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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE QUEEN OF
THE ISLE : A NOVEL ***

THE
QUEEN OF THE ISLE.

A Novel.

BY
MAY AGNES FLEMING.

AUTHOR OF
"GUY EARLSCOURT'S WIFE," "THE ACTRESS' DAUGHTER,"
"A WONDERFUL WOMAN," "LOST FOR A WOMAN,"
"SILENT AND TRUE," "ONE NIGHT'S MYSTERY,"
"A TERRIBLE SECRET," "A MAD MARRIAGE,"
ETC., ETC.

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THE QUEEN OF THE ISLE;

OR,

A HASTY WOOING.

CHAPTER I.

CAMPBELL'S ISLE.

"The island lies nine leagues away,
Along its solitary shore
Of craggy rock and sandy bay
No sound but ocean's roar,

Save where the bold, wild sea-bird makes her home,
Her shrill cry coming through the sparkling foam."—R. H. DANA.

About six miles from the mainland of M——, with its rock-bound coast washed by the waters of the broad Atlantic, was an islet known in the days of which I write as Campbell's Isle.

The island was small—about two miles in length and the same in breadth, but fertile and luxurious. The dense primeval forest, which as yet the destroying ax had scarcely touched, reared itself high and dark in the northern part of the island. A deep, unbroken silence ever reigned here, save when some gay party from the opposite coast visited the island to fish or shoot partridges. Sometimes during the summer, pleasure parties were held here, but in the winter all was silent and dreary on the lonely, isolated little spot.

This island had been, from time immemorial, in the possession of a family named Campbell, handed down from father to son. The people of the surrounding country had learned to look upon them as the rightful lords of the soil, "to the manner born." The means by which it had first come into their possession were seldom thought of, or if thought of, only added to their reputation as a bold and daring race. The legend ran, that long before Calvert came over, a certain Sir Guy Campbell, a celebrated freebooter and scion of the noble Scottish clan of that name, who for some reckless crime had been outlawed and banished, and in revenge had hoisted the black flag and become a rover on the high seas, had, in his wanderings, discovered this solitary island, which he made the place of his rendezvous. Here, with his band of dare-devils—all outlaws like himself—he held many a jolly carousal that made the old woods ring.

In one of his adventures he had taken captive a young Spanish girl, whose wondrous beauty at once conquered a heart all unused to the tender passion. He bore off his prize in triumph, and without asking her consent, made her his wife at the first port he touched. Soon, however, tiring of her company on shipboard, he brought her to his island home, and there left her to occupy his castle, while he sailed merrily away. One year afterward, Sir

Guy the Fearless, as he was called, was conquered by an English sloop-of-war; and, true to his daring character, he blew up the vessel, and, together with his crew and captors, perished in the explosion.

His son and successor, Gasper, born on the isle, grew up tall, bold, and handsome, with all his father's daring and undaunted courage, and his mother's beauty, and torrid passionate nature. He, in the course of time, took to himself a wife of the daughters of the mainland; and, after a short, stormy life, passed away in his turn to render an account of his works, leaving to his eldest son, Hugh, the bold spirit of his forefathers, the possession of Campbell's Isle, and the family mansion known as Campbell's Lodge.

And so, from one generation to another, the Campbells ruled as lords of the isle, and became, in after years, as noted for their poverty as their pride. A reckless, improvident race they were, caring only for to-day, and letting to-morrow care for itself; quick and fierce to resent injury or insult, and implacable as death or doom in their hate. Woe to the man who would dare point in scorn at one of their name! Like a sleuth-hound they would dog his steps night and day, and rest not until their vengeance was sated.

Fierce alike in love and hatred, the Campbells of the Isle were known and dreaded for miles around. From sire to son the fiery blood of Sir Guy the Fearless passed unadulterated, and throbbed in the veins of Mark Campbell, the late master of the lodge, in a darker, fiercer stream than in any that had gone before. A heavy-browed, stern-hearted man he was, of whose dark deeds wild rumors went whispering about, for no one dared breathe them aloud, lest they should reach his vindictive ears, and rouse the slumbering tiger in his breast. At his death, which took place some two or three years previous to the opening of our story, his son Guy, a true descendant of his illustrious namesake, became the lord and master of the isle, and the last of the Campbells.

Young Guy showed no disposition to pass his days in the spot where he was born. After the death of his father, Guy resolved to visit foreign lands, and leave Campbell's Lodge to the care of an old black servant, Aunt Moll, and her son Lem, both of whom had passed their lives in the service of the family, and considered that in some sort the honor of the house lay in their hands.

Vague rumors were current that the old house was haunted. Fishermen out, casting their nets, avowed that at midnight, blue, unearthly lights flashed from the upper chambers—where it was known Aunt Moll never went—and wild, piercing shrieks, that chilled the blood with horror, echoed on the still night air. The superstitious whispered that Black Mark had been sent back by his master, the Evil One, to atone for his wicked deeds done in the flesh, and that his restless spirit would ever haunt the old lodge—the scene, it was believed, of many an appalling crime. Be that as it may, the old house was deserted, save by Aunt Moll and her hopeful son; and young Guy, taking with him his only sister, spent his time in cruising about in a schooner he owned, and—it was said, among the rest of the rumors—in *cheating the revenue*.

Besides the lodge, or Campbell's Castle, as it was sometimes called, the island contained but one other habitation, occupied by a widow, a distant connection of the Campbells, who, after the death of her husband, had come here to reside. The cottage was situated on the summit of a gentle elevation that commanded an extensive view of the island; for Mrs. Tomlinson—or Mrs. Tom, as she was always called—liked a wide prospect.

The most frugal, the most industrious of housewives was Mrs. Tom. No crime in her eyes equaled that of thriftlessness, and all sins could be pardoned but that of laziness. Unfortunately for her peace of mind, she was afflicted with an orphan nephew, the laziest of mortals, whose shortcomings kept the bustling old lady in a fever from morning till night. A wild young sister of Mrs. Tom's had run away with a Dutch fiddler, and dying a few years after, was soon followed to the grave by her husband, who drank more than was good for him one night, and was found dead in the morning. Master Carl Henley was accordingly adopted by his living relative and, as that good lady declared, had been "the death of her" ever since.

A young girl of sixteen, known only as "Christie," was the only other member of Mrs. Tom's family. Who this girl was, where she had come from, and what was her family name, was a mystery: and Mrs. Tom, when questioned on the subject, only shut her lips and shook her head mysteriously, and spoke never a word. Although she called the old lady aunt, it was generally believed that she was no relation; but as Christie was

a favorite with all who visited the island, the mystery concerning her, though it piqued the curiosity of the curious, made them like her none the less. A big Newfoundland dog and a disagreeable chattering parrot completed the widow's household.

Mrs. Tom's business was flourishing. She made a regular visit each week to the mainland, where she disposed of fish, nuts, and berries, in which the island abounded, and brought back groceries and such things as she needed. Besides that, she kept a sort of tavern and place of refreshment for the sailors and fishermen, who sometimes stopped for a day or two on the island; and for many a mile, both by land and sea, was known the fame of Mrs. Tom.

Such was Campbell's Isle, and such were its owners and occupants. For many years now it had been quiet and stagnant enough, until the development of sundry startling events that for long afterward were remembered in the country around and electrified for a time the whole community.

CHAPTER II

THE MAGIC MIRROR.

"I turned my eyes, and as I turned surveyed
An awful vision."

The sun was sinking in the far west as the little schooner Evening Star went dancing over the bright waves towards Campbell's Isle. Captain Guy Campbell stood leaning negligently over the taffrail, solacing himself with a cigar, and conversing at intervals with a slight, somewhat haughty-looking young man, who stood beside him, watching the waves flashing, as they

sped along. No two could be more opposite, as far as looks went, than those two, yet both were handsome and about the same age.

Like all his race, young Campbell was very tall, and dark as a Spaniard. His short, black, curling hair shadowed a forehead high, bold, and commanding. Dark, keen, proud eyes flashed from beneath jetty eye-brows, and the firm, resolute mouth gave to his dark face a look almost fierce. His figure was exquisitely proportioned and there was a certain bold frankness, mingled with a reckless, devil-may-care expression in his fine face, that atoned for his swarthy complexion and stern brows.

His companion was a tall, elegant young man, with an air of proud superiority about him, as though he were "somebody," and knew it. His complexion was fair as a lady's, and would have been effeminate but for the dark, bold eyes and his dashing air generally. There was something particularly winning in his handsome face, especially when he smiled, that lit up his whole countenance with new beauty. Yet, with all, there was a certain faithless expression about the finely formed mouth that would have led a close observer to hesitate before trusting him too far. This, reader, was Mr. Willard Drummond, a young half-American, half-Parisian, and heir to one of the finest estates in the Old Dominion. The last five years he had passed in Paris, and when he was thinking of returning home he had encountered Campbell and his sister. Fond of luxury and ease as the young patrician was, he gave up all, after that, for the attraction he discovered on board the schooner Evening Star. And Captain Campbell, pleased with his new friend, invited him to cross the ocean with him, and spend a few weeks with him in his ancestral home, whither he was obliged to stop while some repairs were being made in his vessel, which invitation Willard Drummond, nothing loth, accepted.

"Well, Campbell, how is that patient of yours this evening?" inquired Drummond, after a pause.

"Don't know," replied Captain Campbell, carelessly; "I haven't seen him since morning. Sibyl is with him now."

"By the way, where did you pick him up? He was not one of your crew, I understand."

"No; I met him in Liverpool. He came to me one day, and asked me to take him home. I replied that I had no accommodations, and would much rather not be troubled with passengers. However, he pleaded so hard for me to accommodate him, and looked so like something from the other world all the time, that I had not the heart to refuse the poor fellow. Before we had been three days out at sea he was taken ill, and has been raving and shrieking ever since, as you know."

"What do you suppose is the matter with him?"

"Well, I haven't much experience as nurse myself, but I think it's brain fever, or something of that kind; Sibyl, however, thinks that bitter remorse for something he has done is preying on his mind, and girls always know best in these cases."

"He is, if I may judge by his looks, of humble station," said Mr. Drummond, in an indifferent tone.

"Yes; there can be no doubt of *that*, though he appears to have plenty of money."

"Has he given his name?"

"Yes; Richard Grove."

"Hum! Well, it would be unpleasant to have him die on board, of course," said Drummond.

"Oh, I think he'll live to reach our destination; he does not appear to be sinking very fast."

"We must now be quite near this island home of yours, Captain Campbell; I grow impatient to see it."

"We shall reach it about moonrise to-night, if the wind holds as it is now."

"And what, may I ask, do you intend doing with this—Richard Grove, when you get there? Will you take him into your Robinson Crusoe castle

and nurse him until he gets well, as that enterprising canoe-builder did Friday's father?

"No, I think not. There is an old lady on the island, who is never so happy as when she has some one to nurse. I think we'll consign him to her."

"Then there is another habitation on the island beside yours?" said Drummond, looking up with more interest than he had yet manifested.

"Yes; old Mrs. Tom, a distant connection of our family, I believe. And, by the way, Drummond, there is a pretty little girl in the case. I suppose that will interest you more than the old woman."

"Pretty girls are an old story by this time," said Drummond, with a yawn.

"Yes, with such a renowned lady-killer as you, no doubt."

"I never saw but one girl in the world worth the trouble of loving," said Drummond, looking thoughtfully into the water.

"Ah, what a paragon she must have been. May I ask what quarter of the globe has the honor of containing so peerless a beauty?"

"I never said she was a beauty, *mon ami*. But never mind that. When do you expect to be ready for sea again?"

"As soon as possible—in a few weeks, perhaps—for I fear that we'll all soon get tired of the loneliness of the place."

"You ought to be pretty well accustomed to its loneliness by this time."

"Not I, faith! It's now three years since I have been there."

"Is it possible? I thought you Campbells were too much attached to your ancestral home to desert it so long as that."

"Well, it's a dreary place, and I have such an attachment for a wild, exciting life that positively I could not endure it. I should die of stagnation."

As for Sibyl, my wild, impulsive sister, she would now as soon think of entering a convent as passing her life there."

"Yet you said it was partly by her request you were going there now?"

"Yes, she expressed a wish to show you the place." A slight flush of pleasure colored the clear face of Drummond. "I don't know what's got into Sibyl lately," continued her brother. "I never saw a girl so changed. She used to be the craziest leap-over-the-moon madcap that ever existed; now she is growing as tame as—as little Christie."

Drummond's fine eyes were fixed keenly on the frank, open face of Captain Campbell; but nothing was to be read there more than his words contained. With a peculiar smile he turned away, and said, carelessly:

"And who is this little Christie to whom you refer?"

"She's the *protege* of the old lady on the island—fair as the dream of an opium-eater, enchanting as a houri, and with the voice of an angel."

"Whew! the bold Campbell, the daring descendant of old Guy the Fearless, has lost his heart at last!" laughed Willard Drummond.

"Not I," answered Guy, carelessly. "I never yet saw the woman who could touch my heart, and, please Heaven, never will."

"Well, here's a wonder—a young man of three-and-twenty, and never in love! Do you expect me to believe such a fable, my good friend?"

"Believe or not, as you will, it is nevertheless true."

"What—do you mean to say you have never felt a touch of the *grande passion*—the slightest symptom of that infectious disorder?"

"Pooh! boyish fancies go for nothing. I have now and then felt a queer sensation about the region of my heart at the sight of sundry faces at different times, but as for being fatally and incorrigibly in love, never, on my honor!"

"Well, before you reach the age of thirty, you'll have a different story to tell, or I'm mistaken."

"No; there is no danger, I fancy, unless indeed," he added, fixing his eyes quizzically on Drummond's handsome face, "I should happen to meet this little enchantress you spoke of awhile ago."

A cloud passed over the brow of his companion; but it cleared away in a moment as a quick, light footstep was heard approaching, and the next instant Sibyl Campbell, the haughty daughter of a haughty race, stood bright, dazzling, and smiling before them.

No one ever looked once in the face of Sibyl Campbell without turning to gaze again. Peerlessly beautiful as she was, it was not her beauty that would startle you, but the look of wild power, of intense daring, of fierce passions, of unyielding energy, of a will powerful for love or hate, of a nature loving, passionate, fiery, impulsive, and daring, yet gentle and winning.

She might have been seventeen years of age—certainly not more. In stature she was tall, and with a form regally beautiful, splendidly developed, with a haughty grace peculiarly her own. Her face was perfectly oval: her complexion, naturally olive, had been tanned by sun and wind to a rich, clear, gipsyish darkness. Her hair, that hung in a profusion of long curls, was of jetty blackness, save where the sun fell on it, bringing out red rings of fire. Her large Syrian eyes, full of passion and power, were of the most intense blackness, now flashing with sparks of light, and anon swimming in liquid tenderness. Her high, bold brow might have become a crown—certainly it was regal in its pride and scorn. Her mouth, which was the only voluptuous feature in her face, was small, with full, ripe, red lips, rivaling in bloom the deep crimson of her dark cheeks.

Her dress was like herself—odd and picturesque, consisting of a short skirt of black silk, a bodice of crimson velvet, with gilt buttons. She held in one hand a black velvet hat, with a long, sweeping plume, swinging it gayly by the strings as she came toward them.

She was a strange, wild-looking creature, altogether; yet what would first strike an observer was her queenly air of pride, her lofty hauteur, her almost unendurable arrogance. For her unbending pride, as well as her surprising beauty, the haughty little lady had obtained, even in childhood, the title of "Queen of the Isle." And queenly she looked, with her noble brow, her flashing, glorious eyes, her dainty, curving lips, her graceful, statuesque form—in every sense of the word "a queen of noble Nature's crowning."

And Willard Drummond, passionate admirer of beauty as he was, what thought he of this dazzling creature? He leaned negligently still against the taffrail, with his eyes fixed on her sparkling, sunbright face, noting every look and gesture as one might gaze on some strange, beautiful creation, half in fear, half in love, but wholly in admiration. Yes, he loved her, or thought he did; and gazing with him on the moonlit waves, when the solemn stars shone serenely above him, he had told her so, and she had believed him. And she, wild, untutored child of nature, who can tell the deep devotion, the intense passion, the fiery, all-absorbing love for him that filled her impulsive young heart?

"Love was to her impassioned soul
Not, as to others, a mere part
Of her existence; but the whole—
The very life-breath of her heart."

As she advanced, Willard Drummond started up, saying, gayly:

"Welcome back, Miss Sibyl. I thought the sunlight had deserted us altogether; but you have brought it back in your eyes."

"How's your patient, Sibyl?" said Captain Campbell, who, not being in love, found Mr. Drummond's high-flown compliments very tiresome sometimes.

"Much worse, I am afraid," she answered in a peculiarly musical voice. "I do not think he will live to see the morrow's sun. His ravings are frightful

to hear—some terrible crime seems to be weighing him down as much as disease."

"After all, the human soul is an awful possession for a guilty man," said Captain Campbell, thoughtfully. "Things can be smoothed over during life, but when one comes to die—"

"They feel what retributive justice is, I suppose," said Drummond, in his customary careless tone; "and apropos of that, somebody will suffer terrible remorse after I die. I am to be murdered, if there is any truth in fortune-telling."

He spoke lightly, with a half smile; but Sibyl's face paled involuntarily as she exclaimed:

"Murdered, did you say? Who could have predicted anything so dreadful?"

"An old astrologer, or enchanter, or wizard of some kind, in Germany, when I was there. The affair seems so improbable, so utterly absurd, in short, that I never like to allude to it."

"You are not fool enough to believe such nonsense, I hope," said Captain Campbell.

"I don't know as it is nonsense. 'There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in philosophy,' you know."

"Yes—I was sure you would quote that; everyone does that when he advances some absurd doctrine; but it's all the greatest stuff, nevertheless."

"But did he tell you who you were to be—"

Sibyl stopped short; even in jest she could not pronounce the word.

"Murdered by?" said Willard, quietly finishing the sentence for her. "No, he told me nothing. I saw it all."

"Saw it! How? I do not understand."

"Oh, the story is hardly worth relating, and ought not to be told in the presence of such a skeptic as Captain Guy Campbell," said Drummond, running his fingers lightly through his dark, glossy locks.

"Heaven forbid I should wait to be inflicted by it!" said Captain Campbell, starting up. "I will relieve you of my presence, and allow you to entertain my superstitious sister here with your awful destiny, of which she will doubtless believe every word."

"I should be sorry to believe anything so dreadful," said Sibyl, gravely; "but I do think there are some gifted ones to whom the future has been revealed. I wish I could meet them, and find out what it has in store for me."

"Let me be your prophet," said Drummond, softly. "Beautiful Sibyl, there can be nothing but bliss for an angel like you."

Her radiant face flushed with pride, love, and triumph at his words.

"Do you believe in omens?" she said, laughingly. "See how brightly and beautifully yonder moon is rising! Now, if it reaches the arch of heaven unclouded, I shall believe your prediction."

Even as she spoke, a dense cloud passed athwart the sky, and the moon was obscured in darkness.

The dark, bright face of Sibyl paled at the dread omen. Involuntarily her eyes sought Drummond's who also had been gazing at the sky.

"Heaven avert the omen!" she cried, with a shudder. "Oh, Willard, the unclouded moon grew dark even while I spoke."

"And now the cloud is past, and it sails on brighter than ever," he said, with a smile. "See, fairest Sibyl, all is calm and peaceful once more. My prediction will be verified, after all."

She drew a deep breath, and looked so intensely relieved that he laughed. Sibyl blushed vividly, as she said:

"I know you must think me weak and childish; but I am superstitious by nature. Dreams, inspirations, and presentiments, that no one else thinks of, are all vivid realities to me. But you promised to tell me the German wizard's prediction concerning your future, so, pray, go on."

"Well, let me see," said Willard Drummond, leaning his head on his hand. "It is now three years ago that a celebrated Egyptian fortune-teller visited the town in Germany where I resided. His fame soon spread far and wide, and crowds of the incredulous came from every part to visit him. He could not speak a word of any language but his own; but he had an interpreter who did all the talking necessary, which was very little.

"I was then at a celebrated university; and, with two or three of my fellow-students, resolved, one day, to visit the wizard. Arrived at his house, we were shown into a large room, and called up one by one in the presence of the Egyptian.

"Our object in going was more for sport than anything else; but when we saw the first who was called—a wild, reckless young fellow, who feared nothing earthly—return pale and serious, our mirth was at an end. One by one the others were called, and all came back grave and thoughtful. By some chance, I was the last.

"I am not, like you, bright Sibyl, naturally superstitious; but I confess, when the interpreter ushered me into the presence of this wizard, I felt a sort of chilly awe creeping over me. He was the most singular-looking being I ever beheld. His face was exactly like that of one who has been for some days dead—a sort of dark-greenish white, with pale-blue lips, and sharp, Asiatic features. His eyes, black and piercingly sharp, looked forth from two deep caverns of sockets, and seemed the only living feature in his ghastly face. There were caldrons, and lizards, and cross-bones, and tame serpents, and curious devices carved on the walls, ceiling and floor, and the white, grinning skulls that were scattered about formed a hideously revolting sight in that darkened room.

"The Egyptian stood before a smoking caldron, and, drawn up to his full height, his size appeared almost colossal. His dress was a long, black robe, all woven over with scorpions, and snakes, and other equally pleasing

objects, that seemed starting out dazzlingly white from this dark background. Altogether, the room looked so like a charnel-house, and the wizard so like a supernatural being, that I am not ashamed to own I felt myself growing nervous as I looked around.

"The interpreter, who stood behind, opened the scene by asking me my name, age, birthplace, and divers other questions of a like nature, which he wrote down in some sort of hieroglyphics and handed to the Egyptian. Then bidding me advance and keep my eyes fixed on the caldron and not speak a word, the interpreter left the room.

"My heart beat faster than was its wont as I approached this strange being, and found myself completely alone with him in this ghostly, weird place. He took a handful of what I imagined to be incense of some kind, and threw it on the red, living coals, muttering some strange sounds in an unknown tongue as he did so. Presently a cloud of smoke arose, dense, black, and suffocating, filling the whole room with the gloom of Tartarus. Slowly, as if endowed with instinct, it lifted itself up and spread out before me. And, looking up, I beheld—"

Willard Drummond paused, as if irresolute whether to reveal the rest or not; but Sibyl grasped his arm, and in a voice that was fairly hoarse with intense excitement, said:

"Go on."

"I saw," he continued, looking beyond her, as if describing something then passing before him, "the interior of a church thronged with people. Flowers were strewn along the aisles, and I seemed to hear faintly the grand cadences of a triumphal hymn. A clergyman, book in hand, stood before a bridal pair, performing the marriage ceremony. The features of the man of God are indelibly impressed on my memory, but the two who stood before him had their backs toward me. For about five seconds they remained thus stationary, then it began to grow more indistinct; the forms grew shadowy and undefined, and began to disappear. Just before they vanished altogether, the faces of the wedded pair turned for an instant toward me, and in the bridegroom, Sibyl, I beheld myself. The vapor lifted and lifted, until all was

gone, and nothing was to be seen but the black walls of the room and the glowing, fiery coals in the caldron.

"Again the Egyptian threw the incense on the fire, and again mumbled his unintelligible jargon. Again the thick, black smoke arose, filling the room; and again became stationary, forming a shadowy panorama before me. This time I saw a prison-cell—dark, dismal, and noisome. A rough straw pallet stood on one side, and on the other a pitcher of water and a loaf—orthodox prison fare from time immemorial. On the ground, chained to the wall, groveled a woman, in shining bridal robes, her long midnight tresses trailing on the foul floor. No words can describe to you the utter despair and mortal anguish depicted in her crouching attitude. I stood spell-bound to the spot, unable to move, in breathless interest. Then the scene began to fade away; the prostrate figure lifted its head, and I beheld the face of her whom a moment before seemed to stand beside me at the altar. But no words of mine can describe to you the mortal woe, the unutterable despair, in that haggard but beautiful face. Sibyl! Sibyl! it will haunt me to my dying day. I put out my hand, as if to retain her, but in that instant all disappeared."

Once more Willard Drummond paused; this time he was deadly pale, and his eyes were wild and excited. Sibyl stood near him, her great black, mystic eyes dilated, every trace of color fading from her face, leaving even her lips as pale as death.

"The third time this strange enchanter went through the same ceremony as before," continued he; "and, as in the previous cases, a new scene appeared before me. Now, the time appeared to be night; and the place, a dark, lonesome wood. A furious storm of lightning, and thunder, and rain, was raging, and the trees creaked and bent in the fierce wind. On the ground lay the dead body of a man weltering in blood. A dark, crimson stream flowed from a great, frightful gash in his head, from which the life seemed just to have gone. As the white face of the murdered man was upturned to the light—cut, bloody, and disfigured as it was—Sibyl, I recognized *myself* once more, As Heaven hears me, I saw it as plainly as I see yonder pale, fair moon now. A white, ghostly form, whether of woman or spirit I know not,

seemed hovering near, darting, as it were, in and out amid the trees. Even as I gazed, it grew thin and shadowy, until all was gone again.

"For the fourth and last time, the Egyptian threw a strange incense on the fire, and 'spoke the words of power," and a new vision met my horrified gaze. I seemed to behold an immense concourse of people, a vast mob, swaying to and fro in the wildest excitement. A low, hoarse growl, as of distant thunder, passed at intervals through the vast crowd, and every eye was raised to an object above them. I looked up, too, and beheld a sight that seemed freezing the very blood in my veins. It was a *scaffold*; and standing on it, with the ignominious halter round her white, beautiful neck, was she who had stood beside me at the altar, whom I had seen chained in her prison-cell, doomed to die by the hand of the public hangman now. Her beautiful hands were stretched out wildly, imploringly, to the crowd below, who only hooted her in her agony and despair. The executioner led her to the fatal drop, a great shout arose from the crowd, then all faded away; and looking up, as if from an appalling dream, I saw the interpreter beckoning me from the door. How I reeled from the room, with throbbing brow and feverish pulse, I know not. Everything seemed swimming around me; and, in a state of the wildest excitement, I was hurried home by my companions.

"The next day the Egyptian left the city, and where he went after, I never heard.

"Such was the glimpse of the future I beheld. It was many months after before I completely recovered from the shock I received. How to account for it I do not know. Certain I am that I beheld it, truly, as I have told it in every particular, for the impression it made upon me at the time was so powerful that everything connected with it is indelibly engraven on my memory. It may seem strange, absurd, impossible; but that I have nothing to do with; I only know I saw it, incredible as it seems. But, good heaven! Sibyl, dearest, are you ill—fainting!"

Pale, trembling, and excited, the once fearless Sibyl Campbell clung to his arm, white with vague, sickening horror. Superstitious to an unusual degree, an awful presentiment had clutched her heart; and, for a moment she seemed dying in his arms.

"Sibyl! Sibyl! my dearest love!" he said, in alarm, "what is it?"

"Nothing—nothing," she answered, in a tremulous voice; "but, oh, Willard! do you believe the prediction?"

"Strange, wild girl that you are! has this idle talk frightened you so?" he said, smiling at her wild, dilated eyes.

"If it should prove true," she said, covering her face with a shudder. "Willard, tell me—*do* you believe it?"

"My dark-eyed darling, how can I tell whether to believe it or not? It has not come true, and there seems no likelihood of its ever doing so. Do not think of it any more; if I had thought it would have unnerved you so, I would never have told you."

"But, Willard, did any of his other predictions prove true?"

"I would rather not answer that question, Sibyl," he said, while a cloud darkened for a moment his fine face.

"You *must* tell me," she cried, starting up, and looking at him with her large, lustrous eyes.

"Well, then—yes," said Drummond, reluctantly. "Young Vaughn, one of those who accompanied me, saw a funeral procession, and himself robed for the grave lying in the coffin. Five weeks after, he was accidentally shot."

She put up her arm in a vague, wild sort of way, as if to ward off some approaching danger.

"Oh, Willard! this is dreadful—dreadful! What if all he predicted should come to pass!"

"Well, I should be obliged to do the best I could. What will be, will be—you know. But I have no such fear. Nonsense, Sibyl! a Campbell of the Isle trembling thus at imaginary danger!—the ghost of Guy the Fearless will start from his grave, if he discovers it!"

The color came proudly back to her cheek at his bantering words, as she said, more coldly and calmly:

"For myself, I could never tremble; but for——"

She paused, and her beautiful lip quivered.

"For me, then, dear love, those fears are," he said tenderly. "A thousand thanks for this proof of your love: but, believe me, the cause is only imaginary. Why, Sibyl, I had nearly forgotten all about the matter, until your brother's remark to-night recalled it to my memory. Promise me, now, you will never think of it more—much less speak of it."

"Tell me one thing more, Willard, and I promise—only one," said Sibyl, laying her hand on his shoulder, and looking up in his face earnestly, while her voice trembled in spite of all her efforts.

"Well," he said, anxiously.

"Did you recognize the face of the person whom you saw beside you at the altar, and who afterward died on the scaffold?"

He was silent, and looked with a troubled eye out over the shining waters.

"Willard, dearest Willard! tell me, have you, ever yet seen her?"

"Why will you question me thus, dearest Sibyl?"

"Answer me truly, Willard, on your honor."

"Well, then, dearest, I have."

Sibyl drew her breath quick and short, and held his arm with a convulsive grasp.

"Who is she?" she asked.

Willard turned, and looking steadily into her wild, searching eyes, replied, in a thrilling whisper:

CHAPTER III.

THE MANIAC'S CURSE.

"Her wretched brain gave way,
And she became a wreck at random driven,
Without one glimpse of reason or of heaven."—LALLA ROOKH.

The schooner Evening Star lay at anchor in a little rock-bound inlet, on the northern side of the island previously referred to. A boat had just put off from her, containing Captain Guy Campbell, Mr. Willard Drummond, Sibyl Campbell, and the sick passenger, Richard Grove. He lay on a sort of mattress, half supported by Captain Campbell; and in the pale, cold moonlight, looked wan and emaciated to a fearful degree. The features, sharply defined, were like those of a skeleton, and, in their ghastly rigidity, seemed like those of a corpse. But life, intensely burning life, shone in the wild, troubled eyes. Willard Drummond and Sibyl sat talking together, in low tones, at the other end of the boat, fearful of disturbing the dying man.

As the boat touched the shore, Drummond leaped out, and extended his hand to Sibyl; but the wild sea-nymph, declining the needless aid, sprang lightly out, and stood beside him.

The figure of a woman, who had been standing on a rock, watching their approach, now came forward, exclaiming delightedly:

"Laws-a-massy, Miss Sibyl! Who ever s'posed we'd see you here again? Where hev you been to this long time?"

"My dear Mrs. Tom!" said Sibyl, smilingly, holding out her hand; "I am delighted to see you. Where I have been is a troublesome question to answer, seeing I have been almost everywhere you could mention."

"Laws, now! hev you? 'Spect you had nice times sailin' round, though it does seem odd how you could stand all the sea-sickness you must have come through. 'Tain' every young critter would do it. But then you allus was different from most young folks. Jemimi! how you've growed, an' how handsome you've got! Jest as pooty as a picter! An' that, I s'pose, is young Master Guy!" continued the loquacious new-comer, eagerly, as the young captain leaped lightly ashore.

Sibyl nodded, and blushed slightly, as she encountered the gaze of Drummond, who stood watching Mrs. Tom, with a half-smile of amusement on his fine face.

"Master Guy!" said the officious Mrs. Tom, bustling forward; "you hain't forgotten your old aunty, I hope? My gracious! you've got as tall as a hop-pole! Growed out of my knowledge altogether!"

"Why, Mrs. Tom, is it possible?" exclaimed Captain Guy, catching her hand in his hearty grasp. "Looking as young and smart as ever, too, and as fresh and breezy as a May morning! 'Pon my word, I'm delighted to see you looking so well! How is pretty Christie and Master Carl?"

"Oh, Christie is well enough, and pootier than ever; and, what's more, she's as good as she's handsome. But Carl—oh, Master Guy! that there young limb'll break my heart yet! I hain't the slightest doubt of it. Of all the thrif'less, good-for-nothing lazy-bones—"

"Oh, well, Mrs. Tom, he'll outgrow that. The best thing you can do is to let me take him to sea with me the next time I go, and that will cure him of his laziness, if anything will. In the meantime, I have a patient for you to take care of, if you have no objection. He can't last much longer, poor fellow, and you are a better nurse than Sibyl. What do you say, Mrs. Tom? Shall I send him up to your house?"

Mrs. Tom was a brown faced, black-eyed, keen-looking, wide-awake, gossiping little woman, of four feet high, with a tongue that could, and did, say sharp things sometimes; but with a heart so warm and large that it is a wonder how it ever found room in so small a body. However, I have been told, as a general thing, little people are, by far, cleverer and warmer-hearted than their tall neighbors—as if nature were anxious to atone for their shortened stature by giving them a double allowance of heart and brains.

Nursing was Mrs. Tom's peculiar element. Nothing delighted her more than to get possession of a patient, whom she could doctor back to health. But unfortunately this desire of her heart was seldom gratified; for both Carl and Christie were so distressingly healthy that "yarb tea" and "chicken broth" were only thrown away upon them. Her frequent visits to the mainland, however, afforded her an opportunity of physicking indiscriminately certain unfortunate little wretches, who were always having influenza, and measles, and hooping-cough, and other little complaints too numerous to mention, and which fled before Mrs. Tom's approach and the power of her "yarb tea." Of late there had been a "plentiful scarcity" even of these escape-valves, so her eyes twinkled now with their delight at the prospect of this godsend.

"Send him up? Sartinly you will, Master Guy. I'll take care of him. This here's the best road up to the side of the rocks; 'tain't so rough as it is here."

"Lift him up," said Captain Campbell to the sailors who had rowed them ashore, "Gently, boys," he said, as the sick man groaned. "Don't hurt him. Follow Mrs. Tom to her cottage—that's the way. I'll be down early to-morrow to see him, Mrs. Tom. This way, Drummond; follow me. I'll bid you good-night, Mrs. Tom. Remember me to Christie."

And Captain Campbell sprang up the rocks, followed by Sibyl and Drummond, in the direction of Campbell's Castle.

Mrs. Tom, with a rapidity which the two sturdy seamen found it difficult to follow, burdened as they were, walked toward her cottage.

The home of Mrs. Tom was a low, one-story house, consisting of one large room and bed-room, with a loft above, where all sorts of lumber and garden implements were thrown, and where Master Carl sought his repose. A garden in front, and a well-graveled path, led up to the front door, and into the apartment which served as kitchen, parlor, dining-room, and sleeping-room for Christie and Mrs. Tom. The furniture was of the plainest description, and scanty at that, for Mrs. Tom was poor, in spite of all her industry; but, as might be expected from so thrifty a housewife, everything was like waxwork. The small, diamond-shaped panes in the windows flashed like jewels in the moonlight; and the floors and chairs were scrubbed as white as human hands could make them. Behind the house was a large vegetable garden, nominally cultivated by Carl, but really by Mrs. Tom, who preferred doing the work herself to watching her lazy nephew.

As the men entered with their burden, Mrs. Tom threw open the bed-room door, and the sick man was deposited on the bed. Lights were brought by Carl, a round-faced, yellow-haired, sleepy-looking youth, of fifteen, with dull, unmeaning blue eyes, and a slow, indolent gait; the very opposite in every way of his brisk, bustling little aunt.

"Be off with you to bed!" said Mrs. Tom. "It's the best place for any one so lazy as you are. Clear out, now, for I'm going to sit up with this here sick man, and want quiet."

With evident willingness Carl shuffled off, leaving Mrs. Tom alone with her patient.

The little woman approached the bed, and looked at his pinched, sallow features with an experienced eye. It was evident to her he could not survive the night.

"I wonder if he knows his end's so near at hand?" said Mrs. Tom to herself. "He ought to know, anyhow. I'll tell him when he awakes, 'cause it's no use for me trying to do anything with him."

The man was not asleep. As she spoke he opened his large, wild-looking black eyes, and gazed around vacantly.

"Mister," began Mrs. Tom, "I don't know your name, but 'taint no odds. Do you know how long you have to live?"

"How long?" said the man, looking at her with a gaze so wild that, had Mrs. Tom been the least bit nervous, would have terrified her beyond measure.

"Not three hours," said Mrs. Tom gravely.

A sort of wild horror overspread the face of the dying man.

"So soon! oh, Heaven, so soon!" he murmured, "and with all unconfessed still. I cannot die with this crime on my soul. I must reveal the miserable secret that has eaten away my very life."

Mrs. Tom listened to this unexpected outburst in wonder and amazement.

"Listen," said the man, turning to Mrs. Tom, and speaking rapidly in his excitement. "One night, about thirteen years ago, as I was returning home from my day's labor, I was overtaken by a violent storm. I was a considerable distance from home, and there was no house near where I could remain for the night. It was intensely dark, and I staggered blindly along in the drenching rain until, by a sudden flash of lightning, I chanced to espy the ruins of an old house, that had long been deserted. Thankful even for this refuge from the storm, I entered it, and, retreating into a corner, I sat on an empty box waiting for the tempest to abate.

"Suddenly I heard the sound of voices in an adjoining room, talking in low whispers. There were, at the time, certain suspicious characters prowling about, and the unexpected sound startled me. Still, I felt they might be only weather-bound wayfarers, like myself; but, before joining them, I thought it might be prudent to discover who they were, and I cautiously drew near the wall to listen.

"The partition dividing us was thin, and in the lull of the storm I could catch here and there a few words of their conversation.

"I tell you he killed himself,' said one. 'I saw him. He stabbed him to the heart with his knife.'

"What does he intend doing with—?' Here a sudden rush of wind and rain prevented me from hearing what followed.

"And serves the jade right, too,' were the next words I heard. 'She might have known what it was to rouse the anger of that devil incarnate.'

"Where are we to find this fellow he wants?' said the second voice.

"At Minton, on the coast, half a mile from here. His name's Dick Grove. I know him.'

"I started in alarm, as well I might, for the name was mine.

"How do you know he'll agree?'

"If he doesn't, said the first, with an oath that made my blood run chill, 'a little cold steel will settle the business. But the terms are easier than that; he's to be well paid for holding his tongue, and as he's a poor devil, he'll do anything for money. Oh, he'll agree; there's no trouble about that.'

"The increasing noise of the storm now drowned their voices altogether. I stood for a moment rooted to the ground with terror. That some terrible crime had been, or was to be perpetrated, in which, by some means, I was to be implicated, I plainly saw; and my only idea now was to escape. I started forward, but, as my unlucky fate would have it, I stumbled in the darkness and fell heavily to the ground with a violence that shook the old house.

"I heard, as I lay half stunned, an ejaculation of alarm from the inner room and quick footsteps approaching where I lay. All was now up with me, so I scrambled to my feet just as two men, wearing black crape masks over their faces, entered. Each carried pistols, and one held a dark-lantern, the light of which flashed in my face.

"Who are you, sir?' fiercely exclaimed one; and I saw him draw a sword that made my blood curdle.

"I essayed to answer, but my teeth chattered so with terror that I could not utter a word.

"'Ha!' exclaimed the other, who all this time had been holding the lantern close to my face. 'This is the very fellow we were in search of. Your name is Richard Grove?'

"'Yes,' I managed to say, quaking with mortal fear.

"'You are a mason by trade, and live in Minton?' said, or rather affirmed, my fierce questioner.

"I replied in the affirmative, for I saw there was no use in attempting a lie.

"'All right, Tom. You go for the carriage; I will take care of our friend here until you return.'

"The one with the knife left the house, and the other, drawing a pistol, the disagreeable click of which made me jump, sat down before me, keeping his eyes immovably riveted on my face. I did not dare to move. I scarcely dared to breathe, as I stood with my eyes fixed, as if fascinated, on the deadly weapon. Nearly ten minutes passed thus in profound silence, when the sound of carriage-wheels was heard; and the instant after, the man called Tom entered, his mask off, but his hat pulled so far down over his eyes, and his coat-collar turned so far up, that I could see nothing but a pair of dark, sinister eyes.

"'The carriage is here,' he said.

"'Then go on; and you, my man, follow him—I will walk behind.'

"I did not venture to utter a word, and was about going out, when he called me back, exclaiming;

"'I came near forgetting a very necessary precaution. Here, my good fellow, let me tie this bandage over your eyes.'

"'Where are you taking me to?' I ventured to say, as he very coolly proceeded to tie a handkerchief tightly over my eyes.

"'That you had better not know. And hark ye, friend, ask no questions. Least said soonest mended. Move on, Tom.'

"Holding my hand to prevent me from falling, my guide led me out. I felt myself assisted into a carriage and placed in a seat. One of the men got in after me, and closed the door; the other mounted the box, and off we drove.

"I am quite sure they took a long, roundabout way and went here and there, in various directions, and came back to the same place again, to make me believe the distance was much longer than it really was. For nearly an hour we drove thus, and then the coach stopped, and I was helped out. I knew I was on the shore, for I could hear the waves dashing inward, and foaming and breaking over the rocks. Then they assisted me into a boat, which was pushed off and rowed rapidly away. The boat was large and strong, but it tossed and pitched dreadfully in the heaving sea, and I was forced to hold on with the grasp of desperation to the side.

"I am sure we were fully two hours, tossing thus on the surf, when the boat struck the shore so suddenly, that I was thrown forward on my face in the bottom. With a loud laugh of derision, the men helped me up and assisted me to land, and then conducted me up a long, slippery beach until we reached a hard road. We walked rapidly on for nearly a quarter of an hour, and then I heard a key turn in a rusty lock, and I was led into a house. Taking first the precaution of locking the door after him, my guide led me through a long hall, up a longer winding staircase, and through another hall, and up two other flights of stairs. It seemed to me he would never stop, when, at last, I heard him open a door, thrust me in, and retreat again, locking the door after him.

"My first care was to tear off the bandage and look around; but the room was so intensely black I could see nothing. The darkness could be almost felt as I thrust out my hand and essayed to walk. I had not advanced a dozen steps, when my foot slipped on some wet, slimy substance, and I fell, and struck violently against something lying on the floor. Trembling with

horror, I put out my hand, and—merciful Heaven! I shudder even now to think of it—it fell on the cold, clammy face of a corpse!"

"Laws-a-massy!" ejaculated the horror-struck Mrs. Tom, as the dying man paused, every feature convulsed at the recollection.

"I think I fainted," he went on, after a pause, "for when I next recollect anything, I was supported by my masked conductor, who was sprinkling, or, rather, dashing handfuls of water in my face, and there was a light burning in the room. I looked around. There, on the floor, lay the dead body of a man, weltering in blood, which flowed from a great, frightful gash in his side!"

"The sight nearly drove me mad, for I sprang with a wild cry to my feet. But my conductor laid his hand on my shoulder and said, in a tone so fierce and stern that I quailed before him:

"Hark ye, sirrah, have done with this cowardly foolery, or, by heaven, you shall share the same fate of him you see before you! No matter what you see to-night, speak not, nor ask any questions, under peril of instant death. If you perform your duty faithfully, this shall be your reward."

As he spoke he displayed a purse filled up with bright, yellow guineas.

"Before I could reply, a shriek that seemed to come from below resounded through the room, a shriek so full of wild horror, and anguish, and despair, that even my companion gave a violent start, and stood as if listening intently. As for me, my very life-blood seemed curdling as the wild, piercing cries of agony came nearer and nearer. A heavy footstep ascended the stairs, and I could hear the sound of some body being dragged up.

"Closer and closer came those appalling screams, and a man entered, masked likewise, dragging after him the convulsed form of a young girl.

"To this day I have never seen a more beautiful creature, notwithstanding her face was distorted with fear and horror. As she entered, her eyes fell on the form of the dead man on the floor. With supernatural

strength she broke from the man who held her, and bent for an instant over the lifeless body. It sufficed to tell her he was quite dead; and then, throwing up her white arms, she fled round the room, shrieking as I never heard any living being shriek before. Great Heaven! those awful cries are ringing in my ears yet.

"The man who had led her in sprang forward and caught her by both wrists. She struggled like one mad, but even the unnatural strength of frenzy failed to free her from his iron grasp. I could see her delicate wrists grow black in the cruel grasp in which he held her.

"The man beside me said something to him in a foreign tongue—French, I think—to which the other nodded, without speaking. My guide then went and unlocked a door at the farther end of the apartment, from which he drew forth a great heap of bricks and mortar, and all the implements necessary for building a wall.

"A light began to dawn upon me. The body of this murdered man was to be walled up here.

"My suspicion was correct. Making a sign for me to assist him, the man raised the head, and not daring to refuse, I took the body by the feet, and we carried it into the inner room, which proved to be a small dark closet without a window, and with immensely thick walls. Even in my terror for my own safety, I could not repress a feeling of pity for this murdered youth—for he was only a boy—and the handsomest I ever saw.

"All this time the woman's wild shrieks were resounding through the room, growing louder and louder each moment, as she still struggled to free herself from his hold. All in vain. He forced her into the inner room, but before he could close the door she had burst out, and, clasping his knees, screamed for mercy.

"He spurned her from him with a kick of his heavy boot, and then she sprang up and spat at him like one possessed of an evil spirit. Flying to the farthest corner of the room, she raised her right hand to Heaven, crying, in a voice that might have made the stoutest heart quail:

"I curse you! I curse you! Living, may Heaven's wrath follow my curse—dead, may it hurl you into eternal perdition! On your children and on your children's children, may——"

"With a fierce oath, he sprang upon her ere she could finish the awful words that pealed through the room like the last trump, and seizing her by the throat, hurled her headlong into the dark inner room where the murdered man lay. Then, closing the massive oaken door, and locking it, he turned to me, and speaking for the first time, commanded me, in a voice fairly convulsed with passion, to wall up the door.

"I would have prayed for mercy, but my tongue clove to the roof of my mouth. The man beside me saw my indecision, and, catching me by the arm, said, in a stern whisper:

"Fool! do you want to share their fate? Do as you are told!

"I shrank from the crime, but life was dear to me, and I obeyed. As men work only for their lives, I worked with those two mysterious masks looking on. All was still as the grave within that closet-door now. Once only I heard a sound as of some one trying to rise, and then a heavy fall—and I worked on with redoubled energy.

"Not a word was spoken by any of us in the deep silence of the solemn midnight, in which the awful crime was perpetrated.

"It was completed at last; where the door had been was a wall of solid masonry, which her death-cries could never penetrate.

"It is well!" said he who appeared to me the superior. "Give him the reward I told you of."

"The other silently handed me the purse.

"And now swear never to reveal what you have this night seen till your dying day!"

"I swear!" said I, for I dared not refuse.

"That will do. Take him away,' said the speaker, leaving the room.

"My guide blindfolded me as I had been before, and led me out, locking the door on the awful secret.

"As I had been brought up, I was led to the beach. The boat was in waiting, and I was taken away, landed, conveyed into the carriage, which for upward of half an hour drove round some circuitous route. Then I was assisted out and left standing alone. I tore the bandage from my eyes and looked around, but the carriage was gone; and I never heard or discovered aught more of the event of that night.

"From that day my peace of mind was gone. Years passed, but it haunted me night and day, till I became a morose and dreaded man. Then I traveled from land to land, but nothing ever could banish from my ears that woman's dying shrieks and despairing eyes.

"In Liverpool I felt ill. I felt I must die, and wanted to come and be buried in my native land. Captain Campbell brought me here. And now that I have told all, I can die in peace. In peace—never! never until that woman's face is gone! Oh, Heaven!" he cried, raising himself up with a shriek, and pointing to the window, "*she is there!*"

With a scream almost as wild as his own, Mrs. Tom started up and looked.

A pale, wild, woeful face, shrouded in wild black hair, was glued for a moment to the glass, and then was gone.

Paralyzed with terror, Mrs. Tom turned to the sick man. His jaw had dropped, his eyes were protruding from their sockets, and he was *dead*.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HAUNTED ROOM.

"What form is that?
The stony clenching of the bared teeth—
The gory socket that the balls have burst from—
I see them all,
It moves—it moves—it rises—it comes on me."—BERTRAM.

Under the guidance of young Guy Campbell, Willard Drummond and Sibyl ascended the steep rocky path leading to Campbell Lodge. Captain Guy bounded over the rocks with the agility of a deer, while his two companions more leisurely followed.

"Yonder is my island-home, old Campbell Castle," said Sibyl, as an abrupt turn in the rough road brought them full in view of the mansion-house. "It is nearly three years now since I have seen it."

Both paused as if involuntarily to contemplate it. Years and neglect had performed their usual work of destruction on the lodge. The windows were broken in many places, and the great gate before the house, hung useless and fallen off its rusty hinges. The coarse, red sandstone of which it had been originally built, was now black with age and the many storms that had beat against it. No lights were to be seen, no smoke issued from the tall chimneys, all looked black, gloomy and deserted. The swallows had built their nests in the eaves and ruined gables, and even the tall, dark, spectral pines that formed an avenue to the dilapidated gate-way, had a forlorn and dismal look. In the pale, bright moonlight, the ruined homestead of the Campbells looked cold, bleak, and uninviting. Even the long, gloomy shadows from the trees, as they lay on the ground, seemed to the superstitious mind of Sibyl, like unearthly hands waving them away. She shuddered with a chill feeling of dread, and clung closer to the arm of Drummond:

"Quite a remarkable looking old place, this," said the young man, gayly. "Really charming in its gloomy grandeur, and highly suggestive of ghosts and rats, and other vermin of a like nature," while he inwardly muttered:

"Dismal old hole; even Sibyl's bright eyes can hardly recompense me for burying myself in such a rickety dungeon."

