

RUBY'S HUSBAND.

5762

BY

MARION HARLAND,

AUTHOR OF "ALONE," "HIDDEN PATH," "NEMESIS," "MIRIAM," ETC.

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Mary Virginia Hawes ^{Turk}
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TO HIM

WHO, FOR MANY YEARS, HAS BEEN TO ME
ADVISER, CO-WORKER, AND BEST EARTHLY FRIEND,

This Volume is Dedicated.

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RUBY'S HUSBAND.

CHAPTER I.

It was a very disagreeable day for Thanksgiving — lowering at dawn ; at noon, sullen to wrathfulness ; rain drops scarce, but large, falling to the earth at long intervals, and threatening wayfarers with the storm that had yet not come at nightfall. It was gloomy, disheartening weather — the medium between sunshine and positive tempest, which is an exception to the famous maxim laudatory of mediums generally. There was nothing of the golden mean about this. All was dully leaden. It had made little difference, perhaps, in the crowded homesteads, scattered over the hills and nestling in the valleys of the state in which my story finds its scene, except as it kept old and young more closely in the happy circles about blazing hearthstones, especially as the afternoon grew raw and cold. It had certainly not marred the pleasure-seeking in the large and populous town of Kräwen, where stores and factories were shut, in accordance with time-honored usage and the governor's proclamation ; and where, when night closed in, broad sheets of light shot athwart the pavements from the plate-glass windows of mansions within which family dinner-parties were gathered ; and narrower streams streaked the damp flags from modest casements in humble dwellings, where a comfortable tea was reviving the memories of the roast turkey and pumpkin pie eaten at noon ; while concert hall, ball room, and billiard saloon blazed forth a welcome to those who were not set in families — “ Come and be happy with the rest ! ”

But in the wide meadows skirting the city on the seaward side, where mists, smelling and tasting of brine, were rolling in before the sluggish wind that would be a gale by morning; where the macadamized turnpike, the thoroughfare between the manufacturing town and its mightier commercial neighbor, was invaded by the tide flooding the ditches that divided the salt hay tracts, and served the double purpose of fencing and drainage; where one looking to the left saw a lurid horizon line, the fires of a hundred furnaces that never went out, and to the right a dimmer but wider glare, that likewise never faded into darkness, and meant miles upon miles of gas-lit streets; where, turning his eyes from the illumined distances, the traveller, or sojourner in the dreary waste, beheld nothing but the fast-glooming marshes, the few and feeble sparks of light from the huts, erected, it was difficult to say for what purpose, and inhabited by beings who must assuredly have been wondrously limited in their choice of abodes; heard nothing but the wash of the incoming tide, and the sigh of the wind through the withered grass; in this low-lying wilderness, where wet, and rawness, and November night meant such discomfort as the denizens of the cities never dreamed of, the twilight of that Thanksgiving evening might have served as the climax of all that was odious in weather and scene. The fog clung to and soaked and chilled the unhappy creature condemned by fate to encounter it, drew strength from the muscles and courage from the heart.

About midway between the emporiums of manufacture and commerce, there stood, a few yards back from the turnpike, a wooden house, two stories high, with a long porch in front, and across a barn-yard, surrounded by a miserable fence, a stable of nearly the same dimensions as the main dwelling. Altogether, the establishment was far more pretentious than any other within sight of it. Half a mile farther down the road wallowed a lazy stream, broad enough to entitle it to the name of river, but which was too shallow for navigation by large craft, and too poor in piscatory treasures to afford lively work to fishing-boats. Back of the house, more than a mile away, although

it seemed much nearer on the dead, treeless level, arose the one prominent feature of the landscape, — a rocky, woody eminence, known far and near as Wolf Hill, starting up abruptly from the plain, like the bristly back of some aquatic monster heaved out of the boggy flats. It was but dimly visible on this evening. The fogs looked heavier and darker in that direction, but of shape or outline there were but vague suggestions. Of the two lighted windows of the wayside habitation, one looked out upon this hill, the other toward Kräwen. Within the squares of light these defined upon the sodden earth, were the shadows of two human figures — a shape that passed and repassed from one point to another, within the chamber, and a form that had not changed her place, or moved her head, for half an hour. The interior of the room was trebly cheerful by contrast with the outer scene. It was a kitchen, for a cooking-stove filled up one corner, and upon the wall above it was suspended a comely array of bright tins, while sauce-pans, gridiron, and griddle were revealed through the open door of a closet to the right. It was the family dining-room; else why the table in the middle of the floor, with the white cloth and other preparations for the evening meal?

A substantial repast it bade likely to be. The savory steam of roast turkey arose from a spit set in front of the flaming grate, pots of vegetables bubbled upon the top of the stove, and a side-table held a large waiter laden with divers kinds of pies and preserves. It was a Thanksgiving feast, so far as the culinary arrangements went — one for which the preliminaries were rapidly approaching prosperous completion, and respecting which no invited guest who loved good cheer would have been indifferent. Yet the priestess of the initiatory ceremonies to the right enjoyment of the banquet was obviously uneasy at the non-arrival of those for whose appetites she was catering. She approached the window every third minute, and shading her eyes with her hands, gazed intently into the dense gloom without. Once she opened the back door, and stood for a moment upon the porch, listening and looking for signs of the expected ones.

“It is very strange they have not come!” she said, impatiently, returning to the kitchen and taking up the basting-ladle. “Your father isn’t apt to be late when he knows there is a hot supper waiting for him.”

There was no answer from the motionless figure at the window. As the speaker poured a ladleful of gravy from the dripping-pan slowly over the browning fowl, the light from the glowing coals fell directly upon her face. It was strongly marked, and not unhandsome. When the sharp outlines of nose, cheek, and chin had been rounded by youth and health, and her complexion been rosy, instead of sallow, she had been a belle in her circle. Her eyes were still bright and dark; her thin figure was erect, and retained traces of the suppleness she had vaunted as one of the charms of her girlhood; her hair, if not now thick and long, was glossy and curling. But the hand that held the ladle had lost its shapeliness; exposure to the heat and vapor of the kitchen had ruined the delicacy of her skin, and her dark calico dress, without a glimpse of white at the neck and wrists, gave a general dingy tone to the picture. She was silent again, thoughtfully anointing the plump breast of the fine bird on her spit, perhaps musing of the impending evil to her dinner from the late arrival of those who were to discuss it; perchance straying back in imagination to other Thanksgiving days, when the plenteous board owed nothing to her skill; when, in place of uncarpeted boards, her feet trod soft carpets; when jewels shone upon her white fingers; silks, and satins, and laces bedecked her for the social feast or assembly-room.

She had known all these things; had been reared to expect and enjoy them; for the first twenty-three years of her life *had* enjoyed them as do most gay and worldly girls — receiving them as her right, with scarcely a thought of the heavenly Giver, or an emotion of gratitude towards the earthly parents, whose pride and darling she was. Then she married — under the influence of what marvellous infatuation it would be difficult to say — a man inferior to herself in birth, in breeding, and in

nature ; a fine-looking animal, with bold black eyes, luxuriant hair and whiskers, a Roman nose, and a large mouth furnished with strong white teeth ; a man who stood six feet one in his stockings, who had the neck of a bull, the stride of a giant, and a deep base voice, like the growl of an awakening lion ; a man who ignored the commonest rules of polite behavior and English grammar, who talked to ladies with his hat on, leaned back in their slight fancy chairs, nursing one of his big knees with both of his big hands, and chewed tobacco vigorously, while assuring his fair entertainers that he was not "a-going to tell them nothing what warn't exactly O K ;" that he "'lowed Miss Agnes Masters was a 'mazing fine gurl, and if folks chose to say as how him and her was to be married, 'twan't for him to go aginst ginerall report."

Marry Agnes Masters he did amidst the groans and sneers of her acquaintances, and to the unspeakable mortification of her parents, sister, and brothers, who yet dared not controvert their self-willed relative. She saw and understood their repugnance to the alliance. When she placed her hand in Nick Sloane's at the altar, she knew that she was giving up everything she had heretofore held dear, save her own will, for the love she bore him ; but she made the sacrifice cheerfully, boastfully. She had unlimited confidence in her powers of suasion and control. She said to herself, and hinted to her intimate friends, that she would educate her handsome Orson up to the level of those who now despised him. For her part, she gloried in him as he was. She overrated her ability, or the quality of the material she had to work upon. Orson was coarse-grained from the beginning. Not a drop of gentle blood had been instilled into the veins of one of the race for a hundred years. Warp and woof, they were homespun, and no amount of labor or ingenuity of art could ever fine-draw them into any less common stuff. Moreover, this scion of the doughty tribe was self-complacent in proportion to his ignorance and clownishness ; utterly unconscious of any need of reform in his manners and speech. But for this overweening conceit, he would never have

dared to lift his eyes to Agnes Masters. Having won her with ease that must have astonished even his dull comprehension, he remained more fixed than ever in his satisfaction with himself, his natural gifts and their culture. Mrs. Sloane was a clever woman, notwithstanding this one lapse into insanity, and proud as shrewd. There must have been a horrid awakening to the true character of her husband, and the appreciation of the consequences of her mad step downward; many struggles, in which the whole might of her determined will, nerved by desperate dread of the result of failure, tore at his dogged brutishness; stormy scenes of reproach and recrimination during the early months and years of their married life, — but no one outside their home was the wiser for their combats, for her defeat and despair. She carried a high head and a brave front to the world as to her nearest of kin. For aught any mortal, save Nick Sloane, could tell, she doted on him, at the end of the first, second, third lustrum of their joint existence, blindly and exultingly as upon their marriage-day.

The fourth lustrum closed with this night. It was not likely she had forgotten that the 26th of November was her wedding-day, or that, recollecting what anniversary it was, memory should fail to sweep a backward glance over the one and twenty years dividing her from her maidenhood, and ask, "Where is their harvest?" Father, mother, and sister had been dust and ashes for fifteen years. She had seen neither brother for ten. They had remonstrated with Sloane upon the reckless style in which he squandered his wife's third of the patrimonial estate. He had quarrelled with both, and she espoused his side. She may have repented her partisanship when another twelvemonth saw them penniless, except for the interest of a small sum invested by her father for her benefit, and so secured as to be beyond her husband's reach. By means of this stipend they had contrived to buy these scanty acres of meadow-land, with the comfortless buildings standing thereupon; and thither they had removed nine years ago this autumn. Nick hoped for and prophesied great profits from the investment. Railroads were

to be built to the north and south of them. Maritime Kroywen and manufacturing Kräwen were to unite their suburbs, and the site of his dwelling become an aristocratic quarter, where lots would be measured by the foot, and litigious mention be made of inches in deeds of sale. The railroads were built, and became lines of travel for thousands of residents and traffickers in the sister cities; but the cautious burghers of the thriving Dutch corporations were too knowing to extend the cords of their tents over, or drive their stakes into, the shaking meadows, pronounced by the wisest land agents to be irreclaimable from the dominion of the salt tides, the marsh fogs, and the mosquitos. The Sloanes were likely to die where they now lived, before they could dispose of their property at the smallest advance upon the original purchase-money. It was on a par with most of Nick's speculations — as foolish and as profitless.

The few people who troubled their brains to remember him at all wondered how he lived. True, he kept hunting-dogs and guns; and when snipe and wild duck were abundant upon the meadows, his house was the resort of parties of sportsmen or cockney Nimrods, who paid liberally for his equipments and his services as head-keeper of the watery preserves. "Sloane's" was a familiar word in the mouths of amateurs in this manly pursuit, and not unknown to jockeys and horse-trainers. There were seasons of the year when foundered trotters, stiffened roadsters, and tender-footed colts ran, free of bridle or harness, in the paddock behind the stable, and were cared for by the proprietor of the "farm" at so much per week. He was a "capital judge of a horse," which, with regard to a man of his intellectual calibre and tastes, is the next thing to declaring him good for nothing. Hand-and-glove with every groom and horse-dealer in the surrounding country, he had occasional opportunities of pocketing a commission upon some cunning sale, or sharp exchange, in which each party had tried to overreach the other, and was usually egregiously cheated himself by his agent and go-between. Yet it seemed hardly possible that his family could

subsist upon an income so meagre and fluctuating as was derived from these various sources. "Sloane," reasoned the wiseacres, "must have some means of living unknown to the public," or that insignificant portion of the public alluded to above, who concerned themselves with conjectures about him and his. These fell into the habit, by degrees, of shrugging their shoulders, and looking knowing whenever he was spoken of.

"It might be all right. Mrs. Sloane was a good manager, and could make a little go a great way; but Sloane himself was a slippery rascal — not too virtuous to resort to any method of turning a safe penny."

We do not design here to investigate the truth or falsity of these insinuations. One assertion, upon which all who knew her were agreed, could not be gainsaid. Mrs. Sloane *was* an admirable economist. But for her, the establishment would have been totally wrecked long since. She was washerwoman, cook, housemaid, and seamstress, as the daily needs of her household required; and she performed each of her multiform tasks well. Nick bragged of his wife's culinary skill, and scrupled not to swear over the game or fish suppers served up for him and his fellow-sportsmen after their day's tramp upon the meadows, that she had not her equal in America.

"She's a thorough-bred nag, I can tell you, gentlemen," he would say, smiting the table with his brawny fist. "One of the sort that steps high, and carries up well while they has a hoof or a hair left."

At which refined conjugal flattery the weary woman would smile with a touch of her old archness, and bid him "keep quiet, and let others find out her accomplishments for themselves."

She never smiled at him in this way when the guests had gone. These little prettinesses of courtship, that obtain with some couples until gray hair overarches the loving eyes, and wrinkles supplant the dimples, were only practised by them as a blind — a means of keeping up the appearances to which the

wife had clung tenaciously since her honeymoon. Not that quarrels were frequent or bitter. She recognized the futility of attempting to alter her husband's habits or principles, and avoided discussion upon subjects concerning which they held opposite views. She was too sagacious to waste her energies in useless bickerings. Without pretence of affection for him who had dragged her down from her high estate to her present ignoble condition, she remembered that she had, of her own free will, linked her lot with his, and doubted her right to upbraid him for following the bent of his native desires and his education.

To this ill-assorted couple had been given four children, of whom three had died in infancy. The first-born, and the only girl of the number, was now nineteen years of age, and had passed the last four years away from home, at a boarding-school, in a distant state. This was her mother's plan. To dis sever her from the associations of her home; to keep her, except in her vacations, at the seminary, which had a high reputation for the scholarship and social status of its graduates; to clothe her suitably while there, — had taxed the hard-working parent to the utmost extent of her strength and expedients. In this effort she labored unaided by her husband. He had ridiculed the scheme from the outset.

“The girl's pretty face would have married her off well enough at seventeen, without more book-learning than her father had, and all the money spent upon this foolery been saved!”

The mother said nothing. She had her purpose in life still, notable as had been her former vanquishment; and from this she was not easily diverted — certainly not by Nick Sloane's arguments.

“The oysters will be tough as leather!” she ended the prolonged silence by saying, removing a sauce-pan to the back of the stove. “Hadn't you better eat yours now, before they are ruined?”

“And spoil my appetite for everything else! No, thank you!”

The daughter turned her head from the window, her eyes from the black panes that had ceased to reveal aught beside the reflection of the fire and lamplight, and came languidly forward to the table.

“It is very vexatious,” she continued, fretfully, “when one is cut off from all enjoyments except eating and drinking, not to be able to indulge in these as she likes!”

“Poor child!” responded the mother. “If I were you, I would not wait for them. Let me give you your supper. Everything is done to a turn.”

“They would come in just as I began to eat. I know how it would be. How hungry I am!”

She sat down by the table, and leaned her chin upon her hand, her gaze devouring the brown-breasted turkey her mother was withdrawing to a safer distance from the stove. She might have been Eve regretting the pleasant fruits of the garden, Magdalene mourning over her departed purity, as she thus leaned and looked. She could not have personated the Peri at the gate of Paradise, or a grieving yet sinless angel, or any other being that had not tasted for herself of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Captious critics of womanly beauty would have called her hair red, but for the bronze shadows that rested among and set off to more advantage the burnished ripples. Her forehead was low and smooth, the arch of the hair above her brows giving it the semblance of greater height than it really had, and her skin had the pearly transparency that often accompanies auburn tresses. Her eyes were of a peculiar tint — neither blue, gray, nor hazel, but one that in certain lights exactly matched her hair. They were cold and clear, with a metallic glitter she studied to hide when she would affect softness, by a trick of dropping over them the white lids until the thick lashes touched her cheek. The lips were bright red, — so red as to suggest to the observer all manner of poetical similes of coral, roses, and cherries, — and, without forming a sensitive feature, could yet achieve a quiver, or pout, at the will of their owner, that enhanced their beauty. She was above the medium

height, and thanks to her inheritance of the mother's trim zone and the father's broad shoulders, presented a model of healthy and graceful womanhood, such as is rarely produced on this side of the Atlantic. Her plump white hands attested to her immunity from the toils that had made the mother prematurely old, and her blue merino dress, fresh white collar and under-sleeves, showed as plainly, by their fit and general arrangement, that she was not insensible to her charms of figure and face.

A petted child, reared with tastes and habits she could not indulge while her father's house remained her home, one needed no prophetic vision to enable him to predict that she would make yet more miserable the humble dwelling of which she was now a regular inmate. She had been domesticated here scarcely a month, and every thought and emotion were in revolt at the meanness of her surroundings and her unpromising future.

“Poor child!” repeated the mother, in genuine commiseration, as the shade deepened upon her darling's countenance, and the mouth assumed a more decided curl of discontent. “I will manage the matter for you! Do you eat your supper comfortably, and I will send your father and that young man around to the front door, if they should come before you are through. You shall not be interrupted.”

The girl twitched her shoulder petulantly to dislodge the hand laid soothingly upon it.

“What matters one spoiled supper, when all the rest of my life is spoiled? It is just of a piece with everything else that happens to me. I wish I was dead.”

Heavy, angry tears plashed upon her fingers. She drew out her handkerchief, and burying her face in it, sobbed violently.

The mother returned to her turkey and basting-ladle. Her eyes were tearless, but her features were contorted by a passing spasm. If she felt, in that pang, that her years of self-sacrificing toil deserved other recompense than these childish repinings and downright disrespect, she suffered nothing of the feeling to appear in her next remark.

“I know it is hard for you, my pet!” she said, in the soft tone she used to her child alone. “But we will hope for better times.”

“I don't know where they are to come from,” ejaculated the daughter, pettishly.

Further speech was prevented by the shuffling and stamping of feet in the porch, into which the kitchen opened. The door was thrown back, and the master of the house appeared, supporting upon his powerful arm the drooping figure of a youth who had been his companion in the day's hunt.

“The big rocking-chair! quick!” he ordered, before the startled women could exclaim or inquire what had happened.

Mrs. Sloane brought it from the inner room, and assisted her husband to place the fainting boy within it.

“Brandy and water!” was the next requisition. Nick enjoyed a sensational scene wherein he could play the leading part. “And I say, Ruby! I saw a bottle of cologne on your bureau to-day. Bring it down, and a clean handkerchief or two! Be spry!”

The beauty departed poutingly upon her errand. She was just sufficiently afraid of her father to withhold open protest. As she reëntered the kitchen, she heard the deep sigh of returning consciousness from the stranger, and her father beckoned to her to hasten.

“Bathe his face!” taking the bottle from her hand, and dashing a shower of cologne over the handkerchief she held. “Now, Mr. Suydam, drink this, sir, and you are all right!”

The colorless lips made a feeble attempt to obey, but the eyelids remained closed. Ruby had a fair chance of studying the physiognomy of her patient, as she ungraciously mopped his temples and cheeks. He looked very young, — almost girlish, — with the soft brown hair falling back from his forehead, and his delicate features chiselled into sharpness by suffering and faintness; but his unwilling attendant remarked in the slight mustache and shaven chin tokens of incipient manhood.

“But for them I should not take him to be more than sixteen,” she said to herself. “He’s too tall for that, though. He must be eighteen at least, or he wouldn’t have such long legs!”

Her gaze strayed to his hands, white and well formed; thence to his hunting suit of rough gray cloth, the trousers being tucked within the heavy boots.

“Some counter-hopper off on a holiday spree!” she concluded. “How was he hurt?” aloud to her father.

“Gun bursted! An overcharge!” was the reply.

The wounded youth opened his eyes with a faint, courteous smile.

“I beg your pardon, Mr. Sloane! The fault — was — in — the — gun — not the — loading!”

Sloane roared with laughter.

“Never say die! You’re one of the plucky breed! Stand up for your rights, sir! A drop more brandy, and we’ll look after this ’ere arm. If it *was* the gun’s fault, you are the one hurt — more’s the pity!”

An indefinable something in the boy’s speech and manner disabused Ruby’s mind of the idea of his clerkship.

“Why, he is a gentleman!” was her mental ejaculation, and she moved within the range of his vision.

She was rewarded by seeing the languid eyes widen in incredulous surprise, the head lifted involuntarily from the back of the chair, while he raised his hand in deprecation.

“This is not — fit — work for you!” he faltered.

“Allow me!” replied Ruby, benignantly, resisting his motion to arrest her ministration of mercy. “I am glad you are better!”

The blood flowed to his face in a sudden rush.

“O, it is nothing! a mere scratch — not worth minding!” sitting upright. “I can’t think what made me so babyish as to faint. I never did such a thing before in my life!”

“I have more’n once!” said Nick, sententiously. “Now, old lady, if you will get Mr. Suydam’s room ready, I should

advise him to turn in right away; he can have his supper up stairs."

"Supper!" The bluish-white circles came back to the boy's nostrils and mouth.

"I don't want any!"

"Sick, eh? Well, you'll be better off for a little fasting."

Mrs. Sloane lighted a candle and left the room. Her husband overtook her in the hall, and a whispered consultation ensued, resulting in Nick's return to the kitchen, with a message to the daughter.

"Ma wants you, Ruby! I will do whatever Mr. Suydam needs."

"Thank you!" said the youth, gratefully, to her, as she resigned her post. "Let me beg you not to trouble yourself about my room. I can sleep anywhere!"

Ruby departed with a reassuring smile, which was exchanged for a scowl when she heard what was her mother's business with her.

"Your father wants you to give up your room for this one night to Mr. Suydam. He is —"

"I shan't do it! That is flat!" interrupted the outraged damsel, setting her back against her chamber door, without which her mother awaited her answer. "It is the only decent spot in the house, and I wouldn't leave it to please the president himself! Who is this boy, that I should put myself out to accommodate his lordship? He may sleep in the barn, for aught I care!"

"The boy is in his twenty-first year, and is the son of one of the richest men in Kräwen," explained the mother, quietly. "His parents are travelling in Europe with his brother, who is consumptive. His father is old, and has already had one paralytic stroke. Your father knows all about them. This young man is studying medicine in Kroywen. He is very clever, and he will be very wealthy; yet there seems to be no one to look after him, and we may have him upon our hands for several days — perhaps weeks. His shoulder is badly torn."

Ruby looked hard in her mother's eyes, a strange tawny light gradually rising in her own, then dropped them to the floor at her feet, and meditated for half a minute.

“Come in!” She announced her altered resolution by stepping aside, and drawing back the bolt of the door. “Have your own way!”

But Mrs. Sloane knew that she was understood; that the one most interested in the hastily-formed scheme would forward it zealously.

The room was small, but scrupulously neat, owing, we may observe, to the mother's care, not the daughter's. Carpet and furniture were new, and although the one was a cheap ingrain, in white and green arabesques, and the other only a cottage set of painted wood, — also a pretty shade of green, — the effect upon the eye was so agreeable, when joined to that of the white muslin window-curtains, tied back with green ribbons, and the white counterpane of the low bed, that it had elicited an exclamation of pleasure from the daughter on her return from school, and fully justified her late declaration that no other apartment in the house could compare with it. Again no thought of the self-denying love and toil that had planned and achieved this unexpected contribution to her comfort and happiness! She accepted it, as she did all other good things that fell to her lot, as her due, and a very inconsiderable modicum of what Fate owed her. She grumbled still, while removing such articles from her drawers and closet as she would need in her new quarters.

“I shan't sleep a wink, I know! That front room is cold as a barn, and noisy besides, with the rattling of wagons before daybreak upon the turnpike, and the cars passing all night long. But it is always the way! I am to give up everything I like, and this is the only corner of this hateful old barn that is at all habitable! I wish pa had left the booby out on the marshes!”

“I hope you will never have cause to regret your charitable action!” responded the judicious parent. Well satisfied at

having gained her point, she heeded the spoiled child's murmurs less than was her wont.

“Not a doctor in the country could have done more for him than I done!” said Nick, modestly, sitting down to his late supper with his wife and daughter. “I am to go betimes in the morning to Kräwen, to let a fellow who is studying with him know what has happened and where he is. I offered to drive over to-night, but he wouldn't hear on it. He seems a good-hearted chap, though I thought him kinder high and stiff all day. A prime shot, too, and he fetched a first-rate dog along. I told him I could sell him for a cool hundred, if ever he wanted to part with him. Said he had been offered a hundred and fifty, and wouldn't take it. It's a lucky thing to have a rich governor!”

CHAPTER II.

THE neat couch of white and green became the bed of Procrustes to the wounded boy before the morning looked through windy rain into the windows.

Nature's sulky mood had broken forth into wild wrath by midnight. The sleepless tenant of the easterly chamber had heard the growl of the wind from the coast wax into a roar in its unimpeded sweep over the meadows, until it buffeted the solitary tenement, shaking doors and casements as with a giant's grapple, and making the timbers of the ancient frame creak again. Then large, slow drops fell, like molten lead, upon the roof overhead, and the November storm had fairly set in. The war of air and water would have lulled him to deeper repose but yesternight. It aggravated now his sense of desolation, and the nervous irritability consequent upon physical suffering. Hot throbs of pain racked the injured shoulder, his whole body glowed as if the chamber were a fiery furnace, and the brain, sympathizing with the general disorder of the system, conjured up images of loneliness and sorrow — reminiscences and forebodings that would have chased away sleep, had there existed no other cause of disquiet. Lapsing into a troubled slumber, he imagined himself a child again, tossing within his crib, ill with scarlet fever, while his twin-sister, the only daughter of the household, lay gasping away her life upon the opposite side of the room. His mother's shriek, as the breath left her child's lips forever, startled him into consciousness of his real situation, and, with the vision of the sweet, pale face of his childhood's idol thus clearly reproduced by memory, he clutched the

pillow in his pain and weakness, and moaned aloud his grief at her loss.

It was the great loss of his young life. Had Effie lived, her three brothers would hardly have grown to manhood careless of home duties and ignorant of home loves; the two elder, hard, unselfish men of the world, gay, brilliant, and heartless; the youngest, morbidly misanthropic. The mother, living over her own girlhood in the bright, glad youth of the daughter, beloved beyond all the rest of her children, would not have been lured to neglect of her family and fireside by the painted gewgaws of fashion — made a holocaust of wifely and maternal obligations to the pitiless Baal of Society. The father, stern and reserved to severity, yet mentioned his dead baby's name once in a great while, in a tone of hopeless longing that showed his heart lived still under the accumulated ice of years and disappointments. Of this grave old man, who rarely gave him a word of affection, the boy thought with more tenderness than flowed out from his nature towards any other human creature.

“He told me once I looked like Effie!” he mused in his semi-delirium. “If I were to die now, we should always be associated in his mind. Nobody else would care. My mother would be provoked, for mourning is not becoming to her. Jack and Fred would say, ‘That is just Louis's luck! He was always an unfortunate devil!’ and divide my portion of the patrimonial estate between them, chuckling over their superior address in keeping out of scrapes. I am a battered skiff stranded upon the beach, not worth the pains of looking after. I might lie in this out-of-the-way hole for a month, and not a soul vex himself with inquiries as to what had become of me. By George! I'll try the experiment!” he exclaimed aloud, with savage glee.

“Eh! what did you ask for, sir?” said Nick Sloane, starting from his sleep in the easy-chair by the fire.

He had insisted upon spending the night in his lodger's room, that he might be on hand in case he was needed, and had enjoyed a series of royal naps, his feet upon the mantel, and his

great mouth wide open. He had awakened several times to replenish the fire, and to give the patient lemonade or water, as his thirst increased, remarking, as he did so, that it was a "confoundedly ugly night," that "there would be lots of craft blowed ashore before morning," and inquiring "how about that 'ere shoulder by this time?" He approached the bedside now, rubbing his eyes, and yawning.

"More pain?" he asked, in a business-like way.

"I should think so!" returned the youth, impatiently. "Is there nothing that can loosen these teeth from my shoulder? It feels as if a tiger had fastened upon it!"

"Jest so! Lor! how I have saw men squirm under that 'ere kind o' gnawing pain!" remarked Nick, with professional coolness. "Let's look at the hole! I'll change the bandages, and put fresh 'intment on."

"What time is it?" asked the patient, while this process was going on.

"Six o'clock and after! Who's there?" as a tap was heard at the door.

"Can I come in?" said his wife's voice.

"Yes!" And as she entered, he added, with his usual refinement, "I say, old woman, 'spose you finish up this 'ere job. I b'lieve I'll take a snooze for an hour or so."

"You can go," rejoined Mrs. Sloane, taking his place at the bedside.

Dizzy with pain and fever, though he was, Louis noted the marked difference in the accent and manner of the pair. He scanned, with languid curiosity, the features and movements of his new nurse. Her very touch brought him comfort, after Nick's heavy handling of the inflamed flesh. Her fingers were neither soft nor fair, but they were light, and nimble as firm. The ointment seemed cooler; the linen bandages a support, rather than a compress, to the swollen joint, as applied by her; and her serious, kindly face and silent solicitude for his well-being were a welcome exchange for her spouse's clumsy familiarity.

“Thank you!” he said, when she readjusted the coverings over his chest.

“You are very welcome!”

She shook up and turned the creased and heated pillows; added ice to his lemonade, straightened the counterpane, put another stick upon the fire, which burst into a laughing flame in recognition of her attention, and after one more glance at her charge to assure herself that he wanted nothing else, she sat down in the chair lately vacated by her husband. Not to doze. Louis's last drowsy look in that direction showed him her erect figure, the ruddy light that stained with a warm blush the snowy coverlet and whitewashed walls, imparting to her dark eyes and thoughtful visage a wondrous resemblance to the pretty girl he had seen down stairs the preceding evening.

She was not there when he awoke. It was broad daylight, or as broad as the light would be at noontide of that gray day. Angry jets of rain were dashing over the window panes with every rise of the restless wind, still blowing dead ashore. The fire burned gayly; the little chamber was perfectly still, except for the moaning bursts of the gale. Louis shifted his position, that he might command a view of the scene without. A pale, watery sky, with not a rift from horizon to horizon, the clouds shutting down closely between the meadows and the ridge, beyond which the domes and pinnacles of Kroywen were distinctly visible on fair days; Wolf Hill looming into portentous height, and darkness through what looked like quivering mist, and was, in reality, slant lines of rain; the muddy river level with the sedgy banks; the monotonous stretch of marsh lands sodden with wet.

“The fattest weed that rots on Lethe's wharf might have grown hereabouts!” said Louis, with the short, disagreeable laugh that had aroused Nick Sloane from his “watch” over the embers. “And what am I but a bit of drift-wood washed up, along with other rubbish, by last night's storm?”

The conceit pleased his fancy. He turned it over in his mind

with dismal satisfaction. Brooding, not reflecting, had become the habit of his thoughts.

“A useless waif, not fit to be picked up or looked after! And nobody is likely to trouble himself to do it!” he repeated, for the twentieth time.

A sudden outbreak of music changed the current of his reverie. Partitions were thin and doors badly joined in that crazy dwelling. The songstress was in the chamber opposite to his, and the width of the passage, with one, possibly two, closed doors, separated him from her. Yet he lost not a note, scarcely a word, she sang. It was the then popular, always beautiful air from *Agathé*, set to the English ballad, “When the swallows homeward fly,” and was rendered by a fresh young voice, both sweet and strong, rising, in the impassioned crescendo of the concluding strains into power and melody that amazed and charmed the listener. He closed his eyes as she finished one verse, and lay, with parted lips and bated breath, hearkening to her and to the rain—the rain which had ceased to be discord. The patter upon the roof and against the glass kept up a subdued accompaniment to the warbling within. He forgot pain, fever, and loneliness while the concert continued. For two other songs followed the first—one, a light, tripping roundelay, to which the rain-drops beat faster time than to the former; the other, an Italian aria, very passably executed.

“Ruby!” called Nick Sloane from the foot of the stairs.

Fleet footsteps passed the sick boy's door, a dress rustled against the balustrade, and all was still again.

“Who and what can she be?” thought Louis, curiously. “A storm-stayed wayfarer, like myself? No! I seem to recollect seeing a pretty girl down stairs last night, as I was coming to my senses, and Sloane ordered her about as if she were an appurtenance of the establishment. What imaginable right can he have to control one who looks and sings as she does—if she were the unseen musician?”

His ideas floated back to the phantasy that had occupied them

a while ago. A gleam that would have been merry had it been less wistful, lighted his face.

“I am a shipwrecked mariner, and she is a siren — perhaps Circe in person. This is a marine grotto, with white walls, chalk shells and crystals, and sea-weed floor. I hear the surf booming overhead, and the enchantress would wile me into forgetfulness of the upper world I have left. I wish she would repeat the charm!”

Mrs. Sloane brought him his breakfast with her own hands, and expressed pleasure at seeing him less feverish and more free from pain than when she had relieved her husband's vigil. He had little appetite, but his febrile symptoms accounted for that.

“I wish I could do your delicacies justice!” he said, with the courtesy natural to, if not habitual with him. “I hope to do better, in a day or two, if you will allow me to remain here until I am stronger. I must have lost a great deal of blood yesterday. I am unaccountably weak and giddy this morning.”

“Rest and quiet are all you absolutely require,” rejoined the hostess, collecting the tea equipage upon the waiter.

The patient's quick eye attended her every motion. He saw that the napkin covering the tray was clean and white; that the cup, saucer, and sugar-dish were of old-fashioned china, translucent as an egg-shell; that the oysters were stewed as he seldom ate them, even upon rich men's tables; that the toast was a wafer in thinness, and delicately browned; the butter fancifully moulded; and he marvelled more and more at the incongruities of sporting Nick's *ménage*.

“Mr. Sloane wished me to say to you that he is ready to go to Kräwen,” continued the wife. “He only waits for your commands.”

There was a touch of proud deference in her manner, which Louis instantly perceived, and, as he imagined, appreciated. He understood more readily and clearly than if she had told him, in so many words, that she had not always been used

to await orders from lodgers; that fortune had been cruel to her, and that, in bowing her will to the requirements of her changed circumstances, she yet felt keenly the fall from her higher position. His innate gentlemanliness responded promptly to the unuttered appeal to his respect and sympathy.

“Beg him from me not to expose himself to this storm,” he said, earnestly. “I am in want of nothing to-day which you cannot supply. As you have said, I require little medicine except rest, and the salve applied by Mr. Sloane is in high repute with the profession. You see,” smiling, “I am enough of a doctor already to despise drugs.”

“But your friends will be uneasy!” objected Mrs. Sloane.

The smile faded before a look half impatience, half gloom.

“There is no one on this continent who would be the less happy if I were to retire from public view for a year, instead of a week. I look young to be my own master, I suppose, but I am such, nevertheless. Or, stay! my prudent and excellent landlady may be ‘uneasy’ at my protracted absence. If Mr. Sloane is going to town to-morrow, or the day after, I will trouble him with a line to her and an order upon her for some articles of wearing apparel. Then I shall be entirely comfortable.”

“Don’t you think your shoulder had better be examined by a surgeon?” persisted the hostess.

The arch smile returned. It became the usually pensive features well, and the accompanying intonation was sprightly and pleasant.

“My dear lady, haven’t I said that I am a bit of a doctor myself? I examined the wound yesterday, *secundum artem*. I ask your pardon! I would say, in a highly professional style. The bone is uninjured, and flesh wounds in a healthy subject soon heal, if they are not too much handled. This is my maiden case, and I am jealous of interference!”

He would never have let slip the Latin phrase in conversation with Nick, but intuition told him his present auditor was quite capable of comprehending all he said.

She appeared to be dissatisfied.

"I do not like to seem officious," she said, slowly; "but I should regret it exceedingly if any unpleasant consequences should follow what would look to others like neglect on our part to procure proper attendance for you. Mr. Sloane goes out in all kinds of weather. I am afraid consideration for him prevents you from summoning your friends, or your physician."

"I have no friends, and I am my own physician," was the reply, hastily and rather warmly reiterated. "I was so childish last night as to mention a fellow-student who goes from Kräwen to Kroywen on the cars with me every morning. But he was to eat his Thanksgiving dinner with some country friends, and I doubt whether he has returned yet. If I am in your way here, please say so, frankly. If not, I am content without other attendance than a couple of visits a day from Mr. Sloane or yourself."

He turned his flushed cheek to the pillow, and his gaze to the window with an expression not to be mistaken by the acute observer. The result of the colloquy was precisely what she most desired, but had hardly dared hope for. She detected, more correctly than he supposed, the misanthropic perversity that dictated his rejection of her offers. He resented his isolation and friendlessness, and took puerile revenge upon Fate by determining that not one feature of his situation should be mitigated. Too proud to complain of bodily anguish or heart yearnings, he had betrayed himself as the victim of both kinds of torture by the asperity of his refusals to seek medicine for either.

"Poor boy!" said Mrs. Sloane, in reporting the dialogue below stairs. "He is terribly homesick, but he would be ready to knock you down if you were to hint it. It made me sorry for him to hear him say over and over that he had nobody to consult in his movements, and could come and go without being questioned."

"He is the gamiest fellow I seen in a month of Sundays," replied her husband. "I guess, however, I'd better drive up to town, and get them clothes and whatever other fixings he wants."

He mought change his mind by to-morrow, and conceit some other plan. Better make sure of him while the humor is on him."

He stated the case to the lodger very differently. He had important business to attend to in town, and was going thither, whether Mr. Suydam had any message to send by him or not. He would gladly attend to any commission, &c., &c.

"If you will help me to dress first, I will write a few lines," Louis conceded, finally.

"Dress! You'd a plaguy sight better lay still!" Nick was not over-pleased at this marked advance towards recovery. "You'll catch cold — sure as a gun! and then there'll be the deuce to pay!"

"I'll pay it!" answered the other, dryly. "If I am too tired to sit up, I will lie down again presently. Nobody but a milksop would keep his bed for a scratch like this."

He winced perceptibly, in spite of his doughty language, as he raised himself to a sitting posture. Nick made no comment upon this, or upon his increasing pallor, clenched teeth, and hard-drawn breath, as the toilet proceeded; but when he thrust his uninjured arm into the sleeve of his hunting-sack, tried to button it at the throat, and reeled backward, the stalwart farrier caught and lifted him up bodily, as he would have done a child, placed him upon the bed, and stamped on the floor to summon assistance. Mrs. Sloane was not in the room beneath, as he affected to believe. It was his daughter who answered the imperative call.

"What is is, papa?" she said, mellifluously, opening the door just wide enough to insert the coy tip of her little finger, had she so desired.

"Come in! Don't stand upon silly ceremony, when a man is half dead!" said her parent, roughly. "He's clear off, this spell!"

Mortifying as would be the circumstance to the disciple of muscular Christianity when he should come to a knowledge of it, it was not to be denied. The pout of defiant protest against

physical infirmity and mental disquiet had relaxed into the unbent lines that denote utter prostration; his hair clung to his damp brow, his hands were limp and heavy in Ruby's, as she chafed them. The girl despised him for his "babyishness," while she hailed, with her father, the weakness that left him an unresisting prey to their wiles.

When he revived he offered no further opposition to Nick's injunction to quiescence.

"More haste, less speed, Mr. Suydam!" said the jockey, philosophically. "Jest you rest easy where you be, and let the women folks take care of you, while I attend to that small matter of yourn up town. Where will I find your boarding-place?"

"If you will get me a sheet of paper and a pen, I will write a line," said Louis, hesitating to remind his messenger that the wary landlady would not be so imprudent as to surrender his property to an unaccredited ambassador.

Ruby glided from his side to a table in one corner of the room, where stood a small rosewood desk, the gift of a school-fellow. Before her father could reply, she was back at the bedside, with the open desk, a sheet of creamy note-paper laid out upon it, and in her fingers a pen already dipped in the standish.

"You are very kind," smiled Louis, gratefully.

But his hand was so tremulous he dared not adventure a stroke. After several futile attempts to steady it, he laid down the pen, and looked up, in chagrined helplessness, into Ruby's face.

She met the appeal promptly and kindly.

"If you will accept of my services as your amanuensis, I shall be happy to write your order. I think you can sign it. That will do — will it not?"

Louis dictated a short note to the keeper of the boarding-house, explaining that he had met with a slight injury in hunting, which would confine him to the house for two or three days, but that he was well cared for, and needed nothing, excepting

his dressing-case and a few articles of apparel, which the bearer, Mr. Sloane, would select from his drawers. Ruby would have laughed, if his eyes had not been upon her, at this modest evasion of the apparent necessity of enumerating the various pieces of clean linen he desired. But maidenly delicacy was her cue, no less than nursely tenderness. She penned the order in business-like gravity, and with no symptom of the gratified vanity that glowed in her bosom at the consciousness that a pair of fine hazel eyes lingered alternately upon her countenance and the white hand moving gracefully over the paper, while wonder and admiration were too clearly expressed in their speaking depths to be unread by her cunning perceptions. Her smile, in presenting the billet for his signature, was respectfully encouraging, and she, in her turn, watched, with flattering interest, the slender fingers that slowly achieved the signature, "Louis Suydam."

As she replaced the desk upon the corner stand, she heard him speak low and hurriedly to her father, and stooped lower over the table to hide her amusement at his fastidious reserve.

"As if I didn't know that men wear underclothing!" said Nick Sloane's daughter to herself. "He is a regular Miss Nancy!"

"Ruby!" called her father, before she turned, "your ma is too busy this morning to attend to Mr. Suydam as much as she had ought to. You'd better stay in hearing. May be, if he wouldn't mind, you'd as well bring your sewing or your book in here, for a spell. He might swound away all alone by himself, and never come to."

"There is no danger of that, I hope!" rejoined Louis, quickly. "I will not impose so far upon the young lady's time and patience as to demand her constant attendance. If she can furnish me with a book, I can amuse myself very well, and I shall want nothing except a drink now and then."

Ruby, who had colored prettily at her father's proposition, answered by selecting several volumes from a row upon a little hanging shelf—another school-keepsake. While he looked them

over, she disappeared for an instant, bringing back with her a hand-bell.

“Please touch that if you want anything,” she said, simply.

She surmised that her father had gone a step too far in his manoeuvres for attracting the stranger's attention to her. His desire to make her the patient's custodian was equivalent to throwing her at his head. She would not be forced upon his notice. She went through the form of arranging pitcher, glass, and cologne flask upon a stand beside the bed, swept up the hearth, put together the fallen brands, and added a stick to the fire, preserving the look of serious simplicity she had assumed to cover her progenitor's *faux pas*. This done, she went out, inclining her head respectfully in passing the bed.

“What a grand creature she is!” commented Louis, left thus alone. “What mysterious decree of Nature or Providence has condemned her to the life she must lead as this boor's daughter? She must be a step-child. Her mother has the air of having seen better days. In a different dress, and in other circumstances, she would pass for a gentlewoman. And this girl has the carriage of a duchess. The whole affair begins to take the flavor of an adventure.”

Meanwhile the duchess was quarrelling vehemently in the kitchen with her father.

“If you are going to interfere in this style, I will throw up the whole undertaking,” she said, her eyes yellow with anger, her lips trembling like a baby's. “The fellow is a ‘muff,’ and he can be caught as easily as I can lift my finger, if you will leave him to ma and me. But he is squeamish as an old maid, and you disgusted him, offering to leave me there to mind him and keep him from fainting or hysterical fits. He flared up in a minute. It is to your interest to have me well off your hands, as much as it is to mine to go; but until the game is sure, you must play second fiddle. I hope you understand!”

Big Nick glowered at her in sullen ferocity.

“Shut up!” he ordered, with an oath. “You are on your high horse to-day, with a vengeance! There'll be no managing

you soon. This comes of your ma's precious book-learning. If you don't keep a civil tongue in your head, I'll make you."

"There, Nicholas! that will do!" interrupted his wife, laying her hand upon his shoulder, with a decided impetus towards the door. "No good can come of disputing over what cannot be mended now. It is time you were off."

He obeyed, with another smothered oath, and the fair Rubina sat down in a kitchen chair, and cried with vexation. Her mother did not address her for some moments, although casting frequent and compassionate glances at her in her passage from table to stove, where she was busy with her semi-weekly baking. At length, as the sobs of the distressed damsel became more violent, the wise parent brought from a cupboard a plate containing a couple of oranges, half a dozen apples, and a heap of nuts and candy.

"Here, darling, I set these away for you against a rainy day. I know you are apt to be low-spirited in stormy weather, and these east winds *are* very depressing. Don't cry any more, my pet! It distresses me to see you worried. Now listen to your mother's plan for your comfort. The fire is all laid in the parlor for lighting. I will kindle a pleasant blaze there in a minute, and you can lie upon the sofa, and read and eat your lunch. If Mr. Suydam should ring, I will go up."

The humored "pet" vouchsafing to signify her willingness to receive this species of consolation, the proposed arrangement was quickly carried into effect. The parlor was a dingy room, with faded carpet, bare walls and windows, and meagrely furnished with a few articles saved from the wreck of Agnes Sloane's departed fortune—a small, discordant piano, half a dozen chairs, with hair-cloth seats and very upright backs, a couple of card-tables, clumsy and melancholy, that seemed to be doing penance in their useless seclusion for the questionable gayeties of other days, and a ponderous sofa, also covered with slippery hair-cloth. This Mrs. Sloane had drawn up in front of the stove, in which the dry kindling-wood crackled and roared. She laid, at the end nearest the front windows, two

pillows from her own bed-room, and, when the daughter was comfortably curled up against these, covered her with a heavy blanket shawl, tucking it well about her feet. The plate of confectionery was set upon a chair, within easy reach of her lazy arm; and the mother paused for further commands, — or, as was less likely, for some acknowledgment that her cares had wrought passable contentment in their object. The smooth forehead was roughened by a frown by the time Ruby was fairly established.

“Pshaw! I haven't my book, after all! It does seem as if things always conspired against my ease and happiness! I thought you would certainly see it, and bring it with you, when you went for the pillows. You saw me reading it yesterday afternoon. It is 'The Blighted Bride,' a pamphlet, with a purple cover, and a picture on it. It is either in your room or on the kitchen mantel.”

The mother sought it with speed, and, luckily espying it upon a shelf above the kitchen dresser, hied back to the expectant step-child of fate, — against whom “things” were in such deadly conspiracy. She was peeling an orange — tearing off the deep yellow rind so carelessly that the juice escaped through divers fissures in the inner skin, and ran over her fingers. Mrs. Sloane deposited the pamphlet upon the chair, and made another journey to the kitchen for a wet towel. Upon this the taper digits were wiped, and, her mouth crammed with the juicy fruit, Ruby opened her novel, and nodded to her mother leave to absent herself until she should have further need of her services.

Two hours later Mrs. Sloane looked in to see if the fire needed replenishing. The purple *brochure* had fallen to the floor, the white hands lay listlessly on the dark gray shawl, the fall of the eyelashes was like golden fringe upon the cheek, flushed with slumber. Ruby had forgotten the invalid, her duties as principal nurse, and the merciless onslaught of untoward “things,” in a sound nap. The doting mother stood over her and surveyed the — for once — unconscious beauty

with a proud delight, that brought the moisture to her keen, dark eyes.

“My precious angel!” she murmured, fervently, stooping for the fallen book, and to lay yet another fold of the shawl over the recumbent figure. “Your mother would give her very life to make you happy!”

Rubina would have sneered had she overheard the soliloquy. Perhaps real angels did hear, and wrote it down to the lonely woman's credit.

CHAPTER III.

ON the tenth day of Louis Suydam's confinement to the house came the first "hard freeze" of the winter. From his chair near the parlor stove he saw the marshes blackened by frost as by fire; the slant arrows of sunlight shivered upon the glassy surface of the pools left by the late heavy rains and high tides; loaded express wagons hurried along the turnpike by impatient drivers; occasionally, a light trotting sulky flashing up or down the smooth road, the occupant muffled to the ears in furs, and holding on hard to the taut rein with benumbed fingers, while, farther to the east, there thundered at frequent and shortening intervals, as night approached apace, long lines of cars, each led by a swift, steady engine, leaving behind it a trail of smoke that arose and broke slowly in the still air.

"It is your move! What are you dreaming about?" said Ruby Sloane.

Not pettishly, as she would have done had either of her parents failed in attention to her presence or wishes, but in amusement that stirred her pretty lips in a roguish smile, and glanced over her eyes very much as the setting sun played upon the pools in the meadow. Louis's look came back to her and the backgammon board set between them.

"Excuse me! I was looking at the reflection of the sunset upon the smoke from that locomotive, and moralizing upon the same."

Ruby leaned slightly forward to gaze through the window, apparently excited to lively interest in the phenomenon.

"You certainly have the faculty of discovering beauty where

no one else would ever think of looking for it!" she remarked, flatteringly. "I never before saw anything to admire about a train of cars."

"Is that so? They are to me a continual and growing wonder, although I have seen them every day from my boyhood. There comes another, just crossing the bridge. Doesn't the calm, resistless progress of that mail-clad monster remind you of the onward march of Fate, never turning aside a hair's breadth from her appointed course, halting only at the bidding of the Great Engineer to fulfil what may be called his side-purposes, or to gather force for her forward journey, until the goal of Destiny is reached?"

This comparison may have bordered upon bathos, and was very unintelligible to his auditor; but she looked all attention and admiration, at the great black cylinder, mounted upon four wheels, with the smoke-stack rising above.

"What an imagination you have! I shall never see an engine again without thinking of you."

"I shall, then, be often in your thoughts. I am under heavier obligations to my fancy than I ever thought to be!" rejoined Louis, with mingled gallantry and seriousness. "And while we are speaking of remembrance in absence, may I tell you that I shall go down to the city every morning in the 8.30 train, and return in the 5.10 P. M? Will you, once in a while, throw a glance at and a kindly wish after me, as I am borne onward in my busy, lonely life? And — let me see — if you were, by some happy accident, to be near the window at the time I passed, and happened, by a chance as felicitous, to have your handkerchief in your hand —"

"And the breeze were to happen to wave it, could you see it from the cars?" interposed Ruby, laughing. "Yes, you could. And what then?"

"I should accept it as a happy omen for that day," was the reply. "I should not forget, in the midst of study and strangers, that one kind heart had me in recollection — one friend desired sincerely my welfare and success. Am I presumptuous in asking

you to grant me, now and then, this token of interest and goodwill?"

Ruby had dropped her eyelids, and was fingering the pieces upon the board nervously. A deeper tint suffused her cheeks; the red lips were tremulous. Louis had time to notice these signs of emotion with surprise, that soon thrilled into other and less explicable feelings, before she replied, —

“Certainly not! It is a slight favor to bestow upon one who has whiled away so many hours for me, that would have been solitary and gloomy but for his cheerful society.”

The speech had cost her some trouble to construct, and her doubt whether she could deliver it creditably imparted an air of diffidence to her address, that struck Louis as peculiarly bewitching. *His* next remark was not studied.

“You will miss me, then! Thank you for the assurance! It is more precious than you can imagine to a poor wretch like myself, who is homeless and all but friendless. I am very young in years, Ruby, but I am an old man in experience of the darker phases of human nature. Fate has been very unkind to me. I had a dearly-loved sister, and Death took her. I had a mother, and Fashion robbed me of her. The thirst for money and power deprived me of my father. My brothers were never brothers to me, except in name. I have had two intimate companions, who swore eternal friendship for me. Both deceived and deserted me. The ambition to excel in my chosen profession, to win for myself an honorable name from those who now overlook and despise me, is all that is left to incite me to exertion to keep my feet in the rush and scramble men call life. I am going back to it to-morrow!” he added, an expression of extreme distaste usurping the place of his late animation. “And when I leave the *mêlée* at nightfall, it will be for my lonely rooms in an overcrowded boarding-house. I shall read a little; grow tired, and write a little; grow weary of that, and play a while, unless I am deterred from this recreation by the fear that the music may attract to my door some of the idle youths in the neighboring apartments. If they demand admittance, they will

sit over my fire until midnight, smoking my cigars, drinking my wine, and retailing their witless or disgusting anecdotes. There you have the history of one day; and they all drag by in the same style."

Ruby said within her secret self that she could make a jolly life out of the materials enumerated, particularly the element of the fast young men. Without forgetting her cue of sentimental sympathy, she suggested amelioration in the form she deemed most rational.

"Are you never invited to parties!"

"Yes, twice a week on an average. Single men, who can afford to wear dress-coats, are at a premium in Kräwen."

"And do you not go?"

"Never! I attended a few a year ago. They were all alike — the same overdressed women and the same dandies flirted, and danced, and chatted the same small nothings; the band played a certain number of marches, waltzes, and polkas at each; the very suppers were stereotyped. The rooms were always hot, and thronged to suffocation. Those who did not have champagne-headaches next day suffered from the effects of an immoderate dose of nitrogen. I have a prejudice in favor of breathing air that has not been previously devitalized by passage through some dozen pairs of lungs."

Ruby laughed musically.

"What an idea! You are a strange mortal — so unlike anybody else I ever saw! I thought all young people enjoyed parties. I used to like those we had at school — May Days, Examination Feasts, and the like. We all wore white muslin and blue ribbons, and were very sorry when the time for breaking-up came. I fancied that all others were as delightful," said the artless creature, with a sigh to the memory of vanished joys.

"You are a perfect child of nature! — a snowdrop of innocence and simplicity, springing up in these meadow-lands!" The *blasé* citizen of the world surveyed her with admiring reverence. "I cannot conceive of a greater contrast to the

artificial dolls of society I have been describing, than is presented by your life. It is pure and beautiful as that of a wild flower — a sweet and lovely pastoral I am glad to have read even at the cost of a week of pain and fever. You have refreshed and strengthened me — done me more good than I can tell you. May I sometimes run over to see you, when I am more than usually weary and heart sick?”

Ruby colored yet more brightly; but her face was very grave as she raised it to a level with his, and gazed steadily at him.

“Are you sure that you will desire it, when you are back in your own circle? Our sphere is very humble, Mr. Suydam. The friends who respected and visited us in our prosperous days have left and forgotten us. You would lose caste were it suspected that you ever honored our lowly dwelling with your presence.”

She played cunningly upon a sensitive chord.

“My circle! How many times shall I repeat that I have none? I am utterly irresponsible for my actions to any human being. I can be happy — or miserable — in my own way; may sit unmolested under my vine and fig-tree, or growl at mankind and Providence under my withered gourd, as Fortune may dictate. Unless you forbid it, I shall often revisit a home in which I have tasted more of peace and happiness than has fallen to my lot in many years.”

“But when your parents return, they may find fault with your choice of associates.”

“My parents, having left me so long to my own devices, cannot complain if I have made my selection of friends with reference to my own pleasure, not their approval. Let me lay your dutiful scruples to rest by one statement. Neither my father nor my mother is likely to inquire who are my associates or intimates. My happiness is a matter too trivial to merit their notice. These reflections make me reckless, sometimes, Ruby!” he continued, with sudden vehemence. “It is a fearful ordeal for a young and sensitive man — this consciousness that, while he is struggling to keep his head above the billows of this

world's trials and temptations, no friendly or loving eye is watching him; that, if he sink, none will mourn; if he swim to land, none will welcome him after his victory. Do you begin to understand now why the cordial warmth, the affectionate kindness with which I have been treated under this roof, have been to me like rain in drought — like cooling fruit to a fevered palate? Yet you would banish me?"

"No, indeed!" The blush was burning now, and her eyes were completely veiled. "I only dreaded lest your intercourse with us should be hurtful to you. It can never be anything but pleasant to us, cut off, as we are, from the rest of our kind. I have literally no society. I might as well be in a convent as in my father's house. My mother is extremely fastidious about my choice of companions. I never come down stairs when my father's sporting acquaintances are here."

"Unless a gun bursts and puts the suspicious character, for a while, *hors de combat!*" interpolated Louis, gayly.

"I should not have been afraid of *you*, had no such accident occurred," was the quick, yet sly response. "You could never be anything but a gentleman. You would show a poor unknown girl the same consideration you would accord to the richest lady in the land."

"Thank you, heartily! I believe your praise is sincere, and I shall try to deserve it. To return to my petition. I shall come often. It is but a short drive from Kräwen — which will be duller than ever now — to your door, and not a long walk to a notable pedestrian like your humble servant. I shall bring you books and music; and if I should send a piano in this direction, some fine day, just to get it out of my way, you will give it house-room, and practise upon it enough to keep it from getting as much out of tune as is that venerable instrument over there — won't you?"

Ruby hid her face in her hands.

"You are too good! too generous! O, I did not think there was a person in the world who would show me such kindness!" she said, breaking off with a well-achieved sob.

“Nonsense, my dear child!” returned the hoary benefactor, his own eyes dewy with the delight of conferring favors so highly prized by the recipient. “I am merely pleasing myself — don’t you see? My French and music are getting rusty. We will read and play together. When I am sad-hearted, you shall cheer me; and I will bring into your conventual seclusion a slight breeze from the outer world. Occasionally, if your mother is willing to intrust you to me, we will slip over to Kroywen, and hear a rarely-fine opera, or see a really excellent drama. The winter will be less dreary to us both with these helps against *ennui*. Is it not so?”

The white hands were clasped upon the table; the countenance above them beamed with rapturous gratitude.

“Less dreary! To me it will be like Fairy-land! I have never heard an opera — never been within the walls of a theatre!”

She said nothing about circuses and negro minstrels — the entertainments she, with her father, most affected.

Louis’s face was one glow of reflected radiance. This was the purest cup of joy he had ever quaffed — the recompense of disinterested beneficence. It was something worth doing — to bring in a flood of pleasure upon this young girl’s life, else so dull in its monotony. He revelled in the anticipation of witnessing her *naïve* delight in the occupations and amusements he had promised. He even hoped to enjoy them himself, in company with the ardent and unsophisticated maiden. She was an engaging study — innocent, tender, and frank, yet intellectually capable of entering into his views of and aims in life. She was a new revelation to his jaded spirit. From his heart he blessed the chance that had cast him upon the hospitality of the isolated family, unpleasant as it had seemed at first. Thus he mused and planned, facing the eastern window, while the city spires faded out upon the pale horizon, and darkness stole over the meadows, illuminated only by the great unwinking eye set in the front of the Cyclops, roaring along the iron track, scattering live coals upon the earth, that shook under his tramp, and snorting fire and vapor from his tremendous lungs.

Louis spoke again, very softly, when twilight had draped the bare walls, hidden the ungraceful outlines of the scanty furniture, and spread the same shade of friendly gray over the dingy carpet.

“Sing to me, once more, Ruby! I shall be beyond the sound of your lullaby to-morrow evening.”

“I am not sure that I can!”

The words were simple enough. The intonation, and the haste in which they were hurried over, said, “I cannot trust my voice when I think of your going!”

Yet she began her song, after a moment's hesitation. He was never tired of hearing “Agathe” from her — never weary of telling her of the effect it had produced upon him on the rainy morning succeeding his accident; and she comprehended that he would have named this ballad now had she asked him for his choice. So she sang it, with fervor and pathos that made his nerves vibrate and his heart ache. Her music master had — as his disrespectful scholars used to phrase it — “expression on the brain;” and he had often complimented Miss Sloane upon her aptitude in catching his rendering of the songs he taught her. She learned by rote with ease and quickness, reproducing not only words, but tones and accents so accurately as to delude most listeners into a belief that she understood and felt the meaning of author and composer. Music was her forte, if she had any other than self-love. Romance was omitted in her making-up. She read novels, it is true, but as she would tales of another existence, and of a foreign land she never expected to visit. From her infancy she had looked forward to marriage with a rich man as the only means of deliverance from her ignoble condition. She considered herself now in a fair way to the accomplishment of this desirable end; but she was not carried out of herself by girlish flutterings and love-sick dreaming. She calculated and traded upon her charms as her father would have done upon the “telling” points of a filly placed in his hands for sale.

“I married for love. You have sense enough to do better,”

her mother had once said to her, in one of the very few moments of confidence poor Agnes had allowed to her disappointed heart since the grand mistake of her life was committed.

And the shifts, privations, and toils of their daily existence were to the daughter so many commentaries upon the text. Those who have watched the adroitness with which she angled for the fish Fortune now offered, may judge for themselves how much faith to put in her professions of inexperience in the ways of the wicked world and non-familiarity with beings of the opposite and more guileful sex. It is sufficient for the present purpose of our tale to state that Louis Suydam relied implicitly upon every word that fell from her cherry lips, received as a verity, not to be controverted by so much as a doubting thought, her account of her past life, her character, disposition, and tastes. He did not dream of falling in love with her, or, for that matter, with anybody else, for years to come, when he should have a name and fortune of his own making to offer some peerless bride. But his imagination was captivated by her beauty, his feelings enlisted by her lonely position, her amiability, her nobility of soul, and her manifest interest in whatever related to him. He foresaw pleasure to himself and benefit to her from their future intercourse. It was well for every young man to have a woman friend. His newly-discovered treasure of purest ray serene should be to him confidante, pupil, and sister. The growth of their acquaintanceship had been rapid, under the propitious influences of propinquity, of weakness and need on his part, and kindly offices on hers; and, superadded to these, the flavor of novelty and romance in his adventure was highly agreeable to his taste. He talked like a cynical cosmopolite. He was in reality a morbidly sensitive boy, girding at the world, because it denied him the home he craved; at mankind, because he had failed, thus far, in finding the kindred spirit for which he longed. He was not the first nor the last of his species who has mistaken the faintness of heart-hunger for satiety.

While Ruby sang, he paced the floor slowly and without

sound. The stars came out, large and bright, in the frosty heavens; the fiery eye lighted up the level track less frequently, since the throng of home-goers ceased to press outward from the city; the house was quiet as though set in the middle of a desert.

Blessed quiet! happy rest! How often, during the days and years to come, would he long for this humble cottage, and its atmosphere of love and peace! How blissful, after the toil of every-day life, would be the evening seclusion of this modest roof, the twilight promenade and reverie, with Ruby to sing sorrow and care to sleep!

Had Mrs. Sloane been cognizant of the drift of his meditations, she would have chosen any other minute than that for diverting them. He started, as from a dream of far-off things, when she opened the door of communication with the rear room.

"Why, you are in the dark here!" was her surprised exclamation. "My daughter, you should have lighted the lamp."

"Mr. Suydam said, last evening, that the light hurt his eyes, mamma. And the darkness has come on so gradually we have not noticed it," rejoined the daughter, respectfully deprecating.

"What tact! What readiness and grace of explanation!" thought Louis, who had been momentarily confused by the interruption, and the discovery that they had been sitting in total gloom for half an hour at the least.

The prudent mother's scruples were satisfied by the reply.

"Kerosene is a poor substitute for gas," she apologized to the guest, "and far more unpleasant to the eyes. But it is the best we can get at this distance from town."

"You citizens are selfish creatures," said Ruby, jestingly, "or you would lend us a few gas-pipes from your abundance. You keep all your good things to yourselves."

Not a brilliant observation, certainly; but Louis made use of it as a peg upon which to hang a speech, half tender, half gallant.

“The good things which can be bought, you mean. Life's most precious treasures are not to be purchased; nor do cities enjoy a monopoly — seldom an abundance — of them.”

Then they obeyed Mrs. Sloane's summons to supper — a carefully-prepared meal, to which the young gentleman paid the homage of a convalescent's appetite, and of which the young lady partook more sparingly than her inclination prompted. She compensated herself for this sacrifice to the genius of decorous pensiveness that night, when Louis had gone to his room, after exchanging a “good night” with her that was more than pensive, without being less than decorous.

“I am hungry as a hound!” ejaculated his snow-drop, approaching the pantry. “I didn't dare eat as much as I wanted at supper. What fools men are, to insist upon women's living and growing plump upon one third of what it takes to support life in one of their gender!”

Her father took his pipe from his lips to laugh, as she seized a leg of chicken, and fastened her white teeth in it.

“That's the way with all of you! You can't manage more than the pinion of a quail and half a pea, at dinner, when there's a beau by; but if he is a sly one, he can catch the most peaking and die-away of you gobbling it by the plateful behind the kitchen door. Women are the deceitfulest creturs in natur'.”

There was no affectation of sentiment in Louis Suydam's slender appetite for his supper on the following evening. He had sent his valise to his boarding-house by Nick, and taken the nine o'clock train to Kroywen that morning, to report himself to the medical faculty of his college. His excuse for his prolonged absence was accepted, with a passing inquiry as to the present state of his wounded arm; and there the matter was dropped. Two or three of the students put a careless query, in meeting him, as to what he had been doing with himself since Thanksgiving, and said, “Ah!” “Indeed!” or, “Sorry to hear it,” upon learning the cause of his non-appearance in the lecture-room. But there was an interesting operation to be performed in the clinical hall that forenoon,

and the minds and tongues of all were too much engrossed by it to spare more than a moiety of attention to minor matters. Louis sat among the rest, apparently intent upon the motions and words of the principal surgeon, and, like the others, jotted down leading particulars within his note-book; but he shuddered and paled as the knife flashed in and out among arteries, nerves, and muscles, although the subject of the wonderful display of scientific skill lay motionless under the benignant spell of a powerful anæsthetic. Personal experience of suffering is a swift teacher, and the newly-closed rent in his own flesh ached and tingled with sympathy which was very human and very unprofessional.

“You are white as a girl! I thought your nerve never failed you!” observed the young man next to him, as they arose to leave the hall.

“I am not nervous — only tired. I am not quite strong yet,” answered Louis, with a perceptible effort to pull himself together, and looking the girl yet more in his blush of shame at the weakness he could not hide. “By the way, Durand, can you lend me your notes of the lectures I have missed on account of this unlucky adventure? I will return them to-morrow.”

He asked the favor ungraciously, because it was one. It irked him to lie under any obligation, however slight, to the classmates, with whom he had never sought to gain popularity. Durand hesitated, reddening in his turn.

“I would, with pleasure, Suydam; but you could not decipher them without the aid of an interpreter. I write an infernal hand at the best, and —”

“All right! It is immaterial to me! Good afternoon!” interrupted Suydam, walking off.

His fellow-student had stated the true reason for not complying readily with his request; but this the nascent Timon would in no wise believe.

“A shallow pretence! An exhibition of mean spite! The device of pitiful envy and unwillingness to aid a possible rival for class honors!” he muttered, on his way down the street.

The fancied rebuff contributed more than his pride would allow him to think to the extreme depression of spirit with which he took his seat in the cars for Kräwen. He had secured a place on the western side of the train; and from the moment it came in sight, he saw nothing in the uninviting landscape save the solitary house standing midway between the two cities. The windows looking westward were sheets of fire; a spiral column of blue smoke arose from one chimney; the surrounding meadows were rosy under the latest sun-rays. To his perturbed soul the isolated home spoke of repose and quiet contentment such as he had known nowhere else — such as he might never taste again. As he approached the point nearest it on the line of the railroad, he stepped out upon the platform, and without attracting the notice of any one on the car, drew his handkerchief from his pocket. The rush of air created by the passage of the train caught and fluttered it until it streamed like a pennon upon the breeze. He had named this early hour as the possible time of his return on this particular evening. Would Ruby remember it? His sight was good, and even in the delusive shimmer of the sunset he saw distinctly the answering wave — like the glimpse of an angel's wing, he said to himself — from the casement through which he and Ruby had, yestereve, gazed upon the flying Cyclops.

Just twenty-four hours ago! Would all the days to come be as long as this had been? It was piercingly cold; and when the next curve hid the cottage from his longing eyes, he was glad to return to warmer quarters. Nobody spoke to him. He knew many faces about him by sight, but he had no common interest with any of their owners. Unchallenged, he alighted at the depot; unaccompanied, except by his gloomy thoughts, he tramped hurriedly along the pavements, that seemed not only colder, but harder than usual, on this bitter evening, until he reached his lodgings. The halls were deserted, for a wonder, for the house teemed with population. Still unchallenged, he entered his room. A fire burned in the grate; but it was newly kindled, and the chamber felt close

and chill as a vault. Before it was warm the supper-gong sounded; and, in the hope that a cup of hot tea would quicken his blood into livelier circulation, Louis obeyed the summons.

He received a smiling bow from the suave landlady, seated at the head of the long table; his neighbors to the right and left said, "Good evening;" and one benevolent old lady, opposite, added to her salutation, "Are you entirely well again, Mr. Suydam? I hear you have met with quite a misfortune lately."

"I am well, thank you, madam. The accident did not deserve a mention," he replied, coldly.

He dreaded being made the object of boarding-house gossip. And the old lady, who had always considered him "a reserved, unapproachable, and almost disagreeable youth — excessively uncomfortable, in fact, my dear," was confirmed in her opinion, and let him alone. His tea was tepid, the toast smoked, and, in lieu of the fragrant rasher, sausage, oysters, or birds, Mrs. Sloane was wont to serve up, smoking hot, on winter nights, a pert waiter gave him his choice of cold mutton — very white and tough — and smoked beef — very black and hard. He drank the tea, being thirsty, nibbled a corner of the toast, and looked at the "relish" — so known in boarding-house nomenclature. Having, by these various processes, consumed fifteen minutes, he left unnoticed the sawdust cakes and stewed apples that completed the bill of fare, pushed back his chair, and sought his desolate chamber again.

Desolate as were the house and the city, in the dearth of all that makes life bright and desirable, — as would be the world but for that humble dwelling over yonder upon the marshes. He was too tired to work. He had no one with whom to converse. He sat down in his arm-chair, rested his head within the concave of his clasped hands, and thought of Ruby Sloane — her volumes of dusky-red hair, the snow and carmine of her complexion, the pensive fall of her eyelids, the dewy coral of her lips, and the tremor of the beseeching tones that had said to him, at parting, "You will let us see you again before very long — will you not?"

Would he?

CHAPTER IV.

WHATEVER might be the shortcomings of Suydam *père* towards his youngest son, parsimony was not among the number. Louis's allowance was liberal, and he was responsible to no one for the manner in which it was spent.

“I shall not increase it, let your pretext for asking me to do this be never so plausible,” the father had notified him. “Therefore, since your expenses a year or two hence may be heavier than they now are, you will do well to practise a judicious economy. I have made ample provision for reasonable needs and lawful pleasures. I have allowed nothing for vices. Remember that!”

The friendless boy's guardian angel had a powerful ally in the work of shielding him against the lower forms of dissipation, in his innate refinement and aversion to whatever was belittling and base. The contemptuous sobriquet, “My Lady,” applied to him behind his back by the gay youths of his acquaintance, expressed their appreciation of the finer grain of his nature, from which the arrows of such temptations as overpowered them glanced harmlessly. He was a riddle to them. He kept a small store of rare and costly wines, to which he made them welcome, in his grave, courtly way, when they forced their society upon him for an evening, and finer cigars than they had the means of procuring; yet he indulged himself sparingly in both luxuries. He invariably declined the invitations pressed upon him in return for these quietly-elegant entertainments, with, “Thank you — I seldom spend an evening out;” while, if cards were proposed, and, as had several times

occurred, were introduced by some spirit bolder than the rest, he met the motion with a formal, "Please yourselves, gentlemen — my chambers are at your service. I never play myself; but do not let that interrupt your pastime."

"Take him altogether, he was an unsocial, incomprehensible fellow," decided the sharp blades who would otherwise have courted him assiduously, for the sake of his handsome income and prospective wealth. Thanks to this reputation, attacks upon his purse and morals were now comparatively infrequent; and it was an easy matter to husband his resources to meet the increased expenditures of which he had been warned. He looked forward to the day when he should commence the practice of his profession, and the honest pride with which he should announce to his father that office-hire, horse and carriage should be paid for out of the balance due him at the bank, in which his allowance was stately deposited. It would seem but a sordid day-dream to others of his age and sex; but it contributed in no slight degree to the temperance and frugality of his life.

That the study and practice of these unfashionable virtues had not cramped generosity, was proved by the alacrity with which he set about redeeming his promise to Ruby, to enliven, by every means at his command, the conventual dullness of her condition. Before breakfast on the morning following his return to town, he had been to a music-store and hired a piano, which was to be sent before noon to Mr. Sloane's house. He was careful to select a good, although not a showy instrument; and upon the same furniture-van went out a present to Mrs. Sloane — a pretty and commodious easy-chair. He made time, moreover, between lectures that day, to select a quantity of sheet-music, — mostly duets, — instrumental and vocal, and half a dozen choice French books, which he designed to deliver in person. Despatching his evening meal more expeditiously — if that could be — than upon the preceding night, he was speedily on his way to the roadside cottage. It was bright starlight; and beyond the city the macadamized road, white with flint-dust, was clearly

discernible, bordered by stunted willows, and stretching away into the level waste, a sea of darkness, bounded north and south by the horizon-glare that never went out. It was very early — only half past seven; but the turnpike was almost deserted. None lingered abroad in that stinging frost, who could seek home and fireside.

“As I am doing!” said Louis, drawing up the fur robes more closely about him, and urging his horse to a brisker trot, as he saw, a mile ahead, the twinkle of the light in the kitchen window he had begged Mrs. Sloane always to leave unshuttered until nine o'clock, as a guiding-star for him.

A few minutes more, and he drew up at the side entrance, having driven around into the stable-yard. Before he could spring to the ground, a flood of light from the open door streamed over him, and Nick's stentorian voice hailed him.

“Come in! come in! I'll look after your animal. You must be nigh frozen. Delighted to see you.”

