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VOL. I.

BEADLE AND ADAMS, PUBLISHERS.  
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No. 1.

A Novel by the author of "VIALS OF WRATH,"  
Complete in this Number.

## Was She His Wife ?

BY MRS. MARY REED CROWELL.

CHAPTER I:  
THE CURSE.

HALF-WAY between New York and the busy, pretty city of Paterson, New Jersey, stands a house, at once conspicuous to travelers on the Erie railroad, for its beauty as well as isolation of situation, no less than its elegance of design

and finish, and the peculiarly romantic appearance it bears.

From the line of the railroad, and perhaps ten feet below that level, from which rude wooden steps lead down, stretches an immense park, traversed by curving drives, tree-shaded promenades, and open, sunny lawns.

A lake, of circular form and rather diminutive size, adorns the center of the park, from which narrow walks diverge toward the railroad—the carriage entrance—where a large iron gate stands hospitably open, and a tiny porter's lodge adds to the style of the grounds; and the dwelling itself—Chotwynd Chase.

At the first glance bestowed upon the fair gray granite pillars and towers of far-famed Chot-

wynd Chase, even the most superficial observer is impressed with the mingled beauty and weirdness, fairy grace, and somber aspect of its external appearance.

Standing upon a slight eminence, with a dense grove for a background, its tall turrets rearing above the highest tree-tops with the sloping grass-grown banks of the Passaic river stretching from the high flight of griffin-guarded steps down to the very brink of the river, that at that spot widens and curves into unusual beauty, Chotwynd Chase is exceedingly fair to look upon, even while among its own admirers it has won the name of the "Mysterious."

And there was a mystery, a deep and unfathomable mystery, that for more than two cen-



TRUE TO HIS TRYST, CHEVAISE DE LAUMAN AWAITED HER.—Page 2.



## CHAPTER III.

## "IT SEES BUT KNEW"

It was a spacious place, with old, moth-eaten drapery, and a floor which luxurious grass grew between the interstices of moldy stones. At one end, it was inclosed by a hedge of pines, at the other by the Passaic river flowed. Above waved tree-tops, a low, tender music lingering in their branches.

An elderly gentleman, with pleasant blue eyes, awaited them.

"Barbara, dear, this is a friend of mine from New York, who is empowered by the justice of his office to marry you—with his best wishes. You do not object to being married by a just of the peace?"

Barbara did not care. Why should she was not her marriage just as sacred solemnized thus?

With luminous eyes she told her lover so, and he turned to the gentleman.

"Mr. Crovden, this is the lady of whom I spoke, Miss Lester. We are ready now."

Hand in hand, under the roofing of Nature's Eternal Temple, with the grand forest aisles about them, and the music of the soft summer winds their wedding hymn, the ceremony was spoken: Gervaisie had kissed his bride; the officiating gentleman had departed.

"Mrs. Gervaisie De Laurian, my wife! my own beautiful bride."

He whispered the words in her ear as they turned to retreat their steps.

A smile of perfect bliss answered him.

"I am glad it is over, Barbara. I have sometimes feared of losing you. But now, never."

She laid her hand on his arm in a half-serious gesture.

"Gervaisie, I have but one request to make. You will grant the first your wife's quest? Promise you will not fight with me."

"Blanche Chetwynd, you mean?" added he, seeing her hesitate. "I can't promise; as you know, Barbara, a man can't help paying court to a pretty girl like little maiden Blanche. But, Barbara, can you trust me? Remember, that as our marriage is to be kept secret—"

Barbara uttered a cry.

"Secret, Gervaisie? Our marriage a secret? Oh, I never dreamed of such a thing."

Her cheeks paled, then glowed as she spoke, while Gervaisie De Laurian's eyes grew threatening.

"Barbara, you must let me dictate, and without questioning, and you do not wish to distinctly understand I desire our marriage to be a profound secret, until you have my permission to divulge it."

His imperious tone seemed strangely at variance with his impassioned manner a moment before, and as Barbara De Laurian searched earnestly his handsome face, and read the light in his willful eyes, she began to realize she had found her equal in her husband; that even as she loved, must she, in the secret meeting of the world. Even as Gervaisie loved her, would he rule over her.

While she had been so steadily regarding him, her beautiful lips apart in the astonishment she had felt at his language, he had abruptly laid his hand over her mouth, half-saucily, half-tenderly.

"There, tiger-lily, do not gaze so reproachfully at me. I mean to do what is best for us both, and the only course is to retain our secret. You a while at least. You'll promise me, dear?"

There still lingered a despotism under his affectionate words, and what could Barbara do but consent?

"Gervaisie, I promise."

"I knew you would. And now I want another promise. You asked me not to fight with Blanche Chetwynd. It is a hard one to keep, Barbara, for, though not so peerless as my royal bride, she is a sweet girl, and it is far from my nature to pass such by."

Barbara gazed stately.

"But, Gervaisie, you are no right to fight again with any woman. You are my husband, and, as a married man, must not devote yourself to young ladies' society as you would have done an hour ago."

Her earnest language burst from her eager lips as she laid her fair, warm hands on his arm.

He smiled; a quick, lightning-like glance of amusement.

"You may be right, Barbara, but don't forget that only to each other we are married. But, will you promise what I was about to ask? I never to think of Roy Davenal?"

A hot flush shot over her cheeks, as she impatiently answered.

"Will you never have done with that old-time engagement? Gervaisie, Roy and I were children then; we never think of such things now. You know I care for no living being but myself."

Her confession gratified him, and, as they came up to the gate, in the gathering dusk, he kissed her.

"Go in now, my darling. Remember your promise."

He bowed, and she smiled her adieu, as she turned down the path to the house.

Gervaisie De Laurian paused and watched her

as she walked along the narrow path, her green slippers skirt rustling against the grass, her flushed face outlined against the gray sky.

"Barbara! I remember she has ruined herself and me, too, I fear! If she but knew, if she but knew, ever so vaguely!"

A sudden smile broode over his handsome face, and he turned away.

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE SPIDER'S WEB.

"BARBARA," said Blanche Chetwynd, as the two girls were sitting on the piazza, and her cheeks flushing as she went on, "do you know I am very much afraid I am allowing myself to admire the good of Mr. De Laurian?"

Barbara started, but answered pleasantly:

"Mr. De Laurian is a gentleman whom few women could dislike."

She uttered the phrase as she spoke.

"He certainly is handsome and agreeable; I have heard my father say the De Laurians were renowned for their courtesy and beauty."

"Yes?" and Barbara's eyes betrayed the interest she naturally experienced in her husband's relatives. Her inquiries and assents, though uttered in a quiet, indifferent manner, were only a mask to her eager anxiety.

"And the De Laurians are wealthy too, Barbara. Not that money is of any value to me so far as Gervaisie is concerned, but I think any girl would prefer a husband who possessed both wealth and beauty."

Her cheeks flushed deeper still as she poured out her sweet, girlish confidences.

"So you have already decided to marry Mr. De Laurian, it seems, Barbara?"

A half-amused smile played on Barbara's lips as she spoke.

"I don't know," she laughed.

"Did I say so? Although, Barbara, and her eyes grew luminous with tenderness, while her voice melted to a low, compelling cadence, I can't be advised to admit that I love him already."

She raised her eyes to Barbara's, that were gleaming brightly.

"You are not angry that I've made you my confidant, Barbara? You're not vexed at my unsolicited secret?"

She spoke in deprecating sweetness of manner, for a dark, angry cloud had settled on Barbara's proud face.

"I wish you'd honored me with your confidence; for that I thank you. But I can sorry you are so girlish, so childish as to believe the attentions of every gentleman you meet are directed to you. When you are older, your flirtations are more amusing than lasting. Besides, Blanche, there is another reason."

She spoke in a more tender tone as she saw the pained look in Blanche's eyes.

"A reason why I shouldn't like Gervaisie De Laurian to be your confidant."

"She asked the question in amusement."

"Not for your simply 'liking' him, Blanche. Of course, we can all like every one we see, whether we love, particularly, or not. But to bestow, is not to be frittered away on every one."

"But the reason, Barbara?"

Her clear, questioning eyes were intently regarding Barbara's face; and the dark cheeks glowed under that innocent gaze, as she realized that the true reason was, that she returned Blanche's gaze firmly.

"It is a very simple one, Blanche, dear. Mr. De Laurian is a most egotistical, and boasts of his reputation as such."

Slowly the blushes faded off Blanche's face.

"Gervaisie has held my hand many a time; he has whispered to me often; he has—even—kissed me."

"Like a molten surge the red tide returned as she spoke, and nearer Barbara to confide the precious secret."

"Kissed you? When?"

"Quite lately, when the woods."

"I can't say. I don't know. All I remember is that I feel sure he cares for me; that I know I love him."

Under Barbara's face were traces of a conflict, bitterly severe. Should she not tell this trusting young girl the secret she herself despised, and which she while it was leniently brushed down, was as surely building a fearful chasm over which Blanche must fall?

She hesitated; the secret trembled on her lip; the words were ready to be uttered that should save them both from all the misery of their future lifetime.

Then, like some foreshadowing cloud came the memory of her husband's positive commands—and her love leveling all things before it, she decided to allow circumstances to mold themselves.

It was a trifling decision, but mighty results depended thereon, and fate—and the Chetwynd curse—the worst of the two fatal elements.

"You have been very imprudent, Blanche; and now that I have placed you on your guard against him, you are enabled to cease thinking of him in a tender manner."

"Cease loving Gervaisie, Barbara? I never can, so long as I live!"

"I cannot ensure you, Blanche, for your devotion to him as your ideal man; as I think myself he is a perfect gentleman; as I find myself to be a woman, could want."

"A smile that would have been mischievous, had her heart been less full, lighted Blanche's face as she uttered the words."

"Perhaps you are a wee what jealous, Barbara; you are so warm in your admiration while you reproach me for mine."

Barbara's laughing curl of lip preceded her answer.

"As a gentleman, I admire him; as a flirt, I detest him."

"Her color deepened, and her heart throbbled as she spoke the tame word "admire."

"I don't care for Mr. De Laurian. She, his wife!"

She drew her trailing skirts up in a handful of glowing crimson, and nodded a pleasant adieu to Blanche.

"I have letters to prepare for the next mail, Blanche. After dinner we will drive to Patterson for some notions I want."

On the sloping piazza she left Blanche, sitting beside the window, where the snowy storminess was tossing its graceful spray.

On a rustic chair, her cheeks robed of their flush, she sat under a cool, watery light, she leaned, her sun-bright head resting on her hand.

A quick tread on the gravelled walk aroused her. She looked up, and saw a man, who caught a glimpse of a face and form that made her spring in sweet confusion from her reclining position.

"Blanche, no, do not rise. I can find myself a seat. Sit still, and tell me if you are glad I have come."

"Gervaisie De Laurian's dark eyes, all alight with a dangerous fire, were reading her thoughts that were all too plainly mirrored on her pink cheeks in the soft moonlight."

"Glad! I am always glad to see you, Mr. De Laurian."

"I shall not believe it if you persist in addressing me so formally. My name is Gervaisie, Blanche."

She cast down her eyes under his avid gaze.

"Gervaisie, then, she repeated, almost under her breath, the varying that on her cheeks paled and glowing."

"Thank you, *cherie*. Now, where are Mr. and Mrs. De Laurian, and Miss Barbara?"

He drew his chair nearer as he asked the question.

"Mamma and papa are out driving with Rex, and Barbara has gone to her room to attend to her correspondence."

"Leaving you all alone—with me," he added, tenderly.

She did not reply, for there seemed nothing to say; but her heart was fluttering like a caged bird.

"What do you suppose I came for, this morning, *cherie*?"

"I can hardly guess. To practice 'Sweet Genevieve' with Barbara, or have a game of chess with Rex."

She smiled as she spoke, and looked up in his face as he leaned curiously back in his chair, and a thrill quivered through her as she saw how handsome he was.

He did not answer; his eyes were half-valued by their long, golden-brown lashes, under which he was intensely regarding her.

"Neither the song nor the game induced me to drive down to you; but only for a second."

He said little girl, who is too modest to mention herself in the list of attractions."

"I have told more than his words."

With a sudden gesture, he pushed the chair away, and, extending both arms, went up to the girl.

"Can you not tell do you not know, my darling, why I have come? It was to hear you say, Gervaisie, that you could not see it, Blanche, even as I say to you, I love you."

He drew her head to his breast, and, with the light of his eyes, he had just greeted his bride, he kissed her pure mouth.

"Say it, Blanche; say it quickly. You little know how I am starving for it."

He held her in his arms, and her head, while her hair streamed over his breast, and against his face.

"Oh, Gervaisie, let me go. Please, please! You frighten me, indeed you do!"

"Frighten you, my dainty lady bird! Does my love alarm you, whom I would woo as gently as a dove does its mate? Blanche, perhaps you don't love me."

Then she clung closer to him.

"Do I love you?"

Her beautiful eyes told the secret her lips had feared to disclose.

"But not as I love you, my Blanche, my darling. I know that, and I know, though, and we will engage ourselves, shall we?"

He drew from his finger a *solitaire* diamond, to urge for Blanche's finger finger.

"Newly have been very imprudent, Blanche; and now that I have placed you on your guard against him, you are enabled to cease thinking of him in a tender manner."

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that my parents should be acquainted with it.

"She pleased with her eyes, though her lips concurred with his; but I insist upon Miss Barbara's being kept in perfect ignorance. I specially insist upon that."

"That shall be exactly as you wish. Barbara shall never hear of our engagement until you tell her. There, Gervaise, does that satisfy you?"

She laid her warm fingers on his hair, while he lay back in kingly grace against the chair, receiving her gentle caresses as naturally as though she had been created for that especial purpose and no other.

As she spoke, a smile of triumphal pride and gratified delight appeared on her face. "That promise, faithfully kept, is all I ask. Now, my darling, I am sure I see the Chetwynd carriage entering the drive—yes, it is. Let me kiss you good-by, Blanche, and after lunch I will come for you and Miss Barbara for a ride to the Falls, up at Paterson."

He arose, and took her in his arms, and kissed her again and again. Then he laid one hand on her shoulder, and stood gazing intently on her scarlet face.

Neither heard footsteps, or knew of a presence, till Barbara's high, clear voice broke the delicious stillness.

#### CHAPTER V.

##### PLAYING WITH FATE.

"What does this mean! I pray to be informed. Mr. De Laurain, will you explain! Blanche Chetwynd, what did I tell you?"

Blanche turned to hide her sufficed face, but Gervaise conferred with her in silence.

"And permit me to inquire what you have been telling Miss Chetwynd?"

There was a flash in his voice as he spoke, that betrayed the rage, the ferer he felt lest Blanche knew all—yet he was sure she never would have acted as she had, had she dreamed of the true state of affairs.

"I told her, sir, that you were too conscientious a flirt to care, really, for her; that you made a pretence of caring, it would end as other flirtations have ended."

Her speech came fluently, and her eyes were steadily fixed on his, while her cheek grew pale as she spoke.

De Laurain's lips parted in a relieved smile, and his eyes lost their steely glitter.

Indeed, Miss Barbara's air was exclaimingly indignant to see for such a recommendation to Miss Chetwynd. However, I need hardly say, your work and mine are alike."

Blanche sprung to his side in a towering rage. "Beware, Gervaise De Laurain, how you accuse me of *fatefulness*. Remember *how I am?*"

Her deep warnings were none. Blanche turned her head in quick surprise, but not quickly enough to see the unspoken threat in De Laurain's eyes, or observe the defiance in Barbara's.

She looked indignantly at Gervaise, who, with a profound bow to Barbara, laughed assuringly to Blanche.

"I certainly do not forget who you are. A most beautiful woman, whom few men can see without loving; whom few women can know without envying."

His eyes, now turned so that Blanche might not see his face, were full of that light that shone in them when he murmured to his wife his love assurances. He turned and smiled, and smiled in the returning tide of confidence, she extended her hand.

He took it, and pressed it passionately, then raised it to his lips.

All this instantaneous tableau had been acted while Blanche had gone to the edge of the piazza to watch her betrothed. During this time, indeed, Gervaise and Barbara had renewed their vows, and apparently fully comprehended each other.

Blanche came through the window toward them.

"They have returned, and now that lunch is ready, why not let us sit all down together? Mr. De Laurain will be hardly by my side."

"If you will promise to go with Miss Barbara and me to the Falls."

Barbara's face did not betray the joy she felt at the prospect of a ride beside her husband, but in her heart she exulted, and secretly pitied Blanche that she, all unconscious, was only invited to ally herself with suspicion.

Blanche, her cheeks flushed with delight, gave an assent, wondering if Barbara really did think Gervaise was a flirt, and trying to imagine what she would say if she learned that, in spite of all her prophetic warnings, Gervaise De Laurain had actually proposed to her, and that the diamond on her watch-chain was the seal of their betrothal.

The lunch-bell rung, and first greeting Mr. Chetwynd and his wife, afterward shaking hands with Barbara, De Laurain then escorted both girls to the breakfast parlour. Laughing and chatting, first to the dark-haired woman on his right, on whose finger he had placed the wedding ring, and then to Barbara, he had spoken the sacred words, "*my wife*," then

to the golden-haired girl, whose maiden heart had passed forever out of her keeping into his unworthy hands; in whose eyes still dwined the recollection, lavished by his earnest protestations of shining affection, Gervaise De Laurain went on, his heart beating high with wicked pleasure as he gloried in successful darning; as he looked on these two perfect women who acknowledged him their heart's sovereign.

Lunch was comfortably over, when the Chetwynds were driven up to the door. Barbara and Blanche hastened to change their dresses for others more suitable, and it was when alone together that Barbara reproved her for the lack of confidence in her admirer.

"But he seems so good, Barbara, and, after all, why should I not receive his attentions as you receive them?"

Barbara did not tell her why, and a pang of pity for the girl shot through her heart.

He does not flirt with me, Blanche. Besides—nothing. Will that do?"

She had abruptly changed the topic of conversation, and took from the wardrobe a mazel-colored silk.

"I will wear it, at any rate, and my Indian shawl," she said, then thinking how her husband admired the dress and shawl.

"I shall wear my white cashmere and scarlet wrap."

And Blanche invariably remembered hearing her lover say she looked like a "sunset fairy" in that heavy, richly hanging dress, with the vivid glowing of the scarlet to relieve it.

It was raining for the only day looked best; each striving to appear perfect in his eyes; and he, pacing the piazza, with a fragrant cigar between his lips, planning his afternoon's work.

For many weeks Gervaise and Blanche, with his engagement to Blanche.

He found the gentleman in the library; a few words of courteous interchange, and then he made known his errand.

"I have come to deliberately rob you of your choice treasure—indeed, I have not already taken it—my Blanche, Mr. Chetwynd, and have told her so. She returns that love. May I have her?"

His greenish grayness overspread the gentleman's face.

"Are you aware of the fate that hangs over her head? The Curse of Chetwynd has been gathering for years to break on my innocent Blanche's head?"

De Laurain was impressed by the solemnity of the man's words.

"I have heard of it, but I do not hesitate to say I can shield her from every harm. Whose fault is it, except her husband's, that she has heart stouter? I want her, and despite the Curse she shall be mine if you give her to me."

"You must give me time for an answer. You tell me you are sure you are sure you are. I have often found myself wondering about it, half convinced, at times, that you did; then your attention to Barbara's letter you become so marked, I decided you were trying to win her."

"That is true, Mr. Chetwynd; but, remember, I have been acted between two so lovely women, that the sun shines on me, that you could have placed differently? I have been analyzing my feelings, and have learned it is Blanche Chetwynd I love."

Very proud, imperious and strong he looked, standing there, in the full flush of a perfect manhood, pleading his suit with a noble fervor.

For a better man, and more so, than Mr. Chetwynd, who had seen handsome men before, noticed the kindling of his violet eyes, the proud curving of his lips, under the heavy amount of hair, and did not wonder that Blanche loved him.

Then he extended his hand cordially.

"I am glad to see you. I would rather you would have my daughter than any man I know. Will you brave the Curse for her sweet sake? Will you take her with her dowry unscathed?"

"I will take her with her dowry unscathed, even if you are sure you are sure you are. I have often found myself wondering about it, half convinced, at times, that you did; then your attention to Barbara's letter you become so marked, I decided you were trying to win her."

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#### CHAPTER VI.

##### LOVE'S HIDE AND SEEK.

Sir turned almost abruptly away from Barbara, in whose hair she was twining a spray of daisy pink flowers, and hastened down the stairs, leaving Barbara alone at the mirror, wondering if Gervaise would find any opportunity for a kiss or a caress, or a whispered love word.

Little noticed she of the seem tramping below, as Mr. Chetwynd closed the library door after Blanche.

At a glance, Blanche comprehended the situation, and had best be rapidly as her father led her up to De Laurain.

"My daughter, this gentleman has asked for you in marriage. He loves you; you love him. I give you my word, that my youngest born daughter, with the awful inheritance of Chetwynd's Curse on your girlish head, to Gervaise De Laurain to wish you to keep the good and ill, bliss and misery, for life, death and eternity."

He laid her hand in De Laurain's; her pure blood, in case so false.

With unshed tears lying on her lashes, Mrs. Chetwynd, who had been a silent witness, touched Blanche forehead with her lips, then kissed Gervaise.

"Remember, my children, this must be sacredly confidential. I have but the one request to make of you. Mrs. Chetwynd herself said. I would request the engagement retained perfectly secret for several months, until Blanche has obtained from Barbara's knowledge till the following week, when you may, if you wish, remember this to be the custom of our family, if they are betrothed before that age. Then we will announce it with all *coeur*. Even from Barbara we wish you to keep the news. May I depend on you to gratify me in this one respect?"

Mrs. Chetwynd smiled as she spoke, as if she thought it would be a very serious thing for Blanche to withhold her all-important secret from Barbara, with whom she was naturally so very intimate.

De Laurain's heart was fairly throbbing with excessive exultation. What could have been better than that Mrs. Chetwynd herself should have suggested the secrecy from Barbara? He smiled at Blanche, who gladly agreed to keep their vows from Barbara's knowledge till the following week, when you may, if you wish, remember this to be the custom of our family, if they are betrothed before that age. Then we will announce it with all *coeur*. Even from Barbara we wish you to keep the news. May I depend on you to gratify me in this one respect?"

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Blanche would not mistrust how direct the application was of such commonplace remarks while through them she and De Laurian conveyed their love.

"Have I loved," you asked, Miss Barbara? I love; I do, most earnestly, most devotedly. I have with a fervor that never can be quenched till my heart be broken, and I will return it."

His eyes were flooded with that dangerous siren light that made those two women's hearts throbb so wildly.

"How is it with you? You have questioned me, now let me elicit an answer from you."

"Well," returned Barbara, her voice trembling low and thrilling, "I will return my affection as warmly as I can ask. I love him as no one else could. I will be true to the death."

She was nervously toying with the lace cover of her parasol, her eyes cast down, the long lashes falling thick and fast. Gervaise de Laurian was watching her passionate face, triumphing that all that beauty was his.

"But, supposing he were false, Barbara?"

Gervaise spoke almost before he thought, and the flashing black eyes were raised in a second.

"I would not believe him false. He is not, I know, but admitting he were, I would not care. I can not express what I would receive at my hands."

Gervaise laughed.

"No one could be false to you, Miss Barbara. No one would. Depend upon this one whom you love, and trust him even as you say you do. He were less than man did if he would worship you."

A gleam of exquisite joy darted from her eyes as he spoke.

Turning to Blanche, who had listened to it all, he laughingly challenged her.

"Come, Miss Blanche, tell us if you are acquainted with this new friend of mine."

"You are too personal. I am almost afraid to confess."

"Then there is a confession? To reassure you, Miss Blanche, I am very confident there must be, somewhere on this wide hemisphere, some one who loves you truly, Gervaise."

The scarlet frown in a quiet tide to her face, and she averted her head, with so thankful for the delicate avowal he had made; but she strove to laugh it off.

"You must be a wizard, Mr. De Laurian."

"There, that is a confession? To reassure you, Miss Blanche, I am very confident there must be, somewhere on this wide hemisphere, some one who loves you truly, Gervaise."

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Well was it for him that the golden light of the harvest moon did not lighten his purposes as it did his faultless face; as it had frozon the heart of some hapless victim, or the lip of his unconsenting victims as he lifted them bravely from the carriage, with a caress for both, as they ascended the steps of the piazza.

Well was it for him that the golden light of Chetwynd Chase would culminate through his wickedness, and that his love was the hand that directed the winds of wrath on another head than his own.

## CHAPTER VII.

## THE SHADOW OF THE PATH.

"We've company for you, Barbara, Blanche. It's late, and you're returned from the city, good season, especially you, Barbara, for your old friend and admirer is extremely anxious to see you."

"Who can it be? I have no such devoted caller."

Her glance wandered involuntarily to De Laurian, who with the light in his eyes she had looked at dead, was regarding her so goodly.

"Who can it be, now, I wonder?" retorted Mrs. Chetwynd, laughingly. "Sure enough, and the postilion who delivered your letter in a tin casket in Miss Barbara Lester's room, all talked with blue!"

A sudden conscious flushing of her cheeks, more than Mrs. Chetwynd's words, caused a tremor in Gervaise De Laurian's breast, that required more excruciating than could easily be expected for the moment, was the woman who her lover looked so darkly; and she dismissed the thought with a chiding to her own heart for a judgment against him. A brief second Gervaise looked sternly at Barbara; and a gesture she rightly interpreted as jealousy, he turned to Blanche, all smiles and attention.

Mrs. Chetwynd's voice broke the oppressively awkward silence.

"You do not seem desirous of welcoming him, I will myself summon him from the parlor. Mr. Davenal!"

Like lightning De Laurian turned around, and though Barbara's face was purposely averted, she saw the gleam of rage in his eyes, and answer to the summons, light quick footsteps approached.

With a door opened and Roy Davenal entered the library. With a bow to the party, he went straight up to Barbara, who with wildly throbbing heart, as she tried to imagine the effect of a meeting on her husband, awaited his coming.

Barbara Lester! I am so delighted to see you, and so glad to do so."

He extended a hand to each, but, after cortically clasping her fragile fingers, let her remove them, while he retained Barbara's, and closed his hand over her hand over her hand over her hand.

His admiration was too sincere for coquetry, and as with elaborate politeness Gervaise De Laurian acknowledged the intrusion, he decided that Roy Davenal was in love with his wife.

He surveyed his rival from head to foot; and as he acknowledged what a fine-looking man this Roy Davenal was, he also concluded to thank him.

It was a serious business this double affair of his; and if he possessed unlimited boldness to attempt to carry it through, he also possessed an unmeasurable amount of jealousy that enabled him to prevent Roy Davenal from courting his wife, or paying attention to Blanche Davenal, or even to the most active of himself sub rose. But, as to what was to act with Gervaise De Laurian, so, while he critically disposed of handsome Roy Davenal, so did he do the same for the course he had mutually made.

First, he was going to let Roy Davenal suppose he was in love with Blanche Chetwynd, and to let her believe that he was in love with Barbara. In this he was very anxious. This plan, while it left him free to keep good his professions to Blanche, would serve to remind Barbara of the promise they had mutually made, viz: that if she ever flirted with Roy Davenal, he should not hesitate to do the same with Blanche Chetwynd. He never for a moment supposed Barbara was playing a game as deep as his own; he only supposed that Davenal was in love with her, and that there was nothing but avarice in this he was very anxious to see as he learned afterward. His mind made up thus far, he dismissed all thoughts of after-reckoning, and began his part in earnest, and darkened from that hour, by turning to Blanche with a smile that set her heart a-dutter.

Blanche, if you are not fatigued, suppose we go to the promenade! Mrs. Chetwynd said she goes! I assure you I will take excellent care of her."

Barbara turned at the words, and was in time to see him place the scarlet wrap over her shoulders, and clasp the siver fastening.

He drew her hand through his arm, and, with a grace as swift as morning at Barbara, passed out the open French window.

"Shall we love, Barbara? I have so much to say to you."

Roy Davenal bent low over her crimson cheeks.

Only an instant did she hesitate, as she thought:

"I will be equal with Gervaise De Laurian. He shall see I can flirt as well as he can."

That with a bowing smile, she heard Davenal, loud enough to be also heard by Gervaise and Blanche; and her husband ground his heel on the gravelled path as the musical sound reached him.

"Thank you, Roy; I will go. I know nothing I should prefer to a moonlight walk with you alone."

And Roy Davenal, in the fulness of his love, believed what she said!

And now, well, we tell every thing that has happened since we parted, in the spring. Have you been well? I am happy, and true!"

They parted with a bowing smile, she heard Davenal, loud enough to be also heard by Gervaise and Blanche; and her husband ground his heel on the gravelled path as the musical sound reached him.

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"Thank you, Roy; I will go. I know nothing I should prefer to a moonlight walk with you alone."

In a flood of exquisite, pensive melody the words died softly away.

"Gervaise, is not that lovely?"

Blanche Chetwynd, who sat with unshed tears, looked up in her lover's face.

"Perfect. So touching, and expressive of my feelings to you, my own."