"It has not a very hospitable look, I must say," said its young mistress, with a smile; "but in spite of its forbidding aspect, I hope we will be able, by some means, to make your stay here endurable."

"A desert would seem a paradise to me with you near by," said Drummond, in his low, lover-like tones. "My only regret is, that our stay here is destined to be so short."

The dark, bright face of the young island-girl flushed with pleasure; but ere she could reply, the hall-door was thrown open, and Captain Campbell stood, hat in hand, before them.

"Welcome to Campbell Castle," he said, with gay courtesy, stepping aside to let them enter.

"Thank you," said Drummond, bowing gravely, while he glanced with some curiosity around, to see if the interior looked more inviting than the exterior.

They stood in a long, wide hall, high and spacious, which the light of the flickering candle Captain Campbell held strove in vain to illuminate. At the further extremity a winding staircase rose up, until it was lost in the gloom above. Two wide, black doors flanked the hall on either side, and Captain Campbell threw open that on the right, saying:

"This I have discovered, upon investigation to be at present the only habitable apartment in the house. Woeful are the accounts I have received from worthy Aunt Moll and her son and heir, Lemuel, of the state of the chimneys. The swallows have built their nests in the only one that ever did draw respectably, and all the rest leak at such a rate every time it rains that the fire is not only completely extinguished, but the rooms filled with water."

"And what in the world are we to do, brother?" asked Sibyl, in dismay at this unpromising picture.

"Why, we must make the best we can of a bad bargain. I have sent Lem—much against his will, I must say, for the young man is disagreeably afflicted with laziness—to take the swallows' nests out of the chimney and make a fire there, while Aunt Moll does all the other *et ceteras* necessary for receiving as its inmate Her Majesty the Queen of the Isle. Then, as there is but one other habitable room in the house, Signor Drummond must occupy it, although it has not the most pleasant reputation in the world."

"How is that?" asked Drummond, drawing up a chair and seating himself in front of the fire, that, thanks to the exertions of Captain Campbell, was already burning brightly on the hearth.

"Why, to tell the truth, Aunt Moll and her hopeful son assert it to be haunted, as it most probably is by rats. If you are willing to trust yourself to the ghost's mercy, I can freely promise you safety from all other dangers."

"Haunted? By Jove, that's capital! I have been wishing all my life to see a genuine ghost, and lo! the time has come at last. But what manner of ghost is it, saith the legend—fair or foul, old or young, handsome or hideous?"

"On that point I am distressingly short of information. Lem's description is rather vague. He describes it as being 'higher than anything at all, with fire coming out of its eyes, long hair reaching to the ground, and dressed in white.'"

"Oh, of course!" said Drummond. "Who ever heard of a ghost that wasn't dressed in white? 'Pon my honor, I am quite enchanted at the opportunity of making the acquaintance of its ghostship."

During this conversation Sibyl had left the room "on hospitable thoughts intent," and now returned to announce that supper was already progressing rapidly—most welcome news to our hungry gentlemen.

Sibyl had taken off her hat, and now her raven curls fell in heavy tresses to her waist. In the shadow, those glittering ringlets looked intensely black; but where the firelight fell upon them, a sort of red light shone through.

As she moved through the high, shadowy rooms, with the graceful, airy motion that lent a charm to the commonest action, Willard Drummond, following her with his eyes, felt a secret sense of exultation, as he thought this magnificent creature was his, and his alone. This bright, impassioned sea-nymph; this beautiful, radiant daughter of a noble race; this royal, though dowerless island-queen, loved him above all created beings. Had she not told him as he whispered in her willing ear his passionate words of love, that he was dearer to her than all the world besides? Some day he would make her his wife, and take her with him to his princely home in Virginia; and he thought, with new exultation, of the sensation this glorious planet would make among the lesser stars of his native State.

So thought and argued Willard Drummond in the first flush and delirium of love.

He did not stop to think that he had loved with even more intensity once before; that he had raved even in a like manner of another far less bright than this queenly Sibyl. He did not stop to think that even so he might love again.

No. Everything was forgotten but the intoxicating girl before him, with her sparkling face, her glorious eyes of jet, and her flashing, sun-bright hair.

From the rhapsody of passion—from the seventh heaven of his day-dreams, he was at last recalled by the voice of Sibyl herself summoning him to supper.

He looked up with a start, half inclined to be provoked at this sudden summons from his ideal world to the vulgar reality of a supper of hot-cakes, tea, and preserves. But there sat Sibyl at the head of the table, bright and smiling—beautifying even the dull routine of the tea-table with the charm of her presence. And then, too—now that this airy vision was gone—Mr. Willard Drummond began to recollect that he was very hungry, and that "dreams and visions" were, after all, very unsubstantial things, compared with the bread and butter of every-day life, degrading as the confession was.

Guy had already taken his place, so Willard took the seat his young host pointed out to him, and the business of the tea-table commenced.

When the meal was over, Aunt Moll cleared the table, and the three gathered round the fire—for, though the weather was warm, the great unaired room was chill enough to render the fire pleasant.

By degrees, perhaps it was owing to the strange, dreary loneliness of the place, the conversation turned upon deserted houses, bold robberies, murders, and by a natural consequence, upon ghosts.

Willard and Captain Campbell seemed striving to outvie each other in telling the most frightful tales, the latter taxing his imagination to invent them, when the original failed to produce the necessary degree of horror. Every one knows what a strange fascination such ghostly legends have, the hours passed almost unnoticed, and it was only when the fire burned low on the hearth, and the solitary candle guttered in the socket before going out, that our party became aware of the lateness of the hour.

"Well, we have been profitably spending the evening, I must say," remarked Captain Campbell, rising, with a laugh. "You should have been in bed an hour ago, Sibyl. Here! Aunt Moll," he cried, going to the door, "bring us lights, and show Mr. Drummond to his room."

He waited for a response, but none came, only the echo of his own voice sounded dolefully through the hall.

"Hallo! Aunt Moll, I say—Lem, bring candles," once more called Captain Campbell. Again he waited for an answer, and again none came. "Confound it!" he muttered, turning away, "the sleepy-headed pair have doubtless been in bed for the last three hours, and are as sound as the Seven Sleepers by this time."

"Never mind, Guy," said Sibyl, laughing at his rueful face, "I'll go. Aunt Moll and Lem are tired, doubtless, with their extraordinary exertions this evening, and it would be a pity to wake them."

She quitted the room as she spoke, in the direction of the kitchen, in search of lights.

And presently she reappeared, and announcing that Aunt Moll was stretched out on her pallet, before the kitchen fire, asleep, she took her light, and bidding them a smiling good-night, left them to seek her own room.

And Captain Campbell, taking a candle, preceded his guest in the direction of the "haunted chamber."

Willard Drummond entered, and looked round. It was a high, wide, spacious chamber, as were all in the house, with floors, doors, and casements of dark, polished oak, black now with time and use. In the wide fire-place at one end, a fire had been burning all the evening, but only the red, smouldering embers remained now. At the other end of the room, opposite the fire, was his bed, and between them, facing the door, was a deep dormer window. The room looked cheerful and pleasant, and throwing himself into an easy, old-fashioned arm-chair before the fire, he exclaimed:

"Well, in spite of all the ghosts and hobgoblins that ever walked at 'noon of night,' I shall sleep here as sound as a top until morning. Your ghost will have to give me a pretty vigorous shaking before I awake, when once I close my eyes."

"Perhaps the ghost, if in the least timorous, will not appear to so undaunted an individual as yourself. May your dreams be undisturbed! Good-night!" And placing the light on the table Captain Campbell left the room.

Willard's first care was to lock the door securely, and then carefully examine the room. There was no other means of ingress but the one by which he had entered, and the room did not seem to communicate with any other. The window was high above the ground, and firmly nailed down. Clearly, then, if the ghost entered at all it must assume its ghostly prerogative of coming through the keyhole—for there was no other means by which ghost or mortal could get in.

Satisfied with this, Willard Drummond went to bed, but in spite of all his efforts sleep would not come. Vain were all his attempts to woo the drowsy god; he could only toss restlessly from side to side, with that feeling of irritation which want of sleep produces.

The moonlight streaming in through the window filled the room with silvery radiance. The silence of death reigned around, unbroken even by the watch-dog's bark. The dull, heavy roar of the waves, breaking on the shore like far-off thunder, was the only sound to be heard. And at last, with this eerie, ghostly lullaby, Willard Drummond fell into a feverish sleep.

And sleeping, he dreamed. He was in a comfortably furnished home, and was recovering from a serious illness. Just well enough to be up, he sat in a chair made comfortable for his back by pillows. He had been reading, and, as he saw Sibyl enter the room in a neat-fitting white-merino morning-robe, he let his book fall to the floor, while she dropped on her knees beside him, and, with loving anxiety beaming from her brilliant eyes, glanced into his face.

Then the scene abruptly changed, and he seemed wandering on the verge of a precipice, treading a path so narrow and precarious that a single false step would hurl him to certain destruction down the unfathomable gulf below. Where that path was to end he knew not, but a white robed siren, with shining golden hair and smiling eyes and lips, went before him and lured him on. An inward voice seemed whispering him to beware, that the path he was treading must end in death; but the smiling eyes of the golden-haired tempter were beaming upon him, and the voice whispered in vain. Above every steep crag, as he passed, the wild black eyes of Sibyl seemed gleaming with deadly hatred and fierce malignity on him; but even those dark, warning eyes could not tempt him back from the road he was treading. Suddenly the siren vanished; he sprang after her, and fell down, down, down into the awful gulf below.

A wild laugh rang out on the air, and Sibyl was bending above him, holding a glittering dagger to his heart, while her great black eyes burned like two flames. He held out his hands for mercy, but she only mocked him with her deriding black eyes, and raised the knife to plunge it into his heart.

With a cry of terror he awoke to find it not all a dream.

An icy cold hand lay on his face.

He sprang up in bed with a thrill of horror, to behold a white, wild face, with vacant, unearthly eyes and long, streaming hair bending over him.

Paralyzed by the sudden apparition, he sat, unable to move or speak, and ere he could fully recover his senses the ghostly visitant was gone.

He sprang out of bed and seized the door. It was locked as he had left it, and, with his blood curdling, he stood rooted to the ground.

Morally and physically Willard Drummond was brave, but this midnight visit from a supernatural being might have chilled the blood of the most undaunted. Sleep now was out of the question; therefore, seating himself by the window, he prepared to wait for the approach of morning. The moon was already sinking behind the western horizon, bathing the placid river in its soft beams. The morning star shone bright and serene in the cloudless blue sky; and, gazing on the calm beauty without, the young man's pulse ceased its feverish throbbings, and he began striving to account for this ghostly visit by natural means.

But he strove in vain. The door was firmly locked, and there could be no secret passage through those strong, oaken walls. Then he arose, and carefully searched every crevice in the room that could by any possibility be made a hiding-place of. Still in vain. The room contained no living thing but himself.

Morning was now growing red in the east, and, exhausted with watching, he threw himself on the bed, and fell into a deep dreamless sleep, from which he did not awake until the sun was high in the heavens.

He sprang hastily out of bed, and proceeded to dress himself. And now a new difficulty arose. He felt he would be questioned about the supernatural visitors of the haunted chamber, and he was at a loss how to answer. If he related the event of the night, he dreaded the ridicule of the unbelieving Captain Campbell, who would assuredly laugh at him for being

conquered in spite of his boasting; and to be laughed at in the presence of Sibyl was not to be endured. If, on the other hand he did not tell, he would be obliged to continue the occupant of the haunted chamber while he remained on the island—a thing he had not the slightest wish to do.

His toilet was finished before he could come to any conclusion; and still debating the case, he descended the stairs, and entered the sitting-room they had occupied the night before.

CHAPTER V.

THE MIDNIGHT CRY.

"And when the midnight hour is come,
A sound is heard in yonder hall—
It rises hoarsely through the sky,
And vibrates o'er the moldering wall."

In a former chapter, we left Mrs. Tom in rather an appalling situation.

Accustomed to the quiet unexciting life of the lonely, sea-girt island, the events of the night had momentarily terrified her, albeit her nerves were none of the weakest. The mysterious revelation of the dying man; his tale of night, and storm, and crime; the wild, ghostly face at the window; and, lastly, his sudden death, were quite enough to thrill for an instant with terror even a stronger heart than that of the solitary old widow.

For some moments Mrs. Tom sat still, gazing alternately at the window and on the ghastly face of the dead man before her, with a chill of horror creeping over her.

The sudden striking of the clock, as it chimed the hour of eleven, aroused her at last from her trance of terror. It was a sound of life, and it

reassured her.

Rising, she gathered courage to approach the window cautiously, and looked out. Nothing was to be seen but the bright moonlight, bathing rock and river in its silvery light. Beyond, she could see the huge, black pile of Campbell's Castle, casting its long, gloomy shadow over the ground. Lights were still twinkling in the windows—a sight as unusual as it was pleasant—and, with renewed confidence at this sign of life, Mrs. Tom went to arouse Carl to assist her to watch beside the dead.

"It's onpossible to sleep with a corpse in the house," thought Mrs. Tom, as she climbed up the ladder leading to Carl's lofty dormitory; "leastways, I couldn't sleep a wink, though I do s'pose that there lazy, sleepy-head of a Carl could snore away jest as soundly as ef we was all dead in a heap. I reckon I'll hev an hour's work getting him up. Here, you Carl! Carl! Get up, I tell you!"

Then Mrs. Tom shook him lustily. The sleeper only replied by turning over with a grunt.

"Carl! Carl! Lor' sakes! you great, sleepy, good-for-nothing, open your eyes. I do b'lieve the last Judgment wouldn't wake you, once you got a-snorin'. Ef nothin' else won't do, I'll try how you'll like this!"

And Mrs. Tom caught the unfortunate Carl by the hair and pulled it vigorously, until that ill-used youth sprang upright, with a roar that might have been heard half a mile off.

"Thunder and lightning, aunty, do you want to kill a feller?" roared Master Carl, in a rage.

"Hush, Carl! Don't get mad, honey," said Mrs. Tom, soothingly. "I only want you to come down stairs and set up with me. That there sick man's dead."

"Dead!" repeated Carl, staring with all his eyes.

"Yes, he's dead as can be; and it's the most lonesomest thing in the world settin' up alone with a corpse, so I waked you up."

"Well don't sit up with him, then," said Carl, with a tremendous yawn. "If he's dead, he won't mind staying alone all night, I suppose. Anyhow, I know I ain't going to get up this time of night, if he was dead twice over."

And Carl lay down, and composed himself for another nap.

But Mrs. Tom was resolved not to be disobeyed; so, dropping the pacific tone she had first adopted, she very summarily snatched away sheets and quilts, pulled the mattress from under him, and overset poor Carl on the floor, from which she soon made him spring up with a sound box on the ear.

"Now then," said the indignant old lady; "tell me ag'in you won't, will ye? Now, look here, ef you ain't dressed and down stairs in five minutes, I'll come back, and this ain't no circumstance to what you'll get. Tell me you won't, indeed! There's no tellin' what the impidence of these scape-goats of boys 'ill come to, ef they ain't minded in time," muttered the old lady to herself, as she descended the ladder.

Carl's toilet, thus unpleasantly hastened, was soon complete, and he descended to the lower room with a very sulky face, and grumbling inwardly at his hard fate in being governed by so tyrannical a task-mistress:

"I don't see why the old feller couldn't have died somewhere else," inwardly muttered the ill-treated Mr. Henley; "a coming here and giving bother, keeping a feller from his sleep of nights. It's downright mean!"

Taking possession of Mrs. Tom's rocking-chair, while the old lady bustled about, laying out the corpse as best she could under the circumstances, Carl was once more soon sound asleep. Then, when all she could do was done, Mrs. Tom lay down on the hard wooden sofa, or "settee," as she called it, and, in spite of the presence of death, followed her worthy nephew to the land of dreams.

Morning was far advanced before either awoke. Mrs. Tom's first care was to send Carl up to the lodge to inform its inmates of the death of her

guest, and desire Captain Campbell's immediate presence.

Immediately after breakfast the young captain hastened to the cottage, while Sibyl and Drummond went out for a stroll round the island.

Mrs. Tom had been anxiously revolving in her mind the singular story told her the night before, and resolved to reveal it to Captain Campbell and learn his opinion about it.

Accordingly, when he entered, Mrs. Tom—having first taken the precaution of turning Carl out of doors—related the story in substance as it had been told to her.

Captain Campbell listened in astonishment and in credulity.

"Now, Master Guy, what do you think of that?" exclaimed Mrs. Tom, when she had finished.

"My dear madam," replied the young man, gravely, "the man, excited, half crazed, delirious as he was, must have imagined all this. No such horrible thing could have ever occurred in a Christian land."

"But he wasn't crazy," asserted Mrs. Tom, almost angry at having the truth of the story doubted. "He was just as sensible, all through, as you or I. He wasn't *colirious* a mite."

"Now, Mrs. Tom, it's not possible that, with all your good sense, you can credit such an incredible tale."

"But, Master Guy, the man told it on his death-bed. Think o' that."

"And doubtless believed it, too; but that does not make it any more probable. I have heard of such cases before. It is all owing to the imagination, my dear lady. He had fancied this story, and thought about it so long, that he at last believed it himself."

"Well, I don't know nothin' 'bout the 'magination, thank my heavenly Master," said Mrs. Tom, in a sort of sullen unbelief; "but I do know, ef you was to talk till this time to-morrow, you couldn't make me believe

differently. I shouldn't wonder now ef you tried to make me think the face I seed stuck at the winder was all 'magination, too."

"I was just about to say so," said Guy, repressing a smile. "It could be nothing else, you know. The hour of night, the thrilling tale, and the man's dying cry that he saw her there, would have made you imagine anything; therefore——"

But Mrs. Tom's wrath was rising. She had been inwardly priding herself on the sensation her story would create, and this fall to her hopes was more than she could patiently endure.

"It's no sich thing," she cried, in a voice louder and sharper than she was in the habit of using to any one but the unfortunate Carl. "I seen it all with my two blessed eyes, and nobody's goin' to make me believe it was my 'magination. 'Magination, indeed!" continued the old lady, in a tone of profound contempt. "Thank my divine Master, I never was troubled with 'magination since the day I was born, and 'tain't likely I'd begin now in my old age o' life. I allers hid a great respect for you, Master Guy; but I'm a poor, lone 'ooman, and can't stand to be onsulted by nobody. I hain't no doubt you mean well, but I like to hev people b'lieve me when I do tell the truth. Scat, you hussy! afore I twist your neck for you."

The latter part of this oration was addressed to Trot, the mottled cat, and was accompanied by a kick, which ejected that unoffending member of society out of doors, much quicker than was at all agreeable. Captain Campbell, quite unprepared for this burst of eloquence, listened in amazement, and seized the first opportunity, when angry Mrs. Tom paused for breath, to humbly apologize for his offense.

"My dear Mrs. Tom," said the young captain, humbly, "I had not the remotest intention of offending you, and most deeply regret having done so. I have fallen into a bad habit, of late, of doubting everything; and really this story appeared so improbable, that I think I may be pardoned for not yielding it full credit on the spot. Come, now, my dear madam," he continued, seeing the cloud still hanging on Mrs. Tom's honest face, "let's be friends still; and I promise for the future to believe everything you choose to tell me, no matter what it is."

Good Mrs. Tom was not proof against the insinuating tone of Master Guy, who had always been her favorite; so the cloud disappeared, and her own cheery smile once more beamed forth.

Having arranged that Lem should come down and prepare a grave during the morning, Captain Campbell left the cottage, and went in search of Mr. Drummond and his sister to tell them what he had heard.

He found them down on the shore. Sibyl stood on a high cliff, her dress fluttering in the morning breeze, her hat off, and her long, glittering, jetty tresses waving behind her like a banner. The wind that came sweeping across the waters had deepened the glow on her crimson cheeks and lips, and sent a living light into her glorious eyes.

Willard Drummond stood beneath, gazing at her as a poet might gaze on the living realization of his most beautiful dreams. Captain Campbell shrugged his shoulders expressively as he saw his impassioned glance, and thought inwardly of the confession he had once made to him of there being but one woman in the world worth loving.

"Well, Sibyl, one would think you were attitudinizing for the stage," said Captain Campbell, dryly, as he approached.

Sibyl laughed gayly, as she sprang down on the white, level sands between her brother and lover.

"I was only looking out for a sail, which I failed to discover," she replied.

"Well, Campbell," said Drummond, "had your old lady down below any important revelations to make, that she sent for you in such haste this morning?"

"Not very important in my eyes, though they are in hers," replied the young captain. "She wished to reveal the dying deposition of our passenger, Richard Grove."

"And what had he to tell? Was I right in saying remorse for some crime preyed on him more than mere illness?"

"Faith, Sibyl, according to worthy Mrs. Tom, I believe you were. He succeeded in frightening that good, but slightly credulous old lady out of her wits."

"Well?" said Sibyl, inquiringly.

Captain Campbell, condensing the story, gave them the outline and principal facts in a few words. Both listened with deep interest; but when he spoke of the pale, haggard face, with its dark, waving hair, glaring at them through the window, Willard Drummond started violently, and turned pale. Sibyl's eagle eyes were fixed on his face, and she alone observed it.

"And what does Mrs. Tom take this nocturnal visitor to be?" inquired Sibyl. "A mortal like herself, or a spirit disembodied?"

"Oh, a ghost, of course," replied her brother. "The spirit, perhaps, of the woman walled up to perish in the room with the murdered man. Ugh! the story altogether is hideous enough to give one the nightmare! And now that you have learned all, I believe I'll go and send Lem down to inter the body."

Captain Campbell sauntered away, and the lovers were alone.

"And what do you think of this story, Willard?" inquired Sibyl.

"I cannot tell. Yesterday I would have joined your brother in laughing at it; but, to-day——"

He paused.

"And why not to-day?" breathlessly inquired Sibyl.

"Sibyl, I do not wish to needlessly alarm you, but last night, as if to punish my presumption, I experienced something very like a supernatural visit."

"Good Heavens, Willard! Then the story told by the negroes is true?"

"It certainly seems like it. Had any one else told me what I experienced, I should think they were humbugging me; but I cannot discredit what I saw with my own eyes."

"And what was the appearance of the nocturnal visitor?"

"Exactly like the description Mrs. Tom gives of the face that appeared at her window—white as that of the dead, with dark, streaming hair, and wild, vacant, dark eyes."

"Oh, Willard! Can it be that—— But, no; it is impossible. At what hour did this apparition appear?"

"Between one and two, as near as I can judge."

"Strange! strange! I, too, heard something dreadful last night."

"Is it possible? What was it, dearest Sibyl?"

"Listen! About midnight I was awakened by something that sounded like a heavy fall right outside my door, followed by a groan so deep, so horrible, that the very blood seemed freezing in my veins. Trembling with terror, I half rose to listen; but all for a time was still. Trying to persuade myself I was only dreaming, I was about to lie down again, when a shriek the most appalling broke upon the air, and died away in an agonized moan. I dared not move; I could not sleep; and I lay cowering in superstitious horror until morning. With the bright sunshine came renewed courage, and I feared to mention what I had heard to my brother or you, lest I should be laughed at—even as you feared the same. Willard, there must be some horrible mystery here! Some foul crime, I fear, has at some time been perpetrated within those walls. What if——"

She paused.

"Well, Sibyl?" he said, inquiringly.

"Oh, Willard! what if *this* house has been the scene of that mystery the dying man spoke of! I thought of it from the first."

"Nonsense, Sibyl! What an idea!" And yet he looked disturbed himself, as he spoke.

"How otherwise are we to account for those ghostly visitings, those midnight apparitions, and appalling shrieks?"

"And yet nothing could induce your brother to adopt your belief. He would laugh at our credulity, were we to tell him what we have seen and heard."

"Yes; and, perhaps I had better not tell him, Willard. I will have your room changed, and my own likewise. Even if they are less comfortable, they will be more endurable than to be disturbed by midnight specters."

"Be it so, then, fairest Sibyl," he said, gayly. And turning, they walked together to the Lodge.

CHAPTER VI.

"OFF WITH THE OLD LOVE, AND ON WITH THE NEW."

"Holy St. Francis! what a change is here!
Is Rosalind, whom thou didst love so dear,
So soon forsaken? Young men's love, then, lies
Not truly in their hearts, but in their eyes."—ROMEO AND JULIET.

The following night passed without disturbance, either earthly or ghostly, at Campbell's Lodge.

Early in the morning, Captain Campbell went over to the mainland on business. And Sibyl, accompanied by Drummond, went down to the cottage, to visit Mrs. Tom. There was an inward feeling of pleasure at Sibyl's heart, when she learned Christie was away to the mainland on a

visit. Not that she doubted Willard; but she remembered Christie as a very pretty child, grown by this time, doubtless, into a lovely girl, and it might not be altogether safe, to throw the gay man of the world into dangerous society.

Toward noon, as they were sauntering along the sun-shiny beach, she hanging on his arm, while he softly whispered the words "ladies love to hear," they espied a boat advancing toward them. Sibyl raised her telescope to survey the new-comers.

"Rev. Mr. Mark Brantwell and wife," she exclaimed, in tones of surprise and pleasure. "Guy has doubtless called upon them, and told them I was here."

"Friends of yours?" asked Willard.

"Yes, the Episcopal clergyman of N——, whom I have known since my earliest childhood. But here they are."

The boat at this moment touched the shore, and Sibyl, disengaging her arm, ran down to meet them. Willard more leisurely followed, just in time to see his lady-love folded in the arms of a gentleman who sprang from the boat.

The stranger was of middle age, married, and a clergyman; yet, in spite of all, Mr. Drummond felt a sudden twinge of jealousy and anger at beholding the embrace. But the next moment jealousy, anger, every feeling was swallowed up in intense astonishment, not unmingled with superstitious horror. For as the clergyman turned round, and Willard obtained a full view of his face, he recognized the countenance of him he had seen years before in that mystic vision at the Egyptian's.

For a moment he stood regarding him, pale with wonder; and he only awoke from his trance of surprise, when he heard the clear, ringing voice of Captain Campbell, as he approached him, saying, with a hearty slap on the shoulder:

"Why, Drummond, man alive, what ails you? You are as pale as a ghost!"

"Are you ill?" said Sibyl, anxiously, as she approached, leaning on the arm of Mrs. Brantwell.

"A slight headache—nothing more," said Willard, recovering himself by an effort; "nothing worth being alarmed about," he added, seeing Sibyl's still anxious eyes.

"Why, Sibyl, have you grown nervous and cowardly?" exclaimed Mr. Brantwell—"you, who used to be as bold and daring as a mountain eaglet. But perhaps," he added, glancing meaningly at Willard, "it is only where some very particular friend is concerned that your fears are thus easily aroused."

Willard smiled slightly, while Sibyl's dark face grew crimson as she hurried on with increased rapidity, drawing her companion with her, and leaving the gentlemen behind.

When they reached the lodge Sibyl left her brother to entertain their guests, while she set about preparing luncheon. When the meal was over Mrs. Brantwell said:

"And now, Miss Sibyl, I have come to carry you off. It is three years since I have had the pleasure of seeing you, and I shall certainly take you with me now. Come, no excuses—I will not hear one of them."

"But, my dear Mrs. Brantwell——" began Sibyl.

"But, my dear Miss Campbell, you *must* come—do you hear that? Your brother can certainly do without you for a week."

"Yes, and glad to be rid of her, too," said the gallant Captain Campbell.

Sibyl stole a glance toward Drummond from under her long eyelashes. He was sitting, looking out of the window with an exceedingly dissatisfied

frown on his brow. Mrs. Brantwell perceived the glance, and broke out again with her usual bluntness:

"And as for that other gentleman you are looking at, Sibyl, I am sure he will be generous enough to spare you for a few days, as he will, in all probability, have enough of you before long."

Again Sibyl crimsoned and glanced reproachfully at her plain-spoken friend, and again Mr. Drummond was forced to smile, in spite of his ill-humor, at the good lady's brusque bluntness.

"You will have to come, you see, Miss Sibyl," said Mr. Brantwell, laughing.

"Of course, she will," added his frank spouse; "and upon my word I think I am doing her a favor in taking her from this lonesome island, and letting her see a little of civilized life at our hands; though, from Sibyl's looks, I should say she doesn't feel at all grateful for it."

"Indeed, Mrs. Brantwell, I do, but—"

"There, there! I won't listen to another word." And Mrs. Brantwell, a tall, good-humored looking lady, clapped her hands over her ears. "Guy, make this ungrateful sister of yours hold her tongue, and do as she is told."

"Come, Sibyl, there is no help for it, you see," said Guy. "Drummond and I will get along swimmingly during your absence. He can keep his hand in, in making love to Aunt Moll, while I try my powers of persuasion over Mrs. Tom."

Sibyl laughed, and paused for a moment in thought. She would infinitely have preferred remaining on the island with Willard, but it would never do to allow them to think that was her reason; and after all, a week would soon pass. Had Christie been home, no persuasions could have induced her to go; but in her absence there was nothing to fear. Then, too, Willard, so long accustomed to her presence, would miss her so much when she was gone that doubtless his love would be increased rather than diminished.

Involuntarily, while thinking of him, her eyes wandered to where he stood. Again the sharp-sighted Mrs. Brantwell observed it, and again she broke out impatiently:

"Lord bless me! Mr. Drummond, just turn round, will you, and tell Sibyl she may go. Nothing earthly will induce her to come till you give permission. I'm sure if you were her father she couldn't be more afraid of displeasing your lordship."

"Miss Campbell needs no permission of mine. I am only too happy to think she will have an opportunity of enjoying herself so well," said Willard, with a grave bow.

"Well, I'm sure that's a mercy to be thankful for. Now, perhaps, you will come, Sibyl," said the plain-spoken old lady; "and as for you, sir, I shall expect to see you at the parsonage every day with Master Guy."

"I shall be most happy," said Willard, his face brightening a little, while Sibyl's eyes sparkled with anticipation.

"Well, now, run and get ready," said Mrs. Brantwell, turning to Sibyl.

Sibyl soon reappeared, dressed for her journey. And then, as the afternoon was far advanced, the whole party descended to the beach. The adieus were spoken, the boat pushed off, leaving the two young men alone on the sands.

"I must go over to Westbrook dock-yard this afternoon," said Guy, "where the Evening Star is now lying. What do you say to coming with me?"

"I prefer remaining here," said Willard, who had not yet recovered his good humor, after what he was pleased to call Sibyl's desertion.

"Well, then, I'll remain with you," said Guy, who was the soul of frankness and good temper.

"By no means!" said Drummond, hastily. "Do not stay on my account. I have a slight headache still, and will retire to my room."

"But it seems hardly courteous to leave you altogether alone."

"Nonsense, my dear fellow. I insist upon it. I hope you do not think of standing on ceremony with me?"

"So be it, then," said Captain Campbell, gayly, as he sprang into his boat, pushed off, and shot like an arrow out into the water.

Drawing a cigar from his pocket, Willard Drummond lit it and proceeded to stroll up and down the beach, in no very amiable frame of mind. He felt angry, in spite of all, at Sibyl's leaving him; and with this feeling would now and then mingle another—profound amazement at the exact resemblance this Mr. Brantwell bore to the face he had seen in that singular vision. Was the fell prediction about to be verified?

Lost in such thoughts as these, he was suddenly startled by a voice singing a wild, sweet song of the sea, in the clearest and most delightful tones he had ever heard. Surprised at the unexpected sound, he sprang up the rocks in the direction whence it came, and beheld a sight that transfixed him with amazement.

A young girl, beautiful as an angel, stood on an overhanging crag, with one round, white arm resting lightly on the rocks, singing to herself as she gazed on the sparkling waters. Her hair, of the palest golden hue, rose and fell in the breeze, and flashed in the sunlight that rested like a glory on her bright young head. Her complexion was dazzlingly fair, with rose-tinted cheeks and full, red lips—like wet coral—and eyes large and bright, and blue as the summer sky above her. Her figure was slight, but round and voluptuous; and there was passion, and fervor, and wild enthusiasm in her look, as she stood like a stray seraph, dropped from some stray cloud, on that lonely island.

Willard Drummond stood immovable, drinking in, to intoxication, the bewildering draught of her beauty. She was in every respect so very different from Sibyl, that she seemed to him the more charming from force

of contrast. Transfixed he stood—everything forgotten but this lovely creature before him—when suddenly, like an inspiration, came the remembrance of his singular dream, and of the fatal siren with the golden hair. Strange that it should have come back to him so vividly and painfully then!

The young girl's song ceased, and turning, she leaped lightly as a young deer from her fairy perch, without perceiving him who stood so intently regarding her. Leaping from rock to rock with a fleetness that awoke the surprise of Willard, she reached the road and disappeared within the cottage of Mrs. Tom.

Everything was forgotten now but the one intense desire of knowing who this radiant sea-nymph was. Turning, therefore, into the path she had just taken, he approached the cottage and encountered Carl at the door.

"Well, Master Henley, how are you?" said Willard, carelessly.

"Sticking together," was Master Henley's concise and descriptive answer.

"Glad to hear it," said Willard, repressing a strong inclination to laugh. "Is Mrs. Tom within?"

"She was when I left the house," said Carl, who seemed determined not to commit himself.

"Any one with her?" again inquired the young gentleman, looking as indifferent as possible.

"No, nobody," was the unexpected answer.

"What!" exclaimed Willard, surprised. "I thought I saw a young lady enter a moment ago!"

"Oh, Christie—she's nobody," said the gallant Mr. Henley.

"Christie—Mrs. Tom's niece—I thought she was away!" exclaimed Willard.

"So she was, but I went for her this morning; couldn't be bothered doing her work and my own both any longer," said Carl.

"I suppose I may go in?" said Willard, feeling a sudden thrill of pleasure at the knowledge that this radiant girl was an inhabitant of the island.

"Yes, I suppose you may, if you like," said Carl, in a tone of the utmost unconcern.

Thus kindly permitted, Willard advanced and rapped at the door. It was opened by Mrs. Tom, whose surprise was only equaled by her delight at being honored by this unexpected visit.

Near the window that overlooked the lodge, stood the golden-haired vision of the beach. She turned round with a quick, shy glance, and blushed most enchantingly beneath the deep, dark eyes of the stranger.

"My niece, Christie, Mr. Drummond," said Mrs. Tom, directing his attention to her with a wave of her hand. "She got back this mornin'. I allers find it powerful lonesome here without Christie."

"I have no doubt of it," said Mr. Drummond, seating himself. "But I have had the pleasure of seeing Miss Christie before."

"Where?" asked Christie, opening her blue eyes in wonder.

"Down on the beach, a few moments ago."

"Oh, yes."

And again Christie blushed vividly, as she recollected how she had been caught singing.

"Where's Miss Sibyl and Master Guy?" inquired Mrs. Tom.

"Miss Sibyl has gone to N—— with the clergyman's family, and will not return for a week; and Captain Campbell has gone to Westbrook, where his vessel is undergoing repairs. So I am left all alone, and came to pay my respects to you."

"Then you'll stay and spend the evenin'?" said Mrs. Tom, smiling complacently.

Mr. Drummond professed his willingness; and the little widow, delighted at the condescension, set about preparing tea instantly, assisted by Christie, whose wild, shy glances were bent on his face whenever she fancied herself unobserved. Half pleased, half afraid of him at first, she was reserved and timid; but as this wore off, he drew her into conversation, and, to his surprise, found her intelligent and well-educated. This Mrs. Tom accounted for, by saying she had gone to school for the last five years at Westbrook, residing there with the friend she had now been visiting.

The evening passed away with the rapidity of magic. Christie, after much solicitation, consented to sing for him; and if anything was needed to fairly enchant him, that sweet, clear voice would have done it. Then, too, Carl added to the general hilarity, by drawing out a rusty Jew's-harp, and playing a favorite tune of his own composition. Not once during the evening did he think of Sibyl; her dark, resplendant face, and wild fierce, black eyes, were forgotten for the golden locks and sweet, fair face of blue-eyed Christie—this dainty island Peri.

The hour for leaving came all too soon. As he reluctantly rose to go, he pressed the hand Christie extended, to his lips, with such passionate ardor that the blood flushed to her very temples, but not with pleasure. Ere he left, Mrs. Tom cordially invited him to visit her house while he remained on the island—an invitation he was not loth in accepting.

Christie stood at the window, watching his tall, elegant form as he walked toward the castle in the bright, clear moonlight.

"I like him, Cousin Christie; don't you?" said Carl, when he had gone.

But Cousin Christie turned away without reply, longing to lay her burning cheek on the pillow, and muse over the new and delicious joy that was thrilling her whole heart, and in her slumber to lie dreaming "Love's young dream."

And Willard Drummond, forgetting his vows, forgetting Sibyl, forgetting honor, forgetting all but this lovely island-maiden, sought his couch with but one name on his heart and lips—

"Christie, Christie!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE HEART'S STRUGGLE.

"She loves, but knows not whom she loves,
Nor what his race, nor whence he came;
Like one who meets in Indian groves
Some beauteous bird without a name,
Brought by the last ambrosial breeze
To show his plumage for a day
To wondering eyes, then wing away."—LALLA ROOKH.

Pale, feverish, and unrefreshed, after a night of restless dreams, Willard Drummond arose from a vision of Christie to hail a new day.

Passion and principle were at war already. Bound by every pledge of love, by every vow, to Sibyl, his whole soul was steeped in this new, all-absorbing passion that had taken possession of him. He had fancied he loved her, until he beheld radiant, dazzling, bewildering Christie and from that moment he could have yielded heaven for her. Every feeling of his inmost heart and soul was up, in arms. Every feeling of honor bade him fly from this intoxicating siren, whose power he felt growing stronger each moment over him; but the voice of passion cried: "Remain! love her, if you will! What right has Sibyl to stand between you and the heaven of your dreams?" And, like all who allow the struggle between right and wrong to wage its warfare in their bosom, Willard Drummond was lost. For, with his hot, fervid, Southern nature, worldly considerations, former vows, reason,

principle, justice, even honor, were swept away, like a wall of smoke, before the fierce impetuosity of passion.

With a head throbbing, and pulse quick and feverish with the inward conflict, Willard descended to breakfast.

Captain Campbell stood in the sitting-room, awaiting his coming. With a courteous "good morning," he advanced to meet him; but started back in surprise at beholding his extreme pallor.

"My dear fellow," he exclaimed, in a tone of solicitude, "you are ill—very ill, I am afraid. What in the world is the matter?"

"Nothing. I had bad dreams, and did not sleep well," said Drummond, with a forced smile. "A cup of Aunt Moll's excellent coffee will set me all right again."

"I don't know about that," said Captain Campbell, with his eyes fixed anxiously on his face, "You are looking terribly feverish, and you were complaining of a headache yesterday. I hope you are not going to be ill."

"I assure you it is nothing," said Willard, in a tone of slight impatience. "You are needlessly alarming yourself. A bad night's rest is the cause of all."

"Well, if it is not, I will have to call up Mrs. Tom to nurse you till Sibyl comes. And, by the way, I regret exceedingly that I shall be obliged to leave you solitary and alone for some days. Important business, that cannot be postponed, demands my immediate attention."

Willard's heart suddenly bounded—he would scarcely have acknowledged to himself the reason—at the words.

"It seems hardly courteous or hospitable to leave you thus," continued the young captain; "but I know you will excuse me, my dear fellow, when I tell you it cannot possibly be helped."

"Oh, certainly, certainly!" interrupted Drummond, cordially. "Go, by all means. I will get along well enough in your absence. When do you leave?"

"Immediately after breakfast. It is an affair that cannot be postponed. In fact, I will not have time even to go and see Sibyl; but, as you will probably be there during the day, you can tell her. Perhaps you will come over to the mainland with me?"

"No, I think not," said Willard, with affected carelessness. "I may go during the course of the day."

"But how? I will take the boat."

"Oh, with Carl Henly. He has one, I believe."

"Well, suit yourself. And now I'm off. Take care of yourself, my boy; and *au revoir*!"

"Good-by!" said Willard, accompanying him to the door. "Aunt Moll and I will keep bachelor's hall till you come back."

Captain Guy laughed, and hurried down to the beach. And when he was gone, Willard arranged his slightly disordered dress and disheveled locks, and sauntering out, almost mechanically took the road to the cottage.

It came in sight at last—this little, quaint, old house, that held all of heaven to him now.

"Shall I enter—shall I thrust myself into temptation?" was his thought. "If I look again on this fairy sylph I am lost!"

He thought of Sibyl, and her dark, bright, menacing eyes arose before him, as if to warn him back.

"For your honor's sake—for your life's sake—for your soul's sake—go not there!" said the threatening voice of conscience.

"And have I not a right to love whom I please? Why should I offer violence to myself in leaving this bright enchantress, for that dark, wild

Amazon? Go, go, and be happy," said passion.

And, as if to overthrow his last good resolution, the image of Christie, radiant, dazzling, and beautiful, as he had beheld her first, in the bright flush of the fading sun light, arose before him, and once again passion conquered.

He approached and entered the cottage.

Mrs. Tom sat near the window, spinning and singing to herself. Willard's eyes wandered around in search of another; but bright Christie was not to be seen.

The widow arose, smiling, to welcome her guest, and placed a chair for him near herself. And still Willard's eyes went wandering round the room.

"She will appear presently," he thought, not yet liking to inquire for her.

"What a venerable-looking affair your wheel is, Mrs. Tom," he said, surveying it, with its hard polished wood and bright brass rings.

"Yes, it's as old as the hills," said Mrs. Tom, resuming her work; "and has been in our family since the flood. I think I spun on that there wheel all the yarn that makes the socks, mittens, and comforters for half the county round; besides making sheets, blankets, and lots of other things for ourselves," said Mrs. Tom, with conscious pride.

"You deserve a premium for industry, Mrs. Tom," said Willard.

"Well, you may be jokin' now, and I dare say you are; but it is true, for all that. Many a true word is spoke in jest, you know," said Mrs. Tom, as her wheel went merrily round. "There ain't many women in this place o' my age and means, can do, or does do more work than me, though I say it as hadn't oughter. I knit, and spin, and sew, wash, brew, bake, sow, and reap, and fifty other things, too numerous to mention, besides. Carl, if I go out there I'll put an end to your laziness, you idle, good-for-nothin' vagabone, you!" she added, breaking off in sudden wrath, as she espied Carl, leaning on the spade with which he should have been digging in the garden.

"You should make Carl do these things, Mrs. Tom," said Willard, still impatiently watching the door and wondering why Christie did not come.

"Carl?" said Mrs. Tom, with a short laugh. "Lor'-a-massy! he ain't worth his salt; that there's the laziest, most worthlessest young scape-goat ever any living 'oman was plagued with. I hain't a minute's peace with him night nor day; and if scolding was a mite of good, the Lord knows he might have been a saint by this time, for he gets enough of it."

Willard laughed. And in such conversation the morning slipped away—very rapidly to Mrs. Tom, but each moment an age to our impatient lover. For Christie was absent still; and a strange reluctance, for which he could not account, still prevented Willard from asking for her. It was an inward sense of guilt that troubled him; for, feeling toward her as he did, he felt he had no right even to mention her name.

At last, in despair, he arose to go. Mrs. Tom relieved his mind by saying:

"Christie will be disappointed at not seeing you," said the old lady, following him out. "She went out berrying to the woods this morning, and hain't got home yet."

Willard started at the information; and, inwardly cursing the folly that had detained him so many hours talking to a foolish old woman, he darted off, with a rapidity that quite amazed Mrs. Tom, in the direction of the pine woods.

"What a confounded fool I have been," he exclaimed, savagely, "to stay there listening to the way to make butter, and flannel, and 'yarb tea,' as if the old beldame thought I was going to be somebody's housekeeper, or a female doctress; and all the time this enchanting little blue-eyed witch was wandering alone by herself. What an opportunity I have lost! and now I suppose I may search for an hour and not find her."

He turned an abrupt angle in the winding path, and stifled a sudden exclamation of surprise and delight; for there before him, reclining on the

grass, with half-veiled eyes, and soft, musing smile, sat the object of all his thoughts, wishes, and desires.

He paused for a moment to contemplate the picture before him, for, if Christie had seemed beautiful when he first beheld her, oh, doubly lovely did she appear now in her attitude of unstudied grace.

Her dress was a loose, light muslin robe, fitting to perfection her rounded waist and swelling bust. Her straw hat lay on the ground beside her, and her golden, sunshiny hair floated, with all its wealth of rippling ringlets, round her ivory throat. How dazzlingly fair looked that smooth, snowy brow, contrasted with the full crimson lips and delicately flushed cheeks—how enchanting the long curved lashes, falling over the deep-blue eyes—how beautiful that faultless form, that soft, gentle, happy smile of guileless girlhood.

Willard Drummond's breath came and went, quick and short, as he gazed, and his dark eyes filled with a subdued fire.

He advanced toward her. His shadow, falling on the grass at her feet, was the first token she had of his coming. With a quick, startled cry, she sprang to her feet in terror; but when she saw who it was that stood before her, she stopped short, while the color flushed gloriously to her rounded cheeks. Her first impression was: He has read my thoughts in my face, and knows I was thinking of him.

"Have I disturbed you, bright Christie?" he asked, coming nearer.

"Oh, no!" she answered, blushing. "I was only waiting to rest a little while before going home."

"And dreaming, I perceive," said Willard. "May I ask, of what—of whom?"

"I wasn't dreaming," said Christie, innocently. "I was wide awake all the time."

"Day-dreaming, I mean," said Drummond, with a smile. "Do you know, fairest Christie, I have been at your cottage all the morning, waiting to see you?"

"To see me?" said Christie, with another quick, glad blush.

"And not finding you there, I have come in search of you," he continued.

"And found me," she said, laughing. "If I had known you were coming I should have staid at home."

"Perhaps it is better as it is, bright one; for I have found you alone. It is very pleasant to have found so fair companion on this lonely isle."

"Yes, it is a lonely place," said Christie, musingly; "and yet I like it better than Westbrook, or any other place I have ever been in. Only I would like always to have a friend with me to talk to; and that, you know, I cannot have here. Aunt Tom is always too busy to go out; and Carl don't care about the trouble of talking, much less walking, so I always have to go alone."

"And if he would go, I fancy Master Carl is hardly the kind of companion Miss Christie would select," said Willard.

"Not if I could find any better," said Christie, with a laugh; "but I have grown so accustomed to being alone now that I do not mind it at all, as I used to."

"And so you are perfectly happy here, fairest Christie, reigning queen of this fairy isle?"

"Ah, no! beautiful Miss Sibyl is queen of the isle. I am only her most loyal subject," said Christie, gayly; "you ought to know that, having paid her your allegiance."

"What if I should say that the subject is more lovely than the queen?" said Willard, in a low voice, and in a tone that brought the hot blood flushing to Christie's face.

"I should say you were laughing at me, as of course you would be. Certainly no one would ever think of me while Miss Sibyl was near. Oh! how I wish she would always stay here, and then I would have a companion."

"Ah, bright one! if I were in her place, what would I not surrender for such a privilege!"

"Would you?" said Christie, looking at him in unfeigned surprise; "then why not stay? I am sure I should be glad to have you here always."

Her innocent words, her enticing beauty, her child-like candor, were a strong temptation. For one moment he was about to fall before her, to clasp her in his arms, to hold her there forever, while he breathed forth his mad, passionate love, and told her nothing on earth should ever part them now. But again rose before him the dark, warning face of Sibyl to allay the fever in his blood. It seemed to him he could see her black, fierce eyes gleaming on them through the trees—he could almost hear her voice shouting "Traitor!"

All unconscious of the struggle raging in his breast, Christie stood leaning against a tree, her curved crimson lips half parted—her blue eyes fixed on a cloud drifting slowly over the sky, little dreaming of the far darker clouds gathering rapidly, now, over the horizon of her life.

And still in Willard's heart went on the struggle. He dared not look at her as she stood before him—bright, radiant, bewildering—lest the last lingering remains of fidelity and honor should be swept away by the fierce impetuosity of passion in his unstable heart.

But his good angel was in the ascendant still, for at that moment the voice of Carl was heard calling loudly;

"Christie! Christie!"

"Here, Carl! Here I am," she answered; and in another instant honest Carl stood before them.

"Aunt Tom sent me looking for you," said the young gentleman, rather sulkily; "and I've been tramping through the woods this half-hour, while you were taking it easy here," said Carl, wiping the perspiration from his brow.

"It was all my fault, my good Carl," said Willard, as Christie hastily snatched up her hat and basket and fled, having a just terror of Mrs. Tom's sharp tongue. "Make my excuses to your good aunt, and here is something for yourself."

Carl's dull face brightened wonderfully as Willard drew a gold piece from his pocket and pressed it into his hand, and then turned his steps slowly in the direction of Campbell Castle, thinking all earthly happiness lay centered in the opposite direction.

Mrs. Tom's reproaches fell unheeded, for the first time, on Christie's ear that day. She heard not a word of the long lecture delivered with more than the good widow's usual eloquence, for she was thinking of another voice, whose lowest tone had power already to thrill to the innermost recesses of her heart. She loved without knowing it, without wishing to define the new, delicious feeling filling her breast, only conscious she had never been so happy before in her life, and longing for the time when she should see him again. Ah, well had it been for her had they never met more.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRIUMPH OF PASSION.

"All other passions have their hour of thinking,
And hear the voice of reason. This alone
Sweeps the soul in tempests."

