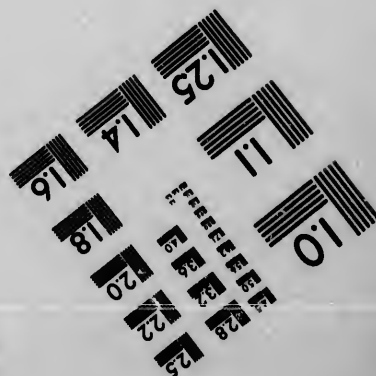
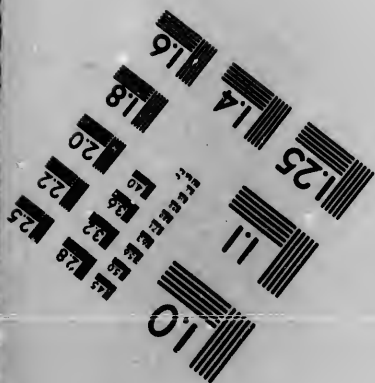
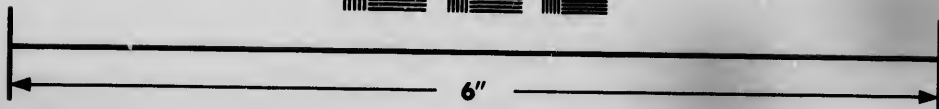
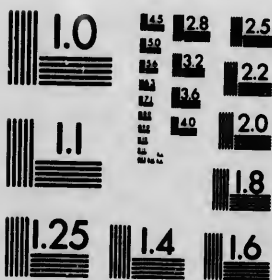


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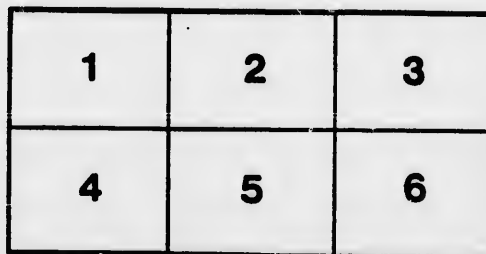
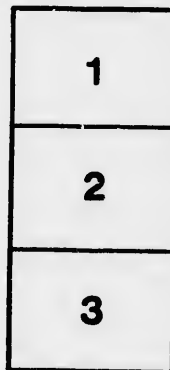
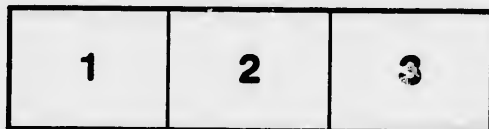
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STAR-CROSSED

THE LIFE
AND LOVE OF AN ACTRESS

BY AN ACTRESS

"IN FAIR VERONA, WHERE A PAIR
OF STAR-CROSSED LOVERS TAKE THEIR LIFE."

TORONTO
WILLIAM BRYCE, PUBLISHER
1888

127246

PRESS OF FLEMING, BREWSTER & ALLEY, NEW YORK

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STAR-CROSSED.

CHAPTER I.

THE BARNSTORMERS
<i>The Acme of Perfection Reached after Years of Search.</i>
THE GRANDEST, MOST SUBLIME, MOST UNI- VERSALLY GIFTED ARTIST
THE DRAMATIC SUN HAS EVER SHONE UPON.
<i>The Beautiful and Captivating Young Actress</i>
GENEVA ROMAINE <i>In the immortal creations revived BY HER GENIUS.</i>
UNDER THE MANAGERIAL DIRECTION OF S.I.L.A.S. W. S.L.I.C.K.

So read the flaming posters whose gorgeously colored letters gleamed from every available bill-board within a radius of miles of the flourishing Western town of D—. — read the gaudy hand-bills which,

as the unoffending pedestrian walked through the crowded streets, small boys, glowing with importance, thrust into his unwilling hands. So the huge posters glared from the newspapers; so the intelligence besieged, pursued, persisted in thrusting itself upon an already suffering humanity.

The first advertisements announcing the coming of Silas W. Slick's Acme Dramatic Combination had been heretofore sufficient to cause the heart of the theatrical hotel-keeper to quake in his bosom. It was the signal for the editor of the *West End Budget* to place a body-guard at the door of his *sanctum sanctorum*, and to take to stealing out of his office, by back doorways and through subterranean cellar passages. It would require great space to enter into the innumerable and extraordinary methods employed by Mr. Slick to secure a full house for Generva Romaine, and a full pocket for himself. Suffice it to say, that during his sojourn in a locality, an excitement prevailed which knew no subsidence until the last battered trunk was piled into the baggage car and the train bearing the members of his company pulled out of the depot.

It was the opening night of Silas W. Slick's Acme Dramatic Combination! The event had been proclaimed broadcast. Generva Romaine, the bright particular Star of the brilliant coterie of artists, would (according to the dodgers), make her first appearance, in her greatest of creations, "Juliet." The public were advised to secure seats as early as possible, in order to avoid the inevitable rush always attendant upon this great artist's coming. Dead-heads were respectfully informed that during this engagement the free list

would be entirely suspended, and speculators were warned that their tickets would not be received at the box-office window. By these and various other devices, the astute Mr. Slick succeeded in creating a veritable curiosity, as regards the phenomenally gifted artist (as she was proclaimed), and the result was a large advance sale, with every prospect of a remunerative week.

It is an established fact that the public are easily hoodwinked; and Mr. Slick, as he scanned the thickly scored box-sheet, chuckled inwardly. On this particular night, muffled to the chin in a heavy fur-lined coat, his cap pulled down well over his eyes, he descended, three steps at a time, the long stairway leading from the office of the *West End Budget*, and emerging from the low doorway hailed a passing cab. With an injunction to the coachman to drive as fast as he could to the depot, he leaned back among the cushions and lighted a cigarette. Presently the vehicle rattled up alongside the railway platform. Mr. Slick threw open the door and jumped lightly to the ground. He had scarcely concluded his customary dispute about the fare, when the six P. M. train came thundering in.

Elbowing his way through the crowd, all the while keeping a sharp lookout about him, his keen eyes suddenly discerned a portly old woman loaded with traveling paraphernalia, who, catching sight of him at the same time, hobbled over to where he stood.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, glancing down upon her.

"Hello!" she replied with a snort.

"Where are the rest?" paying no heed to her evident ill-humor.

"Humph! Why don't you say—where is she?"

"What's up with you, sweet Mother?" inquired Mr. Slick placidly, sticking another cigarette between his teeth. Got the dyspepsia again?"

Without stopping for an answer, he strolled forward to meet the other members of his company, who had at that moment alighted from the cars, and were now gathering around him.

Viewed in the yellow light reflected by the dingy railway lamp, the Acme Dramatic Combination presented a novel sight.

There was no mistaking their profession, their every word, look and action gave evidence of it. Each seemed to vie with the other in putting himself, or (as the case might be) herself, most conspicuously forward. Everybody talked at the top of their voices. A noticeable fact was, that they conversed quite as much with their heads and hands as they did with their tongues; for no remark was made that extravagant gesticulation did not accompany it. Their good-nature, however, was unmistakable. Care seemed unknown! Their faces beamed, though besmeared with the inevitable dirt of a whole day's ride in the cars; and if the casual observer experienced an inward shock at their free and easy address, I doubt if he could have found a single action to conscientiously condemn. The ladies were for the most part prepossessing, but they were flashily and often untidily dressed, and quite as much rouged as when their duties called them before the footlights. The men, enveloped in great-coats generally of a fashionable cut, had leathern bags strapped over their shoulders, wore stylish hats of different makes, and carried jaunty walking-sticks. Every one had more or less baggage, and very

dilapidated-looking baggage it was! Worn-out hand-bags; portmanteaus secured by ropes; shawl straps considerably the worse for wear; battered-in hat-boxes and valises; one a basket and another a dog.

First and foremost came the fascinating leading man, Mr. Percy Randolph, who was next in importance to the star in the Acme Dramatic Combination. He was of medium height, rather well built, with a dark, sallow skin, and thick wavy black hair. Photographers besieged Mr. Randolph for sittings, and rapturous young ladies left dainty missives for him in the theatre, couched in tender phrases of admiration. What wonder that this impersonator of the drama literally glowed with egotism and self-consciousness! He was a great actor in embryo, and would, according to his own theory, eventually take the place left vacant by the incomparable Fechter. For the impassioned lovers were also his forte. He reveled in depicting the emotions of a Romeo or a Claude. When he walked leisurely down the streets of the town in which he was to act (and he invariably made a point of doing this), his elbows a little out, his form erect, head high, gait swinging, he was a living picture of pomposity and self-conceit. Upon perceiving his Manager he now advanced, shook hands with him, remarked that it was deucedly cold, and inquired if he had brought the mail? Mr. Slick's reply was to thrust a packet of letters into his hands, and these he forthwith proceeded to distribute among his companions, who kept up a noisy chatter and interchange of light-hearted badinage.

"Spry town, isn't it?" remarked the leading lady, Miss Blanche Edgerly, a well-dressed young woman

with a frizzed bang, who leaned heavily upon the arm of the comedian, Mr. Gordon Vernor.

"I hope they've got a better hotel than the queer one we just left," said Gertrude Preston, the sou-brette, a buxom girl with saucy black eyes and flaxen hair.

"Listen to her!" exclaimed Vernor, "she'll want a carriage to drive up to it next."

"Well, she shall have it, the pretty thing." This from Mr. Warrington Rush, the avenging villain at night, and an open-hearted devil-may-care chap in the day-time.

"Coachman thrown in?" inquired Gertrude, pursing up her lips, and making a little *noise* at him.

"Coachman?" echoed Mr. Rush, "a dozen of 'em if you like. I'll kiss you if you make a mouth like that again."

"What hotel do we go to?" inquired the comedian, the only glum-looking man in the party.

"If some of you will hold your tongues, and give me a chance to hear myself speak, I'll tell you," said Mr. Slick. "It's the Meeger House, at the head of the street."

"The Meeger House," interposed Warrington Rush, in a hoarse stage-whisper. "The name is ominous, and by heavens I'll—"

"Shut up!" roared Silas, trying to make himself heard to the baggage men, engaged in a discussion relative to hauling the trunks, with the portly old lady, who was none other than his mother, and assistant Manageress of the Acme Dramatic Combination.

"Ha, ha! he throws foul language in my teeth," hissed the avenging villain, setting off with the others;

"then I will hie me away and lie in ambush for him. Will you come?" to Gertrude. "No? ah, you break my heart! Your gleaming eyes with lightning darts have pierced and pierced it through, and now upon the glistening snow a poor and bleeding thing it lies. Proud beauty, shall it perish?"

"For the love of Heaven, Rush, give us a rest!" implored Randolph, leading the way. "Let's hurry and get to the hotel."

"Lead on, Sir Knight, and in thy glittering train I'll follow. How's that, Gertrude, and what do you think of glittering train—eh? What? you are not listening to a word, I say! Ha, ha! my brilliant sallies are unheeded by this dull and sleepy damsel; then shall she die." Seizing her by the arm he brandished his umbrella over her head.

"If you don't mind what you are about," replied the dull and sleepy dainsel, "and stop pawing me like this in the streets, I'll box your ears."

"Now, by the immortal Jove!" began the irrepressible Rush—but here he stopped short, for in calling down this heavenly invocation, he missed his footing, and fell headlong into a snow-pile. His hat-box, hand-bag, cane, book and umbrella, went flying into the air; the hat-box landed on his head, and the hand-bag in the gutter. The sudden collapse brought the whole Acme Dramatic Combination to a standstill in the middle of the street. There was a momentary hush, for the avenging villain was not a light-weight, and came down with a tremendous thud. The silence was not long sustained, however, for soon rang out peal after peal of laughter. Gertrude clung to a lamp-post convulsed with mirth, but the more humane hastened to

the rescue. Placed once more upon his feet, his paraphernalia restored to him, the wounded ravisher with his most diabolical stage scowl stalked up to the lamp-post, and catching hold of the laughing soubrette, administered to her a sound shaking, and then set off on a run, the others joining in pursuit, which continued until the Meeger House came in sight. Laughing, talking, gasping for breath, wet with the snow, veils and ribbons all awry, the Acme Dramatic Combination thronged into the office, to the consternation of a sorely tried and long-enduring landlord.

Mr. Slick, in the meantime, had made his way to where stood a tall slender girl, whose form was completely enveloped in a long cloak, and whose features were concealed by a thick black veil.

"Tired out?" he said, addressing her. "No wonder; It was a devil of a jump! That fly-by-night, Saunders (meaning his advance agent), wants to give me another like it, and I'll jump him back to New York in a way he didn't bargain for. Been since six this morning? It *was* six, wasn't it? Great Jehovah! eight dollars apiece. Isn't he a dandy, that fellow? Eight dollars! Do you suppose any of those duffers will pull eight dollars into the house this week? Not much!"

"Say, Silas," interrupted Mrs. Slick, who was still engaged in a colloquy with the transfer agents, "these men say they can't haul no hotel baggage to night."

"Why can't they? It's in their contract, I warrant."

"They've only got two wagons, and it's past six, and all the theatre stuff to be taken up."

"Holy Hemp, Mum! anything more? you look glum enough."

"Yes, plenty more," with growing irritation, "Beezer's left again."

"Left where? the lazy sneak, he does it on purpose."

"In the last town most likely. I don't see what we are going to do about him."

"About who?"

"Why Beezer."

"Beezer can walk, the roads are beautiful."

"Yes, that's all very fine, but what are we going to do to-night? Juliet's billed and he doubles four parts."

"Well, cut his parts out; the less the audience see of Beezer the better."

"How are you going to cut out *Paris*, pray?"

"Oh, he does *Paris* now, does he?"

"Yes, and to crown matters, Generva's sick again. Just our luck, everything to happen at once."

"Generva!" exclaimed Silas, turning to her.

"What's up, what's the matter with you?"

"She's been ill for a week and fainted twice yesterday," continued Mrs. Slick in a tone of deep injury;

"but she never *did* have any grit. Look at me, how I stand work, and at my age, too!"

"I wish you'd be quiet," said Silas; then to the girl,

"What's the matter, why don't you say something? you haven't opened your mouth yet."

"I'm sure that's nothing new," put in Mrs. Slick.

"Perhaps she would if you would give her a chance," snapped Silas, who didn't see fit to treat his mother with much respect. "Well," he went on, "there's no use in any one getting sick around here. We've got no money to waste on doctors. When I get sick I go to work harder than ever and forget all about it. That's the way the rest of you've got to do. Come

on, Mother, don't stand grunting there, let's make a start. Say, you baggage men, you want to step round spry with them trunks; you ain't got more than an hour to get them up. If they ain't on time you won't get a demned cent from me. Put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

"Have we far to walk?" inquired Mrs. Slick, grasping her huge hand-bag, and shawl strap?

"You've got five blocks, unless you expect me to hire a cab, and I suppose you know cabs cost money. Tired, Gen?"

"Tired! ain't she been sittin' all day in the cars? What's she got to be tired for? When I was her age I didn't know there was such a word. They made women of the right kind of stuff in my day, thank God!"

"Anyway," interposed Silas, "she mustn't get sick. You mustn't even think of getting sick, Gen. By the eternal thunder, what would become of mother and me if you did? You'd ought to think a little about us; we done a heap for you, my girl; ain't we, Mum?"

"Yes, we done what her own kin wouldn't do, bad luck to them!"

"Oh, keep quiet; who said anything about her kin? How was the house last night?"

"Nothing to boast of. Times ain't what they was."

"If business don't pick up, I'll make a clean cut in the salaries."

"There'll be a row if you do."

"Let 'em try it. Now, I look like a man to take guff from a lot of third-rate actors, don't I?" and Silas threw back his head, and thrust his hands into his overcoat pockets. "Cold, Gen?"

"Yes," she replied, drawing her cloak closely about her.

It was indeed cold this fifth of February of the year 18—. A cutting wind stirred the leafless branches of the trees, already groaning with the weight of snow frozen in icy cakes upon them. Overhead stretched a placid winter sky, in peaceful contrast to the noise, and din, and clatter of the town below; a sky, deep and blue as a midnight ocean, studded with stars that shone like jewels in the frosty air. The little town was astir. The sidewalks were aglow with gas-jets, gleaming from the shop-windows, and the electric lights of the streets revealed vehicles of all descriptions, rolling lumberingly over the cobble-stones. The party of three stopped before the door of a dingy hotel. A smoky lamp revealed a rickety staircase, leading from a poorly carpeted hall, and fell upon the ill-kept figure of a surly porter, who between a sniff and a grunt, indicated that the parlor was up *there*, and the office in *here*. Mrs. Slick and Generva proceeded to ascend, and Silas went into the room pointed out, where the male members of the company were grouped about, some hanging over the desk, and others talking and gesticulating, much to the consternation of the landlord, who was trying to give each and every one the best room in the house at the same time.

"It's no use," he was saying, when Silas entered, "you will have to double up."

"Not if I know it," retorted Mr. Randolph, who being the leading man was, of course, most concerned. "I'll go somewhere else first."

"No, you won't," said Mr. Slick coming forward; "I

pay your board, and you'll either stop where I make rates or you'll pay it yourself."

Mr. Randolph assumed an heroic air and drew himself up grandly, but Mr. Slick without paying any further heed to him, marched to the desk, picked out what rooms he required for the ladies, and deliberately proceeded to write a note which he addressed to the Editor of the *West End Budget*.

In the little parlor above sat Mrs. Slick, Blanche, Gertrude and Gencrva. Blanche stood before a cracked mirror arranging her hair. Gertrude was stretched full length upon a horse-hair sofa. Mrs. Slick was deep in one of her stage yarns (she was famous for them, having been raised on the boards), and Generva, seated in a low rocking-chair, looked intently out of the window.

The room was small and shabbily furnished. An ingrain carpet wadded with straw covered the floor, over which were strewn numerous pieces of stiff and ungainly furniture. The walls were a dark brown, their hideous and sight-conflicting designs partly concealed by still more hideous and sight-conflicting pictures. A lamp, with a cracked chimney, burned dimly upon a greasy centre table, while the spiritless coals in the broken grate were kept together by the timely aid of a couple of bricks. Small curtainless windows creaked and rattled, and through a broken pane came an occasional gust of wind, bringing a chill along with it. Two glaring white china cups filled with red paper roses looked down from a high mantelpiece, in the centre of which was a clock, with both hands missing from the dial. A ghostly cross of crumbling wax flowers stood under a globe upon which was inscribed,

"Taken from Willie's grave."

and a whole regiment of queer little vases, glass bottles, beaded cushions, saucers and shells were arranged with prim regularity upon a wooden shelf, ornamented by faded chromos of "Lincoln's Family," "The Surrender of General Lee," "Christ blessing Little Children," and "General and Mrs. Washington." The ladies of the Acme Dramatic Combination, however, made no remarks about their surroundings. They were evidently well schooled to discomforts. Indeed, at the present moment they were deeply interested in what Mrs. Slick was saying. She, like the conventional old woman of the theatre, had had a long and varied experience, and reveled in depicting the past glories of the palmy days of the drama. She particularly loved to dwell upon the good old times when she was a star, and the world languishing at her feet. She could shut her eyes, and lo! like magic, the glittering scenes of her former triumphs would appear before her: The vast theatre crowded to overflowing, and ablaze with lights. The brilliant audience, on the *qui vive* of expectation. The thousand gas-jets, illuminating the gorgeous spectacle, and in the midst of it all herself, radiant in silks and jewels, bowing her acknowledgments over baskets of rare and costly flowers. Often and often had the portly manageress of the Acme Dramatic Combination regaled and dwelt upon these memoirs, for the benefit of the young women by whom she was surrounded; and if in the repetition of the oft-told tale it gained in magnitude and coloring, it lost none of its attractiveness. Nothing according to her was as good as it used to be, and she clung with unwarrantable persistency to those relics of bygone grandeur, so many of which never existed outside of

her creative brain. To-night her story was of a different order, although as usual she figured in it.

"Well," she was saying, "we was in Texas, and Texas was a wild country in those days. Good heavens! You'd never see a man but what he wore a brace of pistols. I was only twenty-one then, and, if I do say it myself, a handsome girl. Lord, such a neck and arms and shoulders as I had! Plump as a partridge! the boys used to say. Well," smoothing the wrinkles out of her shabby gown with her fat hands, "as the curtain was going up a great strapping fellow six feet two at least, with a red shirt girded round the waist by a leathern belt, presented himself at the door, and attempted to enter without a ticket. Dan Döbig was the manager, and of course, being before your time, none of you remember him. But he was the shakiest little coward that ever walked around in a pair of boots three sizes too small for him, Dan being awful proud of his feet.

"'Hello!' he cried, 'where's your ticket?'

"'Ticket?' echoed the man with a terrible sneer; 'not much!'

"'You can't go in without a ticket.'

"'I can't, can't I?'

"'Oh,' said Dan, trembling, for the Texan had drawn a pistol, 'if you take that view of it, you can.'

"'I thought so,' growled the huge fellow, marching in and taking the best seat in the house. Well, girls, he sat that play through, and never once took his great eyes off me. I was playing Pauline, I think. Yes, it was Pauline, my very best role fortunately. What do you think he did when it was all over?'

"'Shot Dan?'" suggested Gertrude.

"No, he went up to him and gave him a slap on the back that nearly sent him through the floor. 'It's a devilish good show, boss,' he said, 'and here's your cash. You see, I bin fooled in this town before. So I pay when I come out instead of when I come in, and in that way I get the best of the actors, and the actors don't get the best of me. Because if they're no good, I keep my money until some more come along.'"

"Well, I never!" yawned Gertrude.

"The man had the makings of a hero in him," sighed Blanche, who was sentimental.

"The man was up to snuff, anyway," retorted Mrs. Slick.

At this juncture Silas came in. "Twenty-two, for you, Mother," he said handing her a key; "twenty for you, Blanche and Gertrude, and twenty-four for you, Generva. There's no fires; but I can't afford luxuries, and landlords ain't throwing them in."

"I think it's horribly mean not to let us have a fire," complained Gertrude. "It's a freezing night, and we'll get our deaths."

"I'll take chances on that, Miss Saucebox," replied Silas. "I've got no money to burn away in fires. Pay for them yourself. You got your last week's salary, I suppose?"

"It isn't big enough to last forever," grumbled Gertrude.

"Well, that's your lookout, not mine. Come along Mother. Generva, your room is down that hall to the left."

"The skinflint!" whispered Gertrude, as she turned the corridor. "I believe he would steal the coppers off his mother's eyes!"

CHAPTER II.

JULIET.

THE theatre of D— was neither better nor worse than the average provincial playhouse. Originally a hall, it had undergone a series of renovations, from time to time, at the hands of its various proprietors. At present writing it boasted a medium sized stage, a tawdry drop-curtain that would persist in coming down with a thud, a limited—indeed, I may say very limited—amount of scenery (three sets at most) and four private boxes hung with cheap lace. The house was entirely devoid of ornamentation, if we may except a chandelier suspended from the ceiling, and lighted with electricity. The long rows of wooden chairs were cushionless, and the floor, which was almost level from orchestra to lobby, covered with cheap matting for the want of something better. A greenbaize door led to the main entrance, in the centre of which, girded round by a brass railing, was erected the box-office and manager's room. As it was verging upon eight o'clock the theatre was fast filling. A long line of people stood purchasing tickets, and crowds thronged through the doorway and stamped noisily up the stairs. Outside, the pavement swarmed with small boys of all ages and sizes, gazing with eager eyes at the huge pictorial posters, or sitting upon the curbstones, lost in admiration of the band crashing away on the balcony above. All was hurry,

bustle, confusion; expectation like a fever communicated itself from one to another. There was a good deal of pushing and shoving; there was a ceaseless clatter of voices; there was a thrusting of hands into pockets, and an occasional glimpse of silver, the sight of which brought moisture into the eloquent eyes of Mr. Slick. Silas was now in his element. Nothing could exceed his graciousness, nothing surpass his urbanity. A crowd pouring into the theatre, and paying their way as they went, was about as near heaven as he ever cared to get.

"It's good enough for me," he said complacently, as he leaned gracefully against the box-office railing, and nodded and smiled and interchanged greetings with acquaintances, all the while keeping a keen eye upon the ticket seller. Mr. Slick was too well aware of his own shortcomings not to be on the lookout for the shortcomings of others. Tall and slender, with swarthy skin, and sharp-pointed features, his face had something of the eagle in contour and expression. A pair of shrewd, restless black eyes were closely set upon either side of a prominent nose; and a thin, black mustache but partly concealed a full, sensual mouth. His head was narrow at the top, his forehead low, and while not on the whole badly proportioned, he had a slight stoop of the shoulders, and a decided contraction of chest. He was flashily dressed in a pair of checked pantaloons, a dark green vest, a brown coat, and very light-colored tan gloves. He wore a glossy silk hat tipped to the right side, a crimson necktie in which gleamed a huge diamond, and a thick gold chain suspended across his breast. Though attired in the worst possible taste, Mr. Slick was not a bad-look-

ing individual, and those who had dealings with him, would certainly add, nor an ordinary one.

To begin with, he possessed the rare faculty of being exactly the person any emergency required him to be. If the occasion needed prompt action, or deliberate calculation, he would be found equally as prompt as deliberate.

If humility would serve, he could be humble; if arrogance, he could be proud. He rarely missed a point; chance sometimes did conspire to make him straightforward in his dealings, but inclination never.

He would take a mean advantage merely for the satisfaction of being able to do it. His craft was only surpassed by his assurance, and his nerve—words fail to even touch upon the quality and quantity of this. Indeed, if a perverse fate had not placed him in the sphere of life it saw fit, no doubt, with his capabilities directed in the proper direction, he would have exercised a great influence in whatever cause his caprice or interest saw fit to espouse. Though he had ingenuity without wit, wisdom without learning, tact without talent; though he was skillful without being scientific, and undaunted without being heroic, he was still full of a latent power, which, while it made enemies of his associates, won for him a sort of reluctant obedience and dogged respect.

He was still eying the people pouring into the theatre, when a District Messenger-boy thrust a letter into his hand, with a "Please, sir, there ain't no answer."

"Here, you!" he called to the boy, who was moving off, "I'll be the judge of that; stay where you are."

Opening the envelope he withdrew a letter headed: Office of the *West End Budget*. It ran as follows:

SILAS W. SLICK, Esq.:

Dear Sir,—It is impossible for me to attend this evening's performance. I send, however, a competent reporter.

With regret, I am yours truly,

ERIC HAZELTON, *Ed.*

"Dem it!" muttered Mr. Slick under his breath, as he crushed the paper in his hand, "and my whole week's business depends upon the criticism of to-night. He can't come! Well, we will see. Where did you get this?" he demanded sharply of the boy.

"From the *West End Budget* office."

"How long since?"

"Twenty minutes, sir."

"Who sent you?"

"Mr. Hazelton."

"Is he there now?"

"Yes, sir, I guess so."

"That will do, you can go."

The boy disappeared, and Silas turned on his heel and made his way through one of the lower boxes behind the scenes. As he stepped upon the stage he was accosted by Mr. Beezer, who had been discovered asleep in one of the baggage cars, just in time to make up for his role of the princely *Paris*. He was now rushing about with a bundle of rugs under his arms, and a tray of gilt paper goblets in his hands.

"There are some things needed," he said, depositing his properties in a heap on the floor, and brushing the dust from his satin cape.

"What things?" demanded Silas, throwing back a lapel of his coat and regarding the gorgeous prince savagely.

"Props," replied the scion of the noble house of Montague. "A bell, a salver, some muslin curtains, and a—"

"See here," interrupted Silas, "you can't come any such games on me. I'm twenty-one. A property man who isn't fly enough to borrow all the things he needs and forget to return them, isn't worth his salt. I lay out no money for props. Dem it, man! do you think I'm a Vanderbilt? Where's Rush?"

"Dressing."

"Send him here and be quick about it;" and Silas waved the grumbling *Paris* away, and watched him until he disappeared behind a wing. "Money for props," he soliloquized, "for props! Ha, ha! that's good. The demned beggar, let him steal 'em! Why, I've known property men to get rich on the stuff they borrow and forget to return. Here, Rush, I want you."

Mr. Rush, who played *Mercutio* and a couple of minor roles, also managed the stage. Upon perceiving his chief he came rapidly forward, with two red spots of paint upon his cheeks and a wig in his hands.

"What is it, did you send for me?" he inquired.

"Yes," said Silas in his quick, sharp way. "It's now ten minutes to eight, and I don't want you to ring in the overture until ten minutes past. Do you understand?"

"Yes; anything else?"

"No, that's all." With this Mr. Rush vanished, and Silas hastily recrossed the stage, and in another moment was whirling down the street in a hack. A short

ride brought him to his destination. He jumped to the ground, ordered the driver to wait, and then mounted the stairway leading to the *West End Budget* office. He stopped at the first landing, and in response to a loud "come in!" entered.

Mr. Eric Hazelton was seated at his desk, arranging some papers prior to taking his departure for the night. Near him sat a gentleman. Mr. Slick came forward, hat in hand, and catching the faintest shade of annoyance upon the editor's face, assumed a most apologetic demeanor.

"I'm deucedly sorry to interrupt you," he began with a marvelous meekness: "I am, upon my honor!"

"Don't mention it," returned Mr. Hazelton, who was something of a philosopher. "Sit down!"

"Thanks, but I have'n't a moment to stay. I just got your note, and I ran in to tell you how confoundedly sorry I am. I've saved a box, too. There's an awful rush!"

"You see," explained Eric, vainly seeking a fitting subterfuge—"you see, I have been very busy, and my friend here—oh, by the way, allow me to introduce you. Dr. Winthrop, Mr. Slick."

"Well," interposed Silas shaking hands with Dr. Winthrop, who had risen, as had also Hazelton, "let me drive you down, you and your friend, and see one act. I've a carriage at the door. You will oblige me very much—you can leave any time you please. Come, that's fair, isn't it?"

He looked from one to the other as he spoke.

"I don't mind going," said Eric, who was too indolent to protest. "Will you come, Tom? Do, that's a good fellow, just to oblige me."

"There's that affair at home to-night that I ought to attend, but it's an awful bore. Yes, I'll go with you," decided the gentleman addressed as Tom.

The curtain had just rung up on the first act, when Mr. Slick ushered them into the private box. Apologizing profusely for being compelled to leave them alone, he withdrew.

"Good house," remarked Eric, "but I never saw Generva Romaine before, did you?"

"No, I don't think I have."

"It don't look like paper," continued Eric, scanning the rows of well-filled chairs. "I hope the performance will equal it."

"So do I."

"We needn't stay, you know."

"Oh, now that we're here let's see it out."

"Won't the folks expect you?"

"What if they do?"

"I should think that when a man had a chance of meeting his 'ladye,' he would embrace it. That is, provided a man were simple enough to burden himself with a ladye," put in Eric, who was something of a cynic to all appearances.

"Well," answered Tom, his dark eyes twinkling, his handsome head thrown a little back, "that all depends. You see, if a man loves a woman and a woman loves a man, and they are both aware of the all-important fact, as well as are their respective families and friends, why then one is apt to take the thing for granted. Now, why should I rush home to see Beatrice to-night, when I shall soon have the felicity of seeing her every night 'until 'death do us part?' Answer that, you woman hater!"

"Oh," laughed Eric, "it's all quite comprehensive to me. I understand it, but the point at issue is, does the lady?"

"Here comes *Lady Capulet*," said Tom changing the subject, "and the *Nurse*, and anon comes *Juliet*. Let's stop talking and hear what *Juliet* has to say for herself. I hope her pronunciation is better than that of her august lady mother."

"An improvement in that respect wouldn't do any harm," agreed Eric.

"*Juliet!*" called the *Nurse*: "'What, lamb!—what, ladybird! Heaven forbid!—where's this girl?—what, *Juliet!*'"

"How now! who calls?" rang out a clear deep voice in distinct response, and a moment later *Juliet* ran lightly across the stage, and fell on her knees at her mother's feet. As she did so, a burst of applause greeted her. For she was divinely beautiful, this *Genevra*. A tall, slender girl with a statuesque figure of exquisite symmetry, and a golden bronze head superbly set upon a pair of faultlessly molded shoulders. Graceful and supple as a fawn, there was a lithe agility in her movements, every one of which was the embodiment of the poetry of motion. "Madame, I am here; what is your will?" she asked, and then as *Lady Capulet* raised her, she turned and the audience caught a full view of her face. It was a face such as one not infrequently meets with in some rare painting of an old master. A face of Italy. Oval in shape, classic in contour, with long almond-shaped eyes, shaded by sweeping lashes; a low broad forehead, and a full red mouth, small and beautifully curved. Her costume was of ivory satin; a long court train with a low cut

pointed bodice, through which gleamed her rounded neck and arms, entwined with strings of pearls. In appearance she was an ideal *Juliet*, and from the moment she stepped upon the stage, one was instinctively carried back to the sixteenth century. As to her voice, it was electric. The dingy, tawdry stage trappings faded away as if by magic, when she spoke. Her presence seemed a charmed one. There was witchery in her glance, her gestures, her voice, her smile.

Tom and Eric sat quietly listening to every word she said. During the entire scene neither spoke. The act was over now, and Eric turned and regarded his friend.

"Well," he said, "that wasn't so badly done, was it?"

"It was a wonderful piece of acting," replied Tom.

"I am not such an enthusiast as you are," interposed Eric; "there's no philosophy—"

"Philosophy be hanged!"

"You are an idealist; I always said so."

"And you are a cynic of the worst dye, and I wouldn't change places with you."

"Any way, you are right when you say the girl is clever. I agree with you there. Where, in the name of all that's incomprehensible, do you suppose Slick found her? She looks like a princess, with that haughty toss of the head and regal manner. You don't suppose she is his wife?"

"Sch—see they are beginning."

It was the balcony scene, and, lighted by a calcium, was effective. There was a momentary pause, and then *Romeo* climbed the garden wall. Mr. Randolph was at his best in this character. He looked very handsome, as with a carefully studied gesture he threw

his long silken scarf from his shoulders, and gazed ardently at *Juliet's* window.

"He jests at scars, that never felt a wound,
But soft, what light through yonder window breaks!
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun!—
It is my lady: Oh, it is my love!"

The lines were well delivered, as with a leap he scaled the balcony and clasped the timorous maiden in his arms. In the pale beam of the moon *Juliet* might have been mistaken for a piece of statuary, but as her lover made himself known, and poured forth his passion in ardent eloquent phrases, her pale cheeks flushed, her dark eyes sparkled. From this time on to the close she drew more and more upon the sympathies of those who followed her. She did not act. She *was* Juliet. When the nurse brought her the tidings that she believed proclaimed her lover's death, there was deep tragedy in the fiendish fury with which she turned upon her:

"What devil art thou, that dost torment me thus?
This torture should be roar'd in dismal hell."

And again, when with the sleeping potion in her hand, she conjured in an awestruck, questioning, weird-like voice, the terrors of the tomb. At this point she reached a climax that for intensity was almost incomparable. It was indeed masterly work. The very perfection of art. The last act was short, owing to the cuts necessitated by the limited number of performers. When the curtain fell, Eric arose from his chair, and turning to Tom said:

"You are right—she is sublime, that girl. I have seen many *Juliets*, but I have never before seen Juliet

herself. I am going back to the office and will write up the notice."

"Well, gentlemen," interrupted Mr. Slick at this juncture, rubbing his hands together and smiling all over his face, "what do you think of my star? She is not bad, is she? A little lacking in finish, but that will come. You see she is young. Only eighteen, gentlemen; I give you my word for it!"

"She is a great actress, and you know it," replied Eric bluntly. "Where did you get her?"

"Ah!" sighed Silas with a mysterious air, "that's not the question. You will pardon me, but our patrons cannot possibly be interested in knowing more than that I did get her, and can keep her indefinitely."

"She is not your wife?" inquired Tom.

"No, she isn't even a relation; but for all that she belongs to me. Mother brought her up, educated, trained her for the stage. She made her *début* at three. Young enough, eh? We've only starred her these past two years; but if things prosper, next season we will burst into New York with her, and show them some acting worth seeing. There's only one thing in the way of our success, and that's her health. If she'd break down she'd ruin me."

"Perhaps overwork," suggested Tom.

"Nothing of the kind," interrupting him. "What does she do? Sits all day in the cars with her hands folded."

"Has she been sitting all day to-day in the cars?"

"Since six A. M."

"Don't you suppose that what she has done to-night is enough without a twelve hours' journey thrown in?"

"What's a man to do?" demanded Silas. "I suppose

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a company's got to be carried from place to place somehow. I tell you the show business isn't a picnic. What do you want?"

(Mr. Beezer had thrust his head in the box.)

"You're to come quick, she's fainted again."

"The devil! that's always the way, good business, well paying house, everything prosperous, and then—now it's just this, gentlemen, if she gives out I'm done for."

"I don't think I would stop to consider the state of my finances just now," recommended Eric with ill-concealed disgust. But this was lost on Silas, who had turned to Tom and was saying:

"Would you come back and see her, doctor? It would be awfully good of you."

"I certainly will if you wish it."

"Then follow me and I'll take you in; and you, Mr. Hazelton, if you'll wait, I'll join you directly. This way, doctor, if you please. It isn't a step. I'm so much obliged. I can't express my gratitude, I can't really; through that door. One moment, Mr. Hazelton, in one little moment I'll be with you."

"Oh, take two while you are about it," snapped Eric. "The cold-blooded villain," he muttered when left alone. "'If she gives out I'm done for.' Bah! he ought to be hung."

In the meantime Tom followed Silas behind the scenes. How dingy and dirty and dilapidated everything seemed. The stage was deserted. In the short interval which had elapsed since the final fall of the curtain, the men had torn away the tomb, pushed back the wings, ripped up the green drugget, and taken themselves off to their respective dwelling-places. The

janitor, lantern in hand, was making a final inspection of the premises, otherwise no one was in sight. Before the door of the star's dressing-room Mr. Slick stopped. He gave a smart rap, and without waiting for an answer, turned the knob and beckoned Tom to follow him. The apartment was very small and, like most theatrical dressing-rooms, dirty. On a miserable old sofa lay Generva; around her hung the *Nurse* (Mrs. Slick), *Lady Capulet* (Blanche), and two or three other of the lesser satellites. The atmosphere was stifling. A rusty oil-lamp burned upon a table, where were strewn rouge, powder, grease, paints, pins, needles, hairpins, and numerous odds and ends. Over a broken chair was thrown her costumes worn in the play; faded-out cheap things they looked when closely inspected. The girl herself was in a dead faint. Her face was livid, her lips blue, and still shrouded in the white garments of the tomb, she was as one dead.

"Thank Heaven, you've come," wailed Mrs. Slick, when she saw them, "though goodness knows you've been long enough about it. Whatever did keep you so?"

"Be quiet," commanded Silas, "I've brought a doctor. Now," to Tom, "what's the best thing to do?"

"Get her head on a level with her body," directed Tom; "there, that's it. Now send all these folks out, she wants some air. You might help me to chafe her hands. So, so—be careful, do it gently, like this."

"Doctor," inquired Silas, looking up from his task after the shortest possible interval, "do you think you can get on alone? You see I promised Hazelton to come right back. I don't want him to get away, I don't really."

"You can go," said Tom shortly, "I don't need you. I can manage perfectly well by myself."

"All right, it's so good of you; do as much for you, though—would, upon my life! She'll come round soon; she often has spells, and they never amount to much. So good-bye—that is, if I don't see you again to-night. I may be detained. Must attend to the newspapers, you know; that's where the work comes in. I never trust anyone to write notices but myself, or in fact do anything that requires brains. So I'll be off. Ta, ta! and thanks awfully."

"Good-night," muttered Tom, and when the door had closed, "the deuce take you, you infernal fraud! Um! I don't like this faint. She ought to be coming round. My God, how beautiful she is! She has the face of a Madonna, and what hair!" taking a long braid in his hand. "But I don't like this faint; she must be roused."

With this he set to work applying restoratives, and in a few moments had the gratification of seeing her move. Suddenly she opened her eyes, and fastened them upon his face, and as her glance met his, a strange thrill shot through him. Was it relief that she had recovered? or was it something in the look, which in her first moment of returning consciousness she flashed upon him?

"Where am I?" she murmured feebly.

"In your dressing-room—you fainted."

"So I did. I remember now. Is the play over?"

"Yes. How do you feel?"

"Cold."

"Have this about you," reaching for a shawl.

"That's better, isn't it?"

"Much better. Who are you?"

"I am a doctor."

"I saw you in the box."

"You did?"

"Yes."

"Are you suffering?"

"Oh, yes."

"Where?"

"My head," pressing her hands to it, "and my back; the pain there is agonizing. Then I am cold, and again hot; see!" She stretched out her bare arms and he laid his hands softly upon them.

"You have fever," he said.

"Could you cure me, doctor?"

"Not at once, but in time I might. Provided, of course, that you would follow all my directions, and do what I told you."

"I would indeed," she promised.

"Then I will try my best. Take a little of this," pouring some medicine in a glass. "It is not very pleasant to the taste, but it will do you good."

With a great effort she swallowed it.

"That's right. Now, I am going to call in your friends, and have them get you ready to go home."

"But you will come back, doctor?"

"Yes. Don't try to exert yourself. Lie still until some one comes to assist you." Rising from her side, he crossed over to the door, opened it, and with a last injunction to her to be quiet, closed it softly behind him. He had not gone far when he encountered Mrs. Slick, who had changed her stage dress, and stood cloaked and bonneted in street attire. "How is she?" she inquired, Tom thought rather flippantly.