"As if I did not know that! And while I am so happy in your love, Gervaise, I rejoice that Barbara's heart is so fully Roy's. They have been engaged these three years."

"Engaged!"

He started involuntarily, his eyes lighting up with a dangerous glow.

"Why, yes. Did you not know? They will be married in the early spring."

"Married? Barbara Lester married in the spring?"

He repeated the words in a low, hoarse tone, that made Blanche look at him in extreme surprise.

"Why, Gervaise, what of that?"

Her words recalled him to the actualities of the present, while they warmed him of his part to play.

"Nothing, Blanche, dear. Only it seems so odd, somehow, to associate Barbara and marriage. I should as soon have thought of hearing of your marriage with—"

"Some old married man?"

And Blanche laughingly supplied the most ridiculous comparison she could think of.

For a second or two she turned, and his dark eyes steadily studied her sweet, guileless face.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### STEELE TO STEEL.

It was only for a second, then he laughed.

"Not so bad as that! But, really, Miss Lester is a splendid girl, and Mr. Davonal will secure a prize—when he gets her."

Blanche did not detect the hidden meaning of the remark.

"Indeed he will. And she, as well, in him, for Roy is a noble fellow."

Gervaise gently pressed the fingers that lay on his sleeve.

"Be careful, little girl, or I shall grow jealous."

"You mustn't."

She looked into his face with a suddenly-grown serious expression of her own, where the darker fought for the mastery over the earnest pallor of her cheeks.

"You never will have occasion to be jealous, Gervaise, for I shall be true. When you are false to me—and I know you will be—then I will even be thought—then you may accuse me of disloyalty."

He never wavered as she met her womanly eyes as she spoke in such proud confidence; but was absorbed to him the vivid contrast of her purity and truth, and his foulness and the living lie he knew he was persecuting.

At the steps, in a patch of unbroken moonlight, the party met.

"You have enjoyed this perfect evening, Blanche—Mr. De Laurian?"

"For myself I can say I have, very much." returned Blanche, half timidly, as if ashamed to confer the credit for the exclusive society of Mr. De Laurian.

"I can safely say I never enjoyed an evening more. As you remarked, Mr. Davonal, the night is perfect; the air is most congenial; and you could help having a delightful time?"

It was Gervaise who spoke, and, as he did so, looked menacingly down at Blanche. Then he addressed Barbara, quite abruptly:

"I may presume to inquire of you, Miss Barbara, if you fear much for your trouble in preparing for the walk?"

His cool tones, so sarcastic and ironical, but served to increase to further heat the flames of her jealous anger.

"You may presume to inquire, and, as my escort was a near and very dear personal friend, you will not be surprised to know I greatly enjoy the opportunity of going with me to the exclusive society—which I prize above all privileges."

"Thank you, my darling."

He spoke impulsively, little dreaming of the effect of his words.

With kindling eyes, yet in a voice in which only Barbara detected the smothered fury, he retorted:

"You are then in a very enviable frame of mind, Miss Lester. Permit me to congratulate you and Mr. Davonal that such choice spirits have met."

Barbara bowed, frigidly.

Roy Davonal wrenched if Mr. De Laurian were always so crisp in his compliments.

Just then Mrs. Chetwynd came in through the window.

"Come, girls, it is time for your beauty-sleep."

Gervaise instantly extended his hand to Blanche.

"Good-night, then."

Then he reached it to Barbara.

Cool and haughty, with the air of an empire, she merely inclined her head, keeping her fingers clasped on Roy Davonal's shoulder.

De Laurian bit his tawny moustache in fierce vexation as he went down the steps, and remembered how another man had called his wife "darling."

All that night, in the sleepless hours, he tossed on his pillow; all the next morning the endearing epithet rung in his ears; then, when the hour came for the usual afternoon ride, he had arranged his plans of action.

In his little pony-phaseton he drove from Patterson and Grand Chase, and found Roy Davonal on the veranda, and a low basket-buggy drawn up by the carriage mount.

The two exchanged greetings, and Roy explained that he was about to start for a ride.

"I beg pardon for interfering in the least, Mr. Davonal, but I fear Miss Chetwynd will think you a little unfriendly in devoting yourself so solely to Barbara. You are a guest of her father, you know, and permit me to suggest that you escort her to-day and leave your betrothed to me."

De Laurian spoke in a half-earnest, half-confidential way that no one could have taken offense at, much less Roy, who instantly appreciated the delicate advice.

"You are right, De Laurian; I'll make amends. Barbara will excuse me if I desire it, won't she?"

He lifted his hat as she came down the steps with Blanche.

"Won't I what?" she returned, as she bestowed a careless nod on him.

"Accept a seat in Mr. De Laurian's phaeton, while I improve the opportunity offered of paying my respects to Blanche."

Barbara looked at Gervaise. He telegraphed her a stern command.

Then she smiled triumphantly.

"I prefer not, Roy. As you know I have committed so on this ride. Blanche would rather entertain Mr. De Laurian, I'm sure."

Blanche blushed.

"I'm sure I'll ride wherever it is best. I would like a nice little chat with you, Roy."

Blanche had received an encouraging smile from De Laurian ere she replied.

Barbara grew frigid in a moment.

"Oh, if it's a conspiracy, I'm sure I won't attempt to interfere. It must be a great pity to deprive you of your nice little ride."

Laurian, I am at your disposal. Do you wish me to ride with you?"

De Laurian ere she replied.

"I shall be too glad. Let me assist you to the phaeton."

He could have taken her hand, but she sprang in herself; a hard glitter in her steady black eyes, a fever spot burning on either cheek.

Blanche lifted Blanche in and then, ere on, De Laurian following, out of hearing distance.

Not a word was spoken till they had cleared the grounds of Chetwynd Chase; then, with a noble deliberateness, De Laurian turned toward Barbara.

"Well?"

In this one word was concentrated all the pent-up emotions he had nursed since the previous evening.

"What do you mean, Barbara De Laurian, by your conduct? What am I to understand you mean?"

Threatening authority was conveyed in every intonation of his voice as he glared at her.

She lifted her eyes boldly to his face.

"What am I, your wife, to understand you mean?"

De Laurian was angry, Barbara was a match for him.

"Drop me out the question and answer me, I command. What does Roy Davonal mean by calling me a friend?"

"What you mean when you call me that name, I presume. I did not ask him to explain."

De Laurian was cool and calm, a smothered snarl curling on his proud lips.

"But, woman, what right does he say it?"

"Friend or right, man. He knew me and loved me long before you saw me."

"And coming from the presence of him, who, less than six weeks ago, pronounced you my wife, you presume to ask me to care for his again? Where has your honor gone?"

"To the same place as yours, Gervaise De Laurian. What did you promise me concerning Barbara Chetwynd?"

She laughed as she spoke, a low, smearing laugh that made him turn fiercely on her, and snatch her hands as they lay idly, gracefully over the other.

"So, here, Barbara De Laurian! I have heard him call you darling; I have seen him with his wild eyes of you. He has loved you and was betrothed to him. Barbara! Barbara! do you know what you are doing?"

His voice lost some of its harsh wrathfulness as she repeated her name; he had been seeing how gloriously beautiful she was in this new phase of character, and he feared, lest, through this Roy Davonal, he might lose her after all.

"Barbara, I ask, what are you doing?"

"What are you doing?"

Their eyes met with the same inquiry in both their depths.

A glance followed; then, by a mighty effort, for she loved him so, and so longed for a loving word or glance, she spoke his name:

"Darling."

Her voice was soft, and it needed but a kind word or a tender look from him to sweep away all his low barriers.

"If we are to be acted wrong there is pardon and repentance."

Her stern tones, tones that he so loved, revealed the jealousy which she so bravely drove; he let fall her hands, and wound his arms around her waist.

"There is no me—I love you so, I love you so, my wife."

She leaned her head against his shoulder.

"And I, Gervaise, was vexed and jealous that you would not believe I loved no one but you. I did not know that you were the wife of my lover's me. You are my all, and in all, my husband."

Then let us forget the past and begin anew. But, Barbara, I must have you all to myself. We have been married six weeks now, and music no hour you, which, of course, seemed advisable, considering the secrecy imposed upon us. But, my dearest, although I must compel a continued privacy concerning our marriage, still our friends must know that what will appear ostensible to the Chetwynds."

She shook her head negatively.

"I fear not."

## CHAPTER IX.

### BEWARE! BEWARE!

DE LAURIAN smiled at her decisive manner.

"You are hasty in your conclusion, my Barbara, are you not?"

"I do not see how it can be done, Gervaise. I do so dislike these secret affairs. Do let us tell them and have done with it. I do not anticipate any trouble, and if there should arise any, we are able to stand it."

She laid her hand on his sleeve while she spoke.

"Barbara, my darling, let me tell you a little confidence. Between you and I there are many good reasons why we may not divulge this affair. First, what think you Roy Davonal will say?"

He watched her narrowly, and a satisfied smile betokened the success of his first appeal.

"Then, what think you Mrs. Chetwynd will say? I do not think Mr. Chetwynd has spoken to me about Blanche. You have heard them mention the name of Chetwynd, have you not? That is to fall on Blanche's head—she being the youngest daughter—in the shape of desolation, dishonor and death. Mr. Chetwynd tells me Blanche loves me, and wishes to marry me, as in case of a happy marriage dishonor could not ensue, desertion would not—as for death, that will come whether or not."

Barbara uttered a faint cry of pain.

"Wait, my darling. He wants me to marry Blanche, as I say, and, if you notice, both he and Mrs. Chetwynd are constantly giving me opportunities of cultivating her society."

With quivering mouth Barbara waited till he paused.

"And you love—"

"Only my glowing tropical bird, before whose brilliant beauty Blanche pales as I live before the rose."

He kissed "the rose" passionately to prove his assertion.

"So you see, my darling," he continued, "why I mean to take you away. The Chetwynds will see me gradually cease my attentions to Blanche, which, for friendship's sake, I have paid, and their minds will be prepared for the news. I will give them, while you are away, I desire to bear the brunt of it myself."

She thanked him for his brave considerations with her most bewitching smile, while a gleam lighted his eyes as he congratulated himself on the success of his plans.

"Then you'll come with me, my darling?"

He whistled, and she went for a visit, could you go, think—even if I were the friend who wrote the letter?"

Gradually the force of the strategy appeared to her; she blushed, then laughed.

"Oh, Gervaise, you are an adept! But our combined absence? People will talk."

"Let them talk. I will be to be annoyed, and the certificate can be displayed when we return to Chetwynd Chase."

His careless, hopeful enthusiasm inspired her; and she gave her name to the man who had loved her so.

"I will prepare for the journey immediately, laughable as it seems for the bride of Gervaise De Laurian to steal forth alone on her wedding tour."

An amused smile accompanied her words.

Just then the other carriage halted, and they all alighted to rest for a few minutes.

It was a charming place, where the fragrant sweetness of the pine grove perfumed the air.

"Do you know what this pine odor reminds me of? Or do none of you believe that scents will carry one irresistibly back to old-time memories?"

Roy Davenal looked meaningly at Barbara as they walked over the leaf-strewn ground. "I, for one, believe that," he said. "I can recollect how, one June night, when I was the merest child, they took me to see the corpse of a friend, the dearest of my kind; and who was covered, almost, with geraniums, and since then, their smell sickens and frightens me."

She shivered, and let her face sink into silence followed her words; then Roy gently spoke.

"After unfortunately leading your thoughts in so grave a channel, I fear I should not mention what I was led to say."

Barbara laughed—a laugh that grated on Roy's ear. He was peculiarly sensitive, and, until now, Barbara's voice had never made but music for him.

If he laugh annoyed him, the words that followed caused strange, sad surprises. "You needn't mind. She has been dead years and years, and, heart-broken though I was, I assure you I am perfectly resigned now."

That heartless remark, and the words of the broken chain; that hour the date Roy Davenal remembered in after days, when it had occasion to be thankful that ever the chain was sundered.

For a moment the silence was awkward; then De Laurian broke it.

"Suppose we go on until we meet the old fortune-teller who lies in somewhere among these mysterious shades? We can pay her a visit, and have her look upon your face unrolled to our eyes by her prophetic sayings."

"I agree, Mr. De Laurian, only I do hope she'll not tell the fortune."

Barbara gave him a look he fully comprehended; then he addressed Blanche.

"You also wish she may not speak the truth?"

She laughed, and shook her head gayly. "As if I wanted all my bad qualities exposed!"

"I differ from you, ladies," said Roy, much more gravely than the occasion called for. "For myself, I prefer the entire truth—much as I loathe her ability. For her, I am not afraid of her witcheries, de Laurian?"

"If I afraid of a fortune-teller! She might swear I were a traitor to my king, as a gambler, a murderer; or call me a—"

"Gay deceiver; that will finish the programme," Roy interposed, merrily.

"Exactly. Nothing she will say can affect me."

He smiled half defiantly, and just then they saw the hidden secret of the house.

Blanche was bending over the pile of light kindlings she had collected for her evening fire.

She looked up as the party approached, and greeted them by a slight nod.

She was an old woman, scantily dressed, whose face was withered and brown, yet of pleasant expression. Her keen, sunken black eyes were kindly in their scrutiny as they surveyed the quartette before her.

"We have come to have you inquire of our future, auntie."

De Laurian bowed elaborately.

"I can do it. Come within, while I read you the hidden secrets you desire."

She pointed to the door, with the authority a duchess might have used, and as they crossed the threshold, the door closed and removed their heads to permit their ingress.

"Gentlemen always do me reverence. It is right. Who can interpret the music of the waters, or demand the reasons their purposes certainly is worthy the respect of both man and God."

Her ready utterance, her deep-toned, dramatic language, were in her favor.

She produced a glass of clear water, and began peering eagerly into its transparent depths.

Then, after a close survey, she shook her head.

"There are clouds, darkness, winds, storm, and a wrecked ship afloat."

She looked suddenly up at Barbara, and beckoned her to draw nearer.

"It is all there, as you touched the glass. 'I see it as plainly as you see the veins on that dainty hand. There is a lover; there is a sweet heart; a wife and a husband. I see wrath and anger; I hear deceitful voices and a lying tongue. I see the deceiver betrayed, and the proud brought low. It is dreadful, dreadful! Oh, the anguish, the agony, the lying! And it is of you, beautiful woman, you, who love brings a light, whose vows end in a curse!'"

Barbara's eyes had a deadly glitter in their brightness, and as she was being led away to a low, creaking murmur as she repeated over and over—"a curse! a curse!" Her cheeks grew as pale as snow, and she snatched her hand from the woman's grasp.

"You wicked, slandering old witch! you vile morbid hag! How dare you, before those gentlemen, repeat your Satanic inventions? How dare you, I say!"

Barbara glared in the old woman's eyes like a red fury.

"Barbara, never mind. We do not care at all for what she says. Did we not agree to enquire of the spirit, and let us be unpleasantness pass! Don't, Barbara, don't look at me."

Blanche laid her hand on her arm.

"Do fortune-teller's face suddenly grew luminous, and almost radiant by the soft touched Blanche's smiling golden hair.

"Sweet-faced and gazelle-eyed. Oh, the heart-ache; you shall see it, if you wish, as you pass me, will know how to offer her balm that will heal. He will strengthen and sustain."

Blanche looked brightly over at De Laurian, whose eyes great back a distance.

She never dreamed the fortune-teller referred to any one but him.

Roy was watching the two, and as he noted the messages telegraphed between them, he knew it was a verity, De Laurian's love for Blanche she eyed.

The woman suddenly threw the water through the door.

"I will take no more. I will tell no more. My eyes are too kind; I will be heart-broken at the scene."

"I will take no money—it would pollute my fingers. Go, all of you, and remember the old fortune-teller's last words: 'BEWARE!'"

#### CHAPTER X.

##### THE TEMPTER AND TEMPTED.

If Barbara had anticipated the surprise her announcement would cause, she more than realized its consequences.

"Barbara, what can possess you! It is such a perfectly wild idea, that of your accepting at once an invitation from a schoolmate you have not seen for years."

Mr. Chetwynd seemed quite displeased about it, and even frowned when Barbara displayed her usual, and very matter-of-factly declared her intention of accepting it.

"Barbara, either you or Nellie Bruges is crazy. Why, she never seemed so good a friend of yours at college."

Blanche spoke in unfeigned surprise, to which Barbara answered carelessly:

"I will tell me he will be, I think. I hope you're not jealous, Blanche?"

After that Blanche said nothing further.

"Fertige, as you aver, it is a looke-whim," Barbara said quietly, to Mr. Chetwynd. "But I should enjoy the tour, and the change of life, for a while at least."

Her determined manner carried the day, as usual; and before night her half-dozen trunks, suit on ornament, and very matter-of-factly declared her intention of accepting it.

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to use it to her own advantage. With a cold, little laugh she struggled to withdraw her hands, but he detained them.

"Mr. Davenal, since you will not release me, of course you must have no choice but to remain, however unpleasant the situation."

In an instant he let her hands fall.

"What, Barbara! you could imagine me? Roy! You affirm to me that I have done to offend you?"

"There is no consequence, in the least degree, that I need repeat it."

She spoke indifferently as she toyed with a stray lock of hair, and let her eyes wander.

Roy's eager eyes were on her impressive face, and the look of distress on his own was painful to behold.

Just then Barbara looked up, and their eyes met. She started at the sight of him.

"I will tell you then that you have surmised correctly in supposing that your presence drove me from my home. At first, your visit was a source of ceaseless joy to me; afterward, when I discovered it was not myself, after all, that was the motive that brought you, I concluded to abandon the field to my fair rival, and dispose of myself as best I could."

"What! you accuse me of favoring a rival of yours, Barbara! You tell me another purpose than seeing you brought me all the way from St. Louis to here, and that my demon has been poisoning your heart against me!"

His voice was freighted with anguish, and Barbara saw him throw his hat on the floor, and see his hands tremble with pain, and again, as if to quell some tumultuous pang.

A momentary remorseful pain struck through Barbara's heart, and she said:

"Poor fellow, he deserves better than this at my hands."

It was a passing thought, but Davenal was not so easily won over, almost involuntarily, she uttered his name, "Roy!"

It was spoken in a low, tender tone, and a sudden happiness shone in his features.

"Barbara, darling, you will take back those cruel words! You'll tell me you have other reasons for going away! You'll tell me once more you love me!"

He was so impulsive, so ardent, in his great, strong love for this woman, and she smiled at his impetuosity.

A smile usually opens the door to a kind word, and it was not the reverse in this case.

"But I will not accuse you of anything so fairly. I did say I thought you cared more for Blanche Chetwynd, than for me—"

He snatched a twig of honeysuckle.

"I don't care a trifle for her; and you know it, Barbara!"

"You are not over complimentary to your dear daughter, Barbara!"

"As a lady, she will always command my respect and honor; as a friend, my best friendship. But as a wife, Barbara, she is a nonentity compared with you. Why, if I had married her, and then met you, I'd not like to say what would have been the consequences. Barbara, don't you know me?"

He laid his hand on her shoulder and looked down into her eyes.

"You'd not commit suicide, or seek for a divorce, would you?" she laughed, but a cold shiver thrilled her as she hastily framed another question.

"Suppose the case reversed. 'Suppose I were to ask Mr. De Laurian, for instance, what would you do?'"

As she waited his answer, a sickening dread seized her, and she numbly over her, that was not alleviated when he spoke, in a painfully-ill-whisper:

"I should hesitate a moment. When a man loves as you love, Barbara, Lester, he would never permit another to cross his path with impunity. Do you care for Gertrude De Laurian?"

The question it was suddenly it almost took her breath; she shrugged her shoulders and laughed.

"I care for Gertrude De Laurian, and engaged to you, Roy, that is absurd."

He did not smile in response.

"You have gracefully evaded the question. Do you care for me, De Laurian?"

He regarded her with a scrutiny that took all her indomitable will to meet. Then, with her matchless shyness, she answered:

"I do not."

A sigh of relief escaped her as he accepted the deliberate lie.

"I thought perhaps you did," rejoined Roy, caressing her cold fingers. "I judged from your coolness toward me, and by the way you just now used me, that suddenly it almost took."

Barbara trembled as she realized the danger her false lips had averted.

"I am going in, Roy; it is getting chilly. Are you coming?"

She passed on the threshold and looked over her shoulder. Roy thought he had never seen her so pleasing fair.

"I do not see you! wherever you go, I follow, even to the death!"

Like a funeral knell those words rung in her ears, and, with all her efforts to forget them, they haunted her for weeks and weeks.





bade adieu on the moonlight piazza at Chetwynd Chase.

"But I will be back in good season for the wedding at Christmas, my little betrothed, and then for a life of love with my own Blanche."

And she, nothing doubting, only grieved at the inevitable separation, and watched him, with tearful, yet happy eyes, as he went forth on his mission of direct wrong.

He joined Barbara at the Continental Hotel, and, fearful lest his plans would be thwarted by the chance recognition of any traveling friends, suggested a quiet honeymoon in some out-of-the-way place, where, as he told her, with thrilling love-words, he could have her all to himself for the few short weeks he could remain with her before he returned to New Jersey to arrange for their home.

Barbara seemed almost like another person,

And so the days wore away, and almost before she knew it, the time had come for De Laurian to go back and arrange for her return.

She earnestly pleaded to go with him in the first place, but with thoughtful consideration he insisted on her remaining until he had broken the news to the Chetwyns and arranged for her a befitting home-coming.

And so, transformed by love into the true, trusting wife, she gracefully consented, and thanked him for his kindness. And then he bade her adieu—only a short adieu, he said, as he kissed her again and again; then he left her.

That afternoon, after he was gone, and she sat alone by the window, she wondered why it was she felt so strangely, not physically, for she never had been in better health. But there weighed on her mind some weight; some cold, leaden pressure that would not be raised, and

There came a letter and this is what it told her, word for word:

"Barbara, the hour has come when it is meet that you should know all, when it is my disagreeable duty, my painful duty, to tell you a truth that I now will bring curses on my head for time and eternity from you. I desire them: I will say that; I accept them as the punishment of my wickedness, and do not add insult to injury by asking or expecting you to forgive what I full well know is unpardonable.

"Barbara, this letter will reach you, I intend, by the five o'clock mail on Christmas afternoon; at noon of Christmas Day I shall be married to Blanche Chetwynd, at Chetwynd Chase, with the full and cordial approval of her parents.

"You start, and exclaim in passionate bewilderment, I know; I answer by solemnly avowing that Blanche De Laurian will be my lawful wife, because—God purg you, Barbara, you are not, and never were."

"You understand how I have stated? You know



"BEWARE, GERVAISE DE LAURIAN, HOW YOU ACCUSE ME OF FALSHOODS! REMEMBER WHO I AM!"—PAGE 4.

all those bright, blissful days; she had thrown care and fear to the winds, thankful that Gervaise was her husband, trusting implicitly to him, and forgetting the tormenting jealousies that had torn her so, in past days. She seemed to live a year in those seven weeks, so crowded were they with concentrated content and happiness; it seemed ages since she had seen the Chetwyns—poor, guileless Blanche—and Roy Davenal. Somehow, whenever she thought of Roy, it hurt her; she was grown so happy and peaceful herself, because of her husband's love and devotion, that she pitied Davenal with a tenderness very foreign to her passionate nature.

Gervaise and she would sit for hours and talk over their romance, and then, with all the ardor of her soul, she would tell him how she loved him.

that she attributed, at length, to nervousness, superinduced by her natural regret at her lover's husband's absence.

Little did she know what that oppression was the shadow of, or what was the substance that cast that shadow!

She never dreamed, in her trusting love, that he who was all in all to her was a man of blacker soul than any man but a very devil could be; how should she know?

So she waited for his return—and then, one bright, wintry day, the one before the sacred, beautiful Christmas, the horrible blow came, that transformed Barbara De Laurian—we never shall call her that again—into the woman whose presence brought a blight, whose hands scattered seeds of Dead Sea fruit, whose heart and brain were the heart and brain of a Medusa— that blasted whatsoever they would.

now that I permitted you to believe valid a ceremony performed by a college student who consented, with as wicked a heart as I, to the infamous deed? I will not attempt to gloss over my conduct; I will not remind you how I loved you; you know that; Barbara; neither will I hardly remind you that it will be better for you to conceal this little episode in your life, for your own sake. Blanche shall never be annoyed by you, nor can I permit that any trouble shall come to my wife's fiancée therefore; you know me, Barbara, and that I will not be trifled with.

"Again, you remember the broken opal stone, and the chain of Florentine gold we have talked about and so often examined? I shall retain it in my possession, and if ever I find you are working me evil I shall send it to you as a token of vengeance."

"And now, Barbara, beautiful, enchanting Barbara, I bid you adieu, never expecting our paths will cross again, but certainly intending, if I do, that we meet as friends, at least.

"GERVAISE DE LAURIAN."

Rigid as a marble statue she had sat, and read the bellicose letter through, from date to superscription, her face as motionless as a paper with a grip of iron, her eyes lurid and tearless.

Then, with almost a snarl, so suddenly did the tense muscles relax, her hands fell lifeless at her side; a quick, chaotic, convulsive convulsion, and then came a torrent of hot, heart-wringing tears.

She was a woman, with a woman's keen capability of suffering, even in proportion as she had loved.

Like a scorching sinuous storm of grief, horror and despair burst over her, withering her heart, inflaming her soul, and leaving the soul of her principles bare and waste.

"Lost—lost! my heart, my life, my dearest, my loved—and all, all by him! Trampled on and then carelessly set aside by him whom I worshiped as man never worshipped his God! Gervaise—Gervaise! can it be true? have you given me up?"

A man of heartrending agony followed her words, and she clasped her hands over her burning bosom, while her head fell forward in the abandonment of her awful grief.

"For you, for you, my Gervaise, my lost love, would I have dashed myself in the sea! Save *this* infamy, that in all my wildest visions of love, I never dreamed of! But you no longer love, in whom you have trusted, then marry and scorn! "You have given the love for which I would have bartered my soul, for which I did, all unconscious, sell my honor, to another!—might have loved, might have married, might have had you been true! But to another—to Blanche Chetwynd!"

Her soliloquy was bringing a defiant glare to her eyes; the olden-time glare, a hundred-fold intensified, that had lighted her eyes in the days when she had not wholly trusted her lover; and she stretched the fingers of her right hand—what she had regarded as her wedding-ring—with a gesture of agonized rage.

Suddenly she started up, and, with yearning cries of love and tenderness, she pressed it passionately to her lips. Over and over again she kissed the bright jewels, her tears dropping on their gleaming carvings.

"The delicious dreams I have indulged in over his betrothal gem; the blissful hopes I have enjoyed—oh, Gervaise! it is so hard! it is so cruel! I will die, all for love and betrayal—love for you, Gervaise De Laurian!"

With a low wail of pain, she dropped her head on her breast, clatching the diamond-ring in a tight grip.

Quietly, motionless she sat; for an hour she silently moved and murmured, her ears were accumulating itself to this sudden blow; she was slowly numbing herself by her inevitable despondency, slowly, slowly, until she was again, with almost superhuman power, the love of her trampled heart.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### THE BURNED LOVE.

PRESENTLY she arose, and walked tottering across the room to the pier-glass.

She smiled scornfully at the reflection, as she addressed it.

"Barbara Lester, do you know who you are? and what you are? and what your business from to-day is?"

"She paused, and a tremor passed over her. She grew paler, and reeled a step, then stood, strong and firm again.

"That was the last, dying pang; I have bartered my love for Gervaise De Laurian—but I have buried it alive."

Her chest heaved irregularly, but only for a moment; then every trace of her agitation had vanished.

"There, Barbara Lester, wronged, disgraced, contemptible though you know you are, you are strong again. Strong with the strength born of weakness, proud, with a pride following humility! You will never quiver when you hear his name; you will never falter when you speak it, or blush when you speak to him!"

She peered in her beautiful dark eyes, and her lips parted in a gloomy smile.

"Love was sweet, Roy, and what was it not? Beauty is pleasant to possess, but there remains something sweeter than the one, and better than the other. Revenge! I write in letters by a pen steeped in the blood of a bruised heart and embittered by the gall of a tarnished honor: Never shall you rest from your toils, Barbara Lester; never shall you find resting eyes for your burning head and your weary feet till your task be finished!"

She raised her hand, and then laughed, to see the gleam of the diamond on her finger.

"No gave it for a love-pledge, but he will rue the day. By that ring I swear to crush every hope, blight every joy, blight every comfort he dare imagine!"

A very avenging spirit she looked; superbly beautiful, calmly defiant. The wave of passion had passed on its way, leaving her resigned, but desperate.

And she did not belie her looks. She intended a revenge from the depths of her heart; and from that moment she dated her life with her love for Gervaise De Laurian, she dated her first step on her self-appointed mission.

It was a fearful mission; it was only one that a woman, deceived, betrayed and crushed as she had been, could have attempted; and she unblenchingly went to work that very hour.

The letter of De Laurian's letter, which arrived twenty-four hours sooner than he had intended or expected, was not overlooked by Barbara; it fell on her eyes, and she read it with all the vigor her ample lungs to perform the journey between Philadelphia and Chetwynd Chase before the marriage ceremony occurred.