"Well," said Aunt Moll, to her son and heir, Lem, as he entered the long, high kitchen of Campbell's Lodge, "I would like ter know what dat ar Master Drummin's up ter? I doesn't understan' dese yer new-fangled young men 'tall. Fust he comes a courtin' of our Miss Sibyl, and jes' as soon as her back's turned he goes rite off an' takes up wid dat ar Miss Chrissy."

"'Tain't no business your'n, ole woman," said Lem, gruffly. "I 'spec's as how Marse Drummin' knows what he's about."

"Yes, honey; but 'pears to me I ought to tell Miss Sibyl 'bout it. Ef he is her beau, he oughtn't to be takin' up wid dat ar Miss Chrissy."

"Better let Miss Sibyl look arter her own beau," replied her dutiful son. "How does ye know he's a courtin' Miss Chrissy?"

"'Cause I seed dem, chile—yes I did—las' night, down on de shore. De moon was shinin' jes' as bright as a new pin, an' I took dat ar litter o' kittens down to de shore to drown 'em, when I seed Marse Drummin' a walkin' along wid Miss Chrissy, and he had his head stooped down jes' so,"—and Aunt Moll ducked her woolly head to illustrate it—"an' was whisperin' soft stuff, jes' as folks do when dey're in love."

"Well, what den?" asked Lem, growing interested.

"Well dey come up ah' seed me, in course, an', Lor', Lor'! I jes' wish you seed de look Marse Drummin' give me. 'Peared as ef he'd a liked to knocked my ole head off. But I warn't afeared, 'deed I warn't, chile; so I jes' stood still an' drapped a courtesy, an' Miss Chrissy, she got red rite up to de roots ob her hair. 'Good-evenin', marse and young miss,' sez I; 'don't be skeered; I only wants to drown dese little kittens,' sez I, for I thought as I might be perlite jest as well as not.

"'Oh, how does yer do, Aunt Moll?' sez Miss Chrissy, a laughin' an' blushin'; 'how is Lem and yer rheumatiz, dese times?'

"'T'ank you, honey,' sez I, 'dey's pretty well, bof ob dem.'

"An' den Marse Drummin' he pulled her arm right troo his'n, and marched her off wid him; an' den I pitched de kittens right in de water an' come home."

"Well, dat ar warn't much," said the skeptical Lem. "Dey might be walkin' on de beach, but that ain't by no means courtin'. Marse Drummin' walk wid her, 'cause Miss Sibyl's gone, an' he ain't got nobody else to talk to."

"Cisely so, chile; but dat ain't all," says Aunt Moll. "Dis berry mornin', as I was passin' troo de hall, de sittin'-room door was open, and I heered voices a talkin' dere; so I listened and peeked in, an' dar was Marse Drummin', rampin' up and down, a talking to hisself."

"Well, dat ain't nothin', eider," said the still contradictory Lem. "I've hearn dat ar Carl talk to hisself when Miss Tom sent him out to work; an' he ain't in love wid no one."

"But listen, honey, and don't you be puttin' me out so, 'cause 'tain't 'spectful—'deed it ain't," said Aunt Moll, getting slightly indignant. "As I was sayin', I clapt my ear to de door, an' I heered him sayin' jes' as plain as nothin' 'tall;

"Oh, dischanting, onwilderin' Chrissy! ef I had nebber met you, I might yet be happy!' Dar, what he say dat for ef he warn't in lub?"

This last was a settler. Lem felt that his mother had the best of the argument, and unwilling to seem defeated, he went out, leaving the old lady to enjoy her triumph.

Three days had passed since the departure of Sibyl, and certainly Willard's conduct seemed to justify Aunt Moll's suspicions. Unable to break the thrall which bound him, wishing, yet unable to fly from the spell of the enchantress, he lingered still by her side. There were shame, dishonor, sin, in remaining, but oh! there were death, misery, and desolation in going. All worldly considerations, her unknown birth, her obscure connections, her lowly rank, were swept away like walls of cobweb before the fierce torrent

of passion that overwhelmed, conquered every other feeling in its impetuous tide.

And she loved him, this angel of beauty, this fairy princess of the isle; he could see it in the quick flush of joy at his approach, the quick, burning glances shot from her beautiful eyes, more quickly averted when they met his—her low, impassioned tones, her bright, beautiful blushes. There was joy, there was rapture in the thought; and yet, unless he forgot honor, vows, all that should have been sacred, what did this love avail?

And so, like a tempest-tossed bark on a tempest-tossed sea, he strove with passion and honor, love and remorse, right and wrong.

Once only, fearing lest her suspicions might be aroused by his absence, he had visited Sibyl, whose rapturous greeting and confiding love made him feel far more of a villain than ever. He looked forward with dread to the period of her return, fearing for the discovery of his falsity; but, more than all, fearing for the effects of her fierce wrath on Christie, knowing well what must be the strength of Sibyl's passion when unchained.

And so, when Mrs. Brantwell proposed that Sibyl should remain with her another week, instead of returning to the dreary isle, instead of feeling irritated now, he backed the proposal, saying that perhaps it would be better for her to do so, more especially during her brother's absence.

And Sibyl, in her deep love and woman's trust, suspecting nothing, fearing nothing, consented, to the inward joy and sincere relief of her false lover.

Resolving to visit her frequently, and so allay any suspicions that his absence might give rise to, Willard Drummond returned to the island and to—Christie, yielding himself without further effort to the witching spell of her love.

Mrs. Tom suspected nothing of the contraband courting carried on under her very eyes. It was the most natural thing in the world, she thought, that, in the absence of Sibyl and her brother, the young man should spend whole days with them, for it was not pleasant having no one to talk to but a couple

of negroes, as she very well knew. Then, it was not to be wondered at, that he preferred talking and walking with Christie to any of the rest, for she was "book-l'arned" like himself, which neither she nor Carl was. She did wonder a little sometimes, and said as much to Christie, why he should stay on the island at all, in the absence of the other.

"But, I suppose," was always her conclusion, "It's because it's Miss Sibyl's home, and, for her sake, he stays there until she comes."

But Christie, though she only blushed and was silent, was of a different opinion—one that she would scarcely own to her own heart. As to his being in love with Christie, Mrs. Tom would have scouted the idea with scorn and unbelief, had she heard it. Every circumstance was against such a conclusion. He was rich, highly connected, and proud as a prince of the blood; she was poor, unknown, and, compared with him, uneducated. Besides, in the good widow's opinion, she was a child in feeling, as she certainly was in years, scarcely knowing the meaning of the word love.

Ah! she had been till he came; and his fervid, impassioned words, his burning glances, his thrilling touch, had swept away the glamour of childhood and simplicity, and revealed to her the passionate woman's heart within her. His words, his looks, his tones, were all new revelations to the artless, island maiden, changing her, as if by magic, from a child to a woman. She revered him as the embodiment of all that was brave, generous, and noble; worshipped him as a god, and loved him with all the affection of her fresh, young heart, with all the ardor of a first, deep love.

As yet, she knew not whether that love was returned; for, unfaithful as he was in thought to Sibyl, passion had not yet so totally conquered his reason as to make him sin in words. He had never said, "Christie, I love you;" but, ah, how often had his eyes said this, and much more; and how long would this slight barrier stand before the fiery impetuosity of unstable youth?

And so that day passed, and the next, and the next, and the next, and with every passing hour the temptation grew stronger and harder to be resisted. Matters must come to a crisis now, or never. Sibyl, in a day or two,

would be home, and this wild frenzy of his could be hidden no longer. If she should come, as matters stood now, all would be lost.

And thus, torn between conflicting emotions, Willard sought Christie, on the day before Sibyl was expected home, with the determination of bringing this struggle to an end, then and there.

It was a glorious August afternoon. The island wore its bright dress of green, and nestled in the blue shining river like an emerald set in sapphire. The birds in the deep pine forest were filling the air with their melody, and the odor of the wild roses came floating softly on the summer breeze.

But Willard Drummond was in no mood to admire the beauties of Nature. The morning had been spent in pacing up and down his room, hesitating, resolving, doubting, wishing, yet undecided still. For, when duty and principle would appear for a moment victorious, the waving golden hair, the beautiful blue eyes, the gentle, loving face of Christie would arise before him, scattering all his good resolutions to the winds. And, mingled with this, there was a sort of superstitious foreboding of evil to come. He thought of his dream, and of the yellow-haired siren luring him on to destruction; and of Sibyl, fiery daughter of a fiery race, fierce, vindictive, and implacable in her wrongs.

"Oh, that I had never met this dark, passionate girl!" he murmured, distractedly, "who now stands between me and the heaven of my dreams; or would that I had seen this beautiful, enchanting Christie first! Oh, for that angel as my wife! And but for those fatal vows once made to Sibyl, she might be mine. I was mad, crazed, to mistake my fancy for that dark, wild-eyed girl for love! And now, for that one mistake, am I to be wretched for life? Shall I give up this beautiful, radiant creature, who loves me, for one I care for no longer? No; the struggle is past. Christie shall be my bride, and I will brave the worst that may follow!"

He set his teeth hard; and, as if fearing second reflection might make him change his mind, he left the house and hurried out to meet Christie.

Down on the shore, under the shade of an overhanging willow, he knew Christie had a favorite seat, where, on pleasant days, she used to take her

work. Here he was sure of finding her, and in this direction he bent his steps.

She sat, sewing, under the shade of the drooping willow, singing softly to herself, and looking like some sylvan goddess of a sylvan scene; or some beautiful sea-nymph, just risen from her grotto of coral and chrystal.

Radiant and bewildering was the smile and blush with which she welcomed him—a smile and blush that might have been found too strong even for more potent principles than his.

He seated himself beside her, with a look of moody abstraction, all unusual with him, watching her covertly from under his eyelashes, as she bent smiling and happy over her work.

For a time, Christie chatted gayly on various commonplace matters; but, at last, catching her tone from his, she, too, grew silent and thoughtful. She bent lower over her work, wondering if she had offended him, and involuntarily sighed.

He heard it, and said:

"And wherefore that sigh, Christie! Are you unhappy?"

"No not unhappy; but troubled."

"And why should you be troubled, bright one? What can there be to grieve one so fair?"

"I—I—feared I had offended you," she answered, timidly. "You appear out of spirits."

"You offend me, gentle one—you who never offended any one in your life? No, no; it is not that."

"Then you are unhappy," she said, shyly.

"Yes, I am miserable—wretched!" he cried, vehemently. "I wish to Heaven I had never been born!"

"Oh, Mr. Drummond! what has happened!" she cried, laying her hand on his, and looking up wistfully in his face.

Her touch, her tone, her look swept away every remaining trace of fidelity. He forgot everything he should have remembered—his vows, his honor, his truth—and saw nothing but the bright, radiant, bewildering vision before him. In an instant he was on his knees at her feet, exclaiming, with impassioned vehemence:

"Christie! Christie! my life, my dream, my hope, I love you. See, I am at your feet, where my heart, my name, my fortune, long have been. With my whole heart, and soul, and life, I love you with a love stronger than death or the grave. All the devotion and hopes of my life I offer you, if you can only say you love me."

He was pale and panting; his eyes were fierce and burning; his tones low, thrilling, and passionate.

Trembling, shrinking, blushing, yet, with a deep, intense, fervent joy thrilling through her heart and being, Christie listened. The blood swept in torrents to her face, neck, and bosom, which rose and fell with her rapid breathing. She dare not look up to meet his ardent, burning, gaze.

"Christie, Christie! my love, my life! look up; speak—answer me—tell me that you love me!"

Still no reply, only those downcast eyes, deepest blushes, and quick, hurried breathing.

"Speak! speak! my beautiful love! only one word from those sweet lips; but one touch of your dear hand to tell me I may live," he cried, growing more wild and impassioned.

With a low, glad cry of intense joy, she buried her blushing face on his shoulder.

"Thanks! my heart's thanks for this sweetest, loveliest Christie!" he cried, with exultant joy, pressing her yielding form to his bounding heart.

"My life, with all its hopes, energies, and ambitions, shall be devoted to but one purpose now—that of rewarding you for your priceless love."

"Oh, Mr. Drummond, your love is all the reward I ask!" she said, in the deep, earnest voice of perfect trust.

"Not Mr. Drummond now, sweetest Christie. I am *Willard* to you, now and forever. Let me always hear that name in music from your lips, and earth has no higher boon in store for me."

"But oh! can you love me thus—me, a poor, little, nameless, uncultured girl, while you are rich, distinguished, and highly connected. Oh, Willard, will you not, some day, repent this choice—you, who might win the highest and fairest in the land?"

"Repent! never—never! Perish my heart, if it ever admit of any love but thine; palsied be my arm, if it ever encircle any form but this; accursed be my lips, if they ever perjure the words I have spoken now; lost forever be my soul, when it is false to thee!" he cried, with passionate vehemence.

"Oh, Willard! dearest, hush! I do not doubt you—Heaven forbid. I should die, if I thought you could be false to me."

"Speak not of death; it is not for such as you, bright, beautiful Christie. And now, only one thing is wanting, to make me the happiest of men."

She lifted her radiant face with a look of earnest inquiry.

"Christie, one little word from you, and ere the sun rises on a new day, my joy will be complete—my cup of earthly happiness will be filled to the brim."

Still the same earnest, anxious gaze.

"Dearest love, you will not refuse? It will be but a small matter to you, and will make me supremely blessed."

"And that?" she inquired, wonderingly.

"Brightest Christie, be my bride—my wife!" he cried, folding her closer in his arms, and speaking in a thrilling whisper.

Again the eloquent blood swept over her stainless neck and bosom, but she did not reply.

"You will not refuse me, my own Christie, this last, greatest favor? Comply now—to-day; for if the present opportunity passes, it may never occur again."

"But how—*how* can we be wedded here?" she said, shyly, lifting her eyes to his impassioned ones, and dropping them in brightest blushes.

"Christie, yonder lies a boat; it is three hours to sunset; long before that time we can reach Westport; there we can find a clergyman, and there you can become my own for life!"

"But it is so soon—so sudden," she faltered; "and Aunt Tom—she will never consent."

"She would not consent any way, fairest Christie. She would say you were too young—too far in social position beneath me. She would not believe my intentions honorable. In short, dearest, she would raise a thousand objections, and the end would be, that we would be parted forever."

"Oh, Willard! it would not be so bad as that; if you explained it all to her, I think she would consent. Aunt Tom is good and kind, and loves me, and would do anything to make me happy."

"That may be, brightest Christie; but that very love she has for you, and her wish to make you happy, would cause her to hesitate. For she would repeat the old, senseless saying, 'Marry in haste and repent at leisure,' and think the best way to make us both happy would be to postpone our marriage for years."

"But this secret marriage, it seems wrong—sinful. Oh, Willard, my soul revolts from it! If I could only tell Aunt Tom!" cried Christie, imploringly.

"When the proper time comes, dearest love, she shall know, and the world shall behold my beautiful bride. But until then, you must have confidence in me, and wait."

"But, oh! I have such a presentiment of what may follow, Willard—such a cloud seems to enshroud this secret marriage, that my very soul shrinks from it in fear."

"Christie," he said, drawing back, and speaking in a deeply offended tone, "you do not love me!"

She raised her bright, beautiful eyes, so full of love and devotion, but did not speak. No words could have told such a tale of perfect, intense love, as did that quick, eloquent glance.

"You do not love me," he went on, in the same deeply hurt tone; "you have no confidence in me, no trust, no faith. I have given you my reasons, good and valid to any one else, but of no avail with you. If you cared for me, you would be content to wait, with perfect trust in my love; but I see you will not trust me. Be it so; there remains nothing for me but to leave you forever."

"Oh, Willard!" was all she could say, as her voice was choked in tears.

"I thought I had found an artless, loving, trusting girl," he went on, with increased bitterness; "but I have found one who will not yield in the slightest iota, lest she should compromise herself in the eyes of the world, who fears what it will say of her more than she loves me! Farewell, Christie! we have met for the last time. Since you care for your aunt more than for me, I leave you to her."

He arose, coldly and haughtily, to go.

"Oh, Willard! do not leave me!" was her passionate cry. "I will do anything, be anything you ask, only do not leave me in anger!"

"Will you be my wife?"

"Yes."

"To-night?"

"Oh, yes! to-night and forever!"

"My own gentle love!" he whispered, pressing her fondly in his arms, "will you go and get ready, and return to me here in a quarter of an hour?"

"But what shall I say to Aunt Tom—how account for my absence?"

"Leave that to me, dearest. In a few minutes I will follow you to the cottage, and ask her to let you take a sail with me on the river by moonlight; she will not refuse me."

"As you will," said Christie, turning toward her home. While Willard, triumphant, exulting, and dizzy with joy, descended to the beach to prepare the boat.

CHAPTER IX.

THE VISION OF THE ISLE.

"But soft: behold! lo, where it comes again!
I'll cross it though it blast me. Stay, illusion!
If thou hast any sound, or use a voice,
Speak to me!"—HAMLET.

Fickle fortune, that often favors the wrong and erring, certainly smiled on the lovers that day. For scarcely had Christie entered the house, when Mrs. Tom came bustling out, in deep distress, saying, in heart-rending tones:

"What is to be done? This five-and-forty year, rain or shine, I've had a cup o' tea for breakfast; and, now, there ain't a grain in the house. I jest know, as well as if somebody told me, that I won't be fit for nothin' to-morrow, when I ain't got a cup o' tea for my breakfast; and there's no use tryin' to make that there good-for-nothin' Carl, go for any to-night. It allers was my luck to have the most dreadfullest bad luck, but I never thought things would come to sich a pass as this. Scat! you hussy!" And Mrs. Tom gave the cat a kick, which was her usual way of winding up an address.

"Aunt Tom," said Christie, "let me go."

"You! Are you crazy? How are you goin' to go?"

"Mr. Drummond is going over to Westport this evening, and he wanted me to go with him," said Christie, turning away to hide a rising blush. "I can easily get it there."

"So you can," said Mrs. Tom, considering; "but will Mr. Drummond return early?"

"Yes," said Christie; "he has some slight *business* to transact, and then he is coming immediately home. The sail will be pleasant by moonlight, and I'd like to go."

"Well, go, then; and don't be gone any longer than you can help. Get two poun's of hyson at Mr. Ginger's."

"Yes ma'am," said Christie, taking the money, and putting on her hat and shawl, in a trembling, agitated way, that at any other time Mrs. Tom must have noticed.

She hurried out, and on her way met Willard coming up to the house.

"Well, has Mrs. Tom given you permission?" he asked, in pleased surprise.

Christie related her errand.

"The gods favor us!" he cried, gayly. "See, Christie! the sun is approaching the west, and before it dies out of the sky, you will be what Heaven has destined you for—my wife!"

"And to be that for one hour, is bliss enough to repay for a whole life of misery," she said, with heartfelt earnestness.

"With my own Christie! Will I ever be able to repay you for this grace, this greatest earthly blessing that Heaven could bestow upon me?" he said, fervently.

"The knowledge of your love more than repays me; for I have made no sacrifice," she said, in a low tone.

They had now reached the boat. He handed her in, pushed off the boat, took the oars, and rowed away.

But other eyes they dreamed not of were upon them. From one of the windows of the high chambers of Campbell's Lodge, Aunt Moll and her son, Lem, were taking observations.

"Dar dey go!—off a sailin'. What will Miss Sibyl say to dat?" observed the indignant Aunt Moll.

"Goin' out sailin' doesn't signify nothin'. De young gemblum wants somebody to talk to as he rows."

"'Tain't right," said Aunt Moll, with an oracular shake of the head; "dar's sumfin wrong, somewhere. Don't b'lieve Miss Sibyl would 'prove of it, nohow; dese yer young men ain't to be trusted nowadays."

"It's nat'ral Marse Drummin' would get tired o' one gal—mos' young men do—and take up wid anoder, for a change. I'd do it myself," concluded Lem, in a pompous tone.

"You would?" said his mother, in high dudgeon; "as if any gal 'd look at you, you brack fool. Marse Drummin' will get hisself inter a hornet's nest, if

he trifles wid de 'fections ob Miss Sibyl. I's come to de disclusion to conform Miss Sibyl ob his goings on, soon as ebber she arrives. Dar!"

And having thus settled the matter to her own entire satisfaction, Aunt Moll descended to the kitchen, and soon forgot all sublunary things in the celestial bliss of smoking a short, dirty pipe, as black and stumpy as herself.

Meantime the erring young pair were swiftly skimming over the bright waters in the direction of Westport. The labor of rowing precluded the possibility of conversation, and both were silent and thoughtful. Urged on by his intense desire of completing what he had so successfully begun—urged on, perhaps, by Fate—the boat seemed fairly to fly over the sparkling, sun-bright waves.

Ere the last ray of sunlight had faded from the sky the boat touched the opposite shore; and drawing Christie's arm within his own, Willard set off rapidly in the direction of the town of Westport.

And having reached it, he led Christie in the direction of a little obscure Methodist chapel, while he left her to seek for a license and the clergyman.

In a short time he returned with both, and without asking any unnecessary inquiries, he hastened through the marriage ceremony; and in a few moments the passion-blinded young couple were man and wife. Then hastily paying the clergyman his fee, Willard led his bride from the church.

"My bride! my wife! my own forever, now!" he cried, with passionate exultation, folding her to his heart.

But just then, with a sharp, piercing cry of thrilling horror, Christie sprang back, frightfully pale—with dilating eyes and choking breath, gasping, stifling, suffocating.

"In the name of Heaven! what is the matter, my own Christie?" he cried, in wonder and alarm.

But, pressing her hands over her heart, she sank dizzily on the church steps, pale, gasping, trembling, horror-stricken still.

"Christie! Christie! dearest love! what is it?" he said, anxiously, encircling her with his arm.

"Oh! the doom—the doom!" she said, shudderingly hiding her face in his arm.

"What doom? Of what are you speaking, sweet wife?" he inquired, in increasing anxiety.

She rose now, and passed her hand over her brow, as if to clear away a mist. Then, seeing his pale, troubled face, she recovered herself and forced a smile.

"Dearest Christie, what was it?" he anxiously asked.

"Oh, Willard! you will laugh at me, but I felt it all, I saw it all so plainly," she said, in a weeping voice.

"Saw what—felt what? I do not understand," he said, puzzled by her look and words.

"Those eyes! those eyes! and that fierce grasp on my throat, and the keen knife! Ah, Heaven! I feel it yet." And she shuddered convulsively.

"Are you raving, Christie! In Heaven's name, what eyes, what knife, are you speaking of?" he said, beginning to think she had lost her reason.

"Oh, Willard! Willard! just as you folded me in your arms, and called me your wife, Sibyl Campbell's fierce, wild, black eyes rose before me, glaring on me like burning coals, and then I felt two strong hands clutch my throat, and a knife plunged into my breast! Oh, saints in heaven! it rises before me yet."

"Christie, you are mad!" he said, vehemently; but the ashen paleness that overspread his face told the sudden shock the name of Sibyl had given him.

In all the terror, horror, and momentary frenzy of that instant, the fear of his displeasure conquered every other feeling in her breast. Shaking off,

with an effort, the creeping dread that was palsying every nerve, she clung to his arm with renewed confidence, and said, with a deep breath of relief:

"I believe I was, for the moment, Willard; but that has passed now. You are not angry with me, dearest Willard?" she said, anxiously, observing the cloud that still overspread his fine face.

"Angry? not at all!" he said, gravely. "Only sorry and surprised to think you should give way to such extraordinary delusions."

"Oh, Willard! it was not a delusion. I saw it all, as plainly as I see you now. Oh, those dreadful, dreadful eyes! they will haunt me to my dying day!"

"Do not think of it again, my own love, and do not look so wild," he said, soothingly. "Come, let us be going; the moon will soon rise, and it will be late before we reach the isle."

"And Aunt Tom will be anxious," said Christie. "And that reminds me of her commission, which I had nearly forgotten. When we reach the store, you can wait outside. I will join you in a moment."

The moon was just rising when they set sail for the isle, which Christie had left a child, and was returning a wife. Ah! where was their better angel in that dark moment of madness and temptation?

The soft, bright moonlight was lighting up the isle with its calm, pale rays when they reached it. The cry of the whip-poor-will and katy-did, from the neighboring forest, mingled with the soft, dreamy murmur of the waves on the shore, was the sweetest music ever heard.

Tempted by the beauty of the night, our lovers prolonged their stroll over the beach. At length, as it began to grow late, Christie, fearing Mrs. Tom or Carl might come out to watch for her coming, persuaded Willard to let her return.

They walked up the rocky, romantic path, whispering those low and often foolish things so sweet to lovers' ears when coming from the lips of

the loved one. A light still twinkled in the widow's cottage, casting a long, thin line of yellow light far over the lonely road. But no other sign of life was visible. Christie's blue eyes were bent on the ground, and Willard's stately head was bent above her, when, suddenly looking up, he beheld a sight which froze the blood in his veins.

From the dark, mystic pine woods, a white-robed figure came floating toward them. One glance sufficed to tell him it was the strange vision that had bent over him a few nights before. There were the same hollow, rayless eyes, the same wild, streaming black hair, the same ghastly corpse-like face, with its fixed look of unutterable woe.

It was coming steadily toward them, this awful phantom. Willard stood fixed, rooted to the ground, gazing as if fascinated on the appalling specter. His next thought was for Christie. He glanced toward her to see her face blanched to the hue of death, her eyes dilating in horror, fixed, frozen, unable to speak a word, one hand raised, and one flickering finger pointing to the dread being approaching.

Neither could move nor speak. Still the phantom floated on until it stood before them, face to face. For an instant it paused, with its hollow eyes glaring upon them; then with an awful cry of "murdered! murdered!" that peeled through the dim old woods, it threw up both its arms, and with a shrill, piercing, agonizing shriek, fled away and was hid among the beetling rocks.

The hand that grasped Willard's arm was growing weaker and weaker, there was a low moan, and he turned in time to catch the senseless form of his child-wife in his arms.

The wild, unearthly scream had startled Mrs. Tom. Alarmed and wondering, she cautiously opened the door and went out. And there she saw Willard Drummond with the senseless form of Christie in his arms.

CHAPTER X.

ONE OF FORTUNE'S SMILES.

"Fortune is merry,
And in this mood will give us anything."—JULIUS CÆSAR, —SAR.

Captain Guy Campbell sat in the parlor of the Westport House, as the flaming gilt signboard announced, his heels elevated on the window-sill, his chair tipped back, a cigar in his mouth, and a newspaper in his hand. Many people were passing in and out, some of whom he greeted with a nod, others with a brief salutation, while he still went on with his reading and smoking. There seemed to be nothing very exciting in the paper, judging by Captain Campbell's suppressed yawns; and he was about to throw it aside as worthless, when a paragraph caught his eye, that brought him to his feet, as suddenly as though those members were furnished with steel springs.

The paragraph was brief, and ran thus:

"If Mark Campbell, Esq., of Campbell's Isle, be still alive, he is earnestly requested to call immediately at the office of C. Ringdon, Attorney-at-Law, No 16 —— street, Westport. In case of his death, his heirs should apply.

C. RINGDON."

"Now, what in the name of Neptune and all his scaly court can this mean?" ejaculated the amazed Captain Campbell.

"Should be happy to inform you," said a voice behind him, "only I don't happen to know what you're talking about."

Captain Campbell turned round, and saw a fashionably dressed young man, who had just entered, standing beside him.

"Ah, Stafford! how are you?" he said, extending his hand; "happy to see you. What in the world brought you here?—the very last person I ever expected to see in this quarter of the globe."

"Well," said Stafford, leisurely seating himself, "I came down here, nominally, to transact some business for the governor; but the fact is, I heard the Evening Star had arrived, and I wanted to pay my devoirs to her majesty, the Queen of the Isle. How is pretty Lady Sibyl?"

"Very well, and at present on a visit to the Rev. Mr. Brantwell's. But look at this advertisement, here, in the Westport *Herald*. What the deuce do you make of it?"

Stafford took the paper and carelessly glanced over the lines.

"Faith, I don't know. Somebody's left you a legacy, perhaps."

"Pooh! what a notion! Who under the sun is there to leave a legacy to me? The Campbells are all as poor as Job's turkey."

"Well, there's your mother's relations—the Eyres. Old Richard Eyre, the New York banker, is a millionaire, worth more hundred thousand dollars than I could undertake to count. He might have died and left you his money."

"And leave his own family without? A likely story," said Captain Campbell.

"My dear fellow, he had no family, except a wife, and she has been dead for many years. You may be certain he has left you his heir."

"By Jove! if it should prove to be true, that would be a streak of good luck. But it cannot be. Dame Fortune would never bestow on a Campbell any such friendly smile. They always were an impoverished race, and always will be, I believe."

"Don't be too confident. Strange things happen sometimes. For instance, I saw something strange a night or two ago.

"Yes? What is it?"

"Weil, you see, about dark I was wandering about the shore, enjoying a cigar and the beauty of the evening, and ruminating whether it wouldn't be advisable to take a boat and go over to see her adorable majesty, Queen Sibyl. Most likely my cogitation would have ended in my going, only, unfortunately, there was no boat to be seen. I was about to turn away in despair, when I suddenly espied a boat containing two persons land at some distance below where I stood. One was a young fellow, tall and good looking, with a certain air of aristocratic hauteur about him that told me he was not to be interfered with. But his companion—oh, ye gods and little fishes! what a perfect little sylph she was! Such a miraculous combination of blue eyes, yellow curls, snowy complexion, pink cheeks, and red, kissable lips, it never was my good fortune to encounter before. But what struck me most forcibly, was her resemblance to some one I had seen before and after puzzling myself for a long time, I at length discovered she was the very image of pretty little Christie, of the isle."

"Christie! oh, pooh! it couldn't have been she," said Captain Campbell, with an uneasy start.

"Of course, it couldn't have been she, with so dainty a knight as that, but it was most confoundedly like her, or what she was when I saw her last—four years ago; though I dare say she has greatly changed since then."

"Well, what was there so strange about a handsome fellow and a pretty girl landing on the beach, to interest the nonchalant Will Stafford?" asked Captain Campbell.

"Listen—I haven't got to the strange part of my story yet. They walked up the beach to the road, and I could see the girl was terrified and excited, while he tried to soothe and quiet her. My curiosity was aroused; for, 'pon my soul, Campbell, I never saw a lovelier little creature; and with a sort of idea they were up to some mischief, I followed them. It was nearly dark, and they hurried on so fast they did not notice me, and I tracked them into

one of the most obscure streets of the town, and saw them enter a little, secluded, Methodist meeting-house.'

"Well?" said his auditor.

"Well, sir, the fellow left her there and went off. I crept softly in, and in the obscurity hid behind a post, determined to see the end. Dark as it was, I could see she trembled with inward emotion, and crouched down in her seat, with her face hidden in her hands, as if terror, remorse, sorrow, or some other feeling, was weighing down her heart."

"Wonder the gay Will Stafford did not approach and offer her consolation," said the young captain, dryly.

"By Jove! I felt like doing it," said Mr. Stafford, in all sincerity; "but I wanted to see what was up, for I knew now all could not be quite right. Presently, the young man came back, and with him a minister. All was clear as stars at noonday, now—this was a runaway match, a clandestine marriage—something which is always interesting to fast young men like myself. The happy pair stood up before the clergyman, and the twain were soon made one flesh.

"My ears would have run themselves into points in order to hear the better, but I listened in vain. The minister mumbled over the ceremony so confoundedly low that I could not hear a single word—not even the names of the parties, which I was particularly anxious to find out. I suppose it was all right, however, for I saw the clergyman pocket the fee, and the young man, tucking little blue-eyes under his arm, walked off; and, faith, I'd given a trifle to have stood in his place. I followed, not being ambitious to be locked up all night, even in so holy a place as a church. Just as I went out, I heard an awful shriek, and there the bride stood like one suddenly turned to stone, while the bridegroom was trying to console her. What scared her I don't know, but certainly I never saw a more terrified look on any face than was on hers. Not wishing to be seen, I drew back, and in a few minutes they started on. I followed them as before, and saw the girl stop for a moment in a grocery store, while he waited outside. Then they went down to the beach, he handed her into the boat, pushed off, and they were gone—leaving me to rub my eyes and wonder whether I was sleeping or waking. Now, what do

you think of this wedding on the sly, without friends, or witnesses, or anything in the usual line?"

"Well, really, I cannot say, such things do not interest me as deeply as they do you. Perhaps it's the Westport fashion."

"No; there's something wrong. He was evidently of a rank superior to the girl. I could tell that, both by their dress and air, and general appearance. I *would* like to get at the bottom of this mystery."

"Then why not see the minister who married them, and find out from him?"

"Well, for sundry reasons. First, I didn't see his face, and wouldn't know him if I stumbled over him. Second, it looks like a rascally, low-bred trick; this tracking them and playing the spy, that I should be ashamed to tell any one of it, but so old a friend as you."

"Well, then, never mind this mysterious couple any more," said Captain Campbell, impatiently; "but tell me what I had better do about this advertisement."

"Why, go and see this C. Ringdon, attorney-at-law, at once, that's all; I'll go with you; it's not ten minutes' walk from here."

"But if it should prove to be a humbug?" said Captain Campbell, as he sallied forth, arm-in-arm with Stafford.

"Then thrash C. Ringdon, attorney-at-law, within an inch of his life," said his pacific friend. "It's the only balm for a wounded mind I know of."

Captain Campbell laughed; and the conversation turned on various matters as they walked on.

In a short time they reached the office of C. Ringdon—a dingy-looking, old house, with his name over the door, in exceedingly dingy letters.

Mr. Ringdon, a sharp, shrewd-looking little man, sat alone in his office, when they entered. He pushed up his spectacles, and surveyed them keenly

as they came in.

"You, I presume, are the Mr. Ringdon mentioned in this advertisement?" said Captain Campbell, handing him the paper, and pointing to the advertisement.

"I am sir. Can you give me any information concerning the parties in question?"

"Faith, he ought to, being the principal party in question himself," interposed Stafford.

"How, sir,—are you a relative of these Campbells of the Isle?" asked the attorney.

"Yes; the son of the Mark Campbell mentioned there."

"Ah! Are there any more of you? Is your father living?"

"No; he has been dead these four years; and there are *no more of us*, as you are pleased to term it, but one sister. May I ask what all this affair is about?"

"Certainly, Mr. Campbell. You are aware, perhaps, you had an uncle in New York—Mr. Richard Eyre, the banker?"

"I knew it! Wasn't I just saying the old gentleman was at the bottom of it?" said Stafford, giving Captain Campbell a dig in the ribs.

"I am aware of that fact, sir; he was my mother's only brother."

"Exactly. Well, he is dead."

"Indeed!" said the young man, gravely.

"Yes, sir; and, having no heirs of his own, he has left his whole fortune to be divided equally between his sister's children. The sum is enormous; and I beg leave to congratulate you on your good fortune. I do not know the exact amount, and for further particulars it will be necessary for you to visit

New York, where the lawyer who drew up the will resides. Here is his address. All you have to do, is to prove your identity, settle a few preliminaries, and take immediate possession of your fortune. Excuse me, gentlemen, I am very busy, and, with your permission, will bid you good-morning."

And the little attorney bowed them politely out.

"Well, this is a streak of good luck!" exclaimed Stafford. "Upon my word, Campbell, you must have been born with a silver spoon in your mouth. I suppose you will start instantly for New York?"

"Not instantly, my dear Stafford. I must go and inform Sibyl of our good fortune. Dear, noble girl, for her sake I am truly thankful for this."

"Of course you ought to be; not many men are blessed with such a sister as that radiant, glorious Sibyl. Have you any objections to my accompanying you?"

"Delighted to have you, my dear fellow. Suppose we start now; we will be at Brantwell's before dark."

"Just as you please, my dear sir. I suppose it will be 'sight for sair een' to see her dazzling majesty, the Queen of the Isle, again."

A carriage was soon in readiness, and our two friends started to impart this sudden glimpse of fortune's sunshine to Sibyl.

It was dark when they reached the parsonage—a handsome and rather imposing-looking mansion—and were ushered into the drawing-room by a neat-looking little maid. Sibyl and Mrs. Brantwell were seated alone, Mr. Brantwell having gone to see a sick parishioner.

Sibyl joyfully hailed her brother, and smilingly greeted his companion, who was an old friend and secret admirer. Poor Will Stafford! The impressions the child Sibyl had formerly made on his heart, time had nearly obliterated; but that radiant smile, those glorious eyes and bewitching glance, totally finished him.

Good Mrs. Brantwell welcomed her guests in her usual hearty manner, and with a jolly little laugh. But when she heard of the unexpected good fortune of Sibyl and her brother, her rapturous delight knew no bounds.

"Just to think of it!" she exclaimed, "my handsome Sibyl an heiress. Oh, won't she create an excitement now? Young, rich, and beautiful! Sibyl! Sibyl! what an enviable fate is yours!"

Sibyl's cheek flushed, and her eyes brightened, as she thought of Willard. For *his* sake she rejoiced over her new-found fortune. Often and bitterly had she secretly regretted, and her pride revolted at the idea of becoming the bride of one so far superior in wealth and fortune. But now she was his equal! there was triumph, joy, exultation in the thought. His aristocratic friends could not look down on her now—could not despise her for her poverty. Look down on her—a Campbell of the Isle! In other days, who would have dared to do so and live? But times had changed since those days; and people looked more now to dollars and dimes than to blood or noble ancestry. Now she had both; she was his equal in wealth, as she was infinitely his superior in every noble quality, and the triumphant thought sent the blood rushing to her crimson cheeks, her red, glowing lips, and the dark, Southern eyes of jet, lit up magnificently with pride, love, and exultation. This fortune of hers she would cast at his feet, with her passionate devotion, as she had already cast heart, and life, and being, and soul.

"What are you thinking of, Sibyl?" said Captain Campbell, after watching her a few moments, with a smile. "Your cheeks and eyes are blazing, your whole face illuminated, as it were, with an inward light of joy and triumph. Surely you do not care as much as this for wealth?"

"Pooh! I know what it's all about," broke in Mrs. Brantwell, in her customary matter-of-fact manner. "She's thinking that good-looking Mr. Drummond will have a richer bride than he bargained for. Isn't that so, Mistress Sibyl?"

Sibyl started from her reverie, and blushed deeply at finding her thoughts thus interpreted. Stafford turned pale as he watched her glowing

face; and the conviction came home to him, for the first time, that Sibyl Campbell's rare beauty was appreciated by other eyes than his.

"By the way, when was Drummond here?" asked Captain Campbell.

"Day before yesterday—wasn't it, Sibyl? He doesn't visit us very often—not half so often as so devoted a lover should. Oh, you needn't try to annihilate me with those flashing eyes of yours, my lady. I'm not a young gentleman, thank goodness! and am proof against even those bright, angry glances. To be sure the young man may have some plausible excuse; but it seems to me if I were in his place I'd stick to you like a chesnut-burr, for fear you might slip through my fingers. Poor, dear Mr. Brantwell was twice as attentive in his courting days, and I never had any beauty worth mentioning," said Mrs. Brantwell, with her usual jolly laugh.

"I don't know about that, my dear lady," said Guy, gayly. "If I were a marrying man, I'd sooner bend my knees to you than half the young girls I know. Only I've an immense respect for Mr. Brantwell, there is no telling what I might be tempted to do."

"Don't be too confident, Master Guy," said the good-humored lady. "I wouldn't have anything to do with such a graceless young scamp as you for any consideration; though, for the sake of sound morality and good taste, I should hope you wouldn't fall in love with me. And here comes Mr. Brantwell himself, who wouldn't approve of it, by any means."

At this moment the good clergyman entered, and warmly greeted his guests.

In a few words his wife told him of this astonishing good fortune. Mr. Brantwell always took matters very coolly, a circumstance which sometimes provoked his more excitable lady, as on the present occasion—he merely elevated his eyebrows slightly in token of surprise, and said:

"Indeed!"

"Yes, indeed!" responded his wife, irreverently mimicking his tone, "and one would think fortunes were in the habit of pouring into people's

hands as they walked, by the way you take it."

"Well, where is the use of flying off at a tangent at everything," retorted her spouse, "as you do. I suppose, captain, you will start for New York immediately?"

"Yes, to-morrow morning."

"And as Sibyl may be wanted, you had better take her, too," said Mr. Brantwell.

"Very true; I never thought of it before. Can you be ready, Sibyl?"

Sibyl thought of Drummond, and asked, rather hesitatingly, "How long will you be gone?"

"About a week—or two or three, at the farthest."

"Now, Sibyl," broke in Mrs. Brantwell, who seemed to possess the faculty of reading people's thoughts, "never mind Mr. Drummond; I'll break the news of your absence to him in the gentlest manner possible. Your fortune is of more importance just now than his lordship, who, no doubt, will follow you to New York when he hears you are there."

There was no use getting angry with the good-humored old lady, so Sibyl smiled, and promised to ready betimes next morning.

And early the following day the brother and sister set out for New York.

CHAPTER XI.

THE STORM—THE WRECK.

"The strife of fiends is in the battling clouds,
The glare of hell is in these sulphurous lightnings!
This is no earthly storm."—BERTRAM.

It was two days after the departure of Sibyl ere Willard Drummond visited the parsonage again. And then he heard of her departure with real surprise and affected concern; but he did not follow her to New York, as Mrs. Brantwell had prophesied.

His passion for Christie was yet too new—the novelty had not worn off—the joy of knowing she was his wife, his own indisputable property, had not yet abated, as it would do some day, as it must do; for such quick, fierce, passionate, selfish love could not last. As suddenly, as completely, as it had come, so must it die; for he was not one of those who, in loving once love for a life-time. Christie was, and so was Sibyl; but in each that love despised, or neglected, would produce different results.

Christie would have folded her hands, drooped, faded, and perhaps died of a broken heart, but Sibyl would rise majestic with the strength of her wrongs, and hurl to destruction all those who had acted a part in her downfall. Something of all this would at times flit through Willard Drummond's mind; and once came the ungenerous thought that perhaps after all it would have been better had he never seen Campbell's Isle. But one smile from Christie, one fond caress from her gentle arms, and all this was forgotten, and all the world was again bounded for him by its wave-dashed shore.

So the days of Sibyl's absence were wearing away, and Willard still lingered a willing captive. Even Mrs. Tom's eyes were beginning to be opened to the fact that there must be *something* more than met the eye in these long solitary rambles—those moonlight walks and sails the young couple were so fond of. Aunt Moll had long been throwing out sundry mysterious hints which Mrs. Tom—who disliked gossiping—paid no attention to; but now she began to think that, after all, it might be more prudent to keep this gay young man of pleasure a little oftener from Christie. So one day she surprised Christie by a sound scolding on her "goin' prowlin' through the woods at all hours, when she ought to be at

home doing her work," and positively forbidding her going out again for a week.

Christie listened in dutiful silence, but promised nothing; and in spite of all Mrs. Tom's watching, met Willard as often as ever. For that young gentleman would visit the cottage each day; and the little widow was altogether too hospitable to hint that he came oftener than was exactly desirable. And so there was nothing to do but to hope that Miss Sibyl would soon return to the isle, and look after her lover herself, for Mrs. Tom was growing tired of it. Besides, she really liked the youth exceedingly, and would have thought him a paragon of perfection if he only would be less attentive to Christie.

And Christie, the sly little child-wife, had gone on dreaming "Love's young dream," and never thinking how terrible one day would be her waking.

Since their bridal-night, the mysterious phantom had never been seen; and both were beginning to hope it had been only an illusion of a heated imagination. Mr. Drummond had accounted for the terrifying shriek and Christie's fainting fit in some ingenious way of his own, that quite satisfied the old lady, and lulled to sleep any suspicions she might have conceived.

One evening, as Willard set out to keep an appointment with Christie, he observed Lem standing, or rather sitting perched up on a limb of a giant pine tree, shading his eyes with his hands, and looking anxiously out to sea.

"Well, my boy, what has caught your attention in that direction—wild geese?"

"No, master," said Lem, solemnly; "I see a sail."

"Well, and what of that?" said Mr. Drummond. "A sail is not such an unusual sight here, is it?"

"Bur dare's a storm brewing an' if de Lord ain't took 'special charge ob dat vessel, de fust lan' it makes will be Davy Jones' locker," said Lem.

"A storm, you blockhead!" exclaimed Drummond, "There is not a cloud in the sky."

"Jes' look ober dar, massa, and see dat black cloud, 'bout de size o' your hand."

"Well?" said Willard.

"Pretty soon dat will be all ober the sky, and den we'll hab a taring squall. De trees tell de wind's risin' already, and you needn't be s'prised ef to-morrow mornin' you sees de ruins o' dat wessel spread all over the shore."

And Lem, with a doleful shake of his head, descended from his perch and sought the house.

Ere the hour had passed, Lem's prognostications proved true. The heavens rapidly darkened, as dense, black, threatening clouds rolled over it; the sea became of an inky hue, crested with white, ghastly-looking foam, as it heaved and groaned like a "strong heart in strong agony," The wind rose and crashed with terrific force through the woods, bending strong trees like reeds before its might.

"Lor' sakes, how it blows!" said Mrs. Tom, as she blustered in and out. "I 'clare to man, it 'most took me right off my feet. I ain't heerd sich a wind these five year come Christmas, and them two ships were wrecked right out from the shore, and every soul perished. Dear, dear! what a sight it was next day, when all the drowned corpses was washed ashore. It was the most awfulest sight I ever seed. Carl, don't sit layin' there in the corner all night, toastin' your shins like a singed cat. Get up and pick the pen-feathers out of that fowl."

"I heard Lem saying there was a ship in view about an hour ago," said Drummond, rising.

"Lord a' massy upon them, then!" said Mrs. Tom; "for, if they touch the shore, they'll every one go to the bottom."

"Oh, dreadful!" said Christie, turning pale with pity and horror.

"It's goin' to be an awful night! Just listen to the wind roarin' through the trees, and that rain! I never heard the waves boomin' on the beach as they're doin' now, that a wreck didn't foller. It's a blessin' Captain Guy and Miss Sibyl ain't on the sea this dreadful night. When they were away, I used to think of them in every storm. Lord preserve us! look at that." And, with a piercing shriek, the startled Mrs. Tom sprang back.

A fierce gust of wind, threatening to bring down the roof about their heads; a tempestuous dash of rain, as if the flood-gates of heaven had opened for a second deluge; a blaze of blue, livid lightning, as though the whole firmament was one sheet of flame; a crash of thunder, as though heaven and earth were rending asunder!

With a wild cry of terror, Christie sprang up pale, trembling, horror-struck. Carl crouched into a ball in a remote corner. Neither dared to speak or move.

Mrs. Tom, forgetting her first involuntary alarm, sprang to close the shutters, and make fast the doors. And Willard, amazed at the suddenness with which the storm had arisen, buttoned up his coat, preparatory to starting for the lodge, ere it should further increase in violence.

"Oh, do not go—do not leave us!" cried Christie, springing forward, and pale, wild, terror-stricken, clinging to him, scarcely conscious of what she did.

"Dearest love, do not tremble so; there is no danger," he whispered, encouragingly, encircling her slight waist with his arm.

But Mrs. Tom, turning suddenly around, and beholding them in this position, in spite of her panic, was shocked and indignant.

"Lor' a' massy 'pon us, child, sit down—no, kneel down, and say your prayers. You ought to be ashamed of yourself to do sich a thing. Mr. Drummond, I'd be 'bliged to you not to keep your arm 'round her that way; it doesn't look right, nor, likewise, respectable."

But here, Mrs. Tom's words were abruptly cut short; for, across the stormy, raging sea, high above the roar and shrieking of the storm, pealed a minute-gun of a ship in distress, like an agonized cry for help.

"Heaven be merciful! Listen to that!" exclaimed Mrs. Tom, turning pale.

Another fierce, tempestuous burst of wind and rain another blinding glare of sulphurous lightning; another appalling peal of deafening thunder rent the air. And then again boomed the minute-gun over the sea.

"Something must be done; something shall be done!" cried Willard, excited beyond endurance, at the thought of so many perishing almost within a dozen rods of where he stood. "Carl, my boy, come with me; and, with the assistance of Lem, we may be able to save some of those perishing wretches."

"It's too wet!" said a terrified voice, from the corner, as its owner crouched into a still smaller ball.

But Mrs. Tom—who never forgot the practical no matter what her alarm might be—went over, and taking the unfortunate youth by both ears, lifted him, with a jerk, to his feet.

With a howl of pain, Carl extricated himself from her hands, and clapped both his own palms over the injured members.

"Now, go this minute, and get your hat and overcoat, and go out with Mr. Drummond, and do whatever you can. And if he goes laying around, just give him a blow 'long side of the head, and make him know he's got to mind you. Come, be quick!"

Carl, whose dread of the storm was far inferior to his dread of Mrs. Tom, donned his coat and hat with amazing alacrity—having tied the former under his chin, with a red handkerchief, to keep it on—stood ready to depart, wiping the tears from his eyes, first with the cuff of one sleeve, and then with the other.

Willard cast one look at Christie, who had sunk on the floor, her face hidden in her lap; and then turned to depart, followed by the unwilling Carl. The blinding gust of wind and rain that met them in the face nearly drove them back; but, bending to the storm, they resolutely plunged on; and it required all the strength of Mrs. Tom to close the door after them.

The storm seemed increasing in fury. The wind howled, raged and shrieked; the waves thundered with terrific force over the rocks; the thunder roared, peal upon peal, shaking the very island to its center; the lightning alone lit up for an instant, with its blue, livid glare, the pitchy darkness; and then the crash of the strong trees in the neighboring forest, as they were violently torn up by the roots, all mingled together in awful discord.

