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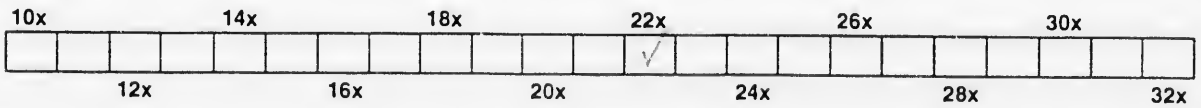

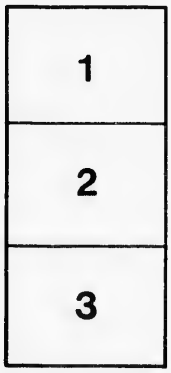

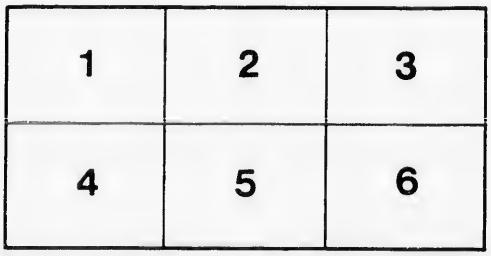

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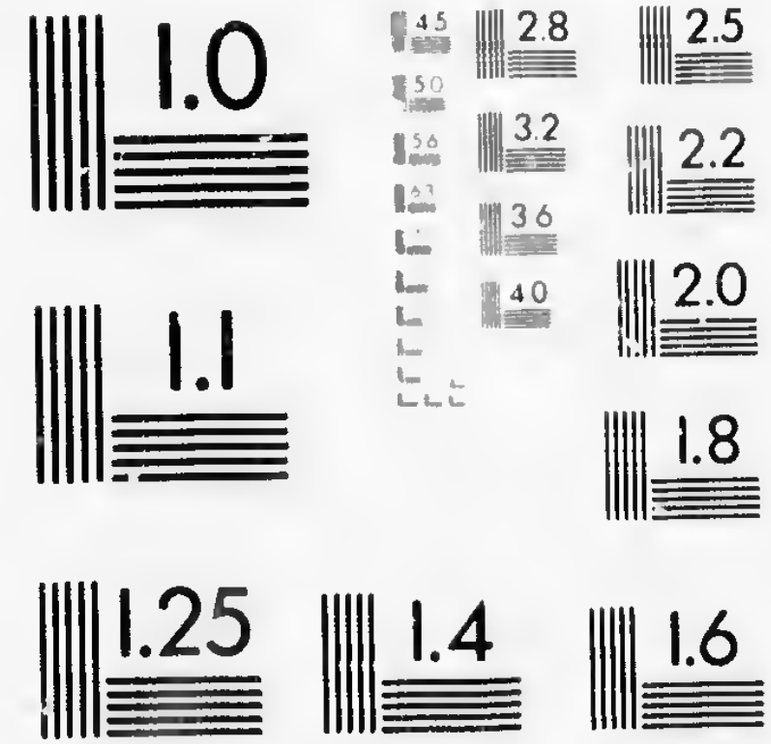

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LADY EVELYN ; OR, THE LORD OF ROYAL REST.

CHAPTER I.

LORD RODERIC.

The September sun was setting stormily, down there on the Wicklow coast. Far off, the purple mountains were fast losing themselves in the double darkness of coming night and storm. Nearer, over moor and meadow, the low-lying sky brooded darkly, and the rising wind sighed fitfully, sweeping up from the Irish sea. Westward, lurid bars of blood-red showed where the fiery sun had gone down, and the black clouds-rack came rapidly trooping up, like a fleet of mis-shapen piratical crafts, over the blue of the evening sky. Black and angry heaved the sea, under that ominous canopy, and the white-capped surf crashed already on the shingly shore with the dull roar of a beast of prey.

A lonely scene that hour. Away to the east, the fishing village of Clontarf nestled under the rocks; to the left, the tall Tudor turrets and peaked gables, rising above the trees of the park, Clontarf Castle reared it hoary head—one of the stateliest and oldest houses in Britain. Curlews and sea fowl screamed and whirled away in dizzy circles over the black waters; high and dry were drawn up the fishermen's fleet, and the only moving thing on darkened earth and storm-tossed sea were a girl and a yacht.

The girl—to begin with the lady—stood on a lofty boulder, gazing seaward, making a picture of herself, outlined against the blackening gloaming—a brightly pretty girl, very fair, very youthful, with a thoroughly Irish face—eyes as blue as her Wicklow skies, and as sunlit; cheeks like radiant June roses; hair, thick, rich, abundant, of the truest golden-brown; a low brow, and a mouth like a veritable rosebud. A face for an artist, a study for a pre-Raphaelite, standing there, in vivid relief against black sky and dark sea, and the brown hair and picturesque read cloak streaming in the rising wind.

The yacht lay a mile away, rising and falling in the ground-swell—the trimmest little craft imaginable—a picture in its way as well as the girl—all white and green——an emerald banner with the sunburst of old Ireland(when the fairest isle of all islands had a flag) flapping from its mast-head. In golden letters on the stern was the name, 'Nora Creina.'

The girl looked impatiently at the darkening sky, at the heaving vessel, then glanced behind her with a little, petulant frown.

'How long he is!' she said, tearing up the tall sea-moss by the roots, in girlish impatience. 'They expected Mr. Gerald this evening, but I don't see why that should keep him! Ah!'

She stopped suddenly, her pretty, sun-browned face brightening, for a boat was lowered from the Nora Creina, and two men rowed rapidly shoreward.

'He will come, then, after all!' she cried, in a joyful, breathless sort of way, a rose flush of intense delight glowing through the golden tan of her fair skin.

That tell-tale little pronoun! The old, old story, you see, to begin with. The pretty peasant-girl waited there in the twilight for the rising of her day-god—the coming of her lover.

A step came rapidly down the rocky path—a step light and fleet—and a rich, melodious voice rang down the stillness, singing a ringing hunting song.

The girl started nervously, reddening to the roots, of her fair brown hair; but she turned half away, and drew closer to the tall shelter of the rock. She waited for her darling, but she was too thoroughly a woman to let his mightiness know that.

'A southerly wind and a cloudy sky proclaim it a hunting morning!' chanted the full, rich voice; and then the singer came into view, with the light step of a stag, over

the boulders, and stood balancing himself in mid-air, on the topmost peak of a lofty crag, twenty feet over the water.

He was a tall young man—nay, youth, of scarce one-and-twenty, 'a six-foot son of Anak,' lithe and long of limb, straight as an arrow, broad-shouldered, deep-chested, golden-haired, and azure-eyed. A magnificent young giant—the wildest dare-devil in the three kingdoms, with the face of an Archangel Raphael—a mad-headed, hot-brained, reckless, young ne'er-do-well, who yet looked at you with eyes as blue and smiling and innocent as the eyes of a month-old babe. He was dressed in the colours of his first and only love—the idol of his heart—his graceful Nora Creina, there afloat on the waters—white trowsers, green jacket, green cap with a gold band set jauntily on his handsome golden head. He stood poised on the dizzy peak, looking seaward, with brilliant, cloudless blue eyes.

'There you are, my beauty, my darling!' he cried, apostrophizing the trim little barque, 'and if I don't give you a spanking run in the teeth of this gale before morning, I'm not my father's son. We'll make King's Head in four hours with this stiff breeze—a glorious race before midnight, my darling Nora!

'"Oh, my Nora Creina, dear,
My charming, bashful, Nora Creina!
Beauty lies in many eyes,
But love in yours, my Nora Creina!"'

He sang gaily, his voice floating out on the breeze to the boat dancing like the cockleshell it was over the breakers, and answered by the men on board with a hearty Irish cheer.

'Lord Rory!'

He had turned to leap down—agile as a cat, never seeing the red cloak and pretty face so near him—when the girl starting up, called, and as he turned with a bewildered 'Hallo!' called again:

'Lord Roderic!'

"'Fore George, it's Kathleen!' He was beside her with a bound. 'Standing here like a Wicklow fairy, or a banshee, or a goddess of the storm, or anything else you like. Come to see me off, Kathleen? How polite of you!'

Kathleen tossed her pretty head saucily. She had come to see him off, and coloured guiltily as he guessed it.

'You always were conceited, Lord Rory, and always will be. As if one could not come down to watch the storm rise, without coming on your account?'

'Watch the storm rise? By Jove! how romantic the dear little girl's getting! Has quite a Byronic sound, that, 'pon my word, and comes of improving her mind, under my tuition, as she's been doing lately.'

He looked a dangerous preceptor for youth, this fair-haired King Olaf, with his laughing eyes and splendid face; and the red light flashed gloriously up in the pretty, sunburned cheeks, under his merry gaze.

'So you're going to King's Head to-night, my lord,' Kathleen said, making a petulant little mouth. 'Well, I dare say you'll be safe in spite of the storm. Any one born to be hanged—you know the proverb.'

'"Hanged will never be drowned." Very likely, Miss O'Neal. I won't be the first Desmond who has been hanged for his country's benefit either, by long odds. We always do come to grief as a rule, and I don't think half a dozen of us ever died decently in our beds. We've been pinked in the "Phœnix," we've had our heads set up to ornament Tower Hill, we've been roasted alive in our own strongholds, we've been court-martialed and shot at day-dawn, we've had our heads chopped off like spring chickens, for high treason. I never heard of but one Desmond who was drowned, and he was a pirate, cursed with "book and candle," so could expect no better. Yes Miss Kathleen O'Neal, I'm off for King's Head in my bonny Nora Creina, and I'll take you with me, if you choose, with all the pleasure in life.'

'Thank you, Lord Rory! I'm not tired of my life yet. When I feel like suicide, I'll let you know. There's the boat. Good-evening to you—I'm going home.'

'"My boat is on the shore, and my barque is on the sea." And so you won't come? Well, then, I would recommend you to go home, for standing here in the wind is neither pleasant nor profitable that I can see. Good night, Kathleen! If quite convenient, dream of me. Oh, I say, how's the Englishman?'

The girl turned upon him suddenly, her face reddening, her eyes flashing passionately in the half light.

'Lord Rory,' she cried.

He laughed, bounding like a chamois down the steep crags.

'Then you won't smile on your lover? Poor fellow, how I pity him! My own heart has been broken so often, you see, Kathleen, that I can afford to sympathize with fellow martyrs. Any messages for King's Head? No? Then, for the second time, good night!'

He waved his gold-banded cap courteously in gay salute, this boyish Lord Roderic Desmond, only son of the Earl of Clontarf,

and went springing down to the shore, singing again.

'"Twas from Kathleen's eyes he flew—
Eyes of most unholy blue.'

But for the Kathleen standing on the rocks, she was forgotten ere the passionate, yearning blue eyes were fairly out of sight.

He sprang into the boat, the men pushed off, and it went dancing lightly over the billows. The girl shrank away behind the tall boulder, lost to his view in the gathering darkness, but watching him and his fairy craft with impassioned eyes, that told their own story of woman's deepest bliss and deadliest pain—love.

And then distance and darkness took him, and Kathleen hid her hot face in her hands, loving, and knowing she loved, as vainly and wildly as that other Kathleen, whose 'unholy blue eyes' Moore sings, hurled into the lake by flinty-hearted Saint Kevin.

Vainly, indeed! for she was only the daughter of the village pedagogue, and he—ah! the blue blood of the princely Desmonds—Kings of old—flowed in his veins, and an earl's coronet awaited him in the future.

* * * * * * *

Night had fallen—black, starless, wild. The frowning coast had vanished; they were far out on the tempest-lashed ocean, the wind rushing by with a roar, a dark and fiery abyss of waters heaving around them.

And through the night and the storm the gallant little Nora Creina shot ahead like an arrow, and on her deck, his gold hair streaming in the salt blast, Lord Roderic Desmond stood, scanning the stormy blackness with a powerful night-glass.

Far off—a luminous speck against the dead darkness—something bright, like a falling star, glimmered and glowed. His men were gathered around him; they needed no glass to see that one luminous ray.

'By heavens!' he cried, closing his telescope with a class, 'it's a ship on fire!'

And then his rich voice rang out above the uproar of the storm, the wind and the sea, giving his orders to bear down to the relief of the burning ship.

Away as a deer flies from the hounds—the Nora Creina flew over the foam-lashed billows! Nearer and nearer they drew to that brilliant ray—that terrible bon-fire on the ocean! Larger and larger it loomed up before them—a pillar of fire—in the storm-lashed sea.

And as they neared it—so close that but a few yards divided them—they could see on the burning deck two figures—a man and a woman.

'We must lower the boat at once, and if the boat does not go down like an eggshell, then a miracle will have taken place,' Lord Roderic said. 'Lower away, my lads; there is not a second to be lost.'

And as his words rang out, wild and high above the uproar, there came, piercingly, a woman's scream of distress.

It seemed surely death, but even unto death these men would have followed their gallant young leader. And a Desmond never knew fear, and Death and Lord Roderic had stood face to face many a time already in his brief one-and-twenty years.

Was he going to shirk it now, and a woman perishing before his eyes? His wild cheer, clear as a bugle blast, echoed cheerily as he sprang into his frail skiff.

'You will come with me, Fitzgerald,' he said. 'No, my lads; any more of you would only be in the way. Now then pull with a will.'

And the fairy bark sped away over the foamy breakers as though upheld by fairy hands. The 'Luck of the Desmonds,' traditionary all the country-side over, was with them in their dauntless, daring to-night.

'Leap into the sea!' those on board the yacht heard Lord Roderic cry; 'we will pick you up. We can go no nearer.'

The man on the deck of the burning vessel seized the woman in his arms, and ere the words were well uttered, leaped overboard into the black bitter waters. The flaming ship lit the storm-lashed ocean for yards around.

They sank—they rose. Fitzgerald bent to the oars, and sent the light skiff shooting to where their white faces gleamed above the hissing waves. Lord Roderick bent over and laid hold of the woman's long, streaming hair.

Breathless the watchers on board the yacht gazed. There was moment of inexpressible peril and suspense; then the woman was lifted in the stalwart young arms of Lord Clontarf's son, and laid in the bottom of the boat.

But that moment was fatal. The white face of the man vanished, as a huge wave dashed him brutally into its depths. Over the wild, midnight sea, one last, agonized cry rang out:

'Oh, God! save me! save my Inez!'

'Back to the yacht, Fitzgerald—back, for our lives!' Lord Roderic shouted. 'The man has perished! Back! Give me the oars!'

The little boat, urged by those strong skilled rowers, shot back to the Nora Creina, as if invisible hands guided it through the tempestuous sea.

They reached the yacht, and a great shout of joy and thankfulness arose as the young heroes passed up the rescued woman, and came on board.

The burning ship blazed steadily to the water's edge, then went headlong down, and an awful blackness reigned.

Of all her living crew, only this one woman remained to tell the tale.

She lay on the deck where they had placed her—still as one dead. Lord Roderic lifted her in his arms, carried her into the lamp-lit cabin, and laid her on a couch.

She was dripping wet, and her hair, long as a mermaid's, clung about her; her eyes were closed; the face was marble white. Cold and still she lay there before him in a dead swoon.

And the young Lord Roderic stood above her, a brandy-flask in his hand, gazing down on that white, still face. For, in all the one-and-twenty years of his bright, brief life, Earl Clontarf's only son had never looked on anything half so lovely as this unknown girl he had saved from death.

CHAPTER II.

GERALD DESMOND.

Sunset hour again, low there on the picturesque Wicklow coast. An October sunset—cloudless and brilliant. An oriflamme of splendour, of golden, and crimson, and purple, a royal canopy for the King of Day, filled all the west with indescribable glory.

And once again, all alone, on the wild and solitary shore, Kathleen O'Neal stood, looking over the boundless sea at that crimson glory in the sky.

The soft, abundant brown hair hung loose, and fluttered in the light evening wind. In and out of the red glow on the sea the fishing-boats glanced. Far away white sails shone in the offing, and rising and falling airily in its sheltered cove, the Nora Creina lay at anchor.

Kathleen looked at none of these things. She had sunk down on a bed of sea-moss, half-lying, half-sitting, one round, white arm thrown up over a tall rock, her head lying wearily on that arm.

The great, soft blue eyes, so brilliant, so joyous six weeks before, looked blankly over the ocean, with a dull and dreamy loneliness, inexpressibly sad to see; the pretty, piquant face had lost all its bright bloom, its glad, gay smiles and dimples.

She lay there listlessly and forlornly enough, pale as the surf breaking on the sands below. Only six weeks since that lurid sunset, when she had waited impatiently here for her lover, with a heart as bright and as light as a bird's. *Now* she sat haggard and pale, weary and hopeless, for in six brief weeks the light had faded from pretty Kathleen's life, and her lover was as utterly and entirely lost to her as though the angry waves of that stormy night had swept over his golden head forever.

Her lover! Yes, hers, by the memory of a thousand words, of a thousand loving smiles, of a thousand tender kisses, of walks, and talks, and sails, and presents, and looks, and whispers.

Only boy-and-girl love, perhaps, but very sweet and charming to them both, until *now*—and now the boy-lord had forgotten his low-born love as completely as though she had never existed, and the girl was breaking her heart over it, as girls have done from time immemorial.

'Will she ever love him as I have done?' Kathleen thought, her heart full of hopeless, bitter pain, 'half so dearly as I have done? And he *did* love me a little, before she came between us! Oh, Mother of God, keep my soul from the sinful wish that the black waves had swallowed her that night!'

A step came down the shingly strand, a man's step, but the girl never stirred. It was not *his*; what then did it matter if all the world passed before her? All would still be desolation, and he were not there.

'Give you good-even, my pretty Kathleen!' said a soft, low voice, that Kathleen knew well, and a whiff of scented cigar-smoke puffed on her face. 'On my life, you make a very charming picture, my dear. I never wished I were an artist until this moment. Come here to see the sun go down, eh?—well!' with a lazy sigh, 'neat thing in the way of sunsets, too. How's the dear old dad?'

Kathleen rose up with a bound, flushing rosy red, and dropping an embarrassed little courtesy. A tall man man stood before her—a gentlemanly looking personage, of thirty or thereabouts, well dressed, well looking—with a shadowy resemblance in his light blue eyes and fair hair to the golden-haired, azure-eyed darling of her heart. He was not one hundredth part so handsome, but he vaguely resembled Lord Roderic Desmond, and was that young lordling's third cousin—the penniless son of a penniless younger brother, a barrister-at-law, of Lincoln's Inn, London.

He looked much more like an Englishman than an Irish Desmond, with his carefully-trained side-whiskers, his slow, languid voice, and his affectation of utter indifference to all things under the sun.

'Gerald!' Kathleen cried, 'you here! I didn't know—I thought you were—'

'At home, as I should be very likely. But hard work all summer has used me up, and I've taken a run over to Clontarf to freshen for the autumn and winter campaign. "Men must work and women must weep," and they avail themselves of their prerogative, the dear, moist creatures, to the full. I must say, equally at weddings and funerals. You don't know the song of the "Three Fishers," I dare say, Kathleen, but you look as though you had gone in for the weeping business yourself, of late. Six weeks ago I saw you as blooming as one of your own Irish roses; now, a belle of seasons could hardly look more chalky and haggard than my wild, fresh Wicklow rosebud. Is it speedy consumption, Kathie, or a more fatal disease—crossed in love?'

He took the cigar from between his lips and bent toward her, a keenly knowing look in his small, light-blue eyes.

He and little Kathleen knew each other well—from the days when he, a tall, hobbledehoy of sixteen, had been 'coached' by old O'Neal, a decayed gentleman and a thorough classical scholar, and had romped with the prettiest four-year-old fairy in the country.

Old O'Neal had been proud of his clever pupil, and Gerald Desmond, who was always prodigal of those fine words which cost so little and butter so deliciously the parsnips of society, was a regular visitor at the cottage of his old preceptor during his flying visits to Clontarf.

He had seen Rory and Kathleen together more times than he could count, and he had pulled his long, blonde whiskers, and smiled sardonically at Rory's boyish devotion and Kathleen's innocent blushes.

'Quite a chapter out of Arcadia, really,' he said, with his cynical sneer; for he had been a cynic before he left off roundabouts. 'Paul and Virginia—the Babes of the Wood—anything innocent and turtle-dove-like you please! My dear, artless Rory, and my pretty, blushing Kathleen! as guileless as a pair of newly-fledged goslings! How refreshing it is to know that such sweet simplicity yet reigns on this big, wicked earth!'

And Mr. Gerald, in his hard, old precocity—a man 'mad-about-town' at-two-and twenty, with all the knowledge of a wicked old age—chaffed his lordly cousin, and caused that ingenious youth to blush nearly as much as little Kathleen herself, half in boyish shame, half in honest indignation.

'It's quite a pastoral, the "Loves of Rory and Kathleen." I think I'll turn poet-taster and write it out, and beat the "Venus and Adonis" all to sticks. How's it going to end, Rory, my lad?' Is it to be the gushing legend of Lord Burleigh and his Ellen over again, and is artless Kathleen, the village school-master's daughter, to grace a coronet? Or will it be, "Oh, weep for the hour when to Eveleen's bower the Lord of the Valley with false vows came?" Hey, my Wicklow Apolo?'

And to all of which Mr. Gerald never got any more explicit answer than a modest blush and an indignant 'Oh, hang it, Ger! none of your nagging! Let a fellow alone, can't you!'

He bent over Kathleen now, and saw the red blood rising to the low, fair brow, and the hot mist that filled the soft, blue eyes.

'Rory hasn't been to the cottage for the past six weeks. I dare swear,' he said, carelessly; 'he is taken up by night and by day, sleeping and waking, body and soul, with that dark-eyed donna from old Castile. Seen her yet, Kathleen?'

He could see the tempestuous heaving of Kathleen's breast, the passionate cloud of jealousy that darkened her whole fair face.

'Yes, I have seen her—again, and again, and again!'

'And she is beautiful as one's dreams of the angels, eh? Not that I ever dream of these celestial messengers myself; and I don't suppose they have big, black eyes, and a shower of midnight tresses down to their waists, if one did see them. But she is lovely as a houri from Stamboul, and—you hate her as Old Nick hates holy water!'

'Mr. Gerald! I!'

'You, Kathleen—for this reason: Rory has gone mad for her! Ah, what an impetuous, hot-headed, reckless, hair-brained fellow that is! On my word it takes my breath away only to think of him. And impetuosity is so very pronounced, and in such excessively bad style! But he is madly in love, and really the Senorita d'Alvarez is very well worth loving—supposing anything is worth getting the steam up to such a pitch here below. She's a royal beauty; she's the heiress of a millionaire, with shares and bonds, and consols, and coupons, and castles in Spain, and bank stock in England. Only it would be such an infinite deal of trouble, I would fall in love with her and marry her myself.'

'I wish you would,' Kathleen said, between her clenched, pearly teeth. 'Why did she ever leave Spain? Why did she ever come—'

'Here—between you and Rory? Ah! why, indeed? You see, Kathie, the Don married an English woman, rich beyond all

telling, and beautiful as—her daughter. Donna Inez has spent her whole life in a Spanish convent, in Valadana, I believe, and Don Pedro and his English donna went in for high life in our modern Vanity Fair—Paris. Then the English lady dies, and the Spanish papa waxes lonely, goes to the convent, claims his daughter, and starts with her for England, to present her to her English relatives by the distaff side, and—the ship catches fire, off the Irish coast, and the crew take to the boats, and the two passengers are forgotten in the hubbub, and Master Rory and his yacht arrive in the nick of time to bear off the shrieking beauty from the devouring flames a modern St George and the Dragon. What a scene it would make for the boards of the Princess' or Porte St. Martin! How the pit and the galleries would applaud! You've not read many novels in your lifetime, my Kathleen, and you're all the better for it; but if you had, you wouldn't need me tell you the sequel to this delightful romance. The curtain invariably falls, after a score or two of such tremendous sensations, on the crowning folly of man—marriage!'

'Marriage!' Cathleen repeated, her breath coming short and quick—'marriage, Mr. Geraid! Will Lord Roderic marry her?'

'I think it extremely likely. As I said, he is in a state of utter imbecility about her, and she—well, those impassioned, tall, black-eyed, dark-skinned, fiery-blooded Southrons are generally the very devil to love or hate. And Rory's thews and sinews, his six-foot of stature, his yellow locks and his blue eyes have made their mark already. The lad's good-looking, as you know, Kathleen, and Donna De Castilla is susceptible. In spite of papa's recent death, and her trailing crape and sables, she looks graciously already on the future Earl of Clontarf. Yes, Miss O'Neal, I think I will be called upon to draw up the marriage settlements for my lordly cousin before the world wags twelve months longer.'

She was tearing up the turf with a fierce, suppressed excitement that must find vent somehow. Gerald Desmond glanced at her askance.

'And if I were you, Kathleen, I would take the initiative. I would marry Morgan out of hand.'

'Mr. Gerald!'

She turned upon him, her pale cheeks flashing in the twilight.

'Don't flare up, you little Celtic Pythoness! Yes, I would! Morgan's an Englishman, and an attorney—heinous crimes both in your eyes and your father's; but for all that, you can't do better. He's well-to-do. He'll make a lady of you, or a lady on a small scale, and no one need ever apply to you that nasty little word—jilted!'

'Gerald Desmond! How dare you?'

Gerald Desmond shrugged his shoulders and smiled. He rarely laughed.

'Coming the tragic muse, eh? Pray don't excite yourself, my dear. I'm talking like a father to you. I met Morgan down there beyant, as they say here, and he begged me most piteously to put in a good word for him. You've lost Lord Roderic, you see, and I give you my word, Kathleen, I thought at one time his little flirtation would have ended seriously. But he has gone down beyond hope before the Spanish eyes of the Castilian beauty, and your cake's dough. Marry Morgan, like a good girl, and live happy forever after!'

She clutched a handful of grass, and flung it passionately over the rocks.

'I would die ten thousand deaths—I would jump into the sea yonder, before I would marry Morgan! I hate him!'

'Poor fellow!' said Morgan's intercessor, plaintively; 'but you'll marry some one, some time, you know, Kathleen. It's woman's destiny—the end and aim of her whole life—marriage.'

'I shall never marry,' her voice choked as she said it, and she turned away. 'I will go to my grave what I am to-night.'

'My dear little gushing Kathleen!'—Gerald Desmond absolutely laughed a little, so amused was he—'"I'll live and die a maid," as the old song says, for Rory's sweet sake. Don't do it, Kathleen. Go up to Clontarf and forbid the banns.'

'What do you mean?'

'Why this, little one: The donna is as proud as the deuce—all these high-and-mighty Spanish beauties are—and as jealous as the devil! Go up to the castle, insist on an interview, tell her Rory is yours, not hers, that your claim to him is beyond dispute; so it is, you know—he has been courting you ever since he was three feet high. Tell her he loves you still, and is only after her doubloons. By Jove! Kathleen, she'll drop him like a hot potato!'

'Mr. Gerald!'

The amazement, the indignation, the superb hauteur with which Kathleen regarded him, is utterly beyond description. She stood drawn up to her full height, her eyes ablaze in the silvery light.

'Yes, mignonne.'

'How dare you say such things to me!'—she stamped her foot, and her little brown fist clenched—'how dare you insult me by such suggestions! Come between him and the girl of his heart, when I would die at

his feet to make him happy! Go to that noble lady and belie him—the noblest, the bravest, the truest—'

Her voice broke down—poor Kathleen was no orator. She covered her face with her hands, and burst into a very passion of tears.

Gerald Desmond shrugged his shoulders, took out a cigar, struck a fusee, and lit it.

'They are all alike,' he murmured—'peasant and princess. They will go in for hysterics in spite of you. Well, Kathleen, don't cry—please yourself, you know—I've only been talking to you for your good. 'Fore George! he must be the darling of the gods, this Roderic Desmond, since you all lose your heads for him; and he can jilt you in cold blood, and the most spirited of you haven't spirit enough left to resent it.'

'He never jilted me,' Kathleen retorted, angrily; 'it was all my own folly from first to last. What was I, that he—so noble so handsome, so high-born—should stoop to care for me? I tell you it was all my own mad folly, nothing else; and I am properly punished. I beg your pardon, Mr. Gerald; you make me say rude things in spite of myself. Good-evening to you! I must go home.'

'Wait one moment, Kathleen,' he said, with a singular smile. 'You are most generous—most magnanimous; now take your reward. Look yonder.'

He pointed—she followed the direction of his finger. Up from the shore, in the silvery haze of the rising moon, two lovers came, walking as lovers walk, talking as lovers talk. She leaned on his arm, clinging to him—a tall, slender, black-robed girl, with a namcless, high-bred grace; and he—ah! the tall, fair head bent over her, the devoted eyes watched her, in a way that told the tale.

'Lord Roderic Desmond and Donna Inez,' said Gerald Desmond. 'Has he asked her already to be his wife? It would be very like him, impetuous that he is, and very like her, passionate and impulsive, to say yes. Well, good-night, Kathleen, and—pleasant dreams!'

He touched his hat carelessly and turned away, humming an old song as he went—

> Thou hast learned to love another,
> Thou hast broken every vow—'

and each word went through the girl's heart like a knife. Where he had left her, she crouched down, her face hidden in her hands with the low, dumb moan of a stricken animal. The tears had come to Gerald Desmond's words; but no tears came now—only mute, dumb despair was left.

Gerald Desmond walked slowly homeward, in the silvery light of the moon, to Clontarf Castle. His pale face was at all times fixedly calm, but his light-cold eyes gleamed with an evil gleam. For he coveted this Spanish beauty, with his whole soul, for her rare loveliness, that had fired his cold blood—for her great wealth, that maddened him with covetous desire.

What was his cousin, this fair-haired, impulsive boy that all the glory of the world should be his! With such a prize as this Spanish princess for a wife, there was no eminence in the kingdom but he, with his shrewd brain and crafty cleverness, might not attain.

He had hated and envied his cousin long, with a letter and terrible envy, all the more deadly from being so closely hidden; but he had never in his whole life before hated—these two, matchless in their beauty—in their bright youth and love. Gerald Desmond set his strong, white teeth and ground out a terrible oath.

'I have hated you in secret for many a year, you shallow-brained, mad-headed fool!' he said with a gleam of devilish malignity in his light eyes; 'the time has come to act now! Woo your black-eyed bride; win her if you can. If you ever lead her to the altar—if you ever slip the wedding-circlet on her finger—then "write me down an ass!" I love Inez d'Alvarez, and mine she shall be—mine! I have said it, and we Desmonds keep our word. When her wedding-day comes, unlikely as it looks now, I will stand at the altar by her side, and you will be—where, Lord Roderic?'

CHAPTER III.

WEAVING THE WEB.

She stood by the window, looking out over the illimitable sea, a picture of rare loveliness. Stately and tall, slender and willowy, graceful and high-bred, the dainty head held proudly aloft, and the rich masses of blue-black hair falling in a shining, glossy cascade over the sloping white shoulders down to the little waist. A low brow; a complexion of the deal, creamy whiteness of ivory; a curved red mouth, haughty and sweet at once, and two wonderful Castilian eyes, long, black, and bright as stars. She was dressed in deepest mourning: trailing far behind her over the oaken floor; her sole ornaments, a sparkling cross of diamonds on her breast, and a circlet of red gold clasping back her beautiful, abundant hair.

She stood alone in the long, low, old-fashioned drawing-room, the first of a lengthy suite—alone by the open window, framed

like some exquisite picture by Grenuze or Guido, in wild-roses and climbing ivy. She stood alone, yet not lonely, for a tender, misty light softened the flashing glory of those great Assyrian eyes, and a dreamy, happy smile curved the perfect month. For she was very, very happy, this impassioned Spanish girl, in spite of her recent loss, her father's terrible death.

She had known very little of that lost father in all the eighteen years of her convent life. Love, to her, bounded the universe, and she was in love, with all the fire and passion, and wild abandon of her tropical Southern blood. She loved, and was beloved, and this wild Wicklow coast was to her fairer than all the beauty of sunlit old Castile—this stormy Irish Sea, spreading before her, dearer than the bright-flowing Ebro, on whose sparkling waters her baby-eyes had first looked.

The moon was rising—like another Venus Aphrodite, out of the ocean—red and round; the stars swung clear in the purple night-sky; the nightingal s sounded their plaintive jug-jug in the woodland; and soft and low the waves washed up on the white sands.

And looking on all the sylvan beauty of the falling night, with her happy heart in her starry eyes, Inez d'Alvarez stood and waited for her lover.

'Why does he linger?' she thought, with the pretty impatience of a sovereign beauty not born to wait. 'If he is only happy when by my side, as he says. why, now, does he stay away?'

She was of an intensely proud and jealous nature, this high-hearted daughter of old Castile, and she came of a fiery-blooded race, who brooked no rival in love or in power.

'What did that cousin—that Senor Gerald mean to-day when he laughed so disagreeably, and hinted at some old love of the past He says he loves but me! My Roderic has never loved any other! He would not dare deceive me—my prince, my king! If he did —Ah, he comes!'

The darkly-beautiful face lit up with a gladder light than ever shone on sea or land. She bent a little forward.

Yes, he came, and 'Senor Gerald' by his side. They were arm-in-arm; both were smoking, and Lord Roderic towered up a full head above his less stately kinsman.

They had been playmates in youth, schoolfellows after, and Roderic Desmond, with the princely habit nature and custom had given him, ever kept his needy cousin's coffers full, even if his own went empty. It was a right leal heart, as became a descendant of the kingly Desmonds, and he loved his cousin and comrade with a great and loyal love.

The fair, dark face glanced out a second in the silvery light, then vanished. She was by far too proud to let any man alive, though he were her king as well as her lover, see she waited his sovereign pleasure.

But the hawk eye of Gerald saw her, swift as she moved, and the soft, trained voice rose ever so lightly as he passed beneath the casement.

'I was conversing with a very old friend of yours this time last night, Rory,' he said, with his low, faint laugh; 'and—poor, little girl—she does take your divided allegiance terribly to heart. We had hysterics, tears, reproaches, despair—all that sort of thing that women persist in going in for—to our heart's content What a terrible slaughterer you are, Rory! Knock Nero to nothing; out-Herod Herod! It is the Massacre of the Innocents over again!'

Rory opened his bright-blue Celtic eyes in a wild stare of honest astonishment.

'Hey! What the deuce are you driving at? I don't know what you mean.'

'Of course you don't. That's your role now—as Benedict, the married man. Stick to it, my dear boy, by all means. Your dark-eyed donna might not relish your feats of prowess, or knowing the list of your killed and wounded. Only—poor little thing! I don't believe she'll ever hold up her head again. How do you do it, Rory!'

'Deuce take you, Gerald! What poor little thing are you talking of?'

'Of Kathleen O'Neal, if you will have it. Drop the mask with me, Rory, lad. It does well enough for the senorita, but I can see through it. You haven't used that little girl well, young one; she's gone to a shadow. Being crossed in love wouldn't be a bad thing for prize-fighters or the university eight, going into training; it takes the superfluous flesh off beyond anything I know. You've heard, among other pretty poetical fictions, of broken hearts, I suppose, old boy? Well, I give you my word, if such inconceivable nonsense could exist, I should say Kathleen's heart was smashed to finders. Ah, you've a great deal to answer for, my Lord Roderic!'

'For heaven's sake, Gerald,' Rory exclaimed impetuously, flinging away his cigar, 'speak plainly! You never mean to say—'

'Ah, but I do!' Gerald said plaintively. 'She's gone down beyond redemption, poor little beauty! I don't set up for Mentor, my dear Telemachus; but, 'pon honour, I don't think you've done the handsome thing by Kathleen. The little one's as innocent as a babe. She thought you serious all along.

I tell you candidly she as good as told me she expected you to marry her; and she's most absurdly over head and ears in love with you. She cried last evening, down there on the sands, until her pretty blue eyes were as red as a ferret's, and her little unclassical nose swollen to twice its natural size. It's only in novels and on the stage women know how to weep without making hideous frights of themselves. You've made the strongest sort of love to her, my innocent Rory—you know you have—and now you throw her off without a word. Well, it's our nature, but it's hard on the women. If you had only let her down gently, now—but with a jerk like this! Ah, bad policy, dear boy—bad policy!'

And then they passed away beyond sight or hearing, the last words coming faint and far-off to the listener's ears.

She did not see the flush of honest sorrow and shame that mantled Roderic Desmond's fair, frank face, or hear the passionate grief and self-reproach in his voice, as he spoke:

'Before heaven, Gerald, I never loved Kathleen save as a sister—a little playmate and pet—or thought she loved me. I never made love to her. I pledge you my sacred honour I never thonght of this.'

Gerald Desmond laughed lightly.

'No, I daresay not. We don't premeditate and do these things in cold blood; we go on impulse, and it comes to much the same thing in the end. You never made love to her? My dear, artless Lord Roderic! there are ways and ways of making love. She thinks you did; so where is the difference? Never mind, Rory; girls will be fools to the end of the chapter. "'Tis their nature to," as Doctor Watts pithily observes; and we must have our little amusements. Don't worry, Rory; I won't tell the donna. Lord! how she would fire up at the thonght of a rival! I'll keep your secret, and you'll reason with Kathleen. Morgan wants her, and if she marries Morgan all will go on velvet. Her father wishes it—poor, old broken-down spendthrift; and you must talk to her as though you were her ghostly director, for the old fellow's sake. Come, let us go in. Bella-donna will think she has lost you.'

The wax-lights were lit in the dark, quaint, old drawing-room, with its heavy, antique furniture, and its squares of Persian carpet, and rich old Turkish rugs, laid over the polished oak flooring.

Donna d'Alvarez was still alone, still standing by the window, gazing out over the shining, moonlit sea.

She never turned at their entrance; and as her lover came up beside her, he started in wonder to see her face set in white, and her black eyes glowing with dusky fire.

'Inez, my darling! what is the matter?'

'Nothing!' she said, coldly and briefly.

She spoke English perfectly, and all the more charmingly for her musical foreign accent.

With that one curt word she turned away, and swept over to his cousin.

'Senor,' she said, with her radiant smile, 'you asked me this morning to sing some of our old Castilian ballads for you. I will sing for you now, if you choose.'

Gerald looked up in surprise. Suave and swift as his courteous answer came, she did not linger to hear it. She had sailed away once more to the further end of the room, and bent above a tall, old-fashioned Irish harp.

Her slender white hands swept the strings, and grand, masterly chords filled the room. Gerald Desmond stood beside her, a shining, evil gleam in his cold, light eyes.

A servant entered the room.

'The Earl wishes to see you in his room, my lord,' he said to his youthful master.

With a troubled face, Lord Roderic followed him out of the room.

Then Inez d'Alvarez threw aside her harp, and stood erect before Gerald Desmond, with angry, flashing dark eyes.

'Half an hour ago, senor, when you passed beneath yonder window with your cousin, I stood there, and heard every word. What did you mean? Has he dared to deceive me—me, Inez d'Alvarez? He told me I had his whole heart. Has he lied, then? Who is this girl who loves him—whom he loves—this Kathleen?'

'My dear Lady Inez—'

'Speak!' she stamped her foot vehemently—'speak, I tell you. I cannot ask him? He has told me once he loved but me; he would tell me so again. Speak, sir, I command! Has Roderic Desmond dared to play with me?'

'Dear Lady Inez, no! I think not—I hope not. He loves you now, and you alone. How could he or any one, do otherwise? But Rory is only a youth, and boys are apt to be fickle. Rory's nature is light and susceptible, easily touched and easily changed. Each fair face makes its mark when we are one-and-twenty. Don't be too hard upon him, Donna Inez. He will always be true to you, let us hope.'

Her passionate Spanish eyes flashed fire, her little hand clenched in a paroxysm of jealous rage.

'*Madre de Dios!* hear him, how he talks! Who is this Kathleen? tell me! I insist—I command!'

'A peasant-girl—beautiful as one of Correggio's smiling angels!'

'Ah-h-h,' she drew a long sibilant, hissing breath. 'And he loves her—*he?*'

'Dear Lady Inez, no, Heaven forbid! There has been some boyish folly in the past—nothing more, believe me; and he is handsome, and she is only a silly little love-sick fool! Ah, what a pity you chanced to hear! How sorry I am I spoke! Donna Inez, forgive Rory. He is but a lad; forget it. Who could look on a peasant-girl, with all the beauty of a Raphael Madonna, after seeing *you?*'

She turned from him with the swift abruptness that was part of her, laid hold of the harp again, and began to play.

Wild, weird melodies filled the room—old Castilian airs full of passion and pain, thrilling and unearthly.

In the midst of the strange music Lord Roderic entered, and Gerald Desmond retreated at his coming, and left the field to him

He approached, he bent over her, he tried to take her hand. 'Inez my love, my own, tell me—'

But she snatched her hand passionately away, and looked at him with eyes that blazed.

'Release my hand, sir! Let me go. My head aches. I am going to my room.'

She was gone like a dream. Roderic De mond turned his bewildered face round to his cousin.

'In heaven's name *what* does it mean?'

Gerald shrugged his shoulders. It was one of his many affectations.

'Dear boy, who knows? A woman's whim! Beauty is in the sulks to-night; beauty will be radiant in smiles to-morrow. Never try to translate a woman's caprices into common sense. Wiser heads have done their best and failed. Suppose we have a soothing little game of *ecarte?* There is nothing like it for quieting the nerves.'

So they sat down; and when, a little after midnight, Mr. Gerald Desmond went yawning up to his chamber, *his* nerves were soothed by fifty additional sovereigns in his purse.

'I have won!' he thought, with a complacent smile. 'I always *do* win; and I shall conquer in this other little game, as well as in *ecarte*. The train is laid low. I'll strike the fusee that shall fire it before yonder full moon wanes!'

CHAPTER IV.

NETTED IN THE MESHES.

A small, thatched, solitary cottage, nestling down, all by itself, in the green heart of the wildest and most picturesque of lonely Wick ow glens.

It looked pretty, it looked a study for a painter, but was drearily lonely and forlorn, despite all the wild, rugged beauty of mountain scenery, closing it in like the setting of a gem. It was somewhere in the afternoon—a gray and sunless afternoon, with a warning of coming storm in the songhing of the sea gale, in the ominous shrieks of the sea fowl. The sky lay low and leaden on the black hill-tops; the furz and purple heath swept downward before the wind, and the moistness of the coming rain was already in the air.

The cheerless light stole through the cottage window—sparkling and bright as the dull green glass could be made. The little cottage-kitchen, with its earthen floor and scant *plenishing*, looked yet exceedingly clean and tidy, and a bright turf-fire lit it up with comfortable cheeriness.

Kathleen O'Neal stood leaning against the chimney, the fair, pretty face sadly sombre and overcast. The soft, child-like eyes had a weary look of pain and unshed tears in their misty depths, and her very attitude, as she leaned there, spiritless, weary, told that hope had gone out of her young heart already.

Pacing up and down the small room was a tall, gaunt old man, stooping and silver haired. His thin, intelligent face, with its sharp aquiline features, had little in common with others of his station. Indeed, the dwellers in turf-cottages were not of *his* station, for Hugh O'Neal had been born a gentleman, had been educatod as a gentleman, and though the all-potent passion for cards and 'mountain dew,' had in his old days come to this—a dependant on the bounty of the most noble Lord Clontarf.

'Kathleen you must marry him!' he was saying now in a shrill passionate voice. 'I tell you, girl, I am disgraced forever if this becomes known. I thought never to touch cards or whiskey again; I promised you, I know; I took my book oath, God help me, and—broke it! I have lost all, Kathleen—all, all, all!' His voice rose to a wild ear-splitting cry. 'This cottage, the gift of our noble patron—the bit of land—all gone, and to Morgan! Oh, Lord of heaven! how will I ever hold up my head again, if this becomes known? and Morgan threatens to

foreclose the mortgage within the month. And then, Kathleen, you know what remains—we are thrown upon the world, helpless as two infants. I am disgraced forever—my only home the p[illegible]ouse. No!' he reared his tall gaunt form, grandly upright, and his bleared old eyes flashed through their tears—'no! it shall never come to that with Hugh O'Neal, whose fathers once reigned Kings of Ireland—never whilst there is water enough in the sea yonder to hide his shame?'

'Father, father!' the girl said piteously, 'for the love of heaven don't say such horrible things! Oh, why did Morgan ever come here to tempt you to your ruin?'

'The ruin would have come the same without him,' the old man said gloomily. 'It was my fate. But I swear to you, Kathleen, and this time I will keep my oath, that if you save me now I will never touch cards or liquor while I live again!'

'You have sworn it so often,' she answered wearily; 'and oh, father, you know how you have kept your word! If I save you! You know I would willingly die to keep you from misery and shame.'

'No one wants you to die,' O'Neal said, eagerly. 'You are young and beautiful, my daughter, and there is a long and happy life in store for you. You know who promises a long and happy life, even in this world, to dutiful children? You will be rich and honoured and happy as Morgan's wife.'

'As Morgan's wife!' She stood erect, and the soft blue eyes, so tender, so gentle always, met her father's with a look he had never seen there before. 'Happy as the wife of a man I hate—a bad, crafty, unprincipled man! Father I will never marry Morgan!'

'Then my blood be on your head!' cried the old spendthrift furiously. 'I tell you Kathleen O'Neal, the day that sees Morgan turn us out of house and home, sees my curse, hot and heavy, on you?'

'Oh, father father!'

'You refuse Morgan, forsooth!—you a pauper cotter's child—the richest attorney in Clontarf—in the country! But we all know why, you little fool! You're disgracing yourself and disgracing your father, by your love-sick folly for Lord Roderic Desmond! A pretty girl you are—a nice, virtuous girl—to be making the idiot of yourself and the townland, by your madness! You'll disgrace me next—worse disgrace than Morgan can bring us. The neighbours whisper about you already, I can tell you, my lady. Don't you know he's going to marry this Spanish lady—the heiress of a millionaire. You want to marry a lord, quotha! and so turn up your nose at an attorney. But I tell you, you little, whimpering simpleton, Lord Rory doesn't think of you half as much, or half as often, as he does of the hounds in his father's pack, of the horses in his father's stable!'

'Oh, father!' Kathleen cried again, in a voice of passionate anguish. 'Have you no mercy? Do you want to drive me mad? Oh, I wish—I wish I had never been born!'

'Will you marry Morgan?' said her father stopping in his stride, and standing sternly before her.

'Father, I cannot! I loathe, abhor that man! I would sooner die! Ah, God help me, I think my heart will break!'

'Let us hope not,' said a soft voice and a man's form darkened the doorway. 'Hearts don't break in the nineteenth century; we have had them, like our city streets, macadamized. What's the trouble, my little Kathleen?'

'The trouble is that she is a fool!' replied her father, with ferocity—'the greatest fool that ever breathed! I have told you, Mr. Gerald, how matters stood between me and Morgan, and still she won't consent to marry him.'

'No? That unlucky Morgan! how you do dislike him, to-be-sure, Kathleen! What's the reason, I wonder? He is not such a bad-looking fellow in the main, and he can keep you in clover.'

'You know the reason—we all know the reason,' said O'Neal, brutally; 'and she ought to be ashamed to hold up her head. By the Lord Harry! I'll go up to the castle myself, and make Lord Rory come here, and order her to marry the attorney. She'll obey him, may be, since she worships the ground he walks on.'

'Oh, mother Mary!' murmured poor Kathleen, hiding her face, 'pity me! Oh, what—what—what—what shall I do?'

'No need for you to tramp to the castle, my dear old dad,' said Gerald Desmond, coolly. 'Rory wants to see Kathleen himself. There's the deuce to pay up at Clontarf. The donna has got wind of Master Rory's little flirtation with Kathleen here, and double things wouldn't hold her. Lord Roderic bade me ask you a favour, Kathleen—to meet him at dusk at the Fairy Well. What answer am I to take back?'

Her heart gave a great throb, that foolish, unrestrained little heart. Since that eventful evening, six weeks ago, she and her darling had never met.

'Tell him I will be there!'

She rose as she said it, and glided from the

room Gerald Desmond looked after her, with his slight, chill smile.

'I thought you would, and I'll make play with the handsome donna meantime. Don't look so down in the mouth, my dear old governor; all well come right in the end. Rory will talk like half a dozen fathers to me, and a word from him will have weight. By Jove! it will be as good as a play to hear him pleading Morgan's cause. Keep up your heart, old friend: you'll have the Sassenach for your son-in-law in a month's time.'

With which, Mr. Gerald sauntered away, whistling softly, and with that cold, chill smile yet on his inscrutable face.

* * * *

It was a wild and lonely spot, on the wild and lonely mountain-side, where the crystal spring bubbled up from the velvet turf. The Fairy Well had its magic charm, and lovers came from far and near to drink its enchanted waters together, and be faithful and true for ever.

And here Kathleen stood, whilst the eerie evening light deepened and darkened, and the night wind blew bleak from the sea.

A great sadness lay on the girl's face, and the blue eyes looked over the darkening landscape with a still, weary despair.

'If I could only die,' she thought, 'and end it all! Life is so bitter, so long, and the right is so hard to find!'

A step came fleetly down the hill-side, and Kathleen's heart gave one great leap. A tall, slender form came springing lightly over the turf, and a second later, Lord Roderic Desmond stood before her.

Ah, Kathleen, it was 'seething the kid in its mother's milk' to bring you there to look in that face, beautiful with man's best beauty, to listen to the voice you loved so dearly, pleading the cause of another man!

She looked up once; then her eyes fell, and she half-turned away. He saw the change in that poor, pale face—so sunny, so rosy, six short weeks before—and the sharpest pang of remorse he had ever felt in his whole life pierced his heart. It was his work, and he knew it.

'Kathleen, Kathleen!' he said, tenderly, taking both her hands—'my dear little Kathleen, how sadly you are changed!'

He bent above her. A promising beginning—and just on the moment two figures appeared among the shadowy rocks below—Gerald Desmond whispered; 'see for yourself, Donna Inez, how tender, how true your lover can be. Yonder he is with his first love, his pretty Kathleen.'

'Ah-h-h!' It was a long, fiery heart-wrung breath, and the great black eyes were terrible in their dusky fire. 'Traitor! dastard! villain! he shall dearly pay for this night's work! Leave me, Senor Gerald; I shall play the spy alone.'

'But Lady Inez—'

'Leave me'—she stamped her foot on the yielding turf, and looked at him with a fiery glance, before which he quailed—'leave me, I command. The wrong, the shame are mine—mine be the retribution! Leave this instant; you have guided me here; I want you no longer!'

She looked like a fiery young Eastern sultana ordering a slave to the bowstring—imperious, wrathful, terrible. He bowed low before her, and went at once.

She snatched something from the folds of her dress—something that gleamed and glistened blue and deadly in the gray gloaming—a keen, Spanish stiletto.

'The race of d'Alvarez never take insult without giving back death!' she said, between her clenched, white teeth. 'False traitor! you will see how Inez d'Alverez can avenge her own wrongs!'

And then, with her black mantilla drawn close about her supple figure, her eyes glowing like black flame, her teeth set and glistening between her parted lips, the unseen Nemesis bent forward to look and listen.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW THE SPIDER WOVE HIS WEB.

Gerald Desmond's own clever brain and crafty plotting had brought about this pretty tableau; no happy chapter of accidents. He had laid his traps, 'whilst all unconscious of their doom, the little victims played,' and he had snared his birds cleverly, like the skilled fowler he was.

On the day following that unpleasant little misunderstanding between the affianced, the two cousins had gone to the moors, with their dogs and their guns. Gerald, with his lighted Manilla between his teeth, smoked and talked with his customary easy good nature; but Lord Roderic's handsome face wore a cloud that rarely visited that sunlit countenance. His answers were all absent and at random; his thoughts were not with his companion, nor their prospective sport. Gerald shrugged his shoulders, and gave it up at last.

'Pleasant companion you are for a day's sport, I must say,' he remarked; 'encouraging, certainly, to ask the same question three times over, and then get a vacant stare by way of reply. *Be* as dull as death, old fellow, if you choose. I believe it's the

normal state of you lovers out of sight of your Dulcineas.'

'I beg your pardon, Ger,' Lord Roderic said, rousing himself; 'I have been absent, I am afraid. You have no one to thank for it but yourself, though. You shouldn't have told me that about little Kath een O'Neal, if you wanted an agreeable companion.'

'Remorse-stricken, eh? Really, Rory, you *are* an original, an.. should have lived in the days when men wore the red cross on their legs, and fought to the last gasp for the Holy Sepulchre. You are entirely thrown away in the present prosaic age, my dear Sir Charles Grandison. All in the dismals, forsooth! because a pretty little peasant girl chooses to yield, incontinently, to your invincible prowess.'

'For heaven's sake, Gerald, leave off your chaffing and talk common sense!' broke out Rory, impatiently. 'Your wit may be very brilliant in Lincoln's Inn, and your Voltaireism of the first water; but your jests and your cynicisms are alike thrown away upon us Irish barbarians. I don't want to believe what you tell me about Kathleen, God knows; but if it *be* true, why, then, Gerald, I'm afraid—all unconsciously—I've been a villain.'

'Very likely, dear boy. You mean you've made love to her? Why, so you have; but at the same time—with all respect to Kathleen—*she* has made love to you, too. We men get all the blame in these cases, and it's not fair upon us. We make love, without doubt; but the pretty ones—bless their hearts!—as a rule, meet us halfway, and are most uncommonly willing to have it made. You have been courting Kathleen ever since you could lisp, and exchanged love tokens in the shape of sweet-meats; and Kathleen took the kisses and the bon-bons, with the keenest relish for both, and held out her two hands for more. It's their nature—dear, little, tender-hearted, tender-headed things! Never fret, dear boy—a wedding dress and a plain gold ring, and the "undivided devotion of one honest heart," as they say in ladies' novels, will console her for your loss.'

'Meaning Morgan, the Cockney attorney, I suppose?' said Lord Roderic, rather surlily. 'I tell you what, Gerald, I'd rather see a good many other things happen than see our little Wicklow rosebud tied for life to that grim old cactus. I hate to imagine her sweet little face alongside of that ugly, sleek-monthed Englishman's!'

'Ah,' Gerald said, airily, 'sits the wind in that quarter? My faith! I begin to believe that Lady Inez has some grounds for jealousy after all. My artless Rory! who would think *you* could be so dog-in-the-mangerish? You can't marry the little one yourself, and you don't want any one else to marry her! How the donna's black eyes would lighten if she heard you, to-be-sure!'

'The donna!' Rory repeated, sharply; 'what does the donna know of Kathleen?'

'Very little as yet, I allow; but enough to make her intensely jealous. Are you so blind and stupid, my boy, as not to know what riled her last night? And upon my honour, I begin to believe she has more reason than I thought.'

'Stuff and nonsense! If Kathleen be willing, she may marry the man in the moon for me. And assuredly I shall never forbid the banns between her and Morgan.'

'Ah,' his cousin said, with one of his long, lazy sighs; 'but the banns will never be published, dear boy, unless you plead Morgan's cause.'

Rory opened his clear blue eyes in wide, indignant wonder.

'I! I'll see Morgan in Tophet first!'

'Well, it's probable you both will meet there some day. However, it's a little hard at present, all the same. See here, Rory, you've been very fond of Kathleen, and she of you, all along; absurdly fond on her part, I must say. Donna Inez appears upon the scene; you save her life in the most romantic and sensational manner, and you fall in love with her headlong, after the most approved romance-hero fashion. You forget Kathleen immediately—May-like; but the poor little willow-wearer can't forget you quite so easily, since nothing better-looking comes a-wooing. She can't believe herself deserted; she can't believe you really mean to marry another, and she won't listen to reason and marry that very clever little fellow, Morgan, as she ought. And if she doesn't hear to reason, before the month is ont, he'll turn them both, father and daughter, neck and crop, into the street. That old fool, O'Neal, has been at his former tricks, and has gambled and lost the roof above his head, and the duds upon his back. Morgan gives them their choice—marriage or misery—a wedding-ring or the workhouse. Kathleen can't see which way duty lies, as yet; but a word from you will make it plain and palpable.'