Mrs. Sloane echoed the last sentence in as cordial but gentler accents, meeting him upon the threshold; and just within the kitchen stood Ruby, all dimples and blushes, holding out both hands in the excitement of the joyful surprise. A surprise it was, apparently, to the entire family. Nick had been out hunting the day before, and having set his heart upon a game supper to-night, the repast had been delayed until an hour beyond the customary time, much to the wife's dissatisfaction.

“But I am glad it happened so, now that you have come,” she said; “for Mr. Sloane was very successful, and he will enjoy his ducks twice as much if he has a brother sportsman to help eat them. They are almost ready. My daughter, Mr. Suydam will be more comfortable in the parlor until supper is on the table.”

“And I have something to show you!” added Ruby, with the most engaging smile. “Come!”

The little old piano had disappeared. The new one, with the crimson cover Louis had not forgotten to send with it, stood between the easterly windows.

“In order that I may see the cars pass while I am practising,” explained she, archly.

Nick had paid a flying visit to the city, and bought plain buff shades, with crimson cords and tassels, for the three hitherto bare casements. The new arm-chair, which was also crimson, was wheeled in front of the stove. Ruby had robbed her chamber of writing-desk and book-bracket, and several other trifles, that gave the apartment to which they were transferred the expression of being frequently and gracefully inhabited. The transformation was marvellous.

“It is easy to guess whose hands and taste have been at work here,” said Louis, looking about him with marked approval, and emphasizing the compliment by a bow.

“Don’t praise me. You are the benevolent fairy!” cried Ruby, hastily. “The room would be as comfortless as before without the piano and chair. But for your generous kindness in sending these, and the hope that we might, some day, see you here again,—that your gifts might appear to the best advantage,—we should not have cared to make the place presentable. Sit down,”—pushing the easy-chair towards him. “Are you not very cold?”

“I was,” rejoined Louis, recollecting that he still wore his overcoat, and proceeding to remove it. “The temperature here is delightful. I have taken the liberty of bringing you some work, to employ the time you were complaining of as hanging heavily upon your hands. Shall I undo the knot for you?”

She had taken the package of books and music, giving him a glance of speechless gratitude as she received it, and was busy with the string of the wrapper.

“I can manage it, I think,” she returned.

But the knot became tighter, instead of yielding to the persuasive efforts of her pretty fingers; and when she tugged at it more energetically, the ready blood mounting to her temples the while, in her haste and confusion, Louis laughed, and came to her assistance.

“No, no!” she protested, playfully petulant, retaining her hold of the obstinate cord. “I will not be baffled by a trifling little knot like this. I enjoy a battle with difficulties.”

Again she pulled at it, until the twine left purple streaks upon her soft flesh.

“I cannot allow this. You will hurt yourself,” remonstrated Louis.

He meant to take hold of and draw the package from her grasp, but an abrupt movement on her part brought her hand directly under his, and he caught it instead. The touch and involuntary pressure brightened the hue of Ruby's face, and fired his. The pliant fingers lay, without other motion than a faint flutter like the beating heart of a caged bird, in the clasp that did not instantly offer to release them. Their eyes met — his eager and glowing; hers full of coy amazement, then suddenly averted and concealed by the fringed lids. His regards followed hers to where the locked fingers lay still upon the paper parcel. He stooped before she could have prevented him, had she wished to do so, and kissed the palpitating palm of the hand he held prisoner, twice, thrice, — a strange, impetuous caress, which Ruby thought very odd and awkward.

“Mr. Suydam!” she faltered, with an appearance of extreme embarrassment.

“Forgive me, I could not help it,” was all he said; but his complexion was pale as it had been sanguine, a second before.

He untied the knot, no longer resisted by her, uncovered books and music, and laid them out for her inspection. He expected nothing more than a constrained phrase of acknowledgment, — perhaps not even this. He deserved a haughty refusal to accept them. He had presumed upon her frank friendliness, offended her modesty, disappointed her hopes of the pleasant intercourse they were to hold in future. His astonishment almost outweighed his relief, as she said, in a voice that was yet agitated, but eloquent with grateful delight, —

“How shall I thank you for remembering and consulting my wishes? How can I ever repay you?”

“By forgiving my apparent impertinence just now; by forgetting that I, even for an instant, seemed to fail in the respectful consideration due you,” was the humble rejoinder. “By believing that I shall never be surprised into a repetition of the offence. I meant no disrespect.”

“I know it. We will not speak of it again.”

But neither forgot it. The recollection lent a more brilliant dye to Ruby's cheek, a more thrilling intonation to her voice in speech and song, all the evening; sent Louis's blood leaping hotly through heart and vein whenever he recalled the warmth and throb of the pink palm his passionate lips had pressed.

Mrs. Sloane's supper was a success, but Louis was obliged to plead a late and hearty tea as the excuse for his failure to enjoy it properly. Ruby ate little, and with palpable effort, and was very silent while they sat at table. Nick had most of the talk to himself, and his theme being the hunt of the forenoon, and field sports in general, he was rather less tiresome than when he was allowed to discourse at length upon other subjects. Mrs. Sloane's quick sight perceived her daughter's preoccupation of thought; marked Louis's eye that sought Ruby's countenance furtively and was then withdrawn, as in fear of offending her modesty; and the mother took courage in the conviction that smooth seas and prospering gales were in reserve for her best-beloved one; felt intuitively that Ruby had honored her tutelage by gaining some important advantage.

When she cleared off the table, she put divers choice morsels of game into a covered dish, and set it upon the hearth to keep warm.

“She will be very hungry after her light supper and so much singing,” prophesied the doting parent, in painstaking solicitude, which would have been ridiculous had it not been pathetic, when one considered the thankless reception that ever attended upon her loving kindness.

She said truly, “so much singing.” Ruby's ear was good, and her voice fine, but she read music with less facility than did

her lately-elected tutor. Several of the duets he had brought were familiar to her, and she acquitted herself well in these. But he enjoyed yet more the task of drilling her in the new ones. If she faltered upon a difficult passage, or candidly confessed her inability to undertake it, he had only to sing or play it over once, or, at most, twice, and she caught it, repeating faithfully notes, time, and expression — a bewitching echo of himself. It was flattering incense to his vanity; and although of the masculine gender, he was not totally insensible to such appeals. So with the few pages of French he persuaded her to read aloud. Her accent was defective, as he could not help admitting to himself, but she besought his patient criticism so earnestly, received his corrections with such sweet thankfulness, strove so diligently and successfully to copy every inflection of his renderings, that he could not regret her need of instruction; in fact, enjoyed the lesson the more because of her deficiencies.

The evening went by swiftly. It was twelve o'clock when he found himself again upon the turnpike, the glittering stars overhead, darkness and silence all around, save for the glimmering horizons and the echo of his horse's hoofs upon the frozen ground. The fire in his room had gone out when he reached his lodgings, but he complained neither of chill nor solitude. There was a dreamy light in his eyes, and a faint, happy smile upon his mouth, as he turned up the gas, and divested himself of his muffings.

“I behaved like an untamed barbarian, and she forgave me like an angel,” he said, audibly, after his head was on the pillow. “He would be a fiend, and no man, who should harbor an unholy thought of purity like hers.”

From which lover-like rhapsody he passed to the determination to guard jealously the knowledge of the existence and habitation of his pearl from the hair-brained youths with whom he was obliged occasionally to consort. Her companionship would be the more delightful if he alone were the privileged visitant of the house.

He was not backward in availing himself of his *entrée*.

Three or four evenings in each week saw him the occupant of the parlor he had helped furnish. The singing and French lessons went bravely forward, and other presents — books, engravings, vases, statuettes, flower-stands, and the other nameless knick-knacks with which young girls love to decorate their boudoirs — had found their way, in rapid succession, to the old white house. A bowl of gold-fish and several pots of rare plants stood upon a table at the southern window, and above them hung a canary's cage. There was a luxury in beholding the *naïve* gratification Ruby evinced upon the reception of each one of these tokens of his regard; the child-like readiness with which she accepted them. Other women would have hung back and made a stand upon the proprieties, consulting duennas and books of etiquette before deciding whether it were right for him to tender, or for her to take, the gifts it was now the pleasantest business of his day to seek and procure. But Ruby understood him. False pride and affected fastidiousness were things unknown in her simple code. She knew that he liked her and was happy in her society, and she liked him in return. *Voilà tout!* What could be more natural and innocent than this recognized state of affairs?

A deep snow fell on the 21st of December, and early in the afternoon of the following day, Ruby, stretched at full length upon the parlor sofa, a novel in one hand, and a paper of cream chocolate drops — given by Louis — in the other, was startled by the slower and nearer jingle of sleigh bells than had resounded all day along the turnpike. Some one had turned into the barn-yard towards the side door. Darting to the window, she had a glimpse of Louis Suydam's agile figure, throwing off the fur robes, and springing from the vehicle. Without staying for a second look, she dashed up stairs, calling upon her mother to follow and help her dress, and adding, in her flight through the kitchen, —

“And you, pa, keep him at the door a minute! Talk horse to him!”

Obedient Nick arrested the impatient young man in the porch.

“My dear sir, you have forgot to blanket your animal!” Nick always spoke as if there were but one species. “A nicish nag for a livery!” he continued, buckling the blanket across the horse’s chest. “Well built for speed, too! Sound?” catching up one leg after the other, with professional dexterity.

“Sound enough, I imagine, for a drive of an hour or two, which is all the use I have for him,” replied Louis, smiling. “I have come to ask Miss Sloane to share it with me. Is she at home?”

“I b’lieve so. Poor child, ’tisn’t often she gets a ride nowadays! If you are thinking of buying this ’ere animal, Mr. Suydam, I would advise you to insist upon a written warranty. I ain’t sure about this ’ere hind leg. Here’s something looks like spavin to my eye.”

“I am not thinking of buying him, or any other horse,” answered Louis, making a movement to enter the kitchen. “Did you say the ladies were at home?”

And Nick’s expedients being at an end, he suffered the chilled visitor to precede him into the neat kitchen.

“Walk into the other room—won’t you?” he proposed, throwing open the parlor door.

“No, thank you, I will wait here,” replied Louis, taking a rush-bottomed chair, and pulling off his fur gloves. “The afternoons are so short, I will trouble you to let Miss Sloane know that I am here, and what my errand is. We must set off very soon, or our ride will be too brief.”

“A haughty, high-strung chap, in spite of his fine words and presents to the women,” reflected Nick, upon the stairs. “It may be my turn, one of these days, to do the cool and uppish. Then look out, my hearty!”

A hasty toilet is never conducive to the perfect preservation of one’s equanimity. The hearth of the green and white chamber was fireless, yet Ruby was in a profuse perspiration by the time her father put his head into the room. The ceremony of knocking at his daughter’s door was one that would not have commended itself to the farrier’s sense of propriety.

“He wants you to go a-sleighing, and hurry up about getting your duds on!” he growled.

Ruby had been lolling about all day in a loose wrapper, with her auburn trèsses done up in crimping-pins. In the attempt to disengage the latter in a quarter of the time generally occupied by the process, she had literally dragged whole locks of hair out by the roots. While her mother got out clean stockings, skirts, and a dress, the beauty, very red in the face, and panting with haste, combed out and put up the main mass of her *cheveleure* into a knot at the back of her head, then brushed and pomatumed the forelock into the rippling bands Louis admired almost as much as she did. In lowering her dress over her head, a hook caught in the elaborate construction.

“Stop!” she cried, sharply, to her mother. “Isn’t that like your awkwardness? You will ruin my hair! Take it out without mussing my *bandeaux* — can’t you?”

An impossibility, as was seen, when she surveyed her disarranged puffs in the glass.

“That’s just the way, forever and ever! Everything goes most crooked when I am in the greatest hurry. And I wouldn’t, for the world, have him suspect that I wasn’t already dressed. The great gump fancies that women sit up in their best clothes all day long, like wax dolls,” — vigorously hooking up the front of her dress, as she pronounced sentence upon her adorer’s common sense and knowledge of women’s ways. “Here! I’ll fix my hair over again, while you put on my stockings and gaiters.”

She sat down before the toilet glass, tipping it to suit the different elevation of her head, and thrust out one foot in its torn slipper and soiled hose. Mrs. Sloane was an expert Abigail. The second gaiter was fitted on as Ruby fastened her collar, and declared herself dressed.

“But as red as a cabbage rose!” surveying herself in the mirror. “Where’s the powder bag? That may cool me off a little.”

At this instant her father delivered Louis’s message, in the style above narrated.

“I'm ready,” she rejoined, slipping past him, and running down to the lower floor.

“How strange that I didn't hear the sleigh-bells!” she said, after replying to Louis's salutation, her countenance joyous as his. “I was deep in — what do you think? A French letter to my old language master. I promised to send him one every year, after I left school, and I am vain enough to fancy that I have improved so much lately in *la belle langue* as to be able to write it without disgracing myself or my new teacher. Don't laugh at my presumption, or I shall throw the thing into the fire.”

“Laugh! Indeed I am highly pleased and complimented. May I claim the teacher's privilege of seeing and reading the important epistle?”

“O, I should never dare to let *you* see it! Dear old Mr. Lux is not half so formidable a critic in my estimation.”

The simple-hearted child! Louis's eyes spoke his estimation of her with sufficient plainness. The projected ride was hailed with enthusiasm. She flew off to don her hat and cloak, reappearing equipped for the excursion in so short a time as to elicit a compliment upon her swiftness in accomplishing what was, with most ladies, a tedious operation. Louis was not supposed to know that the mother had waited in the upper chamber, the cloak on her arm and the hat in her hand, until the young lady appeared to order her to put them on for her, “faster than she ever did before in her life.” Neither of the gay pair thought to look up, as they set off upon their jaunt, to the window at which stood the tiring-woman, shrinking behind the curtain, that her dark calico and collarless neck should not disgrace her stylish daughter, while she could not deny herself the stolen delight of seeing how handsome and happy she looked in the pretty cutter, the white wolf-skin heaped upon her lap, and a devoted cavalier beside her, whom no one could mistake for anything except a gentleman.

Ruby *was* stylish this afternoon. Her gray cloth cloak, if not fine in texture, was of a good color and graceful in shape.

Mrs. Sloane had cut, fitted, and made it herself, after a day spent in inspecting patterns and ready-made garments of a similar description displayed in the city stores, and receiving a variety of rebuffs from the gentlemanly vendors thereof, who were acute enough to surmise that her business was to examine, not purchase. The indomitable woman paid no attention to these polite intimations that the rich only were allowed to take such liberties with their stock. She bought a cheap cloth, because she could afford to get no better, and made it up artistically and fashionably. Ruby's hat was gray felt, bound and trimmed with blue velvet, also by the mother's hands, and tied under her blooming face with blue ribbons. A blue silk scarf about her neck was only a piece of the same ribbon fringed by the ingenious *modiste*, and edged with a narrow velvet binding.

"You should have worn your furs," observed Louis, seeing her shiver slightly, as the wind met them full in the face upon the open road, icy as an arctic nor'wester, from a sweep over hundreds of miles of frozen snow.

"I have none!" she answered briefly, adding, laughingly, after a pause, in fear, it would seem, lest she had been curt in the statement of a mortifying fact, — "That remark, Mr. Suydam, shows conclusively your ignorance of the mysteries of ladies' attire. Only rich people wear furs. I have never had so much as a muff or a tippet. My father cannot afford to dress me as he would if he possessed a competence. These are some of the petty trials of poverty, which persons in your circumstances know nothing about. Still they are trials," with a soft sigh. "I should rise superior to them at all times, I suppose, but it is not always easy to do so."

"Why, I thought you dressed like other young ladies," said Louis, wonderingly.

"I am glad you did. My dear mother has the faculty of making everything she touches wear the best possible face to the general view. Still, I am afraid my wardrobe would not pass muster with your fashionable acquaintances. They would

understand at once, for instance, that I tie a blue ribbon about my throat, not so much that it is becoming, but because I have no sable, or ermine, or mink, or even squirrel victorine to wear instead; that I would not keep my hands under this beautiful robe so closely if I had a muff to protect them from the cold, and that my shoulders are less sloping this afternoon than they ought to be, by reason of my mother's prudence in wrapping an old worsted shawl about them under my cloak. You see I know what feminine critics are."

"And to prove how I defy them, — how fearless I am in the persuasion that you can bear off the palm from the richest be-ermined or be-minked, or be-victorined butterfly there, — I shall take you into the thickest of the Kräwen carnival," returned Louis, manfully, heading his horse directly for the city. "Have you ever seen South Grand Street in the height of the sleighing season?"

"Once, — from the sidewalk, — when, as I sadly fear, I broke the tenth commandment outrageously," she answered, her countenance sparkling with the infantine glee Louis liked best to excite. "The thought that I should ever form a part of the cavalcade never entered my idlest dreams. Do you know," — with a dangerous gaze into his eyes, — "I am more and more disposed to regard you as a magician? Do you carry your wonderful lamp in your bosom all the while? It is always ready to do your friends a service, I observe."

"I have carried a talisman there from the first day of our meeting, Ruby, which brings me joy and gladness continually."

He had not meant to say so much. It was neither wise, nor altogether generous, considering that she was, in some sort, his guest; but he did not wish it unsaid, as her lids drooped under his burning glance, and the carnation glowed into vividness of complexion, making her beauty a marvellous and glorious sight. Her fluctuating color was a miracle of skill and effect. Louis likened it mentally, now, to a burst of light falling upon a rare painting, bringing out only the finest strokes and choicest hues, but heightening these into splendor.

They were in the streets of the city before he spoke again.

“Is there any errand to which you would like me to attend for you or your mother, before we go down town?”

“None — thank you.”

“There is a ladies' restaurant. Wouldn't you like a glass of wine, or a cup of coffee? Can I do nothing to make you more comfortable?”

Ruby's glance was shyly grateful.

“You are too good; but I cannot invent a want, even to gratify your benevolent spirit.”

“Then, ho, for South Grand!” cried Louis, tightening the rein upon his spirited horse, who appeared to understand the command and approve of it.

Louis had aptly termed the scene into which they soon plunged, the “Kräwen carnival.” A procession of equipages, — family sleighs, piled high with gayly-colored afghans and children in their holiday attire, drawn by pompous and prancing spans, and driven by liveried coachmen; less pretentious two-seated vehicles, also crowded to their utmost capacity, with sometimes two, oftener one horse attached; and, more numerous than both of these kinds put together, the light cutters, of every conceivable pattern and color, saucy, coquettish, restless — the yachts of the gorgeous land regatta, rich in robes of tiger, wolf, badger, bear, and buffalo skins, streaming over the backs and enveloping the riders; — all these gliding in two distinct streams, one flowing down, the other up the street, to the inspiring chimes of a thousand bells, made up a pageant that bewildered to enchantment the throng of spectators lining the sidewalks, intoxicated the participants in the popular amusement with the combined excitements of rapid motion, merry music, and convivial society. The wealth and beauty of the town had turned out, *en masse*, to do honor to the first day's sleighing of a winter that promised, by its early severity, many more as fine. Good humor and jollity were the ruling spirits of the hour and place. Whether it were a couple of fairy-like cutters, each impelled by a high-stepping, fiery-eyed trotter,

urged to the top of his speed by the tense rein and excited shout of his master, that glanced by our young people with the celerity of winged creatures clearing the air; or a capacious six-seated affair, swimming leisurely along, the occupants commenting upon the attractive features of the spectacle, or exchanging salutations with their neighbors to the right and left; or a staid Darby and Joan, jogging easily up and down, satisfied with their unfashionable roomy sleigh and sober roadster, — all looked bright, happy, and interested in what was passing around them. It was a golden opportunity for flirtation, gossip, friendly trials of speed, and the too-much-neglected forgetfulness of care in innocent diversion, such as sent the youthful home with glowing faces and riotous pulses, and shook the cobwebs from the brains, and the dust from the social sympathies of their elders.

Ruby had not completed the grand tour once, before she became aware that she was the object of notice from those who bowed familiarly or formally to her escort. The ladies eyed her curiously, the gentlemen more covertly and approvingly. Twice a jaunty “jumper” drew up so near to them as to graze the runners, and kept pace with them for some minutes, ostensibly that the proprietor of the dashing turnout might — as she would have phrased it to her father — “talk horse” with Louis. He was a young man of, perhaps, seven-and-twenty, with bold, black eyes and a jetty beard of surprising length and silkiness. His costume was foppish, his conversation flippant, his sleigh and appurtenances new and expensive, and he drove a blooded mare, in style as showy, and bearing as conceited, as was her owner.

Louis answered the praises lavished upon the animal attached to his sleigh with the laconic announcement that he was a hired hack, with fair speed and tolerable good looks, nothing more.

“I wonder you don't keep one of your own, Suydam,” said the stranger, lounging easily upon his seat, and deliberately studying the contour and tints of the fair young face not three feet from his.

“I have not time to exercise a horse, if I could afford the

useless indulgence," replied Louis, touching the one he was driving with the whip, and shooting ahead of the cutter in front of him, thus ridding himself of a convoy he evidently did not desire.

The second time he joined them he proved more tenacious. Short replies had no damaging effect upon his social disposition. Both horses were walking lazily in the rear of several large sleighs, where there was not room to pass.

"There is an uncommonly brilliant array of beauties here, to-day," the stranger remarked, with a sidelong glance at his pretty neighbor, while he professed to accost her attendant. "Kräwen is not so noted for handsome ladies as for fast horses, — perhaps because horses can be had for money, and beauty cannot. I would suggest importation as the surest means of supplying the deficiency of our city in this important respect. The show this afternoon is really creditable, although the belles are, most of them, new and strange faces."

Louis flicked his horse slightly with the lash, and attempted his former manœuvre, but the ponderous and dignified establishments aforesaid filled up the track left for the down-town stream so nearly that he ran the risk of an upset upon the curbstone if he persisted in the effort. In impatient disgust, he fell back into his old position.

"Take it coolly!" advised his tormentor, smiling at his discomfiture. "Large bodies move slowly, you know. There ought to be a law, requiring portable nurseries, like those respectable old arks ahead, to keep off the trotting ground. Just in proportion as one grows dignified and respectable, he becomes more or less of a bore," taking off his hat with a flourish to a sleighful of ladies, who acknowledged the salute with a smile and a stare — the one intended for him, the other for the beautiful woman with whom he appeared to be conversing.

Louis bit his lip in chagrin as he noticed this. Had he acted prudently or kindly in bringing to this public place one whose personal attractions were so marked, yet concerning whose

name and abode he was unwilling to give any information? He would be plied with innumerable questions for the next six months relative to his charge, and he was determined to keep his wild flower in the shade yet a while longer. An idea struck him, as the portable nurseries swept around, still dignifiedly, to the other side of the way, and fell into the current setting up town.

“What do you say to a trot?” he proposed, carelessly.

“Agreed, with all my heart!”

The dandy sat erect instantly, taking a short hold of his reins with both hands well apart, and squaring elbows and knees, after the fashion of sporting drivers. Louis's horse, put fairly on his mettle, held his own gallantly for half a dozen blocks, then flagged and fell behind. His rival was eight or ten yards in advance, when Louis wheeled suddenly out of the course, up a side street, and in another minute had left the lively scene far behind him.

“Well done!” smiled Ruby. “What a very impertinent and disagreeable man that was! Does he call himself a gentleman?”

“I believe so. And what is more strange, other people bestow the title upon him also, because he is rich and fashionable, I suppose. I regret that he compelled me to withdraw you from the gay scene without consulting your wishes, but I saw no other means of getting rid of him peaceably. However, it is growing late and cold. We could not have remained much longer at any rate. It will be dark before we reach home.”

“I dare say he has just looked over his shoulder to see if we are gaining upon him,” said Ruby, her merry laughter chiming in lightly with the silver bells. “It was a capital *ruse de guerre!*”

To herself she was saying, “The jealous puppy! he is afraid to have another man look at me! Does he think they are all born without eyes and taste, excepting his royal highness?”

CHAPTER V.

“NOTHING but mink! and a victorine, instead of a cape!” Tears sprang to Ruby’s eyes, as she tossed the long-coveted furs back into the boxes in which they had come. “I expected a sable cloak, or a half-cape at least! If I undertook to make a Christmas present, it should be something worth having!”

Mrs. Sloane regarded her in amazement.

“My precious child! Few ladies in this country have sable cloaks unless their husbands are millionnaires. You would have been overjoyed to receive these two months ago — would have been satisfied with squirrel or fitch.”

“Circumstances alter cases,” responded Ruby, contemptuously. “When a man is in love, he ought to pay for the luxury. I don’t like this talk about not affording this or that. I am afraid my gentleman is disposed to be stingy.”

“I have seen no sign of it,” said Mrs. Sloane, smiling at the absurd idea. “These furs are costly; they are fine and dark, nearly as valuable as sable. I know more about such things, because, recollecting how much you wished for a set, I went to a dozen stores in Kräwen, about six weeks ago, hoping to find something you would not be ashamed to wear, yet which would not be beyond my means. The cheapest and commonest mink I saw was fifty dollars.”

Ruby picked up the despised present, and stroked it thoughtfully.

“I saw some magnificent mink and sable cloaks the day before yesterday, when we were driving, — and many young girls wore ermine. I mean to have a set of ermine next winter, if all goes well.”

“All does go well thus far — does it not?” queried the mother, musingly, for there were times when the imperious daughter would not brook questioning.

“Yes. He is as spooney as possible,” laughing at the recollection of the more tender passages of her intercourse with the doomed swain. “But, dear me, such a girl of a fellow! He has no more pluck than a chicken. I thought he would have fainted, one day, when he forgot himself so far as to kiss my hand. I really believe he would have run away, and never showed his face here again, if I had not been particularly gracious to him afterwards. (If there is one trait I admire more than everything else besides, in a man, it is dash, assurance, and a smart spice of wickedness.)”

“Don't say that, dear,” the mother entreated, earnestly. “I talked and felt so once. It is not often that I advise you about anything, but I have seen a great deal of life, and young people are apt to make fatal mistakes if they are not put on their guard. (Choose a husband for his domestic virtues, — for his good temper and sound sense, and his ability to take excellent care of a wife.) You will need care and petting, darling. I did, at your age. I had rather bury you this hour than have you marry unhappily —”

“As you have done, you were about to say,” finished Ruby, impertinently, seeing her mother check herself in the middle of the sentence. “Not very complimentary to my revered paternal, it must be confessed. Never mind, my fearful mamma. I know how to take care of myself!”

Her mother admitted as much to herself, when she watched her reception of Louis on Christmas morning. He was to dine with them, and came out early in the forenoon for the better enjoyment of his holiday.

Four boxes had been left at the Sloanes' door, by an express wagon, the preceding evening. Ruby's two held the victorine and muff she had hinted for at their last interview. That marked with Mrs. Sloane's name contained a dress pattern of black silk; Nick's, a game-bag, powder-flask, and shot-pouch.

The munificent donor of the otherwise well-chosen gifts was not sufficiently versed in the laws controlling these matters to know that articles of wearing apparel are rarely presented to ladies by gentlemen, unless they are members of the same family, or closely connected by ties of kindred or affinity. Mrs. Sloane had once been *au fait* to these rules, but years of need and economical contrivance had cured her of overstrained scruples upon this as upon many other subjects. She was profoundly grateful to the warm-hearted youth she was already learning to love; touched, almost to tears, by his generous remembrance of her in her shabbiness and poverty, and the less disposed, by virtue of this unwonted emotion, to sympathize with Ruby's unreasonable disappointment at her present.

"You had ought to have wore your new silk to-day, old lady!" said Nick, in boisterous good-nature, calling upon her to taste the bowl of egg-nog he had brewed in honor of the day.

She had everything in readiness for the Christmas dinner. Again a noble turkey browned fragrantly upon the spit before the fiery grate, and the top of the stove was covered with sauce-pans. The table was laid with her one damask cloth, the carefully-preserved relic of her wedding store. It had been darned in several places, but so neatly as not to be visible to most eyes; it was snowy in purity, and glossy from the smoothing-iron; and although dishes and plates were common white granite, the goblets pressed glass, and the only silver upon the table consisted of one antique caster and six table-spoons, Mrs. Sloane had no cause to be ashamed of the appointments of her feast. She wore a brown delaine, a plain collar, and upon her head a little cap she had sat up late on Christmas eve to fashion after a model she remembered to have seen in a milliner's window when she was shopping for Ruby's winter gear. In this Quakerish garb she looked more like a true lady than did her daughter, beautiful as she undoubtedly was. Hitherto, Ruby had intrusted the task of her own adornment to her mother's taste and ingenuity; but in the flush of her new hopes and

expectations she was disposed to bloom out more lushly into fanciful toilets and ornaments. Her penchant, like her father's, was for the florid and startling. She had but one silk, and that a summer one, — a *chéné* figure — blue upon a white ground; and this she persisted in wearing to-day, despite her mother's gentle expostulations. The waist was too much defaced to be presentable, and she supplied its place by a muslin spencer, — adding, by way of keeping warm in the exposed, draughty house, a scarlet cloth sack, embroidered with white, which she especially liked. No apparel, however singular, could alter the fact of her more than passable looks, but the scarlet accorded ill with her bright complexion and auburn hair; gave her the odd effect of being overblown — a rose in which the petals were set too thickly, and spread too widely; an arrogant beauty, that commanded, not invited, admiration. In the same style were her redundant bandeaux, and the bunch of curls that, bursting from the coil set low upon the back of her neck, flowed over one shoulder.

She entered the kitchen just in time to hear her father's remark to his wife.

“You have no idea of making that silk up for yourself — have you?” she interrogated. “When will you ever wear it?”

“When she visits her daughter — Mrs. Lewis Suydam!” retorted her father, broadly. “By jingo! but *you* are gotten up regardless, to-day! Quite stunning, I declare!”

“Hold your tongue,” was the dutiful reply. “Mrs. Suydam, — and, by the way, the name isn't Lewis, but *Louis*, I wish you to recollect, — Mrs. Suydam would rather have the use of the black silk now, than the pleasure of seeing it upon somebody else in the dim future. It is just what I want this winter. You can alter it for yourself, when I have done with it. I am so much taller than you that you can make it over nicely.”

“But what will Mr. Suydam say?” demurred the submissive parent.

“Bah! Do you suppose he will ever suspect it to be the one he sent you when he sees it on me, or notice whether

you wear calico or satin? There he is!" as a sleigh passed the window.

She snatched the furs from the table where she had laid them in readiness, fastened the victorine about her throat, thrust her hands into her muff, and danced out upon the porch to greet the guest.

"A merry Christmas!" she called out, gayly. "You behold before you the happiest and most fortunate of Santa Claus's votaries—the maddest, merriest, richest girl in the land on this blessed Christmas morning!"

Madly merry, riotously happy she seemed—a lovely bacchanal in her fantastic dress; her cheeks crimson, her lips parted over her dazzling teeth in the most joyous of childlike smiles, her hair banding her forehead like an aureola. Louis's senses reeled at sight of the apparition. She glorified the old porch, with its low eaves and broken floor; made of the mean house a bower of beauty; of the world, a home of delight; of life, one blissful, endless holiday. He lingered a minute upon the steps to tell her this.

"It is a raw day," Nick had said, leading the horse away to the stable. "We are going to have more snow before night."

"I thought the same five minutes since," murmured Louis, pressing in his the soft hands she offered, in unsophisticated welcome. "I find the weather and the world all glow and warmth now."

"That is the reward of making others happy," returned Ruby, demurely casting down her eyes. "It is more blessed to give than to receive. If that is true,"—her countenance one beam of light, again raised to his,— "what a gloriously happy man you ought to be to-day! You have sent sunshine into a very shady place."

"I shall run away if you say another word," threatened he, playfully. "It is enough for me to know that you are content with my poor offering. There comes the snow!"

A few large flakes fell upon her hair and upturned face.

"Come in," he urged; "you will take cold."

“Take cold! Do not insult my furs by such insinuations,” was her reply.

Nevertheless, she went with him into the house, prettily and sweetly obedient.

The snow changed to sleet by the time dinner was despatched.

“We shall lose our ride,” regretted Louis, watching the patter of the frozen drops against the window. “I had looked forward to it with great pleasure.”

“And I!” answered the amiable siren. “But we can be tolerably well satisfied within doors — can’t we?”

“Tolerably! There is no other spot upon earth so dear to me as this cosy parlor!”

Nick Sloane slept off the effects of his repeated potations of egg-nog upon the settle in the kitchen. His wife removed the traces of the bountiful meal with her accustomed despatch and neatness, and leaving untouched the mending-basket, because it was Christmas-day, sat down by the eastward window, folded the toil-worn hands upon her lap, and gazed with sad, patient eyes towards the sea, at the clouds heavy with the increasing tempest, and the weary waste of meadow-land.

Life had gone hardly with her, poor soul! She was lame and sore with digging, sowing, and weeding, and heartsick at reaping briars and thorns. Up to this time! Tender blades of promise were beginning to show themselves in her dreams of the future. Let her but live to see her darling the wife of a kindly-tempered, honorable gentleman, who could and would maintain her in ease and plenty, and her labor of years would be accomplished. All her prospects had this as their boundary. Ruby married, Ruby rich, Ruby happy — and it mattered little whether she herself slipped unnoticed out of the world, or supported for a few years more the burden of existence. As for the tipsy Hercules, snoring upon the settle behind her, she gave him neither thought nor look. She accepted and endured him as the philosophical hunchback does the deformity he knows cannot be removed, nor rendered less conspicuous.

“O, it is pitiful!” cries the master of modern satirists, in

one of the rare bursts of feeling that reveal to us the aching heart under the Momus mask. "It is pitiful — the bootless love of mothers for their children in Vanity Fair!"

Mrs. Sloane had been fond of reading in her younger days; but before Thackeray came into fashion, she had lost her relish for fictitious biography in the hand-to-hand fight with the troubles that wear most surely into the sensitive and imaginative nature — the commonplace trials of straitened means and uncongenial associations. Had she been never so close a student of this Macchiavelli of novelists, she would not, in the singleness of her idolatry, have discerned any applicability in the above pathetic exclamation to her estate, as she watched, alone and forgotten, the Christmas storm bring premature twilight, then depths of darkness, before she stirred from her reverie, — the hum of cheerful talk, the ring of happy laughter, and the strains of merry music from the adjacent apartment, making more profound the stillness, sadder the solitude of the homely kitchen, where Nick's stertorous breathing and the ticking of the clock were all the interruptions to dead silence.

Groping her way to the mantel, as the shrill bell of the time-piece rang out six o'clock, she struck a match, lighted a lamp, and put on the kettle for tea. Big Nick, on being shaken vigorously and persistently, and told that supper was ready, grunted a dozen round oaths to strengthen his assertion that he had a headache, and "wasn't going to budge, to please her or anybody else, until he got ready," and relapsed into stupor. The sensible wife refrained from further useless efforts to arouse him. She had set the table with great care; but, without a frown or sigh, she removed from it the choicest delicacies, and arranged them upon a large waiter. This she carried into the parlor, and set upon one of the card-tables.

"Neither papa nor I care for supper to-night, my dear," she explained to Ruby; "and I thought you and Mr. Suydam would not mind having yours in here, as I have some work to attend to in the other room."

"It is a charming arrangement," said Louis.

“It takes me back to the days of my childhood and doll’s tea-parties,” said Ruby, gleefully, taking the chair Louis had placed for her, on one side of the board, as he helped himself to one opposite. “You like sugar and cream — do you not?” proceeding to pour out his tea, with a grace and sweetness that would have made the bitterest decoction nectar to his palate.

They toyed for a long time over their repast. Mrs. Sloane had drunk her solitary cup of tea, laid the table anew for morning, and mixed the sponge for her breakfast rolls, before the stroke of the bell, which was the preconcerted signal between Ruby and herself, notified her that she might go in for the waiter. Ruby, in radiant good-humor, supplied the vacant place by the backgammon-board, and the rattle of the dice and click of the shifting pieces kept time for the rest of the evening with the ticking clock and snoring husband, as Mrs. Sloane, still conscientiously omitting her accustomed evening tasks, from the habit or superstition of her earlier years, mused before the kitchen stove, without other light than the dull glare from the grate. For family expenses were heavy nowadays; candles and kerosene too dear to be wasted upon such unprofitable purposes as making her vigil less gloomy. She could rest and think as well in the dark as if the room were ablaze with yule tapers.

She took advantage of a duet, which was *allegro* and *forte*, to awaken Nick, and insist upon his going to bed. Steadied and supported by her, he stumbled across the kitchen floor, and up the stairs to his bedroom, where she assisted him to undress. In one minute after his head touched the pillow he was asleep again. She kindled fires in her daughter’s chamber and in that intended for Louis, who had yielded to her hospitable objections to his braving the fury of the tempest that night, and agreed to remain in his present quarters until it subsided. Then she went back to her chair by the stove, and sat out the midnight. It was half past twelve when she tapped at Ruby’s door. The charming damsel had just assumed her night wrapper, and was busy plaiting her forelock into numberless little tails, destined

to leap from their confinement on the morrow in sunbright rivulets.

“Law, ma! what are you spooking about for, at this time of night?” she inquired, not very distinctly, inasmuch as she held one strand of a braidlet in her mouth, while she manipulated the other two.

The idea of confessing the truth — to wit, that she was lonely, and pined for a caress, an affectionate look, a single word of appreciation of her endeavors to make her child happy — did not present itself to the mother's mind. Ruby was too matter-of-fact, as the parent put it, — too heartless would have been nearer the mark, — to tolerate such non-remunerative effusions. In witnessing her gushing style of deportment in Louis Suydam's presence, one might have thought that nothing short of a forty-horse power pressure could restrain the exuberance of her emotions within the bounds of decorous expediency. But were the members of her family proper were concerned, — to quote her favorite excuse for inconsistencies of all descriptions, — circumstances altered cases.

“I looked in to see if you were comfortable,” rejoined Mrs. Sloane, taking up the tongs to arrange the wood fire. “Wouldn't you like to have something to eat before you go to bed?”

“I guess not,” said Ruby, dubiously. “I had a late supper, you know. And Louis brought me a boxful of Taillard's cream chocolates, and we have been nibbling them all the evening.”

“You have had a happy day — haven't you?” continued the mother.

“Hum! so-so! Rather humdrum, but better than if we had been here alone. The fact is, it tires me prodigiously to talk to that youth. He has formed such a ridiculously exalted opinion of my attainments, mental and spiritual, that I get wearied to death playing the angel. I feel like rushing to the other extreme so soon as he is out of sight. I acknowledge freely that there is more of the devil than the angelic in my composition.”

She said this complacently, knotting the end of the braidlet, and surveying her image in the mirror, while she separated another tress from its companions, and commenced operations upon it. Like some other people we have met, with ten times her brains and moral principle, she thought a touch of deviltry a fine thing to boast of.

Mrs. Sloane made no reply, but there was anxiety in the eyes that seemed to study the blazing sticks upon the hearth.

“Pa was drunk to-night — wasn't he?” inquired Ruby, in her turn.

“Yes.”

“I supposed so, when you proposed that we should have supper in the parlor. I do wish he would have some regard for appearances. He would frighten many men away from the house. I can see already that Louis despises him. He talks so loud, and uses such horrible grammar!”

“You cannot alter him from what he is, my child.”

The reply was uttered composedly, with no dejection in the accent. The season of complaint had passed with that of effort.

“I suppose you are right,” answered Ruby, pettishly, her fingers very busy with the golden-red hair. “After all, it will make very little difference to me when I am once away from here. Then I shall advise Louis to buy or rent a small farm back in the country for you and pa. It will be very nice and cosy for you, and decidedly more convenient for me than to leave him here, where he can run into Kräwen every day, and mortify me with his rough ways.”

Another pause, and she removed another finished braid from between her cherry lips.

“By the way, ma, we — Louis and I — are going to the opera on Monday night, and I want that black silk done in time for me to wear. As good luck would have it, Julia Miller gave me a love of a white opera hood, as a farewell keepsake, and I shall wear my scarlet sack under my shawl, which, of course, I shall take off. So I am all fixed, you see. The white gloves

I wore on examination day can be cleaned so as to look respectable by gaslight."

"I am afraid I cannot finish the dress by Monday," objected the mother, deprecatingly. "This is Thursday night, and there is Saturday's baking and Sunday —"

"You can do it easily," affirmed Ruby, who detested sewing herself. "There is a good full pattern — enough for flounces; and you must hunt up some bits of the precious black lace you are so miserly with, for trimming the waist. It is only getting up a little earlier in the morning, and sitting up later for two nights, and the thing is done. There is no use talking about it. I promised Louis to go, and I am just crazy to see the opera; but I shan't go one step unless I can be decent."

A fuller pout of the red lips, and a suspicion of a sob in the voice, settled the matter.

A hard frost followed the rain, congealing the half-melted snow into a cake of solid ice. Upon this there fell, on Sunday, another fleecy covering, four or five inches deep, and the lovers of sleighing were jubilant. At five o'clock, Monday afternoon, Louis made his appearance at the Sloanes' door. Ruby, magnificent in the new dress and scarlet sack, was ready to receive him. Mrs. Sloane was busy getting ready a cup of strong coffee, to fortify them for the night ride. Louis's attention wandered far enough from Ruby's face to observe hers, as she passed his cup to him.

"Are you not well, my dear madam?" he asked. "You are pale to-night."

She was, with black circles around eyes that were swollen and inflamed.

"I have a slight headache," she answered, evasively.

"Ma!" exclaimed Ruby, in gentle reproach, "why did you not tell me that before? I will not leave you, if you are feeling badly."

"It is a trifle. A night's rest will make all right again."

"Are you sure?" persisted the daughter.

"I am!"

Mrs. Sloane spoke shortly, turning away to the side-table. The perverted instinct of truth and fair-dealing may have revolted at the finished hypocrisy of the selfish child, to humor whom she had cruelly overworked eyes, head, and spine for three days. If so, the maternal conquered it, for, half an hour later, she wrapped Ruby up in shawls and furs, and went out with her to the sleigh, to be sure that she was properly protected from the nipping air.

“There is a hot-water case in the bottom of the cutter for her feet,” said Louis, reassuringly; “I promise to bring her back safely by twelve.”

“But don't sit up for us, mamma, dear,” Ruby begged. “We have a pass key. Good night!”

She kissed her hand to the pair left standing upon the porch, and was whirled around the corner into the broad road.

There was not another woman in the parquette that evening, and not ten in the opera-house, who could compare advantageously, in point of physical beauty, with Louis's charge. The transparent fairness of her skin, her brilliant color, the singular tint of her hair, and her self-possessed bearing, would have marked her out for notice anywhere had her features been less regular. As it was, she was a cynosure in her immediate neighborhood, and lorgnettes, held by dandy connoisseurs and lady critics, were levelled at her from all parts of the building. She was handsome and new, and therefore worth staring at, decided the former. She was tolerably pretty, but too *prononcée* — evidently “not one of our set,” objected the latter. Her manner, dress, general appearance, all showed her to be rather underbred. She lacked *tone*.

Happily ignorant of these disparaging qualifications of the praise awarded the lady of his love, Louis relished heartily the flattering notice she received: accepted it as an augury of the world's approval of his choice. He thought of their future as one now. Months, may be years, might elapse before he should be able to claim her; but they were young, and they could wait for the fame and fortune he was to make for their joint

enjoyment. Reversing the rule governing the optics of the victims of other kinds of intoxication, which makes staircases and precipitous heights of the level ground, this delicious bewilderment graded the Hill Difficulty into a safe and easy highway. He was happy to-night, and, after the invariable wont of enamoured fledglings, he made this patent to everybody who looked at him. Exhibitions of the tender passion are highly entertaining to casual spectators, but in this instance the person most diverted by the display was, beyond all question, the object of his regard. Her own heart, being as cool as the inner compartment of a polar refrigerator, did not mar her amusement by untimely palpitations and yearnings. Strange to relate, she, of all who beheld him, was probably the only one who considered his behavior ridiculous. Even at this unripe age, and under the influence of the most potent enchantment that can blind the reason of men, of whatever age, Louis Suydam maintained much of the calm dignity that dissuaded the lawless scapegraces of his sex and acquaintance from familiarity, and won for him, from the few women he was in the habit of meeting and recognizing in his own sphere of life, the reputation of excessive reserve. Ruby congratulated herself upon the easy conquest she had made of pride and unapproachableness. Had she known him better, or even seen him in his intercourse with the world outside her home, her vain, pleasure-loving nature might have been moved to the better understanding of the obstacles overcome by the love she had inspired, as of the value of the prize she had won. She coqueted with him, on this occasion, as she would have done with any rattle-brained coxcomb. The gaze that took in her exceeding loveliness, as the Parsee would the tempered rays of his sun-god, — with trembling that would not let him quite credit the fact of his blessedness, — she met with coy perversity, alternately eluding his eye, and sending from hers looks of inquiry, tenderness, doubt — clever counterfeits of earnestness that puzzled and fired him.

“Very coarse acting,” said a veteran flirt near them.

Perhaps so, but Louis was past the stage of critical discernment of such nice points.

All went on blissfully until the *entr'acte*. Then a gentleman stepped down the steep aisle, to where Louis sat, on the outside of the tier of benches, and halted beside him.

"Ah! good evening, Suydam! This is the first time I have seen you here this winter. What do you think of the music?"

It was the black-eyed, black-bearded stranger who had stared at Ruby with such unequivocal meaning, and annoyed Louis beyond the limits of gentlemanly patience, on their first sleigh-ride.

"Did you drive over to-night?" he inquired, when his initial question had been answered.

"I did."

"So did I. The sleighing on the plank road is uncommonly fine."

"Ah!" said Louis, dryly.

"Didn't you think so?"

"I am not so good a judge as yourself," returned the other, yet more discouragingly.

"The moon will be up by the time we go home," resumed the intruder, undaunted. "Suppose we finish the trot we commenced last week?"

"I decline entering my horse against yours," replied Louis.

"O, but I did not bring Magpie out to-night. I am positive you could make a fair show of speed alongside of the animal I drove over."

"I have no fancy for racing after dark."

Louis changed his position slightly, almost facing Ruby, and, of course, giving his interlocutor the cold shoulder. The latter retained his stand, pulling his mustache in meditative self-conceit, and scrutinizing bench after bench of the gay assemblage. If he were waiting for an opportunity to renew his overtures to the couple nearest him, fortune favored him. Louis's opera-glass lay forgotten upon his knee, and a chance movement of his threw it to the floor with such force as to crack the

frame, break the screw used for adjusting the lenses, and dislodge one of these latter. This misfortune was announced, with a show of profound sympathy, by the stranger, who had stooped for, and secured the luckless instrument, before the owner could reach it.

“Fortunately I can offer a temporary remedy for the mischief done,” he said, producing an elegant lorgnette, inlaid with mother-of-pearl and gold. “There are few more powerful glasses made than mine, and since I have an engagement which will prevent me from seeing the latter part of the opera, you will really oblige me by accepting and using this. It will only be in my way.”

He addressed Louis, as he forced the glass into his reluctant hand, but his eye, smile, and bow were for Ruby. She felt that she could do nothing less than acknowledge his courtesy by a slight inclination of the head, and to this she joined, from her vantage-ground behind Louis, who leaned forward in earnest protest against the friendly offer, a glance at once complaisant and grateful.

“Not a syllable, my dear fellow. Take it back! By no means!” said the successful manœuvrer, refusing to touch the lorgnette proffered by Suydam. “I don’t want it, I tell you! It would be a regular nuisance if I were to take it with me. You can leave it at my office, some day, when you are passing. Good night! A pleasant evening, and a safe ride home!”

Comprehending, in dumb but expressive show, Ruby with her cavalier, in his suave adieux, he bowed himself off.

Louis laid the opera-glass upon Ruby’s lap with compressed lips and lowering brow.

“Why shouldn’t we use it?” she asked lightly. “He will be none the wiser for our dignified resentment. We should only deprive ourselves of pleasure without punishing him. Who is this *bête noir* of yours? He has a name, I suppose?”

“His name is Bogart Veddar. He pretends to practise law,

but being rich enough to live independently of his profession, he spends most of his time in —”

He stopped, withheld by honor from the utterance of a truth that might seem to savor of malicious scandal, and subjoined, “other pursuits.”

“Why do you dislike him?”

“Who told you that I do not like him?”

Ruby laughed softly — a murmur full of mirth and mischief.

“Yourself, in every look and tone whenever he comes near you! I must have been blind had I not seen it.”

“I do not admire him, certainly; nor do I care to cultivate the intimacy he would force upon me. For some unexplained reason, he has been officious in his attentions to me of late. To-night, his intention, in approaching us, was evidently to procure an introduction to you. I dare say I appeared rude in my determination not to gratify him, but, to be frank, Ruby, he is not the man I should choose as the associate of my sister, if she were alive; and I would guard you as jealously from possible evil and annoyance as I would my sister — or wife!”

His tone sank in saying the last words, and Ruby's eyelids followed suite.

The officious Veddar seemed to be totally forgotten by both during the remainder of the performance. But when they gained the vestibule at the close, he met them, blandly smiling.

“I was through with my engagement in season to witness the last scene. Splendid — wasn't it?”

“Very fine,” rejoined Louis, freezingly. “Allow me to return your lorgnette, Mr. Veddar, with my regrets that we have deprived you of the use of it. Good evening!”

Without further colloquy, he drew Ruby forward to the outer steps, where he signalled a carriage. Their immediate destination was a fashionable restaurant, where they were to sup prior to their midnight ride.

“How unmercifully you snubbed that poor fellow,” said

Ruby, pathetically, when they were seated. "Really, I could not help pitying him. He meant to do us a kindness, although his manner may have been objectionable."

And Louis answered, with more temper than she had ever seen him exhibit before, —

"Do not you take his part, Ruby, or I shall hate as much as I now despise him!"

CHAPTER VI.

ON the afternoon of the 14th of February, Louis Suydam, returning from his day in the city, found lying upon the table, in his sitting-room, a small package, and the following billet: —

“MY DEAR MR. SUYDAM: With many thanks for your kindness in desiring to present me with the accompanying articles of jewelry, I must decline to accept them. My mother disapproves entirely of my receiving such costly gifts from yourself, or any other young gentleman.

“Sincerely your friend,

“RUBINA M. SLOANE.”

This was written upon a fair sheet of note paper, rather irregularly, as if the hand that penned it was not very steady; still the production was eminently formal and proper — stiff and cold enough to change into stone the heart of the most ardent lover. A folded slip had dropped from the enclosure as Louis opened it, and upon this he gazed long — until a mist came between it and his eyes.

Ruby had scribbled the following in pencil: —

“DEAR, *dear* FRIEND: I write this *secretly* to entreat you not to be angry with me for obeying my mother's command. My heart is *breaking*! I cannot bear the thought of wounding, or displeasing you, and I fear this cold, *cruel* note will do both. Believe that I would never, *never* have written a word of it, if

I could have helped myself. But what can I do? My parents' will is my law. As ever, and forever,

“Gratefully,

“RUBY.”

The rejected *gage d'amour* consisted of a pin and earrings, — emeralds and pearls, — selected by Louis as a philopæna for his inamorata. In order to ascertain Ruby's views upon the important subject, he had, a week before, dexterously inveigled her into a discussion upon gems in general, and gleaned from her artless admissions the intelligence that she “had a passion for” just this combination of the precious particles. He had plumed himself upon his diplomacy in extracting the desired information, and gone to a world of trouble to procure a set which he fancied would meet her approbation and enhance her charms. This untoward proceeding on her part, or, more justly speaking, upon her mother's, was a most disagreeable surprise.

Ten minutes after he broke the seal of the envelope he was on the turnpike, supperless, a bleak wind blowing across the marshes into his eyes, and his horse measuring off the distance between Kräwen and the meadow-cottage at a rate that would have exasperated the livery-stable keeper to the extent of an unprecedentedly heavy bill had he witnessed it. Heedless of the warning shouts addressed to him by the drivers of unwieldy vans coming in the opposite direction, as they made frantic efforts to get out of his way, and the mocking cheers of stray pedestrians as he flashed past them, he did not abate his hot haste until he halted at his destination. Instead of driving around to the side-entrance, as a privileged *habitué* of the dwelling, he tied his horse at the gate, and walked up to the front door. Nick answered his knock.

“Ah, good evening, Mr. Suydam!” he stammered, apparently taken aback by the apparition. “I didn't know 'twas you! Walk in. Where's your horse?”

“Out there,” — Louis pointed over his shoulder. “Is Mrs. Sloane at home?”

“Bless me, he will be stolen, sure as a gun, if you leave him there! I'll jist lead him round to the barn.”

“Don't trouble yourself, I beg,” in excruciating civility. “I shall not trespass upon Mrs. Sloane's time for more than five minutes. She is in, you said — did you not?”

“She is. Please step into the parlor. I must look after your animal. 'Twould be a pity for you to have to walk home.”

Nick laughed awkwardly. He was glad to have an excuse for getting out of the way while the momentous interview was in progress. He did not fancy Louis's looks. The pale, set features, glaring eyes, and the ring of his laconic sentences, were symptoms of a species of excitement with which he did not know how to deal. The horse-dealer could not be relied upon in an emergency where brute force was of no avail. He summoned his wife from the back room: —

“And he's in a Harry of a temper, I can tell you!” he added, *sotto voce*. “I've mistrusted, all along, that you'd push him too near the end of the plank. I wash my hands of the whole business. Don't call me in to settle your quarrels!”

“I shall not,” replied Mrs. Sloane, composedly.

She arose, took up a lamp from the table by which she had been sitting with her needle-work, and walked directly into the parlor. Louis stood near the middle of the room, his overcoat still buttoned up to the chin, his hat in his hand.

“Good evening, Mr. Suydam,” she said, placing her light upon a stand. “Will you not take a seat?”

“No, thank you! My business can be stated in a few words. You are acquainted with the contents of this note, I presume?” holding out Ruby's billet.

“I am.”

“I am here to ask an explanation of it. In what respect have I shown myself to be unworthy of the confidence with which I have been treated under this roof? What have I done that I should be suddenly reduced to the place of the merest stranger, from whom your daughter will receive nothing — not

even the trifling token of regard which a common acquaintance may, without risk of censure, send a young lady upon this day?"

"You are neither a stranger, nor a common acquaintance, Mr. Suydam, and this is not your first gift. Nor is it a trifle. I might say that it is inappropriate for the use of a girl in my daughter's position, but that I know you would deny this. Your intention was kind and generous, and it has given me much pain to oppose your wishes. But my first duty is to guard my child's happiness. I will be very plain in my explanation, for I would not have you misinterpret my motives. I have long seen the growing pleasure Ruby took in your society and attentions, and, loath as I was to deprive her of the greatest happiness of her uneventful life, I have foreseen, for many weeks, that I should be compelled to break up an intimacy which could result in nothing but misery to her. She is young, confiding, and inexperienced. She had never imagined, until I told her, that there was anything objectionable in a woman of her rank encouraging such proofs of preference as you have given her from a gentleman in yours. It is her earliest lesson in worldly wisdom. I wish I could say that she had learned it readily and patiently. Perhaps, however, that was hardly to be expected."

"I should hope not!" burst forth the incensed boy, the veins in his forehead purple and swollen with indignant compassion. "I honor, and I thank her that she refused to believe me the black-hearted villain you have represented me, — one who has assiduously sought her regard for his own amusement, who would have made her the toy of his idle hours, with no thought as to what the end of all this must be! What do you take me for, madam?" stamping one foot upon the floor, and confronting her angrily.

"I have never mistaken Mr. Suydam for anything but an honorable gentleman," rejoined Mrs. Sloane, very gently. "But you are very young yourself, sir, and youth is hasty and inconsiderate. I will not deny that my chief reason for exercising what you regard as over-caution, was a desire to save my daughter from unhappiness; but I believed, at the same time, that I

consulted your true interests in putting a guard upon your intercourse. You can judge better than I what your parents' views of this matter would be, what would be the verdict of your world—the fashionable world—were it whispered that you visited here upon terms of apparent social equality. And I, too, am proud!”—throwing off the constraint which had, until now, kept countenance tranquilly grave, and her voice at the subdued pitch of persuasive argument, she continued, rapidly and warmly,—“too proud to have my darling scanned by those who are her superiors in nothing except wealth; to see her affections won only to be trifled with! It would kill me to know that through your mistaken pity for her, or her slavish obedience to your caprices, her heart was broken, her life blasted. She is only a poor man's daughter. You see what her home is. From you we have not concealed its meanness and its deficiencies. But she is dear to us as if this house were a palace, and she a king's daughter. She is our only treasure. Do you wonder that I plead with you to pass her by—not to bring sorrow to her heart and our humble dwelling?”

Louis took the hard, thin hands reverently within his.

“Give her to me, my dear madam, and I promise to cherish her fondly as you have done; to love her with that devotion that teaches a man to leave father and mother,—and heaven knows how little cause I have to hold to mine,—and cleave unto his wife! You have misconstrued my attentions wofully, if you have attributed them to any other motive than a strong, deep affection for your child—an affection such as I have known for nothing else in the world. I have meant, from the first month of our acquaintanceship, to ask her to marry me, when circumstances should justify me in doing so. I had thought that you knew me too well to doubt my honor and sincerity so grievously.”

The keen, dark eyes were blind with real tears at these words, uttered with the sorrowful *naïveté* of a boy.

“Forgive me! But you cannot understand how suspicious a life such as mine has been will make one who once trusted in

human goodness and truth, nor how jealous a mother is for the peace of mind of her only child. I will never distrust you again. Ruby knew you better than I did. Her faith has never wavered, nor could all the arguments of her father and myself persuade her that you could ever play her false. She would have it that you were unlike other men, and I begin to think she was right."

Her rare smile was very bright, and it irradiated her features into an expression of engaging sweetness.

"Heaven bless her for the noblest, truest, best woman that ever lived!" cried Louis, in a rapture. "Where is she? May I not see and thank her?"

"Provided you will take back your refusal to lay aside your overcoat, and spend the evening with us," said Mrs. Sloane, playfully.

She left the room, as he complied with the hospitable stipulation. Up stairs she found Ruby, lying, face downward upon the bed, suffocating with laughter.

"O! O! O!" she shouted, sitting upright at her mother's alarmed inquiry as to what ailed her. "It was too rich to hear you speechifying at one another! I don't wonder you have been so glum all day. You have been composing your address. I haven't heard so many dictionary words, all put together, since I left school. And how he blazed out at you, for all the world like that blood-and-thunder Richard Third we saw the other night! But you were more than a match for him, old lady! If I do laugh, I am much obliged to you for bringing him to the point so cleverly."

In the fulness of her gratitude, she actually put her arms about her mother's neck and kissed her. The sallow cheek colored under the salute, like a girl's at her lover's first caress. She could not reprove the eavesdropper for meanness and coarse disrespect while the touch of the velvet lips was warm upon hers. But she spoke once, out of the abundance of her pained heart, before the petted child went to meet her lover.

"O, Ruby, dear! you have won a noble husband! One who

deserves all the love a woman can bestow — the love and duty of a lifetime. Be very kind, and true, and fond to him."

"Sentiment isn't in my line," rejoined Ruby, putting the final stroke to her redundant bandeaux, and carefully rubbing her pomatumed finger upon a refractory ripple. "But I shall continue to do Lydia Languish as long as it will pay. I am supposed to have been drowned in tears all day — am I not? Tears don't make my eyes red, luckily, nor inflame my nose after the manner of snivelling school girls, but they do impart a pensive droop to my eyelids and the corners of my mouth — thus!" grimacing to her likeness in the toilet-glass.

"That will do! You cannot improve yourself," Mrs. Sloane said, trying to smile.

But when the beautiful scoffer disappeared, her bond-slave buried her shamed face in her hands and wept bitterly. Her game was won! Her daughter was the betrothed of a man who loved her truly; who would, in time, raise her to affluence and distinction. But to compass this end, she had sunk herself lower in the scale of womanhood and humanity than twenty years of suffering and degradation, as Nick Sloane's wife, had sufficed to do. She had plotted and lied to ensnare an affectionate, honorable boy, as the vilest of her sex might have scorned to act; made commerce of her finest feelings, as she had played upon his best and most generous impulses. She loathed herself for it in an agony of abhorrence that would have led her to tear her tongue out by the roots, if by the loss she could have effaced the memory of the hateful interview she had just passed through. Yet she would not lift a finger to undo her work. No! and in the subsidence of the remorseful transport into which the fresh smart of wounded self-respect had betrayed her, she confessed to conscience that, if it were to be done over, she would not change her plan of action in a single particular. She would scheme and lie with a tongue as fluent, and a visage as bold, as had served her purpose ten minutes ago. She would not hesitate to risk her soul in the service of the idol that demanded the hourly expenditure of her bodily and mental

forces. She had nothing else to live for, and hers was no half-worship.

Louis forgot that he had not had his supper ; but Ruby came into the kitchen for her " night-cap lunch," as she called it, at a quarter past eleven, while the sound of her lover's departing wheels was still audible. The emeralds and pearls swung from her ears, shone with modest lustre upon her bosom, where they had been placed by the donor's hand.

" His fingers trembled so he could hardly fasten them," she related to her mother, munching her cake the while. " You never saw such a bungler ! I sent him away dizzily happy. I hope he won't drive off the turnpike into the ditch. Now to bed, old lady. We ought to sleep the sleep of the just, after our day's work."

CHAPTER VII.

DURING the fortnight immediately succeeding his precipitate betrothal, the heaven of Louis Suydam's bliss was obscured by no envious cloud. He studied with a diligent zest to which he had heretofore been a stranger, for he worked now for a definite purpose. The prize of his labor hung, visible and glittering, before him; the promise of attaining unto it spurred him on to an enthusiasm of effort that would soon have undermined his health, but for the relaxation of the evening. He was never at his boarding-house after seven P. M., seldom after six, for he supped with the Sloanes four nights out of six, and passed the entire Sabbath with them.

Music and French lessons were tacitly abandoned under the new dispensation. If he had been enamoured before his engagement, he was infatuated from the hour of his declaration and acceptance. To sit for hours at Ruby's side, his arm about her waist, her hand locked fast in his, her head upon his shoulder, or, lapped in dreamy bliss, to lie at her feet, basking in the light of her smile, while her fingers stole coyly in and out of his hair; to say over passionate love-words, sweet to him in the utterance as distilled honey—painting the coming glories of their united lives, and blessing her as his benefactress, his savior, his guiding-star; to hearken eagerly for the soft confession of her answering attachment;—all this filled up the measure of his content to rapturous overflowing, left no room for forebodings, or aspirations other than such as clustered about the single truth of his reciprocated love.

With the third week there fell a change upon his trance.

Ruby, still tender, still responsive to his avowals of devotion and claim for a return, became in spirits fitful, unnaturally gay, and inexplicably melancholy by turns. Oftentimes he would catch her gaze fastened upon himself in wistful scrutiny, or note, at the moment when his love was most demonstrative, the stifled sigh, the downcast look, the tremulous mouth, that told of inward disquiet she yet refused to unbosom to him. It cost him four evenings of ingenious cross-examination to elicit the expressed reason for these phenomena in the department of a happy *fiancée*. When it came, it seemed to be swept forth by a torrent of salt tears, the sight of which nearly crazed him with anxiety and pity.

“Her late shock,” — she thus described, shudderingly, the lesson in man’s nature and ways he was given to understand had been set for her study by her mother, — “her recent shock had left a painful, and she was beginning to fear, an ineffaceable, impression upon her mind. She could not grasp, as a certainty, the knowledge of his love. She was haunted by a miserable dread that he would yet be lost to her by some unkind decree of Fate — some arbitrary ordering of the tyrant, Society, of which her mother had told her such horrible things.”

“Darling,” interposed Louis, in fond reproach, “have you, too, learned to doubt me?”

Indeed, she had not, she hastened to assure him. Only she had come to hold earthly joys so tremblingly, and this, the dearest of them all, appeared so like a dream when he was not with her! It was difficult in his absence to persuade herself that he would ever come to see her again. Kräwen was to her excited fancy a pitiless maelstrom, ready to swallow him up — which would, at the last, rob her of him. Of course it was weak, and foolish, and wrong to let a mere imagination wear upon her nerves and spirits as this was doing, but she could not help it; — and now she had made him angry — and — and — he would cease to love her — with a shower of quick, piteous sobs, each of which was a penknife in his heart.

He renewed his protestations of eternal fidelity; expostulated,

entreated, and reasoned with eloquence, that fairly astonished himself, and allayed, in some degree, the tormenting misgivings of the pensive betrothed. But the next night the process was all to be repeated, and still with but partial success. Meanwhile her behavior to him was so winning and submissive, her love so touchingly manifested in a dozen delicate but flattering forms, that he was more madly in love with her every hour spent at her side. By a strange, or what would be a strange contrariety of emotions, if we did not witness so many illustrations of it in love affairs, his passion was augmented by the torture she applied. He covered with kisses the hands that turned the screw of the rack — worshipped her in proportion as she made him suffer the pains of purgatory.

She had been more than usually tantalizing one mid-March day, which they passed together in Kräwen. Ruby had drooped all the week — was languid, and slightly feverish. It might be a simple attack of “spring fever,” and the lassitude and want of appetite would soon pass away; or it might be nervous prostration, induced by the unsettled state of her mind. In either case, a holiday would benefit her; and on this Saturday Louis had brought her to town by an early train, and devoted himself to her amusement. They visited several picture galleries, a museum, and about a dozen shops, to look at the spring goods, said Ruby, to whom this part of the programme was as interesting as it was tiresome to her cavalier. He compensated himself for the *ennui* he sustained, as he stood by, like a counter-dummy, and saw her tumble over articles of which he knew neither the names nor use, by presenting her with something in nearly every store they visited. A fan, a pair of embroidered gloves, a handkerchief, a vinaigrette, and a lace collar were stowed away in his pockets for safe keeping. Upon the receipt of each she had flushed with happy surprise, deprecated his generosity, and thanked him in low, thrilling tones, that inclined him yet the more to play the spendthrift.

It was one o'clock when they went for a lunch to Taillard's, renowned all over the land for unequalled creams, incomparable

chocolate, and unparalleled prices. Louis ordered the feast, unassisted by his companion, who, on former occasions, had diverted and charmed him by her pretty pretence of impatience at the slow waiters, and relishful appreciation of the viands after they were brought. She sat by, silent and abstracted, while he issued his directions aside to the attendant. When the covers were removed, and she perceived that he had consulted her taste in the choice of every dish, she smiled across the table at him — a slow, thoughtful gleam, not many removes from tearfulness.

“How good you are! Indeed, dear Louis, I am conscious of, and thank you for all you do for me! I am conscious, too, how little I appear to deserve it.”

“Nonsense!” said Louis, gayly. “If you want to testify your gratitude, here is an opportunity. I shall believe in the genuineness of it just in proportion to the justice you do your dinner.”

Ruby received the plate he loaded with tit-bits in resignation a martyr might burn to emulate. To please him she was prepared to do all things, even to eat the appetizing food for which her mouth secretly watered. She achieved the task with a laudable counterfeit of satisfaction. Louis's eyes could discern that it was a forced show; but to less loving optics she looked like a beautiful girl in high health, disposing comfortably of an excellent luncheon. The dessert was a surprise — great, scarlet, hot-house strawberries blushing through powdered sugar, and flanked by a silver pitcher of rich cream. Ruby laughed outright at seeing them. The next moment there was danger, seemingly, that the fruit would be sprinkled with brine from the eyes bent above them. Louis waited until the passing struggle with her emotion had subsided, until more than one berry, less ripe and fresh than her lips, had regaled her hysterical palate, before he asked, leaning over the narrow board separating them, —

“What troubles my darling to-day? Tell me all about it, without reserve.”

“It could do no good,” Ruby objected, balancing her spoon, laden with a big strawberry, upon the side of the saucer, and personating, alternately, the fairy sisters, Rose-red and Snow-white. “Only time and patience can bring relief to me. Why should I distress you about that which cannot be helped?”

The last berry was swallowed, she eating them deliberately and mechanically, as one who had no thought or care for the things pertaining to the body, before his earnest appeal in behalf of his right to be informed of all that concerned her happiness wrought any visible change in her resolution.

“You have a way of making me do as you like, however contrary obedience may be to my inclination or judgment,” she conceded at length. “I am in sore perplexity just now. I have not slept a wink in three nights. It would be an unspeakable relief to tell you everything; but I am sure it would not be best.”

Another pause, and a meditative tattoo upon the saucer's edge with the empty spoon.

“And I am sure it is the very thing you ought to do,” urged Louis, confidently. “You are to promise to obey me one of these days. Suppose you practise a little in advance. I will take the responsibility of the confession.”

“You have seen Mr. Stainsly two or three times at our house — have you not?” interrogated Ruby, suddenly.

“The red-faced widower, who is always bringing lame or sick horses to your father to be doctored, and always thunderstruck at the news that he has been cheated into buying another unsound one? Yes — what of him?”

“He has been in love with me for two years, he says.”

Louis lay back in his chair, and laughed as loudly as his sense of the publicity of the place would permit him to do. Ruby was graver than before.

“Pardon me,” he said, recovering himself sufficiently to articulate. “But the suggested association struck me as irresistibly absurd. Not that anybody — even a Mr. Stainsly — should discover, that you are the most lovable creature in

the universe, but that he should presume to lift his stupid eyes to you with any such desire as you have intimated. The egregious old blockhead! If he were a younger man, I would cane him for his impertinence. As it is, his age protects him by making him merely ridiculous."

"My father takes a different view of the subject," pursued Ruby, looking more and more troubled. "Mr. Stainsly is in easy circumstances, if not wealthy. He lives at a handsome place, a few miles out of town. He has no children, or other near relatives, to interfere with the reign of his second wife. He has asked me to marry him, and offered my parents a home in his house so long as they shall live."

Another and a much longer break in the stream of conversation. Ruby played with her spoon, — the nervous tinkle against the china evincing her perturbation. Louis sat perfectly still, his hands clasped together upon the table, his head bowed in profound thought.

"Your father wants you to break your engagement with me, and marry this man!" he said, harshly, at length. "He would sell you, in order to put a genteel shelter over his own head! What was your answer?"

"Can you ask?"

The question was a whisper, issuing from lips that hardly parted, while the eyes were not raised from the spoon, the oscillations of which she appeared to count; but it went to the lowest depths of Louis's heart.

"I need not ask. I should be a base, unmanly hound, were I to suspect you of language or thought that savored of disloyalty to me. As for your father, this unfeeling persecution of his only child is not what I looked for from him."

"Do not condemn him too severely!" begged Ruby, plaintively. "Poverty is a fearful teacher, and you have no idea how poor he is — to what straits he is sometimes driven in order to procure for his family the bare necessaries of life. He is weary of the long battle, and he is growing old. A comfortable home for his declining years, a certain mainte-

nance for himself and wife, are mighty temptations. Moreover, he honestly believes that I would consult my real interests in giving to this offer mature consideration. 'Should I die to-morrow, you and your mother would be beggars,' he said to me yesterday. 'Mr. Suydam himself would agree with me that a chance of such a settlement as this ought not to be thrown away without thinking it well over!' Now — as I need not tell you — all this talk has had no effect in altering my resolution. I could not marry Mr. Stainsly had I never seen you. As it is —" Here occurred an eloquent hiatus, in which eyes were the medium of converse. Then Ruby resumed her line of speech. "But this is the idea that has occupied my brain for several days, until I am nearly beside myself with perplexity. My father is not able to bear the whole burden of my support. He has almost beggared himself in order to give me a good education, and I ought to be making some return for it. My plan is to advertise for a place as governess, or as a teacher in a school, public or private. I have already written to the principal of the seminary in which I graduated, inquiring if she knows of a situation which will suit me; and I thought, if this were to fail me, I might, perhaps, succeed in getting a position in one of the Kräwen public schools. Mamma so dreads the prospect of my going far away, that this may be the best plan after all, although the remuneration will be small."

She made this statement with melancholy composure. Having decided which was the path of duty, she meant to walk in it; but she regretted none the less the paradise of love and liberty she was leaving.

She could not have introduced a theme more obnoxious to her auditor. He had a horror of pedagogues of both genders, regarding school-teaching as the least desirable occupation known in civilized countries, and doubtful as to which was the more to be pitied, the tutor or the governed. The picture of Ruby, in her luxuriance of life and beauty, shut up for eight hours per diem in a formal school-room, the slave of parents'

whims and pupils' impertinence ; growing rigid and prim in the effort to maintain authority over her rebellious subjects ; removed from her mother's tender offices and his caresses ; pining for these and home, like some bright tropical bird in a cage, was unendurable. Yet, if what she had said of the state of her father's finances was correct, she was right in affirming that something must be done, or attempted, to relieve her parents.

“ I wish,” he said, hesitatingly, “ that your father would receive, in the spirit in which I should offer it, such assistance as I can render him. My income, as fixed by my father, is more than sufficient for my wants. I have surely the right to act in this exigency, as your husband would, were the like to occur after our marriage.”

“ Are there no limits to your goodness ?” asked Ruby, struggling bravely with the feeling that suffused her eyes and burdened her voice to indistinctness. “ And do you imagine for a moment that we will be so far outdone in generosity as to allow you to rob yourself for our sake ? I should not dare name your proposal to my father, much less my mother, who is prouder and more sensitive than he. We must bear our misfortunes for ourselves, with what fortitude we can summon to our aid. I wonder sometimes, Louis, if I have not run counter to the manifest intention of Providence in engaging to marry you. There is something unnatural in the contemplated union of our lives — the one so poor, and overshadowed by so many ignoble cares, the other bright with present prosperity, and rich in promise of yet brighter days to come. Is it not selfish and cruel in me to hold you bound by a contract, according to which I gain everything and you nothing ?”

Her faint, mournful smile imparted pathos to the query no combination of words could have conveyed.

