed till I come and tell you what news Collins brings," she said to Mrs. McHugh.

"You may be sure I will not."

Then she went away to "wait" again.

This time she was not long left alone—a little before eleven Miss Oakley returned.

"Why, where in the world is Collins?" were her first words, "and—good Heavens, Dorothy, what is the matter with you? you look ghastly!"

Dorothy gave the same explanation she had offered to nurse.

"What a dreadful business! My dear child, he is as likely to throw himself into the river as to go to his hotel! What in the world did you say to him to drive him into such a state?"

"Oh! it was talking and thinking of the past that upset him. Henrietta, you terrify me."

"I am afraid you were not very prudent, but don't tremble so, I did not mean to frighten you. You had better go to bed, you poor little soul."

"Ah, no, Henrietta, not till I see Collins."

"I will go and put on my dressing-gown—I wonder when that man will come back!"

Dorothy sat with her head on her hand, her lips moving in silent prayer, she had stirred and risen up to seek Henrietta, unable to endure the solitude, when to her relief Collins presented himself.

A glance at his face showed her that he had no evil tidings.

"s've had a rare hunt, Miss Dorothy," were his first words. "When I got out of the door——"

"Oh, good gracious, Collins! is he safe?" cried Miss Oakley, coming in as he spoke.

"Yes'm, he's all right. I was a sayin', as I got out of the door I felt I was too late. I could'n't see a sign of him. Maybe he's gone to Kensington Gardens, thinks I, so I went there as fast as my legs could carry me, but as I saw nothing on the way a bit like him, I thought there'd be no end of looking for him under those dark trees, so I returned the other way towards town and got to the hotel! No sign of him! So I went back and up and down, and to and fro, all to no good. At last I went to the hotel once more, and there he was all right, just come in, and the waiter was going to take him a brandy and soda—so I made bold to go up, and asked if he had any commands for me to-morrow. He was lying back, dead beat like, in his chair, and as the man picked up his boots to take them away, I saw there was some mold and grass sticking to the soles. He didn't take much notice of me, but presently he rose up and bid me give him his dressing-gown, and as I helped him off with his coat I saw that the back and one side was all marked with grass and mould, as if he had lain on ground yet he didn't look as if he had had a fit."

"A fit! What a notion, Collins!" cried Miss Oakley. "Did he say he would go to bed?"

"He didn't say nothing, ma'am, except, when I asked, he said I might come round in the morning, and I'm going early—and if you please, I met Mr Dillon coming out, and he has been down to Fordsea. He heard something as took him there, and he saw the Colonel once or twice. He says, Miss, as the Colonel would kill himself if he were let go on the way he did. He used to go out bathing in this sharp, cold weather—out in a boat, so far as I can make out, with the old boatman as used to row Mrs. McHugh

and the children last summer—sometimes he went with him, and sometimes without; but he was always saying it was hot, and how it set him up to have a dip."

"How extraordinary," cried Dorothy.

"How dreadfully imprudent," said Henrietta.

"Any ways, Mr. Dillon had been talking with the old boatman—and he said as how the Colonel was as nice and liberal a gentleman as ever, but that quiet and silent—may be, the salt water didn't do him no good. Mr. Dillon wanted to know when Mr. Standish would be back. He'd been to his rooms, and he was out of town."

"That is very provoking," said Henrietta. "How I wish the Colonel would make up with him." Dorothy frowned at her slightly as a warning to be prudent, and said: "You must be tired, Collins—you had better have some supper, and go to bed."

"Thank you, Miss! I will—and if you don't mind my waiting at breakfast, I'll go around early to the Colonel."

"Oh, yes, pray do," exclaimed Miss Oakley.

"Thank God, he seems all right," she continued when they were alone. "Brandy and soda sounds like sanity."

"Will he ever be himself again?" asked Dorothy with a deep sigh.

"Yes, I think he will," returned Henrietta thoughtfully. "Men always recover. Now that we know he is safe, let us go to bed, I am most dreadfully tired. How I wish Paul Standish was not away!"

"So do I. In fact he must come back, I shall telegraph for him the first thing to-morrow morning," said Dorothy decidedly.

"I am sure you are right! I shall be glad to see him."

"But Henrietta!" began Dorothy, hesitatingly, and nerving herself to secure a tete-a-tete with Standish, which she felt to be indispensable, "I hope you will not think me unfriendly or unkind, but I must see Paul alone."

"Good gracious! Why?"

"Because I must tell him some things—Oh, some things that Herbert said to me about Paul in confidence, which I hope will make them friends again!"

"And do you suppose they would both tell me as soon as they would you?"

"Oh, very likely—only for the present I want to say my

say to Paul Standish alone. You know I have been accustomed to tell him everything from a child."

"Oh, very well—but of course he will pass it all on to me. I suppose he cannot be here much before two! I'll go over and lunch with my aunt, who does not seem to get over her cold; and no doubt when I return you will tell me everything."

"Perhaps so," said Dorothy, anxious to escape from the subject; but above all, desirous to secure a private interview with Standish.

Still quivering with the strain and terror of the last three hours, the question which last occupied her thoughts, above even her deep anxiety about her unhappy brother-in-law, was: "Can Paul Standish really confide every thought of his heart to Henrietta? Kind and true as she is there is a crude realism about her that makes her take such matter-of-fact views about everything!"

Fatigued by emotion, she at last dropped asleep, with this query unanswered.

CHAPTER IV.

"THE PLOT THICKENS."

What a long morning it was!

Henrietta kept her promise, and went away to Mrs. Callander, having waited for a report of the Colonel from Collins. He seemed as usual, but said he had a cold, and would not leave the house. He had made Collins put out his writing materials, and said he had much to do.

"I think I shall go and see him," were Henrietta's last words. "I will talk to my aunt about it."

Dorothy went through the form of luncheon, but could hardly swallow; and then retreated into the study—the room she considered the most safe from intrusion. It was nearly three o'clock, surely he might have come by this time? She had just turned from putting some fresh coal on the fire when the door was hastily opened, and Standish came in unannounced.

She flew to him with outstretched hands.

"Oh! thank God you are come."

"Dear Dorothy! what is the trouble?" He drew her to him, and pressed her hands against his heart.

"I have a long, long story to tell! I almost dread to hear your judgement, Paul; I acted on impulse, but——"

"For God's sake, what is it? Have you promised to marry some one, and want my consent?"

"Marry? I marry? No!"

"Then let us sit down and talk."

"Don't you want something to eat, Paul?"

"No! I ate something at a detestable junction, where I was compelled to waste half an hour! Now, my own little Dorothy, you are my own ward, you know. Tell me everything—keep back nothing!"

He wheeled round an arm chair for her and took his stand on the hearth-rug.

"First of all, I have found out the reason of Herbert's dislike to you, and removed it."

All her nervous terrors seemed to evaporate in his reassuring presence. The light of his kind grave eyes seemed to calm her.

"Ha! this is something! Go on!"

Then Dorothy began at the beginning, and described the conversation she had overheard between her sister and Egerton, her remonstrance with Mabel, the letter the latter had written, and left with Dorothy to deliver, how she had never found an opportunity to do so, how Mabel's cruel death seemed to have closed the account; that some instinct had kept her from destroying the letter, some vague idea of punishing Egerton had held her hand.

Then she described Callander's outburst the evening before, his extraordinary belief in Paul's treachery.

"I could not bear that," continued Dorothy. "If he had killed me I should have told him the truth; so I flew to get the letter I had kept, and gave it to him. He read it through—oh, Paul! how his poor hands trembled—and then he kissed it. The idea that she loved him through all seemed to please him. How he has suffered! Surely death is scarce a grief, compared to the agony of losing the love of any one you love?" In the restlessness of strong emotion, Dorothy rose to her feet, she was trembling, and could hardly steady her voice.

Standish put his arm round her and pressed her to his breast.

"This has been a cruel experience for you, Dorothy, too sore a trial for your young strength! But I scarcely know what to say to your desperate expedient of showing Callander that letter. In his frame of mind it is almost death to Egerton. Think of all that entails."

"I do think. I have thought, Paul," she said, raising her eyes to his with a resolute look. "I do not regret what I have done. I have saved you. He would have killed you, then I should have lost both you and Herbert. I could never see him again if he had hurt you. What is Egerton's life to me? He deserves to die. But you, my best——" A blinding gush of tears choked her utterance, and she hid her face against his shoulder.

Standish pressed her closely to him, and murmured some half articulate words of comfort. She felt his heart beating strongly against her own, and was conscious that she could stay in those dear arms for ever, half because of the weary child's desire to be comforted; half from the passionate woman's love for the man who had been everything to her from childhood.

"Do you blame me, Paul?" she murmured, at length regaining her voice.

"Blame you!"—he paused, looking down on the small brown head leaning against him, and stroking back the wavy hair from her brow—"how could I blame you, dear? After all, it was only just to our poor Mabel to let her husband see the truth of her heart."

Dorothy made a slight effort to release herself, but Paul's close, gentle hold did not relax. "What an infernal villain Egerton has been!" he continued. "I should like to shoot him myself! and yet we must not attack him! I must do my best to keep Callander quiet; the scandal of such a fracas would be too hideous to incur; even you can see the cruel construction the world would put on it."

"I do, Paul," she returned, extricating herself from him, and leaning against the back of her chair. "For poor Mabel's sake we must let her murderer go free."

"Her murderer?" he repeated. "What do you mean?"

"Do you not see that he was her murderer, either with his own hand or that of his emissary, the Spaniard?"

"My God, Dorothy! How do you come to suspect him of being such a monster?" exclaimed Standish, gazing at her amazed.

"Did I not tell you I heard him threaten to crush out her life if she preferred her husband to him, only a few days before her murder? and she never saw him alone after."

"But you forget, he had not seen the letter avowing her intention of breaking with him."

"She had written before to the same effect, and he had taken no notice."

"Still, I never for a moment can believe that he, an English gentleman, would do so foul a deed!"

"I believe it. Look at his conduct, his extraordinary grief, his avoidance of us all."

"Conscience, remorse for the guilt he had incurred, might account."

"No, Paul. He is guilty. I had a stormy interview with him just before he went to Spain, when I accused him, wildly and incoherently enough; and, though he denied it, he did so in a half-hearted way. Remember his blood is not all English. That unpleasant detective suspects him too. I understand his hints about the peculiar difficulties of the case. Oh, it all too like a hideous nightmare. It has almost driven me wild to be obliged to see the cruel destroyer of my sweet sister."

"There is something queer about that fellow Dillon's mode of dealing with the case. Still, I cannot for a moment accept your theory. I wish you had not adopted it; it must have added considerably to the horrors you have so bravely endured in silence. Dorothy, you are a true-hearted real woman to have locked all this in your heart. I would trust my life with you. I shall never call you child or little Dorothy again. You have attained a mental stature that forbids either, only my dear Dorothy you will always be. He took and kissed her hand, holding it a while. "Right or wrong, guilty or not," he resumed, "I must keep Callander from encountering Egerton. Shall I go to see him? It will be an infinite relief to feel that he is all right with me again, shall I go?"

"I almost think you had better not; he sent word by Collins this morning that he has a great deal of writing to get through, and as he told me he was going to write to you, you had better wait for his letter. I feel it very hard, Paul, to meet Mrs. Callander; she has embittered all our lives."

"She is a mischief-making, implacable she-devil!" cried Standish, with energy. "By heaven, I don't think I shall ever speak to her again! Were it not for you, Dorothy, I should tax her with her infamous slander of myself."

"Do not mind me. I do not care to hold with her, except for Henrietta's sake. And, oh, Paul! Henrietta wants

to know so much what I had to talk to you about. I would rather not tell her all"—hesitatingly.

"No; certainly not," promptly. "I will tell her that it was poor Callander's confession of his mother's insinuations against me that you wished to explain. Leave it to me—and, Dorothy, I shall write to Egerton. I shall let him know that we fully understand the dastardly part he has played, and shall warn him that he has to reckon with Callander."

"Oh, leave him alone, Paul. He might murder you. Such a man is capable of anything."

"He is a villain undoubtedly, but, my dear Dorothy, I absolve him from the crime of murder. That seems quite impossible. He is bad enough, but, good God! to kill a defenceless woman in her sleep! Besides it would have punished himself——"

"Paul, I feel certain Mr. Dillon suspects him."

"There is something curious in Dillon's mode of proceeding, I grant; still this conviction of yours is really only the result of excited nerves. I am surprised. You have too heavy a burden to bear, dear Dorothy. I wish I were sure of a reconciliation with Callander, I could then be of some use in reassuring your mind in one direction at least. I wish I could take you away somewhere. A complete change of scene might restore the tone of your mind."