"Very ill," he replied gravely, "but she is conscious, so get her ready as quickly as you can, and see that she is well protected from the cold. I will go in search of a carriage."

"A carriage?" repeated Mrs. Slick, as she hurried off to do his bidding; "whatever will Silas say? Three dollars at least! Well, it's none of my doings. But he'll have a fit when he hears of it, and then I'll have him on my hands too!"

Vague and conflicting were Tom Winthrop's thoughts as he wended his way through the deserted streets, in the direction of the nearest livery stable. He seemed to be walking on air, to have lost his identity, to have become some one else. The idea even forced itself upon him, that by some wondrous miracle, he was in

"Fair Verona, where

A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life."

The lines came into his mind and he instinctively repeated them over and over in a mechanical way. He was rather inclined to be analytical about things in general, but the unaccountable impression which the scenes of this evening had made upon him, he could not have analyzed if he had tried. He was deeply interested in this girl, whom he had seen for the first time to-night. He felt that he must have met her somewhere before: where he could not say; but in his early youth, when loitering under the tropical skies of foreign lands, he had often dreamed of just such a face as hers. How long he would have lingered in the path of dim retrospection it is impossible to surmise, had not a sound of approaching wheels broken in upon

his reverie, and awakened him to a realization of his errand. Catching sight of a coupé he hailed it, and drove rapidly back to the theatre. The lights by this time were nearly all extinguished, and the place in grim darkness. What a bleak and dreary aspect it presented, now that the long rows of seats were empty, and the hall and lobby deserted. He found his patient considerably unnerved; her face was twitching, her hands nervously clasped together, and tears glistened in her large eyes brilliant with fever.

"I thought you would never come!" she exclaimed impulsively, almost gasping out her words.

"Well, upon my word!" interposed Mrs. Slick, "if you're not the most ungrateful piece I was ever so unlucky as to have anything to do with. Here's Dr. Winthrop, a stranger, running about at midnight to get a cab, and you fly at him because he don't get it quick enough. You are getting the big head, I guess."

"Never mind about that now," said Tom, "get into the carriage, and I will bring her;" lowering his voice, "when she is more composed. You must bear in mind she is ill."

"Cranky! you mean."

"I am ready to go now," murmured Generva, without the suspicion of a tremor in her voice. Her sudden calmness and self-control astounded him, but he said nothing, only offered her his arm and led her into the street. Arrived at the Meeger House, he assisted first Mrs. Slick to alight, and then turned to Generva. To his astonishment she made no movement; touching her hand he started—it was cold. She had fainted again. Without an instant's hesitation, he took her in his

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arms, and with an injunction to Mrs. Slick to lead the way, carried her upstairs to her own room, and laid her on the bed.

"If this isn't a pretty how d'ye do," gasped the old woman, holding her fat sides, and panting, from the climb.

"Good gracious," exclaimed Tom, "there is no fire! order one at once; if she gets a chill I won't answer for her life."

With a groan Mrs. Slick pulled the bell. A slovenly woman-servant answered it.

"Make a fire as quickly as you can," ordered Tom, "and bring me some hot water."

"Oh, Lord, she's dead!" shrieked the girl, throwing her apron over her head, and not moving an inch.

"You are a fool! Leave the room, and send some one here who has a little sense."

A man came next, and soon a blazing fire was throwing out a ruddy light. After a good deal of trouble, Generva was brought round.

Very weak and very still she lay, but Tom gave her some medicine that seemed to revive her, and preparing more to be taken during the night, he took up his coat and hat to go. "Good-night!" he said, leaning over the bed, and for one moment holding her hand in his.

"Good-night," she whispered softly, "and thank you!"

CHAPTER III.

THE WINTHROPS.

THE town clock struck one as Tom emerged from the hotel and walked briskly down the street. The night was cold but clear. A white moon floated serenely overhead, and the silver trail it left behind fell in glistening sheen upon the frozen soil. Numberless stars had, like a vast army, gathered upon the dark firmament of the heavens, their thousand lights sparkling like diamonds in the chilly air. How peacefully, how calmly slept the city, that but a few short hours ago so teemed with strife and commotion! How quiet, and still, and pure it looked, all its evil and darkness hidden beneath an immaculate covering of snow! Thoughtfully Tom wended his way homeward. It was a half-mile at least, but it seemed no time before he ascended the stone steps that led to his house, turned the latch-key and entered. He had indeed been lost in reflection. A shaded lamp burned brightly upon a table that stood almost in the centre of a large square Queen Anne hall, elegantly hung with portieres. A magnificently carved staircase, with tall stained glass windows, at each landing, led to the upper story, and upon the first of these steps, her head leaning against the banister, reclined an old woman who was sound asleep. Tom smiled as he caught sight of her.

"Good old creature," he murmured; "I wonder if any one else will ever love me as much as she does? Mildred!" touching her shoulder.

"Lord bless me, is it you?" she exclaimed, jumping to her feet. "I believe I have been napping."

"I'm glad of it. You are too old to be sitting up until all hours for me. Don't you think I'm pretty nearly big enough to take care of myself? Six feet, Mildred, with shoes."

"Of course you're big enough," mumbled the old woman; "you'd be a giant if you'd grow any more. But I've sat up for you since you were a boy, and somehow I've grown used to it. I hope your fire isn't low; put some coal on it if it is, and I'll go and fetch your tea. I'm sure *it's* hot, I left it on the stove."

"I shan't breakfast before nine to-morrow, Mildred."

"Yes, sir."

"Any of the folks been in to-day?"

"Miss Dorothy, sir, this afternoon."

"Did she leave a message?"

"No; only that you were to be sure and go out to the house this evening."

"All right, that will do. Bring up the tea and get to bed."

A few moments later Tom sat before a bright fire, in his room, and ate the lunch the old lady brought him.

"I wonder what my wife will say to these midnight banquets, Milly," he surmised, as she pressed one dainty after another upon him. "Ah, there won't be any more good old times then. I shall not be able to come in and go out, and do and say what I please. I don't believe she will sit up till the 'wee sma' hours' keeping my tea hot. Did Mr. Hazelton come in?"

"At twelve o'clock, sir."

"Well, good-night, and don't let any one disturb me before nine."

Mildred had been in the Winthrop service for years. She had nursed both Tom and his sisters, but it was upon him that she lavished her devotion. When his professional duties compelled him to leave home and set up housekeeping in the city, she became his chief aide-camp, from overseeing the servants and domestic duties to receiving and attending the patients. Tom declared she was entirely responsible for his bachelorhood, and so long as she lived he did not see the necessity of a wife. But Mrs. Winthrop, Tom's mother, thought differently. According to her theory, marriage with a physician was an obligation, and she repeatedly urged the desirability of it upon her son. For years her endeavors had been unavailing; but as constant dropping of water will wear away a stone, so at last he allowed himself to be persuaded. Miss Beatrice Bell, the young lady chosen by Mrs. Winthrop as a fitting partner for him, was, she had argued, a woman possessed of every quality necessary to effect his happiness. When for the fiftieth time she had sounded her praises, and descanted enthusiastically upon her beauty and accomplishments, Tom drew a cigarette from his pocket, lit it, and allowed that she was a nice girl.

"The very woman for you," said his mother.

"Think so?"

"I do, sincerely."

"She's not bad."

"I should say she was all that was charming. Well educated, young, and you must admit, Tom, she has wit?"

"I dare say."

"And tact?"

"Yes."

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"And—"

"See here, Mother," interrupting her, "I am going to please you in this matter if I can."

"And yourself, Tom. I insist upon your pleasing yourself."

"Oh, never mind about me; I daresay you know a great deal better what my wife ought to be than I do."

"Then you will speak to her soon," eagerly.

"The first opportunity that presents itself. I suppose you will take charge of everything after that?"

"Of course," she promised.

And so it was decided, and Tom contented that so momentous a thing should be so easily disposed of. He congratulated himself that he had such a thorough-going mother, and believing that in her hands his future was safe, he lighted another cigarette and gave himself no further concern about it. In the course of a week or so he called upon Miss Bell, and when she came into the room and held out her hand in welcome, he retained it, and leading her to a sofa sat down beside her. Miss Bell, although she knew just what was coming, remained perfectly composed and unconscious. It was Tom who, now that he was about to make the final plunge, felt himself growing ill at ease. But it was not his custom to beat about the bush, so he came directly to the point and said:

"Bee, will you marry me?"

The startling abruptness of the proposition took away her breath. For the first and only time in her life she found herself at a loss for words wherewith to frame a fitting reply. She had expected an offer, for his manner was unmistakable, but she had not looked for an offer of this kind. A painful pause followed.

Tom on his part began to fidget. Was it possible that she expected him to fall at her feet and implore her hand on bended knees? He had not bargained for this. Indeed, he knew perfectly that such a proceeding was entirely out of his line. Beatrice was a taking sort of a girl, and a favorite with most people, but she had never inspired him with any great degree of tenderness. Besides, in talking the matter over upon various occasions with his mother, he had been assured that such a proceeding was not at all necessary. If this were the case, then how was her long silence to be accounted for? He began to think that she had not heard him, and was on the point of repeating his words, when she found the use of her tongue, and said:

"I am so taken by surprise, Tom, that I really cannot decide whether I should say yes or no."

Tom drew a long breath of relief.

"Don't say no, Bee," he entreated, "when yes is just as easy."

"Are you in earnest," turning and regarding him incredulously; "it is so sudden."

"In earnest," he repeated irritably, "do you suppose I come here and ask you to marry me for fun?"

"No, of course not; but in matters of this kind there is generally some little preliminary"—

"In some cases, but not in ours. We have been acquainted for years," he interrupted.

"I never imagined you cared for me," she murmured, lowering her gray eyes and blushing a little.

"Didn't you!" he returned, beginning for some unaccountable reason to feel wrathful towards his mother.

"No, indeed, how should I?"

"Well, that isn't the question at issue, Beatrice," he declared, and try as he would he could diffuse no warmth into his words. "You know that when I have a thing to say I say it outright. Will you marry me? Yes or no!"

"Yes, Tom," softly.

"That's a sensible girl, I thought you would."

"Tom!" aghast.

"I thought you would be a sensible girl," he added hastily. "Then it's all understood, is it? and I can go home and tell the Mater we have settled it?"

"You know, Tom," reminded Beatrice, who never lost sight of the proprieties, "you will have to speak to papa."

"To your *father*?" losing his temper; "well, I won't do it, and that's final."

What a monstrous lover! If he had not been Tom Winthrop, no doubt she would have rung for a servant to show him the door. Instead, she assumed a little air of injury, and replied:

"Very well, Tom, just as you please, but it is customary, you know."

"I don't know anything of the kind."

"But it is," with quiet persistency.

"Then mother will have to do it. I said I wouldn't, and I won't."

Here ensued another most uncomfortable pause.

"I'll tell you what, Bee," said Tom with a sudden inspiration, "suppose you fix it with your father. You could, couldn't you?"

"I might, but you see, Tom, custom requires that you"—

"Custom be hanged!" angrily; "I won't have custom thrown in my face."

This was too much. Beatrice began to cry. Tom felt like a criminal. He set himself down as a brute, and for a moment was at a loss what to do to make amends. Finally, with a happy thought, he put his arm around her waist, and took her hand and held it in his own.

"Don't cry, Bee," he implored, all his anger melting away, "don't! What will mother say when she knows I have begun like this? I will speak to your father in spite of all that I said to the contrary. I don't see how you can be willing to marry a man who behaves so abominably to you."

"You didn't mean it," she declared, drying her eyes and smiling, "and you shall not do anything that is distasteful to you. I will speak to papa myself."

"My dear girl," exclaimed Tom impulsively, "you relieve me unspeakably, you do indeed! Now, you and mother and the rest fix the whole affair to suit yourselves. Leave me out of it entirely, and I will call in as soon as I can and learn how you are getting on. You will speak to your father before I come again, will you not?"

"Yes, Tom, sure."

"And you will forgive me for making you cry?"

"Of course!"

"Bee, you are a sensible girl—kiss me!"

And this was Tom's wooing.

The engagement made considerable stir in the social circles of D—, for Tom was a great catch and Beatrice an acknowledged belle. A word here of what the social circle of D— really was might be *apropos*.

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To begin with it was almost entirely sustained by the Winthrops. In that pleasantest part of the city, generally conceded to be West End, stood their home-
stead. An old-fashioned stone house that would attract no attention from the casual observer, unless by reason of its lack of all the embellishments that the modern architect so delights in. The building was darkened by age, with a low, broad piazza running across the front, and a smooth lawn bordered by a hedgerow of pines. Here the Winthrops for nearly a generation had resided.

It is an established fact that nowhere is the god of mammon more universally worshipped than in America by a certain class of Americans. It can safely be affirmed, however, that if the homage accorded this divinity could be exceeded, West Enders gave the undisputed preference to caste. The pride they took in blood and good descent must have been commendable, if only by reason of its fervor. They argued, and perhaps justly so, that what their betters deemed laudable, was sufficient in itself for their justification. Thus, if New York considered its dignity enhanced by its Knickerbockers, Massachusetts by the descendants of its early settlers, and Virginia by its first families, why should they not have their own social standpoint? Moreover, society, like any other body of people, must have its leader. This question of leadership was pondered with much trepidation, until the social eye fell upon the Winthrops. Here at last was a family worthy of all the honor caste would bestow upon it. Old as the hills, rising out of its extensive domain, with blue blood enough to satisfy even the most prejudiced, rich in worldly goods, what more could even caste

demand? Then, again, there was no blot upon the Winthrop escutcheon. The members of its house had been singularly exempt from scandal. Perhaps they were more than ordinarily righteous. Be that as it may, if those unwelcome visitors, termed skeletons, lurked in their spacious closets, they had it to boast that the luckless beings were at least docile and well bred. That the Winthrops were exclusive, goes perhaps without saying; that they were proud was justifiable. If society was proud of them, why should they not be proud of themselves? When new neighbors made their appearance in the West End, if the Winthrop carriage drew up at the gate, and the Winthrop card found its way to their receiver, it immediately transpired that similar white squares of pasteboard began creeping in to occupy a position beside it. The society of the West End certainly achieved a triumph in choosing them to represent it. The social elevation of that community began to excite the envy of the inhabitants of the most remote quarters of the city, until it came to be a common occurrence that no sooner had an individual found himself growing rich than he turned eagerly in this direction. To live in the West End became a popular craze. New aspirants for social patronage argued that the pedigree of the West End's most favored satellites could bear no further investigation than their own, and that inasmuch as the capricious god of fortune had smiled upon them, why should they not bring their offering and lay it also at the feet of caste? Had not caste been placed upon a throne, and was not his shrine sacred? The young people forming this charmed circle found themselves largely dependent upon their own exer-

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tions for amusement and diversion. Hence it may
have been their arduous efforts in this direction.
Certainly they devoted their minds to little else.
The afternoons were given largely to drives and
calls; the mornings to china painting and gossip; the
evenings were spent at balls, receptions, socials, and
cotillions. The theatre being but a poor place, and
largely patronized by the masses, was of course out of
the question. The lives of the society moths of the
West End were spent in a continual whirl of pleasure,
so much so, that the graver pursuits were left entirely
to their elders, and gave them little or no concern.
To be intellectual was to be strong-minded. To be
popular, one only required tact, good-nature, ap-
titude for small-talk and style. No one inquired, is
she good, is she clever? Their first question was
"Who is she?" their second, "How does she dress?"
As Addison expressed it, they considered only the
drapery of the species, and never cast away a thought
upon those ornaments of the mind that make people
illustrious in themselves and useful to others. The
mind! What use of the mind? They knew enough to
conduct themselves in the drawing-room and how to
while away the time when alone. They knew also
whether olive or amber was the latest shade for bon-
net strings, and were conversant with the current
gossip of their set. Mrs. Winthrop, while she led so-
ciety, was, like most leaders, a slave to her own cause.
Something of the "Grand Dame," in manner and bear-
ing, her views partook largely of the old school, so
much more formal and rigid than even the modern
one. It may have been this, or perhaps an uncon-
scious superiority of her own, that won for her the

reverence and esteem in which she was held universally, her own family not excluded. No one admired and loved her more than her only son. In opinions they differed materially; indeed upon some points there was a quiet feud between them. Not that it amounted to more than an occasional light remark on his part, and an aptly chosen reply on hers. No, for secretly they adored each other. The difference, and difference there sometimes was, arose solely from one cause. Tom was hopelessly honest and outspoken. He detested sham and affectation, and took a positive delight in overstepping the bounds of conventionality whenever he could. Mrs. Winthrop, as the leader of a society whose basis was conformity, and whose laws were as stringent as the laws of a nation, found this rebel in her own house a source of much perplexity. After many and repeated failures to work his reform, she gave him up, and credited his misdemeanors to eccentricity. The society she most apprehended seemed, however, to unite in espousing his cause, for Tom was young, rich, a Winthrop, and withal a good fellow at heart. He was handsome too, with clear blue eyes that looked straight at you, good features, a well-shaped mouth with something sensitive in its curves, and a chin that indicated purpose if not lasting resolution. From his mother he inherited a high-bred, easy elegance of manner, bespeaking at once the gentleman and the aristocrat. He had been practising medicine in D— for eight years, and his admirable qualities, and undoubted ability, had won for him not only a host of friends, but a large and lucrative practice.

Eric Hazelton had been his classmate at college. The friendship that begun there was strengthened by

time. Totally unlike in disposition, they nevertheless experienced keen pleasure in the companionship of each other. So much so, that when Tom took a house for himself it became Eric's home also. Their rooms communicated, and through the doors that now stood apart could be heard Eric's deep, regular breathing.

As Tom sat meditating before the fire, some impulse prompted him to enter Eric's apartment. As he did so the sleeper awoke, and sitting up in bed called out:

"Who's there?"

"It's I," replied Tom.

"Thought you'd gone to bed."

"No, I just came in."

"What kept you so late?"

"She was quite ill, and I saw her safely to the hotel."

"You don't say so! What was the matter?"

"Nervous exhaustion."

"Dear me," lying back among the pillows sleepily.

"Yes, it's a great pity, poor girl!"

"So it is."

"You see she ought to have rest."

"I suppose so," faintly.

"She is completely worn out."

"Too bad!"

"Well, good-night!"

"Good-night."

"I don't believe you have heard a word I said. I believe at this very moment you are asleep."

No answer.

"Eric!"

Dead silence.

"I knew it," bending over the bed, and walking out of the room in disgust.

CHAPTER IV.

MISS BELL.

THE morning following the first appearance of Generva Romaine, in the Opera House of D— dawned clear and cold. Bright winter sunbeams struggled through the curtains, and flooded the Winthrop breakfast-room with golden glory. It was small and luxuriously furnished. The ceiling and walls were frescoed, and on the floor was a costly rug, in the centre of which stood a carved table, spread with a rich damask cloth, whose snowy folds served to enhance the brightness of the cut glass and silverware. In a large mirror which graced a wooden mantel were reflected two bronze candelabra and a massive sideboard, filled with old Sèvres and Dresden china.

At precisely half-past eight o'clock, Mrs. Winthrop, followed by her two daughters and Miss Bell, who was their guest, entered the room. Mrs. Winthrop was a stately woman, with deep-set gray eyes, handsome features and an abundance of white hair, which she wore piled in a snowy heap high upon her head. She was long past middle age, but she did not look it, for scarcely the approach of a wrinkle marred the smooth whiteness of her skin. Tall, queenly, graceful, there was a quiet ease in her movements, a subtle charm in every tone of her low, well-modulated voice, that never rose beyond a pitch not perfectly in keeping with good breeding. Dorothy Winthrop was a near counterpart of her mother. Tall also, rather more slender, she had

gray eyes shaded by dark lashes, light wavy hair, and a pale skin offset by little color. Agnes was fourteen, and said to resemble her deceased father. She was a blonde with a clear, peach-like complexion, big blue eyes and long yellow hair. Miss Bell was in a direct contrast to both the sisters. She was one of those distinguished-looking girls who, while they can boast neither regularity of feature nor brilliancy of color, still possess a certain attractiveness peculiarly their own. She was tall, fair, slender, with large gray eyes, hair of a drabish tinge, and small, sharp-pointed features. She dressed in perfect taste. Her clothes seemed designed especially to show to the best possible advantage her lithe, graceful figure. Her manners were charming. She always said and did the proper thing. If conversation became personal, it was she who cleverly turned it into a safer channel. If some unfortunate person let fall an unhappy remark, it was Miss Bell who came to the rescue. There was never an embarrassing pause when she was present. She always had something with which to fill in a vacuum. Her tact was exquisite. Tom once said of her, that she was the undisputed queen of small-talk. Without being particularly brilliant she was always entertaining. She fairly drew people out of themselves, permitting no one to remain silent or ill at ease in her presence. In disposition reserved, there were no extremes in her character. She liked her friends, she never adored them. The day was warm, never hot. If she possessed affections they were placid, or so they seemed. Passion she never betrayed. To have endeavored to arouse in her violent emotions, whether of anger, sorrow, or delight, would have been as battling against a

stone wall. She was, as Tom expressed it, "a comfortable sort of girl, who would never under any circumstances drive a man beside himself." And yet there was a compression about her thin lips, an expression in her steel-gray eyes, indicating that she was not so placid as she led people to believe. "The shallows murmur, but the deeps are dumb." She was in all points the reverse of Tom, which Tom's mother maintained was as it should be, as it augured their domestic peace and marital felicity.

"I think," said Mrs. Winthrop, as she poured the coffee into the daintiest of hand-painted china cups, "that Tom's conduct is reprehensible. He knew that I particularly desired him to be present last evening; he was aware that you, Beatrice, expected him, yet without so much as a word of excuse he absented himself. If it were the first time it had occurred I should overlook it, but Tom's repeated neglect of social obligations merits deserved reproof, and I shall not hesitate to so express myself when he does me the honor to remember my existence."

"Dear Mrs. Winthrop," replied Beatrice, "don't be too severe with Tom; I daresay he was engaged."

"You are very forbearing, my child, but everything has its limit; and although Tom be my son, I cannot consistently with justice uphold him in his neglect of you." Beatrice winced, and Mrs. Winthrop continued, "I am somewhat of the belief that Mr. Hazelton is not as judicious an associate for him as I could desire."

"I don't see what Mr. Hazelton has to do with Tom's lack of attention to Bee," spoke up Dorothy quickly.

Mrs. Winthrop regarded her elder daughter attentively.

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"You put it emphatically," she returned reprovingly.
"When I made my observation about Mr. Hazel-
ton, I merely suggested the thought that his bohe-
mianism might communicate itself to Tom, seeing the
nearness of their friendship and Tom's natural bent in
that direction. In your place," turning from Dorothy
and again addressing Beatrice, "I would remove that
influence upon your marriage. There is nothing more
conducive to the infelicity of a newly married pair
than the continual presence of the particular friend of
the husband. I speak, my dear, from a long experience
of the world and of men. At best they are but grown-
up children, and must be treated accordingly."

Mrs. Winthrop was evidently speaking with a double
purpose, for although her words were directed to her
son's betrothed, they were clearly meant for her eldest
daughter as well. The girl paled a little under them,
but flashed a grateful look at her sister, who said:

"I think it's a shame, Mamma, to make Eric out
such a dragon."

"You misunderstand your mother, Agnes," put in
Beatrice, who had long since settled in her own mind
as to how Eric should be disposed of when she and
Tom were married. "She merely offered me a sugges-
tion which might eventually prove useful."

"Oh, well," retorted Agnes, with a toss of her curly
head, "if you look at it in that way, why then there
is no more to be said about it. There is no denying
that Tom is a horrible creature; but it's rather hard
that Eric should be blamed for it.

"How can you speak so of your brother?" reprim-
anded Mrs. Winthrop.

"Well, it is the truth, Mamma," declared Agnes,

filling her cup half full of sugar. "If you wish to go anywhere he is too busy; if you want him home he has an engagement somewhere else; when he promises to do a thing he forgets all about it. Now, if you don't call that detestable, why I do!"

"It was a very stupid social, I thought," said Dorothy to Beatrice, referring to the gathering which had taken place the evening before in Mrs. Winthrop's spacious parlors. Beatrice admitted that it was.

"And whose fault was that if not Tom's?" interposed Agnes; "everybody depended upon Beatrice, and she was worse than nobody."

"Agnes," said Mrs. Winthrop quietly, "eat your breakfast."

"I did not feel very well," sighed Beatrice

"And who was to blame if not Tom?"

"Agnes!"

"Oh, well, Mamma, can't a person talk?"

"No; not a person of your age."

"Then I'll read. Give me half of that paper, Dorothy."

The morning journal lay beside Dorothy's plate, where she from time to time stole a glance at it. As Agnes reached to take it, she waved her a little aside, saying:

"Wait, I'm reading something. That actress Generva Romaine was taken sick last night in the theatre, and—good gracious! here is Tom's name: 'Dr. Winthrop, who occupied one of the stage boxes, hastened to her assistance.' Oh, the hypocrite! that's why he couldn't come home. He was there in a box, and—"

"Read it, Dorothy," interrupted Agnes excitedly, "read it all!"

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ted Agnes excitedly,

"Yes!" urged Beatrice, eager for once in her life.

"It cannot be possible," exclaimed Mrs. Winthrop.
"Tom knows better what is due to himself, to his
mother."

The moment the word actress fell from Dorothy's
lips, a feeling of horror took possession of Mrs. Win-
throp. She at once decided that the woman was vul-
gar, and ill-bred, and a great deal more that she re-
frained from mentioning in the presence of her children.
The ground upon which she founded her hasty opin-
ion is, of course, not known, but it does transpire that
these prejudices are frequent with people of acknowl-
edged sound judgment. Regarding no calling are
conceived falsier ideas than of the actor's. The rea-
son for this is, that about no other calling is so much
taken for granted and so little really known. Mrs.
Winthrop, dismayed beyond expression at the bare
mention of her son's name in such disreputable con-
nection, sat for a moment speechless, then she gasped,
"It is impossible! there is some mistake."

"There is no mistake, Mamma, listen:"

ILLNESS OF AN ACTRESS.

"There was a packed house at the theatre last night
to witness the first appearance of Miss Generva Ro-
maine, in (as the bills proclaimed) her greatest role,
Juliet. It must be confessed that for once the public
was not doomed to disappointment, for a finer actress
than Miss Romaine has never been seen in D—.
In another column will be found a lengthy criticism
of her impersonation. Upon the conclusion of the
performance last evening, and immediately after the
fall of the curtain, it was discovered that the young

lady had fainted. The usual restoratives failing to resuscitate her, a message was quickly dispatched in quest of the manager, Mr. Silas W. Slick, who was found in company with Mr. Eric Hazelton, editor of the *West End Budget*, and Dr. Thomas Winthrop, these gentlemen having occupied a box during the play. Dr. Winthrop, in company with Mr. Slick, hastened to the insensible woman. After long and arduous exertions she regained consciousness, and was conveyed to her hotel. At going to press, it was learned that she was still in a precarious condition."

Dorothy drew a long breath as she concluded the article and laid down the paper.

"That's all," she said, looking at her mother.

"And enough," replied Mrs. Winthrop in a freezing tone, "quite enough!"

With this she arose from the table and walked out of the room.

"How angry mamma is," said Agnes, when the door had closed behind her, and the sound of her trailing gown died away in the distance. "She turned pale while you were reading."

"I think she has cause to be vexed," declared Dorothy; "Tom ought to be ashamed of making himself conspicuous, and getting his name mixed up with such people." Here, remembering Beatrice, she stopped and colored; but Beatrice, who had quite recovered her usual serenity, reassured her by saying sweetly:

"Don't mind me, my dear, I am almost one of the family, you know. Besides, I think you are all a little too hard upon Tom. Being in the theatre, he could not well help responding to so urgent a call."

"Yes," interrupted Agnes, who was terribly outspoken, "but what right had he to be in the theatre, when he knew that *you*—I mean," correcting herself, "that *we* were looking for him here?"

"He went with Eric, most likely," surmised Dorothy. Eric again! Bee's brows slightly contracted. Was this man always to come between Tom and her?

Dorothy's quick instinct warned her that her remark was ill-timed, and she added hastily:

"But it may not have been. After all, I only imagined it."

"You are no doubt quite right," said Beatrice quietly; "if Tom went Eric took him. Are they not always together?"

A dead silence followed this speech. Beatrice never before came so near losing control of herself. Agnes hurried to the rescue by saying:

"Well, why shouldn't they be together, when they live in the same house?"

Another unlucky remark, but Beatrice made no reply. Turning to Dorothy, she observed:

"Your mamma did not finish her breakfast; it might be well to send it up to her?"

"No! if mamma had wanted it she would have remained. I wish she had not heard that article."

"Why?"

"Because it will only make trouble for Tom. It is just this, Bee, if he has decided to attend that—that lady, he will do so. He is as firm as a rock when he makes up his mind."

Beatrice might have been marble for all her face betrayed; and yet every word that Dorothy uttered stabbed her like a knife; for she loved Tom and was

jealous of him, and she had too much penetration not to be fully cognizant of the fact that she had no more influence over him than any one else. It was bitter for her to be forced to the secret acknowledgment of this. But whatever her attitude towards the world, Beatrice never deceived or spared herself. When they had finished their breakfast and sauntered into the library, she asked Dorothy to drive her home.

"Oh, Bee, don't go," urged both girls, "we'll be so lonesome."

"I really must," she persisted; "I have considerable on hand this morning."

"Stay, and perhaps Tom will drop in; he sometimes does," urged Agnes.

"Not after being up all night with a patient," replied Beatrice; "most likely he is in bed."

"Tom never sleeps later than nine," declared Agnes, "and it's half past now."

"Suppose," suggested Dorothy, "we go and stop in at his house."

"I don't care about going to town," objected Beatrice, "and I really must return home. So drive me over, Dorothy, like a good girl—you don't mind, do you?"

"Mind? of course not. But I wish you would stay."

"Not to-day, Dorothy. Don't press me."

"Well, get on your wraps, and I will order the carriage."

"I am going up to say good-bye to your mother first. Will you come, Agnes?" observed Beatrice.

"Yes, but I think you're horrid!"

"No you don't," putting her arm about her; "you don't think anything of the kind."

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"At any rate, Tom is, and I will tell him so when he
 does come."

Beatrice smiled as she left the room.

"This air is bracing," remarked Dorothy, when later
 on they drove down the road. "I am going to try and
 induce mamma to go out. She will have a headache
 if she remains shut up in the house all day."

"She seems very much put out, Dorothy," said
 Beatrice.

"Yes. I hope Tom won't come in, he is so quick;
 but he always yields to mamma in the end. Every
 one does."

"Ah!" (Beatrice drew a long breath) "that would be
 like my Tom," she murmured *sotto voce*; "my Tom!
 I oughtn't to be so sure of him, ought I? For he is
 not mine yet, and for all I know he never may be.
 There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip, and in
 this world we can be sure of nothing but death." The
 last words only were heard by Dorothy.

"Why, Beatrice, what has come to you?"

"I was moralizing. I do sometimes, but not often,
 Dorothy." In precisely the same tone, "Would you
 have ermine or silver fox on a dark blue velvet? I am
 in favor of the silver fox myself."

"Bee, what has come to you? —Flying from death to
 silver fox and ermine?"

"Did I?" laughing softly, and turning away her
 face; "at all events I wanted your advice. You have
 good taste, you know."

"Bee is too proud to own it," thought Dorothy, "but
 she is taking Tom's neglect to heart. If it were pos-
 sible I should say she might break with him, but she
 would endure anything rather than that, she loves him
 so well."

And in her estimate of her friend, Dorothy was not far wrong. There are women whose affections are strengthened by being constantly kept upon the rack. If Tom had made an elaborate examination under the glass of the intricacies of her character, for the set purpose of discovering a method by which he might keep her entirely and wholly to himself, the result suggested by the experiment would have been a mode of treatment precisely similar to that which came perfectly natural to him. As he by a happy chance struck the keynote of her nature, she by careful observation and keen discernment gained an insight of his. As a result of her investigation she formed the theory that neither wit, intelligence nor beauty were requisite to excite the admiration of men, but that it required vast ingenuity and unlimited tact to keep their emotions alive. She often marvelled why women could not see that as sweets to the appetite are cloying, so satiety is fatal to love.

CHAPTER V.

GENERVA.

GENERVA fell into a deep sleep after Tom's departure. It lasted three hours. When she awoke it was to find herself alone and her fire a heap of cinders. With a moan she turned wearily on her pillow. A dull, throbbing pain racked her body, a terrible weight pressed upon her head, and her throat was parched with fever. Unable to longer endure her thirst, she essayed to rise from the bed, but weakness overpowered her, and she sank back exhausted. From sheer

helplessness she began to weep. The white moon shone through the dingy little windows of the room, flooding it with pale light; and the cold winter stars peered in with almost dazzling brilliancy. Everything was still. The street deserted, the house as silent as the grave. In the solemn and oppressive hush she could count the beatings of her heart. As she tossed restlessly to and fro, dread fancies began to weave within her fevered brain. The frozen limbs of the tree, that in the swaying wind rattled occasionally against the window-pane, seemed to assume weird proportions. With sickening dread she watched it. Its long, lean branches curled and twisted fantastically, and anon shriveled into ghastly and spectral shapes. Slowly the hours dragged themselves away, until the thick gloom which precedes the dawn fell like a pall, and then of a sudden the day broke.

As the clock struck eight the door opened cautiously and Mrs. Slick came in. She stole noiselessly over to the bed, and started back with an exclamation of surprise:

"Good heavens! are you awake? You were so sound when I left you I thought at least you'd sleep until noon. I hope you haven't wanted anything. I was going to stay with you all night, but what with the journey and excitement, I couldn't keep up to save me. Have you been awake long?"

"I have not slept much," replied Generva.

"Anyhow, I hope you are better. You gave me a scare, I tell you. Lord, but you're pale! and your eyes—I do wish you could see them, they look for all the world like burnt holes in a blanket. Are you in pain?"

"Yes, and I seem to be growing weaker every mo-

ment. "See how my hands tremble, I cannot raise them to my face."

"Well," declared Mrs. Slick, sitting down on the edge of the bed, "it's a pretty state of affairs, isn't it? How do you suppose you're going to act, and such an advance sale, too; but you mustn't give way, you must brace up! There's everything in bracing up. At best you haven't much energy, but under these circumstances you must really make an effort."

"If I feel as I do now," replied Generva, speaking with some difficulty, "I cannot act to-night."

"We will be ruined if you don't," angrily, "ruined teetotally! You never seem to take any one but yourself into consideration. Silas'll have the doctor again, and he'll steady you up. He's said to be a great man. Oh," suddenly remembering, "how you did fly at him in the dressing-room!"

"I?" incredulously; "what do you mean?"

"You were off your head, I guess, or you wouldn't have done it."

"What did I say?" anxiously.

"I can't remember just the words, but you pitched into him because he didn't get back with the carriage soon enough to suit you."

Generva flushed hotly, and Mrs. Slick continued:

"What'll you have for breakfast?"

"I cannot eat; don't speak of it."

"Can't eat? fudge! You've got to eat! How are you going to live if you don't? I'm off now; I'll bring you up something. How would you like an egg and some bacon?"

"I tell you I cannot eat. I want a drink—please put some water where I can reach it."

All right, and as soon as Silas is up, he'll come in. I'm going to have him send right off for that doctor. Is there anything more I can do?"

"You might get a maid to tidy the room a little."

"I'll have one come directly. I must go to my breakfast. I'm famished! This house is Meeger by name and meagre by nature. Say, Gen, did you happen to notice what a swell the doctor was? Ef you was fly you might work him for the bill."

With this reflection, Mrs. Slick stole a look into the glass over the bureau, smoothed her hair, and with a final twist of her neckerchief walked out of the room. Generva heaved a deep sigh of relief when the door closed behind her. Once more alone she fell to thinking. The hot flush that had mantled her cheeks when Tom's name was mentioned still lingered there. But her emotion seemed in no wise strange to her. She was not one to analyze her feelings, nor impart them to another. She had no confidante. All her life long she had been accustomed to keep her own counsel. In childhood her reticence was mistaken for obstinacy; as she grew older, for wisdom. It is astonishing how much respect we feel for the man who says the least, and with what profound knowledge we accord credit him. Generva's nature was essentially artistic. She was nervous, emotional, sensitive, and keenly susceptible to influence. Her habitual disinclination for expression arose solely from her lack of confidence in her own powers, and not from incapacity, as might be the case in one whose advantages of education were so limited. Indeed, they had been confined solely to the theatre, but she might have been in a much worse school, and had infinitely less able instructors than the

old Shakspearean scholars, whose lives were passed in a realm of imagery, peopled with the creations of the poets. Hers was an odd learning. She could quote from the great dramatists of all ages; she knew by memory almost every line of any of the legitimate plays; but she would have been puzzled and confused and awkward in a drawing-room, surrounded by persons greatly her inferior in intellect and actual information. Belonging to the public, it never failed to fill her with other feelings than those of terror. Had she been consulted she would have never shown herself, except when her duties called her upon the stage. Strangers dismayed her. Accustomed all her life to have those who had her in charge think and act for her, she was singularly helpless. She knew nothing of the world or of men. She had no amours. Wrapped in her art, living for it alone, her leisure hours were spent in study and meditation. People nightly applauded and admired her, but the wary Mr. Slick took good care that their fulsome praises should be confined to the artist alone. As a nun lives in a world of religion, so she resided in a world of art. Her life had not been a happy one. From her earliest childhood she was made to work. As a three-year-old baby she toddled upon the stage and lisped out her lines, her little heart quaking with fear, for Mrs. Slick's hands were big, and she would not hesitate, for the slightest fault, to bring them down upon the offending head. She was not habitually cruel, but she was a cold, grasping, selfish woman, and a hard taskmistress. Generva, as she expressed it, belonged to neither kith nor kin of hers, and the child thus kept upon sufferance, soon realized her position, which was far from being an en-

viable one. She was an impulsive, ardent, passionate creature, and literally starved for the love that was denied her. Now that she had grown to womanhood, and was occupied with a profession, exacting beyond expression, this longing for sympathy and affection was in a measure appeased. But she was nevertheless human, and there were times when utter desolation took possession of her. Art is a cold lover at best; it can satisfy the senses, but it cannot stay the wild impulses of the soul. Generva's art filled her life, but it left her heart empty. How empty she never realized until this moment, lying upon her bed and thinking strangely enough of the man she had seen for the first time in her life the night before. A longing to die came over her; to die just as she was, with her hands folded as now, and no one near to break the spell by which she was enthralled. Alas, for such hopes, no sooner uttered than dashed ruthlessly to the ground.

"May I come in?" inquired a voice outside the door, and Mr. Slick turned the knob and forthwith entered. "Jemima!" he exclaimed, "an ice-house is warm compared to this. What's the matter with the fire?"

"It went out," gasped Generva, starting at his abrupt entrance.

"Ain't you frozen?"

"No, I don't feel the cold much."

"Dear me, that's the fever most likely. Any way there's no use having a fire if you don't feel the need of it. Fires cost money. I suppose you know that, my girl. How do you feel? You look like a first-class ghost."

"I'm better, thank you."

"That's right, you got some dandy notices this

morning. Sick or not sick you can act just the same. You'll be all right by this evening, resting quietly to-day, of course."

"If I feel as I do now," she replied, "I shall not be able to get up. I cannot lift my head from the pillow. I should fall if I attempted to walk across the floor."

"Why, Gen, you can't mean it," exclaimed Silas, terrified beyond measure; "you can't be in earnest, or you are mistaken. We would be obliged to close the theatre, do you understand—close the theatre! Mother of Moses, that would be a devil of a look-out! Ain't you been sleeping well all night?"

"No."

"Didn't you acknowledge yourself you felt better? Didn't you tell mother that you hadn't much pain, and that it was only the weakness? The doctor will soon fix all that. I've sent for him, and he will be here any moment."

He had scarcely ceased speaking before Mrs. Slick and Tom entered.

"What did I tell you?" continued Silas. "Here he is now. Good morning, doctor, I am glad to see you; you come just in the nick of time. Here's Generva saying that she's too weak to lift her head, and a great lot of stuff, more imagination than anything else!"

Tom seated himself by the bed, and for some time regarded his patient attentively. After taking her temperature, and noting her pulse, and inquiring carefully after the most minute symptoms, he looked up, and in answer to the eager glance said:

"Without any imagination, Mr. Slick, she is very sick."

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"Yes, doctor, I know, but weakness is all she com-
plains of. And you can surely cure that up to-day.
You've got twelve long hours—think of it, twelve
hours! A heap can be done in that length of time."

"No doubt," returned Tom ironically. Then chang-
ing his tone and facing him, "Do I infer from your
remarks that you expect her to perform this evening?
Because, if such be the case, we had better have a clear
understanding of it now. She is threatened with brain
fever; she may be, for all I can say, in the first stages
of it. Under any circumstances she will not be able
to play to-night, nor to-morrow night, nor the balance
of the week, and for all I can promise several weeks
to come. If you don't feel satisfied with my opinion,
I would advise a consultation. I think I may safely
affirm, however, that any medical man you may see fit
to summon, will agree with me in my diagnosis of her
case."

"Well, doctor," cried Silas, sinking into a chair,
"you've knocked me silly. Do you know that means
ruin—dire, financial ruin for me?"

"I am very sorry," replied Tom calmly, "but it might
be well to bear in mind that it means also life or death
to her."