Louis replied by a look, fixed, searching, passionate. She should not lay another stone of the barricade she was trying to erect between them — a barrier in which pride and self-denying love were equal component parts. It was time the masculine

will asserted its sovereignty — time for him to lead, in place of following meekly at her chariot wheels. She had strangely misconstrued the reason of his habitual compliance to her expressed desires if she believed, however vaguely, that he would see her happiness and his love laid upon the altar of filial duty, or murdered to meet the demands of a mistaken regard for his welfare. The false principle had wrought enough harm. He would effectually prevent its further progress and fruits.

“Ruby!” — he had found her hand under the table, and clutched it in a hold that almost forced a cry of pain from her lips, — “have you forgotten that you are *mine*? — that nothing except death can separate us? — that the commands of father and mother are as idle wind, if opposed to my wishes? Do you recollect telling me, the night of our betrothal, ‘I will be yours, Louis, whenever you see fit to claim me’? How *dare* you intimate the possibility of our being again strangers to one another? — of our ever becoming less to each other than we are now? There is but one course left to me, but one which will lay your scruples to rest forever, and allay the torturing anxiety to which I should, from this moment, be subject; the uncertainty I must hereafter feel when absent from you, lest influences untoward to our love should be brought to bear upon you, or lest you, in the extravagance of your generosity, should resolve to set me free, impelled by what you are deceiving yourself into believing is for my real good. That course is to marry you at once — to assume my right of caring for, and guarding you amid the trials and snares by which you are environed. This must be done this very day — if possible, within this hour!”

“Are you mad?”

She looked at him with a glassy glare, and her face was deathly pale.

“No; only growing sensible,” he returned, with the abrupt laugh that was with him an unerring symptom of intense feeling. “Stay here until I come back.”

Ruby was not so absorbed in meditation upon this new and

important change in the day's programme, as not to note and smile at the adroitness with which the obsequious waiter intercepted the impatient customer before he gained the door, and presented the "check" for the luncheon he had left behind, and the frown with which Louis threw the bit of pasteboard and a bank-note upon the cashier's desk, and strode out without thinking of the change due him. When he disappeared in the crowded street, she heaved a long sigh, and settled herself more comfortably upon her chair.

"The deed is done, and well done, though I say it that shouldn't!" she said. "I dare say he will be away for half an hour or so. I should so like to have another saucer of straw berries! I wouldn't mind paying well for them, since I am soon to have an abundance of pocket money."

With characteristic shrewdness she beckoned a waiter to her, and inquired what the luxury would cost. His answer made her widen her eyes and shake her head in peremptory refusal. As the man turned away, she smiled again.

"Three dollars a saucer! My sighing swain is certainly losing his wits!"

She consoled herself for the disappointment by munching the cakes left upon the plate before her, and sipping the remnant of yellow cream in the pitcher, when she had sugared it plentifully. Then she arose and walked up the saloon, attracting many eyes by her assured grace and pretty visage, until she gained the ladies' dressing-room. By a singular accident, comb, brush, and pomatum pot were in the tiny satchel she had brought to the city with her, and she whiled away a quarter of an hour in re-dressing her hair and washing her face and hands.

"A bride should always look her best!" she muttered, re-tying the blue ribbons in a more careful knot under her white chin, patting down and pulling out the bandeaux framing her rosy face. "But I flatter myself that I will do!"

She had waited nearly an hour, when a carriage drove up to the front door, and Louis alighted. He marched directly up to her, and drew her hand within his arm.

“Come!”

No other word passed between them until they had left the throng and turmoil of the chief thoroughfares for a higher and comparatively quiet portion of the great Babel. Louis had not released the fingers he had taken in his as the carriage door shut them in, and he raised them to his lips before he said, —

“I would not hurry you into an action which you may hereafter bitterly regret. If the thought of our immediate union is distasteful to you, do not hesitate to signify this, and I will abide your pleasure. Another block will bring us to the house of the clergyman I have engaged to perform the ceremony.”

He stooped until his hair touched her face, to catch the bashful reply.

“It shall be as you think best!”

Meadow Cottage — this was the name that stood at the head of the letters written by Ruby to her distant school-fellows and her perfumed billets to her betrothed — Meadow Cottage, then, wore an air of festive expectation that evening. Louis had promised to take tea with Mrs. Sloane, and the anticipated visit of a guest so esteemed by the whole family as was the future son-in-law, would account for the savory supper, filling the kitchen with appetizing odors; for the damask table-cloth, and the shining cleanliness of every part of the small establishment; for Mrs. Sloane's best delaine dress; Nick's newly-shaven chin and white shirt; but it failed to explain the nervous solicitude that had characterized the mother's countenance and demeanor all day, from the moment she had kissed her child “good by” in the morning, to that in the evening, when, having gone to Ruby's room, ostensibly to see if the fire was burning, and found it so warm, bright, and orderly, that even her critical housewifery could detect no room for improvement, she approached the window for the twentieth time since sunset, and strained her eyes in the direction of the railroad.

“If I should not carry my point, I shall be home by three o'clock,” Ruby had said, while preparing for her momentous

expedition. "I shan't care to stay later, unless I see there is a prospect of bringing him to terms."

Whatever Ruby determined to do she generally accomplished. Her mother, knowing this better than did any other person living, had not doubted, even momentarily, that she would return to her Louis Suydam's wife. In this conviction, she had toiled like a galley slave to make the best of the poor abode in honor of her child's nuptials; had — a more unpleasant, if not more arduous task — drilled her undiplomatic husband in the part he was to play; urged him to bear in mind that the marriage was purely Louis's idea; unlooked for, and, in view of Mr. Suydam's unfinished medical course, undesired by Ruby's parents; instructed him to meet the pair with a show of cheerful unconsciousness of any change in their relative positions, and to receive the tidings with an outbreak of amazement and concern. It was more than disagreeable, it was loathsome work, — almost as bad as the labored falsehoods she had told Louis to force him into a declaration. Nick's objections to and comments upon the plan of operations — most of all, his coarsely-expressed satisfaction at this consummation of their manœuvres — augmented her disgust for him, for the vile business she yet maintained was necessary to the promotion of her daughter's welfare, and, above everything else, for herself.

"Ah, my darling, you will never know what your mother has done and borne to make you happy!" she said, half aloud, leaning her forehead against the window sash, and closing her weary eyes. "Will you ever be grateful for what you do know, I wonder?"

Was the punishment for her double-dealing beginning in the dull pain that oppressed her breast with this unanswered question? Was the stifled sigh the first breath of the whirlwind which was to sweep away all comfort and hope from her whose laborious sowing had been the wind? She shook off the mysterious dread creeping over her.

"It is for my child!" she made reply to groaning conscience.

If she had strangled the boy bridegroom in his sleep, and robbed him to buy jewels for Ruby's neck and arms, she would have entered the same plea at the tribunal of earthly, and perhaps of heavenly, justice. All other commendable feelings of her nature had been crushed into inactivity by twenty years' repression, and their combined strength seemed to have passed into the growth of the motherly instinct, until it had become a moral excrescence. Her daughter was coming home to her, the triumphant bride of an adoring husband. She must see no traces of sadness upon the face of one who loved her better than even he could ever do. The constancy and fervor of his attachment would be hereafter, in some measure, contingent upon his wife's amiability and return of his devotion. The mother's would outlive neglect, unkindness, the decay of the charms that had enslaved his fancy — every vicissitude of time, place, and fortune.

Ruby was married! A strange impulse seized this woman, who never entered a church, whose tongue had not formed a prayer in years. She wanted to consecrate her daughter's bridal eve and bridal chamber by some form of invocation that should act as a charm in shielding her new life from evil. She locked the door, and knelt beside the white bed, folding her hands and closing her eyes, as she was wont to do in the long, long ago, when she believed in human goodness, in human happiness, and in the divine care.

“Our Father who art in heaven,” she said, in trembling accents, “bless my child! Make her happy and make her good!”

Then a horror of loneliness enveloped her. She seemed to be the sole inhabitant of an immensity of space, through the far depths of which her words went shuddering up to the ear of the Holy One, and His eye looked down, in calm severity, upon her naked heart.

What had she to do with prayer and with GOD? She had been walking away from Him from the days of her innocent childhood; had said in act, if not in language, “I have no need of Thee.”

Would a few stiff petitions, — formulas all, — repeated, rather as the pagan recites his incantation to an unknown deity, than as the Christian talks humbly, yet fearlessly, with his Father, purchase grace and favor from a Being jealous for His honor?

It was a relief that her husband shouted her name from the foot of the staircase. She had no time to ponder upon these things now, at any rate. Rising from her knees, with another and a deeper sigh, she obeyed the call.

“There’s a carriage coming down the road!” said Nick, his face a shade less rubicund than usual with suspense and excitement. “It’s them, sure as you’re born! I’ll bet a horse now that they’ve come home as they went. You women are always a-kicking over the mush pot by your hurrying ways. Ten to one Ruby’s sp’ilt the whole game by showing her hand too soon. I had nothing to do with it. I’ll tell Suydam so, if she has botched the matter.”

His wife said nothing. She drew up her chair to the side-table, fitted her thimble to her finger, and began hemming a ruffle for Ruby, with an appearance of utter indifference.

Nick eyed her curiously.

“You’re a cool one!” he observed, with an oath. “You and that ar’ high-stepping filly colt of yourn would make the spiritedest team in the country. I should like to see the jump that would balk you. There they are!”

A carriage had stopped at the front of the house.

“We are getting too grand to drive into the side yard!” sneered Nick, as he went to answer the knock that followed.

The hackman had driven off before he admitted Ruby and Louis, and he returned to the kitchen more gayly than he had left it.

“I guess it’s all right!” he whispered to his wife. “Ruby tipped me a wink behind his back. They’re in the parlor, and he told me to ask you to step in there with me. He wants to see both on us together.”

Mrs. Sloane quilted her needle into the cambric before laying it down. Her lips were slightly compressed, but her features

were otherwise tranquil, when she appeared in the outer-room. Louis had untied and removed Ruby's bonnet, and was in the act of unbuttoning her cloak. He withdrew it from her shoulders, passed his arm about her waist, and faced her parents, his eyes glittering, his countenance set in determination, that gave him the mien of a man of thirty.

“Mrs. Sloane — Mr. Sloane, I have sent for you to tell you that your daughter is now my wife!”

CHAPTER VIII.

SEVEN months had passed since the date of the secret marriage, and it was a secret still to the world outside the walls of Meadow Cottage. It had been decided upon in family conclave on the Sabbath which was the morrow to the wedding-day, that it should not be published until the return of Louis's parents. The intelligence that their son had committed the indiscretion of espousing a portionless and obscure bride, while he was himself dependent upon his father for a livelihood, was an awkward matter to communicate by letter. And Louis, when pressed by Mrs. Sloane's serious and sensible interrogations, was obliged to admit that his father was subject to irascible fits, that he was stubborn and immovable if not approached in the right way, while his mother was a very Mrs. Merdle in her slavish obedience to the fiat of society.

Mrs. Sloane had stated the situation tersely, Ruby receiving her share of the maternal rebuke with drooping lids and the mouth of a naughty, yet loving child, who is longing to say, "I won't do so any more!" then kiss and make friends with the Mentor. Louis was brave and sanguine, proud of what he had done, and ready to meet the consequences of that which the astute matron reprobated as "rashness."

"You have done a most imprudent thing, Mr. Suydam!" she pronounced. "It is always dangerous to place one's self in a false position. It is of comparatively slight importance to Ruby that your marriage must be concealed until you can break the news in person to your father, or, in the event of his remaining abroad longer than you now anticipate, until you are

established in your profession. She has no intimate friends, no visitors — very few acquaintances. But it would be ruinous to your prospects in life if your — what it is the fashion in your circle to call *entanglement* were suspected yet a while. Your parents would have a right to be angry, and to decline to continue your income or to receive your wife. My daughter must never enter any family upon sufferance. Until you can guarantee her a cordial recognition from yours, she must remain in her father's house. It is a plain home, but she is welcome and beloved here."

"We fared better at mother's hands than I had feared we should," Ruby said afterwards to her husband. "She has *such* an aversion to any clandestine transaction! Only her love for me and regard for you saved us from her severe displeasure. And we couldn't have said a word in our own defence, Louis, dear! We have acted very imprudently, — in short, like a pair of love-sick simpletons, — don't you think so? I suppose I ought to be horribly penitent for our misdemeanor; but somehow I cannot work myself up to the state of mind prescribed in similar cases by the religious novels. I am not a bit sorry yet!" hiding her face upon his shoulder as she made the artless avowal.

"And you never shall be, my pet, if I can help it!" answered Louis, caressing the bright head with exultant fondness. "All will come right by and by. Meantime we have each other; and what is the outside world to us?"

Outwardly, then, there was little apparent change in the relations of the Sloanes and their visitor. He retained his lodgings in Kräwen, and no one seemed to interest himself sufficiently in his movements to notice his comings and goings. If his place were vacant at the table at breakfast, it was supposed that he had overslept himself; or at supper, that he had taken that meal in Kroywen. "He was always an unsocial fellow — consumedly close-mouthed about his personal affairs," said the men. "A woman-hater, who visited nowhere, and cared for nobody," said the ladies. "Really, the habits of young men in

the higher circles were dreadful nowadays! The very foundations of society were being broken up."

How much hoarser would have been the growls, how much louder and more shrill the shrieks over his delinquencies, had one of the respectable cabal suspected his connection with the questionable characters composing the Meadow Cottage household, he never troubled himself to think.

Seven months then had gone by. The snow had melted from the meadows, and their vernal garb of dappled green refreshed the eyes of the hundreds of passengers who threw a flying glance upon them from car windows; the grass had grown rank and darkly verdant under the suns of July and August, and yellowed for the September harvest; and now the cool nights and warm noons of October helped to make more sere the brown wastes. There was earnest of fine sport for November, in the flocks of white-breasted snipe that fluttered from pool to pool over the dry rushes and ran nimbly along the edge of the ditches, and in the occasional glimpses which a wary eye caught, on cloudy days, of fleets of ducks sailing majestically under the sedgy banks of brackish pond and tidal river.

One moonlight evening, in the third week of October, Louis walked out from town to Meadow Cottage. He had done this before, but not often; and although the night was not warm, he was very pale, and there were drops of sweat hanging upon his forehead as he greeted his wife and her parents.

"Are you not well?" asked Mrs. Sloane.

She was becoming greatly attached to her son-in-law. His deferential kindness to herself, his forbearance with her husband, and his indulgent fondness for her daughter, had gained her grateful regard. She watched his countenance, studied his tastes, and anticipated his wishes with a tincture of the spaniel-like attachment she displayed for Ruby.

"I am quite well, I thank you, my dear madam," he answered. "I have had a headache all day, but it left me at sunset. Ruby, love, can you take a stroll down the road with me? The air is delightful, and the exercise will do you good."

“Isn't it terribly dusty?” she demurred to the affectionate invitation. “And I do so hate to walk, Louis! You are forever on your feet lately. I am not surprised that you should look like a lean ghost.”

He did not smile at her pettish trifling. Neither did he yield his point.

“I particularly desire that you should gratify me this evening,” he said, mildly, but very gravely. “I will bring you back when you complain of fatigue. Come, dearest!”

Mrs. Sloane had slipped up stairs for Ruby's mantle and straw hat, and Louis, taking them from her with the respectful acknowledgment of her attentions that never failed to denote his appreciation of her thoughtfulness, and contrasted refreshingly with Ruby's indifference and Nick's boorishness, put them upon his wife, she standing like a pouting doll while he was thus employed, and led her into the outer air.

“We shall be eaten up by mosquitos!” she fretted, before they had gone ten steps. “Haven't you a cigar with you?”

He had, and lighted it to please her. But he evidently did not enjoy it. He smoked fast and carelessly, wrapped in thought so profound that Ruby soon had another cause of complaint.

“Really, Louis, I don't know what to make of you to-night! You are glum and stupid as possible. You haven't said a word since we came out, and you are puffing all that hateful smoke into my face!”

“I ask your pardon, darling! I only smoked at your request. I will be more careful. As to my silence and absent-mindedness, I have enough to make me sadly thoughtful, sweet. I had a letter from my father to-day. My brother Frederic is dead.”

“Indeed! How very sad! I thought he was improving.”

“So they hoped. But the symptoms that encouraged them to expect his recovery belonged to the many illusive phases of that most deceitful of all maladies, consumption. He relapsed suddenly, and the last struggle was brief. He died at Havre. Poor Fred!”

Sympathy with the bereaved being a novel rôle for Ruby, she held her peace, only squeezing the arm on which she leaned tightly, as an intimation that her feelings were inexpressible.

“This news has shocked me strangely,” Louis resumed, — “strangely, because Fred and I did not love one another as many, as most brothers do. There was a difference of seven years in our ages, and we were very dissimilar in character. He was a gay, dashing fellow, a brilliant talker, an accomplished ladies’ man, and, of course, a universal favorite. At home he was quite a different creature. I used to be thankful he spent so little time there. But we will not discuss his foibles. Since this morning I have striven to remember that he was my brother; that he, now and then, said a pleasant or sportive word to me; that he never struck me, as my eldest brother often did; how handsome and gifted he was, — and that he is *dead*. Dead! Yes, he knows the mystery of mysteries now!”

He added this musingly, looking up to the clear vault overhead, his face marble-white in the moonbeams. Ruby, still at a loss what to say, shivered and sighed, and elevated her eyes at the same angle with his. Internally she was sickening of this gloomy talk. People died every day; and since Louis had believed, long ago, that his brother was far gone in a decline, what else could he have expected? As for this metaphysical jargon about the mystery of mysteries, it sounded like Carlyle and fustian in the mouth of a flesh-and-blood man. It was a matter of infinitely more consequence to her to recollect that old Mr. Suydam had but two children left now; that she and Louis would, if the father were cleverly reconciled to their stolen marriage, be one third richer for Frederic’s decease. In her opinion he had acted benevolently and sensibly in shuffling off the mortal coil he had borne with such difficulty and pain of late years.

“How did your parents bear the shock?” she inquired presently, aware that she must say something. Silence, even when

fraught with sympathy such as hers, would not serve her turn forever.

“ My father’s letter was short. He is not one to express his feelings freely in speech or writing. Yet I can perceive that he is deeply moved, and he says my mother was completely prostrated by the violence of her grief. Fred was her favorite son. She was very proud of him. He made his *début* in society as her escort. I recollect their going out together, night after night, and her laughing lamentations when he, as she expressed it, learned to fly alone, and disdained her chaperonage.”

“ She is a very handsome woman — isn’t she ? ”

“ Yes ; I believe she was a beauty in her youth ; and she has taken excellent care of her *physique*. But I do not know my mother very well, pet ; not nearly so intimately as I do yours. I have been left pretty much to my own devices since I was emancipated from the nursery. I hope to introduce you to my parents before long. My father writes that they will sail by the next steamer. They will bring poor Fred’s remains with them. Their house is to be set in order, and they expect to take up their permanent abode in Kräwen.”

This was tidings worth the telling and hearing. Ruby’s heart beat as it had not done upon her wedding-day. A few more weeks and her fate would be decided. She would take her rightful place in the ranks of the Kräwen *élite*, or be discarded by her husband’s aristocratic kinspeople, and compelled to await a slower method of promotion, viz., his advancement in his profession. She did not seriously apprehend the latter and mortifying event. Her valuation of her charms and abilities — never modest — had been immeasurably increased by her success in entrapping her gentleman-lover. Give her but a fair chance, and she would captivate father and mother as easily and effectually as she had the son. This foothold secured, she saw herself, in imagination, the reigning queen of fashion, the belle of Kräwen, the possessor of countless silk and satin gowns, and as many sets of jewelry as there were days in the month.

They had reached the bridge, and were resting against the parapet, watching the stream of molten silver slipping slowly through the arches down towards the sea. By daylight it was a muddy, ugly, overgrown creek, miserably tame in the absence of rapids in its bed and trees upon the banks. To-night there was weird grandeur in the shadowless silence of the smooth sheet above and below the bridge. Leaning upon the railing, Louis beheld reflected, as from plate-glass, every lineament of the faces bending over the water — the gleam of Ruby's eyes, the undulations of her hair, the fall of the white plume in her hat, the vivid scarlet of her mantle.

“Mine looks but a sombre figure beside yours, dear,” he said, in fanciful melancholy. “We might personate light and shade, mirth and sorrow, or any other pair of strongly-contrasted opposites. How beautiful you are, my own wife!”

She snatched away the hand he would have pressed.

“Hark! Some one is coming!”

A horse's hoofs struck sharply upon the farther extremity of the bridge. The driver sat in a spider-like trotting sulky, and, seen in the distance, looked the dandy jockey to perfection. The moon was at his back. He was close upon the pedestrians before they recognized in him Louis's especial aversion, Bogart Veddar.

“Halloo, Suydam!” reining in his horse. “How came you in this outlandish region at this hour?”

He removed his hat in a low obeisance to Ruby, who returned it graciously.

“I walked out from town,” responded Louis.

Touching his wife's arm, he would have gone on across the bridge; but Veddar stayed him.

“I was very sorry to see the notice of poor Fred's death in the evening papers. He was a particular friend of mine. Does your father intend returning home forthwith?”

“He does.” Another impatient movement.

“When do you expect him?”

“I cannot tell certainly.”

“I shall do myself the honor of waiting upon your mother shortly after her arrival. Please assure her of my sincere sympathy with her in her affliction.”

“I will. Good night!”

Ruby, perforce, followed her lord's lead, but she did so with a bad grace. She really admired Veddar's person, and his swaggering address was the acme of manly grace in her sight. Louis's disrelish of his companionship, and determination not to give him the claim of acquaintanceship upon her notice, was an unfortunate augury of her contemplated belleship.

“I must say, Louis,” she began, when the roll of wheels upon the flinty road had died away, — “I must say that your behavior, whenever we meet any of your friends, is very odd. You should not have married me if you were ashamed of me. As a matter of course, I do not wish to be presented to them as your wife until the right time arrives; but you need not behave as if you were engaged in a disgraceful intrigue with a girl whose name you are unwilling to make known.”

Louis stopped stock still in astonishment.

“Why, my precious child! what are you dreaming of? I explained to you, the night we met that fellow at the opera, that he was not a fit associate for any virtuous woman. If I had a house, he should never darken the door, or touch your hand. Ashamed of you! It is because I love and honor you, that I would keep such as he at a distance.”

“He visits your mother, it seems!” rejoined Ruby, with an angry sob. “You didn't resent his proposal to call upon her.”

“I am not the guardian of my mother's morals or character. Moreover, he was Fred's friend, and she is favorably inclined towards him on that account. A woman of her age and standing can do, with impunity, that which would fatally damage the reputation of one who is young, handsome, and a novice in the world's ways.”

“If you are afraid to trust me, you had better lock me up in a convent at once!” retorted the wife, yet more intemperately.

“I understand the drift of all this. You have lost respect for and confidence in me since the hour in which I weakly yielded to your importunities, and married you upon less than four months' acquaintance. Because, in my ignorance of the wickedness of human nature, and the laws controlling society, I believed and trusted you, braved the anger of my parents and the scorn of the world to make you happy, — as I foolishly believed I could do, — you have set me down as a weak, unprincipled creature, who could be led away from her duty to you by a few complimentary sayings, and who would sacrifice her self-respect at the bidding of any man who chose to make the attempt.”

“You are talking wildly now, Ruby! You know that you do not believe a word you have said. I have no heart to dispute the case with you to-night. Shall we go home?”

The sorrowful dignity of his bearing and rejoinder silenced, for a minute, if it did not shame her. She had ceased to play the angel in the second quarter of the honeymoon. Through the mists of his infatuation, Louis had discerned, months ago, that his gem had in it many flaws, but he had never intimated the fact of his partial disenchantment before to-night. Perhaps because she had never until now spoken so recklessly. She had been out of temper all day — why, she could not have told, except that she was, in her parlance, “nervous and fidgety.” Her mother had sustained the brunt of her ill-humor, which had not spent itself before Louis's arrival. It was impolitic to quarrel with him at this juncture, when concert of action was imperatively demanded; but she had tried to do it. Tried, and failed ignominiously, — balked by four curt sentences of the boy she despised because he was her thrall!

He tossed his cigar into the river, looked after it until it fizzed its last dying spark, then turned to her, and offered his arm politely — not obsequiously. She refused it by a gesture.

“We might meet some one else, you know, and your character be compromised by our walking together,” she subjoined, spitefully.

His reply was to draw her hand through his arm, and retain it there despite her resistance.

“Be still, Ruby!” he ordered, calmly, as she strove to wrench it away, and a bitter epithet escaped her tongue. “You are in a passion, and therefore insane. I shall have my way until you recover your senses.”

She burst into tears of anger and humiliation, and he let them flow. His was the mastery, inasmuch as she did not suspect that he was as angry as herself. He would not stoop to refute charges which were as unjust as indelicate; but he resented them to his heart's core — resented their animus more than the form of the allegations. The woman who could revile thus coarsely the purity and sincerity of a love he never wearied of expressing by word and deed, could not be convinced of her error by arguments or oaths. She had played upon a sensitive chord too roughly, and the result was reaction — temporary revulsion; but the incident would never be entirely forgotten. Such mistakes seldom are. All the tricks of erasure in which Cupid is an expert, can never restore the pristine freshness to the abused material.

Her temper held its sullen heat until they halted at the outer gate of the cottage.

“I must say ‘good night’ here,” remarked Louis, nonchalantly. “I am extremely busy just now. The preparations for my father's return demand all the time I can spare from my studies. I may not be out again in several days. Should I be unable to come, I will write to keep you from uneasiness. Present my adieus to your father and mother.”

He kissed without embracing her, and walked away up the turnpike.

Ruby, gazing after his receding form until it dwindled into a moving dot upon the white road, had her earliest perception of two startling truths: first, that she had married a *man*; secondly, that she had stretched her power over him to the utmost limit during the half year of their wedded life. He had asserted the authority of husbandhood, while disdainingly to reply to her

childish railings; conquered her, and, by his abrupt leave-taking, robbed her of that priceless prerogative of woman — the last word in a dispute.

“He isn't himself to-night!” she said, audibly, when she could see the moving speck no more, and marked, in alarmed surprise, that he had not once looked back. “If he should take it into his head to play the rascal! But he dare not!”

Another and a larger object loomed up in the moonlit distance at the point where Louis's figure had just before been visible. Upon the still night came the click of hoofs and whirr of wheels. A dwarfed and bushy cedar grew at the gate of the narrow strip of yard, and Ruby crouched behind it as she surmised who the traveller was. She saw him drive by, checking his horse almost to a walk in nearing the house; caught the flash of his eye through the shadow of his hat, as he scanned the unpretending dwelling, with its unlighted front and shabby surroundings; heard the ringing “Ha!” to his trotter, announcing that his investigation of the premises was over; and, raising herself again to an erect position, saw him glance away in the direction of Kroywen, like the arrow from the bow.

“Hunting, eh?” laughed Ruby, drawing a long breath. “He must have met Louis, too, and, seeing him alone, guessed that he had dropped me somewhere on the road. He wasn't fool enough to believe that I had walked all the way from town, whatever my amiable cavalier might have done. I can fancy my jealous lord's sensations at this second encounter, and his trepidation lest I might be still hanging over the gate, staring after his adorable self, as all lovelorn wives are pictured as doing. This Veddar is undoubtedly captivated.”

In no wise displeased at the imagination, she entered the house, and told the tale of Frederic Suydam's death, and the necessity laid upon Louis to return to town that night. The fire had gone out in the kitchen early in the evening; the windows and doors were supplied with mosquito-nets; and, as a further precaution against the bloodthirsty marauders of the marsh lands, the room was blue with tobacco smoke from Nick's

pipe. The lamp was unlighted, and Mrs. Sloane sat by the window, knitting in the moonbeams.

Ruby's tidings were heard with profound interest.

"Now comes the pinching time!" observed Nick, ramming a fresh charge into the bowl of his pipe. "If the governor cuts up rough, you'll cut up lean, Mrs. Lewis; and what then?"

"And if he doesn't cut up rough, what then, old raven?" retorted she.

Mrs. Sloane knit on in thoughtful silence, until a few other sentences as refined and affectionate had passed between her companions. Then she stayed the unseemly discussion by her quiet, common-sense view of the emergency.

"Everything depends upon Louis now. If he will tell his story to his parents at the right moment, and in the right way, all will go well, I hope. His brother's death is, in several respects, a fortunate thing for him. His father will be less likely to quarrel with one of his two remaining sons than if he had not lost the third so lately. He has the reputation of being a hard, stern man; but this affliction must soften him, if anything can. Then, in the joy of meeting after so long a separation, he will be more apt to excuse or overlook a fault committed while he was away, than if it had happened when he was at home."

"A fault! I am obliged to you!" pouted Ruby.

"I spoke of the light in which Mr. Suydam might regard his son's action," replied the mother, still thoughtfully. "My advice to Louis would be to sound his father carefully upon the subject, and if he has reason to believe that he will refuse to acknowledge the marriage, not to confess it until a safer opportunity presents itself. Haste and speed do not mean the same thing always. One false step would ruin all."

"Wait!" echoed Ruby, dissatisfiedly. "Haven't I waited already until my patience is threadbare? Mighty little fun have I seen in married life! It is about time it was beginning!"

"You've seen some money, at any rate!" growled Nick.

“I can tell you, Mrs. Spitfire, you would a' had a plaguy sight different time this summer ef it hadn't a' been for the board he's paid for you. You wouldn't a' had no excursions to the sea-shore, nor country rides, nor more'n one dress, where you've six now, and no sech gimcracks as ear-drops, and breas'pins, and rings. Not you! I think I see myself a' wasting 'tin' on you that style! Give the devil his due! Your spark is too stuck up, too much of a fine gentleman, to suit my notions; but he's done better by you nor you had a right to expect. I've mistrusted, sometimes, that he's stinted himself to do it.”

Mrs. Sloane turned her head quickly towards the speaker.

“Why do you think so, Nicholas?”

“I sees what I sees; and when I sees a thing, I'm like Paddy's parrot — I keeps up a confounded deal of thinking,” rejoined Nick, complacent in his sagacity. “He hain't bought a new stitch of clothes for himself this summer. May be you women, who profess to know everything, hain't noticed that! He doesn't smoke one cigar now where he used to smoke ten. You hain't noticed that nuther, may be! He walks out here oftener nor he rides nowadays. You've both on you noticed that, for you keep on a-worrying him with questions about why he does it. And you're a couple of fools for believing him when he says he likes the exercise. Then, he sold that pointer of his'n, two months ago, when Ruby was ailing and cried to go to the sea-shore; and you believed him agin when he said 'twas because he hadn't time for to go a-hunting. No! it's my opinion he finds his doll here a penny more expensive nor he bargained for. There's a bottom to the purse of every young chap who lives, like him, upon 'pa;' and you're scraping his pretty close, my young lady!”

“I hope not!” said Mrs. Sloane, in a troubled voice.

“I don't know who has a better right to do it,” returned Ruby, yawning. “I don't get half as much cash as I want. When I have a house of my own, you shall see how I will

make the shiners fly! There is one abiding consolation in case the old gentleman gets obstinate. He has had one paralytic stroke already, and a smart, hot quarrel might bring on another. The third will be sure to put an end to all opposition. 'Wherefore, dearly beloved, comfort one another with these words'!"

Laughing, as she drawled the last sentence, with a nasal twang, she lighted a candle, and sailed off to bed.

CHAPTER IX.

THE "Suydam House," by which name the American home of John Suydam, Esq., was known throughout Kräwen and the vicinity, was a large, old-fashioned building, partly brick, partly stone, situated upon one of the principal city parks. It was hoary with age, having been erected fifty or sixty years prior to Louis's birth, and being, therefore, entitled to the — in our country and generation — rare distinction of antiquity. It looked very venerable and imposing, by contrast with the staring smartness of the "elegant mansions" to the right and left of it, and never more stately than on the bright October morning when, for the first time in over a year, all the shutters were thrown open, and every room was noisy with preparations for the master's return.

Noisy — not hilarious. The most thoughtless of the workers carried with him or her the recollection of the cause of this haste in getting the dwelling ready for the occupancy of the owners; knew that the morrow, or the next day, might bring the order for the cessation of their labors, accompanying the intelligence that the foreign steamer was in, and the sad *cortége* on the way from the neighboring city to this; that one of the former inmates of the grand old homestead would return to it indeed, but with eyes sealed from beholding it, and feet that would never press the oaken floors again.

Louis had wandered from one apartment to another, chased by the melancholy demon Unrest, since eight o'clock in the morning, giving an order here and a suggestion there, — oftener stopping his uneasy tramp through halls and over stairs, to watch,

in gloomy taciturnity, the operations of scouring, removing and putting down carpets, but partially conscious of what he saw, not knowing at all whether or not it were properly done.

“ He takes it hard — poor young gentleman ! ” was the common observation, when his back was turned to the speaker after one of these halts.

If he did, he was not himself aware of it. He was not in deep grief, although his mind was very full of Fred — of his life more than his death. He had scarcely entered his home since the week of his parents' and brother's departure for their Atlantic voyage. Fred had, like himself, remained a resident of his father's house after John, the eldest son, had married and removed to the West. His exuberance of animal spirits, his love of gayety and revellings, made him the life of the dwelling. The passages seemed now, to Louis's senses, to reverberate with his springing step, his laugh, his voice, which, in his gentlest mood, had an imperious accent. As the surviving brother entered the long parlors, he recalled, with vividness that well nigh deluded him into the belief that he beheld an apparition, Fred's tall, lithe figure, faultlessly attired ; his peculiar gait, which was nothing like a lounge, for it was firm, while it was easy, — a walk which Kräwen dandies tried vainly to acquire, — which was Fred's, and Fred's alone ; a slide of the small, slender feet over the carpet, in approaching, or promenading with a lady, graceful as a minuet step, yet too far removed from effeminacy to win for him, whose natural movement it was, the reputation of a *petit maître*. Traversing the rooms from end to end, and wrapped in the contemplation of the image thus conjured up, Louis involuntarily imitated the well-remembered motion and his brother's carriage of the head and shoulders.

“ Yes, you look jest so like him ! ”

Coming back, with a violent start, to the actually visible objects about him, Louis saw a woman upon her knees in one corner of the front parlor. A pail beside her, and a brush in her hand, denoted her occupation to have been that of scour-

ing the oaken wainscot; but her face was towards him, and with the brush she gesticulated in the direction of a portrait hung between the opposite windows. She was, judging from her dialect, a native of Holland; but her swarthy skin and piercing black eyes must have been borrowed from some Italian ancestor.

She showed her teeth whitely in a smile, although there were tears upon her face as she repeated, "Yes, you look jest so like him! I could know you was his brodder!"

Attracted by her earnest simplicity, Louis crossed over to her, and looked at the portrait. It represented Fred in his most affluent holiday mood. The artist had merely copied faithfully what he saw when he made him audaciously handsome, proud of his beauty, and glorying in life, finding subtle luxury in every breath he drew, a worshipper of pleasure, and tasting more in one hour of his existence than many men do in a half century.

"Glorious Apollo!" a painter had once sighed before this picture; and another corrected him in an undertone, heard only by the shy Louis, who chanced to be near them, "Hardly,—rather a Bacchus, inspired by new wine!"

"You did not know him well, or you would not say that," said Louis to the Hollandaise, still gazing at the wonderful canvas.

"Not know him! I nurse him! I take him in me arms when he was a baby, jest so big as dis!" raising her hand about two feet from the floor. "And he ten year old when I marry mine husband. He cry like leetle girl den, and he say, 'Mine dear Katrine! don't leave me, and I marry you mine-self when I grow to be big man. And I give you bigger house,' he say, 'nor Charles can!' He make me cry and laugh togedder on me marriage-day, he did!"

She did both now, wiping away the rolling tears with her apron, her black eyes twinkling up at Louis with a zestful enjoyment of her reminiscences that inclined him to follow her example.

“ Mine Charles, he keep a flower-garten, — flower and de vegetable, — and every birtday I use to send him ” — nodding at the portrait — “ one beautiful great *bucket*, to show him his Katrine did not farget him. And t’ree time when he was a grown man — t’ree-and-twenty, five-and-twenty year old — he send me a five-dollar gold piece, and his ‘love to his fait’ful Katrine’ he write on a card. Ah! I do tell you, Mr. Louie, he was a goot heart! He no ’shamed of his Katrine cause she was poor. Not dat I poor now!” drawing herself up, and smoothing her apron with the back of her scrubbing-brush. “ I ’ave one leetle farm, — a garten, a leetle green-house, two cows, thirty chicken, twenty duck, and t’ree childer. Gott has been goot to me! He ” — pointing again at the portrait — “ come four time to see me, when he was one big boy, when he was a man two-and-twenty year old. He walk all over my garten, and smell my flower; and I say, ‘ Mr. Frederic,’ I say, ‘ stay and drink tea mit me. I give you fresh milk, fresh egg, doughnut, de cruller, de waffle, — a supper like a king, — if you will eat it in my leetle house.’ At dat he laugh, and he put his hand on me shoulder, like dis, and he say, ‘ My dear Katrine, milk is goot, de egg is goot, waffle is goot; but you and Charles will want cabbitch mit your coffee, and de smell of cabbitch make me faint. If I stay, I starve you and Charles, you see’, he say; and den he laugh! O, how he laugh! Ah! he was a goot heart!”

She fell to scrubbing again, and Louis resumed his promenade.

Poor Fred! beloved in spite of his selfishness; admired the more, perhaps, on account of his overweening satisfaction in himself. It enwrapped him like a luminous atmosphere, and all outside his home whom he met habitually, had the benefit of his happy complacency. In the domestic circle he was a tyrant; but this recollection Louis put resolutely from him.

He was leaving the house at six o’clock that evening, when Katrine waylaid him in the hall. She was loitering near the front entrance, evidently waiting to speak with him. Dropping

a quaint little courtesy, imported, with her accent, from the old world, she said, in a half whisper, —

“ I come to-morrow, and de nex' day, to know when you t'ink dey bring him home. And when you tell me, I 'ave de flower all ready. Nobody else may bring one; and I not sharge one penny for dem all. He was my boy. I never nurse anodder, only jest my own childrer; and he seem to me like dem — jes' de same. Never you be 'fraid but I bring beautiful flower — all right! I please your modder, and you, and all — camelia, and de lily, and de tuba-rose, and orange-flower, — I know! And when you see what I bring, you say so too. I remember áll what *he* like best!”

The emphasis of her words, and the knowing flash of her black eyes, being even more reassuring than her verbal declaration, that he could safely leave the business to her, Louis engaged not to concern himself about it. He refrained from opposing her intention to furnish the flowers gratuitously, judging it to be wiser and more delicate to seem to indulge her for the time, and to remunerate her afterwards by a handsome present.

“ If I were to die, who would beg, as a favor, to be allowed to strew my coffin with flowers!” he ruminated, taking the street leading to his lodgings, his mood inclement as the chill autumn wind roaring among the elms overarching the pavement.

The question was, apparently, nearer a solution than he dreamed of. He had just reached the first crossing, when a cracking, splitting sound above his head, warned him to spring aside into the middle of the street, and a huge bough crashed through the smaller and lower branches upon the spot he had occupied three seconds before. Five or six persons, who were in sight on either side of the way, rushed to the scene of what had nearly been a catastrophe.

“ You had a narrow escape, sir!” said one; and another, recognizing him, added, in an awed tone, “ Good Heavens, Mr. Suydam! if it had fallen a foot farther that way, it would have killed you!”

“That is true; but since it did *not* fall twelve inches nearer me, I am none the worse for the tumble,” returned Louis, his hatred of scenes inciting him to a show of unseemly levity. “And by so much I have fared better than the tree. It is a fine old ‘first inhabitant.’ I am sorry for the loss it has sustained.”

He stepped over the end of the prostrate bough, and held on his way.

“The coolest young dog I ever see!” said a bystander, gazing after him.

“Like all the Suydams!” interjected another. “They are the devil’s own in pride and assurance. This one is the quietest of the tribe, but he is like gunpowder — quiet only while he’s let alone. ’Twouldn’t have been a great loss if that limb had cracked his skull.”

The speaker, aggravated to the uncharitable comment by Louis’s scornful rejoinder to his well-meant congratulations upon his wonderful preservation, might have modified it somewhat, had he surmised how exactly it coincided with the “young dog’s” own cogitations upon the incident.

It started another train of thought, which resulted in immediate action. On reaching his chambers, he lighted the gas, threw off his overcoat, and sat down to his desk to write a letter to his father. Without preamble, he divulged his marriage with Rubina Sloane, assuming for himself the entire onus of his parents’ reprobation, and bespeaking their good will for his innocent widow.

“Innocent of all except —”

The steady pen stopped.

He was about to add — “sincere and disinterested attachment for one so unworthy as myself.” What restrained him? He was persuaded — so he would have sworn — that Ruby loved him, and that love alone had constrained her to marry him. Why, with the shadow of death still brooding over him in the fresh memory of the destruction he had just avoided, could he not write what he believed to be the unfeigned truth? Ruby

might well have trembled for her sceptre had she seen the clouds of irresolution, approximating distrust, that rolled over his face before the next sweep of the pen announced his decision.

“Innocent of aught except obedience to my urgent entreaties that she would become my wife. We were married on the fifteenth day of last March, without the knowledge or consent of Mr. and Mrs. Sloane. I have reason to believe that, had they suspected my design, they would have opposed it. You will see, by the enclosed copy of the certificate, who was the officiating clergyman, and that the ceremony was performed with due regard to legal and religious forms. The lady in question is my wife, according to every law, human and divine. For my share in the transaction I offer no excuse. You would not respect me were I to admit the need of apology. I loved her, and, being an honorable man, I married her, that I might visit her, without fear of compromising her reputation should these visits be noted by others than her parents, and that I might contribute, so far as my means warranted me in doing, to her support. She is poor; but her character is spotless as that of the highest lady in the land. I ask you to receive her as a daughter, or, should your displeasure at an action you may deem precipitate, unwarrantable, imprudent on my part, extend to her, — the blameless participant in my offence, — at least to recognize her claim upon the portion of your estate you had designed to bestow upon myself.”

He sealed this in an envelope with a copy of the marriage certificate, and a will drawn up in accordance with his best knowledge of the legal requirements in cases of testamentary disposition, and bequeathing all his personal effects to his lawful wife, Rubina M. Suydam, wrote his father's address upon the outside, and locked it within a secret drawer of his desk.

“She is safe as I can make her,” he said, throwing himself back in his chair when all was finished. “Perhaps it would be better for her, as well as for me, that the next broken branch should fall the foot nearer! Yet I did mean and hope to make

her happy. It was the dearest ambition of my lonely life. And I have tried."

He broke off there, with a writhe of the pale lips that told but too plainly the story of his latest and heaviest disappointment.

Two days after this, Ruby received, by the hand of a special messenger, the following note:—

"MY DEAR RUBY: I have been so busy superintending the arrangements for my father's return to his house, and with my own removal to my old quarters there, that I have not been able to spare an hour, even for you, since our last meeting. I hoped to run down to you to-night; but I have this moment received a telegraphic despatch to the effect that the steamer by which my parents are expected is below Kroywen. I have just time to catch the next train.

"Hastily, but faithfully,

"Your own L."

"Just as I prophesied!" exclaimed the young wife, tossing the billet into her mother's lap. "Now that his relatives require his society and services, we are deserted. I should not be surprised if we did not catch a glimpse of him again in a month."

"O, yes, we shall!" comforted Mrs. Sloane. "You see it has been impossible for him to come out for several days past. And to-morrow will be taken up by the funeral. It would be very bad policy for him to displease his relations, especially at a time like this."

Ruby kept a bright lookout from the parlor window all day, and was rewarded for her vigilance, about three o'clock in the afternoon, by seeing a train of mourning-coaches darkening the turnpike. Ensconced behind the shutters, she eyed the procession with the interest of one closely allied to the bereaved family. Her inspection of the carriage directly behind the hearse was particularly keen. The window on the side next

her had been lowered to admit the air, and in the dusky interior she could perceive, on the back seat, a lady in deep black, and an old gentleman with silvery hair, and upon the front a tall, robust man, who, she rightly concluded, was John Suydam, Jr. Louis sat at his left. When the carriage was directly opposite the house, he drew out his white handkerchief, as if to wipe his forehead, and shook it in unfolding it. The signal was so adroitly executed that not one of the other occupants of the vehicle suspected the meaning of the motion. Had it been never so conspicuous, it would have escaped the observation of his relatives. Whatever conjectures might have been excited by the gesture, had they remarked it, not one would have coupled the destiny of a Suydam with that of an inmate of the mean abode at which they did not deign to glance twice.

Louis understood this, even while he courageously flung to Ruby the passing pledge of continued remembrance of her, and the bond uniting them. It answered his purpose if it quieted one anxious heart-beat, solaced her during one minute of his enforced absence. His meeting with his own family seemed to have put an immeasurable distance between him and the friends with whom he had consorted during the past eleven months.

John's patronizing shake of the hand, and his "Well, Louis!" his mother's rapid survey of his face, figure, and apparel, so soon as she had kissed him, and dried the solitary tear that dimmed her eye at the thought of the different circumstances in which they had parted; most of all, the weight of his father's trembling hand upon his shoulder, in their walk along the pier to the carriage in waiting, and the husky quaver of the voice that said, "Thank Heaven, I see you again, my son!" were so many blows at the root of his independent existence and action. He belonged to them by every tie of consanguinity and early association; and his recognition of their proprietorship in him, tacit though it was, had put a fearful obstacle in the way of his premeditated disclosure of his connection with one in a different walk of life. While he sat, mute and serious, by his elder brother, apparently absorbed in recollections of him who

had once made the third of their band, or replied respectfully to the inquiries addressed to him, now and then, by one and another of the quartet, his brain and heart were oppressed by one query, — How and when was he to tell his tale? and What omen of a gracious or charitable audience had he in the aspect of the party before him?

Mrs. Suydam had been, as Louis told Ruby, a beauty in her youth; and the more dignified airs of the courted belle hung about her yet. Haggard from her sea voyage, and the sorrow preceding and attending it, in her severely plain travelling attire of black, she carried her head loftily, managed her fine black eyes carefully, as when a legion of followers might be slain by an inadvertent ray.

One remark, uttered after a pause of considerable length, during which she had sighed repeatedly under the pressure of her meditations, was a key to the woman's character.

“My dear,” she said, in subdued accents, to her husband, “did you leave positive orders that our luggage should be forwarded by this evening's express? I have a presentiment that it will not be forthcoming in season.”

“Mr. Carncross engaged to see it through the custom-house with his own, and to send it out to-night. You can depend upon him,” was the response.

“I hope so, most devoutly! I cannot appear in public to-morrow unless my trunks arrive. I brought over a treasure of a French waiting-maid, John. I do not know how I could have existed without her at the time of our great affliction. She went alone to Paris, purchased and had made up all my mourning. I had absolutely no spirits or energy for the transaction of the simplest business. Rosette was the greatest conceivable comfort to me.”

“We were so fortunate as to meet in Florence a family of Americans, with whom I was already slightly acquainted — the Barrys,” said Mr. Suydam, abruptly, to his eldest son. “We owe much to their kindness during the winter. They accompanied us to Havre.”

Mrs. Suydam raised her cambric to her face to stanch the oozing drops from the fount of maternal woe.

“Ah, yes! It is a sad, sad story, my dear son! Poor, dear Fred was to have married one of the daughters—a noble, lovely, gifted girl!”

Louis stared in amazement. His medical education inclined him to regard this design of a man ill of an incurable disease as absurd and wicked. The attempt to chain to what was, in effect, his body of death, a youthful, healthy, loving woman, was sinful selfishness, unworthy even of Fred.

Mrs. Suydam saw the affair from quite another stand-point.

“Their mutual devotion was beautiful,” she pursued. “The darling boy breathed his last, clasping her hand in his, her name upon his lips.”

“Where is Miss Barry now?” asked John, with no remarkable assumption of sympathy with the actors in the mournful romance.

Possibly he was thinking it a lucky thing it had not culminated in a death-bed marriage ceremony that would have given the inconsolable widow a lien upon Fred's share of the patrimonial estate.

“At Tours. They are to go to England in May; in July to Germany. Mrs. Barry is extremely partial to Continental life. I should not be surprised if they remained abroad a year longer, wintering in Paris. Mrs. Barry is a genuine cosmopolitan. Nor do I censure her for indulging her inclinations in this respect. If I had my way, I should take up my permanent abode in Europe. You were abroad long enough, my dear John, to understand how unpleasantly American crudities impress a returned traveller. There is a want of tone—or I might say, with more propriety, an excess of tone—about our very best society that offends a refined taste cruelly. As a people we are too *prononcé*, too self-assertive, and we assert ourselves in a manner—to quote one of poor dear Fred's *bon-mots*—that makes the rest of the civilized world declare us belligerents. America wants ripening and mellowing, he was

fond of saying, in the playful disputes he and Frank Barry often had."

"There you show your inconsistency!" interposed Mr. Suydam, who had been restless throughout this disquisition upon national unripeness. "You pretend to admire Frank Barry; yet where will you find a more thorough American?"

"I grant it, my dear; but you cite an exceptional case. Intense individuality is compatible with perfect refinement. Frank possesses both in an eminent degree."

"And gives no better proof of intelligence, refinement, and good taste than by never bepraising foreign lands and customs at the expense of a country that is worth Europe, Asia, and Africa, with the rest of the globe thrown in as a makeweight!" retorted her irritated spouse. "Louis, I shall keep you at home until your brain is sufficiently steady to carry and weigh two ideas at a time. One upsets the intellects of most people who have had a smattering of foreign travel."

"Very well, sir! I do not object!" replied the son, pleasantly. "I used to fancy that I should like to take a medical course in Paris, but I concur now in the opinion of some of our ablest physicians, that American constitutions and the maladies peculiar to the American climate are best studied on this side of the water."

"*Chacun à son goût!*" said Mrs. Suydam, in true French fashion, through her shut teeth, and shrugging her shoulders. "Your tastes were never mine, Louis. I have always insisted that there was an amalgam of plebeianism in your composition — a levelling proclivity that would subvert the just order of society, if it were carried into general operation."

Louis crimsoned from a secret consciousness she was far from divining. His father grew purple with a different feeling.

"Not so effectually, madam, as the strained patrician blood you boast of subverts natural affection and womanly tenderness!" he recriminated harshly. "We will have no more feeble reproductions of French levity and German transcendentalism, if you please! It is villanous cant at first hand;

and when adulterated by a woman's brain and filtered through a pair of simpering lips, it is simply nauseous. Your wife is not seriously indisposed, I trust, John? You said she was not able to bear the journey eastward."

The junior relieved the paternal solicitude by representing the indisposition of his better half to be temporary, and not at all alarming, and, taking the cue from the scathing rebuke administered to his mother, talked at length, and with pardonable animation, of home, wife, and children, until they entered the streets of Kräwen, and etiquette demanded that the remainder of their journey should be performed in decorous silence.

And thus Frederic Suydam returned to the hall of his fathers.

CHAPTER X.

“PA!” said Ruby, on the morning succeeding the arrival of the good steamship *Minerva*. “I want you to drive me up to Kräwen this forenoon.”

“What’s up now?” queried Nick, mystified by her dancing eyes and saucy smile, and, man-like, on his guard against an ambuscade that might imperil his supreme right, as a lord of creation, to disoblige the women attached by the law to his household, whenever and in whatever particular it pleased him so to do.

“I am going to my brother-in-law’s funeral, to be sure!” she replied, glowing with the fun of the idea. “Papa-in-law and mamma-in-law would be grieved to death if I failed to attend on this sad occasion, and my husband wouldn’t enjoy the exercises at all, at all, if he didn’t see my woe-begone face among the mourners.”

Nick dropped the carving-knife with which he was cutting huge slices of ham for his breakfast, and Mrs. Sloane set down the coffee-pot, to gaze at their daughter. The father’s dumb astonishment exploded in an oath, and the mother ventured to expostulate.

“My dear! you are not in earnest!”

“Never was more serious in my life!” Ruby went on eating, coolly and rationally. “I am dying to have a look at the interior of Castle Suydam, before I enter it as the mistress-that-may-possibly-be-one-of-these-fine-days, and I couldn’t have a better opportunity than is offered by this funeral. I take it as a brotherly deed in the lamented Frederic that he departed this

life and gave me the chance. The *élite* — I beg your pardon, pa! you don't like French — the big bugs of Kräwen will be there in great force. I shall see innumerable handsome dresses and all sorts of fine birds under the fine feathers. I ought to become accustomed to their magnificence by degrees, that the introduction to the royal circle may not frighten me out of my wits. I shall sit with them, and they will stare at me, and I shall, in a lady-like way, as becomes my superior breeding, stare back at them, and laugh in my mourning sleeve to think how much harder they will look at me before long. When they settle into solemnity at the commencement of the services, I shall look more melancholy than the soberest owl of them all, and my blessed lord and master, weeping in the bosom of his aristocratic family up stairs, will be not a whit the wiser for my frolic, unless he should catch a stray glimpse of his divinity in his passage through the hall to the carriage. O, it will be a jolly lark!"

Nick burst into a horse-laugh that made the windows rattle.

"Go it, my hearty! You are a chip of the old block! Him as gets the start of you has got to turn out of bed blamed early in the morning. You shall have your lark, and I'll bet my head you'll hold your own with the brazenest turned-up nose 'ristocrat there. I'll take you up to town in good style, too. That goosy young Bradshaw, that's always a-foundering his animals, left his big gray with me yesterday, and isn't to send for his buggy till next day after to-morrow. I'll hitch up the gray, — he had ought to be exercised, — and we'll be off soon as you like. While you are tending the 'services of this solemn occasion,' as I bet the parson will call 'em, I'll knock around town and look after a little business of my own."

"I shall go to the cemetery; so you needn't hurry yourself," said Ruby. "I mean to do the business up handsomely. It would never do to be wanting in respect to my own family, you know."

In high glee, she made her toilet, — black silk mantilla and dress; a white chip hat, from the brim of which she laugh-

ingly removed a knot of blue velvet, as incompatible with half-mourning; a black lace veil that heightened the effect of so much as was revealed of her exquisite complexion and pretty features, and a pair of light-gray gloves.

“There’s nothing like being prepared for emergencies,” she said to her patient waiting-maid, when the interesting task was completed. “In case papa-in-law should afford his delinquent son a golden opportunity for confession and reconciliation and all that sort of thing, it would clinch the matter if I were ready to rush forward, arrayed in decorous funereal gear for my dear, lost brother, and cast myself upon my knees alongside of my beloved partner, to implore the patriarchal blessing. If I can show myself to Louis by any means, it may suggest the scene to him. Here! you had better give me two handkerchiefs. I might find it expedient to shed tears into one.”

“What spirits you have, my child!” Mrs. Sloane sighed, surveying the laughing face that turned from the glass with a complacent nod and smirk. “I hope nothing will occur to mar the pleasure of your visit to town. If I could order events to suit my wishes, your entrance to Mr. Suydam’s house should be made in a very different manner.”

“Yes! I should march in with a band of music and flags flying. I understand! But I am following the advice you often give me. Since I can’t do as I would just yet, I mean to get the most good out of what I can do.”

It was a glorious October day, bright and still. Nick pointed out to his daughter, in their ride over the meadows, blue heights upon the horizon, which were, he observed, “a good forty mile off.” The beautiful river on which Kräwen was situated wound through the plain like a silver serpent, until lost to the eye among hills crowned with turreted villas, and groves a-blaze with the barbaric splendors of autumn. The marshes were golden-russet in the bath of sunbeams; the misshapen willows bordering the turnpike looked resigned, instead of miserable, and the flinty road sparkled as if strewn with diamond-dust. Exhilarated by her ride and the fine weather, Ruby alighted

upon a side street, several blocks distant from her destination, and bade her father meet her at a designated spot at one o'clock, eleven being the hour appointed for the funeral.

She walked slowly up the obscure street, shaking out her flounces, settling her hat, and drawing on the gloves she would not risk soiling or straining in getting in and out of the buggy. At the first turning, she came within sight of the park, and the gray-brown stone walls of the Suydam house, and her demeanor altered. With an air that should betray, to every one she met, her serious preoccupation of mind, she sailed along the sidewalk, her parasol depending over her veil, her veil overhanging her eyelids, her eyelids drooping at an angle which pensiveness would not begin to describe. With an added shade of regretful thoughtfulness, she mounted the stone steps and entered the open door. Several servants in mourning stood in the central hall, and one waved her to enter a room to her left. The blinds were closed, and, fresh from the brightness of the outer world, Ruby was conscious that her progress through the *chiaro-oscuro* of the apartment to a chair she dimly discerned to be vacant was the reverse of imposing. She nearly stumbled at her trial step upon the yielding velvet carpet, and, when safely seated, needed to recover breath and coolness before using her curious optics upon the company she felt, not saw, occupied the great parlors with her.

True to herself, she recovered composure rapidly and began to make observations by the time her cheeks had regained their peachy hue, and her lungs ceased their irregular play. She had never been in another suite of rooms of equal dimensions and so luxuriously furnished. The carved sofas and chairs, with damask cushions; the curtains, similar in material and color; the grand piano; inlaid cabinets and tables; the tall china jars on the mantels, and the great vase of tinted marble, standing upon a pedestal in the centre of the front parlor; the massive gilt frames surrounding the family portraits and paintings of various subjects that crowded the walls, — inspired her with a strange mixture of reverence and elation; reverence

for the wealth that had created the paradise, and cunning exultation in the reflection that, from her position upon one of the lower — so many lower! — rungs of the social ladder, she had contrived to fasten a grapnel on this pinnacle of earthly desire. An incessant stream of new-comers flowed into the house, filling drawing-rooms, library, dining-room, hall, and staircase; but Ruby did not again succumb to bewilderment. She scanned each toilet that merited scrutiny; made mental notes concerning the dressing of hair, the cut of mantillas, and the fabric of fall dress-goods; not omitting to count the bouquets on the mantels, on the slabs under the mirrors, upon stands in the corners of the rooms, and to admire the exquisite arrangement of the flowers filling the great central vase — a mound of bloom and fragrance, with trailing vines and blossoming sprays falling over the lip to the base of the marble bowl. The coffin was heaped with flowers, also, — all white. The burial-case was covered with black cloth, and ornamented with silver.

“There’s a lead coffin inside, I suppose,” thought Ruby, discursively. “Louis says he was very handsome.”

Struck by a sudden thought, she turned towards a portrait near the front windows. That must be Fred! There was one of an older and more commonplace-looking man opposite, who was John. Louis had described him as rather plain in feature. The pale, slim boy, a little farther on, with a gun in his hand, was undoubtedly Louis. There was another picture of him, in the back parlor, taken when he was a child — long yellow curls streaming over his bare shoulders, and his arm cast about the waist of a fairy girl, with curls and eyes matching his, and who could be no one else than his twin-sister Effie.

But that portrait of handsome Frederic! A streak of sunshine shot through a crevice in the shutters, and struck boldly upon the face. Others besides Ruby remarked the “singular coincidence,” — some people call everything they esteem noteworthy a coincidence, and not one in fifty knows the real meaning of the word, — and many hearts, being endowed with more nerves than hers, ached throbbingly as thought made the swift

transition from the fulness of life and beauty depicted in the picture, and the sealed darkness common decency had decreed should evermore brood over the corrupt Thing laid at length upon the undertaker's trestles; the silver breastplate telling when It had cast off life and comeliness together. I have intimated that Ruby did not vex her soul with the disagreeable ideas funeral scenes are apt to suggest to people of a reflective cast of mind. She admitted that Fred must have been a "splendid fellow," unless, as was extremely likely, the painter had flattered him egregiously. He had more "dash" in him than there was in Louis, or the portrait further misrepresented him. If he had been laid up for ten days at Meadow Cottage with a sore shoulder, there would have been "a world of fun" in making love to him. But then, again, men of his stamp were very hard to insnare — whereas Louis was verdant, which meant gullible.

Shifting her seat an inch or two, she obtained a view, across the main hall, of the opposite room, which, she concluded, was the library. When she should come hither to live, she would choose the chamber over that, fronting the park, as hers. A street lookout was so lively! Mr. and Mrs. Suydam probably occupied the chambers above the parlors. There were, apparently, four large rooms upon each floor, besides one in the wing. What a love of a hat that young lady had on! Chip — no finer and whiter than that she herself wore — trimmed with white strings, a cluster of small scarlet berries nestling in her hair under the brim, and a pure marabout feather, tipped with scarlet, upon the outside. She would alter her own into a fac-simile of the beauty before she was twenty-four hours older. That clergyman's monotonous drawl was enough to put one to sleep, and she could hear about one word in ten, barely enough to apprise her when he was addressing his mortal audience and when reading prayers.

He had stopped entirely. What was the matter? The throng within the parlor parted noiselessly to allow the passage of the pall-bearers, and Ruby awakened to the fact that her

stay in the enchanted palace was nearly over. Her "lark" was painfully short-lived. She almost dared linger where she was until the return of the family from the cemetery. It was only to sit still for an hour, and when they reëntered the dwelling, to introduce herself in her real character and abide the storm the announcement would raise. Since it must rage sooner or later, why not have it now, and have done with it? If she were only sure what was included in that minute pronoun! Her meditated declaration of her rights; the longing for domestication in the abode that had fascinated every sense and enkindled tastes and cravings hitherto but feebly known; the wild, prankish inclination to bring about a commotion in the stately household, — all were overruled by the uncertainty enshrouding this point. A passing *esclandre* would be agreeable excitement; a couple of dozen hard words from *Suydam père*, and a viragoish tirade against the meanness of her extraction, and the shameless manner in which she had duped her poor boy, from *Suydam mère*, would, as Ruby sensibly put the case to herself, "break no bones." But banishment from the baronial mansion, and final disinheritance, were graver perils, and not to be lightly tempted.

The sequel of the two minutes' brown study, for which leisure was granted her by the removal of the remains to the hearse, and the passage of the family and their intimate friends down stairs, was her resolution to adhere to the original programme, and to preserve her incognita. When those about her arose to depart, she went with them to the front door. A pause upon the porch — in *Kräwen* the "stoop" — and a wistful look at the nearest carriage sufficed to draw the notice of the polite undertaker, who was marshalling the procession.

"Wish to go to the cemetery, ma'am?" he said, extending his hand to conduct her to an empty coach, just halting before the entrance.

"I believe I will," returned Ruby, carelessly, "there seem to be so many carriages."

The man of the mournful trade helped her to a seat; beck-

oned alluringly to three other ladies, who also paused upon the steps; packed them comfortably in; banged to the door, and motioned to the next driver to come up. One of Ruby's fellow-passengers was the identical young lady whose hat had attracted her covetous regards.

"That is a providence! Now I can study it at my leisure!" thought the bereaved sister-in-law.

It happened that the other occupants of the conveyance knew one another; and having slyly, each for herself, inspected the stranger of the party, they began to chatter like magpies. If Ruby had been ignorant, up to this time, of the social consequence of the family she had surreptitiously entered, she would have been abundantly enlightened by the talk of the gossiping damsels.

"They say old Mr. Suydam is terribly shaken by this affliction," said one, whom the others called Hatty. "Dr. Milnor told papa yesterday that he feared a second stroke. How white his hair has turned! and did you observe how he tottered coming down stairs? He had to lean all his weight upon Louis's arm."

"I noticed and thought it so queer that he walked with his son, instead of with his wife," replied the Fanny of the trio. "I *hope* it was on account of his weakness. You know it is whispered that he and madame are a strictly fashionable couple; that they have adopted French fashions in everything—even to having separate apartments."

"No?" exclaimed Hatty, interrogatively, at this delightful morceau of scandal.

Whereupon the wearer of the divine bonnet, who, it seemed, was the volatile Fanny's elder sister, interposed.

"Fanny! you indiscreet child! how can you circulate such absurd reports? Mrs. Suydam is a most exemplary lady—a charming woman, against whom no one who knows her has ever breathed a syllable of censure. Her wealth and position compel her to mingle much in the gay world. It will be a sad loss to Kräwen, now that her house must be closed to

general company for some months. As for her management of her domestic affairs, it is nobody's business except hers how she conducts them."

"Very true, Janet; but people will talk, and you cannot deny that Mr. Suydam is a very eccentric man. Why, I have heard that he is so domineering and unbearable in his home, that his sons never dare speak in his presence, except in answer to his questions. That was the reason John left the city and went west within a month after his marriage, and why Louis is such a misanthrope."

"A misanthrope! A misogynist and a bear!" cried Hatty, energetically. "He is perfectly *horrid*, with his grave bow, and cynical smile, and ironical replies to a little harmless raillery! I met him at a party a year ago, and talked with—or rather *at* him—for half an hour; and I was farther off from acquaintanceship with him at the end of the tedious thirty minutes than when I began. He is the antipodes of poor Fred. Ah! speaking of losses to Kräwen society—there was the heaviest we have sustained in years!"

"His mantle assuredly has not fallen upon Louis," admitted the discreet Janet. "Still you had better be cautious in your criticisms upon the only unmarried heir to the Suydam property. He is a most desirable *parti* in a pecuniary point of view. Maybe you could tame him in a few more lessons, Hatty. The prize is worth striving for."

"*Peut être!*" rejoined Hatty, with a dubious shrug, but evidently not displeased at the suggestion. "They do say he has more real talent than either of his brothers, although Fred was more showy. It must be so, or old Dr. Milnor would never take him into partnership, as he proposes to do so soon as he—Louis—can write himself an M. D."

"That appendage to his name should signify Most Disagreeable, according to your account of his manners," laughed Fanny.

"Yes, or Most Doleful, if one may interpret the state of his spirits by his physiognomy to-day," returned Hatty.

“My dear girls, don't laugh in a mourning coach!” reprimanded their monitor, composing the visage shaded by the chip hat into a becoming lugubriousness. “The people in the street will see you, and you be talked about all over town before night.”

“You wouldn't have us parade full-length cambrics — flags at half-mast, — would you, dear?” asked her giddy sister. “People would say then that we were heart-broken at the death of a man who had jilted us while alive. Fred had the most frightful reputation as a lady-killer. And he *was* a wicked flirt!”

“He was very delightful, nevertheless,” Hatty maintained. “It would have been quite pleasant to be jilted by such an adept in love-making, for jilting presupposes courtship.”

“That is one sin, or folly, which the sage, or cynic, — whichever you please to style him, — his brother Louis, will never be guilty of,” said Fanny. “He will not lose his heart to any one. His marriage — should he ever wed — will be a purely commercial transaction. And I suppose he must marry before long. *Noblesse oblige*. Bachelorhood is a prohibited luxury in royal families.”

Ruby, who had with difficulty controlled her risibles, and affected downcast inattention to the lively conversation up to this time, here had to pass her handkerchief over her lips, and turn her face towards the window, as if attracted by some interesting object in the street.

“Fancy their looks, if I were to present myself to their distinguished notice as Mrs. Louis Suydam, the wife of the royal bear — whom he married out of love, too!” she mused, gleefully. “I would give a mortgage of a thousand dollars upon my presumptive wealth to be allowed to do it. This is the jolliest part of the performance thus far. Rely upon it, my communicative friends, I shall not forget one word of your pretty stories. I may even make capital of them at headquarters to punish you for your supercilious conduct to the unknown member of your little party.”

In high good-humor, she alighted when the carriage stopped within the cemetery. It was a pleasant, sunny spot, where they had dug Fred's grave, close beside a short mound, at the head of which knelt a marble child-angel, her face upturned to heaven, and her dimpled hands clasped in prayer.

Ruby elbowed her way perseveringly, but not rudely, to the innermost circle of the crowd gathered about the enclosure, until she could lean upon the iron railing, and was within arm's length of the Suydams. While the clergyman read the burial-service, she continued to make excellent use of her eyes through the convenient veil. Mrs. Suydam had the arm of her eldest son, a man nearly thirty-five years old, with a countenance as expressive of emotion as that of a graven image, — a hard, cold eye, and a mouth frozen into placidity a hundred fold more disheartening to the petitioner for love or mercy than the angriest scowl. The mother's head was bowed, and her face concealed by her handkerchief, but she neither sobbed nor trembled.

“So! that is grief *à la mode!*” commented Ruby. “I am continually learning something I may find useful to me in my future career.”

Mr. Suydam, Senior, had, it was obvious, made a grand rally of his forces to support him through this, the last and most trying scene of the series that had admitted the public as spectators of his domestic life. Rejecting Louis's arm when they reached the open grave, he stood at his full height, no shaking, paralytic figure, but a man of cast-iron, too haughty to make sign or moan while they were lowering his son into his final resting-place and heaping the earth upon him. Louis, relieved, for the nonce, of the charge which had been his, almost without intermission, since his meeting on the steamer's deck, with his parents, folded his arms and gazed steadfastly into the fast-filling pit. Externally calm as his father and brother, the vestiges of severe mental suffering were apparent in his wan cheek and hollow eyes. A nameless fear contracted Ruby's heart, impeding pulsation and chilling her with death-

like sickness as she watched him. Had he made the leap and taken a resolution typified by his position with his blood relatives upon the other side of the yawning chasm, while she looked vainly across it for so much as a silent token of recognition? He seemed to her to be frightfully inapproachable. If she was dying, she would not venture to summon him to her by a glance or call, fenced in as he was by conventionalities and social distinctions more pitiless than the iron rails she grasped.

She valued him now, in the nightmare dread of losing him forever, and with him the ease, and plenty, and multitudinous other worldly advantages she appreciated to-day more truly than ever before. Representing all these to her, as he did, a glamour more powerful than love could ever beget for her, invested the motionless form. She would wait, work, suffer,—do anything and everything that promised ultimate possession,—rather than give him up. She was surveying him thus avariciously when he lifted his eyes and saw her!

Saw the eager countenance, the dilated eyes and parted lips on a line with the rapt face of Effie's guardian angel, and his own complexion was bleached to the pallor of the marble. Was he busy with thoughts of her more than with grieving memories of him they were burying out of his sight? and did he doubt the reality of her presence there? construe the sight he beheld into an accusing apparition, begotten of his self-reproach and cowardly fears? Ruby could not have expressed this inquiry in words, but the thought flashed through her brain as Louis's gaze returned to the earth at his feet, and did not again wander in her direction until the sad work was done; the long mound was rounded into the shape of the turfy hillock beside it, and John made the movement to quit the grounds. Then Louis looked straight at his wife. His regards were not angry or reproachful—only coldly incredulous; and, as he offered his left arm to his father, he drew, with his right hand, his handkerchief from the breast of his coat, and waved it very slightly.

“A cavalier salutation!” said Ruby to herself, pacing back to her carriage, which was a long distance in the rear of the family coach. “But better than none at all! His fastidious notions were offended by my presence there — that was clear! But I don’t care!”

The sisters were in their places on the back seat, but Hatty had joined a couple of friends who had a carriage all to themselves; and standing at the open door of the one in which she had come, engaged in animated colloquy with the heroine of the chip hat and her merry companion, was a gentleman. He stepped aside as Ruby approached. He might have been on the watch for her, so natural were his obeisance and the gallantry with which he helped her into the vehicle.

“We have still a vacant place, since Hatty Bruen has deserted us,” said volatile Fanny, as he made a feint of shutting them in. “You are welcome to it, Mr. Veddar.”

“If you will permit the intrusion!” he assented gratefully.

With that he swung himself to the cushion at Ruby’s side, and ordered the coachman to drive on.

At this unforeseen complication of the plot, Ruby very nearly lost her presence of mind. No surer proof of this can be offered than the statement that she would have mortgaged her expectations to the amount of several thousands more, could she have been spirited away to Meadow Cottage, the back kitchen, and her mother’s protection, before the ubiquitous dandy could give her a second look, or speak to her. For she was certain that he would accost her; that he had seen her descend from this carriage, dogged her while at the grave, and, in some manner, contrived that Hatty should change her purpose of returning to town as she had come out. She was, undeniably, fluttered; but she soon settled it with herself that she was flattered as well. If the enamoured Veddar should try to engage her in conversation, wherein consisted the danger of replying to him civilly, provided she gave him no clew to her name and residence? Perhaps the little mystery that hung

about her was one ingredient of his fascination. She would have more diversion out of the adventure, before she should have done with it.

“You are acquainted with these ladies — are you not?” he said, in an audaciously confidential “aside” to her, seeing that she took no part in their conversation.

The rattle of the wheels upon the pavement drowned the question for the sisters’ ears.

“I am not!” She would have added, “Don’t introduce me!” but he was too quick for her.

“Allow me,” he said, suavely, “to make you known to one another. Miss Trowbridge — Miss Fanny Trowbridge — Miss — I beg pardon! your name has escaped my memory!”

It was an impudent stroke, but Ruby could be impudent, too.

“Manning!” she said, glibly.

“Ah! I recollect! Miss Manning!”

The three ladies bowed stiffly, and exchanged dagger-glances of distrust and incipient aversion.

“This is a sore stroke to our friend Dr. Suydam,” pursued Veddar, comprehensively to the triad, but pointedly *at* his right hand neighbor. “He looks badly to-day. You have accomplished a feat, Miss Manning, which our Kräwen ladies have showed themselves unwilling to undertake, or unable to carry through. I mean, enticing him from his idolized studies into the world of living society and audible music. He has the reputation of being a recluse in his native town.”

“So I understand,” said Ruby, mischievously; whereat the sisters stole disconcerted looks at one another.

“Bravo!” thought the pseudo Miss Manning. “This is not a bad position, after all. I hit them sooner than I expected.”

“He is a young man of fine promise,” Veddar went on to inform her. “With all his reserve and seemingly unsocial disposition, he has a warm heart, and more genuine chivalry than any other gentleman I ever met.”

Ruby bridled in offended silence. Louis was supposed, she

inferred from this speech, to have testified to his chivalric tendencies by escorting her — an unknown stray — to places frequented by the *ton*, who knew him for one of themselves.