But, above all, the minute-gun came wailing once more over the sea.

The two, plunging so blindly through the storm, hastened on as if winged at the saddest of sounds. And, after tumbling, slipping, falling, rising, and hurrying on again, they reached the old lodge at last.

A light was burning in the kitchen. Both rushed in there—wet, dripping, and half-blinded by the storm. Aunt Moll was on her knees in the middle of the floor rocking back and forward, and praying aloud in an agony of terror and apprehension; and Lem was walking up and down, groaning and praying, at intervals, with his mother.

"Oh, good Lor'! I's been a drefful sinner, I is; but if you'll only spare me jes' a little while longer, I tends to do better. Oh, do spare me! I ain't ready to go 'deed and 'deed I ain't. Please do, good Lor', an' I'll nebber do nothin' sinful again. Oh, what a streak o' lightnin' dat 'ar was! O, Lemuel, kneel down, or yer ole mammy'll be took away in a flash o' lightnin' like 'Lijah was."

And in an agony of fear Lem tramped up and down the long kitchen, quaking at every fresh clap of thunder.

"Come, cease that caterwauling!" said Drummond, as he burst in upon them, dripping like a sea-god; "and you, Lem, get your coat, and come with

us down to the beach, and see if we cannot save some poor unfortunates from death and destruction."

"'Deed, Master Drummin', honey, I dassent, I's 'feared to go out," said Lem, his teeth chattering like a pair of castanets.

"You black villain, if you are not ready in ten minutes, I'll thrash you till you are not able to stir!" exclaimed Willard, catching and shaking him furiously.

Too terrified by the young man's fierce tone to resist, Lem drew on his hat and coat, and, shaking like one in an ague-fit, followed them out into the night, and darkness, and storm.

Once more over the tempest-tossed waves rolled the mournful voice of the minute-gun, like a dying cry.

"Oh, Heaven, this is maddening!" exclaimed Willard, rushing to the beach like one demented; "to think they should perish thus, within reach of us almost, while we are here in safety. Carl, where is your boat? I will venture out, and see if I cannot save some one, at least."

"Oh, Marse Drummin'! for de dear Lord's sake, don't risk it!" cried Lem, in an agony of terror. "No boat could live two minutes in dem waves."

"You couldn't launch the boat in these breakers," said Carl, "much less pull, if you were into her."

"And they must perish before our very eyes! Oh, heavens, this is awful!"

Again he listened for the gun, but it came no more. Its voice was silenced in storm and death.

"They have gone down!" said Carl; "the signal gun will fire no more."

"Heaven have mercy on their souls!" said Willard, solemnly, lifting his hat.

"Amen!" said Lem, whose fears seemed swallowed up in awe.

"We may soon look out for the bodies," said Carl, straining his eyes over the black, seething waves.

Even as he spoke, by the blinding light of a glare of lightning they beheld two bodies, lashed to a spar, thrown violently on the sands near them. All sprang forward, and drew them up beyond the reach of the waves.

"Unfasten this rope," said Carl, "and we will bring them up to the house. Perhaps they may not be drowned yet."

"One's a woman," said Lem, as he cut the lashing. "I can carry her, I reckon, while you two tote the man along."

"Go on, then," said Willard, "up to Mrs. Tom's. Be quick!"

Bearing, with the utmost difficulty, their wet and apparently lifeless burdens in their arms, they reached the cottage of the widow, and deposited the senseless forms before the fire. Then, leaving them to her charge and that of Christie, they descended once more to the beach to rescue any other unfortunate who might providentially be washed ashore.

Toward midnight the storm abated, and the king of the tempest sullenly began to call off his hosts. The dense thick clouds slowly rolled back, the lightning ceased to flash, and the thunder only growled in the distance. The wind abated, and the rain fell more slowly; but, though they waited until morning dawned, no more bodies were wafted to their feet.

The next day's light showed a scene of ruin and death. The beach was strewn in every direction with fragments of the broken ship, and some half-dozen dead bodies lay scattered on the sands. All were cold and dead; and sad and disappointed, our tired and drenched watchers turned a way.

Before going to the lodge Willard visited the cottage, and learned that the rescued ones were both alive, and might recover. And, grateful to have been the means of saving even two of the unfortunates, he sought his own couch, to dream of wrecks and drowned men till noon-day.

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CHAPTER XII.

SIBYL'S RETURN TO THE ISLE

"There is a shadow in her eye,
A languor in her frame;
Yet rouse her spirit and she'll glow
With passion's fiercest flame."—T.W.H.

It was late in the afternoon of the following day when Willard Drummond left the lodge for Mrs. Tom's cottage. Curiosity to see the rescued ones prompted the visit as much as any other feeling; and he walked along rapidly, viewing the scene of desolation which the preceding night's tempest had left.

The cottage door was open to admit the pleasant sunshine, and Willard paused for a moment to view the scene before he entered.

Mrs. Tom went bustling about the room in her usual breezy, chirruping way, talking incessantly, but in a subdued tone, as though afraid of disturbing some one. Christie sat near the window, bending over her sewing, looking pale still, after the terror and excitement of the previous night. But Willard's eyes did not linger a moment on her; they were fixed, as if fascinated, on another, who lay back in Mrs. Tom's arm-chair, propped up with pillows.

It was the woman, or rather the girl, he had saved, What was there in that pale young face to make him start so vehemently, while the blood rushed in a crimson torrent to his very temples? He only saw a small, slight figure; short, crisp, golden curls clustering over a round, white, polished forehead; bright, saucy gray eyes, half veiled now under the long, silken eyelashes, resting on the pearly cheek; a little rosebud mouth, and a nose decidedly *retrousee*. It was not a wonderfully pretty face; but there was something bright, piquant, original, and charming about it—something daring, defiant, and high-spirited, as you could see even in its pallor and

languor. She might have been sixteen, though she scarcely looked so old as that.

She lay back now with her little white hands folded listlessly on her lap, her veiled eyes fixed upon them with a dreamy, abstracted look, as of one whose thoughts are far away—replying low and languidly to Mrs. Tom's ceaseless questioning. And Willard Drummond, pale and excited, leaned against the door-post, gazing upon her like one who cannot believe his senses.

Suddenly Christie raised her eyes from her work, and uttered an ejaculation as she espied him. He could linger no longer, and like one who walks in his sleep, he passed in.

The clear, dark eyes of the little lady in the chair were raised as he entered, and fixed with a look of complete amazement on his face. Her dark eyes dilated—her lips parted in surprise, as she made an effort to rise from her chair, and then sank back exhausted.

"Willard Drummond!" broke in surprise from her lips.

"Laura!" he exclaimed.

And he was by her side in an instant, holding her hands in his, and gazing in her eyes with a look that would have aroused Sibyl's jealousy, had she been present, but which only puzzled Christie, who, with Mrs. Tom, looked on in astonishment.

"Who in the world would have expected to meet you here!" said the lady, recovering first from a moment's embarrassed silence; "certainly the last spot on earth I should ever look for the gay, pleasure-loving Willard Drummond. So, sir, I presume you have been 'taking the world easy,' here in this Enchanted Isle, while your poor, deluded friends were laboring under the conviction you were improving your mind—which needed improving, goodness knows—by foreign travel? Pretty conduct, Mr. Drummond, I must say!"

"Oh, Laura! Laura! how little did I dream, last night, you were in that fatal ship!" he exclaimed, passionately.

"Ugh! yes; wasn't it awful?" said the young girl, with a shudder. "I'll never get the horrid sight and sounds of that dreadful night out of my mind while I live. Oh! to have heard the screams, and cries, and prayers, and blasphemies of the drowning crew, mingling with the fearful storm, was appalling. Holy saints! I hear them yet!"

With a convulsive shudder, she hid her face in her hands.

"Thank Heaven your life was saved, at least," said Drummond, with fervor.

"Yes, our escape was little less than miraculous. I remember some one making me fast to a floating spar, as the ship struck; then the waves swept furiously over me, and I remember no more, until I awoke and found kind friends chafing my hands and temples. Was it you who saved me, Willard?"

"Not exactly. The waves washed you ashore, and my part of it was merely to have you conveyed up here. But how little did I dream then, that Laura Britton was so near!"

"Laura Courtney, if you please, Mr. Drummond," she said, quietly. "I have had the honor of changing my name since I saw you last."

"And you *have* married Edgar Courtney! Oh, Laura, Laura?" he said, reproachfully.

Her eyes flashed as she faced suddenly round, and said, sharply:

"Yes, I have married him; and, Mr. Drummond, don't you dare to speak of him in that tone again. I will not endure it. No, not if you had saved my life a dozen times."

The angry blood flushed to her pale cheek, and she jerked her hand angrily away from his grasp.

Willard bit his lip till it bled, to keep down his rising anger; while Christie and Mrs. Tom still sat staring in increasing amazement.

There was a long, disagreeable pause, broken at last by Mrs. Courtney saying, in her usual quick, abrupt way:

"There! you need not get mad, now, Willard; have you forgotten that no one used ever to get angry at anything said by 'Madcap Laura?' Come, don't speak so of Mr. Courtney again, and I'll forgive you; there's my hand on it. I cannot forget that we are old friends."

A shadow crossed Willard's face, as he bent over the little hand she extended.

"Has your—has Mr. Courtney been saved?" he asked, in a subdued tone.

"Yes, the waves washed us ashore together, but something struck him on the head, and he is unable to rise. I suppose you are puzzling your brains now to know what brought us to this quarter of the globe?"

"I confess I have some curiosity on that point."

"Well, you see," said little Mrs. Courtney, adjusting herself more comfortably in her chair, "we went on a bridal-tour to New York, and on our way home Edgar thought he would call at Westport, where he had business of some kind. All the way we had fine weather until the journey was at its end, and then the storm arose in which we nearly perished. But, Willard, what under the sun can have driven you here?"

Willard colored as he met her keen, bright glance.

"Well, I came with a friend of mine, a certain Captain Campbell, who owns a residence here, and I am for the present his guest, though unexpected business, for a time, called him away. Anything for a change, you know," he added, laughing, "and this island is not *quite* devoid of attraction."

"By no means," said Mrs. Courtney, glancing demurely at Christie. "I certainly admire your good taste in saying so. Once here, with such a divinity as this, I can easily account for the attraction that binds you, most fickle of men, here," she added, in a lower tone.

"Pshaw, Laura!" he said, striving to hide by a laugh the guilty flush that lingered still on his face, "you surely do not think I have forgotten *you* so soon?"

"If it were any one else I would not, but you—oh, you never would be true to any one longer than a month. Talk about woman's fickleness! I'm sure the wind never was half so changeable as you."

"Yes, you gave me great encouragement to be true to you," he answered, with some bitterness.

"Did I," said Mrs. Courtney, with a yawn. "Well, I know I was a horrid little simpleton once, but I've grown old and wise now. And, if it's all the same to you, Mr. Drummond, I'll leave you now. I feel tired and half sick yet, after last night."

She rose and went into the room with a weary, tired air.

"So, you know her?" said Mrs. Tom. "Who'd ever thought it? So that tall, dark-looking fellow, with all the whiskers and mustaches, is her husband? I declare if it ain't scandalous the way gals *will* get married afore they're out o' short frocks. I jist wish I had a darter—no, I mean if I *had* a darter—I'd like to see her tryin' to get married at such an unchristian age!"

Christie turned scarlet, and bent lower over her work.

Willard stood leaning with one arm on the mantel-piece, gazing thoughtfully into the fire.

"What did you say her name was?" inquired Mrs. Tom, sitting down, and beginning to reel off yarn.

"Mrs. Edgar Courtney, now; she was Laura Britton when I last met her," he said, as if half speaking to himself.

"S'pose you've known her a long time?" continued Mrs. Tom.

"Yes, we were children together," he replied, in the same dreamy tone.

"And her husband—known him long?" pursued Mrs. Tom.

"Yes, I know him for a cruel, jealous, passionate tyrant!" said Willard, starting up so suddenly and fiercely that Mrs. Tom dropped the ball she was winding, and sprang back.

"Well, you needn't make such a fuss about it!" she exclaimed, recovering herself, and indignantly resuming her work. "Scaring a body out o' their wits for nothin'. I s'pose she knowed all that afore she took him."

"Pray, pardon my vehemence, Mrs. Tom," said Willard, recovering himself by an effort, as he saw Christie's troubled gaze fixed on his face; "I forgot myself for a moment. But this patient of yours, this Mr. Courtney, may need a doctor. I am going over to Westport to-night, and if you wish, I will bring one to-morrow."

"It would be better," said Mrs. Tom, thoughtfully. "He's got a temenjous cut right in his head. I did what I could for him; but, of course, a body would feel more satisfied if they had a reg'lar doctor."

"If I were ill, Mrs. Tom, I should trust to you in preference to any doctor ever warranted to kill or cure," said Willard, as he took his hat to go.

Mrs. Tom smiled benignly at the compliment, quite delighted at this tacit acknowledgment of her skill.

And an hour after, Willard and Lem were on their way to Westport.

What were Willard Drummond's thoughts, as, sitting silently in the stern of the boat, he watched the dancing waves flash and sparkle in the sunlight? Very different from those he had indulged not long since, when, on one eventful night, he and Christie had crossed it together. This Laura Courtney,

with her pretty, piquant face, and pert, saucy manners, had first won his boyish heart. He had raved, and vowed, and implored at her feet, but she only laughed at him and his passion, and now she had no more power over his heart than if she never existed. Might it not be the same with those he had loved since? Was not his passion for Christie beginning to grow cold already? Would it not grow colder every day? And in the hot ardor of his love he had made this little obscure, uneducated, shy child, his wife. Why, oh, why, had he not waited? And now that the deed was irreparable, where was this to end?

They reached Westport before dark; and Lem, having landed him, set off for the island again, promising to return for him in the morning. The moon was just rising above the pine trees when he reached home; and, on entering the house, the first object he beheld was his young mistress, in close conversation with his mother.

"Lor' sakes, Miss Sibyl! you here!" was Lem's first ejaculation.

"Yes, Lem; and glad to be home again," she answered, gayly. "Aunt Moll tells me you have just been taking Mr. Drummond over to Westport."

"So I hev; but I'm to go for him early to-morrow-mornin.' 'Spect, ef he'd know you was a comin,' he'd staid here."

"Humph!" said Aunt Moll, dubiously.

"Did he seem lonely during my—during our absence?" asked Sibyl.

"Lonesome? 'Deed he didn't, honey; he was in fust rate spirits all the time."

"Ah!" said Sibyl, a shadow falling over her face; "he spent his time in fishing and shooting, I suppose, and snaring birds?"

"Snarin' birds? Yes; an' caught one, too," said Aunt Moll, in a tone that spoke volumes.

"Caught *one*! What do you mean, Aunt Moll? I don't understand," said Sibyl, anxiously.

"Miss Sibyl, don't listen to her. She's allers got some nonsense to tell," interrupted Lem, casting an angry and warning glance toward his mother.

But now that the opportunity she had so long waited for had come, the old woman's tongue was not to be stopped.

"It's all fur yer good, child, 'deed it is; an' I 'siders it my duty to warn you, honey, dat Massa Drummond ain't to be 'pended on. Dar!"

"Aunt Moll, what do you mean? Speak, and tell me what you are hinting at. What has Mr. Drummond done?" asked Sibyl, growing very pale.

"Well, chile, 'stead o' stayin' here, and thinking ob you, as he'd orter, he's been prowlin', all hours o' de night, round de island, wid dat 'ar Miss Chrissy—making lub to her, I'll be bound."

"*What?*" cried Sibyl, in a tone that made the old woman leap to her feet, as she sprang forward, and caught her by the arm. "Dare you insinuate such a thing? I tell you he could not, and he would not—he dare not prove false to me!"

"Miss Sibyl, honey! for de Lord's sake, don't look at me wid such wild eyes. I 'spec's she's witched him. I can't 'count for it no other way," said Aunt Moll, trembling before the awful wrath of those blazing eyes. "I on'y says what I knows. He's all the time talkin' 'bout her to hisself, when he's 'lone."

"It cannot be true; he dare not deceive me!" almost shrieked Sibyl. "What proof have you of this? Speak! speak!"

"Miss Sibyl, honey! you may 'sassinate me ef you's a mind to; but I's tellin' de trufe. Sence eber you left, dey ain't a minute apart. Dey've sailed in de riber after night, an' gone trampin' in de woods in de day time; an' I's heered him callin' her his 'dear Chrissy,' when he's 'lone. I knows, chile,

'taint pleasant, nor likewise 'greeable for you to hear dis; but I talks for your good, honey—'deed I does."

But now the first fierce gust of passion was over, and pale and tottering, Sibyl leaned against the chimney-piece—her arm on the mantel, her head bowed upon it, shuddering, sinking, collapsed. All his neglect, that had puzzled her so long, was accounted for now. She was forgotten—deserted, for this island girl!

So long she remained in that fixed, rigid attitude, that Aunt Moll began to grow alarmed; and she was on the point of commencing a consoling speech, beginning with: "Miss Sibyl, honey," when the young girl lifted her head, and, asked in a hollow voice:

"Is this—this girl on the island still?"

"Yes, chile, ob course she is—down to Miss Tom's."

For a moment longer Sibyl stood, gazing steadily before her, with those wild, fierce, burning eyes; her face perfectly colorless, save that two dark-purple spots blazed in and out upon it like burning coals; her teeth set; her hands clenched. All the humiliation, the shame, the agony of being deserted, rushed, like a burning torrent, through her mind. And with it came a fierce, demoniacal hatred of her idol, and a deadly wish to be revenged.

Starting suddenly up, she fled up the stairs, through the long, unlighted hall, out of the front door, and took the path leading to Mrs. Tom's.

The bright moonlight lit all around with a pale, radiant glory. And, standing near a rock, commanding an extensive view of the sea, Christie stood, enjoying the beauty of the night, when suddenly a fierce grasp was laid on her shoulder, and she looked up. Her vision was realized. Sibyl Campbell stood glaring upon her, with her fierce, wild, black eyes, her long hair streaming down her back, like an aroused tigress preparing to spring.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MEETING.

"Thou mayest hold a serpent by the tongue,
A chafed lion by the mortal paw,
A fasting tiger safer by the tooth,
Than cross this love of mine."

Trembling, paralyzed, shrinking with terror and superstitious awe, as she recollected her vision, Christie stood quailing before that dark, passionate glance.

And, glaring upon her with a hatred and jealousy that for the time "swept her soul in tempests," and inspired her with a momentary frenzy, Sibyl stood, transfixing her with those wild, fierce eyes. With one glance she took in all her rival's extraordinary beauty, far surpassing even what she feared; and the sight, to her passionate heart, was like oil poured upon flame.

"So," she hissed, at length, through her closed teeth, "pretty Miss Christie has found a lover during my absence. Girl, take care! You have begun a dangerous game, but the end has not come!"

Her words broke the spell of terror that held Christie dumb. And now, noticing her disordered attire, and wild, disheveled hair, she said, in surprise and entreaty:

"Miss Sibyl, what has happened? What have I done? I did not know you were on the island."

"No; I am aware of that," said Sibyl, with a hard, bitter laugh. "Oh, it is a wondrous pity I should have come so soon to spoil the sport! You and your dainty lover thought yourselves secure—thought Sibyl Campbell far away. But again I say to you, beware! for 'twere better for you to tamper with a lioness robbed of her young than with the passions of this beating, throbbing heart!"

She looked like some priestess of doom denouncing all mankind as she stood there, with her long, black, streaming hair, her wild, burning, passionate eyes, her face white, rigid, and ghastly, save where the two purple spots still blazed in and out on either cheek.

"Oh, Miss Sibyl—dear Miss Sibyl! what have I done? Oh, I never, *never* meant to offend you, or stand in your path; as Heaven hears me, I did not! Tell me, only tell me in what I have offended, and I will never do it again," said Christie, clasping her hands in increasing terror and childlike simplicity.

"What have you done? Have you really the effrontery to stand there and ask me such a question?"

"Miss Sibyl, I do not know—indeed, indeed, I do not know!" exclaimed Christie, earnestly.

In all the storm of anger and jealousy that raged in her soul, a look of superb scorn curled the lips of Sibyl.

"You do not know! Oh, wondrous innocence! angelic simplicity! Must I despise as well as hate you? Listen, then, since I must speak my shame, and answer me truly, as you hope for salvation. Promise."

"I promise!"

"Swear to answer me truly, by all you hold dear on earth! by your hopes of heaven!"

"I swear! Oh, Sibyl, speak!" cried Christie, wrought up to an agony of terror and excitement by her wild words.

"Then, and may Heaven's heaviest curse fall upon him if I conjecture truly—has Willard Drummond dared to speak of love to you?"

Pale, trembling, terror-stricken, Christie's tongue clove to the roof of her mouth; had her life depended on it, no sound could have escaped her quivering lips.

"Speak, and tell me! Speak, for I must know—I have a right to know?" cried Sibyl, grasping her arm, and setting her teeth hard to keep down the tempest of passion that was sweeping through her soul.

"Oh, spare me—spare me!" wailed Christie, lifting up her pleading hands.

"Death, girl! Must I tear the truth from your false heart! Tell me, truly, has he dared to speak of love, and have you dared to listen to him? Heavens! will you speak before I am tempted to murder you!"

"Oh, do not ask me—do not ask me!" cried Christie, in a dying voice, as trembling, fainting, she sank at the feet of her terrible foe.

With her hands clenched until the nails sank into the quivering flesh, her teeth set hard, her deep, labored breathing, her passion-convulsed face, she looked more like an enraged pythoness than a frail girl learning for the first time her lover's infidelity.

She required no further proof now. He whom she would have trusted with her soul's salvation was false. And, oh! what is there more terrible in this world than to learn that one whom we love and trust has proven untrue?

Sibyl had loved as she had done everything else—madly; had trusted blindly; had worshipped idolatrously, adoring man instead of God; and now this awakening was doubly terrible. Had Christie been in her place, she would have wept and sobbed in the utter abandon of sorrow; but her grief would have been nothing compared with the dry, burning despair in those wild black eyes.

Now that Sibyl had learned the worst, her fiery, tempestuous fierceness passed away, and there fell a great calm—a calm all the more terrific after her late storm of passion.

"And so I am forsaken," she said, in a deep, hollow voice, "and for her—this pretty, blue-eyed baby. I, whom he promised to love through life and beyond death. Saints in heaven! shall he do this and live?"

"You?" said Christie, lifting her pale, terrified face. "And did he promise to love you, too?"

"Yes, learn it, and let it whelm your soul in shame. Before he saw you, before he knew you, he loved me; and I was to be his wife. Yes, weep, and wail, and sob; your tears shall not soon dry. You have caused him to forget his vows, his honor, his plighted faith, his promised love to me, and you must pay the penalty."

"Oh, I never knew it—I never knew it!" wailed Christie, wringing her hands.

"And, as he has been false to me, so, likewise, will he be false you. You are the cause of his treachery, of his broken vows, his perjured soul; you are the cause of all; and, think you such love can be blessed?"

"Forgive me! Oh, Sibyl, forgive me!" still wailed Christie.

"May Heaven never forgive me if I do!" cried Sibyl, with impassioned vehemence. "Think you, girl, I am one to be won by tears and protestations? Faugh! you should have thought of all this when you listened to his unlawful love."

"Oh, I did not know! As Heaven hears me, I did not know. I would have died sooner than have listened to him, had I known!"

"Prove it," said Sibyl, with a sudden gleam in her dark eyes.

"How—how? Only say how I shall redeem my error! Let me know how I may atone!"

"Atone!—you?", said Sibyl, with a withering sneer. "I tell you, girl, if your life could be prolonged for a thousand years, and every second of that time spent in torture, you could not atone for the wrong you have done me. But make such expiation as you can—prove at least that there is some truth in your words."

"Oh, Sibyl, I would willingly die if I could redeem my fault."

"Your death would not redeem it. What is your paltry life to me? Neither do I require it—the sacrifice I would have you make is easier. Give him up!"

"Oh! anything but that! Sibyl, that is worse than death!" said the stricken child-bride, in a fainting voice.

"Did you not say you would atone? Prove it now—give him up—it is my right, and I demand it. Promise."

"Oh, I cannot!—I cannot!" moaned Christie, shrinking down, as though she would never rise again.

"And this is your repentance—this, your atonement for what you have done?" said Sibyl, stepping back, and regarding her with superb scorn. "This, then, is the end of all your fine promises. Girl, I tell you, you dare not; it is at your peril you see him more. My claim is above yours. I warn, I insist, I demand you to give him up. It is my right, and you shall do it. What are you, little reptile, that you should stand in the path of Sibyl Campbell?"

"I am his wife!" arose to the lips of Christie. That little sentence she well knew would have silenced Sibyl's claim forever, but she remembered her promise in time, and was silent.

"Rise, girl, don't cower there at my feet," said Sibyl, stepping back in bitter contempt. "It is your place, it is true; but his love has ennobled you, since it has raised you to the rank of my rival. Am I to understand you promise your intimacy with him is at an end?"

"Miss Sibyl, I cannot. I love him!" And pale and sad, Christie rose and stood before her.

The blaze, the dark, scorching, flaming glance from those eyes of fire might have killed her.

"And you dare utter this to me?" she said, or rather hissed, through her tightly clenched teeth. "Audacious girl, do you not fear that I will strike you dead where you stand?"

Again Christie thought of her vision, and trembling, terrified, fainting, she clung to a rock for support, unable to speak. With all the fiery, long-slumbering passion of her lion-heart aroused, the fierce, dark girl before her looked desperate enough for anything.

"Promise!" she said, in a hollow voice, coming nearer, and raising her arm threateningly.

"I cannot! Oh, Miss Sibyl, I cannot!" faltered the almost fainting Christie.

"Promise!" again cried Sibyl, glaring upon her with her wild, dark eyes.

"I cannot!" still wailed Christie, pressing her hand over her heart.

"Promise, or die!" exclaimed the mad girl, grasping her by the arm in a vise-like grip.

"I cannot—I would sooner die!" said Christie, as, unable to stand, she again sank at the feet of her vindictive foe.

For a moment it seemed as though the threat would be accomplished, as Sibyl stood over her like one turned to stone. But the next instant releasing her hold, she hurled her from her; and, as if fleeing from temptation, fled down the rocks, over the rough path toward the lodge, and sank fainting and exhausted on the sitting-room floor.

An hour later Aunt Moll entered, and beholding Sibyl, with her streaming hair, lying prone on the floor, grew alarmed, and coming over, she shook her gently, saying:

"Miss Sibyl, is yer sick? Come, git up now, like a good chile, 'fore you catch your def o' cold, a lyin' on de bare floor. 'Deed, honey, 'taint right for young people to heave derselves into de draft, dis way."

But Aunt Moll went through all the phases of the potential mood—"commanding, exhorting"—in vain. Her young mistress neither moved nor stirred.

"Now, Miss Sibyl, do get up—please do. De Lord knows I's 'fraid you'll cotch de rheumatiz in yer bones. Most oncomfortablest thing as ever was; 'specially fore a rain storm, when ebery j'int feels as if dere was forty hundred cross-cut saws a going t'rough it. Come, chile—come, git up, an' let yer ole mammy ondress you, an' put yer to bed."

And Aunt Moll shook the supposed sleeper gently.

Sibyl lifted her head, and half rose, disclosing a face so pale and haggard, a form so sunken and collapsed, that Aunt Moll started back in terror.

"What on airth de matter in you, Miss Sibyl? I 'clare to man, if yer ain't almost skeered me out o' my wits, sure 'nuff! Is you sick, chile?"

"Yes, sick at heart!—sick at heart!" said Sibyl, in a despairing voice.

"I knowed sumfin' was de matter wid yer. Well, git up like a good chile, and let me git some catnip tea for you, it's the best cure in the world for sich complaints."

"Oh, Aunt Moll, leave me. My illness is beyond your art. 'Not poppy nor mandragora can ever medicine me to that sweet sleep' I once slept beneath this roof."

"Now, chile, don't say so," said Aunt Moll, touched by her hopeless tone. "Folks ain't tuk so sudden as all dat, you know. I ain't got no poppy nor man dragoon; but catnip tea is jes' as good, cordin' to my way o' thinkin'. An' when you take a good night's res', you'll be all well in de mornin'—please de Lor'."

"Rest! Rest! When shall I rest again? Aunt Moll, leave me. I want to be alone."

"Deed, Miss Sibyl, I darsent do it—'twon't do to leab you here in de draf, all alone. Let me help you to bed, an' make de catnip tea, an' you'll be better to-morrow, sure."

"Oh, this heart—this heart!"

"Yes, chile, I knows; I 'spects it's de cramps you'se got, an' I 'vises of you to get up. Come, honey, come." And Aunt Moll put her arm coaxingly round her young lady's neck, and attempted to lift her up.

"Oh, Aunt Moll! if you only knew my affliction! What matters it whether I die or not, since I have nothing more to live for? I might as well die now as live; for the living death of a loveless life."

"You mustn't talk so, Miss Sibyl; 'taint right, nor likewise 'spectful to de Lord, who sends us cramps, as well as healf, sometimes. 'Tis r'ally 'stonishin', de way you takes on 'bout it."

"Aunt Moll, I am not bodily ill—only wronged, suffering, despairing, deceived, broken-hearted almost," said Sibyl, looking straight before her, with a fixed, anguished look.

"Dear heart! don't take on so about it. I's real sorry, I is."

And good Aunt Moll passed her hand gently and caressingly over the glossy, dark locks of the young girl.

"Oh! there is nothing but falsehood and treachery in this world! I, who loved and trusted so much, to be now deceived! I would have staked my life, my soul, my hopes of heaven on his fidelity! And now, this awakening from my blissful, delusive dream is worse than death. Oh, Aunt Moll! my dear old friend, is there any one who really loves me in this world but you?"

And, wholly overcome, Sibyl's strong despair gave way to a passionate burst of tears.

Since Sibyl had been a child, Aunt Moll never remembered to have seen her weep before; and now, in her quaint, tender manner, she strove to soothe her grief. But still the young girl wept and sobbed with wild vehemence, until nature was relieved; and she looked up, calmer and far less despairing than before.

"Aunt Moll," she said, suddenly, "what time does Lem go over to Westport to-morrow?"

"Before noon, honey."

"Then tell him to be ready to take me to N—— before he goes for *him*! And now, Aunt Moll, I will follow your advice, and retire."

"But won't you take the catnip tea, chile?" persisted the old woman, who had some vague idea of the all-powerful virtues of the herb.

"No, no, thank you, I do not need it."

"But it'll do you good, chile; you'll feel more comfortable for it."

"Comfort! comfort! Can anything ever restore comfort here?" And she struck her breast with her hand.

"Yes, honey, de catnip tea."

"Good-night, Aunt Moll." And Sibyl flitted, like a shadow, up the long staircase, and disappeared in the gloom beyond.

CHAPTER XIV.

JEALOUSY.

———"Trifles, light as air,
Are to the jealous confirmation strong
As proofs of holy writ.—OTHELLO.

The next morning, Sibyl made her appearance in the sitting-room, pale, wan, and haggard, as though she had spent a sleepless night. But she

appeared calm. Whatever course she had determined to pursue, seemed fully settled, and now she was calm; but it was like the calmness of a sleeping volcano, from which fire and flame, hurling destruction on all, might at any moment burst forth.

Answering gravely all Aunt Moll's anxious inquiries after her health, she seated herself at the breakfast-table, but touched nothing, save a cup of hot coffee. And, after this slight refreshment, she put on her hat and mantle and descended to the beach, where Lem, with the boat, was already awaiting her coming.

Seating herself, she wrapped her mantle closely around her, and fixing her eyes steadily on the dancing waves, the journey was performed in stern silence. Two hours brought them to N——, and, leaving her there, Lem set out for Westport to meet Drummond. Arrived there, he found that young gentleman, accompanied by Captain Campbell and a florid, bald-headed, old man, who proved to be the surgeon.

On their way, Willard explained to them how the wounded man and his wife had been saved from the wreck. And when they reached the island, Captain Campbell, unconscious that his sister was gone, hastened to the lodge, while Willard accompanied the surgeon to the cottage of Mrs. Tom.

As they entered, Christie, who in spite of her hidden grief, was busily employed as usual, looked hastily up, and turned, if possible, a shade paler than before.

Mrs. Courtney sat listlessly turning over the leaves of a novel, with a bored look on her pretty face; while opposite her, supported by pillows, on Mrs. Tom's wooden sofa, lay her wounded husband, whose eyes never for a moment, wandered from her face.

He was a man of thirty, at least, and would have been handsome but for his ghastly pallor and a certain sour, querulous, suspicious expression his face wore. His complexion, naturally dark, had faded to a sickly yellow, looking almost white in contrast with his black hair, and thick, black whiskers and mustache. But it was the expression of his face that was particularly unprepossessing—in the thin, compressed lips, and watchful,

cunning eyes you could read suspicion, distrust, and doubt. Two things would have struck you instantly, had you seen him sitting there—one, was his passionate love for his wife; the other, a slumbering fire of jealousy, that the faintest breath might have fanned into a never-dying flame.

They formed a striking contrast as they sat there—she so pretty, careless, saucy, and indifferent; he so haggard with illness, and with that watchful, distrustful look on his face. And yet, it had been a love-match; he loved her to idolatry, and she, rejecting perhaps worthier suitors, at the age of sixteen had run away from school and eloped with Edgar Courtney. Willard Drummond had been among the rejected ones. Before the honeymoon was over, the wild girl had found she had married a jealous, exacting tyrant, who hated every man on whom she smiled, and would have kept her locked up, where no eye but his own could ever rest upon her, had he dared.

At first little Laura submitted to his caprices, because she loved him, or thought she did; but as he grew more and more exacting, this love died wholly away, and the little bride awoke one morning in dismay to find she had made a life-long mistake. Still, she was too good and generous to strive to lay the blame on him for taking advantage of her youth and romantic impulse to fly with him, and would have laughed and danced on as merrily as ever with him through life, without letting him know it, had not his own conduct brought on the denouement.

He continued to be tyrannical. Laura naturally proud and high-spirited, grew at length very tired of his absurd fancies and wishes, and vowed she would no longer be a "meek, submissive wife." But, though inwardly despising him herself, she would allow no one else to speak slightly of him, as her first interview with Willard Drummond proved. And all the previous night she had hovered over his bedside, anticipating his every want with the most tender and vigilant care; and it was only when, the next morning, he found himself able to get up, that she had resumed her accustomed air of careless indifference to himself and his wishes. Had he been more generous and less suspicious—had he had faith in his young wife, she would have loved him and been his alone; but had he really wished to make her hate him, he could not have taken a surer plan to bring such a result than the one he did.

All this long digression is necessary, that too much blame may not be thrown upon the shoulders of the poor little girl-bride for her reckless conduct and the awful catastrophe that followed.

When Willard and the doctor entered, Christie, who had anxiously waited for this opportunity, seeing Mrs. Tom busily engaged, touched her husband on the arm, and, whispering "Follow me," left the house.

He unhesitatingly obeyed, and overtook her near the end of the garden, where, pale and troubled, she stood, leaning against a tree.

"Weil, Christie, what is it?" he asked, in surprise.

"Willard," she said, lifting her reproachful eyes to his face, "Sibyl Campbell was here last night!"

"Well!" he said, starting and coloring deeply.

"Oh, Willard! she told me all—how you had deceived her, and deceived me! Oh, Willard! how could you do so?"

"Deceived her?—deceived you? I do not understand, Christie," he said, coldly.

"Oh, Willard! you do! You promised to love only her—to marry her; yet you deceived her, and married me!"

"Well, a moment ago, you said I deceived you likewise. And how, I pray you, madam? Go on," he said, with a sneer.

"You made me your wife while pledged to another!"

"Which, doubtless, causes you a great deal of sorrow." he said, in a tone of slight pique; for though his passion for Christie was dying away, he could not endure the thought, as yet, of her forgetting him.

"Oh, Willard! you know being your wife is the greatest happiness on earth for me; but when I saw her, last night, so wild, passionate, and

despairing, I felt as if I could have died for very shame to think I had been the cause of her misery!"

"Then she did seem despairing!" he said, while his face flushed.

"Oh, yes! almost crazed, mad, frenzied. Her eyes seemed killing me!"

"Who could have told her?—not you?" he exclaimed, suddenly.

"Oh, no—no! I do not know how she heard it; but she knew all."

"What! our marriage, and all?" he cried, starting up, and speaking in a tone that made Christie start back.

"No; she did not know that. But——"

"You did not dare to tell her?" he said, almost threateningly.

"Oh! why will you speak to me in that tone, dearest Willard? I did not mean to reproach you."

"It is very like it, however," he said bitterly.

"But may I not tell her, Willard? She wanted me to give you up; and I thought she would have killed me because I refused. I fear she may come again; and, indeed, such another interview would kill me! If she knew all, she would desist. Oh, Willard, dearest! will you not tell her—or may I not tell her?"

"Not for the world—not for ten thousand worlds! Would you ruin me, Christie?" he exclaimed, impetuously.

"Ruin you, Willard?" she said, faintly.

"My worldly prospects, I mean. My—oh, the thing is impossible!" he said vehemently. "I will not hear of it for a moment."

"But you promised," she began, in a choking voice.

"And will keep that promise when the proper time comes. At present it is impossible—utterly impossible, I tell you. You must have faith in me, and wait, Christie."

Faith! Was he worthy of it? The thought arose in the mind of Christie, to be instantly banished, as she heroically kept back her rising tears and strove to say, in a calm voice:

"Wait! But for how long? Willard, this secrecy is dreadful! this deception weighs on my heart like lead!"

"I do not know; I cannot tell. How often have I said, when the *proper time* comes, when I may safely avow it, all shall be revealed. Christie, you are selfish—you have no consideration for any one but yourself. If I loved you better than Miss Campbell, you should be the last one to reproach me with it. Take care that many such scenes as this do not banish that love altogether."

His deeply offended tone sent the coldness of death to the very heart of Christie. She had not meant to anger him; and now he was deeply displeased. He had never looked nor spoken to her so before. And, totally overcome, she covered her face with her hands and wept aloud.

He was not proof against her tears. All the old tenderness returned at the sight, and, going over, he removed her hands, saying, gently:

"My dearest love, forgive me, I was vexed, surprised, grieved, and in the wrong. Look up, little wife. Lift those blue eyes and say you forgive me!"

Before she could reply a footstep was heard approaching, and she had only time to bestow on him one look of love and pardon, and dart away, ere Captain Campbell came in view.

"Well, Drummond, what says the doctor about your patient?" he demanded, as he came up.

"I have not seen him since he went in. But here he comes, to answer for himself."

At this moment the doctor made his appearance, and Willard propounded the inquiry.

"Oh, it's nothing serious, sir! He'll be better in a day or two," replied the doctor. "Meantime, how am I to get home?"

"My servant is down on the shore, waiting to take you over," said Captain Campbell.

"I'll attend you down, doctor," said Willard, taking the old gentleman's arm.

"And as I reign king, undisputed, here, I suppose it will be only polite attention to visit my wounded subject," said Captain Campbell, approaching the cottage.

On entering, he was presented by Mrs. Tom to her guests.

Equally surprised and pleased to find so pretty and piquant a little lady in Mrs. Courtney, the young captain took a seat beside her, and entered, forthwith, into conversation. Mr. Courtney scowled at the handsome young captain from under his black eyebrows, but said nothing.

And Mrs. Courtney, mutually delighted by the agreeable and gentlemanly newcomer, flung aside her novel, forgot her *ennui*, and laughed and chatted with a volubility that amazed and delighted her companion, who immediately entered into a war of wit, words, and repartee, during which the time sped rapidly away.

Mrs. Tom was the only auditor, however, who seemed in the least to enjoy their smart sayings, and sharp, witty retorts; for Carl, under the unfailing eye of his aunt, was groaning in spirit, as he sat plucking fowls, with a haste and energy that brought great drops of perspiration to his brow, hearing, every time he ventured to look up, a shrill "You, Carl!" that instantly set him to work again with renewed vigor. Christie, pale, silent,

and thoughtful, bent over her sewing, near the window; and Mr. Courtney's scowl grew every moment darker and darker.

At last, after two delightful hours, Captain Campbell arose, reluctantly, to go, saying:

"My sister, will, doubtless, be here in a day or two, Mrs. Courtney, and then you must become our guest. Meantime, I shall be delighted to show you my island home, and assist, in every way I can, to make the time of your stay pass as pleasantly as possible."

Mr. Courtney's midnight brows grew black as a thunder-cloud, and blacker, if possible, as his wife gayly replied:

"Thank you, sir. Nothing could give me more pleasure; so to-morrow, I shall, with your permission, take an inventory of your enchanting isle."

"Shall you, madam?" muttered her husband, between his teeth. "We shall see about that!"

All the rest of the evening Mr. Courtney was just as silent, sulky, and sour as he knew how to be, which is saying a good deal. And that night, after they had retired to the inner room which Mrs. Tom had vacated to their use, he took her to task in the following manner:

"Pray, madam, may I ask what business you had, giving that fellow any such promise as you did?"

Now Mrs. Courtney had seen her husband's groundless jealousy all the evening, and had been excessively annoyed thereby, fearing Captain Campbell might observe it, too, and wonder at it. Therefore, feeling justly indignant, she coolly replied:

"Because, sir, it was my good pleasure to do so."

"Indeed!" and the dark brow foreboded a storm, "indeed, Mrs. Courtney! And is it your intention to go roaming with this fellow, alone, through the island to-morrow?"

"Most assuredly, Mr. Courtney. How astonishingly clever you are at guessing!"

"Madam, you shall not go."

"Sir, I shall go!" said the lady, imitating his tone exactly.

"Have you no respect for yourself, madam—none for me, your husband?"

"Not the least, sir."

"It will be at your peril if you go."

"No, it won't—it'll be at my pleasure."

"Silence, madam!" he thundered, grinding his teeth with rage. "Do not dare to be impertinent, or you will repent it."

"Mr. Courtney, allow me to observe, the inmates of this house are trying to sleep. How they will succeed, if you go on in that manner, is a question easily answered," said Mrs. Courtney, sitting down, with a most provoking coolness, and beginning to unbutton her boots.

"Mrs. Courtney, I command you not to go with this man, to-morrow."

"Mr. Courtney, you may command till you are black in the face; but I've promised, and I'll go!" said his rebellious spouse.

He half sprang up from the bed in which he was lying, his eyes fairly scintillating with rage.

"Would you dare disgrace me in this way?" he said, in a voice hoarse with passion.

"Disgrace you? Disgrace a fiddlestick! Are you losing all the little sense you ever had, Mr. Courtney?" said his wife, now really indignant.

"Are you really smitten with—do you love this man?" he asked, in a hoarse, fierce whisper, keeping his gleaming, black eyes still fixed on her face.

For a moment a flash of intense anger shot from the eyes of Mrs. Courtney; then, as if the absurdity of the question overcame every other feeling, she threw herself back in her chair, and broke out in a hearty peal of laughter.

The action might have dispelled his absurd doubts; but, as nothing can convince jealous souls, he even looked upon this, as another proof of her guilt, and, raising himself up in his bed, he grasped her arm, while again he hissed:

"Do you love him?"

"Mr. Courtney, don't bother me!" said his polite spouse, indignantly shaking off his hand; "and don't make a greater simpleton of yourself than nature made you. Love him indeed! I've had enough of love for one while, I can tell you. I found it dose enough the last time I was fool enough to try it, and now that I've got nicely over it, nobody'll catch me at it again."

This was a most unfortunate speech, for Courtney's fear, day and night, was, lest his wife should cease to love him. He closed his teeth with a snap, and fell back on his pillow with a sepulchral moan.

There was a pause, during which Mrs. Courtney leisurely combed out her curls, and Mr. Courtney lay with knit brows, and deep, labored breathing. At length, he turned over, and said huskily:

"Laura!"

"Well?" said Laura, going on with her combing and brushing.

"You won't go out to-morrow?"

"Won't I? That's all you know about it, then."

"It's my wish you should stay."

"And it's my wish to go."

"Then you *will* go?"

"Most decidedly. And now, Mr. Courtney, hold your tongue, for I'm going to sleep."

He clenched his teeth with impotent rage, and his jealous soul shone forth hideously from his glittering eyes. And, angry and indignant, Mrs. Courtney went to sleep, muttering:

"I vow to Cupid, you shall have some cause for jealousy, my wise lord and master. Pity to have you jealous for nothing; so, handsome Captain Campbell, look out, for I mean to flirt like fury!"

CHAPTER XV.

SELF-TORTURE.

"And to be wroth with one we love,
Doth work like madness on the brain."—COLERIDGE.

That night of deepest woe to the passionate heart of Sibyl had been spent in pacing up and down her room, now hurling fierce, bitter maledictions on the head of him who had deceived her, and on this puny girl for whose sake she had been thrown aside; then in breathing wild, passionate vows of vengeance for the wrong, the deep humiliation that had been done her, and anon, throwing herself upon the floor in a convulsive fit of weeping. Then another mood would come, when she would forget all but the blissful days of the past, and all her despised love and tenderness would flood back to her soul, and her very heart would cry out to be with him again. And then would come the thought that this could never, never be

again, and she would spring up with blazing eyes, her very tears seemingly turned to sparks of fire.

And, mingled with all these stormy passions was an under-current of deepest shame, of bitter humiliation, of wounded self-love and humbled pride. That she, the descendant of a haughty Highland clan, the daughter of a princely race, should be forgotten for one so far beneath her in every way, was a disgrace that sent the blood tingling to her pale cheeks, and made her clench her hands in impotent despair.

So passed the night.

With morning came a calmer mood. The necessity of adopting some line of conduct that would bring matters to a speedy denouement soothed for the time her frenzied brain. No one must know as yet of her desertion. She felt as though she could die sooner than survive the shame of such a discovery. Neither could she stay on the island. Her time for meeting her betrayer had not come; but it was at hand, and then——

The flame that leaped like forked lightning from her black eyes, the deep smile that curled her lips, better than words, spoke the rest.

Leaning her head on her hand, she thought intently. She would return to the parsonage, and remain there until her future course was decided upon. She could easily feign some plausible pretext for leaving the island, and good Mrs. Brantwell, she knew, would be but too happy to have her.

And, in pursuance of this resolution, she went early the following morning back to N——.

Mrs. Brantwell, as Sibyl anticipated, met her with a joyful welcome, and announced her resolution of giving a party a few evenings after in her welcome. Sibyl, in her present state of mind, would have shrunk from appearing in public; but as she could not do so without offending and surprising her hostess, and perhaps arousing her suspicions, she made no resistance to the plan.

"And you know, my dear," said Mrs. Brantwell, "now that you are an heiress, it is time that you should come out. Next winter you must go to New York and spend the gay season there; for, of course, you are quite too young to think of being married yet. I do not believe, for my part, in this new fashion of marrying girls before they are out of their bibs and tuckers, and having them settled down into old women before they are five-and-twenty. So, my dear, just politely inform Mr. Drummond that he must wait your ladyship's sovereign pleasure; and if he rebels, as of course he will, give him to understand he is not your lord and master yet, and you intend doing as you please. Men need to be put down, you know, my dear; it does them good, and takes the nonsense out of them." And Mrs. Brantwell laughed her jolly little laugh.

Sibyl averted her head to conceal the deadly paleness of her face.

"And now, Sibyl," continued the good old lady, "I want you to go with me to the island. Guy has told me of a lady and gentlemen who were saved from the wreck, and are stopping at that cottage, and I wish to invite them here to-morrow. So go and get ready."

"Mrs. Brantwell, excuse me, I would rather not go," said Sibyl, still keeping her face averted.

"Not go! What now, Mistress Sibyl? This is certainly something new," said the astonished old lady.

"I have a—headache, and would prefer lying down," said Sibyl, without turning round.

"Oh, in that case I suppose I must go alone. I'll send Betty up with some vinegar to bathe your head before I go," said the unsuspecting lady of the mansion, as she left the room to dress for her journey.

Captain Campbell, who was waiting for her on the shore, accompanied her to Mrs. Tom's and presented her to pretty little Mrs. Courtney, who took captive, almost instantly, the good lady's heart as she did that of most other people, and promptly accepted the invitation, to the manifest annoyance of her husband.

Mr. Courtney, though still quite weak and ailing, resolved also upon going, to watch his wife, under the conviction that her sole intent and purpose in going was to meet Captain Campbell.

And Willard Drummond, who was present, likewise received and accepted her invitation. What his motive in going could be, knowing Sibyl would be there, it would be hard to divine.

The evening for the party came; and at an early hour the drawing-room of the parsonage was all ablaze with lights. Carriage after carriage rolled up to the door, and bevy after bevy of fair ladies, elegantly dressed, flocked like bright-plumaged birds, through the brilliant rooms, and carried on gay flirtations with their friends in broadcloth.

Mrs. Brantwell, magnificent in black velvet, stood near the door to receive her guests. But every eye was fixed wonderingly, admiringly on Sibyl, who moved with the step of an empress through the throng.

Surpassingly beautiful she looked, with her crisp, shining curls of jet, shading on either side the burning crimson cheeks, her splendid Syrian eyes emitting a vivid streaming light, the rich dark robe of sheeney satin falling with classic elegance from her rounded waist; but the light in her eye was the fire of fever—the glow on her cheek the blaze of excitement, for the hour she had waited for was come, and Willard Drummond would stand arraigned before her that night.