"Death?" gasped Silas, starting to his feet dramati-
cally, and seizing his pocket-handkerchief, "Generva
die? you can't mean it; you don't mean it—you're
mistaken. Did you hear what he said, Mother? Gen
die? What would we do—what could we do? See
here, doctor, I don't want any consultation business
or any one but yourself to tend our girl. You're good
enough for us; what do you advise? What's to be
done? Speak, don't hesitate to speak. Demand any

sacrifice, and I'll make it, for her sake, for Gen's sake. Oh, Gen, if you die it'll kill me!"

Here Mr. Slick's emotion overpowered him, and he applied his handkerchief to his eyes and wept copiously. Mrs. Slick, who had better control of herself, drew a chair near the bed and asked:

"What is to be done first, doctor?"

"I must insist upon providing her with a nurse," replied Tom, "one whom I can rely upon to carry out all my instructions. If you wanted to kill her outright you could not set about to do it more effectually than by keeping her in a room of this temperature."

"She shall have a fire directly," promised Mrs. Slick; and with her usual eye to business, "There's no reason on earth, Silas, why we can't change the bill, and do 'As You Like It' to-night. Blanche isn't very bad as *Rosalind*, and Gertrude can easily cut out *Phæbe* and play *Celia*. They've all day long to rehearse, and if they're not equal to an emergency, why let them clear out and we'll shut up shop. What do you think?"

"It might be done," assented Silas, locking up from his handkerchief with something like renewed hope. "I didn't think of it. I didn't think of anything! This business has paralyzed me. My brain is on fire; I believe I'm going mad! you'd better leave me some medicine, doctor; just feel my head. Did you ever see such a raging heat? Gad, I'm in a fever myself. I'm a sick man, a terribly sick man! But we might play 'As You Like It'; your head's level, Mother. No, we can't; I forgot. We've no one to play the *Duke*. I never dreamed of putting on the piece again, for there isn't a dollar in it, so I fired that last *Duke* in Chicago.

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There's no use talking about playing 'As You Like It' without a *Duke*."

"What's the matter with Beezer's studying up the lines to-day," suggested Mrs. Slick, "the *Duke* has only got to look dignified, and Beezer's fat. He'll make up for it, you see. Now stir yourself and go to work, and I'll hunt up the girls."

"All right," agreed Silas, replacing his handkerchief, all but the embroidered corner, which he allowed to peep jauntily from the breast-pocket; "I'm with you." Then to Tom, "we're going to do everything you want, doctor, if you'll just stick to us and get Gen on her feet. Spare no expense;" grandly; "let her have everything she needs. Whatever do you suppose has given her the fever?"

"She appears broken in body and mind," said Tom, "and exhaustion such as she has is very obstinate, inasmuch as it requires long and complete rest."

"Well, we're going to do all you say, if you'll just tick to us; and you will, doctor, won't you? This is a terrible thing for me, terrible!" and he again reached for his handkerchief.

"Now, don't you give way," urged Mrs. Slick, taking him by the arm and leading him to the door. "There's too much depends upon you. Gen ain't going to die. Come on, we'll go and see the people, and call a rehearsal. Do brace up! I never saw you so shaky."

"I am a sick man, I am," declared Silas; "I tell you we had a blow."

"And I tell you, Gen'll be all right, and we'll show to-night, if I go on and play the *Duke* myself."

"Doctor," said Generva, when the door had closed behind them, "am I going to die?"

"Die," replied Tom, "of course not! What kind of a night did you have?"

"Miserable."

"You were not alone?"

"Yes, I was alone."

"If I had imagined such a thing possible, I should have remained here myself."

"How good you are," she murmured, smiling feebly, "how good! No one was ever so kind to me before."

"You overrate the little I have done," explained Tom lightly; "it amounts to nothing."

"Let me think so at least, please, and above all, accept my most heartfelt thanks."

"With pleasure, on condition that you do not repeat them, or talk further on the subject. Now I must go. I don't often spend so much time with a patient; I have too many to see through the day. Good-bye!"

"When will you come again, doctor?"

"I will be here this evening."

She sighed contentedly.

"You don't like to be left by yourself?"

"No."

"Well, in an hour I will have a bright, cheerful girl here, to nurse and keep you company. So, good-bye! Be very quiet. Sleep if you can."

She was looking up, he was looking down, and their eyes met. Both started. She, flushing and turning away her head, and he suddenly dropping the hand he held, and walking out of the room.

* * * * *

It was evening of the same day. Tom and Eric were at dinner. The servant had withdrawn and they were alone.

"I'm going up to see that sick girl," said Tom, "her folks will be at the theatre, and the nurse must be relieved."

"This begins to look interesting," remarked Eric drily.

"Interesting?" repeated Tom; "yes, it's a very interesting case."

"To a doctor, I suppose?"

"Exactly."

"Ahem," clearing his throat, and darting a significant glance over the celery.

"What's the matter, got a cold?"

"Yes, slightly. I was going to say, however, that you had found a very uncommon case. An almost unheard-of case. A case you are never likely to meet with again. You are quite right to give so much of your time and attention to it. I like to see you wrapped up in your profession—it augurs your future celebrity, your—"

"Eat your dinner, my boy, and don't talk so much," said Tom.

"Oh, I'm doing all right, don't concern yourself about me. How did you find her, anyway? all joking aside."

"I found her upon the verge of brain fever, and without so much as a fire in her room."

"You don't say so. They must be a cannibal crowd."

"They are a selfish, grasping lot, and I feel like watching that poor girl away from them."

"Tom, this really grows dramatic. Have some tur-

ps?"

"No, don't bother me, I can help myself."

"Well," said Eric, refusing to be snubbed, "I said

the situation was dramatic, I now go farther and maintain that according to my judgment it will have a tragic termination, if that article in the morning journal found its way to your respected mother's notice."

"It will be deucedly unpleasant for me if it did," admitted Tom.

"Yes, and besides there is Beatrice," suggested Eric consolingly. "How about her?"

Tom frowned and applied himself diligently to his dinner, and Eric went on:

"You remember that you were to spend last evening with her."

"You shall have the pleasure of pacifying that young lady, *mon amie*. It was you inveigled me into that theatre."

"Oh, Tom, don't put me at the mercy of your haughty bride to be, she hates me as it is."

"No, she don't; you only imagine it."

"My learned doctor, you may be an authority on pictorial anatomy, but upon anatomy of the flesh (the female flesh) you are profoundly ignorant. I have made a study of this species particularly; I have put them under the magnifying glass, as it were, and the result of my experiment is, scientifically speaking, a success. Where you see bloom on a cheek, I detect paint behind it; where you marvel at the gentleness of a touch, I see the claw concealed in it. You believe women what they would have you believe; I, what my investigation qualifies me in being sure of. Now, what I want to convey is this, that while admitting Miss Bell to be your *fiancée*, and granting your opportunities for research as far as she is concerned unlimited,

I still claim to detect with my glass intricacies invisible to the naked eye. One of these intricacies, or irregularities, whatever you may choose to call it, is utter and entire abomination of me: *quand on voit la chose, on la croit.*"

"I'd see a great deal better if you would confine yourself to the English language," said Tom, "though you believe in no woman."

"How can I, knowing them as I do?"

"How about Dorothy, has she been under the glass too?" inquired Tom maliciously.

"Dorothy," speculated Eric, laying down his knife and clearing his throat again; "well, Dorothy don't look altogether bad under the glass. It's a pity about her, *she* was born all right. Her training has spoiled her."

"It wouldn't be well if she were to hear you," remarked Tom, laughing as he always did at Eric's vagaries; "however Dorothy isn't the point at issue. Will you come up with me and see my patient?"

"No I won't."

"Why?"

"Because one in the family is enough."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that this interesting case, that so soon grew dramatic, now looks as if it might become serious."

"Ridiculous!"

"Just as you please; have a potato?"

"Eric, will you be serious?"

"Sir, do you dare insinuate that a man of my profound knowledge, a man of whom it has been said *nihil quod tetiget non ornavit*, can be otherwise?"

"A truce to jesting and to Latin. Will you come with me to see her to-night?"

"No. That's English, I hope."

"Then I shall go myself," rising and pushing his chair from the table.

"You will do nothing of the kind." Dorothy had opened the door and stood before them.

"And why, Madame Evesdropper, may I inquire," asked Tom composedly.

"Because mamma has sent for you and I mean to bring you home. The carriage is at the door."

"How long have you been in the hall, my dear?" interrogated Tom again. "Do you know that listeners never hear any good of themselves?"

"If I had not been aware of the fact before, I should certainly be convinced of it now," she replied, glancing significantly at Eric.

"Then you heard what I said?" he asked, answering her look.

"Every word!" loftily.

"Might one venture to beg your pardon on one's knees, as they say on the stage."

"I would advise," she retorted with superb hauteur, "that you reserve your theatrical attitudes for your friends of the theatre, who would be no doubt much better able to appreciate them."

With this parting shaft she walked majestically away, followed by Tom, who darted a triumphant glance back at the vanquished culprit, as he closed the door behind him.

Left alone, Eric remained for a moment in perplexed meditation; then with a happy thought he walked back to the table, and deliberately proceeded to finish his supper. Truly he was a philosopher!

CHAPTER VI.

TEETS.

"GOOD-EVENING! Mother."

Hat in hand Tom entered the drawing-room, where Mrs. Winthrop sat near a centre table, busily intent upon a piece of embroidery.

"Good-evening, Tom; sit down."

"Thanks!" taking a chair and drawing it near her;

"How is your head? Dorothy says it has been troublesome to-day."

"It is better," looking up from her work, and for a moment regarding him closely; "I shouldn't advise you to keep your overcoat on. One is liable to colds this blustering weather."

"Yes," removing it with some reluctance; "I suppose it is just as well to be careful."

She was in her most unapproachable mood. The mood he had always found so difficult to contend with. "If," he thought, as he sat there regarding her, "she would only take a fellow to task, instead of treating him to silent contempt! But past experience ought to have reminded him that this was not to be hoped for from Mrs. Winthrop, whose displeasure was always characterized by a solemn frigidity. In a sort of apathy Tom leaned back in his chair and waited, an almost interminable time it seemed. Then he sat upright and said boldly:

"You sent for me, Mother; what do you want?"

Still no change in the calm features, still no faltering in the regular drawing in and out of the needle.

"What do you want?" he was obliged to repeat the question before she gave evidence of having heard it.

"I do not wish to appear-obtrusive," she began in her low voice, "or to interfere in an affair which I do not doubt you are fully capable of managing yourself. But" (here she paused to count a stitch) "a mother may be pardoned some anxiety where the welfare of a son is concerned. Until now you have been pleased to accredit me with some judgment; may I inquire if your views have of late undergone a change?"

"No," looking abstractedly into the fire.

"In that case," drawing a long silken thread through the tapestry, "I am going to presume to offer you my advice, upon something I have much at heart. Heretofore you have been pleased to intrust it to my care."

"You refer to Beatrice, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Has she complained of me?"

"Have you given her cause?" fixing a searching scrutiny upon him.

Tom made no reply, and Mrs. Winthrop continued:

"No, Beatrice does not complain of you—on the contrary—"

"Who does, then, may I ask?"

"I was not aware I made an assertion to the effect that any one did. I will say candidly, though, that I am not altogether satisfied with your conduct."

"You talk as if I were a boy," put in Tom impatiently; "come to the point. What have I done?"

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"You have been unmindful of what is due your family, your betrothed, and yourself."

"You speak in enigmas, Mother. Be so good as to explain."

"With pleasure," deliberately stopping to thread her needle. "You forget what is due Beatrice, by a persistent and inexcusable neglect of her. You forget what is due your family by dragging their name before the public in connection with that of an actress; and you forget what is due yourself by a persistent disregard of the proprieties. You ignore the social world for the companionship of a Bohemian scribe, who subsists upon your bounty, and who rewards your generosity by dragging you down to a level with himself."

Having concluded this speech, Mrs. Winthrop applied herself assiduously to her embroidery.

"Have you anything more to say?" inquired Tom, who had grown white about the lips.

"No. I have fully expressed myself."

"Then I suppose that our interview is at an end?"

"Yes, inasmuch as re-animations are concerned."

"In that case, good-night!"

"Are you going so soon?" She glanced up, and there was an anxious gleam in her eyes.

"Yes, I am going."

He had risen, and was regarding her with all the Winthrop pride and resolution in his face.

"And you have no reply to make me?" laying her work aside, and thinking how handsome he was in his anger.

"Only this, that I will try to do my duty to Beatrice, and to act as you wish, where I can. But as far as my professional duties are concerned, there I must

insist upon being my own arbitrator. Regarding them I cannot brook interference even from you. I have done nothing that you should take exception to. By the merest accident I went into the theatre. The rest you know. A sick woman needed my help and I gave it to her. I would do the same thing again, without hesitation."

"I see you mean to persevere in your own course in spite of all I can do or say, and that I shall have to accept the situation as best I can. Well, be it so. But, resolutely, I will not have any further publicity in this affair, nor the linking of your name even in the most remote degree with that of a professional woman."

It would be impossible to convey the amount of scorn Mrs. Winthrop threw into the word "woman."

"How can you be so narrow," inquired Tom, twisting his mustache angrily. "Good heavens! I never knew you to make such a ridiculous observation before."

"Let us not discuss the matter further, my son," she said icily.

"As you please," taking up his hat and coat.

"Is Dorothy in the parlor?"

"I think so," resuming her work.

"I am going in to her for a moment, and then I shall stop and see Beatrice."

"I think that very advisable."

"Good-night," stooping to kiss her brow.

"Good-night."

"You are not vexed with me?"

"Oh, no," sweetly, "Good-night! Be sure you do not take cold. And, Tom, ring for some coal before you go, will you? The wind has surely changed; it must

be easterly, I think, and easterly winds are so treacherous." She shivered slightly and drew her shawl closer about her, and Tom having done as she requested, without any further observation walked away.

Beatrice had spent a trying day. Upon her return home she found, to her unspeakable annoyance, that her father, who rarely concerned himself with her, had seen the notice in the morning journal, and seized upon the occasion to express an opinion regarding it. He was about stepping into his carriage when Dorothy drove her to the door, but he followed her into the house, as if in no wise concerned whether he reached his office before noon.

"I suppose you are aware that your precious Tom has been getting his name mixed up with a theatre woman's?" he said brusquely.

"You seem to forget, Father," she replied haughtily, "that Tom is a physician, and in that capacity is often forced into the attendance of even such."

"Physician be d——!" (Mr. Bell was not always choice of his language when ruffled); "was he the only one in town?"

"No; but he was the only one upon the spot."

"Well, you want to keep your eyes open. If he intends to connect himself with this class of people, why the sooner I know it the better. I'm not going to leave half a million of my hard-earned money for him to squander. So you'd better see to it."

"I daresay Tom is not altogether dependent upon your bounty," interposed Beatrice, shrugging her shoulders, "and, besides, you take a good deal for granted."

"Perhaps I do," grimly, "but that's my way."

"It's a very bad way, and I would advise—"

"See here, Beatrice, I won't have any more of this kind of talk," interrupted Mr. Bell, "and you will bear in mind what I say, if you please."

"It isn't so agreeable that I am liable to forget it," she replied bitterly. Then, "Is there anything else you have to say to me?"

"No, I've had my say," he retorted, opening the door and springing into the carriage.

Mr. Bell was what is termed a successful man; that is, he was very clever in speculation, and entirely engrossed in amassing more and more gold to swell his already well-filled coffers. A hard man but a lucky one. A man who had no compassion for those less fortunate than himself; who could forgive crime rather than poverty.

He would have liked a richer husband for his daughter than Tom Winthrop (social distinction being of no import to him), but Beatrice had said: "I will have no other," and he knew from the compression of her lips and the gleam of her eyes that she meant it. So he gave up the idea of linking her fortune with one equally great, but he did not cease to regret it.

Beatrice heaved a deep sigh of relief when he had driven away. Truly he was growing more trying every day. As she stood there alone for a moment, somehow the thought of her dead mother came into her mind, and she shuddered slightly as she recalled the small, pale woman who had borne so much and borne it so uncomplainingly.

Mr. Bell's married life had been a failure; or so he did not hesitate to inform the meek little woman, an unfortunate fate threw in his path. In everything she

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had been a disappointment. He expected she would bear him sturdy children. Alas! she bore him but one girl, and his contempt for her increased every time he looked at it. He never paid the slightest heed to the child, until one day, for some trifling offense, he struck her, and she turned like a little fury upon him. Then he grew fond of her, and repeatedly declared that she was worthy of being his child. He never opposed or set his will against hers from that time on, and when in her early girlhood his wife died giving birth to a crippled boy, he hugged Beatrice closely to him, and said he had but one child. And the little boy was consigned to the servants' care. No one believed he would live. At ten he was no larger than a child of five, a wizened-faced little creature, with pale, hollow cheeks, long, yellow hair, and great supernaturally brilliant eyes. His nurse called him "Teets," and the name clung to him. Mr. Bell did not think it worth his while to find a better one for his son. He never walked, but he could use his hands, and by means of them dragged his shrunken frame along. Teets's face was beautiful to look at. His soul seemed to shine in his soft, blue eyes, and a whole world of thought was reflected in his pure countenance. He never complained or longed to be with other boys; but he would sit at the window and watch them at their sports, and clap his little hands and laugh merrily at their pranks. He had a voice like an angel, and could sing the most wonderful songs. No one knew where he learned his stranger melodies, but he once told Tom, whom he loved better than any one else, that they came to him in his dreams at night. Mr. Bell never manifested aught save calm indifference for him, and Beatrice, in her

daily round of pleasure, did not find much time to devote to his care. In fact, she rarely gave him a thought unless he chanced to get in her way, when she would say: "Go to Leontine, Teets," and the next moment forget all about him. And the child never questioned such a command; he would obediently drag himself off, not to the nurse whose harsh voice grated upon his ears, but to some remote corner where, unheard, undisturbed, he could sing. What a world of melody awakened at the first sound of his voice! Harmonious strains, that followed one upon another, rising, falling, gaining in depth and sweetness, and then, like a gentle sigh, dying into silence. At the first note the darkened room would fade, and a swift rush of fragrant wind transport Teets to a land of eternal summer. All around stretched gardens with smooth velvet swards, tall, spreading trees, and beds of a thousand sweetly smelling flowers. Brooks like silver lines wound round in many a turn and curve, and on the emerald banks flitted fantastic beings, half fairy, half mortal, aglow with golden sunbeams. To the soft cadence of the music they stepped in rhythmic measure, their gauzy forms moving rapturously in the maze of the dreamy waltz, until the last strain dying, they floated away, and were lost in the gathering gloom. For the song ended, he awakened to find that he was still in his dark corner alone. Left as usual to himself to-day, he sat before the nursery fire, gazing intently into the red coals. Without the trees were white with snow, and the wind whistled shrilly through the ice-covered boughs. Teets shivered and crept closer within the warmth of the grate, and at that moment Beatrice came in.

"Well, Teets," she said as she sat down near him, "how are you this morning?"

"Pretty cold," he replied, stretching out his thin hand; "cold as ice!"

"You must not go too near the fire," cautioned Beatrice absently.

"The fire is warm," murmured Teets; "I like it."

"It don't like you, though," twirling her engagement ring round and round upon her finger, and thinking what a big diamond it was. "And if you go too close it will burn you."

"I shouldn't mind," persisted Teets, clasping his knees with his arms, and resting his chin upon them; "because then I should live in some of those beautiful red rooms in there."

"Now, see here, Teets," recalling herself, and speaking severely, "don't talk like a simpleton. Keep away from the fire, as I tell you. Where's Leontine?"

"Gone, I guess."

"She has no business to leave you alone."

"But I like to be alone. I can't think when Leontine's here. She is so big!"

"You shall not be by yourself," decided Beatrice, "and whether you like it or not, Leontine must stay here. Don't you want to take a drive?"

"No, I'd freeze."

"You can do just as you like about it," ringing to go, "but remember, when Leontine comes back, tell her to stay here; and keep away from the fire or you will burn yourself, and then I will have all the trouble with you."

With this Beatrice sought her own apartment, and was soon lost in moody thought. She had not seen

Tom for over a week. Never demonstrative or assiduous in his attentions to her, she was far too sensible a woman to exact what should have been freely given, and was, by reason of her engagement, rightly hers.

But no woman likes to be overlooked. Indifference is very hard to bear. To be loved was not all essential to her, though she had secretly chafed under Tom's treatment from the beginning. But when it transpired that others than herself noted his delinquency, then the affair began to assume a serious shape. Mrs. Winthrop had not hesitated to express a decided opinion upon the subject, and seeing that she had noticed it, how many more of her friends and acquaintances? Society, so eager for gossip, might for aught she could tell, be busy even now with speculation. She grew white at the bare thought. What should she do? How set about to discover the truth? There seemed no practical way beyond awaiting further developments, and fortunately for her, she knew how to be patient. Numerous callers claimed her attention during the balance of the day, and she found herself looking intently into the faces of each and every one, in the vain hope of seeing something of her fears reflected therein. She was prepared to meet it with the bravery of a lion if it came, but nothing occurred to call from her aught save forbearance. When Tom came that evening, he stumbled over Teets in the hall. He was very fond of the boy, who bestowed upon him a wealth of affection in return. He now stooped down and lifted him up in his arms. Carrying him into the room, he seated him comfortably on his knee.

"Well, Teets," he said gently, stroking the long yellow hair.

"Well, Tom," replied Teets.

"How are you? How do you feel?"

"Happy."

"Happy! Why?"

"Because you came."

"You like me to come, then?"

"Oh," drawing a deep breath and fastening his great eager eyes upon him, "so much!"

"And that's a great deal, I infer. Do you love me, Teets?"

"Better than God!"

"How's that?"

"I can see you and I can't see him. God is so far away from where I live."

Tom kissed him and changed the subject.

"What have you been doing to-day, Teets?"

"Oh! looking in the fire."

"What did you see in the fire to look at?"

"Pictures; and I made songs about them, too."

"Let's have a song."

"No," putting his fingers to his lips, "for Beatrice would come, and I should be sent away."

"You like to be with me, Teets?"

"I like it the best thing in the world!"

"You shall be some day, when Bee and I are married; and I am going to take you over to Europe to a great doctor there, and see if he can't think of a way to enable you to walk around on your feet. You would be glad of that, Teets?"

"Is the doctor like you, Tom?"

"Nicer, by far."

"Will it be soon?"

"A few months hence."

"Is it a real promise, Tom?"

"A real promise!"

"And you won't forget it?"

"Forget it? no," promised Tom, little thinking what good cause he should have to remember it when the time came, which it did later on.

"Do they take boys who have no legs in Heaven?" asked Teets, pursuing his own train of thought.

"They take all good boys in Heaven."

"Are you good?"

"Far from it, my lad."

"Then I hope they won't take me there; I want to go with you when I die."

Tom laughed, and at that moment Beatrice came in.

"Why do you hold that heavy child?" she asked.

"Heavy?" replied Tom, rising and shaking hands with her; "I wish he were, poor little chap!"

"He ought to be in bed. Leontine is waiting for him. Come, Teets."

"I will carry him up," offered Tom, half strangled by the little arms which fastened themselves tightly round his neck, "and then he will be satisfied."

"It is ridiculous for you to be so annoyed. A servant can do just as well."

"Teets don't think so—do you, Teets? You see," in answer to another hug, "Teets has good taste. I commend his judgment. Come, my boy, don't choke me. There, that's better. Now, let's be off!" Whereupon Tom carried him away, holding him tenderly in his arms.

Beatrice never appeared to better advantage than she did on this particular evening, or so Tom thought, as they sat chatting pleasantly together. She was

looking her best, too, and whatever her doubts, nothing in her manner betrayed them. He never before found her so agreeable, and her charming frankness led him to open his heart and speak freely of all that had occurred. "He had done perfectly right," she maintained, "and had all her sympathy and support, and must never hesitate to do as he thought best, under any circumstances." She inquired into every detail, and expressed great solicitude for Generva. When she touched so feelingly on the sick girl, Tom actually felt himself conceiving a tenderness for her; and what wonder, when she entered so entirely into his views? If he thought her a comfortable sort of girl before, he thought her doubly so now. Her graciousness even extended to Eric, that most deplorable of culprits, and she went so far as to find an excuse for the part he had played in the little drama. Tom never commended his mother's choice so much as he did upon this occasion. What a wife Beatrice would make for him!

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIRST ACT IN HER DRAMA.

THE Acme Dramatic Combination sustained a severe shock, owing to the illness of its star. Notwithstanding all the efforts of Mr. Slick and his thoroughgoing mother, the performances were but sparsely attended. Holders of tickets returned them and demanded back their money, and in consequence of this, and the general worthlessness of the performances, the receipts fell off nightly. To crown matters, Generva continued ill each

day, demonstrating that Dr. Winthrop had not been mistaken in his diagnosis of her case. The company continued to perform, changing the bill repeatedly, and exerting themselves to their utmost to please the few people who saw fit to patronize them; but even so their efforts brought small profit to their manager, whose bank account, meagre at all times, succumbed entirely under the severe drain upon it. The engagement, originally for one week, had been extended to another, notably from the fact that the company to follow had disbanded before reaching its destination.

Meanwhile, Generva spent much of her time in company with Tom Winthrop. He took to running in after office hours, when he knew her people were engaged in the theatre, to relieve the nurse, he explained to his conscience, which seemed suddenly and unaccountably to rouse him to a sense of his own shortcomings. Not that his conduct was indiscreet, but from the inner feeling of culpability which came over him every time he entered the shabby little apartment in any but a strictly professional capacity. On this particular evening the object of his scruples was sitting up for the first time. She looked very pale and very pretty in a dull blue gown, relieved at the ears and throat by gold ornaments. In fact, there was quite an Oriental air about her, as she half reclined upon the pillows of an easy-chair, her ruddy hair twisted into a Greek coil, held in place by a dagger, and all the soft folds of her loose robe falling gracefully about her serpentine form.

"We have Cleopatra to-night," said Tom, standing a little off, and fixing the gaze of two very admiring eyes upon her. "Cleopatra to the life!—all but the

flowers." A bunch which he had brought her in the morning lay scattered in her lap. "They are out of keeping with the rest of the costume. Give them to me. So, now we have it to perfection. If I were an artist I should like to paint you just as you are."

"Not as I am," she interposed, "but as I look, if you wished to make a Cleopatra of me. In reality there is a wide difference between the Egyptian queen and myself."

"True," agreed Tom, handing her back the flowers, "there is a difference. You only bear resemblance to one of Shakespeare's women, and she, of course, you know is Juliet."

"I do not feel flattered to be compared to her," rejoined Generva; "she was but a childish creature. Her great passion was the one strong point in her otherwise colorless character."

"And yet," mused Tom, "she was brave enough to die."

"To die when one has nothing to live for cannot be hard," argued Generva.

"To die under any circumstances is hard," maintained Tom.

"For some people, perhaps," she agreed, "but under the same circumstances it would not have been for me."

She grew very grave when she uttered these words, and sighed, and Tom, by way of turning the conversation, said:

"Give me a rose, will you?"

"Not a rose," putting her hand over the one he would have taken, "a pansy, if you like. It is for thought, you know, and I would be very glad to feel that you would keep me a little in your memory when

I am gone." Her voice fell to a whisper, and she handed him the flower.

"Keep you in my memory," murmured Tom, as though to himself; then after a pause, and with sudden abruptness, "My God! how am I ever going to forget you?"

His words were earnest, intense, passionate, and they brought the hot color into her face. In a sort of dazed impulse she rose to her feet, but she was very weak, and as she would have moved from him, a convulsive trembling seized her. She shivered in every limb. Tom rose also. He had paled at sight of her emotion. For a moment he stood irresolute, as if not quite certain what course to pursue; then with quick decision he made a move forward, and stretching out his arms, drew her gently back into her chair. As he did so the door opened and Eric entered.

"I knocked twice," he declared; "if you didn't say come in, why of course there is nothing left for me to do but go out."

The interruption was timely, and both felt it to be so. Of course being a woman, she was mistress of herself upon the instant, and welcomed the new comer with perfect ease and affability. A moment later she was talking in her brightest vein.

"Did you know I was writing a play," she said to Eric.

"What! a blue stocking?" exclaimed Eric with mocking solemnity. "I am surprised. I shouldn't have believed you guilty of literary aspirations."

"Shouldn't you? Well, I am. I began the first act to-night."

"Indeed! let's hear it."

"Not for the world, it is fearfully crude—besides it isn't finished. You did not suppose that I could write an act in a single night, did you? I have only begun to map out the plot."

"I did not know."

"Yes, you did. You knew perfectly that such a thing would be impossible."

"Did I?"

"Yes; and you have not the least faith in me. You don't think I shall succeed."

"I don't think any woman can succeed in writing a good play—at least they never do."

"But I have such an excellent plot."

"Excellent plots don't always make excellent plays."

"You are very discouraging."

"Not at all. You must not think so. On the contrary, I am much interested in your project. Do you mean to play in this piece yourself?"

"If it does not verify your prediction, and turn out hopelessly worthless, I mean to enact the title-rôle."

"Let's hear the plot."

"Not for the world!"

"Why?"

"Because I am afraid of you."

"I assure you I am perfectly harmless; I leave it to Tom."

Tom all this while had been very distraught. He endeavored to appear natural, and follow the conversation, but Eric readily perceived his abstraction, and seized upon the first pretext to propose their departure. He had paid Generva several visits in company with his friend, in spite of his first refusal to do so. But he did it with a motive. He did not propose that

Tom should be compromised if he could help it, which he thought he could, by watching the growth of the intimacy, and stepping in and putting an end to it if occasion required. It cannot be said that he took Generva into any consideration in this plan to serve Tom, for he did not. He liked her well enough, in a Platonic kind of way, but he would have sacrificed her without a moment's hesitation rather than her connection with his friend should have given rise to comment to the latter's discredit. He scented something in the air now, hence his desire to get Tom away. He would have liked to know what the something was, but he knew better than to broach the subject. When they reached the house, however, and were sitting over their cigars, in confidential and friendly attitude, Tom began of his own accord, and made what as a boy he would have termed a "clean breast of it." He admitted that his abstracted demeanor was due to the interview with Generva which Eric had interrupted. He did not hesitate to reveal the exact nature of this interview, and many others which had taken place between the young actress and himself. He confessed to being more interested in her than he had ever been in any one before, but he could readily account for this. The nature of her position bore upon his sympathies. She was dependent upon unsympathetic and grasping people. She was wholly at their mercy. Left a tiny babe to be nursed by Mr. Slick's mother, her parents at first paid liberally for her maintenance. They were Italians of a high class, who for some mysterious reason wished to keep the child's existence a secret. Neither the mystery nor the child were of any consequence to Mrs. Slick, but the quarterly payments were, and so

long as they came regularly to hand, neither the one nor the other suffered. But when several months went by, and the allowance ceased, things grew serious, and it looked as if the child would have to bear the penalty, for Mrs. Slick decided to deliver up her charge to its natural guardians, whether they liked it or not. Its natural guardians, however, had disappeared and left no trace, and she never succeeded in finding them, but she did succeed in turning her charge to a profitable account. Tom went on to say that the girl under these circumstances could not be other than very unhappy. Indeed, she had not hesitated to confess as much to him in one of their long talks, and alarmed him not a little by saying:

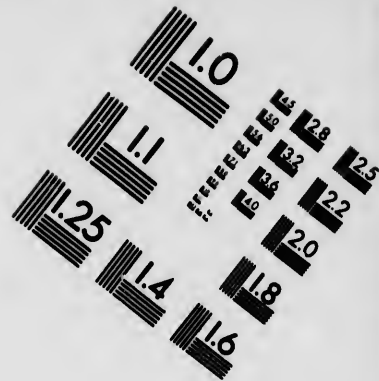
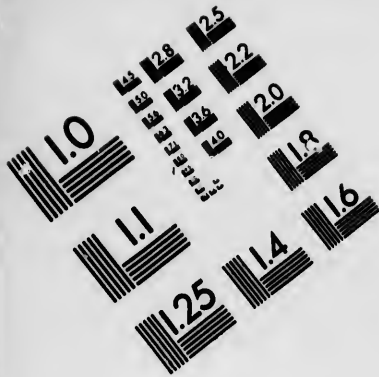
"I hate the ties by which I am bound. If I were only free I might shape my own future."

There was something so earnest and yet so childish in her words, that he forthwith proceeded to read her a lecture. He had said: "Do you look far enough ahead to realize what being free means? do you know what your true position would be? Listen, and I will tell you. You would be alone, with neither relatives nor friends to care for you, deficient in the knowledge and experience requisite to contend with life; and worse still, lacking the physical strength to endure its hardships. You have heretofore lived within your art, and idealist that you are, while you may have formed a theory as to material things, you cannot possibly have arrived at a practical understanding of them. This was just what I said to her, Eric," declared Tom.

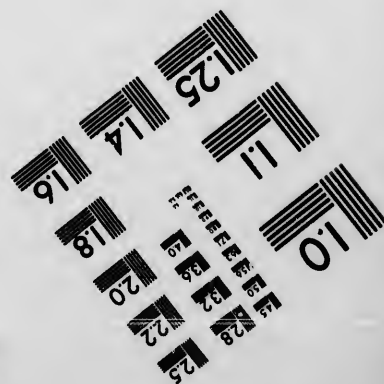
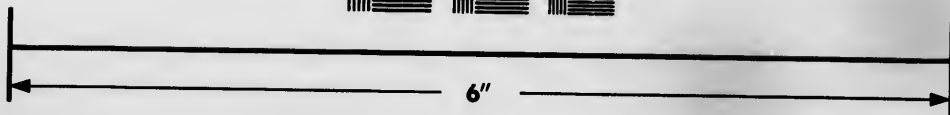
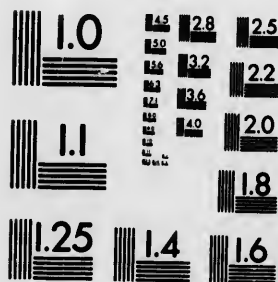
A good deal of puffing followed. After a long silence Eric asked:

"Is that all, Tom?"





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"All what?" sharply.

"All there is to it?"

"Certainly it is. What do you mean?"

"Nothing; I merely asked for information."

"Now that you have the information what do you think of it?"

"Oh, as to that," moving uneasily in his chair, "I think your friendship is in danger of carrying you too far if you're not careful."

"I have not the slightest wish of carrying it beyond a practical plan, by which a friendless woman may be served. Of course, I could not hope to accomplish much single-handed. Our folks are so confoundedly prudish, whatever I should do would have to be done without their knowledge, and then, if they were to find me out, where would I be?"

"In deep water," replied Eric, stretching out his long legs, and thrusting his hands into his pockets.

"There can be no two opinions about that. It is very easy and Quixotic for a fellow like you to do the grand benevolent by a friendless young girl in theory or in books, but it is risky business in reality."

"At any rate, I depend upon you to tell me how it is to be done," persisted Tom. "You are a man of resource."

"Well, my creditors have remarked that I am somewhat endowed with that quality," retorted Eric, "but I am not sure it can be of any use to you. This is an exceptional case. Now, if it were a horse, or a cow, or a dog, or even a brick house, that you wished to dispose of, I don't doubt but with my characteristic ingenuity I should find a way. But a woman. I can't jump in and make way with such. That is your busi-

ness rather than mine, I should say. What do you think?"

"I think we ought to take her from these people."

"That would certainly be a melodramatic proceeding on our part, though, I suppose, I am a deep enough dyed villain to accomplish an abduction. But—and now comes the great question—say I succeed in carrying out my dark deed, what would we do with her ourselves? Excuse me. The more I think of it the more I dislike mixing myself up in the affair."

"Then you see no way?"

"None, unless—"

"Yes, unless—"

"One of us might marry her."

"Marry her! are you in earnest?" Tom jumped up hastily.

"I am; although upon second thought I don't see how that could be arranged. In the first place you can't, and in the second place, I would rather not."

Tom resumed his seat and drew another cigar from his pocket.

"What *shall* we do?"

"I am blest if I know what to propose," continued Eric, puffing away at his pipe, "but I shouldn't think it a bad idea to take Dorothy into our conference. She is the one clever person I know upon whom we can rely."

"She is, for a fact," agreed Tom, "and you do her no more than justice when you say it. But, unfortunately, mother has influenced her, as you are yourself aware."

"No matter; Dorothy is all right at heart: I'd stake a good deal upon her," reflectively, "and it takes a woman to deal with a woman, anyhow."

"What do you think about Beatrice? She is very sensible, and I know she isn't biased."

"We won't trouble her about this affair, though," observed Eric drily. "When I said it took a woman to deal with a woman, I meant there are women and women, and Beatrice isn't the woman. That's not very clear, I am afraid."

"No, I confess it is not. However, I will bring Dorothy in to-morrow, and we will talk it all over with her."

"You will, you mean. She and I don't speak as we pass by, just now. That is, I do and she don't. But it is our best plan, at any rate. However, Tom, don't let this Generva Romaine take too strong a hold upon your sympathies. Remember, you are but mortal."

Tom offered no comment, but continued smoking in calm unconsciousness. E. proceeded notwithstanding:

"You see fellows are apt to have this kind of sympathetic attack once or twice in the course of their lives; warm-hearted fellows like you, particularly, and the disease is somewhat comparable to the small-pox, inasmuch as it will certainly leave its marks behind. From what I can judge, you have to deal with no ordinary woman, either, and this is one of the complications which frequently baffle even the scientist's skill. Instead of a practical Dorothy, or a worldly Beatrice, we have an ardent, hot-blooded Italian girl; calm, still and pale upon the surface, but deep-fretted, turbulent beneath. There are depths in her eyes which would frighten you if you were to gaze into them long enough; passion, poetry, romance, reckless abandonment, love and despair, are all singularly and com-

fusedly mingled there. I tell you, Tom, the nature that those eyes reveal cannot be dealt lightly with. It is all extreme. It may be none of my business, but you asked my opinion, and I give it for what it is worth. Be warned in time."

With this Eric lighted his pipe, which during his long speech had gone out, and relapsed into silence.

Tom said not a word.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW IT ENDED.

THE principal members of the Acme Dramatic Combination were assembled in the parlor of the Mee-ger House, in response to a call issued the night before by the stage manager, at the instigation of Mr. Slick. They sat in a group near the centre table, deep in speculation as to what would be the upshot of the conclave. Mr. Randolph, as the leading man, figured conspicuously among his fellow-artists. He looked worn and considerably the worse of his two weeks' work, and there was an unusual fire in his eyes. In a word, Mr. Randolph was justly indignant. He had rehearsed continually almost from morning until night; he had poured tender epithets into the ears of an unresponsive mistress; he had prompted the *Juliet* and the *Rosalind*, until he found himself mixing their lines with his own. He was called upon to loan almost every available article of his wardrobe to clothe impecunious royalty, and worse than all, during his gladiatorial contest with the wrestler, in the first act

of "As You Like It," he was actually forced, through a combination of unhappy circumstances, to stoop and pick up the front of a marble palace, which Mr. Beezer, in enacting the noble *Duke*, for the first time, by a wild and frenzied gesture, dashed from its mighty pillars. The collapse would have undoubtedly brought the performance to an abrupt and untimely end, but for the almost heroic forethought of Mr. Randolph. Waving the wrestler, who stood in the attitude of combat aside, he seized the tottering structure; restored its equilibrium, and then with undaunted mein turned and faced his adversary. The *Duke*, in a yellow embroidered piano cover and his stocking feet, stood for a moment a picture of fallen greatness, but recovering, assumed his original lofty air, and stalked majestically through the midst of his worshipful subjects, and disappeared in the palace gardens. The above was but one of a series of disasters in which Mr. Randolph figured conspicuously; and when salary day came and passed and no pay was forthcoming, he felt injured and dissatisfied beyond all expression.

"To my mind," he was saying as Mr. Beezer stalked tragically into the room, "we're going to get left. Slick isn't worth a dollar. Now, I for one do not propose to work for nothing, and either he pays me or I stop right here where I am."

Having expressed himself with what he considered a sufficient degree of scorn, he assumed an air worthy his favorite *Claude*, and drew a stogy from his pocket.

An outsider casually glancing in upon these followers of the drama, would have been struck by their various attitudes, partaking as they did largely of the characters they were called upon to perform upon the

stage. They seemed to carry their illusionary greatness along with them. The noble *Duke* was out at elbows, but there was an air of royalty about him notwithstanding. He sat rigidly upright in a cracked bottom chair, his arms folded impressively across his massive chest, lacking only the gilt paper crown to stamp his august sovereignty. There was undeniable pathos in the thought that this mighty ruler of nations, this thrice-crowned monarch, was forced to the necessity of handling baggage and running properties for the magnificent consideration of twelve dollars a week and his board. What wonder that air of noblesse? Was it not his nightly office to hurl fierce invectives at cringing and lowly menials? Perhaps he had deluded himself into the belief that he was indeed the king or emperor he impersonated. More unlikely things could well happen. Mr. Beezer was not alone in this, taking the shadow for substance. His fellow followers were all more or less imbued with it. Thus it was, though reduced to dire straits by the nonpayment of salaries, there was nothing dejected in their bearing. On the contrary, there was melodramatic heroism mingled with defiance plainly visible upon the several countenances. Mr. Beezer conducted himself after the manner of the *Duke* before the marble palace fell. Mr. Vernon retained the sarcastic leer of the jester, with much of that privileged person's effrontery. Mr. Rush's features vividly recalled his *Jacques* of the forest of Arden, and Mr. Randolph united to the dash and grace of *Orlando*, the kindling ire of the wrestler's combatant. The ladies were equally distinguishable in this respect. One lolled upon the horse-hair sofa, in much the same position it was her habit to

strike in "The Lady of Lyons;" and Gertrude, proud of her promotion from soubrette to juvenile, assumed a dignity perfectly foreign to herself, but quite in keeping with her present place in the company,

"Randolph is so hasty," she murmured, glancing over at Mr. Rush, who growled out in reply that he didn't believe in kicking a man when he was down.