She had no intention of making a provision that denoted the high state of nervous excitement she was in; it had been labeled "Miss Lester, Paterson, N. J., of the Chase carriage, would meet her here; if telegraphed, sent to the Kensington depot, and a through ticket to New York brought back.

She had no idea of forbidding the banns; she knew too well the utter nothingness of the claim she had upon Gervaise De Laurian, but she *did* know what to do about it, and the first thing to do was to return to Chetwynd Chase for the wedding, and meet the man who had wronged her with a stolid indifference that would have left her at bay.

She dressed herself, with excellent taste, in a pearl-gray silk walking suit, and called a carriage to take her to the Kensington depot, first paying her bills in a quiet way.

As she took her seat in the car, already nearly full, a gentleman addressed her.

"May I wish you a safe journey?"

With a thrill of anguish and surprise, she turned to recognize—Roy Davenal.

"Barbara! can it be possible? Oh, I am too glad to see you! I have found you!"

"Where have you been, my darling? I went as direct to your friend's house as I could go, and she was as astonished to think I could find you as I was not to find you. Where have you been, my dearest?"

It was like stabbing a wound afresh for Barbara; she had no words to answer him. He called her "darling" and "dearest," this man who believed her to be his betrothed, whom she had grossly deceived, and who, if he had known she would have rushed from her side in horror.

So he had discovered that she had not been to England; well, that was his point to two points; first, to allow him to still regard her his betrothed, and to confess, in the half-truthful way, why she had not come. Two years ago it seemed—that she had never intended going to her friend in the West, but offered it as an excuse for a long jaunt she wanted to enjoy alone.

And so she told him, in her sweet, bright way, this strong-hearted woman who was traveling on terms that the cars could take her to wreak her revenge.

Roy Davenal was so glad to see her; he had been so torn with fearful doubts since Mrs. Chetwynd had promised him Barbara's hand for Christmas; now all clouds were lifted as by magic, and he reveled in the beauty of her presence.

Naturally, the wedding of De Laurian and Blanche was discussed; and Barbara spoke of it, and the bridegroom-elect, without a tremor of fondness.

But when Roy told her of what had been his hopes for the coming day, and urged her with words of such sobriety, to consent to be married, a fierce horrid pain shot through her heart, the existence of which she barely contrived, by her superhuman will, to conceal from Davenal's eyes. It was unexpected, she plead, very gently—for she could pity him, now, since she herself so needed strongest sympathy—would not Roy please to wait till tomorrow?

And in the bitter, anguished memories that flooded her eyes, Roy Davenal read only pleading entreaty. He was obliged to yield a reluctant consent, and then he turned to see the train slip swiftly on, carrying her nearer and nearer—so what?

When the City they took an accommodation train that made all the stops on the Erie road between the city and Paterson, so that while her trunk was carried on to Paterson, she and Roy took a carriage at Essex, and walked to Chetwynd Chase. It was a brilliant night, and at nine o'clock the moon was at its full; they walked rapidly over the bridge, across the packed road, and Barbara, wrapped closely in her furs though she was, shivered as though she were dying as they hurried past the abbey ruins.

When the train was no more to be seen, she had buried it alive.

Chetwynd Chase was all alive with lights that threw their rays far out on the sea; the moon shone brightly, and Barbara wondered if it meant a welcome for her!

Somehow that still, mild night, with its murmurs of twinkling stars, its soft, low tones, its butterfly; such a "home-coming" after the one

she and De Laurian had pictured time and again—now she saw with what consummate skill it had been done, and she hated him for the moment.

They could hear voices now and then, laughing and talking, but she was not to see any one from Barbara's lips. De Laurian and Blanche passed by the window on the inside.

Blanche leaned on his arm, and he was bending his head with that stately grace that became him so well.

After that quick, wild cry, half-stifled though it was, Barbara's mind was free to move and to move, and as she rung the door-bell long and loudly, a flush of conscious pride rose to her face.

The footman admitted her, and she gracefully walked into the drawing-room, among the guests, and went up to Blanche, as she stood leaning on Gervaise De Laurian's arm.

"Blanche, I'm home again, and just in time. Sir, I offer my congratulations." She bowed to De Laurian, who, for the moment, was transfixed with horror; for then she went coolly and greeted Mrs. Chetwynd, who was eagerly talking to Roy.

"My dear child! and such a goose-chase as you have been leading. Roy tells me. Well, let me go with you to your room, my dear, and see that you are rested for an hour or so, before you come down to the party."

And *that* was what this woman had looked forward to in her rosiest dreams: *this* was Barbara's "home-coming!"

#### CHAPTER XV.

##### DRAWING THE NET CLOSER.

PASSING fair was Blanche Chetwynd on the morning of her bridal day, with her sweet brown eyes alight with tender winsomeness, and a faint pink tinge on her white complexion.

The hour was eleven, and she had been dressed only a few minutes when her parents and Gervaise entered the room to exchange their affectionate greetings that seldom occur more than once in a lifetime.

Her bridal costume was superlatively elegant, that well becoming the rank and wealth of the Chetwynds no less than the personal grace of the bride, to whom the cloud-like folds of Mechlin lace and gossamer white silk lent new and sylph-like beauty.

The Chetwynd pearls crowned her proud little head, and lay in coils purely around her throat and over her shoulders.

She had seated herself on a capacious damask sofa when her parents and Barbara had entered. Blanche turned to her to exchange their affectionate greetings, and she said to her, "Miss Chetwynd will ever hold. The next will be given by Mrs. De Laurian."

Mrs. Chetwynd spoke tenderly, and the tears came into her eyes.

"What, tears? Not on your wedding-day, Blanche! Surely the bride of Gervaise De Laurian should be the happiest woman living."

It was the father who spoke so cheerily and merrily, as he gently caressed his daughter's white hand.

"Does they be tears of joy?"

Barbara's mistle voice pronounced the words, and Blanche turned toward her, as Barbara went on.

"Because, my dear, the time may come when tears of anguish will be shed. Why, then, rebuke those of joy?"

Blanche's eyes never came in quick, startled tones.

"Barbara, do not mention such a thing! You send a cold shiver to my very heart."

She smiled so entrancingly at Barbara's dark, handsome face.

She laughed in a low, melodious laugh, that implied a plainly distrust as to Blanche's future happiness.

"I'm a little surprised, Barbara, that you should introduce so gloomy a topic on this occasion, when you are betrothed to all that is beautiful, pleasant and hopeful."

Mr. Chetwynd turned gravely toward Barbara, and she saw the same satirical laugh issued from her coral lips, but it was the other, immediately followed by a rapid, preventive remark.

With her most biting, direct, preventive remark. "What is that?" she said, "Blanche saw De Laurian dressed for the occasion, and she went straight up to her and affectionately kissed her, while she remained the hand he had extended, and embraced, while looking eagerly up in his handsome face."

And Barbara smiled as she gazed on them.

When Roy was making adieu to Miss Blanche Chetwynd, Mr. Chetwynd said to Gervaise, who bowed gravely.

"Because she will be to me the dearest of among women is no reason why you should love her less."

"Surely not," returned Mr. Chetwynd, "and you may never forget the peculiar dower she brings you—'a heart as true as steel'—from to-day you must share equally with her."

"But I fear no old legend, Gervaise; do you?"

"It's surer than any legend I ever heard of, and her gallant love bowed an assent."

"Indeed I do not fear it, my Dinah."

"But at twilight hours, when she comes, Mr. De Laurian, in one form or another, depend upon it."

De Laurian turned haughtily to Barbara, who had spoken; not a vestige of surprise or fear on his face; that only was an expression of cool sarcasm.

"Indeed, Miss Lester! But as you are not an oracle, we will not depend on any thing you may affirm."

"Oh, that covert blow, and his eyes so guarded, his words so aptly chosen. But she was equal to him."

"I suppose you have heard it declared by persons more responsible than I that chickens and curses come home to roost! A wronged, betrayed woman, just as poor a heart as you never suffer her words to fall idle. Lady Constance was such, I take it. Something of my style, was she not?"

She had looked De Laurian full in the eyes while she was speaking, her own face perfectly calm and under control; now she turned to Mrs. Chetwyn with the apparently careless inquiry.

"In person, I should think so; in character, I hope not."

A faint mocking smile flitted across De Laurian's lips that stung Barbara to the quick.

"He shall pay well for that," she declared, then spoke aloud in a sweet voice.

"Mr. De Laurian, if I may venture to ask a boon at the hands of one from whom I should expect nothing, I would like to have you make a personal proof that you will sincerely keep the vows you will take upon you at the altar—to love and cherish Blanche as we, her family, have done."

In surprise they turned to Barbara, as she uttered the strange request.

Magnificent and festal drapes of jet-black velvet and glowing ribbons, she leaned with careless grace against a marble Corin, who lifted aloft a sheaf of golden wheat, from whence flamed the light that illumined the apartment by night.

De Laurian bowed frigidly.

"At the altar, Mr. De Laurian, I shall swear to cherish and protect her better than parent or sister ever could have done."

A defiant smile lighted his face.

"Doubtless, Mr. De Laurian, we all expect you to do that; still, we who are nearest and dearest to her now, would be pleased to hear that personal assurance. I wish it, Mr. De Laurian."

Her eyes were fixed intently on his face with a magnetic flame that could not, but annoy and irritate him; but he had before her.

"Then, Miss Lester—"

But Mr. Chetwyn interrupted him.

"Why should you be requested to make this strange request of Mr. De Laurian? If the idea strikes you as important, or simply pleasing, why not refer him to my wife or myself?"

Mr. Chetwyn's eyes were piercing rainily through Barbara's impassive countenance.

"Because, sir, who else beside the sister whose couch she has shared so many years, whose confidence she has been since her heart knew a secret; who else should demand and receive a promise?"

She looked around at that a moment, and then again suffered, for a second, the bewildering light of her eyes to fall on De Laurian.

Mr. Chetwyn's face relaxed into a smile.

"Mr. De Laurian, it rests with you, now, to indulge so harmless a whim."

De Laurian shrugged his shoulders.

"I think the lady can wait until the ceremony is done; she shall hear me swear 'till death do us part."

A shiver ran upon Blanche's form as her lover uttered the words.

"It sounds so dismal, Gerlaise; I verily believe I am a coward, and I shudder."

She bravely forced a smile to her lips.

"Blanche, dear, it is my fault for having introduced the subject. But you'll forgive me?"

Barbara knelt before the reverend bridegroom.

"Unreservedly, sister mine. I am ashamed of my own childish weakness."

She smiled joyfully at the upraised face, whose eyes of flashing darkness were veiled and subdued by the long, heavy lashes. She saw the smile that played over Barbara's red lips, but in her own purity and innocence, did not read its little.

She little dreamed that the beautiful woman near her feet had been transformed into a veritable demon.

A silence fell on the little company that grew momentarily oppressive.

Barbara was the first to break it.

"Come; the guests will be disgusted at our tardiness—and I am sure that is Roy's step on the stairs seeking the reverend bridegroom, come, Blanche, take papa's arm. Mr. De Laurian, you will escort Mrs. Chetwyn! Roy—I'm ready."

His fresh, girlish laugh, as she issued her playful words, broke the spell, and the bridal party went gaily down the stairs.

The minister began an impressive service, and a solemn silence fell on the assembly, while all eyes naturally watched the bride, none thinking, at that moment, of the stately, graceful bridegroom.

But, Barbara stood there, proud and haughty,

in all the consciousness of her regal beauty, and listened to the vows that Blanche so triumphantly pronounced.

A gleam of fearful fire flashed from her eyes as the officiating clergyman turned to Gerlaise with the customary inquiry. A gleam of light that seemed rather than illumined, a gleam of something, that seemed to scorch, annihilate; on her bloodless lips there curled a smile; that matched well the sardonic belieffulness in her eyes.

Suddenly De Laurian glanced up at her, and met that awful smile, that terrible light! He started, as if he could feel the words of revelation, that this wronged woman would cross his track, and that, too, in her own way and time.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## ONE STEP MORE.

BLOW STAIRS, in the spacious drawing-room of Chetwyn's chateau, the music was playing gayly and twinkling feet kept time in the merry dance.

Above, the guest and dressing chambers were deserted and silence reigned supreme.

He looked at the Chateaux together with the maids of the visitors, were grouped outside the doors, and on the stairways, regarding the gay scene within.

In one of the apartments above the second flight of stairs a chauce passer-by might have heard voices in low, cautious conversation.

The name of what was called the "observatory," a small, square apartment, whose walls were of thick plate-glass, whose furniture consisted of only two chairs, and a complete set of astronomical instruments.

Two persons occupied this room; one, Barbara Lester, who stood carelessly leaning against the thick pane, her brilliant eyes fixed on the fair, handsome face of Roy Davent, that was lifted to her own with a smile of unutterable love.

"Roy," she said, tenderly, "this is kind of you not to forget me amid all the gaiety of the bridal scene below."

"Tell me, Barbara! That I never can do. Do you not know it, and how more than thankful I am to have you back again once more?"

He raised his hand and lifted her round, bare arm to his lips.

"Do not stand, Barbara; sit beside me, and let me hear the sound of your voice. Speak low, words once more. It has been so long since, dearest."

He was looking yearningly up in her pale face as she spoke, he drew her face against his cheek.

"Tell me, you love me as well to-day as ever!—yes, better than you ever did before. Is it never to be which you love me? Was not that your reason when you sent the message to meet you here?"

"The sweet smile of hope was on his lips, that were almost womanly in their fullness and beauty, yet entirely relieved from effeminacy by the defiance of the chin and the determined sternness of his dark blue eyes."

"Roy," she answered, in low, exquisite tones, and, as she heard the sound of her voice, she wondered if it were she or another she were listening to.

"Roy, I did send for you for a most important purpose—a purpose that needs your assistance toward accomplishing it, and I need rest, and whom no one beside yourself can do. You will help me, Roy, dear?"

She glanced keenly at him as he listened in respectful silence.

"To the utmost of my ability, Barbara, darling. What is it?"

"She smiled a smile swept over her face for a brief second before she replied.

"Roy, we both know that Blanche Chetwyn was married, not an hour since, to Gerlaise De Laurian, the festivities are still in progress; but, Roy, Blanche shall NEVER be his wife."

She spoke the last words in a thrilling tone that made him look suddenly, more intensely at her.

"What do you mean, Barbara. You mystify me."

Again, like a flash of fetal sheet-lightning, there swept that gleam from her eyes, and she turned to him to answer, until her breath flamed over his cheek.

"Roy Davent, that man who has married Blanche, has offered me, your betrothed, the deepest of insults. Shall I know who and what he is, permit him to become the husband of my only sister? Will you, my lover, aid me to avenge the festivities are this moment celebrating; but, Roy, Blanche shall NEVER be his wife!"

A wrathful smile leaped into Roy's eyes, and he involuntarily sprung to his feet.

"I will avenge Barbara! De Laurian has dared insult you! Shall I shoot him down before his bride?"

"No, no," she laughed lightly. "Don't be hasty—I am not, you see, and to act effectually we must not be calm. I have laid my plans out, Roy, deep as the sea, and all I require is your aid."

He kissed her cold fingers as she extended them.

"You can depend upon me, to the furthest extent of your need. The villain—how dare he! Barbara, my beautiful betrothed, my blood boils within me for this!"

"I thank you, Roy, dearest."

Her serene voice thrilled his very heart, and he kissed again and again those rare red lips, so false, so fair.

"Barbara, I'd hardly have thought that of De Laurian. Unless your truthful lips had spoken it, were all the oaths that could be taken would have convinced me."

"You cannot be more surprised than I was, to learn his name, and how he was the soul of civility and honor—but I know better now."

Her lips closed tightly after those words, and Roy saw the shiver that went over her.

"And you will take it in your time to save Blanche from him, Roy, darling?"

She crossed his cheek and smoothed his hair with her massetric fingers as she smiled in his eyes.

"Are you not always right, my Barbara? I cannot imagine you lending yourself to anything wrong, dearest, even if you are several times wronged. Therefore, possessing such unbounded confidence in you, I say—do your own sweet will."

He looked at her with a smile, and she smiled at his watch, and the smile vanished from Barbara's face, the soft light from her eyes.

"If I could describe to you the countenance as it looked then, in all its fearful malignity, its bitterness, its despairing jealousy. It was a face that fascinated while it frightened, that bewildered while it terrified, and whose brilliant features were written danger, revengeful hatred, and a fearful strength of will; and, perhaps, more than all, a proud consciousness of them all."

"I must leave you now, Barbara, dearest, or I will be missed. Kiss me before I go."

He turned to kiss her around her waist, and drew her head to his shoulder.

"You could look in those eyes, Barbara, and refuse to obey the command your sweet lips uttered?"

"Then tell Mr. De Laurian, for me, that I await him in this room. Let no one hear the return, and do you ascertain Blanche until he returns."

An excited flush rose to her cheeks as she spoke, low and softly, but with a certain emphasis.

"I will tell him at once, Barbara."

And she sat calmly down, to await the coming of the man who had wronged her beyond hope of reparation.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## THE POISONED SMILE.

She had not long to wait, for he had just stepped herself in one of the chairs that she had seen near the stairs, and she commanded an extended view of the villages around and near Chetwyn's Chase, when rapid steps that brought a cold seer to her ears, as she heard them, came nearer and nearer. A few minutes only had it been since he message had been delivered, in the "coldest, haughtiest way," to Gerlaise De Laurian, yet those few minutes had sufficed him to decide on the course he intended to pursue; that of cold indifference that would battle her passionate accusations; a contemptuous disregard of the magnitude of his sin, and a mysterious threatening attitude if she assumed her presence to be a crime to be expiated.

So she smiled as he tapped at the door, with as much unconcern as though his valet was awaiting him, and not a wronged, jealous woman, whose all-absorbing thoughts were all directed toward hating, and who only awaited his entrance to wreak it upon him.

"Enter," he said in a chill, high voice, say, and very punctiliously he opened the door and bowed to her on the threshold.

"Do you desire to see me, Miss Lester?"

"Do you desire to see me, Mr. De Laurian. You are not astonished?"

"It is needless for me to say I am astonished beyond expression. I supposed it was all over between you and I."

Her low, musical laugh started weird echoes in that lonely room.

"If you really thought so, Mr. De Laurian, be it my delightful task to correct the mistake; and also inform you that not a soul in Chetwyn had as yet been apprised of your whereabouts."

De Laurian returned with interest her steady, taunting glance; then a hateful smile parted his lips.

"Then be so good, Miss Lester, as to tell me for what I am wanted, as I am anxious to return to my chateau as early as possible."

She bowed her head in regal defiance at the words.

"Your bride, you see, but never—"

She smiled again at the words.

"Sit down, Mr. De Laurian, while I talk with you, on an all-important subject that can scarcely fail to interest you."

She gracefully pushed him a chair, then glided to the door.

"I will close this, she said, lightly; we do not know how long you will be here."

The heavy cask door swung heavily to, and



facts. Then they buried him, in almost royal pomp, in the family vault, that was built in a cypress grove on the Laurian estate. A few days later, a new excitement followed; his executor published a card affirming that after a full and searching settlement of deceased's affairs, it was found that he had no fortune existed; and that only to the trifling amount of eight thousand dollars, which Mr. De Laurian would have readily paid, were any debts yet occur for several weeks. The estate was otherwise unimpaired.

Then what meant that letter the wisecracker declared had been sent to his household? Gradually, vague suspicions began to arise; the letter had been a forgery, then, but for what purpose, and executed by whom? And somehow, no one ever knew who started it, came the impression that there had been foul play; perhaps, after all, Mr. De Laurian had been put out of the way; and there certainly had been not a mark of violence on his person, the means used had been infernal ones—in plain words, people began to believe Mr. De Laurian had been poisoned.

Arrangements were made to have his body removed from the vault; the arrangements were completed, and, while the excited people were awaiting further developments, there burst on them like a thunder-bolt, from a clear sky, the appalling news that the body had been removed from the vault, and the coffin left untenanted!

Six days of wildfire excitement, days of wonder, suspicion, distrust and indignation; and then, baffled and disappointed, the world settled down with another unsolved mystery hanging to its skirts.

Wearily and heavily the days dragged on at Chetwynd Chase; to the pallid girl-brake, whose pining grief was extremely touching to see; to the stricken parents who plainly saw the skeleton fingers of Lady Constanza's Curse in the great bright light that had come upon them.

But, equal with the ever-renewing sentiment of sympathy and pity for the parents and Blanche, was the one of admiration for beautiful Miss Lester, who had so openly and nobly used every available means toward clearing the mystery.

Secretly, while she rejoiced that De Laurian had had his coveted cup (laden, too, by her hands, she was worn by the sudden news that had come of the disappearance of his body from its coffin; and that, in the night and nervous days, had taught herself that the minutest examination by the warmest friend—if any such had abducted him in a fit of impetuous enthusiasm—would have left no faintest trace of the subtle poison he had inhaled.

Openly, she was all affection, all sympathy, all attention. Not enough could she seem to do for Blanche, who clung to Barbara in all this trouble like a delicate vine to the sturdy oak.

Mr. Chetwynd was reserved, as ever, seemingly defying even the fatal legacy that had come to him, to crush him.

But to Blanche, who was ever most tender, most gentle, and always referred to De Laurian with an affectionate interest that the more won the girl's broken heart.

Mrs. Chetwynd, with her loving, confiding nature, felt the blow almost as keenly as Blanche did. Their tears, lamentations and prayers were daily mingled, and their sympathy was ever pathfinding and pitiful, would clasp her sister tenderly in her arms and weep silently over her.

Thus the days and weeks went on, and the affair grew unimportant save to the aching hearts that were so slow in the healing.

The bright May days came peeping in, and they drove out the gloom of the winter; the silent monotony of home, and an old cherished friend or close acquaintance would call often than before.

And, as the merciful hands of Time poured the healing balm in their hearts, their faces grew lighter as the glorious summer days wore away, and with a new reserve, a new calm, came sweet laughter from Blanche's lips that told her heart was recovering, with all the olden freshness and exuberance of youth.

All this while, Roy Davenal had been away from Chetwynd Chase; and again, with the autumn, he returned for a visit.

But there was a new reserve, a new ardent lover, Barbara plainly saw.

Mightier even than the quick, hot passion she had entertained for De Laurian—but that would be another story—had he so willfully, so coldly, so heartily had surged up and back, for Roy Davenal; she must center her affections on *some one*; such women are doomed to love—or curse—or hate—on affections in a whole-sold, absorbing manner.

And Roy? We know how for years he had remained busy on a bewildered, infuriated with her glorious beauty.

How all this change had come about, he only realized when, away from the dazzling light of love, and the wilting of passion, he was alone.

When with her, he was so proud that she was all his own—poor, deluded man—and, instead of lengthening the meshes of his net, she had him, he suffered the cords to grow firmer and stronger.

How all this—so sudden and sharp the rending asunder came that it terrified himself—his goddess was dethroned, and he knew, for a fearful truth, that she was a woman whose hands were not the hands he ever should clasp at the altar.

It had happened very simply, naturally, quite in the ordinary course of affairs—if that can be called ordinary; that cradles a confidence of years and uproots a love that has grown with a man's youth and strengthened with his strength. He had read the papers; he had learned all the details of the case; he had grown to speculate on the ghastly subject.

He plainly recalled the careless Miss Barbara, who, while she was so kind to him, she had been surprised then; but now it wore a far different aspect. He remembered of what a willful, passionate nature Barbara had ever been; he knew De Laurian had had a strenuous interview with her; she admitted he had grossly insulted her, and that she should punish him. Then he answered him from the front; she had heard of De Laurian's death; but the insult had satisfied him—or rather, he had forced himself to be content therewith, and gone back to his own home with a more dignified manner than was naturally attributed to the distressed state of affairs.

Then he came the suggestions of poison—that had horrified him; then the fact of the forged letter; and he groaned in very anguish as the awful suspicion took thrust itself upon him. He then, later, he learned that he had had been stolen from its sacred resting-place, he knew, for a sickening verity, that Barbara Lester, in the dead tone to cover her own guilty tracks.

It was appalling; yet what could he do! Tell his honest suspicions to the world, and brand her as a liar? He had so loved her, he had helped with the hands that had so often caressed her, to fasten the langourous rope around that neck, he could not do so; he could not bring De Laurian back, or heal Blanche Chetwynd's broken heart—poor, poor Blanche!

And then his fingers refused to pen the love-letters he was so wont to write; a rush of business," he told Barbara, prevented long letters; when he came in October to Chetwynd Chase, he would see her once more.

Ah, little did Barbara think, as she dreamed of and waited for his coming, that he, peering in the night, sleepless nights, sleepless nights, glancing and fighting with himself to banish the last remnant of love for her.

And then, while she—this jealous and dangerous woman—with a heart so full of love, was counting the hours to his return, he had decided that when they met again he would return her his plighted troth.

#### CHAPTER XX.

##### THE THIRDS AROUSE.

UPON his return to Chetwynd Chase, early in the fall, Roy Davenal was gratified to find how much the circle had lifted off the beloved family; he was delighted at the warm, cheerful reception given him, and he thought how charming an air Blanche's trouble had left upon her—this winning, engaging girl, whose beauty he did not call Mr. De Laurian, but Blanche, as in the olden days. Barbara was radiant, matchlessly brilliant—ever, but Roy knew his eyes of blind pride and slavery were over for ever.

He had fully come to know that she was the last woman in all the world to be his wife; and, as the six weeks that followed rolled on, Barbara—those six weeks in which his devotion to Barbara gradually slackened, and which Barbara noted—in these six breezy, delicious weeks, Roy Davenal had reserved a strange lesson that he feared to teach Barbara.

Yes, he actually dreaded telling her all the truth; he feared that he would, by so doing, unhesitatingly and deliberately destroy a fellow-being for a mere personal affront—of course he did not know the depth of Barbara's injuries; even had he, he was not so bold as to justify the murder he solemnly believed to have been committed—would not hesitate at displaying equal mercifulness to one who justly would demand her dissolution.

It was an extremely delicate affair, and one that, since his sojourn at Chetwynd Chase, had grown to be of greater magnitude and more extreme delicacy than ever.

But he had fully decided that, come what would, he would kindly tell her they must part forever; and he would tell her that he would have his hands were stained with Gervaise De Laurian's blood, but that another, fair as the lily and pure as the angels, had crept all unawares into his heart, and that he would have loved, almost love of which man's heart is capable, he had learned—first, to pity, then to love—Blanche De Laurian.

She had grown very dear to him those six weeks; she had come to be a very star of light to his eyes—perhaps because of the mental contrast he did not avoid drawing between her and Barbara.

He had come to learn to watch for her sweet presence, to watch for her smile, her eyes, her face, as the greatest delights earth held for him. Of her own heart he knew almost nothing. True, when she had caught an ardent, eloquent glance from him, her sweet blue eyes would droop, and a tell-tale tinge surge over her rare face.

Not a word had he liped of this—not a hint had he given Blanche, for Roy Davenal was too noble and honorable to stoop to such a deed when his betrothal vows still bound him to Barbara Lester.

But one warm, cloudy day in the middle of October, when the air was oppressive and sultry, and when he had grown weary to seek Barbara, and end the carking suspense.

He walked slowly to and fro on the lawn that sloped down to the river, bent in a rose-tree window. Barbara watched him as he walked. She had just made her toilette—a task she could perform so well—and now as she stood before her dressing-table to give the last of her evening touches, she wondered if Roy would admire her in that dress; and whether she could not find fault with a warmer love-protect than, she had listened to for so long.

Her dress was very elegant—a thin silk grenadine of interest black, over whose ground was a beautiful, slender, and delicate, and gold-colored silk, from which at intervals, depended a bundle of golden grapes and a leaf of deep autumn red.

This singular and costly dress particularly became her, and Roy had before admired the white arms and neck which the sheer folds but had long concealed.

She fastened the filmy lace collar with a large cluster diamond pin, and hung rings of the same glittering gem, and a necklace of pearls.

The folds of the lace curtains draped around her as she sat down, and looked out upon her lover, wondering at the brightness of his face as he bowed to her.

Ever jealous of his favor, she leaned out to see who was there; her brow darkened, and she crossed her arms, and said, "You are not to be flushed; my confusion and retiring, Blanche De Laurian."

Barbara's quick, jealous eyes perceived how surpassing the air she had on; she saw the white dress floating around her and over the velvet grass, and her lovely golden hair arranged high and fastened with a diamond comb and a diamond brooch. She saw the costly jet ornaments that lent a beauty of their own to her flushed face, and she thought how she would thrill with joy, could Blanche supply her in Roy Davenal's affections—she, who had once before lighted every eye she held dear!

If she saw this match of defiance in her eyes, denoted the light in which she should regard such interference.

Just summoned to the parlor, Mr. Davenal would be pleased to see her.

The crown disappeared, and she immediately went down to the parlor, both hands extended in her hair.

"I am so glad, Roy, you have sent for me to come here. I was just wishing to see you."

He sufficient to be so frank, and then, when he had seated himself, she drew a hassock to his feet, and seating herself, leaned her elbow on his knee.