'That unmitigated scoundrel!' Rory cried ferociously. 'I always knew Morgan was a cold-blooded villain! I'll pay him the old man's debts, and horsewhip him within an inch of his life after.'

'My valiant Don Quixote! Unfortunately, you can't. Mr. Morgan declines all alternatives but the two I have mentioned. He

loves money, but he loves his revenge more. And, after all, you might do Kathleen greater service than horse-whipping the man who wants to marry her. What would you have? She can't do better.'

'But she a[illegible]ors him.'

'Or think [illegible] does. He is not handsome, and my Lord R[illegible]. If I were Kathleen, I should wed Lord Rory, too.'

Rory ground out an impatient oath. 'If Inez ever hears—Gerald, what ought I to do?'

'You ought to see Kathleen and tell her to marry Morgan, and that you will make her a present of a wedding-dress. Else I cannot answer for the consequence. She may come up to Clontarf in a fit of desperation—women do these things—demand an interview with the donna, and claim her prior right to you.'

'Nonsense, Gerald!' Rory cried, alarmed. 'Kathleen is not the girl to do that.'

'All girls are alike when crossed in love; they'll do anything, my lad. Come, come, Rory, don't be squeamish. See the little one; tell her you are about to don the rosy fetters of—what's his name?—Hymen, and urge her to go and do likewise. It's the best service you can render her, and the only atonement for the past.'

'So be it, then,' Rory said, with something like a groan; 'and yet—may Old Nick fly away with Morgan before his wedding-day!'

It was late when they returned, with well-filled game-bags. The moor fowl had been plentiful, the sport good, and Lord Rory had shaken off his gloom as a bird shakes off its glistening wings.

He looked handsome and happy as a young prince when he entered the drawing-room, the half-hour before dinner, and found his dark-eyed betrothed there alone. He bent over her and kissed, with all the ardour of a lover and an Irishman, the low, dark brow.

'My darling, has the cloud quite gone? Tell me now how I offended last night, Inez.'

The dark eyes looked at him earnestly and long.

'Lord Roderic, who is Kathleen?'

He reddened, half in guilt, half in impatience. Kathleen was becoming the Nemesis of his life.

'My dearest, who has been talking to you? What do you know of Kathleen?'

'That you loved her, my lord—nay, that you love her still.'

'Inez!'

'Lord Roderic, is it not true?'

'True? No! I swear it by the heaven above us! I never loved Kathleen. She was my playmate—my little favourite, if you will; but to love her—no, Inez! I never knew what love meant until I saw you.'

Her face lighted; her eyes gleamed. He looked so noble, so kingly, so truthful—her golden-haired hero.

'You swear this, Roderic?'

'By my soul's hope—yes! I love you, and you alone—my queen, my darling—and I never loved any other.'

'I believe you.' She laid her hands in his, her dark, impassioned face radiant. 'Oh my love, my lord, it has been very bitter to doubt your truth.'

'Never doubt again, Inez. Never wrong yourself, my peerless darling, by the thought that the man you have honoured by your love could ever look upon the face of any other woman. Here are the others. Promise me, my love, my bride, before they enter, never doubt me more.'

She turned her brilliant, beautiful face, cloudless now. But the promise that would have bound her fast as her marriage vow was not destined to be given, for Gerald Desmond came suddenly forward, with words of gay and gallant greeting on his lips.

'You appeared indisposed last night. I trust I see you entirely restored this evening, Donna Inez? We cannot afford to have the sunshine of Clontarf clouded?'

The donna's reply was a negligent bow. The earl—a bluff, unwieldly Athelstan, with yet the remains of great good looks in the midst of his corpulency—entered with his sister, Lady Sarah—a vestal virgin of the old school—and the old family-party adjourned to dinner.

Gerald Desmond—a brilliant conversationalist at all times—outshone himself today. His racy anecdotes of all the best and most noted people of England, his witty sayings, his epigrams, kept the jovial old earl in a constant roar.

Even that grim virgin, Lady Sarah, relaxed into occasional smiles; and Rory, happy in the renewed sunlight of his liege lady's smiles, was almost as sparkling and animated as his delightful cousin.

His inspiration sat beside him, with the last level rays of the sunset slanting through her dead-black hair, and gleaming in her soft, Spanish eyes, lightening up the rare Castilian loveliness into a picture fit for Guido or Raphael. She, too, smiled languidly now and then at the dashing young London barrister's wit, as she trifled with the wing of a bird or her glass of rare old vintage. But he was no especial favourite of hers, this light-eyed, light-haired, glib-tongued young man, and she rather avoided him usually, than otherwise.

That night, long after the family had retired, the London barrister sat by his chamber-window, smoking, and indolently surveying the starry heavens, as seen through clouds of Cavendish. He usually confined himself to the mildest Manillas. To-night he smoked a pipe, loaded to its black muzzle—a sure sign of deep thinking and danger ahead.

'How lovely she looked to-night!' he thought, setting his strong teeth savagely on the stem of his pipe; 'More darkly beautiful than the Venus herself. And to think that he—that shallow-headed, conceited, overgrown boy—should win so glorious a prize, whilst I— By heaven, and all its starry hosts, he shall not win her! Not while my brain has power to plot, or my right hand cunning to work! What are they all—Rory, Kathleen, the donna herself—but puppets, who dance as I pull the strings? I have hated Rory Desmond, my handsome, highborn, princely cousin, ever since I have known what it was to envy or covet. Now the time to strike him from his high estate has come, and I swear to-night that Donna d'Alvar and her regal fortune shall be mine, if I have to walk over my rival's dead body to reach her hand!'

He ground his teeth vindictively. An instant after—so strong had habit become—he laughed softly in derision of himself.

'Such inflated language—such very bad "form," fit only for the boards of the Princess. Bah! even the vendetta has gone out in Corsica. We don't go down to the footlights, like Macduff, and, with your eyes fixed on the chandelier, and our sharp swords outstretched, swear eternal vengeance on our foes. No, we don't do that sort of thing; bad taste. We smoke our Cubas, lift our hats to one another, and say little; but some fine morning our Macbeth is pinked under the fifth rib, among the dewy grass and cowslips and M. Macduff's wife and interesting family are quietly avenged all the same. I can slay, and smile while the knife is in mine enemy's vitals.'

The next afternoon, Mr. Desmond walked over to the cottage of old O'Neal, and had that interview with father and daughter. When he left the old man, and returned to the castle, he found his cousin awaiting him with an anxious face.

'It's all right, Rory, lad,' he said cheerily. 'She will meet you at dusk at the Fairy Well. And by the same token, you have no time to spare, if you would not keep a lady waiting. It grows dusk now. Where is the donna?'

'In the drawing-room, with Lady Sarah. Confound it, Gerald! I would rather go to my hanging than this meeting with poor Kathleen.'

'Would you, dear boy? Now, how inconsistent that is, after sending me to make the appointment. Shall I go in your stead, tell Kathleen you are too—how shall we name it?—too nervous to come?'

'Pooh! At the Fairy Well, did you say? Ger—keep Lady Inez from fooling 'nuely until I return. She wished me to take her out for a walk, by-the-by. Do you take her, Ger.'

'Ah, she wished you take her out? What excuse did you make?'

'Told her I had an appointment with a friend, Ger—there's a good fellow—keep her amused till I come back.'

He started off briskly, and Gerald looked after him with a slow, evil smile. Then he turned and entered the house. Lady Sarah sat by one of the windows, trying to read by a pale, gray light. The donna stood listlessly at another, looking out over the wide sea. She turned quickly at the sound of footsteps but her face clouded when she saw who it was.

'The evening is pleasant, Lady Inez. Is it not a pity to spend it indoors? What do you say to a walk?'

'Thank you, senor,' very coldly. 'I will wait, I think, until Lord Roderic returns.'

'Ah.' There was a world of meaning in that one little word, a world of innuendo in the smile that accompanied it. She caught both, and turned upon him like like lightning.

'What do you mean, senor?'

'My dear Lady Inez, nothing.' But the smile was still there—amused, contemptuous, compassionate. The great Castilian eyes lit up, and one little hand clenched fiercely.

'You mean something. Do not speak falsehoods to me, Senor Gerald. Whither has my lord gone?'

'He has told you. To meet—a friend.'

'And that friend?'

'Your pardon, senorita. Lord Roderic's secrets are his own.'

She was white with jealousy, already, and the dark eyes were full of glowing fire.

'Senor,' she said, in a husky, breathless whisper, 'you are my friend—you say you are. You will tell me where he has gone. Ah, *Dios!* see, I plead to you—I, Inez d'Alvarez. You will tell me, will you not?'

'But it would be treason to him.'

'He need never know. Do you think I would betray you? Senor Gerald, tell me, or I will never look at you again while I live!'

'Sooner than that— Lady Inez, do you insist?'

'I do—I command!'

'Then come with me. You word is my law. To please you I would lay down my life!'

She scarcely heard him; she certainly did not understand him. She snatched up a mantilla of velvet and lace, and threw it over head and about her, and flitted with him out of the room.

She took his arm, and they walked rapidly and in silence through the evening shadows. Once only she spoke, and the question came in a hissing whisper:

'Is it to meet her he has gone?'

'It is.'

He heard the gasp with which she caught her breath; he saw the mortal whiteness of the face looking out from the folds of velvet and lace.

'Women of her fiery blood have murdered the man they love for less,' he thought.

The dusk was deepening fast as they reached the foot of the mountain. Half-way up its green breast the the Fairy Well bubbled and in the twilight the two stood as lovers stand keeping tryst, her hands clasped in his, his golden, handsome head bent above her.

'Look!' Gerald Desmond whispered. 'See for yourself, Donna Inez, how tender, how true, your lover can be! Yonder he stands with his first love, his pretty Kathleen!'

CHAPTER VI.

FACE TO FACE.

She drooped before him as a broken lily droops before the wind. She did not look unlike a broken lily herself—wan as a spirit of moonlight, so sad, so pale, so silent. The heart of young Lord Roderic Desmond went out to his little playmate in a great compassion. She loved him—he knew it—loved him so dearly so vainly that all her bright, girlish bloom was gone.

The light faded from the sparkling eyes, the dancing smiles and dimples from the mignonne face. She loved him; and that man has yet to be born whose masculine vanity is not inexpressibly soothed and flattered by homage so sweet. For those fair 'stricken deer' who fall hopelessly before them they have a complacent and infinite pity, which, for the time being, is next door neighbour to a much warmer feeling. A man's pity for a woman is but one degree removed from love; a woman's for a man, very closely allied to—contempt.

'My little Kathleen,' Rory said, 'you have grown as white as the foam of the sea—you, my little Irish rosebud! You have not been ill?'

He bent his golden head to catch her answer, holding both hands in his own.

The watcher, in the twilight, set her pearly teeth, and had looks been lightning, the two standing before her would have been blasted there and then.

Kathleen looked quickly up, her pale cheeks flushing. Some subtle, womanly instinct told her what that deeply compassionate tone meant, and her Irish spirit rose on the instant. She drew her hands away, looked him, quietly and steadily, full in the face.

'I have not been ill, Lord Roderic. Mr. Gerald told me—my father and me, this afternoon—that you especially wished to see me here this evening, and I have come.'

'Yes,' Rory said, a little embarrassed, 'I did—I do. It is about your father I would speak to you Kathleen. I know all.'

'All!' The blue eyes flashed upon him; the cheeks flushed deeper. He could see the rapid throbbing of her heart. Every feminine instinct rose in alarm to guard her hidden secret from him.

'All, Kathleen—your father's misfortune, his losses at the gaming-table, this man Morgan's power. And they want you to marry Morgan, Kathleen?'

'They do.'

'And you?' He spoke a little hurriedly. He did not want to marry Kathleen himself—he was not in the least in love with her; but she loved him, and she was an exceedingly pretty girl, and—oh, vanity of the best of men! he did not want her to wed another. 'What have you said to them, Kathleen?'

Her head drooped—she made a little, passionate gesture as she turned away. To have him stand here—loving him with her whole heart—asking her this, was the bitterest pang of all.

'Kathleen, my little playmate, they shall not force you, those others! Not even your father shall sacrifice you for his own selfish ends! If your heart says no, my dear little Kathleen, I'll see Morgan in Tophet before he'll ever marry you!'

The impetuous blue eyes flashed, the impetuous boyish voice rang out. He towered up before, a golden-haired King David, beautiful and bright as ever was the poet-king of Isreal. And he had come here to plead that unhappy Morgan's cause.

'I'll pay your father's debts myself, and if that pettifogging Cockney attorney makes one demur, I'll pitch him neck and crop into Wicklow Bay! Hang his English impudence! How dare the bandy-legged scoundrel think to force the prettiest little girl

in Clontarf to marry him, whether she will or no?'

She looked up at him with shining eyes, and parted lips, and glowing face—her grand, impetuous young protector! And never in all her life had Kathleen loved her lordly lover as she did in that hour.

'Gad!' Rory cried, swelling with indignation the more he thought of it; 'marry you to pay your father's gambling debts, indeed! Confound his impertinence! Confound all their impertinences! Do they think themselves Bashaws of Three Tails and you a little Georgian for sale? I'll go to the cottage this very evening and see that besotted father of yours, and after that I'll go to Morgan, and, if he won't hear to reason, I'll break his head!'

He looked quite capable of doing it, or any other Quixotism, this fair-haired, flashing-eyed, hare-brained young descendant of fiery Irish kings, as he stood there in the twilight, drawn up to his superb six-foot height. And Kathleen, glowing and uplifted, raised one of his hands and kissed it.

'Dear Lord Roderic—no! Ah? how good you are, how noble, how generous! I will never forget you as long as I live. But it is all in vain—Morgan is the Shylock; he will have his bond, his pound of flesh—nothing less or more. My father's ruin or—my father's daughter. There is no choice between.'

'The black-hearted—'

'Lord Rory, hush! Let me speak. For you to use violence or threats to Morgan would only make a bad matter much worse; for you to plead to him is an utter impossibility. And neither would move him in the least—he is harder than iron, that man. My father is completely in his power. I alone can save him, and—I will.'

The little slender figure drew up to its full height; the starry eyes flashed; the wan cheeks glowed like June roses. He was her inspiration. Her blood was up, and she was ready for anything now.

'But, Kathleen,' Rory cried, aghast, 'you hate this Morgan?'

'Then heaven send me a better spirit. We are all unjust to Morgan. My father's folly is to blame to him. He wished to marry me,' her head drooped and her voice fell; 'he would compel me to marry him—true. But, Lord Roderic, he loves me!'

'My little Kathleen!'

It was all he could say. His heart was full of pity—full of remorse—full of savage hatred of that man. She looked so pretty, so sad, so fragile, and he, with all his strength and rank, was so powerless. He ground his teeth and clenched his fist, and thought what an unutterable satisfaction it would be to punch Morgan's head.

'He loves me, I know it—in his way,' Kathleen went on, hurriedly, her voice faltering in spite of her; 'and I—well, I may grow to like him a little, by-and-by. If I marry him—and I must, I will be his true and faithful wife in word, and deed, and thought. And, Lord Rory, after to-night, it may be—it must be—a long time before we meet again; and so I—I—will wish you joy, you and your bride, now and—' Her voice choked—she stopped, covering her face with her hands. It was the last time, and she loved him so dearly, so dearly!

'Oh, Kathleen?'

'Good-by, Lord Rory. May the good Lord bless you forever. And don't you come to our cottage any more. I want to do my duty—don't make that duty any harder than it is now.'

'Kathleen, listen to me,' he cried, passionately. 'You shall not marry Morgan. I say it—I swear it! If he won't listen to fair means and let me pay your father's debts, he shall listen to foul, by—'

'Hush, my lord. No, no! Would you make my name the country's talk? Would you ruin my father, and disgrace me? No; you can do nothing—you must do nothing. If you ever cared for your old playmate, Lord Rory, take her good wishes now, and leave her—forever!'

She held out her hand, with a sob. Both of his closed over it, and there was a hot mist over the brilliant azure eyes.

'Kathleen—Kathleen! what can I say—'

She interrupted him with a gesture of inexpressible pain.

'Say nothing, do nothing, my lord; only leave me. There is no feeling in my heart but kindness and good-will to you. Let there be none in yours but some pleasant memory of the little girl who was once your playmate. Oh, my lord! it grows late, and I—I am not strong. Go, if you have any pity, and leave me to myself.'

'Good-by, then, Kathleen, but not forever—not for long. This matter cannot, must not, end like this.'

He turned and left her; it was her wish, and he knew Kathleen feared not the gathering darkness nor the loneliness of these Wicklow hillsides and glens. He took his last look at the little drooping figure, fluttering there in the windy twilight; and who was to tell him that the sad blue eyes would be sealed forever, the sweet, beautiful lips chill in death, when he looked upon them next?

The twilight gathered above her; the moon rose round and crystal-clear, sailing

up over the purple sea. The night wind rose with it; and, shivering more with the cold within than the cold of the autumn night, Kathleen turned slowly to go home, when an impetuous voice close beside her rang out with one vibrating word: 'Stay!'

She sprang round with a little cry. There before her—dark and passionate, with dusky eyes of fire, and gleaming dagger—stood the betrothed wife of the man she loved. There, on the lonely hillside, stood the high-born Spanish beauty and the Irish peasant girl, face to face.

CHAPTER VII.

TWO PROMISES.

It was a starting tableau. There in the lonesome moonlight, on the desert hillside, the rivals met, and there was danger and death in the face of one. The glowing Castilian beauty was set in rigid whiteness; the brilliant Spanish eyes, that could melt and grow dewy and sweet as the eyes of a young child, were ablaze with a terrific, lurid light now. Women of her fierce race and fiery blood had stabbed their base-born rivals, without a word, for far less before now. But Kathleen O'Neal was as 'plucky' as she was pretty. She recoiled a little, with a startled face, it is true, at first sight of this dangerous apparition, but after that she gave no sign of fear. She understood all in an instant, and drew herself up with as grand an air almost as my Lady Inez herself. The blue eyes met the black ones in a clear, steadfast, guiltless gaze.

'And you dare to look me in the face, you traitress!' Lady Inez said, between her clenched, pearly teeth. 'Are you not afraid I will murder you where you stand?'

The cloudless blue eyes never quailed—the fair cheek blanched not one whit, yet the dark daughter of the South before her looked quite capable of carrying out her threat.

'Afraid, my lady?' Kathleen said quietly and a little disdainfully, 'No? And I am no traitress. I never wronged you, my lady, and I am neither afraid of you nor your dagger!' She could not, had she been studying her answer for a lifetime, have answered better. The brave words, the brave eyes, disarmed and cooled the passionate Castilian, who admired courage in man or woman above all earthly attributes.

'No, you are not afraid,' she said in a sort of wonder, 'and yet you have reason to be. For you have lied to me, and you know it. How dare you meet my lover, my husband, here alone by night and by stealth if you be not the false traitress I have called you?'

'Madam,' Kathleen answered, still unmoved, 'I meet him because he is the best, the bravest, the noblest, the most generous of mankind, who would save his old friend and tutor, my father, at any cost, at any sacrifice! He would pay his debts as he and his father have paid them before, and save me from a marriage with a man I ha—whom I do not love.'

'Aye—because he loves you himself?'

'No, Lady Inez.' The sweet voice arose, the soft eyes grew wondrously bright. 'Ah, Lady Inez—never poor Kathleen! Oh, my lady, he loves you and you alone, and it is no marvel, for you are beautiful as the angels. I have been his little playmate. I am his humble friend—nay, more—I will own to you who are to be his wife—that I love him too!'

The Spanish beauty retreated a step and stood gazing in wonder at her rival, brave beyond even her dreams of bravery; who faced her dagger with fearless eyes, and who owned so heroically her hidden love.

'That you, my lady, so beautiful, so high-born, should stoop to be jealous of poor little Kathleen I cannot think; but if you ever have for one single second, then you have basely wronged your noble lover. You have his whole heart, my lady. Oh, cherish it as it deserves; trust him as he trusts you, for there is not his equal on earth!'

Her face looked inspired in her unconscious eloquence. She had completely turned the tables, and it was the haughty donna who lowered her lofty crest now.

'And Lord Roderic never loved you? You swear it?'

'I swear nothing; but Lord Roderic never loved me. The folly, the madness have all been mine.'

'Then I have been grossly deceived—and yet, her face which had lighted eagerly, darkened, 'it looked strangely suspicious—it does so still. If what you say be true, my little one, why then does he so oppose your marriage with this other?'

'Ah, my lady,' Kathleen pathetically said, 'we have known each other so long—will you not even let him be my friend? You who are so happy may pity me—who must wed a man I abhor. He would save me if he could; would you, my Lady Inez do less for the playmate of your youth?'

'No!' The impulsive Spanish beauty, as impetuous in her likes as her hatred, flung away her dagger, and caught both of Kathleen's hands. 'No, my little one—and you shall not marry a man you abhor! Ah, *Dios!* how horrible is the thought! We will save you, my lord and I!'

Kathleen drew her hands away very gently, but very resolutely. She was brave to the core, but not brave enough to endure the caresses of the woman Lord Roderic Desmond loved.

'You are very good, my lady, and I thank you, as I did him, but it may not be. You can do nothing save give me your good wishes. My duty lies before me—the way may be hard, but I will follow it. You can do me but one favour, and that is—trust your lover.'

'Until death—from this hour. But, my little one, is there nothing I can do for you?'

'Nothing. Farewell.'

She waved her hand and fluttered away with the words on her lips. The heart in her bosom lay heavy as lead, but Kathleen had no thought within it of self-laudation. Less generous sacrifice has sounded its trumpet before the world and called itself martyrdom.

She sprang along in the moonlight as fleetly as a young deer, and as gracefully. Her life was at an end it seemed to her, but the sharp after-pain was yet to come. Now she felt nothing but a dumb sense of misery and weariness—a sick loathing of herself and life.

'And I am only eighteen,' she thought, drearily, 'and life is so long, so long!'

Her way was unutterably lonely; she met no living thing as she sprang lightly over the hillocks. Wondrously lovely the silver light lay on lakelet and tarn; on brown hillside and purple heather and shining sea. Crystal clear and numberless the white stars swung in the blue-black sky—calm and cloudless and serene. As her cottage home came in sight she leaned against a sycamore, waving in the wind, and looked on all that hush and beauty and peace with strangely solemn eyes of blue.

'And what does it matter, after all?' Kathleen thought—'a few years more or less, joy or gladness, in this lower world? It all ends in six feet of earth—and home is yonder.'

'Kathleen!'

A voice at her elbow spoke. She wheeled quickly around. A short, thick-set man, with a bull-dog face and a profusion of red whiskers, stood beside her.

'You, Mr. Morgan?'

'Me, Kathleen!' he said, sullenly. The habitual expression of his face was a mingling of low cunning and sullen ferocity. 'I've come for your hanswer.'

She shivered all over. Oh, Rory! In his bright, best beauty he rose before her, glorious in his young, magnificent manhood as even the Apollo of the gods; and by her side stood this satyr she must wed.

'I've been to the cottage,' Morgan sulkily pursued, 'and I've seen your father. He told me you were hout with Lord Rory Desmond. Now, what had he to say to you, I should like to know?'

'What you never will know,' Kathleen replied very calmly. 'Mr. Morgan, have you no pity, no mercy? Will you not spare my father and wait? He is very old, broken-down man.'

'All the more reason why I should not delay. The old fellow may go of the 'ooks any day, and I may whistle for my money then. But it isn't money I want, my pretty little Irish girl—it's you!'

She stretched out her hands with a dry, heart-broken sob. 'Have pity on me! spare me! I don't love you; I never can love you—'

'No,' Morgan broke in, with a fierce gleam of his eye and a hissing oath—'no, and you do love this young lordling, with his woman's face and his yellow hair. I hate him, and I'd marry you if only to spite him! Say the word, Kathleen O'Neal, and say it to-night! Marry me or see your old fool of a father rot in Clontarf jail!'

She sprang erect and looked at him—looked him down, coward and bully as he was, with her great, flashing, fearless blue eyes.

'You ruffian! with no respect for woman, no fear of God! You know you dare not call your craven soul your own in the presence of Lord Roderic Desmond! My father shall never set foot in Clontarf jail, for I will marry you—yes, if I loathed and despised you ten-fold as much as I do! You have my promise, Mr. Morgan—I will marry you as soon as you like!'

She turned her back upon him with the last ringing, scornful words, and walked with the mien of a young empress toward the cottage.

The bull-dog face of the English pettifogger wore its most villainous scowl as he watched her out of sight. 'And when you do, mistress,' he ground out between his bull-dog teeth, 'I'll make you pay for every insolent word!'

Whilst the purple twilight shifted to silvery moonlight, Gerald Desmond stood in the lonely glen below the Fairy well and waited. He had in an eminent degree that one virtue which all good haters, all thorough villains, should possess—patience. He had learned completely what so few of us ever learn—how to wait. Where he leaned against the moss-grown rocks, he smoked his Cuba and looked from under his felt hat at the dark-blue patch of sky, all gemmed with crystal stars. Not of their

tremulous beauty was he thinking, but of his own astuteness—how cleverly he had meshed his victims in the toils.

'Ah, my haughty, handsome, dark-eyed donna,' he mused, 'what do you think of your beloved one now.'

A light, fleet step came swift as a young fawn's down the glen at the moment. He swung round, and beheld the Castilian heiress speeding swiftly and lightly along.

'Donna Inez!' He flung away his cheroot and went to meet her; but the donna recoiled, with a look her face had worn for him more than once before.

'*You*, Senor Gerald? I thought you had gone home.'

'And left you in this wild and lonely place by yourself? Really, Lady Inez, you pay me but a poor compliment.' He laughed as he spoke and offered her his arm. She shrank away with a look of cold disdain.

'No, senor; I can make my way unaided. Did not Lord Roderic pass you on his homeward walk?'

'Without seeing me—yes. And you, Lady Inez, you heard and saw—enough?'

'To convince me that we might have spent our time more pleasantly and profitably than in playing the spy and eavesdropper—*yes*, senor! That he is true to the core of his brave and generous and noble heart, and that *we* are baser than the basest to doubt him and dog him. He is no lover of Kathleen's. I have it from her own lips.'

'Curse the little fool!' Gerald Desmond muttered under his breath.

'My first act,' Donna Inez went on, her dark eyes flashing, 'when I reach the castle will be to go to Lord Roderic, confess all my baseness, and beg his pardon. That it should be granted, I do not deserve; but he loves me, and he is great-hearted—he will grant it.'

Her companion laughed—his slight, chill laugh, that always had a latent, unpleasant sneer. 'Let me congratulate you, Donna Inez. I rejoice sincerely that we have both been deceived, and that Rory has come forth from the ordeal by fire unsinged. At the same time—let me bid you good-by.'

'Good-by! And why, senor?'

'Because a scene, a quarrel, are so very unpleasant, and I foresee both in prospective. With the best of motives, I have led you into error; as you say, we have played the spy, and my lordly cousin is a little of a fire-eater when aroused. Rory and I have never had a quarrel as yet—I am absurdly fond of the lad. I will shirk a quarrel now if I can.'

The dark, disdainful eyes of the donna flashed scornfully upon him in the moonlight. 'You take a strange way of showing your fondness, senor. Rest easy; there shall be no scene—no quarrel. I confess my own faults; I tell no tales of others. My lord shall never know from me that the friend he trusts, the kinsman he loves, strove to betray him.'

'Donna Inez!'

'Enough, Senor Gerald. We will waste no words on this subject. I think after to-night I shall understand you thoroughly.' She waved him down with the imperious grace of an insulted empress, and sped on so fleetly that it was all he could do, with his long, man's strides, to keep up with her. Not another word was exchanged. Gerald Desmond ground his teeth in 'curses, not loud but deep.' As the best of gamesters must occasionally, he had staked and—lost.

Rory stood in the low, long, old-fashioned drawing-room, with a very mystified face. Lady Inez was not in house—neither was Gerald. Where had they gone?

She swept in as he stood there alone in dense perplexity, her dark Castilian loveliness aglow, the Spanish eyes brilliant as stars, the rich, black hair falling loose and long. She flung off her mantilla and crossed over to where he stood, clasped both hands round his arm, and looked up in his face with wondrous shining eyes of splendour.

'My Lord! my love! can you ever forgive me?'

'Inez!'

'Ah, no kisses, no caresses, until you know how low I have fallen, how unworthy I am. Lord Roderic, I have been playing the spy!'

'Upon me?' It flashed upon him at once—the truth. She had suspected—had followed—had seen him meet Kathleen.

'Upon you, my lord, base wretch that I am! I doubted—I followed you; I saw you meet her out yonder. Ah, my lord, we Castilians run fire in our veins, not blood! I was mad, I think; I could have slain you both where you stood. But I waited until you left, and then—'

He gave a great cry, held her from him.

'Inez! you have not injured her?'

'No, my lord. Yet who knows what I might have done? I have not injured her, and she has told me all.'

'All. What has she told you, Inez?'

'How good you are—how great—ah, my lord, I never loved you as I do to-night!—how you would save her father; and best of all, how you never, never loved her!'

'Poor little Kathleen!' There was more

than pity in his voice. He knew that all the greatness was hers, not his.

'My lord, can you forgive Inez? It was cowardly, it was ignoble to do it; but, ah, heaven! I thought I had lost you, and I love you better than my life.'

'Forgive is no word between us, my darling. But you did me a cruel wrong when you doubted me. She is my little friend; you, my love are the light of my life. And Gerald, Inez—was he with you, too?'

'Senor Gerald is out yonder on the terrace smoking,' she said hurriedly and with a nervous little laugh. 'He is always smoking, is he not? Then I am pardoned, my lord, freely and fully?'

'Out of my heart, my darling.'

Gerald Desmond, standing unobserved in the doorway, saw that picture—saw him fold her in his arms and kiss the lips that curved so disdainfully for him. The oath he hissed was ground in his clenched teeth.

'One swallow does not make a spring—one mistake does not make a failure. I have sworn to win and I will win, by all that is eternal! Embraced your betrothed, Roderic Desmond; you will never embrace her as your wife!'

CHAPTER VIII.

'IN THE QUEEN'S NAME.'

On the very outskirts of the great Clontarf estate there ran a wide boundary stream, swollen in the spring-tide rains to the width of a brawling river. It was a famous place for anglers, and its loneliness was often invaded by the disciples of the hook and line. It was very lonely, lying between high, ragged banks; elms and sycamores waving their green arms across its crystal waters, and only the thrush and the blackbird to whistle their songs in the stillness, the summer day long. The hush of a warm noontide lay over the earth as Lord Roderic Desmond, in easy fishing costume, lounged down the steep bank and flung himself on the yielding moss. He had come for an afternoon's sport. The light of his existence—the dark-eyed donna—had gone on a visit with Lady Sarah, and without her the old castle was dull as death. Gerald was busy with the earl overlooking the muddled accounts of Clontarf; and left to his own devices Rory had sauntered here. In the pleasant days gone by he would have sought the cottage and gay little Kathleen for company and consolation; but that was out of the question for the future.

'Poor little Kathleen' he thought regretfully; 'how is it with her now? Oh, for the halcyon days gone by when we ruled the green island and had power to order the Sassenach dogs out into a court-yard, without leave of judge or jury, and hang them high as Haman! If those pleasant days would but return, and I had the ordering of Mr. Morgan's fate.'

He looked gloomily down the stream, thinking how the mighty were fallen since those days of yore. An instant later and he had leaped up with a bound and an exclamation; for there before him floated on the placid water the most terrible object moonlight or sunlight can shine on—an upturned dead face. It was the face of a woman; he could see that by the floating dress and the long bright hair. The features under the glimmering water he could not clearly discern. He stood for one instant of time appalled—then, with the light leap of a young stag, he was in the water, and holding the drowning body in his left arm struck out with the right for the shore. He drew his lifeless burden up on the turfy bank, shook himself like a dripping Triton, and looked down upon the face lying so still and white on the grass.

'Oh, God! Kathleen!'

His cry went echoing down the desolate glen, high and shrill; for there before him, marble white, marble cold—drowned—lay Kathleen O'Neal!

His cry was echoed. Whilst he stood above her the branches had parted, and two bearded faces looked down upon him. With a terrible shout—more like the roar of a wild beast than a human cry of grief—one of the men leaped down upon and seized him by the throat.

'Murderer! caught red-handed! You have ended your victim at last!'

Rory Desmond had the strength, the sinew, the science of a young gladiator. Before the words were well out red, his aggressor went down like a bullock, before one scientific lung 'from the shoulder.'

'Who are you? Ah,' with ineffable disdain; 'Morgan, the attorney. Have you murdered her, that you know so well where to come to look for the body?'

Morgan gathered himself up, livid with rage and fear and fury, bleeding from a broken nose, and shook his fist, with a ferocious glare at the slender young aristocrat. 'I accuse you, Lord Roderic Desmond, and your rank shall not save you. Mind, O'Moore—we caught him in the act.'

'Of reskying the body from the fishes—yes,' said the town constable bluntly. 'Hould your dirty prate, Mister Torney, an' don't be accusin yer betters. Oh, the purty darlin'! Troth Lord Rory, it's a thous-

and pities, so 'tis! How did you light on the body at all?'

'I came here to fish.' Rory answered, so lost in grief and amaze and horror that he scarcely knew what he had said, 'and saw her floating. Great heaven, who could have done this?'

'Herself, maybe,' suggested O'Moore. 'Faix I've known them to do it often in the town beyant.'

'Kathleen commit suicide? Never. There has been foul murder done here, and the murderer shall be hunted down, by the light above us!'

His fiery blue eyes flashed on Morgan. The Cockney attorney returned the look with one of bitter hatred.

'He shall! and shall hang like a dog were he the highest in the land! Here, O'Moore, let us prepare a hurdle and bear the poor girl's body to her father's house. She was to have been my wife in a month—only three nights ago she gave me her promise.'

'Did she, now?' said O'Moore. *sotto voce*. 'Then by this and that I don't wonder she drowned herself. Will you bear a hand, my lord? or maybe it's better for you to run away afore us and break the news to the ould man. Shure if he was twice as bad with the gamblin', the divil might pity him now.'

'I will go,' Rory said; 'poor old O'Neal—yes. You can prepare the hurdle and convey the body without me.'

He strode away. Morgan looked after him with eyes full of lurid hatred and rage. 'Curse him!' he muttered—'curse him, the dainty-limned aristocrat! He is her betrayer and her murderer, and I'll have my vengeance on him though he were the son of our queen, instead of a beggarly Irish earl.'

'Arrah! is it his prayers he's mutterin' there?' cried the constable impatiently. 'L'ave off man and give us a han' here wid the hurdle. Av yer giving yer curse to Lord Rory, may it come back hot and heavy on yerself—ye dirty English blaggard!'

The last words were muttered in O'Moore's throat. Like all the rest of his order he had but little love for the beetle-browed, flinty-checked London pettifogger. Like Ishmael of old he seemed to have been born with his hand against every man and every man's hand against him. They bore the body home. 'Ill news flies apace.' Before they reached the cottage it was known throughout the town and the village that bonnie Kathleen, the brightest and prettiest of all the bright, pretty peasant girls had been found cold and dead in the rapid river. And old O'Neal had heard, and had fallen down among them, with a great cry, in an epileptic fit. Gerald Desmond looked with a strangely startled and eager glance into his cousin's face when he first heard the tale. Then he turned away with a long, low, inaudible voice.

'The dead tell no tales. Some one is the better for her being out of the way; and yet—poor little Kathleen!'

The donna looked up with her great, dilated dark eyes. Rory turned hotly upon him.

'What do you mean? Speak out, Gerald! You suspect some one.'

'I do, my Roderigo! It is a lawyer's forte—suspicion. Excuse my speaking out just at present—I'll wait, I think, until after the inquest.'

He sauntered away, and went straight to the cottage. But it was full, and wild, wailing cries, unutterably blood-curdling, rang out in the starry twilight. The London barrister shrugged his shoulders.

'The wild Irish women keening over their dead. Where's Attorney Morgan? he asked O'Moore, the constable, keeping some sort of order among the riotous, excited mob about the cottage.

'Sorra one o' me knows, Misther Gerald. He helped to convey the poor girleen—God be good to her!—home; and—Arrah, ye divils, will ye stan' back. Don't ye see it's full now as it can hould?'

Gerald turned away. In the distance he spied Morgan standing gloomily alone. He went up and laid his hand on his arm. The man raised his sullen, bloodshot eyes to his face, with a questioning glare.

'My good fellow,' Gerald Desmond said, in his lightest tone, 'you have more courage than I gave you credit for. But it was a rash thing to do.'

'What do you mean?' Morgan cried with a hoarse oath, shaking him off.

'Only this, you beetle-browed dog!' answered the lawyer, transfixing him with a vivid look; 'that I was on the river bank *this morning at ten o'clock*. You did not see me? No; I was lying among the alders and willows—you did not see me; you miserable, black-hearted cut-throat; *but—I—saw—you!*'

The face of the attorney turned in the gloaming to the awful, leaden, livid hue of a corpse. A terrible black-thorn cudgel lay at his feet; he picked it up and turned upon the speaker with the glare of a man tiger.

'Ah, hah!' Gerald Desmond said in a voice of indescribable scorn; 'Drop it, you fool! Yes, I saw you, and I could hang you as dead as a mackerel, if I chose. But I don't choose, you cowardly cur, because

there is some one in Clontarf I hate even more than I despise you, and that is saying a good deal. Come down with me to the shore below—I've a word or two for your private ear. Faugh! you hang-dog! that villainous face of yours will hang you yet, in spite of you!'

The Englishman cowered before him—the scorn of his bitter words, the lash of his scornful eyes—as a whipped cur before its master. Like a hound he followed at his heels down to the lonely sea-shore, where the washing waves and swinging stars alone might see or hear.

* * * * * *

The inquest was over. A dozen stolid jurymen had brought in a verdict of 'Found Drowned'—a safe verdict surely, to which no exception could be taken, except perhaps on the score of originality. And they buried pretty Kathleen, and the women went chanting their wild Irish keen over the hills to the lonely chapel-yard, and there was sorrow, deep and true, in many a lowly heart.

'Found Drowned!' that was all; but—people began to talk. Slowly whispers arose and circulated and grew as they went, and dark looks and ominous faces turned in one direction. Lord Rory had been her lover—all Clontarf knew that, or thought they knew it—and—Lord Rory had been a villain. There were secrets that death alone could hide, and—death had hidden them. The fair, proud Spanish beauty and heiress had been jealous of the lost girl—no one else in the wide world could wish the death of bright little Kathleen. And she had not committed suicide—every one felt sure of that. Lord Rory had been found beside her dead body, pale and wild. All that day he had been absent from the castle—whither no one knew; and from early morning Kathleen, too, had been gone from the cottage. The whispers rose and swelled, and did their work in the dark; and at last a little circumstance occurred that turned the suspicions to certainty.

A note was found—hidden away in a litle box in Kathleen's room—a note in Lord Roderic's hand, with these brief words:

'KATHLEEN; Meet me to-day at ten o'clock, by the alder trees on the boundary stream. Do not fail; it is life or death! R.'

On the evening of the day upon which the note was found the Earl of Clontarf entertained a few friends at dinner. It was nigh Christmas time now, and the wintry winds howled about the old castle, and the yule blaze leaped high in the huge chimneys. Lady Sarah presided at her brother's table, and very fair and stately looked the Castilian heiress, in her black velvet robes, with all her rich luxuriant hair falling adorned and unbound. Rory sat beside her, very happy in the light of her lovely eyes, in spite of the sharp pang that smote his heart whenever he thought of lost Kathleen. The ladies had gone to the drawing-room, and he was waiting impatiently to follow, when a servant entered and announced that Sheriff French wished at once to see him.

'To see me?' repeated Rory. 'What can the sheriff wish to see me for? Send him in, Mike.'

The sheriff of the town entered—very pale very grave.

'Well, French,' Rory said, advancing to meet him, 'nothing private, I hope? What is it?'

'A very painful duty, my lord—not private, I regret to say. Lord Roderic Desmond'—his hand fell heavily on the young man's shoulder 'you are my prisoner.'

With a simultaneous cry every man sprang to his feet. For Rory, he stood an instant astounded; then, with a backward bound, he shook off the sheriff and sent him reeling. 'Arrest me! What do you mean?'

'I am very sorry, my lord, but duty must be done. Here is my warrant. I arrest you in the queen's name for the wilful murder of Kathleen O'Neal!'

CHAPTER IX.

THE CRIME OF JUDAH.

A tempestuous April night—a wild and dangerous night down there on the Wicklow coast. A howling wind raged, sheets of rain swept over the sea, and the lightning leaped out in fiery flashes. A terrible night when not even a homeless dog abroad in the deserted streets of the town.

'Sure it's God's anger on thim that swore his life away this day,' muttered more than one awe-struck peasant, cowering before the blue leap of the lightning, the deafening crash of the thunder. 'He's as innocent as the babe unborn. Lord Rory wouldn't hurt a fly; an' sure I've known since he was a wee yalla-haired, laughin' gossoon, no higher than that. And now they say they'll hang him. Oh, wirra, wirra! Bad luck this night and forevermore to that perjured divil Morgan, the 'torney, I pray.'

He sat alone he upon whose head hundreds of curses, heavy and hot, had fallen today. He sat alone in the dreary little parlour of his house listening to the tremendous

uproar of the wind and air and sea. His one servant had long ago gone to rest; the clock upon the mantel pointed to half-past twelve. The stormy April night was cold and the room was chill. Perhaps that was what made Morgan's teeth chatter in his head and his face looked ghastly and blue and pinched in the dull light of one tallow candle. The fire had smouldered itself to black ashes and the dull, unsnuffed candle sputtered and flared in innumerable draughts. He sat in a leathern arm-chair beside the table, his elbows resting on his knees, his red-stubbled chin between his horny palms, his sunken, bloodshot eyes glaring with awful vacancy in the blackening embers. A bottle of brandy and a tumbler stood at his elbow. He had been drinking heavily, but there was that within him that rendered the fiery liquid impotent as water. He had crouched there in that position for hours, his only movement when he filled his glass with brandy and drained it, or lifted his hollow, haggard eyes to the clock. He cowered there listening to the storm beating like a human thing in rage and pain at the closed windows and doors.

'Is there a God?' Morgan thought, a cold dew standing on his pallid face, 'and is it His angry voice I hear in the storm to-night? Is there a hell, and is there a pit in all its horrors deep enough for me?'

A paper lay at his feet; he picked it up and glanced with a strange fascination at one partienlar heading:

'Conclusion of the Trial of Lord Roderic Desmond for the Murder of Kathleen O'Neal—The Evidence—The Verdict—The Sentence.'

The letters swam in a blood-red mist before his eyes. Here and there he missed a word, a line, a whole paragraph. The paper contained but a brief summary of the trial. His eyes went mechanically, over the familiar lines.

'Perhaps,' said the paper, 'within the memory of man our town has never been so convulsed with astonishment and horror as it has been by the late murder and subsequent arrest. The deceased, Kathleen O'Neal, was so well known, so universally beloved, so fair, so young, so full of promise, that her sad, untimely end has sent a thrill of grief and dismay to the coldest heart. The same may be said of the prisoner. Highborn, beloved by all who knew him, the gentlest of human creatures, it seemed impossible to connect his name with that of murder. And yet he has been found guilty. He entered the crowded court-room to-day with his usual dauntless, haughty manner. He has grown extremely pale and thin, but his eagle's eye glanced over the crowd with all the pride and fire of his proud and fiery race. "Not guilty!" he responded, in a voice that rang clear and high, and from the time he took his seat within the dock until the time he was led away, his face never betrayed one trace of any emotion whatever. Even when the verdict was returned, not a muscle moved; even when he stood up and listened to the solemn sentence of death the marble-like rigidity of his conclusion with the calm, courtly grace of a prince—the sole unmoved person in the whole assembly.

'Only once did he betray any emotion—when the Lady Inez d'Alvarez fell fainting from her seat—and even then it was but momentary. As he was being led back to prison, he turned to his friend Sir Owen Fitzgerald, and held out his hand. "Can you take it?" he said with a smile. "It is the hand of a convicted felon. The Desmonds have gone to death with "All is lost except honour" on their lips. With me, all is lost, even honour. Farewell Owen. Don't come to see me; only remember—some day you will know I was innocent!' The evidence was purely circumstantial, but very crushing—especially that of William Morgan. We give a brief synopsis.

'Testimony of William Morgan:

'I am an Englishman by birth, an attorney by profession, and a resident, by choice, of this town for the past five years. I knew the deceased well. she was my betrothed wife. We were to be married in a month, with the consent and approval of her father. I loved her dearly, but I have every reason to believe she did not love me. Lord Roderic Desmond was her lover—a fact well known—and I have it from her own lips that he more than once promised her marriage. But from his first meeting with the Lady Inez d'Alvarez he neglected Kathleen. I pressed my suit—she rejected it, and failed away to a shadow. Then came the news of the engagement of Lord Roderic and the Lady Inez. It was I who told her, and she fell backward—not fainting but very near it—in her seat. Then she started wildly up. "He will not! he dare not!" she cried; "he could not be so base a villain! I am to be his wife—he has sworn it—and—oh, what will become of me if fails to keep his word?' I pacified her as well as I could, but she broke away from me, and ran in an hysterical state to her room. I did not see her again for some days; she shunned me persistently. One evening, a little before dusk, strolling among the hills, I came near the spot called the Fairy Well. There I

espied the prisoner and the deceased, conversing very earnestly. She seemed to be weeping—to be pleading passionately—his soothing and reasoning with her. I heard nothing they said; I was angry and jealous, and quitted the place. About an an hour after, as I stood alone near the cottage of O'Neal, Kathleen came rapidly along. Her face was pale, her eyes red—she seemed to have been weeping. I called h r, and she stopped; I asked her what Lord Roderic had said to her, and she answered me, "I would never know." I told her I loved her, and would endure this suspense no longer. She must either say yes or no, now and forever; she said yes, without a moment's hesitation? Her own words were, "I will marry you whenever yon like."

Then she left me and entered the cottage. I did not follow her that night; I came over next day and all was arranged. We were to be married in a month. She consented to everything I proposed, but she said little; she looked very gloomy indeed. Business kept me so occupied during the next two days that I found no leisure to visit her. Early on the morning of the third day I started for the cottage, my way leading past the boundary stream. It is a solitary spot, so that I was rather surprised when I heard voices on the opposite bank. I looked across, and saw among the alders the figures of a man and woman. I recognized the voice of Kathleen, raised high and shrill at times—again broken and low. The words I could not catch. The man's face was hidden, but I felt positive it was Lord Roderic's. I sould not cross the stream conveniently to confront them; besides I knew what a fi rce reckle-s temper Lord Roderic's was at times. I passed on my way, very ill pl ased, determined to await Kathleen at the cottage and demand an explanation. I found O Neal in, and alone—did not know where his daughter was—said she had been gone over an hour. I waited, but she never returned. As noon drew near I started up, determined to go in search of her. On my way I met O'Moore the constable, and asked him to accompany me. I had a presentment of something evil, I think. We went to the spot where I had seen them together, but they were not there. Just then we heard a sort of cry or groan further down; we dashed through the trees and the first sight we saw was the prisoner bending over the body of the deceased. She was q iite dead. He looked confounded—stunned; I cannot describe his look. I taxed him with the murder at once, and his answer was to knock me down. O'Moore asked him to g to the cottage and apprise her father, whilst we bore the body home.'

'O'Moore was called, and corroborated the testimony of the last witness. Being questioned as to why he had not told this at the inquest, Morgan said he could not swear positively that the man he saw talking to her was Lord Roderic Desmond, he was only morally certain until the discovery of his note, appointing the meeting, placed the matter beyond doubt.

'Testimony of Hugh O'Neal:

'"Deceased was my daughter. Lord Roderic Desmond and she had been playmates from earliest childhood—lovers, I do believe, in later years. I know my daugh er loved him, and I know that until the arrival of Lady Inez he spent nearly half of his time at my place. Then he left off coming, and very soon we heard he was engaged to be married to the Spanish lady. My daughter took the news very much to heart; she would not listen to the proposal of Mr. Morgan, who wished to make her his wife. On the day of her death, she left the house about nine o'clock in the morning, saying she was going for a walk. I never saw her again until I saw her carried in dead. Morgan came about half-past ten or eleven, and ask for her, waited awhile, and then left, saying he would go in search of her. Lord Roderic came about two o'clock, looking very pale and excited, and told me he had found Kathleen drowned—her body floating on the boundary stream. Morgan and O'Moore carried her home. Three weeks after the inquest, rummaging among her things, I found a note hidden away in her room, in the writing of the prisoner, appointing a meeting at the boundary stream at 10 o'clock. I can swear to the prisoner's hand-writing—it was I who taught him to write. I am firmly convinced it was to that appointment she went, and met her death. She was incapable of committing suicide."'

'Testimony of Gerald Desmond:

'"My cousin Roderic and I parted early on the morning of the 18th of November. He said he was going fishing, and I was occupied nearly all day with my uncle the Earl of Clontarf, looking over accounts, in his study. The prisoner quitted the castle about half-past nine. It would take fully half an hour to reach the boundry stream. I saw him next late in the afternoon. He came home looking pale [illegible] wild, and told us he had discovered the dead body of Kathleen O'Neal in the boundary stream, whither he had gone to fish. He seemed very agitated, very excited, but I thought that natural; he and Kathleen had been old friends—lovers, perhaps in a boy and girl way, in the past. The deceased loved him passionately, I know. I also

know she was intensely jealous, and once, in my hearing, threatened to go up to the castle and compel the Lady Inez to resign all right to her lover. "He was mine before he was hers!' were her words. "He shall never marry her! I could break off the match to-morrow if I liked." I thought the words but the empty threats of excitement, at the time, and paid no attention to them. I do remember half-laughingly putting Rory on his guard, and he looked more seriously uneasy than I had thought it possible for him to look on such a matter. Lady Inez was very proud—a whisper of infidelity and she would have broken with him at once. The witness knew his cousin's handwriting. Yes—this note was his—he could swear to it.'

'As Mr. Gerald Desmond descended from the witness stand,' said the paper, 'the prisoner looked at him with a long, steady, reproachful gaze. "And thou, Brutus!" he said'; but Mr. Desmond seemed very much affected and shrank from that fixed look. He had given his evidence with the utmost reluctance throughout.

The jury was gone some hours. The verdict was "Guilty."

'When asked if he had any reason to show why sentence of death should not be pronounced upon him, the prisoner answered, very pale but very firmly:

'Only this, my lord—that I am innocent, and will die condemned on circumstantial evidence, as many an accused man has done before me. That note is an arrant forgery. I never saw Kathleen O'Neal on that day, nor expected to see her, until I beheld her floating in the stream. I accuse Morgan, the attorney, of gross perjury. He never heard or saw me talking to her on that day. She has been foully murdered, and may the great God above confound her murderers and avenge her cruel death. For me—I loved Kathleen as a sister—I would have died sooner than harm a hair of her head."

'The Judge arose and solemnly pronounced the sentence of death. On the third of May the prisoner will be hanged in front of Clontarf Jail. The deepest sympathy is felt everywhere for his noble father and the young lady so soon to have been his bride. The prisoner was universally beloved. Strong men wept like children when he was borne away. The murder, the trial and the impending doom have thrown a deep gloom over the whole community.'

The paper dropped from the reader's hand. He bowed his face in his hands with a hollow groan.

'Will I ever forget his face?' he said huskily. 'The look in his eyes as he turned them upon me last, will haunt me to my dying day. And she—that last, upward look as she fell backward into the river! Oh, God! it will drive me mad!'

The clock struck one. Before its one faint chime died away there came a low, cautious knock at the house door. Morgan started to his feet.

'Tis he!' he muttered. 'I had forgotten him. Ah, among all the dwellers in the regions infernal is there another half so deeply damned as he—this second Iscariot—betraying with a kiss?'

The knock was repeated. The Englishman arose, the candle in his shaking hand, and walked to the door. As he unlocked and threw it open a man muffled in a great-coat and a slouched hat, came in, dripping like a water dog.

'At last, my man! I give you my word I thought you had fallen asleep. A sound digestion and an easy conscience always insure speedy slumber. Beastly night it is but all the better for me. Come in out of this drafty passage, and let's sit comfortably down.'

He jerked the flaring dip out of the hand of the pallid attorney, and led the way, with long strides, into the cheerless room. He unbuttoned and flung back his great-coat threw his slouched hat aside, and stood revealed in the dull glow—Gerald Desmond.

'Your reception room looks dull, like yourself, my dear friend. Still, it's better than the condemned cell in Clontarf jail, with the gallows and the hangman in prospective. Ah, my beauteous, brilliant Lord Rory, how is it with you now?'

He lay back in his chair, his legs, cased in water-proof toy-boots, outstretched; his sallow face flushed; his light-blue eyes gleaming with the cold light of sapphire stones.

'Sit thee down, my Guillaume, and never look so pale! You'd do for the Ghost in "Hamlet," without any pearl powder, only you're too hang-dog-looking for any honest ghost. Sit down and don't look so like the first murderer in a tragedy, if you can help it.'

'I can't help it!' Morgan cried with a bitter groan, 'I feel as though I were going mad! Listen to that storm, Gerald Desmond! look at that lightning! Is it not the wrath of heaven on us for the double murder done?'

'My good fellow speak for yourself. I've done no murder—never mean to, if I can help it. A clever villain—and I pride myself at being at the top of the profession—never breaks law. Now, I don't say but that you are an artful scoundrel enough, in

the main? but there is so much of the blood-hound and bull-dog in you by nature that it will break out in a spite of you. When you pitched your little Kathleen, neck and crop into the—'

'For God's sake, hush!' Morgan cried, in a voice of agony, starting to his feet. 'Walls have have ears! Hush, hush, hush!'

'It was a weakening on your part I should never have judged you capable of. I'm compounding with felony in concealing it, I don't deny; but then it's an ill wind that blows nobody good. I've saved your bull-dog neck from the gallows, my worthy Mr. Morgan, and fixed the crime on another man. You ought to be immeasurably grateful to me, instead of glowering at me over the candle, like the Faust Mephistopheles.'

He lit a cigar as he spoke, and sent a puff of smoke into the face of his companion. That trodden worm looked gloomily at him.

'You are a deeper-dyed villain than I am, Gerald Desmond!' he said; 'and as deeply dyed a murderer as I am—for you made me answer an innocent man's life away? He was your friend—your benefactor—your kinsman. How will you answer to God and man for this day's work?'

'The question of the Covenanter's widow,' Gerald Desmond responded, airly. 'Well, I say as Claverhouse said; "I can answer it to a man well enough, and I will take the Deity in my own hand." Ah, I always admired Claverhouse! But you in the character of a censor—my cut-throat friend! Who'd have thought it? As to my friend, my benefactor, my kinsman, etc., I hate him simply because he is all these. Why was I not born to the purple, instead of he? I'm the cleverer man, far-and-away, of the two. And he is all that stands between me and the coronet of Clontarf. Is that not enough? When I was a wretched little hanger-on—a fatherless and well-born pauper—he was riding about the country like a prince, adored by high and low even then, while I held his stirrup-leather, and picked out of the mud the guineas he threw to me. Is that not enough? And to-day I love the woman he loves, and she flouts me, by Jove! almost as dead-and-gone Kathleen flouted you. Is that not enough? He was rich, and handsome, and beloved, and my benefactor. I was poor and plain, and beloved by nobody, and the hanger-on of my lord the king's bounty. Was that not enough? But I won't do as you have done, my foolish Morgan—drown the woman I worship. I mean to do better—make her marry me. And I shall have her, and her fortune, and the coronet of Clontarf, when Lord Rory's bones are bleached, and all that bright beauty she loves so [illegible]ly is dust and ashes!'

