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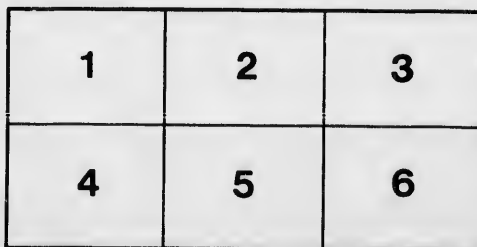
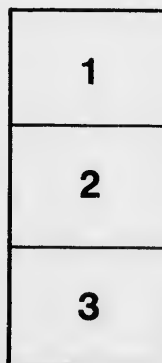
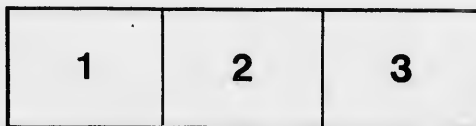
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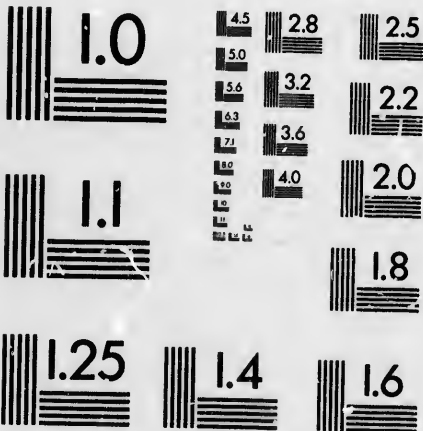
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BY

May Agnes Fleming,



THE THREE COUSINS.

AUTHOR OF

"Fated to Marry,"
"One Night's Mystery,"
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&c. &c.



TORONTO :
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THE
THREE COUSINS.

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"The Secret Sorrow," "Carried by Storm," "One Night's Mystery," &c.



TORONTO:
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The Three Cousins.

CHAPTER I.

HINTON HALL AND ITS MASTER.

"That dear old home!
Something of old ancestral pride it keeps,
Though falling from its early power and vastness."

—MRS. KEMBLE.

"He hath a tear for pity, and a hand
Open as day for melting charity:
Yet notwithstanding, being incensed, he's flint."

—SHAKESPEARE.

In the suburbs of the large town of P—— stood an old building of dark red sandstone, known in the neighborhood by the somewhat imposing title of "Hinton Hall." The scenery around Hinton Hall was very beautiful. Behind in the distance towered a tall, dark, fragrant pine forest; in front was a wide expanse of lawn and meadow, dotted here and there with clumps of trees, or sloping gently down to the river, or rather a wide mountain stream dignified by that name. The house itself was a large, strong, massive old mansion, built more with a view to comfort than elegance, and somewhat dilapidated by the storms of half a century or more. Still it was a fine old house, and its owner, Captain Tom Hinton, one of the richest and most influential men in the State where he lived.

It was a wet, chilly night in April. Outside the rain was plashing dismally against the window, and the wind moaned wildly through the pine forest. The wild roar of the river, swollen by the spring rains and the floods from the mountains, could be distinctly heard by the inmates of Hinton Hall.

But dreary as was the scene without, inside all was bright, warm, and cheerful. In one of the lower rooms of the old hall,

before a glowing coal fire, sat Captain Tom Hinton, late of the United States Army. The soft, warm carpet, rich heavy curtains of purple damask lined with corn-colored silk, the satin-covered couches and lounging-chairs scattered about, the many rare paintings ornamenting the walls, the glowing fire in the polished steel grate casting a light so bright around that the flashing jets of flame from the chandelier were rendered superfluous—all formed a striking contrast to the chill, dreary gloom without.

In a large easy-chair, near the fire, with his feet resting on a softly-cushioned ottoman, his meerschaum reposing sublimely between his lips, lay Captain Hutton, arrayed in a gorgeous dressing-gown. A portly father in Israel was Captain Tom Hinton—"a potent, grave, and reverend signor," with a fat, very good-humored face, straight, sleek, whitey-brown hair, twinkling gray eyes, and the self-satisfied look of a man at peace with himself and the whole world. And yet, in spite of all this *bon-hommie*, Captain Hinton *could* get into a rage, sometimes—a furious one, too—during which, I am sorry to say, he would swear right and left, and blow up everybody who came in his way in a manner perfectly awful. But Captain Hinton was rich, went every fine Sunday in full regimentals to the Methodist meeting to hear the fashionable Mr. Jereboam Goodenough "hold forth" and expound the word, and of course was sure of a free passport to heaven, swear as he might. But Captain Hinton was not a bad man by any means, and though he *did* order every beggar who came to his door to "go and be hanged" first, they were always sure to depart well loaded. In a word, to use his housekeeper's eulogium, "the captain's bark was a *great* deal worse than his bite."

Captain Hinton was a bachelor; he did not believe in the female-persuasion himself, though by no means a woman-hater. In speaking of Catholics, he constantly affirmed that, though (to say it in the mildest way) his opinion was they would all go to Old Nick, *still* he thought the celibacy of the clergy a very redeeming point in their character, and the only sensible thing he ever knew about them. His house was kept by a meek little widow, not remarkable for anything but the whiteness of her caps, the blackness of her dress, and the excellence of her dinners. On the present occasion she sat opposite the lord of the

manor, her hands folded demurely on her lap, her eyes fixed at intervals upon the roses in the hearth-rug and her master's face.

"Mrs. Colter," said Captain Hinton, in solemn tones, "I have news for you."

"Yes, sir," said the little widow, meekly.

"Perhaps, Mrs. Colter," continued the captain, "you may not be aware that in my youth I had one brother and two sisters."

Mrs. Colter ventured to insinuate that she *was* cognisant of that fact.

"That being the case, ma'am," said the captain, "you may not be surprised to hear that they all got married. It's a melancholy fact, but people *will* get married, you know," said the captain, in a moralizing tone.

"Yes, sir," said Mrs. Colter, feeling intensely guilty for having committed the unpardonable crime herself.

"My brother, Ned Hinton," went on Captain Hinton, with a confidential air, "was, I may say, *rather* wild—*rather*, I may say. He used to drink hard and swear like a trooper (I curse a little myself now and then, but that's neither here nor there, nor anywhere else, as Gusty Ardenne says), and he capped the climax by making a low marriage at last. Yes, Mrs. Colter, ma'am he disgraced the family by marrying his mother's housemaid. Well, of course, the family disowned him, and he, with his Irish wife, went to New York or somewhere, and took to drinking harder than ever. The consequence was that he died one day—drinking men *will* die, you know," said the captain, in the same confidential tone as before.

"Yes sir," was once more the little widow's stereotyped reply.

"We heard poor Ned left one daughter—a *female*," said the captain, as if to impress on Mrs. Colter's mind that the daughter in question was not of the masculine gender, "and that she lived with her mother somewhere, and took in sewing. That was ten years ago, Mrs. Colter. My mother was dead, and I, the head of the family, was up in Nebraska with my regiment, and too busy killing Indians to trouble myself about widows and orphans. Well, ma'am, to shorten this preface, when I came home two years ago, I made some inquiries about them, for I didn't like the idea of letting poor Ned's widow and orphan starve to death, while I had more money than I knew what to do with, but I

couldn't find them. So I settled down, and had nearly forgotten all about them, when a fortnight ago I got a letter from a priest, informing me that Mrs. Hinton was dead, and that her daughter, my niece, was living with the Sisters of Charity (a lot of women, Mrs. Colter, in big bonnets, who don't get married)," said the captain, interrupting himself to throw in a word of explanation, "and that as she was very poor and I was very rich, he had made inquiry, and found out my address, in hopes I would do something for her. Well, I wrote to this priest, and told him to pack Miss Hinton up in some baggage-wagon or other, and send her along here. You wouldn't have me leave my own niece depending on any one, would you, Mrs. Colter?" said the captain, looking fiercely at the meek little widow, as though suspecting some terrific outburst of indignation.

Not being in the least indignant, Mrs. Colter made no such outburst, but answered, in a tone if anything meeker than usual:

"Of course not, sir,"

"Ah! you're a very sensible old lady for your years, Mrs. Colter," said the captain in a mollified tone—"a *very* sensible old lady, I must say. Well, you may expect this young lady here at any time now—to-night, as likely as not. I suppose there are lots of spare bed-rooms she can have."

"How many bed-rooms will she occupy, Captain Hinton?" ventured the old lady, in tones of much surprise.

"How the dickens do I know?" said the captain, gruffly. "As many as she likes. They're in order, I hope, Mrs. Colter?"

"Captain Hinton," said the little widow, drawing herself up, "my bed-rooms are *always* in order."

"Hum! Very good! And now about my two sisters. I told you I had two sisters, didn't I, Mrs. Colter?" said the captain, in a defiant tone, as if daring her to deny it.

"Yes sir," responded the old lady, looking at the hearth-rug.

"Well, the oldest married an individual by the name of John Seabright, the mate of a vessel. The mate of a vessel, Mrs. Colter," said the captain, pausing again to explain, "is a man smelling of tar and oakum, who climbs up the rigging of the hatchway, and yells out to every ship he sees, through a trumpet, to 'heave to or he'll fire into her.' My sister went to sea with this mate of a vessel, but a storm came one day, and capsized the ship, and all hands were drowned but one sailor and my

sister's daughter, who were both tied to a spar, or had a spar tied to them, I don't know which, and drifted ashore. The sailor had a wife (sailors *are* fools, you know Mrs. Colter), and she brought up this little girl, not knowing where to find her friends. I found this out accidentally the other day, so I have sent my attorney to find out this other niece of mine, and bring her here, too. There's no telling what minute she may come either. My family is increasing fast, you see. Why don't you say something, Mrs. Colter?" said the captain, severely.

"I hain't got anything to say," replied the little widow, rather alarmed.

"You have no objection to their coming here, have you, Mrs. Colter?" said the captain, in a tone of increased severity.

"Lor' bless you! no, sir. How on airth could I?"

"Ah! I'm glad to hear it; because it wouldn't have made the slightest difference if you had, you know, Mrs. Colter. Well, you heard me mention another sister, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir," said Mrs. Colter, with her sweetest smile.

"Well, *she's* living yet," said the captain, looking as if he expected some tremendous demonstration from the widow on hearing it.

Mrs. Colter wasn't in the least surprised, but seeing it was expected of her, she exclaimed, in a tone betokening not the slightest particle of emotion: "Possible, sir!"

"Yes, ma'am," said the captain, condescending to look pleased, "but she's got a large family of children, principally daughters."

"Dear me, sir!" said the widow, trying a sigh at this point, by way of experiment.

"Our family were great on daughters, Mrs. Colter," said the captain, with solemnity.

"So I perceive, sir; are you going to send for them?"

"Send for *them*! what do you mean, Mrs. Colter?" said the captain, with a terrible frown, fancying the little widow was disposed to jest at him. "Explain your meaning, Mrs. Colter."

"Really, Captain Hinton, I did not mean to offend; I—I—I—" stammered the little widow, blushing and breaking down.

"Mrs. Colter," said the Captain, gravely and with dignity, "allow me to observe that 'I—I—I—,' however plausible it may sound, is no reason whatever. No, ma'am, I don't intend to bring 'them' here. Does that satisfy your mind, Mrs. Colter?"

"Indeed, Captain Hinton, I beg your pardon; indeed, *indeed*, sir, I didn't mean to offend," said Mrs. Colter, ready to cry.

"Mrs. Colter, I forgive you," said the captain, in the calm tone of a persecuted but patient saint; "and I repeat it, ma'am, I *don't* intend to bring them here. My intention *is*—and allow me to observe once more, if you don't like it, it doesn't make the slightest difference—my intention *is*, to send for one of these daughters, the eldest of the lot, whom I had the pleasure of seeing when she was an ugly little red-skinned baby, with a face like a new moon, and dressed in what I regarded very unnecessarily long petticoats; though I don't pretend to have an opinion on the subject. That was sixteen years ago, and Miss Dent (her father's name is Dent, Mrs. Colter) was just two weeks old at the time, so you perceive she is in her seventeenth year. There is no telling what time *she* may come either. In fact, in the words of Scripture, we may expect them 'like a thief in the night.'" Here the captain drew down the corners of his mouth, and looked pious, "Thus there will be three young ladies here, Mrs. Colter, and between those three, when I die, I intend to leave my wealth. There are three bed-rooms, *en suite*, upstairs somewhere, isn't there?" he said, after a pause.

"Yes, sir; they open into each other."

"Very well; have fires lighted in each of them, to air 'em. And, Mrs. Colter, if there is any little feminine tomfoolery needed for them, just send James to P—— for it; I'll foot the bill,"

"They are very nicely furnished, sir; I don't think there is anything needed."

"But there *is*, Mrs. Colter, ma'am; I tell you there is," said the captain, in a high key; "girls are always wanting something—a new frock, or a tooth pulled, or a husband, or a *something*. You will have to send to P——, I tell you."

"Hadn't I better wait till the young ladies come themselves, Captain Hinton?"

"Hum! ha! Well, perhaps you had. Hark! there's a carriage coming! Didn't you hear it coming up the avenue? Run to the window, Mrs. Colter, and see who it is."

"Captain Hinton, it's pitch dark," said Mrs. Colter, in an injured tone; "I hain't got cat's eyes, to see after night."

"Ough! just like women—a worthless race!" grunted the

captain. "There goes the bell! By the holy nose of John Knox! that's one of 'em! *Which* one is it, though, is the question."

There came a rap at the door at this moment.

"Come in," shouted the captain, turning round in his chair in order to face the door.

A spruce chamber-maid entered, and announced:

"A young lady in the drawing-room for master."

"Show her in here," said the captain, savagely.

The girl beat a precipitate retreat; and, turning to the little housekeeper, the captain said, with gloomy sternness:

"Mrs. Colter, ma'am, it's one of 'em."

Even as he spoke the door was reopened, and a slight, girlish figure, in a coarse grey cloak and plain straw bonnet, entered, and stood hesitatingly at the door-way.

"My niece, I suppose," said the captain, rising and advancing towards her.

"My dear uncle," said the young girl, raising the hand he extended to her lips.