"He did it for my sake; he was scrutinizing her varying features."

"Have you no greeting for me, Roy?"

"She murmured a few words in tones of liquid tenderness, but she raised her eyes to his."

"I surely neglected my duty if I failed to do so."

The tones, though courteous, were decidedly distant, and she instantly perceived it.

"Roy—what have you come to tell me? Why do you speak so formally to me. Are you angry with me, does my dress offend you? If I have, you can punish me more severely than by being so stern."

"I did not think—that is, I did not think you would care," returned Roy, hesitatingly, for, now that the time had come, he dreaded arousing her temper.

But I love you, Roy, darling. How could it be otherwise when I love you so; when every word you utter goes straight to my heart, and is never forgotten."

"You will not now, and under her half-veiled lips, Davenal noted the witching tenderness of her eyes."

"You will pardon me, Barbara, if I am compelled to speak as I would not speak. I would



He little knew that at that very moment the cloud was lowering and darkening around him with awful intensity. The tragedy so soon to be enacted.

"Then I may consider my pardon sealed?"

"Signed, sealed and delivered, Barbara; and in token whereunto."

"In an impulse of impudent enthusiasm he bent and kissed her cheek. Lightly, it is true, but his touch sent the blood bounding through Barbara's veins.

But she accepted the caress with a grave look. As that moment Miss Chetwynd called from the adjoining room for Blanche a moment, and urged by an impulse he could not control, Roy solemnly laid his hands on Barbara's arms.

"Barbara, this was the happiest hour of my life, if I only knew that you were as ignorant as I of Gertrude De Laurian's whereabouts and his sudden death."

He looked almost beseechingly in her dispassionate eyes that so calmly and unexpectedly to his question had come, never hesitated or trembled.

"I know? Oh, Roy, can it be possible you ever thought I knew?"

She was apparently almost stunned by the cruel suspicion.

"How could I help it? Your anger with him—your interview in the courtyard—"

"I know," she interrupted; "I see now how I looked to you. Roy, I was angry. I did want to be revenged, but I solemnly vow, Roy, that my vengeance was directed only against the man which I had no control. I know I was passionate—but not to murder—in my eyes now, so truthful and clear."

He drew a long, deep breath of exquisite relief.

"Thank God I believe you, and you are her sister!"

She accepted both his eagerly proffered hands, and as she bent over them, a low cry of rage burst from her lips.

"Because I am her sister?" she fairly hissed.

#### CHAPTER XXII.

##### THE SIGN.

The next morning Roy Davenal left Chetwynd Chase, and the family settled down once more in quiet, until, in the very spring when Rex arrived from Germany, and took up his permanent residence at the Chase.

He was expected by spring, and now, since he was to marry Blanche, it was not surprising he seemed to love her more and better than before, particularly Blanche, between whom and Barbara a new love had sprung up, and new ties were established.

Later, since her engagement with Rex, Barbara had grown pensive and thoughtful, and Mrs. Chetwynd attributed it to the fact that she was not in love with her affianced husband, and would tell her the love would come, *must* come, when she was the wife of a man so perfect as her nephew Rex.

Barbara can never admit that she had received a severe blow when Roy Davenal had deliberately given her up, but the keen, stinging agony had given place to a dumb pain of resignation, which she thought, in time, would give place to her old-time exuberance of spirits. And, although there was ever a quiet air hanging over her, it seemed as though those winter days at Chetwynd Chase were fraught with a sweeter peace and joy than any she had ever preceded them.

At times, Mr. Chetwynd would stroke Blanche's gold-braided hair, and look earnestly in her bright, happy eyes as if to the more assure himself that the Curse was in reality accomplished; and there was nothing more to dread.

Mrs. Chetwynd usually coincided with her husband in his opinion on the subject, but the girls would refuse to believe it. It had been sternly denied that De Laurian's death or her bridal day had any thing whatever to do with Lady Constantine's death. It had been the decree of Providence, she said, and though her bright eyes would sadden momentarily at the memory, a thought of Roy would dispel it at once.

Letters from Rex were dated nearer and nearer Liverpool, to which place of sailing he was slowly traveling by land, and the girls' letters from Roy were so hopeful and cheerful, he had arranged for a transfer of his business to New York, so that after their marriage with Blanche, as well as Barbara and Rex, would all live at the Chase.

The future was so bright and beautiful to them all—but one. Not so bright and beautiful as anguish would yet tear their heartstrings to fragments, but she who would work it all—she to whom a betrothed husband was coming, who was so soon to wear the bridal veils.

Already the day had been appointed—seventeenth of April—the double wedding was to occur.

The trousseau was rapidly preparing; and

the entire household had given themselves up to the joyous excitement ever incident to wedding preparations.

It was still early in March when Roy came from the West, and was not permitted to make his departure from Chetwynd Chase. A week later, and one blustery, rainy night, when indoors seemed like a piece of enchanted ground, in walked Roy Chetwynd, bronzed and bearded, and as handsome as a Apollo.

Although four years had passed since Barbara had seen him, he walked up to her at once, and with a look of intense interest in her eyes, her blushing cheeks and smiling mouth, and then turned and greeted affectionately the other delighted members of the circle, and at once welcomed Roy Davenal by his frank, winning manner.

The family circle was now complete, and the double wedding, if it should occur—these, only marred by the wishful adoption Rex Chetwynd daily developed for the bright, glorious woman who would so soon be all his own.

The ceremonies of this double wedding were to be solemnized in a manner worthy the wealth and social position of all parties: after the wedding, Rex and Barbara were to pass a month at Washington and further south, while Roy and Blanche were to go West.

His eyes and brightness seemed opening up to the entire party, and of Barbara, especially, were fairest prophecies uttered when she would become the wife of the youngest of the family.

It was only when alone that Barbara often wondered if the fate would smile on her wedding, and she would spend that night with her less hands and look at them, and smile as she remembered that they had been employed in a work that stained them forever in guilt—ay, and only too long, be colored direct still with crime's red dye.

The morning of the wedding-day dawned bright and clear and bright, and brightest days in early spring, when capricious April wears her bluest skies and balmy breezes.

The family were scattered about in their rooms, preparing for the event; only the two brides' beds were together.

Barbara had gone into Blanche's room, and, clad in dressing-robe, with her hair curling and hair streaming far down over her shoulders, was talking and laughing with Blanche.

"You are always down with your packing before I am—I very believe, Barbara, if you here are all my loves and kids to be stowed away in their boxes, and I can't trust Gertrude to do it for me, Barbara, dear, if you only would, I can rest a minute."

"I'll do them, of course," returned Barbara, "I'll do them, of course, if you like them to, where's the box, Barbara, fix your hair—"

She gathered up the delicate trifles and closed the door, and looked into the room.

When she laid the flimsy collars and gloves on her dressing-bureau, and then, with noiseless tread, she opened the door, and there, with one opening into the hall, the other connecting with Blanche's room.

Almost imperceptibly a smile of repulsion had crept to her eyes, and a curl of scorn to her lips.

She unlocked a tiny drawer in her bureau, and took from it a small crystal vial, with a rubber stopper.

Then she hastened both windows, and deliberately added handkerchief so that her mouth and nostrils were covered.

Upon each glove, upon each collar, she sprinkled several drops of the colorless liquid; her eyes were bright in the light of the day, she looked out from between the heavy, clinging tresses of hair, and above the ghostly bandage around her mouth.

With this mysterious deed done, she replaced the rubber-stopper, returned the vial to its drawer, locked it, and replaced the key.

She returned to her window, and, matching the handkerchief from her face, leaned far out, and inhaled deeply of the fresh, cool air.

When she returned to her window, the articles had completely dried, and left not the faintest trace.

Carefully she arranged them in the ornamental box, and closed the lid.

"There, Blanche Chetwynd, is your reward for stealing from me, or my two lovers: Little will you be sorry to see the drops on the handkerchiefs that their touch is fatal, or that the costly collars that look so fair around your white throat are no less death-dealing than the langman's nose. If my beauty be lost, it will be slow, but sure—sure as my fate!"

She unlocked the doors, and took the horrible perfume from the grateful girl, and then commenced her own preparations, and, as usual, saved her own feet fingers.

She was gradually, radiantly beautiful in her trailing, braided robes of heavy, lace and velvet, the coronet of orange blooms holding the flimsy veil over her shining hair.

Her toilette made, she crossed from her room to the drawing-room, where she and Blanche and the girls were displayed—a glittering array of costly toke-tokens.

At the door a maid-servant was in attendance, who handed her a tiny, sealed package, with the request to send the dossier to her before the ceremony.

Filled with natural curiosity, she returned to her room, and opened the package with trembling hands.

Suddenly a loud, agonized cry fell from her lips—the package contained a broken chip, with the mysterious "F" and the semi-chain!

She could hardly breathe, and, in a gray shadow came around her tense lips; her heart seemed rising, rising to her throat, threatening to suffocate her.

This fearful token, promised by one who had died under her hand! Heaven's! De Laurian could offer, then, and on her track.

She could hardly breathe, and, in a gray shadow came around her tense lips; her heart seemed rising, rising to her throat, threatening to suffocate her.

She laid her clammy forehead and cold wrists, while slowly the color returned to her pallid face, and her heart ceased its dreadful jerking throbs.

Perhaps for twenty minutes she sat there, and then she pushed away the aromatic perfume, and rose to her feet.

"I will not be threatened by him! I defy him to the death!"

The approaching footsteps of the bridal cortege were heard, and she laid hardly time to drop the ominous token in her bosom, ere Mrs. Chetwynd opened the door, and she saw the party quite complete save herself.

Accepting Rex's arm, she swept grandly down to the altar, and, with a look of stern and impressive solemnity that reignited the two beautiful women were married.

It was a moment of happiness, even to Barbara, while slowly the color returned to her pale face, and she saw the party quite complete save herself.

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#### CHAPTER XXIII.

##### THE STAR THAT WENT OUT.

The month of absence passed rapidly to the pair who were willing away their time in the enjoyment of the rays of the sun, and Mrs. Chetwynd Chase was in order to receive the bridal party again.

Mr. Chetwynd had two suits of rooms on the second story, and had refused to give one to silver and blue for the use of Mr. and Mrs. Davenal, and the other, situated just opposite, on the first story, and had refused to give one to scarlet and gold, for Rex and Barbara.

The drawing-room had been beautified anew by a gorgeous carpet and curtains, so that Barbara could not resist the temptation to enter the dear she was to them as wife of Rex, and mistress of Chetwynd Chase.

She sat and came back so radiant and beautiful as ever, dazzling all eyes and carrying captive all hearts; while Blanche, dear little brown-eyed Blanche, with her hair curled and her face so nervous and despondent at intervals, and so easily tired out.

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The very choicest port wine was ordered her to drink by her physician, and daily exercise in the open air, and she had her hair curled, and her face so nervous and despondent at intervals, and so easily tired out.

Every day she and Barbara drove out in their elegant little pony phaeton; of evenings, there were social parties, and she had her hair curled, and her face so nervous and despondent at intervals, and so easily tired out.

Still, despite her cure, her face looked so nervous and despondent at intervals, and so easily tired out. Mrs. Davenal was going into a decline—one of those slow, creeping, insidious diseases that are so common among, and fatal to, American women.

Then, in the home circle at Chetwynd Chase was whispered a precious secret; perhaps, when she was married, and she had her hair curled, and her face so nervous and despondent at intervals, and so easily tired out.

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It was soul-harrowing—to this guiltless woman, who had loved Barbara so, and who now, of all the dear ones, turned to her most naturally for affection and confidence, should be going on, and on, powerless to her room; husband, mother, father, cousin, friends, all unconsciously cherishing the treacherous serpent in their bosoms, who drove to its death-dealing fangs were robbing them of what they held nearest, dearest, best.

All these days—no error more kindly as the creeping languor strengthened into marked debility, and Blanche kept her chair in the most comfortable nook, almost from morning till night, Barbara was so attentive, so tenderly kind.

It was a touching picture—that of Blanche, as she reclined so wearily in a large, cushioned easy-chair, her feet drawn over in a brown, *spirituelle* pailor; her bright, sunny brown hair that had been cut short when the first of those terrible headaches, under the appearance, curling in loose, wavy rings around her forehead, and just touching the little ears, and the fair throat.

Her hands were thin, and she often showed Barbara how loose her wedding-ring was getting to be. Hours and hours the two young married ladies would sit together, talking, generally, about the one subject that engrossed so much of Blanche's conversation, certainly all her thought. Dainty little garments, and dainty little jewelry, and tasteful skill, would be often seen on her lap, and at times, her trembling hands would fall listlessly down, and she would sigh, in soft musings, as if they never could complete their task, sweet though it was.

So the shadow brooded and brooded; little by little the silver lining faded from the edge of the cloud, and when, one day, Blanche told Roy she could not go down to dinner, it seemed as if the fat had gone, and, alas! Blanche would never brighten their family circle again.

There was ever a pensive sadness over Chetwynd's face; the doctor came and went, and shook their heads when Barbara implored, with tears in her eyes and a voice choked with emotion, asked them if they *couldn't*, if they *wouldn't*, help Mrs. Davenal. Much Chetwynd was greatly stricken, while Roy would not admit the probability of her early death.

He fought against the conviction that was creeping over him; he resisted against the slow conviction of his bright, bonny Blanche fading away, away before his eyes.

But there came a day, early in the blustering spring days when Blanche did not arise from her bed; and then the attending physicians said her life would, in all human probability, go out when the month died.

It was an exceptional case of decline, they agreed, although not entirely rare. Blanche had no cough, no pain, no fever, and that unbearable sensation of weakness and ebbing strength and vitality.

She knew she would die—almost a mother and still never to look in her baby's eyes; she was very calm and peaceful, even to the end, and died one still, starry night, just as the clock in the observatory struck the hour, and the little thin arm around Roy's neck in a painfully tight embrace, and a hand clasped in her weeping mother's.

Her last smile was on Barbara, and then, so violent was her grief, that Rex led her away from the solemn chamber of death.

After the first guest-grief died away, Barbara insisted upon performing for Mrs. Davenal those last sad offices; those little attentions that press such an unspeaking anguish in the doing as we realize that the little gentle would have been the thanks of the one who now lies so still, so unconscious of our soft touches, all dead to our passionate cries, and dumb to our prayers.

But Barbara brushed the clinging hair, that seemed to caress her fingers; she placed the tubose and certain ornaments on the little fingers, and tenderly laid the beautiful head on one side on its snowy satin pillow.

With quick, rolled ceremony, they buried her in the family vault, and then they returned to that inexpressibly sad place—the home—after the funeral.

#### CHAPTER XXIV.

##### A STRANGE NIGHT'S WORK.

BELow stairs darkness and unbroken silence reigned supreme at Chetwynd's house.

Above, in their chamber, Mr. and Mrs. Chetwynd were alone, suffering together for their irreparable loss.

In the room that had been Blanche's Roy Davenal walked the floor in a raging agony of sorrow that could find no relief, while Rex Chetwynd strove to console.

In her dressing-room Barbara had the outer stainers tightly closed, and the heavy lank curtains drawn within. Brilliant lamps burned on her dressing-table, and her hair herself stood before the mirror arranging her hair with quiet precision.

Presently they came, with cautious tap on her door that elicited from her a quick, subdued reply.

"Yes, Regina. It is on?"

"It's Regina," was the answer, in the same low, muffled tone; and then Barbara opened the door, and admitted her dressing-maid. She looked at the woman, a badly-dressed woman, with thin, hard lips that looked as if they never could give or take a kiss; eyes that were sunken, and intensely black, and a smile of merciless cruelty and shrewd cunning combined in them.

"I thought you an ill-favored person, but one who I've been proved to be an invaluable servant at Chetwynd Chase, particularly to Barbara."

"Regina came forward with an assured, half-familiar manner that would have insured her dismissal from the room had her mistress been other than Mrs. Rex Chetwynd."

"You're a good girl," Barbara nodded, and turned again to her task of arranging her hair.

"You sent for me. Is it about Mrs. Davenal?"

"'Hush—!—Regina; your voice is so loud and shrill. Don't forget walls have ears."

"That is so; I'll remember."

Barbara hastily wound her hair round her head before she replied.

"Yes, Regina, it's about Mrs. Davenal. You see that ring is in readiness! then I will go on a tour of inspection."

Regina took from the bureau one of the silver and crystal lamps, and proceeded Barbara as she went to the left the room, Barbara locking her door after her.

Regina led the way up three flights of stairs, and then she opened the door.

Regina set down the lamp on the center-table, and went across the room to the side nearest the flight of stairs by which they had ascended.

She carefully felt along the wainscot; and then suddenly pressing hard against the spot she had selected for her foot, she stepped and sprang away to the floor, revealing a short flight of steps, leading directly up, apparently to the roof of the observatory.

Up these steps the two women went, when, instead of ending upon the roof, they terminated at a door that Regina unlocked with a key and opened, and entered, and crossed a room the size of the conservatory below, but of much lower ceiling.

It was a room of whose existence at Chetwynd Chase no soul knew except Barbara and her ally; whose discovery had been made in a remarkably accidental manner by Barbara, and Rex, and Chetwynd, and it was a room what use she should make of it. From the exterior of the Chase, the room was supposed to be an extension of the conservatory, and Regina to give a more imposing height to the structure.

There were no windows in the wall; but a large, iron-grated skylight lighted it from the roof.

The room was comfortably furnished for a bedroom, and as Barbara and Rex, who carried an approving glance around, a Brussels carpet, worn, but still whole, covered the floor; a bedstead, very plain, but as comfortable and neat as a bedstead could make it; a dressing-stand, covered with a linen towel; a chair; a large, well-cushioned rocking-chair, with a foot-rest; a washstand, with a set of white stone china, and a little stand, whereon lay a book or two, and a basket containing sewing implements.

Over the skylight a light white curtain had been hung, and it hung in its perfect readiness, iron grating outside gave the room; and a thick green damask screen, furnished with rings and brass rods, was arranged to be drawn at pleasure.

"It suits me," said Mrs. Chetwynd, "but I have had my hands well employed in getting all these things here without help and unobserved."

"It suits admirably, and is much more comfortable than I thought it would be. It really is quite a pleasant room, Regina."

"You see I could not manage for my fire, Mrs. Chetwynd, and I thought I would have a stove running through the skylight would attract attention. There's my little gas-stove, though, that I make my tea with in my own room, and I think I have had my hands well enough gets more settled. It'll be warm enough soon."

"Perhaps you had better bring it in to-night, and then everything is in perfect readiness. Have you the key with you—the key of the vault?" If so, we may as well go now as wait later, and, besides, an hour may make a great difference. Bring my water-pail and get your own and the other, and let us go out by the servants' entrance. Regina, you are sure the maids are all asleep?"

"I know they are: there is not a soul in the house awake who will leave their rooms to-night, unless Mr. Rex does."

"Hardly," said Mrs. Davenal, wishing him to remain in his room. "Come."

Like two restless spirits the two women, clad in their black dresses, slipped noiselessly through the dimly-lighted, narrow corridor that was only used by the servants to reach their bedrooms.

At the end of this silent, gloomy hall, a flight of stairs, equally narrow and gloomy, led down

to a small back porch, adjoining the kitchen piazza.

It was only a step from this to a thick group of cypresses, and once behind that, so right-hand wicket from Chetwynd Chase could have seen these women as they glided along, toward the river's edge.

It was a quiet walk of about ten minutes to the low marble vault of the Chetwynds that was built at the extreme edge of the estate.

Regina unlocked the door with a key from key in the ponderous lock, while Barbara pushed against the heavy door.

A stealthy, dark, chill air rushed out, that sent cold, creeping fingers everywhere, yet boldly Barbara entered, holding her lantern, t at she had carried concealed under her cloak, so that its dull rays might be seen for her, and walked up to Blanche's Davenal's chamber.

There she lay, the fair, pale lily, just as they had left her, hours before.

With a steady hand, Regina took the key from Regina, and crashed in the glass that covered Blanche, as far down as her waist.

"Now, Regina, help me lift her out, and wrap the cloak around her. We have not a moment to spare—for I can detect a slight warm moisture upon her face. She will revive fully in less than an hour."

"They had no trouble in removing from her coffin the slight form, and wrapping closely around it the heavy, muffling cloak. Regina carried the body to the vault, and, after securing the door again, and concealing the lantern, they easily lifted Blanche and hastened homeward."

It seemed as if the very fates of evil were with them that night, for they reached the Chase in perfect security, as silence and safety surrounded them, and the mysterious burden to the secret chamber that had been prepared for its reception.

Regina carefully disrobed the resurrected girl of the satin grave-clothes, and removed the still blooming, fragrant flowers from the nervous hands.

"Warm suit of flannel was put on her, then one of her own night-dresses, and she was covered up in the bed to await the dawn, far worse than death, the vengeance of Barbara Chetwynd had planned.

For a moment afterward, the two women sat gazing at each other, and, when they then turned their eyes upon Blanche, her small, snaky eyes full of hidden evil.

"If they only knew, down-stairs, Mrs. Chetwynd, how she will revive, as they may think. Their power is miraculous, and you will see, Regina, how she will gradually recover her original vitality, now that I shall discontinue them."

"And all the time they will mourn her dead."

"All the time they will mourn her dead," repeated Regina, looking up at Barbara, her small, snaky eyes full of hidden evil.

"And all that same time she will be wishing she was dead, and yet she will live on and on, and know what life is to feel, to weigh in my hand. It's a sorry thing, Regina, for any one to cross my path—especially twice."

There was a hidden meaning in her words; and the woman was not slow to detect the pointed words.

"Indeed it is, Mrs. Chetwynd, and you may rest assured I will be faithful."

"It will be best," returned Barbara, tersely.

"You may give me the vault-key, Regina. It may be wanted, and I only can avoid its being used."

"But do you not think they will discover the absence of Mrs. Davenal? Surely some one of the family will go there one day again, soon."

"Do not be so contemptuous scorn swept over Barbara's face.

"Do not really imagine, for a moment, Regina, that I shall allow any such bungling marks to betray me. I will do my best, my best work thus far? No, indeed! I shall myself find Mrs. Davenal's coffin with a dummy dressed in her garments, as though she were dead, and heavy to correspond to her weight. Then I shall cover the face with a thick cloth, and when a strange undertaker from New York, and I shall make it up, and place the permanent wooden lid upon the casket, I myself shall superintend the operation, and see that it evinces no undue curiosity."

"My dear Regina, which will be in a few days—I shall insist that no one visits the vault, as a fresh sight of Blanche will but renew the first poignant pang of grief. I will get all the credits for my kind, thoughtful interest, you see. I will be so disinterested, Regina, over thinking of others' sorrow, and not my own."

A note of absolute triumph rung in her voice, and Regina's eyes looked the admiration she felt—and a little of the fear of Mrs. Davenal's words, occupied in their keen watching of the unconscious girl.

She had, as yet, given no signs of returning life, except the faintest of a smile. I will get all the credits for my kind, thoughtful interest, you see. I will be so disinterested, Regina, over thinking of others' sorrow, and not my own.

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"See," said Regina, touching Barbara's arm. "She seems to know beforehand the trouble she's wakening to."

"And well she may," returned Barbara, coldly. "For it will be trouble such as no woman endured before. What do you think, Regina, of living under the same roof with parrots who mourn their childlessness, with a husband who is distracted because he is widowed? Under the very roof, Regina, and breathing the same air, and yet as far removed as though Eternity's ocean rolled between. Oh, I shall punish her! She shall know now how she has twice widowed my heart! She shall see him, her husband, her mother, and I will laugh when she strives to me for mercy! Regina, I will make her look from that loophole yonder, and watch Roy Davenal, as he walks half-demented around the grounds, yearning for his dead love! And when her child is born, I will tantalize her with the joy it would give its father to take it in his arms and look into its eyes!"

must have fainted. I thought I was dying. I am better, dear, now."

She smiled in Barbara's face, but there was no answering smile, and the black eyes looked down with a terrible fire sparkling in them.

Bianche instantly noticed it.

"What is the matter?—where am I? Why, Barbara, this is not my room!"

She had gazed idly around at first, then a wild, bewildered expression came to her eyes, heightened by the look in Barbara's.

"It is your room, Bianche, and will be for many long days to come."

Bianche struggled to her elbow, and in her weak condition, the exertion called a damp perspiration to her skin.

"But I don't understand you, Barbara, dear. I can't be in any room, you know."

Her voice was gently expostulating, and Barbara came thrillingly back in dreadful contrast.

"It is your room, Bianche, or your prison,

told me. I was degraded that you might be lifted to the glorious honor of being called Mrs. De Laurian! But it was an empty honor, was it not?"

Covering among the pillows, Bianche dared not vouchsafe an answer, and again Barbara, like a relentless doom, went on:

"Perhaps you little knew that while I was away on that two months' visit, it was what I supposed a lawful wedding tour. Yes, Bianche Davenal, I lived with Germaine De Laurian all those weeks, happier than the angels—and then he sprang me, trampled me under foot, and—married you—*you!* the creature who crawled across my path. Do you wonder I hated you then with an unquenchable hatred?"

"Oh, Barbara—Bar—"

"But your time had not come, then; it was on his craven head I would strike, and through him crush you as well. I *did* strike—I murdered him, your bridegroom, and then wept with you over his loss! Bianche, I robbed you of your



"YES, BLANCHE CHETWYND, YOU HAVE CROSSED MY PATH THE SECOND TIME!"—Page 14.

And, in all the intensity of her hate and revenge, Barbara had raised her hands aloft as if in adoration of some potent power, while Regina, with a deathly shiver of horror and fascinated fear, turned toward the bed again, just as a low, quivering sigh came from Bianche Davenal's lips.

#### CHAPTER XXV.

##### THE TIGRESS CLAWS.

A SLIGHT shiver thrilled over Bianche's frame; then she woefully raised her hand and passed it over her eyes.

"Roy, dear,"

It was the dearest name of all she spoke in a low, faint tone, as she had been wont to do when awaking from her troubled dreams.

Barbara stepped to her side, motioning Regina out of sight.

"I am with you, Bianche. Roy is not here."

She opened her eyes in sudden apprehension.

"Roy not here! is he ill?—oh, I remember. I

whichever you prefer. And I am your jailor. Do you understand now? do you remember what I promised you, months ago, when you stole Roy Davenal from me! Ah, Bianche Davenal, I have not forgotten that!"

A look of intense horror crept to Bianche's eyes.

"Oh, Barbara! Barbara! what do you mean! Don't talk so to me, you frighten me so, and I am so weak!"

"Yes, you are weak, Bianche Davenal, but I am strong! I have in my heart the accumulated strength of vengeance that will burst on you—*you!* who have stood in my way not only once, but twice! Bianche, you married Germaine De Laurian—well, and I killed him!"

A scream of terror burst from Bianche's lips, and she sunk back upon the pillows, trembling like a hunted deer.

"Yes, I killed him," went on Barbara, mercilessly, "because he had wronged me, outraged me, deserted me, all for you. I was his wife,

but not in name, he coolly

husband, and now, now, because you dared take my other lover from me, I have taken you from him!"

"But you can't! you shall not! I will tell him all, every word, and you shall never do it!"

"So the pussy has claws! well, they cannot hurt me. Listen to another little romance, Mrs. Davenal, and perhaps when you recall it, you can remember how long you have been ill! how the last and severest of these 'faints' terminated in what you supposed was death! Well, Bianche Davenal, every one else but myself also supposed it terminated in death, and you were dead, to all intents and purposes, to every one but me, the avenger!"

"Oh, Barbara!"

She had no opportunity of saying more, for on swept the tide of insupportable hate.

"Yes, you were *dead!* you were BURIED, Bianche Davenal, and this very hour, under this very roof, there is weeping and wailing over your death."

Bianche had sprung from the bed with intense

excitement, and now stood with her long, sweeping robes, and strained eyes, as if utterly unable to comprehend.

"Dead? buried? if?"

She gasped the words in inarticulate bewilderment.

"Even so—that was your shroud, and those the flowers you carried with you to the Chetwynd vault?"

A shriek of horror came as Barbara's words fell, coldly and cruelly on her half-demented senses.

"That is not all, Blanche Davenal. If you hate and fear me now, you will shrink in utter mortal terror when you learn that all that long, wasting illness, that fever, that death, and genuine funeral, was the work of my hands—these hands, that, helpless as you are now, are lifted in curses on you and yours! I poisoned you, faintly thief of love! and the decline was only its successful working; the faithful instrument did not fail me, and it has brought you here, from your coffin, to your prison, where you shall live, and live, and live, to feel the revenge of a disgraced, betrayed woman!"

Blanche covered her face with her hands to shut out the hateful light of Barbara's eyes that glowered down in her own.

"God help me! God help me!" she moaned, in utter despair of soul, as she staggered to the chair, and sunk, powerless, into it.

"That's nonsense," rejoined Barbara, sneeringly. "You will learn in time to endure the punishment I have inflicted on you, and you do your religion will not serve you much. I tell you you are in my hands, woman, and nothing can avail you. You may suffer a pain for every pang I have endured, Regina."