“You are fortunate, Mr. Veddar, in having learned so much about the character and tastes of one who has chosen to remain a stranger to most of those in his own circle,” returned Fanny, with spirit.

“I consider that I am!” politely. “I prognosticate great things from the progress of the reformation in his social habits, commenced under Miss Manning’s auspices. We shall see him a transformed man before another year has gone by. You will yet esteem and like him, as I do, Miss Fanny.”

Fanny’s mouth took on a pout that would have shaped itself into the pronunciation of Hatty’s sarcastic “*Peut être!*” had she not been restrained by dread of “that horrid spy of a woman” opposite her. Despite Veddar’s efforts to promote easy loquacity, the ladies had little to say after that, until the carriage stopped at a handsome house, a few blocks distant from the Suydam Place, and the sisters Trowbridge alighted.

“Now I am rid of them all!” Ruby congratulated herself, for Veddar had sprung to the pavement to assist them out.

But a fresh difficulty hedged her about as he reseated himself, with a courteous — “Where shall I tell the coachman to set you down?”

Hesitation would be ruin. The strong sense of this gave Ruby an influx of effrontery.

“At the Water Street Depot, if you please,” she replied, promptly.

“You return to Kroywen to-day, then?” he asked, after giving the direction to the driver.

“I do. In the two o’clock train, if I can catch it.”

Veddar consulted his watch.

“O, very easily! I am obliged to run over to the city myself, this afternoon, and I should also like to make this train.”

Was the man a vexatious demon? How should she extricate herself from the web her lies and his trickery had woven?

If she went to Kroywen with the design of returning to the rendezvous with her father in the next train, how should she shake off her escort after reaching the great city? For the first time she felt something akin to terror at the importunity with which he followed her up. A passing fancy for a pretty face would not account for the pains he had already taken, and was disposed to increase, for the purpose of ascertaining her name and dwelling-place. She did not know how much an indolent votary of pleasure will exert himself to secure an object that promises the gratification of impertinent curiosity or sensual desire. She was not, in the usual acceptation of the term, pure of thought; but it did not occur to her that the circumstances in which this man had met her with Louis, the impenetrable reserve of the latter with respect to her, taken in connection with her covert smiles and affable bearing towards one whom her attendant treated with scantest courtesy, had aroused in the mind of the debauchee the most damaging suspicions as to her character. In plain English, Veddar, with the acuteness and genial charity of his class, believed firmly that he was on the track of a disreputable intrigue, and was determined to ferret out the truth, incited to enact the amateur detective, partly by the hope of annoying and injuring a man he disliked, and who detested him; partly by the design of entering the lists himself, and stealing the auburn-haired houri from her boy lover.

Happily, ignorant of his ulterior motives, Ruby took the predicament, as she comprehended it, bravely and coolly. She had great faith in her inventive genius.

"I never got into a scrape yet out of which my wits could not help me," she reassured her dismayed spirit by asserting, and asserting truly.

Arrived at the depot, she put her gloved hand into that of her cavalier, who clasped it more firmly, and relinquished it more tardily, than he had done those of the Misses Trowbridge, and, still attended by him, entered the dingy waiting-room.

"If I can do no better, I will jump off the cars after they start!" she resolved, half in amusement, half in alarm.

“Shall I procure your ticket with mine?” inquired Veddar, just as she came to this determination.

Ruby's heart gave a tremendous bound.

“If you will be so kind!” she said, smiling seductive gratitude.

The ticket office was in the adjoining room. His coat skirt was yet visible in the door of communication, when she slipped out of the main entrance, glided swiftly around the end of the building, darted up a side-street, doubled through a network of dirty alleys like a pursued hare, and never slackened in her flight until she was a good half-mile from the depot, and near the livery stable where her father was to await her with the buggy. He was there, talking “horsey” slang with the keeper and the admiring head groom.

“Halloo!” he hailed his daughter, as she came up to him. “You are red in the face as a turkey gobbler's comb, and puff like a horse with the heaves. What did you hurry so for?”

“I was afraid I might keep you waiting. We had better get off right away,” replied the panting Ruby.

The livery stable keeper invited her to take a chair in the “office,” a stuffy box seven feet by nine, that smelled of damp horse blankets; but it was a welcome retreat.

“He will never think of looking for me here!” she sighed, sinking into one hard, wooden chair, and putting her aching feet upon the rounds of another. “My! how tired I am!”

She was not gifted with extraordinary imaginative powers, but she occasionally perpetrated a bright remark. The foundered gray was making good time upon the open reach of flint-strewn turnpike, when she burst out laughing.

“Hey!” queried Nick, with the vacant eye of one disturbed in an abstruse calculation. “What now?”

“Nothing!” returned Ruby, between the paroxysms. “I was just thinking how Cinderella scampered out of the ball-room when the clock struck twelve, and how the prince chased after her, full speed, and couldn't catch her!”

CHAPTER XI.

KRAWEN gossips had lied less infamously than gossips generally do, in affirming that among other foreign importations of morals and manners into the Suydam household was the custom or taste assigning separate apartments to the *soi-disant* united heads of the establishment. Mrs. Suydam had her chambers on one side of the hall bisecting the building, her spouse a study and dormitory upon the other.

After the early dinner on the day of the funeral, she retired to the seclusion of her boudoir, attended by the invaluable Rosette. John smoked his cigar in the library, in company with several "particular friends," who had "dropped in" to offer condolences and exchange reminiscences with their former townsman. Louis, at his father's request, waited upon him in his study at the close of a prolonged conference between Mr. Suydam and the family physician, Dr. Milnor. The envied possessor of an ancient family name and princely wealth sat in the depths of an immense leathern arm-chair, brought over, family tradition said, from Holland, by the first of the line who crossed the Atlantic. There were traces of gilding still perceptible, here and there, upon the smooth black cushions where they were least worn; and the woodwork, left exposed by the upholsterer, was carved into grotesque claws, wings, and heads of nondescript birds. This state chair had been the bugbear of the younger Suydams in their nursery days. When summoned to their father's presence to receive chastisement, admonition, and — not the least formidable of the three — advice, they invariably found him enthroned in this heirloom, clothed

in majesty more portentous than he could have assumed in any modern *fauteuil* or *causeuse*. The dignity acquired from the embrace of leathern elbows two centuries old was patent even to their childish senses.

A queer thrill of the ancient awe stole over Louis, as he opened the door and espied his father in the old place. But the magistrate had laid by his official air, and the red sunbeams from the western window became a plaintive smile in resting on his white hair. He was wrapped in a wadded dressing-gown, and a fire burned in the grate.

"I find myself chilly, to-night," he said, when Louis was seated. "The east wind — and there is always an east wind in Kräwen during some portion of the day — is harsh to those who are not accustomed to it. I shall soon be acclimated, however, and enjoy better health here than anywhere else, for it is my native air. But, my son, I shall never again be the man I was three years ago. I have had my day. Had my day!" he repeated, shaking his head and chafing his right hand slowly with the left — "and it is nearly done."

"You are despondent just now, sir," answered Louis, affected by the pathetic tone, so unlike his father's ordinary moods. "You are weary and depressed, — mind and body acting and reacting upon one another until you are liable to mistake physical prostration for mental forebodings. You will be another being after a night's rest."

"If I *can* rest! People of my age do not sleep as do those of your time of life. And wakefulness with us implies thoughtfulness. And thought is but another name for anxiety. Poor Frederic cost me hundreds of sleepless nights during the nine and twenty years he lived. He was none the better for it, and I am much the worse. My children have not given me credit for natural affection; but if I have not lived for them, I have lived in vain."

"They have no just cause of complaint," rejoined Louis, sincerely, more and more moved by this unprecedented softness. "Few parents discharge their duty to their offspring so con-

scientifically as you have done. If we have failed to understand you in all respects, the fault has been mainly ours. I fear we have not compensated, by our filial piety, for the care and pains we have cost you."

Mr. Suydam put his hand upon his son's knee.

"You are a generous-hearted lad! I believe I was the same at twenty-two; but time, the world, and matrimony play the deuce with heart-fibres. Depend upon it, Louis, it is a man's wife who makes or mars him. Mine — well! no matter! She is your mother, and I don't deny that I might have been a better husband. At all events, it is too late to remedy that evil — if it be one. Your future gives me more concern, now, than does my past or present. You were always my favorite son. John has acted independently of me ever since he was a school-boy. We talked to and felt for each other, as man does to man, when he was fourteen years old. He never set my authority at defiance, as Frederic did, scores of times — until, if I had been the tyrant report proclaims me to be, I would have disowned him. He might have reformed, had his life been spared. He was in love with a good, true woman, over there in Florence, and she might have been his salvation. As it is, more of my memories of him are thorns than I care to tell even to you. John, then, chose his own way, and walked in it. I gave him a worthy portion when he married, and he never thanked me for it — took it as his inalienable right. I did not mind that so much as I have done the utter absence of cordiality in his behavior to me at all our subsequent meetings."

"His temperament is phlegmatic," Louis offered in excuse for his brother. "However strongly he may feel, he lacks the power of expressing his emotions. We must not bear too hardly upon him for a constitutional defect."

His father was already thinking of something else.

"Dr. Milnor is desirous to take you into partnership," he said, as if he had not heard Louis's reply.

"He has intimated as much to me, several times," responded the son. "From what motive I am at a loss to guess."

“From a variety of motives, probably. He is not a philanthropist, nor yet wholly selfish. He would like to do you a good turn, but he is the more willing to offer this because he needs a young partner, one whose social position holds out a fair prospect of a lucrative increase of his professional connection, and whose talents will reflect lustre upon his declining years. He says you will be a distinguished surgeon and an able practitioner in every department of your profession. I attach the more weight to his opinion, because it is founded upon information gained from your professors and fellow-students. I am unaffectedly pleased to hear this — pleased, but scarcely surprised. Like your brother John, I am not addicted to demonstrations of feeling, and I never flattered a man in my life. Flattery is the natural aliment of most women. But it may smooth some rough places in your pathway, may soften the sleepless pillow of *your* old age, if you can remember and repeat to your sons what your father now tells you — that you are the only one of his children who never added a gray hair to his head, nor gave his heart a pang.”

Louis's astonishment had been approaching a climax for some minutes, and his heart opening to the parent he had scarcely known as such until this hour. At this unexpected commendation, solemnly and affectionately spoken, he bent his face upon the broad arm of the old chair and fairly sobbed.

“You are too good! too kind! O, if I only deserved all this!”

The tremulous hand patted his head as it had not done since the golden curls were mingled upon the same pillow with Effie's. Some long-barred door in the past swung open a little way, and through it Louis saw dimly the picture of the fond parent coming, after the toils of the day were over, to visit the bedside of his twin-babes, when he believed them both to be sleeping; and the son received as a new revelation the belief that he had always retained his place in the heart that cherished him tenderly then. This place he must forfeit; this trust he must grieve; the prideful declaration that this one of his chil-

dren had never deceived, or disobeyed, or otherwise failed in filial duty to a confiding father, would be revoked when his tale was told.

The anguished consciousness extorted from him a woful cry, at which the old man started upon his seat.

“Father! father! if I had known this before! known how entirely I might love and trust you!”

“Louis Suydam!” The tenderness and the tremor were gone from the authoritative voice. “What is the meaning of this, boy? Have you disgraced the honorable name you bear? Let me hear the truth!”

Louis met his stern eye modestly, but firmly.

“I have done nothing disgraceful, father! nothing dishonorable! I may have been imprudent, — I know I have been reckless, — but dishonor is a word of which I have never, for myself, learned the first letter. You may judge me severely when you hear the history of my life during your absence, but you will acquit me of falsehood or meanness. You may think that I have abused your generous confidence in my ability for self-government. And, before I say more on this head, let me remind you how young and inexperienced I was to be left without home or adviser — the irresponsible master of my actions and income.”

His father stopped him.

“I will hear no more. I believed, as you have said, in your capacity for self-government. I have not altered that belief. I was persuaded that you would rebel if I placed a guardian over you while I was away. Ask yourself if your brother John or my lawyer would have been an acceptable mentor; if you would not have plunged into wilder excess from sheer perversity, if I had empowered either to keep watch upon your comings and goings, your companions and expenditures. You fancied yourself neglected and forgotten. Know that you were trusted instead. Know, likewise, that I accept, without another question or reply, your assertion that you have been guilty of nothing base or dishonorable while

you were your own master. The discipline has done you good. You would never have grown into perfect manhood of thought and bearing had you remained a part of your father's family. You have learned to swim alone. Few will do this unless forcibly cast off by their natural tutors, or driven to self-support by that most wholesome of teachers, necessity. Frederic was a mere parasite upon the parent trunk. He never earned a dollar for himself, or had an original idea. I do not want you to creep, like a whipped child, to my knee, with confessions of peccadilloes, into which you have been betrayed by the hot blood and high spirits of youth, and the ownership of more money than you knew how to take care of.

“I have Dr. Milnor's assurance that you have sustained an unblemished character in this community, where scandal-mongers by the score are always on the alert to swoop down, like greedy vultures, at the slightest flavor of a tainted reputation. There must be no confidences between us that will breed embarrassment in our future intercourse. You will understand me better when you come to think over this talk. I was a wild boy myself. I should have carried a softer heart in my bosom since, for all mankind, if my father had visited my petty transgressions with mercy, instead of lashing my self-respect into frenzy by his unsparing denunciations. I smart now when I recollect his upbraidings, and the burning sense of injustice raging in my soul as I left his presence. I never forgave him — no! not on his death-bed — for making me feel like a beaten hound in the eyes of every one who looked upon me, for the story of our disagreement quickly took wind. I shall not repeat the experiment upon the only human being whose love I care to retain.”

“This is extravagance of generosity!” began Louis, with a terrible effort. The thought of losing his father's esteem and provoking his wrath was growing more unendurable with each moment: each proof of the implicit faith in his honor and integrity he had construed into carelessness. “I should abuse it, were I to allow you to go on in your blind trust.”

"How much is it?" interrupted Mr. Suydam, pulling a portable writing-desk towards him, and fumbling in it for a blank check.

"Sir?"

"How much will cover your debts of honor?"

"I have none, sir. I never gamble."

"Ah! I did, at your age. There have been other expenses — other outlays, of which you think I would not approve?"

"I am afraid you would not, indeed, sir!" replied Louis. His heart beat so loud and thick as nearly to suffocate him.

"Will a thousand dollars straighten your affairs? If I add that sum annually to your bank account, will it meet your wishes?"

"If you will let me account to you for the manner in which it is spent, it will be more than sufficient to supply my every possible need."

"You want to return to your school-boy days!" Mr. Suydam was growing impatient. "If you are restrained from foolish expenditures solely by the fear of my displeasure, to whom will you account for your mismanagement of the valuable property I shall bequeath to you at my death? No! you must discard the swimming-belts and corks, or you will drown when they are suddenly taken away. I want you to learn to manage money, for you will be a rich man in the course of time."

Here was another opening, and Louis plunged in.

"You may not be satisfied with the person whom I may choose to help me spend the wealth you give me."

His father filled up the check, folded it, and handed it to him before replying.

"You approach a very serious subject now." His manner showed he felt what he said. "You will not think of marrying, of course, until you are, at least, nominally established in your profession. You are too independent in spirit — have too just a sense of propriety — to ask a woman to share the fortune of one whose income is contingent upon his father's whims. I

speaking now of your position in the eye of the world — not in that of my family. While you are single, you are a member of my household, but when you talk of maintaining one of your own, the case is altered. Not that I would have you live a bachelor a day longer than is required by self-respect and common expediency. If your first half-year's practice should bring you in one fourth of your present allowance for the same period, I will give you a furnished house and other property, the income from which will amply justify you in bringing home a wife. Dr. Milnor tells me you have the reputation of a woman-hater. Taking it for granted, then, that my future daughter-in-law is not yet selected, I may impart to you my views on the subject. As to beauty and disposition, you must please yourself. With your refined taste, you would not choose an illiterate woman. My requisites are a good family — no vulgar parents or near connections — and fair standing in society. I have an invincible repugnance to *mésalliances*. They are the cause of one half the domestic misery one sees and hears of. Of this mistake but one Suydam has ever been guilty. That was my only brother. He married, for his second wife, a bold, flaunting trollop, who passed for a beauty in her set — said set being that to which his housekeeper belonged. Faugh! when I recall that creature's disgusting airs and fourth-rate graces, her petty tyrannies over her step-children, and her glozing arts practised upon the dotting victim of her sorceries, I am ready to swear that I would disinherit that son of mine who should bring to me a wife taken from a meaner sphere than that in which he has been reared. In this respect, if in no other, I hold that a parent has a right to be despotic, for the honor and reputation of his house are at stake. So, don't be casting your eyes upon any 'maiden of low degree.' It will not do!"

"I shall bear in mind your prohibition!"

Louis got up and sauntered to the window. The west was flaming with amber and crimson, and the autumnal tints of the trees in the quiet park were but a shade less vivid. Looking down into this, he saw a woman, neatly, but humbly clad,

sitting upon a bench under a tree; three or four children at play on the grass about her, picking up and making chaplets of the fallen leaves. The woman had a large basket beside her, and ever and anon glanced up and down the avenue, as watching for the approach of some one. Presently there appeared at the lower gate of the park the figure of a man. The mother must have uttered an exclamation, for the children left their play, and ran off to meet the new comer. He was dressed like a mechanic, and bore a tin pail in his hand, which had doubtless contained his dinner. The foremost urchin snatched this, as his father stooped to kiss him; the next seized the coat hung over his arm as his share of the spoils. The third, a wee toddler, he picked up and set upon his shoulder, and meeting his wife half way down the walk, took the basket from her. Thus laden and thus relieved, the happy family party passed under the windows of the grand stone mansion, talking and laughing, the plain face of the wife lifted to catch her husband's smile, each forgetful of the labors of the day in the sweetness of reunion at its close.

“He has a right to marry, and to proclaim his marriage; to appear publicly in his true character of husband and father,” thought the unhappy spectator; “for he maintains his wife and children by hard, honest toil—is not the sycophantic beneficiary of a rich father. If I were a day laborer and Ruby a washerwoman, she might sit beneath the trees waiting for me, and no spy in the window of the great house over the way wag his or her tongue against it. As it is—what must be the end of this?”

For years to come he would never be able to gaze from that casement into the park, in the cool, calm, and glow of sunset, without a return of the stricture that bound his heart now in snake-like folds, each tighter than the last, until respiration became agony—the effort to repress all visible sign of this almost an impossibility.

“You are too independent in spirit; have too just a sense of

propriety, to ask any woman to share the fortunes of one whose income is dependent upon his father's whims."

What had he done with independence and just judgment when he pressed on the mad marriage, that, in raising his wife temporarily above privation and the necessity of labor, had made of him a traitor or a pauper? His choice of characters lay between these. If he continued to conceal from his father his connection with the Sloanes, he was a dastard—doubly craven—to the wife who ought to stand upon his level in the sight of all mankind, and to the parent whose confidence in and lavish kindness to him were heaping fiery coals upon his shamed head. Yet if he divulged all, he exiled himself from that parent's heart and home; took the bread from the mouth of his wife, should she rely upon him for a maintenance; blighted his professional prospects; stood confessed, to the sneering world, an ignominious failure. Thanks to Ruby's incessant "must haves," he had not a dollar beyond his liabilities. Nick had judged correctly for once, in saying that he had practised rigid self-denial in his personal expenditures, that his wife might never apply to him for money in vain.

"A mad marriage!" Could any Bedlamite's be madder?

In all his self-upbraidings he stood up sturdily in defence of her he had described in his testamentary epistle as the "innocent participant in his offence." He shut his eyes determinedly to the array of wiles memory would have recapitulated as the lure to what bade fair to become his ruin.

"If I, with my knowledge of my father's prejudices and those of his class, was eager for the leap, what could be expected of her, poor, unsophisticated child, ignorant of all codes, except that governing boarding-school manners and usages? The worst of the business is, that she must suffer acutely, let me move in either direction. If I could talk for one hour with Mrs. Sloane, I should be less in the dark. I can do nothing without consultation with her and Ruby."

"What has soured you against the other sex?" inquired Mr. Suydam, breaking the brief silence.

“Perhaps the circumstance that I know so few,” answered Louis, with a short, forced laugh. “I don’t think I am acquainted with a dozen, all told.”

He came back to the fireplace.

“The odds then are greatly against the probability that you know one who is worth looking at or thinking about!”

Louis laughed again. “If aversions are hereditary, it would seem that I have a right to my contempt for womankind in the abstract — if the contempt does exist.”

“As to that, there are exceptions,” Mr. Suydam allowed. “Solomon had not found one in ten thousand, but there are many hundred thousands of women in the world. There was that American girl, in Florence, for instance —”

“Miss Barry?” interrogated Louis.

“Yes — a good, upright woman, and charming in manner as estimable in character. Even Frederic spoke reverently of womanhood when he mentioned or thought of her. It was a mystery at first to me that they loved one another, they were so unlike; but that they did, proved the existence of deeper mines of feeling, a truer appreciation of the beauty of virtue in his heart and mind, than I had ever credited him with before. She could not have surrendered her affections to an unprincipled or thoroughly selfish man. One scene is clearly present with me whenever I revert to his death. He sank very suddenly, you know, and himself aware of his condition before we were aroused to a knowledge of his danger, he begged that a Protestant clergyman might be sent for. A messenger was despatched, but it was impossible to obtain one. Miss Barry was standing by him bathing his face, — your mother being in hysterics in another room, — and he looked imploringly at her. ‘Can’t you say one word for me?’ he asked. Her answer was to kneel by his bed and pray, as I have never heard another mortal pray. Her voice is exquisitely clear and sweet, and it sounded like celestial music, as she besought dying strength and grace for the passing soul. I was nearer to being a Christian at that moment than I shall

ever be again, I fear. When she arose, the poor boy said, 'Thank you!' and closed his eyes in meditation or slumber for perhaps a minute. Then he opened them, — they were glazing fast, but he strained them to see her once more, — spoke her name, and expired!"

Engaged as he was with other and foreign themes, this narrative took strong hold of Louis's imagination. That the incident related had affected his father so powerfully was doubtless one reason of this. Although not what is popularly known as a sceptic, Mr. Suydam paid so little external regard to religion, as to earn for him the reputation of a Deist, or, as some described him, an "utterly irreligious man." Mrs. Suydam went stately to church when she was in the humor; when the weather was not too hot, too cold, too wet, or too dusty, and when neither the milliner nor dressmaker had disappointed her on Saturday night. But of family religion there was not even the poor homage of a pretence of remembering the Being who had given them life, and crowned each day with his abundant gifts. Not a prayer was breathed under the venerable roof-tree from the beginning to the end of the year, except the Ave Marias and other formulas pattered in the servants' rooms. That a sexagenarian, who had thus lived and thus ordered his household, should have been won to open praise of the power and beauty of the Christian faith by the prayer of a girl, breathed tearfully above the pillow of his dying son, was to Louis a curious spiritual phenomenon.

He, too, dreamed the scene over to himself, while the red waves of sunlight passed from the chamber walls, and the fire began to shine more brightly, the wind, meantime, keeping up a low hum in the wide-mouthed chimney. Winter and summer the wind was never voiceless to a silent thinker beside that hearth. What stories was it crooning to-night to the hoary-headed man who bent towards the grate, eyes intent, yet sad, and seemed to hearken?

"I like it," he said, with characteristic bluntness.

"Like what, sir?"

“The song of the wind! It has been company for me here many an evening, when you lads were asleep or at your lessons, and madam abroad at a party. It is difficult to say when a man is most lonely, single or married. Should you never be cured of your misogynistic heresy, you will hardly be more solitary in your old age than he, who, with wife, children, and wealth, which the law adjudges to be his, yet comes back to his native land, after long wanderings, to find his most familiar welcome in the friendly embrace of an antique chair, the smile of the fire between the bars of an old-fashioned grate, and the cry of the wind in the chimney.”

CHAPTER XII.

WHO of us that has outlived childhood, and the dreamless sleep which so medicines sorrow that the morning succeeding a night of weeping is like an April sky, the fairer for the shower, — who of us that has taken up for himself the burden of life, has not known the horror of awakening from the merciful oblivion that has drowned for a few hours his sense of suffering, to find the care or the woe he fought with his latest conscious thought, crouched, a watchful panther at his bedside, ready to seize him by the throat so soon as the heavy eyes shall unclose? The strong man groans aloud at the cruel surprise, and his heart is, as was Nabal's, water within him, as he remembers that this is but the prefatory onslaught of the day's battle. The weak woman flings herself back upon her pillow, and sobs her dismay and her longing for the everlasting sleep. Two hours hence, when the physical tone of the sufferer is partially restored, and, as a natural sequence, the nobler part of the human machine in better working order, the cloud will lift or be thinner. But life is, at the best, a terribly tame affair before the bath and breakfast; and if it is near the worst, or even moderately out of joint, it is to the just unsealed optics one hideous mass of disorder and hopeless complications.

Louis Suydam awoke early on the morning after his oddly confidential talk with his father; awoke, and feeling the panther's teeth in his throat, and his claws in his breast, sat up in vague consternation, not recollecting at once where he was, or what dreadful thing had happened over night; awoke, at

length, mind and body, and turned his face to the wall with the moan of a frightened child who lacks courage to look his assailant in the eyes.

Superadded to the wretchedness induced by the whole tenor of his father's conversation, and particularly that part of it relative to the qualifications of his imaginary daughter-in-law, was the depressing thought that he had let slip the best, what might prove to be the only, opportunity of confession that would ever be vouchsafed him. By his cowardly silence he had committed himself to an assent to the propositions laid down, and the deductions drawn therefrom, by his father. The subject of his life during his parent's absence was, henceforward, a closed volume, not to be reopened except by violence. His father understood that their mutual confidence was complete; and, having withdrawn his attempted protest against this conclusion, in what terms, or at what season, should he renew it? Yet, without this explanation, his intercourse with his relatives must be a living lie. All that was just and manly in his nature revolted at the idea of accepting the bountiful provision made for his personal needs by one who would not have given a penny for the support of Nick Sloane's child. On the other hand, if he rejected it, and gave his reasons for the refusal, he might be compelled to sue for a shelter and supper that night from the redoubtable farrier. His surprise at, and the gentle emotions awakened by, the extreme kindness of his father's references to himself, and his noble leniency to what he catalogued as youthful follies, did not deceive Louis into the hope that he would retract, at his instance or entreaty, one jot or iota of his condemnation of *mésalliances*. It was a proverb among Mr. Suydam's acquaintances, that he never revoked an expressed dogma. With him, as with most obstinate men, principles were step-children, dutifully looked after; but his prejudices were bantlings of his own begetting.

In a miserable maze as regarded his actions and his fate, Louis finally arose, dressed, and left his room, intending to tone his nerves by a morning walk. Meeting a servant upon

the stairs, he inquired for what hour breakfast had been ordered.

“Nine, sir,” was the answer. “Mrs. Suydam has her chocolate sent to her room at half-past seven, but the family breakfast is nine until further orders.”

Louis drew out his watch. It lacked a quarter of seven still; and, obeying the impulse then uppermost in his mind, — the single fixed idea, — namely, that he must not settle a question fraught with immense importance to Ruby without granting her a voice in the decision, he took a resolution.

“An hour for going and returning will give me an hour with them!”

Five minutes sufficed to bring him to a livery stable noted for fast hacks; five more put the best trotter in the establishment before a light buggy, and Louis in the seat. The day was fine as its predecessor, but the rider saw neither blue heights nor silver river.

“He’s one as gives his whole mind to his horse, when he’s a-speeding him,” remarked one drover to another, as his beeves scattered to the right and left before the flying hoofs and flashing wheels.

What thought the young man devoted to his quadruped ally was applied to the surest method of gaining Meadow Cottage in season to secure the needful interview. As to carriage and gait, he let the creature make his own selection, provided he did not, in following the bent of his judgment, diminish his speed.

Nick was in the barnyard, looking after the foundered gray and his invalid associates.

“You’ll bring me a patient some day, if you’re not more careful about overheating and winding your animals,” he said, with a grin, feeling the reeking sides of the trotter. “It’s very good in me to tell you so, for the more horses there is foundered, the better for the trade. I don’t know as Ruby is awake yet. You’d better run in and see for yourself. She’s been in a terrible taking to have you come. Leave your folks all well?”

In rising and intense disgust, Louis mentioned that his horse was not to be unharnessed, as he had only an hour to spare; added that his father and mother were in their accustomed health, and complied with the invitation to "run in." Mrs. Sloane opened the side door for him, smiling cordially, although her gaze was keenly anxious.

"I will call Ruby," she said, going towards the hall.

Louis stayed her. "I will go up at once, if you please."

Up he went, three steps at a bound, and was met in the narrow passage at the top by his wife — a blue dressing-gown thrown on over her night-dress, her naked feet thrust into slippers, and her wealth of dusky-red hair rolling over her shoulders.

"My darling husband!" she screamed, falling upon his breast. "I thought you were nev-nev-er co-co-coming again!" with rising sobs.

"Not so bad as that, I hope," said Louis, affecting a rallying tone. "I am sorry you have had such uncharitable doubts of me, while you have not been out of my thoughts for an hour of the day."

He sat down by the open window of her chamber, and she dropped upon his knee, her arm about his neck, her cheek laid to his. She had not often caressed him in this fashion since the wane of the honeymoon, and reluctant as he was to admit an unfavorable thought of her, he did wonder if she imagined he would be harder to hold to his allegiance in consequence of recent events.

"I must seem abrupt to you this morning, pet," he interrupted her cooing to say. "I have a story to tell, and very little time in which to repeat it."

He narrated the substance of the conversation of the previous night, softening his father's most stringent comments upon the folly of unequal marriages, but dwelling most strongly upon the fulness of his unmerited confidence in his son's independence and honor.

Ruby heard all with ill-dissembled mortification. This re-

verse of her expectations, following upon the elation of yesterday, was too much for her self-command. The tears flowed in obedience to dramatic rule at the beginning of her transport, but she cried like a thwarted baby before the tale was finished.

“So you mean to throw me over! I always said how this wretched business would end! that you were like all the rest of the men — false, and hollow-hearted, and mean,” she exclaimed, slipping from her perch to the floor, in abandonment of grief. “I wish I had never seen you! I wish I had never been born!”

Louis did not offer to lift her. Without leaving his chair, he eyed her gloomily, as she rocked herself to and fro, and bewailed her evil case.

“And you sit there like an automaton, and never give me a word of comfort!” she cried, removing her hands from her face, and looking up wrathfully.

“I have nothing to say, Ruby! You believe the worst of me — so much worse than I intended my conduct to you should be, that I despair of clearing myself to you. When you are ready to listen to reason, we will confer as to the best course for us to pursue. While you are trying to compose yourself, I will go down and talk the matter over with your mother.”

He came back in twenty minutes with Mrs. Sloane. Ruby still sat upon the floor, her head laid on a chair. She was crying, as if the reservoir of tears had just been tapped. Her mother approached her, placed herself in the chair, and took the bowed head into her lap.

“Darling!” she said, “we — your husband and I — want, above everything else, to meet your wishes and consult your true interests in all we do in this affair. I have had my fears that trouble such as this would arise after Mr. Suydam’s return to this country. We have often spoken of it together, you recollect, so it should not find us unprepared. I sympathize in your sorrow, and had you been personally slighted, I should resent the conduct of your father-in-law more than you possibly could. But, consider, sweet child, that he does not even suspect

your existence. The question is whether it is wiser to reveal everything to him now, and bear the consequences, or to wait patiently until your husband can make his way in life, should his father disown him."

"He shouldn't have married me if he hadn't meant to own me to his family—the purse-proud aristocrats! How I hate them!" protested Ruby, stormily.

"I agree with you in your first proposition," replied Louis. "Having had occasion to reiterate this several times already, we can dispense with further discussion of that part of the subject."

Mrs. Sloane held up a warning finger. He had made known to her his dilemma, and his remorseful distress at the unpleasant position in which his unseemly haste had placed her daughter, in such a different spirit from that he manifested in Ruby's presence, that this sarcasm shocked her.

"I beg your pardon," he met the reproof by saying. "But my time is too precious to be wasted in sparring. Ruby, do you hear what I say?"

He stooped, and would have taken her hand; but she snatched it away with a furious sob.

Louis continued. "I wish you to believe one declaration of mine, if no more. I am perfectly willing to leave the decision of this question entirely to you. This is but simple justice. If, after hearing your mother's statement and mine, you request me to publish our marriage, I will inform my father of it within the next hour. As to my inability to maintain you, without his assistance, I have no fear, if you have none. I have my health, my head, my hands, and there is work in this land for every strong, willing man. I can get a situation as a clerk, an accountant, a druggist's assistant—or, if nothing better offers, obtain employment as a day laborer."

Ruby shuddered and put her fingers in her ears. Louis gravely pulled them out before proceeding.

"I promise that you shall not suffer. Nor shall I complain to you that I have sacrificed anything in yielding to your

request. The error was mine. The punishment should fall most heavily upon me. I wish I could bear it all!"

Ruby, who had listened pretty quietly for some seconds, recommenced sobbing grievously. The mother patted her head, and whispered soothingly in her ear. The whisper was a plea for Louis, for she broke forth in vindictive retort.

"I don't care if I am hard upon him! He ought to be ashamed of himself! He deserves to suffer, and I hope he does! He has brought me to a pretty pass—hasn't he? I must either starve in a pigsty or be disgraced! I didn't marry a clerk, or a druggist's apprentice, or a day laborer. I thought I was marrying a gentleman. It appears that I was mistaken!"

"You were," answered Louis, imperturbably. "No gentleman could ever be guilty of a folly that would compel him to stand quietly by and hear such aspersions of his character and honor as I have had heaped upon me this morning."

Mrs. Sloane repeated her deprecating gesture.

"The poor child is wild with trouble!" she pleaded. "Let the question rest for one day more. When she is composed, she will write to you—or I will."

"So be it!"

Louis bowed, turned on his heel, and quitted them.

Ruby dissolved her washed eyes in a fresh torrent of grief when the rush and clatter upon the turnpike told them that he had indeed accepted the terms of probation. Simultaneously with this, Nick stalked into the chamber.

"Come, come! It's my turn to know what the row is. Old fellow up there in town balky, or has the young one got his heels over the traces?"

John Suydam, Jr., set out for his western home at noon that day. During the morning he seized a chance to say a word in private to his brother.

"The governor is breaking up, Louis," remarked the dutiful eldest hope, filliping his cigar. "The doctor hemmed and hawed last night when I pressed him for his candid opinion

of his situation. Finally, he confessed to me that the second stroke is a mere question of time. It may be brought on tomorrow by any extraordinary excitement. It may be warded off for years by careful management. He thought — the doctor, I mean — that it was lucky father was in your hands. It is a nice thing for the patient, no doubt; but I wouldn't exchange places with you, old fellow, for two thirds of the estate. It is a tremendous responsibility. One wouldn't like to feel as if he were guilty of parricide because he happened to pass a sharp word with his paternal progenitor, and the latter was found speechless in his bed next morning. You are, apparently, in high favor at present. I hope everything will work smoothly. Only, don't forget that our respected parent has a peppery temper of his own. It will not do to presume upon his new-born amiability. It will prove more evanescent than Ephraim's goodness."

Father, mother, and son dined together that day, and Louis already had exercise for the tactics recommended by his brother. Mr. Suydam had more patience with everybody else than with his wife. Her sentimental platitudes wearied him; her attempts at sprightliness were the signal for dogged gloom on his side; and we have had a specimen of the toleration with which he treated her imitations of the jargon she had caught from Frenchy-German *savans*. As for her, she was alternately afraid and disdainful of him; evincing the one phase of feeling by a martyr air of submission and profound depression of spirits; the other, by a show of frivolity and bravado, unbecoming a lady of any age, much less one of her mature years and high standing in society.

She had a pile of letters by her plate at dinner — the epistles of condolence etiquette exacts from those who aspire to the friendship of afflicted fashionists. She read bits of nearly all — some entire, from address to signature — while the courses were being removed, seasoning the most pathetic with a sigh and the suspicion of a tear. This she declared to be "truly touching;" that, "feeling-fraught;" the majority were "thoroughly ap-

preciative," and the budget, taken *en masse*, "extremely gratifying." At the bottom of the heap was an envelope she scanned through her eye-glass for a half minute before remarking, —

"Why, this is excessively odd! 'Mrs. *Louis* Suydam!' I thought everybody on *this* continent knew, or ought to know, your name, my dear! Let me see who my forgetful correspondent is!"

"Perhaps it is *Mr.*," said Louis, respectfully.

Mrs. Suydam had her finger under the flap of the cover, but turned it over again at this suggestion.

"It may be. Look at it for yourself! Is that a flourish to the *r*, or is it an *s*?"

Louis changed color very slightly when he saw the handwriting.

"This is for me, madam."

He laid it beside his plate without opening it.

"Isn't that too much like a woman?" snarled Mr. Suydam. A second more, and you would have been prying into your son's correspondence."

"Who would not have been severe upon my inadvertence," was the response. "I never dared open poor dear Fred's billets — he had so many ladies upon his list; but a peep into Louis's missive would have revealed nothing more interesting than a scientific treatise upon the management of gunshot wounds, submitted for his criticism by some emulous fellow-student. You see he displays no impatience to master the contents."

"I see that he is too gentlemanly to break the seal, and examine a private letter in the presence of others, unless requested to do so," said the father, irascibly. In a modified tone, he bade his son "read his letter. It might require prompt attention."

Thanking him for the permission, but muttering something about "unimportant," Louis unclosed his wife's note.

"Precious love," she wrote. "Can you *ever*, ever forgive

my insane behavior of this morning? Indeed, indeed, darling, your poor 'pet' was nearly *distracted*! Do with and for me as you will. I submit to your *superior* judgment. Only say that you forgive, and that you will come very, *very* soon to convey that forgiveness, in person, to your devoted Ruby.

"P. S. I will not sign myself 'Wife,' lest you should object to my continued use of the name. I am sick, weary, and lonely. When will you come? R."

Louis pocketed the billet with an expression of countenance so ambiguous as to attract his father's notice and excite his mother's curiosity.

"Not a very pleasing document, if one may judge from the contortion of your upper lip and the elevation of your eyebrows," said the latter. "I trust you have had no bad news!"

"And *I* trust that you will not consider yourself bound to account to your mother for every note you receive," interposed Mr. Suydam. "Your son is a *man*, madam, free to correspond with whomsoever he pleases, and to come and go at his will."

"Which last-named privilege, I regret to say, I must plead, this evening," said Louis. "This note is to remind me of a conditional engagement made some time since. I was to be notified at what time my presence would be demanded, and this is the notification," reproducing it, and eying it with apparent disfavor.

"An engagement!" Mrs. Suydam was horror-stricken. "Who can be so lost to all sense of propriety and humanity as to invite you, on the very day after your brother's funeral? Really, this surpasses all other American Gothisms I ever heard of!"

"Madam," — if her lord did not say, "You are a consummate fool," he looked it, — "will you give this one of your children credit for a grain of sense — a spark of decency? I do not ask your charity for the besotted American public, who, one would imagine, to hear you talk, had all been abroad, and parted with what brains they began life with. For your enlightenment, let me explain that medical students have evening

engagements, into which it is not best for ladies, with exquisite nerves, to inquire too closely. You have heard of such things as 'subjects,' perhaps, that do not pertain to your favorite subjective and objective prattle."

Mrs. Suydam had recourse to her smelling-bottle.

"I excuse you from further definition of the term 'engagement,' Dr. Suydam! In well-bred circles it has but one meaning."

With a sigh of desperation, Mr. Suydam arose. Louis would have been amused by the absurd dialogue, had he not seen how his father's hand trembled as he pulled himself to a standing posture by a tight grip of the arm of his chair.

"My business is not imperative," he observed, as they passed into the library. "I shall have other opportunities of being present at similar scenes," — his lip curling; "I will gladly remain with you this evening."

"By no means! You are very thoughtful — very kind! but I would not hamper you in the slightest degree. When you desire to pass an hour in my study, and can do this without neglecting your duties proper, I shall be happy to see you. But do not feel bound to devote any set portion of your day to me. I am used to solitude. To-night I expect a couple of old friends so you may set your mind at ease. You have a pass-key — haven't you? You will be out late, I suppose."

"I think I shall."

Louis's reluctance to go was augmented, not lessened, by his father's hearty consent to his absence.

"Exactly!" nodded Mr. Suydam. "I understand the need of circumspection, while the vulgar prejudice against the necessary course of surgical preparation remains unaltered. We shall expect you to breakfast. Good night, and a successful evening to you!"

"Ruby was right when she accused me as a false-hearted hypocrite!" thought Louis, as he stood on the pavement without the livery stable, awaiting the appearance of his roadster, — Flyaway, the lively trotter of the morning not being the most

suitable companion of a night journey. "I am a coward! an ungrateful, lying craven! I know that, beyond the shadow of a peradventure. Self-knowledge is said to be useful, but I doubt if one is the wiser man for realizing the certainty of his utter baseness. If I ever grieve that father wilfully, I ought to have my brains blown out — if I have any! I have serious misgivings on that score when I recollect some things I have said and done."

The night was very black, and the gloom was beginning to spit fine rain into his face when he started. By the time he caught the earliest glimpse of the lighted end window of Meadow Cottage, this was thicker and heavier, and his hair and mustache were dripping with water the east wind had driven against him.

He was expected. Between the slats of the parlor blinds issued streaks of light, and the kitchen windows were rosy red. So was the door, thrown wide open at the sound of wheels, while Ruby's voice was full of tremulous joy.

"You naughty, naughty boy!" she upbraided him, when they were together in the parlor, she again upon his knee, both arms around his neck. "How could you fly off in such a passion this morning, at a few words spoken by your silly, hysterical little wife? I haven't an idea of what I said, I am sure; but mamma says I carried on shockingly, and that you were very angry. I shall always maintain that it was because we had not breakfasted before our talk. We will be wiser another time — won't we, dearest? To think how much misery a cup of coffee might have saved us! Now let me tell you what we — mamma and I, pa counting for nobody in such a delicate matter — have resolved upon, with your majesty's permission, of course. We will just live on as we are, until, as your favorite Micawber says, 'something turns up.' We are no worse off than we were last week, — better off, for your income is larger. Trying as it is to me to see you so seldom, why, since it is for my Louis's real good, I will submit to it. When you are an M. D., — and remind me to tell you some-

thing funny about that presently, — we can look a little farther ahead. Our sky might be much darker. We might be estranged in heart as well as separated in person. I could *not* survive that! So, dear, think of your birdie, as singing away bravely in this wretched old cage. I am ashamed of it only when you come to see me, love. It is *such* a contrast to your home! I was there yesterday, you know!”

“ I saw you.”

“ At the house?”

“ No — at the cemetery.”

Something indefinable in his manner arrested Ruby's volubility.

“ Why shouldn't I have gone, Louis?” she asked, half offended.

“ I have found no fault with your going.”

“ I longed so to see you, lovey! Nothing else took me there!”

Louis drew her towards him, impulsively.

“ Dear wife, let us be sincere and true henceforward in our dealings with one another! Tell me all that is in your mind, and I promise never to chill you by doubt or coldness. I am sick at heart of double-dealing and trickery. It is a new business to me, and I do not see where it is to end. Heaven help me!”

Frightened by his vehemence, and the shadow that settled upon his features with the last words, Ruby refrained from a direct reply. She smoothed his hair in all directions, pressed her cherry-ripe lips to his forehead, eyes, and mouth in playful trifling, before she offered verbal consolation.

“ Brighter days will come!” she prophesied. “ Your father will relent, or — ” hesitating. “ He is very infirm — is he not? If anything were to happen to him — ”

“ Ruby, do not wish for my father's death! That is *murder*!”

Instinctively, he put her from him, and stood up, pale and agitated, shaking back the disordered hair from his brow.

“ Again I say, Heaven help me! for Heaven is my witness that I never dreamed into what depths of wickedness one false step would conduct me!”

CHAPTER XIII.

ANOTHER Thanksgiving day had come and gone, and upon the eve of still another Dr. Louis Suydam drove home at nightfall after a fatiguing course of country visits.

Dr. Milnor delegated this class of duties to his young partner in consideration of his own age, and the infirmities that were gradually encroaching upon his once vigorous frame and robust health. His patients found less fault, and manifested more satisfaction, at the substitution of a stranger for an old and distinguished practitioner, than he had foreseen. The rumor of Dr. Suydam's remarkable talents had, thanks to the prestige of the family name and affluence, spread extensively through Kräwen and the adjacent townships. A difficult surgical operation, performed, it is superfluous to say, upon a charity patient, had contributed marvellously to the growth of his infant reputation. Barely six months had elapsed since he received his diploma, yet he already occupied a place in the public sight as a "rising man." Kräwen papers had departed from the straight line of reportorial and editorial comment to notice "our gifted young townsman," and his brother physicians looked askance at him, than which no surer criterion of incipient popularity could be desired. His deportment was not that of a novice in the arena of life. The severity of his professional studies, said his admirers, — a disposition naturally morose, and the ascetic habits he had affected from his school days, said others, — had wrought in him the bearing and speech of dignified maturity. His mien and features were noble, all agreed in declaring, and his known disinclination to

general society caused him to be the more eagerly run after by fair husband-hunters and sagacious mammas, alive to the extreme eligibility of old Mr. Suydam's favorite son.

He kept his own equipage now — a present from his father on the day his name appeared upon the door-plate of Dr. Milnor's office. He left this at the spacious stables in the rear of the Suydam grounds, gave his orders for the night, unlatched a gate in the garden wall, and entered a walk leading to the back portico of the house. He moved slowly — the gait of a man who, at every footstep, dragged a lengthening chain of care. As he neared the dwelling, he became suddenly aware that it did not wear its every-night aspect. The windows of both lower and upper stories were illuminated — a noteworthy occurrence in the left wing, wherein were situated the state guest chambers. The glare showed his frown of vexation as the meaning of the festive appearances was revealed by recollection of what he seldom troubled his memory to retain — to wit, certain sayings and doings of his mother. For the past week, the exemplary matron's incessant theme in the home circle and parlor had been the expected visit of a party of friends who had sojourned abroad for nearly four years. They had been in the country but a month, and she was delighted to announce to those of the community who had a right, by virtue of rank, to participate in her raptures, that there were strong grounds for hope that they would take up their permanent abode in Kräwen. As a preliminary favor to the highly honored city, "dear Mrs. Barry" had consented to spend a couple of months under her roof, her cherished guest.

The power of abstraction had always been Louis's to a remarkable, and, as he now considered, an enviable extent. When his mother began to "talk Barry," he raised the draw-bridge commanding the citadel of thought, and remained undisputed master of the fortress until signals from without denoted that matters more interesting had been broached.

"Those confounded cosmopolitans!" he muttered, savagely, standing still in the path, with more than half a mind to beat

a retreat until some hours of domestication had rubbed off the gloss of their reception. "However, it must come, sooner or later!" he then said, in forcible bitterness. "I may as well make myself presentable, and get the thing over."

"Dinner has not been served yet, sir," said the footman who answered his bell, when the necessary changes in his toilet were made. "Mrs. Suydam ordered it to be put back two hours, that the ladies might be rested before coming down."

"The ladies! Is not Mr. Barry here, too?"

"No, sir — only Mrs. and Miss Barry. They arrived at four o'clock."

"Very well! You can go, Tom. So!" he added to himself, "the incomparable Frank is not of the party! There is genuine comfort in that! he would have been my especial care. I have endured, uselessly, the anguish of picturing myself as the cicerone of the travelled youngster. I heard my mother mention twenty-two as his age. He must be a dilettante of the first water after his European experience. As to the girl — she ought to be wearing the willow still for poor Fred, and not require the services of an escort to above two parties per week."

He halted without the door of the drawing-room to listen for the hum of tongues. All was silent. The apartment was brilliantly lighted, and he was still within the portal when he discovered that it was not untenanted, as he had believed. Directly beneath the chandelier in the front parlor, engaged in pleased contemplation of the flowers in the marble basin that had captivated Ruby's fancy, was a young lady. She wore a black silk dress; she was about an inch below the medium height of well-developed womanhood; her hair was short and wavy, like a boy's; she had pleasant gray eyes and a bright face.

Thus much Louis saw ere she took a step forward — the initiative rupture of their strangerhood which his surprised pause hindered him from making.

"We should not need a formal introduction," she said, in a sweet, thrilling voice. "I have often heard your parents and brother speak of you, if you are, as I suppose, Dr. Suydam."

You may have heard, through the same medium, the name of Frank Barry."

"It is one of our household words," rejoined Louis, with grim pleasantry. "As is also yours, Miss Barry," bowing.

The young lady looked puzzled.

"I fear that we do not quite understand each other yet. I am Frank—not Sue. My sister is in New Orleans. We have relatives there."

To this lucid statement Louis returned first a stare, then a laugh.

"I have made an awkward blunder, indeed! I thought, until this instant, that you were —"

"Francis, instead of the owner of the sister prænomen," finished Miss Barry, joining in his merriment. "The mistake is a frequent one. I hope we shall be as good friends as if I were my own brother."

It was easy to tell how she had earned a name that sat upon her as no other could have done, thought Louis, scanning her open, fearless visage, when she had turned the conversation upon the beauty and variety of the flowers. Direct and simple as a child's, her manner interested him at once from its very dissimilarity to that of any other woman he had ever seen.

"When I came into this room a while ago, I found a black-eyed Hollandaise arranging these," she said, touching the perfumed petals with the tip of her finger, the lingering caress of a true flower-lover. "She was profuse in apologies for her delay in bringing the flowers, but upon my comforting her by representing that we should be the gainers by her accidental detention, since even freshly-cut blossoms soon lose their richest aroma in the atmosphere of a heated parlor, she became delightfully communicative. The result of our ten minutes' conversation was an invitation to visit her. And I mean to go very soon."

"Ah! mein goot Katrine, as her husband names her in every third breath!" answered Louis. "She is an ancient retainer of our family."

“She told me she nursed your brother.” The full gray eyes wandered — no! went straight to Fred’s portrait. “She des-canted, moreover, upon your resemblance to him, which I do not see. She interested me greatly. Your Kräwen roses are very beautiful. There is one variety here with which I am not familiar.”

Louis knew the name, and supplied it.

They were still standing by the vase, and talking over the contents, when the lady of the mansion appeared, ushering in her other guest.

The famous Mrs. Barry was a faded little woman, with a round pink spot upon each cheek, an inimitable French cap set upon the back of her head, and a fan in her hand. Louis noticed the latter appendage to her dress as unnecessary upon a November evening, even in a house where the temperature was uniform and bland as was that of the Suydams. He had yet to learn that without it she was no more Mrs. Barry than was Madame De Staël, Corinne, in summer without her green twig, and in winter her twisted allumette. Whether or not the ancient coquette had, in youth, conned the manual of the fan exercise, as described by the witty Spectator, it is certain she had brought it as nearly to perfection as had the drill-sergeant, whose promised treatise upon the “Passions of the Fan” is now, unhappily for the students of the interesting art, out of print. The wardrobe of the transatlantic lady boasted not only a fan to match every dress, but, satirical paupers in such wealth asserted; one to suit every shade of emotion. Her robe, this evening, was black silk, richer in gimp and lace than her daughter’s; and after acknowledging the introduction to Louis by a deep reverence, and laying within his hand the tips of three gloved fingers, she waved towards him a fan of black scented wood, tufted with white feathers and spangled with silver dots.

“There is melancholy pleasure in this reunion, my dear Dr. Suydam,” she said in accents the gallants of her bellehood had compared to sighing zephyrs, but which had, through over-

much practice and the asthmatic tendencies of advancing years, degenerated into a wheezing whisper. "Your dear mother and I have tasted much sorrow and the many joys in company. I am charmed to find her so well — enchanted — yes! enraptured to observe that her magnificent constitution and her perennial flow of spirits have not succumbed to the crushing" — squeezing both palms together, the closed fan between them, and bearing very hard upon the word at the same moment — "the *crushing* pressure of an affliction the most ineffable. And yourself, Dr. Suydam — how vividly you bring to the memory the speaking image of your deplored brother! True, I see not his dark hair and the exact contour of features; but there is a resemblance that appeals, with every glance, to a heart that still cherishes his remembrance."

She sank into a lounging chair, and, unfurling her fan, motioned him to a neighboring divan. Internally anathematizing her as the most ridiculous compound of folly and affectation he had ever beheld, he obeyed the regal gesture, and submitted to boredom for the fifteen minutes that intervened from the moment of her entrance until dinner was announced.

A French word rarely passed Mrs. Barry's lips in the society of those who were supposed to be comparatively unlearned in a tongue which had, she gave everybody to understand, become more natural to her usage than her real vernacular. Mrs. Suydam took refuge continually in the supple language from the "crudities and coarseness of English — the speech of boors and ruffians, and incapable of expressing the subtler phases of passion and feeling." Mrs. Barry, by refraining punctiliously from such lapses, expressed ingeniously and effectually her thorough Gallicism. The structure of her sentences reminded one of a school-girl's literal translation of Pasquelle's or Choquet's phrases, and testified that, while she numbered the Anglican dialect upon her list of acquired languages, she thought in French. Nor did she, in word, join with Mrs. Suydam in her unfavorable judgment of America and Americans. A genuine Parisienne is too polite to carp openly at the toilet of a Hot-

tentot, or the banquet of a cannibal. But by her elaborate apologies for the barbarisms that met her enlightened eyes at every turn, and her overstrained praises of whatever was to the aforesaid optics worthy of commendation, she contrived to cast more odium upon the land and the semi-civilized inhabitants than did her bosom friend's incessant fault-finding.

Mr. Suydam entered the drawing-room during her monologue to his son, who was not too much absorbed by the quality of his entertainment to overlook the marked cordiality of his father's manner to the younger lady. He seated himself beside her upon the sofa, and engaged her forthwith in a merry play of badinage — a renewal of the kindly-familiar intercourse of other days that betokened mutual esteem and enjoyment in the association. He gave his arm to her when they were summoned to dinner, and motioned to Louis to precede them with Mrs. Barry.

“She might have stepped off the lid of a Louis Sixteenth snuff-box!” was Dr. Suydam's graphic description to himself of the figure that returned a sweeping salam to his bow, as he offered his arm, and laid the same three gloved fingers upon his coat-sleeve, her long train trailing over the carpet, and her fan executing a solemn movement indicative of respect for her attendant and the family feast to which she was bidden.

“We cannot offer you *soupe aux grenouilles* and *filets en papillote*,” said the host to Miss Barry, when he had placed her at his left hand. “You must starve in this unhappy country upon plain roast and boiled.”

“The process of starvation will be pleasant, if it is to be achieved by such means,” she rejoined, gayly. “I am flattered that you recollect my fondness for French cookery.”

“I find the American cookery quite to my taste,” Mrs. Barry hastened to say. “I remember when it was frightful; when, so long as one had an abundance of the provisions upon his plate, it signified nothing how they were prepared. Now, I suffer seldom with the hunger. I can, almost always, secure sufficient that is tolerable to satisfy the cry of Nature for the

sustenance, and for the rest we are assured that the mortification of the body is for the good of the soul. One says that the abstinence makes spiritual, ethereal, celestial. My dear Frank there has the happiness of a good appetite — the appetite of youth and a sound health. Not that my health is feeble. Far from it. I am entirely well; altogether as it should be — but one is fastidious as one grows older. Is it not so, my friend?" to Mrs. Suydam.

"You are right, my dear. I look back with amazement to the zest with which I enjoyed the *soi-disant* good things of twenty years ago," said that lady, ingenuously. "I ask myself, Can I be the same person who ate what I pleased, without fear of unstrung nerves or beclouded brain; who slept six, seven, eight hours at night, and awoke refreshed in the morning? Now, the slightest fault in the preparation of my favorite dish deprives me of appetite; a trifling *contretemps* occurring at the season for my meal has the same effect, and should the like befall me near nightfall, although it may appear to others the veriest nothing, I should not close my eyes before three or four o'clock in the morning."

Mrs. Barry had laid down her soup-spoon and taken up her fan in an agitated flutter. Around the pink spots on her cheeks were rings of a different shade of red, for which she was not indebted to cosmetics. Her eyes were lively — triumphant.

"Ah, well, my child," she cried, nodding at her daughter, "what say you now to the pretty history you have heard from our dear Mrs. Suydam? to the unrest and the nausea, and the megrims and the palpitations and the terrors of the black night? I will tell you, Mrs. Suydam. Ah! assure yourself, Miss Barry, that I shall not conceal from Mr. Suydam, who so praises your 'common sense,' — I shall divulge to him even that you are one grand coward! She will have it that I shall consult a physician because I sleep not so well as herself; that I have the dreams which make me to cry out affrighted and start upon my pillow; that the visions of the past will not let the eyes to shut for hours and hours. 'My little one,' I say, it is nothing!

Have no fear! It is the sorrow common to those who have known the years and the care. I do not murmur! Why should your dreams be the less sweet because mine are sad? Taste the wine of life, my dear, and leave the lees for the beverage of those from whose road the sunshine of early morning has vanished, to return — never! never!”

This, airily, with a gesture of adieu over her shoulder to the departed sunshine, performed with the fan partly furled.

“It is the noonday and the afternoon sunshine that imparts most of warmth and blessing,” replied Frank, with exceeding gentleness. “If I had restless nights, I know who would be most ready to advise medical aid. Judge me by yourself, mother.”

She said “mother” in a way that developed to Louis’s comprehension a depth and richness of meaning in the word he had never until now suspected. Nothing could have been further removed from theatrical effect than her manner at all times, and no studied acting could be so impressive, when she was earnest in talk, as her simple diction. There was a slight, a very slight pause before pronouncing her mother’s name, and a downward inflection of the voice as meaning something dear and sacred. The tender respectfulness of her address invested the embodiment of artificiality and pretension opposite him with something like dignity.

“She gives you excellent advice, *mon amie*,” said Mrs. Suydam. “A system so finely attuned to the perception of the discords as well as the harmonies of our present state requires frequent adjustment and the extremest care. A single broken or frayed string will mar the effect of the whole.”

“You should drink lager bier, Mrs. Barry,” Mr. Suydam was driven by this last speech to suggest. “Your nervous system needs toning. My son here will tell you that, in nine cases out of ten, of neuralgia and general debility, a judicious tonic is worth more than all the drugs in the *materia medica*.”

“Mother disapproves of drugs,” observed Frank. “So do I. Are we rank heretics, Dr. Suydam?”

“If I were an apothecary, I should say, ‘Yes.’ As it is my duty to prescribe, not administer remedies, I may confess that I agree with you in part.”

“You must make an exception in favor of my invaluable valerian,” said Mrs. Suydam. “I owe many nights’ rest to this precious sedative.”

“What is it that it is?” questioned Mrs. Barry, intensely French in her bewilderment at the strange name. “Valeria! It has a pleasing sound. It makes one to remember the matron of Rome who saved the city — was it not? She who was the wife — or is it that she was the mother of Coriolanus?”

“Valerian!” emphasized Mrs. Suydam. “You must positively allow me to send a potion to your room, this very night, by Rosette. It is Heaven’s best blessing to suffering woman-kind. I would not part with my knowledge of its beneficent ministry for a dukedom.”

“Has it the bad taste?” queried Mrs. Barry, naïvely.

“It may be a little unpalatable at first, although Rosette has a recipe of her own for mixing it, disguising the taste with a few drops of orange-flower water, — likewise a soothing agent, — adding a teaspoonful of lemon-juice, a little sugar, and making all very cold with ice-water.”

“Ah! the incomparable Rosette! Did I tell you, dear friend, of the shock I sustained at the exact instant of embarkation, from the conduct the most traitorous of Mathilde? The ingrate informed me, with composure the most heartless, that she desired to marry Philippe, our courier, — also an ingrate, — and that he forbade her voyage to the barbarous America! I was desolate for ten days, and her place I can never supply — never! never!”

Frank was perfectly silent, and so grave as to draw Louis’s notice to her downcast eyes and compressed lips. There was a faint glow upon her forehead, too, that told her equanimity was disturbed.

“She is ashamed of the painted old parroquet!” thought the young man. “I honor her for the feeling.”

He was helped to a better understanding of the source of her disquiet by a discovery made on their passage back to the parlor.

“What a charming house!” commented Mrs. Barry, pinching his arm in subdued rapture. “A veritable antique! and more rich in the associations, I doubt not, than a modern abode.”

She raised her face towards his in speaking, and a puff of air, stirred by the restless fan, brought a familiar odor to his nostrils — familiar and peculiar — the close, pungent smell of valerian!

She had a right to use it if she liked. Hundreds of other women did it, and gloried in their acquaintance with the virtues of the marvellous restorative to worn and weak nerves. His mother had acknowledged her dependence upon it, and recommended it to her visitor. What whim was this feigned ignorance of the name and properties of the sedative? It was this pettiness of deceit that had called the flush of honest mortification to her daughter's face. Was the trivial incident a clew to the characters of both?

“To-morrow is Thanksgiving day — isn't it?” said Frank to Mr. Suydam, stopping again at the great, shallow chalice, with its prodigal wealth of flowers, and burying her face in the perfumed mass.

“It is. I accept your arrival as an auspicious omen for the year to come.”

“Thank you! I trust it is a promise of rest and home to us, too. We have not had a Thanksgiving in five years.”

“It was my intention to celebrate the day and your coming by a large party, but Mr. Suydam fancied, for reasons best known to himself, that you would be better pleased if this were postponed a week or two.”

Mrs. Suydam stated succinctly a difference of opinion, that had culminated in a hot matrimonial dispute.

“You are both very kind. I shall enjoy the family gathering, I am sure, however pleasant your projected party might have been.”

Frank never stooped to flatter, yet rarely offended those with whom she did not agree in sentiment. With all her independence of thought and action she was a true lady, and guarded the feelings of others as she did her self-respect.

“Our family gathering will not deserve the appellation, I fear!” sighed Mrs. Suydam. “John, my eldest son, lives too far away to be with us upon these time-honored anniversaries; and I do not even know that Louis will dine at home,” turning to him.

He looked disconcerted, Frank thought, but she was not versed in the variations of his countenance. He answered tranquilly and politely, —

“If I can, I will, certainly, mother. My time is not my own, you know.”

“These professional men are never at a loss for excuses,” Mrs. Suydam said, smiling faintly at her dear friend.

The fan described a conciliatory curve.

“Ah, then! what would you, my dear heart? Certainly not that the people should not perceive the abilities of our young doctor, and vie with one another to profit by them? But will they be sick — ill at ease — upon a holiday? What droll taste! Truly, the American is a unique. And he, without doubt, enjoys his method of making merry.”

“I rarely interfere with your professional engagements, Louis,” said Mr. Suydam. “But I sincerely hope we shall see you at dinner to-morrow. Choose your own hour. The rest of us can conform our unimportant arrangements to whatever time you may select.”

Louis plucked the ends of his mustache in thoughtfulness that was perturbed rather than dubious.

“I cannot be in until late in the afternoon, sir. It will not be best to wait for me. My design is to eat my Thanksgiving dinner at home. As a preliminary measure to securing this end, I will now excuse myself, and go to see what programme Dr. Milnor has sketched for to-morrow's operations.”

“I congratulate you, dear friend,” said Mrs. Barry, tap-

ping her hostess's wrist with the furred fan, by the time the door closed upon Louis. "Your son has the distinguished air, and in his face there is the intellect, the great intellect! His presence is noble, his conversation fascinating. You should be the happy mother!"

Mr. Suydam, his aversion to her more appeased than he would have owned by this tribute to the one he loved best of living beings, wheeled forward a chair for her occupancy, and Frank set a footstool before it.

"My child!" — the hurried breeze from the black sticks and white feathers blowing the girl's hair over her face as she stooped to perform the daughterly office, — "do you account me as one infirm or lame? I find Mr. Suydam's arm-chair all I could desire."

"I thought you might be tired, mother. My feet are often weary after a day in the cars. Sitting in one position so long cramps them."

"I am not tired — not at all. You should know that I have the wonderful constitution, the spirit, if not the body, of a young woman, Mr. Suydam."

Frank went to the window, pulled back the curtain, and stood gazing across the lighted street toward the dark park, watching, apparently, the elm branches, that, catching the lamp-light upon the nether side of each bough, made a ghostly network against the pitchy sky.

Louis saw her there, her figure strangely distinct upon the brilliant background of the illuminated rooms, and lifted his hat as he crossed her shadow on the pavement.

She did not change her attitude; had evidently not observed him. She was looking upward.

CHAPTER XIV.

THERE had been much talk during the past year of the Sloanes' removal to a residence more befitting their improved circumstances than the weather-beaten cottage on the marshes. Had the matter rested entirely with Ruby and her father, the change would have taken place long ago.

Nick had set his manly affections upon a "snug box" among the range of hills known as the Lemmon Mountains, lying to the south-west of Kräwen. There was a nice paddock, already enclosed, for the galled, halt, and foundered "animals;" roomy stables, and a trotting-park within a stone's throw of the outer fence. What more could vaulting ambition covet in the home of a retired gentleman living upon his son-in-law's money? Ruby had no objection to the designated locality, or to the dwelling. It was more than respectable. There was a flavor of "style" in the peaked gables with their fretted mouldings, and the engirdling piazza. Within doors, there were two parlors, a dining and sitting room, and four chambers above. She could be tolerably contented there while she continued to grovel as a caterpillar, she said flippantly to her husband and mother.

Louis replied merely, "I will take the house if you wish it."

Mrs. Sloane objected. The rent was high — preposterous for people of their means. Dr. Suydam might support his wife in whatever style he pleased, when he could take her to his home. While she remained an inmate of her father's house, he might pay her board and clothe her — nothing more.

"I, for one, will never consent to live upon your charity,"

she declared bravely — how bravely, Louis could not know unless he had gone behind the scenes that night, and for many days thereafter, and heard how she was badgered by daughter and husband.

She stood her ground — an example of successful resistance noteworthy for its rarity, where the opposing force was Ruby. Her point carried, she redoubled her efforts to reconcile the malcontent darling to her condition. Day by day, almost hour by hour, she represented to her that the period of her exile from her lawful abode was growing shorter; that the next week, the very morrow, might bring the welcome summons, and what matter then whether it found them domiciled in the villa on the hillside or in despised Meadow Cottage? She put Nick's surly protest down with a list of undeniable figures, demonstrating that the rent, furnishment, and cost of housekeeping in the villa would consume every dollar of Dr. Suydam's income, in addition to their scanty means.

“And leave nothing for your dress and travelling expenses, Ruby,” she threw in, parenthetically.

And when Ruby had done storming and crying, and wishing she had died without ever setting an eye upon one of the Suydams, she perceived, although she never openly recognized, the force of the interpolation. She adored fine clothes, and had a passion for travelling. Determined, since she must live like a water-rat in the miserable old hut, that she would seize upon whatever compensation chance afforded, she, in the January succeeding the return of the Suydams to America, angled successfully for an invitation from a school-fellow, whose home was in Savannah, and informed Louis, at his next visit, of her intention to accept it. He raised no obstacle, thereby piquing her into the declaration that she believed he was glad to be rid of her.

“Perhaps you would like me to stay away altogether!” she said, snappishly.

“You think no such thing,” rejoined the philosophical husband, taking out his pocket-book. “There are two hundred dollars for your outfit. If you want more, let me know.”

She did let him know in the course of a fortnight, for she was a fellow-sufferer with Miss Flora McFlimsey, according to her showing.

“I haven't a decent thing left over from last winter,” she told him; and since she was going — maybe for the only time in her life! — into fashionable society, she hated to appear shabby.

Louis's reply was to empty his pocket-book silently into her lap.

“Thank you!” she said, her eyes shining, as she unfolded one bank-bill after another. “You are a kind fellow, Louis! Yet” — struck by his taciturnity — “you don't enjoy giving me things as you used to before we were married. Then I did you a favor by accepting your presents. Now I have to ask for what I want.”

“I do not mean to be illiberal or ungracious,” he returned, a pained look crossing his face. “I aim to supply your wants whenever I can anticipate them.”

He never intimated to her then, or subsequently, that her requisitions upon his purse were excessive and unkind. He owed her all the consolation he could render her by any means, for her situation was a trying one to a sensitive, ambitious woman, and her disappointment at the necessity for the continued concealment of their marriage was poignant. Men who proudly presented their wives to their friends and the world, and installed them honored mistresses of their homes, might exact affection and obedience in return for love and protection and handsome provision for their needs and fancies. He had so defrauded this poor girl that she owed him nothing, while all he had belonged to her.

She sailed for Savannah with three trunks full of elegant clothing about the middle of January, and did not return until the last week in April. Her letters were crowded with descriptions of balls, concerts, and beaux, and in one she recounted gleefully to her husband a proposal of marriage she had received from a wealthy Georgian planter.

"I suppose it was hardly dutiful in me to decide so important an affair without consultation with *my lawful guardian*," she went on to say. "I was tempted to take the subject into consideration until I could write to you and get your views of it; but I thought it best, on the whole, to decline, with thanks."

Louis smiled in sad disdain over this passage. He had had reason, before this, to discredit the tale of Mr. Stainsly's addresses, by which he had been goaded over the precipice of a secret marriage, and he disbelieved this also. Wealthy southern planters were not in the habit of throwing themselves at the feet of portionless girls belonging to obscure families. The subterfuges and equivocations in which he had detected his pretty Ruby since they twain were made one flesh had engendered rankling distrust of her principles and assertions.

He tore the letter into bits, and fed his office fire with them, and in his reply made no reference whatever to her clever romance.

He was glad to see her when she came home, and reasonably devoted, as husbands generally are after a union of eight or nine years' standing; but Ruby reproached him with coldness and neglect.

"You are weaned from me!" she sobbed. "You will begin to hate me soon! If you want a divorce, I will help you get it. I will swear that I inveigled you into this scrape by false pretences; that I cared no more for you then than you do for me now."

"You cannot provoke me to a quarrel," answered Louis, wearily. "As to the divorce, it is not I who bring a complaint. The application should come from you. But this is idle, foolish talk! Does it not seem to you, dear, that we have enough real unhappiness without inventing chimeras with which to torment ourselves? Let us be reasonable, and help each other to bear hopefully and bravely the evils incident to our situation, nor mar the few pleasures that remain for us to enjoy."

"You are getting so stupid and sensible!" pouted Ruby. "So like an old married man of sixty-five! I declare, you look ten years older than when I went away!"

A pause, Louis did not seem inclined to interrupt.

“There it is!” she continued fretfully. “I stopped on purpose to let you say that you had been pining for me. I staid twice as long in Savannah as I meant to, in order to arouse some longing in your heart to have me again with you, and you are as stolid as a piece of marble!”

“I wrote that I longed to see you,” responded Louis, patiently. “I thought it would be unkind and selfish to urge your return when you were having so delightful a holiday. I shall be much happier now you are here, provided always that I can make you happy.”

“O, dear!” Ruby yawned. “How tame all this protestation, furnished to order, sounds in comparison with the fine and fervent sayings I have been fed upon for two months! There is but one drawback to the delight of my visit. Pauline is to spend three or four weeks at Saratoga this year, and will expect to visit me. Her coming *here* is not to be thought of. I would drown myself in the nearest ditch if there was any danger of such a mishap. I have represented to her that we never stay at home in the warm weather on account of the ague and fever prevalent hereabouts. But I promised to meet her somewhere. Saratoga is awfully expensive, but there are scores of farm-houses among the Kaatskill's where ma and I could board for a month, and Pauline could come to me there. What do you think of the plan? I never like to take any important step without consulting you, dear pet.”

A declaration eminently flattering to her auditor, when he bethought himself that her going at all was contingent upon the supply of funds she should receive from the “dear pet's” pocket.

For three whole months, including the term of his engagement and honeymoon, Louis Suydam had sojourned in a fool's paradise; but being, in reality, the antipodes of a fool, he saw no reason why he should play the simpleton after he recovered his senses. Recover them he did, with alarming rapidity, when one remembers that the process of disillusion strongly resembles

the sobering of the inebriate. If the intoxication passes off too suddenly, disastrous effects may ensue. Louis had a strong brain and sound judgment when not obfuscated by the fumes of that most powerful of sorceries — a first passion. His reason survived the shock of disenchantment, and what was more wonderful, his love lived through the ordeal. Pity and conscience held it up between them, and brought it out of the fiery trial, not dead, yet far from unharmed. His eyes were unsealed to the poverty of his wife's heart and the narrowness of her mind; but since it had been his blindness that had misled him into the persuasion of her angelhood, and inasmuch as believing her to be worthy he had worshipped her, traces of the ancient tenderness lingered still about his heart.

Ruby was *his*! There lay the charm. Faulty, it might be, to absolute unworthiness, if critically inspected, with tastes and aims totally dissimilar to his, frivolous, hot-tempered, self-willed, and artful, he saw all this in her, but he had made her his wife; had built a palace for her in his affections, and, so help him Heaven! it should be hers while he drew the breath of life! Take her at her worst, — and that was bad enough, — admit the supposition that she had designedly duped him into this alliance, that she had wedded him for a home and position, — he said still to the stern umpires, Conscience and Honor, that she had wronged him less foully than he had her. If she, in her chagrin of her foiled ambition and thwarted hopes, held to the letter of her vow to him, he would not forsake her. He would seek by kindness and persuasive arts to win her to higher views than the paltry trifles that filled the horizon of her desires, and develop her into nobler womanhood. If he failed, she was still the creature he had loved and married. His mind, after all his imaginings, fears, hopes, and plans, swung back to that sure pivot. As to his past conduct to her he had more than misgivings. He knew that youthful blood and ill-regulated affections had carried it with a high hand over true manliness and rectitude. His had been a weakness, his repentance for which had in it a throb of shame more galling than

remorse. He was harassed by incessant doubts as to the justice and honesty of his present course of concealment, imperative as the necessity of its adoption had seemed at the outset. But setting aside this one point, he could be in no uncertainty touching the treatment Ruby should receive from him.