Mrs. Courtney, bright, piquant, bewitching, divided the honors and admiration of the evening with Sibyl. Her husband, pale, ghastly, haggard with illness, and suffering the tortures of a mind deceased, moved like a specter, silent, gloomy, and watchful, through the merry throng. And Captain Campbell, elated, handsome, and courteous, was there too, the recipient of many a bewitching glance from the bright eyes present.

The company were all assembled, chatting, laughing, fluting, all but one. Sibyl stood in the midst of a gay group, the "bright particular star" of the evening, carrying on a spirited conversation, but ever and anon her eyes would wander to the door with fierce impatience. Why did he not come?

Edgar Courtney, standing gloomily by himself, was enduring the torments of a lost soul. His wife, knowing he was unequal to the effort, had endeavored to persuade him to stay; but this he ascribed to the wish of being alone with Captain Campbell. Then she offered to remain with him; and this, also, he refused, thinking, with strange self-torture, some evil design lay beneath. He would come—he would watch her; and Mrs. Courtney's high spirit arose, and she proudly and angrily resolved to act just as she pleased, and flirt just as desperately as she could. She had told him she did not love him—she had gone in defiance of his express command, in company with Captain Campbell, walking through the island; and from this slight foundation, Mr. Courtney judged his wife had fallen in love with Captain Campbell. Where his wife was concerned the man was a monomaniac.

And now he saw them before him, she leaning on his arm; her head bent, as with downcast eyes and smiling lips she listened to his low words. He gnashed his teeth, and glared upon them like a madman. At that moment his face was like that of a demon.

There was no dancing. Mr. Brantwell was a clergyman, and did not approve of it; but there was music, and as if to excite his jealous soul to madness, Captain Campbell led Laura to the piano, and hung over her, while she glanced slyly at him from under her long lashes, and sang "Oh, had we some bright little isle of our own," as though every word was meant for him alone.

Loud and long was the applause which followed. And then Captain Campbell led her to a seat, and took another beside her, and this low conversation was resumed.

Full with jealous rage, the self-tortured Courtney watched them, until, at the end of an hour or so, he saw Captain Campbell rise and leave her alone for a moment. Then, going over, and seeing all were too much engaged, by some one who was singing, to notice him, he grasped her fiercely by the arm, saying, in a hoarse whisper:

"Madam, do you mean to drive me mad?"

"No need; you're that already," said Mrs. Courtney, startled out of a reverie she had fallen into, but instantly remembering to be provoking.

"By heavens! I shall make you repent this conduct."

"Hush-sh! You mustn't speak so loud, my dear."

"Mrs. Courtney, will you tell me what you mean by permitting the attentions of this puppy?" he said, clenching his teeth to keep down his passion.

"Puppy! I'm surprised at your want of taste, Mr. Courtney. He's as handsome as Apollo."

"Ah-h!"

It was like a groan from a sepulcher, that deep, hollow respiration from his labored chest. He looked really a pitiable object, as he sat there, white, ghastly, and rigid. It touched with remorse his wife's heart, and, laying her hand on his arm, she said, more seriously:

"Edgar, don't be absurd. Positively you are as jealous as a Turk. I wish to goodness you wouldn't make yourself ridiculous this way."

"Laura, come away!"

"Come away! Where?"

"Out of this—any place—to the island again."

"Nonsense, Mr. Courtney! what an idea! I haven't the slightest intention of going away these two hours. It's very pleasant here."

"Lord! I am miserable in it."

"That's because, like little Jack Horner, you 'sit in the corner,' instead of mingling with the rest. I've seen some of the people looking at you as if they thought you were crazy."

"I shall be, if you continue this conduct much longer."

No one could look in his pale, haggard face and doubt the truth of his words. But Mrs. Courtney lost all patience.

"What, in the name of all the saints, have I done?" she burst out, angrily. "My own husband sits up like a living automaton in a dark corner, and pays me no more attention than if there wasn't such a pretty little person as Mrs. Courtney in existence; and because another gentleman, who has better taste, and doesn't wish to see me pining to death in solitude, pays me a few trifling attentions here, you come making as much fuss as if I were going to elope with him to-morrow. I declare I *will* too, if you don't let me alone."

"You will!"

And the hollow eyes glared like those of a maniac. Even the taunting little wife quailed before it.

"Ugh! 'Angels and ministers of grace defend us!' what a look that was. Really, Mr. Courtney, you are a ghoul, a vampire—a Vandal, a Goth! You'll scare the life out of me some day, if you don't take care. I wish to mercy you could be a little more reasonable, and not make such a goose of yourself!" said Mrs. Courtney, edging away from him.

"Take care, madam; it is not safe to trifle with me!"

"Well, who in the name of mercy, *is* trifling with you? Not I, I'm sure. And now, Mr. Courtney, here comes Captain Campbell; and do, for goodness sake! drop this subject, and don't make a laughing-stock of yourself and me, too. What under the sun would the man think if he heard you?"

"Do not fear, Mrs. Courtney; I will not interrupt your *tete-a-tete* with the gallant captain," said her husband, rising, with a ghastly smile. "I leave you to his care, satisfied you will make the best possible use of your time."

"That I will!" said his irritated spouse, turning her back indignantly on him, and greeting Captain Campbell with a smile.

Thus, in that scene of gayety, there were at least two tempest-tossed, jealous, passionate hearts—Edgar Courtney and Sibyl Campbell.

All the evening she had watched the door with burning, feverish impatience. Why, oh! why, did he not come.

Her heart was swelling, throbbing, as if it would escape from its frail tenement. She was growing wild, mad, with impatience and excitement. And yet, in spite of all her watching, he had entered unobserved by her.

At last, wrought up to an uncontrollable pitch of excitement, that was beginning to betray itself in every feverish action, she fled from the crowd that surrounded her, only anxious to be alone, feeling half crazed with her throbbing head and brow. A conservatory, cool, shady, and deserted, was near. Hither she went; and pushing open the door, entered.

A man stood revealed under the light of the chandelier.

With a suppressed cry of mingled surprise and fierce joy, she stepped back, and Sibyl and her false lover stood face to face.

CHAPTER XVI.

FALSEHOOD AND DECEIT.

"Ah! what a tangled web we weave,
When first we practice to deceive."—SCOTT.

There was a moment's profound silence, while they stood there confronting each other.

With a face perfectly white, with blazing eyes and rigid lips, Sibyl, majestic in her wrongs, stood erect before him, her form drawn up to its fullest height, her head thrown back, her pale face looking unnaturally white in contrast with her dark hair, like some tragic queen in her festal robes.

All his falsehood, treachery, and deceit—all her own wrongs, her slighted love, her deep humiliation, rushed in a burning torrent through her mind, filling her heart and soul with one consuming longing for vengeance, until she seemed to tower above him, regal in her woman's scorn and hate.

And he, knowing his guilt, feeling, too, that she knew it, momentarily quailed before the dark, fierce glance bent upon him. It was but for a moment, and then all his self-possession and graceful ease of manner returned, mingled with a feeling of intense admiration for the darkly beautiful girl before him.

He had never seen her before, save in her odd, gypsyish dress; but now, in her rich, elegant robes, she looked another being. And with it came another revelation. Underlying all his short-lived passion for Christie was still the old affection for this queenly Sibyl. He had wooed her as a dowerless bride, but now she stood before him the heiress to a princely fortune, equal to his own. Willard Drummond was ambitious. He knew this beauty and heiress would be sought for now by the best men of the day, and he felt what a proud triumph it would be to bear her off from all.

"Yes," he said, inwardly, "this beautiful Sibyl, this regal Queen of the Isle, shall be mine. I have commenced a desperate game, but the end is not yet."

And all this had passed through the minds of both in far less time than it has taken to describe it.

Drummond was the first to break the silence, which was growing embarrassing.

"My own Sibyl," he said, advancing, and attempting to take her hand, "I began to fear we were destined never to meet more. Has this new freak of

Dame Fortune made you forget all your old friends?"

"Back, sir!" she thundered, in a terrible voice. "Do you dare speak to me like this! Oh, man! false and perjured, does not your craven soul shrink to the dust before the woman you have wronged?"

"Sibyl, you are mad!" he cried, impetuously.

"Mad! Oh, would to Heaven I were! Then, perhaps, this aching heart would not suffer the tortures that it does. Mad? It would be well for you if I were; but I am sane enough, to live for vengeance on you."

"Sibyl! Sibyl! you rave! In Heaven's name, what have I done?"

"Done? Oh, falsest of the false! have you the brazen effrontery, to stand before me, and ask such a question as that? Done!—that, which a life-time can never repair. May Heaven's worst curses light on you, for what you have done!"

He almost shrank before that white, terrible face, that corrugated brow, those lightning eyes, those white, cold lips, that mingled look of hatred and utter desolation, her beautiful countenance wore.

He had expected passionate reproaches, vehement accusations, but nothing like this. Yet, he knew, he felt, he deserved it all. Never, had his crime appeared before him, in such glaring colors before. But, outwardly, he still showed no sign of guilt, only grave surprise and offended pride.

"Miss Campbell," he said, folding his arms, coldly, "you are crazed. When you recover your senses, perhaps you will deign an explanation of your conduct. At present, you will excuse me, if I put an end to this interview; it is too painful to be prolonged."

He turned, as if to leave her; but she sprang forward and intercepted him.

"*Dare* to leave me!" she cried, passionately. "Never shall you quit this room, until you hear the vengeance a Campbell can take for a foul wrong,

and deadly insult. Crazed, am I? Oh, you will find out, to your cost, there is method in my madness, before this interview ends. You find it painful, do you? Ha! ha! take care you do not find it more so, before we part."

She pushed the thick, clustering, black hair back off her brow, and laughed a wild, bitter laugh.

"Good heavens! she looks as though she really were mad," thought Willard, with a shudder at that hollow, unearthly laugh. "I always knew her to be a wild, fiery, passionate girl, but I never dreamed of anything like this. What, in her frenzy, may she not dare to do; for, verily, she comes of a daring race. Oh, Christie! Christie! what a storm of passion have I not raised for your sake!"

"So I can make you start and shrink already!" exclaimed Sibyl, with fierce exultation. "Oh, you will find what it is to drive Sibyl Campbell to desperation. So you thought you could make me your plaything for an hour, and then throw me aside for the first new face you encountered. Oh, potent, wise and far-seeing Willard Drummond, what a judge of character thou art!"

Her bitter mockery was worse than her first, fierce outburst of passion, and there was a terrible menace lurking, yet, in her gleaming, black eyes.

But Willard stood looking on, still unmoved, only amazed, as he stood, with one hand resting lightly on the table, looking her straight in the eye with cold hauteur.

That steady, concentrated gaze had on her the effect of mesmerism. Her mood changed, and she broke forth in a strain of passionate solemnity:

"Oh, my soul! was it for this I poured out such priceless treasures of love at this man's feet? Was it for this I forgot God to worship *him*? Was it for this that I would have given my soul to perdition that his might be saved? Was it for this I would have devoted my life, with all its high hopes and aspirations, all that I was, all that I might become, to make him happy? Was it for this that I thought of him day and night, sleeping and waking? Was it for a return like this that I would have given my very life-blood to

free him from all pain? Oh, this heart—this heart! Oh, my lost faith! my blasted hopes! my ruined life! Wealth, and youth, and beauty, were given to me, but what are they worth, when all is desolation here?"

She struck her breast with her clenched hand, and dropping into a seat, her arms fell upon the table, and her grief-bowed young head dropped heavily upon them.

The dead silence that for an instant followed her vehement outburst, was like a sudden lull in a furious storm when the spirit of the tempest pauses for a moment, and breaks forth in redoubled fury.

"Sibyl!"

Soft, low, and gentle, like oil poured upon troubled waves, came the voice of Willard Drummond to her passion-tossed heart, that voice which, in spite of all, was still dearer to her than all the world beside.

Only a convulsive shiver, a fierce grasping of her breast, as though she would tear from it the unspeakable gnawing of her agony, but no reply.

"Dearest Sibyl!"

He came over, and folding her in his arms, bent over her till his face rested on her silken hair.

"Oh, Willard!" she cried, looking suddenly up, and speaking in a tone of piercing anguish, "why did you deceive me so?"

"Sibyl, speak and tell me what you mean. As heaven hears me I have not deceived you. I love you still, as I have always loved you!"

"Oh, if I might believe it!" she said, dashing back the falling hair off her pallid brow, "if I dared to dream that you spoke the truth. But no, no!" she cried, springing up and freeing herself from his clasp, "it is false—it is false as your own false heart! Listen, and let the name blight you where you stand. What of Christie?"

Her menacing eyes were glaring upon him as though she would read his very soul; but, prepared for her question, he neither started nor betrayed the slightest emotion.

"Christie, the island-girl—what of her?" he asked, quietly.

"What of her? Man, man! you will drive me mad! Do you not love her?"

"Love her—that little, uncultured child? Sibyl, you have lost your reason," he said, in a tone of well-feigned surprise and indignation. "What drove such an absurd thought into your head?"

"Oh, she told me so—she told me so!" wailed Sibyl, pressing her hands to her throbbing temples.

"Impossible! You must have dreamed it, Sibyl, She never could have told you anything like that."

"She did; and I could have slain her where she stood for the words; but she said them. And, Willard Drummond, do not deny it—*it is true.*"

"It is not true!" he boldly answered, though for the first time during the interview his dark cheek grew crimson with shame.

"It is true—it *must* be. She would not have said it else. Oh, there was truth in her face as she spoke, and there is guilt in yours now. Willard Drummond, take care! I am desperate, and it is at your peril that you dare to trifle with me now."

"And so you believe this island-girl rather than me. Be it so, Sibyl; if you have no more faith in me than this, it is better that we never see each other more," he said, in a deeply offended tone.

"And do you tell me, really and truly, that you never wavered in your allegiance to me—never for a moment thought of any one else—never for one second gave another the place in your heart I should have occupied—never was false to your vows, to your honor, to me?"

"Never, Sibyl!"

"Swear it!"

"I swear!"

"Oh, which am I to believe? Oh, Willard, if you are deceiving me now, may Heaven's worst vengeance fall upon you! Do not, on your soul's peril, dare to speak falsely to me; for it were better for you to trifle with the lightning's chain than with this aroused heart.'

"Still doubting! have you lost *all* faith in me, Sibyl?" he asked, reproachfully.

"Would to heaven I had never had occasion to doubt! But your own actions are all against you. Why did you so continually seek her society while on the island? How are your long rambles together, your moonlight sails, your solitary interviews to be explained?"

"Very easily. Your brother left me; you were absent, and I was alone on the island, and society is a necessity of my nature. You would not have me spend the day with your old negress or her son; Mrs. Tom or her nephew. The child, Christie, was bright, intelligent, and sociable; she pleased and interested me, and in my walks through the island we frequently met. I was fond of sailing; so was she; and what so natural as that I should sometimes ask her to accompany me?"

"Plausible! But why did you not seek *me*? I was not far distant from you, a good part of the time, and would have been more than delighted to see you every day."

"Well, if I must confess it, Sibyl, I was somewhat piqued that you should have gone away at all, and wished to let you know it by my absence. Perhaps it was very unreasonable on my part, but, loving you as devotedly as I did, I felt your abrupt absence far more than you are disposed to give me credit for."

"But, when alone, why were you ever talking of Christie? If she had not been continually in your thoughts, her name would not have been so frequently on your lips."

"*Still* jealous! Oh, Sibyl! hard to be convinced! I did not talk of her."

"You did; for Aunt Moil heard you."

"Saints and angels! was ever man in the same dilemma I am in? Even an old, half-deaf negress is believed sooner than I! Sibyl, I *never* talk to myself. Aunt Moll has seen me with this island girl—whom I wish to Heaven I had never met—and has fancied, perhaps, I spoke of her. Oh, Sibyl! Sibyl! by your dark, doubting look, I see you are unbelieving still. What shall I do, or say, to convince you?"

"Oh, I do not know—I do not know! Heaven direct me!" said Sibyl, pacing up and down. "I *want* to believe you, but I cannot get rid of those doubts. Willard, once our faith in those we love and trust is shaken, it is very hard to be renewed. There were truth and earnestness in that girl's eyes when she spoke—more, there was love for you. Whether or not you love, or have loved her, one thing is certain—you have taught her to love *you*."

"I have not taught her, Sibyl, nor am I to blame for her childish fancies. Even if she does care for me, which I doubt, it is a sisterly affection—nothing more."

"I am not blind, Willard. It was no sisterly affection read in those soft, pleading eyes; it was strong, unchanging, undying love. Oh, Willard! what if you are deceiving us both?"

"Sibyl, this is too much! I will not endure those doubts. You do not love me as you say you do, or you would have more faith in me. If you believe I could so forget my vows to you, my honor, my plighted faith, for this little artless child, then it were better we should forever part than live in doubt and jealousy. Do you think I could endure these constant recriminations, these stormy scenes, these violent outbursts of passion? Sibyl, it is beneath you to stoop to the mean, low passion of jealousy. I thought you had too much pride and self-respect to think any one, no matter how beautiful and enchanting, could surpass you. And certainly you pay a very poor compliment to my taste in supposing that I could fall in with an illiterate, uneducated child of fifteen, simply because she has a passably pretty face. Sibyl, you are surpassing beautiful and I have to-night seen gentlemen

whom I am sure were fascinated by you, hovering the whole evening by your side, while you seemed to have eyes and ears for no one but them; yet it never once entered my mind to doubt you, or be in the slightest degree jealous."

"Yes, yes; I talked and laughed with them; but, oh! if you had known how every thought and feeling of my whole heart, and soul, and mind were with you all the time—if you had but dreamed of the insufferable agony at my heart all the while, you would have felt how little cause you could have had for jealousy."

"I knew nothing of this, Sibyl, and yet, for not one fraction or a second did the slightest, faintest doubt of you enter my mind. Oh, Sibyl! Sibyl! when will you have faith like this in me?"

"Now!—forever! Oh, Willard, I must believe—I do believe, and I will never doubt you more!" said Sibyl, her beautiful face growing radiant with new hope. "If I judged you rashly, at least I have atoned for it, for never while you live can you dream of all I have endured for your sake. Oh, Willard, with your cool nature and calmly pulsating heart, you can never form any idea of the passionate heart throbbing here—of the fiery blood that has descended to me from a fiery race. Oh, Willard, for all my unjust doubts, and suspicions, and accusations, can you ever forgive me!"

He had borne her frenzied outbursts of passion, her bitter, withering sarcasm, her utter woe and desolation, calmly enough; but now her renewed hopes, and trust, and confidence, pierced to his very heart. He felt the blood rush to his very temples, but her head was bent on his shoulder, and she did not observe it. How intensely in that moment did he despise himself, and this necessity of lying, which his own fault had created! Without thinking of the guilt, as a gentleman he felt himself degraded by a falsehood—something which he had never hitherto stained his lips with. And yet, in the last hour how low he had sunk! Verily, in that moment he felt "the way of the transgressor is hard."

But Sibyl Campbell, loving and hating alike with utter abandon—going from one extreme to the other, without knowing what a medium meant—knew nothing of the thoughts that set the heart she prized even above her

hope of heaven, beating so tumultuously against her own. Casting all doubt to the winds, resolving she would not believe him guilty—the delicious joy of knowing and believing she was still beloved filled her heart. And so for the present she gave herself wholly up to this new happiness. But how long was this delicious joy destined to last?

CHAPTER XVII.

A LULL BEFORE THE TEMPEST.

"We hold our greyhound in our hand,
Our falcon on our glove;
But where shall we find leash or band
For dame that loves to rove?"—SCOTT.

"Now, my dear Mrs. Courtney, you really must not think of going back to the island, any more. Sibyl is to remain with me, for a week or two longer, and you, positively, must stay, for, let me tell you, I have taken a desperate fancy to you, during the last few hours. Then, too, Sibyl, poor child! has seemed ill and out of spirits for the past few days—and the presence of your lively little ladyship will tend to restore her to cheerfulness, again. So, Mrs. Courtney, you will just consider it settled; and, yourself, and husband must remain my guests for the present."

The company, were already dispersing, and Mrs. Courtney, on going to take leave of her hostess, had listened to the above harangue.

"But, Mr. Courtney," she began, rather hesitatingly,

"He will not object, my dear!" broke in Mrs. Brantwell, who was comfortably reposing in a large arm-chair. "He is looking ill, yet, and I don't believe his wound has been half attended to. Just go and tell him, that I say

he must stay. I would go myself, only there is a crowd here, waiting to take their leave, and make their adieus. Mrs. Courtney, it's not possible—you do not hesitate. What earthly attraction can there be for you, in that dreary, little isle?"

"Oh, Mrs. Brantwell! it's not that; indeed, I shall be delighted to accept your kind offer; but, Mr. Courtney is sometimes so queer, and has such strange notions about intruding on people, that I do not know——"

"Intrude! Nonsense!" interrupted Mrs. Brantwell. "I'm sure there's nobody in this world, as fond of society as I am. I'd always have the house full of young people if I could. There now, run away, like a good, little woman and tell your husband that I positively will not hear of his going. Come, be off; here is Mr. Stafford, waiting to bid me good-by, and, I never care to keep a young gentleman waiting—especially such a good-looking one; though, I don't know what Mr. Brantwell would say about that!"

And Mrs. Brantwell gave Laura a facetious poke in the ribs, and went off into one of her mellow laughs.

Inwardly delighted at Mrs. Brantwell's invitation, which gave promise of much pleasure, Laura went in search of her husband, fully determined to accept it, whether that unreasonable individual liked it or not.

She found him waiting for her, in the ante-room, all ready for starting.

"What has delayed you so long?" he asked, sharply. "I have been waiting here this half hour. I have sent one of the servants to hire a cab to take us over to Westport—where for the present we can engage lodgings, instead of returning to Campbell's Isle—a place I never want to see again. Come, make haste and get ready."

"There's no occasion, for I'm not going to leave."

"Not going to leave? What do you mean, madam?" he asked, still more sharply.

"What I say. Are you really crazy enough, Mr. Courtney, to think I would undertake a two-hours' ride over to Westport, after being up all night? Catch me at it! I have too much regard for my good looks to undertake any such journey."

"Ah! you wish to return to the island?" he said, setting his teeth hard. "Captain Campbell, of course, will accompany you?"

"How provoking! Every word I say is converted into food for jealousy. No, I don't want to go back to the island. I'm going to spend a week here with Mrs. Brantwell."

"You shall not stay here. You shall come with me to Westport."

"Shall I, indeed? They'll have sharp eyes that will see me in Westport for another week, at least. Come, Edgar, have sense, and stay here for a few days."

"Will Captain Campbell be here?"

"Captain Campbell again. Oh, grant me patience! How do I know whether he will be here or not? I'm sure I hope he may, if it's only to drive you crazy; for, of all the absurd, jealous old tyrants that ever lived you're the worst. I declare, Mr. Courtney, you'd provoke a saint; and I do wish—St. Laura forgive me—that you were safely in heaven. There, now!"

"Take care, madam!" he said, hoarsely; "your good wishes are premature. Old tyrant as I am, I may live long enough to make you repent this language."

"Take care of what? I'm not afraid of you, Edgar Courtney!" she said, with flashing eyes. "Don't threaten, or you may drive me to say things I should be sorry for afterward."

"Once for all, will you come with me to Westport?"

"Once for all, no!"

"Madam, I command you!"

"Command away, then; I sha'n't budge a step."

"Mrs. Courtney, do you dare to brave my authority?"

"Your authority! It isn't the first time I have braved it."

"Take care that it is not the last!" he hissed, with gleaming eyes.

"Ugh! Don't look at me that way," said Laura, shuddering involuntarily at his unearthly look and tone. "I declare, if you're not enough to scare a person into the fever and ague! What a scowl! Edgar Courtney, you're worse than Nero, Heliogabalus, Mohammed, and all the other nasty old fellows, melted into one. Now I've made up my mind to stay here with Mrs. Brantwell, whether you like it or not; and you may do as you please, for all I care. Allow me to wish you good-night, and a pleasant journey to Westport."

And turning abruptly around, the indignant little lady quitted the room, leaving her spouse to his own not very pleasant reflections.

* * * * *

The company, by this time, had nearly all departed. Drummond, hat in hand, stood near the window, talking in low tones to Sibyl, whose face was now bright, radiant, unclouded.

Mr. and Mrs. Brantwell were still holding a parting conversation with some of their friends, among whom, stood young Stafford, watching Mr. Drummond, with a ferocious glance.

Captain Campbell stood by himself, evidently waiting for his friend to accompany him to the isle.

As Mrs. Courtney entered, he approached her, saying, with a smile:

"Well, Mrs. Courtney, are you not going to return with us to the island?"

"No, I think not," said Laura. "I have accepted our kind hostess' invitation, to remain with her a week."

"Weil, I have no doubt you will find it pleasanter than our lonesome isle, though, we poor unfortunates, left behind will find it doubly dreary, now, that it is deprived of your bright presence."

"Flatterer—flattery! I don't believe I'll ever be missed. You must remember me to good Mrs. Tom, her pretty niece, Christie, and that ill-treated youth, Mr. Carl Henley."

"Your humble servant hears but to obey. But, my dear Mrs. Courtney, you must not desert us, altogether. Will you not visit the island some day during the week?"

"Perhaps I may; indeed, it's very likely I shall. I want to see Mrs. Tom, before I start for home; so, if I can prevail on Miss Campbell to accompany me, your Island will be blessed with my 'bright presence,' once more."

"A blessing, for which, we shall be duly grateful," said Captain Campbell, gayly; "so, just name the day that I shall have the happiness of coming for you, and I shall safely convey you, 'over the sea in my fairy bark.'"

"Why, Captain Campbell, how distressingly poetical you are getting!" said Laura, laughing. "Well, let's see. This is Tuesday, isn't it? Then, I think I will go on Thursday—day after to-morrow."

"Very well, on that day, I shall have the happiness of coming for you. Until then, adieu."

"Good-by, Captain Campbell," said Mrs. Courtney, holding out her hand.

As she spoke, a slight noise behind her, made her turn abruptly round, and she almost shrieked aloud, as she beheld her husband—white, ghastly, and haggard—standing like a galvanized corpse, by her side. He had entered, unobserved, and approached them in time to hear their last words—to hear them make an appointment.

What other proof of her guilt, did he require? His worst suspicions were, of course, confirmed. Oh! terrible, was the look his face wore at that moment, Without a word, he turned away, and walked to the further end of the room.

Startled, shocked, and sick with undefined apprehension, Laura leaned against the table, for support. Captain Campbell's eyes followed the jealous husband, with a look, that said as plainly as words, "what does all this mean?"

"You are ill, Mrs. Courtney," he said, noticing with alarm her sudden faintness. "Allow me to ring for a glass of water."

"No, no! It is nothing," she said, passing her hand across her brow, as if to dispel a mist. "Nothing whatever," she added, rising and forcing a smile as she saw his anxious look. "Excuse me. Good night."

She hastened away, and Captain Campbell, after a moment's wondering pause, approached the spot where Willard and Sibyl stood, and touching him on the shoulder, said, somewhat impatiently:

"Come, Drummond, it's time we were off, if we go at all. Even as it is, it will be sunrise before we reach the island."

In spite of all her efforts a cloud fell on Sibyl's sunny brow at his words. The demon of Doubt was not yet wholly exorcised. The island! the name grated harshly on her ear, for Christie was there.

Willard Drummond saw it, and his resolution was taken. He felt it would not do to return to the island just now.

"I regret having kept you waiting," he said, gravely; "but I do not intend going to the island just yet."

A radiant glance from Sibyl's beautiful eyes repaid him for the words. But Captain Campbell was amazed.

"Not return? Why, what's in you head, now, Drummond? Where are you going?" he asked, in surprise.

"For the present, I shall stay here."

"Here, at Mr. Brantwell's?"

"No, in the village."

"Tired of Campbell's Isle already, eh? I knew how it would be. Well, I suppose I'll have to submit to keep bachelor's hall alone for a day or two, and then I shall return to Westport to see after my bonny bark. As the Courtneys stay, likewise, I shall have to go alone; so *au revoir*."

And Captain Campbell, after exchanging a word with his hostess, left the house to return to Campbell Lodge.

The few remaining guests by this time, had gone; and Willard Drummond, also, took his departure. And then Sibyl took her night-lamp and retired to her room to dream of her new-found happiness.

Laura Courtney sat alone on a sofa in a remote corner, her head on her hand, her brows knit in painful thought. This fierce jealousy of her husband's was growing insufferable; she felt she could not endure it much longer. Every word, every look, every action was warped and distorted by his jealous imagination into another proof of her guilt. And she painfully felt that this absurd jealousy must soon be apparent to every one—an almost unendurable thought; for, in spite of all her levity and apparent indifference, the little girl-wife possessed too much pride and self-respect to carelessly submit to such a bitter humiliation.

"I wish I knew what to do," she thought. "If I submit to all his whims and caprices, it will only make matters worse. Nothing can remove this deep-rooted passion, and the yoke he will lay on my neck will become unbearable. Oh, I was mad, crazed, ever to marry him. Every one that knew him told me how it would be—that he was tyrannical, jealous, exacting, and passionate, but I only laughed at them, and deemed him perfection. How I could ever have loved him, I'm sure I don't know, for he hasn't a single

lovable quality in him. However, it's too late to think of this now; I want to forget the past altogether, if I can, and my folly with it. Good gracious! what an awful look was on his face that time when I turned round. Perhaps, after all, I had better not go to the island. The man's a monomaniac on this point, and it won't do to drive him to desperation."

She bent her forehead on her hand, and remained for a few moments lost in troubled thought.

"No, I shall not go; but I will not give him the triumph of knowing it. He shall not think I am afraid of him, and that he has humbled me at last," she said, half aloud, as she raised her head proudly. "I will avoid Captain Campbell, too, as much as possible, if I can do so without attracting attention. Heigho! what it is to have a jealous husband! I wonder where Edgar is? Perhaps he has gone to Westport, and left me here!"

"Prithee, why so sad?" said the jovial voice of Mrs. Brantwell, breaking in at this moment on her reverie.

"You are looking as doleful as if some near relation had just been hung for sheep-stealing. Come, I can't allow any one in my house to wear so doleful a face. Don't indulge in the blues, my dear, or you need never expect to wax fat and portly, as I am. Come, let me see you smile, now."

"Oh, Mrs. Brantwell! who could be sad in your sunshiny presence," said Laura, smiling as brightly as even the good old lady could wish; "but, really, I wasn't out of spirits—only dreadfully sleepy." And an immense yawn confirmed the truth of her words.

"No wonder; it's four o'clock, so you had better retire. Jenny will show you to your room."

"Did you see—has Mr. Courtney—" began Laura, hesitatingly, as she rose.

"Mr. Courtney went to bed a quarter of an hour ago, my dear. And here's Jenny, now, with your lamp. Good-night, love!" And kissing her, Mrs.

Brantwell consigned her to the charge of a neat mulatto girl, who appeared with a light at the door.

Laura followed her up stairs to the door of her apartment. And here Jenny handed her the light, dropped a courtesy, and disappeared.

Mrs. Courtney opened the door and entered. It was a neat, pretty little room, with white curtains on the windows and white dimity hangings on the bed; a wan-hued carpet on the floor, and a cozy arm-chair beside the window. Mr. Courtney sat on the bed, still dressed in his evening costume—his arm resting on the snowy pillows and his face bowed upon it. His dark elf-locks fell heavily over the white pillows, as he lay as motionless as though death had stifled forever his wildly Throbbing heart.

He looked up as his wife entered, and dashes back his long, dark hair. Laura really felt for him—the wretched victim of his own turbulent passions—but pity and sympathy she knew would be alike misunderstood by him, if manifested; and even, perhaps, be adding fuel to the flames already raging in his breast.

"Oh! you are here, are you?" she said, setting her lamp on the toilet-stand, and throwing herself languidly in the arm-chair, "I thought you had gone to Westport."

"And left you to flirt with your new lover. Ha! Ha! You thought so, did you?"

What a goblin laugh it was. Laura shivered involuntarily, but she would not abate one jot of her defiant sarcasm.

"Yes, I saw you playing the eavesdropper," she said, as she began taking off her collar and bracelets; "it is just what I expected of you. You did it so expertly, one would think you had been taking lessons all your life, in listening at keyholes. Perhaps, you have learned from some hotel-waiter, or lady's maid."

"By Heaven! I will strangle you!" he exclaimed, roused to madness by her taunting tone. And he sprang to his feet, glaring upon her, as though he

would fulfill his threat.

"Come, Mr. Courtney, be calm, or I shall be under the painful necessity of going down stairs, and inquiring where the nearest lunatic asylum is located. Don't rave, now, or try to transfix me with your flashing glances. I am not, in the slightest degree, afraid of you, Mr. Courtney."

And Mrs. Courtney drew her little form up to its full height, and looked with cool contempt, in his face.

"Madam! if you go to the island, I swear, by heaven, and all its hosts, it will be the dearest night's work you have ever done."

"Hem! Why don't you swear by the other place; you are likely to know more about it, some day, than you will ever know of heaven."

"Silence!" he shouted, in a fierce voice, "I repeat it; if you keep this appointment with Captain Campbell, you shall repent it, in dust and ashes!"

For a moment, he stood perfectly paralyzed, foaming at the mouth like a wild beast. Even the audacious Mrs. Courtney, trembled before the terrible pitch of passion, she had daringly excited. And with it, came another feeling, apprehensions for her personal safety.

Springing to her feet, she darted past him, reached the door, and said:

"Mr. Courtney, your disagreeable temper renders it necessary for me to leave you to solitude, which is said to be excellent for cross people. Hoping you will have recovered your usual good-temper, before we meet again, allow me, to wish you good-night."

He darted toward her, but she was gone, slamming the door after her, and was down the stairs in a twinkling. She knew he would not dare to follow her; and, reaching the dark, deserted parlor, she threw herself on a lounge, and burst into a passionate flood of tears. In that moment, she fairly hated her husband.

But, when the household assembled next morning, little Mrs. Courtney looked as bright, and smiling, and breezy as ever, and met her pale, sour-visaged husband with her customary, careless unconcern. He, too, was calm; but, it was a delusive lull in the storm. The treacherous peace of the sleeping volcano—the menacing quiet of a savage, seeking revenge—a calm, more to be dreaded, than his former, fierce outburst of passion.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FATAL NOTE.

"All my fond love thus do I blow to heaven
'Tis gone.
Arise, black vengeance, from thy hollow cell,
Yield up, oh, love, thy crown and hearted throne
To tyrannous hate! Swell, bosom with thy fraught,
For 'tis of aspics' tongues!"—OTHELLO.

Inwardly congratulating himself on his successful interview with Sibyl, Willard Drummond sought his rooms to lay his plans for the future.

Sibyl must be his bride, and that soon—love, and pride, and ambition, all demanded it. It would be such a triumph to carry off this beauty and heiress—this brilliant star, who would so proudly and gloriously eclipse the lesser lights of New York and Washington. And yet, though his darker angel prompted this, he involuntarily shrank from the crime. What was to be done with Christie? What would she do, when she heard of his marriage? Poor, deceived little Christie? his heart smote him to think he had forgotten her already.

He did not fear her much; it was not that which made him hesitate. There was not a particle of revenge in her disposition. Meek, timid, and yielding, he knew if he commanded her to be silent—saying his honor, his

happiness compelled him to act as he did—she would gently fold her hands across her bosom, and die, if need be, and "make no sign." No, he need not fear her, but he feared himself. There was a fierce struggle going on in his breast. Once there had been before. Then it was between honor and passion; now it was between pity and ambition. How could he tell his loving, trusting child-bride that she would never see him more—that he had deceived her and was to marry another? And on the other hand, after his interview with Sibyl the previous night, it was absolutely impossible to pursue any other course. Christie might suffer—die, if she would; but Sibyl Campbell—this regal, beautiful heiress, this transcendently lovely Queen of the Isle—must be his wife. His wife! Could she be that while Christie lived? His brain was in a whirl as he paced up and down, still revolving the question: "What next?—what next?"

Unable to answer it, he threw himself on his bed, only to live over again the past few weeks in feverish dreams.

It was near noon when he awoke; and, with a head but slightly clearer than it had been the preceding night, he set out for the parsonage.

"There is no other course for it," ran his thoughts, on the way, "but to see Christie, and tell her all. But how to see her! Sibyl's jealousy is not dead, but sleepeth; and if I visit the isle it may break out in new fury. I must write a note to Christie, and send it to the island with some one—Lem or Carl—and appoint a meeting, after night, unknown to every one. Yes, that is what must be done. Poor Christie! poor Christie! Villain that I am to wrong you so! but the hand of Destiny is upon me, driving me on. How is all this to end? In woe for some of us, if the Egyptian's prediction come true. Well, I am in the hands of Fate, and must accomplish her ends, come what may."

He found Sibyl alone in the drawing-room when he entered. Mrs. Courtney and Mrs. Brantwell were conversing in the sitting-room, while Mr. Courtney sat silently in the depths of an elbow-chair, and scowled at them over the top of a book.

Sibyl's welcome was most cordial, and they were soon engaged in animated conversation.

Once, as if by accident, during the conversation, he said:

"I have left some things I need on the island, which I suppose I must soon go after."

"If you mention it to Guy, he will send Lem over with them," said Sibyl, with an involuntary coldness in her tone.

"Jealous still—I knew it," was his inward comment.

"I presume you do not intend visiting the lodge yourself?" he asked, after a pause.

"No; the island has few attractions for me now. I really would not care much if I never saw it again," she answered, briefly.

And there the subject dropped.

That evening when Willard returned to his hotel, he sat down and indicted the following note, without date or superscription, to Christie:

"DEAREST.—For reasons which I will explain when we meet I cannot visit you during the day. Meet me to-night, on the heath below the cottage, any time before midnight."

Lest it should by any chance fall into other hands than those for whom it was intended, he had omitted his name—knowing, besides, that it was not necessary, since the person to whom he would deliver it would tell Christie who had sent it.

Folding it up, he put it in his pocket, knowing that either Lem or Carl would in all probability visit N—— during the day, and he could seize the first opportunity of handing it to either unobserved.

And thus, determined by his devoted attention to lull her slightest doubts to rest, he set out early the following morning for the parsonage.

This was Thursday—the day on which Mrs. Courtney had promised to visit the isle.

The day dawned clear and beautiful, and as the family at the Brantwell mansion assembled round the breakfast-table, little did they dream of the appalling tragedy with which it was destined to close.

Sibyl and her lover sat in their favorite seat in the recess formed by the deep bay-window, talking in low, lover-like tones.

Good Mrs. Brantwell had incased her large proportions in a rocking-chair, and was swaying backward and forward, plying her knitting-needles, and trying to find some one to talk to—a somewhat difficult task; for Mr. Courtney, sitting in sullen silence, answered coldly and briefly, while his eyes continually followed his wife, who was fluttering in and out in a restless, breezy sort of way, looking every few moments out of the window, and starting violently whenever the door opened. Her husband saw it, and said to himself:

"She is looking for her lover, and is watching impatiently for his coming. This is the morning he promised to take her to the isle."

And his eyes assumed such a wild, maniac glare, that Mrs. Brantwell, looking up suddenly from her work, uttered a stifled scream as she exclaimed:

"Gracious me! Mr. Courtney, are you ill? You look like a ghost—worse than any ghost, I declare. I knew your wound was not perfectly healed. You had better retire, and lie down."

"Thank you, madam; I am perfectly well," he answered, in a hollow tone that belied his words.

Laura, absorbed by her own thoughts, had not heard this brief conversation. Yes, she was watching for Captain Campbell, with a nervous

restlessness, she could not control, but, with a far different object to that which her husband supposed. She wanted to see him for a moment, before he entered, to tell him she could not go with him, to the island, and, to beg of him, not to allude to the subject in the presence of the others. If he did, she knew her husband's jealousy would be apparent to all—a humiliation, she wished to postpone, as long as possible.

Therefore, when at last she espied him coming, she flew down the stairs, and, flushed, eager, palpitating, met him in the hall.

"Really, Mrs. Courtney," he said, smiling at her haste, "I hope I have not kept you waiting."

"No, no," she answered, eagerly. "I wanted to tell you, Captain Campbell, that I cannot go."

"No?" he said, looking somewhat disappointed. "Then, perhaps, you will come to-morrow?"

"Neither to-morrow nor ever. I cannot explain now, but, I wanted to tell you this, before you met the others. Don't say anything about this, up stairs; and, if my conduct appears strange, set it down to woman's fickleness, to eccentricity, to anything you like."

She did not venture to look up, but he saw the burning flush that swept over her face, and, for the first time, guessed the secret of her husband's gloom.

"My dear Mrs. Courtney," he said, gently, "there is no explanation or apology needed. I intended setting out for Westport, to-morrow; but, now, since you will not go, I will start this afternoon. You will, most probably, be gone before I return; and so, besides the formal adieu I shall bid you up stairs, let me say farewell, now. Should we never meet again, I hope you will sometimes think of me as a friend."

He pressed her hand and passed up stairs; while Laura ran to hide her burning cheeks, in the solitude of her own room.

The dark, fierce glance of hatred, which Mr. Courtney bestowed upon the captain, as he entered, confirmed him in his opinion. Pitying Laura, while he despised her husband, he determined to positively neglect her, rather than give him further cause for jealousy.

"You have left Lem waiting on the beach," said Sibyl, some half-hour after his entrance. "Is he to wait for you, there?"

"By Jove! I forgot all about him. I ought to have gone down, and told him to return. I must go now," said Captain Campbell, starting up.

"No; ring the bell, and I will send Jenny down, to tell him," said Mrs. Brantwell.

"Never mind, I'll go," said Drummond, rising suddenly, as he thought what an excellent opportunity this would be, to deliver his note. "I must be off, anyway, and, I can just take the beach in my way."

"Very well," said the young captain, resuming his seat. "Tell him I won't need his services, and he may return home."

Making his adieu, Drummond hastened out and went down to the beach, where Lem sat patiently sunning himself on a log, and waiting for his master's return.

"Lem," said Drummond, as he reached him, "You are to go back to the island without waiting for Captain Campbell."

"Yes, marser," said the obedient Lem, starting up.

"And, Lem, I want you to do me a service."

"Berry well; I's willin'."

"I want you to carry a note from me to Miss Christie."

"Yes, sar," replied Lem, inwardly wondering what the "ole 'oman" would say to this if she heard it.

"You are to give it to no one but herself—neither to Mrs. Tom nor Carl; and you must not let any one see you giving it either. Why, where the deuce can it be? I surely have not lost it?"

All this time he had been searching in his pockets, but the note was nowhere to be found. He felt in his vest-pocket, where he had placed it, then in his coat-pockets, then back again to his vest. All in vain. The note was gone!

"I must have dropped it on the way, confound it!" he muttered, angrily. "What if any one should find it? But, luckily, if they do, there is no clew by which they will discover me to be the writer. Well, I must write another, that is all."

He took a pencil from his pocket, tore a leaf out of his tablet, and wrote a few lines. Then he consigned them to Lem, with the caution:

"Be sure you do not lose it, nor let any one see you deliver it. And this is for your trouble—and silence. You understand?"

"Sartin, marse," said Lem, rolling up his eyes with a volume of meaning; and he pocketed with unfeigned delight the silver coin. "I's dumb, and nobody'll see me givin' Miss Christie dis. Cotch a weasel asleep."

"All right, then; push off," said Drummond, as, with a mind intensely relieved, he sprang up the bank, while his messenger set off for the island.

Meantime we must return to the parsonage.

Scarcely had Drummond gone, when Mrs. Courtney entered, and took the seat he had just vacated beside Sibyl. Noticing Captain Campbell only by a grave bow—for the watchful eyes of her husband were upon her—she entered into a low-toned conversation with Sibyl.

"Ah! she is growing careful; that is a bad sign. I must watch them more closely, now that they have become guarded," thought Mr. Courtney, setting his teeth hard.

And, while the captain remained, every word, every look, every tone was watched and perverted by the jealous husband. Captain Campbell treated him with cool contempt, and scarcely noticed him at all; but Laura watched him constantly from under her long eye-lashes, anxious and alarmed, as she noticed his ghastly face.

"Oh! I wish Captain Campbell would go—I wish he would go," thought Laura, looking uneasily out of the window, "Heaven help Edgar! the man is mad!"

Did some sweet instinct tell him her wish? He rose that instant to take his leave.

"And—oh! by the way, Sibyl," he said, suddenly, as he was departing, "I came near forgetting I had an epistle for you. This is it, I believe," he added, drawing a note from his pocket, and going over to where slip and Laura sat.

"For me?" said Sibyl, opening it. "Who from, I wonder?"

"Little Christie gave it to me as I was going."

"Christie?" cried Sibyl, in a voice that made them start, as her eyes ran eagerly over the lines. They were as follows:

"DEAR MISS SIBYL.—I did not tell you all that night. I have thought since I should have done so. When next you visit the island I shall reveal to you my secret; for I feel you have a right to know. CHRISTIE."

Pale with many emotions, Sibyl leaned for a moment against the window, without speaking.

"Well, Sibyl, what awful revelation does that tiny note contain, to alarm you so?" he asked, in surprise.

"Guy," she said, impatiently, starting up. "I must visit the island to-day."

"The island! Nonsense, Sibyl!" broke in Mrs. Brantwell.

"I must—I must! My business there will not admit of delay. I must go."

"Why, what's wrong? They seemed all well when I left," said her brother, still more surprised.

Feeling it would not do to excite a curiosity she could not satisfy, Sibyl controlled her emotions, and said, more calmly:

"They are well enough. It is not that; but circumstances render it necessary that I should go there to-day. Who will take me over?"

"If you wait for an hour or two, Carl Henley will be here. I heard Mrs. Tom saying he would visit N—— to-night, for things she wanted. If you must go, he will take you when he returns."

"Very well; I suppose that must do," said Sibyl, controlling her burning impatience by a great effort, as she hastily left the room.

And Captain Campbell, having made his adieus, also departed, followed by Mrs. Brantwell. Laura kept her seat by the window, while her husband still scowled gloomily from under his midnight brow.

"Well, this is certainly pleasant," thought Mrs. Courtney. "What a prize I have drawn in the great matrimonial lottery, to be sure. Ugh! I declare he looks like a ghoul—a death's head—an ogre—a—I don't know what, as he sits there, glaring at me in that hideous way. That man will be the death of me yet, I'm sure. Positively I must have committed some awful crime, some time or other, to be punished with such a husband. His mouth looks as if it had been shut, and bolted, and locked, and the key forever lost. I wonder if he could open it. I'll see."

"Mr. Courtney," she said, facing round.

An inarticulate "*Well?*" came growlingly forth from the compressed mouth.

"Look pleasant, can't you? I declare, the very sight of you is enough to make one's blood run cold."

"You would rather look at the gallant Captain Campbell, perhaps!" he said, with an evil sneer.

"Yes, I would then—there! You don't see him wearing such a diabolical, savage, cut-throat look as you do. I wish to mercy you'd take him for a model, and not make such a fright of yourself, I'm positively ashamed to present you as my husband, of late—you have got to be such a hideous-looking creature!"

He glanced at her, without speaking, until a circle of white flamed around his eyes. And now that Laura's by no means angelic temper was roused, there is no telling what she would not have said, had not Mrs. Brantwell's voice been heard at that moment at the head of the stairs, calling:

"Mrs. Courtney—Mrs. Courtney, I want you a moment."

Mrs. Courtney hastened from the room, and Mr. Courtney was left alone with his evil passions.

As she rose from her seat, his eye fell on something like a note under her chair. Like a tiger pouncing on his prey, he sprang upon it, seized it, opened it, read it, and crushed it convulsively in his hand.

It was Willard Drummond's lost note!

"This is hers; she has dropped it. *He* gave it to her!" said the unhappy man his face growing absolutely appalling in its ghastly pallor. "Oh, I see it all—I see it all! They dare not meet in day-time, and she will meet him this night on the isle. Good Heaven! I shall go mad! Dishonored, disgraced forever! and by the woman I have loved so madly. And she laughed, mocked, and taunted me to my face, with this in her possession!"

He ground his teeth, to keep back the terrific groans that were making their way up through his tortured heart.

And, as if sent by his evil demon, Laura entered at that moment, laughing merrily at some jest she had left behind.

He stood with his back to her, as if looking out of the window.

"And is this the woman I have loved—this vilest of her sex, who dare laugh with such a crime on her soul? I know now—oh! I know now, why she did not go to the island with him, to-day. She thought to blind me, and make me think she was not going at all, that I might be lulled into security. Curses light on them both!" came through his clenched teeth.

Little dreaming of the thoughts that were passing through his mind, Laura—ever the creature of impulse—forgetting her momentary anger, went over, and, laying her hand on his arm, said:

"Come, Mr. Courtney, throw off this gloom, and be a little like you used to be. There is no occasion for all this anger, for, I am not going to the island, at all. You see, I have even given up my own, sweet will, to please you; so, I think I deserve something in return, for being so good. Don't I?"

He turned, and she almost shrieked aloud, at the awful face she beheld.

"Edgar! Oh, Edgar! Great Heaven! do not look so wild. I never meant to make you so angry. I will not go—indeed, I will not go. Only speak to me, and do not wear that dreadful look!"

And, pale, trembling, and terrified, she clung to his arm.

With an awful malediction, he hurled her from him, and sent her reeling across the room.

She struck against the sharp edge of the table, and fell to the ground, her face covered with blood.