The woman stepped from the foot of the bed, whither she had stooped; Blanche looked up, and sprung to her side, falling on her knees at the woman's feet.

"Oh, Regina, you will help me! You will tell me where I have fettered, and where I lie. Oh, Regina, if you'll only tell my husband I will give you a thousand—yes, five thousand dollars!"

Barbara laughed.

"Bribes are of no avail. This woman is in my employ, and she knows what to expect if she plays me false."

Her low, intense tones were fearful to listen to; and Blanche turned away in piteous anguish.

"I was about to say, Regina, that you will obey to the letter the instructions I have given you. You may not see me now, but I shall see you. Regina noiselessly departed, leaving the two alone.

"I am going myself now, and I shall pass the room where Roy is sleeping. It is agony that will not let him sleep. It's a shame, isn't it?"

A sardonic smile curved her red lips as she spoke.

"May God be merciful to you in your last extremity, Barbara, and forgive me if I pray to die."

"Indeed you may well wish you were dead; indeed you will rue the day when you were born."

And when Blanche lifted her agonized face again she was alone.

Language was weak to portray the feelings that filled and overpowered her as she walked, in feeble weakness, the floor of her prison.

Over agony of soul to discover in what circumstances she was to live, her consciousness returned the fearful disclosures Barbara had made.

"Dead and buried" she had been, "Poisoned" she had been—De Laurian a victim by Barbara's hand, and she herself a victim by her odorous and yet Rex Chetwynd's wife; and Roy—

—dear, dear Roy—he thought she was dead, and she was, in fact, so, having, and under the same roof, Barbara had said.

She feared she was going crazy; her head was so vague and wild.

"Under the same roof!" It could not be; this room was so strange, and she knew Chetwynd, Chae so well.

Then Barbara—*that* was the knowledge that made her wild, frantic.

She fell on her knees beside the bed, and, in the darkness of the lone place, her consciousness committed her ways unto him, and implied strength and patience to endure what He allowed in His inscrutable Providence, and for faith to believe in His will, and suffering she should.

Her heart bled, and her tears fell thick and fast when she arose from her knees; and yet there was a secret consciousness of a ray of deep, inward peace.

Prostrated though she was, both by the drug that had so long been sapping the foundations of her life, and the severe mental suffering she had undergone, she arose and groped her way to the wall of the room, wondering, in an uncertain sort of way, if she could recognize any features of it again, if there was any.

But there was no window from which to hang a signal of distress, and she need not have tried the door, for she well knew it was double-locked.

Where was she?

With a feeling of anguished despair, she leaped again to the wall, feeling almost suffocated with her grief.

"Can I be really dying? I feel so strange, so strange," she murmured. "I must live. I will live for Roy!"

Her sudden will-power dispelled the nervous cloud that had clouded her brain, and she thought, "Let me try to think, calmly and dispassionately," she thought, and, groping her way back to the chair, seated herself wearily.

As she sat within Chetwynd's chamber, as Barbara said, this was his hitherto unknown room, of whose location no one knows but Barbara and Regina. Barbara hated no one, and, with that thought, her heart smote in fear and dismay, "and intends I shall be her victim, as poor Gertrude was—Heavens! and we never knew I did it!"

"I am supposed to be dead and buried, and no one but Barbara and Regina knows I am alive; and here, in my father's house, a prisoner of life in solitude, my babe will be born—and they will never know it—oh! Roy! mother! the Curse of Chetwynd, Chae has indeed fallen blightingly upon me!"

#### CHAPTER XXVI.

"Rix, dear, did I did it necessary to go to New York to-day. You can spare me?"

Young Mrs. Chetwynd looked down in her hands, as if she could not decide him while he sat reading the morning paper.

"Spare you? We never can spare you, darling; so good a daughter, and so fond a wife is impossible to be. But I guess I can let you go."

He reached his hand to caress hers, that lay limp and motionless on her shoulder, and she thought, "And you will be so kind and attentive to Mrs. Chetwynd, dear? She needs constant sympathy, you know, Rix; and, above all, don't let her see Roy talk over their grief, it will be more than she can stand."

"So kind, so womanly, my own sweet wife," was the husband's tender, complimentary reply.

"Then let me kiss you good-bye till luncheon—will be back by ten."

As she with her sweetest caresses and kisses, Barbara started on the errand that, had known its import, and more particularly all connected with her, would have flown from those kisses into curses on his lips.

Barbara made a plain, elegant traveling toilet, and reached the depot in ample time for the train, and took her New York train. Arrived at the Chambers street ferry, she procured a cab, and was driven to the dull, dingy offices of an undertaker, and there, to a woman to whom she communicated her errand, and made all the arrangements she had intended.

A few packages of mourning and a light linen carriage, and then to the depot again in time to catch the train home by luncheon.

Her package she carried to her own room at once, and then changed her black velvet walking-suit for an afternoon home dress—a trailing silk of richest black.

The family were gathered in the dining-room around the table, on which a light lunch of oyster patties, cold boned turkey and dry bread, and several species of new coffee for the ladies, and Port for the gentlemen.

It was partaken of almost in silence, and added to the gloom of their somber black garments, was the gloom of the March sky, and the cold, cheerless gray sky that was slowly covering up the last traces of the blue.

As usual, after luncheon, while Mr. Chetwynd, Regina remained in the parlour, Mrs. Chetwynd and Barbara retired to the family sitting-room—a large, well-lighted, elegantly furnished room, opposite the parlor, at the front of the house.

It was a remarkably homelike look, even on that cloudy, cheerless March afternoon.

The room was a good fire was snuggled and crackling in the grate, its ruddy glow reflected on the gilt bunches of grapes that ornamented the wall paper, and low over the mantel hung up by the velvet druggist, near the grate; footstools stood before higher chairs, and a crimson-brocaded lounge was wheeled up to the ebony center-table, where lay books, magazines and the popular weekly.

And still, delightfully pleasant as this room appeared, all the appliances of luxury and taste, its long, bright, crimson damask curtains, looped away by gold bands, its costly landscape paintings, in their massive frames, its dainty nicknacks and well needed fireside uses, it reminded them more of their dead than any other room in the mansion, excepting Blanche's own room, which she had just opened.

On one table lay a splendidly embroidered mat, of gold and crystal beads on crimson velvet, that Blanche had made for the telescope to

On the marble mantel was a magnificent drape of crimson velvet, embroidered with its edges with an edged with a wide gold fringe; there were ottomans, worked in Algonquin stitch, and a gorgeous-wool blanket of the same style thrown over the back of the sofa, that Blanche had made up for the boys, and which she lay down, and a pillow to match.

Little wonder was it then that Mrs. Chetwynd's heart bled to observe she had entered this room and saw over and over again the mute reminders of her daughter's love.

As she entered this apartment, leaning on Barbara's strong arm, her lost calm came vividly upon her, and her tears fell thick and fast.

"If I could only look at her again, Barbara; if I could just kiss her once more, and touch those dear, thin hands?"

"It could do you no good," answered Barbara, softly, her strong arm now caressing the cold fingers she held. "It always seems to me a sacrilege to disturb the dead after they are once laid away."

"But it wouldn't hurt her, Barbara! I'd be so careful not to hurt her—my own, own Blanche!"

"Of course you'd not hurt her; I did not live to that, for we both know our dear Blanche is beyond all suffering forever; but I do most certainly think, dear Mrs. Chetwynd, that in your state of mind, and consequent physical weakness, you could do nothing more imprudent. As I said at first, it can do you no possible good, and I am confident that the doctor once more looking upon her unconscious face would not repay for the consequent harrowing of your feelings."

Mrs. Chetwynd's tears were falling like glittering crystals on her heavily creased dress, and Barbara, with her contemptuous, pitiless smile as she stood by, and her eyes fixed on the faintly streaked hair—streaked with pale silver since Blanche had died; and her fingers were cold and motionless on the arms of Mrs. Chetwynd, even amid all the grief that was consuming her, realized what a comfort her adopted daughter was.

Later, the gentlemen, their wine and cigars finished, rejoined them, and a general conversation ensued, while Barbara, after an hour, excused herself, and retired to her room.

There was a sufficiency of work for her to do, and, securing her doors from possible intruders, she sat down, with a calmly-triumphant face, and, amidst all her grief, to her task.

With creditable skill she stuffed a dummy, that would about answer to Blanche's size. This she did, and then, with a steady hand, Chetwynd, even amid all the grief that was consuming her, realized what a comfort her adopted daughter was.

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"Barbara," she said, lowly, "it must be as late as eleven o'clock; do you not think they will all be sleeping? Do you not think I will frighten them by appearing so suddenly?"

Barbara smiled, and then, in sudden smiles, so kindly and heartfelt, Blanche thought—poor, innocent child!

"Ever thoughtful, Blanche, for others, rather than self. Suppose you go to Roy's room—he would hold your spirit with rapture, I am sure—and explain as rationally as you can, without implicating any one."

Blanche pressed Barbara's hand ardently.

"I know my husband will not be alarmed, for he knows how kind and true I am. And will you press the news to my mother?"

"I will, and we may well anticipate the most joyous remission the world ever saw, in a very few minutes."

Trembling in every limb, and her heart palpitating so fearfully that it threatened to suffocate her, Blanche crossed the corridor to the door of the old-time room, while in the shadowy corner, Barbara sneered at her in mocking, laughing silence. Blanche almost forgot the darkened room so that she had unperceived. A cry of disappointment fell from her lips, followed by another of sudden thought.

"Of course he is not sleeping in the library—I will go down, Barbara."

She glided on like the wind, closely followed by the wretched, almost motionless, woman in the drawing-room that was partially open, revealing the brightly-lighted room, and displacing the unmistakable odor of a cigar.

The glory in her eyes, the light that darkened as she glided through the door, while at the same second started, half-fearful look banished the mocking scorn almost for an hour. Then, simultaneous with the intense anguished cry of disappointment from Blanche, came a hissing noise of rage from Barbara, as she both involuntarily uttered—"Gervaise De Laurian."

#### CHAPTER XXX.

##### THE FOE IN THE HOUSE.

WITH AN easy, graceful courtesy, Mr. De Laurian threw his cigar into the brass grate, and bowed to the ladies in the corner of the white heat and chagrin of Barbara's face, and the pitiful grief in Blanche's.

"Blanche, my dear, the delight at seeing you is only equaled by my astonishment. Permit me to offer you an easy chair, and, at the same time, my congratulations, Mrs. Chetwynd, your most obedient."

It was wonderful, the cool, indifferent air he assumed.

"How did you gain access to this house?"

Barbara spoke boldly, and her black eyes flamed maliciously on his head as he easily and quietly stood to the ladies in the corner.

"In a perfectly natural and legitimate way, dear madam. Through the front entrance."

"The front entrance?" she repeated, in astonishment. "Has Regina done it?"

"Not so fast, madam, if you please. Regina has nothing whatever to do with it; indeed, I doubt if she knew of it in the house. Of course I should not have ventured, by using the latch-key my revered father-in-law gave me, unless I had been assured the family were all off for Europe."

"Europe?" and Blanche sprang from the chair, pale as death. "Oh, Barbara, then you have deceived me again! How can I bear it? How can I live?"

The hot tears, forced from a doubly-bruised heart, fell on her father's face, making it move restlessly in his shame and indignation.

"My tears search you, don't they little one! Oh, I would to God we were both sleeping the sleep that tears could not disturb, nor any trouble awaken."

She spoke in passionate earnestness, such as neither Barbara nor De Laurian had ever seen her evince before.

"You must not wish such a terrible calamity, Blanche, for who knows what good fortune will yet dissipate the clouds that seem so dense?"

He glanced at Barbara as he spoke, with an expression of challenging power.

"It's not at me you should be looking, Mrs. Devalon will ever find her condition bettered, as you see her evince before."

"But you may die," he returned, carelessly, "or, be baffled."

"Mr. De Laurian"—and by a mighty effort she forced herself to be calm outwardly, while a fearful fire was raging within—"you have straddled yourself upon me to-night as no gentleman would; will you be so good as to retire?"

"If my presence annoys you, madam, perhaps you will be rejoiced to learn that I did not come to Chetwynd's house, unless I came purposely to see Blanche, and for a cause that will not annoy her, I am sure."

His brows were a gathering storm as he addressed Barbara, and she was waiting for an answer she might give, turned away as if utterly ignoring her, and leaned respectfully on the back of the tall Gothic chair, so that she could see if you will promise to forgive and forgive

the thoughtless words I used to you the last time I saw you, Blanche, I will promise to forget that I have lost you forever, and, to prove how sincere I am, I am going to save you."

"I will not listen to such language, Gervaise De Laurian. Thank her at your peril!"

"Exactly; you can play upon of high tragedy as well now as ever, I perceive."

Blanche had arisen from her chair in painful surprise, as he addressed her.

"You will take me away where I will be safe until Roy returns! Oh, Mr. De Laurian, you have deceived me, and I know it. I have been giving you since I saw you last! But do not tell me, unless you will. Another disappointment will kill me, I know."

"He turned away to enjoy the blank expression of Barbara's face, that rapidly changed to one of desperate alarm."

"I will kill her where she stands first! You shall not thwart me after all these months and years."

"I will thwart you, Barbara Chetwynd. I had memory that can never die of the hours I hovered over death's chasms, and by that memory I swear to baffle you and deliver Barbara from your power."

He spoke with awfully stern quiet, and Barbara knew he was no mean adversary with which to measure lance.

"I," she retorted, "in an equally intense tone," "I am ever haunted by the memory of an hour wherein I learned what you had made me! And by that memory I repeat my oath of sleepless vengeance if you dare do this thing. At other time, Gervaise De Laurian, success will crown my efforts."

"He answered, meaningly, "Will you ring for Regina to bring Blanche and her infant's clothes?"

"I will, myself," answered the nervous girl, and she sped to the bell-rope and rang a peal that awoke weird echoes in that gloomy house.

Barbara seconds a deathly silence reigned; Blanche jerked the tassel again and again, but there was no answer, and she turned, half-despairing, to De Laurian.

"He smiled assuredly, "Never mind, it is as I expected. I merely used Regina to give summons to the domestics to Mrs. Chetwynd how utterly powerless she is to prevent this step."

"A fear crept into Barbara's eyes. Was there a conspiracy?"

"For the sake of filthy lucre, Mrs. Chetwynd, Regina has left your service and entered mine. She is in the carriage, with all the necessary garments."

Barbara seemed stupefied.

"So, you see, she went on, reluctantly, "you can't depend upon what anybody says. For instance, when I vowed to aid and abet you in keeping Blanche a prisoner under her father's roof, she said—"

"Little flocks of foam gathered in the corners of Barbara's lips, and her eyes glowered like an infuriated beast brought suddenly to bay. Her livid mouth essayed to speak, but language seemed to have left her."

"Blanche, I am going to watch Mrs. Chetwynd, with this locked revolver in my hand that I shall direct at her temple. Do you take the Afghan off the sofa and wrap it around your feet, and, as a bait, to the gate where the bronze fawn is. I will rejoin you in a moment, and drive you to a place of safety."

He never once moved his eyes off Barbara's face. Blanche, with almost superhuman speed, wrapped the sofa blanket about her and her babe, and flew out of the house and through the garden to the stable.

At the gate stood a close carriage, and by it waited Regina, who lifted Blanche, and then sent herself, talking in tender, plying and withal cheerful tones, explaining how Mr. De Laurian had met her in the grounds that very evening and her own over to his side.

"As she was going, she went the two still stood, silent and motionless, a terrible tableau to look upon."

"Step by step De Laurian retraced his way to the door, his eyes never roaming from that rigid, stony face, to which the revolver was relentlessly pointed."

"As she went he bowed, gravely."

"As a friend, madam. Shall I wish you pleasant?"

She made an effort to speak, and De Laurian bowed, as if a lump were in her throat.

She advanced a pace, then slowly raised her hand, and counted her fingers, as if she were saying—"Go—but, remember, I have not done with you yet."

He smiled, mockingly, and closed the door. She heard the snap of the latch, and knew she was alone, at the witching midnight, in the house where she had wrought such dire misery. She heard the crunching of the carriage-wheels as they rolled rapidly away, and she

knew, as in a dream, that Blanche Devalon was safe from her jealous wrath and hate, but that a fervent hope arose in her breast that De Laurian would prove a more terrible foe to her than ever she had dreamed of.

That De Laurian intended to restore Blanche to her parents, husband and home she had not the remotest idea. He knew him far too well to give him any credit for such a nobility of spirit. She knew he only used this method to get Blanche into his own power.

Now, as she sat there, gazed by the fireless grate, cursing De Laurian from the depths of her foul heart, and hurling anathemas on the head of the man who had so cruelly deceived her, she wondered what she had better do? Remain, as usual, at Chetwynd Chase?

"Unless De Laurian chose to expose her, there was no reason why she should not remain. But she had no confidence in De Laurian's not exposing her. At any moment he might brand her with her guilt, and secure her a reward she did not crave."

There was not much to attach her to Chetwynd Chase, now that the object of her sweet revenge was, indeed, beyond her power.

She did not care for her husband, nor for the Chetwyns; and if she had, the fear of exposure would have been enough to drive her away.

Yes, she would go away. No human being should know where, and only De Laurian, why. She would go away, and she would go away for ever alone denoted the current of her thoughts as she ascended the stairs to pack a hand-satchel. At sunrise next morning she was gone, and the Chase was deserted and gloomy.

#### CHAPTER XXXI.

##### BEATING AGAINST THE BARRS.

THE carriage containing the party from Chetwynd Chase drove rapidly along the star-lighted road, the silence within unbroken by conversation.

A short distance only had been traversed, when the carriage was thrown over the excitement she had undergone, and assisted by the easy motion of the carriage.

It was early day-break when she awoke, and she found the carriage drawn up before the door of a large, handsome building of brick and marble trimmings; one of a row precisely like the others.

She looked anxiously from the window, and saw De Laurian gathering up the parcels.

"Why Regina to the New York?"

She spoke in some suspicion.

"New York, madam, and a great deal better than Chetwynd Chase. Let me take the baby, while you get your things."

De Laurian gravely and kindly assisted her from the carriage and up the marble steps to the entrance.

"You will be obliged to remain here, Blanche, until I can procure the address of your party in Europe, which I can do at Mr. Chetwynd's banker's, where I will telegraph. I hope you will be comfortable; Regina has my strict orders to do everything for your comfort."

De Laurian bowed, and then, as he considered that Blanche's heart ached for him. He must have suffered terribly when he learned she was the wife and mother of the man with that knowledge, he was aiding her to a vulgar and Roy.

Her eyes were bright with tears as she seated herself in the chair, as he drew up to the window.

"Oh, Mr. De Laurian, how can I ever thank you? It seems so strange to think you should be doing this for me."

He turned his head away for a second, as if to hide some emotion.

"I only desire to secure your trust friendship in the future. I feel that this sentiment I, Regina, will you see that the cook has breakfast up."

Blanche was so grateful to him. Everything that was arranged with such perfect good taste; a furnished house, a competent housekeeper, and Regina. What could be nicer! And she chuckled as she considered this delightfully cozy home with her cheerless room at Chetwynd Chase.

She asked Regina on what street they were, but Regina didn't know. Blanche did not much care, so happy was she with her baby, her personal liberty, and the assurance of De Laurian; that she would telegraph to her father at Liverpool, where his permanent address was left.

It might be several days before an answer came, De Laurian said, for the party might be traveling through some quiet little town where mail communication was infrequent.

But he bade Blanche cheer up and wait patiently.

A week rolled by, and there came no answer. Her telegram, however, had hit at first, then grew nervous and speculative, and finally sent Regina to ask Mr. De Laurian to come up to the parlor, she must see him.

She was waiting a cigar when the message was delivered.

"I shall be with her at once, Regina," and he lowered his voice to one of confidential importance, "depend upon you. You will not fail!"

"She bowed her assurance, and allowed De Laurian to proceed on from the room. As he passed up the basement stairs, with a curious smile on his face, he looked back a moment."

"You may as well secure the doors, as I explained."

"Then he ascended leisurely, and entered the drawing-room, shutting the door as he passed through."

"Well, Blanche?"

"What, De Laurian, what do you think can be the reason we get no word? Can anything have happened to Roy or mother?"

"I think nothing has happened to them to make you uneasy."

"Then, why don't they answer?"

"De Laurian looked across the room at Blanche's sweet, bright face, all aglow with the returning spirits that lent such radiant beauty to her."

"He moved his chair nearer to her before he spoke."

"I think I know the reason, Blanche. Do you wish it?"

"There was something in his peculiar tone of voice, no less than language, that made her instantly raise her eyes to his own in a vague uncertainty."

"Certainly, Mr. De Laurian, if you know why."

"He deliberately rose from his chair and crossed the narrow space that intervened between himself and Blanche. Laying his hand lightly on the back of her chair, he bent his head to her face, and very quietly, very meaningly, told it to her."

"Because, Blanche, I did not telegraph."

"She sprung frightfully from her chair, and confronted him with dilated eyes."

"You did not telegraph? Mr. De Laurian, you have assumed no time after time that you did so."

"He was alarmed, and he saw that such was the case."

"Sit down again, Blanche, and let me explain."

"No, I would rather stand. But, Mr. De Laurian, you can go at once and send a dispatch. Will you not? or I will do it myself."

"He compressed his lips more sternly, and Blanche, with a sinking heart, wondered what new calamity was about to overtake her."

"Oh, that dreadful, dreadful Curse of Chetwyrd Chase!"

"I will be explicit and candid, Blanche. I did not telegraph, and I bear the blame for it in the same reason, for I suppose for the moment that I am going to surrender my wife to another."

"Then her heart indeed almost broke with the ominous words, and she shrank away, into the furthest corner of the room, her startled eyes fixed on his smaller, more earnest face."

"You are not repulsed by my truthfulness, Blanche?"

"Mrs. Davenal, in the future, whenever you dare address me."

"Her indignant tones made no difference to his stern, mocking smile."

"You speak, Blanche. Did I not, with my own hands, place the marriage-ring on your finger? Am I not alive before you today?"

"There was crowing triumph in his voice."

"You have done all you claim, Mr. De Laurian, yet when I solemnly affirm that I am, by every right, the wife of Royal Davenal, you cannot but secretly confirm the truth."

"Your reasoning is worthy a woman, she rejoined, pleasantly, and she chose to assure for this in my house; you have lived here as its ostensible mistress a week; I have mentioned you as my wife, and the child is supposed to be ours. What will you do, Blanche?"

"Her eyes were bright with the insult, and she moved to the door."

"I will this moment leave the place I regarded as an asylum in my distress. Better, far better the prison room at Chetwyrd Chase than this gilded cage and you for a jailer."

"De Laurian interposed between her and the door."

"No, no, Blanche! do you think I shall allow any such shallow excuses to blind me? No, indeed. You are my wife, and as such I claim you before the world. As my wife, you have no need to fear the hand of a jailer, and no protection in this romantic site. Be reasonable, Blanche; for my oath upon it, you shall remain here with me so long as I choose to remain."

"Mr. De Laurian, and Blanche replied in low, thrilling tones, and as she moved from the shadow to the light, her bright eyes almost started him. "Do you desire me to understand that I am a prisoner here, in New York, with a dozen policemen in call from any window in the house?"

"He bowed politely."

"You are perfectly correct in your surmise. Of what avail are a whole army of police if you do not summon them? And suppose the wind-ups are so well guarded that it is decidedly impossible to raise them, the shutters so ar-

ranged that you cannot gaze through them, and that you walk so thick with voices or combination of voices that you heard beyond them?"

"The hot color rushed to her face."

"Monster! how ever could I have trusted you?"

"An amused laugh fell from his lips."

"I have asked myself that question more than once. I would rather slumber to the last."

"Suddenly she leaned up to him, with extended hand and agonized face, as if the horror of the position had unwarmed her."

"Mr. De Laurian, surely, surely you do not mean all you say?"

"Do mean all, and more than I say."

"His dispassionate tones fell like a death-knell on her ears."

"A dusky paleness overpread her face, and a chilling terror crept into her sweet, hunted eyes."

"Mr. De Laurian, the day will come when, in sackcloth and ashes, you will repent this deed, if you never have wronged you in word or deed, do not regard you my jailer, or this house my prison. I am in the hands of an all-wise God, and his dense cloud through which his groping is a Providential dispensation, which, though I cannot comprehend, I do not presume to question, and accept, as submissively as I can, believing that I am assured that there is light ahead for me even yet."

"Her reverent, half-pitiful words elicited but a staid nod of his head, and as he passed through the door, and assuring himself as he went that the entrance were all secured beyond the possibility of mistake."

## CHAPTER XXXII.

## A STRANGER, STRANGE STORY.

AS soon as De Laurian had returned to the basement, Blanche instantly left the drawing-room and ascended to her private bedroom, where, by a little noise by herself, she unlocked and bolted the door, and without a moment's hesitation, commenced to fold neatly together the dresses, carefully clothing Regina's careful forethought had supplied when they left Chetwyrd Chase."

This done she rung for Regina, and set down by the bedside, where her baby slept, with a nervous glitter in her eyes and a trembling of her pallid lips."

"Then, as Regina's footsteps came sounding through the hall, and paused at her door; then when Blanche had unlocked the door, she entered, and they conversed as usual."

"Sit down, Regina, I want to talk to you; not as a servant, but as a friend who has a woman's heart. I have no friends left, Regina, unless you will be one."

"Her low, sad voice brought a sudden twitching to Regina's lips, and she drew her handkerchief from her pocket as if anxious to hide the weakness of which she was ashamed."

"I hope I never have been unkind to you, Mrs. Davenal."

"Oh, no; I know that. Indeed you have been most kind in your attention and services. But, Regina, we have both been most cruelly deceived by Mr. De Laurian, who has secured me from Barbara Chetwyrd's power to lose my own. Regina, when did you learn that he was so deeply in love with me?"

"A dull red flush crept slowly over the woman's cheek before she answered."

"I cannot remember the exact day when I first fell in love with you."

"Her evasive answer elicited surprise from Blanche."

"Why do you blush so? Is there any mystery that you are connected with Regina, dear Regina, tell me all, and let us be friends that respect each other, on whom each can depend."

Blanche wound her arm in sweet persuasion around Regina's neck, and the young woman, masculine frame shivering under the touch."

"Mrs. Davenal, you never can know the burden I am bearing, and have borne so long, so long."

"Oh! I only wish to know it."

"It came out in a sudden and almost unaccountable burst of impulsive pathos, these words, and Regina, as she listened, was dilated as she looked upon the quivering mouth and moist eyes of the woman, who, until this moment, had always been the impersonation of reserve, calmness, and dignified reserve, although, as she herself avowed, and Blanche admitted, her action had been marked with a tender kindness and delicacy of attention strangely at variance with her appearance."

"You know all my sorrow, Regina, and that I can appreciate all yours. You know I have suffered enough to do for my friends, and a merciful God has spared me yet; now, and I will believe He will lead me up to the light. Tell me your story, Regina, and let me at least console you with it."

"Regina bent her head a moment as if deciding a vexed question; when she raised it and smiled she looked like the best of the new breed of women, and Blanche's womanliness worked upon her rough spirit, and aroused the softer sensibilities of a nature blunted by circumstances."

"Mrs. Davenal, do you remember when I first entered the room of Chetwyrd Chase?"

"Distinctly; it was just previous to my marriage to Mr. De Laurian."

"She instantly turned as the spoke of it, and at its mention, Regina's round, bead-like eyes fairly snuffed."

"You are right. I came unrecommended, just when the storm of grief was offering to forfeit a month's wages if my services were not satisfactory. Miss Barbara was not at home then."

"There was strange significance in her voice; a mingled anger and sorrow."

"No, she was—you know where she was, Regina, these weeks will all suppress her on a visit?"

"I do; and I knew long before I heard her tell you that she was in the observatory chamber. I knew it and knew her, and know Mr. De Laurian long before I ever saw Chetwyrd Chase. I knew you, too, Mrs. Davenal, when you were a baby no bigger than the little one yonder."

"There was calm truthfulness in her eyes and voice, and manner, although Blanche stared incredulously at her."

"Why, Regina?"

"It is true; I am going back to the beginning. Mrs. Davenal, I was not and going to my thing back. When you've heard all my story, if you'll take me for your friend, I will swear abstinence as fresh as the roses of the year."

"Again that same significance of language, and Blanche looked back in those ugly, truthful eyes with a glance of bewildered helplessness."

"I am so unwell, and so nervous, and I am so sure I can trust you. Did you really say you would swear fealty afresh? Have you ever done so before?"

"She was nervous; her white hands clasped and unclasped in a tremulous, uncomely excitement as she waited for a solution to this new way of life."

"First of all, Mrs. Davenal, I have to tell you that when you were born I was the nurse who took care of you, and you were a boy. There is nothing wonderful in that, is there?"

"No; it is simply a coincidence. Go on."

"Blanche spoke in a low, intense voice that betrayed her deep interest."

"Yes, it was an incident that has molded my life, more or less, ever since—that, for the past year, has been my story, and yours, and mine, and that of Mrs. Chetwyrd. I would have been a happier woman to-day, with a less horrible load eternally crushing me, had I never known you."