He was not a good man. He had erred too often and too deeply to merit that title. We have seen his nerve fail him when his need of moral courage was most stringent. Yet, the crisis over, and the consciousness that he had been inadequate to it bowing him to the dust of sorrowful humility, he rallied his powers to wrestle with the new and startling convolutions of his unfortunate entanglement, took up his burden of life, by so much the heavier for his past irresolution and timidity, and carried it without a moan or sign of pain, excepting such as skilful readers of human nature descried in the steadiness and gravity foreign to his age and sex as frost and sear leaves to June. "The annealing-furnace has been at work upon his character," they said, and their discoveries rested there.

Ruby saw about as much of all this as if she had been born deaf and blind. Her matrimonial speculation had not brought her the quick and abundant returns she had counted upon; but it had not been a fruitless investment. She had money enough to gratify all reasonable and many unreasonable cravings, a husband indulgent to her slightest wish, yet who was "not around forever under foot," she felicitated herself more than once in her mother's hearing.

"I shall get so spoiled by Louis's being away so much, and leaving me at liberty to do as I like, that I shall find him a nuisance when we are obliged to live together all the time. If we had a decent house, and I could go out and receive company, I shouldn't care how long the old man lasted. It would be a gloriously independent life."

The summer excursion was settled upon. Nick staid at home to keep house and superintend certain alterations Ruby had insisted upon, if they "were to spend another month in the crazy old cabin."

“I seldom set my foot down; but when I do, I mean something!” she said to her lord, with an imperious stamp of the member named, and an angry snap of the mobile eyelids. “I shan’t cross the threshold again until it is painted inside and out, etc., etc.,” enumerating the capabilities of the dwelling for becoming “less intolerable.” “I may have to stay here ten years yet, for aught I can see ahead. I have surely a right to petition that my cage shall be cleaned once in a half century.”

With respect to his father-in-law, Louis and complaisance were estranged for that season. He made his appearance at the cottage the day after Ruby’s flight to the mountains, and told Nick roundly what sum he would allow for the projected improvements, and that the bills were to be supervised by himself before payment.

“Do you insinuate that I mean to cheat you?” blustered the farrier, thus balked in divers pleasant schemes he had nursed from the moment he had heard he was to have the handling of funds not justly his own.

“I insinuate nothing!” replied the other. “I merely state what I can afford to do, and I will not go beyond my means in this affair.”

Again Ruby’s absence transcended the limits she had originally set for it. She received her school friend at her farmhouse lodgings in July; accepted her father’s invitation to travel with them through the White Mountains in August, and chancing to stumble upon another school-fellow at the Crawford House, played her cards so well as to elicit a third opportune invitation. Her new hostess lived in Boston, and the beautiful Miss Sloane was a toast during September and the earlier weeks of October, in the second or third rate circles of that city.

She had been installed for three weeks and more in her renovated apartments when Louis drove down from the city to partake of their Thanksgiving dinner. His greeting to his wife was a kiss and the presentation of a basket of bonbons. She munched comfits and chocolate drops like a gluttonous three-

year old, and Louis kept her lavishly supplied with confectionery. She was very handsome to-day, and richly attired in a dress she called upon him to admire before he had shaken hands with her mother.

“*Vous me trouvez charmante, n'est-ce pas?*” she said, dipping him the deepest of stage courtesies.

“More charming if you had put your question in English,” he smiled, and gave her a brief sketch of Mrs. Barry. “You may imagine that I am surfeited with French — language, manners, and all.”

“But their wardrobes are splendid — aren't they?” cried Ruby, breathlessly. “They must have all the latest Parisian fashions. O, if you would only use your eyes as I would mine, were I in your place, you could give me some capital hints about my winter dresses. I have worn everything I have threadbare.”

“The more reason you should stay at home for a while!” growled her father.

Ruby interrupted him incontinently.

“There, you be quiet! I want to hear more about these Paris ladies, Louis,” walking with him into the parlor.

“The mother is a bundle of French affectations and millinery, you say!” she continued, when they were seated. “What is the daughter like?”

“Not like her mother, assuredly. She is a pleasant, bright-faced little thing, with short hair. She wore a black silk last night, and a deep crimson peignoir at breakfast this morning. I cannot describe her more minutely.”

“Short hair! Isn't she grown?”

“She is twenty-two. She had an attack of fever a few months since, and her hair was cut off during her illness.”

“She was engaged to your brother — wasn't she?”

“Yes.”

“I dare say she will console herself by setting her cap at you!” — laughing. “Wouldn't it be a No. 1 joke?”

“I do not see the humor of the idea. Nor does Miss Barry look like a flirt.”

“I'll wager my head she is one of them!” persisted Ruby. “I hope she will try her hand on you. I grant you license to humor her to the top of her bent. I have had my fun in that line, and don't grudge you a touch of the same sort. There is a world of mischievous delight in listening to a tale of love, and making fresh conquests, when one knows all the time that she is ‘selling’ her adorer. Did I tell you that I booked another offer in Boston? A No. 1 chance, too!”

They were sitting side by side, and Louis, without shaking off the arm she laid over his shoulder, changed his position so as to face her.

“‘A No. 1 chance!’ Where did you learn so much slang, Ruby? You never used to talk such stuff!”

He spoke coldly, almost severely, nettled more by the coarseness of her sentiments than by their dress.

“I always talked it, more or less, behind your back, for I knew how ultra squeamish you were. But in Boston everybody is slangy, and I like it. It gives a flavor to one's conversation.”

“So does garlic to one's breath!” retorted Louis. “I am afraid your pet phrase could not be applied to your Boston society.”

Ruby's arm dropped to her side.

“It was infinitely superior to any to which Dr. Suydam has introduced me!” she said, with stinging scorn. “With your highness's permission I will leave the room until you recover your lost temper. I have been out of the habit lately of hearing insulting language, and it annoys me more than it formerly did.”

He caught both her wrists, and made her resume her seat. His eye was fierce, his voice hard and dissonant.

“If this were the first time I had listened to the taunt that I had not presented you openly as my wife, I might ascribe it to pardonable anger on your part at a reproof you thought harsh. But I have been assailed with it upon every conceivable pretext, in season and out of season, until I will bear it no

longer. I have now been in practice six months, and I can form a tolerably correct estimate of what my yearly income will be. We can live upon it, plainly, but comfortably, and I mean to try the experiment. I came down to you, to-day, intending to tell you this, and of my determination to right you in the sight of the world. You have hurried on the declaration, but my resolution was not born of your sneer. It was already taken. I shall tell my father everything to-night. To-morrow, Dr. Suydam — not John Suydam's son — but a free man, responsible only to his conscience and his Maker for his actions — will introduce you to whatever society will receive him."

Ruby was not enchanted by the intelligence. Her color faded into the blanched hue of dread or distress.

"How much have you made in six months?" she inquired.

He named the sum.

"Good gracious!" Her eyes dilated now with real alarm. "You've given me as much as that for my dress, first and last, since March!"

"I know it. Our style of living must conform to our means hereafter. It was this thought that made me look grave when you spoke of needing an entirely new supply of clothing. I hope our circumstances will improve with time, although I will not conceal from you my fear that I may, for a season, feel, in my diminished practice, the popular displeasure at my discreditable conduct in not publishing my marriage. But what of that? If a man offends against social laws, he must bear the brunt of social indignation. I am weary of this miserable fraud upon my parents and acquaintances. I long to breathe purer air; to stand forth from beneath the cloud that has overshadowed me for eighteen months, at peace with myself, in the proud consciousness that I have done right. I shall have the approval of my own conscience, if I incur the maledictions of everybody else."

"Don't see it!" blurted out Ruby.

She bore a mortifying resemblance to her father in her hus-

band's eyes, as she crossed her trim gaiters upon an ottoman, somewhat higher than most ladies would have selected as a footstool, and throwing herself back upon the sofa, gazed up at him with her wide, bold eyes.

“I don't see the point of your observation. What are you raving about? Just as I am beginning to be contented in my home, and satisfied to await the development of events, you are set upon ruining us both. You will be sorry for your deed within ten minutes after it is done, instead of enjoying the approval of conscience and all that fal-lal. Your father will disinherit you to a dead certainty, and if he cuts you, the rest of Kräwen will follow suit. I know the ways of the world too well to let you sacrifice yourself, to say nothing of me. As to righting me — that's rank humbug! I've had a jolly time this summer. Nobody besides ourselves is the wiser for the certificate I have locked away safely — I won't say where; for so sure as you carry out your suicidal plan, I'll tear it up, and swear I was never married to you at all!”

Louis's forehead was dark with swollen veins; but he commanded himself to say, still in that hoarse, deep tone, “Don't threaten me, Ruby! There are other proofs of our marriage than the certificate, and I will produce them.”

“Do it!” A mocking smile shot over the fair, brazen face. “When you succeed in convincing people that you are a Benedick, without the coöperation of my parents or myself, I shall be surprised — that's all! Perhaps you didn't see the notice of Dr. James's death in the Kroywen papers last month. I did! As to the two witnesses, they were evidently servants, who would never see your advertisement, if you were to advertise for them. Don't threaten *me*, Louis Suydam! This is my little game, and I won't have it spoiled by you or any other man. I am here, Ruby Sloane — without the evidence of the certificate — and Ruby Sloane I shall remain until your father dies, or you make a fortune — whichever event Fate decrees shall happen first. Let me call your attention to another objection to your *exposé* — I should say, your heroic self-

sacrifice. The princely income you named, just now, will hardly support us in affluence, and allow me to help my parents. I shall not leave them unprovided for in their old age. There will be no room for them in the establishment you contemplate as our residence. They can only stay here and starve. My filial piety cannot sustain the imagination."

She wagged the uppermost foot, the heel being poised upon the toe of the lower, and sat silent, cool, insolent.

Louis's glance passed meaningly from the neat carpet to the papered walls and tasteful furniture, then settled upon the elegantly-attired figure on the sofa.

"They are better off than they were two years ago. I have not played the niggard to you or to them."

"You are generous to remind me of your benefactions! I dare say there are dozens of men in your aristocratic set who lavish twice as much per annum upon ladies who have no legal claim upon their pockets."

"Rubina Sloane!"

"Suydam — at your service — until the aforesaid certificate is destroyed! But I interrupt you!"

"If I thought," — Louis forced down wrath and scorn that he might articulate distinctly, — "if I thought that a spark of womanly modesty remained in your bosom, I would make you ashamed of the inference deducible from your last observation. Suffice it to say that the comparison between yourself and the class to which you refer is of your making — not mine. Let us end this contemptible farce, this childish bickering. As I have said, I stand prepared and resolved to do you ample justice. If you reject my proposal, the responsibility is yours."

"I agree."

"First, hear me through! I offer you a home, recognition by the world as my honored wife, and my constant care of your person and interests. I am moved to this by no Quixotic impulse, no strained principle of self-devotion, but a firm, calm sense of duty — duty to myself, as to you. In some respects I am a wiser man than when I married you. I am not ambitious

to defy public opinion. I respect the verdict of the world more than I did then. But neither do I shrink from its reprobation in the pusillanimous spirit some display. The penalty of my error must be paid, and I shall not be satisfied until this is done. I have strength to bear obloquy and privation, and I vow here, solemnly as I did at the altar, to love and cherish you through all; to shield you from discomfort and pain so far as human power can, until the storm blows over. For it will pass! Innocence of real guilt, and a stanch will, can live down any amount of evil report. After the whirlwind of gossip has subsided, people will begin to see things with more charitable, or just eyes. The prospect is not frightful after all, you see!"

He smiled — a forced gleam that showed more plainly the dark veins upon his pale forehead and the tight muscles ridged about the mouth. Any one except a heartless woman would have framed a careful reply to words so noble in their forbearance and willingness to meet for himself the sharpest thrusts Fate might have in reserve as punishment for his boyish folly.

"I am blind, I suppose," rejoined Ruby, slightly. "But may I be delivered from ever beholding another one tenth as frightful! As for waiting for the pious wiseacres of the community to respect and patronize you, and leave their cards for me, everything depends upon the attitude in which we do this. If we wait, cap in hand, in a mean shanty, we shall be old as Mr. and Mrs. Methuselah before we receive a single call, professional or friendly. On the other hand, let me await the representatives of uppertendom in a fine house, well appointed, myself in silks and satins, diamond rings glittering upon fingers soft and white with idleness, and they will pour in by the score. They may come through curiosity — but they will come! Dr. Suydam, rich and distinguished, will be the hero of a sensational romance. Louis Suydam, disowned by his family, and dependent upon his own exertions for a living, will meet with frowns and dead cuts everywhere. I, for one, am not going to run my head against a stone wall, so stubborn as this, for the sake of an abstract principle."

"If it were an empty abstraction, I would not urge it."

She broke into his speech petulantly. "The upshot of the matter is, Louis, you shall not make a fool of yourself at my expense! When I want to be acknowledged as your wife, I will let you know. Until then it is none of your business to move in the matter. A *gentleman* would not press a disagreeable subject upon a lady after she had asked him to drop it. A husband who truly loved his wife would grant her the casting-vote in a question where she had a thousand fold more at stake than he had. I have no fancy for settling down to cooking your dinners and doing up your shirts. When you can maintain me in the manner I had a right to expect when you over-persuaded me to marry you, you may bring forward your proposition for another hearing. Until then, I stay where I am, and as I am!"

Louis arose.

"At which time you will, I suppose, notify me of your sovereign pleasure, and we can enter upon negotiations bearing upon our future relations. I shall remit to you, monthly, a sum equal to that which you have received for the same period during the past year. If it is not sufficient to cover your expenses, you can let me know in writing. If you are sick, or in other need of me, send for me without hesitation. As physician or friend I shall come willingly and promptly; as your husband, never again, unless you revoke the decree you have just uttered. If I cannot visit you as my wife, I will not as my mistress! Good day!"

Before Ruby recovered from her dumb astonishment, he had passed through the back room, excused himself from partaking of the Thanksgiving dinner upon the plea of an imperative engagement elsewhere, and was in the barn-yard helping Nick harness his horse.

Ruby peeped at him from behind the curtain.

"But *isn't* he the maddest man! I really thought he was going to murder me when he jumped up, he glared at me so! Never mind, old fellow! I shall have you at my feet again in a week, and without sending for you! What he needs at this time is a little wholesome neglect; and he shall have it!"

CHAPTER XV.

MRS. BARRY'S fan, that evening, was of rose-colored silk, dotted with gold, and supported by gilded sticks. Her dress was silver-gray satin, enlivened by knots of rose-colored ribbon, stuck upon the angles of sleeves and bodice, and peeping from among folds. From her lace cap depended streamers of the same, and she disported herself like a superannuated fairy.

"I am but sixteen!" she chattered, a girlish gurgle swelling the skinny neck coated with pearl powder. "Little one! withdraw yourself from my eyes, that I may indulge the fond delusion. I am sixteen — and it is the Thanksgiving day. I am again the happy, the adored Susanne. For I had the lovers — two — perhaps three — and they were not so sad under my smiles as is our young doctor. Confession is wholesome to the soul, my friend! There are here but your father, your mother, myself — your very good friend — and the sly mouse of a girl over there, who is older and graver — it may be more wise — than her volatile mamma. Is it that Love has frowned, or that Science would not be wooed? You are gloomy. You eat nothing. You say nothing. Yet this is the gala day of America, when the law commands — 'Be gay!' Come, we die to pity you — to comfort — to revive!"

"I have had a violent headache all day," said Louis, gruffly.

Her *minauderies*, her frippery and foolery, angered him unconscionably, and he was suffering too intensely from other and graver troubles to care about preserving the semblance of politeness.

The fan was closed with elaborate caution, lest the rattle of the sticks should offend his nerves; and she wore an aspect of deepest concern.

“And in the pharmacopœia so familiar to your learned self, is it that there is no soothing draught—‘poppy nor mandragora,’ nor your dear mother’s celebrated—what is it that it is—valeria—that can charm away the pain!”

“Mother!” said Frank. “Excuse me for interrupting you—but can you tell me where I put the portfolio of photographs I unpacked this afternoon? Mr. Suydam would like to see them.”

Given this key-note, Mrs. Barry was voluble upon the photographic art and the incredible pains she had taken to procure the finest copies extant of world-renowned paintings and celebrated views.

Under cover of Frank’s return with the portfolio, Louis would have retired, had not Mr. Suydam summoned him to the table cleared for the pictures. With an inward groan, but an impassive exterior, he obeyed the request that he would join his father and Miss Barry in the examination of works of art the speaker was sure would interest him.

“He is not an art-student, like yourself,” he added to Frank, “but a sincere lover of the beautiful, nevertheless.”

“Love and intelligent appreciation are far from being identical, as I need not remind you, Miss Barry,” said Louis, seating himself opposite her, as she unclasped the folio.

“Appreciation, without native taste, can never rise into anything better than surface criticism,” was the reply. “These are views for the stereoscope, Mr. Suydam,” laying aside a packet. “I see there is a fine stereoscopic lens in the library. By and by, if you like, we will examine them through it.”

She said little more while the two gentlemen inspected the plates. That little consisted in a pithy sentence, now and then, explanatory of the scene she drew from the heap and laid before them, or a hearty assent to the praises passed by one or the other upon some particularly fine specimen of the

engraver's or photographer's art. Mrs. Barry chattered incessantly to her hostess — a vexatious patter, that wore upon Louis's nerves like the continual dropping of a rainy day. In the excess of his irritation, he glanced across the stand at her daughter, — the very embodiment of healthful calm, — and marvelled with the amazement of one who should find a young eagle in a magpie's nest.

He paid scant attention to the matter of his companion's speech. His brain was in a whirl, his heart sore, and full of wounded pride, outraged love, shame, remorse, and resentment. A new leaf of his life had been turned that day. It might have been a worthless thing upon which his anchor had caught two years ago, but it had held him fast to industry and virtue. However much his judgment had disapproved, and his affections been cooled by, the blemishes in his wife's character, he had remained true to her in word and act. The thought of her, and the work set before him by his alliance with her, had saved him from many a pitfall of temptation — nerved him for many achievements that would not have disgraced a worthier parentage. Now, he was adrift — a bankrupt in love, and faith, and hope.

Those most miserable of comforters — people who have not learned a wise charity from their own lapses into wrong-doing, or gentleness from their own suffering — have a convenient formula of consolation for others whose misfortunes have sprung from over-confidence in their fellow-mortals. "It is a mercy they have found out their mistake at last. Since their affections were fastened upon an unworthy object, how much better that they should be violently detached, than continue to cling to a base thing! Better no love at all than a degrading one." As in physics, so in morals, this class of humanitarians have an inveterate prejudice in favor of bitters as a tonic.

When, on that morning big with disaster to all the borders of Philistia, the temple of Dagon was opened, and the headless, armless stump of their god discovered prone upon the

floor before the ark of hated and defeated Israel, we do not read that a solitary priest who beheld the humiliating spectacle, turned iconoclast and completed the demolition of the helpless image. We have reason to believe, instead, that the dismembered trunk was reverently repaired and restored to its place ere the common people could look upon the ruin. We know that it was, henceforward, held more sacred than before, even by the ministers of the idolatrous rites. For, inasmuch as the head and the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold of the temple, "therefore," says the record, "neither the priests of Dagon, nor any that come into Dagon's house, tread on the threshold of Dagon's house in Ashdod unto this day."

In like bitterness of spirit Louis surveyed the wrecks of his broken image, from which all vestige of divinity had departed, and spurned the thought of comfort. But the mournful tenderness of Dagon's servitors was wanting from his musings. Stern as he was sorrowful, the dearest of gentle and loving memories was impotent to move him to repentance of the resolve that had exiled him from Ruby's presence. His curt farewell was for months, perchance years; and, so far from regretting it, had she clung to his knees now, in all the glory of her voluptuous beauty, and prayed him to return to her arms, he would have reiterated the demand she had resisted that day, and abode by the result. Their estrangement was positive—he believed, final. Her unwomanly taunts had stirred up the worst dregs of a temper naturally generous, although quick. Memory, no longer held in with bit and bridle by conscience, rehearsed the wrongs this woman had done him, until he could have hated her; her and her tribe; the mother, her accomplice in the work of ensnaring him; the boorish father, the original cause of the misfortunes that made him feel like an impostor in the house of his own father, who loved and trusted him, yet whom he durst not undecieve.

The thick mustache veiled the gnashing teeth, and if his fingers grasped the fretted legs of the table with a force, it

would seem, might knead the wood as a baker his dough, they who sat by and talked with him appeared blandly unconscious of the hell raging within him.

He went, at length, into the library for the stereoscope. It was mounted upon a tall stand, and before he could lift it Frank was at his elbow.

“You are not well to-night, Dr. Suydam! You are suffering great pain. Let me take that into the other room and excuse you. Nothing is worse for headache than straining the eyes through these lenses in the gas-light. But physicians are proverbially imprudent.”

She had time to say all this while he bent his knee to the floor and pretended to adjust the screw of the instrument. The sisterly kindness of her address had beaten down his guard of morose reserve, and he required a few moments in which to regain his self-possession. So weary-hearted and wretched was he, that a word of sympathy from a child would have unmanned him. He laughed in rising to his upright position — a laugh that would have repelled Frank, had she felt less pity for his evident discomfort of mind or body.

“You might add, proverbially obstinate in disclaiming the imputation of even temporary invalidism,” he rejoined. “It is weakness in a strong, healthy man to hang out a flag of distress because some dozen petty nerves in his scalp are out of order. I will be so unprofessional as to volunteer a prescription, which you may find serviceable should you ever be in acute pain. Physic suffering with resolution, double distilled. Determine that you will not be subdued, and the odds are vastly in favor of the conquest of mind over matter.”

He spoke sardonically, but she apparently accepted his reply in good faith.

“That is sound advice, provided the desideratum of life be to learn hardness. Suffering, resisted thus, and successfully, must bring strength. But there are other qualities worth possessing besides strength. This dumb battle with pain is often but a refinement of brute endurance — the ignorant or perverse

self-torture of one who had rather die, than, by putting out his hand for the balm within his reach, confess his need of it."

She was not talking to him now. She stood in an attitude peculiarly her own, which would have been graceful in no other woman — her hands clasped loosely behind her, her head bent slightly forward; and her eyes went beyond him into the empty air. Despite his distraction of mind, Louis was conscious of something vaguely yet ineffably melancholy in her tone and demeanor. She had her hidden grief. Was it regret for her dead betrothed? Had volatile, pleasure-loving and self-loving Fred gained the sanctuary of her heart?

"A man had better die dumbly, refusing to make any sign of the anguish which is consuming him, than wear his heart, like a pin-cushion, upon his sleeve," he said, somewhat irrelevantly to her remark, with savage pertinence to his own thoughts. "One who does this invites a prick from every one he meets, and he generally gets it."

"Real hearts are seldom sported in that fashion. Nobody cares how many pins are thrust into counterfeits. Shams of all kinds are contemptible."

"Even sham fortitude — a blast of penny-trumpets over the exploit of bearing, without a groan, a headache of which no one would have heard, had not the victim proclaimed his malady?" interrogated Louis, laughing shortly.

Frank stepped aside to let him pass with the stereoscope.

"We had wandered from the subject of your headache. You know I had no such meaning," she said, quietly.

Louis carried the instrument into the parlor, set it down, and returned to the library. Frank had moved to the window, and was looking out upon the park, as he had seen her on the preceding night. A sincere impulse of ingenuous shame made him approach her with his apology.

"Miss Barry, I came back to ask your forgiveness for the ungentlemanly speech with which I left you just now. It was unprovoked and ungrateful. But I am really enduring intense pain this evening, and am more irritable than usual."

She smiled, putting out her hand frankly, as one gentleman would to another.

“ I only regret my careless language. I suppose the truth to be, that we were both thinking about other things while our lips were busy with truisms, neither very striking nor coherent. If you had never alluded to the subject again, I should have understood perfectly that you did not mean to wound me. Why should you ? ”

“ Why, indeed ? ” Louis laughed at the simplicity of the inquiry. “ People rarely stop to ask that sensible question before appropriating a slight or insult. My intercourse, of late years, has been so much with the rougher sex, that I have not studied the amenities of social life as I should have done. If I should ever, in our future association, give you occasion to repeat your query, please answer it invariably as you do in this instance. Shall we go back to the photographs ? ”

They were a more lively party over the stereoscope than had gathered about the portfolio. The views were interesting to all, and most of them familiar to Frank. Mr. Suydam, who unbent in her company into a degree of *bonhommie* Louis had never seen him display towards another person, laughingly denominated her the showman of the concern, and she fell instantly into the spirit of the jest. Her remarks, prefatory to and explanatory of each scene, were thrown into the form of a lecture, graphic and entertaining, abounding in humorous illustrations and sprightly sayings, changing, at times, into a burlesque of the laborious vivacity of the cockney's “ jottings of travel,” or the pompous statistics of “ our own correspondent,” that elicited shouts of merriment from her auditors.

Louis was moved to laughter with the rest, although the dull aching at his heart, that had superseded the sharper pangs of an hour ago, became more intolerable as the fun went on. Such hollow mirth was to be his for the remainder of his life. Youth, more sanguine in prosperity, is also more morbidly despairing than age when the sky blackens with unlooked-for clouds.

It was his turn to inspect the picture Frank had adjusted behind the lens, and he had stooped to the square of glass in the front of the instrument, when he heard his mother exclaim, "Mr. Veddar, you are just in season to partake of our diversion!"

If Frank noticed Louis's countenance as he greeted the unwelcome visitor, she must have subscribed inwardly to the truth of his confession that the study of the "small, sweet courtesies of life" had had no place in his curriculum. A reception the sixtieth part of a degree more ungracious would have been an overt insult. The lawyer-dandy took it as he did almost everything, debonairly, and proceeded to play the irresistible to the three ladies. He found swift favor in Mrs. Barry's eyes. Aably seconded by the accomplished fan, she went through all the artistically artless tricks that had made the adored Susanne the toast of half the young men in her native town, intensified by the fascinations she had learned abroad, and succeeded, by dint of bringing to the front her entire park of artillery, in making herself superlatively ridiculous to all present save her infatuated admirer, Mrs. Suydam, and perhaps to the respectful regards of her daughter. To the latter Mr. Veddar turned with question or compliment at every glimpse of an opportunity, and her manner of receiving these was a curious sight to Louis. Casting aside her Momus mask at the stranger's entrance, she had seated herself between the stereoscope and the table littered with pictures, and, so soon as her mother was fairly embarked upon the stream of flirtation, resumed the task of selecting the plates for the study of father and son. She did it with so little bustle, and her attentions were met so quietly, that the subdued ripple of their talk was, for the most part, inaudible to the gayer trio on the other side of the room.

To such of Mr. Veddar's observations as were directed to herself, she replied readily and politely—it might be more laconically than she was wont to express herself; but she often dealt in brief sentences, and seldom wasted words upon trifles, and he could not complain that she repelled his gallantries with

prudery or haughtiness. It was just after she had bent a patient ear, and responded in serious civility to one of his choicest specimens, that she singled out a couple of pictures from the heap.

“I shall not tell you the name of this,” she said to Louis, dropping her voice, as she arranged one in position for examination. “Your father has seen the original. I believe you will recognize it when you have studied it for a moment.”

A sweep of level road, leading past a drawbridge and a moat; a clump of trees, partially concealing the lower story of a castle, the peaked towers of which pierced sharply a cloudless sky; washing the base of the walls, a lake, clear and bright as the heavens over it, and faint in the purple distance a mountain range. Louis saw nothing more until he had scrutinized it for not one, but several moments. Then a finger stole between the lens and the paper, pointing silently to a window low down in the lakeward wall.

“I see! I know!” he exclaimed.

“Lake Lemman lies by Chillon’s walls!”

Reading confirmation in Frank’s smile, he gazed again long and earnestly.

“It is the next best thing to visiting the spot in person,” said Frank, presently. “Here is the interior of the dungeon,” substituting another plate.

While he looked, she repeated very softly, as if to herself, —

“There are seven pillars of Gothic mould,
In Chillon’s dungeons deep and cold;
There are seven columns, massy and gray,
Dim with a dull, imprisoned ray,
A sunbeam which hath lost its way,
And through the crevice and the cleft
Of the thick wall is fallen and left.”

“We saw it all — the pillar to which Bonnivard was chained; his footprints upon the floor, and seeing, felt — as you will do when you stand upon the same ground.”

“How full of thrilling interest!” said Veddar’s voice behind her chair. “Will you kindly allow me a glimpse of the picture, Dr. Suydam? This is really very fine — exquisite. A French photograph — is it not, Miss Barry? And the lines you quoted were Byron’s, I believe. You will find Dr. Suydam *au fait* to modern, as to ancient classics,” relinquishing his place to Louis, who showed no disposition to avail himself of the civility. “There was a time when he threatened to relapse into studies of a different nature — animated nature, in fact. I had grievous suspicions — or shall I say, fond hopes — of you, doctor! By the way, what has become of your golden-haired incognita, Miss Manning?”

“Scarcely incognita, if you know her name.” replied Louis, carelessly.

Ruby could keep her own counsel when it suited her ends to do so, and she had never told her husband the incidents of her return drive from the cemetery. Louis imagined that Veddar had been misinformed as to her name by a third person, or had manufactured one for this occasion, with a view to intrapping him into giving the real cognomen.

Mrs. Suydam caught up the word.

“Manning! Who is she, Louis? Why have I never heard of her before?”

“I refer you to Mr. Veddar, madam. He introduced the subject.”

“I beg a million pardons if I have been indiscreet,” answered the malicious gossip. “But I fancied the young lady was an intimate friend of the family. I gathered as much from her own lips. Very pretty lips they are, too! Hers is a rare type of American beauty, Miss Barry. You must prevail upon Dr. Suydam to introduce her to you. His disposition to monopolize her society should not debar those of her own sex from enjoying her acquaintance.”

“Is it that there is a type of American loveliness more rare than the other?” wheezed Mrs. Barry, plying her rose-colored oars lightly, and beamingly condescending to the raw beauties

of the New World. "For me, I find a great, an infinite variety of styles. I cannot classify them. I discern no characteristic national, but a blending of many and the diverse features. Believe me when I declare that this is piquant, unique — in one word, delightful — this diversity, this peculiarity, this I know not what — may I say this mixture the most anomalous which leads one to assert that the beauty of America, like the architecture of this interesting country, is, in its order, composite!"

"A happy phrase, madam!" bowed Mr. Veddar. "And in enunciating an opinion so just and original, you corroborate my statement that Miss Manning's physiognomy is *sui generis* in this latitude. Picture to yourself a blonde, with a skin of mother-of-pearl underlaid upon the cheeks with roses, and on the temples with violets; scarlet lips and milk-white teeth; a profusion of rich, dark auburn hair, and eyes in which the hue of her abundant tresses is reflected; a figure like Juno's, and a step like Diana's, — and you have the siren who, for a season, beguiled our Galen into forgetfulness of books, scalpel, and gallipots."

Frank had arisen to set her chair back from the table as Mr. Veddar approached, followed, an instant later, by Mesdames Barry and Suydam. She had turned her head slightly at his address to herself, and appeared inclined to respond pleasantly to his remarks introductory of Miss Manning's name. Something changed her purpose. Louis, infuriated at the fellow's impertinence, and his inability to punish it as it merited, yet noticed that she moved quickly away from Veddar's side, a shadow of blended repugnance and pity fitting over her tell-tale face.

"He is half drunk, and she has discovered it!" he thought, as he got a fair view of the watery eyes and inflamed complexion.

Mrs. Barry's perceptions were less acute, or her moralities less strict.

"What eloquence!" she cried, with bewitching archness,

in the exuberance of her mirthful appreciation, fulfilling to the letter the fan-master's directions for manœuvre No. 1, — to wit, “shaking her fan at ‘Veddar’ with a smile, giving her right hand woman a tap upon the shoulder, then pressing her lips with the extremity of the fan, and, finally, letting her arms fall with an easy motion.” “What eloquence! Ah! it is easy to see that our young doctor's bosom friend has not escaped scathless, — that the skin of pearl, roses, and violets, the teeth of milk and hair of auburn, the eyes — I forget the color of the matchless eyes, Mr. Veddar.”

“They match her hair, he says,” rejoined Mr. Suydam, dryly, “and that is red. I cannot say that I admire your taste, young gentlemen!”

“Mr. Veddar is responsible for the portrait, and expressed admiration for the same,” Louis returned, yet more grimly.

“If I were on the footing with the subject of my imperfect sketch that you are, I would present her to this honorable company in her own beauteous person, and challenge adverse criticism,” retorted Veddar. “My acquaintance with her does not even include the knowledge of her place of residence. I only know that she does not live in Kräwen, nor yet far distant from it.”

“Who is she, Louis?” Mr. Suydam demanded, as if tired of badinage.

“Put your question in a more manageable shape, if you please, sir, and I may be able to answer it.”

“Who is this Miss Manning?”

“I know no person who bears that name.”

“She has exchanged it for another, then, since you used to escort her to the opera, and take her out in sleighing-time, and walk with her by moonlight,” said Veddar, positively.

“That may be!”

Louis passed his hand across his forehead, and Frank saw, what no one else did, that it gathered the sweat in thick globules before it.

Mr. Suydam heaved a sigh of weariness — or relief.

“Indeed! so she is married?”

“She is, sir!”

Veddar looked incredulous, then feigned discomfiture.

“This is sorry news! The man who withdraws a magnificent creature like that from the general gaze incurs a heavy responsibility. Can he compensate her for all she resigns—bellehood and its prerogatives? Did she marry one who can appreciate and make her happy? Who did you say carried off the prize?”

“A man for whom I have a thorough contempt!” Louis brought out, sharply. “And having said thus much, I may be excused for withholding his name.”

Mrs. Barry wriggled up to him, and patted his arm with her fan.

“Ah, my poor doctor, how I commiserate you! There is the cry of pain in what you say of this perfidious belle. I am sure I should detest her. Console yourself, my friend. She would have made your cup of life to be bitter—she, so fair and treacherous! And the red eyes! Bah!”

CHAPTER XVI.

UPON the extreme edge of the southern suburb of Kräwen stood a piazza, closed on three sides by lattice-work. Four steps led to the floor from the street, and, at the top of these a solid door, painted green, resisted the advance of unlawful intruders. Behind the piazza, as was discovered when this door unclosed at the visitor's knock, was a house, to which the latticed portico was as the husk to the mat. Behind this still was a long, narrow garden, gay, on a warm May afternoon, with early flowers, and holding promise of greater affluence in the hot-beds, crowded with tender annuals, and cuttings of more valuable exotics, and in the weedless borders of black mould, light and warm with constant upturning to the air and sun. Just across the street, if the unpaved highway could be so called, was a small greenhouse, flanked by another garden, and entered by a gate, which was always kept locked excepting when the proprietor was within.

From this emerged, on this May afternoon, two women — the one a foreigner and middle-aged, coarsely dressed, with a clean checked apron over her stuff gown, and a red hood covering her head. She was a picturesque figure, thus apparelled, her black eyes glittering and her teeth shining with pleasure, as she tiptoed across the muddy road, her hands full of flowers — purple, yellow, white, and scarlet, gesticulating and jabbering faster than American fingers and tongues could do under provocation more powerful than the event of a call from a favorite guest. This last was Frank Barry, honest, open-browed, and kindly as when she had first chatted with Katrine over the

marble flower vase in Mr. Suydam's parlor, nearly half a year before.

Mrs. Barry had, in January, bought and taken possession of a house not three streets removed from the Suydam homestead, and fronting upon another of the parks about which Kräwen fashionists clustered, as bees upon a tempting bough. Sue, the second single daughter, had returned from her southern visit two months later, but — as was speedily bruited in the disappointed circle that had counted largely upon the acquisition the pretty and accomplished girl would be to their ranks — was engaged to a wealthy Louisianian. If the wooing had been brief, the betrothal was likely to prove shorter, the wedding-day having been set for the first week of June. There was no talk of Frank's marrying, in consequence mainly of the report, cleverly circulated by Mrs. Suydam, of her engagement to her lost son, although Frank's own demeanor had a certain effect in confirming the story, and the belief that she preferred a single life. She treated gentlemen and ladies alike, simpering misses averred, round-eyed at the phenomenon. She was indifferent to general society, and cared nothing for the gallant devoirs in which other young ladies luxuriated, the gentlemen complained. Even the unabashable Veddar had been heard to declare that his most dexterous compliments and most obsequious devotion "did not remunerate" when brought to bear upon her. Yet she was popular; was probably the better liked by those of her own sex than if she made many notable conquests among the Kräwen beaux.

"I must say 'good afternoon' now," she said to Katrine, when they reached the latticed porch. "I will send down tomorrow for the plants I have selected. I will not trouble you to tie up the bouquet for my sister. Put the flowers into my basket here. I can arrange them at home."

"No, no!" Katrine shook her head in vehement denial.

"Jes you step into mine leetle parlor. I have dem all fix in one — two minute. Come in, come in! You been in mine house before!"

“And shall be again, many more times, I hope,” answered Frank, following her guide through an ante-room into one still more diminutive beyond.

“Jes^so!” responded Katrine, with all her heart, pulling the one rocking-chair the room contained near the window for her companion.

There was a serviceable carpet upon the floor, a round table covered with a green cloth in one corner, and three green wooden chairs, drawn up close to the wall to allow free passage from the door by which they had entered to another opening into a bed-chamber. Frank could survey the interior of the latter nook from her seat. The inevitable Dutch bed was there, heaping the tall bedstead midway to the ceiling, and covered with a spread of many colors.

“You seen dem in de ole country?” observed the quick-eyed mistress of this wren’s nest.

“Yes, and slept upon them.”

“Den — den — you know what sleeps is! not de sleeps one gets on de mattress — husk, straw, hair — but goot, sound, *hard* sleeps dat take de ache from de bone, and make one over goot as new! Dr. Suydam — he laugh when I tell him dat. ‘Faugh!’ he say. ‘Feaders! give you sick Joseph clean cool straw bed when he ’ave de fever. De feaders choke and heat de poor boy!’ ‘Dr. Suydam,’ I say, ‘look at me — me, Katrine Weiss! I come to dis countree mit two guilder in mine pocket — dat’s all! I wash, I sew, I iron — I nurse your broder — until I marry mine Charles. Den I bring him two hundred dollar — all my saving. He ’ave jis’ fifty dollar, and we put it togeder, and we say to your fader, ‘Mr. Suydam,’ we say, ‘you ’ave one acre wet ground on de edge of de marsh. We will buy it.’ He give it to me — one wedding gift — for my angel boy as I nurse, he say to him, ‘Poor Katrine, give her one home, fader! I pay you for it,’ he say. Was not he goot!’”

“It was very kind.”

Katrine nodded exultantly over the bouquet her rapid fingers were binding.

“ Ah, but I 'ave de goot friends, de reech *relations!* Well, we build jes' so leetle a house, and a shed for a cow, and when de cow was paid for, all our money gone! Mine first baby — mine ' Lisabet ' — she in heaven now — was born on a pile of shaving in dat corner dere. You no believe me? but it is true. And Mrs. Suydam, she send her maid to ask me to come nurse anoder child — a leetle, ever so leetle babe dat died. I laugh, laugh, laugh! but Charles, he cry like a child. De maid cry too. ' Poor Katrine, poor Katrine! but you was de fool to marry! ' she say. *Den* I speak! ' I never so happy till now, ' I say. ' I 'ave de goot husband, de dear baby, and de goot Gott over us all, ' I say. Mrs. Suydam, she send me one bed — nice, soft feader bed, and I got well. I help mine Charles dig, rake, plant. I milk de cow for butter to sell, and de pot-cheese — O, some day I give you one of mine pot-cheese! — and milk de goat to feed de babies. I raise geese for de feaders, and we make money, and all we make we save — and we gets reech — ever so reech! Dis is mine house — dat is mine greenhouse. We 'ave two cow, a horse, two pig, five childer, and we jes' so happy as kings. I do all dis, I tell Dr. Suydam, and I never sick. I strong as an ox — as a man. I can reap, thresh, dig de damp ground all day long, and I sleeps on light, sweet feaders from mine own geese, and plenty of them! Say no more to me about straw, husk, hair, dey like breekbats! ”

Frank laughed. She would not mar the good creature's complacency by recounting the agonies of suffocation and sleeplessness she had undergone in Holland inns, when plunged into the yielding depths of the vaunted mass of feathers.

“ I am glad your little boy is better. He was very sick — was he not? ”

“ Very sick! One day I say, ' Charles, we must let him go to his leetle broder and sister up dere! ' pointing. But Charles, he cry, ' No! ' and run for Dr. Suydam. O, he is de goot doctor — if he is young! ' Be brave, Katrine, ' he tell me; ' we will pull him through! ' And he did, for no charge, too — not one cent! I offer him many dollar. I say,

‘We reech enough to pay for my boy’s life.’ But he shake his head, so. ‘If I give your boy life,’ he say, ‘take it as one present from me, and let me break off this sweet tea-rose, and wear it in my button-hole all day, as one present from you. That’s fair.’ Wasn’t he goot?”

Frank’s eyes shone dimly.

“It was a noble act!”

“He is one nobleman. He will marry some day, and may de dear Got send him one wife as goot as himself!”

A rap at the outer door brought her to her feet, and she bustled out. Frank had arisen to go, when she heard her rapturous reception of the new visitor.

“You come to see if mine Joseph quite well, and he gone to school, dis de first day! He is so much better you don’t know!”

“I am glad of it. I thought I would inquire in passing. You are all well — husband, children, cows, and flowers?”

“Yes — all, all!” cried Katrine, merrily. “I ’ave one new flower in mine parlor — one exotic, jes’ from over de water. Come in and see it.”

Frank blushed like the carnations in her nosegay when Louis stood upon the threshold of the inner room, transfixed at sight of her. But she joined in his laugh as he regained his wits and perceived Katrine’s trick.

“How do you do?” he said, shaking hands with her.

Her palm was cool and firm, and her fingers closed upon those of a friend with cordial emphasis. There was no need, to one meeting that sincere clasp, and reading her deep, clear eyes, for her to say, “I am happy to see you.”

“It has been an age since we met,” pursued Louis, courteously.

“It has been a long time,” was her ingenuous answer. “You are very busy — are you not?”

“Busy enough to prevent time from hanging heavily upon my hands. What lovely flowers!”

“They are for Sue. She is going out this evening to Mrs. Kissam’s. Shall you be there?”

"No. I am no party goer."

"Nor I. Mrs. Weiss, I am much obliged to you for putting these up so handsomely. I shall come again before long. Your garden will be growing prettier every day, now."

"You did not walk to this quarter of the town," exclaimed Louis, detaining her.

"O, yes. I am an Old World pedestrian, remember. I seldom use the carriage."

"But it is raining, and you have no umbrella."

"Raining!" Frank drew back the curtain. "It is only a spring shower. I am not afraid of a few drops."

"My carriage is at the door. Let me take you home," proposed Louis, in a matter-of-fact way, that would have piqued many women. "I am going directly past your house."

"In that case, I accept your offer gratefully."

She made this rejoinder after a thoughtful pause, in which she seemed to weigh some question of more moment than the invitation she had received.

Large, deliberate drops of rain were falling upon the roof of the porch when they went out.

"Wait one minute," entreated Katrine, as Frank would have descended the steps.

Rushing back into the house, she brought forth from some convenient corner a huge brown cotton umbrella, and from the kitchen a clean towel. She put the first into Louis's hand, with the injunction, "Hold it over her," and ran out into the street to the buggy that awaited them. Before the amused spectators could hinder her, she had wiped the mud from the tires of the wheels between which Frank must be handed to her seat, and drew back, with a pleased smile, to make way for the young people.

"Thank you. You are very thoughtful," said Frank, taking her place in the carriage.

"That is like you, Katrine," Louis added, approvingly.

"Ah, she ought to be cared for!" was the reply. "She is *goot!*"

"That was a touch of courtly hospitality worthy of the days of Raleigh," continued Louis, when they were out of earshot.

"And unlike Raleigh's famous disdain of ruined cloth, this was not done with an eye to future patronage," returned Frank. "I buy many flowers of her, but she gives me, at each visit, as many as I purchase. There is no such thing as successful opposition to her 'O, I sharge you not'ing at all for dat leetle root! You one such goot customer!'"

"She appreciates, as the rich seldom do, the real luxury of beneficence," said Louis. "She gives of that which would bring in visible additions to her hoard; and Katrine, like most of her country people, knows the value of money."

"I have often thought of that."

The listless or absent-minded tone caused Louis to glance at his companion. She was looking straight forward at some imaginary point between the horse's ears, but the firm set of the mouth and chin had nothing dreamy about it. She was a queer girl in some respects. Any other lady in her place would have exerted herself to entertain the handsome young physician whose politeness had been so apropos to her need. She did not speak again until they were half way to her mother's house. Louis, albeit himself somewhat inclined to taciturnity, did not know whether to be amused or offended at her singular behavior. At last, the silence becoming absurd in length and causelessness, he made a movement towards sociability.

"We shall have a storm instead of a shower. The wind is due east," he said, stretching his head forward to get a sight of a steeple vane.

"Ah!" still dreamily. Then, with a total change of voice and bearing she brought her serious eyes around to his. "Dr. Suydam, I have been anxious to see you for several weeks past."

Louis bowed.

"You had only to command my attendance, Miss Barry."

"I know it. But the question was whether I had a right

to do this; whether, in the circumstances, it was expedient or justifiable."

She stopped again, and her eyes returned to their visionary resting-place.

"In the name of all that is sensible, what does she mean by her laconics?" thought Louis. "What have I done? What does she know about me, or what can she wish to say to me that may not be proclaimed from the market tower over yonder?"

"You are the fit judge of these points," he said, sedately. "If I can do you a service, I shall be happy if you will allow me the opportunity."

"I know it," reiterated Frank. "Less from my own acquaintance with you than from your father's confidence in your sincerity and kindness of heart. He would not trust you as he does if he had not excellent reasons for esteeming your sense and discretion. My hesitation has not sprung from doubt of these. I am persuaded that what I have to say would be safe in your keeping. I believe, moreover, that no one else could advise me better in my grievous strait."

"My father?" suggested Louis, a little startled by the last sentence.

"By no means. He is a true friend. He would be a wise counsellor in most matters. But it would be wrong to agitate him. Then, too, in the present case, he is, I suspect, ignorant as myself. Shall you be engaged this evening?"

"Only for an hour or two. That is, I know of no engagements that will occupy a longer time."

"Can you spare me half an hour, about or after nine o'clock? My mother and sister will be out."

"If you were any other damsel than Frank Barry, I should call that the coolest sort of an appointment," reflected Louis, sorely tempted to smile.

In consideration of the fact that it *was* Frank Barry, who never did things exactly as other people did, and whose deportment to himself was always particularly friendly, in recollection,

doubtless, of her love for his brother, he replied that he would, with pleasure, wait upon her at the designated hour.

“I will not detain you long,” she promised.

Then they stopped at her mother's door, and she thanked him for his civility in bringing her home, quite as if she were a grandmother and he a stripling in roundabouts, or as if he were the grandfather and she a miss in pantalets, — he could not determine which, — and they parted.

He did not ask himself whether curiosity or the desire to serve her took him to Mrs. Barry's that evening ten minutes in advance of the time appointed.

“Mrs. Barry and Miss Sue were going out, but Miss Barry was at home,” the servant answered his inquiry for the ladies.

He heard Frank's footstep upon the stairs before he was seated in the parlor. She came in more nervously than was natural to her manner. She was pale, too, and her eyes wavered slightly from him as she spoke.

“My mother and sister have not gone yet. They may stop to speak to you on their way to the carriage. Of course they are ignorant of the occasion for your call.”

“I comprehend.” Pitying her confusion, Louis replied, reassuringly, “I am ashamed of myself that so natural an affair as an evening call from me at this house should seem to require explanation. It is merely the fulfilment of an oft-delayed purpose. I am an incorrigible offender in the matter of visiting, says my mother, and I believe she is right.”

Mrs. Barry, entering while he was speaking, had the benefit of the closing remark. She wore a moire antique of a soft shade of lavender, open from the throat to the zone to display a stomacher of rich old lace. Diamonds gleamed upon her neck and fingers, and depended — blazing stars — from her ears. Her sandal-wood fan was trimmed with lavender silk, and attached to a slender chain of gold, the other end of which was fastened to her bracelet. By dint of powder, rouge, and hair-dye, she had succeeded in appearing more like a faded young woman than a tolerably well kept old one, and that was the utmost that

could be said of her. Mortifying, yet certain result of the bravest fight vanity and art combined can make against stealthy-footed age!

She was in high spirits, and unaffectedly pleased to see Louis in her home.

“That dear mother! It is she who is always right!” she cried, tossing fast jets of Oriental perfume from the carved ribs of her fan up to his nostrils, and gazing languishingly at him. “She understands — no one better — that the gay world misses our young doctor; that it makes the moan in his absence, and that he would be the happier man if he hearkened to its entreaty. It is not well for man to be alone. The Holy Scriptures — say they not this? I hail this call as the dawn of the blessed reformation. I am chagrined that inexorable duty — the duty to society — calls my Susie and myself away. Ah! but she is a tyrant — is society!”

“Now, mamma, you know you like the pomps and vanities of this life fifty times better than we young people do,” interposed Sue, good humoredly.

She loved her mother, but her demeanor towards her lacked the deference that distinguished Frank's every word and action in the presence of her parent.

“And why not, my saucy miss? Because my children are so disrespectful as to grow into tall young men and women, without regard for the feelings of their mother — still young, still lively, still able to perceive and enjoy the bouquet of the rich wine of existence, is it that this is a reason why I should retire to a convent, Miss Susie? You would be pleased to see me *dévoué*, I doubt not; but I shall be your rival for many years to come,” brushing the soft bloom of her daughter's cheek with her open fan, and gurgling unmusically, “say you not so, my young, wise doctor?”

“You seem to be blessed with a fine constitution, madam.”

“You hear that, Miss Frank!” ejaculated the ancient coquette, radiantly. “Say better than either of her daughters ever had, my dear friend, and earn from me the eternal grati-

tude, and also cover these giddy young creatures with confusion. Eh, Miss Barry! have I shamed you of the degeneracy of this generation of young women — you, who practise calisthenics, and use the horrible cold bath, and walk — walk — to win the roses my mother Nature has planted to bloom perennially in my cheeks.”

Sue tried to echo her laugh, but the glow of anger or mortification crept up to her temples at this senseless rhodomontade.

Frank answered simply, “We are very willing to be outshone by you, mother. Has the carriage been announced, Sue? Mother, do you know that it rains? Have you rubbers?”

“Rubbers!” cackling shrilly. “What absurd caution is this? See!” protruding the tip of a lavender satin gaiter beyond the bottom of her dress. “I make my appeal to you, doctor. Is it not that my foot is well protected against the dampness of the summer night?”

“Not against the chill pavements of Kräwen, I fear, Mrs. Barry.”

“It is but a step to the carriage,” said Sue, hastily. “Mamma, we must go.”

“Good night, little one.” Mrs. Barry patted Frank’s lips with her furled fan, fearing, possibly, to kiss her, lest the vermilion of her own should be moistened by contact with the fresh young mouth. “Consult our young doctor here upon the best mode to preserve your precious health. She has a medical mania, doctor. Forbid her to use the calisthenics, and to take the long, vulgar walks, precisely like a mountain milk-maid. O, she is an inveterate democrat, that girl, there, but very good and very dear, nevertheless! *Au revoir!*”

Louis guided her mincing steps to the carriage, and on the stairs his trained olfactories helped him to another revelation that destroyed the meagre vestige of respect he had retained for her until that moment — respect called forth not by her personal claims to it, but by the fact that she was the parent of two interesting daughters.

“Sandal-wood, patchouly, and opium!” he muttered, sniffing

contemptuously as the carriage rolled away. "I have suspected, since that first evening, that hers was fictitious animation, but I did not think quite so bad of her as this. She is no better than a drunkard!"

Frank was sitting on a low chair, at some distance from the light, her elbow resting on her knee, her face partly shaded by her hand. Louis sat down near her, and made a remark upon the sudden chill that had fallen upon the air since sunset.

"It is colder," she answered in a low tone, without altering her position.

Then Louis waited for her to introduce the subject that evidently engrossed her thoughts — waited in silent watchfulness that lost no motion of hers. He saw the slender fingers quiver and close twice; heard one deep sigh, and she sat upright — self-contained, and ready for business.

"I wish, as you may have divined, to consult you in your professional capacity, Dr. Suydam, and confidentially. I have a friend who, three years ago, met with what seemed, at the time, to be a very slight accident. She was bruised *here*."

She touched her chest with her forefinger, coloring deeply as she did so, but showing no other mark of confusion.

"The external discoloration disappeared within a week. But, a month later, she discovered that there was under the skin a small, hard swelling, not larger than a pea, which was sore when touched. From that time this has increased gradually in size, and she suffers great pain. The swelling is now larger than a walnut. But there is no surface inflammation. What is it, and what remedies would you prescribe?"

She looked directly at him, but he evaded the mute appeal.

"What is the character of the pain?" he asked, in the calm voice of purely professional interest.

"Always a dull aching. Often — more frequently now than at first — there are darting pangs, radiating in all directions from the nucleus. These are very severe — very terrible!"

Had she looked at him now, she would have seen him

change color, and bend a gaze of moved compassion upon her flushed countenance. She had sunk her head again upon her hand, and he caught the fluttering gasp, proving that respiration brought with it suffering. He had never suspected it. He deemed her faultlessly sound — healthy in body as she was equable in spirit. The very glow of her complexion was, then, the hectic of decay; her unvarying cheerfulness the fruit of the victory of a strong mind and indomitable will over physical anguish, the thought of which made him sick and faint.

“I am sorry to push you with inquiries upon a distressing subject,” he resumed, kindly, almost tenderly. His heart throbbed with ineffable pity over the young, frail girl, the agony of whose past experience was, in all likelihood, but a foretaste of fiercer anguish.

“Do not hesitate,” she said, quickly. “I wish you to know all. Having put the case into your hands, there should be no foolish reserve on my part, no mistaken delicacy. I will reply to whatever question you ask.”

“You are a thoroughly sensible woman, Miss Barry. I wish there were more like you among my patients,” said Louis, encouragingly. “This swelling, as you call it — tumor would be the better name.”

Still watchful of her, he marked the shudder that shook her against her will, as he pronounced the dread word.

“Is it movable? Can it be slipped from side to side under the pressure of the finger? or is it stationary, as if it had formed what we term attachments, to the bone or flesh beneath it?”

“It is not movable.”

She saw that he had hoped for a different reply.

“You are quite sure of this?”

“I am.”

Louis meditated for an instant.

“I will imitate your frankness,” he said, then. “Tumors, such as you have described, are of two kinds. I will distinguish these as simple and cancerous.”

Avoiding medical technicalities as far as he could, he ex-

plained the nature of both; the causes from which they sprang, their attendant symptoms, and the treatment adopted by the ablest physicians in each case. He was not surprised that much he said was already known to her. A woman less intelligent and self-reliant would have been driven by the pressure of the terrible secret to learn all that books could teach with reference to the malady threatening to sap the foundations of her constitution. He elicited no fresh information from her relative to her symptoms, excepting the eager interruption when he spoke of hereditary cancers.

“There has never been anything of this kind in the family before.”

“I am glad to hear that — very glad,” he replied. “With untainted blood, general good health and youth on the side of the patient, there is little in what you have told me to excite alarm. My advice to your friend would be to commit her case to some eminent and experienced physician. I should, of course, recommend Dr. Milnor. He is skilful, candid, and honorable. We have agreed to waive false delicacy, and you will allow me to remind you of the absolute necessity that he should ascertain for himself the precise nature of the affection. It may be a trifle, that will yield readily to medicine and simple external application. Should it be anything more, involving the necessity of an operation, she must recollect that the terror of this extreme measure is chiefly in the anticipation. The use of anæsthetics has been brought to such perfection that these scenes are robbed of their most painful features.”

“She would never submit to an operation,” said Frank, hoarsely. “She would die first. Is there no other way?”

He would have been vexed, as he was disappointed at this turn of affairs, but for the distress in her face and accent. He had honored the genuine good sense she had displayed up to this moment, admired, more than he dared to express to her, her freedom from the mawkish airs and prudish concealments that fretted him beyond endurance in many of his lady patients. But this declaration, and her extreme discomposure as she made

it, reminded him that she was but a woman after all, and therefore liable to the dominion of all manner of whims and variations of resolution. With a commendable muster of patience, he reverted to his remark that it was uncertain whether the knife would be used at all.

“I infer, however, from all you have said, that you have serious apprehensions that it must come to this, if the person diseased would hope for a final cure,” she answered. “And if this resort is impossible, what will follow?”

“I prefer that you should take Dr. Milnor's verdict instead of mine.”

“Which means that you apprehend a lingering, painful decline?” interrogated Frank, in desperate composure.

“I can hold out no hope of anything else.” Louis determined to try the effect of very plain speaking.

He regretted it when he saw her turn ashy white, and catch her breath convulsively.

“I am not fainting,” she managed to say, as he moved towards the bell. “Don't ring.”

“This girl should have been born in Lacedæmon, in the heroic age,” thought the physician, as she mastered the spasm, and calmness returned to her features. “Yet she shrinks from the operating table and the knife. Strange inconsistency!”

“We are taking too much for granted,” he said, cheerfully, when she could listen. “I have already expressed my hope that youth and a sound constitution will be our most efficient allies. There is wondrous recuperative energy in the young. Whatever corrupt matter may have crept into the system is often expelled without the aid of drugs by sheer vitality. Nature seems to relax the care of her children as they advance in years.”

“This has been my worst fear,” said Frank, lowly. “All that I have read and heard on the subject tends to confirm it.”

Louis looked perplexed.

“I certainly understood you to imply, if you did not assert, that your friend is young.”

"She is over fifty years of age," replied she, yet more lowly. His speechless astonishment was a new light upon what had gone before.

"You have not believed, all this while, that I was talking about myself!" she exclaimed.

"I have. It is a great relief to learn that you were not."

"I would not have sheltered myself behind so paltry a subterfuge. If the secret had been mine, I should have imparted it in the plainest language I could employ. I could wish it were! If mine were the pain and the peril, my load would be easier!"

She did not weep, but the passionate emphasis of her curt sentences, the yearning and woe of her dry eyes, touched his heart to the quick.

He walked twice through the rooms in perplexed thought, then halted in front of her.

"I believe every word you say, and I comprehend you fully. You have betrayed nothing. You have guarded your friend's secret well, and it shall be as safe in my keeping. For it is mine! May I go on?"

"You may."

"I have already, unintentionally, revealed to you the truth that the case we have considered is less hopeful than if you were, as I thought, the patient. Moreover, the difficulties of ascertaining the precise symptoms, of the thorough investigation into the nature of the disorder, are tenfold greater than if you were to be dealt with. I am right in this — am I not?"

"You know nothing about it!" Frank started up in irrepressible agitation. "The injury was inflicted by an ill-directed and very heavy nosegay which was thrown into our balcony at the Roman carnival. I discovered her condition by accident, eighteen months ago. She fainted, one night, on her return from a ball, and I loosened her dress. We were alone. I said nothing of what I had seen until two days after, when she had another attack of faintness and nausea. Then I could hold my peace no longer. I have never seen her really angry

with me, excepting that once. But I persisted in my inquiries and entreaties until she told me all. It was to be a secret between us. Not even my sister suspects it. I do not think my mother regrets having taken me into her confidence, for I am admitted to her room when she has most need of help and sympathy. She suffers *horribly!*”

The daughter bent her head upon the marble mantel, and shivered in the recollection.

“She is averse to summoning medical assistance?”

“She will not hear of it. She will have it that nothing serious ails her. This ‘petty trouble will wear away soon.’ She has ‘heard of hundreds of similar cases that were cured by being let alone. The pain is sharp sometimes, but a mere bagatelle to what many suffer, and, like nervous headache, is not dangerous.’ This is her manner of treating the subject when I force her to speak of it. Unless I do this, she ignores it altogether. I have reason to fear that she often endures great agony, and conceals it from me through this unaccountable repugnance to talk of her malady.”

“Unaccountable, but not uncommon. This feature in such complaints is so familiar to physicians, that it is taken into account in making out their diagnosis of the disease. Mrs. Barry would not be willing to confer with Dr. Milnor, you think?”

“She would close her door against him if he were to call on this errand. Dr. Suydam, my hands are tied! I see the danger as clearly as you do. I have consulted all the treatises upon this disease to which I could gain access. But she rejects the regimen laid down in them all. You see what her life is, and, knowing what you do now, you can bear witness to the invincible resolution—the—I had almost said—miraculous fortitude that enables her to hide her misery from other eyes than mine. Me she can never hoodwink. I think the consciousness of this irritates her sometimes when she has much to conceal. This life is making me old. Often I am wild with dread. To-day, when Katrine told me of your kindness

to her sick child, I made up my mind that I must ask your advice. The idea has been frequently with me since I listened, some weeks since, to an account, given by a lady, of a critical and successful operation you had performed early in your professional career, and of your growing reputation as a surgeon. I thought you could tell me whether it would be absolutely necessary to use this means. I shall never forget your kindness, your patience, your sympathy. I have trespassed upon all of these by my clumsy method of telling my story, and my weakness when you delivered your opinion. I hoped I should command my feelings better."

"You shall not depreciate yourself, Miss Barry. Your behavior has been noble and admirable. You shall never repent the confidence you have reposed in me. Your singleness of filial duty must be rewarded in time. I will give you a few rules for the management of the disease in the present stage, and trust to your tact to persuade your mother to adopt them, without the knowledge of how you have obtained them. Meanwhile, watch for an opportunity of changing her resolution not to call in medical advice. It may be circumstances will favor you in this regard when you least expect it. Should any novel symptoms supervene, you will oblige me by letting me know without delay. As the friend of my father and my brother, you have an indubitable right to my services."

When Mrs. Barry and Sue returned from their party — a quiet "sociable," beginning at eight and breaking up at midnight — Frank was still in the parlor. She had lowered the gas, and stationed herself by the window to watch for them, or to enjoy the effect of the street lamps upon the wet flagging of the sidewalks.

"Dull music that, I should think!" said Sue, yawning. "Yet about as lively as our evening has been. Even mamma, who, like the bee, gathers honey from everything that pretends to be a flower of pleasure, looked miserably *ennuyéed* by eleven o'clock. I never attended a stupider *soirée*."

"Hear the affianced Mariana, inconsolable for the absence

of the 'one bright particular star'!" replied Mrs. Barry, feebly vivacious. "Our evening might have been more gay, but when the hostess does her best to amuse her guests, criticism should be dumb."

"As you were, mamma, during the half hour you sat upon the uncompromising divan behind the door, and listened to the fat man in spectacles and a white cravat!" retorted Sue, mischievously. "She looked like a wilted rose, Frank, under the solemn fervor of his eloquence. Her very fan ceased to move."

"You are a saucebox, whom one is a fool to regard!" said her mother, in French, with a sorry grimace intended for an indulgent smile. "When did our young doctor leave you to the enjoyment of your beloved solitude, Petite?"

Frank answered in the same language. "At eleven o'clock."

Mrs. Barry's eyes sparkled with real delight.

"I am charmed to hear that he staid so long! He is a favorite with me — the dear, handsome youth!"

"You consider him handsome? I don't!" said giddy Sue. "He is too grave and taciturn to suit my fancy. He looks like a man who has a burden on his mind."

"He is none the worse for that," said her sister. "None of us are, if it be a burden which the Lord, and not our own folly, has laid upon us."

CHAPTER XVII.

MRS. SUYDAM'S thorough familiarity with the various grades of Kräwen society was the skimmer by means of which Mrs. Barry gathered the *crème de la crème* of the city and its environs to grace her daughter's bridal night. The festivities were imposing throughout. The bride was pretty, and superbly dressed; the bridegroom, rich, fashionable, and gentlemanly; Mrs. Barry, the most suave and attentive of hostesses. Nobody — not even her mother and sister — knew how much of the excellent arrangement of the *fête* and the satisfaction of the guests was due to Frank's taste and executive abilities. Whatever she undertook was done well and quietly. Herself unostentatious to the extreme of simplicity, she would have preferred, had the matter been left to her option, a modest wedding breakfast, attended only by the nearest of kin and a few chosen friends. But Sue's liking in such respects coincided precisely with her mother's, and Frank was too unselfish to lay a straw in the way of their plans.

Mrs. Barry, true to her threat of rivalling her daughter, divided with her, that evening, the notice of connoisseurs in ladies' apparel. She wore a pearl-colored satin, trimmed with point lace, lappets of old point fastened by pearl pins to her dyed tresses, and a ravishing shawl of the same diaphanous material veiled her arms and neck. If the bride in white silk and diamonds, brilliant in beauty and happiness, were the sun of the scene, her maternal loveliness might typify the softer lustre of the moon. Her purely white fan frosted with silver was a marvel of chaste elegance; her manipulation of it pro-

duced the effect of scintillating rays from a twinkling luminary, while her *bonmots* and sugared sayings were cast to the right and left like showers of *confetti* at a carnival.

“An unfortunate comparison,” thought Dr. Suydam, as it occurred to him.

On his guard, all the time, lest some significant glance from him might betray Frank's confidence, he yet watched furtively Mrs. Barry's progress through the throng — listened for her wheezing falsetto amid the clamor of two hundred other tongues. He studied her with the curiosity he would have felt in the analyzation of some anomalous hybrid, some wanton freak of Nature. But Art was creator here. With the sure seeds of an agonizing death festering visibly within the bosom that heaved in pants of coquettish laughter, she was tripping in fantastic measures down to her grave. The gnawing evil above her heart was never still; but she defied it, in a flippant jest, to extort from her one sigh or start of pain. Her overweening vanity and worldliness were the bulwark behind which she fought the vanguard of dissolution. As he thought of these things, her painted visage and set smile were a flimsy covering through the grinning outlines of which the death's-head could be distinctly traced. In a martyr for truth or affection's sake, this fortitude and reticence would have been sublime. In her, the servile puppet of fashion, it was a ghastly farce.

“I hope you have not regretted your good nature in accepting our invitation for to-night,” said tones clear and fine as the chime of silver bells across the water.

“I have not!” answered Louis, starting, with a sensation of guilt in having allowed his mind to dwell upon that which the speaker concealed so sedulously. “I have seldom been to a pleasanter party.”

“I should have given you more credit for sincerity had you said a less tiresome one,” returned Frank, smiling. “For myself, I have been too busy to suffer the boredom which is generally my portion on similar occasions. I mean at these

mammoth assemblies. I like to have room in which to breathe and move."

"Your parlors are large and well ventilated," Louis was saying, when Mrs. Barry swam up to them in her moon-like glory. Her escort was a man of sixty-five or thereabouts, who wore a very juvenile wig, very white teeth, a jetty mustache, a conceited smirk, diamond studs, and a suit of clothes cut in the extreme of the latest fashion.

"Ah, behold my second conscience! my little mentor, who is ever on the alert lest her thoughtless mamma should commit some offence against the Medo-Persian laws of the code American!" lisped the lady. "And my dear young doctor, who is ten years older than you, my good Mr. Guysbert, and forty thousand times more wise! Will you that I refer your audacious proposal to them?"

"I consent, in the confident expectation that they, being models of wisdom and taste, will second it," replied Mr. Guysbert, laying his hand upon his heart, and bowing to the pattern pair.

"Bah! You will not conciliate them by your flatteries! They are proof against the forces that bear down the weak will of women credulous and vain like me. I will betray your folly, and you shall see my Minerva and my Hippocrates ridicule your infatuation. He prays me, my children, to execute upon the harp certain melodies that charmed him years — so many years ago! when we were both young and enthusiastic. He has heard, he tells me, that my touch and style have improved with time, as does the good wine. In vain I assure him that I have not practised in a thousand years — that my fingers have lost their cunning. He will not hear it. O, you will not believe how obstinate he is! how tiresome! how intolerably pertinacious! Perhaps you will that I add, how irresistible, sir? Is it so?"

"You have stated the truth with your characteristic perspicuity, madam. I need only to be convinced of the correctness of your last clause by your compliance with my humble petition."

Mr. Guysbert twirled his jewelled eye-glass. Mrs. Barry unfurled and fluttered her fan until her lappets streamed out from her head like the wings of a monstrous moth. The broadest satirist would have found it impossible to caricature the couple of antiquated butterflies.

“But the band is playing, mother!” objected Frank. “And the dancers will soon take the floor again.”

“That is nothing! Did we not agree that, in consequence of the heat of the weather, the dance was to be intermitted from time to time? You said, my forgetful child, that the intervals could be filled by amateur musicians. My heart smites me that I have refused my friends so often the little favor for which Mr. Guysbert prays. I am not so silly as to be beguiled into exhibiting my poor talent by a few fine phrases from one deceitful tongue,” — a coy flutter of the fan Guysbert-ward. “If I yield, it is that I may have peace from entreaties, and that my friends may learn how mistaken they were in soliciting that I would oblige them. It is a happy thought. I will chagrin them as the penalty of their importunity! Mr. Guysbert! behold me at your service! Dr. Suydam, will you command the musicians to be idle until they receive further orders?”

Frank drew nearer to the frolicsome dowager.

“Mother! dear mother!” Louis overheard her plead in a soft aside, “remember!”

Nor was the furious flash of her mother's sidelong glance lost upon him. Her voice, too, was like acidulated honey.

“Little one! have you yet to learn what is meant by your mother's ‘I will it’?”

“*La reine le veut!*” repeated Guysbert; with a profound reverence, and they swept onward.

Louis performed his distasteful errand, and uneasily threaded the crowd to the door of the music-room. It was filled with curious gazers at a tableau in the centre of the apartment. Mrs. Barry was tuning her harp; Guysbert was upon one knee adjusting her foot-cushion and music-rack. Just as Louis

obtained a glimpse of them, a third figure joined the group. Frank, like a classic statue in the noble mould of her colorless features and the sweep of her white draperies, stood at her mother's side.

“Let me tune it for you, mother! You dislike the tedious preface to performance. I do not.”

“Behold the dutiful daughter!” laughed Mrs. Barry, relinquishing the task, and falling into a fine attitude of waiting, as a sultana might rest among the velvet cushions while her favorite slave made ready her lute.

She shook her fan menacingly at some compliment of Guysbert, inaudible to the bystanders, and lapsed into taciturnity, waving her ray-dispenser slowly to and fro, in languor or reverie. Louis, pressing gradually into the inner rank of the lookers-on, saw her chest heave and palpitate in nervous anticipation of the ordeal she was bent upon sustaining, or in physical pain. With far less circumspection than he had displayed in piercing the phalanx of would-be listeners, he retraced his steps to the outer room, procured a glass of iced champagne, and bore it over the heads of the crowd, without losing a drop, to Mrs. Barry. He presented it, not kneeling, as Guysbert would have done, but with a bow that won the approbation of the sovereign of the hour.

She thanked him with a gracious grimace, that brought out for him into bolder relief the feature of the death's-head, raised the glass to her dry lips, and drank it with avidity.

“It is nectar to my parched throat—parched and thirsty after so much talking!” she said, in her airiest manner. “My harp, it shall thank you for the draught so refreshing.”

She played mechanically well, and one could have listened with pleasure to her performance, had he shut his eyes to the contortions of body and visage she deemed essential to the expressive rendering of the piece selected. She undulated from head to foot like a wounded snake; drooped like a scalded cabbage plant; soared, with upturned face, as an ambitious duck rises on tiptoe to snap at a flying bug; and anon bowed herself

to the grand finale as a blacksmith hammers a cooling horse-shoe.

"No, no!" she reiterated, in response to the rapturous "encore." "I have fulfilled my promise! I have disappointed you all! I have played out my stratagem! I retire from the stage! My dear young doctor, may I ask for an arm? This room is oppressive! Let the band resume, and the dance."

Louis, warned, by the deadly sallowness striking through pearl powder and carmine, that the season for action was short, led her out by the nearest door. Frank opened it for him, and followed them closely. They were in a small back hall, shut in by locked doors on two sides. A private staircase led down to the basement and up to the second floor.

"The heat has been too much for you, dear!" said Frank, tenderly. "Will you go to your chamber until you are better?"

"It was the heat—the excitement—the crowd—nothing else!"

And with the gasping lie upon her lips, she swooned outright.

Without more ado, Louis picked her up when she reeled against him, and carried her dexterously up the narrow stairway. She was light, in her faint, as a child of thirteen—a mere skeleton, as he could feel. All her plumpness was padding.

"This way," said Frank, at the top of the steps. Another small, empty entry, and they passed into a chamber, where the insensible figure was laid upon a bed.

"Have you hartshorn in the house?" inquired Louis.

"In my mother's room! This is mine."

She darted off, and was back, in an instant, with a case of restoratives.

"Her dress must be loosened. I will wait in the hall in case you should want me," pursued Louis, retiring.

Frank called him back, and pointed to the adjoining dressing-room.

“Some one might pass through the hall while you were there. If I do not call you soon, there is a door opening into the entry,” she said, hurriedly.

The gas was burning low in the dressing-room, but he did not raise it. He stood, instead, at the one window, straining his ears for sounds from the outer chamber. For two, three minutes all was still, except for the subdued rustle of Frank's dress as she moved about the bed. Then a broken groan, and a word of loving inquiry, and he knew that the lonely girl's work of mercy had brought back the scared life to the outraged body. Hysterical sobs marked the continued return of consciousness, and then a stifled scream. Still Frank did not summon him, and he withstood the impulse to intrude upon the sufferer—the two sufferers—for there uprose before his memory the daughter's face, as she had said, “If mine were the pain and the peril, my load would be easier!”