She had the softest, sweetest, most dulcet voice the captain thought he had ever listened to; and the large, soft black eyes she raised to his face were full of tears.

"What's your name, my dear?" said the captain, considerably softened.

"Mittie Seabright, sir."

"Ah!—the daughter of my poor sister Helen who was drowned with—that mate of a vessel. Hem! I see," said the captain, holding her hand and looking musingly in her face, "You don't look much like your mother, child."

"They say I resemble papa, sir."

"Yes, so you do; though I never had the pleasure of seeing that individual but once, and cannot say particularly. Are you tired, Miss Seabright?"

"A little, sir; but I beg you will not call me Miss Seabright; say Mittie."

"Very well, Mittie then be it, though it's rather a heathenish name, I think. Sit down, my dear. Mrs. Colter, will you go and tell some of them to get Miss Sea—Mittie, I mean—something to eat?"

"My dear uncle, don't take the trouble. I had my supper

with the gentleman you sent for me, about two hours ago," interposed Mittie.

"But I say you *must* eat something. Zounds! madam, do you think, when I invite my nieces to live with me, I'm going to starve them? Ring the bell. Mrs. Colter. Take off your bonnet and cloak, Miss Sea—Mittie, I mean, and make yourself at home. Ring the bell again, Mrs. Colter. I'll twist the neck off every lazy loiterer down in the kitchen regions, if they don't learn to move faster."

For one instant the black eyes of Miss Seabright were raised to her uncle's face with a keen, bright, searching glance. Then the long black lashes drooped and fell, and a slight, a very slight smile curled her thin upper lip.

A servant now entered with refreshments, and the captain insisted on her drinking a glass of wine to his health, while he drank two or three to hers. Then Miss Seabright rose, and asked to be shown to her room, in order to change her traveling dress and brush her hair.

Mrs. Colter led her up a flight of broad, winding stairs of bright polished oak, and entered a sort of gallery, with three doors opening on either side. The little housekeeper opened the first to the right, and ushered Miss Seabright in, saying:

"You can take this for your room, Miss Seabright; the other two will be occupied by your cousins. They are all furnished alike, and open into each other, so that you could walk through the three rooms without going out into the hall. I occupy the room opposite this, across the hall; the next is the library, and the next is the guest-chamber, for any distinguished guest who may happen to be here."

"Um-m-m," said Miss Seabright, in a soft, musing tone; "and where does my uncle sleep?"

"Down-stairs; his bed-room opens from the room you left just now."

"Ah! very well; but, Mrs. Colter, can I not lock this door communicating with the others?"

"Certainly, if you wish it, Miss Seabright; the key is in the lock."

"So it is; I see it now. That will do, Mrs. Colter; they have brought up my trunk, I see, so I will not detain you any longer."

Thus quietly dismissed, Mrs. Colter left the pretty little room—and it was a *very* pretty little room that wet, chilly, bleak night, with its bright-hued carpet, window-curtains of green-and-white, its little French bedstead, with snowy counterpane and hangings, its large, soft lounging-chairs, its toilet-table, and gilt-framed mirror, and white toilet service, its little wash-stand, painted white, with wreaths of gilt flowers, its small and round table to correspond, and, lastly, its bright, warm, cheerful fire.

No wonder Miss Seabright's eyes lit up with pleasure as she glanced around—with more than pleasure—with *triumph* and exultation—for it was the first time in her life she had ever dwelt in a better house than the sailor's humble dwelling.

Half an hour after Miss Mittie Seabright tripped down the stairs and entered the room where her uncle sat. The captain got up, drew a chair for her near the fire, took her hand, and gazed for a moment in surprise and admiration in her face, exclaiming :

“ Upon my word, Miss Seabright, you're a pretty girl—the very prettiest girl I ever saw—and as good as your pretty, I dare swear. Upon my word and *honour* you are,” said the squire, looking highly pleased.

“ You have not forgotten how to flatter, Uncle Hinton,” said Mittie, laughing and disclosing two rows of pearl-white teeth. She *was* a pretty girl, and looked it as she stood there, every motion instinct with grace (not the grace of God, perhaps, but something Miss Seabright valued considerably higher). In stature she was below the middle size, slight and slender, with a waist you might almost span with one hand. Her face was thin—a little too thin, if anything—dark, bright, and sparkling, and lit up by *such* a pair of eyes, black as night, soft as a dove's, keen as a serpent's, with a strange sort of red light shining through them. Long, drooping lashes of midnight blackness shadowed those strange, beautiful eyes, and short, crisp, spiral ringlets of the same shining, jetty hue fell on either side of her crimson cheeks. In the shade those clustering ringlets were of the deepest blackness ; but now, in the firelight, the same fierce red hue shone through like rings of flame. She wore a tight-fitting dress of dark crimson merino, that displayed the exquisite little figure to the best advantage, and set off the dark, rich

style of her beauty. Altogether she was all red and black, and looked like a fiery little blaze, or a beautiful little serpent, brilliant but dangerous, a fierce little tigress with her paws shielded now by softest fur—but arouse her!

"Really, my little fire-fly, you're the brightest and most dazzling fairy sprite I ever had the misfortune to see," said the captain, quite lost in admiration of her beauty.

"My dear uncle, you are laughing at me," said Miss Seabright, veiling her brooding eyes with her long, dark lashes.

"Catch me at it! And now tell me all about your former life."

"There is very little to tell, sir. I grew up with Mr. Hanson's family in New York, went to school there, and would have died there after a time if you had not sent for me. Dearest uncle, I have no words to tell you how grateful I am," said the low, sweet voice of Mittie, so soft and low that it reminded one of the purring of a cat.

"O pooh! pooh! hold your tongue about gratitude," said the captain fidgeting uneasily, "gratitude's a humbug! Do you know your two cousins are coming here?"

"Yes, sir, the gentleman you sent for me told me so," and a quick, sharp glance shot from under the long, black eyelashes, that instantly drooped again.

"How old are you, Mittie?"

"Eighteen, sir."

"Humph! you don't look more than fourteen."

"That's because I'm small, sir," said Mittie, laughing, and showing her little pearl-white teeth under the thin crimson lips again.

At this moment the sound of another carriage was heard driving furiously through the rapidly-increasing storm towards the door. The captain half rose in his chair to listen. A thundering knock the instant after awoke the echoes in the old house.

"That's another of them, by St. George Washington it is!" cried the captain, while the butler, the major-domo of the household, rushed to the door in a palpitation to see

"Who knocked so loud and who knocked so late."

CHAPTER II.

CAPTAIN HINTON'S NIECES.

"One woman reads another's character
Without the tedious trouble of deciphering."

—JONSON.

"Her waggish face that speaks a soul jocose,
Seems t' have been cast i' the mould of fun and glee,
And on the bridge of her well-arched nose
Sits Laughter plumed and white-winged Jollity."

—TENNENT.

A moment's pause succeeded. The captain stood with mouth and eyes agape with impatience, watching the door; Mittie's darkly-sparkling face, with its flashing curls and veiled eyes of fire, were turned in the same direction. Presently a shrill, imperious voice was heard in the hall, reprimanding the old servant for his delay, and the next moment the door was flung violently open, and something muffled in numberless shawls, hoods, and furs sprang in, glanced around the room, sprang at the captain, grasped him round the throat, while kiss after kiss went off like so many pistol-shots.

"Let me go! you confounded woman, let me go!" gasped the strangled and nearly suffocated son of Mars. "Let me go, I tell you! Mittie! Miss Seabright! Mrs. Colter! pull her off before she chokes me! You darned little wretch, I'll *kill* you if you don't let me go," and with a push the captain threw her off and glared at the new-comer with a face purple and eyes starting with rage and strangulation.

"Well, there's an affectionate welcome for you," said a voice from the depths of a quilted hood: "calling me a 'confounded woman,' and 'a darned little wretch,' before I'm right in the house. I've a good mind to go right straight home again. I just have," and the voice in the hood arose to a shrill falsetto as she recounted her wrongs.

"Who in the name of all that's impudent are *you?*" asked the captain, angrily.

"Who am I? Why, I'm your dutiful niece, Miss Josephine Dent, of Virginia, and a pretty welcome I get after leaving my bed and board, and heaving myself away on an ungrateful uncle who can't appreciate me."

Miss Josephine punctuated this speech by kicking off her rubbers and pitching her muffings over the carpet.

"I've been getting my life jolted out in a horrible old ark of a stage-coach for the last two days, not to speak of minor troubles in the shape of want of sleep and nothing to eat, and the end of it all is, that I'm a 'darned little wretch.' Ain't you ashamed of yourself, Uncle Tom, to talk like that? you, that ought to be a burning and shining light and an elder of the church!"

Here Miss Dent hurled her quilted hood indignantly at the cat with such good aim that she sent that defenseless quadruped over on its back.

So completely thunder-struck was the captain by this spirited address, that he sank helplessly into his chair, and sat with his eyes riveted on the orator, a young girl about the same age as Mittie, with a round, white, boyish forehead, a great profusion of tangled brown hair, a pair of immensely bright sparkling brown eyes, two red, dimpled cheeks, and a little wicked, laughing mouth, that wore anything but a laughing expression now, however, and altogether the brightest, merriest, sunniest, most impudent little face you could see in a day's travel. She and Mittie were so totally different that there was no comparing them, yet both were equally pretty—in their way. One might have represented night, the other morning; one darkness, the other light. One would have impressed you with a sense of something fierce, beautiful, dazzling, and dangerous; the other with an idea of light, sparkling, buoyant life.

Having got her hood off, Miss Dent had an opportunity of beholding Miss Seabright, and with the exclamation, "My cousin," she pounced upon her in much the same manner as she had attacked the captain, and off went another startling broadside of hugs and kisses, very like a sharp volley of little pop-guns.

"Lord bless us!" ejaculated the captain, involuntarily loosening his cravat, "anybody that gets a hug from her will have a pretty good notion of what hanging is. Talk of bears! ugh!"

Miss Seabright endured her cousin's furious embrace as best she might, but an iceberg would have returned it as warmly. Even the white heat of Miss Dent's affection cooled down, and she allowed Mittie to recede without a lecture.

"Oh gracious! how tired I am!" exclaimed Miss Josephine, sinking into a chair and panting for breath.

"No wonder, after two such frantic hugs," inwardly growled the captain.

"Uncle Tom, the bell's near you, ring, like a dear," said the fatigued one.

"Ring, like a dear!" The familiarity of the address struck Captain Tom Hinton dumb. To speak to *him* so, to *him*, before whose roused wrath every one in the house quaked with terror! Words would have failed to express his consternation. In awful silence he sat and gazed on the audacious girl.

"Uncle Tom, ring—*ring*; I tell you! Don't you hear well?" peremptorily repeated the little virago, no way daunted by his tremendous frown.

Like one in a dream, Captain Hinton's hand moved to the bell-pull, but his eyes never wandered from her face.

A servant entered.

"Here, you—I don't want *you*—go and tell my own servant to come here."

"Her *own* servant," mechanically repeated the bewildered captain.

"Yes, *her own servant*," mimicked Miss Dent; "her own old nurse. Did you suppose she was going to come up here among a lot of savages without even an old servant to look after her. No, thank you! Aunt Rammy," to an old black woman, in a gaudy turban, who entered, "take these things up to my room, wherever it is," and Miss Dent gave a kick to the wrappings she had just thrown off, "some of them will show you, and have a fire made to air the bed-clothes, or I'll take my death of cold. I feel the rheumatism in my bones already," and with a shiver the young lady drew closer to the fire.

"Will you have a glass of wine?" said the captain, remembering at last the duties of hospitality, and trying to recover his wits, scattered by the astounding shock they had received.

"Thankee, uncle; I never get intoxicated so early in the evening; I'll get Aunt Rammy to make me some egg-nog before I go to bed."

"Aunt Rammy! what a name," said Mittie, speaking for the first time since Miss Dent's entrance.

"Oh! her name's Semiramis, but we use to call her Rammy at home, for short," said Miss Dent. "But look here, Uncle Tom, you're shockingly impolite; you haven't introduced me to

this young lady yet. Where do you expect to die when you go to, if you keep on like this?"

"My name is Mittie Seabright, Miss Dent," purred Mittie, in her sweet, dulcet tones.

"Oh! *is it?* But, Cousin Mittie, don't keep on saying 'Miss Dent'; I ain't used to it, you know; call me Josephine, or Joe; they never call me anything but Joe at home."

"As you please, Miss—Joe. So you come from the State of Virginia, do you?" she said, with one of her keen, searching glances at Joe's fair, open face.

"Yes, I hail from the Old Dominion; there's ten or eleven more of us down there, that anybody's welcome to, poor as Job's turkey, and with terrifying appetites; I'll show you a specimen by and by. But there was another cousin to come, if I understand right. Where is she?"

"She has not arrived yet," replied Captain Hinton, in his most sternly dignified tone.

"Humph! when will she be here?"

"I do not know, Miss Dent."

"Hum! dear me, how imposing we are!" said Joe, opening her brown eyes very wide. "You're as frigid as the north side of a snow-bank, Uncle Tom. Very well, it's perfectly right you should be respectful to me and call me *Miss Dent*, if you have a mind to. I always like to encourage good manners myself. My! what nice times I mean to have here! Got any horses in your stables, uncle?"

"Yes, a few."

"Spavined and ringed-boned, I'll bet you. You don't know what fine horses are up here at the North Pole."

"I have a racer in my stables that you dare not go within five feet of, much less mount," said the captain, nettled at this slight.

"We'll see that to-morrow, if the weather's fine," said Joe, coolly; "and, uncle, you'll give a party in our house when my other cousin comes, eh?"

"Upon my word, Miss Dent, you are the most off-hand young lady it ever was my fortune to behold," said the captain, once more completely astonished.

"Yes, you know there is some Hinton blood in me, and *that*

has always been noted for giving its possessor a large stock of native impudence," said Miss Joe.

Under her long eyelashes the wickedly sleeping eyes of Mittie Seabright saw a storm rising on the captain's brow, and the red rings of fire went dancing more vividly than ever through her curls of jet.