"She paused, and gazed dreamily at her listener."

"Oh, do go on," said Blanche, almost in a whisper."

"Mrs. Davenal, are you afraid of Mr. De Laurian?"

"She asked the question abruptly."

"Afraid! Oh, Regina, I do not know how I regard him. He terrifies me so; he abused Barbara so—"

"Well, I am more afraid of him than anybody in this wide world."

"Blanche interrupted her in a low, stern tone."

"You yet you deliberately act in his employ?"

"Not deliberately, Mrs. Davenal, but conscientiously, for that I might serve you, though indirectly, and, if needs be, save you as I would in time have done from Barbara Chetwyrd, to whom I owe, as you know, all that I have received. Gervaise De Laurian; with whom I broke my faith, as I shall break it with him."

"A shudder ran over Blanche's face, and she said, 'You will save me from free as the air?'"

"Before the night-shades fall, Mrs. Davenal, I solemnly swear to you, as I have promised to do, with your baby in your arms free to go wherever you please, back to Chetwyrd Chase, to hold you, and to send you a telegram you will of course send—or anywhere you choose."

"Blanche rapturously kissed the brown, horny hand she had so often touched, and said, 'God ever bless you, Regina! And now for the rest of your strange story.'"

"A year ago, Mrs. Davenal, you will learn directly why I call her so informally—and De Laurian were on their pleasure tour. I first made his acquaintance. I was in a second-hand jeweler's store, and he came in, and he gave me, and for which I preferred its value in money, as I was almost desperate in my poverty. Mr. De Laurian was looking through some old-fashioned curiosities, and he happened to hear him offer a hundred dollars for."

"I looked up at him, wondering why he was so lavish of his money, and he said, 'I had suddenly caught sight of a broken gold chain and an opal stone—the other half of the ornament as he called it—so great a sum for."

"My husband, who I possessed the remaining portion of that chain and opal, and my cheeks crimsoned as I was thus suddenly reminded of the broken link of the new breed of women, and Blanche's womanliness worked upon her rough spirit, and aroused the softer sensibilities of a nature blunted by circumstances."

"I offered to show him the gem; he accompanied me home, and paid me the money for my treasure, and as much more for the informa-

tion I gave him; and as it startled him, so will it start you, Mrs. Davenal."

Blanche was listening intently, and Regina went slowly on.

"I told him there was a legend connected with that broken old stone, that was numbered as though the entire stone had borne three perfect letters, 'D. D.'"

"Sure enough, when he compared the half he had and the half I had, the surmise was correct. He told me then how he had stolen the chain—you will remember he pretended it fell into a grating! He let me see his coat-button."

Blanche started with surprise.

"I remember it well. Can it be possible? It was our only relic of my dear sister's identity. Is her should be traced out."

"It was traced out, Mrs. Davenal. I held the key to unlock that door, and I gave De Laurian's money back to the boy. He knew then, before he deserted Barbara, who she was; he knows to-day who she is. Would you like to know?"

Regina asked the question almost pityingly.

"Indeed, I would."

"Mrs. Davenal, do not hate her for what she has done, when I tell you it is she, and not you, who justly inherits the 'Curse of Chetwynnd Chase,' because, Mrs. Davenal, Barbara is your sister—your younger, twin sister, born an hour after yourself."

Blanche jumped from her chair in a transport of astonishment.

"Regina, what do you mean to tell me? She—she my sister! the child of my parents! And—she my sister! I never knew it! I never knew it! I believe this strange, incredible story!"

"Incredible as it may seem, I can prove it, and show you why your parents never knew it—why the mother who loved me she gave birth to a second daughter."

"For the three months I was in attendance upon my provisionary mother, I was permitted to go to hear her lament over that fatal Curse she feared would yet fall on a child of hers. She has often fallen on her knees and prayed that God would give her sons and no daughters."

"She was so gentle and patient amid all her troubles, that I used to wish I could die to gain her her wish."

"But, when the trial came, you, her daughter was born, and overcome by the fear that you would never be followed by a sister, and thus the fatal legacy be transferred, Mrs. Chetwynnd was seized with fearful convulsions that threatened her life."

"Horried by the sight, Mr. Chetwynnd was unable to remain in the room; Mrs. Chetwynnd becoming easier, the physician left her in a moment, and she went on with her usual calm, almost fainting gentleman to render some encouraging assistance."

"He was gone probably half an hour, leaving orders with me to call him if there was the slightest change."

"Then it was, Mrs. Davenal, that Barbara was born, with only myself to facilitate."

"I remembered all your poor mother's prayers; I knew you would not inherit the Curse then, and it would be a Christian's duty, I thought, to conceal the truth from everybody and allow Mrs. Chetwynnd, if she recovered, to learn little by little, that no fatal curse fell on you. She might attribute it to whatever cause she pleased."

"So I took the baby away; I kept her, named her Barbara Lester, and, when sin was older, left her at her father's care, and she grew to her great-heartedness and kindness."

Blanche had listened in rapt attention.

"But, the severest test I have to give you is this: was on her person? I have so often heard my mother wonder what it could mean. We decided, one day, that it had meant her initials, and marvelled at its similarity to the initials of three Ds, that denoted the 'Dishonor, Desertion and Death' of the former Curse. Later, when a letter came, bearing the name of Barbara Lester, we only thought you had been mistaken, and ceased calling her 'Della.'"

"Whether I did right or wrong, I leave you to decide. Whether my after course was right or wrong, I leave you to judge; but when I sent the child to her rightful home, I sent that half-queen, and kept her safe two seasons, and that I might claim her in retribution by it—the proof would be positive. The other, a young yearning to someone or other, I left with her family legacy. It seems that I succeeded partially."

"Then, when you saw De Laurian?" Blanche gently suggested.

"I had forgotten. Yes, when I saw him, and had told him all this story, and he, in turn, told me his. I hated him, but I loved him; I loved him; yet, according to his directions, sought an engagement at Chetwynnd Chase, resolved, though I ostensibly went to the house, that if I could, what Barbara would do when she returned, as he felt sure she would, to renew my watchful care over both the babies I once had loved. But, when Barbara was born, my *fiancé*, and I learned the infernal blackness of her soul, I loathed her in proportion as I pitied you. How I felt when I knew she intended poisoning De Laurian, deeply though I disliked

him and censured him! It was 7 Mrs. Davenal, who managed to dilute the poison which she saturated that forged letter; it was I who watched over him in his coffin in the vault, knowing death was but simulated. He doesn't know it, though, that he owed his escape to me, who left unlocked the door of the vault, and with my own hands unscrewed the coffin face."

Blanche was shivering from head to foot with this wild, strange recital; and yet, inspired by the fascination, urged Regina to go on.

"There is little else to tell, Mrs. Davenal. I used to think at times I would lose myself when I saw her pour the daily drop of liquid upon your young wife's hair, and mix it with your soap. I used to wonder if I should not expose it all, regardless of the reckless punishment she would have inflicted upon me; but I was a craven, a coward, and I let you go on and on down to your grave, knowing, however, that you would be rescued from it, and swearing then to save you one time, when her call-like vigilance was removed."

"We will forget it all, dear Regina! You will not be her next! I will save my young De Laurian, who swears I am his wife, and threatens such terrible things!"

"I will save you, Mrs. Davenal. And when you are safe in your mother's arms, you will bless me with a blessing that perhaps will sweep all this burden away."

"Her cheeks had eyes filled with tears, and her voice was husky and hoarse."

"Indeed, you shall never be censured—never! But you shall go!"

"If I may, when De Laurian comes out after dinner, and leaves you in my care, we will go. Once on the street, we can fly to wherever you will save you one time, when her call-like vigilance was removed."

"It must not be to Chetwynnd Chase! I must telegraph at once to Roy, and wait at a hotel on your way to his home, and I will send my telegram to Braxton and Drayton, our solicitors, and they will see that my cheque is honored for the amount we need."

"Her cheeks were glowing with vivid joy, and her eyes overflowed with nervous thankfulness as she arose to take her babe, that, awakened, she held to her face."

"It seems as if my little girl appreciated my feelings, doesn't it, Regina? If Roy and mother could but see her! my precious little one!"

Regina sent a smile of encouraging sympathy upon her.

"Have patience, Mrs. Davenal. It will only be a fortnight at the most before we return home; for, of course, they will not delay a moment. And I think the meeting will repay you for all your unhappiness."

"It almost takes away my breath to think of it! Regina, if you will, I prefer lunch here in my room; and then, when I shall pass the three long hours between now and dinner."

#### CHAPTER XXXIII.

INSTEAD of waiting the three hours that intervened between her luncheon hour and the dinner-time, Regina told Blanche a better opportunity presented itself for their immediate removal.

Mr. De Laurian had left word that he was called out of the city and desired dinner delayed about an hour.

He had left no special message for Blanche's security, doubtless feeling perfect confidence in her; so she had obtained to take charge of her.

It was not yet four o'clock, when, attired in a black alpaca, with a white shawl, and wrapped over her straw bonnet, and her baby draped over in Marseilles circular, Blanche walked through the front door, that Regina unlocked for her.

Once outside, on the top of the marble flight of steps, her head grew giddy with the sudden change of position.

Never before had she appreciated the sunshine and the air so she did that warm, pleasant sunbeams, and the fresh air, her whole soul was filled with such an overflowing sense of thankful, triumphant joy, that she seemed treading on air.

Without put down the dead latch, and followed Blanche's rapid footsteps.

At the first corner she glanced up, and learned, to her surprise, for the first time, in what part of the city she had been staying; without a moment's hesitation she turned toward Broadway, and walked into the city—she reached the City Hall Park.

Here she summoned a neat little coupe, and she, her babe and Regina were driven direct to the office of Braxton and Drayton.

It was not eight yet, but she felt in to tell the startling truth to either of the partners that Mrs. Royal Davenal was alive and desired only a moment's interview with her husband.

Regina readily told the whole of the wild story that she was cloistered in the private office nearly an hour; and then, bewildered and incredulous, the old gentleman came out to the door of the coupe.

He just glanced in, and clasped his hands in stricken astonishment, as though the proof were more strange than the story.

"God bless me! Can it be possible? Is it really you, my dear child?"

A soft smile—Blanche's very own—answered him.

"I am more than happy to say that it really is I. Mr. Drayton, I am sure you could not mistake me!"

And then she told him she needed money and advice; both of which he gave her, and even accompanied her to his office, and himself sent the dispatch by cable.

Most assuredly he did not advise her to go to a hotel; she must certainly go home with him. Mrs. Drayton, however, was not so easily thankful to see her. She would be safe and well cared for until her party returned.

Mr. Drayton, however, was not so easily thankful to see her. She would be safe and well cared for until her party returned.

They were very quiet, happy days at her, albeit darkened at times by scorching memories.

It really was worse to her, all these remembrances, than that a sister's hand had done the deed.

But was Barbara her sister, her mother's child? How could Mrs. Chetwynnd have lives with her so many, many years, and never have recognized, by natural instinct, that she was her own?

Blanche was sorely puzzled about it. Over and over again she questioned Regina, always eliciting the same unvarying story.

And Drayton, too, she could not confided every thing, questioned and cross-questioned the patient, stolid woman, and he was satisfied of the perfect truth of her story.

Blanche had asked him if it would be lawful for Germaine De Laurian to hold her as his wife.

He assured her that, married as she had been, Roy Davenal was the legal husband, and she was waiting, and under such unquestionable circumstances, she was legally Roy Davenal's wife, on whom the law had not the slightest lawful or moral claim.

Moreover, it did not look well for De Laurian to have kept himself hidden so long. He must have been seen, and the agents of justice would have hastened to her at once and explained every thing. That waiting, until Blanche was the prosecutor, and she was going forward to harass her, was extremely unjust to him.

Again, why had he not had a charge of attempted murder brought against Barbara Chetwynnd? Why had he permitted her to go on in her evil way, and then revenge himself upon her in so peculiar a manner?

Mr. Drayton carefully examined the case in all its aspects, and decided upon three points:

First, to render assurance doubly sure, Blanche would have a legal divorce from Germaine De Laurian.

Second, since De Laurian had survived the attempt upon his life, and since he was not Chetwynnd—then Barbara Lester—she could not be made to suffer for it unless De Laurian himself was the prosecutor.

Third, it remained at Blanche's own option to arrest her on a charge of attempted murder, if she was still at Chetwynnd Chase, which he very much doubted.

The first of Mr. Drayton's suggestions was immediately attended to, so that before the family sat down to dinner Mr. Drayton and Blanche had made all necessary preliminary arrangements with an influential lawyer, who promised, under the peculiar circumstances, to obtain a decree very rapidly.

The second suggestion she had nothing to do with; the last affected her most painfully.

It was almost dark when the interview had undergone at Barbara's hands, deliberately deliver her up to justice! Had she been a stranger, Blanche's tears would have prevailed; but her sister—as she now fully believed—no, she could not ever do that.

So, her mind freed from the burdens, Blanche passed happy days, that interval between her departure from De Laurian's home and the expected arrival of the steamer that would bring father, mother, cousin and husband.

Mr. Drayton had received no reply to his telegram, and, indeed, he had not expected it. He knew that the steamer that had intervened had sent with the summons—"The deed is ripe—Blanche is alive—come at once"—would speed them on their way at the first available opportunity.

However, because he thought Blanche would be pleased, he had also telegraphed to the office of the Pacific, a white steamer, for the list of cabin passengers that should sail by the first home-bound vessel.

And, indeed, he had come a reply; a list of names was sent, and among them, to his astonishment, he saw the name of Mrs. Royal Davenal, wife and servant, Roy Davenal, Rex Chetwynnd, Jr., per steamer "Pacific."

Anxiously had Blanche watched the sunrises and sunsets, and now, a fortnight and three days after she had joined the Draytons' party, a white steamer, with a number of male family circles, was rushing down from his office at the unseasonable hour of twelve.

"Blanche, dear child! the Pacific is in!"

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

## THE VACANT CRIE.

VERY coolly indeed looked the dining-room of Mr. De Laurian's house that evening as he entered it from the city streets. His business completed to his satisfaction, he felt in a very delightful mood as he wandered into the hall, and from thence to the elegant dining-room.

The drawing-room was empty, he had seen as he passed by, and no noise worth to be heard in the lounge. Regia sat at the table, her *oleo d'olive* was all attention, and he sat down to the delicious dinner in solitary state.

He leaned back in his chair, and idly toying with his silver teaspoon as he glanced over the evening papers, while the stately ebon statue poured the coffee. The cloth was laid for two, which was unusual. Blanche preferring her meals in her own room.

But to-day, so serene was he that she would have acceded to his demands, that before he had left the house he had given orders for the second plate.

The table was richly decorated with massive plates, gleaming crystal and rose and gold-banded Sevres China, and it had been the thought of how Blanche's sweet face would look behind the coffee-cup that had sped him home that evening.

Through the orange-silk curtains the last sunset rays were falling, and yet Blanche had not come, or sent.

Where was she then, he wondered? At first, he had believed her repulse was genuine, and he had left his life in disappointment; but, as he thought of it, it seemed to him that she could not but reconsider her indignant denial. He grew impatient, and rung for Regia.

Receiving no answer to his imperative summons, and not daring to think anything could be the matter, he himself went up-stairs direct to the front chamber which Blanche had occupied.

To his horror and consternation it was empty! She and Regina were gone; Blanche had escaped him!

With a muttered curse on his lips he sat down to consider what to do.

There was but one explanation to the disappearance. Regia had played him false, and together with Blanche, had sought safety and liberty.

"The old witch! the treacherous cat!" The words hissed from his lips as he paced to and fro in the elegant room, his eyes bloodshot with anger, his lips trembling with passion under his amber mustache.

She had not returned to Chetwynd Chase he felt almost certain; in New York, who was there to whom she could have fled?—

He hit his lips as he thought of Braxton and Drayton.

"It is to them she has appealed, and I doubt not that by this very moment that long-delayed message is on its way! Perdition seize me for trusting to any woman's word!"

His delicate dinner was untouched that night, and the man had his orders to take it away; while De Laurian, too restless to remain seated, too angry to enjoy a cigar, wandered aimlessly through the house.

He had been at great expense in furnishing it, as he believed Blanche would approve. Recalling had been so much to his taste, and she had cordially admired, little knowing it was intended for a gilded cage for her.

He would be obliged to go to work very cautiously to gain the clue of her whereabouts; and as he had but lately mingled among men as he used to do, he had no very noteworthy when it became known that not he alone, but Blanche Davenal also, had, as it were, arisen from their graves.

He knew, as well as old Mr. Drayton, that he could not compel Blanche to render him obedience; and he also knew that Blanche would be approved by all the world in her allegiance to Roy Davenal.

So he sat and walked all that night, laying his plans. And when morning came he had decided that "the game was not worth the candle." In other words, his love for Blanche was secondary to the desire he had felt to humble her—and banish Barbara Chetwynd.

But, although he decided to let Roy have Blanche without any trouble on his part, he was not at all so willing that Blanche should escape so easily from his hands.

She had defied him in word and deed; she had thwarted him when all things seemed most auspicious. He had suspected, and now he was very much disposed to humbly her down on another track, just to show her she could not, with impunity, afford to baffle him.

The immediate result might have wondered where the lady, her nurse and baby had gone so suddenly; but no questions were presumed upon.

The next morning after Blanche's escape a red flag was hung out the window; the furniture sold at "tremendous sacrifices," and no

and that was the end of the little episode in that locality.

But, during the two weeks that Blanche was at Drayton's, awaiting her husband's and parents' coming, De Laurian was not idle.

He had taken a room at the Atlantic House, from which place he pursued his investigations as to Blanche's whereabouts. A private detective had been employed to ascertain the leading facts, and requested to discover her present abode.

Not only within a week did De Laurian learn she was sojourning at Mr. Drayton's, on West 23rd Street, but he also learned that she had fled against him in King's office, that news had been sent across the Atlantic to Mrs. Davenal's solicitor, and that "his" stewardship would bring the party, and the Regina was in consequence, devoted attendance upon her young mistress.

To all this array of facts, De Laurian listened most earnestly; paid the detective and dismissed him.

So, then, all was fair weather, with Mrs. Rex Davenal. She had weathered the storm and was anchored fast in the harbor.

He smiled as he thought that, then, coolly lighted a cigar and commenced smoking it, as he slowly promenade the apartment he had called his.

A week of the time since Blanche had escaped him had passed, and he had been nursing in his heart the suggestions it had given him. It mattered not that Blanche had suffered so that she was returning herself to his side, and to his heart, as base as ever beat, was still revengeful, if not jealous, and the novelty of being baffled by her lent strength to his determination to retaliate.

His thoughts were intensely occupied now by a villainous scheme he had arranged for her.

Barbara Chetwynd was not to be trusted. Regia should not suspect; Blanche believed herself perfectly secure; hence, it was the time to strike, if ever.

The only difficulty he experienced was whether it would "pay" him all the trouble he would be obliged to take.

With his cigar in his mouth he walked out into Broadway to decide.

The entire family of the Draytons had driven in their barouches down to the Cunard landing to welcome the returning party, whose arrival was the occasion of so strange and ecstatic a scene.

Blanche, almost faint from her eager impatience, remained at the house, where she might be seen and be greeted by the solemn privacy of her room.

Above-stairs, Regia watched the little Constanzia, as she slept among her laces and ruffles in a robe of white satin and a relationship. A wide azure silk seal was tied around it, and elegant pearl and ruby armetlets looped its sleeves.

The young mother had kissed it and given it to Regia while she went down to the parlor. Slowly as the minutes passed, it was not long before she had reached up to the door, and, through the hot, blinding tears that hung like mist over her strained eyes, Blanche saw first Roy leap therefrom, in impatient haste, followed by Mrs. Chetwynd.

There was one second of agonized waiting, and then, with sobs of rapturous joy, too intense for words, they rushed into the room and clasped her in his arms.

It was a wild, fearful clamor; that grasping his loved from the grave, as it were; while the little Constanzia, in agony of fear, with her emotions, clasped a hand, and Mr. Chetwynd another.

Slowly a word was spoken; a solemn, holy joy, too deep for utterance, bound them in silence.

Then Roy led her away to the window, and gazed in her soft, sweet eyes, as though scenes never again could be filled with the sight of her.

When their tongues were unloosed, and questions could be asked and answered, the whole pitifully-sad story was told, from beginning to end.

Mr. and Mrs. Chetwynd could not credit the truth; but when Regia was called down from the smothering babe, and Mr. Drayton asked his belief, they too were obliged to accept the unwelcome truth. It was a great shock to them, and Rex, as he listened in dumb silence, grew piteful to behold, as all his love, Constanzia, was swept away at one fell blow.

"And yet I will refuse to credit all," he said, gravely. "I will see her first, and then—and then—"

His face grew stony with the anguish suggested, and he turned away to hide it.

All that while Blanche was keeping her secret; then, when Mrs. Chetwynd was earnestly questioning Regia, and Mr. Drayton engaging her father in conversation, she slipped out of the room, with her baby, and fled to little Constanzia down. But Roy's watchful eyes

saw her depart, and immediately he followed her, overtaking her at the foot of the stairs.

"Come, let me see the sight of you soon even for a moment. Oh, my darling, my own darling wife!"

Blanche nestled in his strong, glad arms with perfect peace shining from her eyes.

"You never can know, much as you love me, Roy, all the terrible anguish I have passed, by this hour; and when you learn what I have been holding in reserve, you will be happier yet."—and she drew her head close to his—"we've a baby daughter, alive and well, Little Constanzia."

His face lighted up with a luminous pride. "Having Blanche I indeed I am doubly blest! Take me to her, that I may give her her father's blessing—this other little treasure nestled beneath the little vacant crib."

With light steps and happy hearts, that left impress on their expectant faces, they entered the room, and tiptoed across to the lace-canopied bed.

Blanche tenderly removed the linen sheet—and a piercing scream burst from her.

"Who has taken her out! Roy—where is my baby?"

Her loud, agonized scream brought Regia in breathless haste. Her countenance turned fairly green with fear, she gasped, half believing, at the empty crib.

"My God help you—but I solemnly believe your ladyship has been wronged, and I am your man! I left her sleeping fifteen minutes ago, and no one in this house has come up-stairs."

With a fearful, heart-curdling cry, Blanche sunk insensible beneath the little vacant crib.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

## THE "STAR" OF THE BOARDS.

THE intense confusion and excitement instantly began their reign in Mr. Drayton's mansion.

His family, who, after greeting the returned tourists at the Cunard wharf, had, with commendable civility, sought to drive home in order that the meeting might be private, drove up to learn the pitiful news just as it became known. Words seemed so powerless to describe the scene, that the party who had gathered at the household when the fact became undisputed that Mrs. Davenal's baby had been kidnapped.

It seemed as though the very air had borne the peculiar circumstances that had rennited them; and when the news went forth, as it did, spreading like wildfire, sympathy and aid, of assistance came upon them.

Immense rewards were offered for the return of the child, or information that would lead to its recovery.

Detectives were sent out on Gervaise De Laurian's track, for there was not the slightest doubt but that he had done, or instigated, the deed.

But success was not to be now.

Various false rumors reached them from day to day, but these all proved as such, and when a fortnight had gone, there was less clue than ever.

Through all these trials, Blanche, the long-tried, sore-afflicted mother, lay in a delirium of fever; and in the terrific struggle between life and death, they feared, if life were at last saved, her reason never could be restored.

But when, the fever-light fled, she opened those sad, and eyes that should never smile again, they were ever bent to the occasion of her shadow in their brown depths, they knew she was sane, and for it thanked the inscrutable Mercy that had mixed so bitter a cup for them to drink.

Pallid, trembling, and heartbroken, she desired to be taken home to Chetwynd Chase; and, with these eyes all proved as such, and when a fortnight had gone, there was less clue than ever.

Through all these trials, Blanche, the long-tried, sore-afflicted mother, lay in a delirium of fever; and in the terrific struggle between life and death, they feared, if life were at last saved, her reason never could be restored.

But when, the fever-light fled, she opened those sad, and eyes that should never smile again, they were ever bent to the occasion of her shadow in their brown depths, they knew she was sane, and for it thanked the inscrutable Mercy that had mixed so bitter a cup for them to drink.

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poignancy of his grief wore off, left Chetwynd Chase on a tour of investigation, and the immediate family sat down to a quiet, restful evening, seeing visitors, of course, who came, and paying a few calls that courtesy imperatively demanded, and which their sorrow could not be allowed to prevent.

And all those days Blanche Davena's heart was sinking, sinking with despair; for her whole nature crying out against the man whose sin that had been committed against her; while Gertrude De Laurian—

He had not remained in New York after the day of the Chetwynd's arrival; he was very warm, and, in obedience to all his impulses, he gave up his room at the Astor, and started off on an aimless pleasure trip.

Long Branch, Saratoga, Newport, were in turn patronized; then, ennuied, and pleasure-seeking, he returned to New York, and when he found that he enjoyed himself, tour it all over the continent.

As with Gertrude De Laurian it was to do to do in a fortnight after—while Blanche Davena sat moaning and weeping amid the October brightness that glowed around Chetwynd Chase—he smoked his cigar in a fashionable restaurant in London, and wondered how he should pass the rest of his evening of his arrival. Conspicuous among the placards on the wall of the bar-room, was an announcement that Miss Ethel Wyndham, the charming actress and songstress, that night appeared in the famous role of "Muriel, the Avenger." Here, in the twinkling of an eye, beauty was extolled in warmest terms, and her wondrous talent was too good to express. A flogging in her art, she had already had half London at her feet.

So De Laurian strolled through the streets to the Prince of Wales Theater, where this star of the highest magnitude, and who had been given a seat in the parquette, and, as usual with gentlemen of his style, began looking around for pretty women's faces.

To the preceding fact he paid no attention, for it was until thunders of applause shook the house, as Miss Wyndham came graciously to the footlights, that he turned his eyes to the stage.

He saw a magnificent-looking woman, cold as an iceberg, haughtily as an empress, bowing to the admiring crowd, with the darkly flashing eyes, the streaming raven black hair, the perfect form, all as in a dreamy maze.

Could it be possible that this strange, or were all these people around him living beings? Was he really himself, and was that brilliant actress on the boards the same Blanche Davena, the woman he had betrayed, who had hated him remember she "was not yet done with him?"

His eyes were riveted eagerly on her, watching every motion as she moved about the stage. Gradually he decided that the resemblance was not so great as he had at first thought. The husband's voice, though mellow and pleasant, had not that rich redundancy of musical tone that "hers" had.

Again, and with a curse on his stupidity, he remembered "her" hair was brown, deeply, darkly brown; his true, but very unlike Miss Wyndham's silver-grey, with its long, loose masses from forehead to waist, while "hers" had fallen one heavy, arrowy tress, almost to her knees.

But this Miss Wyndham was superlatively lovely; she was the "rage," and more than all, to Gertrude De Laurian, she was "new."

So, weary of the long and dreary, but bright, sunny days, one impressed him keenly, and he inquired quite earnestly about her.

He learned she was only "Miss" on the stage; she really was a widow, with one child, who had come to London at the death of her husband, to earn her fortune by her art.

Not a word that she had slept at the actress's; his admiration increased, his interest deepened; and when a shower of bouquets and wreaths fell at her feet, at the conclusion of "Hunted Down," there was one very offering, of a talisman and jessamine leaves, to which was attached a card bearing the name of the giver—Gertrude De Laurian.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

## VENGEANCE AT LAST.

It was a delightful apartment in which Ethel Wyndham, the popular actress, was sitting, late that night.

A little distance off stood a beautiful walnut cradle, with a high canopy of azure silk under white lace; in the cozy nest slept the actress, pale face; and watching it, with an expression on her face that you never would have dreamed could have saddened its ripe, ruddy beauty.

She had not rested in the soft amber satin in which she had performed the last act, and on her white arms and neck still gleamed the diamonds that had flashed with every turn of her body.

And her darkly-pale face, where it seemed a smile never could come, was bent in earnest attention over the book she held in her hand.

"Grace," she said, in those low, pleasant tones, to a colored nurse who dozed in her chair,

"Zella has not awakened since I went out! Bring me those smaller bouquets from the table, and take these books off for me."

She leaned wearily back in the cushioned chair, watching the woman, as she deftly selected the desired articles, with that listless, calm, unobtrusive air so strangely characteristic with the piquant brilliancy she assumed on the stage. One by one she lifted the flowers and inhaled their fragrance, then resting her head on the rest the tiny spray of geranium and tuberose, glanced casually at the card attached.

"As a stung by a scorpion, she sprung from her chair, fastidiously brushing her right and left.

"Leave me alone, Grace, at once."

Her voice was like that of an far-away, unattracting sound, that made the babe in his slumbers start, as if affrighted. Then, when the servant had gone, she sat down again in her chair, a vivid, glowing spot of crimson on either cheek, and a bright intensity of light in her eyes.

Several minutes she sat there, patting her foot against the plushy pink carpet, the carmine on her cheeks fading to ashen pallor.