“It is like a knife! It tears my heart!” he heard Mrs. Barry moan, and Frank's tender soothing—as the mother bird murmurs to her young.

Then distinctly, “Dear mother, Dr. Suydam is in the other room. Let me call him? He brought you up stairs in his arms. He will be very discreet—very gentle!”

“Are you demented, girl?” in a loud, frightened whisper. The rest was lost.

The whispering went on a while longer, and Frank unclosed the door of the smaller room.

“Dr. Suydam! My mother is better. She wishes to thank you for your attention to her just now.”

Her tone was dry, and her features bespoke weary disappointment.

Mrs. Barry reclined upon the bed, the sallowness still showing through the paint, the powder having been renewed since the application of water to her face. She held out both hands with a horribly sickly smile.

“My dear young doctor! there is the healing in your touch. I shall ever regret that I was not partially conscious when

you lifted and brought me up the stairs. The tableau was effective—was it not? I find the incident romantic—delicious! The spirit of Crichton, the soul and the deeds of Bayard, linger still in a few knightly bosoms. I faint with much of grace—do I not?”

“I am a novice in such scenes,” returned Louis, smothering his disgust. “How do you feel?”

He had taken one of the offered hands, and adroitly put his fingers upon her pulse. It was wiry and irregular, denoting fever and excessive nervous derangement.

She jerked her wrist away.

“Fie, then! is it thus that you take advantage of my weakness? Would you have me to become a hypochondriac? I have had the sad heart all the evening. My Susie, my sweet bird of song, leaves me for another nest. My friends say, ‘Smile!’ the world bids me to laugh, to sing, and all the while the thorn pierces my breast. I faint in the effort! Behold the sole cause of what you have seen!”

Louis did not glance at Frank. He would spare her this added mortification.

“You will, however, accept my professional services so far as to empower me to make your apology for not appearing below stairs again this evening?” he said, respectfully.

“How! You dream! I rejoin my guests on the instant!” And why not? I am well! entirely as I should be!”

“Mother!” murmured Frank, beseechingly.

Mrs. Barry raised herself angrily from the pillow.

“You grow officious, Frances Barry! I have indulged your whims until they are unbearable. I am your mother—not your slave!”

Louis staid for no more. When the incensed woman recovered her reason, she would be grateful for his departure, and every word heard by him was another drop of gall in Frank’s cup.

His mother met him just within the entrance of the dancing-room.

“Is Mrs. Barry indisposed?” she asked, anxiously.

“A little faint — or she was, just now,” he answered shortly.

“She is a person of exquisite sensibility,” said Mrs. Suydam, sympathizingly. “Her daughter’s marriage is a severe trial to her affectionate heart. I have seen all the evening that she was struggling heroically with her emotions.”

“She should be used to the trial by this time, I should say. This is the third daughter she has seen torn from her sheltering care by ruthless robbers in the shape of eligible *partis*,” rejoined Louis, in his most cynical tone. “Poor woman! She merits the commiseration of her friends and acquaintances! This is the prescribed mode of doing it, I suppose. Are all these laughing, talking, dancing people battling heroically against *their* sympathy and sadness?”

“You scoffer!” Mrs. Suydam laughed to conceal her displeasure. “Frank, love, what shall we do to convert him to belief in human goodness?”

“Did you speak to me, Mrs. Suydam?” Frank turned back to say, in passing.

“Yes. I want your help in converting this sceptic son of mine from the heresies of misanthropy. Here he is, ridiculing self-denial, disinterestedness, and all the other cardinal virtues that redeem mankind from crustaceous degradation.”

“Oysters are estimable creatures in their way,” interrupted Louis, to avert the threatened revelation.

“He insists upon it,” pursued Mrs. Suydam, “that these people are all selfishly happy; that not one of them is cloaking his own sadness or anxiety, and decking his face in smiles that others may be made glad; that when the surface is bright, there is peace below, or that there are no depths to be stirred.”

“In Solomon’s time every heart knew its own bitterness,” said Frank, pleasantly. “I fancy the world is no happier now.”

Face and tone were discreet, but for the wretchedness of her deep eyes. To shield this from his mother’s observation,

Louis made a playful rejoinder, offered his arm, and proposed a promenade. He exerted himself, moreover, to entertain her — not with the frothy nothings he would have offered for the regalement of any other young lady present, but by sprightly, intelligent talk of books, music, and cognate themes. He did not hope to give pleasure to a spirit so bowed as was hers, but she was secure, while he appeared to engage her attention, from embarrassing questions, and relieved from the necessity of answering others.

They had made the tour of the apartments but once before Mrs. Barry intercepted them. Under cover of the invaluable fan, she squeezed his hand hard, and twinkled her heavy eyes into a condition approximating humidity.

“Is it that I have offended you beyond hope?” she wheezed. “You resent my unfortunate impulsiveness — my constitutional impetuosity — is it not so? Alas, I am so mercurial! I am precisely as a thermometer. The breath of cold, the least slight, dashes my spirits to the earth. I grovel in despair. I sink in an abyss of woe. Then, at a touch of fire, the approach of warmth, I mount, I lose my head! I am no more a creature rational, but a thing that foams — exhales! My little one here and I have wept, each in the arms of the other. I have prayed her to forgive my impetuosity. She has replied — the angel! — ‘Dear mamma, do I not know thy infirmity of nerves — thy temperament the most sensitive? I forget all. Say no more.’ And you, my dear young doctor, is it that you accept my abasement?”

“I remember nothing, madam, except that I have the happiness of seeing you well again.”

It cost him a struggle to deliver the gallant phrase, and when this was effected, he would have despised himself for both effort and speech had Frank's eyes been less expressive of gratitude.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE outer and larger office of Drs. Milnor and Suydam was plainly and sparsely furnished. The many who penetrated no farther into the establishment than the waiting-room went away with an impression that the associate physicians were men of simple tastes and strictly business habits, in whom increase of means had not engendered ostentation. Behind this lay the consultation chamber and private office. This was fitted up as a library parlor, and in it sat, upon a pleasant day late in June, the junior partner, profoundly absorbed in the last number of a foreign medical journal. His writing-desk was open beside him, and on it lay several loose pages of manuscript, to which he referred from time to time. He dabbled in authorship himself, and having just completed an article upon the very subject handled by the transatlantic writer of the printed thesis, he was eager to ascertain in what respects their theories coincided or differed.

Pardonable interest in his brain offspring was the cause of the frown with which he raised his head at the office boy's rap upon the door of communication with the front room.

"A person to see you, Dr. Suydam," said the lad, hesitatingly, having obtained permission to enter.

"Man or woman?"

"A man, sir."

"Did he ask for me particularly?" reluctantly closing the lid upon the manuscript.

"He did, sir."

In the outer office stood Nick Sloane, distressingly brawny

and beefy, in a clay-colored summer suit, a Byron collar turned broadly over a wisp of pink cravat, and a low-crowned, rakish straw hat, surrounded by a sailor's band.

"How do you do, Mr. Sloane?" said the son-in-law, stiffly, and they imitated the motion of shaking hands. "Do you wish to speak with me?"

"Well, I do," swaggered Nick, familiarly.

"Then step in here," leading the way to the other room.

Nick helped himself to a chair, wiped his face with a gay silk handkerchief, stamped all over with blue and scarlet dogs, and stared about him with the air of one whose pretensions to proprietorship in the room and furniture were not to be cavilled at.

"Nice den, this of yours," he said, patronizingly.

"You wished to speak to me for a moment, you said," replied Louis, peeping at his watch with a mien that hinted at countless engagements.

"Yes, I fetched you a note."

Louis received and read the scented billet, as he would have taken and inspected a grocer's account.

"She needs Saratoga water, you see," commented Nick, when it was refolded. "She is real poorly this summer. I want that you should come out and look at her. I think, myself, she's a-going into a decline."

"Does she keep her bed?"

"Most all day. And she's fell away powerful. I never see a woman change like she has done since last fall."

Louis was silent, and his countenance doggedly non-committal.

"Look here!" continued the affectionate father, persuasively, "why can't you two kiss and make up?"

"Did she tell you to say that?"

"No — that is — not exactly that. But she's let on to me more'n once that she was a-breaking her heart after you." Scanning the impassive visage from beneath his bushy eyebrows, he was at a loss how to proceed, and felt his ground

inch by inch. "It stands to reason that husband and wife had ought to live together."

"When either can derive any profit from the other," put in Louis.

Nick was slightly disconcerted by the accent, not the words, of the sneer.

"But it's the Lord's app'ntment — marriage is," he continued.

"Oftener the devil's! Was *this* what you came to say to me?"

"I didn't mean to discombobberate you," said Nick, pacifically. "It's sort o' nat'ral, you see, as I should feel for my poor girl."

"I see nothing natural about your pity for her. She has all she wants — hasn't she? except a hundred dollars for which she has applied to me."

"What is money without a person has a satisfied mind?" queried Nick, pensively.

"What it always is — money! Your only business with me was to bring this note, then? Did you expect to take the money back with you?"

"Well, if it was perfectly convenient to you, I s'pose 'twould accommodate her," said Nick, candidly.

Louis opened a drawer, took out a blank check, filled it up, and rang for his office boy.

"Bring me the money for that, quick!" he ordered.

Spurred to celerity by the stern face and tone, the lad did his errand speedily, and the bills were passed over to Nick. Then Louis laid a receipt before him.

"Sign that, if you please."

An ungainly signature it was, and the Nicholas was spelled without the *h*. Louis stood up when this little matter was transacted.

"You will excuse me for reminding you that my time is precious."

"You'll come out and see her — won't you? She's three quarters sick, you know; no more color in her face nor there is

in a pocket handkercher, and weak as water. I'd like to have you give her some medicine, or somethin'."

"I may call to-morrow. I cannot come sooner."

The door shut behind the burly form, and the icy mask broke up stormily. The young man ground his teeth, and dashed his fist upon the table in a frenzy of rage and humiliation.

"This clog I am to wear about my neck while I live! Why should I care or strive to rise? Can I drag her up with me? If I gain wealth, she will squander it. If fame, she will assert the wife's right to a share in the husband's glory. This is the price the man pays for the insane folly of the boy. All that is left for me to do is to save my few friends from the knowledge of my degradation as long as I can!"

He struck a match, applied it to Ruby's note, and let it burn into ashes. These he blew away with a contemptuous puff from the table on which they had dropped.

"What was once love has as much life in it as they have — no more."

His patients found him doubly reserved and grave in his morning rounds. The day was cool for the season, although bright, and the twelve o'clock train was filled with Kräwenites, as he took his place among them, having engaged to run down to the great mart on business for his father. Of course, there was a rush for inside seats, to wit, those next the windows. These were secured for the most part by men, who, more agile and fearless than the feminine passengers, sprang upon the train before it fairly ceased to move, and disposed of themselves as they pleased. At least a dozen benches in each tier held but a single occupant, a complacent settler in hat, coat, and pantaloons — whose elbow half shut up his window as he inhaled the breeze, and eyed, at his ease, the embarrassed women wandering up and down the aisles in quest of an empty seat, or trying to determine in what location they would find their inevitable juxtaposition to a strange man most tolerable.

Louis had reached the depot just as the train did, and walked directly aboard. Selecting a seat on the shady side, and equi-

distant from both ends of the car, he took possession of it, and opened a pamphlet he had taken from the post office on his way down. Something, he did not know what, made him look up suddenly, in time to see a slight figure pass him in line with the anxious sisterhood mentioned above.

“Miss Barry!” he exclaimed, springing up, “here is a seat. I have been keeping it for you,” he added, jestingly, as she took it with the courteous expression of gratitude that met every offer of kindness or civility.

“Your thoughtfulness for my comfort amounted to actual prescience, since I did not know myself that I was going to the city an hour ago. Mother discovered, at half past eleven, that she could not go on with her embroidery without more silk of a shade which cannot be matched in Kräwen.”

“How is she?”

It was safe to ask the question, for the cars were in motion, and he spoke too softly to be overheard by their neighbors.

Frank shook her head.

“Not nearly so well as she was in the spring. The fatigue and excitement attendant upon Sue’s marriage and departure for Europe was a serious draught upon her strength. She is weaker each day. The pain recurs at shorter intervals, and the paroxysms are far more severe than ever before.”

“She is still unwilling to have a physician?”

“Yes. I have prevailed upon her to use the remedies you prescribed, without telling her how I gained my knowledge of their efficacy. I doubt, however, if they benefit her. I fear their influence is counteracted by opium. This drug has a wonderful effect upon her. It dulls bodily pain while it exhilarates the spirits. But it is gradually losing effect. She has doubled her daily allowance within the last six months.”

Louis was very grave.

“Frank — I beg pardon — Miss Barry!”

“Call me ‘Frank.’ Why should you not? Your brother often did. I can talk to you with more ease upon this subject, if you will let me forget how short a time has elapsed since

our personal introduction to one another. What were you saying?"

"In virtue, then, of my brotherly prerogatives, let me press home upon you one fact. If your mother's life is to be saved, you must put forth every effort now, without the delay of a day, to conquer her aversion to the disclosure of her situation to a competent physician. My counsel is that you tell her, this very evening, all you have learned from me respecting cases like hers. Say that you have described the symptoms of a person afflicted as she is to me, and that I asserted the danger to be imminent. Do not be afraid of terrifying her. Desperate diseases require desperate remedies. The best thing you can do is to frighten her thoroughly. The task will be painful. If I could relieve you of it I would. But you, you alone, have her ear and her confidence. The time may come when you will repent the mistaken tenderness that sealed your lips."

Frank leaned her head upon her hand, and did not speak again until the train had traversed a full mile of meadow track.

"I will do as you advise, for you are right. Before I sleep this night she shall hear all I know," she said; then, whitely resolute, "I had rather be torn by wild beasts. But I ought to do it — and I will!"

"You will acquaint me with the result of your effort?"

"Immediately. You shall hear from me early to-morrow morning."

She turned her face to the window, and seemed to gaze upon the country through which they were passing.

"Who lives in that house?" she demanded, in her most off-hand manner, pointing to Meadow Cottage.

Confused beyond his powers of concealment, Louis bent forward, pretending ignorance as to what building she designated.

"The white house in the middle of the moor," she continued. "I have taken a curious interest in it from the first

day I saw it. I have conjectured much and vainly about the reasons that led to the erection of a dwelling in a location so desolate. The north and east winds must be bleak there for three fourths of the year. Who lives there? Is their isolation from their fellow-men as complete as their home is lonely? I have often searched the darkness of evening for the lighted windows, when the fogs were rolling in from the sea, and fancied it a beacon for the direction of benighted travellers over the marshes."

They had reached the bridge of the second river on the route, and her voice, less guarded than when she spoke of her mother's malady, arose above the duller rumbling of the wheels to the ear of an old gentleman sitting in front of her.

"If you knew the real character of its inmates, Miss Barry, you would rather liken it to a wrecker's lantern," he said, looking over his shoulder at her. "The owner and tenant of the desirable abode is one of the most disreputable of that by no means reputable class, horse jockeys. He combines the character of horse trader, trainer, farrier, sportsman, and swindler general. Latterly he has tapped a lucrative vein, either upon the race-course or at the card-table. His tumble-down house has been patched and painted into a show of decency, and he dresses like a Bowery swell. He brags of a considerable legacy already pocketed, and other and larger expectations, which last, he insinuates, will be fulfilled in a manner that will make all Kräwen stare. Nothing stands between him and vast wealth and social eminence, he says, except the life of one old man, who is tottering upon the brink of the grave. You can credit as much or as little as you like of this remarkable tale, Dr. Suydam. I repeat it as I heard it from his lips in the waiting-room of the Water Street Dépôt not a fortnight since."

"He is a despicable scoundrel!" broke forth Louis; then, recollecting himself, pulled up his temper sharply.

"I ought not to wish that his expectations should be disappointed," said Frank. "Yet I shall be sorry when the house is closed. It is, to me, an engaging feature in a monotonous landscape."

She did not comprehend the heightened color of her escort, nor the sullen glow of his eyes, when they left their seat and mingled with the throng streaming towards the Kroywen Ferry. Perhaps in her own mental disquiet she did not reflect upon his altered demeanor, as her benevolent disposition would have led her at another time to do. At any rate, she walked silently beside him through the ferry gates and upon the steamboat lying at the wharf, and, while awaiting the moment of departure, leaned, still silently, over the guards, gazing down into the murky waves, which even under the blue June heavens were of the lively hue popularly known as London smoke.

Withdrawing her gaze, as the spokes of the paddle-wheels upon the water jarred the boat, she accosted her companion with some unimportant remark. He did not hear her. His undivided attention was given to a couple who stood just without the door of the ladies' cabin. One of them was Bogart Veddar. The other was a lady above the middle height, very beautiful, and dashingly attired. She leaned against the outer wall of the saloon, tracing invisible diagrams upon the floor with the point of her lace parasol, coquettish dimples coming and going about her cherry-red mouth. Her exquisite complexion, the rare coloring of her hair, and her almost faultless features, drew from ingenuous Frank an involuntary exclamation of pleasure.

"What a handsome woman!" she said. "Do you know her?"

"Very slightly," returned Louis, with a disagreeable smile. "I used to call her an acquaintance, but times have changed, and we with them."

"Pardon me. I did not mean to be inquisitive. Her appearance is so attractive that I could not but notice her."

"You think her attractive? I should not have thought hers the style of beauty that would please you. But she is considered, as you say, very handsome."

"Mr. Veddar certainly thinks so," responded Frank, archly. Louis had already noted the dandy's show of devotion, and

Ruby's pleased reception of it. Neither had cast a look in his direction. He could not determine, watch them as he might, whether or not they were aware in whose neighborhood they were. Nick's visit and pitiful story of her declining health were then another of her *ruses* for breaking down his resolution of continued separation until she should grant him leave to announce their marriage; another application of the screw that was to extort money from his compassion or sense of honor. If he had never despised her before, he did now, heartily and bitterly, as he divined what were the convolutions of her scheme. She contemplated a gay campaign at Saratoga; and having overrun the very liberal allowance he made her, had written the plaintive little note, and instructed her father to follow it up by representations of her declining health and spirits. Having received the timely remittance, and her husband's promise of a visit the next day, she had hurried off to town for an afternoon's shopping. Plump as a November partridge, and ruddy as the heart of a cabbage-rose, she was to-day. If this accidental encounter had not taken place, he would have beheld her, at his professional call, languid and pallid, propped by pillows upon her sofa.

A thrilling thought ran through Louis's mind in reviewing the list of deceptions of which he had been the victim — thrilling as tempting.

“This is not the woman I married, but an impostor, without mercy and without shame; a bold speculator upon my love and integrity. What law, human or divine, enforces my constancy to her, my acknowledgment of her pretensions? She whom I loved and wooed was a guileless, tender creature, pure in heart and in imagination as I believe this girl at my side to be.”

His eye strayed from the lush charms of the one — her silk dress that might have been daguerreotyped as an extravaganza of the reigning fashion; her lace shawl, draped loosely upon her arms and trailing to the dirty floor; her summer bonnet of white crape, overloaded without by a bunch of

grapes and one of wheat — currants and striped grass inside, as if they had been forced into bloom by the warmth of her auburn frizettes; her white parasol, covered with black lace, shading her laughing eyes — to the open, serious face of the other; her travelling suit, dress and mantle of silver gray poplin, her straw hat and wreath of ivy leaves, some of the more tender shoots creeping to the shelter of the brim, and hiding in the brown waves of her hair; and the patience he had enthroned as his guiding principle when affection perished, forsook him.

He had made his last attempt, six months before, to win Ruby to the adoption of his plan of confession and submission to the penalty of their folly. He had vowed then never to renew his request. He added to this, now, the fiery protest of his soul against the entrance of this woman into any home that might hereafter own him as master. She was no wife of his, nor ever should be. If riches should be his, he would tell her to name her price and be gone. He would be free, if she beggared him. Her god was money, and with it he would purchase her silence, and buy back the name she would sully by wearing. A very Shylock he knew her to be, but he would throw his wealth into the sea, burn his homestead over his head, before she should enjoy either as his wife. She would never seek to ally herself with a pauper.

The boat rebounded from the city pier with a force that disturbed his equilibrium, and, recovering himself by grasping the railing, he had a glimpse of Ruby's and Veddar's reciprocal smile of amusement at the slight mishap. He saw more. Less abstracted in thought than he, from what was passing about them, they were prepared for the shock, and sustained it gracefully. Yet Ruby deemed it expedient to throw out her hand in a pretty helpless gesture, and Veddar to seize it with as spontaneous an impulse of protection. He relinquished it instantly, but the action was a link in the band of an acquaintanceship that was fast assuming the guise of intimacy.

In leaving the boat, she jostled Louis by a seeming misstep.

“Excuse me,” she said, formally.

He raised his hat in mock respect.

“Please accept my congratulations upon your sudden restoration to health, and allow me to retract my promise of professional service.”

Frank lost the hurried words, but the tone gave her an unpleasant sensation. It must have been the vehicle of a gibe or taunt, and she was loath to believe that Dr. Suydam would address either to a lady. Directly afterwards she heard the voice of the beautiful unknown behind her in conversation with Veddar. It was less sweet and soft than one would have expected after seeing her face, and had the pert inflections of a school girl.

“Who could have slandered me so grossly?” she asked, with an affected laugh, louder than a genuine lady would have given in a crowded thoroughfare.

“You condemn it as a groundless charge — do you?” queried Veddar. “It has cost me more hours of painful thought than anything else I have heard in an age. I can hardly credit your denial.”

He would not dare, conceited fop as he was, to talk in that familiar strain to one whom his despot, Society, bade him respect, Frank knew. Who was this woman at whom Dr. Suydam sneered to her face, and whom Veddar insulted yet more by his fulsome flatteries? She was within hearing again after a moment's separation from them by the living tide setting down one side of the paved sidewalk and up the other.

“What form of oath shall I employ to convince you that whoever reported to you that I was married was guilty of a malicious falsehood?” she said, in a higher key.

“That stamps her unmistakably as one of the *demi-monde*,” thought Frank, glancing, before she reflected what she was doing, at her companion.

Months afterwards she recollected the strange expression with which Louis looked down at herself — the blended wrath and triumph that lighted up a demoniacal fire in his eyes.

“What is your destination in this great Babylon which Mammon hath builded?” he inquired, in reckless gayety.

She named the street.

“We cannot do better, then, than to take seats in that stage,” signalling the driver.

It was empty, the stream of travel at that hour not tending up town. They got in, and, in their deliberate progress, had more than one view of Veddar and his companion sauntering in the same direction with themselves, apparently engrossed in a lively flirtation.

“There is one other matter I have wanted to talk to you about,” Frank said, by and by, timidly, for the aspect of her medical friend was not favorable to confidential communication.

He unbent instantly from the gloomy taciturnity that had succeeded to his flash of playfulness.

“What is it?” he asked, kindly.

“Your mother is urgent in her solicitations that mine shall accompany her to Cape May or Nahant this summer. Is the plan judicious?”

“Nothing could be less prudent. She should go to some rural boarding-house in a mountainous district. She gets too much sea air where she is, and sees too much company.”

“But how shall I prevail upon her to do this? She has a horror of solitude. An incessant round of engagements is, she thinks, necessary to her existence. She would regard the seclusion you recommend as exile from all that makes life pleasant.”

“Make up a party,” proposed Louis. “I cannot plume myself upon any influence with my mother, but with my father I possess a little. I will exert that to advance your design. He is feebler of late than I like to see him. Like some other deluded people, he has great faith in my prescriptions. I will advise mountain air, fresh butter and brown bread to him. Wherever he goes, my mother must, perforce, accompany him, and we can trust her to do her utmost to drag Mrs. Barry into banishment with her.”

“He is very kind,” mused Frank, when he had set her down at the store where the indispensable shade of floss was to be obtained. “A great comfort and stay to me in my trial. Yet I wish he had not known that beautiful girl — or that, knowing her, he had not spoken to her in that jeering tone. It was the only action I have ever remarked in him that was not altogether gentlemanly.”

CHAPTER XIX.

As Louis had expected and hoped, a note from Frank was brought to him the next morning while he was at breakfast. Anxious though he was to examine the contents, he noted in opening it, as characteristic of the writer, the thick, firm, English paper, and the clear, legible chirography, each letter roundly distinct in the midst of the agitation that had moved her to set down the brief sentences.

“MY DEAR DR. SUYDAM:

“My mother has consented to all we wish. I never knew until last night what a good mother she is; how much she loves me. She was sadly worn out when our conference was over. I sat with her until three o'clock, administering sedatives, and sustaining her resolution with such hopes as I could conscientiously hold up for her cheer. I spoke sincerely when I told her that, in my judgment, the most formidable obstacle to her recovery was removed by her heroic determination to submit herself to the guidance of those who had the will and the ability to subdue the disease. She slept at last. She has not yet awakened. I believe she will keep the promise wrung from her by my entreaties. But I dread the effect of suspense upon her nervous system. Please inform me by the bearer of this at what hour you, with Dr. Milnor, can see her. In mercy to her and to me do not let it be later than noon. I am afraid I am childish in my impatience, but this has been a long and weary waiting to me. Sincerely your friend,

FRANK BARRY.”

The messenger returned to the daughter with a note of three lines, to the effect that Drs. Milnor and Suydam would wait upon Mrs. Barry at twelve o'clock that day. Whereupon, a vast deal of strategical talent was expended by Mrs. Barry in clearing the house of all the servants except the cook, who, from the seat of her dominion in the lower story, was not likely to play the spy upon her mistress and her visitors. To the lady's own maid had been granted a holiday that she might visit her mother in the country, and the chambermaid was sent along as company.

“And take the carriage, my faithful girls — why not?” said the good mistress. “I have it in my mind to give you one little *fête*. Take the one-horse carriage, and John shall drive you to the cottage of your mother. But return to-night.”

Profoundly mystified, but very willing to take advantage of her generosity, the trio had departed in great glee, and the coast was clear, Frank being stationed by the window, as the appointed hour drew near, to prevent the doctors from ringing. Mrs. Barry had the undoubted right to receive whatever gentlemen she pleased in any room of her mansion, and her intimacy with the Suydams was too well understood to cause any remark among her domestics at an event so simple and natural as a call from Dr. Suydam and his partner. But it suited her melodramatic taste to manœuvre and plot, and Frank indulged her in the harmless caprice.

The latter received the physicians with gentle composure, thanked them for their punctuality, and led the way at once to her mother's boudoir.

This apartment was a model of French taste. Pink curtains, softened by white muslin, adorned the windows, and were looped about the frame of a tall mirror, which filled one recessed end of the long, narrow room. The chairs wore white linen covers, tied with tufts of pink ribbon; the carpet was a white ground, with bunches of moss-rose buds dropped here and there upon it, and on a snowy lounge lay Mrs. Barry, in a wrapper of India muslin lined with pink silk; her morning

cap trimmed with rosettes of pink ribbon. In her hand was a fan composed entirely of downy white feathers, arranged ingeniously upon a carved ivory handle, from which depended a pink cord and tassel. In perfect keeping with the ruling law of tints, her forehead, chin, nose — all of her face excepting the tops of her cheek bones — were very white, and these were very pink.

She arose upon her elbow, and held out a chill, shaking hand to the two gentlemen.

“You are kind, my dear friends, to humor the fantasy of the little one here — to act with me in the pretty farce! Dr. Milnor, when we were young — you and I — the young girls had not such vagaries, and the mothers — ah! they were less complaisant. I succumb, that I may have the peace I love better than my own will. ‘My child,’ I have said, ‘let them come, to the end that thou mayst be confounded; be made to blush for thy silly alarms.’ She would infect me with her fears had I the judgment less excellent.”

Dr. Milnor, as chief physician, said a few polite words in extenuation of the daughter's solicitude, and commendation of the parent's judgment and freedom from hypochondriacal illusions. Then he glided adroitly into inquiries, at first general, then minute, respecting her supposed malady. These Mrs. Barry parried lightly and civilly. She had no memory for disagreeables. The little misadventure at the Carnival had given her amusement at the time, and then been forgotten in the enchantments of the scene. Such a rare Carnival as that was! It lived in her mind still — a joy forever. The incident of the blow might or might not have some connection with the discomfort she now experienced occasionally from what — she evaded the vulgar word “pimple,” by describing as a “*bouton* the most insignificant.” As to the character and duration of the pains, she could say next to nothing. They were disagreeables — and she made it a point never to dwell in recollection or conversation upon them. The little one, there, was the soul of method in thought and circumstantiality in

speech. The volatile mother referred the learned inquisitor to her for information. Having thus rid herself of all responsibility in the uninteresting affair, she lay back upon her ruffled pillows and fanned herself, looking amiably bored.

Between the doctor and his referee, the verbal examination was gotten quickly over, and the former next hinted delicately at the necessity that the injured spot should be inspected. Without blush or falter, Frank knelt at her mother's side, and undid the brooch confining her wrapper at the throat, when a strange, swift change swept over the patient's face—the only really natural expression Louis had ever seen there. With a look of terror, appeal, and bashfulness, she clutched her daughter's hand.

“Frank! Never!”

“For my sake, mamma! As you love your children! And it may be nothing after all,” said the girl, lovingly.

She detached the clinging fingers from her own, and by a dexterous movement drew aside the muslin veil.

Scarcely three inches below the collar-bone, prominent by reason of the extreme emaciation of the whole frame, appeared a swelling irregular in shape, slightly reddish in hue, and extremely sensitive to the touch,—for the patient became greenish sallow, and gasped with faintness, as the light, practised finger of the physician made the experiment. A minute sufficed for all the tests he desired to apply; then he announced the conclusion of the examination, and raised himself to an upright posture. While Frank adjusted the disordered neck-dress, he exchanged a meaning glance with his associate. Louis telegraphed a rapid reply with his eyes and a very slight movement of the head.

The senior doctor hemmed reassuringly before conveying their united opinion to the ladies.

“Dr. Suydam agrees with me in thinking that there will be no occasion to subject you to the pain and danger of an operation, my dear madam. Nor need we trouble you with much medicine or many rules. We rest our hopes upon the recu-

perative energies of Nature, assisting her so far as we can by sanitary regulations — change of air, freedom from excitement, and the like.”

It was not easy to preserve his blandly unconcerned demeanor now that Frank had moved to the back of the sofa, and stood there, her large gray eyes, deeper and darker than they usually were under her knitted brows, fixed upon his. The scrutiny made him restless. Mrs. Barry's flippant interruption was opportune for him.

“Eh, well, then!” she cried, shrilly, lifting her fan at arm's length to screen her daughter's face. “You hear, you blush! I will conceal your confusion! And, another time, is it not that you will believe? Your spectre is a wreath of mist. Your nightmare is a bagatelle. Your tragedy — it is comedy the most absurd!”

“No one can rejoice more truly than I in the hope that this is so, dear mother.”

Frank's hand stole caressingly down to her mother's cheek, but her eyes did not leave the doctor's face.

“The hope that this is so!” mimicked Mrs. Barry. “The doctor — has he not said it? *Chut!* are you still infidel? Did we not agree to abide by his decree?”

“I shall do it,” responded Frank, seriously. “Gentlemen, let me thank you in my mother's name, and mine, for your kind compliance with my wishes. I have all confidence in your skill and judgment. I am sure you will do all that can be done for her.”

She attended them to the landing outside the door of the boudoir when they had made their adieus to Mrs. Barry.

“You will let me know all soon?” she said to Louis, in her direct fashion.

“I will call this evening.”

He appended no word of cheer or promise to allay the consuming anxiety that clouded her eyes into blackness. Assuatives and anodynes suited some women, but he would not offer them to her. Nor did Dr. Milnor. He only bent his gray

head before her in courtesy that had in it an indefinable mingling of respect for her sorrow, and Louis gave the hand laid in his one strong, warm pressure before they went down the steps together.

In the street, the elder partner asked, "Is she an own daughter?"

"She is."

"And a splendid woman — is she not?"

"You are right."

"Poor child!"

To which Louis answered nothing.

But that evening he told her all. The case was hopeless. The means Dr. Milnor had mentioned might mitigate the severity of certain symptoms, and retard to some extent the advance of the destroyer. Sooner or later the fatal end must come. The deadly thing had struck deep roots into the system, and was neither to be charmed from its fastness by medicaments, or dug out by the scalpel. The patient might live for many months should Nature make a valiant fight for the mastery, but the inroads of Death would nevertheless go on until his victory was complete.

Louis's manner of setting forth the inevitable, if more guarded and gradual than the above statement, was explicit and courageous. He had gained in moral courage since the day when Ruby's blandishments and Mrs. Sloane's flatteries smothered conscience, and made him throw up the reins to passion and the pleasure of the hour. He was no fondly foolish boy now, but a sad, stern, self-concentrated man. Yet the recollection of the task before him had oppressed him all the afternoon, and bowed heart and will to weakness when he met Frank face to face, and read inquiry and dread in her eyes; in the peculiar bend of her brow that was not a frown, while it drew the eyebrows closer together, and gave depth and darkness to the eyes; and in the momentary quiver of the mouth, controlled before she trusted herself to utter a syllable.

She heard him through without interruption. When he ceased

to speak, she hid her face upon the arm of the sofa, and was still for so long he had begun to fear that she was unconscious, when a broken murmur stole upon the silence.

“The thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me. I was not in safety; neither had I rest, neither was I quiet; *yet trouble came!*”

She had forgotten his presence. He could say nothing to alleviate her distress, yet he could not leave her in her desolation. When the wrung spirit had struggled through the spasm, she might have need of his sympathy or counsel. So he staid. When Frank lifted her head she saw him near her, every line of his grave features softened by pity and wistfulness, watching for some token that she was ready to avail herself of his services.

“I wish I could help you, Frank.”

The ejaculation moved the listener as studied phrases of condolence could not have done. Great tears rolled down her cheeks as she replied, —

“You would if you could. It comforts me to be assured of that. I am very weak to-night. The day has been a hard one. But now I know the worst, I shall have strength given me to meet the needs even of this day. I am glad you did not leave me. I have many questions to ask you. My poor mother! Is it best that she should be told the truth at once?”

Louis thought not. Mrs. Barry was miserably weak and excitable. The healthful influences of her summer's rest would probably tone her mind and nerves, if not improve her condition in other respects. They would lose nothing, and possibly gain much, by delaying the communication for two or three months. He did not tell her of a further possibility, namely — that the advance of the disease in that period might prepare the deluded victim for the reception of the intelligence that her days were numbered.

“Yet,” he said, as he arose to go, “it seems a cruel decree that condemns you to sustain this burden alone.”

She looked so young and helpless, with her slender figure and pale face, that the expression escaped him unawares.

A smile, born somewhere behind the dark clouds that had begloomed her eyes, broke slowly and sweetly over her countenance, from brow to lips.

“Alone! None of the Father’s children can ever be *that!* Do not be troubled about me.”

“She is a good woman, sir!” said Louis, in describing the scene to his father.

Frank wished that Mr. Suydam should be admitted to their confidence. Mrs. Suydam’s discretion, in her intercourse with her afflicted friend, was adjudged by father and son to be questionable, and she was not to be enlightened as to the nature of the disease unless Mrs. Barry should herself intrust her with the secret.

“A good woman! You may well say it. She is enough to redeem the sex; and, between ourselves, my boy, they need redemption! It is lucky that one finds once in a lifetime such an offset to the rest as this girl!”

CHAPTER XX.

THE summer retreat selected for the invalid and her party was among a chain of picturesque hills lying to the north-west of Kräwen, and yeleft mountains by the dwellers near the sea. The traveller commenced the ascent of the outermost of these by the time he cleared the outskirts of the city in that direction, and climbing one after another of what appeared to be merely respectable heights, was amazed at the beauty, extent, and variety of the scene stretching around him before he left the town ten miles behind. The glittering sea line bounded the eastern horizon, and on a fair day the naked eye could discern the white wings of the ships departing from and nearing the Babylon of the continent, the spires, towers, and roofs of which lay packed in solid masses to the north of the less extensive, but in its nearness, more beautiful city of Kräwen. Between this and the spectator arose row upon row, green and graceful, hills studded with villas and cottages, the homes of a vast suburban population, holding communication with the great pulsing heart on the seaboard through the iron veins threading the valleys and piercing the rocks in every direction save oceanward. Beyond — assuming his position to be upon the ridge in the neighborhood of the town — was a pleasing succession of higher eminences, still verdant with cultivated fields and forests, intersected by many a romantic vale and flashing stream, and divided into farms and townships. Every farm had its cluster of buildings, the white dwelling and red, gray or brown barns and out-houses, and in the centre of each township a steady white arm was stretched towards heaven.

The Suydam-Barry clique secured all the available spare room in a spacious farm-house twenty miles from the city in the very heart of the modest mountain cluster. The residents of the homestead were kindly country-folk — father, mother, daughter, and son, who contented themselves with looking diligently after the temporal wants of their lodgers, and never interfered with their occupations or pastimes. The long, hot days, if poor in stirring incident, were less tedious than the elder ladies had predicted they would prove. The drives were fine and varied; there were good boating in the broad, clear river bounding one edge of the farm, and pleasant rambles among the hills and in the woods. They had their own carriage and Frank's pony phaeton, and a wagon load of books — treatises, poems, and romances. But the godsend, *par excellence*, to the entire party, was the arrival, the second week of their rustication, of Mrs. Barry's youngest son, Lieutenant Paul Barry, U. S. N., a handsome young fellow of five-and-twenty, whose blue eyes and fair hair made him resemble Sue when he laughed, which was often, and whose firm mouth and broad forehead reminded everybody that he was Frank's brother when he talked seriously and sensibly, which he could do upon occasion.

It had been arranged that Louis should have a fortnight's leave of absence in August, ostensibly to recruit his energies after a whole year's hard work, his real motive, as expressed to his father and his partner, being that he might watch the progress of Mrs. Barry's malady, and apply such checks as were within the reach of the profession. Paul's coming had preceded his by a week, and the two were mutually attracted towards intimacy.

“This sort of life is making me young again,” said Louis, as the party gathered one afternoon upon the lawn in front of Mrs. Barry's apartments.

The day was warm, not sultry; for a stream of pure air flowed down upon them through a rent in the mountain range, rustling the leaves of the giant walnut tree under which they

made their sitting-room, while the thick foliage shut out the sun, except as it sifted through the boughs in stray smiles, crowning first one head, then another, with transient halos, strewing jewels among the folds of the ladies' dresses, or dropping fairy coins upon the short grass. Mrs. Barry and Mrs. Suydam had their embroidery, the latter diversifying the play of her needle by a few minutes of fan exercise, when the treacherous moisture excited by the heat endangered the integrity of bismuth and carmine. With all her enthusiasm of delight with this "sylvan solitude," and her vigorous assumption of rural habits, such as early dinners, and bread-and-milk suppers eaten from a porringer, she remitted not one stroke of her powder-puff or rouge-brush — studied the effect of her toilet as assiduously as if the congregated *ton* of Kräwen and "dear delightful Paris" were to sit in judgment upon it when completed. Her costume, this afternoon, was laboriously simple — a white Nainsook wrapper, with a muslin head-piece *à la paysanne*; but the fluted ruffles running around neck and wrists and down the front of the gown were of the finest Valenciennes lace, as were those edging the lappets of her cap. Her fan was of carved wood — a curiosity she had picked up at Geneva, the outer sticks being oddly illuminated in semi-barbaric taste. Lounging chairs and sofas had been sent up from town for the accommodation of the citizens; but these Mrs. Barry surveyed with disdain after she had once inhaled the scent of new-mown hay, and sat upon a heap of the same. At her solicitation the farmer's son, grinning in his sleeve the while, had "dumped" several wheelbarrow loads of the fragrant grass at the root of the walnut, and Paul or Louis tossed this up every afternoon into such shape as suited her whim, prior to the bestowal of herself and redundant draperies upon the primitive couch. Her affectations, which were synonymous with absurdities, provoked no adverse criticism from her immediate circle. To Mrs. Suydam the wildest of these were charming eccentricities. Paul added to Frank's indulgent respect for their mother's fancies the chivalric tenderness of a son for a parent who had

always indulged *him*. To Louis her fooleries were pathetic, as witnessed in the light of his knowledge of her true condition, while Mr. Suydam had grown strangely charitable in his private strictures upon her behavior, and polite in his deportment to her. Wilfully, or in the surpassing credulity of vanity, she misinterpreted the attention bestowed upon and forbearance exercised towards her, and accepted the station awarded her as chief of the little *cot erie* with childish exultation.

Mrs. Suydam occupied a *fautueil* brought from her home boudoir. Frank had her low sewing-chair, and Mr. Suydam his favorite seat — the heirloom with the carved elbows, and legs, and leathern cushions. Louis preferred the broad stone doorstep to any other resting-place, and Paul lay at half length upon the turf, his curly head in his sister's lap.

“Put down that tiresome stitching, Frank!” he had ordered, in saucy imperiousness, in selecting this pillow. “I am perishing for the want of petting.”

“It is well the lack you mention is not fatal to all constitutions,” said Louis, dryly.

He was thinking of his own unpetted infancy and loveless youth, but the light-hearted sailor perceived no covert meaning in the reply.

“It is fortunate, as you say, that it is, as the coffee-drinker confessed, at ninety-five, of his beloved beverage, a *very* slow poison; yet it is a deadly complaint, nevertheless. A sort of heart-cancer, you understand, that eats out life by inches. You needn't look so lugubrious, Frank, darling. I am reviving rapidly under your treatment.”

Said treatment, at that instant, being a caressing manipulation of his head and face by the softest and coolest of finger tips. Other rejoinder not being ready, she pulled both his ears at once, as an effectual and wholesome distraction of his ideas, and Louis, with an audible inhalation of the summer breeze, projected into the conversation, as an additional means of diversion, the exclamation recorded a while ago, —

“This sort of life is making me young again.”

“Hear!” cried Mrs. Barry, volubly. “Behold the sexagenarian *blasé*! the foiled of fortune, of fame, of love! Where, then, are the gray hairs, the wrinkles, the eyes all bleared and dim, the frame bowed with grief and years?”

“His sentimental sigh over departed youth reminds me of the concealed agonies of a callow swain — a middy, who once made me the confidant of a love affair that had terminated disastrously for him,” remarked Paul. “He cried like a baby from the beginning to the end of the pitiful tale, unintelligible at times because of his excessive snivelling. ‘The heartless world sup—supposes,’ sobbed he, in conclusion, ‘be—because I bear up like a man, and hide the f—fox gnawing at my vitals, that I am the g—gayest of the gay, and I would d—die before I would betray any emotion; but, B—Barry, *I bl—bl—eed inwardly!*’ And to prove how inwardly, he blubbered aloud like a motherless calf — as he was, I believe.”

“As I don’t mean to do!” laughed Louis, “even over the ashes of my four-and-twenty dead and buried years. There is not one of them I would live over again, unless I might have the power to change the complexion of it entirely; not an experience I would review, unless I could shape it in accordance with the teachings of maturer experience and knowledge.”

“That proves, beyond a peradventure, that you have never been in love,” said Paul, pensively. “I was once.”

“For how long?” queried Frank, pinching his cheek.

“For a week. I was two days falling into the trance, four days and a half in the height of delirium, and half a day coming out. Seven days, all told.”

“A brief attack,” remarked Louis.

“True, doctor, but awfully violent. My heart has been paralyzed ever since. Yet I mean to marry, some day, all the same. And when I do, I shall wed some divine creature, who understands the science of petting as well as you do, Frank, girl.”

“If you do not love her, you will not care to have her pet you,” rejoined his sister, her fingers busy with his chestnut curls.

“That shows how much, or how little, you know about men's natures, you conceited monkey! The admiration of the eye for blonde ringlets, melting blue orbs, nectarine cheeks, and strawberry lips, and the cuticular enjoyment of the friction of velvety fingers upon one's scalp and along one's sun-burned visage, is one thing, and this sublimated abstraction, the coalescing of two souls into one — very soft souls they must be, by the way! — over which poets and novel writers go wild and their disciples daft, is another. Until a man nears his five-and-twenties, his heart resembles nothing else so much as a jelly-fish — barring the coldness and want of pulsation. It liquefies at the lowest temperature of Cupid's furnace. Afterwards, the crust forms, and he oftener than otherwise changes into a petrification.”

Frank put her hand over his mouth, at which application he rolled up his eyes in comic transport, and lay still.

“Your jelly-fish is hardly a moral free agent,” replied Louis. “Yet a man's whole after-life is often colored by actions committed before the period you have named.”

“*Pre-cisely!*” Paul pushed by the pretty gag to say. “Therefore, were I a legislator, I would pronounce all contracts matrimonial entered into before that time null and void. Give a fellow a chance in life, I say! When he does ripen into rationality, let him rub out and begin again.”

“You are a veritable Turk, an infidel, a monster!” said his mother, reaching over to slap him with her fan. “You would subvert the foundations of society; destroy all the poesy of life; make the sweet dreams of youth to be idiocy — madness the most irresponsible!”

“As they are, in nine hundred and ninety-nine cases out of a thousand,” uttered Louis, gloomily emphatic.

Paul raised his lazy head to get a better view of the last speaker.

“Hey-day! Have I made a convert?”

“I should be sorry if you had, madcap,” answered his sister, earnestly, when she would fain have seemed playful. “Such

pernicious heresy, which in your case is rank apostasy, should be frowned down by everybody who has a heart, or who ever had one."

"Bravo!" Mr. Suydam clapped his hands softly. "Well spoken for your sex and your kind. Apropos to youth and youthful illusions, are we to hear nothing of Pendennis this afternoon?"

Louis brought the book which had furnished them with entertainment for several days past, Frank being reader. A more judicious selection could hardly have been made. Her clear, round tones, her distinct enunciation and spirited elocution, made the hours devoted to this recreation seasons of genuine enjoyment.

"It is unaccountable to me that you should like Thackeray," Louis had said to Frank the day before. "His trenchant satire, the sorrowful sneer that breaks up through every third paragraph in passages that would else be honest in their pathos or tenderness, in their denunciation of the false and appreciation of the true, should, it seems to me, repel a nature like yours, however well they may suit me."

"I do not enjoy him," returned she, candidly. "The finest flavor of his humor is to me like that of bitter almonds — a deadly aromatic. His good people move our hearts less by their virtues than they excite our contempt by their foibles, while in proportion to the strength of character in his *dramatis personæ* is the dominion of evil in their natures. Helen Pendennis is a feeble-minded pietist, who, while she loves one man, marries another to secure a home, and whose influence over the son she idolizes is continually imperilled by her short-sighted folly. Thackeray never knew a true-hearted, noble woman. Laura is his best portrait of such a one, and this is done in pale water-colors."

The major portion of the company, however, enjoyed the story. The worldly-wise elder women appreciated the etchings of fashionable life, English and Continental. Mr. Suydam smiled grimly over the sayings and doings of that battered

rake and solemn slave of fashion, Major Pendennis. Paul applauded to the echo the clever hits at pseudo-sentimentality and other popular shams, while Louis, catching the almost spent sound of the sigh under the sarcasm, penetrating the secret of the heartache under the royal vesture, took to his own unquiet spirit the balm of consciousness that others had trusted and been betrayed, had risked and lost all, yet held up in the world's sight unhacked and lofty crests ever afterwards. Once he glanced up from the volume of trout-flies he was arranging, and caught the reader's eye. His gleamed with mischievous amusement; hers fell back disconcerted to the page which treated of the brief, stormy, and undignified scene between Pen and Laura, just after the former had learned, through Fanny Bolton's ill-spelled note, of the summary dismissal of the porter's pretty daughter from his (Pen's) sick chamber. Laura's admirer could no longer complain that her portrait was painted in faintly. In fact, that hitherto demure and tender maiden came out too strongly in this interview, for Frank's taste, although, as the turn of the leaf showed, not so shrewishly as to damp the flame of George Warrington's secret adoration.

“ ‘Why shouldn't she love him?’ muttered the honest fellow to himself. ‘Whom else would I have her love? What can she be to me but the dearest, and the fairest, and the best of women?’ ”

Louis, albeit not quite ready to subscribe to the fidelity of George's description of his unacknowledged lady-love, yet felt, in his turn, a shade of mortification that he should resign her, readily and unreservedly, to a coxcomb, who, whatever might be George's friendship for him, was plainly unworthy of the affection of Helen's adopted daughter, while he wore Fanny Bolton's colors, and ran a tilt with his own mother in defence of that forward and foolish damsel.

The next chapter was one of the few that exonerate the author from the charge of heartlessness, so constantly and doggedly urged against him by surface-readers of his marvellous

creations. "Fairoaks to Let" stood at the head, and it opened with George Warrington's confession of his early and irreparable misstep in life, and his plea to Pen in behalf of his mother and uncle, who had, by the interference the hot-headed youth resented as a dire affront, saved him from a like fate. Louis, engaged in the nice operation of manufacturing a fly supposed to be a particularly choice item upon troutine bills of fare, slouched his straw hat over his brows, and heard, with a heart thrilled into slow and labored beats, — each a sickening movement, like the pained roll of a bound and tortured thing, — the marvellous transcript of an experience so analogous to his own, that he felt everybody else must recognize the fidelity of the likeness.

" "She was a yeoman's daughter in the neighborhood," said Warrington, with rather a faltering voice; "and I fancied — what all young men fancy. Her parents knew who my father was, and encouraged me with all sorts of coarse artifices and scoundrel flatteries, which I see now, about their house. . . .

" "Would to God I had not been so deceived; but in these matters we are deceived when we wish to be so, and I thought I loved that poor woman. What could come of such a marriage? I found, before long, that I was married to a boor. She could not comprehend one subject that interested me. Her dulness palled upon me until I grew to loathe it. And after some time of a wretched furtive union — I must tell you all — I found letters somewhere (and such letters they were!) which showed me that her heart, such as it was, had never been mine, but had always belonged to a person of her own degree.

" "At my father's death I paid what debts I had contracted in college, and settled every shilling which remained to me in an annuity upon — upon those who bore my name, on condition that they should hide themselves away, and not assume it. They have kept that condition, as they would break it, for more money. If I had earned fame or reputation, that woman would have come to claim it. If I had made a name for myself, those who had no right to it would have borne it; and I entered life

at twenty hopeless and ruined beyond remission. I was the boyish victim of vulgar cheats; and perhaps it is only of late I have found out how hard — ah, how hard! — it is to forgive them. I told you the moral before, Pen, and now I have told you the fable. Beware how you marry out of your degree. I was made for a better lot than this, I think, but God has awarded me this one, and so, you see, it is for me to look on and see others successful and others happy with a heart that shall be as little bitter as possible.’”

“*Apropos de bottes!*” shouted Paul, striking his hands together with a concussion that caused his mother to — in technical phrase — “ground her fan” several feet distant from the knee where it should have fallen. “I crave leave to press my nullification act upon the attention of this honorable body. Here is the predestined husband of a good, pure woman, ruined before he ever saw her by the machinations of a trio of unprincipled, designing vulgarians. Make his case, in imagination, yours, Suydam, and join with me in urging improved legislation upon this nefarious abuse of confidence, this sharp practice upon these gelatinous innocents — the hearts of minors.”

“I move the adoption of the resolution brought forward by the honorable brother,” said Louis, in a thick voice, caused possibly by his stooping posture, his silk having become entangled upon a bearded head of grass.

“We will suspend deliberation upon it until the reading is over, if you please,” suggested Mr. Suydam, somewhat impatiently.

Louis listened no longer.

“I entered life hopeless and ruined beyond remission.” This was his sentence as surely as if he had borne it branded in scarlet shame upon his forehead.

“I was the boyish victim of vulgar cheats, and perhaps it is only of late I have found out how hard it is to forgive them.”

Not “perhaps,” but certainly and terribly! From the shadow of the slant hat-brim, and by stealth, he scanned her who sat opposite him. The mellow, perfectly modulated inflections

of her voice were sweeter than the song of thrush or robin in the greenwood near by. The clusters of dark hair were brushed away from her thoughtful brow, and among these, and over her white garments, fell drops of filtered sunshine, making of her a lovely Danaë, but a Danaë without the lust for gold, or other unworthy longing. From the serene light of her eyes all thoughts unholy and unclean fled abashed at their own vileness. His whole being bowed before her as manhood only bows in the recognition of pure and lofty womanliness. She had elevated, not alone his conception of what constitutes that womanhood, but his views and aims respecting his kind, his duty, his life itself.

“She would have made a good if not a great man of me. As it is — hopeless and ruined beyond remission.”

And then recurred to him poor George's plaint, at which he had smiled just now.

“What can she be to me but the dearest, and the fairest, and the best of women?”

Nothing else — but *that* always!

If he had met her three years ago! The hard, slow oscillation of the heart was quickened and softened until it kept time to the fast flash of delirious fancies, startled into being and motion by that “If.” If his were the right to take in his her unresisting hand, to draw her closely and proudly to his side, there, in the sight of those who best loved them both, to lead her forward in her snowy robes, the drops of sunlight for her bridal gems, and say to his father, “This is my wife and your daughter!” If his, his only, were the precious privilege of kissing into smoothness the plait between the brows that, more truly than tears or wailings, told when the brave soul was perplexed to dismay; of coaxing into full disclosure the doubts, anxieties, and alarms she now endured in silence!

If to him were granted the comfort of pouring into her ear the story of his life, — his aspirations, failures, achievements, — and of receiving in return the stimulus of her loving sympathy, her wise counsel, her prayerful and hopeful “God speed!”

If — still If !

The monosyllable yet bound his imaginings with weird, maybe wicked, assuredly worse than futile, fascination when the reading was over, and the hour for their afternoon drive arrived.

“ May I be your charioteer ? ” he asked abruptly of Frank, as she brushed by him on her way to her chamber to get her hat and shawl.

“ If you wish it — certainly ! ” surprise that was not displeasure dilating her dark gray irids at his blunt address.

She smiled and colored, moreover, in replying — symptoms of agreeable emotion that did not escape the notice of her mother and Mrs. Suydam. Too much engrossed in his own reflections to observe the congratulatory nod exchanged by the mammas, Louis took his position beside the phaeton and awaited the appearance of its mistress. He said something between his teeth and under his breath, as he did this. He was not addicted to quotations, poetical or prosaic, but this half-whisper had a rhythmic measure :—

“ E'en in a dream to be blest
Is so sweet that I ask for no more.”

CHAPTER XXI.

“You may hold the reins, but I will show you the way to go,” said Frank, leaving the right hand seat vacant for her companion. “You remember the old song which tells how

‘ Adam, the very first man,
Did the very first woman obey,’

and proposes the plan I have mentioned as a sort of amicable compromise?”

“I do not recollect it. I never heard it, I think,” answered Louis, dreamily.

The words and music of another old ballad were ringing incessantly in his brain:—

‘ Though ’tis all but a dream at the best,
And still, when sweetest, soonest o’er,
Yet e’en in a dream to be blest
Is so sweet that I ask for no more.”

“I will sing it for you, some day. Just now, take for granted the wisdom of the advice it conveys, and turn pony’s head to the left. I have explored the route before.”

Leaving the large carriage to bowl comfortably along the wide highway, they entered a lane, bordered for a hundred rods by farm fences; then, plunging crookedly into the recesses of a wood where the trees fastened hardy roots into amazingly narrow fissures in the naked gray rocks, and held on for their lives to the brink of crags and pebbly banks, their trunks inclining at an angle that joined their branches in Gothic and

Norman arches across the road, where pony picked his way up and down stony staircases from which the rushing spring torrents had washed the earth, and bathed his hoofs, every quarter of a mile, in a crystal rivulet, pursuing its busy way from the beetling highlands to the river, plashing and foaming in the wildwood far down to the right, where the sweet fern and blueberries bruised by the carriage wheels, and the hickory boughs and wild grapes and hazel thickets above the heads of the excursionists, loaded the air with spicy odors — warm breaths of fragrance meeting their senses when the August sun struck yellowly through the rifted foliage, swung from unseen censers towards the god of light and heat. Then bearing yet more sharply to the right, and winding steeply downward, jolting among granitic fragments, some of them vying in altitude with the sturdy little Shetland that stepped over and between them with the philosophical coolness of one born and bred in regions where these heights would pass for hillocks, across a rude and not too secure bridge over a yeasty creek, — and they emerged from the forest into an amphitheatre of hills, a temple of solitude, having for a flooring a sea of glass mingled with fire, a lake, waveless as the sea of Death in the hush of evening; glorious as with the reflection from the gates of the New Jerusalem, in the burning mountain sunset. No boat was moored upon the banks, not a bird dipped his wing in the crimson and blue and orange that seemed to line the silent depths of a concave vast as that which overarched them. Far as the eye could reach there was not a trace of human habitation in cottage roof or curling smoke. The scene and the hour were theirs — theirs only.

Louis dropped the reins, folded his arms, and dreamed, unchecked by motion or word from his companion. If her thoughts were full to speechless ecstasy of the beauty and magnificence of that upon which she gazed, other and more intoxicating elements contributed to his reverie.

If — still if! Amid the grandeur and loneliness of Nature, he asked for no companionship beyond hers. The great mother

had other storehouses of loveliness where the foot of man seldom trod, where, hidden from the ken and censure of the world he hated, and to which she was indifferent, they might dwell together, forgetful of past errors, loathsome bondage — all claims save those of love.

“As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people from henceforth — even forever!”

The words were softly breathed, but he started as at the fall of an aerolite. The baleful power of the sorcery that had held captive heart and imagination was dissipated as the hosts of the Evil One are fabled to flee at the sign of the cross or the name of the Most High. He might risk all for love, — honor, principle, his very soul, — and count it great gain if he grasped the coveted prize, but the frenzied pleadings of passion, the starving cry of her own heart, could never tempt her to sin.

“To sin and forget God!” The phrase had a meaning for her — one against which human eloquence would be as sand hurled against a rock.

In the unreasonable smart of his disappointment, he spoke coldly, slightly.

“How naturally the words of Scripture rise to your lips when others would not think of using them!”

“Is that so?” she asked, in unmoved sweetness. He could not determine whether or not she had detected his covert sneer. “I suppose there is good reason for it. The Scriptures are adapted to all human need.”

Human need! Was not his sore enough to call down the pity of the dumb heavens? to move a compassionate Being, like him she worshipped, to relieve, if not to succor?

“To the wants of pious, trustful souls like yours, Frank,” he said, more gently. “Benighted aliens, such as I, have no right and no inclination to handle the sacred treasures.”

“GOD despises no soul he has made. There is room in the heart of the All-Father for every one of his children,” replied Frank, feelingly. “If you would but believe this, Louis!”

An obstinate something in Louis's throat — he would have

set it down to hysteria, had he been a woman — kept his lips closed until they had skirted the upper edge of the lake and fallen again into the main road.

“ I have been a desperate reprobate in my day, Frank,” he said then. “ You don't begin to know how sad a sinner I am. If you did, you would cut my acquaintance forthwith — would show me no mercy.”

“ I think you are mistaken. But if I were to prove so forgetful of the dictates of humanity and religion, you would have but the stronger claim upon One whose pity and charity are boundless.”

“ Suppose ” — pursued Louis, impelled by a perverse longing to tread the extremest verge of fate — “ suppose you should discover that I had, in days gone by — say, before you met me — been guilty of a great mistake — one that had tempted me to the commission of a great crime. Assume, for example, that I turned forger to get money to meet my gambling debts ; that I got drunk, and killed a man while under the influence of liquor ; or that I plighted my troth to one woman and afterwards fell in love with another. I reveal the secret of one, or all of these iniquities to you in this confessional of Nature, won to the disclosure by your exceeding charity towards imaginary offenders of an aggravated type. Would not your righteous instincts instruct you to cast me into outer darkness ? to taboo me socially, and, in the name of Heaven, to condemn me as a son of perdition, into whose secret your soul shuddered to have entered ? ”

“ *Don't!* you pain me ! ” begged Frank, distressfully. “ I cannot reply when you talk in that strain. It is unworthy of you. If you want to know whether sin — wilful and repeated transgressions of God's law — can place a man beyond the reach of God's forgiveness, I answer you in the words of Holy Writ — ‘ The Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy. ’ An old writer quaintly says, ‘ Be sure that we oftener tire of sinning than does God of forgiving. ’ As for the approval or condemnation of our fellow-men, ‘ It is a small thing that we should be

judged of man's judgment.' One learns daily how prejudiced and fallible is that of the wisest mortals."

"Yet men make the laws by which our actions are controlled, our characters and opinions moulded," interrupted Louis.

"They do; and in the main our consciences pronounce them to be just and wholesome restraints."

He interposed again, bitterly and impetuously.

"And now and then — often — arbitrary, tyrannical, and mischievous dogmas; making sin of that which is no sin; forbidding a man to heed the whisper of the higher law within him, upon penalty of social crucifixion! The wrongs done in the name of the law are irreparable, and the wronged one goes down to his grave the wreck of what would have been a man, and might have been a hero, had not the beldame of human law clipped his wings before they were fairly grown."

"You are enigmatical. You condemn me to deal in tame generalities, which fall, random shots. If you can trust me, and are willing to do so, tell me plainly what underlies this very unsatisfactory talk, and I shall know how to shape my answers."

"You are prepared, then, to deal with crimes of enormous magnitude," said Louis, with his short, harsh laugh. "You have nerved yourself to a degree of moral courage that will hinder you from leaping out of the carriage, should you learn that you are sitting by a desperado, who combines, unsuspected by omniscient Society, the characters of counterfeiter, forger, bigamist, and murderer!"

"Louis Suydam! do you know that you are insulting me and vilifying yourself?"

He had never seen her angry until the clearly enunciated query rang upon his ear. Her eyes were large and bright, her cheeks warmly flushed, her mouth compressed.

"However well it may please you to play the cynic to others, and in different circumstances," she went on to say, "let me remind you that I have given you no provocation to use this tone and language to me."

“You are right. We are unlike as are night and morning; moving in diverse spheres, holding opposite opinions, actuated by different and irreconcilable principles,” rejoined Louis, meeting her penetrating look with one that was at once sardonic and despairing. “Perhaps if you had crossed my path before my lot was cast for me — while I was impressible gelatine, flopping upon the beach of life’s ocean — you might have run me in a mould more to your liking. As it is, I am what I am. I can never be anything better or higher. If you knew all, you would subscribe to the truth of this. No!” — seeing her impulsive movement to interrupt him — “I am not talking for effect now. I am not the stultified Byronic disciple you believe me — neither a Manfred, nor a Cain. I do not prate that —

‘Untaught in youth my heart to tame,
The springs of life were poisoned,’

or that —

‘The worm, the canker, and the grief,
Are mine alone.’

Mine has been a hand-to-hand fight with Fate ever since I can remember, and she has been one too many for me, as might have been foreseen from the fact of her sex, if nothing more. Like other men — or boys — I had my dream, and it ruined me. I do not expect or desire pity. My load is mine, and I ask no man or woman to help me bear it. I say this not to excite your interest in my story, which has not one element of the heroic, or sensational, or romantic in it, but is commonplace and vulgar enough — Heaven knows! Still less do I ask your toleration of my moods, as you have once, if not oftener, denominated the infrequent spasms of confidence that have overtaken me in your presence. My design is to exculpate myself from the charge of mannerism, of mawkish repinings, and a flaunt of cynicism which would be undignified in a dyspeptic sophomore. I may be a bear — I am not a puppy!”

And having talked himself into a towering passion, that menaced the preservation of his icy and doughty tone, he choked up and held his peace — or his wrath. Frank was

very white and still, except for an odd contraction and pulsation in her throat. She looked neither alarmed nor defiant — only sadly thoughtful. The brown Shetland jogged along, his head down, as unobservant of the dolphin dyes of the sky beyond the mountains as were the two behind him.

“ You told me something on the second day of our acquaintanceship which it comforts me to remember now,” said Frank, presently. “ I had annoyed you by untimely entreaties that you should seek relief in rest and medicine for a headache which was troubling you. You silenced me finally, as you thought, hastily ; and coming to me, a minute later, assured me that you had not intended to wound me. I replied that I knew you had not meant to be rude or unkind. ‘ Why should you ? ’ I asked. You bade me, then, if I should ever have occasion in the future to repeat this query, always to answer it as I had done in this instance. I shall do it now. If I have occasionally seemed cold in my manner, ever less than kind, it was undesigned. I spoke quickly and warmly a while ago — less, I beg you to believe, because you offended my self-love than because you slandered yourself by linking with your name a list of heinous, and to you, impossible crimes. I ask your forgiveness for whatever was objectionable in my bearing or words. For the rest, you may deny me your friendship and confidence. You cannot refuse my esteem and sympathy. They are already yours — given freely and unasked. They are the due of my mother’s benefactor, and of him who was to me an able and gentle counsellor when I most needed a friend. You must be very unhappy to have said what you did just now. I can only echo your words to me at a time when it seemed as if all hope on earth and help from Heaven had gone from me : ‘ I wish I could help you ! ’ ”

“ Frank, darling, you are no woman, but an angel ! ” cried Louis, agitated to the extremest limit of self-control. “ And I am a passionate, impatient, selfish wretch, who forgot he was a gentleman because you would have hindered him from being a villain ! ”

He caught her hand, and would have raised it to his lips, when he felt it start and stiffen in his, and a wild, blanched face stared away from him at some object in the road. It was on the side nearest her, and Louis had but one glimpse of a huge head, black and shaggy, red eyes dropping rheum, a double row of wolfish fangs, and a tongue flecked with blood and foam, when, with a smothered sound between a yell and a growl, the monster had leaped upon the side of the low phaeton, his chin on Frank's knee.

To dash his heel into the gaping jaws, and, as the shock bore the dog to the ground, to spring over Frank's lap and the wheel, and, bestriding him, clutch his throat with both hands, were, with Louis, the work of seconds so brief and few, that Frank had scarcely caught a single terrified breath when she heard, above the loud pants of the combatants, the tramp of their struggling feet upon the rocky soil, and the growls of the rabid animal, the hoarse call — "Frank, drive on, for Heaven's sake!"

Instead of obeying, she alighted from the carriage. Her shawl was in her hand — a silken web, strong and elastic. In one corner she had tied a loop, and drawn through it a running noose. Holding this open widely, she watched her opportunity to throw it over the dog's head, and, nothing intimidated by his bloody fangs and goggle eyes, drew it tight — tighter — the muscles of her wrist standing out tense and hard as steel, until, the strangled brute reeling to his death, Louis loosened his grip of the throat, seized the ligature, and put his foot upon the big head to finish the work. Then Frank went back to the phaeton, — the Shetland having stood aloof, a phlegmatic spectator of the scene, — sat down and closed her eyes in momentary unconsciousness of all about her.

She was aroused by Louis's voice, saying, in civil regret, "I am afraid your shawl is spoiled. It is a pity. It was very pretty."

He was at the carriage door, displaying her injured property,

muddy, creased, and stretched out of all shape. She put it aside with a gesture of aversion.

“Throw it away! I can never bear to look at it again!”

“Then I shall keep it as a trophy of your prowess,” returned Louis, coolly, folding and tucking it under his cushion. “But for you, our friend in the ditch over there,” nodding backward, “would, I fear, have been, as I said of Fate a while ago, one too many for me.”

He climbed into his place, picked up the reins, and spoke to the Shetland, who trotted off in the most unconcerned manner imaginable.

Frank, resolutely fighting her way to apparent composure, through giddiness, nausea, and ague, found now more collected words.

“Are you quite safe? Did he not injure you at all?”

“My wrists and fingers ache, and my respiration is irregular as yet,” was the reply. “Otherwise I am all right. You have sustained most damage. Look at your dress! The brute’s paws must have done that when I kicked him overboard. There is a zigzag tear two feet long at least. Can it be mended? or am I to add that to my list of mementos, as they hang battered and shot-riddled banners in triumphal arches?”

He laughed — covertly watching, meanwhile, for the first variation of her deadly pallor, his chained heart straining upon the fetters in the mad longing to take her in his arms; to murmur thanks for her safety, and blessings upon the brave, true soul that had led her to tempt destruction for herself sooner than desert him in his peril; to recall the truant blood by his kisses, and to claim her, for that one instant of their mutual deliverance from a horrible death, as his own, bought with a price the utmost mortal can offer, — the venture of his life for her, and hers for him. The chain held fast in all the groaning links — even when the dear eyes closed again, and, with the faintest flicker of color to the cheeks, the tears pressed from betwixt the lids.

“Thank God!” she said, fervently.

Louis did not say, “Amen.” He flicked pony’s side with the whip, inciting him to a smarter trot, and bringing a rush of brisker, cooler air into their faces. Better she should think him callous, ungrateful, unkind, than that he should prove himself a scoundrel. If he spoke at all, he would say that which would, eventually, condemn him forever in her sight, and perchance extort from her expressions of friendly regard — in his self-abasement, he durst go no farther — which she might, in calmer and wiser moments, wish to retract.

The farm-house was in sight, when Frank asked, in a more natural tone, “Was he really mad, do you think?”

“He looked like it. I thought so, at the time. However that may have been, his unceremonious attack upon peaceful travellers deserved condign punishment.”

Pony trotted down into the valley, and Louis, who studiously avoided looking at his companion, felt her move forward as if she tried to catch his eye.

“Dr. Suydam! Will you not let me thank you for saving life?”

O, the fettered heart! O, the untold and never-to-be-forgotten agony under the veil of the smiling visage turned towards her!

“My dear Miss Barry! if formal acknowledgments are the order of the hour, you must allow me to apprise you of a circumstance so patent to me that I supposed you understood it as well. Yours was the greater danger and the more courageous action of the two. You are a heroine, for you could have escaped, if humanity had not moved you to help me. I am not a hero, for I acted upon a simple and unavoidable principle of self-preservation. If the dog had bitten you, he must have attacked me also. Having once grappled with him, I could not let go. You are under no obligation to me — not the slightest. It is not I who underrate what I have done, but you who exaggerate the extent of the risk I ran, and my bravery in the affray which was forced upon me. We will cry ‘quits,’ if

you *will* accord me what I yet insist is unmerited honor. The most valorous combatant of all was worsted, to wit, our four-footed antagonist, who met the consequences of his temerity in having scaled, single-mouthed, a garrison manned by such wise and wary warriors. I hope you observe my alliteration, and commend it."

Frank did not smile at this nonsense. She looked the disappointment she did not utter, at the turn he was resolved to give the affair.

At the farm-house gate she remarked, quietly, "We will say nothing of this in-doors. Mother would be sadly excited."

"You are right."

He forbore to press her hand in helping her to alight. Nor did he send a single look after her as she entered the house. He drove the Shetland around to the carriage-house, took the light shawl from beneath the cushion, folded it into a small parcel, and buttoned it in the breast of his coat. Then, whistling to his dog to follow, he disappeared among the willows and birches shading the stream at the foot of the hill on which stood the house.

When the party assembled for supper, he had not returned; and the farmer "guessed he had gone a night-fishing."

"There's a power of eels and cat-fish to be yanked out o' that 'ere river, after dark, if anybody tried for them what knows how. And Dr. Suydam knows how to do most things, it appears."

Paul went up the stream a dozen rods or so, and shouted for his comrade until the farther mountains returned the echo. Louis did not hear him. Half a mile away, the whip-poor-wills wailing fitfully in the surrounding forest, and his dog watching beside him, he lay on the mossy ground, face downward, cursing the day in which he was born.

CHAPTER XXII.

ONE snowy December afternoon Dr. Suydam stood in Mrs. Barry's parlor, attending a summons to her sick chamber. She was a confessed invalid now. The world at large was given to understand that she had a severe cold, and some, recollecting her hectic bloom and asthmatic tendencies, dared, outside her house, to whisper the dread word, Consumption. Only the Suydams and Dr. Milnor knew that a more terrible destroyer was eating out her life — no longer insidiously, but with rapid advances, appalling to those familiar with sickness and death; dreadful beyond compare to one taking her first lessons in nursing a patient hopelessly diseased with a malady which was nothing less than visible corruption.

Twice the doctor had pulled out his watch, with an impatient look at the entrance. The second time he murmured, "The ruling passion strong in death! She will play out the farce of appearances to the end!"

The handsome parlors were in perfect order — the order of disuse; and although warm as summer, were strangely desolate on this stormy day. The piano was closed, the harp muffled in green baize, never to be swept again by the mistress's hand, and the china and Bohemian glass vases upon mantles and tables were empty. Looking around upon the dreariness of luxury, the physician sighed audibly, "Poor, homeless bird!"

A light step upon the stairs and in the hall, and Frank entered. Louis had not met her in a week or more, and her altered appearance impressed him instantly and painfully. She was thinner and paler than formerly, her eyes larger, darker, and

clearer, and the habitual contraction of the eyebrows had ploughed a slight furrow in her forehead. She wore a gray wrapper without ornament, her hair put back from her face, and bound with a narrow blue ribbon. But her smile and voice were unchanged, and she received him with unembarrassed cordiality.

“Mother will be delighted to see you. Dr. Milnor is very attentive, but she likes you better than she does him. That was the reason I told your mother to ask you to call now and then. I am sorry we have kept you waiting; but we were very busy when you came.”

He knew what was the nature of her recent occupation; — that this young, tenderly-nurtured girl hourly performed duties at which trained hospital nurses would have revolted. If Mrs. Barry had sacrificed everything — truth, nature, and existence — upon the altar of vanity, her retribution was in kind, and fearfully significant. Not that she recognized it. She held high state in her boudoir, where pungent pastiles burned continually, and windows were lowered from the top every half hour to expel the sickly, feverish odor, that struck, like the breath of the charnel-house, upon the olfactories of every one that entered.

Wrapped in a gorgeous *peignoir* of crimson brocade, an affghan, in which mimic roses, pansies, and lilies blossomed into mammoth proportions upon a white ground, drawn over her lower limbs, a crimson silk fan, trimmed with swan's down, in her attenuated right hand, the left being already powerless from sympathy with the affected side, she greeted her young physician by flinging him a coquettish kiss from the tip of her sceptre, and smiled gayly at his nearer approach.