But Captain Hinton was too much of a gentleman to get angry with a lady in his own house; so he gulped down his indignation and wounded pride, and rising, said:

"Miss Seabright and Miss Dent, it is wearing late, and you must be fatigued after your journey. Allow me to ring for Mrs. Colter, and wish you good-night."

He rang a peal that presently brought Mrs. Colter into the room, and then he was stalking away in offended majesty, when Joe perceived she had really offended him; she ran after him, caught him by the arm, and whispered something so absurdly penitential that in spite of himself the captain burst out laughing, shook her off, and left the room.

"There, it's all right now," said Joe; "I knew I'd make him laugh. Law! it's not worth anybody's while to be angry with me."

"I must put a stop to this," thought Mittie Seabright, watching Joe furtively from under her drooping lashes. "She will soon be prime favorite with this old man, in spite of her impertinence, if I do not prevent it. Well, Miss Joe Dent, we shall see—I hardly think *you* will undermine me."

"You can take the room next to Miss Seabright, Miss Dent," said little Mrs. Colter, as she preceded the young ladies up-stairs.

"Next to her! it would be nicer to sleep together! I want some one to talk to," said Joe.

Mrs. Colter looked inquiringly at Miss Seabright.

"Oh! certainly, *certainly*, Mrs. Colter," replied the soft, cooing tones; "*pray* let Miss Dent sleep with me, and if the captain is angry, say it was my fault. It is my desire, you know."

That settled it.

"I'm afraid Captain Hinton *might* not like it," said timid Mrs. Colter, who might have known very well Captain Hinton would not have cared a straw about it.

"Oh! then let it be as he arranged," said Joe; "though I really can't see why he should make such an old Miss Nancy of

himself to care. Aunt Rammy can sleep on the floor of my room, can't she, Mrs. Colter? Though, perhaps, Uncle Prim won't approve of that either."

"My dear cousin, *please do not speak so of uncle,*" pleaded the gentle, honeyed tone of Mittie, as her eyes fell on Mrs. Colter, who stood listening, and looking deeply scandalized.

"What have I said," said Joe, losing patience, of which virtue she did not possess a very large share the best of times; "I want to know if my old nurse can sleep in my room; if she can't, why, there's an end of it."

"There is no necessity for getting angry or speaking disrespectfully of your uncle, Miss Dent," said Mrs. Colter, gravely; "I will send your servant up, and have a bed made for her near yours."

"All right, then, good-night," and Joe flounced into her room, indignant at the old lady's rebuking tone, which she felt she had really said nothing to deserve; and Mittie, with her silken smile, passed into her chamber, and shut herself in with her brooding thoughts.

The next morning both the captain and Joe had recovered their good humor ere they arrived at the breakfast-table, and that meal passed off in the pleasantest possible manner. Miss Seabright, looking as cool and fresh as a May breeze, took the head of the table, at her uncle's desire, and did the honors with as much ease and grace as though it had been her place all her life.

"Now, Uncle Tom, now for the stables," said Joe, as they arose from the table; "I reckon I'll let you see some of the tallest sort of riding you ever beheld in your mortal life. What do you call this magnificent specimen of horseflesh of yours?"

"Starlight," answered the captain, putting on his hat, "and if you're wise you won't attempt to mount him, my little Virginia lightning-bug."

"We'll see," said Joe, putting her arm through his; "I'm not going to show the white feather if I can help it. Do you ride, Cousin Mittie?"

"No, I never mounted a horse in my life," said Mittie.

"Well, 'better late than never.' I'll teach you. Come along."

The captain offered his other arm to Miss Seabright, and the three descended to the yard leading to the stables.

Old Bob, the coachman, threw open the doors for them to enter. There were several fine horses here, but Joe's eyes were fixed on a superb black horse, whose small erect head, fiery eyes, and graceful, tapering limbs bespoke him a thoroughbred.

"Oh! what a beauty!" said Joe, her whole face kindling with delight. "Soh! soh! Starlight! be quiet, sir," she added, patting him, soothingly, and fearlessly stroking his neck, while Mittie and the captain looked on in dismay, expecting to see her crushed against the wall.

"You little villain, come out of that!" said the captain in terror, "do you want to be killed?"

"No, thank you; just go and tell your groom, uncle, if there exists such an individual, to come and saddle Starlight. I'm going to ride him. There! there! easy, my boy," said she, stroking his silken mane.

"Ride *him!* ride Starlight! Is the girl crazy?" exclaimed the captain, bursting into a perspiration of terror.

"No, the girl's *not* crazy," said Joe, "or if she is, you'll soon find there is 'method in her madness.' What do you call your groom, uncle?"

"Bob."

"Very well; here, Bob! hi! Bob!" said Joe, going into the yard; "come in here and saddle Starlight while I run back to the house and don my riding-habit." And off ran Joe.

The astonished Bob obeyed, and led the fiery Starlight out into the yard, champing the ground with impatience. And in a few moments Joe appeared, looking handsome and saucy, in a blue riding-habit, with a black hat and a long black plume cocked jauntily on her brown head.

"O Joe! my dear, don't go! You provoking little dare-devil, don't go!" said the captain, between rage and dismay.

"Don't you be afraid, uncle; I've ridden horses as untamed as Starlight in my time," said Joe, with cool confidence, as she placed one little foot in Bob's palm and sprang lightly into the saddle; "hand me a whip, Bob; now, off we go!"

And off Starlight bounded like mad at the first touch of the whip, nearly rearing himself upright on his hind legs; but Joe sat as firmly and immovably in her seat as though she were part of the animal, holding the bridle with the firm and dauntless hand of a practised rider.

"She'll be killed! as true as preaching," gasped the overwhelmed captain, as with another touch of the whip the horse and rider sped through the gate like a flash of lightning, and disappeared down the road.

"Miss Dent is certainly a finished rider," said Mittie, who had been watching the scene with the utmost *sang froid*.

"I never saw the like; never, in all my born days," said the captain, mopping his terror-flushed face; "that girl will be the death of me, I'm positive, if she keeps on like that. I'm all in a palpitation, like a hysterical girl; I swear I am."

"Miss Dent should not act so when she knows it distresses you, my dear uncle," said Mittie, softly.

"No, she shouldn't, it's not right; I'll put a stop to it," said the captain. "I'd never have sent for her if I'd known she was a Tom-boy like this—can't see who she took it from to be such a skip-over-the-moon madcap, I'm sure."

"Captain Hinton," said Mrs. Colter, making her appearance at this moment. "Miss Hinton has come."

"Oh! has she? poor Ned's daughter! Bless my soul! I'd forgotten all about her," said the captain, hurrying into the house. "Mittie, my dear, come with me, and welcome your cousin."

"With pleasure, sir," said Miss Seabright, with alacrity.

They passed through a side-door into the house, and entered the parlor. There stood Miss Hinton, who sprang forward, clasped both her uncle's hands in hers, and burst into tears.

"Eh! what's this for? Don't cry, Miss Hinton; don't now, there's a good girl," said the captain, rather surprised.

"You were so kind, so good, to offer me a home! How can I ever thank you?" said Miss Hinton, with emotion.

"Fiddle-dee-dee! that is, don't make a goose of yourself, Miss Hinton," said the captain testily. "What's your given name, my dear?"

"Eveleen, sir."

"After your mother—humph!" grunted the captain, looking dissatisfied. "Well, Eveleen, this is your cousin, Mittie Seabright. Mittie, attend to Miss Hinton, while I go to see after that confounded—I mean Miss Dent"; and the captain bustled to the front door to look after the runaway.

"Let me help you off with your things, my dear cousin," said

Mittie, whose keen eyes had been searchingly fixed on Miss Hinton ever since her entrance.

She saw a tall, well-rounded form, a pale, thoughtful, gentle face—more intellectual than handsome—soft gray eyes shadowed by dark lashes, pale golden hair combed smoothly off a broad white forehead. Mittie's black eyes flashed with triumph as she saw how inferior in beauty she was to herself.

"I will not have much trouble with this one," she mentally said: "She is one of your soft, quiet, silent folks, I fancy. This madcap of a Miss Dent is twice as great an obstacle, though this one *does* bear the family name, and has the best right to my uncle's fortune! Hem! your star is in the ascendant, Mittie Seabright; take care that it remains there."

All this time she had been removing Miss Hinton's wrappings with the most tender solicitude. That young lady, completely exhausted by her long journey, had sunk wearily into a seat, thanking her new-found cousin with a kiss and a grateful smile.

While thus occupied the thunder of horse's hoofs coming up the road resounded through the house, and the next instant the captain's voice was heard shouting in rage and alarm.

"You little limb! Oh! wait till I get a hold of you, if I don't pay you off for this!"

"That's Joe," said Mittie, laughing, as they both ran to the window in time to see the cause of the captain's alarm.

Some yards below the house was a stone wall, about six feet high, inclosing the captain's orchard. Towards this Joe came lashing on Starlight at headlong speed, with the evident determination of taking it in a flying leap.

"Don't dare, I tell you; you'll break your neck, and, what's worse, the horse's. Oh! if I only had a hold of you!" yelled the captain, shaking his fist at her in impotent rage.

But he hadn't a hold of her, and he might as well have talked to the moon for all Joe minded him. Backing her horse for the leap, over it he dashed in splendid style, while a ringing shout from Joe announced her feat.

"Gloriously done, by Jove!" cried a spirited voice, as a young man on horseback galloped up and watched admiringly Joe's leap.

"Didn't I do it beautifully, uncle, and ain't you proud of me?" said Joe, riding up the avenue, and laughing at the cap-

tain's enraged face. "I think I've let Starlight find he has a master."

"I've a good mind to box your ears, you impudent little witch."

"I vow if you did, uncle, I'd give you such another hug that you'd never get over it. Hallo, Bob, come and take Starlight," said Joe, leaping down and standing on the front piazza with the captain.

"Get out of my sight, you madcap—here comes Gusty Ardenne," said the captain giving her a push.

Joe laughed and ran into the house. At the same moment the horseman came ambling slowly up toward the house, and tying his horse to a post, shook hands with the captain, and said, with a laugh:

"My dear captain, can you tell me who that daring little lady is who leaped the fence a moment ago?"

"Yes," growled the captain, "she's my niece, Joe Dent, of Virginia."

"Introduce me."

"Of course. How are all at home?"

"Quite well. But, Captain Hinton, I did not know you had a niece here?"

"Got three of 'em here on a visit, and you shall have your choice, my boy! ha! ha! you handsome dog," said the captain, giving him a facetious poke in the ribs.

The young gentleman laughed, switched his boot with his riding-whip, and followed the captain into the house.

CHAPTER III.

MITTIE SEABRIGHT PLOTS.

"In face an angel, but in soul a cat."

"And she with her bright eye seemed to be
The star of that goodly companie."

Gustav Ardenne, son of the ex-Governor of P——, was a young man of three-and-twenty, rich, handsome and an only son. There was a certain dashing, frank, off-hand way about him

very taking, and Master Gusty was an immense favorite with the ladies, somewhat spoiled by them, if the truth must be told. To sum up his accomplishments in a few words, Mr. Gustav was a splendid horseman, a dead shot, a first-rate stroke-oar, an expert angler, and an excellent dancer. He could fight a duel and make love with equal facility, break in a horse and fan a lady with the same cool self-possession—was equally at home playing the piano, or exercising with boxing-gloves, and last, and of course least, would inherit a fortune of a cool million or so when it blessed Heaven to take the “governor.”

Such was the young gentleman who, in the most unexceptionable morning costume, followed Captain Hinton into the parlor.

Joe was there alone, pirouetting round the room, and *whistling* the Prima-Donna Waltz as few of the lords of creation could have whistled it. She came to a sudden halt at their entrance, and, poising herself on one foot, and perching her head bird-fashion on one side, began swinging her hat by the strings.

“Miss Dent, allow me to present my young friend, Mr. Ardenne; my niece, Mr. Ardenne,” said the captain.

Miss Dent acknowledged Mr. Ardenne’s profound bow by a saucy nod of her ringleted head, and flung herself into an arm-chair.

“Where’s your cousin, Joe?” inquired the captain, looking round.

“Mittie went up-stairs with Eveleen just now.”

As she spoke, Mittie, who had seen Mr. Ardenne enter, came into the room with her usual soft, cat-like step, looking so brilliantly handsome that the old captain’s eyes lit up with pleasure as he presented “my niece, Miss Seabright, Mr. Ardenne.” Mr. Ardenne’s bow was, if possible, more profound than that he had just made to Joe, and his look of surprise and profound admiration did not escape the delighted captain.

Joe, leaving Mittie to entertain Mr. Ardenne, ran up-stairs to doff her riding habit and make herself better acquainted with her cousin Eveleen, whose gentle manner and sweet face had already made a far more favorable impression on her heart than Mittie’s dark, bright face and dove-like voice could ever do. Joe regarded young men rather with contempt than otherwise, and considered them a species of animal, composed of vanity

and whiskers, destined by Providence to punish the world for its sins, as locusts are looked upon in the East.

On entering Miss Hinton's room she found that young lady kneeling on the floor and unpacking her trunk.

"Oh! go on; don't mind me in the least," said Joe, flinging herself on Eveleen's bed. "I just came in to have a chat, and, if you put yourself out on my account, I shall go away again."

Eveleen had risen to receive her, but now resumed her work, saying, with a smile:

"Very well, then; since you are good enough to excuse me, I will go on. I want to examine my wardrobe a little."

"It's so strange that we three should be cousins," said Joe, thoughtfully.

"Is it," said Eveleen, "and why?"

"Oh! because we are so different; not a bit alike in the world. Do you know, I don't think I shall like our Cousin Mittie."

"No! what has she done?"

"Well, nothing; she is very polite and sweet-voiced, but there's *something*, I can't tell what, about her that seems queer. Did you notice her eyes?"

"Yes, who could help it? They are so splendid."

"Oh! they're handsome enough, but the quick, sharp way she looks out of them sometimes—did you see that I noticed it the first time I met her?"

"I did not observe."

"Well, you know she mostly always keeps them cast down, to heighten the effect I suppose, when she looks up. But at times, when she thinks no one is looking, she'll lift them, and you'll see a sort of keen red flash. Cousin Mittie's wide awake, I can tell you."