The words hissed out of his lips in the cloud of smoke. He had never taken the cigar from between his [illegible], and blue devil eyes gleamed with a fire [illegible]ad to see.

'You are a fiend [illegible]nate!' Morgan said; 'and you have made another of me. Give me what you came here to give me, and let us part.'

'So! I make a fiend of you, do I?' Gerald Desmond laughed good-naturedly. 'You were but one remove from an angel before, Poor little Kathleen! I didn't tell you to drown her did I?—a very foolish—'

Morgan leaped from his chair, and made a clutch at his tormentor's throat. 'Take care, Gerald Desmond! I'll strangle you where you sit! It's not safe, I warn you—it's not safe!'

'So I see, you overgrown bully!' He thrust his hand within his breast pocket and pulled out a pistol. 'Bah you fool; go back to your seat, and cease ranting. How soon do you propose to quit Ireland?'

'Within the week,' sullenly.

'That is well; and don't remain in England—the air of Great Britain is unwholesome for such as you. Cut to the colonies—Australia, Canada, Cape Coast—anywhere, anywhere out of the world. Or stay! Suppose you try Columbia, the gem of the ocean? suppose you make for New York?'

'Give me money,' Morgan said, with a wolfish glare; 'I'll go anywhere.'

'Go to New York. Fine city—lots of raseality—splendid openings for a man of your genius. Or California wouldn't be a bad idea—it's a sort of *refugium peccatorium* nowadays. Try the New World, my good fellow, and here's two hundred pounds to start you in life.'

'Two hundred pounds? You said two thousand!'

'Did I really? Well, I could as easily give you ten midnight moons. Don't be ungrateful, my William, I've saved your precious neck from Jack Ketch—that's worth the balance. Take the two hundred and my blessing. It's all you'll ever get.' He arose as he spoke, threw away his smoked out cigar, and buttoned himself up in his overcoat once more.

'Wild weather to face at two in the morning. No matter—virtue is its own reward. Farewell, my friend. A pleasant passage to New York.'

'And this is all you mean to give me?'

'All—every stiver, my friend!—and a very pretty sum it is. Many a millionaire has commenced on an eighth of the money. Not a word more, you black-a-vised murderer!—

I won't have it. Show me to the door, and take your villainous face out of the country within the next three days, or I'll be down on you with the same mercy you showed Kathleen O'Neal. That will do—a word to the wise—you understand? Good night!'

He disappeared in the stormy darkness. The man Morgan closed and locked the door behind him, and stood in the passage, shaking his fist impotently, his murderous eyes gleaming like live coals.

'And this is the way you keep your word, Mr. Gerald Desmond?' he said. 'You've used your tool, and now you fling it into the ditch to rot! It's your time now—every dog has his day—but mine will surely come. And when it comes look out! When you're at the height of your power and prosperity, I'll have my vengeance and drag you down, though I perish with you! I'll pay you off, sooner or later, with compound interest, you traitor—you Judas, who sold your friend!'

CHAPTER X.

THE CRIME OF CAIN.

Lord Roderic Desmond sat alone in his cell—the condemned cell of the Clontarf Jail. The mellow April day—the last of the month—had long ago faded, and the 'young May moon,' of which the sweetest of all poets sings, gleamed through the bars of the grated window into the desolate cell. There was no other light—his lamp had gone out—but the soft, silvery radiance fell upon his bright golden head like heaven's own benediction.

It was past midnight. The new day and the new month had dawned. May-day had come, and on the third of May they would lead him forth to die a felon's death on the scaffold.

He walked slowly up and down the narrow cell, very pale and thin and worn, but the bright beauty, that had been Nature's birthday gift to her darling, undimmed. No suffering, no shame, no anguish, could stamp out that glorious dower. A deep sadness lay on that pale face—otherwise it was perfectly calm.

'And it all ends here,' he thought, wearily—'love, ambition, the world and its glories—in the solemn wonder of the winding-sheet. *Sic transit!* If it were only myself—but my father—my proud, beautiful Inez—oh, pitiful God! the thought of them will make me di a coward.'

He had seen them for the last time that day; he had begged them to come no more.

'I am not the first of my name and race that has died on the scaffold for another's crime,' he said, as he wrung his father's hand. 'Leave me by myself for the three days to come. Let me die as they died—game.'

He had held Inez d'Alvarez in his arms—for the last time on earth—in a long, long, passionate embrace; he had kissed over and over again the clay-cold lips; he had looked his last into the wondrous dark eyes, filled with woman's wildest woe. He had taken his last look; he had seen her fall back cold and lifeless in the pitying arms of the jailer, and never again, though he suffered a thousand deaths, could he suffer as he did in that hour.

But the sharpness even of that pang had passed. Death was so very near—a cruel and shameful death—and seen in its light earth, its joys and its sorrows, faded dimly away, and a great calm fell. It is easy, after all, to face the inevitable; hope is at an end—there is no alternative—we sit down resigned.

His thoughts drifted away to Kathleen. The mystery that shrouded her fate had been the great trouble of his life during those dreary months gone by. Who was Kathleen's murderer?

'She never committed suicide,' he thought 'my brave, good little girl. She had been foully murdered and lies in her grave unavenged. Oh, that I were free to seek her murderer over the world.'

His hand clenched and his eyes flashed with all their old fire. The bitterest remorse he had ever felt in his life he had felt for lost Kathleen. She had loved him so dearly—she had given him up so bravely, so generously—she had sacrificed herself so nobly for her ruined father's sake. And this was the reward of her womanly martyrdom.

'Better this, poor child,' Rory thought, bitterly, 'than the living death in store for her as the wife of that brute, Morgan! She has gone back to heaven untainted; as his wife her life would have been hell on earth.'

He threw himself on the bed presently—not to sleep—to watch the rays of the silvery light stream through the iron bars. What tales it whispered—of the bold Wicklow Mountains, all flooded with its crystal gleam—of the waving heather—of the fetterless eagle, soaring up to meet the rising sun—of the purple midnight sea, sleeping under the purple, starry sky—of his darling Nora Creina, dancing like a thing of life on the boundless waves—of hoary old Clontarf, where the Desmonds had reigned time out of mind, and where every moss-grown stone and ivied turret were dear to him as living things. 'And Gerald will reign there now,'

he thought, drearily—'Gerald will be Earl of Clontarf when they lay my poor father beneath the old chancel. And he will retrieve the ruined fortunes of the Desmonds by a wealthy marriage with some English tradesman's daughter, I dare say. Ah, well! the world's a see-saw at best, and it's only in the nature of things that one should go up as the other comes down.'

Slumber stole gradually over his eyes. He laid his handsome golden head on his arm, and slept as calmly as a child on its mother's breast. So deep was that quiet sleep that the stealthy step without never reached him—the stealthy turning of a key in the huge lock of his door never disturbed him. Slowly and softly it swung outward—s'owly and softly a man glided into the moonlit cell. One glance and he saw the quiet sleeper on the straw bed.

'And they would murder him!' the man said between his clenched teeth; 'they call him a murderer! They would hang this fair-haired boy for the murder of the girl who loved him! Blind fools! They'll never harm a hair of his yellow head, by the great heaven above us. Lord Rory! Lord Rory, awake!'

'He bent over the sleeper and whispered the name in his ear. At the first sound the sleeping eyes opened and looked up—wide awake.'

'What is it? Who is it? What do you want?'

'Hush-sh-sh! for the love of God! I have come to save you Lord Roderic Desmond!'

'To save me.' He sat up in bed bewildered.

'Yes, to save you I only reached Wicklow yesterday, or you would not have been in prison all these months. May Old Nick fly away with the cowards who called themselves your friends, and left you to die here!'

'But who are you?' Rory cried, in breathless wonder and bewilderment.

'Ah, then, sure you haven't forgotten me entirely, Lord Rory? Mike Muldoon, that run away four years ago, and went to sea. Sure you saved my life, at the risk of your own, many a day ago up in the mountains beyant. I've a good memory, my lord, and I haven't forgot it, though I am a ne'er-do-well; and I'm here to-night to pay off my debt. Get up, my lord—get up; throw this big coat about you, pull this old *caubeen* over your face, and come along.'

'Come along! Where? how? In heaven's name, Mike, what do you mean? There is no chance of escape.'

'There is every chance!' Mike Muldoon cried, in a breathless whisper. 'The jailor is my uncle, as you know; he hasn't seen me for four years until to-day, only they told me over in the town—oh, wirra!—that they had you here, hard and fast. Lord Rory, I swore by all that's good and great that minute that I'd free you, or know the reason why! I came to my uncle and sure he was as glad to see me as if I was the prodigal son Father Lafferty preaches about: and didn't I ask him to make a little feast in honour of the occasion, and invite the whole ship's crew? And faith he did it like a lady, and I just quietly drugged the punch, and every man-jack of them is sleeping like the devil! I tuk the kays from my uncle's belt, and—Och, Lord Rory! don't keep me standing here palaverin', but come at once.' He flung the coat round him, slapped the hat over his eyes, and fairly dragged the prisoner out of his cell.

'But where, Mike—where are we going?'

'I've a boat in waiting down the reat Peggy's Point, and my ship, the Dancing Dervish, sails in three hours. She's lying at anchor in the harbour now, and as three of our men deserted last night, they'll take you, and no questions asked. And sure when you're safe in foreign parts, you can write home and—*will* ye hurry, Lord Rory, or do ye mean to stand here till the dirty pack of beagles wake and give a chase? Come on?'

Stunned, bewildered, dazed—like a man in a dream—Lord Roderic suffered himself to be fairly dragged along. Still in that dream, he passed through long corridors—through an open court-yard, where officials slept at their posts—through the wide prison gates, and out into the grey, starry morning—free! Then he awoke. He turned to the brave fellow beside him, and held out his hand. 'Mike, my glorious fellow! how can I thank you?'

'By running as if the divil was after ye! May be they're waking this minute and raising the alarm. Never mind thanks, Lord Rory, till we're out o' sight of the coast of Ireland.'

'Mike, they must know of this at home. My father, Lady Inez—I must find means of letting them know. The suspense, the mystery of my fate, will kill them. Oh, Mike, my man, my brain feels half dazed with the suddenness of all this. Think for me—act for me! Tell me how I am to let them know!'

They were speeding rapidly along toward the coast. At that hour no living thing was abroad. Mike took off his cap, and scratched his head in dense perplexity. 'Sure it's like putting yer head back in the lion's den to wait at all; but still—arrah! write a bit of a note, and I'll run up to the castle with it myself. Maybe the "luck of

the Desmonds," that's stood your friend so far, will see you through it; and many's the good turn I owe the ould lord. Come down to the shore, Lord Rory, and write your note. I'll fly up to the castle and back in a brass of shakes.'

As men hurry when life is at stake, they hurried to the safe shelter of the shore. The coast-guard, going his lonely rounds had to be avoided; but Peggy's Point—a high, wild, lonely projection, thirty feet above the sands, with the waves churning on the black rocks below—was safe, even from him. Rory had a pencil in his pocket, and a New Testament. He took out the book, and scrawled rapidly on the fly-leaf:

'I have escaped: I am safe. Before I am missed I will be out of the county. Until you hear from me again farewell.'

That was all. He folded it and gave it to the sailor. 'Deliver it to my father, to Lady Inez, or my cousin Gerald, but to no one else. I will await your return here. Mike and may God speed you!' The man darted off like a deer and Lord Roderic Desmond, the condemned prisoner, whose hours had been numbered, stood under the gray morning sky, fetterless and free once more. Once more the stirring sea-wind thrilled through every vein, like the elixir of life; once more he looked over the ceaseless sea; once more he saw the unspeakable glory of the new day dawn in the rosy east. He leaned against the tall, mossy boulder, and drew a long, deep breath. 'Free!' he thought. 'Thank God! Thank God! for man's best birth-right! They will never take me back to captivity again—never! though all the constabulary of Clontarf stood before me.'

And meantime, fleet as an arrow from a bow, bounded along Mike Muldoon to Clontarf Castle. The distance was nearly two miles; but two miles was as a 'hen's jump' to the swift-footed mountaineer. Day was dawning in the ruddy eastern sky, the breeze was freshening, and Mike knew the ruddy eastern sun was an hour high the Dancing Dervish would be flying from the Wicklow coast, with her white wings spread. And if I am late—oh, whililih!' thought Mike. 'They'll be in bed at the castle whin I get there, I know. Sure and quality's always lazy.'

'Hallo!' cried an astonished voice. 'Now, then, my man, mind where you're going!' But the alarmed warning came too late. There was a collision—Mike had run head foremost into a pedestrian walking briskly down the rugged path. There was a shock—of the most violent—a rebound, and a mutually ferocious glare. 'Confound you, you thick-headed bog-trotter! What do you mean?'

But Mike Muldoon, by way of an answer, flung up his cap and caught it, with a loud, exultant shout. 'Hurroo! tare an age—here's the luck of the Desmonds! Long life to ye, Masther Gerald! Sure, I'd rather see your own good-lookin' face this minute than be made a present of ould Ireland!'

'What the deuce!' exclaimed Gerald Desmond, with a scowl—for Gerald Desmond was always the earliest of early birds 'I have seen you before, my good fellow, somewhere. Was it in a mad-house?'

'God forbid!' retorted Mike, in unfeigned horror. 'Maybe ye remember Mike Muldoon, that thrashed ye within an inch av yer life long ago, for shootin' his terrier? Divil a dirtier trick ever I heard tell of. Sure, it my own four bones, Masther Gerald, darlin', from foreign parts beyant, wid a note for ye *from him, ye know.*' This last in a thrilling whisper, with his hand to his mouth, and his mouth close to Gerald's ear.

'From *whom?* I'll be hanged if I understand one word you're saying!'

'Arrah! read this,' said Mike, thrusting the note into his hand. 'Didn't I come to Clontarf to free Lord Rory, and didn't I do it, too? My curse, and the curse o' the crows, on them that put him where I found him! He's waiting down at Peggy's Point, an' Masther Gerald, av ye'll run down an' spake a word to him, while I'm fetchin' the boat round, you'll be doin' a good turn.'

'But wait, Mike—for heaven's sake, wait!' cried Gerald, breathlessly. 'Do you mean to tell me Rory has broken jail and made his escape?'

'Begorra, he has! an' is coolin' his shins at Peggy's Point this minute.'

'You helped to free him?'

'Faith, I did that! an' more shame to me av I didn't.'

'And what are you going to do with him! What boat do you speak of?'

'The cutter of the Dancing Dervish, no less; it's up yonder a mile or so. And the Dancing Dervish—more betoken I'm second-mate of the same—sails for Mallow within the next two hours, and Lord Rory's off in her, and can snap his fingers in the dirty faces of all the hangmen this side of—Hurroo! I'm off for the boat, Masther Gerald. Run down to Peggy's Point, and tell Lord Rory I'll be with in twenty minutes.' He was gone like a shot. And Gerald Desmond stood alone in the day-dawn, and knew that all his labour was vain—all his plotting and villainy were useless—knew that the cousin

he hated was free! He set his teeth like a bull-dog, and an awful oath rang down the solemn stillness. His face in the gray light, had turned livid and terrible, and his strong right hand clenched.

'Baffled!' he crushed the word between his fierce teeth. 'Never! by the light above us! though I slay him with my own hand!'

He started at a swinging pace, his hand closing on the cold barrel of a pistol, hidden in his breast. There was *that* in the steel-blue eyes, in the compression of his mouth, bad to see.

Roderic Desmond, leaning against the boulder, looking at the crimson glory deepening in the east, awoke from his reverie at the sound of rapidly-approaching footsteps. It was not the tread of Mike Muldoon—he knew that—and he sprang erect and stood with the look in his eyes of a hunted stag at bay.

'They shall never take me alive!' he thought.

The next instant he had sprung forward, with a wordless cry of delight, and grasped his kinsman's hand.

'Gerald!' he cried, 'who would have looked for such good fortune as *this?*'

'Ah! who, indeed?' Gerald answered, with a bitter sneer. 'The proverbial luck of the Desmonds has not deserted the last son of the house, I see. And so, Lord Rory, you have escaped Jack Ketch?'

'Gerald!'

Only that one word. But he dropped the hand he had taken, and recoiled, and stood blankly staring. There was that in the tone, that in the words, that in the smile, of the man before him, no one could see and doubt.

Gerald Desmond laughed aloud—a hard, bitter, sardonic laugh. His falcon eye had measured the narrow margin on which they stood, and the black, boiling gulf yawning deadly below. He folded his arms, and looked with that diabolical sneer full in the pale, startled face of the kinsman he hated.

'My brilliant Rory! my beauteous Rory! how is it with you *now?* A condemned felon—a fugitive from justice—a hunted murderer! Why, your worst enemy might afford to *pity* you to-day! Do you hear, my kingly cousin? To *pity* you—as I do!'

'Gerald!' he could just utter that one word, so intense was the shock, the wonder, the incredulity. '*What* is this? Is it you or I that are going mad?'

'Neither, my princely Rory; it is only that you are learning the truth in the eleventh hour; that I hate you!'

'Hate me! *You*, Gerald—my friend—my kinsman—my brother!'

He paused, but the steadfast blue eyes that looked at him with such unutterable reproach stung to madness the last remnant of honour in the traitor's breast.

'Curse you! he hissed, 'with your woman's face and your golden hair! What right had you to be born Lord Clontarf instead of me? The same blood flows in our veins, and I'm the better man, by Heaven, than you! What right had you to be born with this glorious dower of beauty that has made you be petted and caressed since your very babyhood, while I was like an unlicked cub, for whom cuffs and ha'pence were too good? What right had you to woo and win a beauty and an heiress, and take her to your arms, under my very eyes? What right had you to be my benefactor, my patron, my master, flinging me your sovereigns, and paying my debts, and sharing your pocket-money, like a prince? I tell you I hate you! I hate you for your birth, for your beauty, for your rank, for your birthright, for the woman you love, and for the favours you have bestowed! I hate you because you are Roderic Desmond, heir of Clontarf, and not I. I swore I'd have my revenge one day, and Lord Roderic, I—have—had it!'

He paused, breathless with the fierce mad passion within him. And Roderic listened, with blue, dilated eyes, but very calm now.

'I understand,' he said slowly. 'It is you who have betrayed me to death!'

'It is!' Gerald Desmond hissed. 'I know who murdered Kathleen O'Neal. It was I who bribed Morgan to swear your life away. It was I who forged the note that condemned you! It was I, my Lord Roderic, who did it all!'

'Why do you tell me this?' Rory asked, in the same still voice. 'Why do you seal your own doom?'

'Because I have sealed yours before it. Because you will never leave this spot alive.'

He sprang upon him as a tiger springs upon his prey, his face blood-red, his eyeballs staring, his teeth clenched upon his lower lip until the blood flowed. His tiger's grip was on his brother's throat—Cain stood over Abel once again in the untold horror of murder! Their arms closed around each other. Roderic Desmond fought valiantly for his life.

They wrestled—they struggled, breathless, panting, convulsed—in each other's strong arms. Oh, God, that the radiant glory of thy new day should so often rise to light the brute lust of blood in man! Gerald Desmond was the victor. His right hand

closed tightly on the blackened throat, his left sought his pistol. Its blue gleam flashed in the first red ray of the rising sun that was to have lit Rory to freedom; then its cold muzzle pressed hard against the temple of his fallen foe. For one second the blue eyes of Rory Desmond looked steadily up in the face above him—a look his murderer might never forget to his dying day. Then there was a bound, a pistol rang out over the solemn sea, there was a struggle, one or two convulsive throes, and the golden head fell back on the blood-stained grass, the blue eyes stared blankly up at the brilliant morning sky. And a great calm fell.

The murderer's eyes looked over the wide ocean. Far off, rounding a distant point, a boat, propelled by a single rower, sped—the cutter of the Dancing Dervish, and honest Mike Muldoon. Far below, the rising tide the licked the steep sides of the rock. One plunge, and the dead tell no tales! He lifted the stark body in his arms, and hurled it over. There was a great plunge—it went straight down like a stone. But as he flung it from him, he could have sworn the dead eyes moved and the dead lips parted with the words they had uttered in the crowded court the deathless reproach of the murdered Cæsar. '*And thou* too, *Brutus!*'

He pressed his hand over his eyes to shut out the horrid vision, and hurling the pistol far into the calm sea, fled like a madman from the spot.

PART SECOND.

CHAPTER I.

TREVANNANCE, OR ROYAL REST

It lay deep down in the green heart of the Devon woods, that stately Norman pile, known as 'Royal Rest.' Long and many a day ago, Norman masons had reared its lofty turrets, its massive, battlemented towers, its wondrous pinnacles, its superb ranges of Gothic windows, its rich and rare carved stonework and buttresses, where the clustering ivy and wild dog-roses bloomed luxuriantly now—a noble and storied old mansion, that had stood many a siege, where exiled king and hunted prince had sought and found shelter in the troubled days gone by.

Royal Rest had been the noblest possession of a great and noble house—the only remainder of a long bead-roll of such possessions. It had been the sanctuary of hunted Jacobite nobles; countless Tory plots had been hatched between its grand old walls; Cromwell's petronels had battered it in vain when Lord Dudley Trevannance held it with a handful of retainers, and lost his title and fair, broad lands fighting for the 'White Rose and the long heads of hair.'

A grand old place! In its deep, dark forest lands the rare red deer trooped in countless herds. In its woodland pools the wild fowl flocked in legions. Its glancing river was famed far and wide for char and trout, and on its sedgy margin the water lilies waved, and the white swans 'floated double, swan and shadow.'

Nowhere else in all sunny Devon abounded the partridges, the pheasants, and the rabbits, as they abounded here; nowhere else crowded the teal and mallard in the still dark tarns as they crowded at Royal Rest—a terrestrial paradise, sloping down to the sunlit sea, covering leagues of country, of silvery beach, of stately deer forest, of gorse-grown heath, where myrtles blossomed and wild-roses blew—a grand old place, with a chime of silver-tongued bells, the pride of the county. The August sun, streaming through the quaint ivied windows with their rich heraldic blazonries upon the panes, stained with the crest of the house of Trevannance—a wounded eagle rending a hawk, and the imperial motto, '*Triumpho morte tam vita*'—fell warm and mellow on the head of the last lord of Royal Rest. It was past noon, and he sat with three other men at breakfast, and the lofty apartment was perfumed with cigar smoke, and the fragrant odour of Burgundies and claret, peaches and grapes, and the roses and clematis that surrounded the windows and wafted their odorous breath into the room.

He sat at the head of the table. Vivian Victor Trevannance, the last of his name and race. Cornish by birth, as his name implied—for 'by Tre, Pol and Pen ye may know the Cornish men'—this fair inheritance of Royal Rest came to him from the distaff side, failing heirs direct in the main line.

The old Cornish homestead had long ago gone to rack and ruin, through his father's reckless prodigality, and the elder Trevannance had resigned it utterly to the owls and bats. Recklessness was a characteristic of the race—a race hot in love, hot in hate, falcons in war, doves in peace, fiery warriors in the days of the Plantagenet, and Lancaster, and of York—yea in the days when they had fought and bled at Ascalon. They had lost a marquisate and a princely inheritance, but they were reckless still, under the velvet masque of latter-day custom—with the same fiery old

Norman blood leaping in their veins. He sat at the head of the breakfast table, in a velvet morning coat, a Manilla between his lips, glancing over the letters the morning mail had brought him—a tall, finely-formed man of thirty, with a fair, frank, handsome face, large, lazy, brown eyes, and a profusion of silky brown hair and moustache. The large, luminous brown eyes looked at you with a gentle, dreamy indolence; the voice that spoke was slow and soft; every lingering, leisurely movement bespoke the very essence of indolence, inborn and inbred. The hot Norman blood *seemed* to flow coolly and sluggishly enough in the last lord of Royal Rest. He peeled his apricots, and sipped his claret, and opened his letters—rose-scented, rose-hued, many of them, for the conqueror's myrtle leaves strewed the path of Vivian Trevannance; and the fair ones went down before his handsome brown eyes, his ancient name, and his noble rent-roll, as the rabbits before the ring of his Lincolnshire rifle. And constancy had never been his strong point; he bowed lightly at each fair shrine, but he worshipped long at none.

'Fetters are fetters, though they be wreathed of rose-chains,' he said wearily; 'and, like our wounded eagle, we of Trevannance triumph in death as in life. We live free, or we cease to live.'

Glancing slightly over the fair, perfumed billets ere he threw them aside, he paid little heed to the talk of the other men over their omelettes and salmon cutlets, though that talk ran on a very interesting theme—the *debut* of a new beauty.

'Loveliest thing the sun shines on!' declared Lord Guy Rivers, enthusiastically. 'Saw her presented—made the greatest sensation of the century—delicious as one of Greuze's beauties—not that style though—reminds you of Joanna of Naples, you know. only got black hair—too beautiful, by Jove! for—she's ice!'

'Ah, bah! ice—with all that Morisco blood in her veins! Stuff and nonsense!' retorted Major Langly, of the Guards.

'Pure Castilian, old fellow—no taint of the Moor! D'Alvarez, on the distaff side—grand old stock, with a dash of Irish blood. Gage Tempest has gone stark mad over her wondrous loveliness, and the Ear of Greenlaid his coronet at her feet the third time he met her. She looked down on him as an empress might, said no, and swept away! Greenturf's gone to Central Africa, to forget that disdainful little beauty among the aborigines.'

'They call her the Rose of Castile—pretty, eh? The laureate dubbed her. A certain prince of the blood royal was so struck with her at the Drawing-room that—'

'Oh, yes! heard that story,' interrupted Lord Racer; 'got snubbed for his pains—didn't he? I met Clontarf up the Mediterranean, last year—grumpy old fellow—looks like Byron's Manfred or Eugene Aram—chronic gloom, and all that sort of thing—as if he had a murder on his mind, you know. By-the-by, Clontarf got the title in rather a roundabout way, didn't he? Was nephew of the last earl, and stepped in the shoes of a dead son. How was it?'

'This way,' said Guy Rivers, one of those men who know everything; 'it happened twenty years ago, or thereabouts, but I recollect it perfectly. Lord Roderic Desmond, Clontarf—late earl, of course—Clontarf's only son—was accused of murdering a little peasant girl—horribly unlikely, you know—but he was, and found guilty and sentenced to be hanged. Three days before the sentence was to be executed he made his escape somehow, and was never heard of again. They found a body some months later, washed ashore, and people supposed it to be his. Well, the earl, as was very natural, never held up his head after—very fine fellow Lord Roderic was, they say; and when he died, Gerald Desmond, then a hard-working London barrister, stepped into the title. He did more—he married the Lady Inez D'Alvarez, the late betrothed of his late cousin, and with the vast wealth she brought him, built up the decayed fortunes of the Desmonds. He took her back to Castile, and there our radiant, peerless, proud Lady Evelyn first opened her violet eyes on this mortal life. Pass the Burgundy, I have spoken!'

'Like an oracle!' said his host, flinging aside his last letter, and selecting a peach. 'And now—what's it all about?'

'The Rose of Castile, of course—the subject of the day.'

'Ah! and pray what new floricultural wonder is your Rose de Castile?'

'Hear him!' cried Lord Racer, impatiently. 'You Vandal! If you had not spent the last three years in the land of the Arab and the Mussulman, you would not need to ask that question. Why, Clontarf's peerless daughter, to be sure! Lovely as your dreams of the angels, and worth not only a Jew's eye, but the whole body and bones of an Israelite!'

'My dear fellow,' remonstrated Vivian Trevannance, plaintively, 'don't gush! It's fatiguing in August, and bad taste at any time. Besides, I've seen her!'

'Seen her?—You! Where?'

'In a young lady's proper sphere—at

home. It was seven years ago, and I was doing the dutiful—making a sacrifice on the paternal altar, and that sort of thing. In other words, the governor and my lord of Clontarf are absurdly intimate—a modern case of Pylades and Oreste, David and Jonathan, you know—and General Trevannance desired me to meet him in Castile, and at the residence of his Pythias, Clontarf. Well, it is always less fatigning to yield than to rebel. I yielded and went up the Ebro, and saw what Racer gushingly calls "Clontarf's peerless daughter."'

'Well, and isn't she? You cold-blooded critic, what else can you call her?"

'It was seven years ago,' answered Trevannance, gravely. 'I saw a dark fairy of eleven summers (that's the style in novels, isn't it?), with a pair of wonderful, solemn, shining eyes, who danced the bolero for us by moonlight, under a Castilian chestnut-tree. Damsels of eleven years, in the transition state, I don't as a rule admire, but this tiny lady had very little of the bread-and-butter miss about her, I must say. I rather think I thought her pretty. I must have, for I offered to kiss her; but she swayed away from me like a young queen. I remember distinctly two slim arched feet—altogether Spanish—would have served Owen Meredith for one of his idyls—and a pair of tapering ankles. They sent her back in a week to her convent; and I have still another vivid impression that she declined kissing me again at parting. If she were a prude at eleven, what must she be at eighteen?'

'An icicle—a Venus Victrix, done in Parian marble—beautiful as a goddess, if you like, and with no more heart than Minerva herself.'

'Well, take care of yourself, Guy,' said his host, 'I never yet knew a man begin by abusing a woman that he did not end by losing his head about her—she's coming down to Warbeck Hall to-morrow with the Clydesmores.'

'To Warbeck Hall? Whew! Who says so, pray?'

'The governor,' Trevannance answered, lazily, 'says he's coming here himself. Clontarf goes with his peerless daughter, and the Duke of Amethyst is in their train. Commend me to a woman who can trample on strawberry-leaves! The gorgeous Donna de Castilia has refused him twice, and still his grace's motto is, "Try, try again." There must be something in her, after all.'

'Ah! she can talk—when she chooses,' Guy Rivers said, dreamily—'she and the Premier—I heard 'em at it, at Lady Rocksilver's, one night. She was as brilliant as though she had been born ugly and a blue-stocking.'

'All women can talk,' remarked Major Langley, decidedly, 'I believe with the Persians, that ten measures of talk came down from heaven, and the women took nine.'

'Yes, they all can talk,' said Trevannance, in his soft, slow voice; 'but they seldom say anything worth hearing. They will chatter for hours, and we like to hear 'em. Nonsense from rosebud lips is ever so much nicer, now and then, than sense between beard and monstache, but not for a permanence I hope your Castilian Rose isn't clever, Rivers. If there's one thing I do abhor and detest, it is a clever woman. They have always been my pet abomination since I wore petticoats, and had a strong-minded nurse for governess, who read Stuart Mill and Adam McCulloch.'

'She's fearfully and wonderfully accomplished,' Rivers responded, lighting a rose-scented cigarette; 'but I don't think she reads McCulloch and the other fellow. She doesn't look as if she did. She can sing like Malibran or Jenny Lind. Her shake on the treble notes is something sublime. She can waltz—oh, ye gods! how she can waltz;—turns her round in a nut shell, and fairy floats in air. She speaks four different languages, and each like a native; and she embroiders elaborate vestments, and missals, every day of her life. She's as clever as she is handsome, and, in these days of pretty faces and lackadaisical heads, a little modicum of brain is refreshing Now, then, I say, let's go and have a pop at the rabbits.'

There was a general move and a universal lighting of cigars as they went.

'And so we're to have her next week,' Major Langley remarked. 'Pity, too—she'll spoil our sport with the partridges. When a man's heart hit himself, how can he be expected to bring down the featured game? If things would only turn out in real life as they do in novels! The impregnable beauty's horse runs away, and you rush forward and catch the rampant charger in the nick of time. Or the house catches fire—and she's invariably left behind—and you rush blindfold through smoke and flames up to the forth story, seize a wet blanket, fling it round the object of your adoration, and spring with her in your arms out of the window—an odd matter of thirty feet or so—and the next instant—crash! tumbles in the roof! Or she goes out sailing, and a white-and-black squall arises, and the boat goes on her beam-ends before you can furl the main-sail, and you take a header

after the lovely one into the roaring breakers, and, with her under one arm, strike out heroically with the other for the shore—'

'And the shore is invariable a desert island,' interposed Trevannance laughing, 'where the bread and butter grow on the trees, and the trout and salmon swim up to your front door and beg you to catch 'em. And your beauty falls incontinently in love with you, the "preserver of her life and virtue," as the Ratcliffe heroines say, and marries you out of hand. Yes, my Henrique, it's a thousand pities things won't turn out in everyday life as they do in three-volume literature. We might all be elder sons then, with thirty thousand a year when the reigning potentate goes to glory, and the "loveliest of her sex" hanging like a ripe cherry ready to drop into our open mouth. As it is—well, Clontarf's peerless daughter is for none of us, it seems, since his Grace of Amethyst has been jilted, so we'll take heart of grace, and sing in her face:

'"If she be not fair for me,
What care I how fair she be?"'

'Ah! there's a fellow in the open now.'

His fowling piece rang out, and the rabbit rolled over, riddled through the head.

Sport abounded, and the four men separated in the south coppice. Every few minutes the pop, pop, pop of their guns cracked out of the stillness, and great and mighty was the slaughter thereof.

The afternoon sun was drooping low in the west ere Trevannance came loitering out of the plantation and up the velvet slope of lawn that led to the grand portico entrance of the house. He paused beside a marble fountain where naiads disported in the plashing waters, as the sight of a fly from the railway, rattling rapidly up the noble oak avenue, met his eye.

'Who can it be?' he thought. The instant after he had started forward in surprise. The governor, by Jove!' he exclaimed—'a day sooner than he said.'

He came forward with the careless grace peculiar to him, and greeted his father with outstretched hand and a cordial smile of welcome.

'My dear general! happy to welcome you to Royal Rest. Why did you not say in your letter you were coming to-day, instead of to-morrow, and some of my people should have met you at the station?'

'Ah! thanks! No matter. Didn't know it myself, you see. Took the notion suddenly. How uncommonly well you're looking, to-be-sure! Country air and quiet agree with you, eh?'

'I believe it is considered beneficial. I can return the compliment, however, sir. London air and bustle seem to agree equally well with you. I never saw you looking better in my life. May I offer you a cigar?'

General Trevannance accepted the offer, and, linking his arm in that of his son, led him toward the house.

They resembled each other, father and son, and the bright, dark eyes of the elder man were as brilliant as in the days of his youth—albeit the thick, brown hair was iron-gray now, and the heavy moustache snowy white.

He bore the stamp of the cavalry officer from head to foot—upright as a dart, hale as a lad of twenty, and with twice the energy in voice and face and manner of his son.

'Who have you down here, Vivian?' he asked. 'Royal Rest is full from bottom to top, as usual, I daresay?'

'My dear sir, no. Only three men—Langley, of the Household Brigade, Guy Rivers and Lord Racer. You see, I hadn't quite determined to spend the autumn in England; when I parted with Mountcagle, three weeks ago, in Vienna, it was an understood thing we were to go up the Nile together before Christmas. To go, or not to go, is, with me, an open question as yet.'

'Then let me decide for you, Vivian. Don't go.'

'My dear governor! Really—'

'Come into the library—the men are out after the rabbits, I suppose. When do you dine? You can give me ten minutes before the dressing-bell rings, can't you?'

'Fifty, my dear sir, if you like. Really, this grows interesting, not to say mysterious. In what possible manner can my going or staying affect you?'

He flung open the library-door, and followed the tall, stalwart general in. A noble room—vast, long and lofty—the oak-panelled walls lined with books in rich binding; the draperies gold and purple; the polished oaken floor covered with Persian rugs; rare busts and bronzes on brackets, and surmounting the lofty doorway and book-cases.

General Trevannance planted himself on the tiger-skin before the marble hearth, his hands behind him, his feet apart, his square, resolute, handsome face full of importance, his keen brown eyes fixed on his son.

'Vivian, have you ever thought of marrying?'

Vivian had thrown himself back amid the violet velvet cushions of a lounge, the impersonation of ease; but at this startling question, he looked up almost as if a bullet had whizzed past him.

'My dear father, Heaven forefend! What

a horrible question, and so suddenly, too! Pray remember, I was born with nerves, though you Peninsular heroes don't seem to know the meaning of the word. Marry! God forbid!'

'And why, pray? You must come to it, sooner or later—it's like death and the income tax, and other inevitable evils, not exactly agreeable, perhaps but something there is no shirking. How old are you—thirty, eh?'

'Thirty-one and three months,' murmured Vivian; 'old enough to know better than to marry. Good Heaven! that any man in his sober senses should rush voluntarily, from freedom into bondage of the most galling sort! "The heart is a free and fetterless thing" sings the poet, and I agree with him, while a man's single. I don't think I was ever intended by a beneficent Providence, to fill the rode of Mr. Caudle When a poor devil, without a rap, rushes headlong to St. George's, with the widow or the orphan, the fortunate possessor of fifty thousand in the three cents., we may pity, but we cannot blame. But for me, or any man in my position, able to pay his tailor and his bootmaker, owning a decent house, a decent horse, a good Manilla, and a comfortable dinner, to perpetrate that sort of madness—well, the taint of idiocy must have been in his blood from childhood up. No, my dear general, I haven't thought of marrying, except as I've thought of suicide—as a horrible subject in the abstract.'

'Vivian!' his father cried, impatiently, 'I didn't want the cant of the present day from your lips. The young man of the period is weary of all things earthly at twenty, and good for nothing under heaven but to lounge in club windows, part his hair in the middle, sneer at women, and rail at marriage. But you're thirty, you've seen the world, sown your wild oats, possess common sense, and I hoped for something better. You must marry—you know it; and now is your time, my lad, if ever.'

'Indeed! Do you see any symptoms of apoplexy, or heart disease, or—'

'Stuff! Here is meaning in few words—I want you marry Lady Evelyn Desmond!'

'Eh!'

Vivian Trevannance absolutely started up on his elbow, so great was the shock of his surprise.

'You've never seen her, I know,' pursued the general—'at least, since her childhood; but she is beautiful as even your fastidious taste can desire, with a fortune, my dear lad, of half a million—the best blood of Ireland and Castile in her veins, and the dignity and grace of an empress. What more can you ask? Stay! don't interrupt me. It is the dearest desire of my heart to see my son win this golden prize, for which dukes sigh in vain, and I may say nothing would gratify her father more. The earl and I talked this matter over only yesterday, and he gave me to understand distinctly that—'

"Barkis was willin'," interrupted his son. He had fallen back once more among his cushions, digesting this astonisher as best he might. 'Very accommodating of the earl, I must say! Did the young lady talk it over, too, may I ask, and send you here as Cupid's ambassador?'

'No, sir! don't flatter yourself—the young lady knows nothing of the matter as yet. But when you have consented, she will consent.'

'Will she? What a model of filial piety! 'Gad! if this isn't like a chapter out of one of those romances Racer was speaking of this morning! Flinty-hearted father commands his only son to marry the girl he has chosen, and cuts off only son with a shilling because he won't! Pity you can't do that in the present case!'

'No, sir!' retorted the general; 'we can't do that sort of thing. Royal Rest is your own, and the place in Cornwall is entailed, as you know. All I possess is yours, whether you see fit to obey or not; but my dear boy, it would make me very happy to see my little Evelyn your wife, and my grandchildren around my knee.'

'All born with silver spoons in their mouths,' Vivian murmured, languidly. 'Governor, why don't you marry her yourself? You're the better man, and the better-looking man, of the two, by Jove! 'Pon my life it would afford me the greatest pleasure to salute the Rose of Castile as my new mamma! If she's so ready to obey her father and marry the man of his choice, what can it signify whether it is Raymond Trevannance, age sixty, or Vivian Trevannance, aged thirty?'

'Don't be a fool! Talk sense, Vivian, if you can. I ran down here purposely to see you to-day, before the Clydesmores came, and Lady Evelyn with them. All the best men of the kingdom are at her feet. Amethyst is making desperate hard running, and Amethyst is the match of the season. Now's your time, as I said, or never—take fortune at the flood, or some other man will step in and bear off the loveliest lady in the land, under your very nose. I have no more to say. You can do it. You know it will gratify me—if you can care for that—and you'll never get such a wife again while the world wags!'

With which the general produced his diamond-studd d snuff-box, and refreshed himself by an energetic pinch.

'Melo-dramatic—very!' was the languid response of his son; 'and so I have only to throw the handkerchief—*a la* Grand Mogul—and my lady flies to pick it up. In other words, I have only to open my arms, and she'll plump into 'em.'

'She'll obey her father, sir,' retorted the general, sharply; 'more than can be said for many sons and daughters at the pr sent day.'

'Personal,' said Vivian, 'but correct. Well, my dear sir, there's the dressing-bell Permit me to ring for them to show you to your room. Spare my blushes for the present; give me time to compose my agitated feelings. Permit me to look upon my future *sposa* before I agree to take her to my bosom for life, and then—I'll th nk about it. Edwards, show General Trevannance to his apartments.'

The moment the door closed after the stalwart Peninsular hero, Vivian seized pen and ink, and dashed off a telegram to Vienna and Sir Foulke Mount. agle:

'DEAR MOUNT: Don't forget the Nile expedition. Look for me in a week.

TREVANNANCE.'

CHAPTER II.

RATHER ROMANTIC.

The Clydesmores came down to Warbeck Hall, and with them the Earl and Countess of Clontarf, and their handsome daughter. It was a very fine place Warbeck Hall, though neither so old, nor so grand, nor so storied as Royal Rest. Like its master, who counted his ancestors scarcely a hundred years back, it was rather new; but Lord Clydesmore's wealth and talents stood him instead of the purest *sang azure*.

They brought a train of visitors down with them from the first, but perhaps more followed in the light of that dazzling meteor, Lady Evelyn, than—keen sportsmen as they were—came to knock over the partridges. On the evening following their arrival, there was a reception, at Warbeck Hall—a very brilliant affair—to which scores of titled and untitled guests, from far and wide, came.

The fame of the wonirons Spanish beauty, and her magnificent fortune, had preceded her, and every invitation issued was accepted save one—Mr. Vivian Trevannance was not present at my Lady Clydesmore's ball.

'Gone to Paris—went, this morning, post haste. Received a telegram from a friend at the point of death. Quixotic fellow, Vivian, on the score of friendship. Very sorry, but wouldn't have postponed it for the crown of the world:'

And then General Trevannance took snuff and gnawed his silvery moustache uneasily, behind his large white hand. The Earl of Clontarf bowed, with a cynical smile, and glanced at his daughter.

'I began to think that we are two elderly idiots, Trevannance—like two stiff-necked fathers in a comedy, making absurd matches for our sons and daughters, stamping about the stage very red in the face, and very furious as to voice, during four acts, and yeldi g to the low com dian, and the sombrettes, and giving them our blessing for their disobedience, in the fifth. We had better drop that little matter we spoke of, a day or two ago. Ametnyst's a very good fellow and he deserves to win her.'

Yes, he certainly deserved to win her, if untiring devotion could do it. He hovered around her now, a great yellow-whiskered moth, in the dazzling candle-flame, scorching his mealy wings, poor fellow, while the brilliant flame burned on without mercy. He kept fluttering near, drinking in that dangerous loveliness—the cold indifference with which she turned from him and his ducal coronet like oil added to fire.

She was rarely beautiful, this young Spanish patrician, with the lofty grace of a royal stag. Tall, and willowy, and slender, she floated in a cloud of gold hued crepophane, a Venus robed in sunbeams, with opals clasping the arched throat, the taper wrists, dangling from the pink shell-like ears, and gleaming above the low, dusk brow. The purple-black hair, that fell in a jetty cascade of waves, and ripples, and curls to the taper waist, was soft and fine as floss silk—a *chevelure* for an Andalusian countess. The clear, creamy white of the skin; the mouth, red as a June rose and sweet as a babe's; the acquiline nose, with it's proud, curved nostril; the long, deep dark eyes of purplish blue shaded by sweeping, jetty lashes—ah, wondrously lovely, rarely lovely, was this peerless Rose of Castile! She moved up and down the long suite of drawing rooms, with a floating, airy grace all her own; the princely head haughtily upheld—a 'queen of noble nature's crowning.'

'Confound the fellow!' muttered the old General. 'He's as obstinate as a pig, and as stiff-necked as a Jew! If I thought this flying trip to France was only a ruse—but no, I saw the telegram, and I know that Beauchamp's been at death's door for years.'

It was no ruse. Vivian had really been

sent for to Paris, by a dying friend, and had really gone.

'Thank heaven, I can dodge the yoke matrimonial, without offending the governor!' he thought, as the 'resonant steam eagle' flew with him far from Royal Rest. 'The Rose of Castile is a gorgeous flower, no doubt, but if one must pay for the plucking by life-long slavery, why the gorgeous Castilian Rose may pine on the stem until doomsday for me! No, my worthy parent; when my fiftieth birthday and the gout set in, I may turn my thoughts hymeneal-ward. Sooner than that—excuse me!'

The friend, Beauchamp, an English artist, resident in Paris,—was very near his end when Vivian got there. He found him watched over by a hired nurse, and a little pale-faced daughter of nine or ten.

'It was on her account I have sent for you, Vivian,' he said grasping his friend's hand, and looking imploringly in his face with hollow, haggard eyes. 'When I go she will be entirely alone in the world. Vivian, by the memory of our school boy days, of our old, tried friendship, you will be her guardian, will you not? Take her from Paris—give her some quiet English home. I have but little to leave her, but that will suffice until she is a woman, and some good man makes her his wife.'

And Vivian Trevannance, to whom man, woman, or child never pleaded in vain, wrung his friend's hand, and promised.

'Her home shall be at Royal Rest,' he said; 'her future shall be my care. Have no fears of her, dear old boy! Marian shall be my daughter.'

And the dying artist had gone out of life, his last words a 'God bless you!' for his friend; and Vivian Trevannance, though he utterly repudiated a wife, found himself, willy nilly, saddled with a daughter—a pallid, desolate, little sprite—wan and bloodless as a shadow. He wrote a letter to his father, telling him all, and packed little missy and her nurse straight to England. For himself, the dead man's affairs required his presence in Paris for at least another week. Those affairs settled, he must return to Devon for a few days, preparatory to the great exp dition up the Nile.

'And Donna de Castilia won't be able to hold out against the dueal coronet, down in the country,' he thought. 'Amethyst will have the cover-side all to himself, and can pop over his silver-winged bird of paradise splendidly. I'll have nothing to do but congratulate him when I get back.

He thought this as he rode across the country on the afternoon of his return. The Devon fields, the meadows, the moors, the woodland, the open country spread away far and wide. Half unconsciously he let his horse take its own course, smoking his Cubas, and thinking of poor Beauchamp and his daughter.

'I must get a governess for her I suppose,' he mused. 'She's too young to send to school. The governor must look after her while I'm in England. Poor Beauchamp! I hope she won't take after him. There was a life wasted—genius wrecked. Hello Saladin! Where the deuce are we? Astray for a dueat!'

He drew up his horse and looked about him. The afternoon was wearing late, the sky was thickly overcast, black clouds were hurrying away before the wind. A storm was at hand, and he was in the midst of a desolate plain, with clumps of woodland in the distance, and no human habitation in in view.

A vivid flash of lightning leaped out—there was a crash—and then great drops began to patter on the dry cracked earth, There had been a long drought—all the more tremendous would be the rain-storm now.

'In for a wet jacket! muttered Vivian, 'and a score of miles from home, and this poor old beast giving out already. Pleasant? and as usual, no one to blame for my folly but myself. Ha! a fellow-sufferer as I live, and a lady at that!'

The equestrienne had skirted the woodland and now drew up, as the lightning set her horse rearing furiously. As she did so, a man sprang out of the copse and grasped her bridle-rein.

'Money! he exclaimed, in a hoarse, thick voice. "Give me money! I'm starving!'

'I have no money,' a clear, silvery voice answered. . Let go my bridle rein!'

'I won't? If you haven't money, you have rings, and watches, and chains. Give me what you've got I tell you. I'm a desperate man and not to be trifled with.'

'You villain!' thundered a voice. 'Let go the lady's rein, or I'll horsewhip you within an inch of your life!'

The aggressor sprang back. He was a short, thick-set man, with a pair of savage, sinister eyes, and a head of grizzled reddish hair, his face hidden by a huge muffler, twisted scientifically about it. He sprang back, at the sight of the gentleman on a powerful black horse branishing aloft a heavy riding-whip.

'Begone, I say!' thundered this apparition, 'before I am tempted to break your skull. Madam,' turning courteously to the lady, 'I trust this ruffian has not alarmed you?'

He looked at her for the first time, and saw

the fairest face it seemed to him upon which his eyes had ever rested. She was very pale, but not in the least terrified, as he could see. A pair of lustrous violet eyes, deep, dark, shining as purple stars, turned gravely upon him.

'No,' she said, very simply, 'he did not alarm me. He looks as though he needed what he demands, and I have no money.'

The voice was melody itself, and the marked foreign accent with which she spoke rendered the silvery tone sweeter still. She leaned forward a little in her saddle toward the cowering beggar, swaying like a young willow.

'You look poor and wretched,' she said in her slow, sweet voice. 'I am sorry I have nothing to give you now. Take this.' She drew a ring from an ungauntleted hand. 'Come to Warbeck Hall to-morrow, and send this to me by one of the servants—my name is inside—and I will most assuredly assist you.'

'Thank you, my lady!' the suppliant said, with the whine of his class. 'I'm very poor and ill; I've walked from Plymouth to-day, and I haven't broken my fast. I'll go to Warbeck Hall, my lady; and you won't harm a poor chap like me because he attacked you in his desperation?'

'Harm you!' The lovely violet eyes looked at him in proud surprise. 'I have said I will assist you. Go!' The man slunk backward, gazing with glistening eyes upon the rich ring.

As he turned it over, the name inside struck his eye; the next a loud cry of fear, rage, surprise rang out.

With that cry, he was back before her, looking up in the proud pale face with a wolfish glare in his haggard eyes.

'The name inside the ring!' he cried, breathlessly—'the name! Is it your name, my lady?'

'It is my name, of course,' was the haughty answer. 'What is my name to you?'

'What do you mean, you rascal?' exclaimed the gentleman. 'Be off with you this instant. Have you not annoyed the lady enough already? Madam, the rain will fall in torrents directly. We must make for some place of shelter at once.'

The lady looked around—over the spreading plain and lonely high road—with a faint smile.

'Shelter! The woodland is yonder certainly; but the woodland is scarcely the safest place in this lightning. There is nothing for it but to ride homeward, and brave a drenching. How far is it, sir, to Warbeck Hall?'

'Eight miles, at least—altogether too far for you in this downpour. Look! there is smoke ascending yonder among the trees; there may be a house, a hut, a habitation of some sort. Let us make for it at once.'

She bowed her head, and dashed forward. Flash after flash of lightning played above them now; the crashing of the thunder was deafening, and the rain literally fell in torrents. The September afternoon was dark almost as night. Their horses made the woodland in five minutes. The smoke still feebly ascended—it arose from a campfire almost quenched in the plash of the rain. No house presented itself; instead, three or four primitive tents and inverted waggons told at a glance what the place was.

'A gipsy encampment, by George!' cried Trevannance. 'Well, better that than the open plain in this deluge. Here my man, we want shelter under your canvas—this lady and I—until the storm blows over.'

The gipsy—a tall, olive-skinned, handsome fellow—bowed to the lady with the grace of a Parisian.

'You are welcome, both, to our tents. Phara, tie up the horses. Redempta, give the lady and gentleman a place in your tent until the storm is over.'

Trevannance leaped from his horse, and gave a hand to the lady to dismount. She sprang off lightly, and hurried with him into the nearest tent, where a dusky young woman stood, holding up the canvas doorway.

In lifting the folds of her long riding-skirt, she chanced to drop her whip.

'Never mind!' Trevannance said; 'do not wait, I will return for it.'

He left her in the tent—the rudest and most primitive of structures—littered and dirty to a degree, and filled with a dusky swarm, old and young. Strangely and strikingly out of place the fair intruder looked, standing among the dark-browed Arab tribe, in her proud, patrician beauty and high-bred grace, diamonds flashing in her ears and on her slender white hands.

'Who the deuce can she be?' Trevannance wondered. 'She is lovely as a Peri of the Poet. I can never have seen her before, and yet somehow her face is familiar.'

He stooped to pick up the whip. It was an exquisite toy—inlaid with gold and enamel. A watch, the size of a shilling-piece, was inserted in the end. Above, there was an earl's coronet, and in letters of gold the name, 'Evelyn Desmond.'

CHAPTER III.

IN THE GIPSY CAMP.

And so they had met! Fate, that works

in its own masterly way, in spite of our puny efforts, had thrown them together after this romantic fashion. He was going a trifling matter of some thousands of miles to avoid her, and lo! in the first hour of his advent in England, the enchantress arose before him, to lead him captive among the slaves at her chariot wheels, whether he would or no.

'The Great Irresistible herself, by George!' exclaimed Trevannance, with a long, low whistle; 'and, dolt and dunderhead that I am, I never suspected it, even when I heard of Warbeck Hall. Is it fate? and am I to play Benedict, the Married Man, willy nilly? My faith! I might seek the world over, and never find so fair a Beatrice.'

Quite heedless, in his first surprise, of the pouring rain, he walked back to the tent. She stood where he had left her, gazing out at the leaping lightning, the slanting, streams, the black sky. And in the primitive doorway, steadfastly regarding her, Redempta—a vivid contrast.

'You have suffered in my service, sir knight' she said, with her brilliant smile: 'my whip was not worth your drenching.'

'It is worth a hundred drenchings, senorita,' he said, presenting it to her, with a courtly bow, 'since it has told me whom I have the honour of serving. They talk of entertaining angels unawares—my case precisely. May I recall an old acquaintance to Lady Evelyn Desmond's memory? or have seven years completely obliterated even the name of Vivian Trevannance from her recollection?'

She looked at him, and held out her hand with frank grace, the beautiful, gravely-smiling mouth indescribably sweet and gentle.

'Do me justice, senor; my memory is better than your own—since I knew you at once the first instant we met. Seven years is a tolerable time; but it has not changed Mr. Trevannance in the least. Since when have you returned? We thought you in France.'

'I was but on my homeward way when I became the debtor of a most happy chance. And now—presuming on old acquaintance—may I ask how I came to find you alone, and in peril from that insolent beggar?'

'By my own caprice—which I have to thank for all the mishaps of my life. We went this afternoon to visit some very romantic Druidical ruins, and on our homeward way I separated from the rest of our party, and, before I knew it, found myself hopelessly lost and bewildered. The storm was breaking, the brigand sprang out and seized my horse, and, as all knights-errand should, you rode to the rescue at the very instant when I needed you most. It is like a scene in Don Quixote or Amadis De Gaul.'

'A doubtful compliment, Lady Evelyn; I am Don Quixote, I suppose? Well, even the antiquated tilter at windmills might become a knight-errant in the service of Lady Evelyn.'

'Pray don't!' Lady Evelyn said a little impatiently; 'I detest compliments, and—those who pay them! I am in your debt—don't cancel the obligation with hackneyed phrases.'

'With which you are surfeited. But there are those to whom truth must ever sound like compliment. You have made one captive at least, Lady Evelyn, since your entrance here,' lowering his tone, 'Look at yonder dark brown gipsy—she gazes like one entranced.'

He glanced toward Redempta; Lady Evelyn followed her eyes.