"I feel better already since I opened my heart to you, and if I know Herbert is with you and confides in you, I shall be much more at rest. But, oh, keep him and yourself from Egerton. He is capable of anything."

"Did you really tax him with this atrocious crime?" asked Paul, with some curiosity.

"I did, and he seemed startled and confused."

"He might be that, though innocent. Tell me, Dorothy, was it some instinct that he was playing a part which induced you to refuse him."

"I think so, Paul."

"I confess that your rejection of so very attractive a person made me suspect that some luckier fellow had fore-stalled him."

"Why did you think so," asked Dorothy, a sudden vivid blush dyeing her pale cheeks.

"Oh, I don't know. It was a surmise," returned Standish, slowly, while his eyes dwelt searchingly on her.

She heaved a deep sigh, and the color faded from her cheeks.

"I think I heard Henrietta come in. Will you see her alone, Paul. I do not think I could bear to talk any more to any one."

"Go and lie down and rest then. I will see Henrietta and explain matters, as I said I would. Try and compose yourself. Remember I am always at your service. I wish I could do more for you, my sweet ward."

"Thank you. Good-bye for the present."

"I shall see you this evening, probably. I am not sure that I shall not go and see Callander. It might be some comfort to him, poor fellow."

* * * * *

Standish explained matters so much to Henrietta's satisfaction that she came to talk with Dorothy before dinner.

"You poor dear. Is your head any better? Well, you see Paul Standish was not long in telling me all about it. What an awful fury he is in with Aunt Callander. Indeed, I am not surprised at it. I somehow got used to her dislike and insinuations. She couldn't bear Paul, and was not too fond of poor dear Mabel; but I never thought the nonsense she talked would make such an impression on Herbert. It will be delightful if he makes friends with Mr. Standish again, and a great help. Oh, who do you think I saw to-day in Bond street? Major St. John! He stopped the carriage, and we had a talk. He is coming to see me to-morrow. He was looking so well—quite handsome, and seemed rather brighter than usual. He would really be quite creditable at the foot of one's table. To be sure, he is not one half so agreeable as Paul Standish, but then, again, Paul is rather contradictory and overbearing."

"Have they had a lover's quarrel?" thought Dorothy. "He has always been good to me," she said aloud.

"Oh, yes, I daresay; but then, of course, he looks on you as a daughter. Now I find him rather changeable. I am very steady, myself, and I hate changeable whimsical people."

"Your temper is always steadily good Henrietta," said Dorothy. "I will get up and do my hair now."

Standish came in the evening, and reported that he had called on Colonel Callander, but he had gone out. On inquiry, the hotel porter said he would not return to dinner

and that he had ordered the driver of the cab called for him to drive to some number in Lincoln's inn Fields.

"That is Brierly's office—his solicitor, you know—a very good fellow. If he dines with him we could not desire anything better. Brierly is a bachelor and has capital rooms in Victoria street."

"Yes, that would be more like his old self," said Henrietta, "only I wonder he did not look you up. He will be quite glad, I am sure, to be all right with you again."

"I hope so. I daresay I shall have a line from him to-morrow. He might like to write a preliminary explanation before meeting me."

For the rest of his stay Standish talked cheerfully to Henrietta, and only at parting asked, with an air of deep interest, if Dorothy's head was free from pain now.

"I am afraid I shall not be able to see you to-morrow," he said. "It will be a busy day. I dine with Lord R——, too, and go with him to the House of Commons."

"Pray, when are we to hail you as ambassador extraordinary," asked Henrietta. "That always seems to me such a delicious sort of title."

"Not for many a day—if I ever reach so high a position," said Standish, smiling, and he wished them good-night."

The following day was altogether restful to Dorothy. She felt safe after having confided all the perilous stuff that had lain heavy at her heart to Standish. His warm sympathy was infinitely consoling. With his help she did not despair of seeing her brother-in-law restored to resignation and composure. She, too, would try to compose her nerves, and try to fulfil those duties from which her dearly-loved sister had been snatched.

Somehow or other she did not care to be with Henrietta, good and kind as she was. Dorothy felt that she jarred upon her in a way she used not to do.

She therefore went out to walk with the children, and read a tough book in her own room, leaving Henrietta to entertain Major St. John by herself.

Collins, on his return from his morning visit to his master, reported him to be just as usual, but said the colonel did not intend calling on the ladies till late.

"He will try and see Paul Standish first," they said to each other, when Collins left the room.

Now Standish had been a good deal exercised that morning by the receipt of a letter from Egerton.

The sight of the man's handwriting roused a degree of fury and indignation which quite upset his self-control for a few minutes.

Apart from the knowledge so lately imparted by Dorothy, Paul would have thought the letter a good one and full of kind sympathy—as it was, he read, between the lines, craft and hypocrisy. Perhaps, indeed, Egerton might feel the sorrow he affected, for it was scarce possible that any conscience could be so seared as to be unmoved by the recollection of the devilish part he had played.

The letter was dated from Madrid, and stated that the writer had given up all hopes of tracing the man Pedro. Indeed, there was a report in Valencia that a sailor answering to his description had been washed overboard a vessel plying to Tunis—in a storm off Cape Bon. “If this be the case one is naturally indignant that such a criminal should have slipped through the fingers of justice. But now it has got abroad that he is wanted, there is no doubt he will keep out of the way. I really think that Dillon mismanaged matters—so far as his search out here went—and I have grave doubts that he ever came here at all. I can find no trace of him, indeed, his conduct all the way through has been suspicious. He is working some line of which we know nothing. I shall stay here about a week, and then go straight back to London, where I hope to find all brighter than when I left them.”

Standish threw the letter from him in disgust, then he picked it up, and put it away carefully. There was no time to answer it, and it might, perhaps, be wiser not to express himself in writing on such compromising topics as would form the subject matter of a letter.

He was so infinitely revolted that he even thought, “Could Dorothy's woman-instinct be right when she laid the crowning charge of murder against the refined, accomplished gentleman, who made so little of his duties, of friendship—of the obligations of a man of honor—what was there to hold him back from any felony which his evil, uncontrolled passions prompted?”

While Standish, putting his private affairs out of his mind for the present, threw himself heartily into his work or discussed with his chief the political question on which the latter was to speak that evening, Henrietta Oakley had spent on the whole a satisfactory day. She had bought several bargains quite “dirt cheap,” and she had roused

up the Hon. Major to some unusually strong expressions of admiration.

She was sitting with Dorothy in the drawing-room before dinner, and had just been expatiating on the dreariness of the first long days, and the evening light which is so cold at first, when Collins presented himself, and announced that Mrs. Callander's butler wished to speak to Miss Oakley.

"Tell him to come up to me here," she exclaimed. "What is the matter now? What is it, Ransom?"

As the stately functionary came in and closed the door:

"If you please, 'm——" he said with a loud "hem!"

"Miss Boothby sent me round to see if you would be so good as to come to Mrs. Callander, she is taken in rather a strange way. The colonel, he paid her a visit this afternoon, and stayed a good while, 'm. He went away between four and five, I think. I didn't let him out, for Mrs. Callander didn't ring the bell, but a while after, Miss Boothby went into the drawing-room, and found the missis' sitting stiff-like in her chair, and the first thing she says was, 'Get me some brandy and water,' which is what she never tastes; and then she ordered Miss Boothby to write for Mr. Greenwood, the lawyer, then she had the note torn up; next she ordered that everything should be got ready for Paris; after that she went into a fit of hysterics, and kept calling out 'My son, my son!' and she forbids us to send for the doctor, and so Miss Boothby would be ever so much obliged if you would come to her, miss."

"Very well, Ransom. Call a cab, and I will go with you. Good gracious!" she exclaimed, "she has had a tremendous row with Herbert. He has been reproaching her, and, though she richly deserves it, I can't help being sorry for her! I declare I don't think we shall ever have a peaceful hour again. I am getting sick of it all."

When Henrietta reached Somerset square an evident degree of organisation had replaced the clock-work regularity of that patent, particular household. The cook opened the door, and the page might be perceived carrying a hot bottle upstairs.

"I'm sure ma'am, Miss Boothby will be that thankful to see you."

"Where is she?"

"Upstairs, packing, 'm. Mrs. Callander has had the big trunks dusted and taken down, she says her feet are cold and her head burning."

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Henrietta began to ascend the stair; half way up she met Miss Boothby with a distressed, bewildered expression.

"Oh, dear me! I am glad to see you, Miss Oakley. I don't know what has come to Mrs. Callander. She doesn't know I sent for you."

"Very well. Let her think I came by accident."

She found Mrs. Callander walking to and fro in her bedroom, with a scent bottle in her trembling hand, her usually cold, grey face much flushed, and a strange, frightened look in her eyes.

"Why, my dear aunt! What has happened? Where are you going?"

"Oh, Henrietta!" in a high, nervous key. "I am tired of the constant cold and headaches from which I have suffered. Really, the climate of London is horrible, so I am just going off to Paris. There is no reason why I should not go where I like. I had rather a curious dizzy turn to-day, but I will not have the doctor, mind! I will not see him if you send for him."

"Well, I am sure you ought, aunt. You seem to be very unwell."

"You know nothing about it. Go, Evans—go, Miss Boothby—I wish to speak to my niece."

She sank into a chair as she spoke, and trembled visibly all over.

"Now, then, aunt, what is it?" asked Henrietta, peremptorily, when she had closed the door.

"I had a long and painful interview with my son," began Mrs. Callander, speaking in distressful gasps. "He behaved in an extraordinary manner, accused me of slandering his unfortunate wife, and said he would never see my face again. And I have only lived for him."

"Men are generally ungrateful," said Miss Oakley, easily.

"But I thought better of Herbert. Still, he has been very sorely tried; but you must have patience, and keep friends with him."

"It does not depend on me," returned Mrs. Callander, and she shuddered visibly. "Have you seen my son since he was here this morning?"

"No; but he comes to us, I believe, this evening."

"This evening! Oh, my heart! It beats so fast, and then stands still! Go away, Henrietta—you can do me no good. I only want to get away."

"But, aunt, you are not fit to travel. Do send for Dr.

Birch. He will give you some soothing medicine. You are quite in a fever. Do send for him."

"Don't tell me what I am to do. I do not want you, Henrietta. I shall go to Meurice's, and don't tell anyone I am going away—I don't want people to talk about me."

"Well, aunt, I am quite uneasy about you."

"You need not trouble. I am most unfortunate. I——"

She burst into a violent fit of weeping, in the midst of which her maid announced that the Rev. Mr. Gilmore was downstairs, and wished to see her. Mrs. Callander paused in her weeping.

"I can't see him. I don't wish to see him," she exclaimed, angrily. "I will not be intruded on, or pried into. He may go away. I am particularly engaged."

Henrietta was infinitely amazed. She could hardly believe her ears when she heard her aunt refuse to admit one of her favorite preachers. Was the sky going to fall?

Then the greatly disturbed woman rose from her seat, and exclaiming, "I want to be alone—I want no one's help!" tottered into the bed-room adjoining her dressing-room, and emphatically closed the door.

"What can be the matter with her, Miss Boothby" asked Henrietta, greatly perplexed.

"I am sure Miss Oakley, I can form no idea, except that she had some words with Colonel Callander. Really, there seems no filial affection left in the world."

"I never saw her in such an extraordinary state before. There is no use in my staying here. You will let me know if she asks for me? I don't suppose for a moment that she will carry out her whim of going to Paris."

"It is impossible to say—but I'll let you know, Miss Oakley. Nothing could well be more inconvenient than to start off to the continent just now. I thought we were safe to remain here to the end of the season."

"I don't think she will go. Pray don't leave her alone. I feel most uneasy about her."

Henrietta was not sorry to get out of the house.

"My dear Dorothy," she exclaimed, as soon as she found herself safe in her own drawing-room, "Herbert has been driving his mother fairly out of her wits. I never thought anything in the world would put her into such a state."

"I wonder if he will say anything to us this evening, if he comes?" returned Dorothy.

But the hours sped on; bed-time came, and no Callander appeared.

CHAPTER V.

"THE DETECTIVE'S STORY."

The day described in the last chapter was a very busy one to Standish, but in the late afternoon he managed to call on Callander.

Standish was a good deal annoyed to hear that he had gone out of town for a couple of days—where the waiter did not know. Neither porter nor clerk could give him any information; only Boots knew that the direction given to the driver of the cab which called for him was to Victoria.