With his opinion Gertrude immediately coincided.

"None of us are starving," she drawled out lazily.

"No," put in Blanche, "and there is no use in throwing away dirty water until we get clean. I say we stick it out! What's the use of going back to New York now, even if we could get there, which we can't? There isn't a possible chance of an engagement, and jobbing don't pay. I've tried it and I know."

"So have I," agreed Gertrude. "I say stick to Slick. It's a cold day when he gets left!"

"You can bet your life it's a cold day now, then," said Mr. Beezer, applying a cotton handkerchief to his brow.

"You don't look as though you were suffering from its effects," retorted Gertrude.

"Talk is cheap," moralized Mr. Vernon, "but it don't put money in our pockets. I suppose, Blanche," with sarcasm, "there is a bare possibility of your being obliged to pay your board next summer?"

"Well, I don't ask you to do it," returned Blanche, "and in spite of anything you say, I mean to help Slick out if I can. For a few weeks at least."

"Well, damn me if I touch another trunk!" shouted Mr. Beezer.

"Shut up!" roared Mr. Rush, who had a sense of the proprieties. "Don't you know there's ladies present?"

"I guess the ladies have heard worse," sneered the irate Beezer with a frown.

"By G—, sir, they shan't hear any worse while I'm around!" replied Mr. Rush, beginning to assert himself.

"Bravo!" cried Gertrude clapping her hands.

"Be quiet!" commanded Mr. Randolph.

"For goodness sake, Warrington, leave him alone," pleaded Blanche, "what's the use of kicking up a rumpus here? I don't think we've done so badly considering the circumstances, and for all we know things may come out right in the end."

"Yes," said Mr. Randolph, "they stand a good chance of coming out right, particularly if you go on winging your lines as you did last night; you faked the part from beginning to end."

"It's a pity about you. How many cues did you give me, I wonder?"

"None, I admit, but I was too busy supplying you with words to think of cues."

"You were as shaky as I was, Mr. Randolph."

"Opinions differ, my dear," with calm superiority, "and then, it isn't quite fair to expect a juvenile to jump in at a moment's notice and play the leads."

"She pleased the public anyway," put in Mr. Vernon, championing her.

"Yes, their attendance the past week demonstrated it," replied Mr. Randolph.

"How about your own drawing power that we hear so much of?" inquired Vernon.

Mr. Randolph made no reply to this, he possibly had none to offer. Drawing himself up he said:

"You people can do as you have a mind to; I for one refuse to go on the stage Monday night unless my salary be forthcoming to-day."

"And so do I," echoed Mr. Beezer.

"And I," struck in Vernon.

"Three cheers for the strikers!" exclaimed Blanche.
"Hurrah!"

"What in the devil's all this racket about?" inquired Mr. Slick, appearing at the door with his mother. "Shut up! Who was that shrieking?"

"I," admitted Blanche.

"Your voice seems to be gaining in power," with withering scorn, "and there was room for it."

"Thanks!" in no wise abashed.

One could see at a glance that the manager of the Acme Dramatic Combination was considerably ruffled, and that his mother was in much the same condition. She flounced into the room after him, never so much as vouchsafing a good-morning.

"Ladies and gentlemen," began Mr. Slick, throwing back the lapels of his coat, "I beg you will give me your undivided attention, and I will endeavor in a few words as possible to put the question at issue before you. Of course, being aware of Miss Romaine's illness, you cannot wonder that in spite of all my efforts, we sustained a serious loss during the past two weeks. Our present prospects, I may say, are not encouraging (you will see I am perfectly frank and honest about it), but I believe by uniting our efforts we shall be able to pull through, for there will be no question about her playing Monday in L—. By leaving here this (Sunday) afternoon, and traveling all night in a caboose, I find we will arrive in good time for a rehearsal. Now, that disposed of, I will touch upon another equally important point." Here Mr. Slick cleared his throat. "You've had no salaries

this week, and were not paid in full the week before, but you have had your board."

"Such as it was," grumbled Mr. Randolph.

"One at a time, gentlemen, if you please," said Silas; "I will be through in a moment, Mr. Randolph, and ready to hear from you, sir. As I was saying, you've had your board. Now, is it not reasonable to inquire if you cannot afford the loss of a few dollars, seeing the hundreds I am obliged to let slip through my hands? I had plenty of excuse to disband—plenty! I have at this moment—but your interests are dear to me, dearer than my own," magnanimously, "and I will struggle on for your sakes to the end!" with intense feeling.

"Yes, that's all very fine," again interrupted Mr. Randolph, "but in the meantime we've got to live."

"Live!" repeated Silas, turning and regarding the speaker in astonishment, "who wants you to die? Don't I pay your board? You can't starve in a dollar a day hotel, can you?" bringing his hand down emphatically upon the table. "Ladies and gentlemen, I am doing the best I can. No man can do more! I've put up my watch," impressively, "mother's chain and half a dozen other things to purchase our railway tickets, but I've got them," slapping his breast—I've got them here! I've got money to pay the board, and the baggage, and the ads, and five dollars a piece left over for you, ladies and gentlemen; for each and every one, five dollars apiece! Now, is that coming to the front like a man or not, I want to know."

And Silas took several turns up and down the room in order to give his words time to make the desired effect.

"Come, that's fair, isn't it?" he asked, returning to his former position. "Speak up, any one who thinks I'm not working for the interest of my company."

No one made any response, odd as it may seem, and Silas continued:

"Mr. Beezer, please accompany the expressman on his rounds and see that no trunks are forgotten. You, Mr. Rush, go down to the theatre and attend to packing those drop-scenes yourself; and you, ladies and gentlemen, have all baggage ready at three sharp, and remember the train leaves the depot at four precisely. There'll be a bus," grandly, "so be on time." Having concluded his discourse, Mr. Slick, with due pomposity, drew a roll of money from his pocket and handed a five-dollar bill to each and every person present. Having done this with a great flourish, he announced that the meeting was over and passed out of the door, closely followed by his mother.

"He isn't a dandy, is he?" remarked Mr. Vernon, pocketing his money, and looking round at his companions.

"I knew he'd pull through," triumphed Blanche.

"Well," drawled Mr. Randolph, "Miss Romaine's recovery puts somewhat of a different light upon the affair, I will admit. L—— is a good show town, too; why, I played there last season with the 'Hoop-la' company, and we had a four-hundred-dollar house."

"Yes," muttered Mr. Vernon, "but last year isn't this year, and I'm sick of that old gag. If you just come back again, you'll pack the building: it's a regular chestnut."

"Go dig a grave, Vernon," suggested Rush; "that's about your forte, I guess."

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"Heavens!" exclaimed Blanche, "I wouldn't be as
dismal as he is for a hundred-dollar-a-week summer
snap. Let's go, Gertrude. It must be after twelve."

"All right! I suppose the train won't wait. Say,
Warrington, come up after a little and lock my trunk,
will you?"

"I'll come up now if you say so."

"Very well, I don't suppose it would be safe to leave
you in such lively company, anyhow; you might be-
come hilarious."

"I'm going down to have a drink, Randolph," said
Vernon, when they had taken their departure. "Will
you come?"

"I don't mind if I do," replied Randolph, who had
somewhat recovered his spirits. "Where are you
going?" to Beezer, who had picked up his hat and
was making also for the door.

"To the devil!" growled Beezer.

"Well, good luck to you!" said Randolph:

"If you get there before I do,
Just tell old Nick I'm coming too."

With this he linked arms with the comedian and sal-
lied out of the room. And thus terminated the conclave.

* * * * *

Generva was not so well upon the morning which
followed the evening of Tom's last visit. She lay very
quiet and very still, in a half-sleeping, half-waking
state. His words: "My God! how am I ever going
to forget you?" repeatedly came back to her memory.
She kept saying them over and over again, and was
glad, oh, so glad, that he had said them. But she never
asked herself what it was all to come to, for there was
nothing practical in her nature. She was governed

entirely by impulse; capable of realizing the fullest joy, or of being a prey to the deepest sorrow. A veritable child of the theatre, she had led a precarious life with the Slicks. But she knew no evil, or wrong-doing. She had lofty and high-minded instincts and thoughts. From earliest childhood associated with promiscuous people, her soul rose far above its surroundings, and was never tainted by them, so that when this newfound hope began to grow in her heart, it was destined to be the blossom of a singularly pure and beautiful flower.

Lying contentedly upon her pillow, she dreamed the sweet dream of youth and love. All unmindful of the time, it sped rapidly away until Janet, the nurse, rubbed her eyes and asked if she had slept very long. At the same moment, Nemesis, in the shape of Mrs. Slick, bustled noisily in.

"Come, my girl," she said briskly to the nurse, "stir yourself and help me get these things gathered up. We're going away, and the men are waiting for the trunk. Look sharp, now, and don't stand staring. Are you deaf?" giving her a shake, as a gentle reminder that she was in earnest and meant business.

"Law!" exclaimed Janet, who was about half awake. "How you do flurry one. What things do you mean, and what trunk are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about Miss Romaine's things, to be sure. Whose else should I be bothering my head about? Don't you understand the English language? I tell you we're going away and the men are waiting for the trunk."

"Sakes alive! you don't mean that you're going to take her?" pointing to the bed. "Why, she ain't so

much as walked a step yet. She couldn't put a foot under her if she'd try."

"Never you mind about that," snapped Mrs. Slick; "I'll attend to her. Just help me unfasten this strap, will you, and stop wasting so much time in talk."

"But whatever will Dr. Winthrop say, ma'am? Oh, he'll blame it all on me," wringing her hands and looking around in a helpless, dazed fashion.

"You do as you're told, and don't meddle in other people's concerns. Here," giving the strap a smart tug, "hold that! Now lift out the tray. That's right, put it down—don't stand there holding it like a simpleton; go and bring me those things that hang in yonder closet, and don't be all day about it, either."

"Oh, dear, dear!" wept Janet, tears running down her cheeks. "It's the most dreadful thing I ever heard of. And she so ill."

"I'll box your ears in a moment, now see if I don't," threatened Mrs. Slick, looking up from her knees.

"But what am I to say to the doctor when he comes?" inquired the girl, wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron, and handing over one article of clothing after another, which Mrs. Slick hurriedly bundled into the tray. "What will I tell him when he asks me where she has gone? oh, for mercy's sake, wait until he gets here!"

"Don't come near me, you fool!" shouted Mrs. Slick from the floor; "don't, or I'll throw something at your head. Go and open those shutters; it is as dark as a dungeon in this place."

Reluctantly Janet did her bidding, throwing up the shades that Tom had been so careful to keep lowered, and letting in a stream of sunlight that fell directly upon Generva's face.

"The light is bad for her," said Janet; "I'd better close them a little."

"You'd better do nothing of the kind. She's got to get used to it. Let them shades alone, and come here and help me get her dressed."

Generva might have been dead for all the sign she made. She lay like one lifeless, staring straight before her. Too weak to offer any resistance, she passively submitted. Her clothes hung loosely on her wasted body. But Mrs. Slick paid no heed to this. Sentiment was not in her line. She hurried through her task with all the speed possible, and even gave the man a lift with the trunk, in such a hurry was she to get it out of the way. Arranging things to her satisfaction, she rang the bell, summoned her son, and after holding a short colloquy with him, bustled off, leaving him in charge.

Janet retreated to a remote corner and gazed disconsolately out of the window, and Silas sat down by Generva's side, asking her how she found herself, anyway? said she'd make a first-rate straight ghost, and then ventured to take her hand. She did not move or make the slightest sign that she had heard him.

"Stubborn, ain't you?" he asked. "Well, that don't put me out any, so you needn't try it. Spunky, cause you got to go, eh? well I vow! Been resting in bed for two weeks and not ready to get up yet. Come, speak to me, I won't stand any confounded airs. Don't want to leave the doctor, eh? A mash, I guess. Gad! you're getting on, Gen, if I know anything about it."

All this in an undertone heard only by her.

"It's about right I was taking you away, if this

Janet; "I'd better
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? A mash, I guess.
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ly by her.
you away, if this

kind of thing has been going on long, and it's time
you were getting on your wraps, too," looking at the
clock. "Here, you Janet, suppose you make yourself
useful for once in your life. Get her cloak and hat,
and veil; let's have the veil by all means! It's freez-
ing cold out. Where's her gloves?"

"In the pocket, sir," said Janet, "but oh," with a
fresh burst of tears, "what shall I tell the doctor?
He cautioned me about keeping her so quiet; why I
wasn't even to let in the light on account of her eyes,
and here she is dressed and up and the sun streaming
in and—oh, goodness, I don't know whatever'll happen
to her!"

"Don't you worry," assured Silas; "I'll take good
care of her, she'll be all the better of a little exercise;
and as for the doctor, don't fret, that'll be fixed all
right. You go to him for your pay. He hired you."

"It isn't my pay, sir!" retorted Janet indignantly.
"I'm not thinking of that; I'm thinking what an awful
shame it is to drag her out of bed like this, and she as
weak as a kitten, and—"

"Hasn't that girl done her chin-music yet?" inter-
rupted Mrs. Slick in the doorway, covered from head
to foot in shawls and carrying a couple of valises. The
bus is here, you'd better carry her down, the stairs is
so steep."

"All right," replied Silas. "Come along, my girl;
wait, let me get a good hold. I don't want you to fall if
I can help it. Now we're all right—go ahead, Mother,
and I'll follow; you'd better strike a match, Janet.
This hall is almost dark; I don't propose to stumble
down the steps, and holes in carpets sometimes do trip
even a steady fellow like me. That's it; so, good-bye!

you go to the doctor for your pay. He hired you. I'd nothing whatever to do with it, nothing at all."

"Oh, you serpent!" cried Janet after him. "I hope you'll meet with Satan's own luck. The small-pox would be too good for you. Taking her off like that. What would the doctor have said had he seen her, and what will he say when he sees me?" Tormenting herself with such speculations she sat like one dazed, looking about the disordered apartment, and making not the slightest move toward setting it to rights. In just this position Tom found her, when a couple of hours later, without the least intimation of what had transpired, he rapped at the door. For a moment he stood speechless upon the threshold, and then with an exclamation of astonishment demanded what it meant. Between tears and sobs Janet told him the story.

"And, oh!" she moaned, "I'll never forget the terrible look on her face."

"Did—did she leave a message for me?" he inquired with forced composure.

"None, sir, and how could she? They never left her a moment."

"Go down-stairs and pay your bill," he said, thrusting a banknote in her hand, "and you need not come back until I ring for you—you understand?"

"Yes, sir," folding the money carefully, and hurrying away to do his bidding.

Left to himself, Tom stood for some little time lost in thought. Then he deliberately set to work and made an examination of the apartment. He searched the bureau drawers, the closets, the mantelpiece—every place where there was a possibility of finding some belonging of hers. Finally he turned to the bed,

which was just as she had been lifted from it. He laid his hand gently upon the pillow where he knew her head had rested, and here his eyes fell upon the withered bunch of flowers which he himself had given her the morning before. So she had left him a message after all!

CHAPTER IX.

THE MIDNIGHT VISITOR.

THREE uneventful weeks followed the departure of the Acme Dramatic Combination from D—, and Mrs. Winthrop felt that a great weight had been lifted from her mind. She knew from discreet inquiries set afoot (Mrs. Winthrop was a woman who took time by the forelock) just how assiduous Tom had been in his attentions to the actress. She was furthermore well aware that he had grown less and less mindful of the obligations due his betrothed. She had indeed seriously meditated taking active measures of interference, when, to her great relief, the matter adjusted itself. She was no sooner in possession of the information than she hurried with it to Beatrice. Together they discussed the affair at length, Mrs. Winthrop giving it as her opinion that Tom had been inveigled into it, and was not to blame.

"You know," she explained, "he is so fond of doing Quixotic things; his dear father was just so (lowering her voice a little as she spoke of her dead husband). He will get over these little eccentricities when he is married. A sensible woman will exercise a great

power over him. And he is fond of you, Bee, as fond as it is in his nature to be of any one."

Beatrice recalled the many days that had gone by since she set eyes upon her delinquent lover, and she marveled how his mother (knowing the truth) could have the assurance to touch upon his fondness for her. But she had too much tact to give even the slightest intimation of her impressions. In her own mind she knew that he cared no more for her than he did for a dozen other girls of his acquaintance, and that the affair with the theatre woman (as her father expressed it) was far more serious than Mrs. Winthrop would admit.

"You see," said Tom's mother as she reclined among the cushions of an easy-chair, toying with a costly hand-screen, "these theatrical people are creatures of the deepest design, and I do not doubt that this one brought all her arts to bear upon that misguided boy. Of course she knew it would annoy us, or she wouldn't have found the least pleasure in doing it. I am very thankful that it stopped where it did. I do not doubt that Tom is thoroughly disgusted and heartily ashamed of himself. I am convinced he will tell you so when he sees you."

"When he does!" replied Beatrice forcing herself to speak lightly. "It would seem that we are never to see any more of him now. Don't you think so?"

"No-o, not exactly, my dear. Tom has his professional duties; they consume the better part of his time, remember. And then she—this woman—but we won't say anything more about her. She has gone, and we are never likely to hear of her again."

"I suppose Tom only did what he considered his duty," remarked Beatrice.

"Yes," returned Mrs. Winthrop, "and I venture to say his thanks were an unpaid bill or something equally characteristic. *Canaille* of this kind have no conscience."

"It is a great pity his kindness should have been so misplaced," murmured Beatrice absently.

"If he had only consulted *me*," lamented Mrs. Winthrop, "I should have warned him; but," with a sigh, "young men are wiser than their mothers in this generation."

"It is too bad that Eric induced him to go there that night, for of course he must have done so—Tom never thinks of the theatre himself. It is a miserable place."

"Yes," assented Mrs. Winthrop, "Eric is to blame as usual. Why could he not let Tom alone? All the actresses in Christendom couldn't have done him any harm, or have succeeded in making him more Bohemian than he is."

"I am told," queried Beatrice, "that they are a lawless set."

"Lawless?" echoed Mrs. Winthrop, "why, my dear, that does not begin to express it. Such tales as I have heard—oh!" holding up her jeweled hands in horror, "I should not even think of repeating them to you."

* * * * *

Meantime the subject of this discussion stood in her dressing-room, which consisted of a sheet suspended across a couple of wings, making up for the nightly performance. Matters had gone from bad to worse with her. She was unable to sustain herself in the various plays Mr. Slick saw fit to cast, and failed through sheer weakness to rouse the public to any degree of enthusiasm. The company now tottered upon

the verge of ruin. Four weeks had gone by without the payment of salaries, and matters had come to the point when it became necessary to carry one or two hotel clerks from place to place in lieu of unpaid hotel bills, until the receipts were sufficient to cancel their obligations.

The same evening that Mrs. Winthrop sat with Beatrice and discussed Generva, a climax was reached in the Acme Dramatic Combination. The play was "Romeo and Juliet," and a fair audience had assembled to witness it. The orchestra finished the overture; everything was in readiness, when Mr. Beezer came forward and announced his intention of not going through with his part unless his money was forthcoming without any further delay. Mr. Slick was sent for, and came hurriedly upon the scene of revolt. He stormed, swore and admonished, and finally engaged in a hand-to-hand encounter with the rebellious striker. But all to no avail. Mr. Beezer said he wouldn't, and he evidently meant it. The audience began to manifest impatience at the unwarrantable delay. The manager of the house was at his wit's end. The company was in debt to him and he took a risk in making a further advance.

"Can't you cut that man's part out?" he demanded, tearing his hair.

Silas groaned.

"Can't you, I say?"

"No, I can't," he yelled; "he don't play one part, he plays five!"

"That settles it," said the manager, handing the rebel ten dollars out of his own pocket. "Does that satisfy you—you wolf?" he inquired.

"Yes, for to-night," muttered Beezer, stalking off.

"Then ring up," ordered Silas, "and the next man that comes this dodge on me, I'll punch his head, demned if I don't!"

No sooner had Mr. Beezer flourished his banknote in the faces of his less fortunate colleagues, than the insurrection became general and the issue inevitable. Mr. Slick was simply beside himself. Never of an enduring or unselfish disposition, his financial difficulties brought into prominence his worst qualities. As he saw his foothold slipping slowly but surely from under him, and utter ruin staring him in the face, he grew almost ferocious in his bearing toward those unfortunate enough to be connected with him. His mother laid their whole trouble to Generva. What *she*, poor girl, had to endure at this period passes all power of description. Forced to rehearse with the people who made things as unpleasant for her as they could; to appear upon the stage despite her bodily suffering, and pursued at all times by recriminations, sleep rarely visited her. Night after night she lay awake, and day after day left her food untouched upon her plate. Exhausted nature at last gave out, and she fell seriously ill again. Mr. Slick raged like a lion when his mother brought this intelligence to him, and swore that he would have no more doctors to turn her head and make her believe herself worse than she really was.

The discovery of a ring, given her by Tom as a keepsake, had made a deep impression upon him. For years he had been wont to regard her as his own particular property, belonging solely and without question to him and his. The thought of her forming new ties had never suggested itself to his imagination, and but

for this, probably would never have done so; for Mr. Slick held his own attractions too high even to suspect, much less fear a rival. He had been a little in love with her for a long time—a very little, it is true—and he had told his mother that some day or other he would make her his wife. But since the advent of Dr. Winthrop, he somehow became vaguely conscious that she was farther than ever from his reach.

Thus in the midst of his various other difficulties, he was torn with a consuming jealousy. He now began to realize that he had made a mistake in letting the grass grow under his feet, and he suddenly resolved to make up for lost time and marry her at once. That she would demur never for a moment suggested itself, and with a bold determination to have it settled, he also bought a ring (on time) and announced to his mother his intention.

"Things are in a pretty mess for a wedding," she sneered.

"Well, that's neither here nor there," retorted Silas. "I suppose you'd like Gen to slip through our fingers?"

"No danger of that, she knows which side her bread's buttered on."

"At all events I'm not going to take any chances. I meant to marry her some time, and I don't see why I shouldn't do it now."

As Mrs. Slick made no reply to this, Silas turned on his heel and took himself off to Generva. He found her in her room, reading. She started a little when he entered, but she did not speak until he said:

"I've brought you something, Gen. Guess what it is?"

"How should I know?" turning to him in surprise.

"That's so," he agreed, "how should you? Well," pulling the box from his pocket, "I've brought you a ring, that'll knock the one the doctor gave you silly. Look at that!" opening the lid and holding it between his fingers. "What do you say to a ring of such size? It's a beauty, ain't it?"

"Why do you give it to me?" asked Generva, who never remembered receiving a present from him before.

"Why?" with increasing amiability; "because I like you: there, you have it!"

She made no response to this, but there was something in his face that sent a cold chill creeping through her veins.

"Let's have your hand, and we'll see which it fits best," said Silas, taking her cold limp fingers in his own. "I guess we'll put it on this one: there, how's that? Looks kind of nice and shiny, don't it?" holding the hand between his eyes and the light, and of a sudden placing his lips upon it.

"Why, what's up?" she had drawn it quickly away.

"What makes you do that?"

"Shy? 'cause I kissed it? Oh, come now, you mustn't be shy, because I'm going to marry you. I'm going to do it right straight off, if you'll give your consent."

The words bore a fearful significance. For a moment she could scarcely believe her senses. She had never anticipated or suspected such a proposal. But one quick glance at his eager, flushed countenance was convincing, and with a sickening feeling of horror she arose to her feet.

"What do you think?" he inquired rising also.

"Come, let's have an answer."

"I cannot marry you," she replied firmly, slipping the ring from her finger and handing it to him; "take it back again."

"Take it back!" gasped Silas, starting forward; "take it back! why what do you mean?"

"I mean what I say, that I cannot marry you."

"You cannot marry me!" repeated Silas. "You'll have to give me another answer, my girl. I won't take *can't* from you."

"I *will* not, then," said Generva, setting her lips firmly together.

"You will not?" he replied almost mechanically.

"Why, you little fool, you don't know what you're talking about. Not marry me? well, that's a joke!" and he actually laughed aloud as though he enjoyed it.

"I will not marry you," she repeated, growing white.

"Let that end it!"

"You won't?"

"I won't!"

"You won't marry me? well, by gad, madam, we'll see! There's such a thing as bringing people like you to terms, if I know anything about it, and I think I do."

The truth now dawned for the first time upon him, and he literally quivered with passion.

"Who the devil are you?" he roared, "that you say you will and you won't to me. Why, if you were where you belonged, you'd still be in the gutter, where we found you, you infernal little beggar! And you stand up there with the air of a duchess, and throw my words in my teeth. What do you mean by it? Answer me!"

"I mean what I say," she replied, her dark eyes

flashing, her slender hands clasped before her. "So spare me your insults, if you please."

"And why, may I make so bold as to inquire, why do you refuse to marry me? Do you think I am beneath the station of such a high-born lady as yourself? or," with a sarcastic leer, "is it because your head has been filled with the meaningless flattery of that damned doctor, who kept you in bed for no other purpose than to try and get a fee out of me? Is it that?" seizing hold of her and forcing her to face him, "is it? I *will* have an answer."

"You will," in a low, trembling voice. "Then you shall; it is because I hate, loathe, despise you!"

"By gad!" he exclaimed, throwing her violently from him, "you are a devil if ever I saw one."

In truth his words seemed to have roused some sort of demon within her, for she turned like a fury, and dashing him aside sprang to the bell cord.

"Go!" she commanded, with a gesture of imperious command, "or I will ring and summon the household to my assistance."

At that moment the door opened and Mrs. Slick entered the room. From the outside she had heard all that had passed, and she was livid with rage.

"You ninny!" she hissed addressing her son, "to stand there like the coward you are and take that creature's insolence. Faugh! you sicken me," turning from him in disgust; "and you, my beauty, you've been showing your feathers, haven't you? Well, I like to look at you, I do," planting her hands on her broad hips; "it does my eyes good to see what a traitorous little viper I've raised. Come here; come here, I say! You won't?" as she did not move—"well, take that!

and see how you like it." She made a quick stride forward, and seizing the girl by the arm dealt her a blow that felled her to the ground. Having vented her passion in this fashion, she turned and walked away, and Silas, not knowing what else to do, followed her.

Generva lay like one stunned. For a long time she made not the slightest move; then, consciousness returning, she dragged herself to a chair and pillowed her aching head upon it. Little by little she came to herself, and realizing what had occurred, fell to crying as if her heart would break. Then, spurred on by some impulse, she staggered to her feet, but overcome by dizziness and confusion, could only totter to the bed, upon which she fell heavily. She had been wrought to the utmost during the preceding scene, and the reaction was inevitable. She shivered with horror as she called to mind the fierce anger she had felt; anger of which she had never before deemed herself capable. And then that blow. Oh, the humiliation, the shame, the cruelty of it! Outraged by the indignity, stung to the quick by the insult, she dried her eyes, and after deliberating for a moment, made a bold resolve to escape from further persecution. She would go away; no sooner had the thought flashed upon her, than with her characteristic impulse, she acted upon it. She never stopped to think or reason. Seizing her cloak, she threw it around her shoulders, and adjusting her hat, placed it well over her face, and without so much as casting a glance backward, walked noiselessly out of the room. By a lucky accident she met with no one, and succeeded in passing unobserved from the house into the street. It was verging upon

five o'clock as she emerged from the hotel, but the short winter's day had drawn to a close, and the shadows of night were falling. Walking swiftly along the dimly lighted pavement, she proceeded in the direction of the railway depot. But the darkness soon began to confuse her. She was not well acquainted with the town, and was obliged to pause occasionally, uncertain which way to proceed; whether to turn to the right or left. Some instinct impelled her forward, however, until gasping for breath she staggered to a lamp-post and leaned heavily against it. As the glaring yellow light fell upon her, an officer, struck by her attitude, made his way to where she stood.

"What's the matter?" he inquired in a rough but not unkindly voice, "sick?"

"No," falteringly, "I—I have lost my way."

"Where do you want to go?"

"To the depot, please," gaining confidence.

"Oh, then you're all right. It's at the foot of this street, down there," pointing in the direction; "you can see it from here."

Gathering her cloak about her, she set off at a brisk gait, and was soon lost to sight in the thickness of the deepening gloom. Arriving at her destination, she sank into a seat in the general waiting-room, endeavoring to collect her scattered senses, and to think what her next move ought to be. But her head was in such a whirl, and the noise and confusion of the place so distracting, she grew dizzy and faint, and unable to concentrate her thoughts. At this critical juncture, as she sat there helpless, trembling, undecided, irresolute, the thought of Tom came suddenly to her, and with a great heart-throb she resolved to go to him.

Had he not promised to befriend her in time of need? well, what need more urgent than this? With her quick impulse and ignorance of conventionalities, she had no misgivings as to the step she meditated taking. In her extremity her heart turned instinctively to him, and her untutored mind saw no evil in following its dictates. With renewed hope she accosted an official and inquired what train she should take to get to D—?

"D—," he repeated, "why that train is in now; you want to get right on board!"

"Is—is it very far?" she asked in a feeble voice.

"Far?" looking down upon her, and thinking what a handsome girl she would be were she not so white, "well, that depends upon what you would call far. It's a seven hours' run by the express."

"Thank you!" turning away to gain time for a moment's reflection.

"Shall I see you aboard?" gallantly.

"If—if you please."

"You have a ticket, of course?"

"A ticket? no;" alas, she had forgotten that.

"You can't very well travel without it," explained the man, twirling his mustache and wondering if she was quite steady in the head.

"No, of course not," she replied helplessly; "here is my purse, handing it to him, do you think it is enough?"

He counted the contents, and with an expression of genuine sympathy told her it was not; but he said he would go and see if something could not be done for her. With that he disappeared into one of the private offices, and in an incredibly short time was back again by her side, holding the ticket in his hand.

"Come," he said hurriedly, "you have only one minute. Follow me." Giving her the ticket he led her through the gate to the cars; the conductor had called out "All aboard!" and was about mounting the platform, but perceiving her, he reached down and helped her to ascend. As he did so he pulled the bell, and the cars were in motion.

Generva breathed a prayer of thanksgiving as the train sped quickly through the darkness. From the corner of her seat she glanced occasionally out of the window at the scenes through which she was being rapidly whirled. Each moment seemed to put miles between her and those from whom she was flying. With a feeling of genuine relief she closed her eyes, and, like a weary child, slept, unconscious of all that went on around her. It was only when the conductor called out "tickets" that she roused herself. Peering cautiously around she noted her fellow passengers. They were mostly men, but a quick survey of the various faces revealed no familiar one. So far she was safe. Indeed, everything seemed to have conspired in her favor. At the rate they were thundering along she was even now far away, and recapture, which of all things she most apprehended, averted. Had she deliberately planned her flight she could not have succeeded more effectually. Of her future she never thought, and now that the first step was taken toward putting a barrier between it and the past, she was only conscious of relief. The train stopped at a way station for supper, and a long line of people filed through the cars, leaving them almost deserted. The conductor, perceiving that she was alone, approached and asked her if she did not wish for something to eat. She began to

think, now that it was suggested to her, that she did feel faint, but at the same moment she also remembered her empty purse. So she thanked him and said no; she would take nothing.

They were scarcely in motion before she again fell into a waking kind of slumber, which continued until the brakeman shouted "D——." Thoroughly aroused by the consciousness that the end of her journey was reached, she started to her feet and soon found herself almost alone upon the platform. It was near midnight and the station was deserted. A couple of sleepy porters lounged around, and several cabmen cracked their long whips, conversing in loud voices together. The night was cold and starless. She stood for some moments irresolute.

Finally she took courage, and approaching one of the guards handed him a card and asked if he could direct her to the address upon it. Tom had written it down himself, little thinking when he did so what service it would be.

"It's a good mile and a half," said the man in answer to her question. "You never could walk it. The street-cars have stopped running and you'll have to take a cab."

Her heart sank; she had no money. With a deep sigh she turned away, but he detained her.

"Do you want a cab?" he inquired.

"No," she replied.

"Are you going to walk?"

"Yes, if you will be kind enough to tell me how to get there."

"Well, you've got pluck," he said, leading the way, "maybe some of the fellows might be willing to give

you a lift if they're going in that direction; wait and I'll see."

But none of them were, and she finally set off on foot, walking with her utmost speed. As it was very late the streets were empty and she met few people. These with a glance at the swift dark figure passed on. No one sought either to molest or detain her.

The town clock struck one as she tottered up the steps leading to Tom's house. So quiet and still it seemed to her overwrought imagination, it almost appeared uninhabited. But she glanced at the card, and assuring herself that she could have made no mistake, rang the bell. A dead silence ensued. Her heart beat audibly. Presently a heavy footstep could be heard approaching; nearer and nearer it came. She held her breath. A moment later a bolt was drawn, a key turned, and the door flung wide open. Tom's tall figure stood upon the threshold.

"What do you want?" he inquired; "who is it?"

"It—is—I," she gasped in a voice that sounded weak and far off, "Generva."

"Generva!" he exclaimed, making a movement forward—then as the hall light fell upon her pale face: "*My God, it is!*"

CHAPTER X.

THE SECOND ACT IN HER DRAMA.

TOM had never thought to see her again, and for a moment could scarcely believe in her reality. He passed his hands over his eyes in a dazed way, to assure himself that they were open, and that it was not a

dream. But as the truth flashed upon him, he stretched out his arms and gathered her to his heart. Like a weary child the drooping figure yielded to his clasp; the tired head fell heavily upon his breast. Neither spoke. Still speechless he drew her into the house, made fast the doors, piled fresh logs upon the fire, and pouring some wine into a glass, put it to her lips. She drank mechanically and sank into a chair utterly exhausted. Some time elapsed before she made a sign; when she did, it was to fasten a wistful gaze upon his face. Leaning over he laid his hand upon her brow.

"I never thought to see you again, Generva," he said stroking her hair softly; "what blessed accident brings you here?"

At the sound of his voice her lips quivered and tears started to her eyes. He raised her head and loosened her dress at the throat. Somewhat revived, she murmured, "Thanks, I—I—am better."

"Don't try to talk, you are very weak."

"I must," bravely. "I do not know what you will think or say. I have run away from my people."

At this startling piece of intelligence Tom smothered an exclamation of surprise.

"You have run away," he repeated—"run away! why, whatever induced you to do such a thing?"

"You will blame me, I know," she said, breaking down.

"No," promised Tom, deeply moved by her tears; "no, I will not."

"It was very wrong, no doubt," she murmured.

"But I could not bear it."

And then in a low, trembling voice she told him all.

With mingled feelings of anger and sympathy he listened to her story. When she came to the blow which Mrs. Slick in her ungovernable rage had dealt her he buried his face in his hands and groaned. "My endurance ended here," she gasped—"I could stand it no longer. I left the hotel without a moment's delay or hesitation and proceeded towards the depot. A train was going out, I stepped aboard; there was no place in which I could find shelter, so I came to you. Perhaps I should not have done so. If I did wrong you will tell me." Her last words died away in a whisper and she waited breathlessly for a reply. Tom was completely overcome by the recital. When she ceased speaking he turned and regarded her. She was very beautiful as she lay against the crimson cushions of the chair, her fair face fairer for the rich dark background. One white arm was thrown above her golden bronze head where a gleam of firelight lingered, the other rested upon her bosom, which being partly bare shone with dazzling whiteness from out the loosened black dress. A world of entreaty lurked in the depths of her large lustrous eyes, and her full red mouth, with the little droop at the corners, lent to her expression a pathos as touching as it was seductive. As Tom gazed upon her a mighty passion surged through him; an almost uncontrollable impulse to snatch her to his heart and spend his soul in kisses on her lips. But instead he turned resolutely from her and gazed long and steadily into the fire. And then his reason came back and he began to think. What was he to do? Where was it all going to end? What a situation he was in! If only she were not so young, so friendless; if only she were less beautiful; if—it all seemed a ques-

tion of ifs—and yet he knew that even were it among the possibilities he would not have had her otherwise. Indeed in this perplexing moment he scarcely knew what he would have, or what he would do or could do or *dared do*. He loved her and was fully aware of it, but he was also aware that he was irrevocably bound to another. And this other; what mercy could he expect or hope from her?

So he reasoned within himself, even though his pulses throbbed and all the blood in his veins seemed afire. So he questioned, speculated, vainly sought for a reply to her words: "If I did wrong, you will tell me." How could he tell her that, when in his heart of hearts he did not think so; but what he commended he knew perfectly society would condemn. He had not lived in the world and been none the wiser for its experience. He knew just what it would say. That a man can befriend a woman with a pure motive custom will not allow, having no doubt but a poor opinion of human nature. Where it might be found (as in rare cases) to concede a little to age and deformity, it is all the more merciless where youth and beauty are concerned. "Disinterestedness exists only in the imagination," says society. and society being an infallible magnate, ought to know. But does it?

Finally, Tom said, "You were right to come to me, Generva, and from my heart I welcome you." Before he could prevent her, she fell upon her knees, and in her demonstrative fashion poured forth her gratitude. "You give me new life," she exclaimed, her words dropping rapidly from her lips, "new hope; the world does not seem so desolate since I have found a friend. Oh!" with deep feeling, "I would gladly endure again

the misery of the past, that I might know the happiness of the present. I came almost fainting to your door. I am now strong. Hope fills me to overflowing and my soul goes out in joy, that at last I know how sweet a thing is life."

Her emotion seemed to overpower her. The color faded from her lips and cheeks, and her voice was full of tears. Tom raised her gently, saying at the same time:

"You are ill, you suffer."

"Here," she moaned, placing her hands upon her breast. The loosened dress had fallen back, and there upon the white bosom was the dark and swelling wound, which Mrs. Slick had dealt her. It needed no telling—it spoke for itself; and Tom with a compassion that words could ill express, touched with gentle fingers the blackened flesh.

"I will get something that will relieve you," he offered, hastening across the hall and disappearing behind one of the portières leading into an adjoining room. Here he turned up a lamp burning dimly upon a centre table, and threw himself with a suppressed groan into a chair. For fully half an hour he remained in this attitude. So deep was he in gloomy reflection, his errand passed entirely out of his memory. The striking of the clock recalled him, however, and with something like a twinge of remorse, he turned to a medicine case, took out a piece of lint and saturated it with a thick, dark, liquid substance. This done, he retraced his steps and applied the bandage to the wound. After which, in a sort of nervous haste, he took her hand and led the way upstairs. "I will send my old nurse to attend you," he said, when they

had reached the landing; "you will perhaps remember my telling you how faithful she was to me and," looking down upon her, "mine."

Generva made no reply to this, but she quickened her pace. As he threw open the door of an apartment before which he had stopped, she exclaimed: "How pretty!" and paused before entering to gaze admiringly around her.

It *was* pretty. A bright fire burned in an old-fashioned richly tiled fireplace. Above a massively carved mantel rose a cabinet, the centre-glass of which reached the ceiling. A velvet carpet of pale and delicate design covered the floor, and from the oriel windows fell fleecy curtains with hangings of amber and blue. The furniture was richly tufted with satin of the palest azure; the walls were filled with pictures, and over the bed fell a canopy of lace that swept in graceful folds upon the floor.

Generva took in every detail, and turning her shapely head, stood for a moment and looked him full in the face.

"Why are you so good to me?" she asked tremulously, coming forward and laying her hands confidently in his.

"I love you," burst from his lips, "I adore you!" Then perceiving a wave of color sweep over her face and throat, he stooped and with unrestrained passion kissed her.

In the next moment he was gone. A few moments later he entered Eric's room through the door that communicated with his own, and administering a few sound shakings, succeeded in arousing him from his profound slumber.

"What is it?" he questioned sleepily; "who's the matter?"

"Why, you're the matter," said Tom. "Wake up, and get something on and come into my room. Quick!"

"What in the deuce," began Eric, sitting up and calling after him, "do you mean by pulling a fellow out at this hour of the night, or the morning—I don't know which, but I daresay it's a little of both, if the clocks haven't taken leave of their senses too. What *is* up, Tom? I shan't budge until you tell me?"

"I'll tell you by my fire, it's too cold here. Come along! Wrap the blankets around you if you can't find anything better."

"That's not a bad idea," remarked Eric, acting upon the suggestion and enveloping his tall, spare frame in a long quilt, to say nothing of a sheet and bedspread.

"That's right," commended Tom, "as the ghostly figure came striding in and ensconced himself in an arm-chair. "Now, prepare yourself to be literally struck dumb with surprise."

"I am prepared for anything after this," he replied with a stupendous yawn—"anything, even an earthquake. Fire away!"

"Perhaps you heard the bell ring sometime after midnight?"

"No, I didn't; I'm a respectable newspaper man, and I retire with the chickens."

"Well, I heard it. I was reading when it rang, and I hastened down. Imagine my surprise when I discovered a woman standing on the threshold."

Eric got up and prepared to take himself off.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Tom, seizing the end of a departing sheet, "where are you going?"

"Where I won't hear any more ghost stories until the sun is up."

"But it is no ghost story, Eric. Come back!"

"Oh," resuming his seat, "I thought it was."

"I tell you it was a woman."

"What woman?"

"Generva Romaine."

"Generva Romaine!"

"The same."

"Give me a pinch, I must be asleep."