'What a handsome Arab it is! A face for Murillo or Salvator, and a suitably dusky background. But they are all staring, and most uncomfortably. Really, I hope we are not storm-bound for any length of time! They will be so anxious, mamma particularly, when the rest return without me. Are you weather-wise, senor? Are there any symptoms of its clearing up—must we venture forth in the storm after all?'

'It is clearing off,' Trevannance said, decidedly. 'See! the clouds are lifting over yonder already. In half an hour, senorita, we may ride forth in safety. Pray do not regret the mischance that has brought you an adventure, and me what will remain the brightest memory of my life.'

His eyes spoke more eloquently than words or tone—and they spoke eloquently enough, heaven knows! The beautiful short upper ing of Donna Castilia curled scornfully.

'It is your nature, I suppose—you gentlemen—to flatter. You cannot help it, it seems, and it is a pity. Besides, I have heard, the language Mr. Vivian Trevannance thinks women worthy of. Madam la Comtesse de Portici says so, at least?'

The clear, violet eyes looked at him with a world of quiet mischief in their depths. The fair and flirting Italian countess had been one of Trevannance's latest loves, and he had slipped her flowery fetters coolly off his faithless wrists—when the humour took him. But he met the cloudless sapphire eyes now with a most engaging air of injured innocence.

'Ah, La Portici will be malicious!—always was. Don't believe her, I am the most candid of men, and always mean what I say, as you will discover upon further ac-

quaintance Apropos, Lady Evelyn, do you remain long in Devonshire ?'

'I really cannot say. It depends upon papa, and papa is as whimsical as a woman. I hope not.'

'You hope not? How cruel you can be! May I ask why?'

'Because I should like to go to Ireland.'

She said it dreamily, half to herself, gazing a little sadly out at the still pouring rain.

'I should like to go to Ireland—to Clontarf. They tell me it is in ruins now. I have never seen it, you know; and yet Clontarf, not Castile, should have been my birthplace. It is the dream of my life to go there!'

'And yet I thought the Earl of Clontarf but lived to gratify your unexpressed wishes.'

'He will not gratify this, at least—expressed very often. It is odd, the aversion he has to return there, Mamma, too—' She broke off suddenly, as if annoyed at herself. 'See, Mr. Trevannance, the clouds are scattering already.'

'And the clouds that are to darken and blight your life are gathering,' said a deep, solemn voice.

It was Redempta, standing with folded arms, and glittering, beady-black eyes, gazing upon her guest.

'My pretty lady, let Redempta tell your fortune.'

But Lady Evelyn drew back rather haughtily, and waved her away.

'Thank you—no. It does not open so promisingly. I will wait, and let the future reveal itself.'

'Nay, my pretty lady, do not refuse Redempta. Her predictions never fail. Let me look in your dainty palm, and foresee your destiny.'

'No—I never tempt the future, in earnest or in jest. Besides, I have no silver wherewith to cross your palm, and the oracle, like other oracles, is a golden one, and will not speak unless bribed.'

'The gentleman will cross the gipsy's palm. My lady—so handsome, so haughty—let Redempta warn you of what is to come.'

'It is evil, then? You really must hold me excused.'

'Pray gratify her whim,' said Trevannance. 'It is all that is wanting to complete the adventure.'

But the wilful beauty turned away, a little disdainfully.

'Pardon me—not even to gratify her whim. I have said I do not tempt the future, even if your dusky seeress could lift the curtain, which I very greatly doubt.'

'Others have doubted,' broke in the deep tones of the gipsy, 'and have found to their cost that Redempta speaks what the stars whisper. You will not let me read your palm, my beautiful lady, but the face tells its own story; and as you stand there, in your beauty and your pride, I can see that that brilliant beauty will be your bane—that lofty pride be laid low! Shame and sorrow, suffering and disgrace, passionate love, and of that love passionate misery, are in store for you, my lovely, high-born Spanish beauty!'

The proud, pale face of the haughty Castilian grew paler still with intense anger, and the violet eyes grew black with suppressed passion.

'Cease!' she commanded, with an imperious wave of her hand, an imperious ring in her voice. 'You are insolent? Let us go, seno I prefer enduring the storm to this woman's impertinence!'

'It is truth!' Redempta said, with a grave majesty of her own. 'Your fate is in your face! And you, my gentleman—you will let the poor gipsy tell your fortune, will you not?'

'No—stand aside! Nonsense we might endure; but you, my black-browed sibyl, are insufferably impertinent. Lady Evelyn, let me entreat you to linger yet a few moments—it still rains heavily. I will compel this woman to be silent.'

'She will not be silent, unless you let her predict for you,' Redempta said, loftily.

'Then predict and be hanged to you! Make your speeding as agreeable as possible for the money.' He gave her half a crown. Redempta took the slender, shapely hand he presented in her own dingy fingers, and bent low above it.

'I see here wealth and honour, many friends and varied fortunes. I see here broken vows, and a fair bride won and lost. I see a wide ocean to be crossed, and a maiden less fair than she you leave behind, who will win your heart in spite of yourself. The bride you will wed, my handsome gentleman, will be as bright as the stars, with eyes and hair of midnight blackness. She waits for you, even now, in a land beyond the sea.'

She dropped his hand, crossed her own upon her bosom, and stood gazing at him with wide, unwinking black eyes. Trevannance laughed.

'Thanks, my handsome Zingara! So fair a future is well worth your half crown. You perceive, Lady Evelyn, how silver-tongued the seeress grows under the influence of coin of the realm. Pity to keep that black-eyed bride, who awaits my coming in suspense so long! I fear she will be at the end of her patience before I go after her. If one only knew where that "land beyond the sea"

lay, now. Your description, my dusky Redempta, is poetic and vague, but not so explicit as an impatient bridegroom might wish.'

'You mock Redempta,' the gipsy said, gravely, turning away; 'Nevertheless Redempta's words will come true before another year rolls over your head.'

'The rain has ceased, Mr. Trevannance,' broke in the low, musical voice of his companion. 'Shall we go?'

Trevannance bowed, offered her his arm; and flung a handful of shillings among the gipsy swarm as he went out.

The rain had entirely ceased, and as they passed from the tent the hidden sun burst forth with a sudden blaze of indescribable glory, lighting the dark landscape, the dripping trees, the queenly beauty by his side, and the crouching figure of a man, half hidden among a clump of alders.

'Your brigand once more!' Trevannance said. 'Well sirrah! what is it you want?'

For the crouching figure had arisen and approached them, his baleful, greenish eyes fixed greedily upon the lady.

'I want a word with that lady—only a word. I don't mean any harm,' the tattered unknown answered, still steadily advancing.

'Well,' Lady Evelyn said, facing him, coldly, 'what is it? Speak out!'

'The name inside this ring, my lady—it is yours?'

'Have I not said so? What is my name to you?'

'Only this, my Lady—that if you be the Lady Evelyn Desmond, your father must be the Earl of Clontarf?'

'He is the Earl of Clontarf.'

'Thank you, my lady! And is he, too, at Warbeck Hall?'

'Yes. Have you any more questions to ask?'

'You encourage his forwardness too far, Lady Evelyn. The impertinence of these tramps is beyond belief. Begone fellow or—'

He flourished his whip, and the tramp slunk away with a whine.

'I meant no harm. Thank you, my lady! I'll be sure to call at Warbeck Hall with your ring to-morrow.'

'That's a very singular beggar,' Lady Evelyn said, as Trevannance placed her in the saddle and adjusted her stirrup. 'What could he possibly mean?'

'Only his insolence. The better way to dispose of those sturdy beggars—poachers and thieves by profession—is to hand them over at once to the authorities.'

They dashed off together—the tall, slender figure of the fair equestrienne looking its best, as she sat her horse as easily as a rocking chair.

Trevannance thought involuntarily of Queen Guinevere and the laureate's lines:

'She looked so lovely, as she swayed
The rein with dainty finger-tips,
A man had given all other bliss
And all his worldly worth for this,
To waste his whole heart in one kiss
Upon her perfect lips.'

'Honour thy father, that thy days may be long in the land!' thought Trevannance, gazing on that exquisite face. 'It would be a pity to disappoint the two governors, since they have set their hearts on the match—a greater pity to give all this perfect beauty to that dolt, Amethyst. My peerless Rose of Castile, do you dream, I wonder, that your future husband rides by your side?'

And while the cavalier and his lovely lady galloped gaily away toward the setting sun, the beggar in the inky cloak reared himself upright and watched them out of sight with vengeful, tigerish eyes.

'For twenty years he has prospered. An earl's coronet, ill-forgotten, has graced his head; the woman he loved has been his own; wealth, and honour, and greatness among men—all are his. For twenty years I have been an outcast and a felon, ill and poor, despised and forgotten, and his daughter flings me alms as she would meat to a dog! Well it is my turn now, and I'll tear the coronet from his head, the honour from his name, the wife from his bosom! I lower that beautiful, haughty head of yours, my lovely Lady Evelyn, to the dust! Roderic Desmond, in his bloody grave, shall be avenged at last!'

CHAPTER IV.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

She lay on a low couch before the fire, Inez, Countess of Clontarf. A confirmed invalid, she was always chilly. Accustomed to the tropic heat of her own lovely, sunlit land, England, with its cold rains, its easterly winds, and damp sea fogs, was only rendered endurable, even in its warmest summer months, by a glowing fire. She lay, back amid the silken, rose-hued pillows of her lounge, watching the red glow of the embers, whilst the gleam of the wax-lights shone down on her pale, dark, delicate beauty—in the velvet depths of the solemn, shining eyes—on the chiselled, beautiful lips, compressed in a hard, thin line of pain. She looked like some frail waxen japonica—

lovely and fragile, pale as a snow-wreath, and with deep hues of month. Beautiful she must be ever, even in decay—but it was a worn and weary beauty now, and the rare smile that came and went so swiftly was cold as moonshin on snow. The dainty little boudoir was all that heart could desire o wealth procure, or refined taste suggest. Its rose hangings gave a delicious air of warmth and mellowness. Its silver swinging chandeliers; its in aid toilet tables, draped in lace; its lofty mirrors, framed in Dresden; its gemmed vases, filled with rarest flowers; its crystal caraffes of perfume; its wondrous beauties, smiling down from the rose-tinted walls; its exquisite statuettes, agleam in the silvery wax-light—all were perfect of their kind, and fitted up a chamber for a queen.

Lady Clontarf, wrapped in a gold-tinted *negligé* of softest Indian texture, her long, shining hair unbound, lay and gazed with dark, brooding eyes into the crimson heart of the fire. Outside, the rain beat and the wind blew, the tossing trees in the park moaned wearily, and the solemn voice of the mighty, ceaseless sea came borne to her, fitfully, in the lull of the gale. The last day of September was ending in a wild night.

The great house was very still; its inmates had gone to their rooms to dress for dinner. The little silver-voiced ormolu clock above her head pointed its golden hands to eight as she glanced up.

'She surely must have returned long ago,' she thought, a little uneasily. 'Strange she did not come to see me at once!'

As the thought crossed her mind, there came a soft tap on the panel, followed by a sweet, young voice.

'It is I, mamma. May I come in?'

'Come in, my darling,' Lady Clontarf answered. 'I have been waiting for you.'

The door opened, and her daughter, Lady Evelyn, stood before her. In her dinner-dress of white silk and misty lace, a coronal of scarlet camellias crowning the rich abundance of blue-black hair, the lofty grace of the regal form, the brilliant light in the violet eyes—ah, not one of the lauded beauties, beaming down from the draped walls, was one whit lovelier than the Rose of Castile!

'My Evelyn!' her mother murmured, fondly. 'I have feared for you, my darling. They told me you had missed your way and got lost.'

'Foolish mamma!'—the radiant beauty bent to kiss the pale, sweet face so like her own—'they should not have told you. I did lose my way—was attacked by a brigand—saved by a gallant cavalier—overtaken by a violent storm—sheltered in a gipsy camp, and told my future by a handsome zitana! All together an adventure, dearest mother, was it not?'

She laughed softly, and stood up against the white marble of the chimney-piece, the mellow glow of the wax-lights streaming down on the scarlet coronal and rich floating laces—a picture to haunt an artist to his grave.

'Attacked by a brigand! My dear Evelyn!' Her mother cried.

'Romantic, mamma, but quite true. Perhaps he was a beggar, not a brigand; but it comes to the same thing, since he seized my horse and demanded money. As I had no money, he demanded my watch and jewels; and would have had them, too, without doubt, only on the instant rode up my cavalier to the rescue.'

'Your cavalier! One of the gentlemen in the house, of course?'

'Not at all—a stranger. That is to say—I dare say you remember him—Mr. Vivian Trevannauce.'

'Ah!'

The countess moved impatiently amid her cushions, and looked up swiftly in her daughter's face. But that beautiful face was supremely careless—the violet eyes full of laughing light.

'You recollect, mamma, he visited us, seven years ago, in Spain. He had forgotten me, but I remembered him at once. He took me for shelter to the gypsy camp, and accompanied me home. As the storm was breaking again when we reached here, I invited him to enter, but he declined. He would have gone on, I believe, in the pouring rain, to Royal Rest, but that Lord Clydesmore and papa chanced to appear, and they really took him captive by main force.'

'Ah!' the countess said again, very thoughtfully. 'And he dines here this evening? What is he like, this young man?'

Lady Evelyn looked at her mother in surprise.

'You asking questions, mamma, and interested in the appearance of Mr. Vivian Victor Trevannance (you see I know his name). What will happen next?'

'Tell me, my dear.'

'What is he like? Really I am not sure that I can. He is handsome, certainly—a stately and gallant gentleman, with the perfect manners and finished ease of a courtier; but what is the colour of his eyes, or the hue of his hair, or the shape of his nose, I am not prepared to say. However, mamma,' with her gay,

glad smile, 'as you appear interested in the subject, I will take a mental photograph of my preserver for your benefit, at dinner.'

The countess looked up, with earnest words on her lips, but before she could utter them the great bell up in the windy turrets clanged for dinner.

'I must leave you, mamma. Ah, if you could but come down. It is cruel to leave you here alone.'

'Better here, my dearest. I would be but the skeleton at the feast, and there is only you to miss me. Go—be happy, and young, and beautiful, while you may. Gather life's roses while they bloom. Only come back here before you retire.'

'With Mr. Trevannce's portrait? Certainly, mamma. Until then—'

She kissed the pale brow lightly, then swept from the room, her silvery drapery floating lightly about her, and with all the lofty, beautiful grace of a young deer.

Left alone, the countess sank back among the cushions with a heavy, weary sigh.

'She is lovely as a dream. She is hopeful and young—as I was once. Ah, *Dios!* what a weary while ago it seems. Will they blight her life, too?—will she love this man to whom they will wed her? She does not know, she speaks of him so lightly. If she only dreamed—my beautiful, proud Evelyn—that, whether she will or no, she must marry him. He is made of iron, her father. What is she that she should venture to oppose his will? She is heart-free now. Oh, pitiful heaven, let her love this man whom she must wed.'

Backward her thoughts went drifting nineteen years, to a drearily-loveless bridal—loveless on her part at least. Gerald Desmond had been a successful man. He had won all for which he had plotted—all. The coronet that had been the dream of his life, the title he had coveted so passionately, the woman he had loved with a fierce, savage, burning love, the heiress, whose wealth had restored the greatness and splendour of a fallen name—all had been his. He had taken his seat in Parliament—he had made his name famous as the name of profound statesman, a stirring orator, a leader among the leaders and law-makers of mankind. His ambition had been satiated to the full. The Earl of Clontarf was a synonym for all that was great and good. He had endowed hospitals, founded asylums, pleaded for the down-trodden and the oppressed, reformed almshouses, and headed munificently every charitable work; and yet, since the fierce fire of his love for the woman he had wed had burned itself out, and that ere the honeymoon month had ended, there was not in all the wide kingdom a more miserable man than this hidden assassan who had slain his friend.

For, dead and in his grave, Roderic Desmond pursued him and outrivalled him still. With his first wedded kiss warm on her lips, her lost lover had risen before Inez Desmond, reproachful and pale, and with one, faint moaning word—his name—she had slipped back in a dead faint in her new-made husband's arms. He had stood between them from that hour; and now that nineteen years had passed and gone, the memory of the bright, beautiful lover of her youth was dearer to the Countess of Clontarf than her living lord had ever been in the hours when she had striven to love him most.

He had murdered Roderic Desmond but Roderic still claimed his lost bridehy right divine of that deathless love. There had been times when, in the midst of his impassioned caresses, his endearing words, so coldly borne and never returned, he had hurled her from him, in a paroxysm of rage and despair, and rushed from her presence. There were times when, madly as he worshipped her, he could have taken a dagger and plunged it into her very heart—that heart of ice to him—forever gone with the bright-haired youth, so foully slain in his strong young manhood.

And then, as passion unreturned must, that fiery love had died out, and given way to sullen hate. Ah, how brief the boundary ever is between loving and hating, and the warmer the love the bitterer the hate. Gerald Desmond slowly but surely, grew to hate his wife. He hated her now above all earthly things, and bitterly made her feel it. In the hour when his child was born, he had wished with all his soul for its mother's death, for that pale mother, looking up from her pillows with great, dark, dilated eyes, that seemed burning into his bad heart, had caught his wrist in her cold, wan fingers, and whispered woirdly:

'Gerald, the good God has sent me comfort at last! She looks at me with my lost darling's eyes!'

And then she had fallen back, the poor pale lips murmuring things pitiably sad singing fragments of the old Spanish ballads Rory had loved and which she never had sung since his loss. And a curse deep and mighty, had come crushed through Lord Clontarf's set teeth. In that hour he could have strangled mother and child. For the frail mite of babyhood gazing up with wide-open eyes from billows of flannel and muslin, and face, looked at him indeed with the wondrous violet eyes whose light his

red right hand had quenched two years before.

But the frail babe grew and flourished, an the father loved her with the only lasting, pure, and unselfish love of his life. Aud once more he loved in vain. As her mother had been ere her birth, so the child had been to him—cold as snow, passionless as marble submitting to his caresses, never, never returning them with one word, one thought of love. It was his punishment—or part of it—and the deep, dark, violet eyes haunted him ever, like some avenging ghost. All day long they gazed at him in his daughter's beautiful face; and at night—oh, Heaven! —in the deep, still, solemn watches of long summer moonlight, of wild wintry storm, Rory Desmond rose up before him—the gold hued hair dripping with brine, the brilliant azure eyes stoned and fixed—pale and horrible from his deep-sea grave, until the cold drops rolled down the watcher's livid face, and his hands had cleuched in agony.

Men wondered why the great statesman's hair had silvered so soon—why, at fifty, he was more worn, and haggard, and pallid, and hollow-eyed, than men of eighty—and set it down to profound study and ceaseless mental labour. And of all the world – his world—only his wife knew or guessed.

For a horrible foreshadowing of the truth had dawned upon her Had she not heard him, in his fitful and broken sleep, toss his arms and struggle wildly, and cry out with a dreadful voice of agony that had pealed through the silence of the still night? Had she not heard that one beloved name shrieked in his frenzy? Had she not heard broken fragments that, strung together, told the whole grisly tale? Up to that time she had striven to do her duty—striven to like him —to overcome her loathing and repugnance; but she never struggled again. She had faced him, one morning, after some bitter, insulting words flung at her by him, with a terrible light in her eyes that he had reason to remember all his life long.

'Dastard!' she cried, in a voice that rang; 'coward and traitor! Women of my race have dealt death for a tithe of what you have dared say to me! Utter such words to me again and by all I hold holy, I will give you up to the gallows and the hangman, you murderer!'

'Inez!'

He had recoiled from her with a gasping cry, l vid as a dead man.

'You Judas, who sold your master—you Cain, who slew your brother! I know your secret at last! Beware of me now. Oh, God! that I had fallen dead long before the time you made me your wife!'

He had cronched down before her, pallid, gasping, the dew of death upon his brow. He had striven to catch her dress to detain her in his first agony of mortal fear. She plucked it from him, and no words can describe the horror in her dilated eyes—the loathing, the repulsion, the hatred in her face.

'Touch me not,' she said, wildly, 'lest I go mad and tell the world all! Never, while we both live, shall you touch my lips with a husband's kiss—take my hand in a friend's grasp! Oh, surely I am forgotten of God, or I had never been your wife!'

And then she had broken from him, and for many weeks they had not looked into each other's faces again. And she had kept her word. There had been no open scandal, no public separation—the world saw plainly enough there was little love or union between the husband and wife; but in fashionable society that is such a common case. Inez Desmond had kept her word, and—her terrible secret. She dwelt beneath the same roof for her daughter's sake; but she and Gerald Desmond were sundered as far as the poles.

She lay here to-night in her luxurious little room, while the ceaseless rain lashed the windows and the wild wind soughed among the trees, and thought of her wicked, lost life. There was a world of despair in the dark, melancholy eyes that gazed in the ruddy fire — a settled night of sorrow. She loved her daughter very dearly—that daughter who looked at her with Rory Desmond's own blue eyes—and for her sake she lived and clung to life. But the end was not far off now. An incurable inward disease had held her victim for years—any day, any hour, any instant, she might be summoned suddenly away.

'And before I go I should like to tell her the story of the past,' the countess thought. 'She knows there is some hidden sorrow and mystery in my life; she has asked me to tell her so often. I will tell her—sparing the man who is her father as much a I can, as I have spared him all these bitter, dreary years. They will compel her to marry this man. Well, if she can care for him, as well Victor Trevannance as another; but before the bridal day she will know how my life was blighted. Yes, this very night she shall hear my story.'

She drew from her bosom a locket, strung round her neck by a fine gold chain. It held a bright ring of golden hair, and a frank, fair boyish face, smiling and beau-

tiful, looked up at her—the face of Roderic Desmond.

'My love! my darling!' she softly murmured; 'so fondly slain, in your bright youth, by the hand you loved and trusted. My life—my *husband!* Inez will join you soon!'

And then, with that pictured face clasped close, she sank down among the cushions, shutting out fire-light and wax-light, and went back over the weary past. Twenty years drifted away—the lover of her happy girlhood came back to her over the gulf, and lay at her feet as in the golden days forever gone. And the hours drifted on—there were laughter and music, and light and luxury, below stairs, where her husband and daughter were; but she was a glad, gay girl once more, and the wide universe held but one treasure for her—Rory Desmond's love.

CHAPTER V.

LA ROSE DE CASTILE.

'And so you have been turning out a gallant cavalier, my friend—you, of all men alive! The fiery dragon rushes upon Princess Perfect, and, in the nick of time, up gallops Prince Charming, on his mettled steed, with lance in rest, and routs the horrid monster. None of the accessories are wanting—the flashing lightning, the lonely woods. Beauty lost and chivalry daring. It is like a scene of the Porte St. Martin!'

Thus spoke Virginie, Countess Portici, to Mr. Vivian Trevannance, leaning lightly over the back of her chair in the long half hour before dinner.

A very charming little person, this French-Italian countess—French by birth, the wealthy widow of an old Neapolitan count, a beauty born, and a coquette from her cradle. She was the latest flirtee on the list of the Lord of Royal Rest, a tremendously exacting little queen, and with just a touch of jealous pique visible now in her long, velvety-brown eyes. The voice in which she spoke was melody itself, but its sweetness only rendered its sarcasm the sharper.

'We have been so insufferably stupid here of late,' madame went on, in her low, soft tones, 'that so stirring an adventure as yours is a positive godsend. I think I see that woodland tableau! The brigand grasping the horse's bridle-rein; the swooning damsel; the heroic knight riding to the rescue! It ought to end in a love match and a marriage!'

Her silvery laugh chimed out, sweet and low. Trevannance stroked his brown moustache with an imperturbable face.

'Should it? Who knows, then? Perhaps it may. The price is high, but the Rose of Castile is worth it.'

La Portici's deep-brown eyes flashed, but she laughed faintly once more.

'Poor Lady Evelyn! Besides, your chances are slight, with a ducal coronet at her imperial feet. That imbecile duke! See him now stand there and gaze, with his soul in his eyes, at the door by which she must enter! What idiots a grand passion makes of the best of you. Be wise, Monsieur Trevannance; wear your chain-mail armour still. A man hopelessly in love is an object of compassion to gods and men.'

'Your warning comes too late, *ma belle!*' whispered Trevannance. 'I should have heard it before I met you.'

The countess struck him a perfumed blow with her fan.

'Nonsense! Keep your sugar-plums for the Rose of Castile! I know their value. The most unwholesome confectionery going.'

'And because they disagree with you, you wish a sister belle to be made ill also? Characteristic of your charming sex! Besides, I don't think our Castilian Rose likes sweetmeats. She looks as though she fed upon the nectar of the gods. See Amethyst's fishy eyes brighten. Lo! the conquering beauty comes!'

'La Dame aux Camelias! Accept the warning, and—take me in to dinner.'

Trevannance bowed low as he presented her his arm, but his eyes followed the tall, dark divinity, robed in white and crowned with scarlet.

She gave him a brilliant smile and glance of recognition, as she swept by on the arm of Lord Clydesmore.

The length of the dinner table separated the rescued lady and her knight, and the pyramids of glorious flowers, and an intervening alabaster Hebe, nearly hid her from view; but now and then he had glimpses of that loftily-poised head, with its satin black hair drawn off the delicate temples, and the glowing crimson coronal. Now and then that soft, foreign-toned voice—so low, so exquisitely sweet—fell upon his ear; now and then her airy, silvery laugh reached him; and once or twice the cloudless violet eyes met his full. But the wide dinner table held them asunder. Amethyst monopolized her on one side, and his friend, Lord Guy Rivers, on the other, and by his side sat the most exacting and imperious of coquettes.

'All the better,' thought Trevannance. 'Allah is Allah! It is my destiny, and I

don't want to be led captive by a beauty as perfect as the Venus Medici and as cold as a refrigerator. Heaven forbid she should ever cast me into that pit of bathos wherein she has flung Amethyst, Rivers, and the rest of her victims! Virginie is right—the grand passion is idiotic, and a deuce of a bore. I can play at love-making with the best; but marriage and domestic bliss—bah!'

And then he turned from the camelia-crowned siren over the way, and flirted, as Vivian Trevannance could flirt, with his gay Parisian-Neapolitan countess—flirted so recklessly that his father scowled from his seat, and the Earl of Clontarf shrugged his shoulders, and decided he would speak to his daughter about accepting the Duke of Amethyst as soon as he proposed. The ladies arose, presently, and swept away; but in spite of the gay badinage with which he and La Portici parted, it was not the fairy form of the countess he watched from the room, but the regal figure of the earl's daughter.

'She might sit by an emperor's side, and command him tasks,' he thought. 'What is it Othello says? Her form is as perfect as a statuette of Coysvox; her face as pure and lovely as one of Raphael's madonnas. And all that is to go to Amethyst—a fellow who, in six months, will hold her a little higher than his dog, a little dearer than his house. Faugh! it would be Vulcan wedded to Venus! Out of pity for her I ought to step in and prevent the sacrifice!'

He glanced defiantly across the table at the heavy face and dull eyes of his grace—eyes that only beauty and billiards, horse-flesh and h[illegible]-pacing could ever lighten.

'A man [illegible] marry some time, as the governor remarks. It's the thing to do, and by Jove! she is a mate for a king. I'll devote myself, for the rest of the evening, to my proud Castilian Rose.'

Half an hour after, when the gentlemen entered the drawing-room, his glance sought out Lady Evelyn. She sat at the piano, playing softly weird improvisations of her own, that seemed strangely in harmony with the wild night-storm without. Heedless of Lady Clydesmore, who signalled him with her fan—of La Portici, whose jealous eyes gleamed—he crossed at once to where the fair pianist sat.

'I have been looking forward to this,' he said, 'since the world first began to talk of its Rose de Castile. They tell me you equal Pasta, or Malibran herself. Will you not let me judge?'

'I have not been singing,' Lady Evelyn answered. 'I seldom sing, except to myself or mamma; and'—a little disdainfully—'I equal neither Pasta nor Malibran.'

'Will you not permit me to judge? You will sing for me, I know.'

His calmly assured air seemed to amuse the petted beauty (women all like high-handed rulers). She glanced up at him, a smile in the brilliant depths of the purple-blue eyes.

'My lordly autocrat, I will sing for you, will I? Now, a gentleman who has made the fair sex the study of his life should know better than that! It is a tacit challenge to defiance.'

'But you will not be cruel to me, this first evening you will sing. You sang for me in Castile—you danced the bolero, senorita!'

'Ah, my sunny Castile! Well, senor, I owe you something, certainly. What shall I sing?'

'One of those delicious old Castilian romants—sweetest music on earth; one of your impassioned Spanish ballads.'

She struck the chords—she had a brilliant, masterly touch—and played a wild, melancholy prelude. Slowly her voice soprano, sweet as Jenny Lind's own.

She had chosen a wierd passionate song of her native land—stirring words set to a thrilling melancholy air.

Gradually silence fell upon the room. It was so rarely she sang, her voice was so exquisite, her song so full of fire, and melancholy; so altogether out of the common course.

The listeners held their breathing; weary walkers on society's monotonous tread-mill, they were hearing something new. For Trevannance, he stood beside her, gazing down with a kindling fire in his hazel eyes, a new light in his calm face. That proud, princely head, with its rich, waving black hair, its crimson crown—that pure pale face, those fathomless, luminous eyes of blue—ah! held the world another fairer than this peerless Rose of Castile, this proud young patrician? And she might be his wife—his for the asking. Her heart was free—and proud as her face; something deeper and nobler than had ever been stirred there before by woman's beauty thrilled Vivian Trevannance now.

The song ceased, died out, mournful and low as the last cadence of a funeral hymn. It had told the old story—a story of love and despair. With the last faint chord, Trevannce bent above her.

'Thank you, Lady Evelyn,' he said simply. 'I will not soon forget this night or your song.'

She rose with a light laugh, conscious that she had made a sensation.

'I told you I sang seldom, senor. See what comes of it! They absolutely listen. Lady Clydesmore, will you show me that portfolio of Irish drawings you spoke of to-day? Who knows? Clontarf may be among them.'

She moved gracefully away. Some one came to the piano. The Countess Portici, from her velvet sofa, glared—yes, glared—across at her recusant lover as he followed, and took his seat beside Lady Evelyn.

'She sang for that fellow!' murmured poor Amethyst, pathetically: 'she never would sing for me. Look at him now! And this is his first meeting, and she looks as if she likes it. Confound him and his assurance!'

'She does like it!' the countess responded, setting her pearly teeth. 'Your marble beauty is only marble to dolts and bunglers. When the right hand touches it, the marble turns to flesh. Take care, my proud Castilian! the changing sea, the shifting quicksand, the veering wind, were never half so fickle as Vivian Trevannance.'

'She speaks as if she had suffered from the fickleness,' thought his grace. 'Why do the women all go down before that fellow I wonder? He's well-looking, I dare say, and he's acknowledged the best waltzer in London; but why should that make him irresistible? His praise is a woman's crown; his commendation makes a belle the fashion. I thought Lady Evelyn Desmond had sense, but she's no better than the rest.'

It certainly looked like it. Lady Evelyn, who never allowed herself to be monopolized by any gentleman, allowed herself to be monopolized by Trevannance to-night. The rich, blue eyes wore an unwonted brilliance, the exquisite lips were half apart as she listened. He might have been declaring a deathless passion in sounding hexameters, as far as looks went. In reality he was only telling her of a last year's visit to Wicklow, a pilgrimage to Clontarf. He described the wild mountain and coast scenery, the picturesque ruins of Clontarf Castle, promised her a faithful sketch of it soon, and she listened with a deep, intense interest, unconcious of the speeding hours and the significant glances of the lookers-on. It was very like a flirtation—from a distance. Trevannance saw the faces of the Duke of Amethyst, Lord Rivers & Co., and smiled covertly, in wicked delight.

'*Triumpho morte tam vita!* It is the motto of our house. To carry off the highest priced Circassian in May Fair, the belle of London society, the beauty of the day! By Jove! if a fellow can't distinguish himself by his deeds of "derring-do," let him distinguish himself in the Court of Cupid. My lovely Castilian rose, I'll win you and wear you if I can!'

There was a self-satisfied smile on his face as he sauntered into the smoking-room half an hour before midnight, and saw poor Amethyst glowering upon him through a cloud of Cavendish. It was something, this triumph over a duke, even though that duke had no more brains than a monkey.

CHAPTER VI.

THE STORY OF THE PAST.

The fire had flickered and faded out on the marble hearth; the wax-lights had burned low; but Inez, Countess of Clontarf, lay motionless on her sofa, clasping the picture of her beloved one to her heart.

She had fallen asleep, with the soft dropping of the embers, the beating of the rain, and the wailing of the wind for her lullaby. She had fallen into that slumber—the tears still wet on her dark lashes—but the slumber was a very light one.

The gentle opening of the door aroused her. She looked up, to see the silver-white vision of her daughter, the loving smile on the beautiful face, the camellia crown on the queenly head.

'Asleep, mamma? And I have disturbed you! Shall I ring for your maid? It is much too late for you to be up.'

'Not yet, my daughter. Come in—you do not look sleepy. Your eyes are like blue stars.' She kissed the drooping lids with a passionate love, that had a deeper meaning than her daughter knew of. 'What has made them so bright, dearest?'

Lady Evelyn laughed as she sank down by her mother's couch. The beautiful, brilliant face softened wondrously; all its cold pride vanished; she was another creature by that beloved mother's side. She made a radiant picture there; her perfumed laces floating silvery about her; the crimson-crowned head drooping; the rich blue eyes so luminously sweet.

'How can I tell?' she said, gaily, in answer to her mother's question. 'Not belladonna certainly, mamma. Perhaps Mr. Vivian Trevannance. We have been together for the last two hours.'

'Indeed! An unwonted condescension on my Lady Evelyn's part, is it not? He is agreeable, then?'

'Most agreeable! Very conversative! Very clever!' Lady Evelyn responded, with perfect calm.

'How quietly Donna Evelyn says it! as though he were seventy, and hoary-headed.'

The violet eyes opened wide. 'What does that signify, mamma? Mr. Trevannance can talk. More than I can say for many men in society. He is clever and agreeable, and—knows it! He talked to me of Clontarf.'

'Of Clontarf! Has he been there, then?'

'Last year. He has promised me a sketch of the old castle. Ah, how much I desire to go there! Mamma, why is it that papa will gratify every other whim of mine but this?'

The pale face of the Countess darkened; a strange glitter came into her eyes.

'It is one of your papa's secrets, mydear. He has many. I do not think he will ever visit Clontarf of his own free will again.'

'And why? Mamma, why is this estrangement between him and you? Is there some dark and hidden secret in the life of the Earl of Clontarf? Why does he wear that darkly-brooding face? Why does he always look so gloomily-stern—so moodily unhappy? He never laughs; he never smiles; he is ever wrapped in gloom; he looks at me sometimes as though he feared me. It seems strange, mamma, but it is true.'

'It is not strange,' Lady Clontarf said, that glitter shining in her black eyes. 'He does fear you.'

'And why?'

'Because, my daughter, you look at him with the *eyes of the dead!*'

'Mamma!'

'Oh, my love! my daughter! There has been terrible, terrible wrong done in the past. My life has been blighted, my heart broken, and another heart that loved me—the noblest, the bravest, the best that ever beat in man—stilled forever in death. You have the eyes of the dead—the blue, bright eyes of Roderic Desmond, the plighted husband of my youth—the one love of my lifetime. My child! my child! but for you I should have died, or gone mad in my misery long ago.'

'Wild words, are they not? I have hidden, or striven to hide, my troubles from you and the world for many a weary year, but I must speak at last. Oh, my darling! my life has been a very bitter one—a long, cruel martyrdom, dragged on for your sake. Thank God! the end is very near now.'

'Mamma! mamma!' her daughter cried, wildly, 'what do you mean? Has papa—'

'Hush! not a word. He is your father, and he loves you? Once he loved me, too; but I—my heart was another's before I ever knew him. My heart has been with that other all these in his unknown grave.'

'He is dead, then—this other of whom you speak?'

'Dead for twenty long years, my daughter; most foully, most cruelly murdered! Twenty years slain and still unavenged.'

Lady Evelyn had grown very pale. She sat clasping her mother's hands, gazing with troubled, earnest eyes into that mother's pallid, agitated face—a dread foreboding of something horrible weighing upon her.

'You will tell me your story, will you not, my mother?' she said, soothingly, caressingly. 'I have so long desired to hear it. And it will do you good—a sorrow told is a sorrow half alleviated. Brooding darkly over our troubles in secret adds ten-fold to their burden. You will tell me, mother mine, this sad and cruel story of the past, of the lover you have lost? Ah, his picture, is it not?'

She lifted the locket and gazed long and earnestly at the pictured face.

'And this was Roderic Desmond! A noble and beautiful countenance—one to win any woman's heart. And they murdered him, so young, so bright, so fair! It was a cowardly and dastardly deed—one that should not go unavenged.'

'Then be it yours to avenge it,' her mother exclaimed, suddenly. 'Do you have strength for what I never dared undertake! You are braver, stronger, more self-sustained, cleverer, than I ever was. Be it yours, then, Evelyn Desmond, to bring to light this hidden murderer—to ferret out this unknown assassin, and drag him to his doom!'

She grasped her daughter's wrist, her black eyes blazing—a hot, hectic flush burning deeply on either worn cheek.

'I was a coward, I tell you, Evelyn—a moral coward—the first of my race that ever was. I was afraid to discover the murderer of the man I loved, lest he should prove to be—Oh, my God! what am I saying! And he is her father!'

She dropped her daughter's wrist and shrank away, hiding her face in her hands, shuddering from head to foot.

Evelyn sat and gazed at her with startled, solemn eyes, deadly pale.

'No—no—no!' the Countess of Clontarf cried; 'heed me not, Evelyn! Neither must you seek for him. Let the dead rest—let the murderer go! There is One above who, in his own good time, will avenge innocent blood. But oh! it is hard, it is cruel, it is bitter as death. In the deep dead of night, Evelyn, he rises up before me—my Roderic—with his pale, reproachful face, as

if to ask why I do not bring his slayer to punishment. I see him, Evelyn, often and often, as plainly as I see you now.'

'Mamma,' Lady Evelyn said, softly, soothingly, in their own liquid Castilian tongue, 'be calm. See! the cold drops are on your poor, pale face, and your hands and temples are like fire. Forget this wild talk of vengeance—tell me the story of your lost lover, who is in heaven now. I will bathe your face and hands with this cologne, and we will speak of finding the guilty one after.'

The caressing tone soothed the excited countess. The flush faded—the glitter died out of her black melancholy eyes in a mist of tears. She kissed her daughter's caressing hand.

'My dear one! You are better and wiser than I! Yes, I will tell you—it is twenty years ago, but to me it is as twenty hours. The events of yesterday are as a dim dream of those long, lonely, intervening years! Out of the retrospect, that time alone stands clear and vivid—the golden summer of my desolate life.

'I saw him first, my darling, one never-to-be forgotten night, beaming down upon me through the flames and smoke of a burning ship—the face of a preserving angel. We were off the Irish coast—our vessel had taken fire—it was a wild, windy night—there seemed nothing but death inevitable—we stood together, alone, to die, my father and I. He came to us, my Evelyn, in his yacht—I can see him now, as he stood erect upon the deck, vivid in the lurid glow of the flames—so brave, so bright, so beautiful. I can hear his clear voice as he called to us to leap into the sea—our one chance amid the horrors of that night. My father took me in his arms, there was a plunge into the mad, black waters, then darkness, and all life blotted out.

'I opened my eyes in the cabin of the Nora Creina, and he was bending above me I was alone in the world; he had saved me at the risk of his own life, but my poor father had gone down.

'He took me to his home—to Clontarf Castle—dear old Clontarf! Where father and aunt received me as they might have received a child of their own, rescued from death. And there I learned to love him from the first?—my whole heart went out to him with a passionate abandon that I pray you may never know. And he loved me, my Evelyn, as dearly, as truly, as purely as man ever loved woman. Our wedding-day was named; our sky seemed without one cloud; my life, sleeping and waking, was one endless dream of bliss. I was too happy—my heaven was on earth—such intense and perfect joy can never last in this lower world. The blow came sudden and swift, without one word of warning, and I lost all in an hour.

'A girl was found drowned—a peasant girl, who had loved my darling—as who could fail to love him? She was betrothed to an Englishmen named Morgan—a hang-dog looking ruffian—whom she hated and despised, but whom her father was forcing her, for his own selfish ends, to wed. They found her drowned, and they fixed the guilt of that horrible deed upon my Roderic, who loved her as he might a sister. They forged a note in his hand—I know it was forged—appointing a meeting at the river—that meeting from which she never returned alive. It was Morgan who wore his life away. Circumstances were against him, and oh, my daughter, they condemned him to death!—the horrible death of a murderer!

'How I lived through that time, the good God only knows. I neither went mad or died, though my frantic prayer was for either. But I lived on, every day an eternity of anguish—such anguish that my heart grew benumbed at last, and a merciful stupor took the place of that bitter agony. Life dragged on, the last week came—the week in which they were to lead forth the last of the princely Desmond to die a felon's death.

'At the eleventh hour came a friend—to this day no one knows who—a friend who opened his prison doors, and aided him to escape. Afterward, they traced him to the sea-coast, to a wild and lonely spot, and there, my daughter, he was most foully murdered. He had fled from one death only to meet another. There were all the marks of a struggle for life and death. The grass was soaked with blood; portions of the garments he wore, and his fair, golden hair, were found, drenched with his brave heart's blood. Some unknown assassin had met him there, murdered him, and throw his body into the sea!'

She covered her face with her hands, as though she saw the horrible sight before her, shuddering convulsively from head to foot. Evelyn kissed the white lips tenderly, and bathed the poor, pallid face.

'I lived through it all—oh, life beats very strongly in the weakest of us, since I could suffer like that and not die. But it killed his father; that loyal, loving heart could not endure such misery long. And at his request, and by his dying bed, I—married—your—father!' She pronounced the last words with a slow, strange solemnity; looking at her daughter full in the face. 'His uncle was attached to him; he was the last

of the name, of their house—the future Earl of Clontarf: his influence over that poor, heart-broken, dying man was boundless. And he was Roderic's father. Could I gainsay his last wish? I stood there, beside Gerald Desmond, with a heart that lay like lead in my bosom—a heart as cold and lifeless as the lover I had lost—and became his wife. He knew it all; he wedded me, knowing I loved him not—could never love him; but, oh, heaven! how little I dreamed then of the awful truth! How little I knew he, not Morgan, was—'

'What, mamma?'

Lady Evelyn asked the question, livid to the lips, with a horror too intense for words. Her mother shrank away from the gaze of those wild, blue eyes.

'No, no! no, no! Not to you. Heaven forgive me. How madly I speak. There are times when I think all my misery must have turned my brain; and I scarcely know what I say. But, can you wonder now that such a loveless union should end in estrangement and separation? Your father may have cared for me once—he professed to, with all man's ardour; but, Evelyn, he hates me now.'

'Oh, mamma, mamma!'

'It is true. You are no child. It is plainly enough to be seen, if I were dead to-morrow, he could rejoice in his secret heart. It seems very terrible for me to say this to you, but it is plain to the world, and, if you do not know it now, you soon must. He has no power to make one happy or unhappy, save through you. My daughter, do not let him blight your life—do not let him force you into marriage with a man you dislike.'

'Dearest mamma, how wildly you talk! Papa never spoke to me of marrying any one in his life.'

'No, but he soon will; I know it! If you love no other (and I know you do not)—if you can esteem and respect the man of his choice—very well; I will not interfere. But if he attempts to coerce you—to compel you—then come to me, and I will show him that neither he nor any man alive shall force my daughter.'

The glitter was back in her eyes; her thin hands clenched; the old, fierce spirit was far from being dead yet. Lady Evelyn asked no question—she saw how excited her mother was.

'Very well, mamma!' she said, quietly, 'I will obey you. I will marry no man I dislike, believe that. And now it is very late, far too late for you; let me ring for your maid, and see you safely in bed. Here is your picture.'

'I have another for you; hand me that writing-case; thanks. It is larger than this it may fall into other hands; you will keep it and cherish it for my sake, and for the sake of the dead.'

'Yes, mamma.'

She took the picture. It was an oval miniature on ivory, very beautiful, and a perfect likeness of gold-haired, azure-eyed, fair-faced Roderic Desmond.

'It shall be one of my treasures, dearest mother. Another time we will talk over this sad, terrible story you have told me; it is too late now. Here is Delphine; good-night, sweetest mother, and pleasant dreams.'

She kissed her lingeringly, fondly, and hastened from the room. Her own apartments were brightly lit and luxurious; her maid awaiting her sleepily. She sank into an arm-chair, while the girl unbound the shining black tresses, and gazed earnestly and long at the painted face.

'Murdered!' she thought, 'and so young, so noble, so wondrously handsome! What a terrible fate! Poor, poor mamma, what bitter suffering she has known. How very dearly she loved this handsome Lord Roderic. Shall I ever love any one like that, I wonder? Am I heartless, as they say, or is my time yet to come? Perhaps, if I saw a living face like this, I, too, might yield to the spell of its beauty; but I much prefer *love a la mode* to these fierce, powerful passions. What could mamma mean by all these wild hints of suspected murderers and compulsory marriages? Poor mamma! I begin to fear that brooding over the past is affecting her brain.'

CHAPTER VII.

OLD FRIENDS MEET.

The tramp who waylaid Lady Evelyn Desmond passed that stormy night in the shelter of the gipsy camp. He fraternized with these dusky thieves and prophets, partook of their savoury supper, and slept beneath their canvas canopy in security.

'I don't mind staying with you for a bit,' he said, to Phara. 'I'm likely to remain in this neighbourhood for some days, and I prefer lodging in your tents, my friend, to putting up at the "Prince's Feathers," below. I'm as poor a fellow as ever walked now; but I'll have a pocketful of sovereigns before the sun sets to-morrow.'

'Will you, brother?' the tall gipsy asked, rather dubiously. 'Where will you get them? Sovereigns don't grow in the bushes like blackberries hereabouts.'

The tramp nodded his head sagaciously.

as he lit a grimy little pipe at the glowing coals.

'Never you mind, my dusky friend—they'll grow as plentiful as blackberries for me. I've got a secret here,' tapping his sunburnt forehead, 'that's worth a little mint to me. I've spent the last eighteen years of my life on Norfolk Island, chained like a dog, fed like a dog, used worse than any dog; but that's all over now. I'll spend the rest of my days in clover, and a certain noble earl, not a thousand miles from here, shall pay the piper.'

Further than this the tramp declined to divulge. He wrapped himself up presently in a dirty blanket, and slept the sleep of the just on his turfy bed, while the long hours of the tempestuous night wore on. He was up betimes next morning, shared the maternal reflection of the swarthy tribe, made his toilet by a plunge in a neighbouring brook, and started for Warbeck Hall. It was nearly ten o'clock when he reached the grand entrance gates, and he was in time to see an imposing cavalcade sweep under the noble archway. Fair ladies in hat, and plume, and habit; gentlemen in cords and tops; barouches and pony-phaetons, filled with nodding feathers and glancing silks. The tramp drew under the shadow of the ivied wall, and watched them.

'A southerly wind and a cloudy sky proclaim it a hunting morning,' he thought. 'Ah, there he is at last!'

His eyes fell upon the tall, erect form of the haughty Earl of Clontarf—the proudest and most domineering peer in the kingdom—mounted on a mighty black hunter. His fixed, imperious features were set as though moulded in iron; the light-blue eyes glittered with the keen, steely brightness of a falcon; the unsmiling mouth was shaded by a long, brown, grizzled beard. He sat his horse square and erect and firmly, as though he and the animal were one.

The sinister eyes of the vagrant lighted with a ferocious gleam of hatred and fury as he gazed.

'Curse you!' he said, 'you double-dyed traitor—you bloody murderer! You revel in wealth, in honour, and stand among the highes in the land, while—I curse you ten thousand times! I'll make you pay for it before long.'

At that instant Lady Evelyn Desmond rode forth, with Vivian Trevannance by her side, and the whole procession cantered gaily away. The vagrant stood still until the last ring and clatter of their horses' hoofs died faintly in the distance, and only a vast cloud of dust remained to tell the tale. Then he roused himself and slouched into the park, along the shady avenues, and over the invisible fence dividing the gardens. Here men were at work among the parterres, and one of these—an under-gardener—looked up from his labour, and eyed the approaching stranger with a suspicious glance.

'Well, my man,' he said, 'and what may you want this time o' day? It's too early for broken victuals, if that's what you are after, and our 'ouse-keeper don't allow tramps about the kitchen at any time o' day, I can tell you.'

'I don't want broken victuals,' the vagrant answered, civilly. 'I only see the gentle folks riding away, and come in to rest a bit. I suppose your housekeeper won't turn a poor chap away when she hears Lady Evelyn Desmond told him to come.'

'Hey?' cried the under-gardener. 'What! Lady Heveling Desmond told you to come, did she? Blessed if you hain't a cool 'un at the business, you are. Where did Lady Heveling Desmond come to 'ave the honour of your acquaintance, my Markis of Tatters and Rags?'

'Look here,' said the tramp, 'do you know this? Perhaps it will put an end to your chaffing.'

He drew from his bosom the dirty remnant of a red handkerchief, unfolded it gingerly, and produced a rich ring.

'Look at this, Mr. Gardener,' he said, 'see them sparklers? It's worth a year of your wages, I'll lay a button. Look at that name inside, supposing your education hasn't been neglected, and tell me whose it is.'

'Evelyn Inez Desmond!' slowly read the under-gardener; 'blowed if it ain't! I say, my man, you haven't stole nothin' lately, have you?'

'If I had stolen it, it is hardly likely I would fetch it here, my good fellow. I repeat, Lady Evelyn gave me this ring off her own finger, with her own fair hands, yesterday, and told me, with her own beautiful lips, to come here to-day. Now, then, my covey, what do you think of that?'

He seated himself deliberately on a rustic bench as he asked the question, and leered knowingly up in the gardener's face.

'Blessed if I know what to think!' responded that functionary. 'It's the rummest go I've heerd on lately, and you're the rummest chap I ever met. That's Lady Heveling's ring, I dessay, but how came you by it, is another question. You don't look the sort of gent handsome young ladies and hearls' daughters give di'mon rings to, blowed if you do. Howsumever, it's no affair of mine.'

'They've gone hunting, eh?' asked the tramp.

The gardener nodded and returned to his work.

'They're coming back here to dinner, I suppose?'

'You'd better ask Mrs. Lawson that, my man; I ain't the 'ousekeeper.'

'Well,' said the unknown, 'I'll hang about here, anyhow, and see. I promised the young lady I'd come to-day, and it don't do to disappoint the ladies. You wouldn't mind giving a poor fellow a bit of dinner in the servants' hall would you?'

'Yes, I would!' answered the under gardener, very decidedly; 'it would be as much as my place is worth. I don't know nothin' about you, and what's more, I don't want to. I don't like your looks, Mr. Tramp; you may have an eye to the plate, for what I know. Go round to the servants' offices at twelve o'clock, and ask for a slice of cold beef and a mug o' home-brewed, and you'll get it, very likely, and don't you worrit me with your questions any more.'

The under-gardener turned doggedly away to his work, leaving the tramp to his own devices. There was nothing for it but to prowl about and wait until evening for the return of the earl's daughter.

'It's no use trudging back to my swarthy friends, the gipsies,' he thought, 'empty-handed, as I left. I may as well wait, and take pot luck here. I wish I had come a little sooner. And then I must see him!'

He slouched away to a quiet spot under some lofty elms presently, and stretching himself upon the grass, fell asleep in the warm October sunshine. It was high noon when he awoke, and remembering the gardener's words, he presented himself at the servants' offices for his mid-day meal.

'It's again our rules—beggars,' said a shrill-voiced kitchen damsel: 'howsumer, here, and be off with you.'

She brought him broken meat and bread, and a draught of home-brewed, and Lady Evelyn's pensioner partook of the refreshment, and once more slouched back to his lair.

The October sun was low in the golden western sky, and the evening wind was rising fresh from the ocean, ere the hunting-party returned to Warbeck Hall. They swept up the noble avenue, a brilliant cavalcade, with soft laughter and animated faces, the last of the procession—superb to see—Lady Evelyn Desmond and Mr. Vivian Trevannance.

The tramp stood boldly out under the waving elms, as they rode up, clearly defined in the golden glow of the sunset. The bright eyes of the Spanish beauty flashed upon him at once.

'My bandit,' she said, with her low, silvery laugh. 'He is true to his tryst, though I had quite forgotten him. And you have brought back my ring?'

She swayed lightly from her saddle, her bright beautiful face slightly flushed from her rapid ride, her eyes shining like stars. Her 'bandit' removed his tattered head-piece, and made her a clumsy bow.

'Here it is, my lady.'

He dropped it into her gloved palm. The exquisite face beamed down upon him with angelic compassion; all its lofty pride was gone now.

'I am glad you kept your word. Wait here ten minutes: I will send my maid out to you. If you remain here, and find yourself again in need, return to me.'

She swept away with the words, and the tall trees hid her from sight. The tramp gazed after with a curious face.

'Odd,' he thought; 'she is his daughter, but she has Rory Desmond's eyes—she has Rory Desmond's heart. Does he ever see the resemblance, I wonder, when she looks at him? or is he, as he always was, harder than stone?'

The ten minutes had hardly elapsed before a trim little Parisian waiting-maid came tripping airily over the grass to the spot where he stood.

'I come from my Lady Evelyn,' she said. Are you my lady's pensioner?'

'I am.'

'Then here.'

She dropped into his horny palm a little heap of golden coins, and flitted away back to the house. The vagrant counted his prize with greedy, glistening gaze—ten sovereigns in all.

'She's a princess, that's what she is, and the worst I wish her is a better father. Now, if I could only see you, my lord, for five minutes, I'd be a made man; but it's no use hoping for that to-night.'

He slouched away, but not out of the park; his steps turned in the direction of the river. He would loiter a little longer, he thought, in these pleasant pastures; the twilight was brilliant still, and there would be a silvery new moon presently to light him on his way to the gipsy encampment.

He passed the old mansion, and wended his way along the shrubbery to where the river ran, like a stripe of silver ribbon set in green. As it came in view, he paused suddenly, with a faint exclamation. Fortune had favoured the tramp for the second time to-day.

The silvery twilight, gemmed with stars, and lit by a crescent moon, revealed every object in its soft brilliancy—the murmuring

trees, the glancing ripples of the river, the reeds, the waterlilies, the yellow willows fringing its margin, and the lonely figure of a man—the only living creature in the landscape—standing still as a statue, gazing out over the glancing water, lit by yon magic moon.

'So,' said the tramp, under his breath, 'I have run my fox to earth at last. Now for a surprise, my great lord earl!'

His feet made no sound on the green sward; he was at the great man's elbow, unseen and unheard.

'A fine evening, my Lord Clontarf! Since when have you grown pastoral?'

The Earl of Clontarf swung round, and looked in blank amaze at this unexpected apparition. Side by side they stood in the starry twilight, a strange contrast.

'Our tastes alter as we grow older,' pursued the tramp, transfixing the great earl with an unwinking stare. 'Twenty years ago, if I remember right, Mr. Gerald Desmond wasn't given to star-gazing. It is a long time since we met, my lord, and neither of us have altered, I am afraid, for the better.'

'Who are you?' The cold, harsh voice of the peer expressed neither surprise nor alarm; the rigid, bloodless, haughty face never moved a muscle.

'An old friend, my lord—a friend who did you good service once. Eighteen years' penal servitude may have greatly changed me, but not beyond your noble recognition, I hope.'

He took off his battered hat, and stood with the pearly light of the young moon full upon his sun-burned, furrowed, sinister face.

'Do you know me, my lord?'