"And has it come to this, to this? Has he crossed my path again, just when I deemed my past life so nearly forgotten amid the excitement of the present? I am doomed, doomed to such chances with this man, and I hesitate? I, who never shrink from—"

A shiver ran over her at such a memory.

"And has it come to this, to this? Has he crossed my path again, just when I deemed my past life so nearly forgotten amid the excitement of the present? I am doomed, doomed to such chances with this man, and I hesitate? I, who never shrink from—"

Calm, haughty, perfectly at ease as ever, she summoned the waiting attendant, and when her hand-tray was brought, hastily penned a message.

"If Mr. De Laurian desires the acquaintance of Miss Ethel Wyndham, he can learn her address of the manager, Miss Wyndham receives few calls, but will admit Mr. De Laurian upon one condition: that she see her manager."

"Take this to Manager Robbe, Grace, in the morning, early; now, assist me to undress." She retired to her bed, but sleep would not visit her eyes; she tossed restlessly to and fro on the downy pillows, and then, in sheer despair of courting the drowsy god, arose, and threw around her a white cashmere wrapper, and, in a few minutes, flung, commenced a long, restless promenade.

All through the early hours of that cold, gray autumn evening, she wandered in and out, wrapped in deepest depression of spirits, and then the sad, worried look in her eyes chased suddenly away by one of bitter wrath and intense agitation.

"It is impossible, utterly impossible! I thought, in this new, strange life, I had effected a complete escape from the hateful days of those other days, but it arises like a mighty avenger when I think upon him! I hate him with an ungodly hatred. I feel that from the am fact and the temptation has followed me! The very finger of Fate has led him to me!"

She clasped her hands tightly together; the fiery cutting into the hidden flesh.

"I will do it! his very name has fired the worst passions of my heart! I dare declare I need not sleep with that innocent, guileless babe sleeping under my very eyes! Yes, the hands that kidnapped Blanche's baby—that have never touched it but in tenderest care, shall seize on vengeance, and I shall follow my man on to his doom!"

And then, when the brilliant eyes gleamed with the hot tears of her heart, she looked at that strange, rare smile, so terrible, lingered on her coral-red lips, you knew it was Barbara Chetwynd to whom Gertrude De Laurian was being led, she said, by the inscrutable hand of mysterious Destiny!

When the flushing morning broke, she had made her way to the dressing room, and there her brougham with Grace and little "Zella," as she called baby Constanza; and when the air was over, and she returned to her rooms, a note was laid, by which she read, asked her cheeks for a second.

Then the proud light returned to her eyes.

"I have just arrived, my dear Mrs. De Laurian, and I have Zella in her cradle, when Mr. De Laurian rings, show him in, and retire."

She had scarcely given the directions when the summons came from the door.

She hastily adjusted the mask, threw a glowing scarlet opera cloak on her gray silk carriage costume, and bowed a cold, graceful greeting to Gertrude De Laurian.

"I can not tell you how grateful I am to you, Mr. Wyndham, for your generous offer of allowing me to pay my admiring respects to you in person."

She bowed gracefully in return for the impulsive salutation.

"I am a trifle surprised that you addressed me as 'Mrs.' How did you learn I was married?"

Rumor said so. I beg pardon most humbly if I was mistaken. I can but envy the memory of the husband you were such a treasure to."

"All husbands are not appreciative, Mr. De Laurian."

"I can not imagine yours being otherwise. He would be a very brute."

"So I thought, will you close the window, please? I really think I am chilly."

De Laurian sprang to obey the languidly-uttered request, and when he returned, drew his chair closer to Gertrude's. She made no movement, and De Laurian, emboldened, took one of her hands in his. He felt it tremble slightly; but he knew that it was not fear, and attributing it to reasons flattering to his conceit, he felt a thrill of joy in his veins, as he leaned nearer her.

"I have a desire to hide your face from me, dear lady. Why not let me look and adore, as I did last night?"

"As an acquaintance might disentangle you, you know."

"Impossible! the memory of your beautiful face will never fade from me. Can I not persuade you to unmask?"

His low, eager tones were almost whispered against her ear.

Did you not know that everybody wears masques, Mr. De Laurian? Not of cerise, like this, to be sure, or perhaps not at all visible to human eyes. How am I to know just you are what you appear?"

Although her words were earnest, her manner was light and jesting; but he could not see the terrible, momentarily kindling fires in her eyes.

"For instance," she went on, "when I am on the stage, I feel that I am a creature of my smiles and gayety I hide more sorrow and shame than people dream of. Mine has been a bitter cup to drink; I have been through many deep waters. Mr. De Laurian, you may not believe me, but I am thirsting for revenge! What will high tragedy am I indulging in? Come, see my baby."

She arose from her chair and went across the floor to the cradle, where the child lay, awake and smiling.

De Laurian gave a casual look preparatory to the flattery he supposed expected from him.

Then he started; stared at the child, and turned abruptly back toward the door.

There she stood, in all her awful beauty—Barbara Chetwynd!

Transfixed by the suddenness of the shock, he could only stare wildly, and essay to grasp her name.

But the thunder of her voice rolled in his ears.

"We meet again, face to face, for the last time, Gertrude De Laurian! Look at me, for I am still the look at the child, for it is Blanche Davena's!"

For a moment only he recoiled in horror; then, his lips curling with contempt, would have left the room, had not she uttered her words.

But Barbara sprang before him with a high, shrill laugh.

"No, Gertrude De Laurian, I have sworn by all the powers of Hades that you do not escape me again! Once, twice you baffled me; the memory rankles still. Then, when I had ended the house where that sleeping babe lay, while all was confusion and glad excitement below, and stole it to punish my mother, I vainly tried to find some means to my freedom and kindness to it. But when you, uncouth, came to my very door, all the devils in my soul clamored hungrily for vengeance. I will have my vengeance, and I shall follow my man on to his doom!"

And Gertrude De Laurian was launched on the Sea of Eternity!

She lay as if motionless even in the rigidity of death, while Barbara looked grimly down at her work, reckless of the crowd surging up the stairs who stared and stared, reckless of the terrified wailing of the baby in the cradle, and the door burst open; the excited crowd rushed in, and then Barbara started in affright.

She came into the room, pale as a ghost, and with a cry of infinite agony, spoke his name.

"No! no! not Rex Chetwynd!"

Then, with the flash of a lightning dash, she snatched the tin revolver placed it, snatched the temple, drew the trigger, and fell a corpse across Gertrude De Laurian's body!

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

## THE MYSTERY NO MORE.

STRANGE as they seemed, Barbara Chetwynd's last words were true; it was indeed her husband, Rex Chetwynd, who had gone on in his loving, hopeful trust, and had died, as she had, of a worldwide world, the wife of his bosom, whom he worshipped, and, though against whom such awful calamities had been hurled, he could not believe so. He still lives.

From Chetwynd Chase he had wandered aimlessly westward; while in Chicago, he had picked up a London paper, and casually read the advertisement of the "charming Miss Wyndham."

With peculiar force, the similarity of a part of the mine had occurred to him. His one object in life was to clear up Barbara's own lips her innocence or guilt, by which he would abide; this might be she; at any rate she was as likely to be in England as America, and he might as well follow the imaginary thread in the dreadful tangle as any.

So he sailed for Liverpool, and arrived in London several hours from Barbara's own home. He had at once gone to the manager of the Prince of Wales theater, and learned the address of Mrs. Ethel Wyndham, and was wondering as he mingled with the throng, how he would instantly surging past her windows, how he would obtain an interview, in consequence of her not appearing for a fortnight.

At the very moment he passed her door, with slow steps, and scanning eyes, had come the pistol shot, and the heavy fall, and the infant's shrill scream that alarmed the neighbors by.

Foremost with the crowd, and side by side with a policeman, he entered the room, in time to see, but powerless to prevent, the terrible closing of the tragedy.

It needed but a glance to recognize Gervaise De Laurian, and there came to him the awful suspicion that Barbara had been guilty to long catalogue of sins the heinous one of disloyalty to him.

His heart was bursting with anguish as he knelt beside the ill-starred pair; little did he dream how fearfully their vow had been kept, although made in mockery by the one, and earnest by the other, that "Death alone should part them!"

The crowd stood back a moment, awed by his stony sorrow, as he softly smoothed her bright hair and closed her eyelids. Then, when the officer had kindly suggested him to retire, he mechanically walked to the cradle, where Mrs. Constantia rove, in terrified silence, her brown eyes raised in piteous, wistful entreaty, her tiny lips quivering with dread.

A fresh pang of anguish thrilled his very heart-strings. Barbara's child—and perhaps De—

—No, he would not harbor the thought. She was dead now, as well past any more shining as repenting.

As he stood there, looking at the baby and hardly seeing it, came the strange thought of how different the home at Chetwynd Chase would be if this were Blanche's—and the thought saddened him. Blanche's child! Might it not be Blanche's of a verity? De Laurian was supposed to have abducted it twice, and there lay De Laurian, dead.

In his feverish delirium he called for the nurse of the child, and communicated his suspicions to the officer. Grace said the child was Mrs. Wyndham's as far as she knew, and that she never had heard it called by any other name than Zella.

The officer inquired if there was any package of clothes anywhere that the actress took special care of?

Grace said there was a bundle locked up in a drawer that she never was allowed to open. She had seen Mrs. Wyndham often have it, but beyond the glimpse of something blue she did not know what it contained.

The drawer was broken open, under the officer's directions, and the package given to Mr. Chetwynd.

"Before I open it, as a proof that I am sure that child is my cousin's, I will describe its contents as advertised. There will be a blue silk sash, fringed at the ends; an embroidered suit of underclothing; a lace mittens, a pair of armlets, and a blanket, all marked C. C. D., the initials for Constantia Chetwynd Davenport.

The package was opened, and Mrs. Wyndham's list found complete, while, as though the "finger of Fate" had been as determined about this affair as Barbara had averred it to be in another, there was a letter signed Barbara, but unmistakably written in Barbara's hand. "Constantia's clothes, August 5th."

It was the very day of the event that had well-nigh killed Blanche, the day the "Pacific" arrived; the day Blanche had received her decree of divorce from Gervaise.

Further proofs were not deemed necessary, and in a very few days the little one was formally given to Rex Chetwynd to take to his mother.

He secured the services of the colored woman, Grace, and took immediate passage home, having seen the last rites performed over the remains of the beautiful woman, who, with her headlong passions, her fiery temper, had inherited, to a terrible fatality, first, "dishonor, then desertion, and finally death, the Curse of Chetwynd Chase.

The first gathering shades of Christmas Eve were falling over Chetwynd Chase, the lights were gleaming from windows and halls as Rex Chetwynd drove up the leafless avenue to the home he was going to blow, but from which the light and bright gleams were to be banished. Rapidly the carriage containing his precious freight drove up, and reined in at the front entrance.

Bidding Grace remain where she was until he beckoned, Rex sprung out and went up the steps. The doors were not fastened, at that early hour; and without any trouble he made his way to the dining-room, where he supposed the family were at dinner.

He was not mistaken; they were at dinner, and he was in their midst before any one saw him.

The greetings were quiet, but full of love and tenderness; and when each in turn had been embraced, he turned to Blanche.

"I have brought you a Christmas present; you will accept it."

A wan little smile hovered for a moment on her lips. "Most assuredly, Rex; yet I would ask no better present than to know you were happy once more."

A shade crossed his face as he answered very gently.

"I have but one request to make, for my Christmas gift. I will tell you once for all, that Barbara is dead, and Gervaise De Laurian also sleeps in that sleep. I say that now. When, or where, or how, never shall cross my lips. God willing. All I ask is, never mention it to me again.

A solemn awe-struck silence fell on them; and God only knows the feeling of their hearts as they sat there, not crushed, but sorely hurt by the blow.

"But you cast aside gloomy thoughts. The past can not be recalled; and I am going to give Blanche her Christmas present."

He went to the window and beckoned to Grace, whom he met at the door, and divested of her burden.

With rapid, irregular steps he crossed the room to Blanche, who, her head red, excited manner, had risen from her chair.

"Oh, Rex!—Rex!"

Her quick question, prompted by some wonderful instinct, died on her lips as Rex crossed the room to her, and laid the smiling, beautiful baby in her arms—her arms, her very own!

We leave them to their rapturous ecstasy on that never-to-be-forgotten Christmas Eve, when, by the same fate that led Blanche through such raging waters, she was brought to a great glorious light that never was dimmed again by the shadow even of "The Curse of Chetwynd Chase."

THE END.

## DREAM, MY BABY.

A CRADLE-SONG.

BY EMMÉ E. REEFORD.  
Author of "Silver Threads Among the Gold."

Mother's baby, rock and rest;  
Little birds are fast asleep;  
Close beneath her mother's breast,  
To the bird her bird will creep,  
Oh my nestling, mother sleeps.  
Close within the mother-arms,  
Fold thy little, undeluded wings,  
Safe from any rude alarm.  
Sweet my baby, my dear breast,  
Dream your happy dreams of rest.

Sweet, my baby, from the nest,  
Little birds will some day fly  
To the East, and to the West,  
Will their pretty wings to try.  
But fly fast, my bird, or far,  
Never can you find the spot,  
Under sun, or under star,  
Where the mother-bird is not.  
Refrain—Sweet, my baby, etc.

Oh, my baby, mother prays,  
As she clasps you closer still,  
To the things of God you pray,  
And not any earthly ill.  
Always, child, remember this,  
Your mother's heart is warm and true,  
And she tells you with a kiss,  
That I'll be yours, my baby, etc.  
Refrain—Sweet, my baby, etc.

## WOODED.

BY EMMÉ E. REEFORD.

You say you love me, and your clasping fingers  
Enfold my hand; yet tell me how I feel  
Another's touch, which thrills me while it flatters,  
And wakes again the grief I would conceal.

I hear you speak; but dream another whispers  
His words of love, so low and sweet to me,  
As when we heard the night-wind chanting vapors,  
So long ago, beside the monumental sea.

I see your face, while thinking of another's,  
Your eyes are tender with the love he knows,  
Oh, sweet blue blossoms, hidden under grasses,  
Beneath the coverlet of winter snows.  
Ah, friend, I would not, if I could, deceive you;  
I cannot love you as you ask me to!  
My heart is mine no more; I cannot give you  
The room for which a lover comes to woo.  
My heart is in a grave which dead leaves cover—  
A low, green grave, beside the far-off sea,  
Where sleeps my lost one, who was once my lover,  
And sleeping there, I know he dreams of me.

## THE SECRETS OF THE ROSE.

BY MARIE F. LADD.

"O rose, sweet rose, who knows, who knows  
If my lover be false or true?"  
A maiden cried, "If love abide,  
Who knows, fair rose, but you?"  
At my latiche he breathes, in tender lay,  
The years that pass with Jean and I can say,  
Old words, yet forever new.

A fragrant sigh, to the maiden given,  
I breathed from my petals wide:  
The years that pass with Jean and I can say,  
If good or ill betide—  
True or false, I can not tell,  
May leave you, or over, his bride."

"The very tree that harbored me  
Was parted off with a flower  
Or given, or a token left  
To further a loving hour;  
The hour, ofttimes, has passed along,  
And love was proved but an idle song  
To tell in a lady's bower."

"And yet I know a rose that little song  
Imparts its perfume sweet;  
Guarded with care, by a good fair,  
As the type of a faith complete,  
And the years that have passed since first she  
Had been happy as they were fleet."

"An latiche or gate, here, haunts or wait,  
Which scorcheth with the sun's hot rays,  
And dream your dream, by the stars that gleam,  
For it is but once in life,  
And the other comes, by the stars that gleam,  
Like nectar distilled, like a golden sap,  
'Tis you may be, or not, his wife."

## NAMELESS LOVE.

BY MATTIE DYER BRITTS.

Oh, is there no name for a feeling like this—  
No word for emotion like mine?  
Cannot the poet, the philosopher, the saint,  
The depths of affection define?  
It cannot be friendship—no, that is too cold—  
And love is so affectionate,  
And kindles the quickest on shines made of gold—  
But this is of heavenly birth.

Not passion—oh, not! Like the sun at high noon,  
Which scorches where'er it may shine,  
It burns while it lasts—but it darts on so soon,  
And goes of itself, as the wind,  
No, this is affection as pure as a dove,  
As sweet as its earth or even came—  
For stronger than passion, more tender than  
love—

And where shall I find it a name?  
It brings to my bosom a feeling of rest—  
Which scorches where'er it may shine,  
It scoldes every trouble which saddens my breast,  
And makes me so happy,  
And I find in the phrases our mortal tongues frame,  
No word for such feeling is given,  
We'll struggle the angels to lend us a name  
And speak in the language of Heaven!

## BARTERED.

BY HENRI MONTAËM.

What shall he add to-night between us two?  
I have to thank you for the little price  
That you have come to the old trysting place;  
'Tis the last favor I shall ever ask of you,  
To leave you to him with no parting look  
Upon my face.

So stand a hour [here] as you one year ago  
We stood upon this beach. These selfsame seas  
Creep up to kiss your feet; this same damp breeze  
Tosses your hair, and makes you smile again.  
One little year!

Oh, God! that I were able to find you here  
Unchanged, and as these!  
For I am true. Were all I've said unspoken,  
Though you I would no—'twas it said again!  
Think you not love the less because I know,  
Through the dear bond that fettered you is broken,  
Built by this silver sea,  
With yonder moon for witness,  
I seek the chain.

Oh, you are not the same as you were then,  
Who one so fond art now so stern and cold.  
You do not thrill to meet me as of old;  
You are not glad that we are met again,  
But fix your stony gaze upon the sea,  
Calmly controlled.

And yet, how beautiful this year has been  
To you of us! If an eye could see I'd choose  
—Though knowing that I should but love to lose—  
To draw you closer to me once again;  
But you are not the same as you were then,  
Your lips—contant for one short hour or bliss  
To meet you!

Well, be it so: Go tell your heart of gold,  
I would not hold you to your former vow,  
Yet when there burns upon your forehead here  
The unalloyed truth of your heart and soul,  
Then you will feel the need  
Of true love like mine—your heart will bleed  
As mine does now.



A LAST EMBLACE.—Page 27.

## Lord Lisle's Daughter.

BY C. M. FRAEKE.

### CHAPTER I.

#### THE COTTAGE IN THE LAKE.

AN artist might have sketched Deepdale as the model and type of an English village. It nestled amidst the Devonshire hills, trying to hide itself under the spreading shade of tall trees. The bonny Deepool woods had inclosed it; smiling cornfields, green meadows, and pleasant gardens gave it quiet, varied charm. The deep, broad stream, the River Floss, ran by it; far off in the distance lay the chain of blue hills that sloped down to the sea.

They were a simple, kindly race, the people who dwelt in Deepdale—far behind the rest of the world in knowledge.

The weather and the crops were their two chief subjects of conversation and anxiety. Strangers seldom came near the village; the railway had not broken upon its tranquil calm. There were many such quiet, sunny nooks in old England years ago, but they are rare now.

The houses were scattered; there was no regular street; a group of cottages stood under the tall poplar trees; another in the midst of flower gardens; little villas were dotted here and there, half hidden by luxuriant foliage.

Perhaps the most picturesque spot in Deepdale was Meadow Lane, one of those broad green lanes only seen in England; the hedges filled with wild roses and eglantine; hawthorn trees perfuming the clear, summer air; and wild flowers growing in rich profusion.

A little cottage stood at the end of the lane. Claude Lorraine would have made a grand picture of it. A little cottage, with bright windows encircled by gaudy roses and woodbine; and the white jessamine flowers shone like pale stars. A group of tall chestnut trees stood near, and a pretty brook ran singing by.

On this evening, when our story opens, a young lady arrived at Deepdale. She came from some neighboring town, in a shabby, worn-out fly, bringing with her a large box and a little child. The driver, obeying the lady's directions, inquired for Mrs. Rivers, of Rosemary Cottage; and some of the village people, attracted and half-dazzled by the fly, shabby as it was, showed the way to the cottage in Meadow Lane. But there were places where the brook widened, and the carriage could not pass. The lady quickly solved the difficulty; she bade the driver go to the village inn, and send the box on to the cottage, and she herself took the child in her arms.

"Tell me," she said, gently, "how long you can wait. Give me as much time as you can."

"I must be back by eleven, if possible," he replied.

"Then I will be at the inn by ten," she said, turning from him, and clasping the child in her arms. She walked quickly down the green lane;

then she sat down upon the trunk of an old tree, and gazed around her.

The child in the lady's arms stirred, and she bent over it, kissing the little face with a wistful love painful to see; then she placed the child for a few minutes standing by her side.

"This will be my darling's home," she said to herself; "and I could wish for no fairer one."

Fervently she gazed upon the child; then she rose, took up her precious treasure, and walked on to the cottage, and gently rapped at the door. It was opened by a clean, kindly-looking woman, who cried out with delight when she saw who stood there.

"I never believed it," she said. "Can it really be you, Miss Margaret? I thought the news too good to be true."

"It was quite true, nurse. I could not leave my darling in any care but yours."

Mrs. Rivers took the child from the lady's arms, and placed a large chair for her.

"I have not long to stay," said the fair young visitor; "let me keep baby in my arms while I can."

"That you shall," replied Mrs. Rivers, gently; "it is hard enough for you. Ah, Miss Margaret! I call you 'Miss' still. I cannot remember that you are a married lady, with a lady of your own. It is not long since I nursed you."

"Not so very long," was the reply; "but I have lived many lives since then."

As the lady spoke, a look of pain passed over her lovely features.

"All my other troubles seem like play, nurse," she continued, "in comparison with the parting from my little child."

A sudden mist of tears gathered in her eyes as she spoke.

"Calm yourself," said the nurse. "I will make you some tea, and then you shall tell me your story."

While Mrs. Rivers busied herself in preparing tea, the lady sat with the child in her arms. She laid her fair young face on the little golden head, murmuring the sweet words of love, never forgotten by the one who heard them.

The western sunbeams came in at the open window, but they brought no message of hope for her, whose heart was and even unto death.

She tried to drink the tea kind hands brought her; but she homely cakes, the golden honey, and ripe fruit. Mrs. Rivers offered her in vain.

"Now, my dear," said the nurse, when the simple meal ended, "come out into the garden. You shall sit under the laburnum tree while you tell me all about it—where your husband has gone—why you are going—what is the mystery. Tell me for you know you can trust me."

As she spoke, the nurse placed a chair outside the porch, and then seated herself by the lady's side; and the child, as though knowing how soon those tender arms must lose their hold, lay silent and still.

"I have not much to tell," the lady began.

"You left my father's house when he failed; he did not live long after that. My mother took

me to London, and put me to school there. She died when I reached my fifteenth year, and I was left quite alone. I wrote to you sometimes; but with that one exception there was no human being who took any interest in me. My father's friends, who courted me when he was rich, forgot my existence, even."

"Just before my mother's death, she placed me as governess-pupil in a school near London. In return for the lessons I gave, I was taught many accomplishments. In my nineteenth year, I left there to take my first situation as governess—it was considered a very good one. I had the charge of Colonel Seaton's two little children, who reside at Hurst Hall, in Norfolk."

"I was happy there; the Colonel and Mrs. Seaton were very kind to me. Ah, nurse! I am trying to tell you the story; but how can I! I could not paint the glorious colors of this evening sky; I could not put to music the song of the bird; nor can I describe the change that came over my life, when he who is now my husband began to love me."

"I was but a child when my father failed and died. After that, my life seemed one long, dull, gray-colored dream. Of the pleasures, the innocent happiness of young girls, I knew nothing. I had never even cared whether my face were fair or not; but one evening—ah, me! how vividly I see it return!—one evening, I had done something that did not please Mrs. Seaton, and she spoke angrily to me. When the children had gone to bed, and my time was my own, I went out into the garden. I had been asked to train some choice rose-trees, and as I bent over the roses, the beads fell from my eyes upon the flowers."

"Not tears such as I shed now, full of bitterness, but hopeless tears, that had in them no aching sorrow—nothing but a desolate weariness. Suddenly, standing before me, I saw a gentleman—a young and handsome man. He spoke to me, saying he had come some long distance to see Colonel Seaton."

"I told him Colonel and Mrs. Seaton would both be in at eight o'clock, and if he particularly wished to see them, he had better wait, or call then. He decided upon waiting. Then he looked at me, nurse, with such kind, grave eyes, and asked me if I were in trouble, that I had been weeping so bitterly."

"I had no trouble," I replied, "but I was tired of my life."

"He stood and talked to me, saying such brave, noble words, I can never forget them. And as he spoke, the sun seemed to shine more brightly; the flowers gave forth a sweeter fragrance, his voice made music in my heart—music that has never died out since. From that hour my life changed; it was no longer gray and dull. I lived in a rose-colored dream—a golden light had fallen over me, and dazzled my eyes."

"Nurse! I cannot tell you my husband's name. I shall keep no secret from you but that I promised him, and I must keep my word."



beauty. She took little Daisy in her arms, and promised she would take her mother's place, and the little one smiled at her kisses and tears, all unconscious of the loss no earthly love could ever repeat.

Months rolled on, and no tidings came to Mrs. Rivers. No one wrote about the child; no one claimed it. From over the Indian sea there came no anxious words from an anxious father. Months became years, and the silence was still unbroken. She could not write to Daisy's father, for she knew nothing of his name or address. At length Mrs. Rivers felt sure that one of two things had happened. Either the marriage had not been a legal one, and the Captain neither wished or intended to claim his child, or he was dead, and no one else knew of it.

When two years had passed away, the good widow gave up all thoughts of hearing from any one, or of having to give up the child she loved dearly as her own. She never spoke to little Daisy of the sad young mother who had brought her to Deepdale. She never named the brave soldier-father, far away under the hot Indian skies. Daisy, who never forgot the word, called the nurse "Mamma," and was brought up as one of Susan Rivers' own children. At times she asked herself "This silence wise, and one look at the child's happy face convinced her it was so. Why disturb the sweet, happy content by speaking of hopes and dreams that might never be realized? Daisy was hap-

school herself, where she had received a plain, sensible education. She spoke well and grammatically. Quick to learn, she had caught up the refined tone and accent of her mistress. Listening to Rita and Daisy, one felt sure they had been accustomed to speak with intelligent people. There was nothing broad or provincial. Both were gifted with musical voices—Rita's, rich, clear, and ringing; Daisy's, sweet as the murmur of the summer wind.

The house left to Mrs. Rivers was known as "Rooks' Nest," so called from the fact that, near the cottage, stood a fine group of trees, wherein the rooks, for many long years, had built their nests. The new tenant was looked upon as a most respectable woman—not admissible amongst the "gentry" of Queen's Lynde, but certainly much superior to the "poorer class." The widow had quite enough to do in managing her household; it was sometimes hard work to pay her way and provide all that was wanted for the two young girls.

The years passed over, and no word ever came of little Daisy's friends. The two girls went to school; they were both quiet, and learned rapidly; but there was a great difference in their motives. Daisy loved study for its own sake. Rita looked upon it as a means to an end.

They did not resemble each other in any way, these two who believed themselves to be sisters. In describing Rita, people always called her "beautiful," in speaking of Daisy, one invariably

"I used to dream, when I was quite a little girl, about that same face," said Daisy, "years ago, before we left Deepdale; and I dream of it still. It grows more vague and indistinct, though, and seems to smile more sadly every time the dream comes."

"Why did you never tell me of it before?"

"I cannot tell. I heard you say so often that dreams were all nonsense," she replied; "but I must have seen the picture of such a face some time."

It was quite possible that the child still dreamed of her mother. She was nearly three years old when that mother left her, to find death in the deep sea. The dream might return; the image or memory of the face might still remain in the child's mind, returning more vividly in her sleeping than in her waking hours.

The question made Nurse Rivers again ask herself whether she ought to tell the young girl the true story of her life. "Not yet," she said—"not yet." There will be tears enough, and sorrow enough, in the days to come. I will not awaken her yet."

When Daisy was sixteen, an offer was made to her that pleased her adopted mother. The lady superintendent of a large school in Queen's Lynde, struck with her lady-like demeanor, modest manner, and quiet intelligence, offered her a situation as junior teacher in her school. In place of salary, she was to receive lessons in



"I WILL MAKE YOU SO HAPPY, MY DARLING," HE SAID.—Page 30.

py, loving Mrs. Rivers as her mother, and the beautiful, vivacious Rita as her sister.

So Daisy grew all unconscious of her own story. They lived in the little cottage at Deepdale until Daisy was seven years old. Then some little accession of fortune came to the widow. An old uncle died, leaving her a small house and a few hundred pounds; and they left Deepdale to go to Queen's Lynde, on the Norfolk coast, where the property was situated.

It was a great change from the sunny village, residing in the Devonshire hills, to the bleak, bare coast and the deep, surging sea. The children disliked it at first; they missed the fragrant garden, the green meadows, and fair flowers. But the sea-shore had its charms—the long, yellow sands—the wonder of shell and weed—the restless waves that rolled in and out.