"I thought I was dreaming myself when I saw her."

"Then it's a fact, and she's here," exclaimed Eric, springing to his feet, and totally unmindful of his habiliments, which fell in a heap on the floor.

"Yes, it's a fact," repeated Tom.

"I never was so amazed in all my life!"

"Neither was I," suppressing his inclination to laugh and eyeing him grimly. "I had no idea you bore such a close resemblance to the statue of the Apollo Belvedere."

"You seem to take it for granted," remarked the aforesaid Apollo, referring to Generva and not to his godliness. And proceeding at the same time to redrape his nether limbs. "What brings her here?"

"Sit down," said Tom seriously, "and I will tell you."

"All right," dropping into the chair, "go on!"

"They treated her infamously and she ran away," began Tom. "To-day Mrs. Slick struck her and she could endure her position no longer. I had given her a card with my address, and told her if she should ever be in need of a friend to come to me. She had no place else to go, so she came here."

Eric gave a long, low whistle.

"What are you going to do with her?" he asked bluntly.

"I don't know," admitted Tom.

"What did you wake me up for?"

"I wanted to ask your advice."

"Mine?"

"Yours."

"I told you before, Tom, I did not wish to mix myself up in that young woman's affairs."

"But if her affairs be my affairs, Eric?"

"See here," wheeling round in the chair and facing him, "you are going to get yourself into trouble. Take my word for it."

"I can't help it, old man. I couldn't turn a helpless woman from the door, could I?"

"I suppose not," with a grunt.

"What was I to do?"

"I don't know."

"What do you know?"

"I know we're in for a row if it leaks out."

"I daresay we can take care of ourselves, we are big enough. It is of her I want to speak. She is completely broken down, and it will be a long time before she is restored to health. In the interim—"

"Yes—"

"What is to be done?"

"Tom," looking him squarely in the face, "you love that girl! Confess it."

"Eric," without so much as changing countenance, "I do."

"I knew it," with conviction, "I was sure of it!"

"And now?"

"Now."

"Yes, what is to be done now?"

"Ask me something easier. I'm blest if I can tell."

"You will admit that one's not much to blame for—for caring about her?"

"No; but one is liable to get burnt if one fingers red-hot coals."

"You are very unsatisfactory. I told you to leave me out of the argument."

"Who says it's an argument? it isn't! There is nothing to argue. I wish there were."

"Well, coming back to the starting-point; what am I going to do with her?"

"There's just one of two things, that I can see," said Eric after a pause.

"And they are?"

"Either send her away in the morning or marry her in the afternoon. I advise the former. There's always safety in flight."

"I can't do the one, and I won't do the other," declared Tom emphatically.

"I didn't suppose you would," calmly.

"What did you propose it for then?"

"For your consideration. One is never forced to follow the advice of one's friends. At least, one rarely does."

"You know I am bound to Beatrice?"

"Yes; but you don't love her."

"She did well enough until this girl came into my life."

"I warned you against something of the kind, you will remember," reminded Eric, "and you didn't see fit to pay any heed to me. Now the worst has come."

"How can you call my love for her the worst? why, old man, I tell you it is—the—"

"Yes, I know. I'll take your word for it. Spare me just now. I never was in such a quandary before. I don't know what we are going to do, I don't really! You see, these infatuations are so short-lived."

"I will not have you call my love an infatuation," interrupted Tom angrily. "It will last forever!"

"You think so," returned Eric. "Every man thinks so at some period or other of his career. But they are all convinced of their error in the end. The only trouble is, that the end is sometimes too long coming, and—"

"And what?"

"The result disastrous in consequence. I tell you, Tom, the fierce flame soon burns out, and men's passions rarely outlive their gratification. They are none the worse for it as a rule, but there are other and more serious results to be considered. You would not want to wrong her?"

"Generva? No!"

"Can you tell me what greater wrong you could do her than to teach her to love you, without the faintest hope of being able to give her your undivided affection in return. I believe in your sincerity now. But what does the sincerity of men amount to, any how? They want to be honest—they try to be! It isn't their fault that they are not. It's in the blood. Women are different. I don't always boast much of them, to be sure; still as a rule they are better than we are. Generva will be constant to the death, I believe."

"What am I to do, then?"

"Your one plan is to reconcile her to her folks."

"But they are not her folks, and I *will* not have her ill used by them. Don't make any more such absurd propositions. She came to me for shelter and help, and she shall have both! You seem to misjudge my motives. Good God! don't you know that I love her?"

"Yes, that's just it," returned Eric, "you love her. Well, take care that love doesn't play you a trick. It has been known to do some pretty wily things in its day. Where is she—in bed?"

"Yes; Mildred is with her."

"That's good. Suppose we let the matter rest where it is until morning. It might not be a bad plan to consult Generva herself upon the subject. Don't you see?"

"I daresay," said Tom, rising and proceeding to divest himself of his coat and vest; "I confess I am tired."

"Turn in and get some sleep, then, and I'll sit here for a while and try to think it out. What was that? Sounded like a knock. See who it is, Tom. I'm not quite in the regulation reception costume." Tom opened the door. Mildred stood in the hall, "The lady's taken bad, and you must come at once," she whispered.

Without a word Tom seized his coat, and following the old woman was soon at Generva's bedside. He found her in a high fever and slightly delirious. She did not recognize him as he leaned over and spoke to her; neither did she seem aware of where she was, or who was attending her.

Eric, when left alone, hastily donned his clothes, and in a short space of time joined Tom in the sick-room. "Is she very ill?" he asked anxiously.

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"Yes," whispered Tom gravely, "very, very ill.

"Do you know what it is?"

"Brain fever, I think. I was afraid of it four weeks ago. I don't see what we are going to do now. Do you?"

"Make the best of it," replied Eric with his usual bluntness; "but be sure and caution Mildred against acquainting any one with her presence here. We must keep it the most profound secret."

"I have done that."

"Then we have only to be patient and discreet until such time as her removal be possible."

"Where could we take her?"

"There will be time to decide, judging from her present condition."

Tom looked very serious. "Yes," he said slowly, "there will be time."

CHAPTER XI.

THE QUESTION ANSWERED.

WHEN Tom and Eric resolved to keep Generva concealed in the house, they did not anticipate the many complications that would accrue. One rarely does consider consequences when (as in this case) the need is urgent. It so transpired that while her presence remained a profound secret, there arose from a number of little circumstances, unheeded at the time, a certain suspicion. Mildred, in her endeavor to be discreet, grew self-conscious, and the mysterious patient about whom no one could induce her to breathe a

word, came to be regarded first with a certain amount of curiosity and afterwards with more than a certain amount of mistrust. An almost daily visitor at her son's home, Mrs. Winthrop soon became aware that there was something on the tapis, that she was not to know. Having once conceived the idea, she of course considered it nothing more than her duty to set to work and investigate. It had been impossible for them to conceal the fact that a sick person was there. But as she herself had used the masculine gender in speaking of him, Tom did not see fit to correct her mistake. It thus transpired that she took it for granted that a man was the object of his care.

"It is ridiculous keeping him here," she argued; "I am sure the hospital would be a great deal better."

"The hospital is out of the question for him," maintained Tom.

And so the matter rested. But Mrs. Winthrop was a shrewd woman, and she was far from feeling satisfied. Finally she informed her son, that as he was to be married in the Fall, it was well to commence making the necessary preparations (such as refurnishing, etc.), in the Spring. She furthermore signified her readiness to begin at once. Tom came near swearing when this proposition was made.

"Do you want to kill my patient?" he demanded angrily.

"But your wedding, Tom!" she interposed.

"Let my wedding alone."

"It is astonishing what sacrifices you make for your profession."

"So it is."

The failure of this scheme disconcerted Mrs. Win-

throp not a little. As a final effort she resolved to worm the truth out of Mildred, and she began plying her with questions whenever chance brought them in contact. But the old woman was faithful. She took refuge in yes and no, and did not seem able to say anything else.

"I believe Mildred is in her dotage," she said to Dorothy after one of these ineffectual attempts to glean information from her.

"Why?" inquired Dorothy.

"Because she talks like a simpleton," returned Mrs. Winthrop irritably.

"I think your fears are groundless in respect to Tom," ventured Dorothy, "I do, honestly! There is nothing out of the way in his having a patient in the house if he chooses."

"This is no ordinary patient, my dear," replied Mrs. Winthrop with calm superiority, "and there is a great deal out of the way in his turning the house into a hospital. He has been harboring that mysterious individual to my certain knowledge for the past four weeks, and he has not only pledged Mildred to the utmost secrecy concerning him, but he refuses to say a word upon the subject himself. Now, I am of the opinion that the man has had ample time to get well or die."

"Oh, Mother!" exclaimed Dorothy, "you do not think he is dead and that Tom would be capable—"

"I think," interrupted Mrs. Winthrop, "that in the interest of science that misguided boy is capable of anything. Hasn't he been experimenting on stray dogs and cats ever since he was in knickerbockers?"

"Yes, Mother," agreed Dorothy, "but a cat isn't a

man, and Tom would never be guilty of doing anything inhuman. Dismiss the thought from your mind."

"I cannot dismiss the thought," said Mrs. Winthrop decidedly, "and I would not if I could. It is not characteristic of me to shirk a duty because it happens to be unpleasant, or to lose sight of the fact that the welfare of my children is, and must always be, my first consideration. Our family has heretofore been entirely exempt from scandal of any description. It has been our boast for a generation back. Judge then of my apprehension regarding this mysterious affair. My God! Dorothy, the realization of my fears will mean nothing less than social annihilation. Can you not see that I am right?"

"Yes; but you are looking on the darkest side, and I am sure things are not nearly so bad as you have deluded yourself into believing."

The conversation was broken off at this point by the entrance of a servant bearing an elegantly monogrammed card, upon which was inscribed the name of the Rev. Luther Warren, Mrs. Winthrop's spiritual adviser. She hurried away to see him, and Dorothy sought her own room, where, after a moment's reflection, as though forming some project, and uncertain whether or not to act upon it, she proceeded to don her street attire. The interview which had just taken place disturbed her more than she would have been willing to confess. In her own mind she felt that her mother did not exaggerate the gravity of the situation. In fact, the more she dwelt upon the subject the more solicitous she became. So that by the time her toilet was completed, she had determined to discover the truth even if it became necessary to appeal to Eric. She had held

aloof from him, since the memorable evening of her last visit to her brother's house, when in passing through the hall she had accidentally overheard him express his opinion of womankind in general, and of herself in particular. She was pleased to consider herself deeply affronted upon that occasion, and despite all Eric's subsequent endeavors to effect a reconciliation still remained obdurate. To-day, however, pride was swallowed up in anxiety, and she resolved to seek him of her own accord, and beg him to let her into Tom's secret. By a singular fatuity she had been reading that morning a tale by Poe, of a physician who, in the interest of science, was induced to try the experiment of mesmerizing a dying man. The subject when placed under the influence died at once, but the mesmeric power was so strong, that he not only retained the semblance of life for a whole year, but was able to respond intelligibly to ordinary questions. This ghastly tale had made a great impression upon Dorothy, and now, try as she would, she could not keep her mind from associating Tom's mysterious patient with the subject experimented upon in Poe's horrible story. It was the revolting possibility of any such appalling development that induced her to make an effort on her own part to sift the matter. Her forced calm when in the presence of her mother had been assumed. She knew it would never have done to augment her fears by coinciding with her. So she had persisted in regarding them as delusive, even though her heart was beating with agonized doubt. Without giving any intimation of her intention, she slipped quietly out of the house, took a street-car and rode into the city. Arriving at her destination she marched

boldly up the steps leading to her brother's home, and without ringing the bell, opened the door and entered. The first person she ran against was Eric. The suddenness of the unexpected encounter disconcerted her somewhat, but she found voice to request the favor of a few moments' conversation with him in the library, and strength enough to follow him into the room with more than her usual dignity.

"Won't you remove your wrap?" he asked as he offered her a chair.

"Thanks! I do not intend to remain very long."

"Nevertheless it would be better to take it off," he put in diffidently.

"I prefer to keep it on," she returned stiffly.

"Please, Dorothy," in an imploring tone, bending over her and proceeding to unfasten it.

"You are very persistent."

"I know I am; forgive me. What an obstinate clasp," tugging awkwardly at it.

"You will pull it to pieces."

"It will only meet its deserts if I do. There! it yields at last, stubborn concern."

The wrap disposed of he sat down.

"How do you do?" he inquired after an uncomfortable pause.

"I am quite well, thank you."

"I have not seen you for an age, have I? at least," correcting himself, "for what seems to me to have been an age."

No reply to this, only a blank stare.

"You don't come to town as often as you did, do you?"

"I don't come here as often as I did, if that's what you mean."

"Why, Dorothy?"

"For various reasons," curtly.

Pause. Then from Eric:

"It's—it's a rather warm day, don't you think?"

"Rather."

"Quite like summer."

"Quite."

"Trees all beginning to blossom."

No notice on her part of this brilliant observation.

"How—how's your mother?"

"Very well, thank you."

"And Agnes."

"Very well, too."

"And—and how are you? Oh, excuse me, I did ask you that; I beg your pardon."

"Don't mention it."

"Won't—you take off your gloves?"

"No."

"Your—er—hat?"

"No."

"Will you have something to drink—or eat?"

"Nothing at all."

"Can—I get you a fan?"

"No, I thank you."

"Tom isn't home."

"Indeed!"

"See here, Dorothy," jumping up in desperation, "I can't stand this sort of thing any longer."

"What sort of thing?" placidly.

"This slow process of torture with which you see fit to afflict me."

"I?"

"Yes, you! don't feign innocence; you know perfectly well what I am driving at."

"I assure you, Mr. Hazelton—"

"If you have anything to say to me, say it."

"But I have nothing to say."

"I know you have!"

"I have not."

"Then the only thing for me to do is to take myself off," and suiting the action to the word he moved towards the door.

But Dorothy did not mean to let him escape. It was necessary to punish him, but it would never do to drive him away. Springing forward she seized him by the arm, saying at the same time:

"Don't go, Eric. I want to see you about something very, very particular. I came in expressly."

"To see me?"

"Yes, you."

"Dorothy!" seizing her hand eagerly, "do you mean it?"

"Yes."

"Oh, my—"

"But not in that way," retreating from him. "Not in the way you think I mean."

"In what way, then?"

"I don't know."

"Yes, you do—you know perfectly well. Now, listen to me, Dorothy. Do you want me to think you a heartless coquette like the rest of your sex?"

"No."

"Do you want me to walk out of this room and never speak to you as long as I live?"

"Oh, no!"

"Well, that's just what I propose to do, unless you tell me that you are sorry for the way you have been

treating me, and—and that you like me better than any one else in the world.”

“I will not be forced to say that I like any one,” declared Dorothy.

“But I’m not any one—I am the only one!”

“I won’t be forced to say that I like you.”

“But you do, you cannot deny it.”

“I know I cannot deny it, but I do not mean to say it.”

“You don’t?”

“No, I don’t!”

“That’s a capital joke. Do you not know that in admitting you cannot deny it, you acknowledge it?”

“I will acknowledge it,” put in Dorothy, diplomatically, “if you will tell me about the person Tom has concealed here in the house.”

“Good heavens!” exclaimed Eric, dismayed at the turn the conversation had taken, “how abrupt you are. Tom has no one concealed in the house. There is a patient upstairs, if that is what you refer to.”

“Is he living?” in a breathless whisper.

“Living?”

“Yes, alive!”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean alive, the opposite of dead.”

“Certainly he is living. What would he be doing with a corpse?”

“Eric,” in a low, solemn voice, “will you swear to me, on your sacred word of honor, that the man is alive, and has not been kept here for any blood-curdling experiment?”

“Are you mad, Dorothy?” was all Eric could gasp in reply.

"No, I am not mad," she returned a little hysterically. "I am as sane as you are. But I want you to swear it on your honor."

"What, in heaven's name, has put such an idea into your head?"

"No matter, swear it!"

"I do. I swear it."

"On your honor?"

"On my honor!"

A great sobbing sigh burst from her lips at his words. "I am so relieved," she murmured. "No," perceiving he was about to speak, "do not question me. Do not ask for any explanation. Some time I may tell you, not now. I haven't time. I want to get home; I don't want to see Tom; I don't want him to know I was here. I don't want any one to know. Good-bye! Oh, yes, to be sure, my wrap. I had completely forgotten it. Thanks!" as he assisted her to put it on, "now I'm all right. Good-bye again," holding out her hand.

"Why you are all of a tremble," said Eric, "what is the matter?"

But she refused to say, and despite his remonstrances persisted in hastening away. She permitted him to accompany her to the front door, however, and allowed him to kiss her cheek in parting, but this was all the concession that she could be prevailed upon to make.

In spite of her failure to discover her son's secret, Mrs. Winthrop still kept her eyes open and awaited her chance. Eric, sensible of her suspicions, raked his brains in the search for subterfuges to outwit her. This was continued with absolutely no cessation, and then a new difficulty arose in the convalescence of Generva, who could not be persuaded to keep away

from the windows, or from running to the door of her apartment every time it was opened. Tom cautioned and explained as much as he dared, but she could not be brought to see things in the light he endeavored to put them before her. If the truth were known, her zealous nurses had become her slaves. It was almost pathetic to see the cool-headed, reflective Eric hang over her bed or rush away to obey her slightest wish. Tom was no less devoted, but he retained just some little influence and control. For instance, when she insisted upon getting up one day in his absence, and Eric had not the heart to say no, he ordered her immediately back to bed upon his return, and did not hesitate to show that he was much displeased. Of course, his anger was short-lived and peace was soon restored, but the rebellious subject made no further attempt to overstep certain rules which her physician prescribed. It was shortly after this crisis that a consultation was held as to the advisability of removing her to a place of security. Tom said she must absolutely have fresh air. And Eric declared that he had exhausted his stock of fabrications to the extent that no single lie of any degree of originality remained in his vocabulary. It was time she was taken away, but where? that was the question. A great many plans entered Eric's sagacious brain. Although he still viewed Tom's passion in the light of an infatuation, he would have done anything in his power to have brought them together, being of the opinion that a man has no business to marry one woman and love another; but this scheme was beset with so many difficulties, that he was obliged to abandon it. So he wisely concluded to let matters adjust themselves, and which-

ever way her destiny shaped itself, prepare to stand her friend. He had grown deeply attached to her during her illness, and now that she was well and out of all danger, he sincerely and honestly desired to promote her welfare.

With a view of best serving her, he set off one morning at Tom's request, to find a place that would offer her a temporary home. He did not succeed in getting what he desired without considerable difficulty. In fact, he spent several days in the search, before a satisfactory selection was made. At last, however, his efforts were rewarded, and an abode such as he wished secured. He took it for a year, saying to himself as he drove towards home: "Something will happen by that time, sure!"

Something had happened already, although he could not be expected to know it, seeing that it occurred while he jogged lazily along the white road, marveling at the beauty of the young grass dotted with golden buttercups, and at the fragrance of the pink and white blossoms, reflecting in exquisite harmony against the deep blue sky.

CHAPTER XII.

MRS. WINTHROP'S DISCOVERY.

GENEVA rose bright and early on this particular morning. She felt stronger and more like herself than she had done since her long and serious illness.

"At last I am well," she said, as with deft fingers she twisted her auburn hair into a coil, and adjusted

one of the pretty white gowns which Mildred, by some kind of magic, seemed to have on hand whenever occasion required.

It was one of those mild days in early Spring, when Nature has not only donned its fairest garments, but seems to undergo a constant and radiant metamorphosis. The scene, though ostensibly the same, is ever illumined by varying colors, whose gorgeous tints intermingled with sunbeams almost suffice to dazzle the vision by the harmonious blending of their prismatic hues.

Generva lingered long over her toilet, from the precise arrangement of each refractory little curl to the fastening of the white gown, with its rows of fleecy lace and dainty satin ribbons. At last she was dressed! The mirror before which she stood reflected a picture that seemed to satisfy her critical taste, for a smile lingered about her lips, and the faintest tinge of crimson stained her cheeks.

"I improve," she commented, as she moved away and took a seat by the window. "Oh, what a blessed boon is health!"

With this she threw up the sash, and inhaled a deep breath of the fragrant air, and as she did so the pipings of many a songster fell upon her ears. It was indeed Spring; the birds, the sky, the soft warm breeze all proclaimed it. What gladness came with the knowledge! Her pulses bounded joyously; her soul was filled with rapture. She felt an unwonted energy pervading her hitherto languid frame. Her lassitude seemed to vanish. She was no longer weak. New life had come with that first breath of Summer.

As she stood thus looking dreamily out of the win-

dow, Tom entered. The strain of the past two months had not been without its effect upon him. His face was careworn, and there was an anxious light in the eyes which fell upon the tall white figure that hastened forward to meet him. He did not speak at first, but contented himself with looking at her. She was silent too. Presently he took her hand and drew her to him. She made no resistance, but she sighed softly, whereupon he smoothed her hair from her brow and sighed softly too.

"Are you not well to-day?" she inquired, drawing a little nearer to him and laying her hand lightly upon his arm.

"No," he began, "I am—" he did not finish.

He groaned instead and would have put her away, only that her arms stole about his neck, and clasped him close.

"You love me now, Generva," he said, taking her upturned face in his hands, "but you will despise me when you know." Again he broke off and left his sentence unfinished.

"Know what?" she inquired gently.

"Nothing," was the short reply.

"You ARE suffering," she insisted, gazing anxiously into his clouded countenance. "I wish you would tell me what is the matter."

"I cannot," he said, disengaging himself from her clinging arms and beginning to pace up and down the room.

"Why?" she persisted; "why can not you tell me?"

"I am gloomy," he replied, "that is all."

"Then I will cheer you. Come sit by me," sinking upon a sofa and essaying to draw him down beside her.

"You can not," he protested, "no one can."

"Let me try."

"I tell you it is impossible."

"May I at least know the cause?"

"That is impossible too."

"How can it be?"

"You are the cause yourself," he burst out, throwing himself down beside her of his own accord.

"How so?" she inquired in pained surprise.

"You won't succeed in cheering me if you persist in asking questions."

"Well, I won't persist."

"That's a good girl!—I'm a stubborn fellow."

"Are you sorry I came to you, is that it?"

"My dear child! I thought you promised not to question me."

"But it is very trying to be kept in the dark, when the person one cares most for is in trouble. Don't you agree with me?"

"I suppose so."

"Does your head ache?"

"Yes."

"Poor head!" stroking it; "some eau de cologne, perhaps?"

"No; I detest it!"

A silence. Then: "Do you like me in this white gown?"

"Yes," absently, "very much."

"I put it on to-day because it was so warm that I thought perhaps you would let me go out for a walk or ride."

"Once for all, Generva," said Tom, sitting upright and speaking sternly, "I want you to understand that

you cannot stir from the room, much less the house. I have told you so repeatedly—you are very unreasonable." His countenance during this speech assumed an expression of extreme severity, and his tone was both harsh and peremptory.

Generva started as though he had struck her. He had never addressed her a hasty or an unkind word before. She struggled with her feelings for a moment, but it was no use, her self-control gave way and she burst into tears.

Tom was aghast. He stared at her in silence for a brief space, until realizing that he and he alone was responsible for her grief, his short-lived anger melted as if by magic, and he caught her impulsively in his arms. Every endearing epithet he could think of he lavished upon her, but all to no avail. He had wounded her deeply, and she wept and sobbed, until he was almost beside himself.

He was harassed and worried and out of sorts, it is true. He was suffering with a severe neuralgia; he expected the torpedo upon which he was standing to burst every day and blow him to pieces—any one of which causes for anxiety was sufficient to account for his ill-humor and irritability. But nothing, not even this combination of worries, could justify his harshness towards her? Nothing, so he told himself remorsefully, as he kissed her quivering lips and begged and pleaded with her to forgive him. In this moment he loved her with all the strength of which he was capable, and with as little selfishness as is in the nature of man to love. As he sat there holding her close in his arms, thinking of the tie which bound him to another, the lines:

"In fair Verona, where
A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life,"

came back to him. Star-crossed indeed this love of theirs, though she, of course, did not know it. But was it not right that she should know? Was it not his duty to tell her? He was strongly tempted to do so, but the thought of that little tear-stained handkerchief which he had just now tucked away in his pocket, and the sight of the white face, which still bore traces of weeping, unmanned him, and try as he would he could not bring himself to speak the words.

He was literally torn with conflicting doubts and fears. He dared not allow himself to think of what it was all going to come to; for to do so was to conjure up a perfect army of perplexities. He had permitted himself to drift along during her illness in his usual desultory fashion, promising himself to take a firm stand when she should have recovered; but with her restoration to health, came such deep pity for her weakness and such overwhelming tenderness for herself, that his resolutions fell to the ground, and were likely to stay there. Every day brought with it fresh complications, and they now seemed to surround him on all sides. The servants in the house were gossippers; his mother had become so anxious that she was little better than a spy. Beatrice had grown suspicious and Eric apprehensive. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that he had lost control over himself. But he was very penitent when once he succeeded in prevailing upon her to look at him, and tell him that he was forgiven.

"And you shall go to the country next week, my darling," he said as he settled her comfortably among the pillows of the sofa, and rose to take his leave. "Next week, sure! Eric is searching far and near to

find a suitable house for you. You can be in the open air all day then if you choose."

"It will be very pleasant," she murmured softly, "for Summer will soon be here."

"Summer!"—somehow the word sounded strangely to him. She would know all when Summer came. He would have even shown her Beatrice's picture as he had already shown her Dorothy's, and have told her everything there was to be told. Why then did the word bring such a sense of uneasiness to his mind? He shook it off as well as he could, saying:

"Good-bye, dear! I am going out of town to see a very sick patient and I won't return before evening. Take good care of yourself, and, above all, Generva, keep away from the windows, you might catch cold," he added quickly.

Taking a tender leave of her he hastened away. Generva spent the better part of this day alone. Reading, writing (she had begun the play which she believed would make her famous in the future), and thinking of the man she loved so well. She was always thinking of him for that matter, and speculating upon this strange, sweet, subduing influence which had come into her life, and enveloped her so completely in its mysterious charm. What a bright and beautiful place the world was—what a privilege, what a joy to be allowed to live in it! And this love, that all unsought had come to her. What a God-given gift! She trembled and sighed and even wept a little as she lay there among the pillows of the couch and thought about it. What mattered it that Tom had been impatient, when he loved her so well? So she told herself, even while she sat before the desk engaged upon the writing of

her drama, and busying herself with the dozen or more exalted personages comprised in the cast. A glance at the draft she had made of the play was sufficient to show that she possessed a keen dramatic instinct, that she knew how to classify and arrange, thereby achieving an effect; and that she was thoroughly conversant with stage business. She had chosen for her theme the war of 1855 between France and Russia, and laid her scene about the time of the taking of Sebastopol. Her story dealt with the adventures of a Russian princess, who, in the employ of the French government, endeavored by her charms to glean from General Ivan Orloff a knowledge of the plans of the Russian army, of which he commanded an important division. Finding him invulnerable and her arts of no avail, she conceived for him a bold passion, and resolved to win his love by becoming his partisan, and helping him to a glorious victory over the French. Accident, however, revealed to her that he was enamored of her ward, an innocent and beautiful girl, who had but recently quitted a convent. Her rage and jealousy at this discovery passed all bounds. Through a spy disguised as a servant, and in the employ of Orloff, she gained access to his private apartments; possessed herself of certain documents containing important military information, and without delay forwarded them to the Minister of War at Paris. He acted promptly. A sudden and decisive attack was made, which resulted in the Russian's defeat. General Orloff was wounded in the encounter, and the Princess, in an agony of remorse, sought him out, confessed her love and laid her fortune (which was considerable) at his feet. In this way she hoped to atone, but his reply

was to turn to the priest in attendance, and beg him to continue the ceremony that her entrance had interrupted. The young girl of his choice was then brought forward, and they were united in marriage before the eyes of the miserable and conscience-stricken woman.

Her ultimate fate Geneva never could decide. Should it be the cloister; should it be arrest and conviction; should it be death by her own hand? She asked herself this question over and over again, then she determined to put it out of her mind, and for the present let it rest. "The end ought to come to me as the beginning did," she argued, "freely and without effort on my part. And so it will! I have only to be patient and the play will finish itself."

From the time she had first conceived the plot she was convinced of this, and to-day as she sat absorbed in her work, somehow or other, she felt more certain of it still. Assured of it, she busied herself with such portions as were well worked out. Deep in her occupation, the hours flew rapidly by; she lunched and again took up her pen, but fatigue overpowering her, she was forced to discontinue her pleasant task. "I will rest," she decided, "and then perhaps I can go on." Having come to this conclusion, she laid down upon her bed and fell into a deep and refreshing sleep.

The clock struck three before she awoke. Starting up suddenly, she looked confusedly about her for a moment; then she opened the door and peered out into the hall. From the night of her arrival in Tom's house she had never been outside of her own room. Now she was consumed with a desire to wander away from it. What harm could it do? who would know

it? *Ennui* was devouring her. She wanted something to do; some one to speak to; or, better still, somewhere to go. Even to walk up and down the thickly carpeted corridor would be a diversion. Dared she venture? She trembled as she asked herself. Why not? They were overcareful in confining her so closely. It was a mistake. She must steal a look beyond her prison. Every moment served to increase the temptation. Unable to longer resist it, she seized a light shawl, threw it over her shoulders, and with the train of her dress in her hand slipped cautiously across the threshold. No one was in sight. The beautiful wide hall, with here and there a bronze statue but partly visible in the dim light, elicited from her undisguised admiration.

She strolled up and down, pausing before the images, gazing with eager eyes at the landscapes upon the walls, and occasionally sinking into a low chair with a sigh of perfect satisfaction. Then she grew bolder, and took to peeping into rooms, the doors of which mostly stood ajar. Here she found food for unlimited speculation. That was Tom's, this was Eric's, that the guest chamber; she divided them all off according to her pleasure. But at last even this grew monotonous. Like Alexander she longed for more worlds to conquer. Suddenly she conceived the idea of going down-stairs. No sooner resolved upon than done. She turned at the landing, and proceeded to descend. One step, another, still another, and then—something attracted her attention. Her heart gave a great bound; she grasped the railing, looked down, and to her unutterable consternation perceived a lady standing in the hall below. It was a critical moment,

and a feeling of utter helplessness came over her. She could neither move nor speak, and but for the firm clasp of her hand upon the balustrade, she would certainly have fallen. As it was, she quivered in every limb, and her heart beat to suffocation. With inward despair she waited. A moment of terrible suspense ensued.

The lady did not stir, but she stared fixedly. Generva's eyes fell under her searching scrutiny, and a deep blush suffused her hitherto pallid face. Five interminable minutes must have elapsed before the appalling stillness was broken. Then with a movement of superb hauteur the stately woman came nearer, and in a cold, hard voice inquired, "Who are you?"

As she did so her heavy silk dress rustled and the jewels on her hands glittered with dazzling brilliancy. Generva turned her head away. She would have shut out the vision of that queenly form, with the cruel eyes and inflexible voice, but, alas! look where she would there was no eluding it; no gainsaying the question, coming as it did in the form of a peremptory command.

"Who are you?" the clear tones rang in her ears, the stern features swam before her eyes.

Oh, for a little strength, a little time! She clasped and unclasped her fingers nervously, pressed them against her burning brows, and only by a supreme effort gained sufficient control to gasp out a reply, which simple as it was, nevertheless cost her exquisite torture. "I am—a—patient—of—Dr. Winthrop's," she succeeded in saying very faintly. Then she shivered and drew her shawl closely about her.

"Ah!" the lady took a step back. Again that rustle

of silk. Generva could have shrieked at the sound. "Do not let me interfere with you. You were coming down?" This in a questioning tone.

"No!" stung to the quick by the scorn in her address, and turning to retrace her steps.

"You have been ill, I infer?" evidently seeking to detain her.

"Yes."

"A long time, I should judge?"

"Yes," again.

"Pray do not let me frighten you."

Generva was at the head of the stairs.

"I merely called in to see the doctor. He is from home, perhaps?"

"Yes, madam."

"May I inquire where he has gone?"

"I do not know. He left the city to-day."

"Can you tell me when he is likely to return?"

"This evening, he said."

"Thanks! that is all I want to know. Good-bye! I am sorry to have troubled you with so many questions, though it was quite necessary that I should do so. Still questions are bad form, and I apologize. Good-bye!" Again that rustle of silk; again that glitter of jewels, and the door closed behind her.

Generva staggered, like one who had lost the power of sight, to her room. Her head ached intensely; she was dizzy, confused, unnerved. Who could she be; would she betray her? why did she adopt that chilling manner to one who was a perfect stranger. What did her commanding attitude mean; why was she so cold, so cruel, so insolent? These and various other surmises racked her brain, and as a result a vague un-

easiness took possession of her. Trifling as was the incident, in reality it bore no ordinary significance for her. She felt its importance, realized its gravity, and her woman's instinct warned her against it. She regretted beyond expression her indiscretion in venturing from the apartment. She was told that she must not do it. What spirit of evil could have prompted the desire? Agitated and overwrought, she finally burst into hysterical tears. Meanwhile the train bore Tom rapidly homeward. Eager and impatient he swung himself from the platform of the cars before they came to a standstill in the depot. What would he have said had he been aware of what had taken place in his absence? What would Eric have said, as he also hastened along triumphant in the success of having at last found "The Bower of Bliss," which was the name he had given to the pretty cottage destined for Generva's home? Alas! there is no answer to the questions. They never knew that she had seen and spoken with Mrs. Winthrop, no more than she did herself, until some six months later, when she again (and under, oh, such vastly different circumstances!) came face to face with her. *Then* the harrowing truth revealed itself, but then it was too late. Six months is an eternity in the affections of men!

CHAPTER XIII.

CASTE.

AFTER her interview with Generva, Mrs. Winthrop walked composedly from her son's house. She ordered her coachman to drive home, and bowed at the

same time with unwonted graciousness to a passing friend. Leaning back in her carriage she adjusted her gloves, buttoning them carefully. Another acquaintance appeared. Again she inclined her head and smiled—a little paler, a little colder than was her wont perhaps, otherwise not the faintest trace of emotion could be detected upon her immovable countenance. She was a perfect adept in the art of dissimulation.

Uninterruptedly the vehicle rolled along until the unpretentious, but fashionable church of the West End came in view, whereupon she suddenly remembered that it was the day of the Woman's Foreign Mission meeting. Tapping upon the glass, she told the driver to stop; and she stepped from the coach into the sanctuary. Her most intimate friends, the élite of the social world, were there assembled; for Mrs. Winthrop had begun by patronizing the church, and the church had necessarily become the fashion.

Very quietly she took her accustomed place at the Secretary's desk, and for two endless hours assisted in the discussion of the subject proposed. She was calmer, prouder, more haughty than ever before. Was it that her marvelous instinct perceived the semblance of a shadow upon the stern and unrelaxing features of Caste? Did that sphinx-like face conceal beneath its suave impenetrability, a covert sneer of lurking triumph? Was Caste arraigned against her? She shivered involuntarily at the thought and set her white teeth firmly together. She was brave; but she was human, and there is a limit to everything, even a woman's endurance.

The Society adjourned. The ladies chatted a little

and dispersed. Was it fancy, or did her most devout followers linger by her side a little less than they were in the habit of doing? Did not Mrs. Loftus, her particular aversion, fail to overwhelm her with the usual protestations of regard and admiration? Could it be that those zealous and faithful worshippers had perceived, as did she herself, the almost imperceptible change that had come over the austere visage of Caste?

During the drive homeward she speculated, in her characteristically passive manner, upon these dread possibilities. Alarming as they were, the indomitable woman commended them, or rather the chance that had brought them under her notice. Upon her arrival she went directly to her room, and leaving orders that under no circumstances was she to be disturbed, turned the key in the lock. She was alone, or she thought she was; but, lo! out of one of the closets emerged a figure, whose fleshless bones rattled audibly as it stalked across the floor. She sighed deeply as she recognized it, but she did not despair.

"It is a Winthrop skeleton," she murmured suppressing another sigh; "it is sure to be amenable."

And she was right. The obtrusive visitor sat down beside her upon the sofa, folded its arms, and guarded a decorous silence.

It was as she feared. The hot and rancorous breath of scandal had fallen upon her fondest hope and seared and shriveled it into a crumbling ruin. She was as firmly convinced that the world (her world) knew what she herself had only just discovered, as though her friend Mrs. Loftus had proclaimed it aloud in the church hard by.

That something had gone abroad was unmistakable.

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How? when to her certain knowledge discretion had formed the most important feature in it.

How, then, had this well-guarded secret become known? Alas! walls have ears they say, and it can readily be conceived. How little a thing it is for the maid of one household to whisper to the maid of another, that such and such is the case. And why should not Mary entertain her mistress by the delicious bit of gossip, concerning the one woman she knows her to envy, because of her position, her wealth, or even the cut of her gown, more *chic* than her ladyship's own and imported at a greater expense?

Now, what was more likely than that Mrs. Loftus (once in possession of some similar intelligence) should, in her daily round of fashionable calls, find a sinister delight in being the first to communicate and elaborate upon it? Regarding the unapproachable Winthrops, too; the Winthrops who held their heads so high, who themselves were instrumental in propounding the inexorable laws that governed and held in abject submission the social world.

"How the mighty are fallen!"

This was the very expression which escaped that lady more than once on this memorable afternoon. There was not the slightest doubt but that her information was of the most untrustworthy nature; still it sufficed to set vicious rumors afloat and hundreds of tongues a wagging. It was more than enough to furnish evil scandalmongers with a theme whereon their most vituperative tendencies could be exercised unrestrainedly.

For in no less than half a dozen different circles the subject was even at that moment under discussion.

"Incredible," Mrs. Loftus was saying to Mrs. Vanderpool; "astounding! I never in all my life heard anything like it! I never expect to again. I had my suspicions, though," with an air of importance and a chuckle of delight.

"Indeed," returned her friend, "what gave rise to them?"

"Well, to tell the truth, my dear, I never did see what there was in the Winthrops for people to make such a to-do about. I know her hair is bleached."

"It is certainly very white for a woman of her age," agreed Mrs. Vanderpool.

"Age!" exclaimed Mrs. Loftus, "she's sixty-five, if she's a day! And then her husband—"

"Her husband, what about him?"

"Oh! it's a dreadful thing to think of, but I heard that the doctors never could find out what he really died of."

"Horrible!"

"He was very fast, too, they say."

"Was he, indeed?"

"Like father like son, you know."

"Yes, but Mrs. Loftus, what is it about Tom? Do tell me—in strict confidence, you know. I can't find out the least thing worth knowing. I tried my best at the church meeting to-day."

"Do you mean to say that you haven't heard it's about an actress?"

"An actress?" with a suppressed shriek. "Goodness, no!"

"Well, it is! She was seen in his house," impressively.

"Oh!" breathless with suspense.

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"More than once," raising her eyebrows; "more than twice," with due emphasis—"more than half a dozen times!" This was a base fabrication, but she did not hesitate to enhance the effect of her communication by telling it.

"Scandalous!" gasped Mrs. Vanderpool.

"Outrageous!" declared Mrs. Loftus.

"Where did she come from?"

"Heaven knows!"

"And to have her in his house! why, it's the most audacious proceeding I ever heard of!"

"So it is, and his marriage with Miss Bell to come off in the Fall!"

"What a position for *her*!"

"Serves her right, the upstart!"

"What do you suppose she'll do?"

"There's no telling, Mrs. Vanderpool."

"She will break her engagement, most likely."

"Don't be too sure of it. Girls are so anxious to get husbands nowadays."

"Perhaps Mrs. Winthrop won't find Dorothy too good for Eric Hazelton after this," said Mrs. Vanderpool.

"If he is half a man he wouldn't have her now. Though there are plenty who will, I daresay. That woman's power is unbounded. Did you ever see such airs as she gave herself to-day?"

"I never did."

"I have always had my opinion of such people."

"Must you go?" Mrs. Loftus had risen.

"Yes, indeed! Why, my dear, I have made you a half-hour's call. But I always overstay my time here. It's such a pleasure to chat with you! And you've

such a lovely house, too. I never get tired of looking at all the pretty things."

"Very kind of you to say so, I'm sure," murmured Mrs. Vanderpool ringing the bell. "Do drop in soon again—informally, you know—and let me hear all the news. I'm so tied down with my baby."

"Sweet angel!" cooed the departing guest, who detested children; then, "Didn't you think that wrap Mrs. Winthrop wore this morning horribly unbecoming to her style?"

"I did so!"

"Why, it was youthful enough for you, with all that passementerie!"

Mrs. Vanderpool looked pleased.

"Good-bye! I'll see you to-morrow at church, if it don't rain. I never go to church when it's wet. If you're alone, I'll come over and sit in your pew; it's so much better than ours for seeing."

"Yes, do," urged Mrs. Vanderpool, "the spring bonnets will be out."

"Well, good-bye, until Sunday."

"Good-bye! Be sure and call again soon."

"Thanks! I will."

"Good-bye!"

Whereupon the ladies embraced effusively and the footman appeared and opened the door.

All this time Mrs. Winthrop sat upon the sofa of her boudoir in company with her spectral guest, thinking.

The sun went down in a flood of crimson splendor, the shadows of night crept on; darkness like a pall fell upon the room enshrouding it in gloom, and still she sat—thinking.

Was it the gross deception of which she had been the victim that occupied her mind? was it the danger in which stood the morals of her son? Did she most fear the consequence of the news upon his betrothed, or the disastrous possibility of a mesalliance? Was it the faith forever lost; wounded pride; outraged sentiments of virtue; or was it the image of Caste tottering upon its pedestal, and any moment liable to fall in a thousand fragments to the ground?