The Earl of Clontarf eyed him with the supercilious disdain with which he might have regarded some mangy cur broken from his kennel.

'Can't say I do. You look like a villainous cockney-attorney I used to see formerly in Ireland—a despicable scoundrel, transported for his rascally practices. I daresay you're the same—there couldn't be two such faces. You're Morgan, the attorney, beyond a doubt.'

'Yes, my lord,' the tramp said, with glaring eyes, 'I'm Morgan, the attorney, returned from Norfolk Island, and Morgan the attorney, won't stand any hard names from you! If you talk about "despicable scoundrels," there's a pair of us, my lord earl.'

The Earl of Clontarf made one stride forward, and seized the man before him in a mighty grip by the throat.

'You dog! You transported thief! Say another word like that to me, and I'll fling your filthy carcase headlong into the river.'

He released him so suddenly and violently that the tramp reeled backward, and only saved himself from falling by grasping a tree.

'You scoundrel!' the earl said, not altering that harsh voice of his, or that set, stony face, one whit, 'how dare you address me? If you ever presume to do it again, I'll have you horse-whipped out of the country.'

He turned to go, but Morton savagely interposed: 'Not so fast, my lord! You may be a very great man, but I know you. I'm a miserable beggar, and you're a rich nobleman; I have come to you for money, and I must have it.'

'Indeed! How much do you want?'

He asked the question with a cold sneer, a derisive gleam in his evil eyes; but Morgan answered determinedly:

'I want five hundred pounds—a trifle to you, a fortune to me. Your honour, your secret is worth more than that.'

'What secret?' He started blankly at Morgan as he asked the question. Even that cool hand was staggered by the superior coolness of this master villain.

'What secret?' he repeated, with a fierce, gasping laugh. 'Your lordship's memory is of the shortest. You never bribed anyone to swear away a life that stood between you and a title, did you! Give me five hundred pounds—it's but a small sum—and I'll keep the secret to my grave that I've kept for twenty years.'

'Not five hundred pence—not five hundred farthings! Begone, you returned transport, or the servants shall kick you from the gates. And hark ye, my hang-dog tramp, you evince all the symptoms of madness—your words are the wildest of all wild raving. I am a very charitable man, as you may have heard, and my influence is great. There is a private mad-house about twenty miles from here, and the patient who enters that mad-house had much better be nailed in his coffin at once. Now, let me hear the faintest whisper of these delirious ravings of yours again, and five hours after you will be within the walls of that mad-house for life. I am going to the hall now; I shall tell them there is a dangerous lunatic loose in the grounds, and send the servants in search. If they find you here, look—to—yourself. You know me of old, William Morgan.'

He hissed the last words in his ear as he passed him, his gleaming eyes on fire. The tramp quailed from head to foot, and shrank before that baleful gaze. An instant, and the Earl of Clontarf had disappeared, and

Morgan, the transport, stood alone, livid with fear and fury, under the glittering stars.

CHAPTER VIII.

REJECTED.

There were theatricals at Royal Rest. The grand old manor was filled with guests—the long array of state chambers, empty the year round, were all occupied now, and valets and chambermaids swarmed in the servants' hall. Lovely ladies outshone one another in the lofty drawing-rooms, night after night, flirtations begun in March last, in London, broken off abruptly when the season closed, were resumed again, and with double-added force. Royal Rest was thronged with rank and fashion, and, to help amuse those languid and sated pleasure-seekers, a troupe of actors had been imported—the most celebrated comedian, the most bewitching little prima-donna of the day, at their head. And to-night there was a ball, opening with a gay vaudeville, at Royal Rest. And five minutes before he went forth to play his suave and stately role of host, Trevannance stood alone in the domed picture-gallery, and gazed out over the darkening prospect—for a wonder, very grave and thoughtful. It was not his way to look grave over many things; life to him, like another celebrated philosopher, was a comedy of errors to be laughed at; and he seldom troubled himself to think very deeply on any subject—it was a bore. But in the gray gloaming of this chilly November day, he stood lost in thought—very grave and earnest thought, too.

October had beamed itself out in crimson and gold amid the woodlands, and melancholy November was with them, with its whistling winds, beating rain, its low-lying, chill-gray sky, its weary sea-fog. But life went very brightly at Royal Rest—scores of old friends, good fellows all, rode, and hunted, and played billiards with him every day, and gossiped with him every night over the Manilla and the nargile in the smoking-room; and better still, bright eyes grew brighter as he drew near, rosy lips smiled radiantly upon him, eyelids drooped, and gentle bosoms fluttered at the low, caressing words of the Lord of Royal Rest. He had a long rent-roll—a longer pedigree; his manners were simply perfection, and he was one of the handsomest men of the day. No wonder those silver-plumaged doves fluttered with delicious little thrills of hope and fear, when this gorgeous oriole swept to their dove-cote—no wonder they hated with an intense and bitter depth of envy and malice and all uncharitableness, the violet-eyed beauty of old Castile who moved serenely among them, 'queen rose of the rosebud garden of girls.'

And they had good cause; for in this cold gray November twilight, as he stood here alone, Trevannance was debating within himself the question:

'They leave for Italy next week—they spend the winter in Rome—if I speak at all I should speak to-night.'

Yes, the little golden-winged birds of Paradise, belles at last season in crowded London drawing-rooms, had reason to tremble for the prize they hoped to win—Vivian Trevannance would ask Evelyn Desmond to be his wife. He had been her constant companion for the past two months—a whole lifetime down in the country—and the grand and uplifted beauty, who had dukes with fifty thousand a year at her feet, had condescended to be very sweet and gracious to the Lord of Royal Rest. There was always a smile to welcome him when he came—she was ever ready to allow him to be her escort and cavalier on all occasions, for he was entertaining, and could talk to her as very few men she met in society could talk. She was very gracious and very beautiful—he was the envied of every man he knew. Her father looked bland approval—there could be little doubt what the answer would be when the momentous little question was asked; and yet—oh, innate perversity of man!—there was not the faintest thrill of rapture in the breast of Vivian Trevannance as he stood at the oriel window, with the dusky portraits of his dead-and-gone ancestors glooming down upon him from the walls.

He must marry sometime—it was the inevitable lot of man—as well as now as later. He was very much in love, no doubt. Not with that fierce, and frantic, and desperate passion that some fellows get up, and which makes the stock in trade of Tennysons, and Mussets, and Merediths—not with that jealous, fiery, devouring and altogether uncomfortable flame that scorches some impassioned and undisciplined hearts to cinders—but with a gentlemanly, well-bred *love a la mode*. She was beautiful and stately, and as proud as a young queen, three very essential requisites in the future lady of Royal Rest—he was prepared to be a most devoted husband, as husbands go. No doubt they would be as happy a pair as ever made a sensation at St. George's, Hanover Square.

'And Amethyst, and Rivers, and the Most Noble the Marquis of Rooksilver, will very likely blow their brains out,' was the friend-

ly wind-up of Mr. Trevannance's cogitations. 'Come weal, come woe, this night, my peerless Castilian Rose, the last of the house of Trevannance shall prostrate himself at thy imperial feet and hear his doom.'

The tragic gesture which wound up his soliloquy was worthy 'Milord Brown-Smith' himself in the coming vaudeville, And then, with a 'smile on his lip,' and looking especially handsome, and with the courteous grace of a prince, the Lord of Royal Rest descended to meet and mingle with his guests.

She was wondrously lovely to-night—in her proud stateliness—her pale, delicate beauty—her patrician grace. Her perfumed laces floated soft and misty about her: above her rich, gleaming silks, her mother's Spanish diamonds glimmered and rippled in the glowing light; the soft, abundant, jetty hair was drawn back off the veined temples, and a diamond star shone above the low, classic brow. She was rarely lovely, and the dewy violet eyes beamed gently on the courteous and handsome lord of the manor, and the proud, curved lips smiled their brightest as she listened to his low, caressing voice. Haughty, high-born bosoms throbbed with bitterest envy as she floated by on the arm of Vivian Trevannance, the long lashes falling, the stag-like head drooping ever so slightly uner his gaze and his words.

She sat by his side during the vaudeville, a most laughable burlesque of 'Milor' Muggins' Mishaps in Paris;' original and comical enough even to throw those seated listeners into uncontrollable laughter. And, when the play ended, and they entered the long and lofty ball-room, resplendent with light, embowered with flowers, gorgeous with magnificent toilets, sparkling with lovely faces, she was still by his side, and the most devoted lover that ever went mad for ladye faire.

'Strephon and Phillis!' laughed the countess Portici, as, later in the evening, he bent over her chair. 'You act your part to the life, my friend. The arrows of Cupid are sharp, my faith! when shot from the blue eyes of *la senoritr*, since even your chain-mail armour has been pierced. And when are we to condole—not congratulate you my boy?'

Trevannance laughed. He saw well enough the spiteful eye-flash of the dashing Italian coquette, and the sharp sarcasm under the laughing tone. But he lingered over her chair contentedly—she was pretty and brilliant, and amused him; and although on the very verge of matrimonial proposal, Mr. Trevannance, like most of his sex, was not beyond being amused by another lady. He must speak to-night—the thought crossed him more than once, with—tell it not in Gath!—much the same sensation as, in his nursery days, the recollection of a dose of nauseous medicine loomed in perspective. And yet this high-born beauty was everything mortal man could seek in a wife. The ball whirled on—the 'wee sma' hours ayont the twal' had come,; and out on beyond all this glowing light and profusion of flowers—this music, and dancing, and brilliant assemblage—a bleak, raw morning was breaking over the world, shrouded in mist, and bitter with wild, wailing wind. It was no easy matter for the host to monopolize the belle of the ball, and bear her off to some secret spot where he might fall at her feet and breathe his consuming passion.

Fortune seemed to favour him at last. He had watched her gliding away, and vanish into a curtained recess down the long vista of drawing-rooms; but Lady Clydesmore held him captive, and he listened to her airy chatter, and 'smiled and smiled,' and wished her most devoutly at—Joppa! And it was only when a long-haired, bearded poet came along—the latest lion in the literary menagerie—that she released her chafing serf, and permitted him to rush to his doom. She stood within the curtained arch, La Rose de Castile, but—not alone. Beside the tall, tropical plants—the gorgeous South American flowers—a man stood near her, whose face, poor wretch! told the tale of his misery, as surely as the face of some luckless Russ an serf under the knout.

Trevannance never forgot that tableau vivant all his life long—the miserable day breaking, without the deep Maltese window, in rain, and wind, and gloom; the tossing trees of the park; the far-off ink-black sea; the bellowing of the deer under the beeches; and within, the soft warmth, the rich light, the delicious music, the perfume and luxury, and those two figures—one draped in glittering silks, and laces, and jewels, the haughty head drooping, the exquisite face pale, startled, sorrowful, and his grace of Amethyst, pallid with fruitless love, and man's unbearable pain.

'For God's sake, Lady Evelyn! don't drive me mad! I can't live without you! I can't, by—'

'Oh, hush!'—her voice was full of infinite compassion. 'I am sorry! I tried to avoid this—I have foreseen this. Do not say another word—I am bitterly sorry you should have said this much.'

'Then there is no hope?' poor Amethyst said, hollowly.

Her answer was a gesture as she turned

from him and looked out at the beating snow.

'And it is for that fellow, Trevannance, I am rejected!' the duke cried, hardly knowing in his pain and passion, what he said. 'A good enough fellow, no doubt; but what is he, that you all are ready to throw over every other man for him?'

'Your grace!'—the slender figure was erect instantly, the violet eyes flashing with true Castilian fire—'the pain I have caused you gives you many privileges, but it gives you none to insult me!'

And then, before he could utter even that remorseful, 'Oh, forgive me!' that haughty beauty had swept away like a young queen, and the Duke of Amethyst, with his fifty thousand a year and his lacerated heart, was left alone, to stare blankly at the wretched dawn of the day. With a hollow groan, he dropped down, his arms on the wide window-sill, his face on his arms, and lay there, to do battle with his passionate pain. It had passed in a minute—a minute during which Trevannance stood irresolute, eavesdropping unconsciously. Now he turned softly to go.

'Poor fellow!' he muttered, 'he is hard hit; and she—well, she's only like the rest of her sex—cruel as death to the man who loves her best.'

The ball ended, and its giver had not spoken. Lady Evelyn had vanished ere he returned to the ball-room. Amethyst was beheld no more, and his wild, woe-begone face haunted Trevannance, as though he had seen him slain before him in cold blood. But he rode over to Warbeck Hall, next day, resolute to 'do or die.' He had come of a daring race, and was as ready to lead a forlorn hope, or storm a breach, or meet a foe under the trees before breakfast with pistols or swords, or ask a lady to marry him, as any of his fire-eating ancestors, since Norman William down. It was a gray, chill, and cheerless day, 'ending in snow'—the dull, leaden sky lying on the tree-tops, the raw sea wind complaining wretchedly, the damp piercing you through.

But, despite it all, she was out pacing up and down the marble terrace, wrapped in a vast crimson burnouse, a little velvet cap on head, gazing out at the far sea line.

He went straight to his doom, as the Sir Hugos and Sir Malises, in the portrait gallery at Royal Rest, had done, with complacent smiles on their lips, to Tower Hill; and the face of cold surprise she turned on him intimidated him no more than the axe and headsman had intimidated those dauntless heroes.

She was very pale in the bleak afternoon light, and the violet eyes looked dark and weary, and melancholy. There was a tired expression in the beautiful face, a listless slowness in her walk, a depth of mournfulness in her deep, solemn eyes.

Perhaps his face told his errand, for she looked startled: perhaps his first abrupt words did—'Lady Evelyn, I have come to say good-by!'—for she glanced round her for a second with a wild instinct of flight.

But the belle of society could obey no untutored instincts; the long lashes drooped over the azure eyes; the pale face grew like marble; she walked proudly and resolutely on.

'Indeed!' she said, and the word dropped from her lips chilling as ice; 'then good-by, and *bon voyage*.'

He had heard his doom! His handsome face paled, his teeth set, his eyes flashed. She should hear him now, this intolerably haughty Castilian! He faced her, very pale, resolute as death, and—asked her to be his wife. She looked up at him, full in the face for a moment, and dead silence fell between them. That clear, soulful, womanly gaze read him to the heart. Then her answer came—brief, freezing, indescribably proud:

'No!'

She turned to go as she said it, more haughtily than he had ever seen her before in his life. He ground his teeth under his beard, and his deep eyes flashed.

'You mean it, Lady Evelyn? There is no appeal?'

'There is none.'

'And yet I love you!'

She smiled—a brief, chill, disdainful smile—her father's own.

'Do you?' she answered, with a slight foreign shrug; 'very likely! Mr. Trevannance has loved many women, or rumor strangely belies him.'

'I never loved any woman well enough before to ask her to be my wife.'

She bowed, that cold, slight smile still on her face; the clear, violet eyes knew him as he knew himself.

'You have paid me a high compliment, then. Believe me, I am very grateful. And now, as I may not see you again, once more, adieu, and a pleasant voyage to—Central Africa, is it not?'

She floated away with the most profound and graceful of courtesies; and if Sir Malise, on Tower Hill, with his head on the block, and the mighty axe swinging in mid-air, felt anything like his last descendant, standing alone on the terrace, the feelings of that martyr to the Stuart cause were by no means to be envied.

He broke into a laugh—a laugh that was loud, but not at all pleasant to hear.

'I pitied poor Amethyst last night! By Jove! I'll go and hunt the unlucky beggar up, and we'll condole with one another—wrecked in the same boat. Misery loves company.'

And then, whistling shrilly, and slashing the trees with his riding whip, the Lord of Royal Rest rode home, and wrote out a second telegram to his crony, Sir Fulke Mounteagle, in Vienna:

'DEAR MOUNT: Meet me in London on the 15th. High time to go up the Nile.
TREVANNANCE.'

CHAPTER IX.

'A MARRIAGE OF CONVENIENCE.'

There was a little room adjoining the library at Warbeck Hall, sacred to that profound statesman, the Earl of Clontarf. Here he read and wrote his letters, undisturbed by the gay life around him; there he spent the chief part of each day until dinner. Two or three times a week he paid his countess a ceremonious visit in her apartments, as a matter of domestic propriety; beyond that he rarely saw her—still more rarely thought of her. The one thing for which he lived now was political ambition—the aim of his life was the advancement of his party even his affection for his daughter was secondary to that. He was proud of her and fond of her; he wished her to marry the man of his choice, so that her husband might plunge, soul and body, into the political vortex, and become a leader in the land, and he himself the progenitor of a long line of brilliant statesmen. This was why he looked so coolly on and saw her jilt his Grace of Amethyst Politically, Amethyst was a brainless nonenity; this was chiefly why, also, he so ardently desired her union with Vivian Trevannance. The Lord of Royal Rest was brilliantly talented, clever and subtile—of the stuff of which eminent politicians are made. With him for his son and successor, Lord Clontarf looked exultingly forward to a dazzling future, and the highest honours of the kingdom.

This windy November afternoon, as he sat alone, brooding over his papers and ambitious projects, he saw Trevannance join Lady Evelyn on the terrace. The tender passion was a very old memory now with Gerald Earl of Clontarf; women had never been his weakness; he looked upon the whole sex with cynical disdain. They were useful tools, sometimes, in the hands of clever men; woman's wit had been known ere now to further man's bold ambition. But these were the exceptions—the Maria Theresas, the Queen Elizabeths, the Aspasias; as a whole, he regarded them with impatient, contemptuous disdain. But little as he knew how to fathom with his political line and plummet the sea of love, he could descern easily enough the devotion of Vivian Trevannance to his beautiful daughter. He would propose one of these days, and she would accept him, he thought, complacently and then he would take Trevannance in hand, and send him forth into the arena of state craft, the most talented young leader of the times.

Watching from his window, this bleak afternoon, he saw the brief interview—saw his daughter sweep majestically away, and saw in the face of Vivian Trevannance that he had been rejected.

Rejected! He had never dreamed of that! Men bowed to his every wish—for the past ten years he had carried all before him with a high hand; and now to have his darling project overset by the caprice of a shallow girl! Amazement, incredulity, rage, swept alternately over the great earl's face.

'By Heaven! she shall not refuse him,' he said, starting up and flinging open the study door. 'Here Evelyn, a word with you!'

She was passing, in her slow, graceful way, down the domed and marbled hall. At the sound of her father's voice she paused, and stood looking at him in quiet surprise.

'Come unto my study,' he said briefly. 'I have something to say to you.'

She bent her head, and followed him in silence. If she wondered, her face did not show it. She was a little surprised, all the same. There had been very little intimacy or confidence ever between the earl and his only daughter. She had never loved her father—never, even in her earliest infancy—what she regarded her mother with a passionate affection. She had no affection whatever for her father, and her remorse at that very lack of affection made her doubly anxious to obey him in the smallest matter. It is true, he had rarely exacted any obedience from her—he was the most indulgent of parents—but had he been the tyrannical old despot of the melo-drama, she would have yielded her will to him in almost all things, through her strong sense of duty.

He placed a chair for her now, with grave courtesy. She bowed with equal gravity, and took it, quietly prepared to listen. He resumed his own seat by the writing-table, and broached his business at once. 'I saw Vivian Trevannance with you on the terrace

yonder, five minutes ago, my daughter. I can guess what his errand was—he asked you to be his wife?'

She coloured faintly, and bent her head in assent.

'And you consented?'

'No, papa, I declined.'

'Ah, you declined! And why?'

The faint rose-light dawned in her face again; the violet eyes drooped.

'I suppose one should love the man one marries. I do not love Mr. Trevannance.'

'Oh!' the earl said, with a cynical sneer, 'you don't love Mr. Trevannance! Sentimental, certainly, but not satisfactory. I presume you don't love any one else?'

'No, papa.' The drooping face lifted proudly; the violet eyes met his full. My Lord Clontarf rather shrank from the gaze of those singularly beautiful and brilliant eyes—they reminded him uncomfortably of other eyes, sealed for ever on earth.

'Then I think Mr. Trevannance has great cause of complaint; you certainly have encouraged him. He has been your constant companion, your favoured attendant, during the past six weeks, to the exclusion of all others. And at the last you reject him. I thought Lady Evelyn Desmond was too proud to stoop to coquetry.'

'I am no coquette.'

But she coloured painfully as she said it, with a conscious sense of guilt.

'No—it would be coquetry in any one else, then. Have you any especial aversion to Vivian Trevannance?'

'No.'

'He is wealthy, clever, accomplished, handsome—all that any girl could desire. You love no one else, and you have no aversion to him. Then, my dear, you shall marry the Lord of Royal Rest.'

'Papa.'

'My daughter, I have intended it from the first—set my heart upon it. I did not speak of it before, because I thought of your own free will, without any interference of mine, you would choose him. You have not seen fit to do so, therefore it is high time I should step in and proclaim my wishes.'

'Papa,' Lady Evelyn said, growing very pale, 'you should have spoken sooner. It is too late now. I have refused him.'

'Not in the least too late, my dear. A young lady's first "no," means nothing, as so clever a fellow as Trevannance fully understands. He shall speak again and you shall say yes.'

She sat still as death, pale as death, in her chair, her hands folded, her eyes fixed on the cold November sky, on the worried trees, rocking in the high autumnal gale.

'As for love, and that sort of thing, it is very pretty in little books bound in blue-and-gold, and one likes to hear of "two souls with but a single thought, two hearts that beat as one," from a box in the grand tier of Her Majesty's; but in real life, my dear, it isn't practicable. Mr. Trevannance is sincerely attached to you, I am positive—very proud of you, and will be as devoted after marriage as is consistent with public duties; and you will esteem him and do honour to his choice, and be as happy as is at all necessary or customary. It is an eminently suitable match.'

Was it a smile that dawned so faintly over the pale, proud face as she listened—a smile like the reflection of his own—cold, disdainful, cynical? But she never spoke; she sat still as stone.

'In the land where you were born—in the convent where you were educated—young girls are not permitted to choose in these matters for themselves. Their parents or guardians do it for them. You have seen your companions taken from their convent-school to the bridal altar, without any option on their part, and thought it all right. It is your turn now.' Still blank silence. Pale and cold she sat, rigid as marble, her eyes fixed on that lowering sky, that dreary, darkening prospect. 'I have seldom interfered with you, Evelyn, or asserted my paternal authority before; I do most emphatically assert it now. You must promise me to marry Vivian Trevannance.'

She turned and looked at him; once again his eyes shifted and fell before hers. 'Do you want me to go to him and offer myself, papa? I see no other way in which my mistake of to-day is to be rectified.'

'Nonsense—of course not! Rest easy; he shall repeat his proposal!'

'At your instigation? Rather humiliating, is it not?'

'My dear Evelyn, this part of the business need not concern you! Trust to me: your maidenly delicacy shall be remembered and respected; yet Vivian Trevannance shall repeat his proposal!'

She rose slowly. 'Have you anything more to say? May I go?'

'You have not answered me yet, Evelyn.'

'There can be but one answer. I will obey.'

'That is my good girl. And I have not made you unhappy? You are pale and cold as a statue.' He spoke a little wistfully. In his hard, cruel, selfish heart there was one pure and tender place, and his daughter held it. Her cold, passionless look and tone never altered.

'You have not made me unhappy. I am

only regret you did not say all this sooner. You knew I would obey you.' She turned proudly to go. But he drew her to him and kissed her white brow.

'God bless you, Evelyn, and make you happy.' And as he uttered the benediction, Rory Desmond's cloudless blue eyes looked up at him from his child's face. With a sort of groan, he pushed her from him, sank down in his seat, and covered his face with his hands. There are other punishments for the shedder of blood besides the haugman and the halter.

CHAPTER X.

THE RESCUE.

The Countess of Clontarf very rarely left those pleasant apartments, in the sunny southern wing of Warbeck Hall, fitted luxuriously up for her use.

She glided uncomplainingly away into confirmed invalidism, without much seeking to know what ailed her. But my Lady Clydesmore, an imperious young despot in petticoats, came sometimes to these apartments, and whisked the invalid peeress off, willy-nilly, for a drive in her own pony phaeton. The pale, weak countess had little strength or energy left to resist the pretty, impetuous whirlwind, and yielded, because yielding was easier than resisting. It was two days after that memorable interview on the marble terrace, and the weather had greatly changed since then. It was what in America is called the 'Indian summer,' and the sunshine was warm and mellow, the sky blue and brilliant, and the fresh saline breath of old ocean, sleeping far off in golden ripples, deliciously invigorating.

The two ladies came sweeping ont presently—pretty Lady Clydesmore, in the daintiest of driving costumes; the fragile Spanish countess, robed in black from head to foot, her pallid moonlight beauty looking quite startling by contrast. She leaned on her companion's arm, moving slowly and wearily.

'Where's Evelyn?' she asked.

'Evelyn is not coming,' Lady Clydesmore answered 'Don't you know she plays Lady Bountiful in the parish?—my duty, I suppose; but she does it, and she has gone to write a letter for some old Goody or Gaffer to a son in the United States. By-the-by, she has been as solemn as a churchyard the past two days. What do you suppose; the matter?'

Lady Clydesmore looked keenly at her companion as she asked the question; but the still, pale face of the countess told nothing.

'Evelyn is never gay,' she said, quietly.

'No—but—well, perhaps it is only a fancy of mine, after all. *Apropos* of nothing, Trevannance is off again. His father must play host at Royal Rest. What restless beings these men are!'

'Ah, I don't know Mr. Trevannance! Where does he go?'

'Up the Nile, down the Niger, across the Amazon, "anywhere—anywhere out of the world!" We shall miss him horribly—the only man I know who talks to me, and can talk without platitudes or compliments, hackneyed and old as the hills. Pity he don't marry; as Thackeray's old dowager Lady Kew says, 'A young man like that should live at his places, and be an example to his people.' 'But they wont. He leaves to-night, and I am—sorry!'

The countess said nothing: she understood her friend, and was sorry too, perhaps. They both knew intuitively, that Lady Evelyn had refused him, and that was why he was off 'up the Nile, and down the Niger.'

They had left the park-gates far behind them, and were bowling along the most delightful of high-roads, the waving trees on either hand arching overhead, and forming a long natural avenue. The steppers were wonderful beauties to 'go;' spirited, if you like, but kindly and well in hand, and bowled along over the broad, rolling road, swift and smooth. When suddenly—it was the most abrupt and tragic thing conceivable—a man leaped out from among the trees, and fired one, two, three shots in quick succession from a revolver. Before the report of the last had died away he had vanished. The first shot missed; the second raked the flanks of the off-wheeler; the third whizzed over the head of the Countess of Clontarf, within an inch of her temple. And the ponies with wild snorts of pain, and rage and terror, were off and away like the wind. The shots were heard. A party of gentlemen, far in the rear—Lord Clydesmore, Lord Clontarf, General Trevannance and his son—set spurs to their horses, and galloped furiously in the direction. But a far-off mighty cloud of dust was all that remained of the pony-phaeton, and a man, standing all agape, under the trees, the only living thing visible.

'What is it, my man? Who fired those shots?' shouted General Trevannance.

The man turned—he was a country rustic, who took of his hat to the gentry, and made a clumsy bow before he answered.

'I dunno, zur; but there be leddies in

yon coach, and t' mouth o' Hell Pit it be oapen, zur, and—'

But they heard no more—with a cry of horror, Trevannance spurred his horse madly on, shouting, frantically: 'It is Lady Clydesmore's pony-phaeton, and Hell Pit shaft is open, and—For heaven's sake! ride for your lives!'

His last words came wafted on the wind; he was far ahead already. He knew what the man's words meant—the old, disused mining-ground lay straight before them, and sudden death held reign there. They followed him as rapidly as they could; but his horse flew like the wind. Ahead, the raging ponies tore on their way, straight to that awful place.

'Oh, God, it is too late!' Lord Clydesmore gasped, sick and dizzy with horror; 'and Beatrice is there!' The strong man closed his eyes for an instant, faint as a woman, on the verge of swooning. A great shout aroused him. He spurred his charger furiously on, and there stood Vivian Trevannance at the horses' heads. He had hurled himself off his own animal, and, like lightning, grasped the ponies' heads, at the risk of almost certain trampling to death. They were on t e very verge of the old, disused shaft. He held them in his mighty grasp, while they tore, and plunged, and reared, and almost dragged his arms from their sockets. But it was only for a five seconds; the other men were upon them, and they were mastered. Trevannance, with his hands all torn and bleeding, was the first to approach the phaeton. The Countess of Clontarf lay back in a dead swoon; but the high courage of Lord Clydesmore's wife had upheld her through all. She was pale as death, but as still.

'My darling!' her husband cried. 'Oh, Beatrice! my love! my wife!

She held out her arms to him with an hysterical sob, and he lifted her from the carriage. Trevannance did the same for Lady Clontarf, her husband looking quietly on.

'She has fainted,' he said calmly. 'Better so. A narrow escape my dear Lady Clydesmore. I rather think you owe your life to Vivian here. Ha! the ponies wounded—bleeding—how is this?'

Lady Clydesmore told her startling tale. The four men listened aghast.

'Fired a revolver three times in succession! Good heavens! Lady Clydesmore, who was this man?' asked General Trevannance.

'I had but a glimpse of him—he looked like a beggar, or tramp; a wretched object. But he vanished as quickly as he came.'

There was one among her listeners who turned white as he listened. Surely, the Earl of Clontarf knew this mysterious assailant.

'It must have been a madman—an escaped lunatic!' he said decidedly, 'No one else would perpetrate such an outrage. We must search for him presently. Our business now is to convey the ladies home. Vivian, I wish you would ride forward and prepare them at Warbeck Hall.'

'But Mr. Trevannance,' 'Lady Clydesmore interposed, 'your hands are frightfully wounded. See how they bleed! Oh, you must not—'

'Mere scratches, dear Lady Clydesmore,' Trevannance interposed, lightly, as he leaped into the saddle. 'Not worth a thought. I will ride on, as the earl suggests, and prepare them at the hall!'

He was gone as he spoke, leaving the party behind to follow at their leisure. He reached the hall, saw the housekeeper, informed her of the accident, and inquired for Lady Evelyn Desmond. Lady Evelyn, attended by her maid, had gone to the village, after luncheon, to visit some of her poor pensioners, and had not yet returned. 'If she does return before her mother, break the news to her gently:' Trevannance said. 'The countess is not in the least injured—only frightened. It will not do to alarm Lady Evelyn needlessly.' He departed again, and rode homeward. To tell the truth his hands were badly lacerated, his arms stiff and painful, and half-wrenched from their sockets. 'How coolly my Lord of Clontarf took it,' he thought. 'I fancy he would not have lost an hour's sleep, though those rampaging brutes had hurled his fair, pale countess straight to the bottom of Hel Pit. Confound the savage little ponies! I shall be in a pretty condition, for travelling to-morrow.' Once at home, and his wounds dressed, however, he went on with his preparations for immediate departure. His valet was to precede him to town, by the night express, he himself to go by the early parliamentary train on the morrow.

'And, as I will have no time in the morning, I must ride over this evening to say good-bye, and see how the ladies got on after their fright. Will that disdainful little beauty, the Castilian Rose, deign to say adieu once more, I wonder? The earl would have me repeat my proposal, I fancy; but I'm not quite so badly don for as that. My lady has said no, and, though she were twice as lovely, no it must remain. "If she be not fair for me, what care I how fair she

her?"' So when the white disc of November moon sailed high in the cold, blue ether, Trevannance remounted and rode over to Warbeck Hall.

CHAPTER XI.

BETROTHED.

Through painted windows the silvery light gleamed, falling in long spears of gold and purple and crimson on the oaken floor. At one lofty casement, gazing out at the night, Lady Evelyn Desmond stood. Her blue silk dinner dress trailed the floor; a rich white rose gleamed in the silky masses of her dark hair. The lovely face was as colourless as that snowy rose. She stood like some exquisite statue—marble white, marble cold. At the sound of rapid footsteps on the oaken floor, she glanced around and saw the man of whom she had been thinking—the man who had saved her mother's life, at the risk of his own. Her own life, saved ten times over, would not have awakened half the gratitude she felt now. As their eyes met, a faint carnation hue arose over the exquisite face and the violet eyes, that had so lately flashed upon him, full of haughty pride and rebuke, fell.

'Do I intrude, Lady Evelyn?' Trevannance asked, lightly, all unconscious of what was passing in that disturbed heart. 'I have come to inquire after the Ladies Clontarf and Clydesmore, and seeing you here, made bold to venture in. I trust I have not disturbed you?'

'You have not disturbed me,' she answered, slowly, and with difficulty.

'And your mother? I hope her fright has done her no serious harm?'

'I hope not—I think not. She seemed quite restored and cheerful when I left her, half an hour ago. She would like to see you, I think, and thank you for the inestimable service you have rendered her. Words are poor and weak on such occasions as these. What can I say, except thank you, Mr. Trevannance, from the bottom of my heart, for saving my mother's life.' She held out both hands to him, with a sudden impassioned gesture, tears standing in the bright blue eyes. Deeply touched, Trevannance bent over those little hands and kissed them. In all her brilliant beauty she had never looked so lovely, so sweet, so dear as now.

'Not another word of thanks, dear Lady Evelyn! You make me feel like an impostor; for I did nothing, after all. My part was the merest trifle—thank Heaven we were in time.'

'Your hands are wounded,' she said, quickly. 'Oh, do not deny it! Lady Clydesmore told me. They are not very painful, I trust?'

'Two or three scratches, and they are just the least bit in the world stiff and uncomfortable, but so trifling that not even your kindness nor Lady Clydesmore's can magnify me into a wounded hero. It was a very mysterious and terrible thing, and might have had a frightful ending. I hope they will find the mad perpetrator of the deed. You must make my excuses to the Countess, Lady Evelyn—I had better not disturb her to-night, and to-morrow I leave by the earliest train. Will you wish me good-bye and God speed here? I shall remain but a few minutes in the drawing-room.'

'Then you really go?' She spoke the words lowly and hurriedly, her heart throbbing as it never throbbed before, her eyes dim with hot mist, her face averted. He looked at her with wonder, and strange, wild hope.

'I really go, unless—oh, Lady Evelyn! unless you bid me stay!'

'*Stay!*'

She stretched forth one hand to him, the other covering her drooping face. The word was almost a sob. It cost the proudest of all beauties a great deal to stoop even so little from her high estate.

'Lady Evelyn!' Trevannance cried, strangely moved. 'Do you mean it? Will you love me? Will you be my wife?'

'If you still wish it—yes!'

'If I still wish it! Evelyn! Evelyn!'

He would have clasped her in his arms, but she shrunk away with a swift, sudden motion that held him off.

'No! no! no! Spare me! Oh, Mr. Trevannance, do not deceive yourself—do not deceive me. We do not love each other, and—you know it.'

'As Heaven hears me, Evelyn, I love you better than I ever loved woman before.' Which was true enough, perhaps, for the loves of Vivian Trevannance, heretofore, had never lost him one hour's sleep, never cost him one heart-pang. They had been as brief and as bright as the sunshine of a summer day—airy little flirtations, that whiled away the idle hours of an idle man.

'I want to believe you,' she said, slowly, 'I will believe you, although there are those who say, "it is not in Vivian Trevannance to be true to any woman." For me—I esteem you; I respect you; I like you; but for that love of which I have read and heard so much—no Mr. Trevannance, I do not feel toward you like that.'

'It will come in time,' he whispered . . . .

shall be the aim of my life to win it. Such love as mine must bring a return.'

'I am quite frank with you, you see,' Lady Evelyn went steadily on. 'The day may come when I will love you dearly—there is no reason why it should not. Perhaps I am cold and passionless, and different from others of my sex—I do not know. But of this I am certain—that, as your plighted wife, your honour and happiness will be dearer to me than my life. No suffering or sorrow can ever come to you that I will not feel in my inmost heart. I will think of you—I will pray for you—I will trust you—I will make you happy, if I can.'

'My dearest,' he said, kissing again the slender white hand, 'you are an angel of whom I am most unworthy. Of my happiness there can be no doubt. I am far happier now than I deserve. But I will try and become worthy of you—worthy of the fairest and most spotless bride man ever won.' And then there was silence between them, while the silver moon sailed up and the earth lay still under the frosty stars.

'I have a favour to ask of you,' she said, presently; 'a strange request—an unkind one, perhaps. But you will grant it, I know.'

'You can ask nothing I will not grant, unless it were to—resign yourself.'

'Well it is not quite so bad as that,' smiling; 'it is only that you will not alter your plans for this. Go to-morrow, as you have intended; give me time to get used to my new position. In writing to you—in hearing from you—in following you in spirit in your wanderings—the unpleasant strangeness I feel now will wear off; and when you return I will be able to meet and greet you as your betrothed wife should. You will obey me in this?'

'In everything—in all things—my liege lady! It is a little cruel; but it shall be precisely as you say. To-night I will see your father; to-morrow I depart, to be absent half a year. When I return there must be no delay—my Southern Rose must be my wife.'

She caught her breath, flushing hotly; but she smiled up in his face bravely, and gave him her hand.

'And now let us say farewell—I must go back to mamma. Good-by, Vivian, and good speed.'

She fluttered away from him with the words on her lips, and out of the room. And so this odd wooing and winning is over, and the Rose of Castile stood plighted to be his wife.

PART THIRD.

CHAPTER I.

'THE RED QUEEN.'

'Good-night, Mignonnette!'

'Good-night, little Queen!'

It was the ward of a public hospital—the hour close upon twilight—the time early spring—the scene St. Louis. The lengthy hospital wards were filled with sufferers, and for each of them she had a kind word, who tripped so lightly down the long aisle. Dull eyes brightened, weary, throbbing heads lifted, hands stretched forth, parched lips opened to bid her good-night. They all knew her—they all loved her—the tenderest of nurses, the most patient of scribes—every one of these hospital patients knew 'The Red Queen.' See her as she trips so fleetly so jauntily down the long ward, with the last golden gleam of the April sunset bright on her darkling, sparkling face, and great, shining black eyes. She is as darkly handsome as some old Salvator or Murillo painting; the oval face duskily olive; the long, lazy, Andalusian eyes black, liquid, fiery or melting, as you like; the thick, silky, curly crop of jetty hair, growing in little kinky rings over the low brow, all cut short like a little boy: the lips and chin simply perfect, dimpled, rosy, sweet; and her cheek—

'Her cheek is like a Catherine pear;
The side that's next the sun.'

A little, lithe, supple figure—an airy dress, all crimson and black—a black velvet cap, with a scarlet feather, set jauntily, like a boy's, on the crisp black rings of hair at the right side—that is Red Queen, otherwise Mignonnette, otherwise Minnette, the actress. There were all manner of stories afloat about the little black-eyed beauty, who smoked rose-scented cigarettes, rode across country like a bird, shot like a rifleman with revolver or carbine, danced like a Parisian *première danseuse*, sang like a woodlark, chattered French like a little grisette, and spoke English perfectly, with the most delicious little accent in the world. On the stage or off the stage, the Red Queen was bewildering. Every one knew her for the brightest, the merriest, the prettiest little dark fairy alive. Further than that, all about her was of the most shadowy and delusive. She had first made her appearance in a third-rate New York theatre, in the role of *soubrette*, and that first appearance was a decided hit. The frequenters of the third-rate, east-side theatre began to look eagerly for the little.

saucy brunette face, and big, black eyes, the pretty little dances, the sweet little songs. Then all at once Minnette was whisked away to a certain stylish Broadway house, and made her debut as *La Reine Rouge*, in the most delightful little three-act drama, written expressly for her, and which, as you know, ran nearly one hundred nights, and made Minnette famous

But who she was, and where she came from, or what her name might be, no one knew—no, not even the manager; not her most intimate friend; not her most impassioned adorer. For of course she had adorers, this dashing, pretty girl of seventeen—more than you would care to count; and she took their bouquets, and declined their more costly gifts, and listened to their protestations with black, dancing eyes of fun, and made them a stage courtesy, and said, 'No thank you, monsieur!' to one and all. She was attached to her profession—to the doublet and rapier, and jaunty stage swagger, the dancing and singing, and so forth, and was nightly showered with bouquets and vociferous applause. But every day she was among her favored patients, with fruits and flowers, and ice and dainties, and soothing words and tender smiles, and patient nursing, writing long letters to friends at home, reading aloud, singing if they choose; as devoted, as tender, as sweet as any Sister of Charity. She was a living riddle, a brilliant, sparkling streak, with the sunshine ever ripples on its surface, but with depths below that no line or plummet of all her friends had sounded yet. Her secret was her secret still. Not one of those who had known her for months and years knew more of her than you know now. She tripped away to the end of the ward, her hands thrust into her sash, the black cap, with its crimson plume, set jauntily on the crisp curls. She looked like a saucy boy—an audaciously saucy boy; yet a woman's heart beat brightly under her dainty bodice—a heart that of late had been mutinous and rebellious, and not at all the well-trained little organ hitherto. She had nursed a certain dark-eyed hero from the very jaws of death; that was nothing—she had nursed scores; but the great, luminous brown eyes of this especial patient floated strangely before Mignonnette, in the golden noontide, in the black midnight, and a soft, slow voice, very sweet, very eloquent, sang ever in her ears like distant music. When, night after night, she came, saucy and bright, before an enthusiastic audience, the big, black eyes flashed first of all to a certain box, where one face invariably showed; when boquets were literally showered upon their pet and favourite, the most brilliant exotics were neglected for some tiny bunch of violets or rosebuds, if his hand flung them.

And Minnette knew the symptoms of her complaint perfectly well, and grew bitter and restive, and angrily impatient with herself for her folly. 'Ah, bah!' she would say, scowling at her own visage in the glass. 'What a little fool you are! Hadn't you sworn to hate all mankind for her sake? Don't you know, you little imbecile, that they are all alike false, treacherous, selfish and cruel as death? Haven't you been sensible all along until now, and are you going to make an idiot of yourself because this "lay gnid swell" has handsome eyes and pays you compliments? An Englishman, too—and you doubly bound to hate all Englishmen! Bah! Mignonnette, you little simpleton! I'm ashamed of you! Let him see your folly, and be served as your mother was before you!'

So Mignonnette guarded her secret with fierce jealousy, disgusted with herself; and would have been torn to pieces by wild horses before she would give him—this particular him—one encouraging word, or look, or smile. On this bright April evening she was on her way to a certain patient of hers, whose right leg had been blown off by an explosion, and who was otherwise so very seriously injured that the chances of his recovery were as ten to one. He lay—the last of a long, long row, the amber glitter of the sunset lighting his bloodless, pain-drawn face—awfully still and corpse-like.

'Mike,' the little Amazon said, bending over him, 'I have come at last. I tried to be here sooner, but there were so many poor patients who had a word to say to me that I could not. And how is it with you now?'

The haggard face brightened; the dulled eyes lit up.

'Ah, little queen, I knew you would come! God bless that tender heart that never forgets one of us! You'll write a letter for me, mam'selle, to my poor old mother in Ireland?'

'Certainly, Mike, with pleasure—as many letters as you please, until you are able to write yourself. That will be soon, I am confident. What shall I say?'

'Well, you see, mam'selle, it's an old story, and a long story, and it's more about another than myself. The old mother nursed him, Mignonnette, and he was as dear to her as the apple of her eye. I've kept the story to myself by his orders for twenty years; but now, when I've one leg in the grave, it's time I made a clean breast of it. I saved Lord Roderic Desmond's life mam'-

selle, from the hangman, first, and then from that devil's own limb after, his cousin Gerald. It's a long story, mam'selle, but I want you to tell mother the whole thing, so I know you'll listen.'

'I'll listen, with pleasure, Mike. Go on.'

'Well, little queen,' the sick man said, 'it's twenty years ago, as I told you, that I returned home to Clontarf, after a long voyage, mate of the Dancing Dervish. The first news I heard upon landing was about the worst news I could hear—that my foster-brother, Lord Roderic Desmond, only son of the Earl of Clontarf, was in prison, condemned to death for the murder of a little cottage-girl, Kathleen O'Neal. He was innocent, of course. I knew it as well then as I do now, and I swore a mighty oath I would free him, or die with him.

'Well, mam'selle, I kept that oath. I freed him from prison; I took him to a lonely place on the seashore, and left him there, while I went for a boat to take him to the Dancing Dervish. On my way I met his cousin, Gerald Desmond—a lawyer, and the blackest devil alive.

'But I thought him his friend, and so did Lord Roderic himself, and I told him what had happened, and begged him to go to his cousin while I brought the boat.

'He went—the cowardly cut-throat!—and what passed between them I never knew. Only as I rounded the point and came in sight of the cliff where I had left Lord Rory, I saw two men struggling in a death grip. I heard the report of a pistol. Then one tumbled backward into the sea, and the other fled like a madman from the spot.

'I rowed with all my might, mam'selle, and I reached the place as the body arose. He was not dead—he was not even senseless—he was badly wounded; but the bullet, aimed at his heart, had missed its mark. I drew him into the boat. I had the strength of giant in that hour, mam'selle, and I put for the Dancing Dervish. Half an hour after, and we were on our way to Melbourne, with Lord Roderic lying like a dead man in the cabin below.

'I told no one on board who he was—it would have been fatal—they would have given him up at once. The captain was a friend of mine, and an easy, good-natured old cove, and kept him, and doctored him, and took care of him, and when we reached Melbourne he was nearly as well as ever. But he was an altered man—a score of years could not have changed him as he changed during that voyage. It was not that his looks differed much—and I think, little queen, you never saw any one in your life half as handsome as Lord Rory.'

Mignonnette shrugged her shoulders with a very French gesture of impatient disdain. 'Handsome! Ah, bah! What have men to do with beauty? Let them be brave, and strong, and clever—and what does a straight nose and a pair of bright eyes matter? I never knew a really handsome man yet who was not a born idiot, or else tyrannical and selfish, and cruel as Nero! Don't talk to me of handsome men—I've seen the animals, and despise them. Your Lord Rory was no better than the rest, I dare say.'

'Ah, but begging your pardon, he was, mam'selle. He was neither an idiot nor a tyrant. As I said, he changed out of all knowledge on the passage out. He had grown still as death; he seemed stunned, dazed like, by the knowledge of his cousin's guilt. They had been friends from boyhood, and Lord Rory loved him like a brother. And now he knew that Gerald Desmond had always hated him, and had lifted his hand against his life.

'He never told me what passed between them that morning and—though I'm not a coward, mam'selle, there are some things I dare not do—I never dared ask Rory any questions about that day, and he never told me. Only when, a fortnight after our landing in Melbourne, I wanted to stay behind the Dancing Dervish, and remain with him, he refused point-blank to hear of it.

'"Nonsense, Mike, dear old boy!" he said, with one of his old looks; "you shall commit no such folly. You shall go to Rio Janeiro in the ship, and I will remain where I am for news from home, and you will find me here, safe and sound, when you come back."

'Well, mam'selle, the end of the matter was that he had his way, and I went. It was hard to part, but—but there are more hard things in the world than anything else, I went out to Rio, and some other parts, and it was two years before the Dancing Dervish got back to Melbourne again.

'When we got back he was gone. There was a letter for me, dated six months before—I have never parted with it since. Here it is now—a good deal smeared and torn, but maybe you can make it out.'

The sick man drew from his neck a little silk bag, and from the bag the dingy remains of the letter. It was soiled and torn, and the ink was faded; but the bold, clear characters were still perfectly distinct.

'Read it for yourself, mam'selle,' Mike Muldoon said. 'It's the first and last I ever had from him. I know no more than the dead what became of Lord Rory.' The girl

took it; the fading light was dim, but with the first glance at the writing she recoiled as though she had seen a ghost. With an exclamation of amazement, of consternation, she tore it open and read rapidly:

'DEAR OLD MIKE: When your honest eyes see this I shall have left Melbourne forever. I have had news from Ireland—news that you, too, have heard, doubtless, long ere now. My father is dead; he reigns in the old man's stead, and she is his wife. My trust in man and woman has ceased forever. I do not tell you whither I go—I hardly know myself, and it matters little. God bless you, my brave old Mike, and good-by!

'I will never return to the old land. I am a felon and an outcast, as you know, and can claim no legal rights. I hardly think I should try to, if I could. Let the friend I trusted, the woman I loved, be happy if they can, and enjoy their new honours in peace. They will never be disturbed by me. I have discarded the old name with the rest, and I sign myself by the new one, under which I begin a new life.

ROBERT DRUMMOND.'

As she read the last word—the name—a low, wailing cry broke from the pale lips of Mignonnette, the black eyes were dialated, the dark face white and wild. 'Robert Drummond,' she repeated—'Robert Drummond! And I know all—at last, at last!'

CHAPTER II.

MIGNONETTE'S SECRET.

The sick man half raised himself on his elbow, and stared at her. The face of the little actress, in the luminous dusk of the silvery spring evening, was white as his own, her black eyes dilated, and blankly staring at the faded and crumpled note she held.

'What is it, Mam'selle Mignonnette?' Mike Muldoon asked suspiciously, 'Did you ever meet Lord Roderic Desmond?'

Mignonnette looked at him, aroused from her startled trance, and broke into a laugh—a laugh that was strangely different from the silvery girlish laughter he had often heard from those pretty lips. 'Did I ever know Lord Roderic Desmond? You dear, old, simple fellow, where should I—Minette, the actress—ever meet a live lord? Oh, no; I never knew your Lord Roderic—your handsome paragon of perfection—but I did once know a Robert Drummond.'

'Mam'selle!'

'There, there! easy, my brother,' Don't jump so, you'll do yourself mischief. Yes, I once knew a Robert Drummond—a very handsome man, too, my good Mike, but not in the least like your brave, your magnanimous, your heroic Lord Rory. Come! I'll tell you all about him. One pretty story deserves another.'

She sat down by the bedside again, the deepening dusk hiding her face and its expression entirely from the anxious eyes of the sick man. 'Nearly eighteen years ago, Mike—the time corresponds, you see—only another odd coincidence, of course—there came to Toronto a young gentleman who called himself Robert Drummond. I say gentleman, because this handsome Robert Drummond, I have heard say, looked more like an exiled prince than an every-day Citristian, and teacher of English and mathematics in the "Toronto Commercial and Classical Academy"—which he was.

'He spoke like a courtier and bowed like a king, and carried himself with a grave and lofty grace, that was the awe and admiration of all who knew him. Where he came from, what his past history might have been, were dead secrets.

'He was the most silent and reticent of men, and no one dared question the haughty stranger, who looked with such a proud, grand seigneur glance upon all who came near him. They set him down for an Englishman; but even that was only supposition. Well, this handsome and haughty teacher of English and mathematics boarded in the house of a Toronto mechanic—a poor man, a Frenchman—named Chateauney, because, I suppose, he was too poor to board at a hotel. M. Chateauney had one daughter—beautiful as all the angels, so I have heard—just seventeen—my age now, Mike—impulsive, impassioned, headstrong, wayward—all that there is of the reckless and wild, if you will. She saw this beautiful English prince every day, and she fell in love with him—as these passionate, fiery natures will love—madly. And he—he looked at her with great, blue, weary eyes—eyes that saw her beauty, and never thought of it any more than if it had been wax or wood. 'That drove her to desperation, and she—it was a mad and unwomanly thing to do, my good Mike—she soon changed all that; she made him look at her; she made him know how fiercely she loved him. She was as a little leopard; if she lost him, she should die! Monsieur Robert Drummond listened to the frantic girl before him in pale amaze. He was grave and startled for a moment, then he broke into a faint, strange sort of laugh.

'"What does it matter?" he said. "I might as well, and she's really very pretty!

Thanks, my beauty, this is an unexpected honour; but if it will make you happy, why—I dare say I might as well marry as not. Only I warn you I'm a poor man, and likely to remain so all my life. If that be no drawback, why—I am very much at your service!" A strange wooing—was it not, Mike? And three weeks after, M'lle Chateauney, looking beautiful, in white and orange flowers, went to church and became Madame Robert Drummond.

'It was an odd marriage—it should have been a happy one, since she had the desire of her heart, and he was too much of an aristocrat ever to be anything but courteous and kind. He was too courteous; he did not care for her—no, not one straw; and tossing in his dreams at night, he called upon another name—a woman's name—not hers. And over his heart, sleeping and waking, he carried a woman's picture—a face far more lovely than her own; for this jealous wife looked at it while he slept, and her love turned to bitterness and hate. He was colder to her than ice. Even when their child was born, he just glanced at it with those weary indifferent eyes, then away and out into that unknown world he had left behind him. The insensate picture in his breast was dearer to him than wife and child.

'She grew reckless after that—bitter desperate. I told you there was wild blood in her. Before he had ever met her, she had run away from home and joined a troupe of strolling players, who took her for her beauty and her voice; for she sang—oh, Heaven y! Her father went after her and brought her back, and her husband never knew. When her recklessness reached its height—when his coldness, his insulting indifference, could no longer be borne—when he had driven her mad with jealousy, she took her child, one day, and fled far from him—far from home—a desperate wanderer, resolved rather to die than ever to look upon his stony face again. She did not die. She went on the stage once more. She was not much of an actress, but she was so handsome, and sang so sweetly, that managers accepted her, and paid her a pittance, upon which they lived—she and her child. And when years went by, and the little one grew up, she went on the stage also, and mother and daughter wandered over the world together. Many years after, when the daughter was nearly sixteen, they came back to Toronto. The unloved wife came back to die; her heart had broken. She was a worn-out, aged woman, with white hair, at thirty-three.

'She was dying of a terrible pulmonary disease—and dying, the old love came back and she longed with unutterable longing to see her husband once more, to hear his voice, to feel his kiss upon her dying lips. She had never heard of him from the hour she had left him; he had never searched for her, very likely. What did he care for her or her child—whether they lived or died? She went back to Toronto to find her father and mother dead years before, and her husband gone, no one knew whither, immediately after their death. That blow killed her. Three days after, she died in her daughter's arms.'

The soft, low, French-accented voice of Mignonnette paused suddenly. With the last words she arose to go.

'It is time I was at the theatre, Mike,' she said, in a totally different tone, pulling out a tiny watch. 'See how we waste time telling stories! I must leave you to-night, and I wish you a good night's rest. To-morrow, early, I will be back to write a letter to your mother in Ireland.'

'But, mam'selle,' the sick patient gasped, eagerly, 'for heaven's sake stay a moment! Was your Robert Drummond Lord Roderic Desmond?'

The little actress laughed—the same strange laugh as before her story.

'He wasn't mine, Mike. I'd be sorry to own him! And he wasn't your Lord Roderic, of course. The Robert Drummond of my story was a cold-blooded ingrate villain, whom I hate—whom I—hate!' slowly, and with clenched teeth; 'while your young lord was a sort of Irish archangel. He would never break a loving wife's heart by coldness, and cruelty, and neglect, would he?'

'No,' said Mike Muldoon, resolutely, 'he would not! But from all you've said, I'll be hanged if I don't think think the fault was the woman's from first to last! She was no better than she ought to be—that's my opinion, mam'selle, begging your pardon, if she was any friend of yours. She made him marry her, whether he would or no, and I'd see any woman at the dickens before they'd do that with me. She didn't ask beforehand, so she had no right to raise the deuce about it after. And so you say he was always civil and kind to her, and still she ran away from him, without rhyme or reason? Oh, bedad! Miss Minette, your Mrs. Drummond was a fool—no more nor less!'

Mignonnette's dark face flushed with angry impatience, and her black eyes flashed. Still she laughed—a trifle bitterly.

'Oh, of course! Trust a man to judge a woman? You are all alike—hearts of stone. The best of you can't understand us—hardly

to be wondered at, perhaps, when the best of us can't understand ourselves. But, Mike—'

'Ye-, mam'selle.'

'I want to ask you a question. I feel interested in your ill-fated Lord Roderic. You told me he was an earl's son?'