But he heeded her not. Seizing his hat and coat, he rushed from the house, as if driven by ten thousand furies. And his face, upturned to the light, was the face of a demon.

Three hours later, a boat, containing two persons, put off for Campbell's Isle. One, was a rough fisher-boy, half simpleton, half idiot; the other, a tall, dark man, who sat in the stern, his hat drawn far down over his brow, the collar of his coat turned up, leaving nothing to be seen, but a pair of wild, black, maniac eyes, that glared like live coals, with the fire of madness.

CHAPTER XIX.

THAT DAY.

"The day is lowering, stilly black,
Sleeps the grim wave."

"Really, Sibyl, my love, you are getting to be a most singular girl. Two or three days ago you were all in the dismals; then, after the party, you got as amiable and bright as a June morning; and scarcely had you promised to stay with me here for an indefinite length of time, and I was congratulating myself on having secured you here, when Guy brings you a tiny note from this little blue-eyed island-girl, Christie, and lo! you are off on the wing again, and I am left to go moping about like a poor old hen-turkey with the distemper."

"But my dear Mrs. Brantwell," said Sibyl, "you have Mrs. Courtney, who is twice as agreeable and lively a companion as I am. It's impossible for you to go moping around, as you say, when she is here."

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Brantwell, "that's all very fine, without being in the least consoling. I want you. Mrs. Courtney's very lively and all that, I know; but I invited her here as much to keep you in spirits as anything else, and now you fly off and leave us for my pains."

"I am very sorry, Mrs. Brantwell, to disturb your amusements," said Sibyl, gravely; "but when I tell you this affair is of the utmost importance to me, and that my happiness, in a measure, depends upon my going, I am sure you will withdraw your objections."

"Your happiness? Now, Sibyl Campbell, I would just like to know what this island-girl has to do with *your* happiness?" said Mrs. Brantwell, folding her fat hands, and looking in Sibyl's face.

"More than you would ever think, perhaps—more than I once ever dreamed myself she would have," said Sibyl, while a cloud fell over her brow. "But enough of this. I cannot explain further at present. The amount of it is, I must go to-night!"

And Sibyl's face assumed that look of steady decision it could sometimes wear.

"Humph! particularly mysterious all this. When do you return?"

"That depends upon circumstances. To-morrow, perhaps."

"Sibyl, do you know what I think?" said Mrs. Brantwell, with such abrupt suddenness that the young girl started.

"No, indeed; I do not pretend to divination," she said, with a smile.

"Shall I tell you?"

"If you please. I am all attention."

"And you will not be angry with your old friend, who talks for your good?"

"Of course not. What in the world is this preface about?"

And Sibyl's large eyes were fixed surprised on the fair, florid face of the matron.

"Well, then, Sibyl, it's my opinion you're jealous of some one," said the old lady, with the air of one who has made a discovery.

Sibyl's dark face flushed, and then grew very pale.

"And that's a very miserable feeling, my dear," said Mrs. Brantwell, composedly, "and also very foolish. No sensible person ever gives way to it, because they only bestow their affections on those in whom they can place implicit trust. Now, I hope you have too much good sense to fancy Mr. Drummond can care for any one in this world more than you."

Sibyl sat with her face averted, and made no reply.

"I had too high an opinion of you, Sibyl," went on the old lady, very gravely, "to think you could stoop to be jealous of any one, much less an insignificant little girl like this Christie. Don't be angry, my love; I am talking for your good. And indeed you have not the slightest cause to fear a rival; for, go where you will, you cannot find one more peerlessly beautiful than yourself. I don't say this to make you vain—though I know you, my queenly darling, could never be vain—but it is to inspire you with confidence. Come, my dear child, shake off this feeling that is unworthy of you. Mr. Drummond, I feel assured, has never for an instant wavered in his fidelity to you."

"Who said I was jealous?" said Sibyl, passionately. "I am not. He *dare* not be false to me. Let him try it at his peril. He knows I am not one to be trifled with."

"Why, my dear, your very vehemence convinced me of what I only suspected before. I am afraid you will be very unhappy, Sibyl, if you indulge in such feelings. You ought to try and cultivate a more trusting spirit, my dear; without perfect faith in the person we love, there can be no happiness.

"I do trust! I *do* trust! I *will* trust!" said Sibyl, clenching her small hand as though she would in a like manner shut out all doubt from her heart. "But, oh, where we love, the faintest symptom of distrust is madness."

"Where we love truly we feel no distrust, Sibyl."

"Oh, you do not know. Do I not love truly? Have I not staked life, and heart, and happiness on him, and yet——"

"You doubt."

"No, no—not now. I did doubt, but that time has gone," said Sibyl, with a sort of incoherence.

"Then, wherefore this visit to the isle, Sibyl?" said Mrs. Brantwell, fixing her eyes searchingly on her face.

Before Sibyl could reply, a sound, as if of a heavy fall below, reached their ears.

"What can that be?" said Mrs. Brantwell, starting up.

"It sounded like some one falling," said Sibyl, listening breathlessly. "I will go down and see."

She flew down the long staircase, followed by Mrs. Brantwell; and, on entering the room, there they found Mrs. Courtney lying senseless on the floor, her face deluged with blood.

"Great Heavens! what has happened!" said Sibyl, turning faint and sick at the sight.

"Oh, I know," said Mrs. Brantwell, wildly, as she hurried forward and raised the slender, prostrate form. "Oh, that demon of jealousy! How many souls is it destined to torture? Sibyl, please ring the bell."

"But what does this mean? I do not understand," said Sibyl, as she obeyed.

"Why, this poor child's husband is crazy with jealousy—I have observed it, though she thought I did not."

"Heaven be merciful! he cannot have struck her?" said Sibyl, white with horror.

"Oh, I do not know; but jealousy will make a man do anything—commit murder. It has done it before now, and will again. Jenny," she said, as the mulatto servant entered, "tell Tom to go instantly for the doctor, and then come back and help me to carry this poor lady up stairs."

The alarmed girl flew to obey; and after dispatching the boy for the doctor, hurried back and aided Mrs. Brantwell in conveying the slight form of Mrs. Courtney to her room.

Then, with some tepid water, she washed off the blood and disclosed a deep gash right above the eye, which continued bleeding so profusely as to awaken fears for her life.

"Oh, I fear she will bleed to death! Would that the doctor were here!" said Mrs. Brantwell, wringing her hands in deepest distress.

"And here he is," said Sibyl, as at that moment the doctor hastily entered.

After examining the wound the doctor pronounced it dangerous, but not fatal, and soon succeeded in stopping the bleeding. And then the dark eyes of Laura opened wildly, and wandered with a vague, frightened look around.

"My poor child, what has happened?" said Mrs. Brantwell, bending over her, and parting the bright disordered hair on her pale brow.

"Where is he?" she said, grasping Mrs. Brantwell's arm, convulsively.

"Who, love?" said Mrs. Brantwell, gently.

"Oh, he—Mr. Courtney," she said, in the same frightened whisper.

"He is gone, dear. Did he strike you?"

"Oh, no!—no, no!" she cried, wildly. "I fell, and struck against something. Oh, my head! I am going crazy, I think."

"Hush, love! You must not excite yourself. Lie still, and do not talk."

"I have been very wicked—very rash," she said, "but, I did not mean it. Oh, I never meant it—I never—never meant it!" she moaned, pressing her hands over her heart.

"My dearest child, I know it. But it will hurt you to talk so much."

"Yes, yes; I always did talk thoughtlessly, and it has driven him mad. Oh! I loved him once, and I have driven him mad, now," she cried, wringing her pale fingers.

Mrs. Brantwell looked at the puzzled doctor in deepest distress.

"Give her this; it will compose her," said that gentleman, who could not tell what to make of all this.

"Drink this, love; it will soothe you," said that good lady, raising the poor, wounded head of the young wife, and holding the cup to her lips.

With the passive obedience of a child, she complied, and fell back on her pillow. And, gradually, the wild, frenzied expression left her face, and she fell into a deep slumber.

"And now, she must be kept very quiet," said the doctor, as he took his hat and gloves. "There is not the slightest danger, if she is not allowed to excite herself, and is carefully nursed, which I know she will be, with Mrs. Brantwell. Repeat the medicine, when she wakes, and I will call again, to-morrow."

And the doctor bowed himself out, while Mrs. Brantwell sat down beside the poor, pale sleeper, fanning her gently, and watching her while she slept.

Sibyl, seeing her presence was not necessary, went down to the parlor, where she found Willard Drummond awaiting her. She started in alarm, for

his countenance was grave and deeply troubled.

"Why, Willard, what has happened?". she asked, hurriedly, quick to take the alarm, where he was concerned.

"Sibyl," he said, slowly, "I am obliged to leave you."

She turned deadly pale, and her large, dark eyes were fixed on his face, in agonized inquiry.

"Scarce an hour ago, I received a letter from home," he went on, "saying, that my father was at the point of death, and, if I ever wished to see him again, I must hasten there, immediately. I have not a moment to lose. I start instantly; but first, I have come to take leave of you."

The news came so suddenly, that, for a moment she seemed stunned.

"When do you return?" she said, in a voice faint with emotion.

"Soon, I hope; but, I cannot, as yet, tell. Farewell, my own, dearest love; believe me, I will return to you as soon as may be."

"And you will write?" she said, burying her face in his shoulder.

"Certainly, Sibyl—that will be my first care. Remember me to our friends, and explain to them the cause of this abrupt departure. And now, once more, adieu."

He pressed her to his heart, and then quitted the house, and, mounting his horse, rode rapidly away.

Once he paused, and looked anxiously in the direction of the isle. He thought of Christie receiving his note, and waiting for him in vain, at their lonely, trysting-place.

"What will she think of my absence?" he mused; "for, I know, poor, faithful child, she will await my coming there, until morning dawn. What cause will she assign for my not keeping my appointment? Well, I cannot

help it. I dare not wait until morning; and she will hear to-morrow, why I was absent."

And he rode on, never thinking whether Christie was destined to live to see that eventful tomorrow, dawn.

When he was gone, Sibyl sat for a few moments, with a feeling of utter desolation. She knew he was not to be gone long; but, it was their first parting, save the few days she was absent in New York, and there was a dreary sense of loneliness—a passionate longing to be with him, to never leave him—filling her heart. With her hands lying upon the table, and her head dropped upon them, she remained wholly unconscious of the flight of time, until the entrance of Mrs. Brantwell, aroused her.

She lifted her head and tried to listen, as the good old lady spoke of Laura.

"She has had a quiet sleep, and now appears much better. But how pale you are, Sibyl! Are you going to be ill, too?"

"No, I am quite well; only it gave me such a shock, it was so sudden," said Sibyl, pressing her hands to her throbbing brow.

"Yes, I don't wonder at it," said Mrs. Brantwell, thinking the shock she alluded to, was the sudden sight of Laura. "I came to look for a sponge, and must go back to Mrs. Courtney, now."

She left the room, and Sibyl went to the window, and looked out.

The afternoon was waning, the sun was slowly sinking toward the west, and, Sibyl saw, with some concern, that a dark, dense cloud was rising.

"There is a storm coming, and perhaps there may be no boat from the island, after all," she said, anxiously. "How can I wait until to-morrow?"

But, even while she spoke, she espied the well-known form of Carl Henley, approaching the house.

Sibyl sprang to the bell, and rang a peal, that presently brought Jenny.

"Jenny, run down to the door, and tell the boy you will see passing to come up here immediately," she said, excitedly.

Jennie disappeared, and soon returned with Master Carl looking considerably amazed, not to say frightened, at this unexpected summons.

"Carl, what time do you return to the island?" asked Sibyl.

"Right off—soon's ever I get some tea, and sugar, and coffee, and starch, and things for Aunt Tom."

"Will you take me over when you are going, Carl?"

"Yes'm, if you'll not be long getting ready; 'cause there's a storm a comin', an' no matter how hard I pull, it'll be dark afore we get there," said Carl.

"I will be ready in five minutes, and wait for you on the beach. That will do," said Sibyl, rising, to close the interview.

Carl hurried out to fulfill his commissions for Mrs. Tom, and Sibyl went to her room to dress, and take leave of Mrs. Brantwell.

"Self-willed—self-willed!" said the good old lady, sorrowfully, as she kissed her. "Well, good-by, my love. Remember, I half expect you back to-morrow."

"And I shall certainly try not to disappoint you," said Sibyl, as she quitted the room.

She took her way to the beach, where she was soon joined by Carl, who, muttering an inarticulate something about having a "stunner of a storm pretty soon," pushed off and took the oars, and under his practiced hands the boat was soon flying like a bird through the sparkling waves.

CHAPTER XX.

WHAT CAME NEXT.

"And on the midnight air arose
That awful dying cry,
That echoed through the lonely house
Vibrating to the sky."

The sky was rapidly darkening. The wind came wailing with a low, menacing sound over the waters. The sun sank red, fiery, and threatening in the far west, and the scared water-fowl went skimming over the troubled face of the bay, sending full, wild shrieks, as if to herald the coming storm. The darkened sea heaved and tossed, as if struggling with an inward foe, and the little boat quivered in every joint as it flew over the glassy waves.

Sibyl's eyes kindled as they surveyed the grand but terrible beauty of the scene. On the east, as far as the eye could see, spread out the boundless, tempestuous ocean; on the west stretched a long line of coast, forming a sort of semi-circle, lost on one side in the dense primeval forest, that as yet the woodman's axe had not desecrated, and on the other jutting out in a wild, rocky promontory. On the south was the island, which they were now approaching, looking a mere dark speck in the vast and mighty deep.

"If we don't have a screamer of a storm to-night you may say I don't know nuthing 'bout the weather," said Carl, pausing for a moment to wipe the perspiration off his heated brow, and glance at the darkening face of the sky. "Such a one as we ain't had since the night me and Mr. Drummond and Lem saved the man and woman what was washed ashore from the wreck."

"That was an awful night," said Sibyl, still keeping her kindling eyes fixed on the gloomy grandeur of the sea and sky, "but how splendid, how magnificent, how glorious this prospect is. Oh, I *love* a storm. I love the grand jubilee of the earth, when sea, and wind, and lightning, and storm, all join in the glorious hymn of the tempest. Oh, the nights that I have spent on sea when nothing was to be seen but the black pall of the heavens above,

rent every instant by the forked lightning, while the crash of the thunder, and the roar of the wind and waves mingled together in the sublime refrain, and our ship went driving on, as if mad. Oh, for those nights again! when my very soul was inspired by the unspeakable glory of the scene."

Her wild eyes shone and flashed like stars, and her cheeks flushed with the impetuosity with which she spoke.

She was not addressing Carl, she was not thinking of him, she did not even see him; her whole soul, and heart, and mind, were filled with the present scene, and the remembrance of those she had seen.

Carl stared for an instant at the wild girl, wondering if she had gone mad, but Sibyl recovered from her momentary trance, and asked, quietly:

"Do you think we will reach the island before the storm bursts?"

"Yes. I guess so. We'll be there in 'bout ten minutes now. Oh, by granny, here it comes!"

A low, sullen rumbling, the herald of the coming storm, was heard, and two large, heavy drops of rain fell pattering on the thwart.

"Lor' sakes! ef the squall comes now we'll go to the bottom for sartin," said Carl, pulling with the energy of desperation, until the perspiration stood in great globules on his brow.

But the storm, as if in pity for that frail bark and its inmates, held up a few moments longer, and Carl uttered a yell of triumph, as he shot into a little natural harbor, sheltered by overhanging rocks, immediately below the lodge.

"Let the storm come," he cried, waving his cap in exultation; "we're all right as a trivet now."

And as he spoke his last words were lost in the roar of the wind and sea.

Safe and sheltered as it was in the little cove, the boat quivered for an instant, like a reed in the blast, before the first furious crash of the storm.

Had it burst upon them a few moments sooner they would instantaneously have been swamped. But Carl, bending before the furious gale, drove his stanch little craft ashore in triumph and sprang out, followed by Sibyl.

The rain was falling heavily, and the wind blew so furiously, driving it in her face, that for the first moment she shrank back, and was forced to grasp a projecting rock to prevent herself from being blown backward. The next instant her dauntless spirit returned, and, raising her head, she shook the rain from her dripping locks, and sprang up the rocks with the fearless agility of a young mountain-kid, until she stood at the door of Campbell's Lodge, her ancestral home.

All the front of the house was dark and cheerless, for Aunt Moll never visited the front chambers when the family were absent. Pushing open the hall-door, which was never locked, Sibyl, accustomed to the way from earliest childhood, passed through the hall to the door leading to the kitchen, while the old house shook to its center, and every window rattled in the furious blast of the storm. The very chimneys shook as though they would fall and annihilate them, when Sibyl opened the door, and, wet, dripping like a mermaid rising from the sea-foam, she stood before her two astonished servants.

There was a bright fire roaring cheerily up the wide chimney, for, summer or winter, Aunt Moll insisted on having a fire; and over this, the affrighted old woman crouched, mumbling strange prayers and invocations for mercy, and fairly gray with terror. Lem, little less alarmed, sat in a remote corner, keeping his eyes tightly shut, to exclude the blinding glare of the vivid flashes of lightning.

At the sudden and startling opening of the door, both looked up, and beholding their young mistress, whom they supposed safe at the parsonage, standing before them, her wild, black hair streaming in disorder down her back, Aunt Moll uttered a piercing shriek, and, springing to her feet, rushed over and threw herself into Lem's arms, with the cry:

"Ah, it's a ghos'! it's a ghos'! Oh, Lem, sabe yer poor, ole mudder! It's our young missus' ghos'!"

And, terror-stricken, Aunt Moll clung shrieking to Lem, who stood unable to speak, his teeth chattering with terror.

The scene was so ridiculous—Aunt Moll's terror, and Lem's frightened face and distended eyeballs—that Sibyl, throwing herself into a seat, could scarcely refrain from laughter.

At this, Aunt Moll ceased her shrieks, and looked up, and Lem looked at her in utter bewilderment.

"It's our young Miss Sibyl, herself," ventured Lem, at last.

"Why, of course it is," said Sibyl, as soon as she could speak, for laughter. "Come, Aunt Moll, I'm no more of a ghost than you are yourself. Don't look so terribly afraid of me."

"Miss Sibyl, is it you?" said Aunt Moll, beginning cautiously to approach, and eying her askance. "Well, I 'clare to gracious, ef I didn't t'ink 'twas your ghos', Miss Sibyl!" said Aunt Moll, drawing a deep breath. "What could take you out sich a stormy night?"

"Carl Henley's boat, brought me here; I wanted to see you and Lem, Aunt Moll. And now, Lem, go and make a fire in my bed-room, to air it; I am going to stay here, all night."

"S'pect you'll have to. Should like to know who could go out ag'in dis night. Oh, Lor' a massy-sakes! jist listen to dat, will yer!" said Aunt Moll, trembling and shrinking, as another furious blast made the old house shake.

"Yes, it's a terrible night. Heaven grant there may be no wrecks on the coast!" said Sibyl, thoughtfully.

"An' now, honey, when de fire's made in yer room, yer mus' go up an' take off'n your wet clothes, else you'll catch your deff o' cole. An' I'll get yer supper, cause yer mus' be hungry," said Aunt Moll, approaching the fireplace.

But at that instant, a vivid flash of lightning blazed down the wide chimney, and old Moll sprang back, with a yell.

"Oh, Lor'! who ebber did see de like o' dat! S'pect it t'ought it had me dat time; but I ain't cotched yet!" said the old woman, quaking in terror.

"Oh, don't mind, Aunt Moil; I do not care for anything," said Sibyl. "And here comes Lem; so I will go to my room."

"Oh, Miss Sibyl, may I go too? 'Deed an' 'deed, I is 'feared to stay here!" said Aunt Moll, in trembling tones, as she listened to the roaring, howling, shrieking of the wild storm without.

"Certainly, Aunt Moll, if you think you will be any safer with me, you are welcome to come. But your trust should be placed in a higher power. He who rules the storm alone can help you," said Sibyl, gravely.

"Yes, Miss Sibyl, I knows all dat, an' I does trus' in Providence; but, 'pears like I'd feel safer ef I was with you. Seems like de danger wouldn't be so near, nor so drefful," said Aunt Moll; "an' I allers was awfully skeered o' lightnin'."

"Very well; come, then," said Sibyl.

And Aunt Moll, glad of the permission, lit a candle, and preceded Sibyl through the hall, and up the polished oaken stairs, at a shuffling trot, leaving Lem, much against his will, sole possessor of the kitchen.

There was a bright fire burning on the hearth, which the damp, unused rooms required, rendering the flickering tallow candle superfluous.

"Now, where are you going to sleep, Aunt Moll?" said Sibyl.

"Here on de floor, honey; I'll bring in de matrass, an' spread it here afore de fire."

Sibyl assented to this arrangement; and, lifting the blind, seated herself by the window to watch the storm. But Aunt Moll coming in, held up her hands in speechless terror at her hardihood.

"Settin' at de winder, an' it a lightnin'!" she exclaimed. "Miss Sibyl, honey, dat's de mos' recklessness thing to do as eber was. Put down de curtain, chile, an' go to bed; it's a temptin' o' de Lor', dat ar."

"There's no danger, Aunt Moll," said Sibyl; "it is just as safe here as in bed."

"But it ain't, chile; you doesn't know. It's wrong, and likewise sinful, to sit down a lookin' at de storm," persisted the old woman.

But Sibyl, without paying the slightest attention, still sat gazing out, while Aunt Moll from entreating took to scolding, which was likewise unheeded.

"Hold your tongue, Aunt Moll!" said her young mistress, at last, impatiently facing round, tired of hearing the garrulous old woman.

And at this unprecedented rebuke, Aunt Moll sat down before the fire in mortified silence.

Though burning with feverish impatience to meet Christie, and learn what meaning lay couched in her mysterious note, Sibyl found herself forced to wait until morning. The storm seemed steadily increasing, the wind raved wildly, shaking every beam in the old house, and the booming of the sea on the rocks was deafening.

Perhaps it was the wildly shrieking tempest, the appalling crash of the angry elements, but an unaccountable depression weighed on Sibyl's spirits—a creeping feeling of horror that no effort could shake off. She strove to rouse herself, to reason herself out of the superstitious dread that was overwhelming her, but in vain. A nameless terror had clutched her heart, and would not relax its hold.

And so the hours wore on, and midnight approached. And the storm without seemed to have shrieked and roared, and worn itself hoarse, and was at last relapsing into sullen silence. The fire on the hearth was burning low, and casting wild and fantastic shadows through the gloomy room. Aunt

Moll lay in that deep, deathlike sleep which only those of her race enjoy, and her deep breathing sounded audibly through the room.

Exhausted with the excitement of the storm and her own thoughts, Sibyl rose and prepared herself for bed, hoping in sleep to lose the strange feeling that was overpowering her.

She lay down, but she wooed the drowsy god in vain. Sleep would not come at her call. So she tossed from side to side, wishing—vaguely, wildly—morning would come, and listening to the dreary beat of the waves on the shore.

A death-like silence reigned within the old house, while the storm without was still sullenly grumbling.

It was near midnight, and Sibyl lay with her hands clasped over her forehead, when suddenly she heard the front door burst violently open, and through the silent house arose the wild, terrific, appalling shriek of "Murder!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THAT NIGHT.

"Come, madness! come with me, senseless death!
I cannot suffer this! Here, rocky wall,
Scatter these brains, or dull them!"—DE MONTFORD.

About an hour before the storm burst upon the island, Edgar Courtney, the victim of his own diabolical passions, reached it unseen and unobserved. "You will await my return here," he said, as he was moving away. "I must be back in N—— before morning."

"Don't know 'bout that," said the boy who had taken him over; "there's an awful storm rising; but if you ain't afeared to venture, I ain't."

Mr. Courtney glanced at the dark, sullen sky, but what was the storm without compared with the storm within? Leave the island he must before morning, so he replied:

"I must go back, let it storm as it will. You can remain here sheltered under these rocks till I come back."

And wrapping his cloak around him, he moved swiftly away, and concealed himself behind some overhanging trees to await the result.

The spot where he stood commanded a view of the sea on all sides. And, therefore, when in the deepening gloom, some hours after, he saw a boat approach the isle, containing the form of a woman, he had not a single doubt as to who that woman was.

Oh, the demoniac look that his face wore at that instant! His face upturned to the bleak light was that of a fiend.

Blinded by his passions, he did not observe, as in a calmer moment he might have done, even in the gloom, the difference between this tall figure and that of his wife. He only saw a woman landing on the isle, springing up the rocks, and disappearing in the darkness, and who but Laura would have ventured to the isle that stormy night.

When the night fell in more than Egyptian darkness, accompanied by wind, and lightning, and rain, he made his way blindly through it all to the trysting-place; and, sheltered behind a friendly rock, he crouched down like a panther waiting for its prey.

"She will not come in this storm—she cannot; you will wait in vain," said the voice of Reason, faintly trying to make itself heard.

"She will come—she will!" said Jealousy. "She has braved the storm to come to the island; and, though fire should fall from heaven, she will keep her tryst. Wait! wait! and you will have your revenge."

And the demon voice conquered.

* * * * *

Meantime, how went the night in the widow's cottage?

When—wet, dripping, soaked through—Carl reached the cottage, his first care was to change his wet clothes, and seat himself at the table, where a smoking supper awaited him.

Mrs. Tom held up her hands in wonder and amazement when she heard that Sibyl had braved all that furious storm to come to the isle.

"The girl must be clean crazy," she ejaculated, "to venture on the stormy sea such a night! I do wonder, though, what brought Miss Sibyl here to-night?"

"Dunno," said Carl, speaking with his mouth full of griddle-cake. "She was talking sort o' crazy in the boat. 'Spect' she thought that Mr. Drummond was here."

Christie, whose white fingers were, as usual, flying busily, as she plied her needle, suddenly flushed to the temples, and then grew paler than before. She knew what had brought Sibyl to the island, though she had hardly fancied she would have ventured out in such a storm.

"Oh, I wish it had been clear to-night!" she thought, lifting her head, and listening anxiously to the howling tempest.

Lem, true to his promise, had faithfully delivered Drummond's note to Christie unobserved. But would he come in all this storm?

Some vague rumor had reached her ear that Miss Campbell, the beauty and heiress, was soon to be the bride of Willard Drummond. She did not believe it; it was too monstrous, too dreadful; the bare possibility of such a thing was maddening. But Sibyl loved him, and might cherish hopes that could never be realized; and Christie felt it her duty, despite her promise, to put an end to all these hopes, once and forever, by proclaiming their

marriage. Therefore, she had seized the first opportunity, and sent the note before mentioned by Captain Campbell.

By this time Carl Henley had dispatched his supper; and laboring under a vague impression that some one would be in presently to carry him off by force, as Mr. Drummond had done on a previous occasion, he made a hasty exit up the ladder to bed, firmly resolving not to go out again, though Aunt Tom should pull every hair out of his head.

And when he was gone, Mrs. Tom, having secured the windows and doors, drew up her wheel, and sat down to spin. And Christie, with cheeks flushed, and eyes bright with anxiety and impatience, sewed on in silence, replying vaguely and at random to the stream of smalltalk kept up by Mrs. Tom.

There were many anxious thoughts passing through the mind of the young girl. Why had Willard been absent for so long a time?—why had he appointed this strange midnight meeting?—would he venture on the sea in night and storm; and, if he came, what could his visit and note portend? His manner had changed so of late, that, in spite of herself, the conviction that he already repented of his hasty marriage forced itself upon her with a pang like the bitterness of death.

"Oh, I might have known," was her inward cry, "that he, so rich, so handsome, possessing the love of one so beautiful as Sibyl Campbell, could never be content with poor little me! Oh, I might have known he would tire of me; but I was crazed, and believed all he told me. Something warned me it would, sooner or later, come to this; but now that it *has* come, it does not make it any easier to bear."

"Well," said the voice of Mrs. Tom, at this instant breaking upon her reverie, as she stopped her wheel with a jerk and looked sharply into Christie's face—"I would like to know what's got into you to-night! Here I've asked you three blessed times to hand me that there gownd, an' you don't mind me any more than if I was the cat. S'pose it's the latest fashion not to answer your elders when they speak to you? What is the matter with the gal?"

"I didn't hear you," faltered Christie, turning scarlet; "my head aches. Please excuse me; I didn't mean to offend."

"Better go to bed, then, if you head aches. Time we was all in bed, for that matter. No use sittin' up a-wastin' of candles, when we can get up airly in the morning jist as well. Gemimi! how it blows!" said Mrs. Tom, as she slipped the bands off her wheel and carried it over to its accustomed corner.

Glad of the permission, Christie arose and began arranging her bed on the wooden settle in the kitchen, where she slept. And Mrs. Tom, who preferred sleeping by herself, sought her own couch, where, by the combined effects of a light heart and a clear conscience, she was soon in the land of dreams.

Relieved of the presence of the inquisitive old lady Christie wrapped herself in her mantle, tied on her hood, and softly opened the door. The storm was at its height, and the sudden entrance of a rush of wind and rain, sent all the loose articles lying about, whirling through the room.

It was awful to venture out in such a storm; but, had the tempest raged twice as wildly, the faithful, loving child-wife would have braved it all, to meet him, she loved.

Exerting all her strength, she closed the door after her without arousing the sleepers, and quitted the house she was never destined to enter more.

On—through the falling rain, the driving wind, the vivid lightning—she plunged, making her way blindly through it all. It was well she knew the road she was traversing, and could pursue her way as well at midnight as at noonday, or she would never have been able to follow that tortuous, rocky path.

But, shrinking, and blinded by the rain, at times she was forced to stop and cover her face in her mantle; and anon, at some more furious blast that would have whirled her away as though she had been a feather, she grasped some projecting rock or tree, to protect herself from being blown over the crags; but still she toiled on to her destination.

"Will he be there?" she said, wildly. "Oh, if after all he should not come! It seems madness, for me to expect him in such a storm; but, if he should, it would never do for me to be absent. Oh, saints in heaven! what lightning," she said, as pale with terror, she hid her face in her hands.

But there was no time to pause—even now, he might be waiting for her, on the beach; and still, on through night, and rain, and storm she pressed, until at last, drenched, dripping, and totally exhausted, she gained the wet, slippery beach.

Half dead, with cold and exhaustion, she sank on a rock, and cowered beneath the pitiless blast. The dull booming of the waves near sent a thrill of nameless awe and horror, into her very soul.

She could not long sit there, exposed to the peltings of the storm; so, wrapping her mantle still more closely around her, she rose with a shiver, and strove to pierce through the thick darkness, in search of that loved form.

In vain! The gloom of Hades could not be deeper than that which enveloped every object.

But, at that instant, there came a flash of lightning, illuminating, for a single moment, with a blue, unearthly glare, the bleak, slippery shingle, and revealing the black, heaving sea, with its foam-crested billows. Nothing more. As far as she could strain her eyes, no living thing but herself, stood on the shore.

"Oh, why does he not come?" was her heart's agonized cry. "Does he not know, in spite of storm and tempest, I am awaiting him here?"

Another flash of lightning, revealing the dark, deserted beach, the wildly shrieking ocean, and a pair of gleaming, serpent-like eyes, watching from behind a rock, revealing the slight, delicate form of a female standing alone on the shore.

"Oh, he will not come! I know it! Shall I stay here longer, or shall I go home!" thought Christie, in an agony of doubt.

Still another lurid blaze of flame! And now, looking up, she uttered a cry of joy; for the tall figure of a man, wrapped in a cloak, was seen descending the rocks, coming toward her.

"Oh, he is here! he is here!" was her joyful cry. "Dearest, dearest Willard! I knew you would come!" And springing forward she threw herself into his arms.

He did not speak—he did not move—only he drew a step back and folded his arms over his breast.

"Dearest Willard! I feared you would not come; but, oh! I am so glad you are with me once more!" And her encircling arms clasped him closer, while her sunny head sank on his breast.

With the storm within and the storm without, he heard not, heeded not the name of Willard. But another flash of heaven's fire showed him a slight, slender form, with the shining, golden hair of his faithless wife.

And now, for the first time, she noticed his strange silence; and lifted her sweet face in surprise, saying:

"What is the matter? Why do you not speak to me? What have I done? Oh, I am so sorry, if I have angered you. What, what have I done? Oh, indeed, I love you more than life!"

His teeth closed together with a galvanic snap, his eyes were like two living coals set in a ghastly skull, and his hand clutched something within the folds of his cloak with a convulsive grasp.

And still she clung to him, and still he maintained that strange silence.

"Tell me what I have done? Speak to me, or I shall die!" she cried out, in anguish and terror. "Oh, indeed, I love you better than any one in the world! I would die sooner than offend you!"

"Die, then!" fairly shrieked the maddened man; "die, since your own lips have proclaimed your guilt!" And clutching her fiercely by the throat,

he plunged the hidden knife into her side.

One piercing, terrific shriek, and she sank writhing, quivering at his feet in mortal agony. And the wretched maniac above her unable to speak, or move, or think, with distending eyeballs, glazing eyes—his ghastly face like that of the dead—his trembling hands red with her life-blood—stood rooted to the ground, caring not, feeling not the furious storm now.

Was she dead? Would that wild, appalling shriek be repeated? He listened, palsied with horror. Naught met his ear but the shrieking of the warring elements.

Just at that instant there came a blaze of lightning, as though heaven and earth were on fire, and he beheld that little, child-like form lying stiff and rigid at his feet, the head fallen back; the blue lips parted, as if from them the quivering soul had taken its flight; the arms lying limp and lifeless by her side; the bright, golden hair, half shading, the cold, beautiful face, on which the pitiless rain wildly beat.

All his jealousy, his hatred, passed away with that pitiful sight; and the passionate love, the adoring worship his heart had first felt for her returned like a swelling flood. The memory of the time when she had left home, and friends, and all, to fly with him—when she had first been his loved and loving bride—bright, happy, and beautiful—came back in overwhelming force. And now she was dead—dead by his hand!

"Oh, Heaven! what have I done? Oh, my wife! my wife! my beautiful murdered Laura! Oh, what have I done? My love! speak—look up! live for me once more! Oh, she is dead! and I am her murderer!" And with a shriek of agony, the wretched man fell prone on his face beside her.

But now there came another sound more terrible than all else. Swollen by the heavy rain, the sea was rising on the island.

With the roar of a beast of prey, the furious waves, lashing themselves into foam, rushed upon the shore. It recalled the miserable assassin from his frenzy of despair; and with the instinct of self-preservation that never

deserts us while life remains, he seized the cold, stark form, and fled wildly up the beach.

But just then—had the infernal regions yielded up their hosts to pursue him?—a human form, bearing tin figure of a woman, revealed by the quick flashes of lightning, came flying toward him, her uncovered hair streaming in the gale—her wild eyes glaring with the fires of madness.

Her eyes fell upon him and his bleeding burden at the same instant; and throwing up her arms, with a piercing cry of "Murder! murder!" that pealed high above the raging of the storm, she fled in the direction of Campbell's Lodge.

That appalling cry, that awful apparition, drove the last spark of reason from his maddening brain. With a perfect yell of terror, he flung his lifeless burden on the rocks, and fled from the spot as if pursued by the avenger of blood.

CHAPTER XXII.

NEXT MORNING.

"Between the enacting of a dreadful deed
And the first motion, all the interim is
Like the phantasma of a hideous dream."—SHAKESPEARE.

With blood on his hands, with horror, insanity, and wildest woe in his eyes; and worse, far worse! with the dreadful mark of Cain branded indelibly on his brow, the wretched man fled—hating himself, his crime, the earth, and heaven—only longing to fly far away, where human eyes would never more behold him, clutching his breast with his pale, talon-like fingers, as if to tear hence his insufferable agony and remorse.

On he went—flying over rocks, and chasms, and uprooted trees—on, on, still on, unable to stop. The waves were wildly, madly cannonading against the banks, as if they would tear their way to where he stood, and bodily engulf him; but he heard nothing, save that unearthly cry of "Murder!" saw nothing but the cold, still face and lifeless form of his murdered wife.

Panting, tottering, exhausted, he fell heavily at last on the ground—shuddering, gasping, collapsed. The deafening roar of the waves still rising and booming on the beach, the crash of the thunder, the wild discord of the raging elements were serenest music, compared with the tumult, the terror of the unspeakable horror filling his soul.

"What have I done?—what have I done!" was the cry that still rived its way up through his tortured heart. And the wind and waves, in their terrific uproar, seemed answering the cry with "*Murder! murder!*"

Midnight approached, and the storm began to abate, the rain ceased to fall, and the mighty waters began sullenly retreating from the shore.

But still the stricken man lay prone on the ground, dead to everything above, around, about him, with that gnawing, unutterable remorse at his heart.

Another hour waned. The clouds rolled away, the lightning had ceased, the wind abated its fury, and the troubled, heaving waves were slowly calming down. And, suddenly, from behind a cloud, broke forth the moon—brightly, gloriously, grandly shedding her soft, silvery radiance over sea and land.

For the first time the murderer ventured to look up. Morning was near at hand, and must not find him at the scene of the tragedy.

"What is to be done next?" was the thought that arose through all the distracting rush of grief, horror, and remorse. "She will be missed; and if I am found here I will be taken for the murderer, and—" A shuddering spasm closed the sentence.

He rose to his feet, but tottered, so he could hardly walk; and, as if hurried by some uncontrollable impulse, took the road leading to the beach.

He reached the spot, where, in his first wild impulse of terror, he had dropped the body; but, far beyond that, the waves had risen, and the lifeless form was gone—swept away by the boiling waters.

A groan, so deep and hollow, that it seemed like rending his very heart, broke from his lips at the sight—his murdered Laura had found a grave in the boundless sea.

A footstep behind met his ear, and in terror he turned to fly; but, seeing only the half-witted boy, who had brought him over, he restrained himself and stood still.

Even through the dull mist of his clouded brain, the ghastly face before him, struck terror to the boy's soul. And well it might; for, with that white, death-like face, branded with a look of unutterable horror; those ashen lips, sunken, collapsed cheeks, glazing eyes, shuddering form, and trembling hands, he looked like a corpse galvanized for a moment, into a hideous semblance of life.

The words he had been about to say, died on the boy's lips; and, with distended mouth, and eyes all agape with surprise and fear, he stared at him in stupid bewilderment.

"Well?" came at length, from Courtney's lips, in a voice so hollow, that it seemed to issue from an empty coffin.

"What's the matter?" said the boy, "frightened by the storm?"

"What do you want?" again came in deep, husky tones from his livid lips.

"Why, you said you wanted to get back afore morning, and I reckon we can start now. The sea runs pretty high, yet, but I guess there ain't no danger."

Like a man in a dream, Courtney passed his hand across his brow, as though to clear away a cloud. Again, self-preservation, "the first law of nature," rose before him overcoming every other feeling. His eyes wandered mechanically to the fatal spot, and he turned away with a shudder.

"Can we reach N—— before morning breaks?" he asked.

"I reckon so?" was the answer, "if we start now."

"Do you think there is any danger?"

"Don't think there is. You'll be apt to be sea-sick, though," said the boy; "waves run pooty high. But what makes you speak so hoarse, and look so scared, as if you'd seed a ghost? P'r'aps you did, too; they say there's one up in that old house, there."

"Let us go!" said Courtney, unheeding his words, as he folded his cloak closer around him, and started in the direction of the boat.

The boy shuffled after him, to where the boat now lay, high and dry on the strand, requiring the united efforts of both, to launch her into the water.

"Precious hard time I had of it, all night in the storm," said the lad, as he took the oars; "got soaked right through; and, by golly! if there wasn't some thunder! I never wants to be out such a night again."

The boat was pitching and tossing wildly on the heaving waves, threatening each moment to capsize; but Courtney, lost to all sense of personal danger, sat striving to dispel the cloud of horror and remorse from his mind, and answer the momentous question: "What is to be done next?" His wife would assuredly be missed. How was her sudden disappearance to be accounted for? It seemed probable that none but Captain Campbell knew of her intended visit to the isle, save the boy who had brought her over; and, in waiting on the dark, dangerous beach, in such a wild tempest, with the advancing tide rising on the shore, what would be more natural than that she had been accidentally overtaken, and swept away by the rapid rising of the waves?

The mist was passing away from his mind, his burning fever of excitement was abated by the cool sea-breeze, and every faculty, preternaturally sharpened by the fear of being discovered as a murderer, was at work. Of the stupid lad who had brought him to the island he felt no fear. Before the coming day's sun had set he would in all probability, have forgotten all about it, and none else knew of the visit. He would endeavor to hide all traces of guilt, and be the most zealous in the search after the lost one. Perhaps, too, suspicion might fasten on Captain Campbell, and *then* how amply would he be revenged! He thought of the note appointing the meeting, and felt in his pocket for it, but it was gone. No matter—so that he himself was not criminated, it mattered not.

Then came another thought: How was he to account for his absence during the night? It seemed scarcely probable that his wife had told any of the inmates of the parsonage of their angry parting and his brutal blow—she had too much pride for that—and they could easily be made to believe that sudden business had called him away. Doubtless, they would think it strange he had not told them before going; but as he had already acquired a character for eccentricity from his gloomy reserve, it would be readily set down to that. He had business at Westport—he would go there—remain for some hours, and return to N—— before night.

His plans thus rapidly arranged, he proceeded to carry immediately into execution. Lifting his head, he said, briefly:

"I have changed my mind. I will not go to N——. Take me to Westport."

Regarding him for a moment with his customary vacant stare, the boy, without a word, turned the boat in the direction indicated.

The rising sun was reddening the orient before they reached Westport. And Edgar Courtney having paid the boy, dismissed him, and sauntered about the town until the business of the day would begin.

Gradually the streets began to fill; men on their way to their daily labor passed him in groups, now and then stopping to gaze in wonder at the tall,

muffled figure, pacing through the streets as though he were hastening for life or death.

He noticed this scrutiny at last, and slackened his rapid strides, muttering inwardly:

"This will never do. I must not allow my feelings to carry me away thus. I must be calm, or I may be suspected. Nothing but coolness will save me now."

Turning down the collar of his cloak, and pushing up his hat, that the cool morning air might fan his feverish brow, he turned in the direction of the Westport House.

The door had just been opened, and the rooms had that dreary, uncomfortable look large, lonely rooms always wear in the gray dawn of the morning, a yawning waiter, half-asleep, passed him, staring with lack-luster eyes, as though he had seen a ghost, and a slip-shod, frizzle-headed chambermaid uttered a faint scream as her eyes fell on his haggard face and wet garments.

"Let me have a private room immediately," was his command to the waiter.

"Yes, sir; this way, sir," said the man, recovering from his surprise at the entrance of so strange-looking an individual.

He ushered him into a neat, comfortably furnished room, and Courtney threw himself into a chair, and said:

"Light a fire here, and bring me up a cigar and a cup of strong coffee."

"A fire, sir," said the waiter, surprised at such a demand in summer.

"Yes, sir, a fire; did I not speak plainly enough," said Courtney, in a tone that sent the man hastily from the room.

With his garments soaked through, he began to feel cold and chilled; though in the fever of his mind, up to the present, he had not observed it. A

fire was soon kindled, and spreading his cloak and outer clothes before it to dry, he threw himself on his bed to try and lose the maddening recollection of the past night in sleep.

Totally exhausted by fatigue and excitement, he succeeded at last, but only to re-act over again in his dreams the catastrophe of the preceding hours. Again he saw the lifeless form of his murdered wife lying rigid at his feet; then would flit before his horror-stricken gaze the ghostly apparition of the isle, with its wild, terrific shriek of "murderer!" then the gallows, the coffin, the hangman, with all the fearful paraphernalia of the felon's death, would rise in ghastly array before his distorted imagination; he could feel the very rope encircling his neck, and by some strange contradiction, his wife, bright, beautiful, and happy as he had first known her, stood smilingly adjusting it, and stranger still, he felt no surprise at seeing her there; he heard the fatal signal given, the drop sliding from beneath his feet, and with a shriek of terror he sprang up out of bed, the cold perspiration starting from every pore.

"Great Heaven! am I never to lose the recollection of that fearful night, and my more awful crime? Oh, for the fabled waters of Lethe to drown recollection! Must I forever go through the world with this mark of Cain?—this red-hot brand of murder on my face, as well as on my soul? Saints in heaven! should this dream prove true?"

The guilty man paused, while his whole frame shook, and his teeth chattered as though he had the ague.

"And yet it need not, unless this paltry cowardice of mine betrays me," he again cried, starting wildly up and pacing the room. "How many murderers walk in the open sunshine, in the broad face of day, through the very heart of our most crowded cities, with impunity? It only requires nerve, courage, boldness, to face the worst, and I can defy Satan himself and all his hosts. Others have committed murder before me, without any provocation to excuse them, and it troubled them not. Why, then, should I, who only acted in vindication of my wounded honor—and if ever murder is excusable, surely it was in my case? Why should I tremble, and shrink from my very shadow? Courage, coward soul? These dreams and phantoms of a disordered brain will pass away, with time. When this affair in some degree

blows over, I will hasten to London—to Paris; and in the excitement and turmoil of a great city, forget the miserable past. Courage, Edgar Courtney! Thou hast begun a desperate game, and all thy boldness is required to carry thee through! Yes, I will put a bold face on it, and dare the worst. And, now Satan—for on thee alone dare I call now—help me in this extremity, if ever thou didst help me before!"

He paused before the glass, with clenched hands and teeth, and almost started to see the wild, fierce look his ghastly face wore. His long elf-locks fell in wild disorder over his face and neck, and added to the haggard pallor of his countenance.

"This craven face will never do," he said; "I must compose it. And this disheveled hair must not hang thus disordered. She used to twine it round her fingers once," he said, the look of agonizing sorrow and remorse coming back: "but that time long ago passed away. I must not think of it more—let me only think of this man for whose love she forgot she was already a wife."

The thought did bring a sort of fierce composure. Brushing back the heavy black hair off his face and brow, he threw on his now dry cloak, lighted one of the cigars that lay on the table, and then rang a peal that presently brought up one of the servants. When the man entered Courtney was lying back in the pillowy depths of a lounging-chair, his feet extended to the fire, looking, as he smoked—or, rather, trying to look—the very picture of nonchalance. It was a miserable failure after all, as the wildly gleaming eyes still testified.

"Breakfast!" he said, briefly, to the bowing waiter.

"Yes, sir. What will you please to have, sir?"

"Anything—coffee—waffles. I don't care what—only be quick!"

The man disappeared, and presently returned with fragrant coffee, delicious waffles, and eggs.

Courtney seated himself at the table, and drank cup after cup of the strong coffee; but the first morsel he attempted to swallow seemed to choke him.

The grateful beverage soothed his excited nerves more speedily than all his reasoning and philosophy had done.

Drawing out his watch and perceiving it was after ten, he arose, put on his hat, and having settled his bill, was about to leave the house, when he was suddenly confronted by Captain Guy Campbell, who came running up the outer steps, laughing at something that had occurred outside.

For one moment the guilty soul of Courtney quailed before the bold, bright glance of the young captain's eye—for one moment only; the next, he looked up and met his gaze with one of deep, sullen hate.

Touching his hat coldly, the young captain passed on, and Courtney emerged into the street, all his fierce hatred and jealousy returning with fourfold bitterness at the thought of the contrast between them—he himself so ghastly, so pallid, so haggard, and this lover of his dead wife so handsome, dashing, and careless.

"Heaven's worst curses forever light upon him!" he hissed, fiercely. "That he—he who has caused me to do what I have done—should be happy, flattered, and beloved, while I—I whom he drove to madness, should be doomed to a life of torture! They tell us of a certain place—I doubted its existence once, I do so no longer, for I feel already some of its torments."

And any one seeing the demoniac look his face wore, would not have doubted his words at that instant. Entering a livery-stable, he hired a horse and gig, and immediately started in the direction of N——.

He dreaded the coming scene, and the false part he would have to act in it; and yet, as if impelled by some inward power, over which he had no control, he whipped and lashed the horse in a sort of frenzy of impatience to be there. On he flew, his horse foaming and reeking in sweat—houses, people, streets, passing with the velocity of a dream, and yet all too slow for the burning, maniac impatience that was consuming him.

He reached N——, and consigning his panting horse to the care of an innkeeper, within half a mile of the parsonage, he set out for it at a rapid walk. Ten minutes brought him to it, and in spite of his haste, he paused, as its sober, gray front and green window-shutters rose before him, while a vague thrill of nameless terror shot through him.

It was no time to hesitate now—the worst must be faced at once. Drawing his breath in hard, he approached the door and rang.

The summons was answered by Jenny. As he passed into the hall, he encountered Mrs. Brantwell coming down stairs. That good lady's pleasant, cheery face wore a look of unusual gravity as she greeted him, that for a moment startled him out of his composure.

"Is my—I wish to see my wife, madam," he managed to say, while every word seemed choking him.

"Your wife is in the parlor, Mr. Courtney," said Mrs. Brantwell, gravely, as she held open the door for him to enter—ascribing his evident agitation to a far different cause.

For one moment his wild, maniac eyes were riveted upon her with a look that actually terrified the good minister's wife. Reeling unsteadily, as though he had suddenly received a violent blow, he passed her and entered the parlor.

And there before him on the sofa, supported by pillows, her little pale face looking out from its masses of floating golden hair, with a look of beseeching entreaty to be forgiven, lay she whom he supposed buried forever under the wild waves. For in instant he stood paralyzed, speechless, with ashen face and dilating eyes. And then the last glimpse of hope and reason fled, and with a terrific cry, that froze the life-blood of the hearers, the wretched man fell senseless on the floor.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MORNING IN THE ISLAND.