"Well, what harm is there in that?"

"Oh! there's no harm, not the least, but it's *odd*. Ain't uncle a dear old man?"

"Yes, indeed," said Eveleen, warmly; "so kind, and generous, and good. I loved him the moment I saw him."

"Just the way I was taken; and these rooms are so pretty and his horses are splendid. I'm going to make him give a party, and buy me a piano. Do you play?"

"A little."

"Fond of dancing?"

"I never dance."

"Whew! where did you live before you came here?"

"With the Sisters of Charity in New York."

"Nuns! Why, you ain't surely a Catholic?" said Joe, getting up on her elbow, in her surprise.

"I am a Catholic—yes," said Eveleen, unable to resist a smile.

"My gracious! I'd never suppose it—they are such strange people."

"Have you known many of those 'strange people'?"

"I never knew any, but I have heard of them."

Eveleen laughed such a genial, musical laugh that Joe liked her better than ever.

"Since you never knew any Catholics, you should not judge them unheard, my dear little cousin; there are some very sensible and amiable people among them, I assure you."

"Exceptions, I suppose, like you."

"Rather better, I should hope. I suppose you never saw a Sister of Charity, Cousin Joe?"

"Never; there were none down home."

"Then you never saw angels in human form—glorious women, who brave famine, pestilence, war, and death to devote their lives to their fellow-creatures—noble women, who give up wealth, and home, and every earthly comfort to serve the poor, the sick, and the despised—heavenly women, who trample the earth and worldly joys under their feet, to take up their cross and follow their crucified Saviour. O Cousin Josephine! if you saw these earthly angels what a different idea you would have of Catholics."

"'Pon my word, Eveleen, I had no idea you could fire up this way. I suppose you'll be one of these Sisters of Charity some day yourself."

"I wish it were my vocation, but I'm afraid it's not," said Eveleen, blushing a little at Joe's quizzical look.

"I'm glad you think so; my opinion is that every girl's vocation is to get married, and flirt, and enjoy herself generally. Do you know the kind of a man I mean to marry?"

"No. I wish I were a man for your sake," said Eveleen, laughing.

"I jush wish you were; I'd be Mrs. Hinton in no time; but as

it's not likely you'll ever be one, I intend to marry some dear, old, good-natured, gray-headed, rich fellow, who'll pet me and let me do as I like. Ain't it nice to do just what you like? Now, I don't like young man at all, especially handsome ones like that Ardenne fellow; they're nothing but conceit and mustaches, a set of apes, the whole of 'em."

"A sweeping assertion that," said Eveleen, "Now, I think there are some sensible young men in the world—if one could only find them out."

"Ah! that's the difficulty; just lay one hand on your heart, and the other on that love of a lace collar, and say you ever met one. You can't do it, you see. If there is a sensible one among them, it's an exception; the rule holds good still."

Thus conversing, the two young girls remained until the dinner-bell rang, and then Joe jumped up and ran off to her own room to brush her hair and arrange her dress. This done, she joined Eveleen, who, in her plain black dress and white linen collar, was looking the very perfection of neatness,

Mittie had already taken her place at the head of the table, and greeted them with one of her silky smiles as they entered.

"Has your visitor gone, uncle?" asked Joe, taking her seat.

"Yes; he had an engagement somewhere, and couldn't stay to dinner."

"How do you like him, Mittie?" asked Joe, slyly.

"Pretty well. Pass the mustard, please," said Miss Seabright, carelessly.

"Handsome—ain't he?"

"Very."

"Did you make a conquest, coz?"

"I really don't know, Miss Dent, and—with all deference—don't care," replied Miss Seabright, languidly, without lifting her large eyes.

"Humph! you *might* care, then; Gusty Ardenne, I can tell you, is no small prize in the matrimonial lottery," grunted the captain.

"Is he so very rich?" said Mittie, with more interest than she had yet betrayed.

"I believe you! Only son of Honorable Joseph Ardenne, late Governor of P——"

With a sudden energy that startled them all, Mittie dropped her knife and fork, and exclaimed :

“ *What!* The Honorable Joseph Ardenne *his* father. Are you *sure*, uncle ?”

“ Of course I am. What the dickens has got into the girl ?”

“ Do you know if Mr. Ardenne’s native State is Maine ?” said Mittie, unheeding their surprise in her eagerness.

“ Yes, I believe so. What in the name of——”

But Mittie, a perfect adept in the art of dissimulating, dropped her eyes, shining now with a triumphant light and composed her face to its usual calm, careless look, and interrupted him with :

“ I met a person in New York once who claimed to be a relation of some Honorable Joseph Ardenne from Maine, but I did not know this was he, She was a school friend, and I must write and tell her I have seen this honorable cousin of hers.”

The quiet indifference with which this explanation was given disarmed the captain’s surprise, but had he only seen the triumphant flash of her black eyes at that moment !

“ I say, uncle,” said Joe, “ I want to get acquainted with all these people—all your aristocracy, you know.”

“ Well, Flibbertygibbet ?”

“ Well, I want you to give a party—that’s the way to do it.”

“ I intend to, my dear.”

“ Do you, really. O uncle ! you’re a nice old man ! When ?”

“ Next Thursday.”

“ That’s you. And another thing, I want you to get me a piano.”

“ I hate noise,” said the captain, testily.

“ Noise !” repeated Joe, indignantly ; “ there’s a man claiming to be a Christian, and saying he hates music ! Why, uncle, what will you do when you go up to heaven. It is all music there.”

“ Is it ? I expect you’ve been there, eh ?”

“ No, but I expect to some day. And, uncle, you must give us money to buy dresses.”

“ Take the carriage after dinner, go to P——, order anything you like, and I’ll pay for it.”

“ Will you, uncle ? Oh ! you’re a real seraph, and no mistake ! Will you come with me, girls ?”

"I feel rather tired, you must excuse *me*," said Eveleen, smiling.

"I must, I suppose; what do you say, Mittie?"

"I will go, with pleasure; but really, uncle, you are *too* kind."

"No, he's not," exclaimed Joe; "it's his duty to dress his pretty nieces prettily, and he's got plenty of money. I mean to run up a bill as long as the moral law."

"You impertinent little ape," said the captain angrily. But Joe only laughed, and danced away when the meal was over, to dress for the shopping expedition.

The invites were written and sent out, and all was bustle and preparation at Hinton Hall from that until the eventful night. Mrs. Colter would have pressed the three girls into her service, but Joe would "none of it," and having wheedled the captain into buying her a piano, spent her time practising and riding Starlight, to the great wonder and admiration of all the good people of P—. Mittie, closeted with milliners and dress-makers, had no time to attend to any one but herself; but Eveleen good-humoredly gave up all to assist the old lady, and with her cheerful presence, skillful hands, and "bump of neatness," invoked order at last out of this chaos.

The night arrived. The doors of the stately old mansion were thrown open to the elite of P—, who were rapidly filling the brilliantly lighted rooms. Captain Hinton stood ready to welcome his guests, supported on one side by Miss Scabright, and on the other by Miss Hinton. Mittie was dazzling, radiant in a gold-colored satin under black lace, a ruby necklace gleaming like a line of fire round her neck, pendants of the same jewels flashing in her ears and on her arms. Eveleen, refusing all the costly dresses that had been offered her, wore white crape, with no ornament save a plain gold chain and cross, her golden hair twined in broad braids round her well-formed head. And yet, with her sweet, calm face, and pale, intellectual brow, and deep, thoughtful eyes, she was far more attractive than her gorgeous little neighbor, who looked liked some brilliant golden firefly, alighted there to irradiate the room.

Joe Dent, bewildering in blue silk and white lace, and pale oriental pearls, and a great profusion of dancing ringlets, went flying hither and thither with a laugh and a joke for every one,

turning the heads of half the young men in the room at the time. When the dancing commenced she went whirling round the room in a brilliant waltz with young Ardenne, on whom the sweet face of Eveleen Hinton seemed to have produced a deep impression, for he had raved of her continually.

"It's such a shame she doesn't dance," he exclaimed indignantly; "there she goes, devoting herself to all the old maids and wall-flowers in the room, instead of enjoying herself as she ought. There she is standing alone now by the window; excuse me, Miss Dent," and dropping Joe, he pressed through the crowd to where Eveleen stood.

"Smitten," laughed Joe; "lilies are more to his taste, it seems, than tulips, for there goes Mittie, all black, and red, and yellow, like a little flame of fire, all jets and sparkles, and he is so absorbed talking to Eveleen that he doesn't even see her. How coolly the girl treats him, too! just as cavalierly as if she wasn't aware he is the beau *par excellence* of the ball. There's Mittie, the centre of the crowd, as usual. I wonder who that stately old gentleman beside her is. I'll go over and see."

And suiting the action to the words, Joe approached Mittie, who sat on a sofa near a tall, distinguished-looking gentleman, to whom she was introduced as the "Honorable Mr. Ardenne,"

"I was just about to tell Mr. Ardenne of a singular story I heard the other day, Cousin Joe," said Mittie, with her sweetest smile and sharpest glance from beneath the long lashes. "Have you ever heard of a village in the State of Maine called Brenton, Mr. Ardenne?"

The ex-governor bowed with sudden gravity.

"There is a thick pine wood near the outskirts of the village, is there not?" continued Mittie, while a red flush of malignant power shot from under her drooping eyelids.

Mr. Ardenne grew deadly pale as he hurriedly said:

"Yes."

"Well, the story I heard was that *the skeleton of a man had been found in the wood, hidden under some low brushwood, with the skull cleft in twain.* Very strange, is it not, Mr. Ardenne?" said the girl, raising her piercing black eyes, while their red, lurid glances looked with undisguised triumph in his face.

"Good Heaven! Mr. Ardenne is fainting!" exclaimed Joe, in

alarm, as he fell back, with livid face, ghastly lips, and corrugated brow, gasping and suffocating.

"Carry him to the open air," said Miss Seabright, rising quietly; "he has not fainted, you perceive; even now he is recovering. Joe, bring me a glass of water, and try to make those people stay back."

She took the water Joe handed to her, and pressed it to his lips. At the same moment he opened his eyes, and fixed them upon the dark face bending over him in terror and a sort of vague amaze.

"I know your secret!" she hissed in his ear, with a malignant smile; "you are in my power—remember!" and with a glance full of menace, she turned away.

"So far so good," was Mittie Seabright's thought as at three o'clock that morning she quitted the ball-room for her own chamber. "I stand higher in the affections of this old dotard of an uncle of mine than either of my cousins, and, better still, I have totally and irrevocably in my power the high and mighty potentate of P—. Well done, Mittie Seabright! If you only continue to play your cards as well as you have commenced, you will one day be sole heiress of Hinton Hall, rich, worshiped, and a reigning belle. But if *he* should escape!"

She paused, and began pacing the floor excitedly, while her dark brows contracted and her small hands clenched.

"Oh! impossible," she added, abruptly; "I will not think of it; *he* will never trouble me again."

And the scheming girl threw herself on her bed to dream that all her ambitious visions were realized.

Next morning, at breakfast, she appeared with her sly, down-cast eyes, her soft, cooing voice, and silky smile, and listened quietly as Joe unmercifully quizzed Eveleen about young Ardenne.

"Half the young ladies in the room were crazy with jealousy, Ev," said Joe; "and I don't wonder for I never saw any young man so badly taken at first sight. He had eyes and ears for nobody but you. Oh! you made a conquest and no mistake; cut Mittie completely out."

"Nonsense, Joe; how you do run on!" said Eveleen, deeply blushing.

"And Gusty Ardenne is a conquest any girl might be proud of making," said the captain, emphatically; "young, rich, good-looking, and of high family—what more could any girl in her senses want? I don't know any one I'd rather have for a nephew-in-law than him; and I'll tell you what, girls, whichever of you gets him shall have a double portion. I *did* intend to divide my wealth into three equal shares, but now I've changed my mind. The one who marries Gusty Ardenne shall have *half*, and the other half will be divided betwixt the other two. Now, I've told you in time, so you can all try."

Eveleen blushed again, Joe, pursed up her mouth and looked saucy, and Mittie stole a quick, sharp glance at him from under her long, sable eye-lashes and smiled slightly to herself.

"I'll have him, then, that's settled," said Joe; "the next time he comes here I'll ask him to marry me, and if he says no, why, you may look out for white squalls, that's all. No objections, I hope, Eveleen?"

"None in the world."

"And what say you, my little bright-winged bird-of-paradise," said the captain, good-humoredly; "shall it be a drawn battle between you?"

"With all my heart," cooed Mittie, in her velvety tones, "and the victory shall be mine, or I will know why," she added inwardly.

CHAPTER IV.

MYSTERY AND SUSPICION.

"But now I look upon her face,
A very pictured show,
Betraying not the slightest trace,
Of what may work below."

"*Bon matin, mesdames!*" gayly exclaimed Gusty Ardenne, as, the morning after the party, he presented himself on the veranda where Mittie and Eveleen were standing; "I set out in search of sunshine and have found it here."

"Pray, spare your fine speeches, Mr. Ardenne," said Eveleen, laughing, "for they are quite thrown away here. I believe my cousin Mittie has no more taste for flattery than I have."

"By the way, Miss Seabright, I have a message for you," said the young man; "rather a droll one, too."

"For me!" said Mittie, raising her lustrous eyes in languid surprise; "from whom, pray?"

"That is exactly what I would like to know; I haven't the honor of the gentleman's acquaintance."

"It's a gentleman, then," said Eveleen, glancing mischievously at Mittie, who stood leaning carelessly against the veranda railing, her drooping eyelashes resting on her crimson cheeks, her short, crisp, jetty curls glittering in the sunlight.

"Yes, and a remarkably fine-looking fellow, too, though rather seedy and out at the elbows," said Mr. Ardenne, as he lounged against a pillar, and began caressing his mustache. "But, Miss Seabright, have you no curiosity on the subject? Do you not wish to know what the message was?"

"I am all attention," said Miss Seabright, half raising her veiled eyes.