There was another great advantage that Mrs. Rivers had not overlooked. At Queen's Lynde there were schools, where, at a moderate rate, it was possible to procure a really good and sound education for her children. She wished them both to be well educated and lady-like. Whatever might be Daisy's future, she ought to receive the best training she could afford her; then, if ever she were claimed by those who had a right to her, she could take her place among them without shame. As for Rita, she gave promise of such magnificent beauty, that her mother began to form ambitious hopes and plans for her.

Mrs. Rivers had been for years at a good

bly characterized her as "sweet." She had a fair, spiritual face, with calm, clear brows, and tender violet eyes, full of truth and purity; her pure, sensitive lips had a smile sweet as a simon; her golden hair rippled over white dimpled shoulders; there was an air of graceful, high-bred refinement about her that did not belong to the more beautiful Rita.

There was nothing worldly in Daisy. She loved her adopted mother, quite believing she was her own. She was proud of her brilliant sister, and perfectly satisfied with her station of life. She had no longing for rich dresses and rare jewels; she wished for books and music. She never felt jealous or envious when the *Lynde Gazette* told of gay balls and *fetes* in which she had no share. The world, as yet, had not touched her—its warm, passionate breath had never quickened her pulse, or flushed her face.

There was one thing about her that good Mrs. Rivers would fain have seen altered—that was, a quiet gravity, that at times almost amounted to sadness. At times, too, Daisy started her nurse.

"Mother!" she said one morning, suddenly; "have I ever seen in my life a lady with a beautiful though sad face, and mournful, loving eyes? I dream so often of such a face, I must have seen it."

Mrs. Rivers was more startled than she cared to own.

"I cannot tell, my dear," she replied. "Dreams are all nonsense."

music, drawing, and French. Simple, innocent Daisy thought herself in fairyland. Rita scornfully declared she would not have gone if Miss Toffles had offered her a hundred a year. "Our ways in life will never be the same, Daisy," said the young beauty. "You have no ambition."

So Daisy went to Miss Toffles, thereby, in some measure, sealing her own fate. The school was some three miles distant, and she was allowed to go home only at stated intervals. There she quickly learned all that Miss Toffles could teach. When Daisy reached her nineteenth year, she was both educated and accomplished, and Mrs. Rivers looked with proud satisfaction upon the girl whom she loved dearly as her own child.

#### CHAPTER IV. RITA.

ONE lovely evening, toward the end of August, a young girl walked slowly down the long stretch of yellow sand. Far out in the distance lay the broad blue sea. The waves rose with a gentle murmur, and fell with a musical ripple; the sky was all ablaze with beautiful colors. But neither the beauty of color or sound made any impression upon the young girl. Never once were her eyes turned to the sky or the sea never once did she pause and listen to the faint music of wind and waves.

Yet that consciousness should have belonged to

one capable of appreciating both. It is seldom that, under our sun, a more perfect example of such wondrous loveliness is seen. It belonged rather to the daughters of sunny Spain.

It was a face that drew all eyes and charmed all hearts—so lovely, so brilliant, so radiant and charming. Such beauty might have won the dowry of a queen. Native, in her caprice, had lavished it upon the most worthy of the dandies, girlish figure was graceful and dignified; but Margaret Rivers lacked, with all her beauty, the high-bred air of refinement that characterized her father.

The two girls were as dissimilar in mind as in person. Rita was proud to an inordinate degree of her beauty, and she was proud of her riches and grandeur consumed her. She longed for all that wealth can procure—for rich dresses and costly jewels. Would she never attend balls and parties! Ah! and she was rich!—if she could but go among the gay and fashionable! There was no one in look to compare with her. What was the use of such a face and such a figure she who was to live always unknown at "Rocks' Nest"? If she could but once gain admittance into the great world, those would soon lie at her feet! Rita never dreamed of marriage for beauty; so, at least, romances said. Who could tell what might be in store for her! Perhaps wealth—titled honors! She might even live to be one of the great ones of that world, where she longed to shine!

All these thoughts rushed through the vain, worldly heart of Rita, as she sat there, musing even long into the sands. Margaret Rivers had fire, passion, force, and a certain kind of cleverness; but of truth and high principle, of true nobility of soul, she said, calmly.

It was about after that for three days; but all Rita's misgivings were set at rest on his remark. "It is not my fault," he said, "I was pressed out." He called it. How much of his hard words had been spent on it, he knew best. She sat as usual on the sands, and she put into her hand the diamonds she had given her, and with a cry of delight, saw a pair of diamond ear-rings, that shone with a light that dazzled her eyes. In one moment she was near them, and Ralph placed it on her finger.

"That is our betrothal ring," he said; "and the time will come when you shall wear as many diamonds as you like. Let me place those ear-rings in your ears."

The diamonds were not brighter or more full of life than the dark eyes and in mild wonder and silent admiration to his face.

"Oh, Ralph!" she said; "how lovely, how costly! I never thought I should have a real diamond on my own."

She was so pleased, and looked so beautiful in her joy, that Ralph Ashton gladly gave her all she had in mind to give her. The gems had well-nigh emptied his purse; still, he thought not, cared not.

She never gave one thought to any sacrifice he made to procure them, or to any sacrifice he made to her; or of the love that had actuated him; she only gloried in her own bright, rich beauty, and how the jewels would increase it.

Ralph Ashton had but another fortnight to meet in England; and one evening, when the day had passed and the sun setting, he went to meet Rita on the sands. As the time approached for his departure, something like fear and doubt took possession of his mind.

He began to wonder if Rita would be true to him during his absence. She who loved wealth, and longed for grandeur—would she be true if he should not come with the sun setting, and if he were half-doubt took hold of him, and blanched his dark face. For many months they had met on the sands, and he had told her every secret of his heart; but he had not remembered that she had ever blushed, or that her proud face had been lowered for him.

"He would be true to me," he said, "and he would be true to himself; and bid her by a vow so solemn, that she who feared little, should fear to break it." For two whole days he had not seen her, and she had not seen him, and she had promised to come, and he knew she would keep her word.

#### CHAPTER V.

##### A LOVER.

THE evening had come, and Ralph Ashton proceeded to the sea-shore to meet the haughty beauty he so passionately loved, and to bind her to him as he had done to himself, from which she should never sever. The tide was out, and the sun was setting behind a red bank of cloud.

As he saw her lover approaching, she noted the anxious, depressed look on the face usually so bright and hopeful.

"I had great difficulty in getting away," she said; "I had to be in still very late, but you wanted me, and I am here. Tell me quickly what it is—my time must be short."

"I am not happy, Rita," said he. "I wish I could stay near you, but I am so enchanting.

Some one is sure to try and steal you from me while I am gone," she said, with a smile and a sigh.

"There is not much to fear," she replied, with a smile and a sigh.

"Even should it be so," she continued, "if you were to be stolen, would you give me, Rita?"

"There was not a quiver on the proud lips that said, calmly, 'Of course I should, Ralph'; and her eyes, still bent on the waves, never sought his.

"Tell me so, in another tone of voice," he cried; "look at me, as though you loved me. It is a terrible thing, to be stolen, and to have a man's heart as you have won the whole of mine. It would be dangerous to deceive me, Rita; my whole life would be devoted to you, and yet I tremble at one word or look of yours. You are my own, and I am yours; deal gently with me—do you love me?"

"You know it, Ralph," she said more gently, for the passion of his words alarmed her; but he listened in vain for the true ring in that musical tone—it was not there.

"I try to believe it," he said; "if I were to doubt it, I should go mad. I could not live without you, Rita; the world would be a dreary blank. Were you to die, my darling, I could not survive you. If you deceived me—"

"What should you do?" she asked.

"I would kill you, Rita," he said, with a smile, "and when I found you, as truly as the sun sets, I would kill you, Rita, and thus avenge my love on the one who loves me."

In after years, she remembered his words; in the most terrible hour of her life they came back to her, and she knew he meant what he said.

"Do not talk in that wild way, Ralph," she said; "you alarm me."

In one moment the fierce look had left his face, and he was himself again.

"Forgive me, Rita," he said, humbly; "the very thought drives me to despair. You will be true to me—will you not, darling? When you are my wife, I shall be a good man. I must do something for the kind heaven that gives me my treasure. It is not only my heart, but my soul, that you hold in your hands. Deal gently with me—I have staked all my life on one throw."

"You then do you go?" she asked. His unusual seriousness dismayed her. She was there to listen to praise, not threats.

"I am not here to look for anything other than what is done for me; but no change, no cloud came over it; and you have promised me, Rita, we shall be married on the first week of my return."

"I have promised," she said; "and I will keep my word."

He looked over the wide sea, and again to the shining sky.

"Rita," he said, suddenly; "I shall bind you to me by a vow. You are mine before heaven. Swear to me that you will ever be true to another, and that, until you die, you will be faithful to me."

She would have hesitated, but there was a look in his face that compelled her to obedience. The bloom faded from her countenance as she repeated after him words so solemn—her whole soul was so wrought.

"There," said Ralph Ashton, releasing her hands; "I am quite satisfied. Neither you nor any other man breathing dare break such an oath as that."

Long after Ralph Ashton left her, Margaret Rivers sat dreaming by the sea—out of the world, and in a world of her own. She was a passionate heart that lay in her hand—not of the soul she might help to save, but of the old, tormenting doubts. Had she done the best she could? For a moment she would have even realized what she had done. Ralph Ashton's hold upon her was for life. He would never let her go.

One day she made money—he would one day, perhaps, be rich in a certain kind of way; but, after all, he was not a gentleman. He had given her jewels; he counted on her for money; he would have her to think he could repeat the gift. All the visions and dreams he had won her with seemed unreal.

Over and over again she asked herself, if, with her glorious dawn of beauty, she had done her best.

No warning comes in the mysterious voice of the future. She had been told that on this very evening the crisis of her life had begun.

She sat watching the waves until the tide began to ebb. She was alone, and the light faded in the western sky. Then Rita, rousing herself from her dreams, went slowly home. It was late, and she was some distance from her father's house, and the evening had grown dark as she reached home.

All visions were forgotten when she stood outside her door. She had been told that the doctor had long been lying. For some days the doctor had been attending her, but did not say she was in any immediate danger. When Rita felt that everything was over, she saw one of the neighbors offered to sit with her while the young girl was out. This same woman met her now at the door, with a pale, scared face.

"Miss Rita," she cried—"where has you been? Your mother has been taken so ill, I thought you would never see her again."

"And when Rita stood by her mother's bedside, and saw the fatal change that had come over the kindly, homely face, tears of genuine sorrow filled her eyes.

"Your mother is very ill," said the doctor, gently; "the immediate danger seems to have passed, but she must be carefully watched all night; and if the least change takes place, send for me."

There were many offers of assistance, but Rita saw her mother wished to be left alone with her. In her own room, she gave them a "good-night" to those who would faint have lingered. She arranged the sick-room, shaded the lamp so that the light should not fall on her mother's face, prepared the medicine, and then took her seat by her dying mother's side.

"Rita," said the faint, changed voice, "is it too late to send for Daisy? I wish to see her. I shall not live until the sun rises to-morrow. I feel death-cold at my heart, and I must see Daisy before I die."

"I will do my best," said Rita, gently; "but you will not die yet, mother."

"I know, child," said the sick woman; "I can feel that the end is not far away. I shall have seen your father again before to-morrow dawns, Rita. A doctor's words signify nothing; they cannot know. I feel it, and I must see Daisy."

But midnight had struck before a messenger could be found to go for Daisy. It was a long walk there, and half of it to her. She was lying weak down before her sister could reach home. She told her mother so; and Susan Rivers, turning her pallid face to the wall, moaned aloud.

"Are we quite alone, Rita?" asked the sick woman, in a low, faint voice.

"Quite alone, mother," answered the young girl. The moonbeams peeped in at the window, throwing long lines of silver light on the floor; the deep, solemn hush of the night was unbroken, save by the murmur of the wind and the distant breaking of the waves. Margaret Rivers never forgot that night—its solemn silence and dim light.

"I have a secret, Rita," said the faint voice; "I have lived many years. I must see Daisy before I die, and tell it to her. If she does not come, I must tell it to you, and you must hold it in charge, secretly, as I have done."

The long night wore on, and Daisy did not come.

"Rita," said the dying woman; "unlock that little box for me, and take out the parcel that lies there."

Rita obeyed; her mother's trembling fingers could not unfasten the string; she opened it—and there lay a ring of pearls, a locket, with fair and dark hair, and a letter, with "A" in the center; with her hand lay a packet of letters, written in a fair, delicate hand.

"These are Daisy's," said the dying woman to her. Bend down, Rita, lower still, while I tell you the secret I have kept for fifteen years. Daisy is not my child, Rita; she is not your own sister, as you have so long believed her to be.

She paused, for Rita cried out in astonishment.

"Are you dreaming, mother?" she said.

"No," replied Mrs. Rivers; "these things prove my story is no dream. Look in the register at St. John's, in Deepdale; there you will find I have only one child, Margaret, my only daughter. Daisy is no child of mine."

"Who is she?" asked Rita, in utter amazement.

"That is the story I must tell you; and you must repeat every word to her, if—I if I do not see her again."

"I have never spoken much to you of my early life, Rita," continued her mother; "and my silence has been for Daisy's sake. My parents were respectable well-to-do people, who sent me to school, and had their daughter brought up as they did; I went out to service. I never had but one place, and that was at Mr. Arle's—a rich merchant, with a large family. He had one daughter, Miss Margaret Arle; and, although I was but sixteen, the entire charge of her was intrusted to me."

Mrs. Rivers then proceeded to tell her daughter all the particulars relative to the bankruptcy and death of Miss Arle's father; of the young lady's marriage with a man of dissipated habits, in her charge, as already unfolded to the reader.

"She was," concluded her mother, "but a childish thing when I left Deepdale, and came to Queen's Lynn. For my dead mistress's sake, I have kept the secret. No one ever dreams that Daisy is other than what she appears to be. I expect it. I tell you now, Rita; for I shall see her mother in another world, and she will ask me if I have done my best."

## CHAPTER V.

## TEMPERATURE.

There was silence for some minutes, and Mrs. Rivers' voice had grown faint and exhausted. Rita sat lost in bewildered surprise.

"And what am I to do, mother?" she asked.

"Give these to Daisy," she replied; "this locket and ring, with the letters. Tell her the story I have told you. Tell her I have no claim on her father's name, save that which was given to me by her father, and that his regiment was in India, in 18—, Perhaps he died there. If ever Daisy was friends, they will make inquiries for me; but if she finds the messenger is not a legal one, tell her I charge her, for her dead mother's sake, to let the story die, so that it falls dead on Margaret Arle's grave. I will give her these messages faithfully, Rita! Promise me!"

"I will not omit one word," replied her daughter, obediently.

"For you," said the dying woman, "I have no fear. This little house will always be your own, and you will have no money subject to my support. Had heaven so willed it, I should like to have lived long enough to have held your children in my arms. I have been very proud of your beauty, child; but things look different in the strong light of eternity. I have often thought you proud and vain. Ah, Rita! you will live some day when I am lying dead, and I will see you all vanity! Do not fix your heart on the world's honors and riches. Ah, me, that pain! I shall not see Daisy again; kiss her for me, and let her know how well she is loved."

Even as she uttered the words, an awful gray pall settled on her face; and Rita went hastily to her mother's side, and then hurried and called away for Mrs. Rivers—the fat had gone forth. The doctor was summoned; friends came, and stood near; the faithful nurse was fast nearing the end; she did not speak again.

When morning light, when Daisy came and bent over her, no look of recognition shone in the dim eyes; they were closed to earthly things.

Mrs. Rivers died—before Daisy came home—Rita gathered the contents of the little parcel together, and placed them carefully in a box.

"There will be time enough for telling her that strange story," she thought.

And Daisy, all unconscious, slept by her mother's side, and that luxury her last moments with gentle, loving care. She closed the kind eyes that had always looked tenderly on her; she knew that she had done her duty to her own, she wept bitter tears of sorrow. Yet, as she gazed upon the white, cold face, she felt, in some way, it was not part of herself that lay there.

Friends and neighbors comforted the two orphan girls, now left utterly alone. Daisy felt her heart would break, and wept away at the strange, dreamy look on Rita's face. There was not much time for weeping; preparations had to be made for the funeral. Poor Rita had only one friend in Deepdale, an old widow lady, Mrs. Forns, took up her abode at the cottage, where mourning dresses and articles of furniture for the funeral deepened the gloom of the young girls.

Rita said, to herself, that there was no opportunity of telling Daisy the story, and that, as a feeling of envy crept into her heart. For the first time, she was struck by the difference between herself and herself. She saw the high and refined refinement; the spiritual expression of the sweet, pure face; the little hands, so white and beautifully formed; the graceful symmetry of the slight, girlish figure. Could it be possible that this girl, who she had always looked down upon as her younger and inferior sister, should turn out to be the child of her noble father! Either she was that, or her very birth was a shame and disgrace. Which could it be?

Her mother had entertained cruel doubts; could they have been just ones. In the dead silence of the night, Rita rose, and unlocked the box in which her mother had hidden the Arle's letters over and over again. Ah! there could he no doubt, she spoke so proudly of her husband; it had been a real marriage. Ah! there could be no mistake. Whose was Captain Arle's might be, Daisy was his legitimate child. What if he were a man of high position and high birth? The door of the noble lady—would enter, by right, that gay world Rita thought paradise. She would be rich and happy. Why had fate and fortune favored her? Ah! she thought that Daisy had been Mrs. Rivers' child, and she the Captain's daughter!

Then, with the letters in her hand, she felt impelled to tell the story to her mother. She never rest until she had discovered him—she would search for him until he were found. Then she would win his love. He would reward her magnificently. Then all she had longed for would be hers. She saw herself superbly dressed, with diamonds and jewels, with long waving hair—her with the gay, the great, and the noble all offering her homage. The vain, worldly heart was dazzled with the picture; and the story was carried chilled her—this was for Daisy, and not for herself.

With a deep sigh, she unlocked the box, and went to the little room where she had slept. The moon shone brightly; one of its silvery beams touched Daisy's face, lingering almost lovingly on the clear, calm brow, and the deli-

cate, spiritual features.\* Rita bent over her, silently wondering—until wonder became jealous pain—what the future held in store for the sleeping girl. Suddenly, across her face there came a strange expression, as if she had deep thought; it lingered there, filling the dark eyes with gloom.

She held out her hands in horror, as though trying to drive it from her, but it would not go. "Not now," she whispered to herself. "I will not think of it now. I have to kiss my mother's face again."

Yet the thought had a weird fascination for her. She could not sleep, she could not rest; ideas and fears were arising, and suggestions, plans and arrangements suggested themselves to her. Early morn found Margaret Rivers pale and absorbed.

The sun rose, and the day was the one appointed for Mrs. Rivers' funeral. The two girls went together to the darkened room where she lay, and took their last farewell of her. Warm tears fell from Daisy's eyes upon the cold form she had always dearly loved; but no tears dimmed the dark eyes that had so strange an expression.

The funeral was over; friends and neighbors had all withdrawn; Mrs. Forns alone remaining. Daisy was left alone with her mother's body, and on the following morning, and still the secret was not told, the trust was not fulfilled; and the younger girl wondered why the elder one should grieve so deeply, and why the elder one Rita's face with something deeper than sorrow. She little dreamed of the fierce warfare going on in that young heart, and she little dreamed that good and evil were fighting a hard battle; that her own destiny and Rita's hung trembling in the balance.

At first, while Daisy slept, Rita watched, and fought the battle that decided the course of her life. For many long hours the battle had raged, and was fast taking its course.

She had never told the story; for on the night she gazed with jealous envy on Daisy as she lay sleeping, a vision came to her, which burned its way into her heart, and she had never told Daisy nothing of the secret. No one in the wide world knew it but herself. There was no proof of anything, and she had no right to say. Why not put herself in Daisy's place, and call herself Captain Arle's daughter! Who would know? The only two who could detect the imposture, were her mother and her own—were both dead.

At first, the thought that glanced through her mind, she shrank from it, as if it were a stain on her mother's trust. But gently and subtly it stole back, and nestled there, a welcome guest. Still she did not dare, while her mother lay motionless, to tell the secret to any one. When she stood, as it were, alone in the world, she made up her mind.

It was a bold venture; there was something of good in the vain, worldly, ambitious nature, and her better self cried out at the base design; and the story was conquered, and that summer night when she stood by the window watching the quiet stars. The temptation was too strong—she yielded—and the great battle was lost.

She was now in a position of great difficulty to overcome—thanks to the fate that had called her Margaret, and had given to Daisy the same name. Margaret Rivers was not to register, the only child Mrs. Rivers had. There could be no difficulty in that. Every one would readily believe Daisy to be that child. Who could dispute her title? She was known, few knew her at Deepdale, and they were never likely to hear of the circumstances again. Fossils and bones were not the points of the law. She had the ring, the locket, the letters, and, above all, the story. She need not alter one word of it. She had but to put herself in Daisy's place, and she would have everything connected with the history of Margaret Arle and child, and could not find one weak point.

"After all," she said to herself, as the voice of conscience tried to make itself heard—"what does it matter? If ever Captain Arle comes to his high birth, and to his fortune, and I shall make a better lady than Daisy ever could. To deprive him of a child would be very different to substituting a grown-up girl for another cannot matter much."

It was after midnight when Rita went to Daisy, and calling her gently, roused her from sleep. She said, "I have something to tell you, and I want to tell you something before you return."

Daisy looked up in some surprise, and said, "What is it, dear?"

"Are you in trouble, or have you any news?"

Rita finished her story, and she said, "It is a secret; one that no one ought to be revealed."

\* LORD LISLE'S DAUGHTER, BY MISS IRVING. IN TWO VOLUMES. LONDON: PUBLISHED BY G. B. ROBINSON AND CO. 15, N. B. ST. MARKS PLACE, W. IRVING, COMPLETE. 25, N. B. ST. MARKS PLACE, W. FOR TEN CENTS.

## CURRENT EVENTS.

INGENUOUS persons were selling eggs at \$1.80 per dozen the other day in Portland, Me., when the suspicious police seized them, and discovered that the shells had been filled with a colored article of whiskey. An egg-seller was fined of evading the "Maine Liquor Law," we should say.

It is said that but four of the 98 signers of the Declaration of Independence of Texas are now alive. These are: Edwin Waller, at present a citizen of Houston; George S. Foster, of Texas, aged 78; John W. Bunton, of Mountain City, Hayes County, aged 65; W. B. Scates, of Sherman, Colorado, aged 70; and James B. Stewart, of Montgomery County, aged 70.

The founder of the Ragged Schools of England was a poor cobbler of London. He began by teaching a few ragged boys in his cobblers' stall. They would not have come to a regular school, but they listened to the kindly words of Robert Raikes. From that small beginning sprung the Ragged Schools of England, raising countless thousands from the gutters of the streets to honor and respectability. He is justly considered one of the greatest benefactors of mankind.

The Boston Advertiser mildly declares war against the English sparrows, condemning them as quarrelsome and unsocial. "All our little American songsters," it says, "are harassed by this savage English pest, which makes up in pugnacity and numbers what it lacks in size. It is driving them away, and is fast becoming its own untoward critic and the chattering of its constant chattering under our windows. It is prolific to a marvel, and if delicately favored, as in the past, will soon suggest the frogs of Egypt."

AFTER a silver-plating factory closed its business not long ago, at New Haven, the floor of the plating room was taken up, and \$681 worth of silver was extracted from the ashes. Both gold and silver are very apt to be distributed in invisible particles in the garments of workmen employed upon jewelry, plating and assaying. A tattered vest belonging to such a workman has been found on calculation to contain \$30 worth of gold and silver. It was the office of one of the largest dealers in specie in this city, the sweepings and dust of the place and the water which the employees poured into their hands after counting money were carefully set aside, and always produced more than enough gold and silver to repay extraction.

Or all the vanities and absurdities of fashion that have crept into the world, few are more useless and ridiculous than that of wearing ear-rings. No part of the human body is so little affected by the ordinary changes of life as the ear. If allowed to remain in its natural state, where God put it, it is erect, shell-shaped, transparent, and delicately beautiful. But Satan has defiled the earth, and put its mark upon the most beautiful and enduring things. It has been a custom in all ages for stock-growers to put the mark of their ownership on the ears of their animals, and the same is true in the history of the world, soon after Eve was driven out of Eden, managed to put his mark on the ears of women. The rich and the poor, the lady in her silks and the beggar in her rags, are alike the victims of this deforming and barbarous custom.

PITTSBURG is fairly entitled to rank as the Sheffield of America, and the fact that the steel manufacturers has not only achieved for Pittsburg the highest reputation as a producer of the best crucible steel, but has carried them far ahead of any other city in the annual amount produced, the aggregate annual production of all the works being 30,000 tons, the full capacity being 40,000 tons. The finest kinds of plate and bar steel, and steel for edge tools, agricultural tools, springs, axles, plows, etc., are made here in every grade; in fact, there is no form of steel or merchant steel that is not produced in Pittsburg. The nearest approach in the way of product is, perhaps, the steel works of Lake Superior, which probably produce about 6,000 tons annually.

If blue glass be not a panacea, there are many curious Chinese remedies that can be tried. For instance: Dried boards, dung beetles' skins, and mud collected from the corners of houses; dried scorpions for rheumatism, and eggs of scorpions for cholera; a stimulant; rhinoceros horn, a decoction for smallpox; dried toads, a tonic and sulfuric; dried magpies for fever; dried crickets for cholera; dried quail for hydrophobia; pearls, used in affections of the heart and liver; and powdered for ulcers and opacities of the cornea. These remedies are sold by the Chinese drug exhibitor at the Centennial. It reads like an invoice of the witches' cabinet.

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## FANCY AND FACT.

A MAN should live with his income, even if he has to borrow to do it.

A SWEETHEART is called a turtle dove; so a coquette must be a mock-turtle dove.

ANY YOUNG man is made better by a sister's love. The love of another fellow's sister will do.

THE AVERAGE age of sheep is ten years, cows fifteen, hogs fifteen, and horses not used as beasts of burden, fifteen.

FOOLS and their money soon part. It's worth while being a fool, to have the money to part with, though.

"CHANCE COURTS" is what a bootblack said to a countryman the other day, when he had finished one of his programs.

SWEET are the uses of adversity. A cross-eyed schoolm'am can keep twice the usual number of children in order at once.

An electric light on board Her Majesty's steamer Alexandre enables a person three miles distant to read a newspaper.

"WE'VE got to economize, or this country is ruined," was the soliloquy of a St. Louis husband as he kindled the fire with his wife's bustle.

An eminent statistician estimates that there are 400,000 yards of rag carpet in Vermont, and that every third family has a quilting frame to spare.

A GROCER had a pound of sugar returned with a note saying: "Too much sand for table use, and not enough for building purposes."

SOME physicians now claim that the general prevalence of diphtheria is due in a great degree to the fact that it is thrown off from coal stoves and ill-ventilated rooms.

"At a Des Moines dinner party the other day," says an exchange, "all the dishes were over 100 years old." How? Is it possible? Oh, yes; we see boarding-house board children.

AFTER all, mankind has changed very little with the lapse of time. In a little tavern, recently dug out at Pompeii, the usual state and pencil were found hanging on the back of the door.

THEY were talking of a death when one man asked: "What were his last words?" He didn't say anything," was the reply. "That's just like him," said the other, "he was an improving sort; there was no gas about him. He was all business."

HERE is a good business-like epitaph: "Here lies Jane Smith, wife of Thomas Smith, marble cutter. Her husband died in the year 1865, and she buried as a tribute to her memory and a specimen of his work. Monuments of the same style, \$250."

LITTLE MISS—Papa, I can eat a pie more current tart, please. Papa—No, my child; I have no more that you have had sufficient. Little Miss—Well, papa, then why do we so often sing that favorite hymn of yours, where it says, "Pled me, was said to me more?" She had the tart.

THE plantation negroes were engaged in pitching coppers. It was discovered that after pitching a while several coppers were missing, though it was ascertained that no one was picking up any but his own pennies. One old negro, whose coppers had mysteriously disappeared, at length becoming satisfied in his mind that there was foul play, called on his neighbor, a young woman of the barefooted party had a peculiar way every now and then of jerking his right foot up to his hand, calling it "paw" in the game, saying, "De wifaw." The suspected individual retiring on this polite invitation, the game went on without any mysterious disappearance of any more coppers.

THEODORE HOOK, at a dinner party one day, was charged with stealing from a farce written by one of his friends the expression "You are down upon me," he continued, "No, my child; it is the extinguisher." He immediately proceeded to show how little he was under the necessity of stealing by supplying the same species of extinguisher every thing he said to him for the next half hour, e.g.: "You are very pressing, Dean, as the filberts said to the nut-crackers." "Pray pardon me," he continued, "No, my child; it is sorry to trouble you, as the pin said to the periwinkle." "Bravo, Hookens," shouted the Dean, "you must give up your plan of going to the moon!" "Well, my child, you are right; I will be all the same one hundred years hence, as the American sailor would say it came into bloom."

But I've a song, and you see, I've got to use the rat said to the trap which cut his tail off. I've a bad cold, but will try my best, and hope to come off with flying colors, as the English general said when he ordered his negroes to retreat. If I attempt a stave, don't make a butt of me!"