"And she was gone, and yet they breathed,
But not the breath of human life—
A serpent round each heart was wreathed,
And stung their every thought to strife."—BYRON.

And how dawned that morn on Campbell's Lodge? How on the widow's cottage?

With that appalling shriek, that most terrible of all cries, that unearthly scream of murder ringing in her ears, Sibyl sprang from her sleepless couch, and while her very heart thrilled with horror, waited for what was to come next.

Through the lonely, silent old house, it echoed and re-echoed like a knell of doom; but it was not repeated. She could hear the wild wind rushing through the open door, awakening strange, ghostly noises through the high, empty rooms, but nothing else.

What had happened? What was to be done? Was it only fancy? Had she been dreaming, and was that cry of murder only a delusion, after all?

No, it could not be; for, just as she was beginning to think it was only the effect of fancy, she distinctly heard footsteps flying up the stairs—a light, fleet step that paused at her own door.

Sibyl's heart stood still. It was but for an instant; then the same piercing cry of "Murder!" rang through the lonely house once more; the quick, light footsteps flew down the long, winding staircase again, passed through the echoing hall below, and then the large, heavy front door was slammed to, with a violence that made the old house shake, and all was again profoundly still.

In one instant, all the wild, ghostly legends she had ever heard of the old mansion, rushed through Sibyl's mind. Heaven of heavens! could this be the spirit of some murdered victim, returning from its bloody grave, to seek for retribution on its murderer? Sibyl Campbell, naturally brave, was yet, as we know, superstitious, and the terror that mortal man could never have inspired, filled her very soul at the thought. Shaking as with an ague fit, for an instant she crouched upon the floor, her face hidden in her hands, while memory recalled the tale she had once heard, of a woman stabbed by one of her dark, fierce forefathers, in that very house, whose restless spirit (the legend ran) came when the storm was wildest, and the furious tempest at its height, from her troubled tomb amid the heaving waves, to denounce woe on her murderer and on his descendants.

How long she sat she knew not, but the sound of the old clock below, striking in deep, sonorous tones, that echoed startlingly through the silent house, one! two! three! recalled her once more to life.

That earthly sound brought her once more to herself. She raised her head and looked wildly around. Aunt Moll lay near her, breathing heavily, and sleeping the deep, dreamless, death-like sleep that seems peculiar to the children of Africa. The consciousness of companionship—even though that companion was but a poor, helpless old negress—brought renewed courage. Rising, and half ashamed of her superstitious fears, she walked to the window and looked out.

The storm had passed away and the moon was shining brightly, lighting up with her calm, pale radiance what had so lately been a scene of deepest darkness and wildest storm. Her eyes wandered over the island; all there was still and serene. From thence they strayed out over the boundless sea, and suddenly rested on an object that banished all fears of supernatural visitors, and brought with it a new alarm.

It was a boat—a boat that had evidently just put off from the isle, and was rapidly disappearing in the distance.

It held but two persons—she could see that. But what meant this midnight visit, in darkness and storm, to that lonely isle? What terrible deed, under cover of night and tempest, had been perpetrated this night?

She caught her breath quick and short; but now that she feared only earthly dangers and earthly foes, there came with this discovery a deep breath of relief. Some one might still be concealed in the house—some one who indulged in the popular belief that there was money concealed in it somewhere.

There was no time to hesitate—the house must be searched. Lem must be aroused to assist in it. He slept in the opposite wing of the building, and, supposing any one to be concealed in the empty rooms, the journey was a hazardous one; but it could not be avoided. Sibyl grew quite calm in the face of this new danger, and, stooping, she shook Aunt Moll by the shoulder to arouse her.

A deep grunt, as the sleeper turned over and fell into a deeper sleep than before, rewarded her exertions.

"Aunt Moll, wake! Wake, I say! There are people in the house," said Sibyl, in an anxious whisper, as she shook her more violently than before. "Oh, Heaven! what shall I do? Aunt Moll, wake! wake! Do you want to be murdered in your bed?" cried Sibyl, giving her a shake that might have aroused the seven sleepers.

"Dar, Lem—dar! Don't shake yer ole mammy, dat's a good chile; 'tain't 'spectful, nor likewise——"

Here the sleeper sank into deep slumber, muttering an incomprehensible something.

There was no time to lose—it was fruitless labor seeking to wake Aunt Moll. Seizing a lamp, she hastily struck a light, and hastened out into the windy hall, pausing for an instant at the head of the long, black staircase, to listen, ere she ventured further.

The silence of the grave still reigned. Nothing met her ear but the faint echo of her own light footsteps.

Like a shadow she flitted down the dark, cheerless staircase, through the lower hall into the kitchen, and here she again paused to reflect.

The moonlight was pouring a light through the two low-curtained windows and rendering the flickering lamp superfluous. Everything stood precisely as it had the night before; chairs and table were in their places, and had not been disturbed; a few red coals still glowed like fierce eyes amid the darkness of the great, black, yawning chimney—it was evident that no one had been intruding here.

Pushing open a door leading directly from the kitchen into Lem's sleeping-room, she entered it, and stood beside him. She could not spare time to try to arouse him by ordinary means, so seizing a large pitcher of cold water that stood near, she unceremoniously dashed it in his face, drenching him completely.

The shock aroused him, as it well might; and, uttering a fearful yell of mingled rage and terror, Lem sat bolt upright in bed, unable to distinguish anything for the light of the lamp that flashed directly in his eyes.

"Oh!" was his first ejaculation; "I's gwine for to be 'sassinated 'thout a minit's warnin'!"

"Hush, hush, Lem! for Heaven's sake! It's only I, your mistress!" said Sibyl, putting one little white hand over his huge black mouth. "Get up and dress yourself as quickly as possible, and join me in the kitchen, where I will wait until you come."

And without waiting for the host of questions she saw hovering on his lips, Sibyl passed out to the kitchen to wait for him.

With teeth chattering, and shaking with terror, Lem proceeded, with trembling fingers, to draw on his clothes. Without waiting to make a very elaborate toilet, he passed out to the kitchen, where Sibyl stood waiting in a fever of impatience.

"Miss Sibyl!" he exclaimed, in trembling tones, "What's happened? Is we all gwine to be killed, or anything?"

"Hush! No, I hope not. But—be silent now—I greatly fear there are men concealed in the house somewhere. Hush, I tell you!" she repeated, with a

flash of her bright eye that arrested the exclamation of terror on Lem's lips. "This is no time for idle exclamations. I only say I think there may be men here; if there are, your noise will only reveal where we are; if there are not, there is no occasion for your terror. Come, follow me; we must search the house."

"Oh, Miss Sibyl, I's afeard! 'Deed, de Lord knows I's afeard!" said poor Lem, in shivering tones.

"Pshaw! Do you think you will be any safer here? Come, give over your fears, and follow me," said Sibyl, as she turned toward the hall once more.

"Oh, Miss Sibyl, don't wenture! We'll be all 'sassinated if you do."

And poor Lem wrung his hands in mortal terror, while Sibyl hastened from room to room, but, as may be anticipated, finding no one.

"What can this mean?" she thought. "There was certainly some one here to-night, and yet I find everything undisturbed. This is most strange; they must have gone, too, for the house is perfectly still. Oh, what could that cry of murder have meant? That voice and that light, quick step belonged to a woman, most certainly; yet what woman would venture out in such a storm? The girl Christie would not come, she is too timid, neither was it her voice. What—what can it all mean?"

Suddenly the recollection of the midnight visitor, the fair, pale woman with the dark, wild hair and eyes, who had bent over the couch of Willard Drummond the first night he had spent in the lodge came over her. It must have been that same supernatural visitant; and Sibyl grew for an instant faint and sick at the thought.

Further search in the house was fruitless; but her impatience would not permit her to wait until morning to investigate further. Returning to the kitchen, where Lem was on his knees, alternately groaning, praying, and bemoaning his hard fate, she commanded him to get his hat and come out with her, to see if any traces of intruders could be found on the island.

In vain did Lem begin expostulating; Sibyl cut it short by threatening him with her brother's future vengeance if he did not instantly obey. There was no help for it; and trembling in every limb, the frightened darkey followed his imperious mistress from the house.

All without was so calm and peaceful—all the more calm and peaceful, contrasted with the wild uproar of the storm a few hours before—that it seemed like sacrilege even to think of deeds of violence in such a spot. A delicious odor from the distant pine forest filled the air, and the fitful sighing of the wind among the trees, and the dull booming of the waves on the shore, alone broke the silence of early morning. The moonlight, obscured now and then by fitful clouds, brightly illumined their way, but nothing betrayed the presence of others save themselves on the isle that night.

Sibyl took the path leading in the direction from which the boat had started, but there the waves were breaking with the same monotonous sound, giving no indication of any one having been there. The tide had now receded sufficiently to allow Sibyl to walk around the beach; and, tempted by the calm beauty of the night, and feeling a sense of security in the open air, she strolled on until she reached the spot where Courtney, in his first moment of alarm, had dropped the body of Christie.

Something caught her eye at some distance further up, fluttering from a prickly thorn bush, evidently a fragment of dress. Feeling as if she had at last found some clew, she approached the spot and found it to be a white muslin handkerchief, but almost saturated with *blood*!

A sensation of horror came over Sibyl. Had there really been a murder committed there that night? Shrinking from touching it, she was about leaving the spot, when near one corner, free from the horrible stains that covered the rest, her eye fell on something like a name or initials. Taking the corner with the tips of her fingers, she beheld, marked in full, the name "Christina."

It was hers, then, Christie's. What could have brought it there? Had anything happened to her?

"Oh, impossible!" thought Sibyl. "Who is there in the world to whom she is of the slightest importance, living or dead, except indeed, to me? Willard has gone; she is, in all probability, safely asleep in yonder cottage; and I am only torturing myself by useless fears. I will return to the lodge, and leave to-morrow to unravel this mystery."

So saying, to the great satisfaction of her attendant, who had all this time been cautiously walking behind her, looking fearfully at every tree and rock, and fancying an assassin in their very shadows, Sibyl turned slowly toward the old hall. On their way they passed the cottage of Mrs. Tom. All was perfectly quiet there; and, mystified and uneasy still, Sibyl sought her room once more, to wonder and speculate upon the events of the night until morning should dawn.

The bustling little widow, Mrs. Tom—like all those who seem to have least occasion for it—was in the habit of getting up very early in the morning, to the serious annoyance of young Mr. Henley, who preferred letting the sun rise without impertinently staring at him while doing so. Christie, too, would just as soon not be awakened from some rosy dream at daylight, by the shrill voice of the old lady; but Aunt Tom's word was law, and when she called there was no such word as disobey. The little widow was quite aware of their disinclination for early rising, therefore great was her amazement, upon going to the outer room, to find Christie absent, the bed made, the door unlocked, giving evidence of her being up and out.

"Well!" ejaculated Mrs. Tom, "what won't come to pass! Next thing, I s'pose, will be Carl offering to wash the dishes without bein' told. Shouldn't wonder if he was up and off this mornin', too. Fust time I ever knew Christie to git up 'thout bein' told. Here, you Carl! Carl!" shrieked Mrs. Tom, going to the foot of the ladder and looking up through the trap.

A sound she was well accustomed to, something between a snort and a groan, was Mr. Henley's answer.

"Hurry up there, ef ye don't want me to go up and help ye," called Mrs. Tom, "ef I do, ye'll wish ye had got up 'thout my help, that's all. I'll dress you, I reckon."

Now, as this was a formula Mrs. Tom had repeated every morning for some ten years, without ever being known to vary it in the least, Carl was too well accustomed to it to venture to disobey. Accordingly, he sprang up, and began dressing in all haste, considering he was half asleep during the performance. Mrs. Tom meanwhile set about kindling a fire, and preparing the breakfast, a meal which was usually over before the sun was up, and dressed for the day.

"Where's Christie?" was Carl's first question, upon reaching the kitchen, as he glanced in the direction of the settle, where, every morning, about this hour, he was accustomed to see her making her bed.

"Up and gathering sea-moss an hour ago, I'll be bound," replied Mrs. Tom, "same as you would do, ef you wasn't the most shiftless young vagabones on the face of the airth! I hope now this will be a warning to you for the future. Think o' all the sea-moss, and berries, and sich, you could have gathered every mornin' 'fore this time, ef you was worth your salt. But it al'ays was my luck, ever since I was born, to be plagued with a set o' the laziest, most good-for-nothing bein's ever I saw upon the face of the airth! Stand out o' my way, will you, ef you don't want to break my neck!"

Trot, the unfortunate cat, came in as usual, for the latter part of this outburst of eloquence, emphasized by a vigorous kick.

"Lor' sakes, Aunt Tom," exclaimed Master Carl, roused to something like indignation by this unexpected harangue. "You don't want a feller to get up in the middle of the night, do you? By granny, it's too bad! No matter how early a feller gets up, you always think he ought to get up earlier still. 'Spouse you'll be waking me 'bout midnight pretty soon, ugh?"

Most of this reply was delivered *pianissimo* (that being the most prudent tone), and accordingly did not reach Mrs. Tom's ears, who was blustering out and in, sharp and breezy as the goddess of morning, bringing in wood and water, and beginning to knead biscuit.

"Yes, grumble," said the active little woman. "I never knew you doing anything else ef you was told to work. Pity if a great, big, lazy fellow like you can't get up as airly as Christie, a delicky young gal, too! See her, up

and out while you was snorin' away like a pig up there! you ought to be 'shamed o' yourself."

"I say, Aunt Tom," said Carl, looking up with as much interest as his usually expressionless face could assume, "was she out a little 'fore twelve, when it was a-stormin' so?"

"Fore twelve?" said Mrs. Tom, in a high key, as she imagined her dutiful nephew was making fun of her. "Look here now, you Carl, ef I hadn't my hands in this dough, I'd box your ears till you wouldn't ask me such a question agin."

"Now, Aunt Tom," said Carl, in a whimpering tone, "it's too bad, so it is; a feller carn't say nothing you don't get mad at. If it wan't Christie, 'twas Miss Sibyl! I saw some woman or other out, 'bout midnight, running like mad through the storm—an' what's more, I heard her, too."

"My conscience!" ejaculated Mrs. Tom, lifting up her floury hands in holy terror, "my conscience! how that there boy does lie! Carl Henley, do you mean to tell me that you was out in that storm last night, and saw Miss Sibyl?"

"No, I wa'n't out myself," said Mr. Henley, tearing the comb fiercely through his tow-locks, in his deep indignation at having his veracity and reason both doubted. "But I seen what I saw, for all that. S'pose you ha'n't forgotten, Aunt Tom, that there's a pane of glass broken out of one of the windows up stairs, with your old bonnet stuck through it. Well," said Carl, in a slightly subdued tone, "your old bonnet got blown out with the wind last night, and the fust thing woke me was the rain a-beating into my face. So I jumped up to fix it, and, jest as I got to the window, there came such a flash of lightning as I never seen afore. Blamed if I didn't think I was a goner! Everything for nigh onto ten minutes was considerably clearer nor day; and just then I saw a woman flying through the storm, like as if all creation was after her, and as she passed the house, I heard her singing out *mother*, or *murder*—I don't know which. I was pretty considerable scared, though I did think it was only Miss Sibyl, for she had long black hair a-flyin' behind her, jist like hers. When the flash went away I couldn't see nothing, for it was as dark as all outdoors; and though I was scared of the

storm, I wanted to see if it was Miss Sibyl, and I stood there, waiting for the next; but when it came, she was gone."

"My sakes!" exclaimed Mrs. Tom, whose deepest interest was for the moment arrested. "What did you do then?"

"Well then," said Carl, in a lower key, as though sorry his story had not a more thrilling sequel, "I got tired a-settin' up, so I laid down and went to sleep. Who do you s'pose it was, Aunt Tom?"

"I don't think it was anybody. S'pose folks is fools to run out in sich a storm as that there? I know Miss Sibyl had queer notions sometimes, but she has more sense, I reckon, nor to go out philandering through the rain."

"Well, it must have been somebody," said Carl, with a sort of dogged resolution. "I know I seen a woman running like a house a-fire through all the wind and rain."

"No, you didn't," said Aunt Tom, shortly. "'Twas only a touch of nightmare; so don't bother me any more about it."

Thus ignominiously silenced, Carl proceeded lazily to assist in the preparation for breakfast, which he would greatly have preferred discussing, if left to himself, to getting ready.

The coffee and biscuits were smoking at length, on the table, but Christie did not make her appearance.

"Very strange," said Mrs. Tom; "don't see what in the world keeps the gal. Here it is going on to seven o'clock, and my work a-standing, while we're waiting for her. Carl, jest run out and see ef you can see her."

Carl started on his mission, but soon returned, announcing that nothing was to be seen of her.

"Then there's no use a-waiting any longer," said Mrs. Tom. "Set down; may be she's gone to the lodge to breakfast with Miss Sibyl."

The meal was over, the service cleared away. Carl set out to weed the garden; Mrs. Tom sat down to her wheel. But still Christie came not.

"Very strange!" observed Mrs. Tom, at last beginning to grow uneasy. "Ten o'clock, and Christie not here yet! My stars! I wonder ef anything can hev happened to her? I've noticed she's been kind o' silent and pinin' away for the last two or three days. I hope nothin's happened to her. Oh, here she is now! No 'tain't neither; it's Miss Sibyl."

The little widow rose, and came smiling and cheery to the door to welcome her guest.

"Well, Miss Sibyl, I'm glad to see you. Walk in and sit down. I thought when you and Master Guy came home from furrin parts you'd stay comfortably on the island; but, 'stead o' that, we never see you no more nor if you was in Canada or Rooshia, or any other outlandish place. How's the captain, and that Mr. Drummond?"

"They were both very well when I saw them last," said Sibyl, smiling slightly, as she took the proffered seat, from which Mrs. Tom had been whisking some invisible particles of dust with her apron. "I hope you have been quite well yourself, Mrs. Tom?"

"Oh, tol'bul," said Mrs. Tom, complacently. "Fact is, you know, I hain't no time to be sick; it's only rich folks, what's well off, can afford to indulge in sickness. So you've had a great fortune left you, Miss Sibyl, I've hearn tell!"

"Yes; Guy and I have received a legacy."

"Well, the Lord never does forget his critters; and every now and then something's allers sure to happen. I've allers remarked that myself. I s'pose you don't intend to stay here much longer, Miss Sibyl?"

"I rather think not. We will leave you to keep the island, Mrs. Tom. But where is your niece this morning? I do not see her!"

"She went out this morning before any of us got up, and hasn't come back yet. I'm getting rale onasy," said Mrs. Tom, anxiously, getting up and going to the door. "I thought she had gone to see you."

Sibyl gave a sudden start, and grew deathly pale as she thought of the handkerchief, the wild cry of murder, and the men leaving the island during the night. A terrible presentiment flashed across her mind, and, sick and dizzy, she fell back in her chair and pressed her hand over her heart.

"My gracious! Miss Sibyl, what's the matter? Are you sick?" said Mrs. Tom, turning suddenly, and seeing with alarm the unaccountable paleness of the young lady. "Here's some camphire; smell of it, or ye'll faint."

"Thank you, I do not require it," said Sibyl, rising with an effort, and striving to be calm. "Have you any idea what time Christie left the house?"

"Not the slightest idee; 'cause I was asleep at the time. Carl says—though there's no puttin' confidence in him—that, somewheres 'bout midnight, he seed a woman runnin' through the storm, and singin' out 'murder!' But in course he was dreaming; there couldn't hev bin any sich thing."

"Oh, merciful Heaven! then it was no delusion on my part, since I heard it, too. Oh, this is dreadful!" said Sibyl, wringing her hands.

"Miss Sibyl, what's happened?" said Mrs. Tom, growing very pale.

"Oh, Mrs. Tom! Heaven help you, Christie!"

"Christie! what of her?" cried Mrs. Tom, grasping a chair to steady herself.

"Oh, Mrs. Tom! must I tell you? Christie, I fear, went out last night in the storm, and—oh, Heaven!" said Sibyl, sinking into a chair, with a convulsive shudder.

"And what, Miss Sibyl? Tell me, quick! Was she swept away in the storm?" said Mrs. Tom, striving to strangle her trembling tones.

"Oh, worse—worse! I fear; still worse!" said Sibyl, wildly.

"Oh, my soul! what has happened? Oh, Christie! dear Christie! where are you?"

"Christie has, I fear, been waylaid and——"

"Murdered! Oh, Heaven!" exclaimed Mrs. Tom, falling back in her chair and covering her face with her hands.

There was a moment's awful silence. Then Mrs. Tom, who (no matter what the emergency) never allowed her ever-practical mind to be long overclouded, dropped her hands from before her face, and, though she was frightfully pale, said, in a voice whose firmness astonished Sibyl:

"What makes you think so, Sibyl? My poor little Christie had not an enemy in the world!"

"Oh! she had—she had!" cried Sibyl, thinking, with bitter remorse, how intensely she herself had hated her.

"Who was it?" said Mrs. Tom, starting up. "No one but a monster could have hurted one hair of her gentle head! Miss Sibyl, who do you think has done it?"

"I do not know—as Heaven hears me, I do not know!" said Sibyl, recovering herself.

"What makes you think she was murdered?" said Mrs. Tom, who by this time had recovered all her customary composure, and now fixed her eyes keenly on Sibyl's face.

"Last night I, too, like your nephew, heard the cry of murder," said Sibyl, shuddering at the recollection; "and early this morning, I discovered in a bush, down near the shore, a pocket-handkerchief, stained with blood, and marked with her name!"

"Where is the handkerchief?"

"It is there still; I did not touch it."

"Come, then, and show me the place," said Mrs. Tom, a sudden passionate outburst of sorrow breaking through all the composure she was endeavoring to assume.

Without exchanging a word, they hurried to the spot, where the ghastly handkerchief still fluttered in the breeze.

"Oh, it is hers!" exclaimed Mrs. Tom. "They have murdered her on the beach, and the tide has swept her away. Oh, Christie! Christie!"

And bowing her face in her hands, for the first time she wept passionately.

There was a long pause, broken only by Mrs. Tom's convulsive sobs. Sibyl stood wrestling with her own bitter thoughts, not daring to break in upon her grief by any useless words of comfort.

At last Mrs. Tom looked up, her tears seemingly changed to sparks of fire.

"Who has done this? *You* know!" she said, gloomily, laying her hand on Sibyl's arm.

"Heaven be merciful! I do not."

"Have you no idea? Is there no clue? Speak; for if there is law or justice in the land, those who have done this deed shall suffer."

"The only clue is one so slight that even now I do not know whether I really saw it or dreamed that I did," said Sibyl, hesitatingly.

"Speak, and tell me what it is. I must know," said Mrs. Tom, with a sort of grim vengeance.

"Then listen. Last night after the moon rose—some two hours, I should judge, after I heard that cry of murder—on going to the window to look out, I perceived a boat push off from the shore containing the forms of two men;

but so speedily did they vanish from sight, that I had barely time to catch the dark outlines of their figures. As it all passed so quickly, I am still half disposed to believe it the effect of fancy."

"No boat could reach the island in the storm last night," said Mrs. Tom, still keeping her gloomy eyes fixed on Sibyl's face.

"I know that; and that is the principal reason I have for thinking what I saw may be the effect of fancy. And yet—and yet some one must have been here, else how are we to account for the committing of the deed? And what could have induced Christie to go out in such a storm, and at such an hour?"

"I do not know; it is all wrapped in mystery," said Mrs. Tom, taking the handkerchief and turning away. "But I'll find it out—I'll discover the murderers, if I should spend my whole life in seeking for them myself."

"What do you mean to do?" said Sibyl, anxiously.

"To have the island searched the first thing. I suppose you will let Lem come and help?"

"Of course. But would it not be a better plan to go over to N—— immediately, and inform the authorities, and let them investigate the matter?"

"Carl shall take me right over," said Mrs. Tom.

"I will accompany you," said Sibyl; "we may both be needed to give testimony."

Half an hour later, the boat, containing Carl, Mrs. Tom, and Sibyl, was dancing over the water in the direction of N——, to electrify the community by the announcement of the atrocious deed.

But where, meantime was Christie? Had she really, as they so readily supposed, found a grave beneath the wild waves?

CHAPTER XXIV.

CHRISTIE.

"Then she took up her burden of life again,
Saying only, 'It might have been.'
God pity them both! and pity us all
Who vainly the dreams of youth recall,
For of all sad words of tongue or pen,
The saddest are these, 'It might have been.'"—WHITTIER.

With the cold rain falling in her face, the colder wind fanning her brow, Christie awoke from that deep swoon that had been mistaken for death.

She opened her eyes, and gazed vacantly around, but all was dark as Erebus. There was a roaring sound, as of many waters, in her ears—a vague, dull sense of some awful calamity, a heavy, suffocating feeling in her chest, a misty consciousness of some one supporting her head. Dark and dreary was the night around, but darker and drearier lay the heart in her bosom. Memory made a faint effort to regain its power, to recall some dreadful woe that pressed like leaden weights on her bosom, but in vain. Only that dull aching at her heart, only some past unutterable sorrow—that was all.

Bodily as well as mentally every faculty was prostrated. She made an effort to speak, to ask what had happened, to know where she was; but her lips moved in vain, no word came forth. She strove to rise, but at the first faint motion a sudden pang, like a dagger-thrust, pierced her breast, and she fell back in a deadly swoon once more.

When next she woke to consciousness she found herself lying in a bed, with the bright sunshine shining in broad patches on the floor. Memory had not yet resumed its throne, and of that last dreadful night she was mercifully prevented from recalling anything. She strove in vain to collect her thoughts; nothing could be remembered, only that strange aching—that vague, unspeakable pang that lay on her heart still.

She cast her eyes, in a sort of languid amaze, about the room where she lay, with a dreamy wonder how she had got there. She saw indistinctly, as we see things in a dream, a small, square room, with a rough, uncarpeted floor; two chairs, a small table, and various articles of wearing-apparel

hanging around the walls. A little stand, on which lay bottles, linen bandages, and a glass filled with a dark liquid stood near the head of the bed on which she lay. At the foot of the bed was a small, square window, covered with a dark paper blind, but through which the sunlight peeped here and there in chinks.

All was profoundly still. She could hear the flies buzzing and droning as they flew over her head; she could hear what she fancied must be trees waving gently in the wind, with a low, soothing sound, inexpressibly sweet; and like a wearied child she closed her eyes, and fell into a deep slumber.

Again she awoke; and now she knew it must be night. Some one had evidently been in the room while she slept, for the curtain had been rolled up from the window, and the moonlight came softly and brightly in. She could see, without moving, the tall, dark trees beyond; and she knew she must be in the forest. Once more her eyes wandered round the room; and reason now made a terrible effort to resume its powers. Where was she? What had happened? Who had brought her here? As her mind began to clear, and consciousness to return, question after question rose to her lips. She closed her eyes, and struggled to recall the past. Gradually the broken links in the chain of memory began to reunite. She recalled the note Willard had sent her, that appointed their meeting on the beach—that night of storm and tempest through which she had gone to meet him—that meeting—and then, with a pang sharper than death, came the terrible recollection of his plunging the knife into her side.

She could think no further, the recollection of that dreadful moment seemed driving her mad. She made an effort to rise, to cry out; but just then, a hand was laid soothingly on her forehead, and a voice met her ear, saying:

"Gently, gently, my child. Thee must not get up. Here, lie still, and drink this."

Some one—she could not tell whether it was man or woman—was bending over her, and holding the glass to her lips. Too weak to resist, she drank it off, and almost instantaneously, fell into a deep sleep.

Days, weeks passed before consciousness returned. During all that time she had a vague idea of talking, raving wildly, incoherently to Willard— imploring him not to kill her, and she would never reveal their marriage; and then shrieking aloud as though again she felt the steel entering her bosom. Sometimes, too, she fancied Sibyl standing before her, with her wild, black, menacing eyes, as she had been the last time she saw her, and once again, would she clasp her little, pale hands, and piteously implore her to spare her. Anon her mood would change, and she would speak in low, subdued tones of Mrs. Tom and Carl, and strive to rise from bed, saying wildly, "she must go home to Aunt Tom." And then, falling back exhausted, she would vaguely see a kind face bending over her, a hand holding a cooling drink to her lips, or wetting and arranging the bandages on her wound. This, too, like the rest, would pass, and life and thought would again for a time be blotted out.

But one bright, golden, August afternoon, the blue eyes opened, no longer wild with the fires of fever, but calm and serene once more. A naturally strong constitution, united with youth, and skillful though rough nursing, had triumphed at last over her long and dangerous illness.

Weak as an infant; unable to move hand or foot; pale, thin, and spiritual as a shadow, she came back to life once more. Her feet had stood on the threshold of the valley of the shadow of death, but they were not permitted to pass therein; and the soft eyes looked forth from the little wan face, with the light of reason again.

It was a glorious summer evening. From the window at her feet, she could see the tall trees crowned with sunshine, that fell like a glory on her pale, transparent brow. Through the open door, came floating in the delicious odor of flowers, and the sweet, wild songs of birds, breathing of peace and holy calm.

While she yet lay with her little, wan hands lying listlessly on the quilt, the gentle quiet of the sylvan scene stealing into her heart, too weak even to think, she heard a footstep beside her, a hand lightly arranging her pillows, and then a voice, one of the kindest Christie had ever heard, saying;

"How does thee feel to-day, my child?"

Christie lifted her eyes languidly, and saw a man bending over her. He might have been forty years of age; short, square, and ungainly in form, but with a chest and shoulders betokening vast, almost herculean strength. His hair was almost white, but dark streaks here and there showed what had been its original color; his face, with its irregular features, would have been positively ugly, had it not been for the expression of benevolence, of quiet goodness—the gentle, tender look it wore, that seemed shedding a very halo around it, and you forgot the brown skin, the rough, large features, the bushy eyebrows, and stony gray eyes in the almost womanly sweetness and softness of his smile. His dress was a long, drab coat, with blue homespun vest and trousers.

At any other time this unexpected apparition might have alarmed Christie, but that gentle voice reassured her; and she answered, faintly:

"Better, thank you."

"That is well. Thee feels weak, does thee not?"

"Oh, yes—so weak," she said, closing her eyes.

"Well, I expected as much. Thee has been very, very ill," said the man, adjusting a pillow, and shading the light, with the skillful hand of a practiced nurse.

A thousand questions were rising to Christie's lips, but she was too utterly prostrated to give them voice. She fixed her eyes wistfully on the man's face with a questioning gaze that brought him once more to her side.

"Well, my daughter, what does thee now want?"

"Tell me"—the faint whisper died away, and totally exhausted, the hand she had half raised fell again by her side.

"Does thee want to know how thou camest here?"

A faint motion of her head, and that eager, inquiring gaze, was the sole reply she could make.

"It may excite thee too much; thee had better wait until thee is stronger, child," said the man, gently.

"Now—now!" she faintly gasped, with that wild, troubled, imploring look still riveted on her face.

"Then, I found thee on the beach one wild, stormy night, three weeks ago, wounded nigh unto death."

A spasmodic shudder convulsed all her frame. Oh! what would she not have given for strength to ask for Willard! Where was he? Would he be arrested for what he had done? She longed to know that he was safe and well; all she had suffered herself was as nothing compared to that. She wanted to ask how this man had come there—where she was now—if Mrs. Tom knew of this; but, to save her soul from death, she could not utter a word.

Perhaps the man read her thoughts in that eager, almost passionate gaze, for he said:

"Thee wants to ask how I came on the island that night, does thee not?"

She made a faint motion in the affirmative.

"That would be too long a story for thee to hear now, my child. When thou art stronger I will tell thee all. Rest content with knowing that thou art safe, and with friends who will care for thee as though thou wert their own. Thou must drink this now."

One question more—one on which more than life or strength depended. Willard! Willard! she *must* ask of him.

Pushing back the proffered drink, which she knew contained some narcotic for sending her asleep, she collected all her energies for the effort and managed faintly to say:

"Was there—did you see the one who—who wounded me?"

"No, my daughter; the assassin had fled, most probably. I saw no one but thee, and made no further search. Now thee must not talk just yet. In two or three days thee will be stronger, and then I will tell thee everything thee wishes to know."

Too weak to resist, and deeply relieved that he had not seen Willard, she quaffed the proffered draught, that brought with it balmy sleep.

During the next two or three days the man was her most zealous nurse, tending her with a zeal, care, and gentle solicitude few nurses could have equaled, but resisting all her efforts to draw him into conversation.

"By and by, daughter. Be patient, and thee will learn all," was ever his firm reply, given, however, in the very gentlest of tones.

Left thus to herself and her own thoughts, as she grew stronger, Christie's mind strove to comprehend and account for the motive that had prompted Willard to commit so dreadful a deed. That it was he she never for a moment thought of doubting. That the act had been premeditated, the note he sent her appointing the meeting, on that lonely spot, at the dead hour of the night, fully proved. But his motive? That, too, she had settled in her own mind. She had heard that he loved Sibyl Campbell before he met her. Now, Sibyl was an heiress, courted and admired by all for her beauty and wealth; what so natural, then, as that he should wish to make this peerless Queen of the Isle his bride? She was the only obstacle that stood in his way; therefore, he had, no doubt, resolved to murder her, to make way for Sibyl. Perhaps, too, he had heard her message to Sibyl, and, guessing its purport, resolved that the secret of this marriage should never go forth.

Long before, she had felt he was tired of her; but she had never before dreamed he wished for her death. Yes, she felt as firmly convinced that it was his hand that struck the blow—she felt as firmly convinced, too, that these were his motives, as she did of her very existence; and yet, in the face of all this, she loved him still. Yes, loved him so well, forgave him so freely, that she resolved he should never know of her existence; she would no longer stand between him and happiness. She would never return to the world she had so nearly quitted; she would fly far away where no one

would ever know or hear of her; or she would stay buried here in the depths of the forest with this recluse, whoever he was, if he would permit her.

She thought of Mrs. Tom and Carl; they were the only ones in the wide world who cared for her. How would they account for her absence?—what construction would they put on her sudden flight? She could not tell: but she felt, long before this, that they had given her up for lost, and this grief for her loss would soon abate. Yes, her resolution was taken—she would never go back to the island more.

With this determination taken, her mind grew calm; for hers was not a nature for long or passionate grief. It is true, she wept convulsively at times; but this mood would soon pass away, and she would lie quietly, calmly for hours after, watching the trees sleeping in the sunshine, willing to submit quietly to whatever the future might have in store for her—like a stray leaf whirling down the stream of life, willing to set whichever way the current willed.

Her strange, rough-looking, but really gentle nurse was still indefatigable in his cares for her; but, as yet, he had told her nothing of himself, nor his object in visiting the island that night. Christie used to look up in his hardy, honest face sometimes, and wonder vaguely, as she did everything else, what possible reason could have brought him there.

One other circumstance perplexed her not a little. Once or twice she had caught sight of a female form and face moving about in the outer room. It had been only a momentary glimpse, and yet it vividly recalled the wild, weird woman she had seen in the island on her bridal night. There was the same pale, strange face; the same wild, streaming black hair; the same dark, woeful eyes; and Christie trembled in superstitious terror as she thought of her. Many times, too, she heard a light, quick footstep moving about, which she knew could not belong to her host; the soft rustling of female garments; and at times, but very rarely, a low, musical voice, talking softly, as if to herself.

All this perplexed and troubled Christie; and she would have asked the man about her, only—as he never by any chance mentioned her himself—she feared offending him by what might seem impertinent curiosity.

In a few days Christie was well enough to sit up at the window of her room, and drink in the health-giving, exhilarating air, and listen to the songs of the birds in the trees around. She saw this hut—for it was little more—was situated in the very depths of the great forest, far removed from every other habitation. As yet, she had not stepped beyond the precincts of her narrow chamber; but, one morning, tempted out by the genial warmth and invigorating beauty of the day, she had arisen for the purpose of going out for a short walk.

As she entered the outer room, she glanced around with some curiosity. It was a small, square apartment, scarcely larger than the one she had quitted, containing little furniture, and that of the rudest kind. Two small, uncurtained windows admitted the bright sunshine, and opposite the door was a low, smoky-looking fire place. A bed occupied one corner, and a primitive-looking deal table the other.

No one was in the room; but the door was wide open, and in the porch beyond Christie caught sight of a female sitting on the ground, with her back toward her. There was no mistaking those long, black, flowing tresses, and for a moment she hesitated and drew back in terror. But her attitude and manner showed her to be no phantom of an excited imagination, but a woman like herself; and curiosity proving stronger than dread, Christie softly approached her, but with a fluttering heart.

Whether the woman heard her or not, she did not move, and Christie was permitted to approach and look over her shoulder unnoticed. A little gray and white kitten was in her lap, which went spinning round and round after a straw which the woman held above its head, now and then breaking into a peal of silvery laughter at its futile attempts to catch it.

Surprise at this unexpected occupation held Christie for a time spell-bound; but reassured now that the person she beheld was flesh and blood like herself, she passed her and went out.

For a moment the strange woman looked up from her occupation and glanced at Christie; and then, without further notice, resumed her play with the kitten, just as if she had not seen her at all. But in that one brief, fleeting glance, Christie read her sad story. The woman before her was *insane*.

In mingled sorrow, surprise, and curiosity, Christie stood gazing upon her. She could do so with perfect impunity, for the woman never raised her eyes to look at her after that one careless, passing glance, every faculty being apparently absorbed by her straw and her kitten. In years, she might have been five-and-thirty, with a face which, in spite of its total want of expression, was still singularly beautiful. Her tall, slender form was exquisitely rounded, and her long, rich, waving hair floated like black raveled silk over her fair, sloping shoulders. Every feature was beautifully chiseled; her complexion dazzlingly fair, almost transparent; and her large, black, brilliant eyes magnificent, despite their vacant, idiotic stare. Her hands and feet were of most aristocratic smallness and whiteness; for she wore neither shoes nor stockings. Her dress was of coarse brown serge, but it could not mar the beautiful form it covered.

Moments passed unheeded, while Christie stood gazing sadly on the lovely wreck of womanhood before her, and wondering what could have driven her insane, and why she and this man dwelt alone here, so far removed from human habitation. She wondered what relation they bore to each other. He could not be her father—he was not old enough for that; neither could he be her brother—they were too totally dissimilar in looks. Perhaps he was her husband; but even that did not seem probable.

While she thus idly speculated, the woman suddenly arose, and clasping her kitten in her arms, turned and walked rapidly away in the direction of the woods, without once glancing at Christie, and was soon lost to sight amid the trees.

"Who can she be?" thought Christie; "it is certainly the same one I saw that night on the island, though she was raving mad, and this one seems perfectly harmless. I thought her a ghost that night, and fainted; and he had to tell Aunt Tom some story of his own invention to account for it."

The thought brought back the past so vividly to her mind, that the maniac was forgotten, and, sitting down on a fallen tree, she buried her face in her hands and gave way to a passionate burst of grief.

It was soon over. Christie's paroxysms of sorrow never lasted long, but exhausted themselves by their very violence, and she arose to survey the

place which seemed destined to be her future home.

It was a beautiful sylvan spot. The cabin was built in a sort of natural semi-circle, surrounded on all sides by the dense primeval forest. A smooth grass-plot sloped gently, for some three yards in front of the house, and then was broken on one side by clumps of bushes, and on the other by a little clear, crystal stream, that danced over the white pebbles, flashing like pearls in the sunlight. Behind the house, was a sort of vegetable garden, with a narrow space reserved for flowers, betokening the refined taste of the gardener. The house itself was a low, rough, unpretending looking cabin of the smallest and plainest dimensions. Not a sound broke the deep stillness, save the musical ripple of the little stream, the songs of the birds, the soft swaying of the trees, and involuntarily, the deep peace of the scene passed into Christie's heart, soothing it into calmness once more.

As she sat gazing around, a heavy footstep came crashing through the trees, and the next moment her host stood before her, with a gun in one hand, and a game-bag, well filled, slung over his shoulder.

He advanced to where she sat, looking surprised and pleased to see her there.

"So thee has ventured out, my daughter!" he said, with his kindly voice and kindlier smile. "I am glad to see thee able to leave thy room once more."

"Yes; the day was so fine and the sunshine so bright and warm, I could not resist the temptation," said Christie. "I see you have been shooting with good success."

"Yes; game is plenty in our woods," he answered, replacing his gun on a couple of hooks in the porch. "But thee had better come in now; it is not good for thee to sit too long in the hot sun, thee knows."

Christie rose half reluctantly and followed him into the house.

The man drew a low wicker rocking-chair close to the open window, and said:

"Sit thee there, child. I know invalids, like thee, like to rock back and forward; it's very quieting to the feelings. I must get the dinner, now."

"Let me help you," said Christie, anxious to be useful. "Let me get the dinner."

"By no means, daughter," said the man, with his pleasant smile; "thee is too weak to work yet, and besides, I have nothing else to do. Sit thee down there, for, now that thee is strong enough to bear it, I want to have a little talk with thee."

Christie sank anxiously into the chair, and waited for what was to come. The man took a brace of partridges out of his bag, and, placing them on the table, drew up his chair, and began taking off the feathers and conversing with Christie at the same time.

"First, my daughter, I should like to know what is thy name?"

"Christie," was the response.

"Hast thee no other?"

"I am sometimes called Tomlinson, but that is not my name. I am an orphan, and live with my aunt."

"Where is thy native place?"

"Campbell's Island," said Christie, in a slightly tremulous voice.

"Ah!" said the man, in some surprise, "if I had known that I would not have brought thee here. I thought thee was a stranger. Does thee belong to the Campbells?"

"No, sir; I lived with Mrs. Tom, the widow who resides in the island."

"Yes, yes, I see," said the host, thoughtfully; "I have seen the woman thee means. But, how came thee, child, to be lying stabbed on the beach that stormy night?"

"Sir, there is a long story connected with that—which at present, you must excuse my not telling. I cannot do so without involving others, and that I do not wish to do," replied Christie, trying to steady her trembling voice.

"As thee pleases, child, as thee pleases," said the man, kindly. "Do not speak of it, if it hurts thy feelings. I merely asked from the interest I take in thee. But how about returning to thy friends? Thee wishes to do so, I suppose?"

"Oh, no, no, no!" cried Christie, with involuntary vehemence. "Oh, I never wish to go back again!"

"Does thee not?" said her host, fixing his strong gray eyes on her face in grave surprise. "Thee has good reasons for that, doubtless?"

"Oh, I have, I have! Some day I will tell you all, but not now. I have no one to accuse or to blame; and the only friends I have, have ceased to think of me as living before this. If I returned to them, there are many who would be rendered miserable for life; and as they all think me dead, I intend to be so to them."

All her courage gave way here, and bowing her face in her hands, she gave way to one of her wild, passionate bursts of tears.

The man's face expressed deep sympathy and compassion; he did not speak nor interrupt her till the violence of her sudden grief was abated, and then he inquired, in his customary, quiet tone:

"And what does thee intend to do, my daughter?"

"I do not know yet," said Christie, raising her head. "I will go away somewhere and work for my living, where I will never be heard of again."

"Poor little one, what can thee do for a living?" said the man, compassionately. "Thee is too small and delicate to work, and never was made to buffet the storms of this rough world."

"I will not have to wait long. I will die!" said Christie, sadly.

"That thee will, if thee takes thy place among the workers in the outer circle of life. So thee is fully determined never to go back to thy friends?"

"Oh, never, never! I would rather die. All I wish, all I hope and pray for, is that they never discover I am alive."

"Then stay with us; thee will not have to work at all, and no one will ever hear of thee any more than if thee wast thousands of miles away. We are buried here in the very heart of the forest, where people very rarely come; and if any one did come, thee could easily be concealed till he went away. I know it is dull and lonely here, but thee will get reconciled to that in time."

"Oh, this is just what I wished, but I hardly dared hope for!" exclaimed Christie, with sparkling eyes. "How can I ever thank you for your generous offer?"

"I do not wish for thanks, my daughter; and thee will oblige me, friend Christie, by not mentioning it more. Thou wilt be very useful, and can take care of Bertha, who is insane, but quite harmless. Thou hast seen her, has thee not?"

"The handsome woman with the dark hair and eyes? Yes," replied Christie.

"Then that is settled," said the man, with a smile; "and now that I have questioned thee, it is thy turn. Does thee wish to ask something?"

"Oh, yes, ever so many things," said Christie; "but I am afraid you may not like—that you may be offended."

"There is no danger of that, my daughter. I may not choose to answer some of thy questions, but I will not be offended, let thee say what thee will."

"Well, then," said Christie, with a faint smile, "to begin catechising alter the same fashion as yourself, may I ask your name and that of the lady who lives here?"

"Yes; her name is Bertha Campbell—mine is Reuben Deerwood; thee may call me Uncle Reuben, if thee likes."

"Then she is no relation to you?"

"She is my cousin—no more."

"Once before," said Christie, hesitatingly, "I asked you about how you came to be on the island that stormy night. You did not tell me then. May I repeat the question now?"

"Certainly. Bertha, though usually quiet, has certain paroxysms of violence, during which, with the usual cunning of insanity, she sometimes eludes my vigilance and escapes. On these occasions she goes down to the shore, takes a boat, and goes over to the island. I, of course, follow her; and it was one of these times I happened to be there. That afternoon she had gone over, and was wandering through the pine woods. I went after her, and just reached the island as that furious storm came on. I wandered around for a long time without finding her, and in my search, somewhere about midnight, I providentially chanced to reach the spot where thee lay wounded and exposed to the fury of the storm. The tide was rising on the shore, and five minutes later thee would have been swept away. I lifted thee in my arms and carried thee down to the boat, instead of following my first intention of leaving thee at the cottage or at Campbell's Lodge. I did not wish to let it be known I was on the island. Then I heard a voice screaming 'Murder!' and knew it must be Bertha; so I set off to look for her again, and found her just coming out of the lodge. I had to bind her hand and foot and tie a handkerchief over her mouth to keep her quiet; and there I waited till the storm had abated.

"It was near noon the next day when we reached the shore, a quarter of a mile below here; and Bertha's paroxysm being over, she followed me quietly home, while I carried thee. I feared thee was dead for a long time, and only I happened to have some knowledge of surgery, thee never would

have recovered. That is the whole history," said Uncle Reuben, rising with a smile, and hanging his partridges over the fire to roast.

A light had broken on the mind of Christie while he spoke. This woman must be the apparition that had so often been seen on the isle, and had given it the name of being haunted.

"May I ask," she said, eagerly, "if this—if Bertha has been in the habit of visiting the island?"

"Yes, such is her habit at times," said Reuben, gravely. "About the full of the moon she gets these bad turns, and generally makes her escape to the island, though sometimes I prevent her. Has thee ever seen her there?"

"Yes, once," said Christie; "but I thought she was a spirit."

"More than thee has thought that, friend Christie; but thee need not be afraid of her; she is perfectly harmless."

"Why is it she always goes to the island at such times?" said Christie, curiously.

The man's face clouded.

"There is a long story connected with that, my daughter—a sad story of wrong and crime. Some day I will tell it to thee, if thee reminds me of it."

"How long has she been insane?"

"Nearly fourteen years."

"A long time, indeed. I should like to hear her history very much. Do you not fear she has gone to the island now? I saw her go into the woods an hour ago."

"No; she has only gone for a stroll through the trees, or to look for berries; she will soon be back—and here she is," he added, as the woman Bertha abruptly entered, her kitten still in her arms; and, without looking or

speaking to either of them, she sat down on a low stool and began sorting some pine cones held in her lap.

All this time the man Reuben had been getting dinner and setting the table, proving himself to be as good a cook as a nurse. In a few minutes it was smoking on the table, and then he went over, and, touching the woman on the shoulder, said gently:

"Is thee ready for dinner, Bertha?"

"Yes," she said, rising promptly and taking her seat.

Christie took the place pointed out to her, and Uncle Reuben, taking the head of the table, did the honors.

Then, when the meal was over, Bertha resumed her stool and her pine cones; Christie took the rocking-chair by the window, and Reuben busied himself in clearing away the dinner dishes and setting things to rights.

Weak still, and exhausted by the efforts of the morning, Christie threw herself on her bed during the course of the afternoon, and fell into the profound and refreshing sleep of bodily weariness, from which she did not awaken until the bustle of preparing supper aroused her.

In the evening Reuben took down an old, antiquated-looking Bible and read a few chapters aloud, and then they all retired to their separate couches.

And thus began Christie's new life—a life of endless monotony, but one of perfect peace. As the days passed on, bringing with them no change or excitement, she gradually settled down into a sort of dreamy lethargy, disturbed now and then as some circumstance would forcibly recall all she had loved and lost forever, by short, passionate outbursts of grief, but which were always followed by a deeper and more settled melancholy than before.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE MANIAC'S STORY.

"All was confused and undefined
In her all-jarred and wandering mind;
A chaos of wild hopes and fears—
And now in laughter, now in tears,
But madly still in each extreme,
She strove with that convulsive dream."—BYRON.

Autumn was at hand. The woods were gorgeous in their radiant robes of gold, and purple, and crimson. Christie's chief pleasure was in wandering through the forest, and gazing on the brilliant jewelry of Nature. The weeks that had passed, had restored her to health; but her step had not regained its elastic lightness; her voice had lost its old joyous tones; her once roseate cheek had lost forever its vivid bloom; and the bright, joyous light of hope and happiness had died out in the deep, melancholy, blue eyes. She moved through the little forest cabin, the shadow of her former self, pale, wan, and spiritual. And in looking at her slight, delicate figure, her fair, transparent little face, with its sad, haunting eyes, you might have thought her some fair vision of another world, and almost expect to see her fade away before your very eyes.