"Well, as I was coming along here this morning I was accosted by a tall, dark, brigandish-looking fellow, rejoicing in a tatterdemalion costume and any amount of hair, with the inquiry, if one Captain Hinton lived about here. I answered in the affirmative, and pointed to the house."

As she heard the description of the stranger, Mittie had given a sudden start, and grew slightly pale.

"Well, I see I have interested you, so I'll go on," said the young man. "The next question of the intensely brigandish stranger was, 'whether Captain Hinton had not a niece living with him at present,' to which I replied that he had three."

"Well, and then?" said Mittie, breathlessly.

"Then he asked if one of them was called Miss Mittie Seabright, whom he described as being small, dark, and exceedingly handsome, to all of which I, of course, said yes."

"And then?" demanded Mittie, excitedly.

"Then came the message, if such it can be called. 'Miss Mittie Seabright,' said he, with a smile I cannot describe, 'ask her *how many hours till day dawns*'; and before I could speak he turned away and walked rapidly in the direction of Wilt's Inn."

Mittie Seabright had wonderful self-control, but it all seemed to forsake her now. Her face grew ghastly; her teeth closed

with a snap; she reeled, and would have fallen had she not clutched the railing for support. With exclamations of surprise and terror, Eveleen and Ardenne sprang forward to assist her, but she waved them off, and said, incoherently:

"It's nothing—a spasm—I'm subject to them—water, please."

Eveleen flew into the house and returned with a glass of water. Mittie drank it off and looked down the road in the direction of P——, with eyes wild with terror and affright.

"Dear Cousin, are you better?" said Eveleen, anxiously.

"Yes," said Mittie, with a sort of shiver.

"I hope, Miss Seabright, this message had nothing to do with it?" said Ardenne. "If the villain has dared to insult you through me—"

"No, no, no,!" cried Mittie, vehemently, recalled to herself by his words; "indeed, I assure you, it was nothing," she added, smiling, and lightly shaking off her gloom and terror; "I have always been subject to sudden attacks of faintness, but they pass off in a moment. This seedy gentleman and his message are rather amusing." And she laughed her low, soft laugh, but under this shadowy lustre the red glances of her eyes were like gleams from drawn stilettoes.

"Then you have no idea who he is?" said Ardenne, completely deceived by her *sang froid*.

"Not the slightest; it is probably some one from P—— who wishes to play off a practical joke," said Mittie, laughing, "though why he should so particularly select me is, I confess, somewhat puzzling."

"The audacious scoundrel!" indignantly broke out Ardenne; "I'll horsewhip him within an inch of his life if I ever come across him again, and see if that will cure him of his practical jokes."

"I beg you will do no such thing, Mr. Ardenne," said Mittie, quietly; "it would come to my uncle's ears, and besides, I have no desire to have my name mixed up with such an affray. You say he entered Wilt's Inn?" she carelessly added.

"Yes; very likely he is stopping there."

"Um-m," said Mittie, musingly, while her eyes were bent on the ground, "it's rather amusing, on the whole, but I beg you will not mention it to any one, much less my uncle, for I detest being laughed at."

Mr. Ardenne closed his lips, and went through a pantomime of sewing them up.

At this moment the captain's voice was heard calling Mrs. Colter to come and help him on with his great coat, and Mittie, who was ever by his side to offer her services, glided into the hall and helped him into that useful garment before Mrs. Colter had left the kitchen.

Ardenne and Eveleen were thus left *tete-a-tete*, to the no little embarrassment of the latter and the great delight of the former, who began being as fascinating as he knew how.

"There's a good little girl," said the captain, chucking Mittie under the chin; "always ready to help her old uncle. Well, I won't forget it some day."

"Dearest, best uncle!" said Mittie; "I wan't nothing but your love; you have already done more for me than I can ever repay." And, as if with a sudden impulse of affection, she flung her arms around his neck, and then turning, ran rapidly up-stairs and sought her own room.

"What an affectionate little creature she is!" said the captain, looking fondly after her. "It's a pleasure to bestow favors on such as her. I hope *she'll* get Gusty Ardenne. She's the best-looking of the three; got a pair of wonderful eyes of her own."

That night, about dark, a little dark figure, wrapped in a black mantle, glided softly by a side-door from the house, and took the road leading to Wilt's Inn. About ten yards from the house the tall figure of a man emerged from the shadow of some trees and confronted her.

"*How many hours till day dawns?*" he said, carelessly.

"Hush, hush! Then this *is* you, Harry?"

"To be sure. How do you do, Mittie?" he said, with a chuckle.

"I thought you were caged for life," she said, bitterly.

"See what thought done! I knew you would come to-night after getting my message. Don Seigneur Monsieur Mustache Whiskerando delivered it, then," he said, bursting into a laugh.

"And how *dare* you give it?" she said, in a voice of suppressed passion; "how dare you, sir, implicate me? Do you not fear my power? You have the audacity of the demon himself."

"Come, now, Mittie, keep cool. *Fear you?* That is a good one! Are you not as much in my power as I am in yours. Come now."

She ground her teeth, and her dark brows were convulsed with impotent passion.

"There's no use in your flaring up in this way, you know, Mittie," said the young man, coolly, putting a piece of tobacco in his mouth and beginning to chew; "you used me mighty shabbily that last time, but I'm not a man to bear spite. I heard of your good fortune from the Hansons and I came here to share it, knowing that, like the affectionate little girl you are, you would not let your——"

"If you *dare*!" she fairly hissed, in a voice that made him quail.

"Oh! come now, none o' this," he said in a bullying tone; "I have you under my thumb, you know, and there's no use you striking fire, little flint and steel that you are! This rich old cove you live with must shell out. I'm confoundedly hard up, and some of his spare cash must fill my pockets."

"Well, how are you going to get it?"

"You will get it for me, my dear."

"Steal it, do you mean?" she said, sharply.

"Oh! any way you like; if he gives it to you, so much the better, if not——" a gesture, with his thumb on his nose and his fingers spread out, finished the sentence.

"I won't run any such risk for you," she said, passionately.

"Very well, then, all will come out, and this uncle of yours will be slightly astonished to find——"

"Would you dare to tell?" she said through her clinched teeth.

A rude laugh was his answer.

"What will insure your silence?" she said at length, and even in the dark he could see the fierce, menacing glitter of her eyes.

"I have told you—*money*."

"And if I refuse?"

"I split—that's all."

"You have it—on one condition."

"And that is?"

"You remember the young man you met this morning?"

"Don Monsieur, and so forth—of course."

"Well, he is immensely rich, and a great favorite with my uncle, and he says whichever of us (he has two other nieces at the Hall), whichever of us marries him will get the half of his

fortune. Now, if you will promise secrecy, I will be the successful one, and after that you shall have all the money you want."

A long, low whistle was the answer.

"Well, what do you say?" she demanded, impatiently.

"Oh! marry him, by all means—I won't interfere. Let me wish Don Seigneur joy of his bargain."

"Will you leave this place?"

"No, thankee; New York's too hot to hold me just now, and P—— is a very nice place."

"Fool! you'll get drunk and let all out."

"Trust me for that. I never babble in my cups. But, Mittie, when shall I have the 'ready'?"

"Here is my purse; it has ten dollars only, but I have no more. Will that do you for a week?"

"To oblige you, I'll make it. When am I to see your charming ladyship again."

"Let me see—I cannot run the risk of meeting you in daytime, and after night the outer gate is locked. Oh! I have it; there is a little wicket round near the back of the house, and a side-door opening into the yard from my uncle's room. Come this night week about eleven o'clock—they will be all in bed by that time—and I will meet you there with more money. But mind, if you dare to let a word out about knowing me——"

"Make your mind easy, Mittie; I'm dumb, would not know such a distinguished individual as Miss Seabright for the world."

"And if you value a whole skin, keep out of the way of Mr. Ardenne."

"Is he in love with you, Mittie?"

"Not he, no more than I am with him; but I shall marry him, nevertheless. He is in love with a yellow-haired, doll-faced cousin of mine," said Mittie, with a low, scornful laugh.

"Then how will you manage it?"

"His father shall do it. I have him in my power. I'll be Mrs. Ardenne before two months, or know the reason."

"Mittie, you're a trump!" said the young man admiringly.

"You told me so before two years ago," said Mittie, with a curling lip. "Good night."

She turned and flitted away like a dark spectre in the chill

night wind, while the young man bent his steps in the direction of Wilt's Inn, carelessly whistling "The girl I left behind me."

When she came down to breakfast next morning her smile was as bright, her brow as calm as ever; no signs of the evil brooding within could be read in those dark, drooping eyes and that bright face.

Ordering out the carriage after breakfast, she took her seat, and desired to be driven to the residence of the Ardennes. On reaching it she found Mr. Ardenne, senior, in the parlor, alone.

He started at her entrance, and turned first red and then pale.

"Good morning, Miss Seabright," he said, rising hastily. "Mrs. Ardenne will be delighted to see you; I will go and tell her you are here."

"Mr. Ardenne, I beg you will take no such trouble," said Miss Seabright, sinking into the depth of an arm-chair, and drawing off her gloves with her sweetest smile, "my visit was intended for you."

The governor bowed and grew paler than before.

"If you are any judge of human nature, Governor Ardenne," began Miss Seabright, "you will perceive that I am not one to make idle visits of ceremony. I have a motive in coming here this morning."

"And is that motive to taunt me with the knowledge of a secret that I believed known only to myself and Heaven, dark, dreadful girl?"

"By no means, Governor Ardenne; but the subject is quite as delicate; it refers to your son."

Mr. Ardenne fixed his large, strong eyes on her in unfeigned surprise; but she sat before him with her brilliant eyes fixed on the carpet, her thin, elfin face looking out from a forest of black, glittering curls as expressionless as a statue in bronze.

"Perhaps some girls might feel embarrassed in speaking on this subject, but I never was troubled with such a weakness. Are you aware that your son is paying attention to Miss Hinton?"

"I am aware of that fact, Miss Seabright."

"And with your consent?"

"And with my consent."

"Governor Ardenne, this must go on no further."

"What, Miss Seabright?"

"This match; it must be immediately, instantaneously broken off."

"Impossible, Miss Seabright!"

"And why, sir?"

"Because my son has already spoken to me on the subject, and I have given my consent."

"That consent must be retracted."

"Miss Seabright, I assure you——"

"And I assure you—*you*, Governor Ardenne," interrupted Mittie, coolly, "that unless it is instantly broken off your secret will be given to the four winds of heaven."

As if he had received a spear-thrust, the governor fell back in his seat and covered his face with his hands.

"Girl! girl! what object have you in all this?" he said at length, in a husky voice.

"That is my affair, sir, *yours* is to do as I command."

"Perhaps you wish to be his wife yourself."

"Just as likely as not; does Governor Ardenne object to me as a daughter-in-law?" she said, with a low, insolent laugh.

"What further do you wish?" he said, sternly; "am I to command my son to marry you?"

"Not at all; if I find it necessary I will give him that command myself; all you have to do is to forbid any further attentions to Miss Hinton."

"And after consenting before, what reason can I possibly give for the unexpected command?"

"Oh! you can give him any reason you please—her religion, for instance; tell him you can't hear of him marrying a person not of his own faith—or you can pretend a personal dislike to her—anything you please."

"And thus mortally offend my old friend, Captain Hinton."

"He need not know it; enjoin Mr. Gustav to secrecy, and if he does happen to discover it, I will make your peace."

"But my son and Miss Hinton, they will be miserable for life."

Mittie's beautiful lip curled.

"I thought Governor Ardenne had got over the sentimental nonsense of believing in such stuff! I should think a certain

little *accident* that once happened in Brenton woods would have cured him of such folly."

"For Heaven's sake, hush!" said the unhappy man growing ghastly. "You will drive me mad, girl."

"Do you promise?"

"Yes, yes, yes!"

"Take care that you keep it then," said Mittie, rising. "And, after all, I will be just as good a wife for Master Gusty as my baby-faced, grey-eyed cousin. Good-morning, Governor Ardenne. For a first visit, this has been very agreeable. Shall we see you soon at Hinton Hall?"

He only waved his hand, but said nothing, and, with a deriding smile, Mittie took her seat and was driven to the Hall.

CHAPTER V.

THE PATIENCE OF EVELEEN.

"The good are better made by ill,
As odors crushed are sweeter still,"

"But I tell you, Eveleen, I *won't* be dictated to in this fashion; he has no right to order me to do this."

"He is your father, Mr. Ardenne."

"I don't care if he were my father twenty times over, he has no right to give any such command. I won't submit to it—hanged if I will!"

"You forget yourself, Mr. Ardenne."

"I *don't* forget myself, nor you either; I have a right to marry whoever I please."

Eveleen said nothing, but looked sadly out at the dead leaves whistling away on the morning wind.

"And as I please to marry you, I'll do it in spite of them all," continued Gusty, very much excited.

"I fancy I will have to be consulted first," said Eveleen, proudly.

"But you have consented, Eveleen."

"That was when you told me your father was willing; now that he has refused, it alters the matter."

"But his refusal is so absurd—just because your faith and mine are not the same."

"Your father is right," said Eveleen; "mixed marriages are always unhappy. But enough has been said on this subject. I was wrong to think such a thing ever could be. Your father has desired the connection between us should end—so do I. I wish you good-morning, Mr. Ardenne."

She arose proudly.

"Be it so," said Gustav, bitterly, "It shows how much you ever cared for me."

Her lip quivered, her eyes filled and saddened, but she turned away without speaking.

"One word, Eveleen," he cried, passionately. "May I not hope that time—that reflection——"

"Hope for nothing, sir, but to forget what has passed. Be assured that neither time nor reflection can alter me. I am sorry if I have given you pain—but it was necessary. For the future, when you come here I shall not appear, so that you will have nothing to recall painful memories."

"Then I shall come here no longer!" exclaimed Gustav, as he darted down the steps, sprang on his horse, and galloped away as if mad.

As Eveleen slowly and sadly entered her own room, the door opened and Mittie came in with her soft steps and softer smile.

"Why, Eveleen, what is the matter? what have you done to Mr. Ardenne? He promised uncle to stay for dinner, and instead of that, before he is ten minutes talking to you, he flies off as if the gentleman with the cloven foot were after him. What is it all about?"