'His only son, mam'selle—the earl of Clontarf!'

'The earl is dead, I suppose?'

'Years ago, little queen—dead of a broken heart.'

'Yes! and if this Lord Roderic had his right, he would be earl of Clontarf now?'

'He would, mam'selle. More's the pity and the shame that he's not.'

'Well, suppose he were—suppose he had married, and had a daughter—she would bear a title, and be presented at court in tiara and diamonds, and have the best in the kingdom at her feet?'

'She would, mam'selle. There isn't older or better blood in the three kingdoms than the Desmonds of Clontarf. And she would be a beauty, too—Lord Rory's daughter could not help it.'

Mignonnette laughed again—that laugh which sounded so strangely to honest Mike from her lips!

'No doubt? Well, his cousin, you say, holds the title and estates? This wicked Gerald Desmond—is that how you called him?—is earl of Clontarf to-day?'

'He is.'

'And has he a daughter?'

'Aye, that he has, and a wonderful beauty, I've heard say, too. He mother, they tell me, was that before her. She must have been, or, Lord Rory would never have loved her as he did.'

'And her name — was her name Inez, Mike?'

'Mam'selle!' again the sick man started up in amaze, 'are you a witch? I never told you her name!'

'Did'nt you? Perhaps I am a witch! At least I know it, you see. And your Lord Rory loved her like that? Now, if she had loved him one tithe as dearly as my Mrs. Drummond loved her husband, she never would have wedded this false cousin.'

'You're right, mam'selle—no more she would. But it's always the way with women—on with the new love, and off with the old, at a moment's warning.'

'My good Mike,' Mignonnette said, with a French shrug, 'ain't you a little severe? I think it is just the other way—but that is an open question. One last word—tell me the name of Lord Clontarf's daughter.'

'She is the Lady Evelyn Desmond.'

'Evelyn! Ah!'

She uttered the name like a cry—recolling. Once more Mike looked at her in wonder.

'Sure, then, you'd puzzle a Philadelphia lawyer to-night, mam'selle. Upon my conscience, I believe you know more what I've been telling you than I know myself. If you do—'

'Nonsense, Mike! I know nothing—nothing, I tell you! Never mind me—the moon is at the full, that is all. It affects half-idiots, you know, and I'm one. I grow more of a little fool every day. Good-night, Mike pleasant rest. I'll write the letter to-morrow.'

And, with these words, she flitted away out of the ward.

Mignonnette passed out of the gate of the hospital into the gas-lit city streets. Up in the azure, the spring stars shone. Many people were abroad. As she neared her destination, a gentleman in a loose, light overcoat, slowly sauntered up, with a cigar in his mouth, caught a full view of her face under the gas-light. He stopped at once.

'Mignonnette! you here, and at this hour and alone? Surely I am the debtor of some fortunate accident.'

Mignonnette glanced up, never halting for a second, in her rapid walk, at the handsome face and tall, gallant figure. 'No accident in the world, M. Trevannance. I merely overstayed my time at the hospital, and I don't in the least see how it can concern you, or,' mimicking his courtly tone, 'make you the debtor of some most happy accident!'

'By giving me the privilege of escorting you to the theatre—your present destination of course. Do me the honour to accept my arm, mademoiselle. At this hour it is quite out of the question you should be abroad alone.'

'Your solicitous, fatherly care is quite thrown away, Monsieur Trevannance. And I won't take your arm, thank you! I can get along very well without it.'

'You will permit me, at least, to accompany you as far as the theatre door? It is my destination, also.'

'I beg your pardon—don't tell stories! You were going in entirely the opposite direction when I met you. And—if you will excuse my saying so, monsieur—I prefer to be alone.'

'But why? You are as hard to gain an interview with as Queen Victoria—harder, by Jove! That old duenna of yours guards you as though you were a living Koh-i-noor.'

'So I am—only a great deal more precious.'

'As if I did not know that—to my cost. Mademoiselle, you are cruel. I owe my life to your care, and yet you only save it to render it supremely miserable. You know I adore you.'

But the Brummel nonchalance of his tone never altered as he said it, and the lazy, handsome hazel eyes, looking down upon her, burned with no very passionate ardour. Yet, at the slow, lazy words, the downward gleams of his brown eyes, the blood flushed red in the dark face of the Red Queen, despite her every effort. She caught her breath, and bit her rosy under-lip fiercely, as she stopped short, all at once, and faced him.

'M. Trevannance, in your country—in London—it may be the correct thing to impertinently follow an actress, whether she will or no, and insult her in the public streets. But this is another country, and even aristocrats like you are amenable to the law. Yonder stands a policeman—follow me another step, and I will give you in charge.'

Her fiery black eyes flashed up at him with a passion and a rage he could not understand. Her little hands under her shawl were clenched. He stepped back at once, removing his hat.

'I beg your pardon! it will not be necessary. Believe me, I had no intention of insulting you. Good-evening, mademoiselle.'

He bowed to her with courtly grace, and turned away, his handsome face quite imperturbable. 'By George!' he said to himself, leisurely relighting his cigar, 'what a little leopardess it is! I admire her pluck. I admire her—yes, considerably more than the affianced of Lady Evelyn Desmond has any right to. Ah, well! we'll change all that. My lady is not so deeply in love with me, or I with her, but that such trifles may be overlooked.' He sauntered on, his slow, graceful walk in striking contradistinction to the bustle about him.

And Mimi Bonnette, with eyes afire, and cheeks aflame, hurried on twice as fast as before. 'Bah, bah, bah!' she said to herself, fiercely. 'What a little fool you grow! You ought to be strangled—you. I hate him, with his slow, drawling voice, his white hands, his indolent, languid glances, and his insolent words—yes, insolent, in spite of his courteous tone and elegant politeness. I hate him, and one day I shall have the pleasure of telling him so.' She reached the theatre; the play that night was Sheridan Knowles' 'Love Chase,' with the 'Loan of a Lover:' M'lle Minette was in both—beautiful, bright, bewitching. She needed no rouge to-night; her dusky cheeks burned bright red, her voice rang, her black eyes flashed fire; her laugh was as clear and sweet as a silver bell. And who was to know that under all that brightness and beauty, the heart beneath the velvet bodice beat with a dull, bitter pain?

Above her, in one of the boxes, the centre of a gay group of richly-dressed ladies, sat her handsome suitor of the street. She saw him there almost without looking, and when bouquets showered upon her in a floral deluge, it was his hand which flung that exquisite cluster of half-blown roses. She saw them fall. She looked straight at him, and, setting her gay little boot upon them, ground out before his eyes all their beauty and bloom. The next instant the curtain fell, and the pet of the audience was gone.

'Why did she do that, Mr. Trevannance?' one bright young beauty asked the gentleman beside her, over her white shoulder. 'She trampled your flowers under her feet.'

'Where she trampled his heart long ago,' laughed the beauty's brother. 'Eh, Trevannance? We all fall like corn before the reaper under the black eyes of the Red Queen.'

The gentleman questioned laughed slightly, but did not otherwise answer; and the little beauty beside him discreetly asked no more. She was too well satisfied as he drew her arm through his, and led her with tenderest care, as though she were the only little beauty in the world, through the well-dressed throng. They drove to a grand ball, and the pretty American heiress waltzed her heart entirely away in his encircling arms. But the flashing black eyes of Minette, the actress, haunted him strangely—aye, to the exclusion of the proud, calm, violet eyes of peerless Evelyn Desmond. And while the brilliant hours sped on, strung to sweetest music in those elegant rooms ablaze with gaslight and the glitter of laces, and jewels, and fair faces, where Vivian Trevannance waltzed, and looked handsome as your dream of a Greek god, Minette, the actress, sat in her room alone, by the open window, looking at the bright spring stars, golden in the mellow purple of the midnight sky. The brilliant dark eyes had lost their fire; they were very dim and misty with inward pain. The flushed cheeks were strangely cold and pale.

'To think what I am, and what I might be!' she thought, bitterly. 'An actress, and—an earl's daughter. Would he dare look at me—speak to me—as he does, if he knew all? Lady Evelyn Desmond!' She repeated the name slowly. 'A beautiful

and high-sounding name; and I am Minette, the actress. Is she his Evelyn, I wonder?' She lifted from the table beside her a locket, set with gems, opened it, and gazed by the starlight on the pictured face. A lovely and haughty patrician face—far more perfect than her own. On the reverse, in golden, glittering letters, was the name, 'Evelyn.' As suddenly as she had taken it up she closed it again, and flung it from her. 'Who can wonder that he is blind to every other face after that? And yet, in laces and jewels I would be fair, too. Ah, Robert Drummond, I have a long and bitter score to settle with you, if we ever meet.'

CHAPTER III.

COLONEL DRUMMOND.

The street lamps were just lit in the silvery, luminous dusk of a July evening. A tender, young sickle moon gleamed in the violet arch, with one or two tremulous stars shining beside it, and the soft spring wind cooled the sultriness of what had been the heat of a mid-summer day. And gazing with listless, dreamy eyes at all the tranquil beauty above, at all the stir and bustle of the street below, Vivian Trevannance sat at his hotel chamber-window, and smoked his cigar—Vivian Trevannance, who had never gone 'up the Nile and down the Niger,' with his Viennese friend; who had changed his mind at the last moment, as he had an old trick of doing, and come to America instead. 'Lion hunting and jackal-shooting may be very lively amusement. Cumming and those other fellows say so,' he said, in his nonchalant way: 'but I think it's even livelier out on the Plains. I'll take a trip to Colorado, instead of Central Africa, and see as good game as lions knocked over.' A month later, he was on the Plains with a hunting party, right in the heart of the Indian depredations, and if ever he came near being excited and moved out of his constitutional indolence, it was to see how bravely the little bands of government troops fought against the wily and desperate Indians. 'By Jove! its glorious!' he cried his eyes kindling with a warrior's fire. 'I almost wish I had been born an American, that I, too, might join in this exciting fray. I suppose man possesses, in common with the inferior animals, the blood-thirst, or I never would feel the temptation to join these dashing cavalry so strongly as I do.'

Trevannance was nearer being 'cursed with the curse of an accomplished prayer' than he dreamed of. Riding alone one day through the glowing woods, he managed to lose himself completely, nor could any effort of his find the right path. There was neither mortal nor habitation in view, and he was making up his mind, as the evening closed about him, that he was destined to spend the night in the woods, when, mounting a hillock, he beheld in the plain below a duel to the death going on. A band of United States cavalry were encircled by thrice their number of Indians, and were fighting as men only fight for their lives, cheered on by one at their head, whose sword gleamed, and flashed, and fell like the sword of the Lion-Hearted among Saladin and his Saracens. Trevannance looked but once—then, with a mighty shout and levelled revolver, he was down like a whirlwind, and charged with the weaker side. It was a bloody and bitter contest. The little soldier band fought with reckless desperation, cheered on by their leader, a stalwart, magnificent-looking man, whose long, fair hair streamed in the wind, and whose blue eyes gleamed with the fiery war-light. Side by side with this leader, Trevannance fought—fought like a very fury. Twice his horses was shot under him—twice he sprang upon the backs of others, whose riders had fallen in the *melee*. Victory hung doubtful long, but as night closed it fluttered to the banner of the fair-haired officer, and the Indian band, routed and slaughtered, fled helter-skelter into the woodland, and were lost in the deepening night. The officer might have borne a charmed life, for while bullets whizzed like hail about him, he had come through the sharp ordeal unscathed. Half his little band lay dead around him, and as he turned to speak to his unlooked-for and unknown volunteer, Trevannance reeled and fell from his saddle like a log.

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The sunlight of many days after was flooding the hospital wards with its amber glitter, when consciousness returned to Trevannance. He opened his eyes, and they fell upon a young, dark, girlish face—a very pretty face—bending compassionately, upon him. 'What is it?' he asked, faintly. 'Where am I? What has happened?'

'Nothing very unusual, monsieur,' answered his piquant-looking nurse. 'You had rather a sharp skirmish, got a bullet through the lungs, and have been out of your mind for some time—that is all. Mere scratches, monsieur—nothing to what half the poor fellows with you got. They tell me you fought well. Very good of you, to-be-sure—an Englishman and a tourist, too.'

'Ah, I remember,' Trevannance said, faintly. 'And the officer who fought so bravely—where is he?'

'Don't know,' said Mignonnette. 'Have not heard—not his name, even although he may be in the city, for he had you brought here. Now, you are not to talk. Talk's exhausting, and you're one of my patients, and I'm responsible for you. He may drop in through the day to see you, if he be in St. Louis.'

Which he did—a tall and soldiery-looking personage, who announced himself as Captain Drummond, and who heartily thanked Trevannance for his timely succour in the fight. 'It was a close thing,' he said. 'You came in the nick of time. I wish we had you for good, Mr. Trevannance; but that is not to be hoped for. We are in St. Louis now, you know. Will you remain here, or do you particularly wish to be removed to your hotel? I rather fear there is no choice however.'

'I will remain,' Trevannance answered. 'My very pretty little nurse tells me my wounds are 'mere scratches,' and she intends to be "responsible" for me. As there is nothing half so good-looking at the Southern Hotel, I will stay in any case where I am.'

Captain Drummond laughed. 'So your nurse is young and pretty, is she? Very unwise in the powers that be! Instead of allaying fevers, young and pretty nurses will create them. I am not lucky enough to know anything from experience. My time has always been spent in camp and in the field, not in hospital!'

'And you call that unlucky? By Jove! I envy you. What a gloriously exciting life yours must be. Are you bullet-proof, Captain Drummond? or have you hidden armour under your blue and brass, that you pass through those hail-storms of bullets unscathed!'

Captain Drummond laughed again. 'They say so, at least. My luck hitherto has been marvellous—that of my whole company, in fact. The call us, you know, the "Devil's Own"—suggestive, eh? Well, I am more than thankful that your gallant conduct in that fight did not cost you even dearer than it has. Bad enough, of course; but, 'pon my life, I thought the Indians had finished you for good. I shouldn't leave St. Louis now with a clear conscience if I didn't leave you in such safe hands.'

'You leave, then?' said Trevannance, with some regret. He liked the gallant officer who had fought so splendidly, and who looked at him with such frank, genial eyes.

'Immediately. The "Devil's Own" are never so happy as when in field and fray. They like fighting, I believe, for fighting's sake. There's a little of the tiger in the best of us once we smell blood. Farewell, Mr. Trevannance! I may return to St. Louis again before you leave. Meantime, don't fall in love with your pretty nurse.'

The two men parted with real regret, slight as their acquaintance had been. Captain Drummond went West to his ominously-named regiment, and Trevannance remained under the absolute government of Mlle. Mignonnette, in the greater peril of the two, far and away.

As the days strung themselves into weeks, he lingered still, convalescent, to-be-sure, but not at all anxious to leave. His bright little nurse read for him, and talked to him, and sang for him, if the fancy took her, and nursed him with tenderest care, and—lost her heart incontinently. Trevannance left the hospital quite restored, and went back to his old quarters. He did not leave the city. It was very pleasant there, and Mignonnette was the bewitching little actress of the season.

And the winter went by, and the six months' probation was at an end, and still the betrothed of Lady Evelyn Desmond lingered in those pleasant pastures. Why, he could hardly have told you himself. He felt infinitely content there, and the proud, serene face of his beautiful bride-elect very rarely troubled his dreams. So, on this spring night when he should have been at her feet, imploring her to fix their wedding day, he sat at his window in the Southern Hotel, and smoked his cheroot, and saw—Mignonnette's big, black, flashing eyes athwart the drifting wreaths of smoke. There was the discreet tap of a waiter at the door.

'A gentleman inquiring for you, sir—an officer—Colonel Drummond, of the—th.'

'Drummond—at last! Light the gas, William, and show him up at once.'

The servant obeyed. Five minutes later, and there entered with the unmistakable cavalry swing, Colonel Drummond, of the 'Devil's Own.' The two men grasped hands with as cordial a pressure as though they had been old friends. Some mesmeric sympathy bound them in warm liking at once.

'At last!' Trevannance repeated. 'My dear colonel, I am delighted to meet you again! So they have given you two or three steps since I saw you last? Well, no man better deserved it, if the glowing accounts the newspapers give your exploits be half true. And you have been dangerously wounded, too? Your charmed life left you

for once. You look scarcely fit to be abroad yet.'

He was a very tall, very fair man, this Colonel Drummond, with chestnut hair, and beard and moustache of tawny gold.

The face at which Trevannance looked, thin and bloodless from recent illness, was, with all his pallor, singularly handsome, and the blue eyes were large and beautiful as a woman's.

'I have but just arrived,' he said, seating himself by the open window. 'On the invalid list yet. It will be weeks, months, they tell me, before I am fit for duty again. That is the worst of it. I confess it was some hope of finding you here still that induced me to return to St. Louis, and yet I was surprised when I found my hope realized. Has our charming little hospital nurse anything to do with it?'

He smiled as he asked the question, and the smile lit up his frank, fair face with rare light and beauty. Smiles were not very frequent visitors there. The general expression of that handsome countenance was a grave weariness, a worn, tired look. Those azure eyes, that flashed with a soldier's fire so brightly in the heat of the fray, had a haggard mistiness always in repose.

'Well, I don't know,' Trevannance made answer, wincing a little at the home-thrust; 'perhaps she has. I should have been in England three weeks ago, that is certain. However, all delays must end now—I leave by the next steamer. My father-in-law elect has had a stroke of paralysis, and lies dangerously ill. I can't say his lordship has a particularly deep hold upon my affections, but I suppose, in common decency, a fellow should be on the spot.'

'To console the fair betrothed, most certainly. So you are to be congratulated? The lady is a compatriot, of course?'

'Yes—no—that is—'pon my life, I don't know whether she is or not. An Irish father and a Castilian mother—Castile for a birthplace. What do you think of that?'

Colonel Drummond was engaged in lighting a cigar. He ceased the occupation suddenly, and looked his companion full in the face.

'An Irish father and a Castilian mother!' he repeated, slowly: 'rather an unusual combination, is it not? Might one ask the lady's name?'

'Oh, certainly. Lady Evelyn Desmond—otherwise, poetically, "La Rose de Castile."'

Colonel Drummond turned slowly away, and quietly and deliberately lit his cigar.

'I have heard that name before,' he said; 'read it, I fancy, in the Morning Post. Only daughter, is she not, of the Earl of Clontarf?'

Trevannance nodded, looking out of the window. In the clear light below he saw Minnette, the actress, pass, at the moment, with the old French-woman, who lived with her and 'played propriety.'

'And so you are to marry her?' the American officer slowly said, puffing at his Havana; 'she is rarely lovely, of course? I saw a full account of her presentation at Court, a year ago—her beauty, her diamonds, took fully half a column of the Morning Post to themselves. And you are the fortunate man! Permit me to congratulate you, Mr. Trevannance. She is a great heiress as well as a great beauty, is she not? What a wonderfully lucky fellow you are!'

'Why, yes, I am rather fortunate. Best blood of Ireland and Spain—perfect beauty, perfect grace, and as you say, heiress of a noble fortune. The Desmonds were poor as church mice until the Spanish alliance filled their coffers with doubloons. Yes, the chosen of my Lady Evelyn should consider himself a most fortunate man.'

Colonel Drummond removed his cigar, and looked thoughtfully at his companion.

'He should, but Mr. Trevannance does not. You are not particularly ecstatic over it; though, to be ecstatic over anything, is dead against all the creeds of your order. Your Lord of Clontarf is one of the cleverest peers of the realm.'

'So he is. Fearfully and wonderfully versed in politics—power the dream of his life—ambition his god! And yet, he might have wedded his daughter to a duke, and didn't.'

'You are a favourite of his, it would seem?'

'Well, no; not that, either. He and the governor are a modern middle-aged Damon and Pythias, and deeply imbued with the notion of uniting the houses of Desmond and Trevannance. And, like dutiful children, my lady and I bowed and yielded at once. "Honour thy father," etc. We are very deeply in love with each other, of course, in a gentlemanly and lady-like sort of way. Drummond,' taking an easier position in his arm-chair, 'suppose you come to England next week and be present at the nuptials? It's rather a trial of nerve, they say, that sort of thing. Have you ever attempted it?'

'Have I ever attempted it? Marriage, do you mean? Well, yes!'

'Then, in common sympathy with a fellow martyr, you will accompany me, and see safely through the ordeal? Seriously.

my dear fellow, I wish you would. I don't want to part company so soon, and I should very much like to present you to the Lady Evelyn Trevannance that is to be.'

A faint flush came over the face of the cavalry officer. His blue eyes glowed for a moment, then the light faded and left him very pale.

'Thanks! It would be a pleasure, no doubt; but, no! My work is here, and here I stay.'

'And yet—pardon me!—England is your home—your birth-place?'

'You think so? No, you mistake; I am no Englishman.'

'You are no American, then, whatever your nationality. However, I won't be impertinently inquisitive, and I can only deeply regret your refusal. And now—apropos of nothing—I am due at the theatre to-night. Mignonnette plays "La Reine Rouge." Will you come? Very well worth seeing, I assure you.'

Drummond looked for a moment as though about to refuse; but, with the gentle temper that was habitual to the man, he arose with a certain weariness.

'It is so long since I have been present at anything of the sort, that I fear I will fail to appreciate even your favourite actress. However, as well there as elsewhere; so lead on. I follow.'

They left the hotel together, and sauntered through the shimmering dusk to the theatre. The American officer was very grave and silent; the Englishman talked languidly; but, he, too, was not especially brilliant.

He was thinking how soon 'La Reine Rouge' would be a dream of the past, and the flashing black orbs of the actress exchanged for the proud, serene eyes of the earl's daughter—thinking it, too, with something nigh akin to a pang of regret.

The house was crowded; it always was when La Mignonnette played. The two made their way to the Englishman's invariable box, as the curtain fell on the second scene.

It was in the third the pet of the playgoers, appeared, and as she bounded lightly before them, a little Amazon queen, *en Zouave*, in scarlet cap and Turkish trousers, the black eyes afire, the cheeks bright with rouge or colour, the rosy lips dimpled with smiles, a perfect storm of applause resounded through the place.

She was so beautiful, so sparkling, so piquant, and she played so well, in her audacious dress, and with her saucy glances, she was their idol of the hour!

'What do you think of her?' Trevannance asked his companion, carelessly; 'bewitching, eh? Too young, and pretty, and clever, I think, for the life she has chosen.'

There was no reply. Surprised a little, he glanced around. Colonel Drummond sat like a man turned to stone—petrified with some unutterable amaze—staring aghast at the brilliant little soldier-queen. There was an absolute horror in his pallid face and dilated eyes.

'My dear fellow! For heaven's sake! what is it? Have you seen the Gorgon's head, that you sit there, turning to stone?

But Drummond never answered; that thrall of horror or amaze held him fast. Trevannance took him by the arm

'Wake up, Drummond! What the mischief ails you?'

The cavalry officer turned his eyes slowly from the sparkling vision, ablaze in the gaslight, and looked at his interrogator.

'My God!' he said, in a hushed, hoarse voice, 'it is Minette Chateauney!'

'Chateauney?' Trevannance repeated. 'So that is her name, is it, at last? We all knew her as Minette, but until now her other name was a mystery So she is a Canadienne, after all? I might have been sure of it, with those long, almond-shaped black eyes.'

But Drummond never heard him. His gaze had gone back to the audacious little amazon queen, so brilliant and so bright before him.

'It must be the child!' he said, in the same hushed voice. 'But, great heavens! how like her mother!'

'Oh-ho!' exclaimed Trevannance: 'so you knew her mother, my friend? Now for Minette's history, at last! Really, this grows interesting—mysterious as a sensational novel! And you knew the mother of pretty Minette? Make a clean breast of the whole thing, dear boy!'

'Knew her mother?' Drummond repeated, blankly. 'Yes. Good heaven! it is like seeing a ghost! She is the living image of Minette Chateauney, as I saw her first, eighteen years ago. My poor Minette!' repeated Vivian Trevannance, glancing at him with his indolent eyes. 'And this is poor Minette's child! Now, who the dence, Colonel Drummond, was La Reine Rouge's father?'

'Trevannance!' exclaimed the soldier, paying no heed to a word he uttered; 'do you know her? Can I see her? I must see her, and to-night!'

'Quite impossible, my dear sir—not to be thought of! Mignonnette wouldn't grant an audience to the Emperor of all the Russias, after ten at night.'

'Then I will send her a note. I tell you, I must, and at once!'

'Do, by all means, if you find it the slightest relief. It will serve to light the manager's cigar! He has orders to burn, unopened, all letters left for Mignonnette behind the scenes. You see, my dear fellow, I know from painful experience.'

Drummond looked at him earnestly. He was strangely and deeply moved out of the stern calm that had grown second nature from long habit. Even now the momentary excitement was passing off, and the outward quietude returning.

'I regret that—no—I do not—I am glad she is so discreet—I can see her to-morrow, I suppose; and to-morrow will do. Meantime, Mr. Trevannance, will you tell me all you know of'—he glanced at his bill—'La Minette?'

'Undoubtedly—that all being very little. She is La Minette; she is of French extraction—Canadian French, of course; she is a charming actress; she is only seventeen years old, and as good as she is pretty. She has an old Frenchwoman living with her, going whithersoever she goes—a Madame Michaud—a very dragon of propriety and all the virtues. I have never heard a breath against the character of the little queen. She has no lovers—will not listen to a word, though her adorers are legion. Her charities are numberless. She gives with both hands, and the sick in the hospitals here look upon her as an angel of light. So she is—to them. That is the history of Mignonnette.'

'Thank you!' Colonel Drummond answered, in a suppressed voice; and under his beard the keen ear beside him heard a fervent 'Thank God!'

'And now, *mon* colonel,' Trevannance asked, coolly, 'one good turn deserves another. I have given you Minette's history—made your acquaintance with all appertaining to her I know. Now, my dear fellow, what is she to you?'

The blue eyes turned full and grave upon him. The calm voice answered, slowly and quietly: 'She is my daughter!'

CHAPTER IV.

FATHER AND LOVER.

Little Minette, with a wholesome horror of hotels and boarding-houses for such bewitching fairies as herself, had a tiny bijou of a furnished cottage in one of the quietest streets of the city. A little doll-house, snowy white, with a scrap of garden in front, two lilac bushes its only vegetation, a mimic parlour, and dining-room, and kitchen, and chambers. Here, with Madame Michaud, her 'sheep-dog,' a maid-of-all-work of the most diminutive proportions, to match the establishment, her canaries, her big Canadian wolf-hound, Loup, her books and her piano, Minette dwelt in her fairy chateau and entertained her friends. They were not many—the little actress made few intimacies. One or two of her female theatrical acquaintances, the manager, a few of her convalescent hospital patients, her dressmaker, her music teacher—these were the chief.

There were very many callers, very many cards left—dashing young gentlemen drove up to the little front door by the dozen; but Madame Michaud's shrewd, brown, nutcracker face, always imperturbably good-humoured, barred the entrance, and madame's cherry French voice piped to these gay Lotharios ever but one refrain—'Mam'selle is not at home, monsieur!'

Mr. Vivian Trevannance could have told you all about it—he had been there, you see, more than once or twice, or two dozen times; but mademoiselle was never at home, although her laughing, roguish face could be seen sparkling behind the lace curtains. In a low rocker, in her toy parlour, she lay back now, the bright morning sunlight streaming in between the curtains on the delicate carpet; her pretty, soft curls, so black, so silky, pushed from her temples; the morning paper lying idly on her lap. It was a cozy little room, with its profusion of books and birds, and flowers and pictures. Loup lay crouched at her feet, looking up, with big, loving eyes, at the face of his mistress.

A fine and costly piano half filled the room. Minette practised assiduously; she played brilliantly and sang delightfully; music was with her a passion. It was still not ten; but Minette had been out, and, in her street dress of black silk, a white band and knot of rose ribbon at her throat, she looked as much like a little nun as the dashing Zouave Queen of last night.

'Is it true,' she was musing, with a very thoughtful brow, 'or but a rumour, that he goes next week? He was in his usual place last night, but he threw me no flowers. I wish—I wish—I wish I had never seen his face! How happy I used to be! And now—ah, bah!—and now I'm a little fool!'

She opened her paper impatiently, glanced over its items, and was arrested in five minutes by one of brief paragraph:

'The many friends of Mr. Vivian Trevannance will regret his speedy departure for his native land. He leaves next Thursday in the Columbia.' That was all. The paper dropped in Minette's lap, and she

sat, staring blankly at the fireless, old-fashioned grate. It was true, then—he was really going—going to her—going to his bride and his bridal! She sat for nearly an hour quite still, a little paler than her wont, but otherwise unmoved. Then, drawing out her watch, and seeing the hour, she rose, with a long, shivering breath, and rang the bell.

Madame Michand, with her brown ever-smiling face, appeared.

'Mademoiselle rang?'

'Yes, madame. If Monsieur Trevannance—you know him, I think?—calls to-day, admit him.'

She turned away, opened her piano, and, sitting down, played bravely and brilliantly for nearly another hour. Suddenly, through the storm of melody, she heard the ting-a-ling of the door bell.

'Ah!' she said, with another long breath, "at last!'

The parlour-door opened. It was Madame Michand, with a card and a puzzled face.

'It is not Mr. Trevannance, my dear—it is a grand, tall gentleman, pale and handsome, and military and *distingue*. He has never been here before, and he bade me give you this. He must see you, he says.'

'Must!' Mignonnette arose, stately from the piano—'must! Give me the card.'

She took it, glanced at the name, and turned white as death; for the name was 'Robert Drummond,' and in pencil was written:

'I saw you last night. You're Minette Chauteauney's daughter. You know who I am. For your dead mother's sake, I conjure you to see me.'

For her dead mother's sake! Had some magnetic witchery told him that that was the only adjuration she would not scornfully refuse? She stood with the card in her hand, cold and white.

'The gentleman waits, my child,' madame said, puzzled by her changing face; 'shall I go and send him away?'

Minette looked up. Her heart, that seemed to have stopped beating for an instant, sent the blood suddenly surging back to her face. She reared her stately little little head erect, her lips compressed, her eyes ominously sparkling and bright. 'No. Show the gentleman in at once.'

Madame, considerably surprised, left the room to obey. Minette stood by the window, the card between her fingers, haughty as a young duchess. An instant later, and the all, stalwart form of Colonel Drummond towered in the doorway, which he had to stoop his head to pass, and father and daughter stood face to face for the first time. He was quite white with suppressed feeling—she erect, superb, defiant. And it was her clear, ringing voice that first spoke: "Colonel Drummond does me an unexpected honour! I knew he was in St. Louis, but I hardly thought he would care to see me.'

'You knew, then, who I was?'

'Why, yes, monsieur,' Minette said, carelessly. 'I suspected—I thought that Colonel Robert Drummond might be the Robert Drummond who drove his wife and child from him seventeen years ago. That was rather a dastardly act, although they say Colonel Drummond fights well. But physical prowess is often a villain's virtue.'

'You knew me?' he repeated, slowly, paying no heed to her stinging words. 'You knew I was here—you knew I was your father, and yet—'

Mignonnette broke into a laugh—a low, bitter, derisive laugh. 'What would monsieur have? Was I to go to you, to fling my arms round your neck, to cry out, as we do on the stage, "My long-lost father, behold your child!' So devoted a husband, so tender a parent, surely deserved no less! I have been cruelly ungrateful, have I not, M. le Colonel? And you very properly came here to chide me for my unfilial disrespect.'

'My child, how bitter you are. Was it your mother taught you this?'

'My mother!' Minette said, her mocking face turning upon him, flushed and passionate. 'My mother was an angel, and you are a demon. You dare to take her name on your lips!—you, who broke her heart, who drove her from you by your cruelty and neglect, who left her to beg, or starve, or die, as she chose, with her child. You dare come face to face with that child, grown a woman, and ask if her mother taught her to hate you? My mother was an angel, whose only fall was when she stooped to love you. She never taught me to hate you—no; despite her deep and deadly wrongs, she loved you, dastard and ingrate, to the last. With her dying breath she forgave you—as I never shall!' The impetuous voice stopped, choked by its own passion. She was pacing to and fro now, like a little Pythoness, her eyes flashing, her cheeks aflame.

Colonel Drummond, leaning lightly on the back of an arm-chair, listened in regretful silence to the wild torrent of reproach. 'My child,' he said, very gently, when she ceased, 'you do me less than justice. You have a brave and generous heart, they tell me, and the brave and generous should be just. If your dead mother stood here before

me, I do not think she could say I ever wilfully wronged her in word or deed in my life.'

'No,' Minette said bitterly—'oh, no, M. le Colonel! You were too courteous a gentleman, too grand a seigneur, to use brute force to a woman. You only married her, and broke her heart with your merciless coldness. You were only chillingly disdainful, and away up in the clouds above your bourgeois bride or back with the lady you loved and left in your native land. You only drove her mad with vain love and jealousy, and when she left you—you let her go!'

'Minette,' he said—'my daughter!' And at the word, uttered in that deep, melodious voice, the girl's face flushed, and her passionate heart throbbed. 'Will you not listen to me? Will you not try and believe me? As Heaven hears and will judge me, I never knew your mother was jealous; I never gave her cause to be so. From the hour she became my wife, I strove my best to make her happy. If I failed—and I did fail, it seems—it was because ours was an ill-assorted union—the mingling of fire and ice. When she fled from me—I pursued and strove to find her, in vain. I continued the search for months, and only gave it up when the conviction forced itself upon me that she had died a suicide's death. I remained with her parents whilst they lived, and for her sake, was to them as a son. You say she was jealous. That was impossible. I do not think there was a woman in Toronto of whom she could be jealous, that I knew, even by name.'

'In Toronto!' Minette said scornfully. 'Who said in Toronto? No, my Lord Roderic Desmond! She was jealous of no woman in Toronto. Her rival was the—Lady Inez!' At the sound of the name so long unheard, the man beside her started as though the ghost of his dead youth had risen before him. His face, pale before, blanched to a dead, startled white. The little actress saw, and laughed aloud. 'I know, you see! No wonder M. Drummond, the teacher of English and Mathematics, looked so like an exiled prince. It came naturally. And I am the daughter of my lord Earl of Clontarf! Fine antecedents for the little American actress. No Lord Desmond—Colonel Drummond—whichever you like—my mother feared no rival in Toronto. Her rival, who kept your heart from her, was far away in another land. None the less surely, though, was the work done, and her heart broken.'

Colonel Drummond lightened in pale amaze But the calm of long habit was back when he spoke: 'How you have learned all this is a profound mystery to me. How your mother could ever have heard the name you have uttered is still a greater mystery. Certainly it was not from my lips. But all this is beside the question. The past is dead—let it rest. Whatever I have been, I am now, and will ever be—plain Robert Drummond. I never was unkind, or unjust, or unfaithful, to your dead mother. I tried, to the best of my ability, to make her happy. If she had been a little more patient—waited a little longer—all would have been well. You would have grown up to love me as a child should love its father. My daughter, I am a solitary, a lonely man—you, a little waif, afloat in a wicked world. Let us bury our dead past; let the future atone for all that is gone. Let me claim you as my child—give you my name and home. Already I love you; you will soon learn to love me. Minette—my daughter—come.' He opened his arms. She looked up in his face—glowing, earnest, noble, good. Her heart went out to him with a great bound—her colour came and went—a mighty struggle rent her. But the fierce indomitable pride of the little firebrand held her back. 'Come,' he said, the deep, rich tones very sweet—'come, my little, wandering child—my poor, little, nameless darling. Forgive and forget the past. Come and brighten my lonely life. Come! You, at least, shall never regret it.'—He made a step toward her. But she shrank away almost in affright.

'No, no, no!' she cried, wildly; 'not yet! Ah, my God! I swore to hate you, and I cannot—I cannot. Leave me, Colonel Drummond! I will not go.'

He saw how excited she was—how she trembled like a leaf with the passionate emotion within her—and he yielded at once.

'I will go, my child,' he said very, very gently; 'but first let me hear from your lips that you do not think me altogether the base and unworthy wretch you have thought me. Tell me this, Minette, and bid me come again—I cannot, I will not give up my daughter.'

She looked up at him suddenly, and stretched forth her hand, great tears, standing in her dark eyes. 'I do believe it. For the rest, I can promise nothing. Come or not as you like—only leave me now.'

'I will come to-morrow,' he answered, pressing the hand she gave him between both of his; 'until then, my child, adieu, and God bless you.' The door closed behind him—and Minette flung herself on the sofa, and buried her face in the pillows hating herself for the weakness she felt—for turn-

ing traitor to her dead mother at a few pleading words from this man. And yet, how good, how great, how noble he looked!—how brave she knew him to be—and Minette adored bravery—how true and earnest his eyes were as he spoke. And that lost mother had been passionate and wayward, and rash and impulsive—what if, after all, the fault had been her own, not his? 'She would have him marry her,' she thought, 'knowing well he did not love her. Passionate reproaches, sullen jealousies, were not the means afterward to win that love. And it might have come with time. She fled from him with his child. Ah, heaven, who is to teach me what is right? I don't want to yield after all these years, and yet, if I see him again, I know I shall.' Her musings were interrupted by the sudden entrance of Madam Michaud.

'Pardon, mam'selle! Monsieur Trevannance is at the door.'

Minette sat up. She pushed her tangled curls away from her temples, and with that name all the bitterness came back. She was an earl's daughter, and his equal by right, and yet he came here to make love to the little actress—whose name he would not dare mention to the lady he had left behind in England. At least he would learn, to-day, whether she was to be insulted with impunity. She sat up very erect, and all the old light and fire came back to the black eyes. The dusky face was strangely pale, and its pallor contrasted with the fiery glitter of her eyes. 'Admit M. Trevannance!' she said, with a superb wave of her hand, as a princess condescending to admit to an audience her slave.

Madame hastened away to do her bidding, wondering to herself. 'What is it with the Red Queen,' she thought, 'that she receives to-day all who come?'

Perhaps M. Trevannance was agreeably surprised also—it was but the second time he had ever crossed that threshold. Did she know he was going away, that she was thus unusually gracious. She did not look especially gracious as he entered and bowed before her. The pale face, glittering eyes, and set, unsmiling mouth, said, very plainly, 'Not at home to suitors.'

'Good-day, M. Trevannance?' mademoiselle, brusquely. 'This is an unlooked-for honour. To what do I owe it?' They had not spoken before since that memorable evening on the street, when she had threatened to give him in charge. Her look and tone were not one whit more cordial than they had been then.

'Mademoiselle,' he said, courteously, 'I have come to beg your pardon. I fear (most unintentionally on my part) that I deeply offended you the other evening. You will not be implacable, I trust, to me, whose only offence is—admiring you too greatly!'

'As how did you offend?' mademoiselle responded, with supreme carelessness; 'I have forgotten. Oh, by following me on the street! My dear M. Trevannance,' with a light laugh, 'what very unnecessary trouble you have given yourself! Why, I had forgotten the offence and the offender, five minutes after.' She looked up in his face with the old, audacious, provoking smile he knew so well, on the stage and off it. The colour came again to the brunette cheeks. She made a wonderfully pretty picture, lying careless-ly back in her low seat, her little, ringed hands crossed on her lap.

'Then you are to be envied, Mignonnette. You have accomplished what I never can.'

'And that is—' arching her black brows.

'Forgetfulness! As long as I remember anything I shall remember—Mignonnette.'

'Mademoiselle if you please, sir!' the fairy actress said, waving her hand magnificently. 'Only my friends have the right to call me by that name.'

'Among whom I am not numbered?'

'Most certainly not! A gentleman who, on more than one occasion, has insulted me—no need to stare, sir; I repeat, insulted me—can scarcely hope to be numbered in the list of my friends.'

'Insulted, mademoiselle?' Trevannance repeated. 'You will pardon me if I say I am utterly at a loss to comprehend you. It is not my habit to insult any woman, much less the woman I—love.'

'There it is again!' Minette said in her most careless tone; 'that is the insult. It is the third or fourth time you have told me you love me. What do you call that but an insult?'

'I protest, began Trevannance, half-laughing, 'it is the first time I have ever been told so, and I—

'Have made the same declaration to a dozen actress before, no doubt!' interrupted Minette, bitterly; 'but there are actress *and* actresses, sir, as you will find. You love me, you say; I laughed at it before; now let me treat it in earnest. Let me ask you a question. The man who loves a woman should marry her. Monsieur Trevannance, do you wish to ma ry me?' She arose as she spoke her little, slim figure drawn up, her haughty head thrown back with as lofty a grace as the Lady Evelyn herself, the great black eyes dilated, and fixed on the half-smiling, handsome face before her. 'Do you wish to marry me?' Minette repeated. 'Is that what you mean when you say you love me?'

He coloured in spite of himself, and for once all his long-trained and perfect self-possession failed to find a reply.

'I am answered,' she said, very quietly. 'I am a little, friendless, unprotected girl, forced to starve, or earn my living by the one only means in my power; therefore all you high-born, high-bred gentlemen have a perfect right to insult me if you choose. I am pretty and young, and lawful prey to be hunted down, whether I will or no! As a great lady once said to an English king, "I am too high to be your mistress, and too low to be your wife!" Take your answer, M. Trevannanee, and with it take this.' She crossed the room with the stately step and mien of a young empress, and lifted from the table a chain and locket, and presented them to him with a deep bow. 'When you were brought into the hospital, monsieur, this fell from around your neck. I took charge of it, intending, of course, to restore it in a few days; but before I could do so, you had made me your first declaration of love. I laughed at you then—as I do now, for that matter—and kept it. That lady, whose name and picture are within, is your plighted wife—is she not, monsieur?—and you go to England next week to wed her? And you thought the flighty little actress, without name, or home, or parents, or friends, was in love with your handsome face, and would only too gladly accept your left hand, whilst you honoured my Lady Evelyn with your right? That was your mistake, you see. Don't fret for me, monsieur, I am altogether heart-whole where you are concerned.' She laughed sneeringly up in his face as she said it. 'Permit me to thank you for all the pretty bouquets and the love you have so freely lavished upon me, and to say a pleasant voyage, and—farewell!' She made him a low, sweeping stage courtesy, the pretty, piquant face all dimpling with laughing light, and was gone from the room before he could speak.

CHAPTER V.

THE LAST SERVICE OF THE 'RED QUEEN.'

The afternoon sunlight brightened the hospital wards, and the many lying in their infinite misery of pain and fever watched it wearily with their dulled, aching eye. The man to whose story the little actress had listened the evening before, gazed at the golden glory on the white walls as he tossed restlessly on his feverish couch. He was wondering why Minette had not been there with the letter she had promised to write for him long before.

'It is not like the Red Queen to delay,' he thought. 'Something out of the common has kept her this time.'

'Am I late, Mike?' a voice said close to his ear. 'I didn't want to be recognized on the street, and I have been too busy to come earlier. How are you to-day, Mike?'

'Doing well, they say,' Mike responded, with a half groan; 'as if any one could do well cooped up here! And the letter, mamselle?'

'I haven't written the letter. There!' as Mike turned his eyes in wistful surprise and reproach on her face, 'no need to look like that. There was no occasion to write it—I have done much better. I have found—now don't jump, Mike; you'll displace the bandages—I have found Robert Drummond—your Robert Drummond!'

The man uttered a cry—his face blanched, his eyes dilated. 'Miss Minette! for the love of heaven—'

'Now, now, now, Mike! I told you not to excite yourself. Yes, your Robert Drummond is alive and well—he who was once Lord Roderic Desmond! I saw him and shook hands with him not three hours ago. Why do you stare! What is there wonderful in it? You never heard he was dead, did you?'

'No; but—oh, mam'selle!' with passionate excitement, 'for the love of God, tell me all. Who is he? Where is he? how came you to know him? does he know I am here? when shall I see him? Speak quick, for heaven's love.'

Minette laughed—her sweet, silvery, girlish laugh. 'Talk about the impatience and impetuosity of women, and listen to this. A dozen questions in a breath. Who is he? Why, Colonel Robert Drummond, to-be-sure, the famous leader of the "Devil's Own," you big stupid Mike. Where is he? Here in St. Louis. How came I to know him? Well, you recollect the story I told you last night of Minette Chateauney and her husband? He is that husband. Does he know you are here? Not yet, but he shall before this time to-morrow, if you can survive your frantic anxiety so long. There, I hope you are satisfied.' She turned as if to leave him, but the sick man grasped her dress in an agony of excitement.

'Mignonnette, Little Queen! don't go—tell me more. Tell me, what is he to you?'

'I have told you sufficient,' Mignonnette answered, with sudden hauteur. 'I have nothing more to say on the subject, and you will permit me to go. I have a great deal to attend to this afternoon, and all my patients to visit before I leave the hospital. Is it not sufficient that your idol lives, and will

be with you to-morrow?' She bent over him with the last words; the passionate, dog-like fidelity and love in the man's face touched her. 'He is not worth such devotion, Mike—no man alive ever was yet. Still, I honour you for it. And now good-day, and—good-bye!'

At the earliest possible hour on the ensuing day, Colonel Drummond presented himself at the little cottage. There was an unusual bustle around the tiny house; the front door stood wide open, and a woman was washing the windows. A little girl, armed with a broom, answered the officer's knock.

'Mam'selle Minette?' she repeated after him. 'Law, sir, she's gone!'

'Gone! gone where?'

'Left St. Louis, sir—left this morning. What's your name, please? She's left a note.'

'My name is Drummond, Robert Drummond.'

'All right, sir,' cried the girl, briskly. 'The note's for you, sir. Wait a minute and I'll fetch it. Mother and me, we're a-cleanin' up.'

She darted away and was back immediately 'Colonel Robert Drummond,' she read from the envelope. 'Will you step in while you read it?'

'Thanks—no! I will read it here.' He leaned lightly against the door-post and opened the letter. It was very brief:

COLONEL DRUMMOND: I write what I cannot trust myself to say—Farewell. I may have been mistaken in the past in my estimate of you, but none the less do I feel bound by my promise over my dead mother. We are better apart; we owe each neither love nor duty. Let us forget we ever met. Have no fear for me; I can protect myself—young as I am and dangerous as is my profession. Do not follow or search for me; if you found me to-morrow what would it avail you? If the day ever comes when I need your care or protection, I will send for you. Until then, leave me in peace. And now a last favour; Go to——Hospital; there lies an old friend—Mike Muldoon—who, twenty years ago, saved your life. He longs for your coming as the blind long for light. Adieu.

MINETTE.'

As Colonel Drummond read the last words he started up with a suppressed cry. Mike Muldoon, and after all those years! The shock of surprise, for a moment, was stronger even than the shock of bitter disappointment at the flight of Minette.

'It must be as she says,' he thought. 'To seek her would be to change this dawning forgiveness into anger and hate. And yet—poor, lonely child!—it seems a cruel and heartless thing to do?'

Ten minutes later, he was striding through the hospital wards, making his way to the humble friend who so many years ago had rescued him from death—who had loved and cherished his memory as neither the kinsman he trusted nor the woman he loved had done.

'Mike!' It was the old, familiar voice—the music for which Mike Muldoon had thirsted in vain many a weary year. The wounded man rose up with a cry—a cry of irrepressible joy.

'Lord Rory!' he said, his whole face lighting with ecstacy 'Oh, thank God!'

Colonel Drummond laid his hand over the man's mouth, with his peculiarly gentle, melancholy smile. 'Not that name, Mike; I have done with it, now and forever! I am Colonel Drummond, if you like—call me so.'

'Blow me if I will!' Mike responded, with sudden ferocity; 'you're the Earl of Clontarf, and no man on earth has a right to that title while you live. Why haven't you gone, years ago, an' torn the coronet from that perjured murderer's head?'

'Easy, Mike—easy! some one will hear you. My good fellow, you know I could not. The charge under which I lay, when you took me from Ireland, stands unrefuted yet. I am a felon—I can claim no civil rights.'

'You can claim them, and you are no felon. And if you're the man I take you to be, you'll give up everything—fighting here among the rest, though it's a larky life, I allow—and you'll go back to the old country, and you'll vindicate your honour and claim your lost birthright.'

'Easier said than done. Twenty years ago they found me guilty, through the perjury of two scoundrels, of high felony, and the charge were as easily disproved then as now. If I went back to-morrow, would they take my word for it I did not murder Kathleen O'Neal? Oh no, Mike! Death from a bullet I don't so much mind—we risk that every day; but death at the hands of Jack Ketch is quite a different matter. Not that I would be the first Desmond of Clontarf who reached that lofty destiny,' he added, with a half laugh.

'Nor the last, I hope,' Mike ground between his teeth. 'If ever man was born for the gallows, Gerald Desmond's that man! Go back to England, Lord Rory, and tear the coronet and title he holds from him; Show him to the world as he is—a liar, a coward, a perjurer and a murderer!'

The calm eyes of Colonel Drummond flashed with some of Mike's own fiery passion. But his voice, when he spoke, held its habitual quiet. 'You talk at random, my good fellow. Do you think I would remain a felon and an exile in a foreign land, if the power were mine to do as you say? I know Gerald Desmond to be a perjurer and a would be murderer, but I have no power to prove it. If I had, no dread of detection for myself would hold me back.'

'The way is easy,' the sick man said, vehemently. 'Only find that scoundrel, Morgan. He knows everything, and will confess.'

'Will he?' doubtfully. 'I am not so sure of that. If he still lives, he is doubtless what he was twenty years ago—the slave and tool of the other greater villain.'

'No, sir—no, my lord—there you are out. He is not the tool of Gerald Desmond. He served that gentleman's dirty purposes, and when his work was done, got kicked like a dog out of the way. He was sent to Norfolk Island for fifteen years for some of his tricks, and his time was up a year or so ago. When he returned, a broken-down beggar, my Lord Clontarf's alms were the horse-whip and the horse-pond. I had a letter some months ago from home—from one Tim McCarty, an old friend of mine that keeps a public house, and he told me Morgan was at his place a week or so before he wrote. He was blind drunk, and swearing vengeance against Gerald Desmond. "I could tear him down from his high estate if I choose," says he, "and I will, too—the liar and murderer! I wish Lord Rory were alive to-day. I'd soon tell him who drowned Kathleen O'Neal—aye, if they hung me for it an hour after! I'd hang willingly, so that they strung him up, too!" Tim and the rest,' Mike continued, 'set all this down for drunken blather; but you and I know better. Go back, Lord Rory; give everything up, find out Morgan, and make him turn queen's evidence. You'll get your own, and Gerald Desmond will get his own—a hempen halter!'

There was dead silence. The face of Colonel Drummond had grown very pale and grave.

'You will go, Lord Rory?' Mike urged, in an agony of suspense.

'I will go, Mike,' he said slowly. 'You are right. My honour must be vindicated, if there be any earthly way. If what you say be true, and I do not doubt, it the way is open at last. I will go. I will find William Morgan, if he is above ground, and wring the truth from him. They will hardly recognize the sunburned American colonel as the beardless young lordling, drowned twenty years ago, in Wicklow Bay,' with his thoughtful smile; 'and if they do, it will go hard with them to prove it. Would you have known me again, Mike?'

'The wide world over, Lord Rory! And you have not changed much—grown stouter and browner; but, barring the beard, nothing to speak of. Oh, faix! I'd know your skin on a bush!'

Colonel Drummond half laughed as he arose to go.

'They will hardly be so sharp-sighted,' he said. 'In that world they never remember the absent long. I leave you now to return to-morrow. I shall depart for England in the Columbia next week.'

He quitted the hospital, and walked briskly to his hotel. As he approached he encountered Trevannance, looking hurried and pale.

'Have you heard?' the younger man asked, with suppressed excitement. 'Mignonnette is gone!'

'Ah!'

'She left this morning. The cottage is in charge of the owners. She and Madame Michaud, and Loup, made their exodus by the early train for New York. Last night was the conclusion of her engagement. She refused every offer to renew it, bade her friends farewell, and has vanished. Do you know anything of this, Colonel Drummond?' asked Mr. Trevannance, with considerable suspicion.

For answer, Colonel Drummond placed the farewell note of the little actress in his hand.

'Knowing so much already, you may as well read this. I saw her yesterday, urged her to quit the stage, and permit me to shield her with a father's love and protection. That is her answer.'

Trevannance read it with a very blank face.

'Good heavens! what a wilful, reckless sprite! And she must be obeyed. If we followed and found her to-morrow, as I suppose we could easily do, it would only render her twice as defiant and determined. We must let her go—mad, absurd child!'

'We must!' repeated Colonel Drummond, eyeing his companion keenly. 'Pray, how comes the pronoun to be plural? Have you any especial claim upon Minette, the actress?'

Mr. Trevannance looked rather disconcerted, and the laugh with which he answered sounded somewhat forced. 'Oh, no! of course not, beyond the ordinary claims of strong interest and friendly liking. She is but a child in years—a very bewitching and and precocious child, I grant you—and by

far too pretty to be tossed, like a stray waif, upon the stormy sea of life. And she is your daughter, colonel? 'Pon my life, it's an out-an-out romance!'

'A very matter-of-fact romance,' Colonel Desmond responded, coldly, 'of which we will speak no more at present. There is nothing for it but to do as she says, and trust that the day may come when she will send for me. Meanwhile, I intend to be your fellow-passenger, next week, to England.'

'My dear colonel, I am delighted?' said Trevannance, with unusual warmth. 'I thought you could hardly be cruel enough to forsake a friend in the great crisis of his life.'

The colonel smiled. 'You mistake. I sympathize with you, but I go on urgent business of my own—business that will preclude all possibility of my visiting you!'

'No business can be so urgent as to preclude a week or two of sojourn at Royal Rest. And I want to introduce you to Lady Evelyn. You will like each other, I am certain. You are a hero and she is a hero-worshipper. I ought to dread a rival, but my liking for you is stronger than my dread; so, my dear fellow, be gracious and come.'

Colonel Drummond looked at him an instant, in grave thought. 'If he knew my mission,' he thought—'if he knew it was to expose as a murderer to the world the father of his plighted wife—to strip him of title, and honour, and rank! But to see her—Inez—once more—to confront him—to look on the daughter of Inez d'Alvarez! Shall I yield and go?

'Well,' Trevannance said, 'and what means that gaze—face as solemn as a churchyard slab? Are you debating whether you shall say yes or no? Let me decide—yes is the pleasanter word. Let it be yes.'

'With all my heart,' Colonel Drummond responded, drawing a deep breath; 'let it be yes.'

CHAPTER VI.

THE IVORY MINIATURE.

It was close upon sunset. Far off above the Devon hills the rosy clouds trooped, and down here on the shore, the sun was sinking into the sea in an oriflamme of gorgeous splendour. And half sitting, half-lying on a mossy bank, with yellow water-willows trailing over her, a girl sat watching, with her heart in her eyes, that red light on sea and sky. Farther down on the shore a good a young and pretty, but more matronly-looking lady, holding by the hand a little boy of four or five. They, too, watched that rosy sunlight in the wide ocean, and the boats with their white sails flitting to and fro.

'Very pretty, isn't it, Ernest?' Lady Clydesmore said to her little son; 'and La Rose de Castile watches it as if she had never seen the sun go down before. But all its beauty won't gather the shells we come after, will it, Ernie? and'—drawing out a jewelled watch, the size of a sixpence—'it's only thirty minutes until dinner.

La Rose de Castile glanced over with a smile.

'Don't mind me, Beatrice—go with Ernie for the shells. I feel lazy, and prefer waiting here.'

'To dream of my husband elect,' Lady Clydesmore responded, with a gay little laugh; 'he will be here to-night for certain—happy fellow. Come, Ernie, let us collect our shells. Time is on the wing.' Lady Evelyn's face clouded perceptibly at Lady Clydsmore's words. When she had gone, she drew forth a letter, received the day before, and read it over. It was dated 'London,' and signed 'Vivian Trevannance,' and it announced his speedy arrival at Royal Rest.