Standish mused over Callander's possible reasons for choosing that route. He did not know of any which recommended it, for it was not likely he would visit either of the friends who resided near the lines converging at that station—true, Eastport and Fordsea could be reached by the South Coast Line; but why should he not travel as usual by the South Eastern from Waterloo?"

Arriving at his chambers only in time to dress for dinner, Standish was a good deal disturbed by a letter which awaited him from Dillon.

"Sir," it ran; "I should feel much obliged by your fixing some time most convenient to yourself, when you can give me an uninterrupted interview. I have now completed the search you have commissioned me to make, and I am anxious to lay the results before you. You can then judge what claim I have to the reward offered by the relatives of the late Mrs. Callander for the discovery of her assassin. May I ask you to keep this communication strictly private for the present?"

"I am, yours respectfully,

"LUKE DILLON"

After a few minutes' thought, Standish wrote a few lines appointing the following evening at eight o'clock.

The dinner to which he was engaged proved very agreeable in every way. It was a small gathering of men occupied in politics, and the conversation was interesting, especially to Standish, to whom everything relating to England's foreign relations was of the highest importance. But across the intellectual excitement of interchanging views

and ideas with men of thought and information came at intervals the stinging question: "What is Dillon going to reveal? Can it be possible that he will verify Dorothy's wild conjecture, or rather her conviction? No, the idea is too outrageous."

It was a wild, stormy evening when Standish, having despatched a solitary meal at his club, returned to his own abode to await the appearance of Dillon.

He had not called at Princes Place, for he had an unaccountable reluctance to tell Dorothy of his expected interview, and he knew that Henrietta would worry him to stay to dinner.

He had had a note from her in the morning, describing her aunt's nervous seizure, and asking if he knew that Colonel Callander had gone out of town again. This, he answered, promising to visit her the next day.

"Not at home to any one except Mr. Dillon," was Paul's order to his servant as he exchanged his frock coat for a smoking-jacket, and, lighting a cigar, took up an evening paper, to which he could not force himself to pay any attention. He had not long to wait. A few minutes after eight Dillon was shown in.

"Good evening, sir," he said, in a grave, important tone.

Standish fancied there was a triumphant gleam in his light-grey eyes.

"Good evening, Dillon. I am looking forward with curiosity to your communication. Sit down."

"Hope you'll be satisfied, sir," said Dillon, drawing a chair, and taking out a small note-book, which he laid before him on the table. "I have done my best, but it has been a difficult job, and I did not feel at liberty to speak until I had my chain of evidence complete. If you'll allow me I'll begin at the beginning." He uttered a loud "Hem!" and looking at the book before him for a moment, proceeded, "When you applied to me last September—the 20th, I see," (Standish nodded)—"and I went down to Fordsea, I found the usual sentimental difficulties. I could get over these, you see, if I were a regular police detective, but as it was I was in your service, and must not go to view the poor lady till everything was interfered with. But I persuaded the old nurse (who had more brains than the rest) to let me have a very private view. I saw how the body lay, the head a good deal bent forward as if slipping off the

pillow, the face so calm and peaceful that she could have had no glimpse of whoever was going to deal her her death blow. I took a good look round; but I could not stay long, because Mrs. McHugh was horribly afraid the Colonel would find her out, and he had given strict orders that no one but the women who attended to her should be let in after the jury had viewed the body."

He paused, but Standish sat silently gazing at him.

I got a good deal of information talking to the servants till I knew the life of the family, which seemed peaceful and happy enough," he resumed, "and at the funeral I had a long look at Mr. Egerton. He struck me very particularly. He's as handsome a man as you'll see in a day's march. But there was a devil of some kind in his eyes, and if ever a man was in mortal agony of grief he was. The husband was quiet and resigned compared to him. Mr. Egerton looked to my mind like a man conscience-stricken. Of course I had heard a good deal about him—how he was wanting to marry the young lady, Mrs. Callander's sister, and all that. But it seemed odd to me that he never came near her nor Miss Oakley. Then you gave me full right to examine the room, to put the ladder across the window, and to talk to Miss Wynn. You remember she thought she had heard the bar of the window fall. Well, sir, I saw clear enough that she thought there was more in it than a mere vulgar murder with robbery, and that she was particularly anxious not to give me a clue; in short, that there was something in it that she did not want me to find out, and I began to smell a rat. I began to think 'Has the handsome fine gentleman, that has been like a brother in a manner of speaking, any thing to do with it?' Jealousy has been at the bottom of such a pile of crime."

Standish moved uneasily, and uttered a half-articulate exclamation. "You were saying——?" suggested Dillon.

"Nothing. Did you then discard the theory of the sailor's guilt in the matter?"

"Yes, sir; pretty soon. I'm coming to that. Then, sir, I thought of you. You are a good-looking chap, and easy in manners, almost like a Amurikan, and the widower's reluctance to see you was rather remarkable, but I didn't hold to that very long. I never could get to speak to the young lady often enough. She knew a thing or two, but

she was as close as wax. I gave up the idea of the Spanish sailors for a good many reasons. First, how the deuce could these men know that Colonel Callander was not sleeping in his wife's room? They couldn't gossip with the servants, for they didn't speak their lingo; next, how could they know where the ladder was kept? Of course, they might have overhauled the premises some other night, but it's not likely. Then, I defy any stranger to have lifted up that bar and stepped in right against that dressing-table without making noise enough to disturb a timid woman, unless she knew who was making it, and that is not a pleasant nor a probable idea."

"My God, no!" cried Standish.

"Now you see, from the way the poor thing was lying, her face was to the window, a stranger coming in by it and pushing the dressing-table must have roused her. She would have seen him, screamed, and, even if killed, her face, her position, would have been totally different."

"To what conclusion does this lead you?" asked Standish, eagerly.

"That the murderer entered by the door of her room, that his step, his presence, was so familiar that he could approach almost to touching her without creating disturbance or alarm, and then as she lay, still and unresisting, he struck her dead with one blow in the vital spot left undefended by her position."

Standish was a man of great nerve and self-control, but he changed color at the horrible and degrading suspicion so ruthlessly presented to him by the unmoved detective.

"No, sir," he resumed, "no stranger struck that blow! In addition to these conclusions, which any man of common-sense might have arrived at, I observed on the outside of the door, a little splash, a mere spark of blood, low down near the floor, and a speck near the handle, which those dunderheads, the police, had not detected.

You see, they were all so taken up with the notion that the murderer came in from outside, that they never looked beyond the interior of the room itself, except to search the poor servants' boxes, I believe! Besides these, I picked up, half under the bed, where no doubt, it had been pushed by some of the feet that trod there, this bit of a silver ornament." He drew it from an inner pocket, and laid it before Standish, who stared at it with distressed eyes.

"You don't happen to have seen it before, Mr. Standish?"

"No, certainly not," replied Standish, sharply, while he thought with dismay of Dorothy's description of the broken silver shell with the half-holes at one side.

"Well, sir, I thought you might have seen it. I showed it once to Miss Wynn, and she said she had never seen it before, though her eyes didn't back her up! That little bit of silver has given me a heap of trouble. I have hunted to and fro to find the other bit of it, but I did at last."

"For God's sake get on!" cried Standish. "What have you discovered? Who do you suspect?"

"Hear me out," replied Dillon, sitting upright, and assuming a more earnest look. "I made up my mind when I washed away them sparks of blood, that someone in the house did the deed, someone to whom the poor woman was accustomed, whose presence did not disturb her, or frighten her, who could come in and out, and knew the ways of the place, where the ladder was kept and how long it would be before anyone would come to find her stiff and stark! Those strange sailors would never have dared to come into a house with a master and two men sleeping in it. No, sir, the hand that struck the blow was her husband's."

"You are raving," exclaimed Standish.

"No, I am not, sir. Listen. From many a trifling indication I got out of Collins, and the old nurse, I believe the unfortunate man was eaten up with jealousy. The more I watched him—and I have shadowed him for months—the more convinced I grew, that, in some mad fit he put an end to her, and then tried to mislead us all by laying that ladder on the window-ledge."

"It is impossible" ejaculated Standish.

"No, it ain't! Jealousy is the underminingest thing out. It works like rats through a wall, gnawing and gnawing for many a long day unheard, till all at once its ugly head gets out to the light to kill and to destroy. Ah, Mr. Standish, the biggest lot of cruel deeds I have traced home took me straight to jealousy."

Standish stared at him with blank, bewildered eyes.

"Well, though I was pretty sure it was he as did the deed, it was very hard to get proof. I followed him pretty close, wherever he went I was by him in some disguise or another, and an awful time he has had of it. From all

I can see, I'd say hanging is a trifle to what he has gone through. Still, I could never get a glimpse of any knife that had ornaments on the sheath answering to this. Another thing puzzled me—he always kept in with Egerton. I got to see Egerton more than once, but he was uncommon haughty and snuff-the-moon in his ways. I wasn't good enough to touch with a pair of tongs—Oh, dear no! I'd have rather proved him guilty as the other poor fellow. Latterly I've begun to think he suspects the truth. Anyhow, after waiting and watching, I got what I wanted at last.

"When Colonel Callander came back from the Continent the other day, I began to hang about and pay a visit now and again to that respectable, civil-spoken man, Mr. Collins, and one morning I found him packing up the Colonel's duds, so I sat down and discoursed him a bit, watching him sorting the things. Presently he came to pistols, and a queer, long, narrow, foreign-looking knife, with an inlaid handle, and shell-like bits of silver stuck on to the sheath. It was uncommon like the queer sort of weapons hung up in Mr. Egerton's rooms, but the ornaments were different. I took it to the light to examine it, with my back to Mr. Collins, and tried this bit where one of the ornaments was jagged and broken. It fitted perfectly, thoroughly!"

"Still—" urged Standish, starting up, and moving restlessly to the fireplace.

"One moment," said Dillon, raising his hand. "The man who had seen the figure carrying the ladder, I ought to mention, in conversing with me, said it was a broader, larger man than Egerton, though about his height. Last of all," he continued, speaking more quickly, "I followed the Colonel to Fordsea, where he wandered about on land and sea. He was always going off in a boat with that old tar—you know him—or else he'd be off, striding so fast that there was no keeping up with him, to the little churchyard by the hillside, with a basket of flowers for the grave. At last I hired a dog cart, and used to drive past as if quite on my own business. He never noticed! Twice I saw him outside groping under some gorse bushes that grew above the low stone wall. You know the wide view there is all around. Not a soul was to be seen stirring. I drove past, and waited under a piece of broken bank a little further on. I told the boy I had with me to hold the reins, as I wanted to

gather some of the ferns about there, and I gradually got my head over the bank and saw the colonel coming slowly down the road. I watched till he disappeared on his way back, then I went on picking 'specimens' here and there till I came pretty nigh where I had watched him stooping down. Not a soul was to be seen. When I was there in the autumn time there used to be bits of boys herding sheep and goats, but there were none now. When I got about the part where I had noticed the colonel I looked well around under the bushes, and at last I came upon a spot where the grass looked a bit disturbed and mixed with mould, as if someone had been digging for roots. I took the bearings of it, and went away back to Fordsea with enough ferns and twigs to set up a botanist. Very early next morning I found the colonel was going off to London, so I bought a trowel, and then I watched him start off in the train. As soon as I saw him safe I trudged away to the place I had marked. I would take no one with me. It was easy to dig, for the soil had been lately stirred, and scarce a foot below the surface I came to a gold chain and locket, then a bracelet, then I picked out three or four rings, then a gold bangle, all messed with mould. There are more there, but these are enough for me."

He took a brown paper from his pocket, and opening it carefully, displayed the trinkets, soiled and bent.

Standish took up and examined each. He was stunned, yet did not let himself go. Dillon was not the man to whom one should make an unguarded admission.

"Your extraordinary ingenuity has unearthed an extraordinary story," he said at length. "The circumstantial evidence against Colonel Callander is of course very strong, but it is not conclusive."

"Perhaps not," returned Dillon carelessly; "still I think there is enough to justify me in applying to the Eastport magistrates for the reward and detailing my reasons for asking it."

"No doubt," rejoined Standish, coolly, seeing Dillon's drift, while the revolting consequences of publicity rushed into his mind.

The arrest of Colonel Callander, the terrible stain on Mabel's character which his fatal jealousy, however unjustifiable, would leave, and backed by Mrs. Callander's evil tongue it would be indellible—and Dorothy! Whatever it

cost, Dorothy must be saved from further shocks, deeper pain even than any she had gone through.

"I do not suppose Colonel Callander's family would wish to rob you of a reward which you have so justly earned by your zeal and perseverance, though certainly I little anticipated the direction your inquiries have taken. Your own experience must have shown you how misleading circumstantial evidence very often is. Further search might show a different side to the story. Suppose I promise you another thousand if, by your trained skill and natural acuteness, you discover any other solution to the mystery?"