But, instead of replying, Eveleen dropped her head on her false friend's shoulder and burst into tears.

"My dear cousin, this is something serious; tell me, darling," cooed the dove-like tones, "have you quarreled with Gustav?"

"Yes."

"What about? Let me be your confidante, dearest Eveleen?"

"His father has ordered him to break our engagement—he, like me, is opposed to mixed marriages. Gustav is of age, you know, and wanted me to marry him without consulting his father, but——"

"But you would not, my dear, high-hearted cousin, is it not so?"

"There is no merit in my refusal, Mittie. I could not do it without sin. Please don't speak of it any more, and don't mention it to uncle. He might be angry."

"Are you sure Gusty will not tell him?" said Mittie.

"Gustav is not coming here any more," said Eveleen, in a slightly tremulous tone, "so uncle will not discover it."

Mittie's black eyes flashed angrily as she half pushed Eveleen away and said:

"I rather fancy he will not like your driving young Mr. Ardenne away from the house; he is a great favorite of his," said Mittie, coldly.

"Dear cousin, how could I help it?" said Eveleen, with filling eyes. I am sorry to be the cause of any dissensions between the families. Dear Mittie, what do you think I had better do?"

"Your best plan will be to confine yourself to your room as much as possible. Perhaps we can manage to induce Mr. Ardenne to come back. I will try to keep it from uncle's ears, for I know he would be very angry if he discovered it."

And, kissing her affectionately, Mittie left the room.

But no sooner was she in the passage than the whole expression of her face changed. Her brow grew black, her hands clinched, and she hissed between her teeth:

"The prudish, straight-laced little puritan! Now that she has driven Gustav Ardenne away from the house, my plans may fail after all. Uncle shall hear of it, but it shall be in my way; and I fancy it will not greatly predispose him in favor of his brother's daughter."

She passed down stairs, with her soft, cat-like step, and tapped at the door of her uncle's study.

"Come in," said Captain Hinton.

Mittie entered, and found the old gentleman reposing in the depths of his elbow-chair, smoking his meerschaum.

"Pray, don't stop smoking, uncle," she said, with her sweetest smile and softest tone. "Don't mind me in the least. I rather like tobacco-smoke than otherwise."

"You're the only sensible girl I ever saw, then," said the

captain, vastly pleased ; " and what brings my little fire-fly here now."

" Sir, I come to plead for my Cousin Eveleen,"

" Eveleen, child ! Why, what has she done ?"

" Is it possible you have not heard, sir ?" said Miss Seabright, in well-feigned surprise.

" Heard ? Not I. What awful mystery is coming now ?"

" My dear uncle, pray do not be angry, but young Mr. Ardenne is very deeply offended, and has refused to come here any more."

" Gusty Ardenne not come here ! Bless my soul !" said the captain in dismay. " Who is the cause of this ?"

" I am sorry to say, Eveleen, sir,"

" And how has she offended him ? Pooh ! Pooh ! Little Eveleen is too gentle and quiet to offend any one—my little jay !"

Mittie bit her lip, but answered calmly :

" I have only Miss Hinton's word for it, sir. She told me she had quarreled with him, and that he had gone away in high anger, vowing never to come back. Eveleen seemed so much afraid you would be angry with her, that I undertook to plead for her, though she does not know it."

" And what business had she quarreling with him, I want to know ?" said the captain, in a rage.

" They were lovers, sir, I believe."

" They were, eh ? And what was that to quarrel about ?"

" Lovers always quarrel, I have heard."

" Humph ! profitable occupation ! And what was the cause of this lovers' quarrel, eh ?"

" Governor Ardenne, though anxious his son should marry one of your nieces, will not permit him to marry Miss Hinton, because she is a Catholic. Mr. Ardenne informed Miss Hinton of his father's determination, and this, I believe was the cause of the quarrel, the result of which is they have parted in high anger, and Mr. Ardenne will come back no more."

" But I say he *shall*," said Captain Hinton, giving his stick an emphatic thump on the floor. " No puling girl is going to deprive me of the society of Gusty Ardenne. Miss Eveleen Hinton had better take care of herself. If she begins to play off any such pranks as this she'll find herself in the wrong box."

"My dear uncle," said Mittie, hastily, "I hope you will not mention that *I* told you this. My design was to obtain pardon for Eveleen, for I feared you might be angry with her, and if she heard I told you she might think I did it from malice."

"You're a good girl, Mittie, a very good girl," said the captain, patting her cheek; "the best of the lot I begin to think. Now, I don't see, Mittie, why *you* couldn't get Gusty; you're the best-looking, eh?"

Miss Seabright cast down her eyes, and tried to blush and look bashful, but the effort proved a failure.

"I'll tell Gusty to come back," said the captain, rising. "I'll *make* him come back, and if *you* don't keep him, why then you're not the clever little girl I take you to be. Run and get my overcoat and I'll be off."

Mittie assisted him on with his overcoat, and watched him with a covert sneer, as he strode off in search of Gusty.

Two hours after he returned with the young man, who was not at all sorry to be obliged to come back, as he thereby hoped to obtain another interview with Eveleen. But Eveleen, by the advice of Mittie, did not descend to dinner that day, and Miss Seabright, elegantly dressed, her cheeks flushed, and her eyes bright with triumph, took her place at the head of the table, and during the meal exerted every art of which she was mistress to fascinate Gusty Ardenne. It was hardly in human power to resist the fascinating siren, and before he departed she had the pleasure of seeing that Eveleen was apparently forgotten, and he had eyes and ears for her alone.

But once out of the magic influence of her brilliant eyes, and still more brilliant smiles, the glamour faded away, and the calm, sweet face of Eveleen rose up reproachfully before him, and in the exciting intoxication Mittie was forgotten for her gentler cousin.

But Mittie Seabright, standing in the veranda watching him as he rode away, dreamed not of this as she exultantly murmured:

"The Fates favor me! so far all has gone well. Harry will find I am a true prophet; in two months from this I will be Mrs. Gustav Ardenne, with wealth enough at my command to satisfy even my highest ambition. So, dainty Cousin Eveleen, look yourself."

From that day forth Gusty became a constant visitor at Hinton Hall. Mittie always received and entertained him, for Joe was generally galloping over the country, or else up in her Cousin Eveleen's room, which the latter rarely left. Joe was highly indignant at the coolness with which the captain treated Eveleen, and took to rating him for it so soundly one day that that gallant officer unceremoniously took her by the shoulder and landed her out of the room. But toward Mittie she was positively savage, and incessantly ranted and scolded about her meanness in "taking Cousin Ev's beau from her," as she phrased it. To all these reproaches Mittie listened with a quiet smile, treating both scolder and scolding with silent contempt.

But Eveleen, most deeply wronged of all, uttered no complaint or reproach, though day by day her cheek grew paler and thinner, and her slight form and gentle brow more frail and spirituelle. Often, when Joe would commence some violent tirade against Mittie's abominable conduct, Eveleen would gently endeavor to defend her, thereby so deeply disgusting Miss Dent that she would flounce out of the room in a towering passion.

But still heavier trials were in store for Eveleen.

Of late the captain had begun to miss sundry sums of money. He usually kept a considerable amount in a bureau in his bedroom, and for some time past various sums had been missing. Who the thief was, notwithstanding all his vigilance, he could not discover.

It will be remembered that Mittie's chamber was next to Eveleen's, the two apartments being separated by a partition so thin that every motion made in one could be distinctly heard in the other. Eveleen passed many long and sleepless nights now, sitting by the window with her sad young face bent on her hand, and more than once she had been startled about midnight by hearing Mittie's door softly open, then a slight rustling of garments, and lastly a swift, light step gliding down-stairs. She knew it was Mittie—that velvety foot-step could belong to no one else. But what could induce her to leave her room at that hour?

At first Eveleen fancied she might have gone for something she wanted, but as upwards of an hour passed on these occasions before she returned, this explanation did not seem satisfactory. And what was still more mysterious was that invariably after

each of these nocturnal expeditions Captain Hinton would discover he had again been robbed.

"Could it be possible that Mittie—but no, no!" exclaimed Eveleen, banishing indignantly the thought, "it is impossible."

Eveleen had mentioned her discovery to no one; for, in the first place, it might have involved Mittie in trouble, and in the second, she shrank from the idea of appearing like a spy on her cousin. She would have spoken of her discovery to Mittie herself, but Miss Seabright had treated her very coldly and reservedly of late, though Eveleen knew of no reason she had given her to do so.

Matters were in this unsatisfactory state when one night, at the appointed hour, she heard Mittie's door cautiously open, and then a light, gliding step descending the stairs. For the first time came the thought that Mittie might be a sleep-walker, and *this* would account for all.

Impetuously Eveleen rose up from the window at which she was sitting, and throwing her mantle over her shoulders, she softly followed Mittie down the stairs. As she reached the foot, she caught the last flutter of her dress as she entered the parlor, her little, straight, lithe figure dimly revealed in the soft, misty May moonlight. Eveleen saw her enter her uncle's bed-room, which opened off this parlor. Opposite the door stood the bureau containing the captain's money.

Speechless with amazement and horror, Eveleen saw her take a key from her bosom, coolly unlock a small drawer, take out a roll of bills, thrust them in her pocket, relock the drawer, and then glide swiftly and silently out through the side-door opening into the yard.

The thief was now discovered, but where had Mittie gone? Curiosity, of which, being a female, Eveleen possessed her share, was now aroused, and, cautiously entering her uncle's room, she too passed out through the side-door. By the old man's loud snoring she knew he was sound asleep, and there was little fear of her being detected.

As she gained the yard she paused and looked around. Down at the farther end, under the shade of an old elm, dimly seen in the hazy moonlight, was Mittie, her long black hair streaming wildly over her shoulders. By her side was the tall, dark figure of a man, wrapped in a long cloak, and wearing a slouched hat

far down over his brows. Both seemed to be earnestly conversing, and Eveleen stood rooted to the ground with astonishment as she gazed. After the lapse of about ten minutes she saw the man turn away, and she caught his last words, spoken in a laugh :

"Thank you, Mittie ; 'pon my honor, I'm almost disposed to envy this Ardenne fellow the clever little wife's he's going to get."

Mittie's reply she could not catch ; but she heard the quick, imperious tone in which it was spoken, and then, before she could turn, she saw the girl's light form approaching, and with an impulse of dread she opened the door to return.

But the keen, bright eye of Mittie had discovered her. She felt her arm clutched in a steely grip, and a pair of black, glittering, blazing eyes were flashing in her face, fairly gleaming with passionate rage.

The fierce, vice-like grip extorted a cry of pain from Eveleen. The cry aroused the sleeper in the bed. Quick as lightning Mittie flung her from her and flew from the room, out of the parlor, up-stairs, and into her own chamber.

Involuntarily Eveleen stretched out her hand to save herself, and grasped the bureau for support. At the same moment the captain had sprung out of bed crying ;

"Stop thief ! stop thief !" and turning to arrest the robber in the act, found himself confronted with the pale, trembling Eveleen.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIERY TRIAL.

"And there was light around her brow,
A holiness in those dark eyes,
Which showed, though wandering earthward now,
Her spirit's home was in the skies."

The astonishment, the horror, the amazement of Captain Hinton on discovering, as he supposed, the robber in Eveleen may be imagined. Grasping her arm, as she stood white and trembling, with undefined apprehension, looking, indeed, very like a real culprit, he said, in a low, stern voice :

"So, then, *you* are the thief! That tells the whole story. *You* come at the dead of night to rob your benefactor, do you!"

"I? O uncle! I would die sooner than steal," said Eveleen, flushing at the degrading charge.

"Do not add a lie to your other crime," he interrupted, sternly. "You are my brother's daughter, and I will say nothing of this for my own sake. See that you are equally discreet, Miss Hinton. Go to your room now, and let me hear no more of this. I will take measures to prevent a repetition of the act in future."

"Uncle——"

"Not a word, Miss Hinton. Go to your room."

"Uncle, hear me——"

"Not one word, not one syllable. You cannot exonerate yourself from the charge without lying, and I do not wish to add to your degradation. You will oblige me by going to your room, Miss Hinton, and remaining there as much as possible for the future."

He took her by the arm, and, with cold politeness, escorted her from the room to the foot of the stairs, and then returning to the parlor, he locked the door, while Eveleen fled wildly upstairs to her own room.

Once there, she threw herself on her bed in a wild, passionate burst of weeping; hot, bitter, scalding tears of shame and humiliation. Accused of stealing—believed to be a thief by one who had done so much for her, whose good opinion she valued so highly. Oh! it was too much, too much! And Eveleen wept long and passionately.

At last exhausted nature grew calm, and then came a quieter mood. Falling on her knees, she invoked help and protection from the Father of the fatherless, and thus consoled and strengthened, she resolved on a plan of action. She knew her uncle, stubborn in his determination, would listen to no explanation, but she resolved to see Mittie, and implore her to free her from his unjust suspicions.

Pleading a headache as an excuse for absenting herself from breakfast, Eveleen remained in her room, and when Joe came up to see her, after the morning meal, she desired her to send Miss Seabright up to her.

And calm, handsome, self-possessed and elegant, Mittie in a few moments made her appearance.

"Good morning, Miss Hinton," was her polite salutation; "I regret to find you are ill. How is your headache?"

So thoroughly taken "aback," to use a nautical term, was Eveleen at this off-hand way of doing business that she fixed her eyes on the dark, bright face before her in utter amaze. But in that beautiful mask nothing could be read but graceful ease and polite expectation.

"Josephine informed me that you wished to see me, Miss Hinton," she said, leaning one little brown hand on the chair-back, and with the other drawing out an elegant little watch, as a faint hint to be expeditious.

Now Eveleen was by no means prone to anger, but smarting under the ignominy of *her* crime, this was a little too much, and she answered passionately:

"Mittie Seabright, can you stand there before me and talk like this after what happened last night? How can you even look me in the face after last night?"

"Last night!" echoed Miss Seabright, arching her jetty eyebrows in lady-like surprise; "my dear cousin, I am really at a loss to understand you this morning. Pray, *what* happened last night?"