'I bring with me a friend,' wrote Lady Evelyn's lover—'an American officer—like Ney, the "Bravest of the Brave," a very hero of romance, whose life seems to have run after the fashion of a three-volume novel. His name is Drummond; you will like him, I am certain.'

She read the letter over very slowly, and thoughtfully, and when she folded it up, not all the rosy glow in sky or sea could light the gloom that lay on the perfect face. 'Does he love me? Are we both playing a part—and for what? I dread his coming—yes, dread—when I should rejoice. His absence was like a reprieve to a sentenced criminal—his coming brings nothing but terror. It is just to him to become his wife, with a heart that is cold as stone, so far as love is concerned? They have called me an iceberg, those others—perhaps I am, for love, such as I have read and heard of, I have never felt. Will I marry Mr. Trevannance, and in a year or two, meet him only once or twice a month, as mother does papa, and then with the cold formality of utter strangers? And yet, no—I cannot be quite wretched as she, for she loved another with all her heart and lost him.'

She drew forth from the pocket of her dress a little ivory miniature. It was the portrait of Roderic Desmond, given her by her mother, and which she had an odd fancy

for carrying about with her. The fair, frank beauty of the face had a charm for her; the violet eyes looked up at her full of boyish brightness and life, the lips seemed to smile, the colours of the picture were fresh and undimmed, the likeness a living one.

'How noble he looks—how beautiful!' she thought. 'Ah, one could love such a man as this! And they thought him a murderer—with that face!'

So absorbed was she in her day-dream, that the sound of approaching footsteps on the velvet sward behind never reached her ear. Two gentlemen in evening dress, under their light spring overcoats, came down the sloping bank toward the strand.

'Look yonder,' the elder of the two said, pointing with his mantilla: 'the "Sleeping Beauty," is it? Or perchance the lady of whom you are in search.'

The other looked languidly. The evening was warm, and he was not prepared to excite himself.

'If she would only turn round,' he murmured, in his sleepiest tone. 'That stately poise of the head—that mantilla—ah, yes, it is Lady Evelyn.'

'What is that? A book? No, a portrait; yours, no doubt, and she is absorbed over it. Good Heaven,' under his breath, 'what a lovely face!'

'Yes, she is beautiful.' Trevannances said, placidly, 'and—she hears us at last.'

The crushing of a dry twig under his foot reached her ear. She glanced carelessly over shoulder—the next instant she had arisen, and the miniature had fallen unheeded at her feet.

The meeting was very quiet—there was no scene. Mr. Trevannance took both her hands in his, and touched his lips lightly to her white forehead. For her, she had grown very pale, the hands turned cold in his warm clasp—otherwise there was no sign.

'They told us you had gone to the shore,' her lover was murmuring, 'and we took the liberty of following. My dearest, are you well? Have I startled you? You are pale as a spirit.'

'I am quite well,' she answered, panting slightly. 'A little startled—yes. I did not know you had arrived.'

'Arrived early in the day. Would have sent word, but wished to surprise you. I had thought to find you in London still.'

'Papa's illness induced us to leave town. Lord Clydesmore insisted on our returning here with our family. Yonder is Lady Clydesmore and Ernest. How surprised she will be at your unexpected apparition.'

'Agreeably, I hope. Allow me to present friend, Colonel Drummond, of the United States service. Colonel Drummond, the Lady Evelyn Desmond.'

The American Colonel bowed low before the stately beauty—the most perfect he had ever seen. And Lady Evelyn, with a proud inclination, just glanced at him, and started in a sudden surprise, and looked at him steadily and long. Where had she seen that handsome face, with its deep-blue, brilliant eyes, its waving chestnut hair, and gold-brown beard, before? It was as familiar as her own in the glass, and yet utterly strange.

'Allow me.' The voice of her plighted husband broke the spell. 'You have dropped this, I fancy.' He picked up the ivory miniature from the ground, where it lay in some danger of being trampled on, and presented it to her.

Both gentlemen saw the pictured face distinctly, and saw that it was not the face of her lover. A faint flush of surprise flashed over the pale bronze of Colonel Drummond's countenance. For Trevannance, he was of Talleyrand's kind. If you had kicked him, his face would not have shown it. The instant after he had given it to her he started forward to greet Lady Clydesmore, with rather more effusion, perhaps, than he would otherwise have shown.

'So the prodigal has returned!' her gay little ladyship said, most cordially shaking hands. 'We missed you horribly last season, Vivian. I missed you. In a *valse a deux temps* I don't know your equal; you have my step better than any one alive. And as for private theatricals, you stand unrivalled. Yes, we missed you, didn't we, Evelyn dearest? And if I was acquainted with any fatted calf in the neighbourhood, I should have him killed on the instant. When did you reach Royal Rest?

Trevannance told her, laughingly, and led her up to his friend, whom he presented in due form. Little Lady Clydesmore, the most genial of peeresses, frankly held out her hand.

'So happy to meet you, colonel. Have heard all about your exploits from Mr. Trevannance's letters to Lord Clydesmore, and welcome you sincerely to England. I adore America and the Americans. You must tell me all about the country. Vivian, you come with us, of course—with your friend—and dine. Oh, no excuse! I insist upon it!'

'Lady Clydesmore's lightest wish is equivalent to a command,' Trevannance said, bowing low. 'My friend and I are entirely at your disposal.'

'That's as it should be. And as you must have a thousand-and-one things to say

to Lady Evelyn, Colonel Drummond and I will lead the way. Only I beg leave to premise it is past seven. We dine in half an hour, and Lord Clydesmore (though but one remove from an angel in a general way) does lose his temper if the soup is cold.'

With which my lady gaily took the American officer's proffered arm, and leading her little boy by the hand, and chattering airy small talk, walked away. She was the merriest and most coquettish of little matrons—a coquette from her cradle, and would have flirted with the wandering Jew, had that often-talked-of, seldom-seen Israelite appeared. Colonel Drummond listened, as in duty bound—smiled and responded; but all the while it was not the rosy, dimpled, pretty face of the viscountess he saw, but that other, behind—pale, and proud, and peerless—the loveliest his eyes had ever seen. It was Inez D'Alvarez over again, only more spiritual, more beautiful, less of the 'earth earthy,' and the golden days of his youth came back, and he was her happy lover once more. It was not 'love at first sight;' it was only the old love, that had died out, warming in his heart once more. He forgot the years, long and weary, that had gone, and changed his Spanish beauty into a faded, pallid matron. The Inez of his youth, of his love, walked behind with Vivian Trevannance. The blue, brilliant eyes, the pure, starry face, must haunt him to his dying day. And the smile that answered my Lady Clydesmore was absent and a little sad, and the mind that took in her present prattle had wandered far away.

The lovers behind followed slowly, she leaning lightly upon his arm, listening whilst he spoke of the land he had left, of his regret at her father's illness, his happiness in meeting her again. But from the last topic she started so perceptibly that he paused. He looked down on the splendid face beside him, with an annoyed sense of defeat and jealousy in his breast. 'You promised to try and learn to love me when I was gone, Evelyn,' he said, bending over her. 'My dearest, have you kept your word?'

Her eyes fell; her cheeks flushed. 'I have striven; I have done my best. I think, sometimes, it is not in me to love at all—as you would have me. Spare me now. Another time—' she faltered and paused.

He thought of the ivory miniature with a sharp, cruel twinge of jealousy. It was not the jealousy of alarmed love, but of imperial man's wounded vanity. 'No other has supplanted me?' he said, his eyes lighting. 'You were the belle of London last season—' He stopped; she had looked up at him, with all her Spanish blood afire.

'You have said quite enough, Mr. Trevannance. The question is an insult. I disdain to reply!'

'I beg your pardon—I did not mean it. I spoke on the impulse of the moment, and I love you so devotedly, my darling, that your coldness drives me wild!' But even as he spoke there came [illegible] ting to him, through the purple haze of [illegible] spring twilight, a bright brunette [illegible] laughing, saucy, defiant, with sparkling black eyes and dimpling smiles—the dark [illegible] of Minette, the actress. And, in that hour, with his peerless patrician bride on his arm, Vivian Trevannance knew he loved the little Canadian actress the best. Silence fell between them. Lady Evelyn was looking, with eyes full of thoughtful interest, at the stalwart figure of the American colonel before her. Trevannance saw it and smiled.

'You honour my friend with especial regard,' he said. 'You have deigned to look at him—twice. May I venture to ask why?'

'Yes. Tell me where I have seen him before—he [illegible] me. Who is he like?'

'You [illegible] ver seen him before, and your puzz[illegible]ar to me. Shall I tell you whom he [illegible]?'

'Yes, for [illegible]an at a loss.'

He touched the ivory miniature, looking into her grave face with a searching smile. 'Fancy him twenty years younger, and with all that magnificent auburn beard mingrown, and he might sit as the original of the picture you hold.'

It was a difficult thing to disturb the self-possession of La Rose de Castile—few had ever seen the phenomenon; but at these words she paused suddenly, with a low, irrepressible cry—for at one glance she saw it—the strange, the wondrous resemblance.

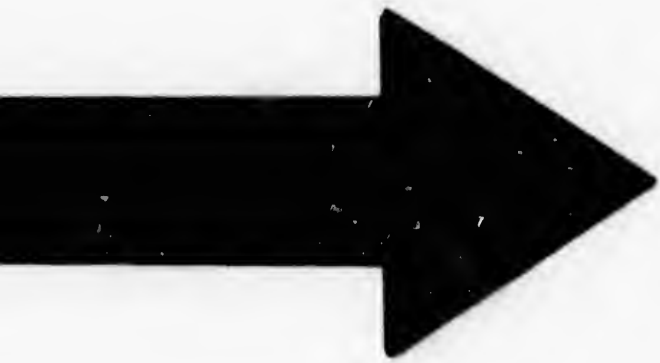
'It startles you,' her lover said; 'and yet we meet these accidental resemblances now and then. This is the portrait of a friend?'

'It is the portrait of a man who was murdered, twenty years ago,' Lady Evelyn said, in a frightened voice. 'Mamma gave me this picture. What does your friend mean by wearing a dead man's face?'

'Can't say,' her lover responded, with a laugh. 'I'll ask him if you like. Who is the gentleman he so vividly resembles?'

She hesitated a moment, then answered, slowly: 'I may tell you in confidence—Lord Roderic Desmond. You will have heard of him; he was papa's cousin, the late Lord Clontarf's only son. There was foul play; he was wrongfully accused of a murder; he made his escape from prison, and was cruelly murdered himself.'

[redacted]



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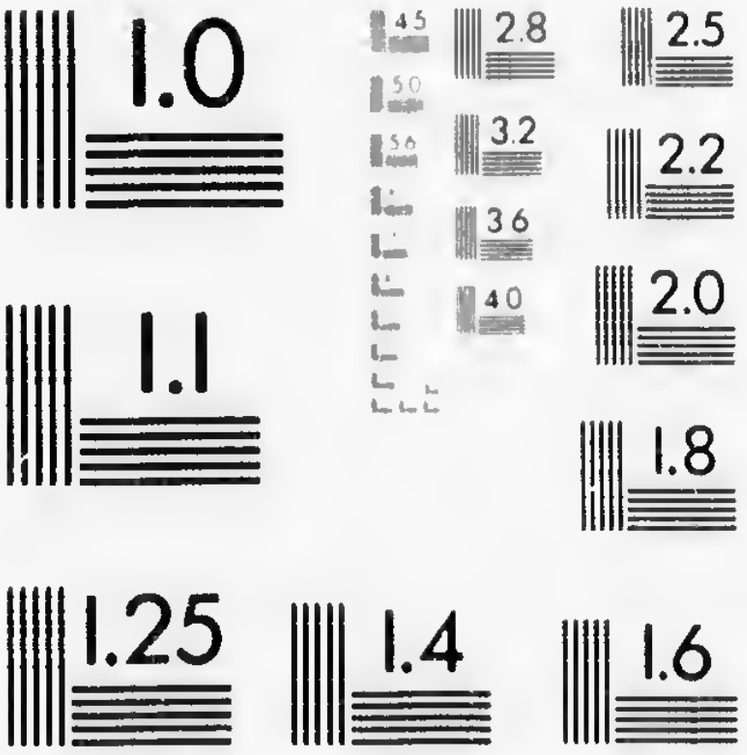

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'My dearest Evelyn! how can you possibly know all this?'

'Mamma knows it—mamma told me. She was to have been his wife; she loved him very dearly. She had cherished his memory and his picture and all these years, as even a wedded wife may cherish the memory of the dead. She must not see this man; the likeness is something terrible.'

They had entered the park gates, and were passing up the avenue. Two gentlemen, pacing leisurely around a vast ornamental fish-pond, paused upon seeing them, in some surprise.

'Yonder are my lord and the Earl of Clontarf, taking their before-dinner constitutional, and gazing, with the eyes of astonishment, upon Vivian Trevannance!' cried out Lady Clydesmore. 'Run to papa, Erme, and show him your shells.'

She did not glance up at her companion. Had she done so, the gleam in his deep eyes, the rigid compression of his mouth, under that beautiful golden beard she admired so much, might have startled her. She saw nothing; she led him up to the two gentlemen and presented him. 'Lord Clydesmore, Colonel Drummond—the friend of whom Vivian Trevannance has written you so often. Colonel Drummond, the Earl of Clontarf.'

The two men looked each other straight in the eyes—Colonel Drummond and the Earl of Clontarf. And the Irish peer, pale before from recent illness, turned ghastly white, and reeled like a man who has been struck a blow.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SPELL OF THE ENCHANTRESS.

And so those two had met again; once more they stood face to face who had parted last in a bitter, murderous death-struggle on that lonely rock on the Irish coast. It arose before them both in that instant—the wide sea, the desolate strip of coast, the rosy splendour of the new day radiant in the east, and two who had been as brothers, locked in that fierce struggle for life or death.

In the ears of the Earl of Clontarf sounded the crash of his murderous fire; before his eyes rose the vision of that brave, bright, boyish face, as it had looked up at him ere hurled headlong over the dizzy cliff. Oh, God! had there been a day or a night, sleeping or waking, in which that face had not risen up before him to curdle his blood and blanch his guilty face? And now, after twenty long years, a stranger must come from a foreign land, and look at him with the dead youth's eyes.

The gaze of all was upon him—that of his daughter with a strange intensity that was almost terror. She knew the reason of that recoil, of that stifled exclamation, of that corpse-like pallor—he, too, saw the resemblance between this American officer and his murdered kinsman. He noticed that earnest, troubled gaze, and it restored him to himself as nothing else could have done.

Of all the creatures on earth, he loved but this bright, beautiful girl; of all the creatures on earth, he dreaded most that she should ever suspect the horrible truth. He started up, with a ghastly smile, muttering, incoherently, something about recent illness, a sudden spasm, etc., and turned, with unnatural animation, toward his son-in-law elect.

'I looked for you this evening, Vivian,' he said, taking the young man's arm whilst his daughter walked to the hall beside Colonel Drummond. "I have been anxious for your return. Illness, I suppose, makes the best of us weaker than water—nervous as tea-drinking old women. I give you my word,' with a hollow laugh, 'the sight of your friend yonder, a second ago, gave me a rare start, simply because he bears a vague resemblance to a man I knew twenty years ago.'

'Ah!' Vivian said, with nonchalance. 'Man's dead, I suppose?'

'Yes,' Lord Clontarf answered, hoarsely. He had kept silent for a decade of years, and his secret had burned his very heart within him. Now, he must speak, or go mad. 'Yes, he is dead—he was murdered!'

'Ah!' Mr. Trevannance said again, in his laziest tone. 'Unpleasant, that. Who was he? Perhaps Drummond's a relative.'

'No—impossible! I speak of—of'—he moistened his dry lips; the name so long unuttered, seemed to choke him—'I speak of my cousin, Roderic Desmond. You have heard of him?'

'Was accused of a murder, escaped, and got made away with himself, wasn't he? Body never found, was it—nor the murder brought home? By-the-by, is it certain he was murdered? Men supposed to have been assassinated, before now have turned up in the most improbable manner—at last, I have read so. Isn't it just possible your cousin may have absconded, and striven to leave the impression behind that he was killed?'

Gerald Desmond looked at the speaker with eyes dilated in a great horror. 'No,' he said, huskily, his voice full of suppressed intensity; 'there was no mistake—he was

murdered. The body was flung into the sea —the sea that will hold it until the Judgment Day. And the murder was never brought home—no, you are right—and twenty years have passed, and never will be now.'

There was that in his tone which made Trevannance look at him curiously 'Egad!' he thought, in some alarm, "I hope my worthy father-in-law is not going mad. Twenty years is a tolerable time to forget one's consin, especially when one steps into that consin's title and estates. By Jove! I hope he didn't do the thing himself. He has an uncommonly Eugene Aramish look this moment.'

There was no chance for further conversation—they were in the drawing-room. And Vivian Trevannance never dreamed that in that instant, he had hit upon the truth.

Lady Evelyn went into dinner on her lover's arm, and listened to his murmured conversation; but often—very often—her eyes wandered to the face of her father and Colonel Drummond. And steadily and incessantly she found the earl's fixed gaze fixed on the stranger's face.

For the colonel, he looked as calmly unmoved as the Parian Ganymede upholding the great cluster of flowers in the centre of the table. He was talking brilliantly and well. It seemed the silent colonel could talk, rather to Mr. Trevannance's surprise, who had hitherto found him inclined to monosyllables.

Did he see the glances his fair betrothed cast so frequently at that handsome, sunbrowned, gold-bearded face? If so, they did not disturb his admirable equanimity. He ate his dinner and made murmured remarks, and his appetite was not injured by the fact that my lady was inattentive and responded absently, even though this was the evening of his arrival.

He was not feverishly in love—no more was she—and presently, he knew not how, silence fell between them, and two black eyes, and a saucy, merry face came to him from over the sea, and he found himself wondering where poor little Minette might be, alone and friendless in her beauty and youth, in that vast, wicked, pitiless New York.

Perhaps Colonel Drummond, though he never seemed to look that way, missed none of the glances of those wondrous violet eyes. Amid all his anecdotes of the Indian war, and of American life in city and camp as he had found it, he caught the flute voice of the Castilian Rose, and the looks directed toward him.

He had half hoped, half dreaded, Lady Clontarf might appear at dinner—she would recognize him, he was certain; but Lady Clontarf never dined in public now. The disappointment was slight—his Inez sat opposite him, in azure silk, with white roses in her dead-black hair, more beautiful than the dream of an opium-eater. He was Roderic Desmond, twenty years old, and hopelessly enslaved once more. He found himself beside her once, after dinner, in the long suite of drawing-rooms. Many guests were at Warbeck Hall, early as it was; but his eyes saw only one fair face, that shone matchless among them all. She had been singing, and he had stood a little apart, drinking in those glorious tones, whilst the man she was to wed bent beside her.

'And she, fit to sit by emperor's side and command him tasks, will wed this languid Sybarite,' Colonel Drummond thought, bitterly. 'A very good fellow, no doubt—an excellent husband for my Lady Clydesmore, or such as she; but no more fitted to be her husband than a plowboy! I was a fool to come here! Justice I shall have, "though the Heaven's fall;" and yet that justice that tears the coronet from her father's head, and shows him to the world as the perjured, would-be murderer that he is, will break that haughty heart. And she looks at me with the only face I ever loved, and the old madness that I thought dead and done for is strong within me as over. And she belongs to another man—to the friend whose bread I have broken, who trusts me so free and so frankly. I was a fool to come; I will be a villain if I stay. She does not care for the man to whom she is pledged, and I feel it, yes, strong as man's instinct can teach him anything—that I could make her love me! Oh, Heaven! in losing my birthright I have lost for ever all that makes man's life sweet. Shall I spare Gerald Desmond because the child of Inez d'Alvarez looks at me with those glorious eyes, with that matchless beauty? No!' his hand, hanging by his side, clenched, his eyes flashed—'no! To the uttermost farthing shall he pay. I loved him and I trusted him—all I had was his; and his return was dishonour and death. Spare him? No! I will cross this threshold no more. Before this week ends my search for Morgan will begin, and when I have found him, then, Gerald Desmond, the dead Kathleen and the living Roderic Desmond will be amply avenged.'

But though man may propose, the woman he loves is very apt to dispose. Medea, the Enchantress, could injure the died out with her. Samson, and Hercules, and Antony were men of might, but Delilah, and Omphale, and Cleopatra could twist them round their little fingers and make of them the

veriest drivellers. So, presently, when the stern and stalwart American officer found himself in a cosy nook beside Clontarf's peerless daughter, all his heroic resolves melted away, and he was listening to the soft music of that low-trained voice and dazzled and blinded by the light of the starry eyes and brilliant smiles. Trevannance, leaning against the marble of the low chimney-piece, and flirting with Lady Clydesmore and a whole group of county sirens, watched them under his eyelashes, and wondered a little at the gracious mood of her imperial ladyship.

'Is it because of his melo-dramatic resemblance to the defunct Irish cousin? or is it because he is my friend?' He smiled a little at the last conceited notion. 'If my lady loved me, that I might account for it; but she is far beyond any such mortal weakness. It would not be polite, I suppose, to interrupt their private conversation.' He took an easier position against the mantel as the Earl of Clontarf approached him. The Irish peer was still ghastly pale, and still kept that furtive but incessant watch upon his future son's friend.

'The American is inclined to monopolize,' he said, with a forced smile quite awful to see. 'I congratulate you upon your freedom from the green-eyed monster. He is a remarkably handsome man.'

'Best-looking man in the room, by long odds, myself included,' Trevannance responded, serenely; 'and I'm not jealous, thank you. It's a most fatiguing passion—never want to get the steam up so high as that. And I have every trust in my fair future bride.'

'The more I look at him, the more his wonderful resemblance to—to the person I spoke of strikes me,' the earl said, hastily. 'If—if Roderic Desmond had lived, he must have looked now precisely as that man looks. There is something horrible in this wearing the face of the dead—it is like seeing a ghost.' He laughed, but the laugh was hollow and forced. 'Vivian, I wish you would tell me all you know of him.'

'And that "all" is nothing. He is Colonel Drummond. He is a thorough gentleman, and the best fellow I ever met.'

'And this is all you know?'

'All, my lord.'

'And you bring a stranger—an adventurer—a blackguard, probably—here among your friends; a man of whose antecedents you are totally ignorant, and present him to my daughter. Sir, such conduct—'

'My lord!' Mr. Trevannance said, and his soft, low voice contrasted strangely with the harsh, high tones of the other, 'pray don't excite yourself. I regret giving you the great trouble of getting angry; but, at the risk of doing so still further, you will permit me to say, my friends must always be fit associates even for the daughter of Lord Clontarf. What Colonel Drummond has been in the past, in his own country, I cannot say—what he is, I know—a gentleman, a scholar, a hero.'

'In his own country,' the earl had caught but these words, 'in the past! What do mean? Is he not an American?'

'No—I am quite certain he is not. English, Scotch, or Irish he maybe, as—but of his birthplace and his history I am in profoundest ignorance. That the history has been a singular and romantic one, I am positive. It would be strange and melo-dramatic, and sensational, and all that,' with a slight laugh, 'if he turned out, after all, to be the man you think dead. It's not likely, you know, but still—Ah, excuse me Lady Evelyn beckons.'

He sauntered across the long room to the side of his fair betrothed. Drummond still held his place near her; he had been talking, she listening, and her cheeks were softly flushed and the brilliant eyes sweet and tender and the perfect lips wreathed in a thoughtful smile.

'He has been talking of you,' she said, with the brightest glance she had ever given him—'telling me how bravely you saved his life.'

'And what of himself? On their own merits, modest men are dumb-ech? Has he told you his name was a word of terror with which mothers frightened their children into being good, as the Saracen matrons used, with the name of King Richard? Was it Richard, by the way? He has told you he was a host in himself—the invulnerable leader of the "Devil's Own?" I think of bringing out a book relating his exploits—and immortalizing myself.'

He had not once glanced back at his late companion—had he done so, the livid horror in the ex-colourless face must have strangely startled him.

He stood staring—yes, absolutely glaring—at the group, seeing only that one manly face, with its rare beauty and gravely-smiling mouth. If it were true? if Roderic Desmond still lived! if this man were he!

The next morning he could have laughed aloud at his own folly. 'I am a fool!' he said, fiercely—'a drivelling monomaniac! I fancy resemblance where resemblance there is none. I will put it to the test, by heaven!' He started up with a sudden idea. 'My wife shall see this man! If Roderic Desmond were alive, old, and gray,

and hoary, she would still know him! Dead, and in his grave, he has still been my rival—still poisoned my life!'

He walked resolutely away, and not once again, during that evening, did he glance in the direction where this trio sat.

Lady Evelyn gave her hand to her lover at parting—it lay loose and unresponsive in his—then to the stranger from over the sea, and it thrilled as no man's touch had ever thrilled it before, in his warm clasp. That night, as she unbound the long, rich hair, her maid wondered at the new light, so dreamy and indescribable, that softened the perfect beauty of my lady's face, and made it radiant. And the violet eyes, whose like she had never seen save in her own mirror, haunted her into the land of dreams. She stood upon a towering cliff, whilst the day dawned rosily over the sea, and from the rose-flushed waters a form arose, wearing the face of the stranger soldier, and looking at her with the grave, beautiful smile and eyes, 'Come!' he said, holding out his arms, 'my bride, my darling! I am not dead, and I have waited all these years for you!' And with a heart full of bliss, she leaped from the cliff into those extended arms, and—awoke!

Vivian Trevannance drove his friend home in his mail-phaeton, and on the way discoursed of the manner in which his worthy parent-in-law was exercised by his uncommon resemblance to a gentleman dead and gone. Colonel Drummond, sitting back with folded arms, listened with a grim smile.

'Tried to convince him he might be mistaken,' Trevannance said, puffing at his cigar, 'but the obstinacy of these elderly fellows is past belief. Told him you might be the dead man come to life again—they do that sort of thing in light literature, you know, though I don't think myself it's practicable.'

'And you couldn't convince him?' Drummond said, with a sardonic laugh. 'How can he be so positive about his cousin's murder if he didn't see him murdered, and they never found the body?'

'Put it to him,' Trevannance drawled; 'all of no use. You look as much like the dead man as two peas—know you do, because I've seen his picture. Melo-dramatic on your part, as I have said before, to go about with the frontispiece of a dead man; not but that it is an uncommonly handsome one all the same. Wanted your biography—the earl did; very sorry I couldn't give it to him.

'Couldn't think of putting you to so much trouble, my friend,' the colonel said, drily; 'and as for the earl, his profound interest does me proud. I shall take the liberty some day myself, perhaps, of pouring my humble history into his noble ears.'

There was a pause—both men puffed their cigars, whilst they whirled through the starry beauty of the May night.

'And what do you think of my lady, La Rose de Castile?' the younger man asked, abruptly.

'That she is well named,' he answered, slowly. 'Your Castilian Rose is perfect and peerless!'

'And we are at home,' said Trevannance, as they drew up, and the groom came to lead away the phaeton. 'Doesn't the old place look picturesque by moonlight?'

His eyes kindled—he loved every tree, and stone, and ivy spray—yes, with a deeper love than that for his fair Castilian bride. And Colonel Drummond's deep gaze rested on him for an instant with a look that was almost envious.

'Yes,' he said, 'you are a fortunate man, Vivian Trevannance.'

The other laughed gaily, and led the way himself to his guest's room. 'Good-night, and fair dreams, my boy,' he said. 'You will sleep well if you are half as drowsy as I.'

He left him, and Robert Drummond stood before the fire and gazed up at a portrait over the mantle. It was a crayon head—an admirable likeness, though merely a sketch, of the Lady Evelyn Desmond. The proud, drooping eyes, the gravely smiling mouth, looked, in the firelight, alive.

Long he stood before it, entranced, and when at last he undressed and lay down, it was long before sleep came, and he lingered and watched the flickering firelight playing upon the lovely face of the Rose of Castile.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GIPSY GIRL'S PROPHECY.

'Scarlet wins! Blue's ahead! No, no, no! Purple and Gold has it! Ten to one on Castilian Rose! Purple and Gold wins! Hurrah! hurrah! Castilian Rose wins!'

It was the spring meeting. The ring was thronged, the uproar was deafening. For Scarlet and Blue, and Yellow were ignominiously beat n, and Purple and Gold rode in winner. Castilian Rose, a bay beauty, with s ender legs and brilliant eyes, had won the race. Castilian Rose could belong to no one, of course, but Vivian Trevannance. The little mare, entered for the spring meeting, had surpassed even his expectations; but his indolent smile was as indolent as ever, and his nonchalant glance never al ed whilst huzzas ren' the air, and men ou

the turf, below seemed going mad with excitement.

'Rather a close thing, that finish,' he murmured, gently. 'I thought King Cheops would have had it. I might have known, though, that the bay mare, so named, could not be beaten. Castilian Rose must always win.'

Lady Evelyn Desmond shrugged her shoulders, a trifle disdainfully. She had sat there on the grand stand, between her lover and Colonel Drummond, and there had been very little of interest in the violet eyes that followed her colours over the field. She had come there because she could not very well stay away; but whether her namesake lost or won the great race, was a matter of very little interest to her.

Colonel Drummond stood beside her. Yes though two weeks had gone since that night on which he had made his heroic resolves, Hercules lingered still by the distaff of Omphale. He could not go! The fascination that held him was a sorcery he was powerless to resist. He loved as he had never loved before—nay, not Inez D'Alvarez—this regal beauty, whose invincible coldness and pride had yielded to him as they had never yielded before to mortal man. He had made his resolution in all good faith—he meant to keep it honestly—would have kept it but for the power of circumstances. And to the power of circumstances we are all, the best and bravest of us, abject subjects. To linger there, and meet her father day after day, her mother perhaps, would have been simply impossible; but, on the day following his arrival, pressing business of a political nature had called the convalescent peer back to town, and he had but returned this morning. For my lady, she was a confirmed invalid, just able to move about her apartments, and no more. Her friends visited her there, her future son-in-law among the rest; but the American officer, of course, she had never seen. Her life hung but by a thread; not for worlds would Lady Evelyn have let her mother meet the man who so strangely wore the face of the lover of her youth. And so he had lingered, yielding to the solicitations of his friend and host, and gave himself up to the spell of the siren. They met daily, at dinner and evening parties, boating and riding excursions, improvised picnics, and pilgrimages to ruins—they met daily, and why her heart quickened its beatings, and why the world looked a brighter and fairer place than ever before, Evelyn Desmond never thought nor asked herself. She knew that a dreamy and novel bliss filled her life; that she could listen and never weary whilst Colonel Drummond talked; that she had learned to search for his tall form and grave, noble face in crowded rooms, and to find them wearily empty if he were not there. She knew it vaguely, but it was all so new and strange to her that as yet she had not dreamed that at last—she loved. As her gaze wandered over the surging throng below, a face and figure she knew arrested her attention. It was the striking figure of a gipsy girl. 'Look!' she said, touching her lover's arm; 'do you remember that face?'

'The gipsy, by Jove! who told us our fortunes a year ago. Didn't come true—did they?—her predictions?'

'I have forgotten what they were,' Lady Evelyn said, carelessly. 'Have you ever had your horoscope cast, Colonel Drummond? If not, now is the time. You will never find a fairer seeress.'

'My fortune was told twenty years ago,' the American officer said, with his grave smile—'the future I think I can predict for myself. Your dusky sybil might easily tempt a more hopeful man. See that strange figure speaking to her now.'

A wretched looking vagrant, leaning on a stick, his face shaded by his battered hat, had hobbled up and addressed her. She turned from him, and looked up at the grand stand with dark, earnest eyes, as though he had spoken of them. The eyes of the vagrant turned too, in that direction—red, fiery eyes, full of fierce hate now, as they fixed on the face of the Earl of Clontarf. 'Aye! there he stands, the cowardly murderer! the perjured traitor! high in honour among the great, titled and wealthy, looking down on honest men like dogs. I wonder if he thinks—the mighty Earl of Clontarf—as another of his order once said, "All men are equal on the turf, and—under it?" There he stands, and one-and-twenty years almost have passed since Kathleen O'Neal and Roderick Desmond found the seas their winding-sheets, and still he lives and prospers. And they say there is an avenging heaven after that!' He hobbled away with a last baleful glance of hate. He never looked at the others—he plunged away among the crowd, soliciting alms with the true professional whine of the Beggar Tribe.

As the ladies and gentlemen swept down from the grand stand through the field, the handsome gipsy came suddenly up to them, and confronted Vivian Trevannance. 'My pretty gentleman, let the poor gipsy tell your fortune.'

Vivian laughed—Lady Evelyn, upon his arm, shrank ever so slightly back. 'My pretty gipsy, I think I have had the pleasure of hearing you speer fortunes, before, and—

it was a waste of silver. They didn't come true.'

'But they will come true!' the fortune-teller answered, loftily. 'Redempta speaks but what the stars have written. Let me see your hand.'

He laughed again at the imperious tone, and yielded. The dark-eyed prophetess bent above it, and peered into the womanly palm. When she lifted her head, her eyes flashed. 'It has come true!' she said, transfixing him with those glittering eyes. 'You have found the love of your life in a land beyond the sea—found her and left her. Redempta knows the past as well as the future. My pretty lady, let me tell for you!'

But Lady Evelyn waved her back, proudly and coldly. 'No! we have had enough of this folly. Stand aside and allow me to pass on.'

'Ah, you are chaughty, my pretty lady, and you will not let me look in that dainty palm, because you fear to! Yes, fear, my lady, though fearless blood runs in your veins—you fear the truth, fear your own heart. Your hand is to go to one, while your heart is given to another. My gentleman, shall I not predict for you?' She turned with swift, subtle grace to Colonel Drummond, coming up at the moment with Lady Clydesmore.

'A gipsy!' cried her vivacious ladyship; 'and such a pretty one! Oh, I know she can tell the future for certain, and we must have our fortunes told. Cross her palm, colonel, with a piece of silver, and let her predict. I am dying to know what is in store for you, you mysterious man.'

A group had gathered—Lord Clydesmore and Lord Clontarf among them. The former paused, smiling at his airy wife's chatter, the latter with an intensity of eagerness under the circumstances quite absurd. And Lady Evelyn paused also, with a sudden impulse of absorbing interest. Colonel Drummond smiled and obeyed. The gipsy took his hand, and gazed long and earnestly into the myriad lines.

'I see here a strangely-chequered past—very bright, very dark—strange and tragical. A hand has been lifted against your life; some strong and deadly enemy has darkened your past; but the power of that enemy is at an end. The clouds are behind; the sun shines brightly before; the close will compensate for the beginning.'

She dropped his hand.

Did she speak at random? Or did his face tell her, keenly skilled in physiognomy, of that darkened, bitter past? It startled even him. He turned and looked straight into the eyes of that 'strong and deadly enemy.' And the earl was as white as a dead man. Lady Evelyn drew a long, tremulous breath, and her lover felt her unconscious, tightened grasp upon his arm relax.

'Vague,' he said—'vague as the Delphic oracle, and mysterious—very! I knew there was a mystery, and a tragedy, and a romance, and all that sort of thing, hidden away in Drummond's life, and now—"oh, my prophetic soul!"—here we have it for a fact. Colonel, I beg to congratulate you upon the brilliant, sunlit prospective spreading before you.'

But whilst he spoke, voice and face matchlessly serene, he was filled with a strange, secret dread. Was it only a chance —this tru[illegible] she had told himself—and what did my Lady Evelyn think of it? He glanced at her; the beautiful face looked still and pale, and kept its secrets well.

'Shall we go?' she said briefly. 'Or must we stay in the hot sun among the crowd, listening further to this folly?'

'I beg your pardon—the fault has been mine. Do you return with Miss Albemarle in the phaeton, or will you ride with me?'

'I will ride, if you wish it.'

A vague twinge of remorse shot through her whilst she spoke. A dim consciousness of her own infidelity of thought to the man she must wed, was beginning to dawn upon her. For Redempta's words to him, she was far too proud to ask for any explanation, even had she believed them.

He led her to a shaded seat under some silver beeches, whilst the remainder of the party sauntered up.

'We will wait here,' he said, 'until the groom leads round the horses. Ah!' with his slight laugh, 'the gallant colonel is to be my Lady Clydesmore's cavalier on the return journey. My lord is the most confiding of men, and my lady—' He stopped and glanced at his lady. There was no answering smile in her face—a face as unreadable as though carved in marble.

The colonel and Lady Clydesmore had ridden away and were out of sight ere Trevannance's servant led up the two horses. He assisted her into the saddle, and they galloped away, flashing past the long line of carriages, after the pair who had gone.

CHAPTER IX.

TOLD IN THE TWILIGHT.

The pair who had gone were very much engrossed with one another on this especial occasion, although my lady had the conversation almost exclusively to herself.

She flirted with the handsome soldier.

certainly; she admired him immensely, and made no secret of it; but she also saw, with woman's sharp sightedness, the secret he fondly thought buried deep in his own heart. And liking him, and interested in him, my lady pities him in her own secret heart, and began to wish he would go away.

'He is such a splendid fellow, you know, Ernest,' she said, with charming candour, to her husband—for of course, wife-like, she told him at once of her great discovery, 'that it's a pity to see him falling into the Slough of Despair where La Rose de Castile casts her victims. There was poor Amethyst, you know—his career in Paris, and Vienna, and Baden-Baden, has been something shocking since she refused him. And Major Langley, of the Guards, he has exchanged and gone out to India. It's been so with dozen; and the worst of it is they all belonged to me first "I never loved a dear gazelle," etc.; and now I mean Colonel Drummond should not lose his head and break his heart for—'

'For a beauty as cold as the Diana of the Louvre—very philanthropic of you, my dear,' his lordship said, drowsily.

'Ah!' my lady responded, with a wise, little, womanly nod; 'I'm not so sure of that, either. She doesn't know it herself; and he doesn't know it; but the sooner Colonel Drummond departs the better for her peace of mind also.'

'Good Heavens, Beatrice!'—Lord Clydesmore choked a yawn, and sat erect, staring—'you never mean to say—'

But his lady closed his mouth with a kiss and a laugh. 'Of course not, you precious old stupid! Only I shall take the very earliest opportunity to tell the handsome colonel of the grand preparations, for the wedding, and that it is to take place in June. Now go to sleep.'

That opportunity had come to-day, and in the most natural, most off-hand way imaginable, Lady Clydesmore chattered of the grand preparations, and the grand wedding to come. 'It will be an eminently suitable match, I think,' she said, gaily, 'I have known Evelyn and Vivian so long—both are the soul of honour and integrity, and very strongly attached to each other. It will be a very happy union. You stop for the wedding, of course, Colonel Drummond?'

'No,' he said; 'I leave at once—at once!' he repeated, sternly, 'as I should have left long since.'

Lady Clydesmore's answer was a startled cry.

'What is that?' she exclaimed, whirling round in her saddle. Colonel Drummond turned on the same impulse, and echoed that cry of alarm at the sight he saw.

The horse of Lady Evelyn, a wild-blooded, half-tamed thing at best, had taken fright at some obstruction, and darted off like an arrow.

There was very little real danger, perhaps—but the lightning-like rapidity with which she flew over the ground—the earth a black, flying sheet beneath her—made her sick and faint. Her head reeled, the reins fell, and, with a dizzy sense of blindness, she felt herself falling headlong from the saddle. But swifter than her fall, swift as his love for her, Colonel Drummond had flung himself off his own horse, and caught her in his arms as she reeled and fell.

'My love—my love! you are safe.'

He forgot everything—honour even—everything but that he loved her, and that her life for an instant had been in danger. And at the words, the eyes, which had been closing, opened and looked up into his.

She did not answer; he spoke no more, But, with that sudden, startled look, the truth was revealed to both. He loved her—she loved him. On the instant, Trevannance dashed up, white with horror, and flung himself beside her.

'My darling! Thank God you are saved.'

She smiled faintly, and turned to him. Lady Clydesmore joined them as she spoke, with wild eyes and many exclamations.

'It was very weak and silly of me,' Lady Evelyn said, forcing a smile, 'to turn dizzy. But for that I could have managed Roseleaf well enough. However, I am not in the least the worse for his escapade, so pray don't make a victim of me. Here comes the pheaton: I think I'll take the vacant seat with Ethel Albemarle. My nerves are just a trifle shaken.'

She did not once look at her preserver; she made no attempt to thank him. She entered the pheaton, and Vivian rode by her side, still pale and full of blame for himself. And the American officer vaulted again into the saddle, and galloped homeward beside Lady Clydesmore; and, strange to relate, her volatile ladyship did not speak one word till they reached Warbeck Hall.

Colonel Drummond refused every entreaty to enter; he went straight to Royal Rest with his host.

'I must leave you to-morrow morning,' the American officer said, briefly, once on the way. 'I have to thank your friendship and hospitality for many pleasant hours; but my men and my duty are out yonder on the Western plains. It is the life after all, best worth living—best suited to me. I should have gone long since.'

Trevannance bowed gravely—murmured some polite and meaningless platitudes about needless haste, regret, etc., which the other scarcely heard.

'And the business which brought you over?' Trevannance asked, as they rode up the avenue.

'That I have given up,' the other responded, quietly. 'My plans have changed of late. I shall return to America at once.'

They separated and went to their respective rooms, the colonel to pack his belongings with his own hands, Vivian to dress for dinner. In the midst of the colonel's labour, his host's valet tapped at the door, and entered.

'My master's compliments, M'sieur Colonel, and you will drive with him to Scarsdale? The drag is waiting.'

'Tell your master to be good enough to make my apologies, Antoine,' he said, looking up from his work. 'I do not dine at Scarsdale Hall to-day.' The Swiss valet bowed and left the room, and the colonel resumed his packing. It did not take long—the May sunset was at its brightest when he had done. He looked at his watch, paced up and down a few moments in deep thought, then hastily rang the bell.

'Saddle my horse, and bring him round at once,' was his order. 'Has your master gone?'

'Yes; half an hour ago,' the servant said.

And, his command being obeyed, in a few minutes he was riding rapidly in the direction of Warbeck Hall, 'One must not steal away like a thief,' he muttered, between his teeth. 'Besides after what escaped me to-day, I must explain before we part for ever.'

The early twilight was falling like a silvery mist as he strode into the long, dusky drawing-room, and dispatched his card by a servant to the Lady Evelyn Desmond.

'Tell her I come to say farewell,' he added. 'I will detain her but a moment.'

He walked to one of the long, lace-draped windows overlooking the park, withe a rich, dark ivy and dog roses clustering thick around it. Farther than he could see the spread a fair vista of lawn and woodland, with the glimmer of running water, and the scent of wild, sweet roses. 'I will see it again in dreams,' he thought, 'under the stars of the prairies, or among the Western wilds, or perhaps, when some Indian bullet ends a life of little use to any one on earth.'

'You wished to see me—you are going away?' a low, soft voice murmured. He had not heard her, so absorbed had he been. She had crossed the length of the room without sound. She stood beside him, glancing up with dark, startled eyes into his face. 'Is it true?' she asked, a tremour in the sweet voice. 'Do you really go so soon?'

'Would to God I had gone long ago!' he burst forth, passionately. 'Would to God I had never come! I should not then have been false to friendship and to honour. I should not then have said the words I was mad enough and base enough to say to you to-day. But in your danger, I forgot everything else. Lady Evelyn, the only expiation I can make is to go and never look upon your face again; to carry my secret with me, and bury it with me when I die, in the land I have left. Will you say farewell, and "I forgive you," before I go?'

She had grown white as death. She stood straight out at the misty moonrise, and seeing nothing.

'You do not speak. I have been too mad and presumptuous, and my sin—of loving you—is beyond pardon! Well—I deserve it. I have been false to the friend whose bread I have broken; false from the first instant I looked upon your face. I, a penniless soldier. Yes, silent scorn is surely answer enough for me!'

She turned and looked at him. The depths of self-scorn, and something she could not understand in his tone, roused her. 'What do you mean?' she said, slowly. 'You are good enough, for a princess But you are right—you must go, and at once. I can echo your prayer—it would have been better you had never come—better for you—better—for me.' Her voice broke over the last words. But his face lighted, his eyes glowed.

'Lady Evelyn,' he said, 'for pity's sake tell me—had you been free, had I been of your own rank, could you have learned to love me?

The violet eyes turned to him, full of great reproach. 'It is cruel to ask that!' she said; 'but if it will comfort you any, yes. Had I been free— Oh, why speak of this? As for rank, you are only greater than I, better, braver, nobler! I never knew until to-day what a base, utterly despicable creature I am—weak and unstable as water. See what I have done! To please my father, I have given myself to a man I do not love—an honourable gentleman, who trusts me and believes in me. I have plighted my word, and see how I keep it. No one—not he, when he hears this—and hear it he must—can despise me as I despise myself. It is useless wishing we had never met. Our expiation, as you say, must be in parting at once and for ever. Farewell, Colonel Drummond! Forget me; I am not worthy of any good man's regard.'

She extended her right hand—the other covered her face. He spoke no word; he raised the hand she extended to his lips. It was his silent adieu. A moment later, and she was alone. She stood there long, rigid and still. The ringing of the dinner-bell aroused her; the heart breaks, but we must dine. She turned mechanically, and walked away. At the same instant a recumbent figure raised itself from the wilderness of ivy and tangled fern and roses beneath the window. It was Vivian Trevannance, there by the merest accident, and who had heard every word.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE TENTS OF THE GIPSIES.

The man who called himself Colonel Drummond mounted his horse and rode away from the lodge-gate, whither he neither knew nor cared. Never before—no, not when doomed to a felon's death for the murder of Kathleen O'Neal—not when the woman he was to wed, the coronet he should have worn, the friend who should have been as a brother, were all alike false, and lost to him—had the bitterness at his heart been so deep and deadly as now. For at twenty we love but lightly, and though our hearts are well-nigh broken to-day, Youth and Hope heal the wound, and we smile and eat our dinner to-morrow, and postpone suicide and despair to a more auspicious season. But at forty, with buoyant youth behind us, love is deeper and sorrow stronger, and not all the college of physicians can heal the wounds the winged god inflicts. He rode on, through the starry May night, whither his horse chose to go. He had given up everything in his lost love for this plighted bride of another—the hope of the past twenty years, the vindication of his honour, the eternal resignation of his rights. Gerald Desmond he would not have spared. Justice to the utmost farthing he had come prepared to wring from him, when Morgan should be found and make confession; but her father he could not injure—it was simply impossible. The disgrace that fell upon him must blight her life forever—the just retribution that would give him back his birthright would bow that queenly head forevermore in sorrow and shame. No! As he had come, he must return—as he had lived, he must die—nameless and unknown.

'For your sake, my love—my love!' he murmured, inwardly, 'your father—even yours—is sacred from me.'

He had ridden for hours: his horse falling lame was the first thing that awoke him from his semi-trance. He dismounted and examined the animal; it had cast a shoe and walked lame. He glanced around him. Far away, twinkling among the trees like will-o'-the-wisps, he caught the sparkle of lights.

'Gipsies!' he thought. 'Well, as there appears to be no village near, I will try them.'

He led his horse slowly over the turfy heath. The place grew more familiar as he went on, and he knew it was half-a-dozen miles beyond the town, and near the race-course. The gipsies, who had congregated for the races, had pitched their tents here among the trees; the light he had seen was their tent-fires.

Around one tent a little group were gathered, and a donkey-cart stood near, the driver perched on his seat as though waiting for a load. As Drummond stood gazing, he saw two gipsy men come forth from the tent, bearing between them, stretched on a rude hurdle, the body of a man. The soldier watched in wonder.

'Is he dead?' he thought, 'and are they going to bury him? By Jove, I'll see!'

He strode forward at once into their midst. The men and women paused in their work to stare at the gentleman who came amongst them like an apparition, leading his horse.

'What is all this?' he demanded. 'Whom have you here, my good fellows?'

He looked authoritatively into the donkey-cart. Two eyes, dulled with great pain, gleamed up at him from an unshaven, ghastly face—a face full of infinite misery.

'Poor wretch!' the soldier said, involuntarily. 'He is not dead, then. What's the matter?'

'Met with an accident to-day on the race-course,' a young woman said rapidly, coming forward. It was the dark-eyed Redempta, the queen of the wandering tribes. 'He is of your people, not ours, though he has dwelt in our tents and broken our bread. He will not live four-and-twenty hours, and he must not die here with us. Your people in the town yonder would think little of accusing the vagabond gipsies of murder. So we send him thither to breathe his last. He can speak for himself, and acquite us of blame.' Drummond bowed his head gravely. There was a stately dignity about this Zingara Queen that impressed him.

'How did it happen?' he asked.

'He was drunk—he is always drunk; a carriage-pole struck him and knocked him down. The wheels passed over him and broke both legs; but the wound in the left, from the pole, is the worst. They

drove on—gay young gentlemen—what was the beggar-tramp to them? We brought him here. I have looked at his wounds. He will not live to see another night.'

'Poor wretch!' And where are you taking him?'

'There is a low inn in the town, where he thinks they will let him lie. He has spent all his earnings there, and they knew him in better days. He was once rich, he says, and a lawyer.'

'And fallen so low! What is his name?'

'That we do not know. Ask himself—he can speak and may tell you.'

Drummond bent over him. The dulled eyes looked straing up at the starry sky with a blank, piteous misery very dreadful to see. But it was not that misery that made Drummond recoil—that drove the blood from his face, and stilled the very beating of his heart; for, begrimmed and haggard, and aged and ghastly, through rags and filth, he knew him still—the man he had left America to find—the man who had sworn his life away—the man who had murdered fair Kathleen—William Morgan!

The keen black eyes of the young gipsy woman watched him with brilliant intelligence. 'You recognize him,' she said, coolly. 'You have known him in days gone by?'

Her words aroused him. At last! at last! the vengeance he had come to seek, the vengeance he had resigned, was here at his hand.

The blood flushed darkly into his face, then receded, leaving him ashen white, with the might of a great temptation.

'You know him!' Redempta repeated; 'but he has not found a friend.'

'He has,' the soldier said, sternly; 'the dying and the dead have no enemies. Morgan!' he bent over him, and uttered the name in his ear.

'Who calls?' The wounded man started and glared around in affright. 'Morgan? that's my name. Who knows me here?'

His eyes fixed full upon that brave, gallant face bending above him, with the silvery moon-rays bright upon it. An awful horror crossed his own—there was a choking, gurgling cry—and the conscience-stricken wretch fell backward in a death-like faint.

The short summer night had worn away, and the dawn of the first June morning was rosy in the eastern sky, when he awoke from that deadly swoon, or stupor.

He lay in the best chamber of the little inn, whither Drummond had seen him conveyed, and two strange faces bent above him—the village doctor and the rector. The dull eyes wandered from face to face; memory and intelligence came slowly back. He was in little pain now.

'Where is he?' he asked, in a husky whisper.

'Whom, my poor fellow?' the rector said drawing nearer.

'Lord Roderic. He has been dead twenty years, but I saw him and heard him last night!'

The rector glanced at the doctor. 'Is his mind wandering?' he asked.

'Must be,' the physician responded; 'although he looks as if his mind were clear. There is no such person, my man,' he said; 'the gipsies sent you here. You are dying—do you know it? This gentleman is a clergyman—if you have anything to say to him, best say it at once. Your hours on earth are few.'

He took his hat and left the room as he spoke. In the little inn yard he found Colonel Drummond pacing to and fro.

'Well?' he asked.

'He has recovered from his long semi-trance, and spoken. His mind seems wandering though; he asked for some Lord Roderic. My cutics call me away—I can be of no use—he will not live two hours. Mr. Hall is with him. If you know him, and have anything to say to the poor wretch, colonel, best see him and say it at once.'

The doctor hurried away—the colonel entered the house. As he went softly into the room of death, the clergyman met him on the threshold with a very grave ace.

'He seems in great mental anguish and remorse,' he said, in a whisper; 'he has a confession to make, he says, and cannot die with it on his soul. Twenty years ago he committed—good heavens!—a horrible murder, for which an innocent man suffered through his perjury. I am a magis rate, as you know, and must take his dying depo i-tion. Will you stay in the room? In all my clerical experience, I never attended the death-bed of a murderer before, and pray God I never may again! I have a nervous horror of being alone with this dying wretch.'

'I will stay,' Colonel Drummond said, very, very pale; 'he need not see me. I should have remained in any case.'

He crossed over to the little curtained window at the head of the bed and seated himself. Leaning his chin on his hand, he watched the rosy glory of the bright new day, and listened to the words that vindicated his honour, and left his name, tarnished for twenty long years, stainless once more.

The rector drew up a little table close to the bed-side, pen, ink and paper before

him, and prepared to take down the deposition of the dying man. The word came slowly and with difficulty, but clear and unhesitating, freezing the poor rector with horror as he wrote.

'It is one and twenty years ago,' Morgan said—'ah, heaven! it seems twenty centuries—since I practised as attorney in Clontarf, County Wicklow, Ireland. I was a young man then—thirty, or there abouts; my name is William Morgan, and I am English by birth. I practised my profession in Clontarf—I was land agent for Sir Robert Young, doing well and amassing money, and hated, as most land agents are in Ireland. There was a young girl in the place, Kathleen O'Neal by name a poor cotter's daughter, with whom I fell in love. She laughed at me—she refused to listen to me—she would not be my wife. She loved, in her turn, one who did not care for her—Lord Roderic Desmond, only son of the Earl of Clontarf, the betrothed husband of the Spanish lady, Inez D'Alvarez.'

The rector dropped his pen, aghast.

'It cannot be?' he cried. 'Do you know of whom you speak? The lady is alive yet—she is the Countess of Clontarf.'

The wounded man grinned horribly a ghastly smile.

'She goes by that title,' he said, 'though I strongly doubt whether she has any legal right to it. That has nothing to do with my story, however. Kathleen would not listen to me, the odious English attorney, because she worshipped the brilliant young Lord Clontarf, with his fair woman's face and blue eyes; and he, in his turn, loved the Spanish donna.

'He was the darling of the gods; they all adored him—the women—old and young, for his beauty and his brightness, while I hated him as I hated the devil; and his cousin, Gerald Desmond, hated him still more. Don't drop your pen and stare! I know Gerald Desmond is Earl of Clontarf today, and your friend, very likely; but for all that he is the most infernal villain out of—'

'My good man! my good man!' interposed the rector, in horror.

'Well, don't cry out before you're hurt. He is, though, for all that. At last I got Kathleen's father completely in my power, and I used that power without mercy. I drove her half-wild with fear. She was in blank despair, too, at the approaching nuptials of Lord Roderic and Donna Inez, and, in very desperation she consented at last to be my wife. But after that promise she met him—she loved him as devotedly as ever. I was mad with jealousy, and I had very good cause. One day I met her in a lonely woodland place, on the banks of a narrow river. We called it the boundary stream. I charged her with her falsity to me—her love for Roderic Desmond. She could not deny it—she gloried in it.

'I have loved him all my life—I will love him till I die!' were her words. 'I do not want to be your wife. If you possess one spark of manliness, you will set me free. I tell you, as your wife, I will still love him. I would die for him—my beautiful darling!'