“Ah, truant! What forfeit shall I exact for your delinquency? What have you to plead in miserable excuse for your cruelty, in that you have inflicted upon me the doctor, venerable, and sage, and precise” (with mock primness); “who feels the pulse with the eyes upturned, and sighs dolo-

rously when he inquires for my health? who bids me protrude the tongue, and asks the questions — O, the most tiresome!”

“I wished you to have the benefit of a skilful physician, madam; and there is no comparison between Dr. Milnor’s ability and experience and mine,” rejoined Louis, sitting down by her. “What a number of beautiful bouquets!”

The stand near her lounge was loaded with flowers and littered with cards.

Tickled as a child by praise of his new rattle, Mrs. Barry launched into encomiums upon the donors, and expatiated upon the delight she derived from “communion with the beloved Nature,” as typified by the cut darlings of the greenhouse.

“This,” Frank said, singling out a small but choice group of flowers, “is from our friend Katrine. She leaves one at the door every day. Mother sometimes sends for her to come up. She amuses us by her quaint humor; interests us by her genuine goodness of heart.”

“She is a character the most charming!” cried Mrs. Barry. “The poor creature! but she is honest, sensible, and grateful!”

“I know she is in high favor here,” answered Louis. “And this has instigated an idea I have come prepared to broach this morning, Mrs. Barry. She is an excellent nurse — tender, strong, and discreet. Her attachment to your family and to mine leads me to believe that I can secure her as aid to Miss Frank here, who shows the effect of confinement more plainly than so youthful a nurse should be allowed to do. What do you say to installing our excellent Hollandaise as assistant nurse?”

He had expected a battle, and he had it. He had prepared himself for an extraordinary trial of temper and patience, and nothing could have met these anticipations more fully than the levity with which his proposal was at first received, and the selfish melancholy into which his opponent subsided, when he made her understand that he was serious and determined. She paraded, *ad nauseam*, her excessive refinement, her ineffable and supersensitive delicacy, that shuddered at the thought of

the approach of an uncultivated stranger to a bedside which should be sacred as a temple to a heart truly interfused with filial piety—a reproachful look at Frank, who had hitherto taken no share in the conversation.

She interfered now.

“Dr. Suydam,” she said, hurriedly, and with rising color, “I am grateful for your consideration for my health, but I am quite adequate to my work. I am well and strong.”

“You are neither,” returned Louis, bluntly. “I am acting now less as your friend than your family physician. You have lost flesh and color lately. A month more of this life will exhaust your strength, so deplete the vital forces that utter prostration or low fever will ensue.”

“A month! Of what does he speak?” giggled Mrs. Barry, hysterically. “In a month I shall be quite restored. The social assembly, the ride, the concert, the opera—they will know me again as of old. If you will have it that this weak child loses strength daily, it is I who gain it continually. It is I who will nurse her, should she sustain injury in supplying my few wants. *Ma foi!* what is it that these are? A glass of *eau sucré* from time to time; a touch to my draperies and pillows; a few pages of a charming novel read aloud, when she is in the mood to oblige me—this is absolutely all.”

“You forget, madam,” replied Louis, boldly, “that you cannot turn yourself upon your lounge without assistance; that oftentimes your bandages must be adjusted several times each day; that your food must be brought to your bedside and cut up for you; the very cup held to your lips when you would drink, or take your medicine. I would not be needlessly harsh, but this is a serious question. Dr. Milnor and myself are one in the opinion that you should have another nurse. Katrine is kindly of temper, patient, cheerful, and obliging, and I will be security for her discretion. Should you, in a month’s time, recover sufficiently to warrant your dismissal of her, you will have given employment to a worthy woman, and, while helping her to maintain her family at this, the dull season of the year

with her, have assisted in the preservation of your daughter's health and bloom."

Mrs. Barry covered her face with her fan, and affected a shivering sob. Dramatically viewed, she was dissolved in tears, which must, however, have rolled over her powdered cheeks as dew-drops from a dock leaf, since no trace of them was perceptible when she lowered her fan, literally and figuratively.

"Have your own way!" she said, with an asthmatic quaver, and an expression of general broken-heartedness. "I am but a faded flower, tossed from wave to wave, at the will of every current and breeze."

Louis maintained his gravity by a tremendous effort. Her weazen, whitened face, lying amid her crimson wrappings, was, taken in connection with her plaint, ludicrously like the pollen-dusted pistil of a hollyhock.

"You will not regret this sacrifice," he returned, cheerfully. "You will soon perceive the value of the treasure you have gained in *la bonne Katrine*. I commend to your interest her stories of peasant life in her native land, and reminiscences of her girlhood. They have a flavor about them like that of Rhenish wine. Your artistic taste cannot but be gratified by her simple yet graphic tales. You will thank me, shortly, for the delightful variety I have introduced into your day's programme."

He had not known his interesting patient more than a year, and failed to learn that the surest way to her heart was by the exercise of well-timed flattery. Her appetite in this respect was insatiable as a boa-constrictor's. She brightened up perceptibly at this titbit; but liveliness was out of the question as yet. Meek resignation was her rôle, and her endeavors to accomplish a becoming show of this were to her medical adviser and reputed despot but a shade less tolerable than her fantastic gayety.

"You will send the" (gulp); — "your nurse, immediately — is it not so?" she murmured, looking up into his eyes with excruciating patience when he rose to go.

“Not before to-morrow — or the next day.”

“Thanks! you are kind!” as one respited from the scaffold for a night and day more.

“She shall not come at all, if you do not wish it, mother,” Frank said, decidedly.

“My child, have I not given my word that she shall be my custodian? Is not that enough? Or do you will that I shall make the greater sacrifice of my unconsidered feelings, and declare that it is my earnest desire she should supplant my daughter at my bedside?”

Frank remonstrated further, but not until she had attended Dr. Suydam to the parlor. There her protest was energetic, and his vantage-ground was as energetically maintained.

“Do not drive me to say that if I am not obeyed in this particular, I shall renounce the management of the case,” he said, at length. “The good of the patient demands the arrangement I have proposed. Mere justice to you requires it as peremptorily. You are not one to be swayed by quixotic ambition to immolate yourself at the shrine of another’s caprice, let that other be who she may. And,” after a pause, “you must remember that your work of nursing may have just begun.”

They were standing by a window, the panes of which were blurred and misty with the driving snow. The elm branches bowed low under their ermine robes; the area enclosed by the park railing was a smooth, untrampled sheet. The streets were nearly deserted, and the roll of wheels and fall of feet upon the cushioned earth were soundless. The stillness without and within was alike profound.

“I only wish to know my duty, and to do it,” said Frank, in a weary tone, resting her brow against the glass.

“No one who knows you can doubt that,” replied Louis, in grave sincerity. Then he changed the topic. “You have written of your mother’s condition to your sister, Mrs. Langley?”

“Yes — that is, I wrote to Mr. Langley, asking him to break the intelligence to Sue. We had letters from them yesterday.

They are at Nice. Sue is not well this winter. The doctors fear that her lungs are weak. Sorrows seldom come alone."

"And Paul?"

"Is cruising in the Mediterranean. He knows nothing. I thought it best that he should not—poor boy! He cannot come home, and he would but suffer the needless pains of suspense."

"You have another brother?"

"Yes—in New Orleans, and a sister in San Francisco. We are a widely-scattered household. My brother cannot leave his business for a week, but I keep him advised regularly of my mother's condition. The distance, and my sister's large family, put her coming out of the question. No; I must meet whatever is to befall me alone, and patiently. It is best so. The rest will be spared much sorrow. They could do nothing for her if they were here."

"You staid an eternity down stairs!" fretted Mrs. Barry, when her daughter returned to her chamber. "I am perishing with thirst, and my pillows are uncomfortable."

Frank held the glass to her lips, and arranged the cushions under her shoulders and head.

"You are growing careless," her mother resumed, fanning herself with peevish rapidity. "You tire of me—of the mother who watched over your childish ailments, and nurtured you into mature girlhood. While the acquaintances of a day vie with one another to show me attention, my own daughter wearies of my society, finds the light duties of attendance in my sick-room burdensome."

"I have never wearied of these for an instant, mother. I prefer to be here, and to wait upon you, to any other companionship and occupation."

Mrs. Barry fidgeted in pain or restlessness.

"The glare from the snow hurts my eyes. Drop that curtain."

"This storm will make fine sleighing," observed Frank, pleasantly, as she obeyed.

“A very *mal-a-propos* speech to make to one who cannot participate in the amusement,” retorted her mother. “You seem to take a malicious delight in reminding me of my misfortune. But for your officious tattling, no one besides ourselves need ever have known of it. What benefit have I derived from your confidants? Absolutely none. I am in their power, and they cannot relieve one pang. But for the knowledge that I was at his mercy, that he would revenge himself by trumpeting the story of my affliction everywhere, I would have dismissed Dr. Suydam to-day for his insulting recapitulation of my trifling needs. His language was coarse in the extreme, his smile and bearing insolent. And you offered no defence for me, who am unable to protect myself. You plotted slyly and effectually — you two — to bring that low Dutch woman into my house and chamber!”

“Mother,” burst from the much-enduring daughter, “I had no suspicion that Dr. Suydam meant to provide a nurse for you until he spoke of it to you this afternoon.”

“Bah! Am I a silly child, that I should credit that? How cunningly you introduced the name of ‘our friend Katrine,’ whose bouquets, I now see, were so many bribes for my favor! And how quickly he took up the thread and helped you weave the web about me — me — unsuspecting, trustful, suffering!”

Real tears ran from the angry eyes, clearing sallow little channels through the bismuthed surface.

“Dear mother! poor little mother!” soothed Frank, bringing her a bottle of cologne, and gently fanning the fevered face. “You will judge me more truly when you are yourself again. You are tired now, dear, and excited. Let me charm you to sleep.”

A cabinet piano had been brought up stairs since the beginning of Mrs. Barry’s confinement to her boudoir and chamber, and one of Frank’s duties was to play whenever and whatever the whimsical invalid ordered. She touched the keys softly now, in the inspired strains of Beethoven and Von Weber, passing into dreamy improvisations, when a glance over her shoulder

told that her mother slept. If the plaintive minor chords, linked by ever so slender a chain of melody, were cries of the heart, the musician carried one in her bosom overtaken and aching beyond what falls to the common lot of those of her sex and age. Slowly and more faintly moaned chords and melody, until they died into the stillness of the snowy winter afternoon. Then the watcher, without noise, rolled a folding screen between the sleeper and the windows, and lowered them, cautiously, one after another, herself pacing the room to keep her blood in motion, while the freezing air did the work of purification.

She looked like one in prison bounds, and she was. The gay good humor which had been Mrs. Barry's chief recommendation to the affection of her family, and the respect of those whose good opinion was worth having, had not been proof against the irritating influences of her disease. All her powers of dissimulation — and they were neither few nor contemptible — were now addressed to the task of keeping up appearances in the eyes of visitors. The servants privately denounced her as “a cross old cat,” and Frank said nothing at home or abroad to intimate that her mother's temper was anything but perfect in grain and in wear. She was not thinking, in her solitary promenade, of the taunts hurled at herself; of the ungenerous depreciation of her tireless services; of the selfish disregard of her comfort and health, manifested by one who should have been earliest to fear that her child's life was endangered by her self-devotion. She was picturing to herself, instead, the changes that would be brought to her by the coming months — the ravages of the ineradicable evil, which through her much pondering upon it had assumed for her a character, a motive, and a purpose.

Mrs. Barry's disbelief in the fatal nature of her disorder was obstinate. In vain the doctors, urged by Frank, spoke out candidly and plainly their conviction that nothing short of a miracle could arrest the march of decay. In vain Frank strove to divert her thoughts from the hollow baubles of vanity and

time to the momentous considerations that challenged the interest of one who might be, even now, standing upon the verge of another world. In vain pain, pitiless and greedy, reminded her, in throb, and dart, and burning ache, that Nature could not long make good her own against such odds. Child of earth and folly she had lived, and in death she would not renounce her allegiance. The puppet of fashion, she had danced her hour upon the stage of life, and she would not, or could not, cast aside the tawdry masquerade dress. Oblivion of physical pain, and diversion of her reflections from what she termed the "disagreeables" of her case,—meaning not only the physical features, upon which no one cared to dwell, but the awful reality of her danger,—were her ruling desires. Grant her these, and she was a sickly shadow of her former self.

"This life is making me old!" Frank had said, eight months ago. She looked back to that time now as does the mariner upon the stormy high seas to the gently heaving waves of the harbor wherein he rode at safety. She united to a strong will and even temper a trust in the mercy and wisdom of her heavenly Father, which was singularly child-like and steady in a world where faith is apt to faint and fall for the want of sight in those who grope amid the lower and thicker fogs. But she was a woman, and human sympathy was a need of her nature. With Paul's arm ready to uphold her weary form, and Sue's breast on which to shed the tears that moistened her pillow when others slept, she could have borne whatever rested upon and overhung her. The Suydams were exceedingly kind. Especially she valued the affectionate respect accorded her by Mr. Suydam. His advice was sound and readily given whenever she asked for it, and his manner to her was even fatherly. But the disparity in their ages, characters, and positions precluded intimacy. Louis was watchful of her comfort, guarding her from pain and annoyance in many ways. He liked her, she knew; but since the memorable day of their forest drive, he had never overstepped the barrier of reserve he had then built. Circumspect in his deportment when with her, as in

the audience-room of a queen, serious, gentlemanly, and professional, he seemed to recede farther and farther from the terms of brotherly and sisterly intercourse she had once hoped would be established as their natural meeting-ground. She accepted the place allotted her, and showed him that she acquiesced in his wishes in this regard. Perhaps under the more active elements of sorrow and forebodings in her mother's behalf, there was the weary pain of disappointment that she was no more to him than the dozens of other women who passed daily under the review of his grave, penetrating eyes.

This she did not show.

CHAPTER XXIII.

NEW YEAR'S DAY—the social jubilee of Knickerbocker belles and beaux—was but a week off, and Mrs. Barry resolved, in the recesses of her crotchety brain, to make a demonstration. She was pining, she announced, less from the wasting effect of disease than for the want of a sensation. Despite fever, pain, and the gnawing horror above her heart, she would “receive” on the first of the year.

“You need not look horrified,” she said sharply to Frank, whose expression, on learning what was her intention, did, it must be owned, warrant the use of the word. “I comprehend, as well as your decorous self, that it is impracticable to admit to this small room the host who will besiege my doors upon that day. But when Récamier, and Pompadour, and Ninon de l'Enclos received morning calls from their chosen friends of the other sex in their dressing-rooms and bed-chambers, as does many a French lady of rank at the present day, there can be no impropriety in my seeing half a dozen elderly gentlemen in this my boudoir. I shall give orders,—if I am still so far the mistress of my own house as to issue an order,—I shall direct, I say, that Messrs. Guysbert, Suydam, Brevoort, Gause, Vanderpool, and one or two more whom I shall select, be admitted to my presence for a few moments. I shall, with them, taste a macaroon, and touch my lips to my glass when they drink to our early reunion under more favorable auspices. I will, moreover, Petite, that you purchase a new dress for me. I can achieve nothing beyond a demi-toilet, of course, but I would have that *recherché* and becoming. I slept

none last night, in the dread lest, in the half-furnished shops of Kroywen, you should not be able to find what I want—a purely white cashmere robe with an Indian border, in bright, yet delicate colors; to match, in effect, my camel's-hair shawl, which, gracefully disposed about my shoulders, shall hide this disabled member," touching disdainfully the useless left arm. "I desire you, also, to see that the pillows trimmed with Chantilly, are in order, and to you, my good Katrine, I leave the flowers. I wish there were time to get up new curtains and to retint the walls."

Katrine's countenance as this preposterous jargon was poured forth was a comical study. Lest she should betray the excess of her amazement and contemptuous pity, she withdrew to the rear of the sofa, and stooped to pick up bits of lint from the carpet, the bandages having been prepared there five minutes previously.

Mrs. Barry had talked herself into a fine humor, and the glitter of her eyes, the rapidity of her articulation, and the quick oscillations of her fan, evinced her excited enjoyment in her novel project.

Controlling her tongue to parley discreetly and subtly, and letting her features relax from their obnoxious "horrified" cast, Frank essayed to overcome her mother's resolution. She might as well have wooed Wolf Hill to abandon his lonely sovereignty of the marshes for a seat among the gregarious hills flanking the western horizon. Dr. Milnor, arriving in the midst of the discussion, heard both sides, and advised Frank to surrender.

Privately he explained to her that her mother must be humored whenever it was safe or possible to do so.

"Get the dress and appurtenances," he said. "The processes of making and fitting will provide her with amusement for a week to come. Should she not change her mind by New Year's day, we must devise some other means of circumventing her than by direct opposition. It is necessary—imperatively needful—at this juncture to exercise the utmost

tact and ingenuity to avoid excitement or irritation. Soothe and flatter her into a pleasant calm whenever you can."

In pursuance of this counsel, Frank set out, next morning, for the metropolis, with a heart as full as her pocket-book, and far heavier. By some inexplicable accident, she found, in the first store she visited, a morning robe of French cashmere, answering to Mrs. Barry's description of that in her mind's eye, as if it had been manufactured to order. The quiet little lady, in whose sight the civilly patronizing shopman displayed its glories, was not moved to enthusiasm by "the most superb article of the kind ever imported, madam." She examined texture and pattern with unpromising gravity; ordered it to be put up, and paid the exorbitant price befitting the beauty and rarity of the prize, as she might have purchased a burial garment.

Her shopping expedition having consumed less time than she had anticipated, Frank bethought herself of another errand her mother had instructed her to perform. This was to pay a visit to an old friend of Mrs. Barry, who had sent her card out to Kráwen two days before, inscribed with the address, "Santa Claus Hotel." To the hotel Frank repaired, and sending up her name to the lady in question, sat down in one of the drawing-rooms to await her appearance.

The adjoining apartment on her right hand was the last of the long suite—a snug little parlor with a bright fire in the chimney. The sparkle of this—the outer day being sunless and bleak—drew Frank's notice to the hearth as seen through the arched doorway. Then, wandering idly over the bronze ornaments of the grate, and the elaborate workmanship of the white marble mantel, her eye lighted upon a tableau painted within the frame of the mirror reaching from mantel to ceiling. A beautiful woman, richly habited in a morning costume not dissimilar to that the daughter had just selected for her mother, the shine of the fire bringing out dusky-red reflections in her wealth of brown hair, her long lashes sweeping a cheek where rose-pink struggled for suprem-

acy with creamy white; a smile, coquettish, shy, seductive, disturbing the curves of the scarlet lips—leaned back in a deep chair, and listened to the low tones of her companion, a man fashionably attired and well made, whose back was to the glass. His words were subdued below Frank's hearing, but the earnest inflections were those of passionate pleading. If other proof that he was reciting a tale of love were needed, it was supplied when he took in his the unresisting fingers, loaded with gems, and kissed them once and yet again. In the listener Frank had immediately recognized the fair incognita she had seen upon the ferry-boat in June, to whom Veddar had that day paid assiduous court, and at whom Dr. Suydam had sneered.

With an uncomfortable sense of having played the spy to a tender scene, Frank got up to retire to another room, when the cavalier changed his attitude so as to project his profile upon the telltale mirror. It was Veddar himself who personated the worshipper of the warm-tressed goddess.

“And why should he not?” queried Frank, effecting her retreat unseen by the enamoured pair. “He has the right to woo whomsoever and wheresoever he chooses.”

Yet she felt that all was not right. The laxity of his habits and principles was no secret in Kräwen. Into Frank's comparatively secluded life had stolen tales of his vagaries and intrigues, which had caused her to decline any overture of gallantry from him tending towards familiar acquaintanceship. Mr. Suydam, she knew, discouraged his visits at his house, and Louis's significant silence, whenever his name was introduced, warned her that he could say much detrimental to his character, if policy or honor had not sealed his mouth. There was, moreover, a nameless air about the woman who permitted, nay, invited, his show of homage and received his caresses, that jarred upon Frank's instincts. Her florid beauty, the redundancy of jewelry that bestudded her dress to disfigurement, bespoke her something less than the true lady, and her smile was the blandishment of a courtesan. Still, Dr. Suydam

knew her, accosted her as one old acquaintance might another — not as a physician would speak to a whilom patient.

Thoroughly vexed at the spectacle she had witnessed, and with herself for having in the first place contemplated it, and, secondly, meditated and conjectured about it, she gladly hailed the entrance of the lady she had called to see, and tried to banish recollections and speculations together. She had partially succeeded in the revival of ancient memories and talk of family affairs with her friend, when the lovers came through the archway, dallied for a moment in the apartment Frank had vacated, chatting in suppressed voices, with little bursts of soft laughter; then entered the larger one in which Miss Barry sat with her hostess *pro tempore*. The beauty leaned upon her attendant's arm, and his glossy head was bent in ostentation of adoring interest, his eyes devouring her face, while she studied the pattern of the carpet and the play of her rosetted slippers in and out from beneath the dress she held up in one hand so high as to allow a liberal view of a neatly-turned ankle.

Again that unpleasant misgiving — a sensation of repulsion she could have mistaken for a presentiment of evil to herself — ran through Frank's frame. Still unobserved by the twain, she watched them pass on down the vista of arched doorways, and turn into the outer hall.

“I do not wonder you look after them,” said Mrs. King, Mrs. Barry's friend. “She sits opposite me at table, and this young man occupies the next chair to her at dinner and tea. Their courtship is the theme of universal remark.”

“Who is the lady?” questioned Frank, ashamed, ere the question fairly escaped her, of yielding to feminine curiosity.

“Her name is Stone, I think. She is an unmitigated *parvenue*. Nobody here knows her, although she has been here four weeks. She is ostensibly matronized by her mother, a quiet, sad-looking woman, whom her daughter treats as a cipher. The elder lady appears at the *table d'hôte* about twice a week, just often enough to save appearances. This Mr. Veddar's attentions are unremitting. Mrs. Vansleyne was

telling me, last night, that he is a young man of excellent family and fine property. If this be true, his devotion to this under-bred girl is sheer infatuation."

To which snowball of gossip Frank did not think it advisable to add what she herself knew of Veddar's character, antecedents, and place of residence.

As Dr. Milnor had foreseen, the business of directing the preparations for what she gleefully styled her second *début* engrossed Mrs. Barry to the exclusion of the humors which had possessed her of late. A fashionable dressmaker was employed to make up the new garment in a chamber adjacent to Mrs. Barry's boudoir; and she actually went through the torture of having it tried upon her, meeting Frank's dissuasions by the argument that even a loose wrapper should fit accurately about the neck and shoulders.

"I have always been celebrated for the fine slope of my shoulders," she faltered, staggering back to her lounge when the ordeal was through.

Katrine caught her as she lapsed into a limp heap among the pillows, and motioning the wide-eyed mantuamaker to withdraw, undid the close, high bodice Mrs. Barry had donned to conceal her infirmity, and applied sal volatile with an unsparing resolution that speedily brought back the scattering wits. The honest creature nodded, until, to one unused to her ways, dislocation would have appeared imminent.

"If you vill, you vill!" she said, before Mrs. Barry quite knew where she was. "And ven it is done, vy, it vill be done — dat is all!"

Frank, to whom her words were a dagger, resolved to risk all upon one final appeal. She found her opportunity on the last night of the year. Katrine had gone home for a few hours. Dr. Suydam had looked in upon his patient, and been assured triumphantly that she was rejuvenating with every hour.

"You will be one of my visitors to-morrow — is it not so?" she said, engagingly. "It is then that I shall cast aside the

shell of convalescence, and try my new wings. I am not the invalid any more. What is it you would do? *Fi donc!*" hiding under her shawl the wrist he would have taken for the second time during this call. "You presume upon the privileges professional. Dr. Milnor attempts no such gallantries. Ah! he is the man superior to the weaknesses of poor humanity! He takes the hand of a fair lady as he would that of a doll. You will press him to call to-morrow. I should make no public show of partiality. We will not wound him. He means well, poor old man!"

"Let me feel your pulse, if you please," requested Louis, very gravely.

She feigned to refuse, then seemed to change her mind suddenly, and dropped her hand into his, laughing artlessly.

"It must be that I humor him, — else he will be tyrannical, and refuse us our *fête* of the morrow. Well! what is it that you make of the poor trembler? Should it not flutter at the touch of a young man, handsome and distinguished?"

"I wish," replied the doctor, yet more seriously, "that I could prevail upon you not to see company to-morrow. You are utterly unfit for it."

"Hear! he is jealous!" cried Mrs. Barry, in her shrillest wheeze. "Jealous lest graybeards like his father and my poor Guysbert should steal my regard from himself. Ah! but you are a serpent in guile. I am shrewd also — shrewd, and full of art. I divine your motive, and I thwart it. I shall see my respectable graybeards. I shall talk with them, touch the glass to theirs, and bow to their toast — but" — in ghastly roguishness, "they shall not feel my pulse. I grant that to you, absurd, jealously-exacting man!"

She recalled Frank when she moved to the door with Dr. Suydam.

"Stay here!" she commanded. "I am on the *qui vive*. You would concert some device for my discomfiture. O, I distrust you two!" hooking her lean fingers in Frank's dress with a pretence of anxiety lest she should run away.

Debarred the chance of giving so much as a reassuring glance to the uneasy girl, Louis smiled, promised to call as soon as etiquette allowed on the following day, and retired.

Mrs. Barry twitched her head around to see her daughter's countenance so soon as the door closed.

"You would defeat me yet if you could," she said, angrily.

"I would guard you from all risk of evil, mother. It is clear that Dr. Suydam disapproves of your intention, and that he has some weighty reason for opposing it."

"He is a fool — the slave of prejudice, narrow-minded, and arbitrary! Am I, at my age, to be his puppet? I have been his tool and yours long enough! It pleased you to make use of my trifling indisposition as a means of securing meetings with him, and I have indulged you. If he has not proposed, he must suffer the penalty of his tardiness. I cannot be sacrificed forever."

"Neither of us ever thought of such a cruel, such an infamous plot!" exclaimed Frank. "O, mother! do me — do your kind physician, bare justice! Your life is in danger, and we would save it. We think only of this, talk of nothing else. You are very ill, and I tremble to imagine what may follow if you carry out your scheme for to-morrow. Be persuaded, dear, that I love you with my whole heart; that every thought of you, nowadays, is a prayer that you may live to see Sue and Paul, and William and Mary, once more — your children, mother! Have not I a right to plead with you in their name and in mine? You have often said that you lived only for us. Live for us yet a little longer. Do not throw away what is so precious to us — your strength and existence — for the pleasures of a day. I would lie down in your place if I could, by so doing, set you free from the bondage of disease. But since I cannot, grant me the privilege of caring for you, of keeping you from the harm I can ward off."

She was sobbing like a child. Her mother's hand was wet with her tears, and warm with her kisses, when it was wrenched violently from her grasp. Mrs. Barry seized her fan, and brought

it down upon her daughter's arm with a force that shattered the delicate framework into splinters.

"Be silent!" she said, her voice shaking with passion, "and leave the room for the night. Katrine will sleep in the ante-chamber. I have no further need of your services. They are dearly bought. Not another word!"

"Let me stay within call until Katrine comes home," prayed the girl, humbly.

"I am here," said the Hollandaise, entering, and Frank's paleness gave way to scarlet blushes at the thought that another than herself had witnessed the blow and heard the accompanying words.

She dared not touch a good-night kiss to the implacable face turned from her on the pillow, and refrained from performing certain offices in the bedroom which were a part of her nightly duty. Her mother was already wrought up to a frightful pitch of excitement, and she would not provoke another spark from the glowing coals.

Katrine, having put her charge to bed, administered her sedative, and seen her fall asleep, crept with noiseless tread to the threshold of her favorite's chamber, and listened. There was no light under the door, but presently a long sobbing sigh, that was not the wind, confirmed her suspicion that the inmate of the darkened room was not sleeping, and she tapped for admittance.

"Come in," said Frank, hastily. "What is the matter? Is she worse?" turning up the gas, as the door unclosed.

She had not undressed, and had apparently started up from her knees.

"She sleep; she say not one word since you come out. She will sleep now one, two, tree, four hour. You sleeps jes' none at all. Dat is bad!"

The Dutchwoman took the soft hand between hers hardened by toil.

"Dat is bad!" she repeated, slipping up the loose sleeve before Frank could prevent her, and revealing a livid, swollen

mark where the fan had struck. "I bathe it wid warm water. De cold water is not goot. De warm draw out de ache, and de heat, and de bruise. You know dat?" showing her white teeth in her child-like smile.

"I did not. But this is nothing. It was an accident — that is, unintentional."

"I see, I know," nodded Katrine. "*She* not know what she do. She all wrong *here* to-night," tapping her forehead. "Dr. Suydam tell me so. I meet him at de door."

The hard, dry distress vanished from Frank's face.

"My poor mother! I should have seen that. And I tried to reason with her. I was thoughtless, unkind."

"You mean for de best," Katrine comforted her, bathing the wounded arm with tender assiduity. "Now you sleep too. When to-morrow come, to-morrow take care of its own t'ings. Dat is true saying. You find it in your Bible — eh? Dr. Suydam say to me, 'Miss Barry must not fret. Tell her,' he say, 'I will manage so her mother s'all not see too much companies.' O, he is goot! Eh?"

"He *is* good!" responded Frank, feelingly, regardless of the arch flash of the black eyes. "But for him I should despair sometimes."

She tried to follow his prescription of tranquillity and sleep, but it was near dawn when she sank into slumber so profound that Katrine, coming at eight o'clock to arouse her, had to call her twice before she awoke. It went to the faithful creature's heart to see the look of pained inquiry supersede the calm of sleep upon her face, as she opened her eyes and saw who stood beside her. Before she could frame a question, Katrine nodded smilingly.

"You had a nice sleep. She 'ave too. She awake jes' half hour ago and ask for her chocolate, den for you. She forgot all she say and do last night. You forget, too."

Mrs. Barry was amiable and affectionate to her daughter, and condescending to her attendants, but she wore an unsettled air, and there was a vivid, restless light in her eyes. She talked

incessantly, sometimes breathlessly, her mind running all the while upon the details of her toilet and reception. At nine o'clock the solemn process of robing commenced, and the extreme importance of the work served to sober her partially. At intervals of five minutes the operation was suspended, and she lay down to collect strength for additional effort.

“My complexion is more healthy than it has been in weeks,” she said, before the powder-puff was applied. “And my eyes are clear and sparkling. Ah, the sonnets which were composed to my *beaux yeux* when I was younger! That curl, little one — let it project slightly over the temple. How it imparts the air *riante* to the face! My good Katrine, your hair has the silver threads in it; mine is still like the raven's wing. The pencil, Frank. Touch the left eyebrow, carefully, dexterously. Now a line to the right.”

Frank went through the hideous comedy patiently, without comment or entreaty. It was a busy morning. Herself gotten up to her satisfaction, Mrs. Barry attitudinized upon her sofa, and directed the appointments of her boudoir. Fresh covers were tied with new, bright ribbons upon the chairs and divans; the lace curtains were dropped to soften the garish sunlight. Katrine set bouquets upon the mantel and tables, and built a fairy pyramid at the foot of the state sofa, with a marble-topped tripod for a base. The air was surcharged with fragrance, yet one window at each end of the apartment was lowered from the top, and upon mantel and table, and hidden among the clustering spikes of bloom pointing the apex of the pyramid, was a pastile burner, and the pastile was a disinfectant. A roaring fire blazed in the chimney, made necessary not merely by the open windows, but for the purpose of ventilation. In a smaller side-room refreshments were laid ready for those who were to be admitted to the fairy bower.

The presiding genius was beginning to cavil at their tardiness, when Dr. Milnor was ushered in, radiant in a New Year's smile and a white cravat. He offered the compliments of the season with old-fashioned gallantry, congratulated his “late

patient," as she bade him call her, upon her improved looks and perennial flow of spirits, chatted a few minutes, pledged her health and happiness in a glass of sparkling Moselle, and bowed himself off. But Frank perceived that his smile was constrained and mirthless, and that his furtive watch upon her mother's movements had a new meaning in it. She could have imagined it to be consternation.

Mrs. Barry was in raptures over her physician's transformation.

"He is absolutely the man of society, my dear," she informed her daughter. "Did you note his avoidance of medical inquiries and allusions? I am charmed!"

Another long spell of waiting. Without, sleighs glided to and fro to the music of chiming bells, but no message was brought to the upper chamber.

"Does every one pass us by?" complained the invalid. "I do not even hear the door-bell."

"Because of the confusion of sounds in the street," answered Frank, in her simplicity.

Katrine made an errand into the next room. Dr. Suydam, in instructing her as to the best method of muffling the bell, that the tantalizing peal might not keep the sick woman's nerves in a useless quiver, had forbidden her to take Frank into confidence. Nor was she to know that inside the hall door was stationed the footman, to receive upon his salver the cards that were presented when he pronounced the formula put into his mouth, to wit, that Mrs. Barry was much worse, and could see no one. All had been well concerted, and was obediently executed. From time to time relays of the interesting bits of stiff paper were brought up, and appeased, in some degree, the gnawing anxiety of the expectant. By the middle of the afternoon these lost their efficacy. Mrs. Barry cast away a fresh supply, with a gesture of disgust and chagrin.

"Frances Barry! I believe there is some trick in all this! If it is you who have kept my chosen friends from me, I will

never forgive you while I live! Why has not one of those I designated called?"

"I do not know, mother."

"I warn you —" began her mother, threateningly, when the door flew open, and the footman announced —

"Mr. Suydam! Dr. Suydam!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

PROPPED among the pillows trimmed with chantilly, Mrs. Barry tossed a kiss from her fan to father and son.

"Welcome, dear friends," she said, fairly laughing in her delighted relief. "You are as the swallows to the blessed summer. I hail you."

The extraordinary salutation did not surprise those to whom it was addressed. It is doubtful whether any extravaganza of hers could have had this effect. After the formal greetings were over, the elder gentleman engaged the hostess in conversation, and Louis took advantage of the temporary abstraction of her attention from them to put several questions to Frank. They related to the manner in which her mother had passed the night, and her behavior during the day.

Frank asked two in return.

"Is she worse?"

"I fear she is — decidedly."

"Can anything be done for her?"

"Nothing."

She arose, and stole quietly away into the adjacent bedroom.

Louis approached his patient.

"Faithful among the faithless found!" she said, forestalling his speech, squeezing her fan very hard, and looking at him with all her might of fascination. "I have languished for you to-day, my peerless young doctor. But who are all these?" Her eyes dilated, and were fixed upon the open door. "I salute you, one and all!" Anything more horribly

ludicrous than the smirk and *minauderies* with which this was said, it would be impossible to conceive. "Friends, I bid you a happy New Year!"

Louis signed to Katrine to advance to the head of the couch, and himself knelt in front of it.

"Mrs. Barry!"

She stared beyond him, her fan fluttering like an aspen leaf, herself mewling and gibbering idiotically.

"Welcome, one and all! You see before you, gentlemen, the admired Susanne — the unparalleled Madame Barri — the Récamier of this country — the rival the more beautiful of Corinne! I accept your homage! This is the day the most proud and happy of my life! Ah! *mon Dieu!*"

Her fan slipped to the carpet. She put her hand to her head, and a shocking change fell over her face. The jaw dropped to one side, and the eyes closed, as a strong convulsion seized her. It left her motionless, paralyzed, insensible.

Mr. Suydam drove home for his wife, summoning Dr. Milnor on the way. Louis did not leave the house. The dying woman still lay among her lace-frilled cushions, clad in her *recherché* robe, but paint and powder were cleansed from the poor, distorted visage, exposing a cadaverous hue that would never change until after the coffin-lid shut upon it. Then they sat down and watched her from hour to hour, with the forgotten bouquets poisoning the air with sweets, and the merry bells ringing blithely without — watched the features sharpen and shrink; the closed eyes sink more deeply in the sockets; the breath die into faint, infrequent gasps; the nails purple and the fingers stiffen — and still no sign of consciousness. At ten o'clock, while the streets were yet alive with trooping visitors, and the night air gave back in clearer music the silvery chimes, Katrine stepped forward and drew the sheet over the dead face.

With one wild shriek, the outgushing of the restrained agony of months, Frank sank to the floor. Louis caught her up, bore her from the chamber, and, guided by his recollections

of the wedding-night, carried her along the hall to her own room. He deposited his burden upon the bed, where he had then laid the mother, and swept back the dishevelled hair from her forehead. Cold and still as stone! The strong man bowed before the spring-tide of love, anguish, and despair, that flowed over him. Forgetting time, place, — all except his fondness and his hopelessness, — he knelt by her, and pressed kiss after kiss upon her hands.

“My darling! my lost darling!” he sobbed.

The bolt of the door rattled loudly and uselessly, since he had left it ajar. He sprang to his feet as Katrine ran in.

“My lamb! my flower!” ejaculated she, beginning to cry, at sight of the prostrate figure. “You go, now!” to Louis. “I bring her right! Never you fear! I save her for you!”

“Save her for me!” Louis repeated many times to himself during the ensuing week. “Better that she should die!”^{on}

The funeral, if more modest in some of its features than the deceased would have directed, had she left orders concerning it, was an imposing demonstration on the part of those who had delighted to honor her wealth and fashion while she lived. Surprise was freely expressed by these that the coffin was of black cloth with no trimmings except the silver nails and plate. Had the daughter died instead of the mother, said the malcontents depreciatingly of poor Frank, the survivor would have enshrined the remains in a burial-case covered with black — perhaps white-velvet, and enwrapped with flowers. The solitary wreath of immortelles laid upon the grave was insignificant, not to say mean. Then they, her dear friends and *ci-devant* critics, felt defrauded because the lid of the coffin was fast. Still supposing Frank to have been the sleeper within the narrow limits, she would have lain there in more than bridal array, crowned with lilies, and orange blossoms, and odorous green leaves, as living and sane people never adorn themselves, but in a style that has come to be the height of the fashion for the wealthy dead.

“But then, poor dear Mrs. Barry had such exquisite taste! And how suddenly she went off at the last! I was near fainting

when I heard it. On New Year's day, too! They say she was standing in the parlor, dressed elegantly, as she alone *could* dress, you know, and twirling her fan, just as she always did, you know, and surrounded as she always was, by a crowd of gentlemen, when she had a fit, and never revived. Dreadful — wasn't it! Miss Frank will be an heiress now, although there are five or six children; and they *do* say that poor, dear Mrs. Barry lived up to her income, if not beyond it; and where will Frank stay until her sister or brother comes for her? She cannot live alone, you know, and she will not go to the Suydams, of course, since she and the doctor are certainly to be married in the spring. Mrs. Suydam does not pretend to deny the engagement. The doctor is eccentric, you know, and so is Frank; so it is not publicly acknowledged."

Notwithstanding these confident predictions, Frank did accept Mrs. Suydam's invitation to become her guest until she should be able to join her family, or until some member of it could come to her. By the same mysterious fatality which had thrown the entire weight of the responsibility and labor incident to her mother's illness upon her, she was left alone in this her sorest extremity. The telegram notifying William Barry of his mother's death was answered by one from his wife, stating that her husband had sailed, the preceding day, for Rio Janeiro, upon pressing business. She wrote, also, by the next mail, tendering the hospitalities of her abode to her sister-in-law; but since some competent person must stay in Kräwen until the house and furniture were disposed of, Frank decided to tarry in the place until she heard again respecting Sue's arrangements. The property was to be divided among the children, and nothing could be done without consultation with the rest. Ignorant of the rumors proclaiming her approaching marriage, she desisted no impropriety in seeking a refuge under Mrs. Suydam's roof.

She had been there two weeks, the recipient of marked and unvarying kindness from every member of the household, when she left her sick-room and made the trial journey of the stairs,

bringing her black dress and wan face into the library, where sat the father and son, talking of her.

“I am afraid she is thoroughly broken down,” Mr. Suydam had said, a few moments before the unexpected apparition. “Confound doctors and their drugs, I say! Can’t you and Milnor together build up this one girl’s constitution!”

“Her constitution is all right, sir. There are not many better. All she needs is time with rest.”

“And a rousing draught of happiness — hey!” interrogated the senior, with a lurking smile.

Louis looked profoundly indifferent.

“I dare say it would not be a bad prescription.”

And then Frank glided in like a sable-robed ghost, and both arose to greet her.

“I have been telling this young gentleman that, in my opinion, he and his brother practitioners are a set of humbugs,” said Mr. Suydam, when she was ensconced in the softest seat the room afforded. “Of what use are all their tonics and invigorators, if they cannot put color into your cheeks and elasticity into your step?”

The faintly-tinted lips quivered — just perceptibly.

“They will, sir, after a while, I hope. Patience is the best curative. Without it nothing else can take effect. I am better to-night.”

Mr. Suydam said he was glad to hear it, walked irresolutely around the room, seemingly in quest of a missing book or paper, mumbled something about his study, and left doctor and patient to themselves. Frank did not notice his absence for a while. She sat back in the capacious chair, her feet upon a hassock, her slight hands laid together in her lap, gazing into the fire. Louis surveyed her across the hearth, and listened to the rising wind, creaking the elm boughs, rattling the sashes, and crying, like a lost spirit, in the chimney. She was a mere shadow, and a sorrowful one, of the bright-faced vision that had startled him on that Thanksgiving Eve, fourteen months ago. How much he had learned and suffered in that time! What had not

she suffered? The noblest woman he had ever known, she was also the one who had most of his pity. He had seen her sustain, without repining, or attempt at evasion, a load the complicated hardships of which would have driven an ordinary girl mad, or killed her. Misconception, insult, revilings, had been the reward of fidelity and love to a parent in herself so unlovely, he stood astounded that the most patient of nurses should be capable of exercising aught of charity or kindness towards her beyond what was dictated by the stern letter of duty. Her mother's last words to her, as he had learned through Katrine, were a threat; yet she mourned for her as children rarely regret the kindest and best of parents.

He had no consolation to offer her. Had his heart been trained to feel the beauty of the Christian's trust, and his tongue to express it, he must have remained dumb all the same. The worldling had died as the fool dieth, and he understood intuitively what Mrs. Suydam ignored in her platitudes about resignation and immortality, namely, that the saddest, deepest fountain of the daughter's grief had its rise in the consciousness that her mother had gone to her account blind and unprepared.

Struck by the stillness of the apartment, Frank glanced up hastily, and encountered the earnest eyes of her only companion.

"You have acted wisely in venturing down stairs," he said, naturally and pleasantly. "The change will do you good."

"Do you think so?"

Her tone was spiritless, and her gaze went back to the grate.

"I am sure of it. You have no physical ailment to contend with — only depression of nerves and spirits."

Frank straightened herself up, and began her answer bravely.

"That is all. I shall rally soon. I ought to make a better fight against these now. Time robs all memories of their sting, it is said. Will it *ever* make this bearable?"

With the irrepressible cry, the tears came in a flood. Feeling herself powerless to check them, she arose to go back to her room; but Louis stopped her.

"Cry on, my child! You will be the better for it," he said,

in the serious accents of mature age that were frequent with him of late.

When she could see him clearly again, he was standing before her with a glass of wine.

“Drink it all.”

This done, he dipped the corner of her handkerchief in a bowl of ice-water he had brought from the dining-room, and bade her bathe her eyes and face. A vinaigrette was the next restorative, at which the first real smile Frank had given since New Year's Eve lighted her countenance.

“You are an accomplished nurse.”

“That is my trade, you know. Let me put this screen between you and the fire. Now you are more comfortable.”

They fell into friendly chat after that. Not cheerful — that could not be as yet; but neither was it sad. There was interesting news from abroad in the evening papers, and Louis, reading it aloud, questioned Frank about foreign politics and the topography of the country likely soon to be the theatre of bloodshed. He loved to hear her talk at all times, but he led her to do it now for her own good more than for his pleasure. If the deed had cost him painful exertion, — and it had not, — he would have been abundantly recompensed by seeing how much brighter she was when Mrs. Suydam stepped in, at tea-time, to say that Frank was to have hers in the library.

“Cannot I go into the other room?” she said, looking from mother to son. “This eating alone is irksome.”

“The upright position at the table continued throughout the meal would weary you,” returned Louis. “As to eating alone, I have no intention of stirring from this cosy corner, unless I am compelled to do it. Will you allow me a place at your board?”

He amused himself and her by clearing off the centre-table, and, when the waiter arrived, by setting out their repast in the most attractive manner. Then, sitting down opposite her, he invited her to try her strength by pouring out a cup of tea for him. She complied with a shade of shyness that made her

appear very bewitching, and while he sipped the beverage she had prepared, the old sorcery crept over him. He had battled so long and mightily (with this sophistry he excused his relapse into the insidious snare) that he was entitled to a moment's rest, one hour's sleep upon the Enchanted Ground, one drink of the cool, flowing waters conscience had commanded him to forsake even though he perished with thirst.

This, then, was their home; the sweet hush of the warmed atmosphere, the laughing leap of the blaze upon the hearthstone, the luxurious seclusion made more delightful by the roaring wind and the groans of the writhing boughs outside, were so many elements of the blissful rest permitted to mind, body, and spirit, now that the day's work was over. Yet these were nought, less than nought, if she had not filled the seat across the table, making of the whole place a sanctuary of holy, happy thoughts and domestic love.

"Does your tea suit you?" Frank interrupted his reverie. "It is the first I have ever made for you, and it may require qualification."

"It is nectar."

She smiled and blushed.

"Let me give you another cup, then."

She was filling it, when Katrine's characteristic tap was heard at the door. She had a basket of flowers, and her hardy face glowed like a crimson dahlia from her walk in the wind.

"Dat is goot!" she uttered, seeing the occupation of the pair. "She be all right soon. Now, I go fill de big vase in de parlor, just purpose because you come down stairs. I tell Mrs. Suydam so. I say, 'She like it, and she like me jest so soon as she see me, ever so many mont' ago.' I s'all fix it never so fine. *Den* you bring her to see it — eh?"

"I will," Louis promised.

The charm was not broken yet. His earliest meeting with her had also been beside the marble vase. The spot was dear and hallowed to him. When Katrine signalled them that her

work was ready for inspection, he offered Frank his arm, drawing her hand within it with care that seemed to her the solicitous attention of a physician and brother, — which with him meant the loving guard of a husband over a being so precious and so feeble. Guiding her through the hall slowly and tenderly, he led her into the great parlors. Katrine's work was a *chef-d'œuvre*, and Louis, placing his charge in an easy-chair close by, enjoyed the flush and light in her countenance, as she examined it, far more than he did the floral exhibition.

Katrine perceived this, and her professional jealousy was aroused.

“You not love de flower so well as she do,” she said, in mild rebuke; “nor so well as your brudder did.”

Her attachment to her nursling always revived in full force when she beheld his portrait.

“I tink dat was one reason why she,” nodding at Frank, “love him so much.”

Her manner added force to a remark which would otherwise have been thrown away upon one of her auditors. In her simple soul she saw no cause why Fred's betrothed should not have an especial claim upon the affections of the younger and surviving brother. She loved Frank the more on account of that betrothal. Louis should do likewise, and the bond be an acknowledged one.

“Loved him so much!” repeated Frank, slowly, as questioning her meaning. “I certainly liked him. We were very good friends. But that was all.”

The grieved reproach of Katrine's eyes was pathos itself.

“He was de most dear, de best friend to you, or you would not mean to marry him. Don't forget him now, since he dead. *He* love you while he live!”

“I never meant to marry him. You are strangely mistaken,” replied Frank, curbing some emotion, — impatience or surprise, — that she might speak composedly. “I was with him when he was sick. I felt very sorry for him. I thought, from the first day I saw him, that he must die. He did not think so,” color-

ing so redly that Louis retained that part of his belief in the story of the engagement which treated of Fred's passion for her.

"I never guessed before that you, or anybody else, entertained such an idea as you spoke of just now. I supposed every one understood."

Referring, in her bewilderment, to Louis, she was electrified by the glad gleam of his eyes, the rapture irradiating his countenance.

"We have all been mistaken," he said, in a low voice he vainly attempted to make calm. "But I believe your version of the story. Do not trouble yourself further about the matter. I will explain it."

Frank was exceedingly discomposed.

"I feel as if I had entered this house under false pretences," she said, in the same key, as Katrine was busy collecting the broken stems and leaves strewed upon the floor. "Does your mother credit this?"

"She did once. I have not heard her speak of it in a long while."

"But your father surely knew better?"

"He, I suspect, received my mother's statement as truth without question."

"And you?" the plait between the brows deepening.

"What was I to think? If the tale had improbabilities, there were also plausible features in it that confirmed my belief in what I had heard."

"If it had been so, I would not have made a secret of it. We were totally unfitted for one another."

"Give me the credit of having discerned that much. Yet one sees incongruous unions every day."

His mien altered suddenly into gloom that was not devoid of fierceness.

"Shall I conduct you to the library? It is warmer there."

He did not reseate himself when he had taken her back. He had to go out, he said, but his mother would be in directly.

"I shall go to my room very soon," she answered. "But I should like to talk for a few minutes with Mrs. Suydam first."

He reëntered the library after she thought he had left the house.

“I have questioned Katrine,” he said, coming up to her and speaking rapidly. “She had that absurd story from Rosette, my mother’s maid. Servants will tattle. I thought it might relieve you to learn that my mother has not made of your affairs capital for Kräwen gossip. Katrine is sadly troubled. She fears you are displeased with her.”

“I am not. I have no right to be. Send her to me—please.”

Louis delivered her message to the flower merchant, and went out into the windy night. For two hours he buffeted the blast, tramping up one street and down another, like a lashed and goaded creature that could not break his harness, and whose forces were not yet so far spent that he could lie down and die.

Ruby's Husband

CHAPTER XXV.

"LOUIS!" called Mr. Suydam from his study, as his son trod on tiptoe by the door, at half past ten o'clock that night.

The young man turned back with a frown, which had not quite gone when he confronted his father.

"Sit down, my boy," said the elder, pointing to a chair. "You look jaded."

He did, and very wretched. His lips had been bitten until they were swollen and discolored; the heavy lids overhung bloodshot eyes, and there was a deep-red line just above his brows, where he had dragged his hat down upon his forehead — the more marked since the rest of his face was very pale.

"I am tired, sir, very tired."

"You work too hard. You will be an old man by the time you are fifty, if you go on at this rate. Nature's laws cannot be violated with impunity. Devotion to your profession is praiseworthy, but it should not urge you on to suicide," lectured the parent, didactically.

Louis made no reply.

"You would be a happier man, and, in the long run, a more useful one, if you were married, Louis. There is no wish nearer my heart than to see you comfortably and handsomely settled in life before I die."

"I am not impatient for the change, sir," rejoined the other, moody to surliness.

"No?" said the father, taken aback by the rebuff. He hemmed twice before making a fresh sally. "Your mother was in here this evening, with a queer story. Would you

believe it? Frank Barry declares she was never engaged to Frederic. She owned to your mother that he addressed her twice, and vowed he would never resign the hope of winning her. Had I suspected that this sort of persecution was going on, I would have interfered to protect her. But she says it was her wish and his that his proposal and her rejection should not mar the amicable relations of the two families. She really liked him, and enjoyed his conversation; but apart from all other objections that might have existed to the match, she could never have promised to marry one whose health was, she was persuaded, hopelessly destroyed. Frederic's vanity was insufferable, and I doubt not he was sincere in his declaration to his mother that his prospects for marrying the girl of his choice were fair. The dear child is making herself very unhappy over the notion that she has partaken of our hospitality and friendship when she had no real claim to them. I sent her word that the little we had been able to do for her was a tribute to her intrinsic excellence, and that our regard for her was not one whit diminished by what she had told us. I might have added, with truth, that I had always considered her too good for Frederic."

"You have acted kindly and honorably." A grateful spark lit up the sullen eyes.

"Only justly, my son, only justly. She is a good girl—a noble woman—the queen of her sex, as I have said to you before. I don't know her equal. And, Louis, lad," faltering slightly, "it has been a darling hope of mine that you should marry her."

The livid complexion changed to sanguine, but the frown was more lowering, and the eyes glowered from the pent-house of the contracted brows, as Louis gnawed his lip, and said nothing.

"I have noticed, with pleasure, your attentions to her, and the marked interest you have evinced in her affairs," continued the senior. "I believe you to be capable of forming a correct estimate of her character. Some men could never know her

aright. I have fancied that you appreciated her, and that your affections had followed the dictates of your judgment. In short, — for I flounder atrociously in this kind of delicate circumlocution, — I believe that you love the girl, and that she is not indifferent to you.”

Louis raised one hand in deprecation, while he leaned his head upon the other.

“Don’t go any farther in that direction, father. I am not very far from distraction already.”

Mr. Suydam sat aghast.

“Do you mean to say,” he resumed in a tremulous voice that touched Louis to pity for his disappointment, “that she has refused you?”

“I never offered myself,” — without lifting his face. “If I had, she would have been a rank fool, and, in the end, a most miserable woman, had she accepted me.”

“Tut, tut! this *is* foolery!” said the father, in half-angry raillery. “Modesty is commendable in youth, if only for its rarity; but there is neither wit nor bravery in mock humility. If you love her, tell her so like a man, and know your fate without delay. To be sure, your mother harps upon the etiquette that forbids such a step while she is your parent’s guest; but this is an exceptional case. When she leaves us, it will be for New Orleans or Europe, and your time is short. Unless I am greatly mistaken, you have nothing to fear in making the venture.”

“Excuse me.” Louis arose. “But neither my father nor any other man has a right to speculate as to the probable reply a young lady would return to a proposal which will never be made. There are circumstances that render it inexpedient for me to take the step you speak of. I honor Miss Barry as much, or more, if that can be, than you do. But I shall never ask her to marry me.”

“You do not deny that you love her,” said the father, testily. He waited for a rejoinder, but none came.

“Tell me you are indifferent to her, and I am silenced. If

this is not the case, where is the sense of these mysterious allusions to insuperable objections? Does Frank inherit her mother's malady?"

Louis shuddered. "Heaven forbid!"

"Is she in love with anybody else?"

"Not that I know of."

"*Are you?*"

He could see his son's countenance, and the derisive smile that crossed it.

"I am not!"

"What, then, hinders you from doing as I wish?"

Louis pulled himself together, physically and spiritually.

"I do not like to seem disrespectful, father, but you are trespassing upon ground which I will allow no one to tread, unless invited by me. This is my affair — not yours. I, as the person who would be most affected by the adoption or rejection of your scheme, protest against the intervention — I do not say interference — of anybody else. If I decline to follow your advice, I alone suffer from my contumacy, and there is no law obliging me to give my reasons for the declinature."

He appreciated the extent of his imprudence when he saw his father turn purple, and his hand shake violently as he held up his closed fist.

"And I protest, in the name of honor and manhood, against what is either poltroonery or inexcusable trifling with a woman's affections. You have made this good, pure girl the talk of the town only to bow her head in undeserved shame. Everybody expects you to address her, or thinks you are already engaged. Dr. Milnor believes in your betrothal fully as he does in his own marriage, — a belief founded upon what he has witnessed in Mrs. Barry's house, — not what he has heard abroad, although he has heard enough, in all conscience. If you were a libertine, a gambler, or a drunkard, I could tolerate your scruples. But, seeing in you — as the rest of the world does — a man in the prime of youth and health, prosperous in business, and with fair expectations, an unblemished character, tastes and

sympathies akin to her own,—I tell you Frank Barry has a right, after what has passed between you, to expect you to offer your hand in marriage to her, or to account you a fickle villain. You have not asked for my opinion, but I mean you shall have it;” letting his clenched hand drop on the table with a prodigious crash among a pitcher and glasses set thereon.

Wheeling his chair around, he poured out a goblet of water, and drank it very slowly and with apparent difficulty, taking stertorous pants after each swallow, as though his throat were inflamed or obstructed.

“We had better drop the subject, father. It excites you. I spoke hastily; but I did not intend to wound or displease you.”

Mr. Suydam was not a profane man. He regarded swearing as a foolish and ungentlemanly vice. Yet an oath escaped him now.

“Don’t talk to me about excitement. I have a right to be angry. Any honorable man would fume at such behavior in his son. If you must flirt, must play football with a woman’s heart, why didn’t you take one that was good for nothing else? There are a hundred girls in this town who would toss theirs at your feet if you hinted your desire to indulge in this manly and harmless sport. Would nothing serve your purpose but my poor little Frank’s?”

His voice trembled now, to breaking.

“Don’t think me worse than I am, father. I have not trifled with Miss Barry’s affections. If I had, I should deserve to be hanged, drawn, and quartered. She cares no more for me than she does for other men.”

“Will you put that to the test?” asked the father, eagerly. “I beg your pardon for my harshness just now, but my heart is bound up in this matter. I ask merely that you should tell her the exact state of your feelings, and note the effect of your communication. It is hard for me to give this up, Louis. You have been a dutiful son to me in everything else. Don’t disappoint me now. It is for your own good. I wish I could tell

you how strongly I feel this. Moreover, I believe the girl likes you well enough to marry you, if you were to put the idea into her head. You would be very happy together. Come, my boy! faint heart ne'er won fair lady."

Louis was standing behind the chair from which he had arisen, leaning thoughtfully over the tall back. He did not respond immediately. When he did, it was to the point.

"The young lady in question is weak and nervous as yet, sir. Let her remain here a fortnight undisturbed by my importunities, profiting by your advice and help in the settlement of her affairs. Her brother will hardly come for her within that time. At the end of the two weeks I will make a frank confession to her of everything bearing upon the subject we have been discussing. Afterwards, I will report to you what has passed. Will this satisfy you?"

His father scanned his features dubiously.

"You are dealing with me in good faith, boy?"

"I solemnly affirm it. You have guessed the truth. I love this woman. When I began to love her I cannot tell. I never meant to do it. I have fought with the feeling until I am worn out in the conflict. She may—I fear she will—despise me for it when I confess it; but she shall know it. You run the risk of a sore disappointment in urging me to this course. I need a friend, father, and I will throw myself upon your love and generosity. If Miss Barry should spurn me,—as I warn you it is very likely she will,—will you, too, take your favor from me? I have not meant to break your heart."

Mr. Suydam arose, and laid his unsteady hand among the thick, damp locks shading the averted face, as Louis bent his head upon his crossed arms.

"Come, come!" he said, with a husky laugh. "I had not thought you were so hard hit as this. Love makes cowards of us all; but I did not expect you, of all the young fellows I know, to show the white feather. You talk as if courting a pretty girl who has never—to speak within bounds—openly slighted you, and who, so far as we can judge, likes

nobody else better than she does you, were like crying for the moon. Suppose the worst comes to the worst, and she says, 'No.' You are no more badly used than hundreds of others have been before you. I let slip an opportunity — *the* golden opportunity of my life — when I was young, because I fancied the girl liked another man. I learned, years afterwards, when she was in her grave, that her heart was mine. I have not alluded to this before in forty years. I do it now that you may profit by my fault and my remorse."

He poured out another goblet of water and sipped it, his back to his son.

"Has it never occurred to you to doubt whether you would have been happy had you married your first love?" inquired Louis, respectfully. "It is a theory of mine that more harm comes of precipitate declarations and hasty matches than from all other sources of human unhappiness combined."

"There is no danger of your falling into this mistake, at all events," returned his father, smiling. "I have more charity for the excesses of youthful blood than for the quibbles and delays of premature middle age."

"Thank you for that remark, sir. I may have occasion to quote it to you before long," Louis replied, laughing shortly and harshly. "In a fortnight, then, you shall hear from me."

Good nights were exchanged, and the two sought their respective chambers, the elder to congratulate himself upon the tact and resolution which had carried his point with the foolishly diffident suitor — congratulations unmarred by misgivings touching the mysterious scruples his son had hinted at. He had been an irrational lover himself in his day, and no amount of absurdity seemed to him inconsistent with the character. Modesty was, with Louis, a distinguishing trait, and this backwardness in addressing the lady of his choice, these gloomy apprehensions as to the result of his suit, were exaggerations of that quality. Love was a notorious refracting medium.

Was it through this that Ruin and Despair loomed up before

Louis in his fireside musings — grim and horrible demons, menacing him with imminent destruction?

“I know now what the Eumenides were,” he said aloud, when he had sat, bowed together, over the hearth until the grate was black and cold.

Denied the reality of happiness, he had taken to dreaming of it, and this was the fruit of the pernicious indulgence. He had precipitated his overthrow — his expulsion from his father's heart, and from the high place in the world's esteem which he had earned by his own exertions. He accounted this a trifle not worth remembering when he took into consideration that upon which his father had laid particular stress — the fact that he had compromised Frank. Her noble head was then to bow, her pure face to crimson with shame, before the ready finger of scorn that would be directed at her by those who had envied her for her goodness and mental gifts, as for her wealth and other extrinsic advantages. He could have crushed under foot the mighty host of hissing serpents, as he pictured to himself their clamor and her confusion; but was he, the cause of her discomfiture, to become her champion? He was powerless, except to warn her of the gathering storm. A prophet of woe, he must deliver his message, and then flee her sight. She would hate him when she recalled their hours of confidential intercourse, her sisterly trust in his word, in his skill, in his integrity, in his friendship for her, and in his worthiness to receive her answering regard.

When, all the while, he, the husband of another woman, had been endangering her dignity and purity of maidenly reputation by the tokens of preference he had showed and she had accepted. He knew society and women too well to hope that their censure would spend itself wholly upon him, who merited the uttermost dregs of their wrathful vials. She — guileless dove — would be hawked at and torn as if hers had been the folly and the crime of concealing it. She would hate him. He could scarcely continue to respect her, as he did now, if she did not turn from him in loathing.

“I know now what the Eumenides were,” he said, when he had reached this point of his musings.

He will not be recommended to mercy by the most tender-hearted of my readers; yet the most censorious must own that he was being vigorously belabored by the avenging sisterhood.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE fortnight of probation was over.

Mrs. Suydam had an engagement out that evening — a wedding reception, and a select one. The bride, the daughter of an intimate friend of Mrs. Suydam, had lately lost a brother, and was to be married very privately in consequence. There could be no impropriety, therefore, in the appearance of Mrs. Barry's "soul sister" in the demi-funereal assembly. Yet she deplored the necessity of emerging from the seclusion so grateful to her smitten heart, even while she was arrayed by the sympathizing Rosette in the mourning silk, white crape sleeves and chemisette she had settled upon as most in consonance with her bereaved state; plained to Frank of the inexorable laws of society, and the demands of other friends, as she clasped the pearl pin, earrings, and bracelets, the subdued lustre of which typified the nebulous condition of the wit and spirits erst so sparkling.

"I have no heart for gayety. I think I shall never have again. But dear little Blanche would never forgive me if I remained at home on her marriage eve. Now, *ma mignonne*, you must engage not to droop in my absence. You must study to divert your mind from your sorrow, Petite. How sweetly that name ever fell from your beloved mother's lips! and none other suits you so well. Mr. Suydam would be delighted to see you in his study, and that strange, unsocial son of mine is never unsocial or cynical to you. You will form an harmonious trio."

"I shall not be lonely," responded Frank. "I am glad

you are going out. Give my love and kind wishes to the pretty little bride. You are looking well to-night. That dress becomes you admirably."

She tarried in her hostess's dressing-room until the carriage was announced. Frank had not flinched at the repeated allusions to her loss, or the sentimental injunctions to resignation and fortitude. Some griefs lie too deep to be touched by plummets prepared for fathoming shallow hearts, especially when the owners of such hold and ply the line. Nor did she evade one of the caresses that were the climax to the flattery and petting that seasoned Mrs. Suydam's talk to and at her. She said, within her single, honest heart, that the lady designed nothing but kindness; that she had loved her mother and been beloved by her; and that these three considerations entitled her to respect and gratitude at her hands. Yet she breathed more freely as she returned to her own room, having seen the unwilling reveller flit down the broad stairway, wrapped in her white opera cloak, the ostentatiously disposed black trimmings of which were to keep before the minds of others — no need for her to gaze upon such remembrancers — the solemn and touching circumstance of her blighting affliction.

A letter lay on Frank's dressing-table. It had been put there while she was with Mrs. Suydam, and was a bulky package directed to her in Louis's hand. Within the outer envelope was another, addressed to Mr. Suydam. About this was wrapped a half sheet of letter paper, containing but three lines. Frank read these first, as Louis had designed she should.

"MISS BARRY: Please read the enclosed. If, after doing this, you can endure my presence, may I ask of you the last favor of an interview? I shall be in the library until ten o'clock.

"LOUIS SUYDAM."

It was nearly nine when she joined him. He had given her up, and, from pacing the room in such burning suspense as seemed to lick up his life, drop by drop, had settled into

quietude of feature and limb that resembled apathy. He did not move or turn when the door unclosed to admit her. She was within arms' length of his chair before he looked at her — lifting his eyes then with abrupt and painful effort. She had gained strength and color within two weeks, but every vestige of the latter was washed away by the waves of whatever emotion she had underlain during the past hour. Her face was unmoved in other respects. Her eyes, grave and clear, rested upon his, neither in anger nor confusion, and she bowed slightly, but courteously, in laying the packet he had sent her upon the stand at her elbow. He set a chair for her, and as she took it, she uttered the only reproach he was ever to hear from her with regard to his great fault.

“You were very wrong not to tell me all this before.”

Was it reproach? Did ever condemnation from mortal lips fall upon the sinner's ears in accents of gentlest pity for the transgressor, and sorrow that retribution had overtaken him — that the punishment of his evil doing followed hard after him?

“Don't speak to me in that tone, Frank! It unmans me. Tell me I am a scoundrel, and that you despise and abhor me, and I can bear it better.”

“I cannot tell you that, for it would be untrue. I am very sorry for you, and you must let me help you. This letter to your father was written two years ago. Are you willing to tell me what has happened since? Do not, if the recital will pain you. I only want to know your exact position.”

He could not look at her as he told the tale. He covered up none of his own sins — want of forbearance with his wife's foibles; of courage in his dealings with his father; of submission to Fate when it dawned upon him what a frightful destiny that one act of boyish passion had entailed upon him. He did — and the listener honored him for it — speak gently and charitably as truth would allow him to do of the unacknowledged wife; of her indifference and her caprices; her inordinate love of finery and excitement; lastly, of her obstinate rejection

of his offer to recognize her before the world in the name and character he had bestowed upon her.

He went no farther than this. He *dared* not breathe a word of his unlawful love for herself in her hearing. In one particular, he failed in his pledge to his father. He had thought it would be difficult to do this. He found it impossible. This girl carried with her an atmosphere of innocence that guarded her from evil as with celestial panoply. He could not say to her, "I, a married man, saw and loved you, as a man should love but one living woman." She had not loved him in return. That was plain from her composure, her frankness of compassion, and offer to befriend him. He was not so lost to all sense of moral right, not so imbruted in selfishness, as not to be thankful that he was the only sufferer from his presumption; yet he felt the more desolate for the discovery. He would keep all else she gave him, since her love was never to be his. The sweet pity beaming in her eyes, the kindly interest expressed in voice and manner, were too precious, to one beggared in all other affections, to be forfeited. He shrank from meeting the full measure of pain his sin had earned. He may have been weak in this. He was certainly human. He had dreamed of Paradise, and, awaking, found himself a perpetual exile from Eden, forsaken in the desert by all save one friendly angel. Was it strange that he dragged himself to her feet, and lay there, even while he knew that his touch upon her robe would be defilement?

"I have been very blind," Frank said, ending the pause that succeeded the disgraceful story. "I have seen, from the evening of our first meeting, that there was a ceaseless sorrow in your heart. I must have been strangely absorbed in my own selfish griefs not to surmise what was the nature of your trouble. You tried to tell me this, last summer, on the afternoon of our visit to the forest lake. It was this that was upon your tongue when the dog attacked us. Am I right?"

"You always are."

"Not always, or I should have understood you then. You

perplexed me sadly. I am afraid I did not invite your confidence."

A light scarlet cloud suffused her complexion, and was gone as it had come.

"I wish I had been a better — a truer friend. I might have saved you some suffering. What do you propose to do?"

"Advise me," was all Louis could say. Words had never been so scarce with him before.

"Your conscience and sound judgment marked out your line of conduct a year and more since. You then resolved to make a free confession to your father. Your mistake was in yielding to your wife's persuasions."

"Persuasions!" Louis interrupted with his peculiar laugh.

It jarred miserably upon his ear and heart — that word "wife" applied to Ruby by Frank Barry. He could not resent it, but he retorted savagely upon the next one when used to describe the latter's coarse refusal of his proposition to right her.

"She did not persuade. She declined to enter the humble abode my unassisted exertions could provide for my wife. She defied me to prove our marriage. The clergyman who performed the ceremony is dead. I could only find the witnesses by advertising for them and exposing the whole affair. She has the certificate, and she declared she would destroy it sooner than join with me in a disclosure she deemed premature. What could I do?"

Frank mused, sadly. "Poor girl! That is the language of one made desperate by wrong and sorrow, or the ill-judged devotion of one who would sacrifice herself to secure the welfare of him whom she loved more than she did her happiness and fair name."

This was too much for Louis's magnanimity.

"You do not know her," he said, curtly disdainful.

"I wish I did. I could plead with her to more purpose than with you. For this thing must not be. When a great wrong has been committed, it should be retrieved at any cost short of life or principle. You must bring your wife home."

“ Here ! ”

“ Here,” she replied, firmly. “ Your father loves you too sincerely not to forgive you when he hears of your temptation and your punishment. What your father decrees in his household is done without gainsaying. If your parents receive their new daughter, the world is silenced. These are the conditions insisted upon by Mrs. Suydam.”

Louis smiled bitterly.

“ Your chain of sequences would be irrefutable were your premises correct. I know my father better than you do. He told me, when I tried to set my real position before him, that I might hope for absolution for all offences save one. He has neither charity nor forgiveness for a *mésalliance*. But for this conviction, I would have rent my way out of this detestable web of deceits before he had been at home a week. Again — and here lies the most formidable obstacle, after all — a sudden or violent shock would imperil his life. I have lived through the scene in dreams a hundred times — have sustained the brunt of his displeasure, seen his grief, and awakened in the agonies of a murderer’s conscience. The crime of parricide is not to be courted for any light cause.”

“ I understand,” said Frank, meditatively. “ Yet ” — her eyes clearer and deeper — “ it can never be wrong to do right. We may hedge about the path of duty with whatever precautions we think needful, but we may not walk in any other and hope for the blessing of Heaven. I agree with you as to the need of circumspection in breaking this news to your father ; but we wrong him every hour by withholding it. He will be grieved and angry at first. We can expect nothing else. But I have a firm persuasion that in the end he will forgive you, and be reconciled to your marriage. He cannot live without your society and affection.”

Louis took a turn through the rooms.

“ I will do as you say.”

“ Not because I say it. Because it is right.”

“ With me the one reason implies the other,” was the reply.

It was not flattery, but sorrowful sincerity, and Frank, conscious that this was so, attempted no disclaimer. She sat still a moment, thinking.

“You dread the task?” she said then, interrogatively.

“More than I do death. The declaration may be cowardly, but it is truth.”

“Do you object to my undertaking it?” timidly, and with hesitation.

Louis halted abruptly.

“Frank, am I such a mean-spirited caitiff in your sight? If a load is intolerable to me, shall I cast it upon your shoulders? I deserve that you should think me despicable, but I had not looked for this.”

“I have not yet to learn how readily you would avert inconvenience and annoyance from me whenever you could. You have befriended and shielded me so many times and in so many ways that I have a right to press my services upon you in your distress. Mr. Suydam will listen to me patiently. I am sure of this. May I undertake the embassy — or, at any rate, open negotiations?”

Her playful accent and winning smile were more potent than her words to move him from his purpose. But additional arguments and pleadings were required to wring from him a reluctant consent to her petition. It was with a sense of dire humiliation that he saw the door close upon her, as she departed on her mission.

Mr. Suydam answered the tap at his door without raising his eyes from his magazine, but laid it down quickly when Frank's soft step fell upon the carpet.

“My dear, you are more than welcome.”

“Thank you,” said Frank, taking the seat he offered. “Can you spare me half an hour for a little matter of business? Two items of business, I should say — one my own, the other relating to another person.”

“Assuredly. I can give you three hours, if you wish.”

But his face had an uneasy cast, and his voice, still kind, was

graver. His thoughts reverted directly to Louis, and the possible non-success of his suit. Had Frank, like the brave, true soul she was, volunteered to stand between the father and the son in the moment of mutual disappointment, and to assume the onus of frustrating his cherished scheme?

“To begin with my own affair, as the less important of the two,” continued Frank. “I had letters from Nice to-night. My sister is not so well. I shall go out to her by the next steamer.”

Mr. Suydam heaved a mighty sigh. It was over then! Had Frank penetrated his designs upon her, she could not have led him along more adroitly to the acme of mortification and amazement.

“I am very sorry to hear this,” he said — “extremely sorry. We shall miss you very much. Have you told Mrs. Suydam of this — or — or — anybody else? What do they say?”

Frank's answer was explicit as his query was bungling.

“I have said nothing to any one about it excepting yourself. Mrs. Suydam was dressing to go out, and I would not disturb her with what would keep perfectly well until morning. I have been in the library with Louis for an hour, but I did not mention my letters. He has trouble of his own.”

“Ah!”

The father's face was more puzzled than surprised. What was she about to tell him? His boy's trouble could have but one origin. If she were acquainted with this, she was marvellously collected in her reference to it.

“Trouble growing out of his love for you; his regard for your good opinion; his dread of your disapprobation,” pursued the ambassadress, in the same gentle, even tone that had before accosted him. “He is a fond and dutiful son. You have been a loving and generous parent to him. It is not wonderful that he should shrink from divulging that which, he fears, would lower him in your esteem. Consciousness of his error — not distrust of your affection, leads him to apprehend this result. Yet he has committed no crime. And the indiscretions of

youth are easily pardoned by the wise when they are followed by repentance."