"There is no other to be found. Still there is no reason why the true facts might not be kept dark, and all notoriety, and scandal, and sensational paragraphs avoided. It's worth paying a second thousand for that alone. Eh? Just think of it all. The assertions about the colonel's discoveries, the contradictions and counter-assertions. Why it would be months and months before that nice young lady would be able to take up a paper."

"Very probably," returned Standish, still calmly. "It is natural to dread such publicity; still, it may be more just to Colonel Callander to pursue your researches and see if some key cannot be found to the extraordinary riddle your discoveries present."

"Look here, Mr. Standish," said the detective impatiently, "you are a little too exacting. Why should I work any harder for that second thousand than I have done?" The more we seek the worse the case will be against your friend. The best piece of service you can do him and all the family is to keep it all dark. I don't believe the poor fellow is quite right in the upper story. Take a day to think over it, and if you don't zeal my lips with a second thousand, why I'll make sure of the first through the magistrates of Eastport."

"You are——" began Standish, quickly, then paused half a second, and added: "a remarkably shrewd fellow!"

"Ah, that is better!" returned Dillon with an unpleasant laugh. "Anyhow, I suppose you have seen these things before?" pointing to the jewels.

"Some of them, certainly," replied Standish.

"I thought so." He began to roll them up carefully. "I need not trespass any longer. I'll call to-morrow about this time for your answer. I'm pretty sure what it will be. I think you are only wasting time."

He put his book and the packet of jewel's in his breast pocket, and, with a keen, lingering look into the eyes of his companion, said abruptly:

"Good evening to you, Mr. Standish."

Paul had rarely felt so stunned and helpless as when the door closed on Dillon, and the strong grasp he had kept upon himself relaxing, he let his thoughts dwell freely on the extraordinary summary which the detective had just laid before him. What a hideous climax to the tragedy of poor Mabel's death! And Callander, that kindly, upright, chivalrous fellow, what a mental wreck he must have become, how maddened by disease and his mother's insinuations, before he could have laid a destroying hand on his adored wife!

Paul's heart thrilled with painful pity, when he thought of what the man's terrible sufferings must have been. But was Dillon right in his conclusion? Was there not a loophole of escape somewhere from the ghastly conviction that Callander was the murderer? and that he should have suspected him—Paul—of having been so base as to tamper with his own ward's fidelity to her husband!

"Thank God! Dorothy had the pluck to clear me from so vile an imputation," he thought. "I wish Callander would fulfil his promise of writing to me. No; I will not believe it yet, in spite of that man's wonderful chain of evidence. Yet, it is amazingly complete, and somehow Callander's extraordinary indifference as to the capture of the assassin had always struck me as unnatural. What is best to be done? If a whisper gets out of the true story (if it is true), the scandalmongers and gossips won't leave that poor girl a shred of character! The worst of it is, there is just enough folly and weakness at the bottom of this disastrous story to make it a little difficult to deal with frankly—I am afraid we must silence Dillon. I will only do so under color of extended search for information. I will never admit that I believe his inferences, his admission! It was to the brute's devilish interest to prove poor Callander guilty!—and Dorothy! What shall I do as regards Dorothy—how shall I ever break the terrible fact that her brother-in-law, the man she loved and respected so heartily, was Mabel's murderer? Need she ever know it? I am afraid in justice to that scoundrel Egerton I must tell her some day, but not yet. This frightful trial has told upon her. There's a brave heart and a clear brain sheathed

in her slight, delicate frame. Poor little Dorothy, how tender she is in spite of the flashes of fiery spirit that light up her eyes—such a loving nature. Her frank affection for me is touching. I wish I were older for her sake, I might be of more use to her, but as that cannot be, I wonder if I married Henrietta Oakley whether we might make a happy home for her? They are very fond of each other, and Henrietta is rather handsome, a good match in many ways. How can I branch off to merely selfish considerations with this dreadful history fresh before me? What egotists we are—I am! I will run down to Fordsea if I possibly can to-morrow, and see Callander. Meantime, is it too late to see Dorothy and Henrietta to-night? Yes, it is past ten. I'll catch them at breakfast to-morrow morning, and say I am going to join Callander and get him to come back with me, that will keep them quiet, and after—well, God knows. It is impossible to form any plan. Heaven grant me some good inspiration! everything looks woefully dark.

* * * * *

Dorothy had not yet come downstairs when Standish presented himself at Miss Oakley's breakfast-table next morning.

"Why Paul—I mean, Mr. Standish—what in the world brings you here at this unearthly hour?" cried Henrietta, who was standing on the hearth-rug before a bright coal and wood fire, teaching a beautiful, fluffy, Yorkshire terrier high principle, in the guise of resisting sugar when offered for a "Gladstone dog."

"I ought to make a thousand apologies," returned Standish. "I am going down to Fordsea, just to see what Callander is about, and, as I cannot get away till the afternoon, I thought I would venture to look in on you first."

"I am delighted to see you, and very pleased that you are going to look for that poor man. Do try and induce him to come abroad and to keep with us. The way he wanders about is quite alarming. Dorothy has not made her appearance yet. She is generally late, poor thing! She is always so mournful. It is really rather trying. I think she would feel more comfortable if we could find the wretched murderer and hang him!"

"Hush!" said Standish, quick and low. "Here she is." Henrietta's heedless words sent a cold thrill of pain through him.

When Dorothy found herself face to face with Standish, her large, serious eyes lit up, and a welcoming smile gladdened her sad mouth. "How early you are, Paul! Has anything happened?" the smile dying away. "You look as if you had not slept all night—so ill and worn!" gazing anxiously in his face.

"I am all right, Dorothy; only, as I have been explaining to Miss Oakley, I intend to run down to Fordsea, if I can manage it, this afternoon, and I wanted to see you first."

"You are going to find Herbert? Oh, thank you, dear Paul."

"Sit down and have some breakfast, both of you. Collins, lift the covers, cried Miss Oakley.

"It is curious, your coming this morning," said Dorothy, unfolding her table napkin. "I think some fairy must have whispered that I had a letter for you."

"For me? Who from?" asked Standish, surprised.

"Oh, I did not read it, but it was enclosed in one from Miss Boothby, who said she did not know your address."

"From Miss Boothby?" exclaimed Standish. "This is most astonishing." He opened it, and had a little difficulty in keeping his face quite steady and unchanged when he read—

"Dear sir,—I am directed by Mrs. Callander to beg you will not hesitate to draw upon her, even to a large amount, should you require funds for the use of Colonel Callander, in connection with the late distressing event.

"I am, sir, yours, faithfully,

"C. BOOTHBY."

"The unhappy old woman knows the truth," was Paul's mental comment.

"What does she say? Don't be mysterious, Mr. Standish," cried Henrietta Oakley.

Dorothy did not speak, but she fixed such questioning, tender, sympathising eyes on her guardian that he longed to open his heart to her.

"There is very little in it. There, read it, Dorothy." She took it from his hand, and read it aloud.

"Well, really my aunt is more of a trump than I believed," said Henrietta, exultingly.

"There is something rather strange about this letter," said Dorothy, thoughtfully.

"Let us believe, with Miss Oakley, that her aunt is a trump," he returned, and applied himself to his breakfast.

CHAPTER VII

COLONEL CALLANDER'S LETTER.

With all his diligence Standish found, when he reached his rooms that afternoon, he had so little time left that it would be almost an impossibility to catch the 5.30 train to Eastport. He was, however, ready to make the attempt, when, among the notes and letters which had come since he started that morning, was an unusually thick envelope, directed in Callander's handwriting.

This changed his plans. It would be foolish to start before reading what Callander had to say, and doing so would compel him to lose the train.

He opened the letter, glanced at it, and ringing for the man who waited on him, hastily directed that no visitor should be admitted. Then, drawing his chair near the window, he began, with interest which deepened at every word, to read the long epistle addressed to him.

"I have been going to write to you, Standish, ever since Dorothy proved to me how greatly I have wronged you in my mind. I have begun once or twice, but, somehow, my brain would not keep clear or steady. There is such a cloud troubling and confusing me; but last night, as I lay awake, battling with my thoughts as usual, some thing seemed to break away in heart or head, and light came to me.

"I don't think I am mad but I am not what I used to be, and there is a strange spirit—not my own—urging me at times, with a force I cannot resist, to do many things. Ever since Dorothy showed me the truth I have wanted to tell you every thing, for you loved her, not as I thought, but as a true elder brother, and you will understand me—perhaps you will help me.

"When she left me in India it was a rueful day. Then I was ill; after, I recovered. Her letters were not the same; they were cold, constrained. How mad I grew, with an agonized longing to see her again, to hold her in my arms! My mother wrote often. She did not like you; I do not know why, but she did not. She was always repeating

how my darling and Dorothy preferred being with you to any one else, even to Egerton, who was so superior. It was a long time before she roused the devil within me, but she did at last. Then I came home. The voyage was a long warfare between the heaven of anticipated reunion and the hell of doubt. I used to be so secure of her, of myself, of everything. Now, sleeping or waking, I was always struggling on the verge of precipices over which it was destruction to fall.

"When she met me in London, she was so sweet and kind that I thought all was well, that she was the same beloved Mabel I had left, that I was all to her I had been. Whether my joy at meeting was too fierce, too intense, I cannot tell; but in a few—a very few—days, I thought I felt a change; a faint, gentle chill, like the first breath of the night-wind; but I put the idea from me. I fought with it for days and weeks; sometimes I had gleams of happiness and security too delicious for earth. Then my mother would suggest hellish doubts; I do not suppose she thought I would brood over them as I did, but—God forgive her! All this time I saw that Egerton was seeking Dorothy to be his wife. So far as anything could interest or please me, I was pleased. At last I proposed to Mabel, who seemed to me unwell and ill at ease, that we should take a journey together somewhere, away from Dorothy, from the children, from every one. I made her acceptance or rejection of this scheme the test of her feeling for me. I quivered with terror as I suggested it. Well, she accepted. During that drive to Rookstone, which was the last gleam of heaven on my path, and for a while I had a little peace—not for long—she grew pale, and cold, and nervous. I went to London; there she wrote to me in a curious, constrained tone. She said she was not strong enough to bear such a journey as I proposed! That decided me to kill her and you. I thought it, mind, not with fury, but with a calm, judicial sense of executing a judgment. The only mode by which I could keep myself in hand was by preserving silence. Wife, children, friends, fair fortune, every good had become cruellest evil, torturing me with poisoned darts. I used to sit silent and deadly in your midst holding back the madman's rage to kill—as best I might.

"At last, one evening, just before you left us, I came into the drawing-room, and found Dorothy putting flowers in a basket. The tea table was set. I asked her where Mabel

was. She said, 'out driving with your mother.' 'And where is Standish?' 'He will be here soon, Mabel expects him.' I stood with my arm on the mantelpiece, gazing into the glass, yet seeing nothing, and thinking—thinking. Suddenly I saw the reflection of Mabel, coming through the open window. She must have come from the dining room into the verandah, and so in by the window nearest me. She did not seem to see there was anyone in the room, but went to the round table, which was always covered with books—you know the oval mirror that leaned forward over it? Well, in that I saw her slip a folded paper into a book—the lowermost of a small pile—a green one with gold edges lay on the top. I kept my eyes on it, but as her back was to me, I sat down noiselessly in a chair. Presently she turned and perceived me. Then she uttered a little cry, came across the room to me and kissed me more tenderly than she had done for many a day. Then I knew I could kill her! I pressed my finger and thumb round her soft, white throat—she little knew how near death was to her for a moment! She said, 'you hurt me, dear,' smiling in my face. I let her go, though I thought my heart would burst.

Soon you came in, and Egerton, and Henrietta; while you spoke together I went to the table and took away the book. She was at the tea table and never noticed. I hid the book, and afterwards found in it a folded sheet of paper, on which, in her writing, were these words: "I cannot resist your influence; it was always too strong! For God's sake do not urge me to leave all for you—you ought to have mercy on such weakness! I fear him more every day—for he suspects, I know he does—and that idea overwhelms me. Go! keep far away! Whatever happens my heart will break! I do beseech you to go!" There was neither address nor signature; but the expression 'your influence, it was always too strong,' pointed to you—it seemed confirmation strong as Holy Writ. I have destroyed the paper lest blame should ever touch her."

Here the unfortunate man had evidently stopped, and resumed after a pause of some hours, perhaps days.