"Oh! this is the very climax of brazen effrontery," exclaimed the indignant Eveleen; "has five short hours banished all memory of your visit to my uncle's room, of your midnight interview with a man in the yard, of your meeting with me after? Tell me, has all this already escaped your wonderfully short memory?"

"Miss Hinton, I fear you are slightly delirious this morning. I shall request my uncle to send for the doctor, and meantime I would advise you to go immediately to bed and try to sleep off these fancies," said Miss Seabright, turning quietly to leave the room.

Eveleen sprang between her and the door and interrupted her.

"You *shall* not go, Mittie," she exclaimed, her pale cheeks flushed and her eye bright with just indignation. "You *shall* not go till you have rendered me justice. You *know* you stole the money from my uncle last night. You know you did, though

you would deny it now. I am blamed for it, and you *must* free me from the unjust suspicion."

What a contrast they formed! Eveleen flushed, indignant, excited; Mittie cool, collected, and composed.

"This is rather strange language, Miss Hinton. I steal money last night. Be careful how you talk, my dear cousin."

"O Mittie! Mittie! O Mittie! for Heaven's sake——" Eveleen's voice failed, and covering her face with her hands she wept as if her heart would break.

Miss Seabright, graceful and self-possessed, arose and laid her hand on the handle of the door.

"This is rather singular, Miss Hinton, unless, indeed, you are practicing private theatricals," said Mittie, with a cold sneer. "As I have almost a masculine horror of scenes, and Mr. Ardenne is waiting down-stairs to take me out driving, allow me to wish you good-morning."

And with a jeering smile, curling her beautiful lip, Mittie Seabright bowed gracefully, and swept from the room.

"O, Heavenly Father, help me! O Mother Mary, pity me!" wept poor Eveleen, falling on her knees in the depth of her bitter sorrow, "for my cross is heavier than I can bear."

And then, like a strain of sweet music heard in the lull of a tempest, rose a low, soft musical voice, breathing the words, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted," and Eveleen lifted up her grief-bowed young head in holy awe, and paused to listen, but she was alone in the room, with the soft May wind and streaming sunshine. The odor of flowers came wafted through the open casement; the exulting songs of the birds chanting their morning *Te Deum* to the Author of all good gifts filled the air with brilliant melody.

The peace of the scene stole into Eveleen's heart, calming the wild tumult of grief and indignation, and bowing her face in her clasped hands, she meekly murmured:

"Not my will, O Father! but thine be done. Sweet Mother Mary, give me strength to bear my cross patiently to the end."

That was Eveleen's last struggle, and her better angel obtained the victory.

Quick tears would fill her eyes as she saw her uncle's cold, contemptuous gaze, and a sudden flush would stain her pearly cheek beneath the deriding mockery of Mittie's black eyes, but

no complaint or reproach passed her gentle lips now. Joe, too, and Gusty Ardenne had grown very cold and reserved towards her, for the captain had dropped sundry mysterious hints of some hidden crime she had been guilty of that degraded her beneath their notice, and these embers Mittie had taken such good care to fan and keep alive that they forced back the rising pity they felt as they watched her slight drooping form and pale young face, that grew paler and wanner every day, and turned resolutely away and hardened their hearts to the pleading gaze of those sad, wistful, steeled eyes.

And so the last gleam of earthly sunshine was fading away from Eveleen's sky; but, folding her meek arms, she sweetly kissed the rod that smote her. Evening after evening found her now in the shadowy old cathedral of P——, and, save to go there and come down to her meals, she rarely left her room.

So the sweet spring-time passed, and the summer roses began to bloom, and with it came the most terrific pestilence, the most horrible of all horrible plagues—the loathsome small-pox. All P——were in consternation, for the pest came in its most virulent form, and scores were dying weekly. Every one who was able fled from the doomed towns, and among the rest Captain Hinton prepared to go, for neither he nor his neices had ever had it, and Mittie, dreading the loss of her beauty, had an unspeakable and deadly horror of it. But, as often happens, that very dread brought it on.

The night before that fixed for their departure she complained of an intense pain in the back and a blinding headache. Mrs. Colter observed with alarm that these symptoms were, in many instances, the first symptoms of the terrible disease; but Mittie vehemently scouted the idea, and asserted that a good night's rest was all she needed to make her quite well again, and that she would be perfectly able to leave P—— in the morning.

But when morning came Mittie Seabright lay tossing in the wild delirium of burning fever. A doctor was sent for, who pronounced the disease small-pox of the most malignant kind, and then horror and consternation spread through the household. Every servant, from Mrs. Colter downwards, fled from the lazaret-house; and the captain, who had himself a mortal dread of the horrible disease, shuddered from head to foot.

“What is to be done?” was the first trembling question.

"Obtain a nurse for your neice, if you can get one—which I very much doubt—and leave here immediately with your other two neices," said the doctor.

"Where can I procure a nurse?" inquired the captain.

"I haven't the remotest idea," said the doctor. "What between the hospital and all, a nurse is worth her weight in gold about this time."

A hand was lightly laid on the doctor's arm. He looked down and saw a pale young face, with soft, pleading eyes.

"Oh doctor! may I nurse her? I am strong and well, and I will be so watchful," pleaded Eveleen.

"You, child!" said the amazed doctor. "You never had the small-pox?"

"No, sir."

"Well, are you not afraid of catching it and having your beauty spoiled?" he said with a smile,

She lifted her eyes to his face, and the smile died away.

"You may take it and die, young lady," said the doctor, gravely.

"I am not afraid of it, and it does not matter——" If I do die, she would have said, but her voice choked, and she stopped.

"But, Eveleen, I don't know what to make of this; 'pon my life I don't," said Captain Hinton, more thoroughly surprised than he had ever been before in the whole course of his life.

"Dear uncle, do not object. I am not afraid of the small-pox; and even if I were, I could not leave Mittie with a nurse of any kind in her dangerous illness. Take Josephine away and let me remain," she said, gently.

"An' luff me stay long o' you, Miss Heavyling, honey," said the voice of old black Aunt Rammy. "I'se had de dretted infunnelly small-pox myself, as all dese yer holes and carved work in my face testerfies, and I ain't afeard of it dis time no-how. All dese yer cow'dly white niggers hab gone and runned away, and I, Miss Joe——"

"Oh! stay, by all means, Aunt Rammy," said Joe, who entered, paler and quieter than was her wont. "I can do very well without you. But indeed, Eveleen, I had no idea you would stay; just think of the danger."

"Cousin Josephine allow me to tell you that the sooner you

leave here and let me go to my patient the better. Isn't that so, doctor?" she said, appealing to him with a faint smile.

"Assuredly, Miss Hinton. Captain, you can do no good here, and had better depart with your niece immediately. Miss Hinton, I will call again before night. Good-morning."

And with a glance full of admiration at the brave young girl, the doctor took his hat and gloves and departed.

And then there were a few hasty preparations for departure, and Joe impulsively flung herself on Eveleen's neck before going away, and sobbed out:

"O dear, brave Eveleen! forgive me; I have been very cold and haughty to you, and all the time you were so good, and gentle, and saintly, that I hated myself for believing Mittie. Dear, dear Eveleen, say you forgive me!"

"My little darling, I have nothing to forgive," said Eveleen, dropping her head on Joe's shoulder to hide her own fast-falling tears. "Go, go and pray for me."

One hasty kiss and she opened her arms and let her go; and then, with one hand over her eyes, she held out the other to her uncle, who came to bid her good-by.

The sight of that slight, drooping, girlish figure, that sad, pale young face through which the heroic soul, that could so resolutely brave death, shone through, touched him, and his lips quivered as he took the little wan hand in his, and said:

"Good-by Eveleen! *One* fault is easily atoned for; and I believe in my soul you're a good girl after all. Mittie would not have done this for you."

"O uncle! I never did it—I never, never did it," she sobbed out. "If—if I should die, uncle, will you not believe that I never stole your money? Good-by, uncle, dear—dear, uncle, good-by."

She threw her arms around his neck in one last embrace, and then, ere he had recovered from his surprise, she was gone.

Mechanically he entered the carriage, and before night was far away from the pest-stricken town.

Meantime Aunt Rammy had gone through the house, closing and fastening and securing doors, closing blinds and shutters, and elevating a red flag from one of the attic windows, to mark that the gloomy house was infected. And Eveleen had resolutely

shut her heart to the weak promptings of the flesh, and had taken up her place in the sick chamber.

And oh! the horror of that sick chamber, what pen can disclose, when her very soul sickened as she saw that beautiful face, neck, bosom, and limbs become covered with a horrible eruption, and the patient tore her very flesh madly to ease the intolerable itching.

Oh! fearfully revolting to every sense of smell, and sight, and touch, was the blackened and discolored form that lay helplessly on the bed, and could not be moved save when wrapped in sheets. And in the long, dreary watches of the night, when old Rummy lay sleeping in her chair the deep, death-like sleep of the children of Africa, Eveleen lay by that sick couch, heeding not the danger she was in herself, but earnestly, fervently praying that that erring soul might not then be summoned before the eternal throne with all her sins on her head.

And Eveleen's prayer was heard; and the doctor, who had once despaired of her life, began to look hopeful again, and say thanks to the best little nurse in the world, Miss Seabright would soon be well once more.

August had come, with its gorgeous bloom, before Mittie was well enough to talk or realize that she had been ill. Her eyes would follow Eveleen around the room in a sort of languid amaze, and she would receive all her attentions with the same sort of still wonder. Once or twice she attempted to talk and ask what it all meant, but Eveleen had greatly soothed her into quiet, and Mittie, too weak to resist her, had fallen passively back on her pillow.

One thing Eveleen dreaded, and that was, that she might ask to see herself. She who had been so proud of her beauty, how would she bear the sight of this purple-spotted, discolored face hideous in its ugliness now.

But the time was at hand; and one day, Eveleen coming in after a few minutes' absence, found her lying on her elbow, one hand to her head, and her great black eyes—the only unaltered feature in her face—gazing in wild, vague terror around.

"Eveleen!" she cried, "*where is my hair?*"

"It has fallen out, dear, during your illness," said Eveleen, forcing her gently back on her pillow; "but do not be alarmed, it will grow in again in a few weeks."

"Eveleen, tell me, have I had the small-pox?"

"Yes, dear Mittie, but you are almost quite well now. In a fortnight, the doctor says, you will be perfectly recovered."

She passed her hand slowly over her face, and as she felt the rough, harsh, uneven surface, that had once been as smooth as satin, her eyes grew wild with affright.

"A glass! quick, quick! a glass!" she cried, madly starting up.

But Eveleen gently, but firmly, held her down, while she said:

"You cannot have a glass just now, Mittie, and you positively must not excite yourself in this way; it will endanger your life."

"Let me go! let me go! you shall not hold me here," she cried, struggling to free herself, and sprang from the bed, but, weak and powerless, she fell back on her pillow in a passionate burst of weeping.

Luckily, the entrance of the doctor relieved Eveleen from her painful position at the time; and then that dissimulation that had become second nature to the girl came to her aid, and she appeared calm and quiet for the rest of the day. But the next morning, when Eveleen, by the doctor's orders, had gone out for a short walk, Mittie called the old negress to her side, and began:

"Aunt Rammy, how long have I been sick?"

"Now two months, honey. 'Clare to my 'vine Lord ef I didn't think you was boun' for to die, sartin; and all de time Miss Heavyling tended to you like as if you was her mudder, de dear, bressed little angel! de darned infunnelly little fool nebber thinkin' how she'll be sure to cotch it herself, all along tendin' onto you."

"Have I had the small-pox *bad*, auntie?"

"*Bad!* Oh! my 'vine Master 'Deemer! I nebber wants to see sich a sight again. Paugh! if you wasn't the most disgustenest objeck I ever clapt my two bressed ole eyes onto! Doctor said you was the wussest case he ebber 'tended to in all *his* born days."

A sudden convulsion passed over Mittie's face, and there was an involuntary quickening of her voice, as she said:

"Aunt Rammy, I want a looking-glass for a minute."

"Yes, honey; but Miss Heavyling won't 'low it, you know."

"Miss Eveleen will not know it; *do* oblige me, auntie."

"Yes, chile, I'd like to, but——"

"O Aunt Rammy! *pray* don't refuse—just for one moment!"

Aunt Rammy's heart was not proof against her pleading, so she went to the next room, and brought Mittie a small circular mirror.

One quick glance was enough—it revealed the spotted, pimpled, ghastly face, in all its distorted ugliness.

With one piercing, passionate, despairing cry, she dashed the glass from her against the wall, where it was shivered to atoms, and, with maniac strength, leaped from the bed, a dark stream of blood oozing from her mouth, as she fell heavily to the floor.

And then Aunt Rammy fled, shrieking for help, from the house, and met the doctor and Eveleen at the door, and wildly and incoherently told them what had happened.

And when they reached the room they found the wretched victim of her own fierce passions lying on the floor, weltering in blood.

CHAPTER VII.

RETRIBUTION.

"The wages of sin is death."

Life was despaired of; and when Mittie awoke from that death-like swoon she learned that she must die.

Kneeling by her bedside, Eveleen implored her to send for a clergyman, and strive to make her peace with Heaven; but the old sneer curled the dying girl's lips as she replied, in a low but distinct voice:

"'As we live, so we die,' I heard you saying that to Joe one night when you fancied yourselves alone, and I have never forgotten it. I will be a forcible illustration of its truth, and you can hold me up as one of your 'frightful warnings' to all coming ages. Don't preach now—I won't hear it," she said, with a quick, fierce gesture. "I am not altogether ungrateful for what you have done for me, Eveleen Hinton, and, to prove it, I will do two acts of justice before I die. Send for the doctor, and, yes—is Governor Ardenne here?"

"Yes; his son left P——, but he did not."

"Then send for him instantly; I have something to say to him he will be glad to hear. Quick! there is no time to lose."

Late that night, when the harvest moon shone into the room—for the dying girl would have no other light—the doctor, Eveleen, and the Governor gathered around her bedside to hear her story.

"My earliest recollection," she began, "was living in a low tavern, kept by the sailor's wife with whom I lived. There I grew up until I was fifteen years of age, learning boldness and dissimulation, as matters of course, from the set with whom I mingled.