Following this didactic strain, evenly and gently, she was yet on the alert for tokens of excitement in her auditor. He was serious to anxiety now, but his complexion did not vary; his voice was firm.

"What has he done?"

"Nothing lately that is inconsistent with true manliness and filial duty. Nothing at any period which you will not pardon when you learn what were his temptations, and how noble and honorable has been his conduct throughout the trial — how he has suffered in conscience and heart at the concealment he has practised towards you. While you were abroad, he met with an accident while hunting."

She paused, and was told — "I remember. Go on."

"In the family that received and nursed him during the illness that ensued was a young girl — very beautiful, very winning, and well educated, although poor. He loved her and she loved him. Her parents were in straitened circumstances, and importuned her to accept a richer suitor. In the heat of his indignation at this persecution, moved to deeper pity and love by the sight of her sufferings, your son proposed a secret marriage, and gained her consent to it. They were very young, and loved one another dearly." The narrator was less coherent as the father's brow gathered stormily. "When you came home, Louis tried to confess all, but was deterred by certain expressions of yours relative to unequal alliances — more by the dread lest your health should be endangered by the shock of the disclosure. Since then, you can witness to his exemplary deportment as a son and as a man, to his energy and zeal in his profession, his generosity and kindness of heart, his love and respect for yourself. He is good and gifted. He is wretched at the thought of banishment from your heart. For six months he has not looked upon his wife's face, although he has maintained her in comfort and ease all the while. She would not consent that he should ruin himself in your eyes and

in those of the world by avowing their marriage. She preferred to remain unknown, and in the seclusion of her parents' house, to the chance of prejudicing his fair reputation, and he would no longer visit her clandestinely. Dear Mr. Suydam, you have been father and guardian to me in my orphanhood. Yours is too large and lofty a nature to visit upon your best beloved son the anger you may feel would be deserved by such conduct in another as his has been. You — you only — can make these two happy in the future as they have been miserable in the past. Think what they have already borne as the consequences of their ill-advised step, and spare them further suffering."

She had glided to a stool at his feet, and the tears that trembled in her voice in the concluding sentences of her appeal bedewed his hand as she took it between hers.

It was well for the health of the parent's brain that the sight and feeling of these brought a thick mist before his own vision; yet he grew apparently the more angry at the unwonted softness into which he had been surprised.

"Do you call this a manly deed?" he said, in savage sarcasm. "Afraid to meet the consequences of his misconduct, he adds to a long course of deception that which is even more despicable than deceit — moral cowardice; thrusts this revolting task upon you — a timid, innocent girl, who should have been the last to hear this abominable tale. It is in keeping with the rest of his infamous conduct."

"Not infamous!" He could not loosen her fingers without violence, and their fond clinging subdued him yet more. "Not infamous, dear father! Louis could not be *that*. You will own this when you have had time to think of what I have been saying. I had to beg long and hard for permission to tell you the story in his stead. He could not have related it calmly and connectedly, as I have done. He could not have supported your anger unmoved. It was best you should hear all from a third person. I had other reasons for desiring the office of mediator. You have been lavish of benefits to me. I can never speak my sense of what I owe you, Mrs. Suydam, and Louis, for your

care and kindness to my mother — to all of us. I longed to prove my gratitude by my deeds. You have received me into your house as if I were a daughter. I am going away. I may never return. My parting request is, that you take this young and lovely girl — your son's wife — to your heart; give her my place in your home."

"My child, if your petition were that I should increase your happiness, you would not have to plead so earnestly."

The man of the world laid his hand upon the young head, and searched the moved countenance with his keen eyes.

"It is, it is!" repeated she, fervently. "For my happiness and yours! O, if so much hung upon one word of mine — one sentence of forgiveness — as depends upon yours, I would walk barefoot to the end of the earth to speak it."

"If you had been wronged, insulted, defied by him you loved best?" A spasm changed the father's features. "If you had not told me this shameful thing, I would not have believed it — no, not from his own lips."

He covered his eyes with his hand.

"He wrote all to you nearly a year and a half ago," Frank said, tenderly. "When you have read the letter, you will judge him more leniently."

He would not, or could not, attempt the perusal. Returning the paper to her, he asked her to read it aloud.

She gave each sentence distinctly, but there was a mournful cadence in her tone, as of one who renders to another the message of a departed friend; and this told more powerfully upon the listener's feelings than she dreamed of. Dimly, but surely, he perceived what Louis, in the depth of his humility, had not suspected; what it was well he should never divine. For one moment his wrath boiled up so furiously that he was suffocated to blindness; the next, a breath of more generous emotion cooled the seething tide.

"If *she* can forgive him, should not I? He has learned the worth of that which he has lost forever. Could hatred devise greater refinement of cruelty than this punishment?"

The battle was won. Frank felt this as she met his gaze — mild and sorrowful, although he purposely roughened his voice.

“Her name is Sloane, it seems. Do you know her?”

“I do not. I never heard of her until to-night.”

“Where does she live?”

Frank consulted the letter, and re-read the paragraph descriptive of Meadow Cottage.

“I recollect the house — a mere hovel! What is it?”

Frank had changed countenance. She, too, remembered it now, and the unflattering sketch of the proprietor given by the car-gossip, the day she and Louis went to Kroywen together.

“I have often noticed the place, sir. It is a sorry abode for a woman of education and refinement. It is growing late. I have kept you up beyond your usual hour of retiring, and, I fear, wearied you. Let me entreat you to view this matter in the most favorable light. You know the worst, and you have not tested the good that may be wrapped up in a seeming misfortune. Will you give me one word of hope for Louis? This is a season of trying suspense with him.”

“Tell him” — a sparkle that was not the peaceful light of forgiveness kindling in his eye — “that if, in the review of our conversation in this room two weeks ago to-night, he can forgive himself, he has my pardon.”

Frank knit her forehead perplexedly.

“I will repeat what you say. I wish it were less equivocal — without reservation.”

“Say, if you prefer, that he shall have my answer to-morrow evening. To spare you needless anxiety, I will add that it will, I think, satisfy you that I mean to make the best of this wretched business.”

“Shall he come to you for sentence?” asked Frank, trying to smile.

“Yes — or no! I will leave my answer in his room. That will save embarrassment. Good night, my child. No one can ever fill your place in my heart, whoever may share my home. God bless you!”

He sat over the fire for a long time when she had gone. At last he opened Louis's letter to himself, and read it carefully from beginning to end. Then he unlocked his escritoire, — took out an envelope inscribed in legal round hand "WILL," and threw it into the fire.

He had made up his mind.

CHAPTER XXVII.

RUBY SUYDAM, *née* Sloane, lay upon her bed on the afternoon succeeding the events set down in the last chapter. Her bright eyes, rosy cheeks, and general plumpness, denoted a state of high health, despite her reclining position. She had eaten a hearty dinner, and she was going to the opera that night—two circumstances that involved the necessity of loosened stays, dressing-gown, and a loll until tea-time. Mrs. Sloane sat by the fire, altering the trimming of a light silk dress.

“You are vastly entertaining this afternoon,” remarked her daughter, ending a pause of considerable length in a conversation that had flagged lamentably from the beginning. “It is well I am not dependent upon you for amusement the year round. I should die of the vapors in a month. What are you moping about to-day? Doing penance for my sins, of course—but for which especial transgression?”

The mother's sallow skin showed a faint glow at the coarse taunt.

“I have enough sins of my own to repent of, without doing penance for those of others,” she answered, evasively.

“I don't dispute that. But I can see when you are in the dumps over me. You are sulking now about nothing upon earth except my determination to go to Kroywen with Veddar to-night. You might understand, by this time, that it is of no use to oppose me when I have once said I will do as I like. Mercy knows I have little enough pleasure, if I take all that is offered me. You can't endure the sight of Veddar. From the moment you set eyes on him at Saratoga up to this, you

have detested the man and all connected with him. Has this prevented me from accepting his attentions and presents? You opposed my Santa Claus spree with all your might. Did this hinder me from spending six weeks in that Elysium, and keeping you there three days out of every seven to play propriety? You forbade my telling Veddar where I really live 'when I am at home,' which isn't often, thank gracious! I gave the unfashionable address to my sighing swain all the same. You went so far as to vow that you would notify my devoted legal banker of my flirtation with his particular friend; whereupon I checked your virtuous intention by swearing I would cut off household supplies, and save all my money for an elopement, if you carried out your threat. Latterly, seeing that my rich and fashionable cavalier is as little appalled by my humble lodgings and plebeian parents as was your former favorite, Duke Suydam, you have concentrated your energies upon the endeavor to keep me from riding and attending places of public amusement with *my* present favorite. I am neither a baby nor a fool. You seem to believe me both. That lace looks bungling at that corner. You had better rip it off and do it over."

"I know it is of no use," rejoined Mrs. Sloane, desperately. "The evil is beyond my reach. I can only fold my hands, and see you ruined for this world and the next."

"Trust me for this world," interrupted Ruby, scornfully. "As for the next, 'Time enough for that, says I.'"

"This Veddar is a dangerous man," burst forth the mother; "a vile, unprincipled libertine, in whose company no woman is safe. I have warned you of this again and again — without effect, as you say; but my conscience will not let me keep silent. He comes to see you in this poor house — you, a girl whose rank in life is lower than his. He flatters you and makes you expensive presents. You accept these, and receive him here, where you have no other visitors. What is he to think of the marked partiality shown him, except that your affections are engaged, as well as your vanity pleased? Whereas every gallant attention, every loving word, — and that he talks love to

you I am confident, — are so many insults ; first, because they are offered with a dishonorable motive ; secondly, they are paid to a married woman.”

“ Well, are you through ? ” said Ruby, yawning. She crossed her arms under the back of her head, and stretched herself lazily. “ Each of us is entitled to a speech, I suppose. I made mine first, and it is a bit of a bore to be called upon for another. I had occasion to tell you, long ago, that I am entirely competent to the management of myself and my lovers. Veddard may be dangerous to most women. *Entre nous*, I have no doubt he is a sad rake, and, equally *entre nous*, I believe he hopes to make me love him as madly as he professes to love me. I don't deny that I like him amazingly — better than I ever did any other man. He is handsome and lively, full of anecdote and fine sayings. He is very liberal in purchasing presents, and tasteful in their selection. He is very devoted to me, very dashing, and, I suspect, very wicked. All these contribute to heighten my regard. As to my being a married woman, he is in blissful ignorance of that unfortunate circumstance. His *devoirs* do not insult me on that ground. When papa-in-law dies, I will show my deluded follower my marriage certificate, and ask him to visit me at Castle Suydam. He will naturally be furious ; but who cares ? I shall have had the benefit of his society, of his escort to scenes from which I must have been debarred but for his politeness, of his presents, his horses, his *bonbons*, and be none the worse for any of them.”

“ He will ruin you in the sight of the Suydams — will denounce you to the world,” said the mother. “ You are putting yourself in his power. You cannot tamper with such as he and not be polluted.”

“ You talk as if he were the Prince of Evil,” retorted Ruby. “ Never fear his telling tales out of school. He dreads ridicule more than he does a broken heart. He will never make himself the laughing-stock of the town by relating how egregiously he has been sold. He hates my dignified spouse, and he will

not give him the pleasure of hearing of his discomfiture. In the end he will forgive me, become my *cavalier servent* when professional duties tear my loving lord from my side. That's the style now in the best circles. Veddar keeps me posted on such subjects. He says, by the way, that Duke Suydam is certainly to marry that tame little Barry girl. You see I have a respectable precedent for my flirtation. Your saint is not so white as you have painted him. I'll wager my wedding-ring that he will marry — take her to heal his lacerated heart. I've chalked out my course in case he does. I'll let them go off upon their honeymoon trip, and then wait upon papa-in-law, hair dishevelled, eyes glaring, face whitewashed, certificate in hand, and have my say. The old gentleman will have a stroke — as the cockneys say — 'immediate.' Kräwen will delight over the scandal in high life; the spurious bride will be frantic; there will be a divorce and a liberal maintenance for me. I rather think that would be the best card my fate could play for me."

"Shame, shame!" Mrs. Sloane's truer womanhood arose outraged at the vile programme. "What harm has this poor girl, who has just buried her mother, ever done you, that you should want to disgrace her for life?"

"As to her having buried her mother, I don't know that she is to be pitied on that score," returned Ruby, recklessly unfeeling. "Sometimes, to be thus bereaved is to be relieved. She has money and a place among the elect of earth. She is deemed worthy of an alliance with the illustrious line of Suydams. She wants to marry my lawful husband. He has left me to solitude and Veddar that he may philander with her. These are legitimate reasons why I should wish her all the ill that can befall her."

"If you really loved your husband — not else."

"I care as much for him as you do for yours," answered the daughter. "Conjugal devotion has gone out of fashion — so says Veddar. I shall have the less trouble to appear creditably before my aristocratic relatives, when Lord Louis takes me again into favor."

“Which he will never do!” pronounced Mrs. Sloane, solemnly. “You grieved away his love, wounded his pride, despised his authority—and you have lost him forever. He was hasty and headstrong, but he was not wicked. If he loves this Miss Barry, it is you who have driven him to do it. You might have held him fast, and you chose to let him go. But he will not attempt to marry her. Not that his affection for you will prevent it; but he must have changed entirely and wofully if he can deliberately plan a woman’s ruin. He used to be the soul of honor. Louis Suydam’s is a gentlemanly nature. Veddar, if he had been born in a palace, could never have been anything but vulgar.”

“Hoity-toity!” Ruby craned her neck to get a better look at the trodden worm. “We are coming out strong to-day. I had no idea the handsome duke was still in such favor. Some mothers would take the part of a daughter deserted and neglected by a husband who, for six months, has given no sign that he remembered her existence, except by remitting at stated times pitiful sums of money, as he might pension a discarded mistress. But you are an extraordinary woman. Duke Suydam used to say so. It would please you to see me spoiling my eyes with crying, losing a pound of flesh a day, and writing pitiful letters, all spotted with brine, to his highness, imploring him to come back to me, and promising to be a good girl hereafter, if he would sneak in, now and then, to see me. From such husbands and such mothers—Good Lord, deliver us!”

The mother was paler, and her breath came hurriedly, with a catch in each respiration, as if heart or lungs were in deadly pain; but she sewed on dumbly. She had given her warning, and it had been thrown away. It is a dreary business—this reaping the whirlwind, this harvesting of thorns and dragons’ teeth. She should have been used to it ere now, and she was, as used as a woman whose heart still lives in some of its fibres can ever be.

Selfishness, cultivated, ripens into cruelty at the last. There was deliberate malice in Ruby’s next observation.

“I have been thinking that if Dr. Suydam knew what a friend he had in you, he would make you a separate allowance. I will write to him and represent your friendship, and that the sum I allow you for my board is insufficient to supply your table and pay your husband's gambling debts. It is but fair he should remember you in some substantial way. You sold your daughter to the verdant youth, and you have handled a comparatively small proportion of the purchase-money. Having arrived at this satisfactory conclusion to our quarrel, you will please allow me to take a nap. I want that dress by half past five at the latest.”

She turned her fresh, round cheek upon her arm; the golden-red lashes lay, long and still, upon the velvet of her skin — soft and fine as an infant's; her bust and waist were thrown into relief by her careless attitude and the relaxed muscles of the whole figure. Just so had Louis seen her sleep many times, and hung over her in breathless entrancement, lest the beautiful vision should be, after all, but a dream invoked by his loving imagination. Would he have looked and dreamed thus now?

I am writing hard things and heavy to be borne by the young, with whom hope is reality, and thoughts of love dearer than promise of life, wealth, and honor; but he who sketches from nature must, perforce, oftentimes fulfil the thankless task of iconoclast. Our early idols were passing fair, and we loved them with a haste and an ardor that make the more enduring flame of our wiser days pale into a phosphorescent shimmer. But were they dragged from their resting-places among the owls and the bats, and set up in our clarified sight, we should find them indeed very idols — not only lifeless, but uncomely. Of the few to whose petitions, the Fates, in severe practical satire turned a gracious ear, and granted their passion-fraught prayer, some have dragged a clog at their heels for the rest of their lives; others, more happy, have settled into hopeless and fatuous idolatry — very pitiable, but, taking into the account the strength of their chains, very merciful.

Ruby had not erred in calling her mother an extraordinary woman. She retained her seat, and managed the rustling fabric cautiously, that the incipient doze might deepen into slumber. No tear dropped among the lustrous folds; no tremor unfitted the fingers for their cunning work. Why should she quit the room? Like Sindbad, she carried her burden wherever she went. As for tears, there is a dry, patient despair that disdains the useless crystals as the playthings of silly children.

She had sewed for ten or fifteen minutes after Ruby's heavy breathing certified that she slept, when she heard the tinkle of the door bell. She had no visitors, and she did not stay to adjust her cap or collar, or cast a glance at the mirror. Veddar would not be out from the city until six o'clock; so this call must be that of some itinerant vender of tin or china ware.

A handsome carriage stood at the front gate, and upon the steps was a stately gentleman, who uncovered a fine silvery head as he inquired, "Is Mrs. Louis Suydam at home?"

"Sir!" stammered the astonished woman — terrified as amazed, when she observed, at the second look, a resemblance to Louis in feature and voice that convinced her who stood before her.

"Is Mrs. Dr. Suydam at home?" modifying his phrase, but not his accent, which was cold and stern enough to justify the mother's fear that he had come in judgment upon her child — not in peace. "If she is, please give her this card. I am her father-in-law."

Dazed and speechless, Mrs. Sloane showed him into the parlor, and repaired to Ruby's chamber to acquaint her with this new and startling event.

Mr. Suydam walked up and down the floor, hat in hand, scrutinizing the appointments of the room, and trying, from these and the appearance of the person who had admitted him, to form some idea of the habits and character of the family. Thus far, nothing except the general aspect of the exterior of the dwelling and the location absolutely offended his fastidious

taste. Louis's wife must be removed immediately and forever from her unfortunate associations. Still it was consolatory to learn that these had not been actually degrading. There was a bright fire in the grate, and the apartment had a certain air of being frequently, if not habitually, used. He had expected to see a stiff, tasteless best room, kept for state occasions by a family who themselves sat and ate in the kitchen. Everything was clean and tidy; the carpet and paper matched well; there were a piano, book-shelves, neat and pretty furniture, and against the walls a few really excellent engravings, with here and there a good painting — a landscape or head. A couple of bronze busts — Dante and Petrarch — occupied brackets upon opposite sides of the parlor, and upon the centre table was a marble group in statuette — Burns and his Highland Mary. The bronzes had been Louis's present to his bride, the group Veddar's latest Christmas gift. Not knowing this, Mr. Suydam's verdict was favorable.

“So far, better than I expected. The mother, — as I suppose her to be, — although plainly dressed, spoke and moved like a lady. Matters may not be insupportable, after all.”

Ruby opened her tawny-gray eyes, streaked with the brown shadows of sleep, at her mother's energetic shake of her shoulder.

“Get up!” whispered the latter, still overawed by the magisterial presence she had just left. “Who do you think is down stairs?”

Ruby sat upright, and rubbed her heavy lids drowsily and crossly.

“What did you say? Somebody down stairs! Who is it?”

“Mr. Suydam — Louis's father. And he wants to see you!”

Ruby's effrontery was usually her closest and most reliable ally; but she was daunted now.

“Wants to see me!” she uttered under her breath, and eying the door, as afraid the formidable intruder might invade the privacy of her bedroom. “What does he say? What does he know?”

“He inquired for Mrs. Louis Suydam, and said, when he gave me this card, that her father-in-law wanted to see her.”

Ruby scanned the card on both sides, as if it too had a tale to repeat. Then the lost hue returned to her face, and she slid from the bed to her feet with two emphatic exclamations.

“The cat is out of the bag!” she said, shaking her hair down upon her shoulders, and beginning to comb it in a prodigious hurry. “I’m in for it, and I won’t be bullied by him, nor any of his crew!”

“I hope nothing has happened to Louis!” suggested Mrs. Sloane, uneasily, taking from the wardrobe a dark-blue *moire* which Ruby demanded for what she termed “a stunning toilet.”

“I never thought of that!” said the wife, with naïve candor. “If there is, I hope it is a broken leg or arm, and none of these horrid infectious diseases. It is lucky you put it into my head. It would be just like a man to turn his back upon me while he was well, and as soon as he caught the smallpox, or diphtheria, or typhoid fever, to want me to come and nurse him. I tell you what, if that’s the game, I’ll refer it to you, and you must assert your maternal authority and refuse to let me go.”

“I trust there will be no occasion for me to interfere,” was the reply. “Don’t put that bracelet on, dear?”

“Why not? It is the handsomest I have.”

“I do not think it is quite right for you to wear Veddar’s presents when you are going to meet Louis’s father,” ventured the mother. “It seems indelicate. And don’t you think you are dressing too much, my child? Mr. Suydam may think your appearance unsuitable for a person in your position.”

“Bother my position! I am his son’s wife, and I mean to carry him by storm. If he has an eye for a superb woman, I shall catch it. I can’t dispense with any of my armor today. There’s a battle before me, unless Louis is hurt, or sick, or dying, or anything else disagreeable. Not that perfume! The heliotrope! Now for it!”

She ran down stairs, but halted in the passage, alarmed at

finding that her heart was thumping violently, her limbs quivering, in short, her courage in a very unpromising state for defence or assault. Conscious that delay would intensify the malady, she went forward to the encounter, pushed open the parlor door, and stood, blushing, before her father-in-law. Her unaccustomed bashfulness served her better than the brazen demeanor she would have forced could ever have done. Mr. Suydam saw a very beautiful woman, over-dressed, it was true, and a trifle *gauche* in manner, but handsome enough to take captive the imagination of an ardent lad who had gazed into the eyes of few other women. He was relieved that she was not a bold, shrewd adventuress, who had speculated upon her hackneyed charms, and that she was younger than he had feared. She might yet receive the imprint of the set in which she must hereafter move.

Making up this case in her favor with a second's thought, he advanced and took her hand.

“Are you my son's wife?”

It was not the tone that had called Frank “dear child” the preceding night, but Ruby, not having heard that, was mightily flattered by the gentleness of the address.

“I am Ruby Suydam!” she lisped, in a babyish way she meant for timidity, laying her disengaged hand upon her heart, and looking up at him *à la* startled fawn. “Has anything happened to *him* — to my husband?”

The last word came in a whispered sob, and her lips parted more widely than was necessary or becoming over her white teeth. Perhaps it occurred to Mr. Suydam that the more natural exhibition of her wifely solicitude would have been to hurry down without going through the process of a full toilet. Perhaps, being old-fashioned in certain of his fancies, he may have reflected that this array of brooch, chains, rings, and bracelets was not quite in consonance with the agonized gesticulation and wistful contortion of feature. If so, he remembered, also, that she was youthful and underbred, and had doubtless, poor mistaken child, put on her best finery that she might please him.

So he replied kindly, still holding her hand, "He is quite well. I never knew of your marriage until last night. It was hasty and injudicious, and you were both to blame for concealing it. But I did not come to scold you. I would treat my son's wife in a manner becoming her position and her claims upon me. Can you go home with me this afternoon? So soon as he can arrange it, your husband must settle you in his own house. For the present, I offer you the hospitalities of mine. How soon can you be ready?"

Ruby's face was one flush of rapture and triumph. The summit of her ambition was gained at a single leap. Breathless with the rapid flight, she could only hang her head and mutter incoherent thanks.

"I shall wait for you," said Mr. Suydam, pitying her confusion. "Do not let me detain you now. We dine to-day at half past five, and Mrs. Suydam expects you."

He led her to the door, opened it, and bowed her out — courtesy that was princely to Ruby's unaccustomed eyes.

"He is perfectly splendid," she repeated, over and over, with slight variations, to her mother, during their hurried packing. "You used to think Louis such a graceful gentleman. You ought to see his father. What a fool Louis was not to tell him everything, ages ago! I don't believe a syllable of the rigmarole he told me about his father's dread of unequal marriages. He was tired of me, and didn't want to introduce me to his family — that was all. Won't I pay him off! I have made a conquest of the governor already — that is plain. Now, how is that trunk to be got down stairs? Where is pa?"

"Gone to town. Can't the coachman come up for it?"

"What a question! I suppose he never did such a thing in his life. No; you must manage to lug it down to the front hall in some way. It isn't very heavy. When Mr. Suydam sees it, he may order the man to step inside the door and get it."

Thus instructed, Mrs. Sloane laid hold of the trunk, and, by dint of lifting and dragging, removed it to the lower hall. Ruby was at her desk when the mother came up again.

“I came near forgetting to leave a ‘regret’ for Veddar,” she said, laughing. “Wouldn’t I like to see him when he reads it? I am going to be proper for the rest of my days, and this is the way I begin,” flinging the note across the table to her mother. It was this:

“Mrs. Louis Suydam regrets that the pressure of an unforeseen family engagement prevents her from accompanying Mr. Veddar to the opera this evening. Mrs. Suydam’s address for the present is No. 10 Lafayette Park Square, where she will always be happy to see Mr. V. January 30, 18—.”

She had put on a white bonnet with a sweeping plume, and a black velvet cloak, retaining her blue silk dress. Mrs. Sloane’s look at her was prideful, through all her melancholy. She was very beautiful, and she was her only child.

“When shall I see you again, darling?”

“I can’t say, really.” Ruby was very busy buttoning her glove. “Of course, I shall feel a delicacy in asking for the carriage to come all the way out here. But I’ll hire a hack some day, and pay you a visit. Don’t expect me very soon, however, for now they have got me, they won’t let me out of their sight for a while, I suppose. Then, I shall be very much engrossed with company, et cetera, for a few weeks. Maybe I’ll write. Don’t forget to drop me a line telling me exactly how Veddar behaved when he read the *billet-doux*. You recollect the address? Good by. Don’t come down. It is likely Mr. Suydam mistook you for a servant, and it isn’t necessary to undeceive him. Good by again.”

She gave the pale woman a careless kiss, and tripped away.

Mr. Suydam was very taciturn on the road. Had he seen — as Ruby was sure he had not — the agonized countenance that looked through the upper window for a last sight of the idolized and thankless daughter, he could not have been more saturnine, his lips been more sternly closed. He had had a fearful blow, and his soul was surcharged with harsh judgment of him who

had dealt it. Frank's prayers in behalf of the erring ones, and his own high sense of honor and justice, had less to do with his adopted line of conduct than had the resolve to punish Louis's breach of filial duty and subsequent duplicity. He had confessed his love for Frank Barry. Under cover of righting the injured wife, the indignant father and judge would make him feel, to the full, the consequences of his wicked folly. He should live with her whom he had chosen, present her everywhere as his elect partner, and be happy — if he could. As he had sowed, so should he reap. The harvest was of his choosing. The parent would have nothing wherewith to reproach himself.

That is the deadliest anger that lurks so far beneath the surface of civil or pleasant language as not to be suspected by lookers-on. The servants, who were versed in their master's temper and habits of speech, saw nothing amiss in his manner when he gave orders for Ruby's accommodation in the paternal mansion.

“Show Mrs. Suydam to Dr. Suydam's room,” he said to a maid, and to a footman, “Take up Mrs. Louis Suydam's trunk.”

Turning to Ruby, he continued, in the hearing of the gaping domestics, “We shall not dine until your husband comes in, my dear. He will show you the way down.”

Louis came home heavy-hearted and weary. Had he been less busy with his own meditations, he might have discerned the expression of lively curiosity in the physiognomy of the footman who rushed forward officiously to relieve him of his overcoat in the hall, and that of the servant-girl who crossed his track as he neared his own door. He did not even remark the streak of bright light under the latter, but, opening it, was dazzled by the effulgence that streamed forth. Three globes of the central chandelier were illumined, and directly beneath it stood Ruby smiling and expectant.

This was his father's answer.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MRS. SUYDAM had been in hysterics all day — the incomparable Rosette and the patient Frank in constant attendance. It was futile to warn the afflicted mother of the expediency of discretion in the hearing of the quick-eared, gossiping *soubrette*. Rosette carried to her fellow-servants at luncheon-time a diffuse statement of Dr. Suydam's secret marriage with the daughter of a horse-thief, and her mistress's declarations that the low creature should never cross her threshold; never sit at her table; never call her mother. There was a combination formed against the upstart daughter-in-law before one of the kitchen cabinet had ever seen her. The dignity of the family must be maintained even at the cost of their young master's favor.

Frank, foreseeing this, ventured to expostulate with Mrs. Suydam in Rosette's absence from the chamber.

“The poor girl's position will be extremely painful, however much we may try to make her comfortable and happy,” she said. “We should guard her from annoyance whenever we can. Servants have ingenious and innumerable arts for showing dislike to their superiors.”

“I shall not enjoin them to obedience or respect to this woman,” retorted Mrs. Suydam, flatly. “It is Mr. Suydam's affair. It is he who persists, in defiance of my wishes, in introducing this vulgar *parvenue* — this grisette — into a home where disgrace has hitherto been a thing unknown. I should have repudiated her utterly, and Louis likewise, if he had refused to give her up. It is a clear case of marriage under false pretences. A divorce could be easily obtained, and there

the scandal would end. Or the venal wretches, father, mother, and daughter, could have been bought off. All such creatures have their price. If she will force herself upon us, invited only by Mr. Suydam, she must be satisfied with such treatment as she shall receive. If Mr. Suydam can bribe or coerce the servants into outward respect for her, let him do it. I shall not second him in the endeavor. Least of all shall I show her the slightest favor. As my husband's guest, she shall receive politeness at my hands. I shall not now, nor ever, recognize her as my son's wife. A horse-jockey's daughter! picked up in a wretched hut on the marshes! O, I shall not survive the ignominy. I can never face Society again."

Sal volatile, orange-flower water, and valerian are clamorously demanded by the patient, and faithfully administered by the long-suffering nurse.

Had Frank's been the place of an impartial spectator, she must have smiled at the state with which the lady of the house sailed into her spacious drawing-rooms, punctually at quarter past five, and looked majestic disdain from side to side, to crush the low-born reptile she fancied was skulking in some corner. Only Frank was present, toying abstractedly, and, for her, nervously, with the marble vase of flowers.

"Ah," breathed Mrs. Suydam, sinking upon a sofa, with due care for her draperies, "she has not come down yet."

"No."

"She is in the house — positively under this roof? Rosette tells me Mr. Suydam called her 'my dear' before all the servants, and spoke to her of Louis — the infatuated, ruined boy — as her husband. *Eh bien! ce n'est pas mon affaire,*" shaking out her perfumed handkerchief as if to dislodge some noxious thing from the folds.

"Nor mine!" said her husband, coming in unperceived. "I have taken the one course left for me to pursue. Nobody but a fool neglects to make the best of a bad bargain. If protest would do any good, mine should be entered with yours against this very objectionable connection. Since it will not, I simply

leave things as they are. I do not indorse my son's choice; but since it is his, it is more sensible and dignified to tolerate than to dispute it. How are you to-night, my dear?"

He kissed Frank's forehead, and her hand lingered in his, while she replied to his inquiries about her health. They were beginning to understand each other marvellously well.

Louis, passing through the hall on his way up stairs, saw their attitude, heard the accent of affectionate interest that questioned, and the grateful reply.

Ten, twenty minutes elapsed before there was any sign of an addition to the family group for whom dinner now waited. Then footsteps sounded upon the upper floor, and the silent trio distinguished, blended with these, the rustle of silken and voluminous skirts down the staircase, and husband and wife entered, arm-in-arm. Mr. Suydam stepped forward, and, taking his new daughter's hand, led her up to her mother-in-law.

"This is your son Louis's wife, Louisa. Make her welcome to your house."

Mrs. Suydam had arisen at their approach, and now, in lieu of a more friendly salute, swept the intruder a courtesy that would have been profound in a royal drawing-room. Afraid to disobey her lord, she said at the same time, "You are welcome;" but tone, face, and action gave the lie to the unmeaning phrase.

Mr. Suydam looked around for Frank.

"My dear Miss Barry, let me present Mrs. Louis Suydam." He was surprised that she did not stir from her place, that her greeting was a silent bow — surprised and distressed to note her varying color and agitated countenance. Frank had had many severe shocks in her life, but none that exceeded in suddenness and force the identification of Louis's wife with the auburn-haired beauty she had met upon the ferry-boat, and afterwards seen in so questionable a position at the Santa Claus hotel. But for her firm clutch of the marble lip of the basin by which she stood, she must have reeled under it. She was drowning for one second, blindness before her eyes, ringing

noises in her ears, choking in her throat. Then she recovered to meet the stare of the unveiled incognita fastened upon her in mockery or malice, and to feel what a cruel advantage her temporary consternation had given her, if she were disposed to mischief-making. Frank was a noble woman, but it is not in human nature to be forever on the guard against temptation to indulge in ungenerous or ignoble emotions. Something in Ruby's eye, and the half smile hovering about her mouth, excited her to strike a blow in self-defence.

"I ask pardon," she said, composed, but unsmiling, advancing towards the new arrival. "I fear I have appeared ungracious or uncivil. But I was astonished to discover that your face, Mrs. Suydam, was not a strange one to me. I have seen you twice before to-night — once, last summer, upon a Kroywen ferry-boat, and again, about a month ago, at the Santa Claus hotel."

"I recollect meeting you on the boat, and I was at the Santa Claus for a week or two this winter," answered Ruby, her metallic, high-pitched voice a disagreeable foil to the clear modulations of the other. "It is very possible you did see me there. Where was I, and what was I doing? I certainly did not see you, or I should remember it."

"You were in one of the parlors, talking with a gentleman. You did not observe me, although you passed directly by me while I sat in the adjoining room."

Ruby's eyes gleamed tawnily before the lashes fell.

"The Santa Claus is the rendezvous for my southern friends. We had a merry time there in December," she remarked, carelessly.

Then dinner was announced. But the foundation was laid of distrust between the last speakers, and, on Ruby's side, of intense dislike. If Frank had seen her with Veddar, and chose to describe what she had beheld, and perhaps overheard, it might damage seriously the foothold she believed she had gained in Louis's family. She was in no doubt as to Mrs. Suydam's view of her son's marriage, but she was sufficiently cognizant

of the family government of the aristocratic household to understand that she was safe from downright insult while Mr. Suydam supported her claims.

Louis's amazement and disturbance at seeing her in his room were, to say the least, not eminently flattering to her vanity, or her hopes of "making all straight" with him. When she recounted the incidents of his father's visit to Meadow Cottage, and marked affability to herself, — losing nothing in the telling, you may be sure, — his perturbation was not diminished. He was either deficient in faith in her sanguine declaration that "everything had worked out right at last," and that they had only clear skies before them for the rest of life's journey, or the anticipation was not so transporting as it should have been. When, in finishing her history of the *dénouement*, she essayed the sentimental, and would have cast herself upon his neck, he drew back, and proposed that they should go down to dinner.

"Like a sulky boor," said Ruby, poutingly, to herself.

Still, so long as she was in the good books of the senior, she could disregard the black looks and reserve of the son.

"He can't help himself," she reiterated inly and gleefully several times while the formal dinner was in progress.

And once she slipped her hand into her pocket, and gave a loving squeeze to the folded certificate she had put there for safe keeping, and as an absent-minded bridegroom is said to have tucked the wedding-ring into his shoe — "to have it handy in case it should be needed."

Mrs. Suydam sat haughty and superbly cold at the head of the board. Louis supported her on the right, and said literally nothing of his own accord — an appetiteless Diogenes; Frank was opposite, white and reticent.

"If I were dying in love with a man, I wouldn't show it so plainly," thought Nick Sloane's daughter. "She is dreadfully cut up, as one can see with half an eye. That's the way with these lily-livered, amiable, dutiful girls. When they like a fellow, they think to win him by appealing to his

compassion, if all else fails. What a plain, uninteresting little thing she is! Not a particle of style about her."

In elate consciousness of superiority in attire and person, she bridled, smirked, and languished, and devoted her best efforts to keeping up a dialogue with Mr. Suydam. Few people in her situation could have appeared to advantage. A woman of sense and delicacy, appreciating this fact, would have demeaned herself modestly, waiting for the overtures of her hosts, and accepting these gratefully, not servilely. The Masters will and the Sloane assurance prompted and kept Ruby up in a different rôle. She was arch, serious, and insinuating by turns, construing the dignified responses of her father-in-law into jests, or making of them pegs to hang her jests upon, flattering him by ostentatious deference to his will and judgment, and behaving as nearly as she could like a coy young bride who had been selected from the entire assortment of marriageable princesses as the consort of the son of the noble household. The reward of her efforts was not immediate and visible success. Mr. Suydam's nice taste revolted at her forwardness, her unwarranted familiarity, while Louis froze and darkened into intenser bleakness at each sally and laugh. It was hard work all round—for the listeners and the colloquists. Ruby felt immeasurably relieved when the meal was concluded, although a trifle less confident than when she sat down as to the facility with which her conquest of the entire household was to be achieved.

The evening papers lay upon the table in the library—the family room after dinner, unless there were visitors. Louis was looking over one when Ruby stole behind him and rested her hand upon his shoulder.

"Watchman, what of the night?" she said, playfully tender.

In saying it, her eye fell upon a paragraph, and she put her finger eagerly upon it.

"*Married* in Kroywen, March 15, 18—, by Rev. Dr. James, LOUIS SUYDAM, M. D., to RUBINA SLOANE, both of this city."

"Did you put it in?" she questioned, inaudibly to the rest.

He shook his head.

“I suppose all Kräwen is in a twitter by this time,” she continued, laughingly.

Louis let go the paper, and moved away from the caressing hand.

“Has she resolved to leave untried no device to make me despise and hate her?” thought the miserable man.

The trials of his evening were not over.

“Louis,” said his father, presently, “I should like to speak with you in my study for a few minutes.”

As they left the library, Ruby called after them, “O, soon return!”

She was making herself at home with terrific rapidity. Louis saw his father's lip curl, and his mother roll her eyes upward in speechless horror. He did not glance at Frank. His shame was already greater than he could bear. The interview between father and son was brief and business-like. Louis was presented with the deed of a house belonging to Mr. Suydam, and advised to remove thither with his wife so soon as he could make it convenient to furnish and take possession of it.

“After which time you must depend upon your own exertions for a support,” said Mr. Suydam, plainly, but not offensively. “Your wife has, I fear, expensive tastes in the matter of dress, but in other respects she must have been reared economically. She needs toning in manner and voice, and this she will soon find out for herself. It is not my province to advise you in anything pertaining to your domestic relations, or I should suggest the expediency of severing your wife at once from her former associations. She is very pretty, and so young that you may yet correct whatever is *bizarre* in her style or crude in her ideas.”

Louis was fingering the title-deed, downcast and irresolute.

“I had rather not take this, sir,” he said, mustering courage to face the parent he had wronged. “It is like coals of fire upon my head. Say only that you forgive my folly in the past, and I will strive to prove myself worthy of your trust hereafter.

The income from my profession is not contemptible. It ought to maintain a small family comfortably. I shall lose caste for a time, I suppose. Perhaps I should do better anywhere else than here, now that this affair is the town talk."

A week ago Mr. Suydam would have negatived imperatively the remotest approach to this suggestion.

He answered now, merely, "That is a question which you must settle for yourself. I would not bias your decision one way or the other. As to the deed, you can make what disposition of the property you please. I shall not take it back. I did the same for your brother John when he married. It is to you an act of justice — not favor."

The wind sang in the chimney. The father leaned forward, his arms upon the carved elbows of the old chair, and appeared to listen, as he had done many times before in the course of former conferences between the two; but the frank affection of other days was gone forever from their intercourse. Louis had chosen his path, and he must walk in it, however widely it might diverge from the smooth ascent the loving fancy of the parent had traced for him to fortune and to happiness.

"You had better go back to the ladies, now," Mr. Suydam ended the pause by saying. "Rubina is having a dull time of it, I am afraid."

She was. Frank, who usually worked in the evening, was crocheting a shawl and hood for her sea voyage; Mrs. Suydam, who never worked with her fingers, sitting by, lofty and silent, save when she addressed some pet phrase to the orphan of her friend, or bewailed their approaching separation. At Ruby she did not look once, try as Frank might to make the conversation general. The tidings of Miss Barry's projected departure were unwelcome to the lately-installed wife. She had meant — in her parlance — "to pay her off well" for angling for her secretly-espoused lord; to pierce her heart and deplete her self-love by multitudinous pin-pricks and scratches; to work her up into frenzy by the display of her love for her husband and his attentions — compulsory or voluntary — to herself.

Moreover, leaving this agreeable pastime out of sight, her present quarters promised to be dolorous to melancholy, if she were left to Mrs. Suydam's tender mercies. Nick's child could hold her own in an open fight with any daughter of Eve, let her be an importation from upper-tendom, or Billingsgate; but she was baffled by a woman whose level eyelids entirely overlooked her existence. Frank was very tired of bearing the whole weight of the conversation, when a message was brought that Katrine wished to see her.

"Show her to my room. I will come up directly," she said, with alacrity.

Avoiding Mrs. Suydam's beseeching glance, she gathered up her work, excused herself to the two ladies, and left them *tête-à-tête*.

Upon the broad landing of the stairs she met Louis coming down. Neither spoke. He stook back against the wall to let her pass, bending his head respectfully, without looking up. He remembered afterwards that she checked herself, as about to speak, then passed on without a word. What could she have to say to him? She was too truthful to offer congratulations, too merciful to add to his abasement by condolence. Was it advice or warning that had prompted that brief halt?

Katrine turned from a study of the glowing grate, when Miss Barry unlatched the door. Her dark face was flushed, her eyes glittering.

"What's dis I hear?" she commenced, vehemently. "Dey tell me Dr. Suydam is marry; dat he been marry one, two year, and tell nobody — not his own fader. Eh!"

"He was married almost two years ago, very privately," said Frank. "Sit down, Katrine, and rest."

"Rest? I can no rest. He marry, and you neber know it! O, de shame, de shame! And I to t'ink all de time he was de picture of his broder, my angel boy! O, he's no goot, no goot!"

"You are wrong. He is a good and an honorable man. He was mistaken in concealing his marriage so long, but his father's

health is delicate, and he was afraid the shock of the news might injure him."

"Bah, for his fader's health! What he t'ink of you when he make de love to you, and he marry!"

"Katrine, you must not talk in that way of Dr. Suydam, or of me. He never made love to me — never gave me any reason to believe that he cared for me, except as for a sister."

"I see him! I hear him! De night your moder die, you faint, and he carry you to your room. He lay you on de bed — kiss your hands four, five, six time, and he cry like a woman. He call you 'my darling, my love.' I stan' at de door, and see and hear him. He may be marry to de oder one. He love you all de same. O, he's a bad man; he's no goot!"

"There!" Frank said with dignity, the crimson tide that had bathed neck and temples slowly receding, until her lips were bloodless. "You are excited, and so am I. We will say no more about this just now. Do not speak to any one else of what you have told me. If the dear Christ were to judge us as we do others, who of us could hope for pardon?"

The house and streets were very still that night, when Frank arose from her knees before the great chair beside the hearth, where she had cast herself at Katrine's departure. She was wan and heavy-eyed, and tottered in moving about the room, as she prepared for bed. When she had lain down, and the chamber was dark, a moan trembled through the stillness and gloom.

"God help him, and help *me!*"

CHAPTER XXIX.

“THERE'S a man in the parlor to see Mrs. Dr. Suydam,” said the footman at the door of Mrs. Suydam's morning room.

Frank and Ruby were with her, the latter having been invited by the other, who had with difficulty secured the permission of the mistress of the sanctum to this step. Mrs. Suydam's final compliance was, it is very possible, induced less by a desire to oblige her young friend than by a disposition to show off her boudoir and her boudoir manners to eyes unused to such exhibitions. She was complaining of nervous headache that morning. Her *négligé* was perfect, ditto her languor and interesting pensiveness; ditto the attitude in which she rested among the pillows, golden vinaigrette in hand, and begged “darling Frank” to read to her from “divine Ariosto.”

“The affected old vixen!” was the mental comment of the slighted and sacrilegious daughter-in-law. “She understands no more of that lingo than I do. She wants to display her *protégée's* accomplishments at my expense. But if she can listen and look wise, so can I.”

It was the third day of Ruby's sojourn under the ancient roof-tree of her husband's father. It was well understood in the Suydam circle that the eminently respectable family had come to grief, and etiquette recommended the observance of certain forms in these cases which were strictly complied with. Whole packs of cards had been left at the door for the elder, or, as each visitor was careful to word it, “Mrs. John Suy-

dam," who, still in obedience to etiquette, remained invisible while her nerves and sensibilities were recovering some feeble symptoms — plaintive breathings, as it were — of their wonted "tone." There was no sign yet of the troops of admirers, who, Ruby had predicted, would flock to her shrine when she should be recognized as Dr. Suydam's wife. In the midst of the long coveted and now possessed magnificence, she was devoured by *ennui* — a prey to discomforts she had never recked of in her day-dreams. Mr. Suydam was scrupulously civil; but she had evidently retrograded, not gained, in his regard, notwithstanding her frantic show of loving familiarity. She was even slightly afraid of him, and began to have a glimmering perception of the causes that had deterred Louis from an earlier confession of his woful dereliction from filial duty. Mrs. Suydam was loftier and more contemptuous every hour. The servants' sly sneers and covert slights were more and more apparent. Louis was morose and unapproachable — "unmanageable," she phrased it.

In private, she took revenge for his moody bearing in the presence of others by twitting him upon the points she fancied were sorest; ridiculing his parents; and the gloomy state in which they lived; his whilome passion for herself, and later perfidy, and the like. He had broken out at her once — a tornado-burst of wrath and disdain, that closed her lips effectually upon one topic.

"That Barry girl is dying with love for you," she had said. "I don't believe this trumped-up tale of her sister's sickness. She is going away to hide her mortification and despair."

"Silence!" thundered Louis, wheeling sharply upon her. "But for her intercession with my father, you would never have seen the inside of this house while he lived. But for her pleading with me in your behalf, I should never have acknowledged you. She is too far above you and the rest of woman-kind in her purity, goodness, and magnanimity, to be understood by your shallow minds and baser hearts. Never name

her to me again, or you may hear that you will be sorry to learn. She love me — *me!* *your* husband. Moral beauties don't become enamoured of moral beasts in these days!"

His rage and scorn were not so pleasant to behold that Ruby cared to excite them again by disobeying his commands; but she liked Frank none the more for the stormy scene.

With the mean spite of a little mind, she made occasions for contradicting and thwarting her. The two were much together, partly by Ruby's contrivance, partly in consequence of Mrs. Suydam's aversion to the companionship of her new daughter, Mr. Suydam's secluded habits, and Louis's out-of-door duties. The Havre steamer would not sail in a week, and Frank, having written to Mr. Langley to meet her at that port, and ordered the few essential articles for her voyage, had nothing to do but sit down quietly and await the day of embarkation. Ruby had taken a fancy to learn a new crochet-stitch from her, and commenced an astonishing burnous for herself.

"Excuse me, Miss Barry," she said, when Frank lowered her book for a second to reply to a remark of Mrs. Suydam upon the passage just read. "But I must ask your advice about this border. Shall it be shaded gold color and blue, or gold color and purple?"

Mrs. Suydam sniffed pathetically at her vinaigrette, and closed her eyes with a frown.

"Those shades of purple are fine," replied Frank, "and contrast well with the gold color."

"But will they suit my style as well?" cavilled Ruby, dissatisfiedly. "Louis is so partial to blue! I wore a blue dress the first time he saw me."

"The blue is very pretty," answered Frank, unmoved by the sentimental reminiscence.

"But you have some reason for preferring the purple," persisted the other. "What is it? Or is it an impertinent question?"

"Not in the least. It is well known that blue worsteds are apt to fade, even if the dye does not rub off upon the fingers or dress."

“Is that so?” — incredulously. “It is strange I never heard it before, when I have worn so much blue. I think I shall risk it, rather than offend Louis’s taste by a color he dislikes. He can’t bear purple, or black, or any other sombre hue. He was saying, last night, that a woman looked like a fright in black. I wanted to wear a black silk to dinner, and he wouldn’t let me. He said it was only fit for nuns and prudes. He is the oddest fellow! I am ever so much obliged to you for settling my mind. I was in a desperate quandary. I can’t afford to lose time in this work, either. It must be done by next Wednesday. I want to go to Antonelli’s concert. Would you believe it? I have never heard her.”

“Indeed!” said Frank, seeing she must reply in some form.

“You see, I have been living so very quietly, when in this part of the country,” rattled on Ruby’s released tongue. “In Boston and Savannah, it was *une autre chose* — also at Saratoga. Only in Kräwen I was a recluse. I mean to make up for lost time, however. I find that Louis has been out amazingly little. It was not my wish that he should deny himself the pleasures of society. Indeed, I always urged him to visit and attend parties, but he says there wasn’t a woman in town he cared to wait upon, or to talk with. What flatterers men are!”

“Petite,” said Mrs. Suydam, plaintively, “let me hear your sweet voice again, and Ariosto’s smoothly flowing numbers. They rest my pained ears.”

Frank picked up the volume, and Ruby chafed under the impossibility of resenting the insult to herself conveyed in the mournful sigh of the sensitive creature on the sofa. Ere the reading recommenced, the tall footman came to the door with the announcement set down at the head of this chapter.

Mrs. Suydam unclosed her eyes querulously.

“That is a very singular speech, David! A *man* in the parlor!”

“He looks like a man, ma’am, and spakes like one,” rejoined the Mercury, sure of his ground. “I ast him would he wait in the hall; but he walked hisself intil the parlor, and sot down. He said his card was no consequence.”

“Very well,” — which meant “exceedingly bad,” — “you can go, David.”

“It is probably some one from the upholsterers.” Ruby was not to be put down by mistress or servant. “Louis was to leave an order at Melliff’s for me this morning. I proposed to him, Miss Barry, that we should spare ourselves the trouble of running from shop to shop, and from Kräwen to Kroywen, and do you a favor at the same time, by taking your furniture off your hands. But he does not agree with me. He has the queer taste not to admire the fashion or color. Of course I must obey him in this, as in everything else, although it subjects me to a world of inconvenience. As I said to him last night, ‘What was good enough for Miss Barry should do for us.’ Whereupon he called me a little goose!”

Laughing at the recollection, she heaped up a mountain of white wool upon Mrs. Suydam’s pet stand of gilt and ebony, surrounded it with a circle of balls, yellow, blue, and purple, and went her way, humming an opera air on the stairs to show how entirely at home she was.

She broke off abruptly when her father nodded to her from the sofa, where he was making *himself* at home.

“How do, Ruby? How goes it by this time?”

Ruby shut the door carefully behind her.

“Law, pa! who would have thought of seeing you?”

“*You* had ought to a’ thought on it, seeing you never left a word of ‘good by’ for me, and we ain’t heerd a line from you since you come away. So, I driv’ up to town this morning, to get the p’int from you. I driv’ a new animal. Old Stainsly, he’s been a-buying a flashy cretur. She carries up well, and seems to step out nice; but bless your soul, there ain’t no more speed into her nor in an undertaker’s hack, and she’s skit-tish as a deer. Stainsly, he’s afeard on her — says she’ll break his neck some day. I’m to gentle her, so’s he can drive her, or else trade her off. I was a-thinking she’d suit Dr. Suydam. She’d look good before a doctor’s buggy, and go fast enough for his business — specially when he charges by the hour. Ha, ha!”

“You’re half tipsy,” said Ruby, bluntly. “Don’t laugh so loud! The people in this house have nerves. Everything must go upon velvet, and nobody speak above a whisper. I don’t believe Louis will want your animal. He can’t invest much in that line just now. His father has given him an elegant house, and we are furnishing. How’s ma?”

“So-so! kinder off her feed since you left her. She misses you powerful. We are worried about another thing, too. And that’s the main thing that brung me here. You ain’t going to cut off supplies now you’ve got into such bang-out quarters — be you? I says to your ma, last night, says I — ‘She ain’t the girl to go back on us that ar’ way. From the time she was a baby, you could put dependence into what she said,’ says I, ‘and after all we’ve done for her, beggaring ourselves, as you may say,’ says I, ‘to give her an edication, and rigging her out like a dukess, to catch a smart, rich husband, she ain’t going for to forget us, now she’s come into her fortune,’ says I. ‘She’s a chip of the old block,’ says I. ‘There’s the right kind of grit into her. She’ll do the handsome thing by us, I’ll go bail,’ says I. I said jest them words. I’ll take my oath onto it.”

“Don’t talk so loud,” said Ruby, alarmed lest his rough tones should penetrate the ceiling to the floor above, in which event she believed Mrs. Suydam to be capable of sending David to order the disturber of her refined stillness out of the house. “I haven’t heard Louis say a word about you, since I came home” — magnificently. “I’ll speak to him when he comes in this evening to dinner, if I can recollect it. As a matter of course, you cannot expect us to do as much for you as we have been doing these two years past. You and ma ought to live very economically now I have gone. And you gamble too hard, pa. It’s time you were laying up something against your old age. Ma’s a good worker, but she’s beginning to fail. I’ve noticed for the last six months that she is not as active as she used to be.”

“Pity you hadn’t thought of that when you were hauling

her back and forth, three times a week, to the Santa Claus, last December, to help you and Veddar play the fool! She's worked more and harder for you nor for all the rest of the world." Nick interrupted the daughterly lecture, with a savage growl. "She give me this note for you, and sent her love to you, this morning, for all she didn't want to have me come among your high-flying new kin. I see now she was right in saying you would not want to see your poor old father. That's the way of the world."

A maudlin whimper.

Ruby was pondering one paragraph of her letter.

"Mr. V. was furiously angry when he read your note. He swore at me and at you, and declared that he would be revenged on us both. Take care of yourself, my child. He is a wicked man, and he means to do you all the harm he can. He says he can ruin you, and that he will. I am very unhappy about the affair."

"Veddar has frightened the poor woman out of her wits," remarked Ruby, with an uneasy smile. "Did you see him?"

"I wasn't home when he called that night. He come into the house jest before I did, jest now."

"Into this house! You are mistaken. I left Mrs. Suydam and Miss Barry together up stairs. His name has not been brought up to them this morning."

"I seen him, for all that. I was a-blanketing my mare out at the hitching-post, as he went up the front steps. The same feller let him in that opened the door for me."

"Stay here a moment," said Ruby, hurriedly. "I'll be down directly."

Mr. Suydam's bed-room was shut off from his study by folding-doors, fitting together not quite tightly, as Ruby had remarked at her only visit to the latter. She slipped into the chamber, which was untenanted, and peeped through the crack.

The bolt was not caught by the socket—the interstice fully half an inch wide. Mr. Suydam sat in his arm-chair, his back to the eaves-dropper. Across the table, and facing her,

was Veddar, his features alive with evil cunning, reading aloud one of a little heap of letters that lay before him.

Nick waited, not one, but ten minutes, fidgeting from window to window, uncorking essence bottles, staring at pictures, sounding tables and cabinets, and exerting the finest powers of his godlike mind in the estimate of how much the "hull lot mought a' cost when it was new." Finally, Ruby came down to him, equipped for riding.

She had a scared look, and her manner was flurried, while she tried to speak naturally.

"I am going home with you, pa. I should like to have a peep at the old place again, and ma seems so lonely! Louis will come for me. You said you had your horse and buggy here — didn't you?"

Nick was pleased and alert. The flashy mare was speedily untied and unblanketed, and the massive front door shut them out with a solemn bang. No one had noticed their departure.

Dr. Suydam was home earlier than usual to dinner that day. The parlors were unoccupied, he observed, in passing the open door. He had taken the post-office in his homeward route, and had letters for his father, mother, and Frank. Those for the ladies he delivered to Rosette, who met him on the stairs. The incomparable had a trick of intercepting her handsome master in passages and upon landings, for the purpose of dropping him coquettish courtesies, shedding upon him bewitching smiles, and when he was more absent-minded than ordinary, offering a coy "*Bon jour, monsieur.*"

"*Et cela?*" she said, pointing to the envelope he retained. "*Voulez-vous que je la prenne?*"

Louis frowned at her pert tone and action.

"I shall deliver it myself."

He rapped at his father's door. There was no response.

"*Il n'y est pas, je crois,*" said Rosette, lingering officiously near.

Impatient at her pertinacious meddling, Louis entered without a second knock. All was dark save for the reflection of the

street lamp upon the wall. The fire in the grate had burned out, and, mingled with the whistling moan of the wind in the chimney, was an odd, stifled sound, like the breathing of an over-tired dumb beast. The physician's hand trembled violently in striking a match and touching a gas-burner. This done, he beheld what he had feared, — a senseless head lying loosely against the back of the old elbow-chair, — the eyes closed, and the mottled, impurpled skin telling but too plainly what was the enemy that had struck a sure blow at life's citadel.

It was not until his second visit to the apartment, two hours later, that Louis noticed the signs of his father's occupation at the moment of his seizure. A small packet of letters, tied with red tape, was inscribed with his address, and upon a sheet of paper near by were these words: —

“Louis, I enclose to you the proofs of the indelible disgrace —”

The pen had fallen there. The proud heart had broken at the dread word.

The enclosure was examined that night, as the son watched alone by the death-bed of his father. Ruby had not written many letters to her admirer, but these few were sufficient to convict her of infidelity in word, if not in deed, to her marriage vows. Read by Louis, in the light of his acquaintance with Veddar's character; her acknowledgment of presents received; her acceptance of invitations to visit this and that place of amusement; her appointment of places of meeting, joined to the levity of her address, and such appellations as “Dear Veddar,” “My most constant knight,” “Ever faithful friend,” and others not less objectionable, — established her criminality beyond dispute.

“And this is the vile weapon that has let out your life-blood, my father!” murmured Louis, passionately, laying his burning forehead upon the palsied hand. “It is well for you that you can die. I am young and strong, and life is likely to be long as it is hateful. Father, if you can hear me, grant me some token of forgiveness that shall help me bear the load.”

No answer except the heavy breathing. The eyelids did not quiver or rise; the purple complexion was grayish as the night wore on; the turgid veins of brow and neck pulsed more feebly; the extremities grew colder, until, just at daybreak, Nature ceased to battle — the heart was still.

And the last word he had written — his latest thought — was *disgrace!*

Was Louis to blame if he recollected this above everything else, when the following note was brought to his room at eight o'clock — brought to him, as he mourned apart in exceeding and unspeakable bitterness?

“MY DEAR DR. SUYDAM: I am in great distress. As Ruby and her father were coming home yesterday afternoon, their horse took fright at a train of cars, ran away, and threw them both out. Mr. Sloane's injuries are comparatively slight. Ruby struck her head in falling, and she still lies very ill. A strange physician — Dr. Marshall — was called in by one of the men who brought her home. He thinks her condition critical. Can you, will you come to her without delay? You are my only hope.

“Very truly, AGNES SLOANE.”

“Another trick! A transparent subterfuge to inveigle me into their accursed den! They cannot leave me alone even on this day!”

The mother's note was flung into the fire, and the mourner sat still, and alone with his woe.

His door was still locked at noon, when Frank tapped at it.

“Who is it?” was the hoarse response.

“It is I, Louis. I must see you.”

He turned the key, and showed her, at the half-open door, a face that had grown suddenly old, and was seamed as by the ploughshares of many years and sorrows.

“I am sorry to disturb you, but my tidings cannot wait. I have just had a letter from Mrs. Sloane. There has been an accident. Your wife is hurt.”

He read the letter she placed in his hand.

Mrs. Sloane, having heard of Mr. Suydam's death, and doubting whether her former note had reached Dr. Suydam, took the liberty of begging Miss Barry to inform that gentleman of his wife's danger. She had remained unconscious ever since she was brought home, and, fever having set in, the doctor gave little hope of her recovery.

Louis returned the envelope to Frank with a discordant laugh.

"If this were the only summons I had ever received to the bedside of the interesting sufferer, humanity might move me to go to her. You remember in what high health she was when we met her on the ferry-boat last summer? I had had, that morning, intelligence that she was in a decline, and unable to leave her bed. She may have been thrown from the carriage and slightly bruised. If I were to visit her, she would, doubtless, simulate delirium, as she has simulated many other things. I must have other proofs of her injuries than her mother's word before I pay any attention to these pathetic epistles."

Frank looked uneasy and unhappy.

"I am sure this is no deception. Mrs. Sloane is, you have told me, a sensible woman. She would not dare attempt to dupe you at a time like this. You can do no harm to yourself by going. If the danger should be grave as she imagines, you will never forgive yourself for neglecting the summons."

"Never forgive myself?" repeated Louis, his eyes drearily vacant. "Having already committed the unpardonable sin, I can afford to be reckless. Don't urge me, Frank. You are only distressing yourself in vain. I would not go near that woman if I knew that she was dying."

"This is your answer?"

Frank searched his face, fierce and gloomy, for a ray of better resolve.

"It is."

"May I send Dr. Milnor to ascertain the truth?"

"If you wish to add ridicule to disgrace."

CHAPTER XXX.

ABOUT three o'clock that afternoon, a hired carriage stopped before the cottage on the marshlands, and a lady dressed in mourning, her features wrapped in a long crape veil, alighted.

Nick answered her knock. His arm was in a sling, and he wore a black patch upon one cheek, but there was nobody to attend to him if he played the invalid; so he had been dozing away the slow hours upon the kitchen settle, a wet towel upon his aching head. He was horribly ill-humored, and looked like a cutthroat.

Frank blanched slightly in saying, "I am Miss Barry. You may have heard my name from Mrs. Suydam. I called to inquire how she is now."

"Bad as she can be. Why ain't her husband been to see her?"

"He is in great affliction, and unfit to act or think for himself. Mrs. Sloane wrote to me. Can I see her for a moment?"

Nick grunted dubiously, opened the parlor door, and went off with the message to his wife. Returning, presently, less cross, but more serious, he asked her to walk up stairs.

Mrs. Sloane met her on the threshold of Ruby's chamber.

"It was kind in you to come," she said, as Frank held out her hand. "She will not know you, and I could not leave her," she continued, seeing the visitor glance at the bed. "She talks a great deal now, but she has recognized no one."

The mother had, several times, bound up the rich profusion of long hair, the weight of which, it seemed, must oppress the hot head; but the incessant motion of the sick woman soon

dislodged it. She had pulled it down just before Frank's entrance, and was winding it tightly about her fingers, burnishing the smooth coils with many a loving stroke, and prattling like a baby.

Frank put her cool palm upon her forehead, and she laughed in looking up at her.

"He says I am the 'fair one with golden locks.' He called me so when we were dancing the Lancers. I was dressed in white — a piece of a cloud I tore off when we were in the Kaatskills, and I had a rainbow for a head-dress. He gave me a diamond ring — did you know it? Pearls, emeralds, and turquoises are such cheap trash! And when I am at home" — whispering with a droll twinkle of the eye — "I live in a dog kennel."

Nothing more rational or connected passed her lips while Frank was with her. She suffered little pain, and Mrs. Sloane dwelt upon this symptom as hopeful. Miss Barry did not add to her uneasiness by controverting her opinion.

"I will either return myself, and watch with her to-night, or I will send a nurse whom you can trust," she promised at parting. "If I can leave Mrs. Suydam to-morrow, I shall certainly see you again. The next day is that fixed upon for the funeral, and on the following I sail for Europe."

She turned back when about to quit the room, approached the bed, and gazed earnestly and long upon her who lay there. She carried the picture with her to many lands and through many years.

The lips were vivid scarlet, the cheeks like damask roses; the eyes, widely opened, were afire with the sultry glare of fever; the teeth shone continually in a meaningless smile; and the rare wealth of dusky-red hair framed the face, and rolled in high billows over arms, pillows, and bosom. She reminded the gazer of a gorgeous tropical plant, that, set in too warm a soil, unwatched and unpruned, was blossoming itself to death.

"If Dr. Suydam could spare time for a single visit, it would be a great comfort to me," said Mrs. Sloane at the door. "I have no right to ask it, but she is my all."

Frank returned the grateful pressure of her toil-worn fingers with one of hearty sympathy.

“You may expect him this evening, I think and hope. When he knows how ill she is, he will not stay away.”

The rain of sorrow quickens into germination many seeds that have hitherto lain dormant in the heart, unsuspected by others, scarcely known to the possessor. Mrs. Suydam did not mourn her husband as a more loving and beloved wife must have done, but his death was a great shock, succeeded by a sense of loneliness and need, now that the shelter of his name and nominal protection was no longer hers. At such a moment, the contrast between the care-free isolation of girlhood and the desolation of the widowed intrudes itself upon the mind of the least imaginative. The one was embarkation upon an untried sea, the other is shipwreck upon a desert shore. Between lies a vast main of memories, of buried hopes, dead joys, loves that shall know no resurrection until that other and gloomier ocean shall be overpassed.

The hostess met her young friend at dinner, calm, sad, and kindly — less prone to dwell upon her own griefs, and more alive to the happiness and well-being of those about her, than she had appeared in many months. She was very solicitous about Louis, particularly when Frank had told her of Ruby's condition.

“He has eaten nothing all day,” she said. “He should go at once to see the unhappy creature, but he will sink under the trial. He was greatly attached to his father — poor boy! and I have no doubt it is the thought that all was not quite right between them at the last that now oppresses him. Frank, dear, would you mind, if you have finished your dinner, taking a small waiter up to him, and begging him, in my name, to eat a few mouthfuls? If he will only take a biscuit and a cup of coffee, it will sensibly refresh him.”

Frank would not mind it at all, she stated promptly. She might have added what she was too unselfish even to think, viz., that it had been her life-long vocation to do disagreeable

tasks, which should devolve, by right, upon those who foisted them on her willing shoulders. She was desirous to oblige the mother and befriend the son; yet her knees shook under her in the ascent of the long staircase, and she paused without the locked chamber door to breathe a prayer for strength and wisdom, ere she requested admittance.

“May I come in?” she asked, when Louis undid the bolt and looked into the passage.

“If you wish.”

He was haggard, and moved like one utterly exhausted by mental or physical agony. Frank set the tray upon a stand, and delivered her message.

“Now,” she added, with the affectionate decision of an elder sister, “I want you to sit down and eat — or make the effort — while your coffee is hot. Your fire needs replenishing.”

She took up the tongs, and laid lump after lump of sea coal upon the low embers; put on the blower, brushed up the hearth, and lowered the window curtains to shut out stray draughts, and to induce an aspect of cosy cheerfulness in the bleak room. The coffee refreshed Louis's parched throat, warmed and strengthened his system. He looked and felt better when Frank finished her round of the apartment by putting in order the dusty centre-table, and setting back the stand with the tray.

“Can you listen to me for a few minutes?” she said, softly, not timidly, coming to the back of his chair and resting her hand upon it.

He bowed assent.

“I went, this afternoon, to see Ruby. She is very ill. All you have been told about the accident and her injuries is true. I am afraid we do not know the worst. Dr. Milnor has gone out to her, at my request. Katrine is engaged as nurse, Mrs. Sloane being the only woman in the house. She cannot go until to-morrow, however, on account of household duties. That poor mother must not be left alone with her raving daughter all night. Will you be her assistant — or shall I?”

A long pause, in which Frank heard the beats of her brave yet anxious heart.

“Did you see her?” inquired Louis then, without changing his position.

“I did. She is entirely delirious. I fear her brain has received incurable injury. She did not know me. She will not know you.”

Another silence, longer and deeper than before. Frank's hand stole from the back of the chair to the shoulder of the thoughtful occupant.

“‘For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.’ The promise is sure, Louis.”

“You do not know how much I have to forgive,” he answered, lowly.

“More than He has to forgive you?”

She was afraid she had gone too far, when the reply did not come immediately. It was satisfactory when it did.

“I will go.”

“Thank you.”

The hand left his shoulder. He glanced around, but she had gone.

They met but once more face to face, and then their eyes looked each into the other's, above the grave of the father and the friend, as the busy spades were hurling the snow and earth upon the coffin. It was a furtive glance on one side — gentle and compassionate on the other. Then the widow took the arm of her youngest son; the elder offered his to Frank, and the procession resought the carriages that had brought them thither. Louis's buggy stood at the cemetery gate. He had explained to his mother that he could not accompany her home.

“He has gone back to that unfortunate girl,” she said, when John inquired where he was. “His first duty is now to her, he says.”

The next day John took Frank down to Kroywen, and saw her on board the Havre steamer.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE tramp of the iron Leviathan — resistless as Fate, and more swift — still shakes the quaking marshes for miles around, as, a hundred times per day, the sister cities send greeting to one another. Wolf Hill rears his rough back — green in summer and bristly in winter — against the western sky; the salt tide comes and goes in the ditches, which are the arteries of the unredeemed expanse of wet lands. Still, in the hunting season, the whistle of the sportsman and the sharp crack of his gun breed consternation among, and send death to, duck, and snipe, and woodcock. And still, when the day's sport or work is ended, the windows of Meadow Cottage send long lines of red light into the darkness and mist of the surrounding levels; still the walls echo the sound of boisterous laughter and boastful tales of achievements in moor and forest, while the odor of savory roasts and appetizing broils clings lovingly to the dingy walls. But the enclosures have decayed fast in the damp atmosphere, and mould and fungi have done their work upon the exterior of house and barn.

Nick Sloane's name is almost a forgotten word even with those who frequent his old abode. There is a story that he obtained money from some mysterious quarter, after his wife's death, a larger sum than accrued from the sale of his property, and set sail for California, Australia, or Pike's Peak, he having named each of these points as his destination in conversation with different persons. For five years preceding Mrs. Sloane's decease, he appeared but seldom in his former haunts. Meadow Cottage was sold, and the father and mother inhabited a neat

farm-house twenty miles back in the country. Their daughter, who lived with them, was reported to their few neighbors to be out of health, and was never seen by visitors. They lived modestly, but comfortably; and since Nick seldom worked, and was known to lose money, from time to time, in horse trades, not to hint at his quarterly sprees at the nearest market town, it was surmised by the country folk about them that they "had money in the bank."

To the astonishment of those who were familiar with the late Mr. Suydam's strict business habits, and to the especial bewilderment of his widow, it was announced, after a diligent search through his papers, that he had died intestate.

"He told me on two occasions that he had made a will, and the homestead was to be yours, Louis," said Mrs. Suydam to her son. "And now the old place must be sold and go out of the family!"

"Yes, mother, unless John should choose to buy it in. He has property independent of his patrimony," rejoined Louis, concealing his surmise as to the cause that had wrought the change of purpose in his father's mind. "Neither you nor I can afford to keep it."

John chose to do no such thing. He had made money, and, in making it, learned better how to keep it than to invest tens of thousands in an old pile of mortar and stone for which he had no personal use, and which would require the outlay of thousands more if he would modernize it, without which process it could not be rented to advantage. It came under the hammer, and was knocked down, with much of the furniture, to a "new man," who straightway set to work to renovate the ancient mansion by introducing all the modern improvements, and sent chairs, sofas, etc., to the upholsterer's, for fresh covers of brocatelle and velvet.

Louis selected for himself two articles from the "large and varied assortment of household and kitchen furniture." These were his father's favorite elbow-chair and the marble vase in the front parlor. The sale over, and herself put in possession

of her third of the estate, Mrs. Suydam sailed for the other continent, taking up her most permanent abode in Florence. People expected that Dr. Suydam would accompany her. It was the only thing left for him to do, now that his practice was so broken up by the queer stories in circulation about his marriage and his wife, whom, by the way, it was queerest of all that nobody had ever seen. It was reported that she had sustained some terrible injury about the time of Mr. Suydam's death; but she did not die then — and what became of her afterwards?

Ruby did not die of her hurt, thanks to the unwearying care of her husband and her mother; but the light of reason had departed forever from her eyes when Frank Barry last looked into them. Harmless as a child, and as silly, she remained a tenant of her father's house, tended like a baby by the parent whose devotion to her idol was measurable only by the term of her own life. Louis settled the three in their mountain home, and sought for himself a livelihood and a career in the far West. For five years he transmitted regularly a stated sum for the maintenance of the Sloanes and their helpless charge, paying them an annual visit to note if there were any change in the condition of the latter.

Early in the sixth year, he received a telegraphic despatch that hurried him eastward. A sudden but not violent change in Ruby's physical state had alarmed the watchful mother. She was alive when her husband reached her, — alive and suffering little or no pain. She smiled — the vacant simper habitual to her when he, for the first time in years, addressed to her a term of endearment, and asked if she knew him.

“The man is going to make love to me,” she said, feebly, and shrilly. “Ma, if you say a word to him about you know what, I'll never forgive you. Let me have my day.”

She never saw the dawn of another. Mrs. Sloane survived her daughter but six months, and Nick disappeared shortly afterwards.

A year later, Dr. Suydam, the most highly esteemed and successful physician in the rising city he had chosen as his resi-

dence, took patients and friends by surprise by bringing home, and installing as mistress of his new and handsome house, a sweet-looking little lady from Louisiana. She had been an early friend of the grave doctor, whose occasional gray hairs gave him additional dignity in the eyes of acquaintances, and won for him the confidence of many who would otherwise have hesitated to place their lives in the hands of a man, who, it was whispered, was not over thirty years of age. There had been talk of a love affair between these two, many years before, but it had come to nought, — the gossips further reported, — until he had chanced to meet her in the course of a trip down the Mississippi, the previous year. She was living with her sister, the wife of a rich planter, and the smitten physician had followed her home. She was speedily a welcome and honored member of the really excellent society her husband's talents and worth had drawn around him.

In this circle and abroad, he always speaks of her as "Mrs. Suydam," and adds to this respectful title the tribute of a certain gentle deference to her expressed opinions, and what he imagines are her wishes, which the ladies pronounce charming, graceful, and worthy of all imitation. In the sacred privacy of their home, happy and dear as earthly homes can ever be, he calls her, usually, "Frank" — often, and most feelingly, "my good angel."

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