"It is a long, weary tale; it seems to me that I am writing of another, and I pity him profoundly, as I should never pity myself. My hatred of you grew deep and cunning; there was no base, cowardly act I would not have done, could I have tortured you without bringing disgrace on my own name. But all through my curious, agonising

mental struggles, I remembered that my name belonged to my children! You went away the day after, or the day but one.

"That seemed in obedience to her request. My mother said it was an immense relief to her mind that you were safe out of the way. I silenced her fiercely; but even above my burning desire for revenge on you, was my resolution to save my darling from her cruel comments, her bitter judgment. Brooding over this, haunted by a hideous vision of being compelled for my honor's sake to put away my wife, to drag her through the mire and filth of legal proceedings, of the opprobrium of society, of moral annihilation; something whispered to me, 'Have the courage to save her from all this—let the icy hand of Death send her unsullied to a better world, where the All-seeing alone can judge her.' The idea would not, did not leave me. It had an extraordinary fascination for me; even now, though I know my suspicions were wrong, I believe I did my best for her under the circumstances.

"It was not murder, no—it was the act of the tenderest love. I wanted no revenge on her—I only wanted to save her from shame and the bitterest grief. As a Christian, I believe in the happiness of the hereafter, and her sin was but slight now, only a womanish weakness which laid her at the mercy of a stronger will—a will backed by the force of her habitual obedience to it. If I hesitated, she might—almost surely would—break the social laws we are bound to uphold, and become an outcast. Had she not in her veins the blood of a mother who had outraged them? So I resolved to send my beautiful Mabel to Heaven, even while I affronted Hell for her sake. My logic is sound, Standish, is it not? She would have gone hence blameless! From me an inexorable judge would have demanded the price of blood, and for her sake I am content to pay it!"

Here came some discontented, passionate sentences about the freedom of choice, the happiness of Heaven, the injustice of Fate, the boundless love of God, the possibility of the Persian belief in the final purification of the guiltiest by fire proving to be true, and Callander resumed his narrative more calmly.

"This idea fascinated me. I had, from the fear of doing my dearest one harm in some ungovernable fit of despair, remained in my own room on the plea of indifferent health, and there I thought out my plan. One night, just after

you had gone, I had put on my smoking jacket, and sat down to think, but I could not smoke, my mind was a sort of fiery mist, all the past unrolled itself, the happy hours, the sweetness and purity of my darling, should I allow shame to touch her? A voice said to me, 'The hour has come; let it not pass.' I rose up, and took a long, keen knife, which Egerton had given me as a curiosity. It was fine and sharp. I went softly but boldly to her room. I did not fear to meet any one, I was not overstepping my right. Her door opened without noise, she was not asleep, she said drowsily, 'Is it you, Herbert?'

"Yes, I said, I cannot sleep. I think the sleeping medicine is here."

"It is perhaps on the mantel-piece. I went to look, and stood there long, listening, till her calm, regular breathing told me she slept, then I took the candle and stole behind her. Her head had fallen forward, her pretty hair was gathered into a thick knot, and I saw the place where old Dowden, our surgeon, once told us (myself and one or two of 'ours') where a thrust might cause instantaneous death. With a silent prayer that I might not fail, or cause her a moment's pain. I struck deep and true with a steady hand. There was a slight sigh, the fair head fell a little further forward, and she was free—quite free; now she knows my motives she forgives me! I turned to go round, and looked into her angel face, when I trod on the sheath, which had fallen on the carpet, and knocked against the bed. This shocked me more than I can tell you, for there was something terribly, sublimely sacred in that silent, motionless figure. To stir it rudely seemed sacrilege. I know not why, but I could not stay after that. I wiped the knife with my handkerchief. There was very little blood upon it. I wiped what I could from the roots of her beautiful golden hair. Then I left her lying there. I was not quite so steady when I closed the door behind me as when I opened it; for when I reached my room I found I had dropped the handkerchief. I went back and found it against the door.

"I felt a sort of relief as I sat down and thought of what I had done. She was safe. I had taken her sweet life, but I had kept her from evil tongues, from a terrible fate, and embalmed her in the loving memory of those who could never reproach her. But now came the reflection that were I suspected the truth would ooze out, and the judg-

ment upon her would be more unmerciful than even. I had acted on impulse. Now it was my bounden duty to conceal my crime (as it would have been called), for her sake first, for my children's, for the completion of my revenge on you. There was no time to lose. I lit the fire, which was always laid ready in my room, and thrust in the handkerchief that it might leave no trace. I hung up the knife in its accustomed place. I went softly to the side door. I often wandered out of a night unknown to anybody, and the hinges were well oiled, then I took the ladder from the shed, and placed it as it was found. I crossed it, and lifted the bar which secured the shutters inside, letting it fall with what seemed to me a terrible noise, and entered the room again. By the dim night-light I kissed my darling, and put back the dressing-table which I had slightly moved. Then I gathered up the watch, the locket, rings, bracelets that lay on the table, and stole away once more to my own room. I rolled up the jewels in three parcels, and locked them away. Then I put on my dressing-gown, and sat down as if to write—so I waited, waited for the discovery. I think I must have become insensible or slept. I felt awfully exhausted. At last Collins came with my tea. I drank it, and still sat wondering what would happen next. Then Mrs. McHugh burst in—you know the rest. I seemed but half alive after, and it was amazing how things lent themselves to my rude plan of concealment.

"Now, I have nearly told you everything, Standish. My brain is growing dull and dreamy. I have always wondered why Egerton shrank from me. Dorothy has explained why. She has restored my faith in you. When I knew the truth, it made me pitiless. The irreparable evil wrought by my mother infuriated me. I rushed to her, and told her that, thanks to her cruel tongue, her son was what she would call a murderer. I wonder it did not kill her. My sufferings have been great, though I have had long spells of torpidity. Since I came down to Fordsea I have been conscious of an awful, irresistible weariness of life. Like the unhappy Moor, whose story is so like my own, 'My occupation's o'er'—no, not yet! I must settle my account with Egerton. I cannot rest till that is finished; does he know this, that he keeps out of the way? Well, I can find him. If he lives as I do, I would not seek to cut short his career. I went a few days ago to her grave; I go often,

but this time I accomplished what I long desired. I dug up the jewels I had buried on the hillside, to get that bangle she always wore; I have longed for it. I seem to see her white arm and the glittering gold ring upon its snow. Do not touch the rest, Standish, let them lie where I laid them. Take care of my poor children, you and Dorothy must take care of them. I am so desperately tired. When shall I find rest? Your friend, as of old,

“HERBERT CALLANDER.”

Standish was very white, and his teeth were set when he laid down the last sheet of this long, sad, startling letter.

It was too true, then, Dillon's clever disentangling of the puzzle! What a terrible tragedy this destruction of two lives! His generous heart ached for the ruin, the injustice wrought by a spiteful tongue, by the selfish recklessness of a man too absorbed in a guilty passion to hesitate at the sacrifice of friendship, honor, loyalty, or even the happiness of the woman he professed to love.

It was brutal, insensate, but Standish had no time to think of Egerton now. Callander's case was a serious one. He must not be suspected; the terrible truth must not leak out. For the unfortunate criminal himself, Standish felt the most profound pity. He could not look on him as responsible. Disease was gaining fast upon him, but a jury would probably take a very different view of his condition. Come what might, he must be shielded from the consequences of his desperate deed. It must be kept profoundly secret. Dillon must be silenced. No breath of the dreadful truth must reach Dorothy's ears; it was enough to kill her with horror. He (Standish) must get him out of the country. But how? Could he send the unhappy, half, if not wholly insane man to wander alone, and put the climax to the dreadful story by murdering Egerton, or himself, or both, and so display the disgraceful facts to the world, covering the memory of poor, timid Mabel with obloquy?

Nor, if Callander went, as Henrietta Oakley proposed, with her and Dorothy to make a temporary home abroad, would he ever know a moment's peace! The fatal brain disease from which he believed Callander was suffering was certain to increase, and God only knew what delusions might urge him to attack Dorothy. Standish shuddered and started to his feet as the idea flashed across him. For

some moments he was stunned and incapable of forming any plan. But, by an effort, a strong exertion of self-control, he pulled himself together. He would go to Eastport that night. There was one more train. He could, at least, go and speak with Callander, and see how far he was capable of reason. He had been such a fine, high-minded, unselfish, chivalrous fellow; surely some sparks of the old light must linger in his poor, distraught brain. He might feel the necessity of a friend's sheltering guidance. How could he, even in the profoundest aberration, lay a destroying hand upon his sweet, gentle wife? Had he been himself, and fit to guide her, a few, wise, loving words would have put all right between them, and freed her from the unholy mesh in which Egerton had entangled her. But, looking at the past by the light of the present, Standish felt convinced of what he formerly dimly guessed at; that for some reason Mabel had of late grown to fear her husband.

"I waste time pondering here when I ought to act," he exclaimed, and, taking Callander's long confession, he enclosed it in a fresh, strong envelope, sealed it, and, writing on it his own name, he added, "to be destroyed in case of my death."

Then, with a heavy heart, he put a change of raiment into his bag, and, having snatched a hasty meal, drove to Waterloo station. He was rather too soon for the eight-thirty train to Eastport, so he sat in the corner of the waiting-room, his legs stretched out, his hands deep in his pockets, and his travelling cap over his eyes.

There were few people about, and Standish, wrapped in his own troubled thoughts, was not conscious of their presence. He was, therefore, startled when a tall, well-dressed man suddenly accosted him.

"Halloa, Standish! Where are you bound for?"

"Ah, St. John! I—I didn't know you were in town."

"I have been up for ten days," returned St. John, "and I am going down to Aldershot to see my sister, Lady Dashwood. Her husband is quartered down there. I'm due at headquarters the day after to-morrow. I was dining with your handsome cousin, Miss Oakley, and missed my train. Little Miss Wynn, Mrs. Blackett, her son, and old Colonel Conway, made up the party. They said you had gone down to Fordsea to look after poor Callander."

"Missed my train, too," returned Standish, abruptly.

"Both in the same predicament, eh? Your ward, Miss Wynn, is looking as if she had cried her eyes out. 'Pon my soul! its too bad to see such a pretty creature fretting herself to fiddle-strings."

"Can't wonder at it?" growled Standish. "When you think of the awful blow she has had. I am glad she appeared; she is inclined to shut herself up."

"That's foolish—ain't it?"

"It's one of those things that can't be reasoned about."

"Have you seen Egerton?" pursued St. John.

"Egerton? No; he is not in England."

"Oh, yes, he is. I saw him in a hansom just now, coming across the bridge."

"Are you sure?"

"As sure as I am that I see you!"

"I did not know he was coming back so soon!" exclaimed Standish, and fell into deep thought. It would be hard to meet Egerton and refrain from shooting him; he was such an utter scoundrel. Yet he must keep him from encountering Callander. If this happened, some frightful scene would ensue which would expose the whole truth to public gaze. His unexpected return would complicate matters considerably.

"So, I suppose they will marry now, and then he'll dry her tears for her," St. John was saying when Standish again listened,

"Who—what?" he asked, rather impatiently.

"Why your ward's. I suppose when the mourning is over he'll marry her—Egerton will, eh? They are engaged?"

"No, they are not. They never were. She never wanted him."

"Do you mean to say she would refuse such an offer? Why, there must be some other fellow in the field. Yourself, eh? Always heard you were a fascinating sort of chap. But the little girl has no tin, I fancy.

"Good night!" exclaimed Standish, starting up, "I must get my ticket," and he rushed off abruptly.

"What a blatant idiot that St. John is," thought Standish, as he settled himself in a corner of his compartment; "and it's uncommonly lucky that Dorothy had the discrimination to see through Egerton's spurious love-making! Nine girls out of every ten would have been carried away

by it! What preserved my little Dorothy? Profound penetration? No, that's too big a thing. True instinct?—more likely. Love for another?—most likely of all; but who? She is an uncommon little puss—and—I'm not sure I should quite enjoy seeing her fondly in love and going to be married! Yet it would be best for her. This dreadful business will affect her future—affect it rather disastrously if any trial and 'esclandre takes place. If Henrietta marries, what is to become of Dorothy?—even if she does not—they have only drifted together temporarily! What a womanly little creature Dorothy always has been! Why, I don't think she has given me a kiss since she was twelve years old! Well, she must be taken care of whatever happens!" Then, half ashamed of dwelling so long on Dorothy's possible love affairs when such grave and tragic matters lay before him, Standish turned his thoughts to the problem of Callander's future.

Though feeling that the unfortunate man was scarcely responsible, he was conscious of a distinct repugnance to the idea of meeting and probably touching hands with the murderer of his gentle lovable war!