'Were those words not enough to madden any one? I seized a sharp-pointed stone, that the devil himself seemed to have laid ready to my hand, and, in a paroxysm of fury, I struck her on the temple and hurled her headlong into the stream. She sank like a stone. Oh, God! I see her face now, as she looked her last on me—a smile on her lips, her eyes bright with her love for him! I left the accursed spot. I was cool and calm enough then. I went straight to her father's cottage, and asked for her. She had been absent all day, he said, he knew no where. Search was made. One of the village officials went straight to the spot. It was an old haunt of hers, and there we came upon Lord Roderic Desmond, drawing the dead body out of the water. I flew into a frenzy of rage—I saw my way clear at once—I laid hold of him and accused him of the murder. He shook me off as if I had been a viper; but vipers have their fangs, and bitterly he felt mine. That very evening I met Gerald Desmond—his arch-enemy too. I thought he looked at me strangely. I had always distrusted him, but I never feared him before. Something in his sinister eyes made me fear him now. I had good reason. He summoned me down to the shore, and there, alone on the sands, he told me he had seen all—he knew me, a murderer.

"I was on the opposite side of the stream," he said, "hidden in the thicket. I saw your meeting; I heard your words; I saw you strike the blow; I saw you fling her down to her death. William Morgan, I can have you hung as high as Haman at the next assizes."

"But you will not," I said boldly. I was horribly frightened, but something in his face gave me hope. "You will not, I said. "You would rather hang your cousin." I cannot tell you what he said in reply; it made even *my* blood run cold. He had hated him, with man's deepest and bitterest hatred, for years—for his rank, which he coveted; for the woman he was to wed, whom he coveted still more. On one

condition would he spare me—that I swore his cousin's life away. Well, I consented—"all that a man hath will he give for his life"—and I hated him with all my soul myself. Suffice it to say that the trial came on. Perjury was as nothing to Gerald Desmond and me. I tell you solemnly, with my dying breath, we both swore falsely, again and again, and by those false oaths of ours Lord Roderic Desmond was convicted and condemned to die. I accuse Gerald, Lord Clontarf, of double treble, perjury, and of being accessory to a most horrible murder.' He raised himself in his bed, his gaunt, skeleton arm uplifted, his eyeballs starting, his voice rising in a shrill, dreadful cry.

The horrified rector recoiled, his hair bristling with terror and dismay. 'Good Heavens above!' he gasped; 'can this be true?'

'True as the gospel you preach is true, on the oath of a dying man; and I hold you bound to proclaim it to the world, and punish the double-dyed traitor and perjurer as he deserve.'

'But his cousin—Lord Roderic—was not hanged. I have heard the story before!' cried the affrighted clergyman.

'No, he was not hanged. Whether he was murdered or not is an open question. He escaped from jail, but no one has ever heard of him or seen him alive since. My own impression is that he encountered Gerald Desmond, and that there was foul play. Would God he were alive! I would not have two murders on my soul, in my dying hour.'

His voice failed. He was sinking fast, but he had still strength left to sign the document. His breathing came slow and laboured; the death-rattle sounded already in his throat.

'I see them every night!' he whispered, hoarsely—'Kathleen and Lord Rory! I saw him last night. He bent over me and spoke to me in the moonlight, and I know he is dead.'

Colonel Drummond arose and came and stood beside him. 'Desmond is not dead?' he said, slowly. 'Look up and see!'

A piercing cry rang through the room; the dying man sprang almost erect.

'His voice!' he cried; 'his face—changed, but his! Am I sane or mad? Are you Lord Roderic Desmond?'

'Twenty years ago, I was known by that name. You have done me deep and bitter wrong, William Morgan, but in this supreme hour, may the great God forgive you as I do!'

The light of a great joy flashed over the dying face. He tried to speak, but the awful death-rattle choked his words. With his glazing eyes fixed in the last ghastly stare on the pale features above him, Morgan, the attorney, the murderer of Kathleen, fell back—dead!

CHAPTER XI.

MUTUAL CONFESSION.

Lady Evelyn Desmond, entering the dining-room on the arm of Lord Clydesmore, found herself face to face with her lover. He sat beside his hostess, listening to her incessant prattle, with a look of stern pallor on his face, very unusual there.

'You here, Trevannance?' Lord Clydesmore said. 'I thought you had another engagement for this evening?'

'None that I could not throw over, and Warbeck has charms no other house in the county possesses,' with a bow to his fair companion.

'Oh, certainly! I am the attraction, beyond a doubt!' retorted her brilliant ladyship. 'But how is it Orestes has left his Pylades, Damon his Pythias, David his Jonathan? Where is the gallant colonel?

'Am I my brother's keeper? He is pining for the sound of the war trumps once more; he scents the battle afar off, and is away to the Western glades and green woods by the first steamer.'

'And I, for one, am very "sorry," said Lady Clydesmore. 'I shall never find a Chevalier Bayard, a hero without fear and without reproach, again. Peace to his memory. I hope he will be civil enough to come and say good-by!'

And so the subject was dismissed. Trevannance looked across at Lady Evelyn, but her eyes were upon her plate, and her pale, still face told nothing. But over that of her father there flashed a look of unutterable relief.

'What an inconceivable idiot I have been!' he thought, 'to let that passing resemblance frighten me so horribly. I am like a nervous child, terrified at an imaginary boggy. But, thank God, the fellow's going!'

The ladies went back to the drawing-room; there were but three on this particular evening—the hostess, Miss Ethel Albemarle, and Lord Clontarf's daughter. Miss Albermarle, a brilliant pianist, sat down to the open instrument; the viscountess took a new novel, and saddled herself up cozily; and Lady Evelyn, with a feeling of oppression, as though there were not air enough to breathe in the long drawing-room, opened

one of the French wiindows and stepped out upon the lawn.

The gentlemen lingered long over their wine and walnuts. My lady was half-asleep over her high church novel ere they entered. The keen eyes of Trevannance missed his liege lady at the first glance: at the second, they caught sight of a slender, stately figure out there on the moonlit lawn. An instant later, and he was by her side.

She glanced up, not startled, not surprised; she had expected him, but the beautiful face in the starlight looked paler than he had ever seen it.

'I am glad you have come,' she said, slowly. 'I have much to say to you to-night.'

He bowed, and offered her his arm without a word. In silence they walked down between the copper beeches, out of sight of the lamplit windows.

'I have a confession to make,' began Lady Evelyn Desmond, and the tremor in the clear voice alone told how bitterly painful and humiliating that confession was. 'The confession I owe to you as my plighted husband. When I promised to try and love you, I honestly meant to keep my word, I have kept it—I have tried, and—failed! When you ask me upon your return—ah, such a short time ago—if any one else had supplanted you, I scorned to answer so preposterous a question, my heart was free as when you first asked for it. In my wicked pride I thought myself superior to such base weakness, and—I have been properly punished. I am the weakest and falsest of all women!'

There was a pause. They had stopped in their walk, and she covered her face with both hands with a passionate sob.

Never before had she seemed so near to him, so womanly, as in this hour of her confessed weakness. And yet—was it a great throb of relief that set his heart plunging in a most unwonted way for that well-trained organ?

'I am to understand, then,' he said, in his low, lingering accents 'that the heart Lady Evelyn Desmond cannot give to me has been bestowed upon some more fortunate man?'

'Oh, forgive me! forgive me! I meant to do right—I tried so hard—heaven knows I did! I respected you—admired you—esteemed you—'

'Everything but loved me! And you demand your freedom now! Well, Lady Evelyn, I once no woman to wed me; I set you free. Only I made the same mistake you did yourself. I fancied La Rose de Castile superior to mortal weakness—"a creature all too bright and good for human nature's daily food—an angel, the hem of whose garment I was unworthy to touch. And I find—will you pardon my rudeness in saying it?—a finished and perfect coquette, who flings aside a lover or a faded bouquet, when they grow triste, with equal high-bred indifference! May I ask the name of my fortunate successor?'

The most gentle of gentlemen, the most courteous of courtiers, can be mercile-sly cruel when they choose. Trevannance would not have laid a rude finger on the coarsest hag that ever dishonoured the name of woman, yet with his soft, slow words he could stab to the core the proud heart of the lady he professed to worship.

She looked up, all her Castilian fire flashing in her great eyes and growing red in her before pale cheeks.

'You do well,' she said, laying her right hand on her throbbing breast, 'to remind me how false, how miserably weak I have been. I deserve your reproaches, but you might have spared me that one taunt! I do not ask for freedom: I ask for nothing but—but your forgiveness, if you are great enough to grant that. Evelyn Desmond does not give her word one hour, and withdraw it the next. All I have promised I am ready to fulfil—to be your wife to-morrow, if you demand it; and the honour of the man I wed, whoever he be, will be dearer to me than my life. Not for my own sake, but for yours, have I told you this. Do you think I do not feel the bitter degradation of such a confession as this? Do you think you can despise me half as deeply as I despise myself?'

He listened to the impassioned words with a face of emotionless calm.

'And the man who has supplanted me,' he said, his low tones a strange contrast to the suppressed passion of hers, 'is the friend I trusted, the hero "without reproach," Colonel Drummond!'

She turned from him and hid her face, a cry breaking from her lips—such a cry of sharp, cruel pain as he could not have wrung from that haughty breast had he struck her down at his feet. He was at hers the instant after it was uttered.

'Oh, forgive me!' he cried. 'I am a wretch—a merciless brute! Evelyn, dearest, look up—speak to me—pardon me, if you can!'

She obeyed him, looking up, ashen white.

'I deserve it!' she answered, huskily. 'But spare him! I will never look upon his face again. And the blame is all mine, not his.'

'No man is to blame for loving you! Dear

'Lady Evelyn, forgive me! I knew all this before you told me, and—I think you ten times more of an angel than ever. He deserves to win what I could not keep. He is a better, a braver, a truer man than I! He has suffered greatly and endured silently. He is worthy of you, and I—am not!'

She dropped her hands, and looked at him in white amaze. Was this Vivian Trevannance talking, or was she in a dream?

'Two hours ago, Lady Evelyn, I lay yonder, under the drawing-room windows, and inadvertently played the eaves-dropper. A confession quite as humiliating as your own, is it not? I heard Drummond's first words to you, your reply, and I was chained to the spot—I could not stir. I heard all. I knew he had won the greatest prize man ever fought or died for—the heart of the purest, and noblest, the most beautiful of women! And, Lady Evelyn, I free you from your promise. I honour you as I never honoured any woman since my mother died, and Robert Drummond shall be the friend dearest to me while life lasts.'

She still stood looking at him in that stupor of pale amaze. 'Why did I not know you sooner?' she said, under her breath.

He smiled. 'We were not for each other. Dearest Lady Evelyn, you remember the gipsy Redempta's words to me on the first day we met, and again, a few hours back, on the race-course?'

'Yes—no. I paid no heed. I have forgotten. She spoke of—'

'Of some one, loved and left, over the sea. Lady Evelyn, out yonder in America, there is one, not one-half so beautiful, not one quarter so good, or gentle, or loveable as yourself, and yet—I love her! I loved her and I left her. She is beneath us in rank, perhaps, but as far above me in genius and virtue as yonder starlit sky. I left her, for you were to be my bride—you, the Golden Apple, for whom half a hundred of the highest in the realm would have bartered their coronets. But now we are both free once more. I will return to my little Mignonnette, and you—you will bless the life of a better man.'

He took both her hands in his, and looked down at her for an answering smile. But the smile that flitted and faded over the beautiful face was very sad to see.

'We have parted,' she said, softly, 'and forever. Do you think papa, with his pride, would ever listen to him? And if I be not his wife, I shall go to my grave what I am to-night. For you, I wish you joy with all my heart—you and your bride. Shall we return? I am cold.'

She shivered slightly, but not with the cold. He held her still an instant more.

'Then here we part,' he said; 'here we end what was to be, and go our different ways. Farewell, Lady Evelyn, and God bless you.'

For the second time in his life he stooped and touched the pearly brow with his lips. Never had he been so near loving her as now, when he gave her up.

'Farewell!' she seemed to sigh rather than say, as she glided from him like a spirit, and flitted away to the house.

And Vivian Trevannance, left alone in the moonlit avenue, lit his Manilla—man's best consoler—and leaned against a big tree, and smoked, and looked at the moon, and wondered why things were at such cross-purposes in this world, and whether it was sorrow or joy that most filled his inconstant heart at his freedom.

CHAPTER XII.

FROM THE DEAD.

The amber haze of the June evening lay bright over the fair English landscape, as Robert Drummond rode back to Royal Rest.

Warbeck Hall lay on his way thither, and as he approached the lofty entrance-gates, he came face to face with Vivian Trevannance.

'By Jove!' the younger man exclaimed, 'here you are, after all! I give you my word I began to think you had gone off to America without the ceremony of saying good-by. As for that other story, I knew it was too absurd to be true.'

'What other story?'

'That you had met with an accident, and were killed or dying. It takes considerable killing to make an end of the fire-eating leader of the "Devil's Own." The servants in the house got hold of some garbled version from the village, and the worst of the matter is that—women believe these stories so readily—I fear Lady Evelyn may have heard it.'

Drummond looked in amaze at his friend. Vivian Trevannance stretched forth his hand with a smile.

'I know all! I give you joy! You have won a prize for which an emperor might lay down his crown and sceptre!'

'And you?'

'All is at an end between us—a dissolved engagement by mutual consent. She confessed all with a noble heroism rarely met with, and—of course she is free. I do not blame you in the least. Go in and win, and my blessing be upon your virtuous endea-

yours! For myself, I return to America. I find I have left my heart behind me there.'

'With—'

'Yes—with Mignonnette. I think the little one cares for me, in spite of her scorn and defiance; and I know how much I care for her. Perhaps you had best go in. Only from your own lips'—smiling 'will Lady Evelyn believe you are alive. Whom ave we here? Ah, the rector.'

Mr. Hall ame whirling up in his pony-shaise, with a pale and alarmed visage quite remarkable to see. He had come on a most unpleasant errand. The deposition of the dead vagrant was in his pocket, and to Lord Clontarf's influence he owed his present highly eligible living. How was he to face his patron, and accuse him of this array of horrible crimes?

The three men entered together. The rector and Trevannance went into the library.

'You will find Lady Evelyn where I left her ten minutes ago, in the picture gallery. Go and tell her you are not altogether killed.'

The colonel very readily obeyed. He sprang up the stairway—passed along the second hall on his way to the picture gallery. But ere he reached it, a near door opened, and Lady Evelyn herself stood before him, with a white, wild face. A second later, and she had recoiled with a low cry.

'They told me you were dead. They told me—'

Her words died away—the man she loved held her clasped in his strong arms.

'My darling!' he said; 'my darling! And you care for me like this? Oh, my love! I have come back to you—not to say farewell, but to claim you as my own, to hold you here forevermore.

'You scoundrel, you audacious villain!' a harsh, stern voice broke in upon his impassioned words; 'release my daughter this instant.'

The Earl of Clontarf stood before them, white to the lips with amaze and rage. It was on the threshold of her mother's apartment Lady Evelyn had met him—the earl chanced to be with his wife on one of his rare, ceremonious visits, and in leaving, had come upon this unexpected tableau.

His daughter, deadly pale, strove to release herself, but the 'audacious villain' held her fast. He stood, drawn up to his full, kingly height—those vivid violet eyes the peer had such horrible reason to dread flashing upon him their blue lightning.

'We part not, sir!' the soldier said, in a voice that rang—'not at the command of ten thousand fathers! I love your daughter, and she loves me. Vivian Trevennance has resigned his claim—her hand is free. Her heart is mine, and no power on earth shall sever us. Not yours, Gerald Desmond.'

Lady Evelyn looked at her lover; looked at her father, ashen pale. The former stood 'a king of noble Nature's crowning'—grand, strong, flashing eyed, majestic, the latter, ghastly white with an awful, unuttered dread, had staggered back, and stood blindly staring.

That voice! that face! those words! Was he going mad?

'Who are you,' he cried, hoarsely, putting forth his hand as though to hold him off, 'that dares speak to me thus? Who are you that speaks with the voice and looks at me with the face of the dead?'

The reply on the lips of the man he addressed never was uttered; for, in trailing white robes—white as a spirit herself—Inez, Countess of Clontarf, stood upon the threshold. She had heard that voice, silenced for twenty long eyes—and she had risen and come forth. Her great black eyes were upon the face of her daughter's lover with a wild glare for one awful moment—only for a moment—then, with a long, shrill cry of recognition—'Roderic, Roderic!'—she reeled, and fell heavily at his feet.

He caught her as she touched the ground. Her daughter had echoed her cry, but Gerald Desmond stood rooted to the spot. He knew all at last. It was no dream, no fancy, no chance resemblance—but his cousin, Roderic Desmond who stood before him from the dead!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE VENGEANCE OF RODERIC DESMOND.

That wild scream had been heard. The moment after it was uttered, Trevannance, Lord Clydesmore and Mr. Hall were on the spot.

'What has happened?' demanded the master of the house.

He might well stare. Colonel Drummond stood with the swooning form of Lady Clontarf in his arms, while my lord earl, leaning against the wall, was glaring before him like a galvanized corpse; and Lady Evelyn, pale as a spirit, looked from one to the other, from father to lover, still 'far wide.'

The calm clear voice of the American officer broke the silent spell. 'Nothing very extraordinary, my lord. This lady, in attempting to quit her room, fainted. With your permission, Lady Evelyn, I will place her upon the sofa, yonder, and leave her in your charge.'

He carried her gently in and laid her down. One fleeting second he paused, gazed at the white, rigid, death-like face of the woman who so nearly had been his wife, so sadly changed since those long-gone days. Then he had quitted the apartment, leaving Lady Evelyn with her mother, and closed the massive oaken door behind him.

Her father stood as he had left him; he had neither moved nor spoken. Robert Drummond flashed his light y on the shoulder, as officer of the law might in making an arrest.

'A word with you, sir,' he said, authoritatively. 'I go to the library; precede me there. Mr. Hall, will you lead the way?'

Trevannance and Lord Clydesmore exchanged glances. Neither spoke; they were curiously watching the Irish peer.

Mechanically, with that livid hue settled on his face—with that fixed blind stare in his eyes—he obeyed the command of the stranger. He walked, without one word after the rector.

Colonel Drummond turned to his host. 'You will pardon this seeming mystery, and later all shall be explained. I must have a word in private now with your friend.'

Lord Clydesmore bowed rather haughtily, and Drummond passed on his way to the library.

'Odd!' the viscount remarked to his friend, when the trio had disappeared.

'Very!' assented Mr. Trevannance.

The library of Warbeck Hall was a vast apartment, where carved oak and green velvet curtains made perpetual gloom. A cluster o waxlights blazed already over one of the writing-tables, though the summer sunset was still rosy in the sky without.

In an arm-chair before this table, Gerald Desmond sank down, and, with his elbows upon it, his forehead bowed on his hands, sat waiting for his doom. For a great and utter hopelessness had come upon him—a dull despair filled him, in which there was a strange mingling of relief.

He had lost all for which he had risked so much, but he was no murderer—at least, in deed. A murderer he might be, as surely as though the grave had closed over his victim; but the dead face of Roderic Desmond could never haunt him night time and day-time more, and blast the happiness of his life.

He was weak in body and crushed in mind just now, in his intense shock of amaze, while his great enemy reared above him, tall, strong, majestic, in the very force of his wrongs. It was the cowed earl who first spoke, with a sullen glance at the rector, who, pallid and trembling, hovered aloof.

'What does he do here?' he asked, doggedly. 'Let him leave the room!'

'No!' the other interposed, 'he shall stay! He holds in his possession a document that will send you from this house to the town jail yonder a felon and an outcast. He holds the death-bed confession of William Morgan!'

The man who for so many years had been Lord of Clontarf caught his breath with a sort of gasp. All, then, was at an end. His cousin's triumph was complete.

'Will you hand me that paper, Mr. Hall?' the colonel said, with stern brevity. 'Nay, sir, never hesitate! Who is there alive has a better right than I? I will read it aloud for my lord earl.'

The rector yielded up the paper; the flashing fire of those blue eyes terrified him into instant compliance.

Roderic Desmond opened it and read it, in a slow, impressive voice, from beginning to end. With the last word dead silence fell.

'You did wrong, sir,' Roderic said, 'to fling aside your tool when you had used it. The man who perjured himself at your command was worth watching. But you thought me dead, and fancied yourself safe.'

'I thought you dead,' Gerald Desmond muttered, in a strange, thick voice, 'with a bullet through your heart and the waters of Wicklow Bay above you.'

'That was your mistake. Your aim was hardly as accurate as usual that morning, my worthy kinsman. The bullet aimed with such good will for my heart missed that organ by an inch or two, and a friend was on hand to rescue me from the waters of Wicklow Bay. You forgot my faithful foster-brother, Mike Muldoon, in your haste, did you not? He rescued me; he took me to Australia; he saved me from the felon's death—from the base assassination to which the man who had been to me as a brother consigned me.'

Something like a moan escaped the livid lips of the cowering man, and his eyes fell before the lightning glance of those fiery eyes.

'Twenty years have passed; you have prospered. The world has gone well with you; wealth, rank, honour, have been yours. I have been an alien and an outcast, a felon and a wanderer over the world, without faith in man, or trust in woman. You took from me my honour, dearer to me than life—the woman I loved, the title I should have worn, my life itself, if you could. You know the old German proverb—"The mill of the gods grind slowly, but it grinds exceeding small!" You have run the length of your tether. It is my turn now!'

His voice rang, his eyes flashed. The stricken wretch before him seemed to shrivel up in the scorching flame of that lightning glance.

'I hold in my hand the paper that will strip you of wealth, and rank, and honours, and all you hold dearest on earth! It is mine to drive you forth from this house, with the scorn and hatred of all therein! Your wife's love you never had. No, Gerald Desmond, that triumph never was yours! On your bridal day, with wide leagues of ocean between us, she loved me still. Your daughter's heart is mine to-day—that proud and peerless daughter, who, when she learns the truth, will abhor the man she once called father.'

A cry, like the cry of a wounded animal, broke from the man before him at this last bitter blow.

'Oh, God!' he said, 'I deserve it! But have mercy, Roderic Desmond!'

'I left America,' Roderic Desmond went on, stern as Rhadamanthus, 'to seek my vengeance on you: nay, not vengeance—wring the truth from your guilty heart. I came here—I met your daughter—the Inez d'Alvarez of my youth again, and from the first moment we met I loved her. That love made me blind and mad. She was bound to another; she could be nothing to me. Yet for her sake I resolved to pare the wretch who was her father. I said, "Kathleen is in heaven; no vengeance will bring her to me now. For myself, I can die as I have lived, an honest man at least. I will leave this place; I will leave him to God, and her to the man she is to wed." And I would have kept my word; I would have gone and left my vengeance behind. But Providence had willed it otherwise. By merest accident I came upon Morgan, wounded, dying; all unknown, I sat in the room while he made his dying declaration to this clergyman. When he ceased, I bent over him. Like you, like your wife, he knew me at once. His last word was my name. My revenge came to me when I was leaving it. What is there to hinder me breaking it in full now? For all the deep and deadly wrongs you have done me—for honour lost, for Kathleen murdered, for my father's heart broken, for my bride taken from me, for a life blasted and made desolate, for a name and memory tarnished with dark dishonour—this paper gives me full and complete atonement at last!'

A dreadful groan again burst from the breast of the tortured man. On his face lay the leaden hue of death, and the muscles convulsively twitched. In that hour he suffered as Roderic Desmond had never done in his life.

He stood looking at his prostrate foe, while the evening shadows deepened about them, and the soft summer twilight fell.

A change came over the fixed, stern fire of his eyes—the proud and splendid face of Evelyn floating before him, unutterably soft and tender, with the love she had learned from him.

'For your daughter's sake, I would have spared you once, Gerald Desmond. For your daughter's sake, I take my vengeance now—thus!'

He lifted the paper—the confession of William Morgan—and held it in the blaze of the chandelier.

Gerald Desmond sprang to his feet, with a great cry—a cry echoed by the rector. But both stood rooted to the ground, whilst the paper shrivelled and scorched to cinders.

Roderic Desmond ground the charred fragments under his heel.

'You, sir,' he said, turning to Mr. Hall, 'who heard the dying man confess the murder, for which he afterwards swore my life away, will do me justice before the world. I forgave William Morgan, in his dying hour, Kathleen's murderer; surely, then, I can forego all personal revenge. Your crimes are known on earth to but us three—for your daughter's sake, whose heart that knowledge would break, the world shall never know. Mr. Hall, for his own sake, will be discreetly silent, and I—I leave you to a vengeance mightier than any on earth. My civil rights I shall claim and take from you, and your daughter shall be my wife, and Countess of Clontarf—'

He stopped abruptly. The man he addressed had slipped from his chair and fallen prostrate on the floor.

The rector sprang forward and raised him up. The Omnipotent vengeance to which Roderic Desmond had left him had stricken him down almost with the words. For the second time he had fallen in a fit of paralysis—a dreadful sight!

CHAPTER XIV.

AFTER TWENTY YEARS.

Lady Inez Desmond lay long in that deep, death-like swoon. The evening shadows fell thick about them ere the great, dark eyes opened to light and life once more. Her daughter hung above her; the gentle, loving lips fondly kissed her own. With the first glance into that pale, young face, memory returned. Slowly and painfully she struggled up and gazed around.

'Where is he?' she asked. 'Was it a dream, Evelyn? Has my reason left me, or did I really see Roderic Desmond—dead-and-gone twenty long years?'

'You saw Colonel Drummond, sweetest mother,' her daughter said, caressingly. 'You saw the strange likeness— the startling likeness—he bears to the lost lover of your youth. I too, was struck by it the first moment we met.'

'No, no, no!' Lady Inez cried, 'it is no mere resemblance. If I saw a living man, I saw Roderic Desmond in the flesh. Do you think there could be another man alive to look at me with his eyes, speak to me with his voice? I tell you I saw Roderic Desmond—the dead alive! Oh, my daughter, what if, after all those years that we have mourned for him as dead, he should still be alive? Tell me,' she wildly cried—'tell me, Evelyn, all you know of this man. Who is he?'

Lady Evelyn, very pale, looked her mother straight in the eyes. 'A man—whoever he be—whose name I desire to hear to my dying day.'

Lady Inez uttered a faint cry.

'My daughter! And Vivian Trevannance?'

'All is at end between Vivian Trevannance and me. If I do not marry Robert Drummond, I will go to my grave unwedded.'

Her mother drew her closer to her, and kissed the pale, cold face. 'Tell me all about him, my darling—who brought him here—how long you have known him—all, all?'

'That all is but little. Mr. Trevannance met him in America; he saved his life there; he brought him with him here when he returned. We met, and mo her mine. I think I loved him from that first meeting. I, too, saw the wonderful likeness to the picture you gave me, and I think—I believe—papa saw it, too, and for some reason dreaded him. Of his previous history I know little or nothing. I do not ask to know. He is all that is noble and good, and I love him. I need say no more.'

'And he loves you?'

'With his whole brave heart.' The lovely face glowed as she made the answer. Just then came a soft tap at the door. Evelyn crossed the room and opened the door, expecting to see Lady Clydesmore. But in the twilight her lover stood before her, paler than herself.

'My dearest,' he said, drawing her to him, 'an accident has happened. Do not be alarmed; but your father is very ill. He has had a stroke of paralysis.' She grew so white that he thought she was going to faint; the large, violet eyes fixed themselves with strange, startled intensity upon his face.

'He has had a shock of some kind,' she said, breathlessly. 'Have you been the cause?'

'I have. Evelyn, my love, your father knows who I am—your mother knows it. My beloved, do you?'

'You are Roderic Desmond!'

She said it with a sobbing cry. He drew her into his arms, and held her there close—close to his beating heart.

'I am Roderic Desmond, so long thought dead—alive to love you with stronger love than man ever felt for woman before.'

She freed herself by an effort.

'And my mother?'

'Ah, your mother!'—his face darkened ever so little—'that was dust and ashes years ago. But you are now what your mother was twenty years back, and I think I loved you first for that. My dearest, I have a very long story to tell you of the bitter past—of the woman I loved and lost—of the woman who loved me, and whom I wedded, of a daughter, a stray waif, somewhere in America. But not now—you must go to your father.'

'And you must go to my mother! Yes, Roderic, she desires to see you with a desire not to be denied. And she was not so false as you think. Let her plead her cause, and pardon her—for my sake!'

He kissed the pleading lips.

'For your sake, my darling, there is nothing on earth I would not do. Lead me to your mother—as well now as another time.'

She drew him into the apartment. It was still light enough, even among the gathering shadows, for them to see each other's colourless face. Lady Inez reared herself upright where she lay, with one faint word on her lips:

'Roderic!'

'Inez!'

He stood drawn up before her, tall, stern, grave as doom. Lady Evelyn gave him one pleading glance—a glance that said plainly as words. 'Oh, be merciful!' and flitted like a shadow from their presence. But in that first instant of meeting—with this new love strong and sweet in his heart to atone for the past—it was hard to forget all his cruel, bitter wrongs. Twenty years rolled away — he thought of the happy, true-hearted, gladsome boy who had loved the Spanish beauty with his whole soul, and of her base return. Within a few brief months of what she had thought the day of his death, she had given herself wholly to his would-be

murderer. She had been false beyond the falsity of woman.

His face set and hardened, and grew rigid as iron, as he thought of all this. She saw that stern darkness, and held up her clasped hands.

'Oh, forgive me! I was false and base! You despise me, and I deserve it! I wedded him. No scorn you can feel for me can be half so bitter as that I feel for myself. And yet, if you knew all, you might try at least to forgive.'

He smiled a little as he listened—a smile that had a world of bitterness in it.

'There need be no talk of forgiveness between us. You lost me, Lady Inez, and you married another man—not at all an uncommon case. Pray do not plead to me. I think I would rather not hear it. You did as most women would have done. I have no right to complain—nothing to pardon. I am only sorry you did not marry a better man.'

She covered her face with her hands, her tears falling like rain. 'Cruel—cruel! But I deserve it all. And yet I, too, have suffered—oh, my God, so bitterly, so long! Roderic, by the memory of the past, be merciful—speak one kind word to me! Listen whilst I tell you all!'

She stretched out her hands to him in an agony of supplication. He bowed low before her, but he would not touch those extended hands. All that passionate pleading only seemed to harden his heart, only seemed to remind him that through her he had lost faith in man, trust in woman—that through her he had been an exile and an alien all those years.

'I listen, Lady Inez,' he said, gravely; 'but once more I repeat, it is unnecessary. Let the dead past stay dead—the suffering and misery have gone by. If it gives you pain, I do not ask you to speak one word.'

'It is your coldness, your sternness, your cruel indifference, that give me pain. Ah, you are very unlike the Roderic Desmond of twenty years ago!'

He smiled again. 'Very unlike, my Lady Inez. You can hardly wonder at that.'

'No; your lot has been cruelly hard—your exile long and terrible. And I seemed so false, so base, so heartless. And yet it was for love of you I wedded Gerald Desmond,'

Rory Desmond's blue eyes opened wide at this declaration. He almost laughed aloud.

'Pardon me, Lady Inez, but really that is hard to believe. You marry my rival—the man I have every reason to hate—because you love me! Sounds rather like a paradox, does it not?'

'Nevertheless, it is true. I can never tell you what I felt, what I suffered, in those first dreadful days when we all thought you murdered. I only wonder now I did not die or go mad. But I lived on, in a stupor of anguish, under the blow which killed your father. Ah, he was happier far than I! And on his death-bed he called me to his side and begged me to be Gerald Desmond's wife.'

'My father did this?'

'He did. Do not blame him now; he did it for the best. Gerald Desmond did with him as he willed; and I—oh, Rory! could I refuse your father anything in that supreme hour? You were dead, I thought and it mattered little what became of me. Besides, I hoped my life would be but for a few months at best; I thought I could not live in such utter desolation as that. But, ah, how strong I was! I lived on and on—a living death—abhorring the man who was my husband—seeing my folly too late—ever, ever mourning for you. If you cannot forgive me, try at least and think less hardly of me, now that my days are numbered—for the sake of my daughter whom you love!'

He listened in pale amaze. Then all else was lost in a great and deep compassion for this frail, pale creature, who in heart had been true, after all—whose sufferings had been so much greater than his own.

'It is I who must ask forgiveness, Lady Inez,' he said, in a tone infinitely gentle and sweet, 'not you; for I have greatly wronged and misjudged you all these years. If you think there is anything to pardon, then I pardon it freely, God knows! I see it all now. You have been far more sinned against than sinning. Yes, Inez—my sister—I forgive all, out of my inmost heart.'

He kissed the pale, transparent hands reverently—he looked with pitying tenderness into that pallid, wasted, worn face. Yes, her womanly martyrdom had been long and very hard to bear.

Her eyes shone through their tears, at peace now. They dwelt upon him with an angelic look, full of an affection free from every taint of earthly passion—the gaze of a mother upon a beloved and long-lost son.

'And you will tell me all now—your past?' she said, softly; 'and why it is we have met at last?'

He seated himself beside her. Her face glimmered white as that of a spirit in the wan light as she lay back to listen. He told her all—his escape from prison by faithful Mike Muldoon; that terrible struggle for life on the cliff with the man who was her husband; of his second rescue from death by Mike; of the cruel news of his father's death and her marriage, which had

reached him in Melbourne, and which had made him a wanderer and an exile ever after. He told her of his marriage, of its tragic ending, of his daughter, of the meeting in St. Louis between himself, Trevannance, Mignonnette, and poor, wounded Mike.

He told her all—of his love for her daughter; his strange encounter with Morgan; the death-bed confession, and that last interview in the library, so awfully closed.

She listened, deadly pale, breathlessly interested, but never interrupting until the story's end. Then she strove to rise.

'I must go to my husband,' she said 'If he is stricken by the hand of God, my place is by his side.'

She struggled to get up, but Roderic held her gently back.

'Not yet Inez. Evelyn is with him, and the orders of the medical man are that no one else save the nurse be admitted. You are able to do nothing. He lies insensible to everything. You must wait until the morning.'

She looked at him wistfully as he arose to go.

'Pardon me, Roderic but how is it you could leave your daughter to struggle alone in those large, terrible cities, young and beautiful as she must be? It is not like you.'

'The fault was not mine. She had learned to hate me all her life, and was quite unmanageable in her pride and independence. I can do nothing with her; but I think I know some one who can,' with a smile.

'Ah! a lover?'

'Mr. Vivian Trevannance. He fell in love with her before I met him, and she with him, I rather fancy; but again that indomitable pride of hers held them apart. Besides, he was then engaged to Lady Evelyn. But he will go to America and he will find her, and I shall welcome my late rival as my son.'

'How very strange it all is! And this brave, faithful friend—this heroic Mike Muldoon—what of him?'

His eyes glistened at the name of that true-hearted friend.

'My brave Mike, who has loved me with a love surpassing that of a woman! He and I shall never part more. He shall reign Grand Seigneur of Clontarf—the great ambition of his life. It was agreed between us, when we parted, that he was to wait until I wrote to him, or rejoined him in St. Louis; and he will wait. I write to-night, and I mean to repair and rebuild Clontarf, and he shall be my bailiff there, and the happiest fellow in the three kingdoms. Shall I ring for your maid, Inez, before I go?'

She assented, and held out her hand.

'Good night, Lord Clontarf! Ah, thank Heaven I can call you by that name at last! Go to Evelyn. Do not let her wear herself out. Send her to me when she can leave her father.'

He lifted the wasted hands to his lips, passed from the boudoir, and was gone.

CHAPTER XV.

CONQUERING THE CONQUERORS.

'LADY CLYDESMORE TO MADAM LA COMTESSE D'AVIGNON, PARIS.

'WARBECK HALL, June 20, 18—.

'DEAREST VERONIQUE: I promised, I think, when you left London last April, to keep you posted on all that transpired here. That I have not written before is simply because I had nothing to say. It is only in books that things keep happening continually, and diaries are interesting reading. In real life, the old treadmill round goes perpetually on—dressing, dining, dancing, flirting, marrying and giving in marriage—all without a particle of romance. But something has happened at last—a living romance under our very roof—the most astounding event of the age! Town and country are ringing with it. It is the topic of the day, the sensation paragraph of the papers. I can scarcely realize it all yet.

'Let me collect my wits and write coherently, if I can. You will have seen, my dear Veronique, in Galignani, no doubt, the marriage of Lady Evelyn Desmond to Roderic Vincent Desmond, tenth Earl of Clontarf. And in the next column you have seen among the deaths that of Gerald Desmond, at Warbeck Hall. You have seen this, and been properly astonished, I dare say, for you knew my Lady Evelyn and her late betrothed, handsome Vivian Trevannance.

'Yes, you knew Vivian Trevannance. There was a time, even, madame la comtesse, when I thought you would have written your name Mrs. Trevannance, and held it a prouder title than all earth had to bestow. Ah, well! M. le comte has five-and-fifty years, but he makes you a much better husband than our favourite Vivian would ever be, dear friend.

'"It is better to be an old man's darling," etc. You and he parted as many others parted before you, and Lady Evelyn got him and kept him, as we all thought. But nothing is certain. She is off and away on her bridal tour, and he is free and fetterless once more, and gone, no one knows whither.

'You recollect the sensation the news of

his engagement caused, and his flight to America immediately after? He returned from thence some two months ago, bringing with him a friend—an American, he said—one Colonel Drummond. Lord and Lady Clontarf and their daughter were with us at Warbeck Hall at the time, and the two gentlemen came by chance upon Evelyn and me the day of their arrival, down on the shore.

'I was struck from the very first by this Colonel Drummond. You and I have seen many handsome men in our day, Veronique, but I don't think we either of us ever saw a man like Colonel Drummond. I do not mean his being exceptionally handsome, although he is—quite magnificent, I assure you: but I had heard such tales of his prowess, of his invincible courage and heroism, that I expected a ferocious barbarian, I think, instead of what I saw. Vivian had described him as a cool, daring soldier, ready to lead his men into the very jaws of death, with a cigar in his mouth, and, what is better, lead them out again triumphant.'

'I found the cool, daring soldier the gentlest of gentlemen, with the bow of a court chamberlain, the lowest and softest of voices, the most courteous of manners, and a look of fathomless sadness in a pair of eyes deeply, darkly, beautifully blue. Of course I became absorbed, interested in him at once. It is rather pleasant to know that the cavalier who bends so devotedly over you has led men to the cannon's mouth; that your partner in the waltz, who twirls you round so gently, has slain his thousands and tens of thousands, and is a hero.

'You will not be surprised to hear this of me: but you will be astonished when I tell you the cold, the haughty, the heartless Lady Evelyn fell in love with him at first sight. I don't pretend to understand it yet—it is altogether unlike her.

'And to complicate matters still more, he fell in love with her also, and they had an understanding somehow: and there was a scene, I daresay, and a tragic farewell spoken, and the handsome colonel rode away, to return no more—as we thought.

'But the next afternoon, to our surprise he returned, and with him Mr. Hall, the rector. He went up to the picture-gallery to see Evelyn, leaving Mr. Hall and Trevannance in the library. A few moments after we heard a piercing shriek, that rings in my ears yet. We all rushed up—I kept out of sight, however—and there stood Colonel Drummond with Lady Clontarf in his arms, in a dead swoon, while the earl stood staring like a man insane.

'The Colonel broke up the tableau—he was master of the situation. He placed my lady on a sofa in her ante-room, left her in charge of her daughter, ordered—absolutely ordered—the earl down to the library, Mr. Hall also, and followed them there, without deigning the slightest explanation to any one.

'The interview was long, and ended tragically enough. Mr. Hall came rushing out, crying for help, and when all flocked in, they found the earl speechless and helpless, in a second attack of paralysis. They bore him to his room, a physician came, and we were told that his earthly career was run.

'He was able to speak a little, and move his right hand and arm. He whispered one word, Roderic, and Colonel Drummond came and stood by him. He smiled a little, and beckoned the rector. Mr. Hall bent over him.

'"Tell," he whispered, "tell all!"

'Lady Clontarf and her daughter came into the room; he saw them, and motioned them forward. He lay clasping in his own the hand of the colonel, and Lady Clontarf's great black eyes were fixed upon him—the colonel—with a look of such wild joy as I never saw before in human face. We were all present—Clydesmore, Vivian Trevannance, myself, and Mr. Hall, in faltering broken accents, told the story he had to tell.

'Colonel Drummond was not Colonel Drummond at all, but Lord Roderic Desmond, and rightful Earl of Clontarf. Over twenty years before he had been taken and tried for the murder of an Irish peasant-girl—Kathleen O'Neal—and condemned to be hanged.

'In some wonderful way, he effected his escape, and for twenty years was a wanderer upon the earth, a branded felon, while his third cousin, Gerald, succeeded to his title and estates. Not only to his title and estates, but to the hand of his promised bride, Inez d'Alvarez.

'You know, Veronique, how unhappily the earl and countess always lived together. Now the secret is plain—she loved always the lover she had lost; she recognized him the first instant their eyes met.

'It appears there had been in some way a conspiracy against this Lord Roderic. The girl, O'Neal, had a lover who was madly jealous of the young Irish lord, and it was he who had sworn him guilty. But in the strangest, most providential manner they had met, when Drummond, as he calls himself, left Warbeck Hall. He found this man—Morgan, by name—wounded, dying, and in his dying hour he made a confession to the rector. He had done the murder

himself, for which Lord Roderic had suffered; he made a full and clear deposition, and recognized in Drummond the man he had so deeply injured, ere he died.

'And so we knew the secret at last, and the true Earl of Clontarf stood before us! He who had been the plighted husband of the mother, and stood there the accepted lover of the daughter. To see her he had come from America after all these years, and at first sight mutual love had been the result. My handsome colonel was a veritable hero of romance.

'A wonderful story, you say. I agree with you; and the most wonderful part, the conduct of Vivian Trevannance. He resigned "La Rose de Castile" without a struggle. Is it possible he never really cared for her? that vanity, not love, made him seek her? Gerald Desmond from the moment he was struck down, and knew himself dying, seemed but to have two desires left, that this new found cousin would forgive him for something, and that he would marry Evelyn before he died. He could not bear him out of sight; he would lie for hours. She was whiter than her robes and veil, but inexpressibly beautiful. And he—oh, Veronique, I sigh to think I shall never see anything like him again. Trevannance was groomsman—I laugh when I think of it—very handsome, very elegant, eminently self-possessed, and with just the gravity becoming the occasion. It did not cost him one pang. I wonder if there be such a thing as a heart in man's anatomy?

'Gerald Desmond died that night, his daughter's husband by his side, his last look in his face, his last word "Forgive?" And he is buried, and his secret with him, and the new earl and countess, and Lady Inez—she won't be countess-dowager—have left for old Castile. It is the land of mother and daughter—both pine to behold it, and Lady Inez goes there to die. She seems strangely happy, and yet her days are numbered. A peace I never saw in her face before, has come there since the hour she discovered this Lord Roderic lived.

'Immediately after the strange, weird wedding, Trevannance disappeared. Whither he went, he declined to tell, only Evelyn whispered a word to me as she said farewell, "He has gone back to America for a dark eyed bride.' I don't know whether it is mere surmise or not—time will tell.

'Dear! what a long letter, and what a budget of news! Never complain of me again as a bad correspondent. I am drearily lonely since they all left. I wish you were here, Veronique. But that may not be, and so farewell. Best regards to M. le Comte—a thousand kisses to you from thy

'BEATRICE.'

* * * *

The amber glory of a sunny September afternoon filled the city, and Vivian Trevannance sat a hotel window looking listlessly down on the tide of life ebbing and flowing along Notre Dame street, Montreal. The inevitable cheroot was between his lips, the old, languid grace was in his attitude, but his handsome, nonchalant face looked worn, and pale, and very grave.

For his search after Mignonnette seemed a well nigh hopeless thing. He had tried New York, and Philadelphia, and Washington, and had failed. The stage had lost her; since she disappeared so mysteriously the previous spring, in St. Louis, none of her theatrical friends had heard of her. Advertisements, large rewards, detectives—all failed. La Reine Rouge had vanished.

Trevannance gave up the chase in the United States, and went to Canada. He visited Toronto, Ottawa, and finally Montreal. Still in vain; all the means used hitherto had failed as well here; Minette, the actress, was not to be found.

The very difficulty of the chase gave it added zest—the oftener he was disappointed the more determined he grew. He had never known how dear she was to him until the hope of finding her began to leave him. He grew haggard and pale, and a certain look of nervous anxiety and watchfulness grew habitual to his handsome face.

He sat alone, this sunlit September afternoon, weary and half-hopeless. What had become of her? Whither had she gone, poor little, frail wanderer, adrift on life's stormy sea? Ah, if he had been true to his own heart, and made her his whilst he could have taken her to his bosom and shielded her from shipwreck in the world.

Crowds passed up and down—he only saw a black, moving stream. All at once, though, he started, took the cigar from his mouth, stared again, half in doubt, half in hope and delight. An instant later he had seized his hat, and was leaping down the stairs, five at a time. Chance had done for him at last what labour and search so long had failed to do.

An elderly Frenchwoman stood on the curb-stone, waiting for a chance to cross the street. With a dozen long strides he was beside her.

'Madame Michaud.'

The little old woman wheeled around and recognized her handsome accoster at once with sparkling eyes.

'*Mon Dieu!* M. Trevannance. Who would have thought—these months? Is she here? Is she well?'

'Both, monsieur.'

'And with you?'

'Always with me, monsieur. Could the child live alone?'

'Thank Heaven. Is she on the stage?'

'No, monsieur. She has never been on the stage since that time.'

'Thank Heaven again. What then, does she do?'

'Monsieur, I don't know that I ought to tell you. Mam'selle will not like it.'

'Why not, pray—if it be honourable? Tell me, Madame Michaud.'

'Well, then, she teaches singing and the piano. But it is hard work monsieur, and poor pay. The other was so much easier, so much pleasanter. Still she toils on, and works for us both. Ah, it is a noble heart.'

'Why did she leave the stage?' Trevannance asked, more moved than he cared to show.

Le Michaud glanced at him askance. She was old, but she had not forgotten her youth. She understood perfectly why, but she was by far too womanly to tell. She shrugged her shoulders, and trotted on by his side.

'Ah, why indeed. Ask her that when you see her, monsieur; she never told me. Where are you going now?'

'Home with you, madame,' Trevannance answered, with quiet resolution. 'Don't be inhospitable; I insist upon it. Is Mignonnette there?'

'Mignonnette is out—at her lessons. She will be very angry when she returns and finds you. 'We don't receive gentlemen in our chateau, M. Trevannance,' chirped madame.

'But such an old friend as I am, and after coming all the way from England, too. Your rule is excellent—I rejoice you don't receive gentlemen—but I am—'

'No gentleman, monsieur means to say?'

'An exception, I mean to say, madame. Is this the place?'

This was the place—up two pair of stairs—three little attic chambers—spotlessly clean kitchen, sleeping-room and parlour. Into the latter madame ushered her guest, apologizing for its lack of luxury.

'We are poor, monsieur—the Mignonnette never could keep her money—it flowed from her like water to all who needed it. And then, travelling from place to place melts it away. Sit here by the window, monsieur—the view is pleasant. And tell me, did you really come all the way from England to find—us.'

'For no other purpose, madame. And I never mean to part from—you again.'

Madame laughed cheerily. At the same instant, a step came slowly and wearily up the long stair.

'*Mon Dieu!*' madame cried, in evident alarm, 'here she is. Oh, monsieur, she will be angry.'

'Then I will bear the blame. Open the door.'

The door opened of itself, and Minette stood on the threshold. Yes, Minette; but with all the old, defiant brightness, the old dash, and sparkle, and bloom, gone. She looked pale and thin, very tired and sad.

Her glance fell upon the visitor the first instant. She uttered no exclamation, no word. She stood rooted to the spot with amaze, and something else that left her pallid as ashes.

Trevannance rose, very pale himself, and came hastily forward.

'Mignonnette! at last. Thank heaven, I have found you once more.'

The sound of his voice broke the spell. She came in and closed the door, but the hand he extended was entirely overlooked.

'This is a very unexpected honour, Mr. Trevannance,' she said, slowly and frigidly, 'You will pardon me if I say as unwelcome as unexpected. To what do we owe it?'

She stood looking at him, the old, flashing light in the black eyes, the old, defiant ring in the rich voice.

Madame saw the coming storm, and fled before it. She retreated to the kitchen. She could hear just as well there, and awaited the battle with her eye to the keyhole.

Trevannance spoke—a very torrent of eloquence it seemed to the little madame. She could understand English, and spoke it, too, but not when it flowed in a deluge like this.

The gentleman pleaded his cause eloquently and long, looking irresistibly handsome all the while. The lady paced the little room, very angry, very haughty, very majestic, at first, but melting gradually.

Madame knew how it would end—oh, yes!—and chuckled inwardly at this fencing with the buttons on. And when presently monsieur, after an impassioned harangue, clasped mademoiselle in his arms, and held her there, and mademoiselle, after one or two efforts to escape, submitted to be held captive, why then madame laughed outright, applauded softly with two brown hands, and trotted away from the keyhole.

'*Dieu merci!*' said madame; 'it's all over! And now I'll go and get supper.'

Trevannance had conquered. The little,

black, curly head nestled contentedly against his breast at last.

'You always loved me, Mignonne! Come now, be honest and own it!'

'I always hated you! I do so still—so impudent, so conceited! Will you let me go, sir? Madame will come in and catch you ki— Stop, I tell you! There, sit down, for pity's sake, and behave like a rational being.'

'But I'm not a rational being, and never mean to be again! I'm quite delirious with happiness!'

Mr. Trevannance took the seat, however, very coolly for so vehement a declaration.

'And now I'm going to ask you questions, and you are to answer them,' said mademoiselle, with the air of a counsel for the prosecution to a witness on the other side. 'In the first place, why have you come here?'

'A very absurd question, to begin with! To find you, as I have told you ten times in as many minutes.'

'Why did you not get married to Lady Evelyn when you went home?'

'Because Lady Evelyn fell in love with another man, and I was in love with you. She told me her story, and I told her mine, and we shook hands and parted. I had the pleasure of being at her wedding the week I left.'

'Her wedding! She is really married then?'

'Really married. And you have the handsomest stepmother in Europe!'

'Stepmother?'

'Yes, Mignonne. She is your father's wife!'

'Colonel Drummond?'

'Not at all. The Earl of Clontarf, my Lady Minette! Come, sit down here, and I'll tell you all about it.'

She let him draw her down beside him, and listened to the story of all that had transpired.

'She has been told of you; she loves you already; they both know why I have come. And when they return to England next spring, they will find Mr. and Mrs. Vivian Trevannance waiting there to welcome them.'

And then—but really, my reader, you can't be indulged in this way—they sat in delicious silence, whilst the September moon smiled up, and they were very, very, very happy; and little Madame Michaud came in, after ever so long, and told them supper was ready, and got hysterical in the telling, and cried, and laughed, and kissed her darling, and, after her, embraced Mr. Trevannance. It was quite a scene!

CHAPTER XVI.

BY THE GRAVE OF KATHLEEN.

LADY CLYDESMORE TO MADAM LA COMTESSE D'AVIGNON, PARIS.

LONDON, April 3, 18—,

MY DEAREST VERONIQUE: Again I write you, after a long, long interval—again in the very midst of the rush and bustle of the London season. And once more I am magnanimous enough to write, not of my 'noble self,' but of those in whom you tell me you are so deeply interested—the heroes and heroines of my late romance-like letter.

Well, then, dear, they are here in London. We are all cards in the same pack, as some clever person observes, and are sure to come together again in the universal shuffle. The Earl and Countess of Clontarf have taken a house in Park Lane, and Mr. and Mrs. Vivian Trevennance are stopping with them until the end of the season. Then the latter go to Royal Rest, and Lord and Lady Clontarf to a magnificent estate in Hampshire, which he has recently purchased.

The Lady Inez is dead. They have left her in her own fair Castile; her end was all happiness—all peace. Lady Clontarf is in deepest mourning, of course, and does not appear in society at all. She is more beautiful than ever, and in her eyes there shines a glow of infinite joy that I can never describe. She and her husband—my late magnificent colonel—exist only in the light of each other's presence. Such post-nuptial bliss as theirs is wonderfully rare in this age.

Ah, well! I laugh, because I laugh at most things; but this old-fashioned wedded devotion is very touching and beautiful, too. They go to Ireland very soon. Clontarf—which my lady has never seen—is being fitted up for their reception.

And now—for I know you are dying to hear of your old flirtee, my Veronique—of Vivian Trevannance and his bride. Ma chere, the little one is—the fashion. You know the meaning of that magic word. The men absolutely rave about her, and pronounce her more beautiful even than La Rose de Castile; a wild absurdity, of course. She is not nearly so beautiful, but she is better than beautiful, she is bewitching! She fascinates us all with her sparkling piquancy, her joyous insouciance. She is entirely different from anything I ever met, and yet with a perfect manner that would serve a court.

She was presented, at the last drawing-room, by the Marchioness of Marabont, Vivian's cousin, and royalty itself deigned

to ask some questions concerning her. She is the belle, decidedly, of the season.

What is she like, who is she? you impatiently cry. My dear, she is an orphan; she was Mademoiselle Minette Chateauney, portionless, but of one of the best families out there. That is all we know of her, and no one asks more of the lady fastidious Trevannance has made his queen consort. What is she like?

She is petite, brunette, vivacious, full of sparkle and repartee; her keen little Canadian tongue has a double edge, and her long almond eyes flash black fire. She designs to flirt a little—poetical justice for Vivian Trevannance—but he looks calmly on, with eyes of lazy adoration, good to see. In their way I dare say they are quite as fond of one another as the earl and countess; but they are so different there is no comparing them.

And now, dear, adieu. Come to England this summer—come to Warbeck Hall, and see for yourself the Corydons and Phyllis of Royal Rest. Best love and countless kisses from thy devoted.

BEATRICE.

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Sunset; a sky of gold and rubies; a sea sown with stars. The western windows of hoary Clontarf Castle had turned to sheets of beaten gold; its tall turrets glittered in the red glances of the sunset. Very peaceful lay the fishing village under the beetling rocks; very peaceful looked the humble church in the distance, its tall cross—that 'sign of hope to man'—ablaze in the last light of the May day.

The lady and gentleman who came up the rock path from the seashore took their way slowly in this direction. She leaned upon his arm, a woman in her first youth, beautiful as some dream of heaven, with the radiance of a great and perfect bliss forever in her face. A pure and noble soul shone out of starry violet eyes; she looked and moved

'A daughter of the gods, divinely tall,
And most divinely fair.'

And he upon whose arm she hung looked a fit protector for her loveliness—a man for women to honour—to adore. The handsome face was very grave, very thoughtful, a little sad, as he gazed around on the familiar landmarks unseen for one and-twenty years.

He pointed them out to her as they went along; but, as they drew near the church, silence fell. He opened the little wicket gate, and led the way round to the churchyard, where the 'rude forefathers of the hamlet slept.'

Tall grass waved, and wild-flowers bloomed; a few stones marked the resting-places—wooden board others. Over all the May sunset rained down its impalpable gold.

He led the way along the beaten path to a sunny corner, where a tall sycamore cast it's waving shadow over the grave. A white marble cross stood at its head, a wreath of immortelles surrounding one name—one—only one—'KATHLEEN.'

And Lady Evelyn sank down on her knees, with a sob, on the yielding turf, and kissed the name passionately.

'Oh, what have I done,' she said, 'that such bliss should be mine, while she, who loved you so dearly, who died for you, lies here?'

He uncovered his head before that lowly grave with as deep a reverence as he had ever done in the stately cathedrals of old Spain, as he thought of that fair young life, lost for love of him.

'Kathleen is in heaven,' he said, 'and her memory will be ever green in our hearts.

Oh, my darling, my youth comes back as I stand here and look at her name! What am I that I should have won such a heart as yours?'

The sunset faded while those wedded lovers lingered there. Then as he drew her gently away, the happy tears still wet on her eyelashes, she saw him casting one last, lingering look back, the long evening shadows deepening over the quiet sleepers, and the last rays of the sunset yet bright on the grave of Kathleen.

THE END.