"Among the crowds who frequented the tavern was a young man, or rather a youth, of twenty or so, named Harry Hale—handsome, dashing, and a great favorite with every one. I was a passionate, impulsive girl, and fell as deeply in love with him as my selfish nature would allow. He was smitten, too, and the result of it was a secret and hasty marriage. Yes, you look surprised, but I am already a wife.

"Well, we were both fickle by nature, and before six months had passed we were both heartily sick of our bargain. However, we agreed to be mutually useful to each other, and keep the matter a secret from all.

"Harry was a burglar by profession, and was leagued with a gang of other petty pilferers and housebreakers. I was in their confidence, and often, dressed in boys' clothes, accompanied them on their nocturnal expeditions. I am a small girl, and made a still smaller boy, and proved myself very useful in creeping through panes of glass and other small apertures of a like nature.

"Well, ten years passed on: then I learned that I had a rich uncle and was going to be a lady. I was always ambitious by nature, and resolved that those with whom I lived should lose all clue to my whereabouts, for I fancied that my new relative would hardly approve of my 'fast' courses in the 'fast' city of New York; and besides, it might stand in the way of my farther advancement. So I secretly and adroitly betrayed the whole gang into the hands of the police the night before coming here, and felt my mind at ease concerning them. But I was slightly out of my reckoning, it seemed, for one day your son, Governor

Ardenne, came here and told me he had met a young man on the road who desired him to ask me, 'How many hours till day dawns?' This was a sort of pass-word with the gang, by which they discovered their friends from their foes, and by this and the description, I judged that my husband had escaped and discovered my whereabouts.

"And so it proved. That night I stole out and met him, and was obliged to buy his secrecy by the promise of a constant supply of money. This money I easily stole from uncle by means of false keys—a trick of my old trade—and one night Eveleen, following me, was discovered by my uncle in his room and was suspected of being the thief. You can tell him gentlemen, that his dutiful niece, Mrs. Hale, *nee* Mittie Seabright, has cleared her fame in her last dying speech and confession."

She had spoken in a rapid, reckless manner hitherto, but her voice was failing now, and the shadow of coming death was settling on her face. The doctor applied a restorative, and she revived and went on:

"That is act of justice number one. Now for number two, which will be interesting to *you*, Governor Ardenne.

"Among the visitors at the tavern was an old sailor called Jack Ardenne. I was a great favorite of his somehow, and one day, observing a great scar over his left temple, I asked him how he got it, and in reply he related the following story:

"He had lived, he said, in his boyhood in a village in Maine called Brenton. He had one brother, a quick tempered, passionate youth, whom he delighted in taunting, mocking, and engaging. One night as they were passing through a lonely wood in the outskirts of the village, he began his old occupation, and in speaking of a young girl for whom his brother entertained an affection, excited his rage almost to madness. His brother had a strong stick in his hand, and in his blind rage he struck him a blow over the head that laid him bleeding and senseless on the ground.

"Jack Ardenne said his next recollection was being on shipboard. A party of drunken sailors, staggering through the woods on their way to their ship, had picked him up, and not knowing what else to do with him, had carried him along with them. With the assistance of a strong constitution and the ship's surgeon he soon recovered, and before that voyage was

over took such a fancy to life on shipboard that he resolved to become a sailor. That resolution he kept and for many years was absent from America.

“When he returned he made some inquiries concerning his brother, and learned that during the years he had been serving before the mast his brother had risen so rapidly in the political profession he had chosen that, after being sent to Congress, he had been elected Governor of P——. Jack Ardenne, who was, after all, really kind-hearted, had long ago forgiven his brother the blow he had so richly merited, and rejoiced to hear of his prosperity. Thinking it would not be very flattering to his brother's pride to find him a rough, tarry salt, he resolved not to visit him, and to spare him the humiliation of being obliged to own him. Such was the story Jack Ardenne told me, laughingly adding that he supposed his brother, the governor, still fancied himself guilty of his murder. I had nearly forgotten the circumstance when your name, Governor Ardenne, together with your resemblance to him, convinced me that you and the brother he spoke of were one and the same person. I instantly saw how I could use the circumstance to my own advantage—with what success you already know. Working upon your fears of discovery, I persuaded you to break off the match between Eveleen Hinton and your son, whom I intended some day to marry myself. The trifling drawback of having another husband still living might have made some girls hesitate, but I was never one to stop for trifles when they stood in the way of my ambition. If I have failed, it is not my fault. Life is ending rapidly for me, and one dying pang will be spared me in lifting the consciousness of crime from the soul of another. I have a long enough account to settle for without that.”

Her dark face worked convulsively, and the gray shadow of coming death fell darkly upon it. A joy—an intense thankfulness, too deep for words—filled the eyes and lighted up the face of Governor Ardenne. But the dread Presence restrained all outward demonstration, only he clasped his hands and fervently exclaimed:

“Thank God!”

“It is growing so dark—so dark,” said the dying girl, with a shudder, “and so cold. Am I dying, doctor? Oh! I cannot

die! I will not die!" she cried, starting up with sudden wildness; "it is too dark there. O doctor! I am not dying, am I?"

She put out her hands in vague affright, that thrilled through every heart.

"You have not ten minutes to live," said the doctor, solemnly.

With a long, low, wailing cry, that echoed through the lonely house, her raised hand dropped on the bed, and her large dark eyes—unnaturally large and dark now—went straining around the room, in the vain effort to see. Mittie Seabright had been struck with sudden blindness.

Trembling at this ghastly death-scene, Eveleen knelt by the bedside, with her face hidden in her hands, unable to bear the dreadful sight.

"I will not go! help! help!" she said, with another passionate cry, as she lifted her arms in wild horror as if to hold some invisible being off. "Eveleen is there with her pale face, mocking me now! Help! help! O my God! It is too late!"

Her arms fell. With that last terrific cry, ending in a prolonged shriek of wildest woe, her dark spirit fled, to stand before the judgment seat of God.

"She is gone!" said the doctor, in low, solemn tones, as he lifted his pale face in awe. "Poor, poor girl!"

"And Miss Hinton has fainted," said the governor, as he raised the white, still form that lay senseless on the floor. "This dark death scene has been too much for her already weakened nerves."

"Take her into another room," said the doctor, rising; "a little water is all that is required. I will ring for the negress to come and prepare the corpse for the grave. Among all the scenes of death I have witnessed I have never beheld anything to surpass this. So young and so inured to crime! Poor, poor girl!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TWO BRIDES.

Before the alter now they stand,
The bridegroom and the bride;
And who shall tell what lovers fee
In this their hour of pride."

Weeks passed, and when the maple-leaves turned gold and crimson and purple, in misty October, Eveleen rose from the couch of sickness on which she had so long lain, while her pure spirit hovered between life and death.

Arose, well at last in body, but every trace of beauty gone forever. Ere Mittie was laid in her grave Eveleen was prostrate in her couch with the same terrible scourge, with only the faithful negress to watch over her. No soft, careful hand was near to press her throbbing brow—no gentle voice to whisper of hope and comfort; no pleasant face to beam like that of a stray angel's, as her own had once done on Mittie's dark eyes; no one but the faithful, honest, black face, that loved her already second only to "Miss Joe." It is true, the doctor and Governor Ardenne came sometimes, but they were men. No gentle woman's face lighted the dusky gloom of that dreary sick-room.

And after many days of deadly sickness Eveleen arose once more. But oh! how changed!—so changed that she started in momentary wildness when she first saw her altered face. She thought of the pitying, humiliating looks of all those who had known her in other days. She thought of the horror and disgust of Gusty Ardenne, and her head dropped heavily on the table, and something rose in her throat and nearly choked her. It was very hard to say "Thy will be done;" but this soul's trial passed at length over, as many others had done, and, kneeling down, she was the meek, uncomplaining Eveleen once more, bending her gentle head meekly under the chastening hand of Him who "doeth all things well." But though able to sit up,

it was long before Eveleen could go out, and when she did she became a ministering angel in every house where the pest dwelt.

The disease raged still, and Eveleen gave herself up, heart and soul, to the good work, unheeding fatigue, cold, or long, sleepless nights. Her ministrations brought its own consolation, too, for the looks of love with which she was greeted, the fervent prayers that ascended for her welfare from many a grateful heart, more than repaid her for all she endured for their sake. Despite her altered face, Eveleen found many, very many, true hearts to love her still.

Captain Hinton had been apprised by Governor Ardenne of Mittie's dying confession, and a long penitential letter to Eveleen was the consequence. It was filled with praises of what he called her "unequalled heroism, her noble-hearted conduct," which Eveleen read with a calm, quiet smile and wondered what he could see so very remarkable in her conduct, when hundreds of heroic women did as much every day.

There was one on whom Eveleen never suffered her thoughts to linger now—Gusty Ardenne. All hope of human love was at an end forever, and if any thought of the past ever arose she stood before the glass and resolutely smiled as she saw the changed face there reflected.

Forcing back all bitter and regretful feelings, she resolutely looked that altered vision steadily in the face, and whispered to herself:

"You must not be nonsensical, Eveleen. God has been very good to you, and if He has deprived you of the gift He bestowed upon you once, will you be so ungrateful as to murmur. All the sweet dreams you dreamed once must be given up now, for affection like this is denied you forever. Your task has been allotted you; perform it, and when the end comes you will have your reward!"

And so Eveleen, quietly putting away all hope of earthly happiness, devoted herself more zealously than ever to the service of the sick and poor.

Slowly, as if reluctant to leave, the plague quitted P——, and the angel of health came back once more to the half-depopulated city.

With the absence of the sickness ceased the greater part of

Eveleen's labors. But soon after there came a letter from the captain, saying they might expect him home very shortly, and a day or two after the receipt of it came Mrs. Colter. And then the house was to be cleaned, and for some cause newly furnished, and Eveleen, in assisting that worthy lady, grew bright and cheerful again, until the good little woman declared she was like a stray sunbeam in the house, and worth a million in cash. At which Eveleen laughed and kissed her, and flitted in and out, and up and down the broad polished stairs, half wondering at herself for being so happy and light-hearted.

The captain and Joe were to come at Christmas, and Eveleen was counting the days until their arrival. Catching a stray glimpse of herself in the glass at intervals, a sudden, sharp pang would pass through her heart, and for a few moments she would shrink in terror from the thought of that first meeting; but this, too, would pass, and she would be Mrs. Colter's "sunbeam" once more.

And with the merry Christmas time came the two so anxiously looked for. As she stood in the hall to meet them, with a heart whose loud throbbings could almost be heard, Eveleen in silence held out her hand to the captain, not daring to lift her eyes to witness the look of profound pity she felt his face must wear. But she need not have feared, for mingled with that first moistened look of commiseration was one of profoundest admiration, of deepest respect and reverence, as if he looked upon that slight, girlish figure as a superior being. It was a silent greeting, but the crushing pressure he gave the little hand, his whispered "God bless you, my child," repaid her, more than repaid her for the sorrowful past.

And after him came Joe, who flew into Eveleen's arms with one of her own crushing hugs, which a bear might have envied, and who considered it her duty to laugh and cry, and talk and overwhelm her with kisses all at the same time, until Eveleen, laughing and half strangled, extricated herself from her arms, and Joe flew off to greet her old nurse. Captain Hinton had betaken himself to his own room, but Eveleen was not alone.

A tall, manly figure, who had entered with them, stood by her side, gazing down upon the changing face that grew white and red beneath his gaze, with eyes full of deepest reverence and love.

"Eveleen, Eveleen! am I forgiven?" he asked, in a thrilling whisper.

"I have nothing to forgive, Mr. Ardenne," she said, in a voice that all her efforts could not render steady.

"Then I may yet hope for this dear hand," he said, taking it in his.

Every trace of color faded from the face of Eveleen, as, lifting her eyes for the first time to the eager, handsome face bending over her, she withdrew her hand from his, and said:

"I thought this subject was dropped forever between us, Mr. Ardenne. Surely, you cannot mean to mock me now."

"Mock you, Eveleen?" he said, reproachfully. "Dear, brave, generous girl, far more than ever before I love you now. All obstacles to our marriage are forever at an end. My father never objected to our union, as you are doubtless now well aware; and since he has learned of your self-sacrificing heroism, he positively commands me to win you, on pain of disinheritance. O my darling! speak; when may I hope for this little hand?"

"O Gustav! it cannot be—could you marry me now?"

Her voice failed, and she covered her face with her hand.

"Yes, dearest, you are to my eyes far more beautiful now than ever before. What! tears, Eveleen! Let me wipe them away, and lift your head and smile."

"Humph! matters seem to be progressing," exclaimed the voice of the captain at this instant, "That's right, Gusty, girls always have to be coaxed on such occasions. When's the wedding to come off, Eveleen? Oh! she's gone. All's right, I suppose, eh, you handsome dog?"

"All right, sir," said Gusty, laughing, "and with the blessing of Providence, before another month I'll be a respectable married man."

Two weeks after the great cathedral of — was crowded to suffocation to witness a most interesting ceremony. All the *elite* of the city were there, for it was known that the governor's son was about to marry the heiress of rich Captain Hinton.

"For this occasion only" the vivacious Josephine had consented to act as bridesmaid, and, on being asked for an explanation, she whispered to Eveleen that it was her intention to enact the part of a principal in a similar ceremony three months later.

For two years Henry Fairfax, a young Virginian, had besieged her heart, and at last she had capitulated.

At Hinton Hall still lives Eveleen, which she will not quit even for the executive mansion of the Governor. Gustav has risen to fame in his profession, and wealth has flown into his already well-filled coffers. The captain, perfectly happy—save for a slight drawback, when little Gusty or Josephine tramps on his gouty foot—lives with them, watched over by the motherly care of good Mrs. Colter. Aunt Rammy still lives with “Miss Heavyling,” and superintends the children and poultry generally, and waxes fat every day.

Mr. and Mrs. Fairfax often visit Hinton Hall, and, although no one enjoys that reunion more than Josephine and Eveleen, their thoughts often turn to the cousin who sleeps quietly in her grave.

THE END.

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