"The mind must have been hopelessly impaired," mused Standish, "before a man like Callander, a chivalrous gentleman, would deliberately strike a woman in her sleep, and that woman his own beautiful wife! What may he not attempt in the future? But without displaying the very seamy side of the story, how can I appeal for legal authority to put him under restraint? It's all infernally puzzling. Much will depend on the condition in which I find him. I almost hope he may never quite regain his original mental condition, or remorse for the fatal crime he has committed will be more than I can bear. As to letting Dorothy live with him—that is not to be thought of."

* * * * *

It was past eleven when Standish reached the well-known Pier Hotel at Fordsea.

Colonel Callander, the waiter said, had gone to his room some time before. So Standish would not hear of disturbing him.

"I can see him to-morrow morning," he said. "At what time does Colonel Callander breakfast?"

"Nine sharp, sir. He goes out to boat or bathe very early, and comes in about eight-thirty—to-night he ordered

fish and kidneys for breakfast, as he seemed to expect you might come, sir."

"Oh, very well! Give me some brandy and soda and I will go to bed too."

This apparent hope of seeing himself seemed a good sign to Standish. If Callander was only capable of taking a rational view of his own position it would simplify matters; but Standish dreaded the final stages of that most terrible disease—softening of the brain—which reduces the most gifted to the level of the "beasts that perish."

It was sometime before Standish could sleep—when he did he slept heavily.

The emotions of the day had fatigued as much as physical exertion would have done.

When he woke the sun was high in the heavens and sparkling brightly on the rippling waters of the bay. All things seemed smiling with the infantile joyousness which the sea in its gently playful moods often expresses.

It struck Standish with indescribable sadness. Heshrank from the approaching interview with profound repugnance, and a depressing sense of not being equal to the task he had undertaken.

When dressed and ready—it was nearly half-past eight—and taking his hat he sallied forth, thinking it might be less oppressive to meet Callander first in the open air.

As he strolled slowly towards the hut where Old Jack, the boatman, sheltered himself among his boats drawn up beside it—every step recalled the happy hours he had spent on the beach with Mabel and Dorothy the previous autumn; chiefly with Dorothy, for, as he reviewed that happy holiday time, he remembered how often the partie carree broke into a tete-a-tete division—that Egerton rarely left Mabel till Callander arrived, while Dorothy and himself found so much to occupy and interest them that they rarely missed the others.

And what an ending to such fair, tranquil, seemingly innocent days! To what a tragic conclusion they were blindly drifting!

Standish found Old Jack seated in the stern of one of his boats, smoking a very black pipe, and looking out so earnestly towards the east. headland that he did not hear the approaching step.

"Good moruing, Jack."

"Eh? Mr. Standish! Mornin', sir—haven't seen you down here this many a day, sir."

"No, I've been too busy to take a holiday."

"Not much of a holiday for you to come down here, sir," said the rugged old salt with feeling.

"That's true." There was a pause—then Standish asked, "Has the Colonel gone out to bathe to-day?"

"Yes, sir. He goes a fishing or bathing every morning when he is down. Sometimes I go with him; but bless your 'art, sir, he never catches nothing! Forgets he's holding the lines most of the time! He ought to be coming in about now," putting a battered glass to his eye. "I see no sign of him yet. When he gets the oars in his hands he rows sharp enough. You sit down a bit, sir—he'll not be long—he went away tow'st the Head, where the ladies used to like to row, in the mornings—last autumn! Ah! well!—the ways of Providence are past our knowledge!"

With a sigh, and a wise shake of the head, Old Jack resumed his pipe.

CHAPTER VII.

"THE SEA GIVES UP ITS DEAD."

Standish accepted the old man's invitation, and, lighting a cigar, took his seat beside him. A long spell of silence ensued.

There is no more taciturn creature in the world than your regular old salt. With his weather eye (whatever that may be) perpetually on the look out for squalls, or the shifting of the wind, and his mind on the alert to meet the treacherous forces of the sea and storm, with all that human foresight and resolution can do to circumvent and conquer them, he does not care to weaken his mental powers with idle words, but out of the stores of accumulated wisdom he lets fall pearls and diamonds of tersely expressed opinion, the essence of his crystalised experience.

So Standish and his weather-beaten host (for, had he not offered him the hospitality of his stranded boat?) sat silently side by side, their eyes directed watchfully toward the "Head," as the promontory east of the bay was familiarly called, the thoughts of both centred on the same object.

Time went very slowly, and Standish was quite surprised when half-past nine chimed from the clock of the old town church. "I thought it must be ten at least," exclaimed Standish, impatiently.

"It's past his usual time," said Jack, putting up his battered glass again. "He went only for a dip," he said. "If it's your will, sir, I'll just pull out to look for him if we see no sign of him in ten minutes."

"Do," said Standish, eagerly, "and I'll come with you. You may have a long pull."

"The tide will be flowing for quarter of an hour longer," said the boatman, "and with the tide he ought to come pretty quick, but we'll find it stiff work."

He got over the side of the boat as he spoke and began very deliberately to put a couple of oars in a lighter one.

"It's the finest morning we have had this month," he said, slowly. "He may be tempted to swim about a bit. Still, it might be better to go and look for him."

"Much better," said Standish, assisting the old man to push the light boat over the shingle to the water. As they took their places, three-quarters chimed out, a sou'-west wind carrying the sound over the waters.

Standish had been accustomed to row in his Oxford days, and from time to time since; and now unknown to himself, his unspoken fears found expression in his energetic strokes, till at last his old mate exclaimed, "Gently, by your leave, sir. If you pull so hard you'll pull me round. There's no use in hurrying. It's getting a little fresher, and there's a pretty tidy swell on. We might miss the chase in the trough of the waves. Keep her head to the wind and I'll give him a hail."

Standing up, old Jack Goold shouted long and loud the name of the boat taken out by Colonel Callander that morning, "Lively Peggy. ahoy!"

In vain; there was not even an echo to reply.

Then he returned to his oar, saying simply, "Let's make straight for the Head."

So they rowed on and on, and round and about but no trace of the Lively Peggy nor her oarsman was to be seen.

Never did Standish lose the profound impression of that weary row, the sickening fear that grew upon him, the hopelessness and sinking of heart.

At last Jack Goold said, sullenly and hoarsely, "We'd better get back, sir. I don't see how we can do any good.

We'd best speak to this tug I see coming along on our tack. If you promise something of a reward, they'll keep a look-out. There's no knowing where the boat's drifted?"

"The boat, man!" cried Standish, in much agitation. "You don't mean to say you do not think Colonel Callander is in her?"

"I don't mean nothing, Mr. Standish; only it looks bad-dish seeing no sign of her."

The old man presently hailed the tug, which ran down to them. Standish clambered on board, but the old boatman thought it better to return to his station, in case they had by any accident, missed the object of their search, hoping to find his boat and its occupant, alike beached and safe.

It would take much time and space to describe the growing fears with which Standish paced the tug's dirty deck, or stood eagerly scanning the face of the waters, as they steamed slowly to and fro.

At length the skipper remarked that if they stayed thereabouts till night they would find nothing; adding, not without feeling, that he would not give much for the gentleman's chance if some craft had not picked him up before this.

Standish agreed with him, and the master bringing his vessel to as near the Head as he could safely go, sent his passenger ashore in one of the tug's boats.

The spot he landed on was a small rocky projection not far from a stretch of fine sand which filled a slight indentation of the shore, where Standish had often found Dorothy, with Nurse and the children hunting for shells and seaweed. A long walk, however, was before him, and his mind was too profoundly disturbed to allow of tender memories. He pressed on at a good pace, thinking hard what was best to be done if Callander had disappeared, or if he had returned alive. Both contingencies had their difficulties.

It was a long, painful progress. Nearing the common he diverged from his direct road to pass Jack Goold's hut. The old man was on the look-out, and, perceiving his approach, came rapidly to meet him.

"What news?" shouted Standish before they were within speaking distance.

Jack shook his head, and as soon as they stood face to face, said, in a low voice, "Bad—couldn't be worse. A chap has just come down to tell me that my boat has been

picked up by the fishing smack Mary Jane, with the Colonel's clothes, his watch and chain and purse. The poor gentleman is lost, that's plain enough. Likely got cramp and went down, for he was a strong swimmer."

Standish stood still and silent. Was this the end of the story—the last act of a pitiful tragedy to which two innocent sufferers had been driven by blind fate?

"I suppose it is folly to hope?" he forced himself to say at last.

"Ay! no good at all, sir. I don't see as there is a spark of hope, nohow! He was a grand gentleman," continued the old boatman, beginning to fill his pipe with an unsteady hand. "That kind and thoughtful for them as worked with him; but one you wouldn't care to say 'no' to. I don't think he was quite right, sir, since them Spanish swabs murdered his poor lady! By Gad, sir," with sudden fire, "I'd like to string 'em up to the yard-arm with my own hand."

"It is an appalling finale," muttered Standish to himself.

"It is so, sir; but the Lord, he only knows the heart!"

An utterance which showed Standish the drift of the old man's thoughts.

"Where can I find these fishing people and the boat?"

Jack Goold immediately offered to guide him, and, tired as he was with five or six hours' mental and physical strain, Standish had no thought but for the task still before him, and proceeded at once to the well-remembered old dock, where the fishing smack lay.

The clothes, etc. had been already handed over to the police. These Standish had no difficulty in recognising. He was assured that all attempts to search for the body would be useless. Some of the currents that existed outside the bay might have swept it out to sea, or the tide might cast it out.

As there was no more to be done at present, Standish, though greatly shaken, was obliged to think of his own duties, public and private. His temporary leave was nearly expired, and his chief had shown him so much consideration, that he was anxious not to out-stay it. Then none save himself must break the sad news to Dorothy. How would she bear this last blow?

He, therefore, telegraphed to Colonel Callander's solicitor to come down himself, or send some capable employee to be

on the spot, should action of any kind prove necessary, adding that he would wait his arrival.

A reply wire soon reached him to the effect that Mr. Brierly himself would come down by the three-ten train.

Standish was thus enabled to confer with the greatly distressed lawyer (who was a personal friend of Callander's) before he started for town,

It was nearly nine o'clock when he reached his rooms, and he debated with himself whether he should attempt to see Dorothy that night or not. "No," was his conclusion; "she shall have this night at least, undisturbed." Indeed after the tremendous strain of that trying day, he felt quite unable to meet her.

"Mr. Egerton is below, sir," his servant announced. "Shall I show him up?"

"Yes; show him up," said Standish, sudden vigor and fire replacing his exhaustion at the sound of his name.

He remained standing, and the next moment Egerton entered.

"Very glad to find you at last," he cried, in his usual genial, pleasant voice, as he advanced, with outstretched hand; "I am longing to know——"

He stopped, silenced and astonished by the aspect of Standish, his stern face, and the sight of his hand closed and resting on the table, quite irresponsive to Egerton's friendly gesture.

"What is the matter, Standish?"

"I will explain. You must hear me without interruption, for what I am going to say is sufficient strain on my self-control. I have heard the whole truth which underlay the tragedy in which we have both played a part. I know the brutal villainy of your conduct towards your friend's wife. I know that the suspicion which should have fallen on you were directed to me, and I have it from Callander himself that he, too, had learned the truth, that he was aware of the debt he owed you, and was resolved to pay it in full; therefore you are unfit to touch the hand of a gentleman, to sit in the room with a decent woman! You took the heart, the will, of a weak, innocent child by false stratagem into your iron, pitiless hands, and for the gratification of a base passion, destroyed her soul's life, as certainly as her murderer struck her dead!"

"While he spoke Egerton's large, dark eyes grew larger,

fiercer, and fixed themselves unflinchingly on those of Standish.

"Yes!" he returned in a harsh voice. "This is how, I suppose, a moral, blameless man like yourself looks upon me, and this is how I look upon myself:—I found one of the sweetest, fairest creatures my eyes ever rested on, whose indefinable charm fascinated my heart, and thrilled my senses as no other woman among the numbers I have known ever did before. I found her tied to a cold, half-indifferent man, whose age, whose dull nature checked and repressed hers. She feared him, she wanted the companionship of a younger, a more sympathetic man? She was formed for me, and all that was needed to secure such happiness as men and women rarely taste was that she should take courage and burst her bonds. It would have been but a nine day's wonder, soon forgotten, and I could have given her everything. But she dared not! God never created an angel purer or more self-denying than Mabel! Whether right or wrong, I have but one regret, that I did not succeed in carrying her away from the oppression of her home to the heaven my love could have created—from the cruel madman who destroyed her sweet life, to the shelter of my arms. My love for her gave me superior rights! I shall never repent or regret my share in the past!"