Yes, Caste was the adversary which Mrs. Winthrop, diplomatist that she was, feared to look in the face. Caste was the contingency that she was unprepared to meet. Caste, the anathematizing deity, as merciless to her as to the simplest follower in its train.

Under the ferule she must also pass unless—and here a bright idea occurred to her—unless she could outwit Caste. There was a bare chance of being able to accomplish this, but that there was a chance at all sufficed. She seized it with avidity and began to weigh the obstacles likely to interfere.

Everything must yield, she decided—everything, unreservedly! All must give way in the great cause. No sacrifice too great, no means too bold, nothing, however good or great or worthy or innocent, be spared. It was going to be a combat to the death, and deadly weapons were indispensable. The deception concerned her alone—that was soon disposed of. She buried it away among the other griefs which had come to her in the course of her life, with a sigh, but with eyes in which there was not the suspicion of a tear.

The next point in the case touched Tom's fall from grace. It is astonishing how little this fall affected

her. "The girl is pretty," she argued, "and"—well she would not go into details. It was not in her code to expect too much of men; were they not all weak and fallible? But how was Beatrice to be reconciled to such fallibility? Mrs. Winthrop did not dwell upon this speculation, time was too precious. She made a note of it, however, and passed on to the next item, which was the possible low marriage. That, fortunately, she could prevent. Tom, by some means or other, should be removed from the temptation, or the temptation by some means or other removed from Tom. Why not a European tour, until gossip subsided, with Beatrice of the party, providing, of course, she could succeed in getting her to look upon fallibility in the proper light? However, that was to be an after consideration; there remained nothing now for her to overcome but her outraged sense of virtue, her wounded pride, and Caste's animadversions. And here arose the stupendous difficulty; here was where all the craft, dexterity and adroitness which she could command might not serve her purpose. Albeit she would try; and try she did, patiently and persistently. The night wore wearily away and still she kept her unflagging vigil. All the color faded from her face, all the lustre from her eyes; her features became pinched and drawn under the self-imposed strain, and her slender hands, weighed down with gems, trembled in her lap. And still she sat there—thinking.

The first gray streaks of dawn revealed her worn and haggard, still on the same attitude and still thinking. At last, at last, an idea darted like lightning through her fertile brain! Quick as a flash she grasped it and set about to lay the plans by which she meant

to defeat her enemy. The means were simple. She merely proposed to turn the current of scandal in another direction.

According to her theory the affair stood thus: her son's connection with a young woman of the theatre had become known. Admitted. She did not intend to deny this, but she did propose to connect Mr. Hazelton's name with that of the real culprit, and throw as much, if not all, of the blame upon him. Nothing easier than to make people believe it, for no denial would ever come from his lips; she knew him well.

This idea abroad, there would be a revulsion of feeling in favor of Tom. He would become a hero. Beatrice, always willing to coincide with popular opinion, whatever her secret scruples, would be pacified; and lastly, Dorothy, who (in spite of their many variances) still persisted in her faithfulness to a man whom Mrs. Winthrop was resolutely determined should never be her husband, would receive a blow sufficient to shatter the last remnants of her affection.

Six months must make a change in all concerned. Mrs. Winthrop was a great believer in the healing power of time. Tom would be constantly under her influence, too—constantly in the company of his *fiancée* and—well she did not know just what might occur. Yes, her course was clear, and only required deftness and skill. Fortunately for her purpose, she possessed both. By the time this point was reached she was almost exhausted from agitation and loss of sleep. It was daybreak before she prepared to retire. As she sank prostrate upon her bed the skeleton arose, and gliding noiselessly across the room, disappeared with

an almost imperceptible rattle of bones into the closet whence it came.

Mrs. Winthrop raised her head and regarded it attentively; after which she sought her pillow and closed her eyes. "At least it was well bred!" she murmured, and fell asleep.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BOWER OF BLISS.

SEVERAL weeks after Mrs. Winthrop's discovery, an article appeared in one of the daily papers that caused Tom and Eric considerable trepidation. It mentioned no names, but the scurrilous insinuations it contained were unmistakable. It is perhaps needless to affirm that these pointed markedly in their direction. Tom was completely nonplussed—not so much because of the venom which characterized the paragraph, nor indeed the paragraph itself. His fears arose from the probable effect it might have in arousing the suspicions of his mother, which, above all, he most wished to avert. As time went by and no serious consequences seemed likely to follow, these fears began to abate. For various reasons, though, he not only became a frequent visitor at her house, but contrived that she should have an excuse to become a frequent visitor at his. After her eventful *contre-temps*, she was not slow to embrace the opportunity to thoroughly investigate his premises; and she only breathed freely when an effectual search revealed not the slightest trace of the obnoxious person.

"They have sent her away," she said mentally, "and they have sent Mildred, too."

This did not trouble her a great deal, for in furthering their own ends, they little realized how much they were advancing hers, or how she commended the secrecy and discretion they observed.

"She suspects nothing," declared Tom, "absolutely nothing!

"I am not so sure of it," replied Eric, dubiously; nor was he. There was something in her manner which caused him to doubt. He knew perfectly that nothing escaped her notice, newspaper items headed "Society Gossip," especially. And added to this was the profound silence she observed upon the subject, which but a little while before gave her ground for unlimited discussion. The more he dwelt upon it, the oftener he found himself in her presence, the firmer grew his conviction that there were perfectly reasonable grounds for his impressions. Tom could not be brought to realize this; he scoffed and ridiculed the idea, but Eric stood to his opinion and waited, not without anxiety, for further developments.

In the interval the idea occurred to him that it might not be a bad plan to make a tour of the principal club and billiard rooms, in which resorts he was sure to pick up scraps of any gossip going the rounds. The success that attended this proceeding exceeded his wildest hopes—indeed it succeeded in ruffling him not a little, for, being taken completely unawares, he was almost betrayed into an avowal, which had it escaped him, would have more than sufficed to bring Mrs. Winthrop's well-bred skeleton from its hiding-place. And he came nearer giving utterance to these

words than he ever did to anything in his life. They actually trembled on his lips before he thought of their consequences and suppressed them. For it did not take him long to discover that *he* was the Lothario accredited with the *esclandre*. Mrs. Winthrop did not lay her plans in vain, nor count too much upon the loyalty of her victim. He was quick to see that by taking the blame upon himself, he would exonerate his friend, and then he never hesitated.

He laughed the affair off as a huge joke, and offered no denial of it, and the belief in his guilt, was thereby confirmed. The sacrifice was freely made, and he never would have regretted it, but for the time that came, *when his word was not sufficient to give the lie to the accusation.*

* * * * *

Two apparently uneventful months passed away. It was July. The last rays of a hot summer sun fell in yellow beams upon the broad veranda of a picturesque little cottage nestling snugly against a hill. The windows were flung open, and a gentle breeze stirred the lace curtains with which they were hung. The wide walk lined on either side by bright flower-beds wound in a sweeping curve through the grounds, and the smooth green lawn sloped to a gateway overgrown with wild-rose and southernwood. The house was low and rambling, and a piazza thickly hung with woodbine stretched entirely around it. A little in the distance waving fields of grain gleamed in the sunlight; grassy meadows dotted with flowers nestled in shady vales; and beyond rose a range of purple hills sharply outlined against the clouds. To the north, in a grand sweep, stretched a sheet of water ablaze with the

golden lines quivering upon it. A soft sky, flecked here and there by rifts of floating cloudlets, spread overhead, like a vast dome, pale and azure tinted, and gently in upon the stillness came a tinkle of bells and a murmur of kine lowing in the daisied pastures.

Under the shade of one of the stately trees stood Generva, a fair picture in a fair scene. Generva, with light and buoyant tread, and an air of bewitching grace about her. She wore a fleecy white gown, confined round the waist by a broad sash, and her rare pale face was shaded by a great leghorn hat, whose drooping feathers lent to her features an unwonted softness and beauty. Behind, as a background, rose a clump of rich dark herbage, with here and there a bunch of purple lilac peering through, and above, a struggling sunbeam fell from a quivering maple bough, and dropping at her feet, tinged her hair and dress with amber.

With folded hands and wrapt expression she gazed upon the landscape before her. To her eyes there were ever-varying tints upon the foliage, ever-fleeting shades upon the undulating hills; she was a passionate lover of nature, and her poetic imagination received a constant stimulus from these picturesque surroundings.

Reared in the gloom of a city, she had often dreamed of the peace to be found in a spot like this, but, except from a railway train, she had rarely ever caught a glimpse of such. One glance into her blooming face and shining eyes was sufficient to discern the great benefit she had imbibed from these new conditions. Her strength was completely restored, and with it a happy contentment. The past, like an unpleasant dream, seemed to have faded from her memory. She

lived, as was indeed natural to her, wholly in the to-day. The to-morrow was too far away even to waste a thought upon.

If the future ever came in upon the present it did not mar its harmony, for love was her world, the Bower of Bliss her home. She had found her heaven for a little while. No whisper of the world, no breath of its doings, ever reached this charmed dwelling-place. The days here were perfect. She spent them in following her favorite pursuits. She read, and wrote, and wandered under the trees lost in idle day dreams; and every evening brought her lover, or her friend, or both. She was waiting for them at that moment, and not in vain, for even then a footstep sounded upon the gravel walk and she ran lightly across the lawn.

It was Eric, who hastened forward to meet her; Eric, who took both her hands and pressed them warmly in his own.

"I knew it was you," she said, flashing a bright glance upon him; "I knew it at once."

"And you could not suppress a little feeling of disappointment that it didn't happen to be somebody else. Eh? Come, own up!"

"I will not,"—strolling with him to a rustic seat near by. "I am glad to see you; you know it."

"Virtue meets its own reward," replied Eric. "He will be out by and by. As soon as he can get away from his mother, who was at the house when I left."

"Indeed," murmured Generva, almost under her breath. "Did you dine?"

"Yes, thanks."

"You will perhaps take something now?"

"A cigar, if you will permit me, and I know you will. It's a very good one," offering it for her inspection.

"It looks as though it might be."

"Have you a match?"

"A box full."

"Then you are happy."

"Very. Are you?"

"Can you doubt it?"

"No. One would be blind who failed to perceive that. I don't want to flatter you, and I am not in the habit of paying compliments, but you grow more beautiful every day of your life. Of course, you know it, though you wouldn't be a woman if you didn't."

"Yes," she admitted, with arch simplicity, "I know it—but not because I am a woman. Have not both you and Tom told me of it repeatedly? If I grow vain you will have yourselves to blame."

"We have ourselves to blame for a good many things," said Eric, sententiously.

"I do not believe it," she maintained, stoutly.

"Generva," knocking the ashes from his cigar and regarding her attentively, "you are making a sort of god out of Tom, and offering him a homage which he neither deserves nor appreciates; for he is a man, and men have a habit of taking things for granted. Now, it may be a waste of breath; but I warn you, your idol is clay—common clay at that, and likely to crumble in your hands or fall to pieces at your feet. Think about it, my dear," with a puff, "when you are alone and have nothing better to do."

"If my idol break," she retorted, laughingly, "I will say with the poet:

In this hour I could wish
 Thy noble strength would fail thee,
 For then, perchance, my wanton heart,
 Less truly might bewail thee;
 And even though I knew that thus
 Thy faith and trust were broken,
 Still would the shattered relics be
 To me a priceless token!"

"Romanticist, you wrote that!"

"It would be useless to convince you, so I make no denial."

"Where will all this lead you?"

"Who can tell? I am in Paradise now."

"Was Juliet chimerical, think you?"

"She was at least faithful."

"Even as you would be?"

"Even as I would be."

"I believe you imbibe your fanciful notions from the poets."

"Perhaps!" dreamily. "They are my constant companions."

"Poets do not always say what they mean, Geneva. Did you ever think of that?"

"No; I have never questioned the teachings of those with whom I have always found myself in sympathy."

"How does the play come on? That's a slight change of subject, but it doesn't matter."

"The play is finished with the exception of the last act. I somehow am unable to write that, try as I will."

"Why not?"

"I have repeatedly asked myself the same question."

"Perhaps I might be able to help you?"

"I doubt it. You see, it is the fate of the *Princess* that I cannot determine."

"She being, more or less, yourself."

"No; how can you say so?"

"Because I was struck with a similarity when I looked over the first part of the manuscript."

"It is a mistake. I do not at all resemble her."

"In a measure, I agree, with you. For instance, you would not do as the *Princess* did, but you would feel as she felt if the man you loved failed to return your affection and lavished his attentions upon another. You would suffer as she did if placed in the same position. Don't you think you would?"

"I might; I do not know. But how does that account for my apparent inability to bring to a fitting close her unhappy career?"

"I think I can explain," and Eric threw his cigar away. "Now, we have first to deal with her love for *General Orloff*. There is where the resemblance between you strikes me most, and there you found little difficulty. Why? because you knew what love was, and you breathed passion, your own passion, into the being created by your fancy. Now we come to her frenzied jealousy of the rival who has blighted her hopes. There your ready imagination did you good service, and you were keenly sensible of the emotions such would incite. Is not that so?"

"It may have been," she agreed.

"Well, this fierce jealousy would of itself suggest a revenge. You conceived the idea for the *Princess* even as you would have been capable of conceiving it for yourself. In reality, of course, you would not have been able to effect it; but that's not the point,

you are quite able to think you would. Now, where your imagination utterly fails is in its power to qualify both remorse and despair. Remorse that would be sufficient to portray the anguish of a woman whose 'compunctious visitings of nature' far exceed the range of your conception. And then despair—tell me candidly, what do you know, what can you realize of it? Comparatively speaking, nothing (for pain though keenly felt is rarely remembered); nor will you, unless, God forbid! you should experience something of the kind."

"Then I must know something of despair to portray it?"

"No, not necessarily, but you must have the faculty of analyzing it. I tell you, my dear, either a broad realization or an actual experience is requisite. Honestly, now, do you realize the full significance either of one or of the other?"

"In their entirety, no," she confessed.

"Can you imagine them?"

"In a way I can, but it is vague."

"Then you have the solution of your problem."

"I do not fully agree with you," she replied, "that is, as far as despair is concerned. Touching remorse, you are right, I could not sound its depths. But—"

"But what?"

"Despair is different."

"So it is, I admit. But taking them together they are the joint difficulties which retard your progress, are they not?"

"Yes, I believe you are right."

"Tell me why."

"I am too happy, too far removed from their reach."

"That's it exactly."

"Then I shall never finish that play."

"I hope to Heaven it may be so!" replied Eric fervently; then, as if to divert her attention from his observation, he exclaimed: "Look! is not that a magnificent spectacle?"

She glanced quickly in the direction he indicated, suppressing a cry of rapture at the sight. The sun had just set in a ball of fire, leaving behind a lurid trail of molten gold. Its edges were deeply dyed in purple, and overhead the clouds were opal tinted. The lake stretched along the coast like a mirror of silver, and the gentle ripple of its waves softly washed against the shore. A dusky forest outline swept the horizon and every fleeting shadow reflected itself in the glassy stream. Suddenly a glow of crimson flushed the heavens, the lights waned and took a deeper shade. Then a misty haze, thin and transparent, crept from the water upward, until it mingled with the vapory clouds, fading their resplendent colors to hues that waxed paler and paler, dying away at last and leaving the sky a vast expanse of sea-green, with the evening star hanging like a silver drop from its bosom, and a crescent moon slowly climbing the distant hills. Twilight unfolded its sombre mantle; the shadows deepened, and the day with a gentle sigh fell into the arms of night and slumbered there. Then, and not until then, did Eric arouse himself, and turning to the white figure at his side touched the cold little hands round which were entwined the long silken ribbon of the leghorn hat.

"Come," he said, rising and leading her towards the house, "you will take cold."

"A moment longer!" she pleaded, holding back and glancing down the road. "I thought I heard the sound of a buggy. Let us go to the gate and look, he must come soon."

Eric demurred, but finally humored the whim, and following her down the path, lingered fully a half hour longer by her side. They did not talk much, both being under the spell of the night; but they watched the fantastic shadows reflected by the trees; the trembling beams of moonlight dancing upon the waves and the myriads of stars that had gathered in the broad expanse above.

"Did you not hear something?" she inquired, after a long pause.

"No," he answered, and there was deep compassion in his voice, "I heard nothing."

She made no reply, but slipping her hand through his arm, leaned lightly against him.

He knew just what prompted the action, and he was glad that she could find some comfort in having him near. Looking down into her face etherealized by the moonlight, he felt perhaps for the first time the wondrous power of its beauty, but he only said: "Let us go in."

"A little longer!" she pleaded tremulously, and somehow he could not withstand her appeal. So another half hour went by and no voice broke the solemn stillness, save the voice of her heart sending forth a mute appeal to the darkness.

For Tom did not come.

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CHAPTER XV.

DIPLOMACY.

GENERVA and Eric lingered long by the gate in the expectation of seeing Tom, who all the while was closeted with his mother, too deeply absorbed in the subject under discussion to take any note of the flight of time.

For Mrs. Winthrop, contrary to her usual custom, had come directly to the point, and informed him that she knew his secret.

The direct attack dumbfounded him. He was so totally unprepared for it from her that it put him entirely at her mercy, leaving him no single chance of justification. Judge of his astonishment then, when, instead of profiting by the advantage which she had gained, she simply drew her chair nearer and, laying her hand upon his shoulder, murmured:

"My poor, poor boy!"

"Don't, Mother," he protested with a man's usual antipathy to pity; "I do not deserve your sympathy. I only wish I had known that it would have been extended to me, though, for then, at least, I should not have been guilty of deceiving you. As it is, I can but offer a confidence which you would be perfectly justified in doubting." And moved and encouraged by her unwonted tenderness, he opened his heart (as she confidently expected he would) and told her everything, freely and of his own will.

Very attentively Mrs. Winthrop listened to the story of that ideal love; of those sweet, stolen meetings; of that Bower of Bliss, with its clump of hawthorn just coming into bloom, its garden crowded with larkspur and roses; its reef of rocks overlooking the lake where at eventide the dusky glimmering stars were reflected in weird and mystic proportion; of the fair young creature who presided there: her rare pale beauty, and blush-rose lips; her deep violet eyes, the depths of which it was impossible to sound, so ever varying their expression; her voice, so low and sweet, that stirred the blood with its penetration. Her innocence of life and its responsibilities—of the world and its attractions—of men, society—all, pertaining to the practical or commonplace. And, lastly, of the inexpressible, the overpowering love with which she had inspired him. The love that was stronger than self; that overstepped obstacles; cried down conventionalities; scattered to the winds conscientious scruples, and laid claim to every thing, even—

“Honor!”

It was Mrs. Winthrop who finished the recital. Tom shuddered involuntarily as the word fell from her lips with cold precision; never perhaps fully comprehending all it involved until that moment. What profound contempt he felt for himself, for the weakness which could only result in bringing sorrow to one or the other of the women, to whom by the sacred ties of love and duty he was bound.

“Tom,” inquired Mrs. Winthrop, “do you think you could be happy with a wife who demanded a sacrifice like this on your part?”

“She does not demand it,” he replied, rousing him-

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self—"as yet she has not the slightest suspicion that I owe any obligation to—another."

"And when she has?"

"It will break her heart, poor girl!"

"Not quite, I hope," and Mrs. Winthrop smiled; "hearts do not break. That is a mistaken idea entirely."

"You do not know her," he maintained; "you cannot possibly conceive the peculiar sensitiveness of her impressionable nature. She is an extremist in every sense of the word."

"That is in her favor," mused Mrs. Winthrop. "Do you not think it your duty to acquaint her with the true state of affairs?" she asked.

"I cannot"—brokenly—"I have tried over and over again to do so."

"Why?"

"Because I could not answer for the consequences, which might prove fatal to us both."

"You mean that she would renounce you?"

"Perhaps," gloomily.

"Will you let me advise you in the matter, my son?"

"Are you in earnest?" he inquired turning quickly round and taking her hand. "Do you mean it?"

"Yes, I am in earnest, and I mean all I say," she replied.

"You heap coals of fire on my head," he said fervently. "I deserve reproof from you, not generosity, Mother."

"Say no more, but listen. I have a proposition to make—one that you can consider at your leisure in case you are not prepared to decide upon it now."

"A proposition, what is it?"

"I want you to accompany me abroad for six months, during which time you must agree to hold no communication whatsoever with this lady. If, at the expiration of that term, you find your feelings have in nowise undergone a change, that you are still of the same mind as you are now, why then—"

"Well, then?"

"Then we will consider what can be done to effect your happiness."

"And Beatrice," eagerly.

"I will answer for her."

The Priestess of the Delphian Oracle was not more obscure and equivocal than Mrs. Winthrop on this occasion; nor the crowds of pilgrims flocking to its holy shrine more credulous than the young man who, upon the conclusion of her last sentence, exclaimed:

"Do you mean that you would consent to my union with Generva? that you would promise—"

"Nay, you must not exact a promise of me, yet," was the Machiavelian reply, "at least," noting his disappointment, "until I become acquainted and—"

"If that be all," he interrupted, "I have no fear. To know her is to love her!"

"Then you will go?" suppressing her eagerness.

"I will, upon the conditions you mention, although I do not see how I shall reconcile her to such a prolonged separation."

"It is really very serious," thought Mrs. Winthrop; but aloud she observed, "Explanations will come later on, and are secondary considerations, I assure you!"

"I hope they may prove so."

"And they will, believe me," rising with an air of

unmistakable relief. "But I want your word upon this, Tom," holding out her slender, tapering hand, which he immediately took, saying as he did so:

"You have it!"

"Then we understand each other?" regarding him searchingly.

"Better than ever before!" he declared.

"You only imagine that, my dear. Circumstances invariably alter cases; and while I think of it," with an apparent afterthought, "I must further exact that until the expiration of the time allotted, you make no change in your conduct toward Beatrice."

"What! you would have me lead her to believe that I—"

"Nothing of the kind," perfectly anticipating what he was going to say—"I wish you to go on treating her in precisely the same manner as has heretofore been your custom. A friend, and nothing more; or," lowering her voice somewhat—"less! I do expect that you will observe the strictest silence upon this subject, however, both to her, as well as to others."

"I will do that," he agreed—not without misgiving, however.

"So you are willing to refrain from mentioning this young person to any one?"

"Yes, I am willing."

"And to Beatrice particularly."

"Beatrice particularly," opening the door.

"Then we will go down," she said taking his arm.

"The girls are in the drawing-room and she is with them. I would like you to see her if you will. It's nothing more than courtesy. She knows you are in the house."

"I did have an engagement," acknowledged Tom, looking at his watch, "but it is now too late for me to think of keeping it. I will go with you if you like, but don't press me to stay, Mother."

Mrs. Winthrop satisfied him upon this point and then led the way to where were assembled Dorothy, Agnes and Beatrice; the two former of whom took possession of him, and beset him with questions.

"Girls, girls!" he exclaimed, after shaking hands with his betrothed, "one at a time, if you please. I can't answer you both. I leave it to Beatrice."

"Not very well," she decided.

"But are you going, Tom?" importuned Agnes.

"You can say yes or no, I suppose?"

"Going where?"

"Abroad," put in Dorothy; "to Europe?"

"Europe!" echoed Tom. "Oh, that's it, is it?"

"Yes, it is," replied Agnes, impatiently.

"We wish it very much, Tom," murmured Dorothy.

"You do? How much?"

"More than I can say," and she slipped her hand into his.

"Well, then, I am," he admitted placing an arm around each of them. "So rejoice!"

"You darling!" exclaimed Agnes, hugging him rapturously.

"Dear Tom!" sighed Dorothy, and something in her face prompted him to stoop and kiss it.

"Bee, ain't you glad?" And Agnes ran over and gave her an embrace.

"Very!"

"It will be perfect now," dancing about the room. Mamma and Beatrice and Tom, three angels together."

"I neglected to mention that Beatrice is to accompany us," explained Mrs. Winthrop, *sotto voce* to Tom, who had grown pale and who looked questioningly from one to the other. "It can make no possible difference to you."

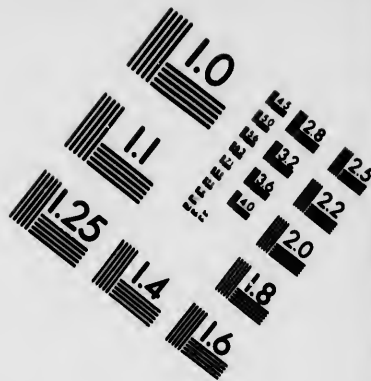
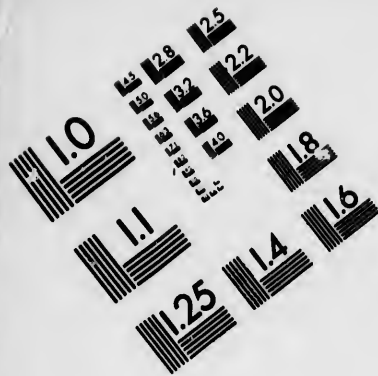
"It makes every difference to me," he returned in the same tone. "Had I known of it I should never have committed myself. As it is, I do not consider that I am in the least obligated to keep a promise gained under false pretences," and resolutely, "I will not go!"

Mrs. Winthrop set her teeth and breathed hard, and Tom relapsed into a moody and stubborn silence. At that juncture, and scarcely before the words, "I will not go," escaped him, two arms stole softly round his neck and a flushed little cheek touched his own.

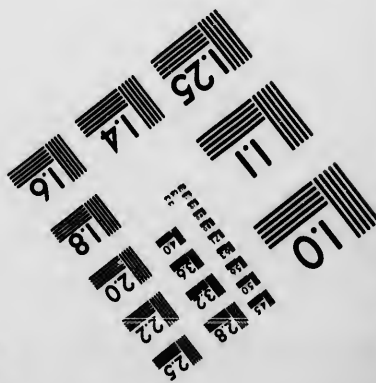
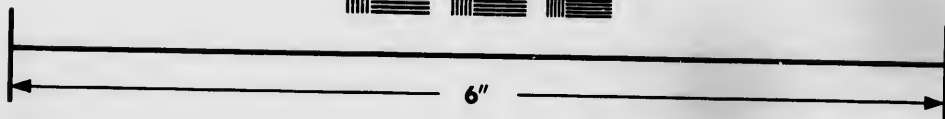
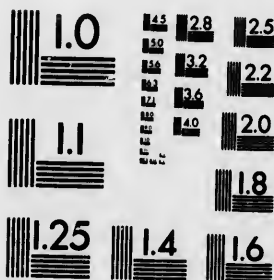
"You promised to take me, Tom," whispered a tearful voice in his ear, "and I won't get my new legs if you don't."

It was Teets, who, curled up half asleep in an arm-chair, had been passed over unnoticed. At the sound of the pleading, quivering accents Tom started and without a moment's hesitation clasped the little fellow in his arms, and said: "I never break my word, lad! At least—" Here somehow his faithlessness to Teets' sister came into his mind and he did not finish the sentence, but he was glad that he could make an effort to atone, for the child was failing of late, and a sea voyage and the treatment of a famous specialist in Paris (in whose ability he had unlimited confidence) must undoubtedly benefit, perhaps permanently improve his feeble condition. So Teets won the day, and Beatrice at that moment loved his shrunken limbs





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and misshapen dwarfish body. For despite Tom's neglect of her; despite the rumors which in her heart she knew were not without foundation; despite coldness and indifference, she loved him still, and never swerved in her resolution of becoming his wife.

"You will go, Tom?" inquired Dorothy as she followed him into the hall and took his hat from the rack.

"Yes," he replied, "I will go."

"Tom"—she spoke with nervous abruptness—"I believe mamma has planned this trip to separate me from Eric more than anything else."

"You would not allow mere absence to do that, I hope," he returned pinching her cheek; "you are not inconstant?"

"I am not—but he—"

"Don't doubt him, Dorothy."

"Tom, mother will never consent to our marriage, of that I am convinced. Nor would I, if certain rumors that have reached me of late be true."

"Rumors about Eric. Faugh!" and Tom laughed.

"Don't you believe them!"

"I don't," she affirmed, "but—"

"You will have to make it a runaway match, I guess," he put in.

"I would not like to do that."

"Until all else failed, eh?"

"Even then. Why, mother would never forgive it!"

"She would forgive it sooner than she would consent to it, don't you think?"

"Yes," dubiously.

"Well, you must be patient. He loves you, be assured of that."

"You really think so?"

"I am sure of it!"

"Dear Tom!"—and Dorothy gave his hand a sympathetic squeeze.

Words fail to express Eric's indignant astonishment when Tom told him of all that passed in the short interval which elapsed since they parted. It did not take the astute young fellow very long to discover Mrs. Winthrop's motive in wringing from her son the assurance that he would accompany her across the ocean. What puzzled him most was the apparent simplicity of the victim. Still, when he came to reflect upon it, he decided that it was perhaps scarcely fair of him to blame Tom. "A man is not likely to suspect his mother of other than honest intentions," he argued, "though there is no earthly reason why a man's friend should blind himself to the truth, or look the affair other than squarely in the face."

This Eric did. The result was conclusive but perplexing. He found that he entirely agreed with Mrs. Winthrop in the wisdom of the temporary separation she proposed. This was an unlooked-for issue. Who would have deemed it possible that he could find himself in accordance with her? But he was. His first sensations when Tom brought him the news were those of bitter anger: these subsided, however, for cool reflection, which, while it did not serve to change his belief, was certainly instrumental in presenting more than one side of the question for his consideration. He had always been doubtful of the durable nature of Tom's affections (respecting the fair sex), and it was hardly in keeping with good sense to blame his mother for offering the very best means to test them.

Much as he regretted it, on principle, he was forced

to the conclusion that for once in his life he sided with her, even to the extent of commending her plan of having Beatrice of the party; for in this lady Eric only saw another obstacle for Tom to overcome, and one which, perhaps better than any other, would serve to try his powers of resistance. There was but one serious drawback to the whole proceeding that he could see, and that was Generva, who, all unconscious and trustful, would receive a terrible shock when told, for of course she must now know all. It would not be fair to keep her in ignorance any longer.

"I would never have given my word," declared Tom when they were talking it over, "had I been aware that Beatrice was to go. This fact will be sufficient to fill Generva's mind with doubts, and who can say what the result will be?"

"She must know it, though," persisted Eric.

"I can never tell her!" and Tom buried his face in his hands.

"I wouldn't take it to heart, old fellow," sympathized Eric. "It's a good thing for both of you. You will have time to think. and she—"

"To forget."

"You are much more likely to do that."

"Me?" astonished.

"You!"

"Why?"

"I don't know, unless it be that Time is better disposed to men than women, touching them more lightly with his hands, and rarely failing to provide a speedy balm to heal their wounds."

"Time doesn't make it any easier for me to break this to her," muttered Tom.

"Give Time time, and he might."

"I can never find the courage to tell her all you say—never!" and Tom arose from his chair.

"Then I must find it for you," replied Eric becoming grave, "but it goes terribly against me. I am blunt and outspoken, and may wound her unthinkingly by my brusqueness. But I'll do my best for all that, and tell her, if you say so."

Tom made no immediate reply. He took several turns round the room with his hands clasped behind him, then he came back to where Eric sat and said:

"Yes, it will have to be you."

Nothing further passed between them upon the subject of the tour, except scraps of the interview with Dorothy, which Tom repeated, somewhat incoherently if must be confessed. Eric smiled when he touched upon the rumors which had filled her heart with doubt.

"I will fix all that," he promised, and he did; for, before going to bed he wrote the following note:

MY DEAR, DEAR GIRL,—Tom has told me of your fears. Banish them now and forever; and whatever comes, remember, that I am always Your loyal,
ERIC.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

IT was not without misgiving that Eric sought Generva for the purpose of breaking the news of her lover's departure. To speak candidly, his anxiety was such as to fill him with the most gloomy forebodings.

He found himself beset with doubts vague and conflicting, and involved in a perplexing speculation, regarding not only the manner in which he could best approach her, but as to how and by what means he could ever summon sufficient courage to approach her at all. "He must guard against a shock," he told himself, and be careful not to wound or hurt her, and yet withal must impart, in whatsoever words best expressed it, a most unpleasant piece of information. In plain terms, he was trying to inflict a sword-thrust without hurting the victim. It was no easy task, and he finally gave it up, resolving to trust to chance as his sole abettor. With no idea of how it was to be done, he found himself driving speedily along the road which led to her house, firmly resolved to do it. And here a word concerning Eric himself may not be out of place, seeing that he figures conspicuously in this tale, and has never been properly presented to the reader.

Perhaps Mrs. Winthrop's greatest objection to him for her daughter was the fact that he came of an obscure family. Father and grandfather before him had been simple farmers, but they were honest, upright, thrifty men, and if uncouth and but little learned, were none the less exemplary. His mother was a country schoolmistress, but she was a bright, clever woman, and so ambitious for her son, that she had been induced to ask help for him from her brother, a morose, taciturn but monetarily successful man, who responded to the call and adopted the boy in his early youth. It was to him Eric owed his collegiate education, and the large interest in the newspaper of which he now stood at the head. His humble origin brought

no blush to his face, which Mrs. Winthrop declared was but another proof of how hopelessly humble it was. To be low-born was deplorable, but to glory in it indicated nothing less than moral depravity.

So it came to pass he was in her bad books, and destined to remain there, but the knowledge did not prevent him from laying away a tidy sum of money, by means of which he meant to go to housekeeping some day in the near future with Dorothy. He was quite as great a believer in time as Mrs. Winthrop herself—it was strange that they should both agree so well upon some points!

But to return. It was late in the afternoon and raining steadily. A dark and threatening sky spread sombrely overhead, the waters of the lake fretted turbulently, and creeping curves of foam curled fantastically round the rising billows, throwing out flakes of spray, or dashing with a low murmurous moan against the shore. Swaying trees bent in the gust, and swept their dripping branches on the ground; the wind howled dismally, and there arose a vaporous density in the atmosphere, unbroken save for a flock of sea-gulls spotting the dark horizon. It was a depressing day, but it was the day Eric had set, and nothing short of a shower of pitchforks could have kept him at home. He believed in getting disagreeable duties over with alacrity, claiming that every moment's delay was apt to give rise to complications. As far as the unpromising state of the weather was concerned, he rather commended the good taste of the elements, in providing such fitting accompaniments to both his humor and his mission.

He did not even complain of the mud which was

almost up to the hubs of his buggy; or find the least objection to the rain, which literally beat in upon him.

If it had been any one but Generva who was to be made to suffer, he would certainly have drawn the line at the huge cakes of clay which so retarded and impeded his progress; but under the circumstances he permitted himself to take a savage pleasure in each creak of the hinges, strained to the utmost, and liable at any moment to be wrenched from their groaning sockets.

As he drew up at the gateway he stopped voluntarily and looked about him. It was not more than six o'clock, but it was almost dark. Very bleak and dreary appeared the drenched garden, with its beaten-down beds of flowers, its straggling bushes of lilac and clematis; its sweet-scented woodbine drooping lamentably, and the passion-flower that climbed the trellis-worked arbor, shivering in the wind, and casting its bright red petals upon the water-beaten ground. Even the cottage presented a dismal aspect, with its bright colored awnings drawn up, its doors made fast, and here and there through a carefully closed window a sickly ray of light struggling faintly with the all-absorbing gloom.

Eric drove slowly up the avenue in the direction of the stable, where he hitched his horse, and raising an umbrella ran lightly towards the house, and entered by the kitchen door.

Mildred dropped a gridiron when she saw him, so utterly he took her unawares. But she soon recovered herself and proceeded to help him off with his rubber coat and boots. This done she led the way up-stairs

to a room where he set to work to remove some of the superfluous grime from his face.

Generva, hearing his voice, ran precipitately to the kitchen. Seeking out Mildred, she had her to make a fire in the little parlor, after which she bustled round like an excited child, to assist in the preparation of tea. By the time it was ready, Eric appeared in the dining-room, and in answer to her inquiry of what could have induced him to venture out such a fearful night said, that the weather never gave him much concern, if he wished to visit so important and secluded a personage as herself.

"You flatter me very much," she said, "but that isn't here nor there—you are very imprudent." Whereupon she began to rate him about the cold he would take and inquired if Tom knew of his fool-hardiness.

"Yes, Tom knew," he assured her, taking a cup of tea from her hands, and making a vain pretense to eat; and he "never had a cold in his life. Wouldn't know what to do with it if he had. Left such ailments for delicate young ladies and wheezing old women."

Generva laughed merrily at this, and pressed some marmalade of her own concoction upon him, saying as she did so: "Mildred had nothing to do with it; I made it myself, and it's good; taste it, and see."

"It is—delicious!" gasped Eric, trying to swallow it down together with the lump that would persist in coming up into his throat every time his eyes fell upon her happy face. "De-li-ci-ou-s!"

"I thought you would like it," triumphantly, "and you ought to if for nothing else than the great trouble it was. I don't mind confessing now that I did succeed in getting it to come to a jelly; that I never ex-

pected it would—nor Mildred either, for that matter. We almost gave it up in despair; but it thickened finally, though I shouldn't have blamed myself in the least if it had all to have been thrown away."

"Whom would you have blamed—Mildred?"

"No, the cook-book."

"The cook-book!" trying to smile, and encourage her to pursue the theme which, if sticky, was at least safe; "would not that have been unfair?"

"Not at all!" decidedly, "and I'll prove it to you. Listen to what it said: 'Take six pounds of Seville oranges—' To begin with, my oranges never came from Seville, I am sure. But I shouldn't think that would have made any difference. Should you?"

"Of course not."

"—'Cut the peel so as to make it peel off in four pieces—' Now, I'll acknowledge that's where I may have been mistaken—my peel wouldn't peel."

"Well?"

"—'Put it on the fire in a preserving pan, adding a consistent sufficiency of water.' Now, did you ever hear anything more absurd than that? 'Consistent sufficiency!' will you kindly inform me what that may be?"

"I don't know," he admitted.

"Nor I; but to proceed: 'And boil them for two hours.' Mine boiled five and were not done then, which goes to prove a cook-book is a delusion."

"And after?"

"After? Oh well, after that I managed, with the exception of getting the proper thickness, which that misleading and exasperating book said should be about the same as some kind of jelly (I forget what)—but I

know I never heard of it before. Ugh! I was disgusted."

"You may well have been."

"And that isn't all."

"What! more marmalade?"

"No, I burnt my finger—look at it."

She stretched out her hand, on which was a white blister.

Eric examined it closely, and, still retaining it in his own, led her away saying: "Come, if you have finished I have something to tell you."

"Something to tell me!" looking inquiringly into his face; "is it nice?"

"It is serious," he replied trying to avoid her eyes.

"You quite arouse my curiosity," she remarked as she seated herself near the fire, impressed by his manner, which had changed perceptibly.

"I will not keep you in suspense," he promised, leaning his elbow upon the mantel-piece, and glancing down at her slender graceful figure and fleecy lace dress, relieved at the throat by a dark red rose. "But I want you to hear me through without interruption. When I have finished, I shall be glad to answer any questions you wish to put to me. Will you agree to this?"

"I will agree to anything. Go on!"

Eric cleared his throat, for his voice was husky, and fixing his eyes upon a copy of Guido's "Beatrice," which hung between the windows, began: "Do you remember how particular Tom and I were to keep you from being seen while you were ill," he inquired.

"Yes," she answered trembling, as she recalled her meeting with the lady in the hall.

"We had a motive in that," he went on steadily, "which owing to your critical condition we dared not reveal. You are better now, however, and circumstances have arisen that necessitate an explanation which Tom has requested me to make."

"Tom?" the rose at her throat fluttered a little, but he did not perceive it, for he was looking fixedly at the pathetic beauty of the picture on the wall. And then, in a few hard, dry sentences, and with scarcely a pause between, he told her all. Of Tom's position in society, of his worldly mother's machinations, of the manner in which he had been cajoled into an engagement with a lady for whom he entertained only an esteemed friendship, of Mrs. Winthrop's discovery and what it led to, and finally Tom's struggle and ultimate decision. Afterwards he touched upon his own views concerning the prospective separation, and having no more to say stopped abruptly and let his glance fall from the face of the picture to the face of the girl sitting almost directly in its shadow. As he did so a smothered exclamation escaped him. It might have been the yellow lamp-light, it might have been a trick of fancy, or of the imagination, or of vision, but it was none the less realistic. *The face of "Beatrice" and the face of Generva had become identical.* There was the same girlish countenance, the same subdued expression involving an unfathomable depth of woe, the same eyes, large, dark, lustreless, looking mournfully, hopelessly, pityingly from beneath their sweeping lashes. There was the same bronze-colored hair falling loosely about, the same delicate pallor, the same full exquisitely shaped mouth, the same haunted, agonized, tearless expression that seemed to say, "My doom is fixed!"

With ineffable dismay he hastened to her side, knelt down, and taking her cold, limp hands, called her gently by name.

"Generva! Generva! don't look like that," he implored. "Don't make me more despicable in my own estimation than I am now. I know I was cruel, abrupt, unmindful of everything, except my selfish desire to get a distasteful task speedily performed. You cannot blame me more than I blame myself. But listen, I have told you the worst, and with my customary bluntness at that. Another would have chosen some tender method. Any one could have done it better—even Mrs. Winthrop or Bee, or—oh! if I had only thought of it sooner—Dorothy. How different it would have sounded coming from her lips; you would have been comforted, reconciled, instead of—my God! I could not have hurt you more had I laid you dead at my feet."