"You too, are insane," exclaimed Standish, amazed at his self-deception, and struck by his allusion to Callander. "You must have lost your balance or been born without moral sense!"

"Moral sense? What is moral sense? the cumbrous lacquer with which the needs of society compel us to overlay our nature! There are circumstances which excuse our casting off this outer husk. But I understand what preachers such as you will think. To the moral sense of your ward Dorothy, her sister owes her death. Had she not interfered Mabel would now be living, recovered from the shock of following the dictates of her own heart, and glowing with the joy she gave and received.

"And Callander?" asked Standish, sternly.

"Dead, or in a lunatic asylum—what is that to me?"

"Your recklessness is revolting."

"Is it? Remember, I have conquered myself for her sake! Feeling convinced from some strange innate conviction that Callander murdered his wife I forced myself to endure his company rather than give cruel tongues any

chance of touching the truth. I bore the bitter reproaches of her sister. I will bear in silence—no breath from me shall ever tarnish the pure name of my beloved dead! Do you think that all the suffering has been on the husband's and sister's side. You little know the absolute physical agony I have endured! For her sake I listen to your abuse without seeking the satisfaction I should otherwise gladly demand! But no! I do not care enough for your opinion—for yourself or for anything else in life—to enjoy shooting you! You are of your kind---honorable, phlegmatic, high-principled---not with living fire in your veins as I have! We cannot help our natures! But you and I have the honor of Callander's name, the safety of his life in our hands, and though we shall keep far apart in future, we must guard it well."

"His honor, yes; for the rest---no earthly judge can touch him now."

"My God!" cried Egerton, with a sudden revulsion of feeling. "Is he dead?"

"I have reason to believe so," and Standish told the occurrences of the day as rapidly as he could.

"Then that chapter is finished!" exclaimed Egerton.

"We can never meet again as friends; but for the sake of the dead we must not seem enemies. Dorothy may rest satisfied with her work," he added, with a sneer.

"She has reason to be satisfied," returned Standish, gravely. "Better mourn over her sister's early grave, than blush for a faithless wife, a dishonored mother."

Egerton stood a moment in silence. Then he said, more to himself than to Standish, "I shall leave England to-morrow." With one steady, defiant look into the face of his accuser he left the room and the house. This last interview completed the exhaustion of the day. Standish forced himself to take some food, and then stupified with fatigue slept heavily till morning. He felt that there was yet a severe trial before him in breaking the news to Dorothy. He profoundly feared the results of such repeated shocks on her sensitive, sympathetic nature. He must guard her from the knowledge that Callander's hand had robbed her of her sister.

* * * * *

When Standish reached Prince's place next morning he found Dorothy alone at the breakfast table; she was look-

ing a little brighter than usual, and rose to receive him with a welcoming smile.

"I am so glad you have come, dear Paul! I am dying to hear how you and Herbert met. If he is friends with you and trusts to you, he may recover something of his old frame of mind."

"Yes, Dorothy, I will tell you everything," returned Standish, holding her hand half unconsciously in both his own. "But come into the study, we shall be undisturbed: Have you finished your breakfast?"

"Oh! yes, quite---Henrietta has a headache, so she did not come down; but she wants to see you before you go."

While Dorothy spoke she led the way into the study; a small fire was burning, and the window was open upon a neat little garden, where the sunshine of an early spring morning seemed to promise a future crop of grass and flowers.

"It is cold still," said Dorothy, closing the window and turning to Standish, who stood still and silent; something in his face, in his compassionate eyes, struck her heart.

"Paul---dear Paul---how dreadfully ill you look! something has happened! something to Herbert! Tell me at once."

"Yes! my dearest Dorothy! We greatly fear---that an accident---bathing---sudden cramp, perhaps---" Standish could hardly form his words.

"Oh Paul! say it at once. Is he dead?"

"Sit down, my child," drawing her to the sofa, and holding her hands in his. "We cannot say certainly that he is! but I fear that we shall never see him again---I will tell you all---"

Dorothy listened with wide open dry eyes.

"Might he not have been taken up by some other ship, Paul?" she exclaimed in a tremulous voice. "Oh! I wanted him to have a few peaceful days with you and me and the poor children, he has been so miserable! and you two never met again! It is all too cruel!" She trembled violently but could not weep. "And Mr. Fortescue---you know him---he came with us that day so long ago, in the yacht to Bookstone. Well, he was at luncheon yesterday, and said he had seen Herbert at Fordsea, and thought him looking better than he expected; he spoke so nicely, so sympathetically, that I felt cheered. And now all is over

—the children are quite orphans? Oh! I feel that he is indeed dead?"

"I rather think he must be! But if he died without much suffering, don't you think it better for him to be at peace---perhaps united to Mabel---as Christians are permitted to believe such things possible? Have you no tears, Dorothy? It frightens me, dear, to see your poor eyes so dry---to feel how you tremble."

"I tell you what terrifies me, Paul! Do you---do you think he did it himself?" and she clung shuddering to him.

"No, certainly not!" returned Standish, promptly, "Why---he ordered breakfast for himself and for me (for he seemed to have expected me), and in his letter he spoke of objects to live for! No Dorothy---put that thought out of your head."

"He wrote to you, then?"

"Yes, very kindly and frankly, just like his old self."

"Ah! how good he was, how kind he was---how gentle, how true---why, why has one bad man been allowed to destroy our happiness? My head feels on fire---"

"Think of these poor little children, so unconscious of their desolation," began Standish, at his wits' end to draw tears to the poor strained eyes, when the door burst open and Henrietta, her eyes red with weeping and a handkerchief in her hand, came in.

"Oh! Have you told her? Isn't it too dreadful? Oh, poor, dear, Dorothy, how I feel for you! Yet what can your grief be to mine? I loved him all my life, quite all my life," and sitting down, she covered her face and sobbed aloud.

"How did you know?" asked Standish. "I did not say anything in my note, to save murdering sleep for one night?"

"It was this morning. Collins read it in the papers and told Celestine, and she ran, of course, to me. I kept out of the way in my room, for I knew I should talk to Dorothy, and I told them to keep all the papers below. Now you must tell me the whole dreadful story."

Standish complied---noticing the constant fits of trembling that shook Dorothy's slight frame.

"Now," said Henrietta, rising, "I hope you will not mind being left alone Dorothy, but I am going off almost immediately to catch the mid-day Calais boat. I feel I ought to break this dreadful news to my aunt. In

losing her son she loses everything, and nobody seems to think of her."

"I certainly do!" said Standish, grimly. "Had it not been for her ——" he stopped.

"Oh! yes, I know, she growled and grumbled and made herself disagreeable, but then she meant well! At any rate, Dorothy, I feel I ought to go to Aunt Callander."

"Yes, Henrietta. I don't mind staying with Nurse, I am so fond of her, and Paul will come and see me. I think I will go and lie down, my head and eyes ache dreadfully."

"Well, do, dear. I shall see you settled before I go."

"Good-bye, Paul. How good and kind you always are to me!" At last the gracious tears came, and Dorothy hurried from the room.

"Thank God she can weep at last!" cried Standish to Henrietta. "For Heaven's sake come back as soon as you can. I feel certain she is going to be ill! But I daresay Mrs. McHugh will take good care of her."

"I declare you don't seem to have a thought for anyone but Dorothy," said Henrietta, impatiently.

"Not many," he returned tersely.

Henrietta stared at him.

"You will be sure to telegraph to me to Maurice's if you have any news or in any case. If this day passes over without his return, we have seen the last of poor Herbert!" She again burst into tears, and shaking hands with him, followed Dorothy upstairs.

Standish returned to his chambers on his way to the Foreign Office, and found a telegram from Brierly:—

"Body cast up by tide on western spit. Shall do all that is needful. Come as soon as you can."

Despatching this by a messenger to Miss Oakley, Standish perforce continued on his way, that he might clear off some work, and make what arrangements he could to attend the funeral of his unfortunate friend.

CHAPTER VIII.

FINIS.

It was all over. The mortal remains of poor Callander were laid to rest beside those of the wife he loved too well.

The only members of his family who followed him to the grave were a couple of distant cousins. Mrs. Callander

was in a strange state of nervous depression. Henrietta in Paris. Dorothy laid up with a severe attack of low fever. Egerton—no one knew where. Of all the pleasant party that used to assemble at The Knoll, Standish was the sole representative.

Those officers who had any acquaintance with Callander, begged to be allowed to testify their respect by attending his funeral.

Then Standish felt that he could do more, and the curtain fell upon the last act of the sad drama.

He was profoundly anxious about Dorothy, and greatly feared her strength would not be equal to the strain upon it.

A few days after he had once more settled to the ordinary routine of his life, he paid a visit to the lawyer at his request, for Colonel Callander, a few days before his unexpected death, had, by a codicil, revoked his appointment of Egerton as executor, and named Standish in his place, requesting that so long as Dorothy was unmarried she should remain with his children.

Together Mr. Brierly and Standish went carefully through the will, which was simple and reasonable enough. He had little more than a competence to leave his children, but that was judiciously disposed. The will had been made just before he went to India, and the only changes in it were since the death of Mabel. Then the wish for Dorothy's superintendence of the children was put in; and Egerton's name substituted for that of Standish. This was again altered as described, and a further appointment of Standish, as guardian of the children, added.

"There is no sign of unsoundness of intellect in this," said the lawyer, folding up the document as he spoke. "Yet I must confess there was much in our poor friend's manner and conduct latterly which showed that he had somewhat lost his mental balance. His poor young wife's strange and dreadful end supervening on the impaired condition of his health, would account for much. As we are speaking confidentially, and are equally interested in my client, may I venture to ask you if it has ever occurred to you that his death was voluntary?"

"Yes, it has occurred to me; but, on reflection, I have rejected the idea. The only letter I had from him for some time was just before his death, and in it he spoke of ulterior objects, for which he wished to live. He seemed to have fully intended returning to breakfast that morning. No;

I do not think we are at all justified in supposing him guilty of suicide."

"I am glad to hear you say so," returned the lawyer; "but he had certainly been for some time in a remarkable state of despondency."

"He was, indeed." There was silence for some moments.

Then Brierly resumed:—"It has been an extraordinary affair altogether. I don't suppose we'll ever find the murderer?"

"No; I don't suppose we shall. There never was much chance of it."

"I am very glad Colonel Callander put your name in as executor and guardian. Mr. Egerton was too much a man of fashion and of pleasure for the office, though a very sincere friend—quite devoted."

"Yes, remarkably so."

After a little further conversation, Standish left him, and walked towards his own lodgings in somewhat deep thought.

He was uneasy about Dorothy, who had not left her room since the day he had broken the news of Callander's disappearance to her. She was very weak, Mrs. McHugh reported, and apparently quite content to lie still, without a desire for anything.

Certainly the doctor assured him there was no need for alarm. It was a case of nervous prostration. As soon as the weather was a little warmer, they must get her away if fresh scenes, new interests, could be presented, this would, no doubt, effectually restore tone and vitality.

"I wonder if she has any girlish fancy for that young Fortescue? He is a nice young fellow, and in the midst of her grief about Callander, she thought of the pleasure his company had given her. But he is a mere boy; by no means a fit mate for a girl whose mind is as mature as Dorothy's, and quite incapable of appreciating her. What an age it is since I have seen her, and nurse says she will not be downstairs again for three or four days." Then his thoughts wandered to Dillon. His silence and non-appearance puzzled Standish. He certainly was not likely to renounce the claim he had made for hush money. He must know well that Colonel Callander's family would shield the reputation of the dead as carefully as they would have guarded the safety of the living. He was up to some mischief. "I should like to see him," mused Stan-

dish ; "but I shall not seek him. He will be sure to present himself. He has been well paid so far, but I should like to be sure of his silence. The awful truth must never come out. It is humiliating to think that we are at the mercy of such a scamp as Dillon. But he must be silenced."

Standish here hailed a hansom and drove to his own abode. As sometimes happens, he found his thoughts had been prophetic. The servant of the house, hearing his latch-key in the lock, came out of the front parlor. "If you please, sir," presenting a card, "the gentleman said he would call again."

"If he does, show him up," returned Standish, reading the inscription, "Luke C. Dillon." "I shall be at home most of the afternoon."

"The decisive moment has come a little sooner than I expected," said Standish, as he sat down to his writing-table. "How shall I deal with the fellow? he is really master of the situation. I don't want to hold any communication with Mrs. Callander. In spite of all the mischief she has done, I am rather sorry for her. Her son's confession must have been a deadly blow—a blow that must have shattered her pride and ambition, and made the only affection she was capable of a source of torture."