Completely overcome with remorse and self-condemnation, he broke off his incoherent speech, and buried his face in his hands, and Generva still motionless, made no reply, no sign that she heard, or understood, or felt.

"I have told you the worst," he went on when he had gained sufficient control to pursue the subject. "You must bear in mind that it will only be for six months. After that—he will return," cheerfully, "and all will be merry as a marriage bell."

Still no reply, no relax of the set features. But he was determined to persevere, so he drew up a chair and asked:

"Don't I generally keep my word? You know I do. Well, I am going to make you a promise to-night. Do

you want to hear what it is?" brushing her cheek with a roseleaf which had fallen into her lap. "Whether you do or not you shall, for I promise this day six months, which will be January 1st, 18—, to laugh heartily with you over your fears. And I'll explain why I am so sure. It is because I am to take care of you until Tom comes back. When he does, and I have delivered you safely to him, why of course I shall send in a well-worded resignation, composed of fictitious regrets, etc. (after the manner of resignations in general), and retire into my former obscurity. Another thing Tom told me to be sure and mention, and which I forgot, is that he will consent to your occupying yourself just as you like best during his absence. You can remain here quietly, if you wish, or come into town. He will make every provision for you that affection can suggest, and leave nothing undone that can in any way add to your comfort or happiness. Engaged in pleasant pursuits, time will pass quickly away, and before you are aware of it the 1st of January will be here. Now, is not that a bright prospect? I ask you plainly, and you will answer me, will you not? and if you *can* forgive my thoughtlessness—ah!" (perceiving a little flutter of the flower at her throat and an almost imperceptible quiver of her lips) "how cruelly I have wounded you."

"To—the—death!" she gasped scarcely moving a muscle of her rigid face.

"Tom ought to have told you himself," said Eric miserably; "I knew I would be unequal to it."

"Yes," she replied brokenly, "he ought to have told me himself. Oh, if he only had!" she replied brokenly; "if he only had!"

"He loved you so well, Generva; he had not the strength, and I offered to do it for him. Forgive me!"

"You have done your duty," she said in a low, measured voice. "Good-night!"

"You want to be alone?" rising and regarding her with compassionate tenderness; "you wish me to leave you?"

She made no answer, but inclined her head a little, and not even glancing in his direction rose and walked slowly over to the table that stood directly under the painting to which she bore such a striking likeness. Seating herself, she took up a pen and, seemingly oblivious of his presence, began to write. For full ten minutes he watched her slender white hand glide rapidly over the paper. He noted the superb poise of her head, the graceful folds of her dress falling about her. His eyes took in every curve of her classic profile, lighted by the gleam of the shaded lamp. He even noted in a semi-unconscious manner the details of her surroundings. The soft Turkish rugs that covered the floor, the rich dark curtains that graced the low windows, the gilded-papered ceiling and walls, the willow chairs tufted with plush, the bookcase with a bust of Niobe looking down from its shelf, the marble mantel loaded with bronze—all of which not only arrested his attention but imprinted themselves indelibly upon his memory. He knew perfectly that he should never forget that small octagonal-shaped room, nor the silent figure sitting under the picture that seemed to have cast its fatal spell upon her.

"There's nothing for me to do," he said mentally, "but leave her, and that I am very loath to do."

Which was quite true. It might have been fear

that held him; or the fascination of the weird mysticism which seemed to have become a part of her, but he was certainly kept there by a powerful magnet—which it took considerable will-power to overcome. With firm resolution he finally walked to the door that led from the apartment, and with his hand upon the knob looked back. The pause was fatal to his intention; for impelled by some unaccountable impulse, he retraced his steps, and stood with his hand upon the back of her chair. As his eyes fell upon the paper, over which her pen continued its rapid flight, he drew back in dismay. She had begun to write the last act of "Her Drama."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DREAM DISPELLED.

THAT an "honest confession is good for the soul," was certainly exemplified in the relief Tom experienced when apprised by Eric that he had fulfilled his mission. Of course, he had not exactly made an honest confession, but inasmuch as he had been fortunate enough to secure a trusty envoy to make it for him, the result was much the same. To be sure there were some points in Eric's account that troubled him a little; for instance, the manner in which the news had been received; but he soon convinced himself that it was to be expected she would feel it keenly—for a time. After the first shock was over—why, then, of course, she would become accustomed to it.

It was quite clear he judged her from a standpoint based upon his own light-hearted temperament; and

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while closely drawn by the graver element of her character, was still quite incapable of comprehending it. Without doubt he never understood her, and herein perhaps lay the secret of the charm which she exercised over his life. There was no melancholy vein in his nature. Trouble might come to him as in the natural course of events it did, but trouble rarely lingered. Clearly, he was born with a golden spoon in his mouth, for from earliest infancy he had trod upon paths of flowers. By a singular and happy fatuity everything he touched prospered. Possessing a retentive memory and good intelligence, he succeeded in leaving his fellow medical students far behind, and, without any perceptible effort on his part, at once took a leading place among the oldest fraternity of physicians, some of whom boasted so much as a twenty years' experience. From the very beginning his practice was large; whether because of the high social position he held, general proficiency, sheer good luck, or something of each, the fact that he achieved almost immediate prominence was unquestionable. His prosperity unfortunately made him a little selfish, and his impulse a little inconstant. He was not equal to great self-sacrifice, but he was upright, and generous; and if somewhat overrated, not altogether responsible for it. He felt, since Generva knew all, that the gods really smiled upon him. Who would have supposed it possible that such a complication could have been so easily adjusted? It was now a question of six months' absence only: not a long or severe probation, particularly when one considered it was to be passed in travel and amusement.

The oftener he permitted his mind to recur to the

prospective trip, the more favorably it impressed him, and he finally found himself looking forward to it with pleasant anticipations.

He would not have cared to acknowledge it very likely, but there were times when the two weeks that must intervene before the day set for departure, lagged unmercifully. And yet, there was much to be done. But notwithstanding this the hours hung heavily upon his hands. He was as much in love as ever, but things had changed. There was no longer reason for concealment. He could come and go unquestioned, and stay if he wished, which it happened was not the case, for there was something about Generva which oppressed him indescribably. He thought, after his first visit made close upon Eric's disclosure, that she would brighten up and be herself again; but in this he was doomed to disappointment, for she did not brighten up and was never quite the same even to him.

It might have been the change in her, or the lack of the zest that secrecy invariably lends to passion, but it certainly transpired that he visited the Bower of Bliss less frequently than was his wont. Curiously enough he took to spending considerable of his leisure at Mrs. Winthrop's house, where continual meetings with Miss Bell occurred, and while he did not regard her with any warmer sentiments than heretofore, he wouldn't have denied that she diverted him. She was chatty, she was gay; moreover she was clever—and Tom liked clever women, when they possessed the faculty of being entertaining as well.

There are men who require obstacles to keep their affections alive, and others again who despair at the approach of a difficulty. Tom was of the first class,

for the apparent hopelessness of his love had been a constant impetus to it. The secrecy, the risk, the intrigue were all instrumental in affording a keen excitation to his susceptibilities, urging to constant action his rather sluggish emotions.

There had been something indescribably sweet to him in those stealthy meetings amid the flower-scented gardens and cool shadows of the Bower of Bliss; something more than ecstatic in the contemplation of beauty, offset by such poetic surroundings, and a delicious consciousness in the thought that so much loveliness was his by right of each heart-throb beating in accord with his own, each responsive sigh or tear or kiss.

Heretofore there had been an impassable gulf between them, and he was forced to content himself with crying out from the opposite shore. But now a kindly chance (alas, was it so?) had come unexpectedly to the rescue, and raised here and there a stepping-stone, upon which unsteady flags he leaped with all a lover's agility, until his goal was in sight—nay, firmly clasped in his eager, outstretched arms. Nor did his hold relapse until he had realized that it was effectually his, and then, as is the nature of man, his ardor subsided.

The Bower of Bliss was not as attractive as it had heretofore been. It was still green and fragrant; still a cool and dewy retreat robed in summer glory. In all respects it was as it had been, *save that it was now accessible*. Besides, the spiritless dejected attitude of the goddess was due to him, and he reproached himself every time he looked at her. Not that she ever blamed, or in any way altered her usual gentle de-

méanor, or failed to greet him less lovingly, less gladly, less tenderly than of old: no, it was not that; it was the strange reserve which had fallen upon her. The unconscious pathos that had stolen unawares into the tones of her voice; the deep sigh that every now and then escaped her lips, and more than all, the profound apathy into which all unknowingly she seemed to have sunk her individuality—all this filled Tom with remorse and he was profoundly contrite; but as the time went by and his efforts to assuage her grief proved unavailing, he grew restless and anxious and took to absenting himself upon the most trivial provocation.

It would seem that she had never really liked the precarious and bohemian life of her professional associates—but rather an ideal one, peopled with the creatures of her imagination. In this Arcadia, far from the haunts of mortals, she had passed a simple, peaceful existence, until love appeared, saying, "Come, I will show you greater joy." Trustfully she had taken the hand he offered, and left her land of happy dreams to follow him. Alas, she did not know that it was an earthly abode to which he lured her. An abode perhaps more real than the aerial one of her fancy, but as evanescent as the fragrance of its soul-breathing flowers.

How could she tell that one day the din and strife of the world would drown the voices of the winged and feathered creatures who dwelt in this secluded place? How could she mistrust the truth and fidelity of the God at whose shrine she worshipped so faithfully? How could she realize, as the echo of the distant city's roar fell upon her ears, ringing in them like a funeral

knell, that they proclaimed a rude awakening; woeful tidings of separation; another woman's pain and grief? How could she tell that these horrors would force an entrance to her charmed abode? She could not know these things, nor contend with them when they came; so an utter helplessness fell upon her, benumbing her sensibilities, clouding her thoughts, dwarfing her power of reason, of expression, of comprehension, turning her into some cold, senseless being, deprived of every capability save that of suffering. She tried repeatedly to realize the position in which she was placed, with regard to her duty both to him, his mother, and the world; she tried to discover wherein her own culpability lay. But so many possibilities presented themselves, that her perceptions grew dim, and she could only weep in the despair of her regrettable failure. Eric watched these developments with calm placidity. He made no comments, offered no suggestions. Whatever his impressions he kept them to himself.

"Have you decided to remain here?" he asked her in the course of a conversation that they had together.

"I will do as you advise," she replied, "but I should rather live almost anywhere else."

"Why?" he inquired, not a little taken aback.

"Because," and there was a deep mournfulness in her voice, "of the memories that are here."

"I understand," he interposed; "but have you discussed the subject with Tom?"

"No," trembling a little as she had a habit of doing whenever his name was mentioned.

"I will tell him for you," patting her hand, and asking at the same time how the obstinate last act was coming on,

"It is finished," she said.

"Entirely?"

"Irrevocably!"

The expression of her face when she uttered this word, produced a powerful effect upon her auditor, but not more so than the next sentence which fell from her lips:

"And I desire nothing so much now as to play it," and her voice fell.

"Play it?" exclaimed Eric incredulously; "do you mean perform it in a theatre?"

"In a theatre—yes!" she replied excitedly, "a large theatre in the Metropolis, with rich and appropriate surroundings; actors of worth and reputation; an audience vast, brilliant, appreciative. Play it where there will be brave Russian soldiers, with shields and helmets of glittering steel, beautiful court ladies in elegant and tasteful costumes, slaves, spies, nuns, priests, the rabble, all that can tend to develop, exalt, intensify the glorious climax, for in that I shall achieve my triumph."

She had risen like one inspired. Her great searching eyes were upturned, her face radiant with lofty and heroic purpose.

"Then it is to be the theatre?" said Eric, thrilled by her eloquence. "I congratulate you—it is what I myself most recommend."

"Yes, it is to be the theatre," she went on, still laboring under the influence of her excitement. "The theatre, a fitting beginning for a fitting end." Here her strength gave way, and of a sudden she sank into a chair and wept.

She had scarcely composed herself before Tom

joined them, and Eric, thinking the time opportune, began to discuss the plan of producing the play.

"But what sense is there in it?" demanded Tom with evident irritation. "I will be back by the time you can make such arrangements. You don't suppose for a moment I will permit her to follow her profession after we are married, do you."

"Certainly not," replied Eric.

"Well, be good enough to inform me what is to be gained by this?"

"She wishes it, for one thing," replied Eric, "and I advise it for another."

"I suppose you have good reasons?"

"Excellent ones."

"What are they, pray?"

"Excuse me, Tom, but I don't choose to say." With this he walked to one of the low French windows and looked out. While he was moodily contemplating the landscape, the two at the other end of the room conversed earnestly together. Every now and then a word or so reached him, and he knew that they were still upon the same theme. Presently Tom came over and laying a hand on his shoulder said:

"I give in, old fellow, on one condition; you must take a few months leave of absence."

"What are you driving at?"

"At you—dotard."

"Me?"

"Yes, you!"

"What have I to do with it?"

"Everything. You must accompany her. I will only leave her in your care."

"But—"

"I admit of no buts. You have been contemplating a vacation for two years to my knowledge. Take it now."

"But, Tom—"

"I won't listen to any buts, I tell you. For some mysterious reason or other that I don't pretend to understand, you want her to spend the time of my absence in the theatre. For my part I see no sense in it whatever; on the contrary, it appears to me a prodigious piece of folly. However, as you both wish it, why, of course, I yield on the condition that I have mentioned. I will deposit whatever funds are requisite to your credit. Will you or will you not accept the trust?"

"I will, Tom," promised Eric rising and grasping his hand. "It is a generous offer on your part, and I don't believe you will regret it."

Thus it was decided.

Tom's last day dawned bright and cloudless. He awoke earlier than usual with feelings of mingled pleasure and pain. Unquestionably he was glad to go, but a pang of the keenest remorse he had ever known shot through him when his mind recurred to Generva. In order to be able to spend every possible moment with her, he hurried through his final preparations and at an early hour was by her side. She was sitting in the little parlor when he arrived, gazing intently at a picture of Beatrice which she had first asked him to show her and afterwards entreated him to permit her to keep.

"I believe you are jealous," he said lightly as he drew a chair near her and sat down.

"No, I am not," she replied, "but there is something

in her face that repels, while it attracts me—I cannot refrain from looking at it. I have a presentiment that I shall see her, but not under ordinary circumstances."

"It is the most likely thing in the world that you will meet by and by," interposed Tom; "I don't see very well how it could be avoided."

"Yes," rejoined Generva, "we shall meet, there is no doubt of that, and I shall recognize her instantly by this. It is a good likeness, is it not?"

"Excellent!"

"She must feel very bitter towards me for robbing her of your affection.

"She never had my affection," declared Tom.

"And yet you were going to marry her?"

"Yes, I suppose it would have come to that in the end," he admitted. "But I'm not going to marry her now. So don't let us talk of it. Let us speak of ourselves. Do you know I have come to bid you good-bye?"

"Yes," she replied, catching her breath a little, "I know."

"Are you going to be real sorry to have me go, and miss me ever so much?"

"Yes," turning away her head that he might not see how pale she was.

"And love me, and be true to me."

"Oh, my God!" she gasped, "can you doubt it?"

"No, but I want to hear you say it to make sure."

"I love you and will be true to you," she whispered brokenly, "and"—as he drew her to him and held her in his arms—"if you do not come back to me I shall die; surely, surely, die."

A deep unbroken silence fell between them after

this. They could not speak, they could only cling to each other in mute embrace. All had been said that was to say. All done that was to do. There was nothing left them now but to tear themselves apart, and each set forth upon the road which destiny had mapped out for them. But it was very hard, harder apparently for him than her—or so it seemed, for she grew singularly calm at the last. Too calm, he could not refrain from thinking, as he kissed her white cheek and whiter hands, and tore himself away.

"She is colder than I thought," he mused as he drove rapidly towards town; and he was right, for even then she lay senseless across the threshold of the door.

* * * * *

"I daresay they will be married abroad," surmised Mrs. Loftus to her friend Mrs. Vanderpool, referring to Beatrice and Tom.

"So Mrs. Winthrop told me," replied Mrs. Vanderpool—"and oh, by the way, Mrs. Loftus, I really think you must be mistaken about her hair. It doesn't in the least impress me as being bleached."

"I may be wrong, of course," rejoined Mrs. Loftus, "and I daresay you know best. You certainly have better eyesight."

"And about her husband's death, dear Mrs. Loftus, it is positively asserted, and upon good reliable authority, that he died of a fever."

"Indeed! you astonish me. But I'm glad to know it. One hates to be doubtful of one's friends."

"Yes, and we were both in fault about the passermenterie on her wrap."

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"Truly, yes!"

"How so?"

"I have just received a fashion plate from Paris, and it says *passementerie* is worn by ladies of *all* ages."

"Well, I'm glad of it," declared Mrs. Loftus, "for now I shall have a wrap exactly like hers, if I can only get the pattern. It *was* stylish."

"Of course," pursued Mrs. Vanderpool, "you know that it was mere rumor about Tom and the actress. Not a grain of truth in it, as far as *he* was concerned, at all events."

"So I have heard," returned Mrs. Loftus, "and he and Miss Bell are to be married. Dear, dear, what an affair it would have been to open the Fall season with!—pity they don't postpone it until they get home, isn't it?" Here the friends shook hands, and parted, each wondering whether the other would, or would not, receive wedding-cards.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SILAS TO THE FRONT.

GENERVA'S flight fell like a thunder-bolt on the Acme Dramatic Combination. Its manager and manageress looked helplessly at each other, and then, to use their own expression, "Gave up the ghost." "There's law in the land," shrieked Mrs. Slick; "thank God, there's law in the land!"

"Yes, and she's got it on you if she's a mind to use it," retorted Silas sneeringly.

"Me?" throwing up her hands in surprise.

"Yes, you! You knocked the life out of her, for all you know."

"I had a right to correct my own child, a perfect right! and the law'll give her back to me, see if it don't."

"I told you to let the law alone," yelled Silas. "She's past eighteen, and you have no more control over her than you have over me or any one else in the company. Besides, she isn't your child, and you know it."

"Just the same thing," whined the inconsolable lady. "Haven't I nursed her, and borne with her and loved her?"

"Well, sentiment don't go down with lawyers, nor with me; so stop your sniveling. I told you she'd slip through our fingers, and she's done it. I hope you're satisfied."

"Where do you suppose she's gone?" inquired Mrs. Slick, applying a powder-rag to her bleared visage.

"How in the devil should I know!"

"Can't we go on without her?"

"No, we can't; and if you weren't a fool you wouldn't ask such an idiotic question. Might as well try to run a train without an engine," he grumbled under his breath.

"What are we to do, then?" meekly.

"Starve!" with thrilling emphasis.

"Oh, Si! you can't mean it."

"Can't I?" grimly. "Well I do, all the same."

With this consoling remark he threw open the door, to confront on the threshold a lean, lank, cadaverous individual, whose small, blonde face and drab-colored hair were almost entirely concealed by a shabby black hat, worn rusty round the brim, and at least two sizes

larger than his diminutive head. His tall, spare frame was covered by a seedy, worn-out suit of clothes, the collar of which was buttoned tight to the throat, and the cuffs turned down partly over the hands. He had a bag strapped over his attenuated shoulders, and a woe-begone expression upon his sharp-pointed face.

"Hello!" exclaimed Silas, when his eyes fell upon him. "What keyhole did you come out of? I didn't expect you before to-night."

"Didn't you?" The stranger spoke in a high, shrill key.

"No, I didn't. Come in!"

Mrs. Slick was engaged in playing a game of solitaire when Silas ushered in the new comer. She went on shuffling the cards, however, contenting herself with a "Hello! Saunders," and a "When did you get here?" which remark provoked no reply other than a suppressed sniff.

"What are you buttoned up like that for?" inquired Silas, pointing to the collar and cuffs.

"No laundry for a month," squeaked Saunders.

"Not so much as a postage-stamp!"

"Well, you ain't the only one that's bad off," growled Silas. "We're all in the same box. I telegraphed you to come back because I hadn't the boodle to telegraph you to go on. I'm dead broke."

Mr. Saunders sighed and thrust his hands into his empty pockets. "What'll we do?" he asked feebly.

"Do without!"

Saunders sighed again. He looked as if he had served a long apprenticeship of doing without, which in his capacity of advance agent for the past five years was quite likely.

"Silas," he said in his piping, jerky voice, "I ain't had my percentage since we started."

"Neither have I," snapped Silas, lighting a cigarette; "I ain't had anything but guff."

"My contract," continued Mr. Saunders, drawing from some hidden pouch a greasy-looking document, "particularly specifies that nightly statements are to be telegraphed me after each performance. Silas, those statements never came."

"Didn't they?" cynically. "Well, if you must know, it was because I hadn't the money to send them. Now, kick, why don't you, like the rest of the demned beggars have been doing."

"What's the use of wastin' so much time in words?" cried Mrs. Slick, slamming her cards down upon the table, "why don't you *do* something?"

"What's there to do?" asked Silas with his mouth full of smoke.

"Skip!" said Mrs. Slick between her teeth, seizing at the same time a box of make-up and jamming it helter-skelter into a trunk.

Silas and his agent exchanged glances. "What do you say, Saun?" inquired the chief.

"I'm with you, but—"

"But what?"

"I've put up everything I got now except my trunk. It's been for five seasons on the road and wouldn't bring a V."

"I'll work it somehow," mused Silas; then, to his mother: "Where's that engagement ring I bought for Generva?"

"Here," drawing it out of her pocket and handing it to him.

"And that fur sack of yours that I got in Canada?" he added.

"Good gracious, Si! must that go?"

"Yes, it must; but you needn't mind, it's not paid for."

"Anything else?"

"Nothing of yours. But every single stitch of Generva's—trunks and all."

"It's a God's blessed thing she left them," remarked Mrs. Slick.

"So it is," agreed Silas.

It will not be necessary to enter into the methods Mr. Slick employed for the purpose of raising sufficient funds to purchase tickets home. Suffice it to say, that after many difficulties and considerable delay he arrived with his mother and agent in New York. The other members of the Acme Dramatic Combination were left to the tender mercies of an unpaid landlord. How they succeeded in getting back to where they started from will ever remain a mystery. But that they did, is certain from the fact that several of their names were afterwards enrolled as members of another troupe, quite as likely to collapse as the one they had so recently quitted. It would seem that experience was not a wise teacher, to judge from the reckless way in which these people conducted their affairs. "From the frying pan into the fire," was an every-day occurrence, but it made them not a whit less confident or a degree more practical. A flashily dressed, loud-talking manager so dazzled their vision that they never failed to fall into the net he spread to ensnare them. Silas congratulated himself as he stepped from the train and felt that at last he was clear of his difficulties. But

he did not reckon upon the hardships which even yet lay in store for him. To begin with, it was the breaking up of the season of many of the traveling companies. Certainly, few, if any of them, thought of starting out with Lent and Spring staring them in the face.

It thus transpired that he could get nothing to do. He found a couple of poor rooms on the top floor of an apartment house, and managed by dint of much economy to eke out a miserable existence for himself and his mother. As time went on, his prospects instead of brightening grew more and more precarious, until an almost desperate point was reached. Nearly every available article was pawned to defray the daily expenses, and at last even that source was cut off.

One afternoon about the first part of August he returned home earlier than was his custom. He had been tramping around all day long in search of employment, and as usual could find nothing in keeping with his dignity to do. For there was a certain questionable pride about him, and he preferred death to a menial position—or so he told his mother, with a dramatic gesture of reckless despair, as he tossed his hat aside and applied a handkerchief to his sunburnt face.

"Death's very fine," she said irritably, "but there's no such good luck!"

"Didn't I tell you we'd have to starve?" he asked; "didn't I? Well, as usual, my words have come true."

"I won't starve," she declared, starting tragically to her feet and moving towards the door. "There's nothing to eat, but"—here a look of triumph gleamed

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in her small shrewd eyes—"I can borrow a loaf from some one in the house, or," impressively, "beg it from some one in the street." With this she waved her hand significantly and departed.

Silas was alone, and, for the first time in his recollection, unable to contend with the obstacles which on all sides seemed to beset him. There was no denying that a critical moment had come. His pockets were empty and so was the larder. He had borrowed from every person who could be inveigled into making him a loan. He owed all the tradespeople on the block. The coal was out, so was the wood, and everything he possessed was in the pawnshop round the corner.

"It's a pretty how d'ye do," he said, "that a man of my brain, my personality"—this with a glance into the cracked mirror opposite—"should be obliged to sit down upon a three-legged, broken-backed chair and starve. But that's what it has come to. Nay"—as a pang of hunger reminded him—"that's what it is!" With folded arms and drooping head he remained a long time plunged in absorbed reflection. Then he looked up, raised his eyes heavenward, and in a voice broken with emotion said: "Well, I will starve!"

Having determined upon it, he assumed a more comfortable attitude, and waited for death; but death did not come, though a thundering noise outside in the hall did. He had resolved not to move from the graceful position in which he hoped his mother would find him unconscious, but the intense longing to know whether she had not returned with perhaps something to eat was too much even for a dying hero; so he jumped up hastily and rushed to the door. A dirty-

faced, slipshod servant-girl, of about fourteen years of age, lay full length upon the floor grasping a letter and crying dismally.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Silas, giving her a poke with his boot. "Get up, and stop that noise."

"I felled up the stairs," wept the intruder. "and I've broke something, I know I have; most likely me neck," with a fresh burst of noisy tears.

"Will you shut up or not, you howling baggage; what do you want here, anyway?"

"I brung you a letter, but I've losed it."

"A letter?" Silas felt a thrill of hope. "Isn't that it you're holding, you ninny?"

"Yes, sur, that's it."

She thrust it into his hand and turned and limped away, and Silas with his eyes fixed upon the post-mark dashed excitedly back into the room. "Generva!" he gasped, tearing off the envelope, and eagerly devouring the contents. "Generva, and, oh, ye gods! here's a draft. For how much—how—Great Cæsar's ghost! fifty dollars!"

It was some time before he could see to read the letter through, so completely had the money blinded him. When he came to the end he could contain himself no longer. He flew round on one leg in search of his hat, and in a sort of delirious frenzy bounded down the stairs. At the first turn he ran into his mother, knocked her flat on her back and sent the two loaves of bread which she held in her hand, spinning over the banister.

"I've heard from Generva!" he shrieked, dragging her to her feet and paying not the slightest heed to

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her agonized groans. "She's sent a draft for fifty dollars! and I'm to come to D—; the address and all is given, and manage—do you hear? manage the production of her drama, which she has not only finished writing, but which she has the money to produce. Think of it! the money to produce, and me to do it. Me!—won't I show those fellows on the Square a thing or two worth seeing. Won't I, though! Infernal beggars, every one of them!"—and with a flourish of the hand—"subjects of my scorn for ever!"

"Give me that draft, Si!" gasped Mrs. Slick, when she was fairly on her feet and had found some breath, "and go down into the front hall and pick up them loaves of bread."

* * * * *

Several days later Silas arrived at D—, and by means of a few inquiries, and an occasional glance at the directions contained in the letter, found himself strolling up the path that led to Generva's home. He arrived just as the sun was sinking into an ocean of cloud behind the long stretch of hills; but the glory of the dying day had little charm for him. True, he stopped for a moment within the gate, and looked about him: but the walk had been long and hot, and he was tired, and wanted to rest a moment. Besides, he was very curious.

"Lucky little beggar!" he muttered; "I wonder if she does live here, or if I'm in the right church but the wrong pew?"

"Yes, Miss Romaine will see you;" said Mildred in answer to his inquiry, and drawing back a portiere she ushered him into the parlor and bade him sit down.

"Well, I'm dazed!" he declared as he sank into a

chair and took in the elegance of his surroundings; "completely dazed! and it isn't natural to me, either. Now, what I want to know is how the deuce she managed so well. Of course, it's the doctor. I knew he was a swell the moment I set eyes on him, and I knew he was sweet on her, too. Can't fool me about such things, I'm too old a bird. Well, he's done it up brown, anyhow. Egad! the carpet alone must have cost a mint, and these pictures, and curtains, and bric-a-brac! Mother's eyes would water if she'd see 'em. 'Pears like she's a good while coming down: don't know as I care, though; guess I've sat in worse chairs and worse looking places, but I never sat in any better and never will; no such good luck, dem it!"

At this point a light step sounded upon the stairs and in another moment Generva entered the apartment. She was dressed in black relieved by a handsomely embroidered crepe shawl of deep carmine, thrown carelessly over her shoulders and falling rich and dark among the folds of her skirt. She advanced slowly to meet her visitor, who had instinctively aisen and was regarding her in mute astonishment.

"How do you do?" she said in her soft, low voice, offering him at the same time her hand in greeting.

After which she motioned him to a seat and sat down some little distance from him.

"You had a pleasant journey, I hope?" she inquired courteously.

"Yes-s," he replied in a half dazed fashion.

"But you must be fatigued with the long walk from the station. I will get you something to drink."

"Thanks-s!" murmured Silas, looking after her retreating figure, and when it had passed out of sight,

giving himself a sort of shake. "I wouldn't have known her," he declared, "and I'll warrant mother wouldn't either. Gad! she's a queen—a princess—a—" he did not finish, for she again stood before him.

"I hope it will refresh you," offering him a glass of iced claret.

"It's sure to," he replied, draining it with evident thirst. "Thanks! ah, it is refreshing, very!"

"You received my letter and draft?" she next inquired, seating herself still a little farther away.

"Yes, and under many obligations, I'm sure."

"Don't mention it," she protested with a shade of annoyance on her face, "rather tell me what I am very anxious to know, and that is, if there be a possibility of my securing a theatre."

"There's a possibility of doing anything for money, my dear," observed Silas, leaning back lazily in his comfortable chair.

"How much money?"

"For what, the theatre?"

"For everything; the whole production."

"Whew!" thrusting his hands in his pockets. "Now you've got me. Let me see, don't know as I can estimate it exactly."

"You can give me some idea, can you not?"

"Well, I should say it would cost—cost five thousand, any how—yes, every cent of it, for the first week. It's a devil of a lot of money, but it'll take it."

"I believe the amount will be forthcoming," she remarked quietly.

Silas sprang to his feet.

"You do! well, without doubt you're the luckiest woman in America. Here you are, with all the lucre

you want, and installed like an empress in the bargain. You've fallen on your feet, you have. Plush chairs, velvet rugs, lace curtains, tapestry, pictures, bronzes, mirrors—dem it, Gen! ain't it good enough for you as it is? I can't see why the deuce you want to act, unless he's got tired of putting up and—"

"Stop!" she rose and confronted him.

"I sent for you to make a business proposition, which you are at liberty to accept or decline as you chose; and not for the purpose of asking your advice, or laying myself liable to your comments, the lightest one of which is an insult. Bear in mind, then, sir, from this time forth that you occupy the position of any manager I might select to transact my professional affairs. Personally, you have nothing whatsoever to do with me. When I suggested sending for you, knowing better than any one else your ability, Mr. Hazelton warned me of the likelihood of some such occurrence as has just taken place. I see now that I have made a mistake, but fortunately one that can yet be rectified."

"I—I—I—beg your pardon," stammered Silas completely nonplussed. "It—it—will not happen again, I assure—I promise you! Only let it pass now. You see, I was quite dazed when I came in, and it was owing to that—that—I—"

"Say no more," interrupted Generva pitying his consternation, "only do not let us have any repetition of it. Sit down, please."

Silas resumed his chair and, quite subdued, waited for her to proceed.

"My play," she began, "is of course unfinished. That is, it will require revision. I have an idea Mr.

Carlylse would be the best person to do it. He has frequently seen me act and understands my requirements."

"The very man!" agreed Silas; "don't know any better—don't know any as good, in fact! All thieves, every one of them. How many acts have you got?"

"Three."

"Scenes?"

"One to each act. There is no change."

"Good! Now, the people, how many will it take?"

"Fourteen altogether."

"Principals?"

"Yes."

"That's a pretty big cast; couldn't cut out a few parts, could you?"

"No."

"I suppose it is arranged in the regular way?"

"Yes."

"Might run mother in for the old woman, don't you think? Get her cheaper than any one else, you know."

"After what has occurred," said Generva with dignity, "an arrangement such as you propose could not be other than unpleasant for us both. I beg you will not refer to it again."

"It's a pity, though," he sighed; "get her so deucedly cheap."

"It is not a question of money," she explained, "and please say no more upon the subject. If you will come with me I will show you to a room now. I daresay you feel quite dusty, and we dine in half an hour." She led the way up a broad, handsomely carpeted staircase into a small but daintily appointed

chamber, where she left the ex-manager of the Acme Dramatic Combination to his ablutions and his thoughts.

"It beats me," he soliloquized, with his face in the basin, "to see such a change in her. Why she used to be the meekest little beggar I ever saw, and now an empress couldn't surpass her in grandiloquence. And even so, she don't look very happy. Guess she's got tired o' loafin'. It beats me hollow, it does. Now, what I want to know is who puts up for all this splenderness." Drying his hands on a towel he made a tour of the room: "Why, that bed alone," sitting on the edge of it, "must have cost a cool hundred. Egad, I should say so, lace and linen, and springs, and eider-down—dem it! genuine, bonafide eider-down; she's got in with the skim de la skim, or I'm another. But I'd like to find out if it's the Doctor or the Editor. Now, let me see; she spoke of one and she didn't mention the other. I wonder if she meant the one she didn't speak of, or spoke of the one she didn't mean? Hi, that's too much for me; I'll give it up, and proceed to comb out my ebony locks prior to partaking of the banquet. Darned nice brush that!" passing his hand over it; "and what's this?" taking a stopper from a silver toilet bottle. "Perfume!"—with a sniff. "Well, if all this isn't too rich for my blood; why it's a regular five dollars a couple picnic, that's what it is! Great pity I can't ring in the old woman, though, and keep the luck in the family. Maybe, if she'd do the penitent and apologize, Gen would wilt; she used to be a chicken-hearted little cuss: I'll try it when I get a chance. You bet your life I ain't going to lose a trick if I can help it; not much! I

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wonder," curling the ends of his mustache jauntily, "what my services will be worth to these skim de la skim people? \$150 a week, I guess, would pay me pretty well. I'm a dandy worker, I am! and worth a great deal more; but I'm afraid of Gen. I don't like her looks when she gets riled. I guess I'd better be careful and not put my foot in it as I began by doing. Whew! how her eyes blazed. Devilish fine woman! devilish handsome woman! I always said she'd be—know the article when I see it, you bet!" and Silas chuckled.

"What's that?" pausing with his arms half in his coat, "summons to the banquet? Well, I'm ready for the feast if the feast is ready for me! Come in!—" a knock had sounded upon the door.

"Come right in! Ah, Mr. Hazelton! is—it—really—you? Glad to see you—very glad!" shaking hands with him. "Agreeably surprised, I'm sure!"

"I hope you have recovered from the effects of your journey, Mr. Slick," said Eric smiling a little.

"Recovered? Oh—ah—yes, quite so, thank you!"

"Ready for your dinner, too, I presume?"

"Yes—ah—thanks!"

"Come with me, then;" and Eric led him to the dining-room, where they found Generva awaiting them.

"Miss Romaine tells me that you have had some little conversation with regard to her prospective undertaking," observed Eric, after they had partaken of the soup and fish.

"Yes," returned Silas, awed by the calm reserve of his hostess, "we talked some upon the subject."

"She says you gave her an estimate of about what expenditure would be necessary. Am I right?"

"Yes, you're right;" replied Silas, struggling with a chicken wing.

"You believe the amount you mentioned would cover it?"

"It ought to, and if I've anything to do with it, it will! I'm a careful man, Mr. Hazelton. I count the pennies."

"So Miss Romaine says," turning to her—"you told me that, Generva, did you not?"

"Yes, Silas can come and go on less than any one I ever saw."

Silas looked gratified, and, emboldened by her praise, took the obstinate bone in his hand and picked it.

"You are not eating anything," remarked Eric to Generva. "Have a little of the fowl—it is very nice?"

"I don't care for it," she assured him; but he gave her some notwithstanding, saying as he did so, "just to please me, my dear."

"He's the man," decided Silas, "and it isn't the doctor at all. Well, the newspaper business must pay, that's all I've got to say about it. Egad, I've a notion to tackle it myself!"

"Bring Miss Romaine some of the Madeira, Mildred," said Eric, "and perhaps Mr. Slick would take a glass, too." Silas acquiesced by a nod of the head, observing mentally, "You bet I will! When I'm at a picnic or a circus I take all that's going."

"There will be considerable preliminary work necessary, will there not, Mr. Slick?" inquired Eric, when Mildred had poured out the wine.

"You've struck the right nail on the head there; we can't be ready before January, now; I found out

we could get R——'s theatre before I left. He promised to hold the time for me."

"On what terms?"

"Very fair ones, considering; they take the first \$500, we the next, and share equally after. You see, Gen's never played there, and New York isn't Kalamazoo. Carlyle's name as adapter would help; he's got a big reputation since his last Madison Square success."

"How about a company? Isn't January a bad time of year to engage one?"

"There's no time of year so bad but what I can get you all the actors you want. The woods are full of them!"

"But they will go out in the fall."

"Yes, and come in before the winter. I tell you the theatrical business is overdone—run into the ground. Why, since this combination system started, a theatre has sprung up in every town in the country, and what's the result? they give a different show six times a week in a place that can't support two. The upshot of it is that you've either got to have a big attraction or a bank account to stand it. Why, if I'd have had a woman like Gen in mother's day, I'd have made an everlasting fortune out of her."

"How about New York proper?"

"Ah! now you're talking. There's always room there. The small fry can't get in, you see."

"But we have to look for hypercritical audiences, do we not?"

"That's a popular error," declared Silas, leaning back in his chair and wondering how he was ever going to find room for the dessert that was being served,

"but it's a natural one. The truth is," and here he winked knowingly, "New Yorkers are the easiest gulled people on earth. Just let two or three good newspapers come out and say that Generva Romaine, or Generva anybody else, is a great woman, and New York will say so too. It's the press that does the work; get it on our side and we're all right."

"How can that be done?" asked Eric paring a peach.

Silas winked again and looked very mysterious.

"I suppose you have some friends there?"

"Very few."

"No matter, I can manage it, under the circumstances," this with another deeply expressive look.

When dinner was over the two gentlemen repaired to the parlor, where they remained closeted until a late hour. Generva sought her own apartments and was seen no more that night.

When Silas had retired, after seeing Eric drive off in the direction of town, he was more dazed, as he himself expressed it, than ever. "It's worse than a Chinese puzzle," he said utterly mystified: "he don't act like a man in love; and if he doesn't love her, why what the deuce is he? I have it!" kicking off a boot. "It's the doctor, and he's given her the slip. But who's putting up if that's the case, and what interest has this editor in jewing me down to a \$75.00 a week contract. Me!" with an air of injury. "Anyhow, that's better than nothing—yes, a blamed sight, if I could only ring mother in; but I can't, they're both dead set against it. It would be perfect, though, if I could—perfect! Well, I ain't going to give up yet. No, sir! there's two things I'm going to do if they're

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in the power of mortal man—two things: the first is to find out who's putting up, and the second to ring in the old lady if I can."

CHAPTER XIX.

IN THE GREAT CITY.

THE announcement of Generva Romaine's debut caused considerable stir in the dramatic circles of the Metropolis. After the contract for the theatre was signed, Silas began operations by inserting newspaper squibs in the several most important dailies, followed by spicy interviews which, while they made an inroad into the bank account, were nevertheless effective in rousing universal interest in the forthcoming event.

It will not be necessary to enter into a detailed account of the manner in which a play is brought before a New York audience. The most effectual way of doing this is, to a certain extent, and in many particulars, a subject upon which managers disagree. Some claim the late fall to be auspicious for an opening, others the winter. Some are of the opinion that an uptown theatre is the best, others select one downtown. There are those who believe in lithographing and billing to a large degree, and others again who repel the idea of window advertisement, claiming that in no way can the public be so well reached as through the medium of the press.

Silas chose R——'s house, from the fact that it was centrally located, and had a good general patronage of the masses, which after all undoubtedly form the

principal paying element of amusement seekers. It also possessed an enormous stage, good scenery, splendid mechanical contrivances, and a well-known and universally popular manager. His first move (and it must be admitted a most judicious one) was to introduce the genial Mr. R—— to the débutante by means of a quiet little supper at her hotel. The result of this proved beneficial in many respects, for R—— became not only interested in her success, but conceived for her a personal regard, which deepened into a sincere friendship. Upon him, the same as upon all with whom she came in contact, she made, because of her grave, gentle manners, modest reserve, and patient kindness, a deep and lasting impression. Carlyle, that most brilliant and withal most unassuming of dramatists, in whose company she passed several hours of each day, was most enthusiastic in his praises of her talents and charms. Recognizing, as he never failed to do, good material, emanating from whatever source, he set to work upon her drama with a right good will and gave it the benefit of his best efforts. A powerful play was the result, and as Generva bent eagerly over the manuscript, she could not suppress the exclamation: "Oh, I shall succeed!"

Snugly housed in a comfortable family hotel, she found occupation for every hour of her time. In company with her modiste she designed and selected all the costumes to be worn; was a constant visitor to the studio of the scenic artist; took some lessons in voice culture, as well as in fencing and dancing, and attended all the theatres where first-class performances could be seen. She gave herself up wholly and entirely to her work. To those who sought her society

she talked of nothing else. Silas, she never ceased advising and assisting, even so far as the most minor details were concerned. There now seemed but one object in life for her, and that was success in her profession; she talked of it, thought of it, dreamed of it! It became a fixed idea excluding all others. Not a moment's idleness did she allow herself, often studying into the late hours of the night. A set purpose lurked beneath her yielding gentleness. Either she was trying to blot out the past and build up a future, or she was bent upon finding a method by which the present could be endured. She was no longer the visionary girl who wandered under the tall trees of the Bower of Bliss lost in castle-building; she had become a resolute woman, strong and self-reliant, with an energy that never abated and a determination which grew firmer with each succeeding day. Could it be, and the idea finds favor as it is dwelt upon, that she wished to greet her lover with a glorious triumph? Did she think to achieve a meteoric success whereby to flame him with admiration? Had she in her mind the fear, that the long months of absence would cure his ardor? Was it her desire to have him find her weighed down with glory; courted, emulated, sought after, occupying a position in the dramatic world so high, that even his mother could not say he stooped to take his wife? Something, and who can unravel the hidden motives that lurk in the hearts of women and men, urged this girl on, endowing her with an almost supernatural strength, lending ever-renewed and ever-increasing zeal to her efforts, and paving the way for her to realize the most ambitious hopes in which she ever indulged. It might have been the

destiny which shaped her end; the bounty of Providence pitying her lot, or the fate which more or less governs our lives, but something, felt perhaps rather than known or understood, swayed her with an irresistible blinding force, from the beginning to the end.

The importance Silas gained by his new accession to fortune almost passes credibility. Managers who had never taken the slightest notice of him before, now lifted their hats as he passed; and second-rate actors in search of engagements congregated about him when he appeared upon the Square, eagerly drinking in his lightest words and quoting them afterwards as oracles. It must indeed have gratified his vanity—of which he possessed not a little—to think that he was the cynosure of all eyes as he promenaded down Fourteenth Street, in the neighborhood of Broadway, conscious of being well attired, and not a bad-looking young man, by any means. Pardonable pride swelled his manly bosom to have Mr. Jessop and Mr. Drake, the civil dramatic agents, run after him for the purpose of securing the distinguished privilege of engaging his company. To have printing-house representatives and lithographers watch their chance to snatch a half-dozen words with him as he passed by on his way to the "Brunswick," where he dined, and where the bowing attendants infected with a similar homage, by reason of the pad of complimentary tickets which he displayed between the courses, rushed to secure the honor of serving his meal.

Here as elsewhere favors were heaped upon him. Whether it was into one of the dramatic newspaper offices, agent bureaus, photograph galleries, or theatre lobbies, that he chanced to find himself, the cordiality

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was universal. It was "Walk in, Mr. Slick;" "Take a chair," from the editor, "Come and have a drink," from the smiling agent; an urgent request that he would sit for his picture from the photographic artist; all the seats he wanted from the playhouse representatives; a present of a half-dozen boxes of cigars from the tobacconist, who desired Miss Romaine's last portrait for a cigarette trade-mark; all the perfumes he could use in months from the druggist, who wished the signature of his illustrious star, to swell the list of celebrities already vouching for the latest brand of soap. Countless and inexhaustible were the favors heaped upon this Thespian disciple, and not without effect either, for a great change came over him, or, as he told his mother, the spirit of his dreams. He now walked slower than was his wont, and with more dignity; added several trinkets to his watch-chain (which had been redeemed without delay), various rings to his fingers, and a whole cluster of diamonds to his rich neck-scarf of brilliant crimson. He wore now an expression of pressing haste, a sort of pushed, hurried, overworked business air, exemplified by sending off as many as four district messenger-boys all at once and each in a different direction, and referring constantly to a note-book in which were written some such memoranda as—

Patent leather pumps to be done at four.
Laundry from Chinaman's.
Call at Sarony's for photographs.
Meet Bertha at the Coney Island pier.
Try Daisy Cern Plaster.
Get tailor to take note for last account.

Bottle of Blondine for mother's hair.
 Tickets for Bijou to-morrow.
 Box Jane's Liver Pills.
 Call on Louise, etc., etc., etc.

Bobbing in and out of various playhouses he never failed to find occasion to remark how confoundedly overworked he was, winding up with a rhapsodical eulogy upon the transcendent genius of his star, who was going to cause a revolution in the history of dramatic art. About the first of December and close upon Eric's arrival (Generva had declared that he should not neglect his business on her account, and would not hear of his coming until it was absolutely necessary), the engaging of the supporting company began.

"I hope we shall be able to secure good performers," said Eric anxiously. He was of opinion that Silas delayed too long in making his selections.

"We will, I promise you," replied the ex-manager of the Acme Dramatic Combination, "only give me breathing time. Why, my dear fellow," patronizingly, "I can get you more actors than you know what to do with. I've only got to go round to Jessop's and pick them up."

"Is this the best way?" inquired Eric, referring to the agency.

"W-e-l-l," drawling the word out, "I don't know as it is the best way, but," twirling his mustache and talking to himself in the looking-glass opposite, "it's a good way—keeps up square with those fellows, you see."

"And their charges, Mr. Slick? I beg you will take that into consideration."

"Charges!" whirling round on his heel; "we've nothing to do with the charges. Come off the actors, my boy, don't you know? If they want engagements, why, dem it! they've got to pay for them. Jessop's going to send me down a lady for leading business this morning: she ought to be here now," pulling out his watch. "I'll just wait about five minutes longer. and if she don't show up," snapping his fingers, "why, her bread's dough, that's all I've got to say about it."

This conversation took place one day about eleven, A.M. in the private reception room of R——'s theatre. Eric, on his way down-town to a newspaper office where he had an appointment, merely glanced into the house as he passed, and finding Silas about to settle himself in an arm-chair with a novel, seized upon the occasion to express his views as above. Having done so, he took up his hat and coat, and thrusting several letters which the treasurer handed through the box-office window as he passed, in his pocket, was about stepping into the street. Just then a stylish coupé stopped in front of the entrance, from which emerged a magnificently dressed lady, who accosted him with: "Will you be so kind as to inform me where I can find Mr. Slick?" offering him at the same time a card upon which was written:

Recommending Miss Allegra Vaughn for leading roles.

(Signed)

JESSOP & Co., *Dramatic Agents.*

"Mr. Slick is inside," returned Eric, pointing out the way and giving her back the card, lifting his hat at the same time, which courtesy she acknowledged

by a low bow as she swept past him and disappeared in the hallway.

"This must stop here," he muttered, "and I'll stay and see that it's done. I am not going to throw money away in paying the salary that young person will require. I don't indulge in coupés and footmen myself."

With which reflection he went into the box-office and took a chair to await the termination of the interview.

When half an hour later he caught sight of a bonnet he hastened out, just in time to meet Silas as he returned from escorting the actress to her carriage.

"Thought you'd gone down-town?" observed this gentleman buttoning up his coat.

"No; I waited to have a talk with you. Is that the lady from Jessop's?"

"That's the one—stunner! ain't she?"

"Of course you made no engagement with her?"

"Of course I did; why not?"

"Because you must understand that there is a limit to everything, even a bank account, and while I want first-class artists to compose Miss Romaine's company, I don't require first-class equipages. It is out of the question for us even to entertain the idea of meeting with such a lady's demands."

"You're all wrong," exclaimed Silas; "way off!—way off! I made a splendid contract with her—got her cheaper than I expected even. She dresses her own part, too, and dresses it well, I can tell you!"

"What did you agree to pay her?"

"Fifty dollars a week."

"No more?"

"Not a penny!"

"Why the costumes alone will—"

"Don't you bother about the costumes, that's her affair; and don't you bother about the salary, that's my affair."

"Well," observed Eric, "I don't pretend to know anything about this business, but I do know that fifty dollars a week won't dress the play and keep up the carriage, and it appears to me that a woman with simpler tastes—"

"That's where you're off again," interrupted Silas. "The show business is all show, and hasn't the slightest use for modest simplicity. That young woman is well known; she'll pull money into the house, and it's money we're after! People who see her turn-out dash up here two or three times a day, will think we pay her five times as much as we do, and that speaks well for us and our substantiability. I tell you, if the public don't see you and hear of you, and have reason to think of you, the public forget all about you! That's a well-known fact and you've got to admit it. Now, I want a company that people are interested in and curious about. A company that makes a sensation in the street as well as in the theatre. I'd like a leading man who had fought three duels and ran away with as many different men's wives!"

"You do?" said Eric; "I'm glad to know it. Because I won't have Miss Romaine brought in contact with any but gentlemen, and—"

"Who says they're not gentlemen?" demanded Silas.

"Why, I do! most emphatically," replied Eric.

"Well, if you don't let me alone"—threateningly—

"I won't be responsible for our success."

"In that case I will secure the services of some one who will," and Eric marched off leaving Silas bursting with rage and fright.

Of course this little breach was mended later on, but the people engaged to support Generva were one and all selected by Mr. Hazelton. Silas swore his biggest oath when there was no one by to hear it, and wrote Louise to meet him at Koster & Bial's, where, over a bottle of Champagne, he poured into sympathetic ears the tale of his complaining.

The ladies and gentlemen who assembled for the first rehearsal of the "Princess," which title had been chosen by Generva for her drama, were made up of some of the leading professionals of the day. They formed a striking contrast to the defunct Acme Dramatic Combination, both in appearance and bearing. They were all well dressed and agreeable, and manifested a general interest in marking down the points which Mr. Carlyle repeatedly offered. They evinced a careful and prompt obedience when the stage manager made a suggestion, and were respectful in demeanor towards the star. All of which was very gratifying to Eric.

Things, indeed, went astonishingly well. The rehearsals soon began to run smoothly; R—— expressed himself as being content with everything and every one. The windows began to exhibit tasteful lithographs, bill boards, attractive printing, and no newspaper but what teemed with the coming production. The costumes and scenery proved a great surprise, surpassing even Generva's expectations. Nothing could be desired either in play, company, appointments, costumes, theatre or manager; with all Eric

was satisfied. If he were apprehensive at all it was for Generva herself. He had ceased to be her confidante. She no longer spoke to him of the future which was in store for her, and the one who wandered in other lands: his name never fell from her lips, no more than did the past, which it would seem, like a pleasant dream, was lost in the darkened shades of time. But it was such a short time to blot out such a memory! Too short, in fact, and it could not be—so he said anxiously—for her strange silence upon all that pertained to the man she had so loved, her close application to tasks not at all to her tastes, and withal the gradual wane of physical strength, sustained solely by will-power, were matters of a serious nature to one who understood her so well. Hitherto she had leaned upon him, and found solace in his support; but now, even as her weakness became more and more manifest, she gathered her remaining energies together and assumed a firm attitude in their midst, and stood for perhaps the first time in her life—alone! Thoroughly alarmed for her health, he took her sternly to task.

“I do not propose to stand by and permit you to kill yourself,” he declared, “and that is what you seem to be bent upon doing. I will write to Tom.”

It was the first time he had spoken the name for long weeks, and strangely enough, a pang shot through him at its utterance; for since his departure, beyond a few lines announcing his safe voyage, Tom had not made a sign. His agreement to hold no communication with Generva did not include Eric, and the protracted silence could only portend some serious consequence. Hence, no sooner did he speak the name than he was seized with a presentiment which,

while it puzzled him then, he readily accounted for afterwards. "You must not write to him about me," she said quietly; "he is keeping his word, and"—something arose in her throat and prevented the completion of the sentence.

"He is, indeed," retorted Eric with a frown; "keeping it to the letter! You might be dead for all he knows, and you will be, if you continue like this."

"But I am not ill," she protested, closing her weary eyes to keep back the tears.

"Then what is the matter with you, Generva? You used to confide in me, but now—perhaps, I have done something of which you did not approve?"

"Say no more," she begged, piteously; "you wrong me by such doubts." And beyond this she offered no further explanation.

"What could Tom mean?" was the question Eric continually asked, "by leaving unanswered the letter sent to the London address? Was he ill? No, for in that case Dorothy (who wrote but rarely, it is true, on account of her mother's opposition) would certainly have apprised him. What was the reason? What could it mean?"

CHAPTER XX.

THE MYSTERY SOLVED.

"THERE'S a screw loose somewhere," muttered Mr. Slick, one evening as he paced restlessly up and down the office of the hotel, awaiting the return of the bell-boy with whom he had dispatched a note to Mr. Hazelton's room, No. 97, to the effect that he (Silas)

must confer with him upon a matter of importance that would positively brook no delay. The truth is, he was becoming anxious, and with reason, too, for he had not been admitted to Miss Romaine's presence when he called upon her that morning, nor to Mr. Hazelton's when he dropped in again during the same day; both pleaded an excuse and returned his elegantly monogrammed three-cornered pasteboard. To make matters more complicated, they for the first time absented themselves from the rehearsal. Unable to discern a satisfactory motive for such strange conduct, he again dashed round to their respective dwelling-places and was again refused admittance. He now for the third time wrote his name, with the message above cited, and sent it up, waiting with secret qualms for the reply.

"Mr. Hazelton will see you, sir," announced the boy, whereupon Silas heaved a sigh of relief and followed him to the elevator.

He found Eric seated before a table busily engaged writing. He merely nodded in response to the genial "good-evening!" proffered, and said, "Sit down!" Silas found a chair, and seating himself, began speculating upon the marked change which had come over his employer. Pale, emaciated, his face wore a haggard look, his eyes were hollow and swollen round the lids, and his whole attitude cast down and dejected.

"Been quarreling with Generva," surmised Silas as he brushed his silk hat with his hand and tried to appear unconcerned, "or been a paintin' the town?"

Accounting for the transformation in this highly characteristic manner, he bit his nails and waited. Presently the figure at the table pushed away the

papers with which it was littered, and resting his head upon his hand inquired:

"You wished to see me, Mr. Slick?"

"Yes-s," spoke up Silas, pulling his chair nearer.

"I called before to-day, but you were engaged, or so those fellows said."

"I was engaged."

"Oh, then, it is all right! You see, I've been about somewhat since I saw you, amongst the newspapers; talked with most of the fellows, too, and drew 'em out."

"Yes," indifferently.

"Don't think we're as solid as we might be, or we can be, if we're a mind to give a thunderin' big supper at Delmonico's and oil 'em down—see?"

"I am of the opinion that we have already spent a lot of money," replied Eric. "Still, if it be necessary, and if it would not cost too great an amount—"

"Nothing worth mentioning," interrupted Silas.

"Assure you, on my honor, won't have covers laid for more than fifteen. You don't suppose I'm going to feed the town, do you? Not much! I've made out a list here; you can glance over it at your leisure," handing it to him, "and let me know what you think. I tell you it's the thing to do. I'll have it written up beforehand, and they can't be mean enough not to notice it afterwards. By that time we'll be ready to ring on the first act. You see, all these chaps I have chosen are well known and influential, and so far as I can learn well disposed towards each other. Now, once they see Gen, we've got 'em, particularly Carrisford; a pretty face fetches him every time! Poet and all that, you know; devilish nice little fellow, too!"

"Then you deem the presence of Miss Romaine

essential?" inquired Eric. "Would that be quite in keeping with propriety?"

"Of course it would! Why, didn't they tender an affair of this sort to Miss K——? and isn't she a lady of propriety; you bet your life she is!"

"Was Miss K—— the only lady present; that is, was she there unattended by one of her own sex?"

"Yes," admitted Silas, "she was chaperoned, if that's what you mean?"

"That's exactly what I do mean," returned Eric; "she was accompanied by her sister, perhaps, or her aunt, or mother."

"I guess so."

"Generva has no one who bears any such relationship to her."

"You ain't going to let a little thing like that stop you, I hope? I can get you all the sisters, and mothers, and aunts you want inside of twenty-four hours. We manufacture them in the profesh—"

"Manufacture sisters and mothers and—"

"Aunts? Yes," put in Silas, "and grandmothers too, if you like. Which do you want; that is, which do you think would look the most rigidly proper—a sister or an aunt, a real nice fat aunt, in widow's weeds; mourning for her husband and sacrificing herself to her niece? How does that strike you—the sacrifice and the crape? Kind o' touching, ain't it?"

"I don't like sailing under false colors of whatever nature," remarked Eric, "and I particularly object to a wholesale manufacture of relations."

"It's the commonest thing in this biz, my boy. Now, you listen to me, for I know. Why, it's done every day!"

"I won't agree to it, notwithstanding."

"Let her go alone, then."

"I can't do that, either."

"Perhaps," with renewed hopefulness, "you wouldn't object to a mother or a grandmother, with spectacles and a cap, and—"

"Worse and worse!" declared Eric impatiently.

"Well, what'll we do, then?"

"I will send for an acquaintance of mine and have her go with Generva as her companion, which she will honestly be."

"Think it better than my plan, eh?"

"I think it's squarer."

"What's the lady's name?"

"Maloney," absently.

"Ma what?" shrieked Silas.

"Maloney—what's the matter?"

"Why, it's Irish!"

"So it is; I never thought about that before."

"It will look abominable in print, though I might drop the y, and write it Malone; that's not so bad. I don't suppose you will object to my leaving off the y?"

"Not in the least," said Eric with a bland smile, "but I would not like to answer for the lady herself. I believe she is rather proud of her nationality than otherwise."

"Well, let her think it is a mistake of the type," muttered Silas, rising to go. "You don't look well?"

"No?"

"Better get some quinine."

After this advice he took his departure; and Eric, left alone, bolted the door, and flinging himself into a chair, buried his face in his hands. "To think it

should come to this," he groaned, "to this!" Then he drew a letter from his pocket, post-marked Paris, and for the hundredth time read it over.

It was from Tom, and very short, but it contained an accusation so undeserved, so false, that, stunned by the words, he sat speechless and gazed upon them. It was not the injustice of the charge that stung him so cruelly, nor the gravity of its import. It was not the ungrateful return for generous self-sacrifice, or the casting off of a friendship sealed by long-tried years. It was the loss of his faith in the one man he loved and trusted, that bowed his head, and wrung from his lips the cry: "To think it should come to this!"

For by some means or other Tom had been brought to believe that he had not been true to the trust he accepted, nor she (Generva) to the honor left in her care. He spoke in a vague way of a letter telling of their joint duplicity, which, even so, nothing could have induced him to credit, had it not been for his chance meeting with two club friends, whose statements harmonized with the anonymous intelligence. All this at first mystified Eric to such a degree that he could form no lucid idea of the real nature of what his suspicions were. By and by, however, the truth revealed itself, or what he surmised to be the truth, for of course he knew nothing of a surety. "Some malicious slanderer has poisoned him against me," he finally concluded, "and that by turning my disinterested and honest regard for Generva into a culpable and guilty passion. Not content with blackening my name and assailing my honor, they go farther and drag a pure and innocent girl down to a level with a cowardly blackguard, whose tool, puppet, accomplice, they make

her out. And he puts faith in it owing to his accidental encounter with those two mischief-makers, whom I distinctly remember were present when I tried to play the part of a friend, by taking his love affair upon myself, and leading them to believe it was (as they had heard) my own. And the result is I have lost Tom forever!" He really felt this to be so, because even if explanations should avail to disabuse his mind, could explanations restore the old-time confidence and esteem? He felt, and his impression was reasonable, that nothing could bring them entirely together again, for a link from the chain was gone. Who, and the question is a natural one, wrote Tom that infamous letter? Could it have been Mrs. Winthrop, that high-bred noble lady, whose position, birth, education and lofty religious sentiments were so well known? Could she who stood so high have allowed herself to stoop so low—she whose praises were so lauded, whose virtue was so unapproachable? The devoted wife, the model mother, the envied, the admired; the representative of society, of charity, of good deeds without number! Could this paragon have conceived the idea, much less put it into execution? Was not her mind above falsehood and calumny—her slender white fingers incapable of bringing themselves in contact with ink so indelible? Could such a woman perpetrate such a crime? Perish the thought! There are no dark spots visible upon her soft, shapely white palms; they are still pale and smooth and beautiful. Perhaps, though, the costly rings lend a covering to many defects which would not be surprising at all, for we are well accustomed to see wealth play this kindly office.

Who then wrote the letter? Could it have been Miss Bell, consumed with jealousy and passion? She was playing for high stakes, and she was daring. If by a bold move he could be won, why hesitate to make it? She had a better right to him than a poor obscure actress, who boasted neither name nor family. There was sufficient motive for Beatrice to have been the writer, but was she? Is one quite justified in accusing her upon ground which, after all, is purely circumstantial?

Did Dorothy do it? No; for she loved and trusted Eric, and stood firm in her opinion regarding him, never wavering for one single moment, to the anger and despair of her mother.

"Now that you are all against him," she affirmed, "the more need he has for me; and I shall consent to marry him upon my return home, if for no other purpose than that of proving my faith in his innocence."

Remonstratives, threats, recriminations, persuasions proving unavailing, Mrs. Winthrop gave up the contest and contented herself with adopting a haughty and scornful attitude towards her rebellious daughter, rarely addressing her, and treating her as a person for whom she felt the most supreme indifference.

Who else than Mrs. Winthrop, or Miss Bell, would have had a motive in concocting the plot? Silas? Possibly, but not likely. He was as yet undecided as to whether Eric or Tom was (borrowing a theatrical term from him) the backer. He rather inclined to the belief that they were both financially interested. Believing this, he could have derived no possible benefit by starting a rumor more than sufficient to cause a dissolution of the partnership, which he secretly

approved. "Was it Mrs. Slick? No again, for she knew little or nothing of Generva's affairs, and, moreover, fortune smiled upon her at this epoch. As the seventh daughter of the seventh son, born with a mystic veil over her face, etc., etc., she had all she could do to invent fabrications with which to delude the patrons who crowded her new Bowery residence. It would seem, then, that no human hands penned this epistle. That the anonymous writer of the anonymous letter remained as anonymous as he, she or they could possibly desire, is a fact. The envelope containing it, which later on was carefully examined, gave evidence of having voyaged nearly half round the world before reaching its destination. It bore the postmarks of New York, London, Paris, and various other cities, mixed together in the most incomprehensible fashion. It was forwarded several times, and looked very much as if it had been buried and resurrected (from the dead-letter graveyard). So anonymous it came, and anonymous it remained ever after.

Eric was obliged to acquaint Generva with the unfortunate circumstance. He was not only desirous that she should prepare herself for any contingency that might arise, but he felt the need of taking counsel with her upon the subject itself. When he told her, she started violently, colored vividly, and turning as suddenly pale, put out a hand that was very unsteady and asked for the letter which Tom had written. She read it over several times, almost as though she would commit it to memory; then she gave it back again, and asked for some water to drink.

"Are you faint?" inquired Eric as he held a glass to her lips.

"No, my throat is parched," she explained, "and very dry."

"What is your view of the position Tom has taken?" he next asked.

"Tom has been deceived," she replied, and her voice was quite weak. "He is not to blame."

"You think that he will be convinced by our explanations?"

"I'm sure of it: he has never failed to listen to reason or—to me."

"But consider the bad influence of his advisers, and put together the anonymous letter which connects our names and warns him against us, and the confirmation of the base suspicion by the gentlemen who heard me acquiesce in it."

"All of which we can tell him," she maintained. "All and more. Might I trouble you for the water again; you have put it out of my reach, and I—"

"Generva," said Eric, who was not to be deceived by the light manner in which she took the news, "you are faint—you—"

"Yes, a little," she acknowledged, "perhaps to open the window—to—"

"You want some air," hastily, throwing it up and regarding her ashy face.

"Yes, air," she murmured and fainted dead away.

The very next mail brought a letter from Dorothy. "We are to sail next week," she wrote, "on the steamer *Nevada*, and are now paying a visit to a relative of father's residing in Liverpool. At least Teets, Agnes, and myself are. The others have remained sight-seeing in London."

Farther on, and after considerable matter in which

we have no interest, she told him of the disagreement between herself and her mother, of her relief at the thought of getting home, which was the dearest place on earth, and assured him that she was now convinced that "Absence made the heart grow fonder."

"There had arisen unpleasant things," she said, "but these in nowise influenced her, though he must not be surprised to find Tom greatly changed, owing to an occurrence which he would know in due time and which she only wished to prepare him for."

"Teets is so much improved as to be almost unrecognizable. He can walk by the aid of his tiny crutches, and is so proud and happy it does one's heart good to see him! I shall be on the ocean when you get this," etc., etc., etc.

Not a very long, or particularly well-written letter, far from being in her best style, but one which somehow brought great relief to its recipient. For he saw by it that in spite of all, she was still the steadfast girl he deemed her to be.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE LAST ACT IN HER DRAMA.

It was the first of January of the year 18—. There had been a heavy fall of snow during the night, followed by a steady increasing temperature, and now a cutting wind swept in a furious gale from the north, over the ice-bound river, up the frozen streets, and across the bleak, bare commons, whose unsightly trees, gaunt and grim, and ugly, shivered in the piercing blast.

A cold winter's sun shone brightly in a clear winter's sky, throwing a thousand dazzling lights upon the crystal heaps of snow piled high along the frosty sidewalks. The great metropolis was rife with activity. Its busy streets, its huge public buildings, its stores, markets, wharfs, ferries, churches, hotels, theatres, all teemed with an overflowing mass of humanity, with the rise and fall of a million voices, with a jangle of bells throbbing out doleful and despondent sounds; a rolling of wheels, a clatter of horses' hoofs, a rumble of cars, a tramp of feet—all seemingly engaged in a maddening race for life.

The fashionable season was at its height, and New York looking its best, still robed in festive holiday attire, and wearing a fêted air, suggestive of shining bunches of holly with bright-colored berries, and frolicsome antics under green mistletoe boughs.

The shops glowed with rich and gorgeous trappings; sleighs echoed the merriment of happy fresh young voices and tinkling bells, and hosts of care-free pleasure-seekers promenaded gaily up and down the crowded thoroughfares, or thronged into the various places of amusement to smile at the comedian's drollery, or weep with the tragic muse.

R——'s theatre was a blaze of light. A placard reading,

GENERVA ROMAINE

IN

"THE PRINCESS,"

was conspicuously displayed. A white canvas awning had been erected from the pavement to the curbstone, where were stretched a continuous line of carriages.

It was a gala night, and the beau-monde had turned out in vast numbers to do honor to the occasion. If it were not bad form to be curious, one would say that society was infected with vulgar curiosity; if it were not rank heresy, one would affirm that society was rudely impatient to gratify its inquisitiveness, for the manner in which society pushed and edged, and whisked, and shoved each other about; the way it wedged and elbowed its passage into the entrance, and from thence up the broad steps leading to the spacious lobby, was, to say the least, bewildering. At a quarter before eight o'clock the house was jammed and the sign,

"Standing room only,"

exhibited. All the first-nighters were there. Not a newspaper or magazine that did not have its representative.

The boxes glowed with a bevy of pretty women, presenting a galaxy of feminine loveliness. The vast auditorium was filled to overflowing, the aisles were strung with camp-chairs, the deep window-sills were turned into seats and occupied, indeed every available space was taken advantage of. Ladies could be seen standing in groups round the dress-circle, unable to secure chairs; men towered over them in the background. A few distinguished and privileged personages were conducted to the orchestra, and put side by side with the musicians.

The galleries swarmed with people, and as there seemed to be no end to the demand for admission tickets, the manager was forced to close the box-office and refuse to allow more money to be taken.

As Mr. Slick stepped from a hansom at a little after seven, he found a messenger-boy awaiting him with a letter, upon the envelope of which was printed "Fifth Avenue Hotel." "Who the deuce," he muttered as he opened it, "can be writing to me from there?" "Ye gods!" as his eyes lighted upon the signature and he read:

NEW YORK, January 1, 18—.

MR. SLICK:

Dear Sir,—We arrived from Liverpool on the *Nevada* to-day, and are desirous of witnessing Miss Romaine's *début* to-night. Kindly reserve one of the stage-boxes, for my *wife*, mother, sister and self, and
Oblige, yours very truly,

DR. THOMAS WINTHROP.

"His wife!" exclaimed Silas, holding up the letter to the gas-jet and regarding it closely; "his wife? why he hasn't any—he—but he must have, for here it is, and underlined, too! So he's gone and got married, and I was thinking that Gen—Gen—I wonder if she knows? By gad, I'll find out—I'll put her to the test, if I never do anything in all my life again! She'd a been mine if it hadn't been for him, with his big swell airs and smooth-tongued flattery. You go back to the hotel," he said to the boy, "and tell Dr. Winthrop that Mr. Slick sent him these (giving him the box-checks which he took from the treasurer), and they'll be \$25.00. See that you don't forget the amount!"

When the boy had gone he hastened round to the stage to acquaint Generva with the surprising intelligence. She was dressed for the first act and was

alone. The door of her room being ajar he rapped lightly and entered, and with a triumphant flourish of the paper asked if she could guess what it contained?

"No," she declared, "she could not guess—she could not even think; she was too agitated to concentrate her thoughts."

"Read for yourself, then!" and without a word of warning he gave it to her. A moment later and she knew the truth; but her informant did not remain, as had been his intention, to taunt her with it. Scared and cowed by the look of dumb anguish which crept gradually into her face, blanching it to an ashy hue, he slunk away, and was about to enter the theatre, when he was suddenly confronted by Eric, who seized his arm in a grip of iron, and shook him until he could scarcely breathe.

"You miserable, dastardly scoundrel!" he exclaimed; "you have told her." Silas began to cry.

"I didn't suppose you'd care," he whimpered.

Eric flung him aside with contemptuous scorn. "And to think," he went on, "that she should have been subjected to this at such a moment. To think that all my efforts to keep it from her until to-morrow, even, are frustrated, and by you, *you!*" laying hold of him again.

"Don't," implored Silas; "please don't hit me; you're a bigger man, you oughtn't to do it."

"Hit you?" repeated Eric throwing him off again,

"I would like to throttle you. Come here!"

Silas obeyed.

"Now, answer my questions. What box did you send to him?"

"I swear that I—"

"You needn't deny it, for I know from the treasurer that you did!"

"But I charged him with it—I did, upon my honor! I charged him \$25.00."

"Which, I asked, did you send him?"

"The stage box to the right, and the only one there was left."

"Now you can go."

Silas went, with alacrity and Eric glanced hurriedly over the note he had that morning received from Dorothy.

"They were married in London," she wrote, "and we knew nothing about it. Mamma is delighted, but Tom—oh, Eric! I know you will forgive him when you see how fearfully changed he is."

"I must see her somehow," he said, as he folded up the letter and put it in his pocket, "but how? that's the point. Perhaps she will be here; in which case my best plan is to watch for her." Deciding upon this course, he posted himself in a position where he could get a good view of her if she came in, which he secretly prayed she might.

The first strains of the orchestra floated sweetly through the house, the chandeliers blazed up, the hum of conversation abated, and then there appeared in the doorway the whole Winthrop party. Eric's heart beat as he hastened forward, to be greeted by a supercilious stare from Mrs. Winthrop, a cool nod from Beatrice, a haughty bow from Tom, and a little sly hand-clasp from Dorothy. They all moved on, following the usher, but she lingered behind despite the angry light in her mother's eyes.

"Do you love me, Dorothy?" he whispered as they walked along.

"Yes." It was very softly spoken, but he heard it.

"And you will be my wife in spite of all?"

"Yes," again.

"When, Dorothy?"

"Whenever you like!"

By this time they had reached the private box, whereupon Tom once more bowed with icy courtesy and closed the door behind him.

Eric hastened away, a dull pain at his heart. Without being observed, and from behind the shelter of a pillar, he stole a look at Mrs. Winthrop, scanning the large audience with her gold opera-glass; at Beatrice in a costume of marvelous texture, and combination, fresh from Monsieur Worth, listlessly perusing her programme; at Dorothy, flushed, eager, excited, and lastly at Tom sitting like a sphinx; upright, unbending, implacable, his proud lips firmly compressed, his features hard, repellent, cynical. When he could bear the sight no longer he fell back and mingled with the crowd, upon which had fallen a hush, for the music had ceased, and the first act of "Her Drama" began.

It represented a sumptuous apartment in the house of the *Princess Delmar*. The furniture and decorations were Russian. Costly fur rugs were strewn about, and luxurious divans of oriental design were placed in recesses hung with shimmering silk, and caught back by heavy chains of gold. At the rise of the curtain the *Princess* (Generva) was discovered seated in a massive arm-chair, placed upon the skin of a polar bear, the head of which served as a footstool.

She wore a plain dress of white cloth, trimmed with broad bands of Russian sable. Her neck and arms were bare, her hair arranged high in modern style,

and upon her bosom shone a star studded with diamonds: Before her, in an attitude of respectful attention, stood *Kasan*, a spy. He was wrapped in a heavy dark cloak, and held his hat in his hand. A soft, red light fell upon them, from the logs that blazed upon the hearth, revealing plainly the humble shrinking figure of the one, and the proud disdainful mien of the other.

She began by questioning him as to the possibility of the Allies driving the Russians into Sebastopol, and as to the probability of an assault; after which she demanded of him the despatches which he was about to carry from *General Orloff* to the quarters of the General-in-Chief. Making copies of these, she dismissed him, and glancing over them hurriedly, fell into a low, tender, half-heroic soliloquy, touching upon her remorse for the error of her past, and her resolve upon the atonement (through love) of her future.

The lines were delivered softly, gently, under the spell of a new-found joy, which curved her lips into a tender smile, and thrilled her voice with sweet and vibrating emotion.

It stirred the pulses of the throng, and from the orchestra up, up, to the top of the highest tier, there arose a murmur of approbation. She had made her first great point; and as she followed it with ever-increasing power the great audience sat hushed in wrapt approval. Breathlessly they listened, leaning forward to catch her lightest word. Other characters came and went: *Mirah*, her ward, sought an interview, after which *General Orloff* was announced. Unmindful of all else she greeted him with tremulous happiness. Bending low over her hand, which, like a

frightened bird fluttered in his strong clasp, he glanced anxiously into her averted face, but only for a single moment; in the next he had turned to the timid, blushing *Mirah*, led her forward, and begged that she might be given to him for his wife.

The die was cast, the unhappy *Princess* knew the truth. Smiling, she tendered them her congratulations; but no sooner had they withdrawn, than she sprang like a fury to her feet. It now became evident that a prodigious amount of strength and intense dramatic force lay dormant in this fragile actress. The words: "I could have borne his scorn but not his unfaithfulness," came from her quivering lips with a sobbing moan, that sent a chill to every heart. Her anguish was like that of a dumb animal, which could not reveal the full measure of its pain, in expression. It seemed a woe too great to be spoken.

At the close of the scene she was enthusiastically recalled.

Crash went the band; loud and general became the buzz of conversation; out crowded a string of people to promenade in the lobbies, or lounge in the reception rooms.

"A general success!" went from mouth to mouth. "She is divine!" "It is really an event!" "What stage effects! what scenic display! what millinery! how sumptuous! how elegant! how accurate!"

"Do you like it?" inquired Beatrice of Dorothy in a low voice.

"Can you ask such a question?"

"A young person of considerable talent" criticised Mrs. Winthrop, "and an excellent play."

She had addressed herself to Tom, but he made no

reply, offered not the slightest comment. He sat like one in a dream.

Act II. represented a magnificent ballroom in the Imperial palace, with marble columns reaching the ceiling, and tall mirrors reflecting an array of beautiful women and handsome, distinguished men. From the gilded cornices fell heavy plush draperies, of the richest design, offset here and there by groups of vases filled with hot-house exotics. The *Princess*, resplendent in white velvet and pearls, leaned upon the arm of his *Imperial Majesty the Czar*, bearing herself with regal pride in the midst of the throng of courtiers. The current scandal, the new opera, the latest duel, the war, etc., formed the dialogue. But in the midst of the festivities and just as the intoxicating strains of a waltz stole softly upon the ear, an officer arrived, announcing the victory of the Allies, and *General Orloff's* ignominious defeat.

With undisguised solicitude the nation's ruler retired, and the *Princess* looking after him murmured:

"Poor fool! poor puppet! blinded by your own greatness, I have shaken the crown upon your head, and you looked into my eyes and smiled on me while I was doing it."

She paced restlessly up and down as she spoke like a fuming, fretting panther, uttering every syllable with bitter, burning hatred—but suffering in her revenge, suffering horribly. For she had turned traitor, and the defeat had been due to her treasonable machinations. As she dwelt upon her crime, and the awful consequences likely to arise from it, thick dark cords swelled upon her neck and forehead, respiration came laboredly, and every nerve throbbed and bounded.

Remorse, keen and poignant, was depicted with appalling fidelity.

"Our fortune's made!" cried Silas frantically, as he danced a wild can-can in the box-office, where Eric himself, imbued with the prevailing fever, flew around excitedly, manifesting not the least surprise, when the habitually dignified Mr. R—— grasped him impulsively by the shoulders, and shouted:

"It's a go, my boy! a big go! Every one says so. The little woman will wake up to-morrow morning and find herself famous. Did you ever see such a crush, such vehement, such rampant, clamorous, volcanic, irrepressible enthusiasm—did you, now?" and he rushed off forgetting to wait for an answer.

The last act was well advanced when Eric succeeded in wedging his way through the crowd around the stage, in order to be on hand in case she needed him upon her final exit.

This scene represented the interior of a tent near the battle-field, where *General Orloff* lay upon a couch. His wound (a slight one) had been dressed by the nurse in attendance.

At this point an official announced:

"*The Princess!*"

She entered slowly, in a long, loose black robe, confined around the waist by a girdle. Her hair flowing about her wasted form and a sad, penitent, conscious-stricken expression upon her mournful face.

"I have come to make amends, *Orloff!*" she said, fixing her great liquid eyes upon him.

"Amends!" he echoed scornfully; "what amends can you make for such a wrong as you have done?"

"Oh, heavens!" came shudderingly from her,

nerving herself with an effort she burst out disjointedly, "I have not come to talk of my treachery, I have not come to sue for your forgiveness, or court your favor. I have come to atone. You cannot, you will not deny me reparation." Here she fell upon her knees and burst into ungovernable weeping. But *Orloff's* only reply was to wave her aside. Moving away from her he started forward to meet his betrothed, who entered at that moment in company with the priest. In a few words he made known his desire to be married to the young girl who had thrown herself into his arms. Nothing of this escaped the wretched woman, who arose with difficulty from her knees, where she had fallen in the abandonment of her reckless woe. Turning with a quick movement she fastened her gaze, not upon the *General*, but upon the private box where sat the man she had loved and trusted. Straight into his cruel, merciless face she looked, until she forced a responsive glance, and in spite of himself he met her eye.

Fixedly they stared, each trying to sound the other. As the last words of the monotonous service passed the priest's lips, and his sing-song voice died away in a whisper, there fell a deadly hush broken only by the long gasping sigh which burst from *Generva* as she involuntarily moved nearer and nearer the private box. A strange apathy seemed to have fallen upon her. Her hands, which had heretofore clutched her skirts, fell nervelessly to her sides.

Her form so erect, became limp, and a vacant, far-off expression settled upon her features. Sleep-walkers appear as she did at that fatal moment.

"*Princess Delmar!*"

General Orloff recalled the actress to the character. But again her eyes wandered. They flew from the bride on the stage to the bride in the box. The audience observed not the transition, and saw only looks and actions appropriate to the scene. How the actress was absorbed in the character! What a wonderful portrayal of emotion!

Her ashy face was distorted beyond recognition, her muscles twitched convulsively, a glassy light crept into her eyes that glared like the eyes of a corpse, and she shivered and shook, and writhed like some poor beast hunted down and wounded to the death. Her sensitive nostrils dilated, her gray lips fell apart, and her lithesome body swayed to and fro like a broken reed.

Nervously, spasmodically clutching at the folds of her gown, she drew a glittering dagger and, without a moment's hesitation, raised it steadily. Then, with a quick, swift gesture, she plunged it deep, deep into her panting breast.

The illusion was perfect.

"Oh, God!" burst from Tom Winthrop as he sprung like a madman to his feet.

"Oh, love!"

Her voice rang out with startling emphasis. The words resounded like the spectral echo of a voice in a tomb.

Pale as death, her wonderful orbs fixed, her hair falling in a disheveled mass, the horror of the dead was portrayed in every lineament. A hueless pallor overspread the marble surface of her neck and brow, her form stiffened, her eyes sank into their sockets; and she fell.

The drop was hurriedly lowered, and the mighty assemblage rose as one man and sent up a deafening cry. "Bravo!" shouted a thousand voices. "Bravo!"

Flowers were torn from bouquets and corsages and thrown across the footlights. There was a thunder of stamping feet. Wave after wave of cheers passed over the vast auditorium. As she did not respond, the frantic plaudits were increased. "Romaine!" was the name shouted from every throat. Still no response. Why? There was a moment's pause, as if the crowd exhausted was gathering energy for another and more prolonged recall.

Now there is a movement at the wings.

Is she coming at last? No, it is the figure, the voice of another.

"Ladies and gentlemen:"

Eric Hazelton's grave face and deprecatory manner won for him an instant hearing. "There has been an accident," he said brokenly, "a heart-rending accident, that I—"

Here, something seemed to choke him and he paused, but as soon as he could command his voice he continued, "Miss Romaine."

A sickening fear spread from one to another and a stillness of death closed around.

"—In enacting the closing scene, overcome with emotion and excitement, has wounded herself seriously—fatally! She is dead!"

* * * * *

Had a thunder-bolt fallen, the panic could not have been more universal. Sorrow-stricken women and ghastly men looked helplessly at each other, and turning, fled through the aisles into the street. The

musicians stared speechlessly, and laying their instruments into their cases, vanished like fleeting shadows.

Every light fluttered and went out in a funereal gloom; a bell in the distance rang faintly, and the sombre green curtain fell noiselessly upon the last act of Generva's star-crossed life.

THE END.