He began a letter to Henrietta, for he was anxious that she should return to her temporary home and to Dorothy.

His lubrications were cut short by the announcement of "Mr. Dillon," and the detective entered, fresh, cool, self-satisfied, and red as ever.

"Good morning!" said Standish, rising.

"Good afternoon!" returned Dillon, and both sat down opposite each other, with civil faces and watchful eyes.

"Thought I'd look you up," began the detective. "You'll have been wondering what has become of me?"

"Well, no! You see there is nothing more to do, as —" Standish paused.

"Just so! Nothing more to do—and a pretty tidy job I made of it, eh, Mr. Standish?"

"I readily acknowledge your remarkable ability," returned Standish, cautiously.

Dillon laughed a short laugh, as if he did not value the compliment.

"Well, sir, the poor gentleman made away with himself sooner than I expected."

"How do you know that he made away with himself?"

"Why, Mr. Standish, you and I who know the whole truth, need not beat about the bush when we are face to face, and no witnesses by. I daresay there's doubt enough as to intention to entitle you to deny it was suicide, but what you think is another pair of shoes. Between you and me, it's the best thing the poor fellow could have done! His life was over—any life worth living—so he was right to get shut of it."

"We need not discuss the question," returned Standish, haughtily. "We are not likely to agree on abstract questions."

"Like enough!" with careless superiority. "Now the reason I have called is to show you that I have a good deal of what I believe you top-sawyers call delicate consideration mixed with a due regard for my own interest." He paused.

"Pray continue; I am much interested."

"You'll be more so presently. When last you and I had a talk, Mr. Standish, we differed about one or two trifles. One was the amount due to me for information which would certainly lead to the discovery of the murderer, and also for an undertaking to hold by tongue as to the same. Now on reflection I decided not to trouble you. You were not of the family, you could not be exactly a judge of how far their feelings would urge them; so I just crossed over to Paris and asked the old lady, Mrs. Callander, to grant me the honor of an interview."

"You did!" cried Standish. "This is exactly what I should wished to have spared her!"

"I daresay, but I suspect the old lady would rather do business with me. Anyway, she saw me pretty quick. Lord, what a taking she was in—shaking like an aspen! She is just fifteen years older than when I last saw her. She's dying by inches, of fright. She soon let out that her son had confessed his crime, and that she was ready to pay me any amount if she could only ensure my silence. But I am a man of principle, Mr. Standish, always was; so I kept down the figure, and told her that two thousand was heavy enough to sink the business deep down out of sight for ever. She was quite amenable to reason, not to say in a hurry to draw me a cheque, and wished to add a trifle for travelling expenses. However I directed her how the matter was to be done; not all in a lump to create suspi-

cion. That's neither here nor there—any way, I have bagged the cash. Fortunately I got the matter settled before the news of the Colonel's death reached her." Dillon paused, but Standish did not speak. Had he opened his lips he felt sure his words would not have been complimentary. After waiting with expectant eyes, Dillon resumed once more.

"I thought it right to tell you this, and as I am just going to start for Australia on a curious lay—to let you know that all's square. I needn't tell you, as I am a man of honor, that you may make your minds easy, the family secret is safe with me."

"Unless," replied Standish, yielding to an irresistible impulse, "some one offers you three thousand for it."

Dillon smiled, not an amiable smile. "No, Mr. Standish, my character for secrecy and reliability is worth more than that!" He rose and so did Standish. "Now, I've finished with you, and so I'll bid you good-bye; but I'll not be so uncivil as to put you to the necessity of refusing my hand; though it's a curious contradiction that you disdain the man whose work is so necessary to you in your straits."

"It would be less a problem to you, Mr. Dillon, if you cared to remember that there are more methods than one of doing the work; a grain or two of more disinterestedness alters the aspect of things wonderfully."

"Faith, may be so. Good morning, sir, and if ever an enemy wants you for any little delinquency, pray God he may not put me on your track! With a defiant nod Dillon left the room, and by an instinctive action, Standish threw open the window as if to breathe purer air.

* * * * *

"The day drags on, though storms keep out the sun," and spring was now far enough advanced to make Standish think it was time that Henrietta Oakley took Dorothy to Switzerland or North Italy. She had been full of the scheme at first, but for the last week or two seemed disposed to postpone their departure, till Standish determined to go and settle the date at which they should start for Brussels, a town Dorothy wished to visit.

It was a fine, bright Saturday in mid-April, when Standish drove up to the well known house in Prince's Place.

"Miss Oakley was not at home," said the mournful Collins, "but Miss Wynn is in the drawing room."

The room looked delightfully home-like; the bright sunshine tempered by outside blinds, the atmosphere rendolent of violets. Dorothy was at the piano when Standish came in, and rose with a quiet smile to shake hands with him. She looked less delicately pale than formerly; there was a pale, shell-like pinky tinge in her cheeks, but her great, dark-grey eyes were more pathetic than ever.

"I am glad to see you at the piano once more, Dorothy," said Standish. "You are a good girl to try and get over your morbid feelings."

"Yes, I must conquer my dread of hearing music," she said, with a slight sigh, "though I don't like to think it is morbid. But if I do not resist, it will take too strong a hold on me. It will not do to be melancholy with those poor dear children."

"No, certainly not. You are looking better my dear ward," still holding her hand.

"I am gaining strength," she returned, gently withdrawing it. "This is the occupation that cheers and soothes me most. I must have the soul of a seamstress," and opening a work-basket, she drew out a little white embroidered frock, half made. "This is for Dolly. I am taking lessons from dear old Nurse, who is a past mistress of needlework." She displayed it with a smile, then seated herself on a low basket-chair, and began to ply the needle.

Standish leaned on the end of the sofa, and looked at her with tender regret for the young days which sorrow had so deeply shaded.

"It is time you were away in some sunny new place. Where is Henrietta? I am determined to put matters en train to-day, and we can do nothing decided without her."

"I am afraid you will not see Henrietta to-day, nor to-morrow either; she has just gone down to stay with Lady Kilruddery at Twickenham, till Monday."

"Lady Kilruddery? I did not know she was a friend of Henrietta's!"

"She is going to be more than a friend," said Dorothy, with a gleam of her former fun in her eyes.

"She told me a wonderful tale this morning. She has accepted Major St. John."

"Is it possible?" cried Standish.

"Yes; that was what I said, and you know Henrietta's frank, out-spoken way. 'I really think it is the best thing I can do,' she said. 'He is nice looking, and quite fond of me. Then, his eldest brother, the invalid, you know, died about six weeks ago, so Major St. John will be Lord Killruddery; indeed, he said he would not have had the face to ask me but for this. It sounds horrid,' she added, 'but there is really no harm in it.' So she has gone down to stay with her future mother-in-law. She says she is getting sick of living by herself, and as everything has been miserable of late, she wants a fresh interest; then she is told that Irishmen make rather pleasant husbands, and she will take care he does not squander her money."

"This is, indeed, a piece of news! I hope she will be happy; she is a good soul, though a little flighty," said Standish,

"Yes; very good. How kind she has been to me! I like her so much that I am in a way vexed and disappointed that she should treat such an awful serious affair as marriage so lightly and carelessly. Just think of being tied for life to Major St. John!"

"There are worse fellows. He will let Henrietta do as she likes, and I think he admires her."

"Ah, well!" Dorothy slightly shrugged her shoulders, and put her head on one side with an air of disapprobation.

"I should like to know more of your ideas on this important subject, Dorothy," said Standish smiling. "You have withdrawn your confidence from me of late."

"Oh, no," carelessly. "Whenever I fall desperately in love, I shall come and tell you, of course."

Standish did not reply, and Dorothy looked up.

"Why Paul, how ill and worn you look!" she exclaimed in quite a different tone. "Are you ill?"

"Physically, I am quite well; mentally, ill at ease," he returned, and, walking to the fireplace, he stood leaning against the side of the mantelpiece.

"I've got promotion at last, Dorothy. I am to be Secretary of Legation at C——."

"At C——? And how long are you to stay there?"

"That I am not sure—three years, at least."

Dorothy did not speak. She began to fold up her work with unsteady hands, and grew very white, even to her lips.

"Three years, Paul? That is a lifetime. Henrietta married and you away! What—what is to become of me?"

"We must arrange something for you, Dorothy," he said in an odd, absent manner. "I shall not go for a month or six weeks." He paused; Dorothy rose, and went to the window, as if to escape his eyes.

"Though you will not confide in me, Dorothy," he resumed in a low, earnest tone, "do you care to hear a confession of—well, I fear I must call it weakness—from me?"

"Of course I do," she said, while an awful thought dashed across her. "Is he going to say he is in love with Henrietta? She believed he was."

"To you I dare say it will seem folly in a man who has left youth behind him," continued Standish, grasping the top of a chair near him with a nervous grip, "but I have fallen, no, rather grown into love, deeper and more intense, perhaps, than many a younger fellow could feel, with a girl almost young enough to be my daughter. I don't know that everyone would think her a beauty; to me no other face or form was ever so—so fascinating. To sit and watch the endless changes of the one, the grace of the other, is happiness to me. She has her faults; she is a little hasty, a little self-willed; but so true, so generous, so unselfish, so kind to me, whom she has known all her life. I see her sweet, sad eyes brighten when I come near, but dare I hope it is anything beyond the almost filial affection which might be her natural feeling for me, that speaks in them? Shall I ask her to be my wife? Is it not possible that for kindness, gratitude, pity's sake, she might say Yes, when nature might dictate No? Can I trust her to be true to herself as well as to me?"

"Let me confess, too, before I answer," returned Dorothy, clasping and twisting her fingers nervously, while her heart beat so fast it stirred the folds of her black dress. "I, too, have been foolish, for I have let myself fall in love with a man older, wiser, better—oh, a thousand times better—than myself, and I have been very unhappy, because I am ashamed of loving one who could only think of me as a half-formed, incomplete creature, to whom, however good he might be, I could only be an object of charity in the way of affection or regard. To know he loved me——" Breath and utterance failed her.

"And his name?" cried Standish, imperiously seizing her cold, trembling hands.

"Is Paul," whispered Dorothy, as she gave her soft mouth to his and leant unresistingly against his breast, locked in a tender, loving embrace.

It is well that in this brief, troubled life of ours, moments of pure and unalloyed delight are given once or twice in its chequered course. They may be but short, yet they remain a blessed memory, in heart and mind, like a strain of heavenly music.

"Long, long be our hearts with such memories filled,
Like a vase in which roses have once been distilled,
You may break—you may ruin the vase if you will,
But the scent of the roses will cling round it still."

After a delightful interval spent in a rather disconnected and interjectional review of past experiences, doubts, fears, and mistakes, the lovers came partly down to earth. The influence of their old free happy companionship enabled them to speak with complete frankness.

To think of being always with you, never to be alone and adrift any more! It is wonderful!" murmured Dorothy.

"Wonderful and heavenly, Dorothy! Then, my darling, you will come with me at once? In this deep mourning our wedding needs no parade, no preparation, and we know each other so well."

"Yes; that is best of all. I will do whatever you think best. But Paul, dear Paul—what about the poor dear children? I must not part with them."

"Why should you? We will take them with us. C— may be very cold, but the climate is dry and healthy. We will take all possible care of them, and they will develop into energetic, vigorous young Scandinavians."

"Ah, had our dear Mabel and Herbert lived! How glad they would have been to see us united. If that cruel, dread—Randal Egerton—"

"Hush, dear Dorothy; do not think of him to-day. Put him out of your mind altogether. There is a Judge who knows the measure of his guilt, and can mete out punishment more just, more subtle, than any we could devise."

[THE END.]

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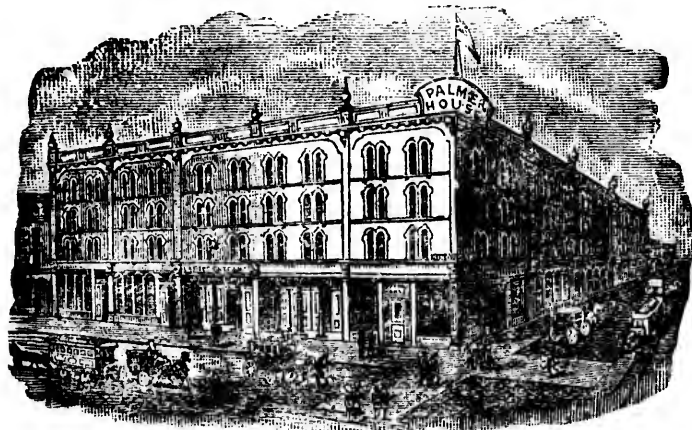
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