It was very lonesome, buried there in the depths of the forest, with no companions but the man Reuben and the maniac Bertha. But its very loneliness made it all the more welcome to our little recluse, who dreaded nothing so much as a discovery; and in roaming through the grand old woods, she felt she never wanted to leave this solitary spot again. At any other time she would have shrank in terror from the prospect of passing the long, dreary winter here, when even the comfort of these walks would be denied her. How little did she dream of all that was to occur before that winter came.

Reuben's journeys to N—— to buy necessities for the little family, were the only incidents that broke the unvarying monotony of their life. At first, Christie had been somewhat afraid of remaining alone with Bertha;

but, finding she was, as Reuben had said, perfectly harmless—sitting for hours together playing with her kitten—she had soon recovered from this fear. Love was a necessity of Christie's life, and as time passed, she learned to love Bertha with a deep, earnest love that sometimes surprised even herself. The maniac, too, in her fitful, uncertain way, seemed to return this love, and would sit for half a day at a time, with her head lying in Christie's lap, and the vacant, childish smile on her face.

As for Reuben, no one could know him, with his simple goodness and benevolence, without loving him; and Christie already loved and revered him as a father, while he felt an affection for his little stray waif, second only to that which he felt for Bertha.

As yet, he had not told her the history of the maniac; and Christie, for the most part, absorbed in her own sad thoughts, had almost forgotten it; but one cold and blustering night, as she drew her low rocking-chair up to the fire, while her nimble fingers busily flew in making some warm clothing for the winter, she reminded him of his promise, and urged him to relate it.

Bertha had already retired, and lay asleep in her bed in the corner of the kitchen; and Reuben, his day's work done, sat opposite Christie, making wicker-baskets, which he was in the habit of taking to N—— at intervals, to sell, and which constituted the principal income of the family.

"It seems a sad thing to recall days so long past," said Reuben, with a sigh; "but thee deserves to know, Christie, for waiting so long, patiently. And, my daughter, when thee hears, thee may think it strange that there should be so much wickedness in this world; but the Lord will redeem His servants in His own good time."

"Let me see; it requires time to look so far back. My father was a farmer living in Connecticut, and belonged to the Society of Friends. He had a brother, it seems—a wild youth, who ran away at the age of sixteen, and went to sea. Eight years passed before they received any news whether he was living or dead, and then a letter came to my father from him, saying he was in Spain, in a place called Grenada, and was married to a Spanish girl of that place.

"After that, for fourteen years more, we heard nothing else from him, until one cold winter's night, as we were all sitting round the fire, there came a knock at the door, and when one of my sisters opened it, a man, dressed like a sailor, entered, leading a little girl of twelve years by the hand. That man was my father's long-absent brother, whose wife was dead, and who wished to place the child with his friends before he went to sea again. That child is now the maniac Bertha thee sees on that bed."

Uncle Reuben's lips quivered a little as his eyes fell on the still beautiful face of the sleeper, and Christie listened with a look of the deepest interest.

"Bertha, though only a child then," said Uncle Reuben, resuming his work, "was taller and more womanly looking than many girls of sixteen, with the most beautiful face thee ever saw in thy life. My three sisters were then accounted very handsome girls by everybody, but they were no more to be compared to her than candles are to stars. They had fine, healthy features, and red cheeks, and round, merry faces, but she had a dark, oval face, with long, beautiful black curls, and large, melancholy, dark eyes. Ah, my daughter, thee looks as if thee thought her beautiful still, but she is nothing now to what she was then.

"Bertha could speak very little English then—hardly a word—and I remember how the villagers used to laugh at her attempts to talk with them; but when they looked at her mourning-dress, and sad, beautiful face, their laughter quickly ceased.

"Her father, who, though not rich, had some money, wished her to be sent to some good boarding-school, where she could acquire a good education. He was going off on some voyage, in which he expected to make his fortune; and when he came back, he said Bertha should be a great lady.

"Accordingly, three weeks after she came, she was sent away to a boarding-school, and I do not think there was one sorrier to bid her good-by than I was. Her father the next day went away in his ship, destined to some far-off place, which he was never doomed to reach, for a month after news came that the vessel was wrecked, and all hands cast away; so that Bertha had now no living relatives in this country except us.

"As her father before he went had made abundant provision for her schooling, in case anything should happen, Bertha remained five years at school. We saw very little of her all this time, for she mostly spent her vacations with her friends, the school girls; but when the period of her stay had elapsed, she came back to the old homestead. We had parted from her a beautiful child, but she returned a woman—peerless, superb—a perfect vision of beauty. Everybody was raving about her. All the young men, far and near, were in love with her; but Bertha never seemed to care for any of them, and used to spend her time embroidering, or reading, or playing on the guitar, and singing Spanish songs about 'beautiful Grenada.' I was a young man then, about seven-and-twenty years of age; and I, too, like the rest fell in love with my beautiful, dark-eyed cousin. It was a hopeless love, and I knew it. I felt that she was as far above me as heaven is above the earth, and I locked my secret in my own bosom, and resolved I would never give her a moment's pain by telling her of it.

"I was, however, her favorite; there were two more brothers, but she liked me best—but only with a sisterly love. To me alone she used to speak of the vine-clad hills of Spain; of her beautiful dead mother, and of her longings for sunny Grenada once more. And I used to sit and listen, and sympathize with her, and keep down the yearning desire that used to fill my heart to kneel at her feet and ask her to give me the right to take her there.

"Ah, little Christie, thee may wonder how such a rough, uncouth man as I am could ever feel love like this; but I could have died then for my beautiful cousin, though she, nor no one else, ever dreamed I cherished for her other than a cousinly affection. When I used to see her smile on other young men, and lean on their arms, and listen, and look pleased when they talked, and blush when she would meet their eyes, I used to feel the demon of jealousy rising within me; and then I would be forced to tear myself away from them all, lest my looks or actions might betray me. It was very hard then to bear my lot patiently; but, when, after a while, Bertha would come back to me, and tell me how tiresome they all were, and that I was the dearest, best cousin in the world, and worth all the other young men she knew put together, I used to feel recompensed for it all, and I could have knelt down at her very feet in gratitude for the words.

"These were the happiest days of my life, little friend; and though I knew Bertha could never love me, yet I felt if I might only be near her, and know she was happy, and see her smile on me sometimes, I could even bear to see her married to some man more worthy of her than I was. I do not say there were not times when I was tempted to murmur and wish Heaven had gifted me with a less ungainly form, for Bertha's sake; yet, I think, I may say, I strove to subdue all such ungrateful murmurs, and think of my many blessings; and, on the whole, I was happy.

"My father, who was growing old and infirm, loved Bertha, with a passionate fondness, and often spoke of his cherished wish of seeing her united to one of his sons. I was the oldest, and his favorite, and I knew his ardent desire was to see us married; but as this could never be, I always strove to evade giving a direct answer to his questions concerning my feelings toward my cousin. To her he had never spoken on the subject; but on his deathbed he called us to him, and putting her hand in mine, charged us to love one another, and become husband and wife. Ah! there was little need to tell me to love one I almost worshiped already. Bertha's hand lay passively in mine. She was weeping convulsively, and neither of us would render his last moments unhappy by saying his dearest wish could not be fulfilled. I thought then that she had merely acquiesced to soothe his dying moments, and resolved, much as I loved her, not to bind her by any such promise. But in the bustle and confusion of the next three day, there was no time for explanation, and the funeral was over before I could even speak a word to her in private.

"The day after the funeral I found her sitting alone in a sort of arbor, at the foot of the garden; and going up to her I said, with abrupt haste, for every word seemed to stick in my throat:

"Bertha, I knew thee did not like to refuse my father's dying request to marry me; but as the promise was given against thy will, I have taken the first opportunity of telling thee I do not consider it binding, and so far as I am concerned, thou may consider thyself quite free from all engagement to me.'

"I did not dare to gaze at her, as she sat there, looking so sweet and beautiful, lest my resolution should falter; and I turned away, and was about

to leave, when her voice recalled me.

"Do you wish our engagement broken, Cousin Reuben?' she said, softly.

"Wish it!' I cried out, forgetting prudence, resolution, everything but her. 'Oh, Bertha, I love you better than all the world!'

"Then take me for your wife,' she said, coming over and pushing back the hair from my face. She kissed me and was gone.

"For a while I could not tell whether I was sleeping or waking, her words seemed so unreal. I stood like one in a trance; like one in some blissful dream, from which he fears to awaken. I could not realize that this peerlessly beautiful girl could be willing to marry me—a rough, homely, plodding farmer. I resolutely shut my heart against the bewildering conviction; but that evening, when we sat alone together, and I asked her to repeat what she had said, she smiled at my incredulity, and told me she intended to be my wife just as soon as our term of mourning expired, and that I might make known our engagement as soon as I liked.

"It will save me from being persecuted by the attentions of other young men, you know, Cousin Reuben,' she said.

"Everybody was surprised when they heard of it, for she had rejected richer and far handsomer men; and for a while people refused to believe it. But when they saw us always together, and Bertha quietly confirmed the report, they were forced to the conviction that it really was true, and I was looked upon as the most fortunate and enviable of men.

"The next six months I was the happiest man in the world; and in nine more we were to be married, and go on a tour to Spain. It seemed too much happiness for me. I could not realize that it would ever prove true; and, alas! it never did.

"One day there came a letter from a school friend of Bertha's who lived in Westport, inviting her there on a visit. Bertha wished to go, and no one

opposed her; but I saw her set out, with a sad forboding that this visit would prove fatal to my new-found happiness.

"Three months passed away before Bertha came back. She used to write to us at first long, gay, merry letters, telling us all about the place, and the people she met; but gradually her letters grew shorter, and more reserved, and less frequent, and for a month before her return, ceased altogether.

"I was half-crazed with anxiety, doubts, and apprehensions; and was about to set out for Westport to see if anything had happened, when one day the Stage stopped at the door, and Bertha alighted. Yes, Bertha—but so changed I hardly knew her; pale, cold, and reserved; she sang and laughed no longer; but used to sit for hours, her head on her hand, thinking and thinking. Bertha was bodily with us; but in spirit she was far away—*where*, I dared not ask. She hardly ever spoke now, but sat by herself in her own room, except at mealtimes. From me she shrank with a sort of dread, mingled with shame, coloring, and averting her head, when she met my eye; and, much as I loved her, I used ever after that to shun meeting her, lest it should give her pain.

"But oh, Christie, what it cost me to do this, may thee never know! I saw she repented her promise, given in a moment of impulsive generosity; and I resolved that that promise I would never call upon her to redeem.

"One morning she made her appearance at the breakfast-table, looking pale, wild, and terrified. We all thought she was ill, but she said she was not; she had had bad dreams, she said, forcing a smile, and a headache, but a walk in the breezy morning air would cure that.

"After breakfast as I stood leaning against a tree, thinking sadly of all I had lost, she came up to me, and laying her hand on my shoulder, said:

"'Cousin Reuben, I have seemed cold and distant to you for the past few days, and I fear I have offended you. Can you forgive me?'

"She spoke hurriedly, and with a certain wildness in her manner, but I did not notice it then. I thought she was about to be my own Bertha again, and how readily that forgiveness was given, I need not tell thee. She

stooped down and kissed my hand while I spoke, and then, without a word, started off down the street at a rapid walk, from which she never came back."

Uncle Reuben paused, and his hands trembled so that for a moment he could not go on with his work. Then, recovering himself, he continued:

"All that day passed, and she did not return; and when night came we began to wonder at her delay. Still, we were not uneasy, for we thought she had stopped all night at the house of some friend; but the next day passed, and the next, and nothing more was heard of her. Then we grew alarmed; and I was about to rouse the neighborhood and go in search of her, when a letter was brought to me in her well-known writing.

"A terrible thought flashed across my mind at the sight. I sank into a chair, tore it open, and read:

"'COUSIN REUBEN:—I have gone—fled from you all forever. Do not search for me, for it will be useless. I cannot ask you to forgive me, I have wronged you too deeply for that; but do not curse the memory of the unworthy

'BERTHA.'

"Every word of that note is ineffaceably burned in my heart and brain. In that moment my whole life and destiny were changed. I did not show the note to a living soul. I rose up and told them to hush their clamors, and never to mention her name more. I think my looks must have frightened them, for they drew back in silence; and I put on my hat, and without speaking a word, walked out of the house.

"The moment I had read the words, my resolution was taken. I determined to go forth and seek for her till she was found, and tell her, with my own lips, that I forgave her all. In a week I had arranged my affairs. I

left to my second brother the farm, and without telling him where I was going, or what was my object, I left home, and never saw it more.

"I went to Westport. I felt sure I would find her there, and I was right. Just one week after my arrival, as I was out taking a stroll through the town, one night about dusk, a woman, dressed in deep black and closely veiled, brushed hastily by me. I started as if I had received a galvanic shock; for, though the veil hid her face, there was no mistaking that tall, regal form and quick, proud step. I knew I had found Bertha. I turned and followed her. I overtook her, and laying my hand on her arm, said:

"'Cousin Bertha!'

"At the sudden sound of my voice, she started and shrieked aloud, and would have fallen if I had not supported her. Fortunately, the street was almost deserted, and no one noticed us; and I drew her arm within mine, and said:

"'Fear not, Bertha; I have only sought you out to tell you I forgive you for the past.'

"'And you can forgive me after all I have done—after so cruelly, so deeply wronging you! Oh, Cousin Reuben!' she cried out passionately.

"'Hush! thee will be heard,' I said, softly. 'I am thy brother now, Bertha. Where does thee live? I will go with thee, and, if thou art willing to tell me, I will hear your story.'

"She tried to speak, but something seemed to choke her, and we hurried on in silence until we reached the hotel where she stopped. When we were in her room she sank down at my feet, and, holding up her hands, cried out:

"'Once again—once again, say you forgive me! Oh, Cousin Reuben, I cannot believe what I have heard!'

"She looked so pale and haggard, that I felt I had more to pity than forgive. I raised her up and said:

"I have nothing to forgive, Bertha. Look on me as a brother, and while I live I will ever regard thee as a dear sister."

"What she said then, and how wildly she talked and wept, I need not tell thee now. I waited till she was calm, but it was long before she was composed enough to tell me her story, and then I learned she was already a wife, though no one knew it but myself, her husband, and the clergyman who had united them.

"Thee has heard of Mark Campbell, the late owner of the lodge—a man feared by all, and loved by few? It was to him she was married. His first wife had been dead some years, and he resided with his young son and daughter on the island. He had met Bertha during her stay in Westport, and had fallen violently in love with her. He was a tall, stalwart, handsome man, as all his race ever were, and she returned his passion with all the fierce impetuosity for which those of her nation have ever been distinguished. But he was proud, very proud, and arrogant, like all the Campbells, and would not stoop to marry a girl so far beneath him publicly. Thee knows I told thee she was only a sailor's daughter, and an unknown foreigner besides. He gave her some plausible reason—I forget what—and urged a private marriage. She loved him, and was easily persuaded, and, though unknown to the world, was Mark Campbell's wife.

"I promised not to reveal her secret; but I felt that a marriage with such a passionate, vindictive man, could be productive only of misery and sorrow to her. She had no friend in the world but me, and I resolved to remain in Westport and watch over her safety.

"So nearly two years passed. Bertha dwelt sometimes in Westport, and sometimes on the island. Campbell's Lodge, thee knows, is a large house, full of rooms and passages, and she could easily remain there for weeks at a time without being discovered. Mark Campbell had a schooner, and kept five or six rough-looking sailor fellows, half smugglers and whole villains, constantly about him. I managed to obtain employment about the place, and was enabled to remain on the island, and, unsuspected, watch over Bertha.

"Bertha, when on the island, always lived in some of the upper rooms where the children and servants never came. One day, when she was in

Westport, I chanced to have some errand to those apartments, and entering a little dark closet off one of the large rooms, I knelt down to grope for something on the floor, when my hand pressed heavily on something which I knew now to be a spring; a trap-door fell, and I came very near being precipitated twelve feet to one of the rooms below—a large, empty apartment, filled with old lumber.

"When I had recovered from my astonishment at this unexpected occurrence, I examined the trap, and found it could be opened from below, and that, owing to the darkness of the closet, when shut it could never be discovered. I was at no loss to account for its object, as it had evidently been constructed by some former occupant for no good purpose. I felt convinced, however, that the present proprietor knew nothing of it, or long ere this it would have been made use of; and I resolved to say nothing about it, not knowing for what evil end he might use it.

"I was right when I felt that this hasty marriage between Bertha and Mark Campbell could be productive of nothing but misery. Already he was wearying of her, but that did not prevent him from being madly jealous. A stranger, a mere youth, and the handsomest I ever saw, had met Bertha somewhere, and was deeply struck by her beauty. He was a gay, thoughtless lad, and Mark Campbell, overhearing some speeches he had made about her, had all the fierce jealousy of his nature aroused. He set spies to watch Bertha; her every word and look was distorted, after the fashion of jealous people, into a confirmation of her guilt, and poor Bertha led a wretched life of it. Her only comfort now was her little daughter, of whom I had forgotten to tell thee before.

"One night one of his spies came to the island and sought an interview with Mark Campbell. What its purport was I know not; but when it was ended his face was livid—absolutely diabolical with passion. Two of his villainous crew were dispatched in a boat to Westport; and when they returned they brought with them this youth, gagged and bound hand and foot. Bertha was at the time dwelling in the lodge, for Campbell was too madly jealous to suffer her to go out of his sight.

"I had a presentiment that something terrible would occur that night, but I never dreamed of the awful murder that was perpetrated in one of the

upper rooms. It was a stormy, tempestuous night, but the men were sent off again to a little sea-coast village some miles below N——, and when they came back they had with them another man, gagged and bound like the first.

"I could not rest that night, but sat anxiously in my room, in the basement story, longing with a strange dread for the morning. I felt sure some evil was meditated, and as I listened I suddenly heard one wild, terrific shriek, which I knew must be Bertha's. Half mad with terror, I fled from the room and stole into the lower hall to listen, but all was perfectly still. For upward of half an hour I remained thus; but nothing broke the deep stillness until heavy footsteps began to descend the stairs, and I saw the two worst of Campbell's gang coming down, and leading between them the man they had last brought to the isle. They placed him in a boat and rowed away, and I returned to the house, still ignorant of what had transpired. As I approached it I saw two others of the crew talking in low, hushed voices as they descended to the shore. I stole behind them to listen, and judge of my horror when I learned that, in his frantic jealousy, Campbell had murdered this stranger youth, and in his infernal barbarity had cast his loving wife and the murdered body of her supposed lover into a room together—consigning her to a death too fearful to contemplate. The man who had just been taken away was a mason, who had been procured to wall up the only door to the room.

"I listened, my very life-blood freezing with horror; but judge of my feelings when, from their description of the room, I knew it to be the one with the hidden door. In that instant everything was forgotten but the one thought of freeing her who was dearer still to me than life. I was more like a frantic man than one sane. I procured a ladder, made my way noiselessly into the deserted lumber room, ascended it, and carefully let fall the trap. The lifeless form of the murdered man lay across the opening, but I pushed it aside and sprang into the room, thinking only of Bertha. In the farthest corner, crouching down to the floor, she sat, a glibbering idiot. The terrible shock had driven her insane.

"What I felt at that dreadful sight no words can ever tell. I raised her in my arms and bore her, unresisting, down into the lumber-room. I closed the

trap, concealed the ladder, and carrying her as if she were an infant, I fled from the accursed spot. She neither spoke nor uttered a single cry, but lay passively in my arms. There were boats on the shore; I placed her in one, and with a strength that seemed almost superhuman rowed over the heaving waves till morning. Whither I was going I knew not, neither did I care; my only object was to bear her beyond the reach of her deadly enemy.

"When morning came, I found myself on the shore, below this place. I had often been here, and admired this quiet and hidden spot, buried in the depths of the wood. Here I bore Bertha, who followed me like a child; and, before noon I had constructed a sort of rude hut, to screen her from the heat of the sun and the night dew. Then I went to N—— for such necessities as I immediately required, and resolved, that here I would spend my life in watching over my poor, insane cousin.

"It would be dull, tedious, and uninteresting to relate how I labored for the next few weeks, to construct this hut, and form, as best I could, the rude furniture you see here. It was a labor of love, and I heeded not fatigue nor want of rest, until it was completed. No child in the arms of its nurse could be more quiet and docile than Bertha, but I saw that reason had fled forever. I fancied she would always remain thus still and gentle, and never dreamed she could be attacked by paroxysms of violence, like other lunatics; until one night, I was startled to find her raving mad, flying through the house and shrieking murder. All the events of that terrible night seemed to come back to her, and she fled from the house before I could detain her, sprang into the boat, and put off for the island. She knew how to manage a boat, and before I could reach N—— and procure another, she had reached the island, entered Campbell's Lodge, still making the air resound with her shrill shrieks of murder. Fortunately, in the dark, she was not perceived, and I managed to seize her and bear her off to the boat before any one beheld her.

"A fortnight after, when I visited N——, I learned that Mark Campbell was dead; and, I knew that he must have heard her cries, and supposing them to be supernatural, the shock had hastened his death.

"Of Bertha's child, I could discover nothing. How he disposed of it is unknown to me to this hour.

"And so, Bertha and I have lived here for fourteen years, unmolested, and our very existence is doubtless long since forgotten. She is, as you see her, gentle and harmless; but, she still has those periodical attacks of violence, but in a lesser degree than at first. At such times, by some strange instinct, or glimmering of reason, she always seeks the isle, enters Campbell's Lodge, and goes wandering through the rooms, as if vacantly trying to remember something that is past. These nocturnal visits have given the lodge the reputation of being haunted, which her appearance at different times upon the isle has confirmed. As the house was for several years deserted, except by some old servants, after the death of Mark Campbell, she could roam with impunity through the rooms—sometimes even pushing back bolts and entering apartments that were locked. Such, Christie, is the story of the maniac Bertha."

All this time Christie had been listening, with a look of the deepest, most absorbed attention, in silent amazement at all she heard. The mystery of the haunted house and the spirit of the isle, was cleared up at last.

"And the child—did you never hear anything more of it?" inquired Christie.

"Nothing concerning it have I ever heard."

"Then it may be still alive."

"It is very probable; villain as he was, he would not slay his own child. But enough of this; it is wearing late, and thee looks tired, Christie. Good-night, my daughter."

Christie sought her couch, to wonder and dream over what she had heard, and forget for a time her own griefs in thinking of the greater ones of poor Bertha. How similar, too, seemed their fate! The sufferings of both had originated in those fatal secret marriages. Bertha's were over, but Christie's were not; and wondering how hers were to end, Christie fell asleep.

And thus days, and weeks, and months glided by in the little, lonely, forest cottage. The long, dreary winter passed, and spring was again robing the trees in green, while the inmates of the cottage knew nothing of the

events passing in the great world, more than if they no longer dwelt in it—dreamed not of the startling denouement to the tragedy of the isle that was even then hastening to a close; until their peace was broken by an unexpected occurrence that roused Christie into electric life once more.

But for the present we must leave her, and return to the other scenes and characters of our story.

CHAPTER XXVI.

REMORSE.

"Oh, tell me, father, can the dead
Walk on the earth and look on us,
And lay upon the living's head
Their blessing or their curse?
She comes to me each night—
The dried leaves do not feel her tread;
She stands by me, in the deep midnight,
In the white robes of the dead."—WHITTIER.

And now we must return to the day following that night of storm and crime on the shore of Campbell's Isle.

When Edgar awoke to consciousness once more, he found himself lying on a lounge, with some one chafing his hands and temples. Unable for a moment to realize what had happened, he started up and gazed wildly around.

The first object on which his eyes rested was the pale, anxious face of his wife, as she bent over him.

That sight brought back all. With a hollow, unearthly groan, he fell back, exclaiming:

"Heaven and earth! has the grave given up its dead? Or am I dead, with my victim confronting me in another world?"

But, at the sound of his voice, Laura uttered a joyful cry, and falling on her knees beside him, clasped her arms round his neck, crying out:

"Oh, Edgar! dearest Edgar! thank Heaven you are still alive! Oh, Edgar, I was made reckless. Only forgive me for the miserable past, and, as Heaven hears me, I will never, never make you so wretched more!"

Her tone, her look, her clasp, convinced him she was really alive. With his brain burning and throbbing as though he were going mad, he started up and grasped her by the arm, while he fairly shrieked:

"Woman, do I speak to the living or the dead? Did I not murder you?"

"Dearest Edgar, no! The fall scarcely hurt me at all. It was all my own fault. Do not think of it any more, and do not speak or look so crazed and excited. Do you not see I am alive and well?"

Yes, he saw it. She whom he supposed was buried forever in the heaving sea was bending over him, holding his frenzied head on her breast, pushing back the wild black hair soothingly off his burning brow.

Was he sane or mad? Were all the events of the previous night only the horrible delusion of a dream—the vivid deception of a nightmare? Was the storm, the murder, all a mocking unreality?

He looked down and saw on his cloak a dark, clotted mark, the maddening evidence of the past, and knew that it was not a dream. His wife was living, still. Who, then, had fallen by his hand? In the storm and darkness, what horrible mistake had he made?

He ground his teeth and clenched his hands together to keep back the terrible emotions that made his very brain reel, feeling as though nothing, in that moment, could inflict greater tortures than he endured.

Dreaming not of what was passing in his mind, Laura still bent over, caressing him, and striving to soothe him back to calmness, bitterly accusing herself for her heartless conduct, that had driven him to such a depth of misery and despair.

"Oh, Edgar! my dearest husband! only say you forgive me for the past! I have done you wrong, but I never meant to torture you thus. Oh! indeed, I never—never meant it! I will do anything, be anything, go anywhere you wish for the future. Dearest Edgar, will you not say you pardon me?"

"Leave me—leave me!" groaned the unhappy man, averting his head, and shading his eyes with his hands.

"But say you forgive me first, Edgar! Oh! if you knew what a miserable night I have passed, you would think I had atoned sufficiently for what I have done."

"You—you—where were you last night?" he cried, with sudden wildness, starting up.

"I was here, of course. For Heaven's sake, Edgar, do not excite yourself so," she said, startled and alarmed.

"Were you here all night?"

"Certainly, Edgar. If I had been inclined to go out, I was not able; and if able and inclined, I could not have done so in such a storm. Do compose yourself, Mr. Courtney."

"You are *sure* you were here *all* night?"

"Most certainly I was. Why will you persist in asking me such a question?" she said, in extreme surprise. Again he fell back with a shuddering groan. "Dear Edgar, you are very ill. I must send for a physician," said Laura, in great alarm, thinking his violent jealousy had unsettled his brain.

"No—no! on your peril, *no!*" he vehemently exclaimed. "Leave me! all I want, all I ask for, is to be alone!"

"But you have not yet forgiven me. Will you not do so before I go?"

"Yes—yes, anything, only leave me."

Sighing deeply, Mrs. Courtney arose, and pressing a kiss on his brow, left the room.

And he was alone—alone with his own frenzied, tumultuous thoughts—alone with his own conscience, the most terrific companion a guilty man can have. Again came the torturing thought, What, oh, what had he done? Whom, in his mad passion, had he slain? While reason and judgment slept, and jealousy and blind frenzy raged, what wrong had he committed?

But his wife lived. With a sudden revulsion of feeling, in all the tempest of agony and remorse, that conviction was the one gleam of blessed sunlight in the dark night of despair. Come what might, she who had given up all for him, had not fallen by his hand; her death was not on his soul. And he drew a deep breath of relief; and, if he had dared to breathe the holy name, would have thanked Heaven for her preservation.

How strongly amidst the wildest chaos of doubt and anguish does the instinct of self-preservation ever remain in the ascendant. All other thoughts quickly passed away, and the one absorbing idea of securing his own safety filled his whole breast. He thought, with a start of alarm, what conjectures his strange questions and wild excitement must have given rise to in the mind of his wife, and resolved that, for the future, come what might, he would be on his guard, and not commit himself by betraying his emotions.

"I must leave this place immediately," was his thought, "before suspicion will have time to fix on me, and trust to time and absence for security. But first, I must find some clue to this horrible mystery. Oh! that dreadful night. Oh, that it could be forever blotted from my memory."

Even while he spoke, an unusual bustle below met his ear. He heard voices speaking in quick, excited tones; then a scream, and then the sound

of many feet hurrying to and fro.

With the one idea, the one dread thought of his guilt being discovered, ever uppermost in his mind, he listened in an agony of impatience for what might follow.

Still the bustle and excitement continued, and, wrought up to a fever of anxiety, he was about to rise and go in quest of information, when the door suddenly opened, and Laura, pale, trembling, and horror-stricken, stood before him.

"In the name of Heaven, what is the matter, Laura?" he asked, in a voice hoarse with agitation.

"Oh, Edgar! you have not heard the dreadful news?" she said, trembling.

"What dreadful news? Speak and tell me instantly," he said, grasping her arm, and setting his teeth hard.

"You remember that lovely little island-girl, Christie?"

"Yes; what of her?" he said, turning frightfully pale.

"In the fearful storm of last night, she was most foully murdered. Poor, gentle little Christie!"

He knew all now, he remembered her resemblance to his wife; that had deceived him. She, then, had been his victim. In spite of all his resolve to be calm, he was forced to grasp a chair to steady himself. But in her sorrow and horror, his wife did not perceive his increasing agitation.

"Dear beautiful Christie! so fair, so young, so gentle, to meet so terrible a fate. Oh, Edgar, what a demon her assassin must have been, worse than a demon, for even a demon would not have committed such a deed. Poor little child! what an awful doom was hers."

He had recovered his outward calmness by this time, and, steadying his trembling voice, he asked:

"Who could have done the deed?"

"No one knows. Mrs. Tom and Sibyl Campbell have only just arrived, and all they can tell about it is, that, owing to some unknown cause, she either left or was borne from the house during the night, and part of her clothing was found this morning covered with blood. The body could not be found, and it is supposed it was carried away by the waves. Oh, it is horrible! What crime would not men be guilty of, since they could even murder that gentle girl. The proper authorities are about to be apprised of the fact, and the island is to be searched to see if any clew to the discovery of the murderer can be found."

"What is supposed to be the cause of the murder?"

"Oh, there is no cause assigned. Everything is wrapped in the deepest mystery; but I have an idea of my own. You know poor Christie was exceedingly beautiful, and some one may have become enamored of her and attempted to carry her off, thinking the night and storm favorable to his purpose. Most probably she resisted; and, failing in his purpose, in a fit of passion he may have slain her, and fled to escape the consequences of the act."

"Most probably that is it," said Courtney, wishing fervently that every one else would adopt his opinion.

"But, oh, it is terrible—terrible!" exclaimed Laura. "Poor little Christie! And her aunt is almost deranged. Oh, to think we should all have been safe here, thinking only of our own petty troubles, while she was lying, wounded and dying, exposed to the fury of the winds and waves! I do not know how it is, but there is a feeling of remorse in my heart, as if I were in some way accountable for this crime."

"You, Laura! What nonsense!"

"Yes, I know; but *still* it is there."

"An over-excited brain, that is all. Who is down stairs now?"

"Sibyl Campbell and Mrs. Brantwell. Mrs. Tom and Mr. Brantwell have gone to the magistrate's."

"I think you said Sibyl Campbell came with Mrs. Tom. Was she on the island last night?"

"Yes; she went there about dark."

"What! in all that storm?"

"Yes, I believe so."

"What could have taken her there?" asked Courtney, who scarcely knew what his own object was in asking these questions, except it was to keep his mind from dwelling on what he had done.

"I do not know. Oh, yes! now I recollect; it was a note brought her by her brother; and, strangely enough, from Christie herself. She seemed very much agitated upon receiving it, and insisted on going immediately to the isle, in spite of the storm."

Courtney gave a sudden start; a strange light leaped into his eyes; his white face flushed, and then became paler than before, as he said:

"Do you know what this note contained?"

"No, how should I?"

"Did Miss Campbell meet Christie the night of the murder?"

"No. I heard her telling Mrs. Brantwell that the storm came on so violently that she was scarcely able to reach the lodge, much less the cottage."

"Are you aware whether those two girls were on good terms?"

"Why, what a question! What do you mean, Edgar?"

"Nothing, nothing; answer my question."

"Why, I really do not know; but I fancy not."

"Ah! Why?"

"Well, of course, I may be mistaken, but I think Sibyl was jealous of poor Christie at one time. Willard Drummond certainly paid her a great deal more attention than he should have done, considering he was betrothed to Sibyl. But, then, he was always fickle."

"And Sibyl was jealous?"

"Yes, I am quite sure she was."

"And, consequently, this island-girl's enemy?"

"Well, I cannot say as to that. What on earth *do* you mean, Edgar?"

"Who first discovered the murder?"

"Sibyl."

"Ah! *she did!* And I presume she immediately went and told Mrs. Tom?"

"No; I heard her telling Mrs. Brantwell that she found it out somehow—I forget how—somewhere about midnight; but she did not inform Mrs. Tom till morning."

"Why was that?"

"I don't know. Really, Mr. Courtney, if I were on trial as a witness, you could not cross-examine me more strictly," said Mrs. Courtney, beginning to lose patience.

"I wish to know all the particulars, Laura. Did you hear anything else?"

"No—yes. I heard Mrs. Tom telling Mr. Brantwell, that about the time they suppose the deed was committed, Carl Henley saw a woman flying through the island; but *that* no one credits."

"A woman, did you say?"

And the strange light in Courtney's eyes grew almost insufferable.

"Yes; but I suppose he dreamt it, or wished to add to his own importance by a made up story."

"I do not think so," said Courtney, who had good reasons for the belief. "Perhaps this tangled web may yet be unraveled."

"Edgar, in the name of all the saints! what do you mean?"

"Hush! I mean nothing—never mind now. Perhaps my suspicions are premature."

"Good heavens, Edgar! you surely do not suspect——"

"*Hush!*" he said, in a hoarse whisper; "I suspect no one. Be silent concerning what has passed. Leave me now, I wish to lie down. When those people return from searching the island, come and let me know the result. I do not wish to be disturbed before."

Wondering what possible meaning could be couched beneath his mysterious words, Mrs. Courtney left the room.

Edgar Courtney sat down, and with knitted brows and compressed lips fell into deep thought. Now and then his white face would blanch to a more ghastly hue still, and his muscles would twitch convulsively; and, again, an expression of demoniacal joy and triumph would light up his countenance, to be clouded a moment after, by doubt and fear, while his customary midnight scowl grew darker and darker. At last, a look of desperate resolution usurped every other expression, and he hissed through his clenched teeth:

"I will do it! I will do it! *Anything*, even this, sooner than the fate that may be mine. It can easily be proved. A slighter chain of circumstantial evidence has been found, before now, strong enough to hang——"

He paused suddenly, and cast a terrified glance around, as if fearful the very walls might hear his diabolical plot. Or, perhaps, the word suggested what might one day be his own destiny.

He arose and paced excitedly up and down the room, so deeply absorbed in thought, that he heeded not the flight of time, until the sudden opening of the door, and the entrance of his wife startled him from his reverie.

"Well," he said, seating himself, and trying to hide his anxiety under a show of composure.

"Oh, they have searched every corner of the island so carefully, that if a pin had been lost, it must have been found; but it is all in vain. They cannot obtain the slightest clue to the discovery of the murderer or his victim. All that has been found is a knife, deeply stained with blood, which places the fact that she has been murdered, beyond the possibility of a doubt. The murderer, in his flight, probably dropped it unawares," said Laura.

Courtney started in alarm at the news; but a moment's reflection convinced him, that—as the weapon bore neither name nor initials, and had never been seen with him—there was nothing to be feared from the discovery.

"And what do they mean to do now?" he asked.

"I do not know—give up the search, I suppose, since it seems utterly useless to continue it. Poor, ill-fated little Christie!"

"Has Mrs. Tom returned to the island?"

"Yes."

"And Miss Campbell?"

"She is here, where she intends remaining."

"How does she bear this news?"

"Oh, she seems terribly excited, I must say; and I do not wonder at it. She insisted on going with them to the island, and aiding in the search; and has been walking up and down the room, like one half crazy, since their return."

"Very singular agitation to be produced by the death of a girl she did not like, isn't it?" said Courtney, in a peculiar tone.

"Why, Edgar! who could help being agitated at so dreadful a deed. Every one is horror-stricken."

"You are not thus agitated, Laura!"

"Well, I feel it none the less deeply on that account; but Miss Campbell and I are different; and, besides, she has known her much longer than I have. But it is almost dark, Edgar; and you have had no dinner. Are you sufficiently recovered to come down to tea?"

"I think not; I do not care for any. I will go to bed."

"Let me bring you up some tea and toast first," said Laura. "You have eaten nothing all day."

She left the room, and soon reappeared with the tea-tray. And Courtney, to satisfy his wife—having partaken of a light supper—retired to bed, wearied after the excitement of the day.

He closed his eyes, but not in sleep. Hour after hour passed on, while he lay tossing restlessly, striving to banish from his mind the tragedy of the previous night. All in vain! sleep would not come at his call. Again he beheld the lifeless form of the murdered girl lying before him, with the rain and wind beating pitilessly on her cold, white face, while the life-blood ebbed slowly from the wound his hand had inflicted. He closed his eyes with a shudder, and pressed his hands over them; but he saw her before him still. How the scorpion sting of conscience lashed him now in the deep silence of the solemn night!

At length he fell into an uneasy slumber, but only to re-enact, in feverish dreams, the vision of his waking hours. Still before him was that body on the beach; but now, as he gazed, the deep blue eyes seemed to open and fix themselves, with a look of unutterable reproach, on his face. Slowly the rigid form seemed to rise and approach him. Nearer and nearer it came, with its glassy, stony eyes staring upon him steadily, until it stood by his bedside. His tongue clove to the roof of his mouth; cold drops of perspiration stood on his brow; he would have cried out, but his throat seemed parched. With one spectral hand it pointed to the gash in its side; and laid the other, icy-cold, on his brow. With a shriek of terror, he sprang from the bed, and stood trembling in every limb on the floor.

He looked around in an agony of fear and horror, but he was alone; and with teeth chattering and head reeling, he sank into a seat, and covered his face with his hands, exclaiming:

"Oh, it was she! it was she! Am I never to be rid of this ghostly presence? Is she to rise from her ocean grave thus, every night, to drive me mad?"

The great old clock in the hall chimed twelve. He shuddered at the sound; and hearing footsteps ascending the stairs, knew that the family were retiring. Casting himself once more on the bed, he strove to compose himself, and while away, in fitful slumber, the tedious hours, till morning should dawn.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE WIDOWED BRIDEGROOM.

"One fatal remembrance, one sorrow which throws
Its bleak shade alike o'er our joys and our woes,
To which life nothing darker or brighter can bring,
For which joy has no balm, and affliction no sting."—MOORE.

And where, meantime, was he, whose headstrong passions had brought about this catastrophe? Where was Willard Drummond?

In his far-off Virginia home, he had seen the last remains of his only surviving parent laid in the grave, and found himself the sole possessor of an almost princely fortune. And now, in deepest mourning, and with a brow on which rested still the sad shadow of that newly closed grave, he turned his face, once more toward the house of Sibyl Campbell.

A complete change—a total revulsion of feeling had taken place within him during the last few days. The awful presence of death had hushed the clamorous voices of passion and ambition, and awoke within him the deepest feelings of remorse for the unmanly part he had acted.

All his sophistries and specious reasonings were swept away by that dying-bed; and he felt, in its fullest force, how base and unworthy had been his conduct. He felt it was his imperative duty, in spite of love and wounded honor, to renounce Sibyl Campbell forever; and, let the consequences be what they might, to tell her all. It would be a bitter humiliation to him, it would bring life-long sorrow to her, but there was no alternative. He shrank from the thought of the terrible outburst of passion his confession would be received with; but better this than the shame and disgrace of wedding the husband of another.

Christie was his wife—his patient, loving little wife—and, as such, must be acknowledged before the world; and with the resolution of following the promptings of his better nature, despite all obstacles, he reached Westport, one lowering autumn day, and, weary and travel-stained, entered the "Westbrook House."

The first person on whom his eyes rested, as he went in, was Captain Guy Campbell, sitting at a table sipping his coffee and glancing over the morning paper.

The noise of his entrance made Captain Guy look up; and, starting to his feet, he caught his hand and shook it heartily, while he exclaimed:

"Drummond, my old friend! delighted to have you here with us again. Here, sit down. Have you breakfasted?"

"No, I have only just arrived. How are all my friends—your sister and the Brantwells?" said Willard, taking the proffered seat.

"All well; though Sibyl has been worrying herself to a skeleton about that sad affair on the island. You have heard of it, I suppose?"

"No; what sad affair?" said Willard, with a start.

"Why, the death of little Christie, to be sure! It is very singular you have not heard of it. The papers are all full of it; but—good heavens! my dear fellow—what is the matter? are you ill?" said Captain Campbell, rising in alarm.

Reeling, as though he had received a spear-thrust through his heart, Willard Drummond sprang to his feet, and with a face deadly white, grasped his friend by the arm, and said, in a choking voice:

"*Dead*, did you say? Christie dead? How? when? where? Of what did she die?"

"Really, Drummond, this agitation is most unaccountable," said Captain Campbell, slowly, and in extreme surprise.

"Dead! dead!" said Drummond, unheeding his words. "Great Heaven!—speak and tell me—how was it? when was it? Where did she die?"

"On the island. This is most extraordinary," replied Captain Campbell, looking at the pale, agitated face before him, in still increasing surprise.

"Oh, Captain Campbell!" exclaimed Willard, in bitter sorrow, "if you call yourself my friend, do not keep me in suspense now—tell me all. How did she die?"

"It is very extraordinary, all this!" said the astonished young captain, who was quite unprepared for such an outburst of feeling from the usually gay, nonchalant Willard Drummond. "Then you have not heard she was—"

"What?"

"Murdered!" said Captain Campbell.

"Murdered! Oh, Heaven!"

And with a deep groan that seemed tearing its way up through his anguished heart. Willard sank into his chair and buried his face in his hands.

Captain Campbell looked at him with the most unbounded amazement.

"Well, upon my soul!" he broke out at length, "if this doesn't surpass anything I ever dreamed of! I can understand feeling sorry and horrified at so atrocious a deed—I felt all that myself; but to take on in this way, is something beyond me, I must confess. Waiter, more coffee."

"Campbell, tell me all," said Willard, springing up and fiercely dashing back his long, black hair. "Who could have committed so base, so atrocious a deed? Oh! can there exist a being on earth, capable of committing so infernal a crime? Who is it?—speak and tell me; and may Heaven's heaviest curses rest upon him, now and for all eternity! Who had the heart to hurt one hair of her gentle head?"

"Drummond, my dear fellow, what means all this violent agitation? What was little Christie to you?"

The keen, searching look, the meaning tone, and probing question, brought him from his fierce outburst of remorse and anguish to a sense of the presence in which he stood. This was not the time or place for the revelation; nor was it to Captain Guy Campbell, that revelation was destined to be made. Controlling his agony of bitter sorrow, and still more bitter remorse, and feeling the necessity of calmly hearing all, by a tremendous effort, he subdued his fiercely excited feelings, and dropped in his seat, and said, while he shaded his face with his hands:

"To me—to me? Nothing; yet I felt toward her almost as if she were my sister. When last I left her she was full of life, and youth, and vigor; and now, now to hear so suddenly that she is dead—and murdered! She—sweet,

fair, and gentle as an angel, to meet such a fate! Oh, Campbell! is it not enough to drive one mad to think of it?"

"It is a sad thing, I must confess," said Captain Campbell, who, being the most unsuspecting of human beings, received this explanation as perfectly satisfactory; "and no one but a demon in human form could have perpetrated the deed!"

"Who is the murderer?" said Drummond, in a deep, hollow voice.

"That cannot be discovered. The island, and every place else, I believe, has been searched; but no clue to his hiding-place can be found. Rewards have been offered, the police put on the track, but all in vain."

"When was the diabolical crime committed?"

"The very night you left N——. You remember the terrific storm of that night! Somewhere about midnight, it is supposed, poor Christie was assassinated. The deed was committed somewhere near the shore; and as the tide was very high, the body, if left on the rocks, must have been swept away. What could have brought Christie from the house at such an hour, and in such a storm, unless she had been forcibly carried out, is a mystery still unsolved."

In spite of all his efforts, another anguished groan broke from the tortured heart of Willard Drummond. The thought of his note appointing that fatal meeting! Oh, too well he knew what had brought her there; and a pang, keener than death, pierced his soul as he thought of that slight, delicate girl plunging through all that howling tempest to meet him!

"Who was on the island at the time?" he asked, after a pause.

"No one but Mrs. Tom and Carl and one or two negroes; and—yes, now I think of it, Sibyl was there too."

"Sibyl?" said Willard, with a start.

"Yes; she went over shortly after you went away. Poor Christie, it seems, wanted her for something, and sent her a note. What it contained I cannot say; but it seemed to agitate Sibyl as I have seldom seen her agitated before; and the result of it was that she insisted, despite the gathering storm, on going to the island that night."

What was the thought that made Willard Drummond turn so ghastly at that moment?

Had Christie, in that note, revealed their marriage? and had Sibyl, in a fit of passion—he shrank in horror, in loathing of himself at the terrible thought that the arch-fiend suggested at that moment. Wild, vindictive, passionate, frenzied in her rage, he knew her to be; but, oh! never, never could even her terrific passion carry her so far away as to raise her hand against that gentle child's life. But who could have done it? Christie, the unknown island-girl, had not an enemy in the world except Sibyl; and she, in violent agitation, had braved storm, and danger, and death to reach the island that night. Oh, horrible thought! With his brain reeling with conflicting emotions, he felt for the moment as if his very reason was leaving him.

Captain Campbell, sitting placidly before him, sipping his coffee, saw nothing of what was passing in Drummond's thoughts; and setting his unexpected emotion down, partially, to the morbid state of his mind since his father's death, and the want of rest, arose and said:

"My dear Drummond, you must be tired and worn out with your journey. You had better retire at once. I will call here this afternoon again. When do you intend visiting N——?"

"Any time, to-day, to-morrow, immediately," answered Drummond, incoherently, scarcely conscious of what he said.

"I am going there to-morrow. What say you to going then?" said his companion, with a stare of surprise.

"I shall be at your service," said Drummond, striving to rally himself. "What with fatigue and all, I am rather bewildered as yet; but I trust by that

time to be far enough recruited to pay my *devoirs* to the ladies at the parsonage."

"Very strange, I must say!" mused Captain Campbell, as he ran down the steps and entered the crowded street. "Very strange, indeed, that the news of little Christie's death should so affect him. I had some notion once that Sibyl was a little jealous of Christie; and, faith, I begin to think she may have had some cause for it. But, perhaps, I wrong Drummond after all. He is not very excitable usually, I know; but his mind being unusually troubled, Christie's dreadful death may have given him a shock. He dare not trifle with Sibyl; if he does, he will feel the weight of a Campbell's vengeance!"

Willard meantime had secured a private room, and was pacing up and down, and striving to collect his thoughts. The first shock was over—the first thrill of horror at the news was past; and though sorrow for her fate, and bitter remorse for what he himself had done still remained, he could not suppress something very like a feeling of relief.

Alas for all his good resolutions! Gone were they now, as the fading sunlight flies before the approach of night; and his love, his hopes, his desires are in the ascendant again. Perhaps he was not altogether to blame for the fickleness of his nature. Perhaps most of it might be owing to his education, to those with whom he had mingled, and the world for which alone he had ever lived.

He thought of Sibyl. That momentary suspicion was quiet, and he hated himself for having indulged it an instant. No; terrific as he knew her to be, when her deep passion was roused, he felt that not on Christie—guileless, inoffensive Christie—would fall her vengeance, but on him, who rightly deserved it. His glorious, high-spirited Sibyl, the descendant of a daring, chivalrous race, would not stoop to slay a weak, unprotected girl like this. There was no obstacle now to prevent his marriage; she might lawfully become his wife, when his period of mourning was past. There was a thrill of secret joy in his heart at the thought; but the sad, reproachful face of Christie rose like a vision before him, and with a shudder he sat down, while remorse again tugged at his heart-strings.

So passed the morning; and when Captain Campbell entered his room again, he found him, though outwardly calm and composed, pale, with many conflicting emotions.

Before he left, it was arranged that they should set out together the following day for N——.

And the next morning the two young men started for the residence of the Brantwells.

They reached it late the same afternoon, and were warmly welcomed by good Mrs. Brantwell. Sibyl, thinner and paler than Willard had ever beheld her, flushed with pleasure as he embraced her, and took a seat by her side.

He looked earnestly in her face; but he read nothing there save deep, subdued sadness; no guilt lingered on that broad, queenly brow, or in those clear, bright eyes.

As a matter of course, the conversation first turned on Christie, and her melancholy fate.

"You have heard it, no doubt, Mr. Drummond," said Mrs. Brant well.

"From my friend Captain Campbell—yes, madam," he answered, gravely, but calmly.

Sibyl's keen eyes were bent with ill-concealed anxiety upon him, and she drew a deep breath of relief as she noted his quiet gravity, as if a heavy load had been lifted off her breast.

"Poor Mrs. Tom!" sighed the minister's wife, "she is indeed to be pitied. I urged her to quit that lonesome island, and we would provide for her somewhere here, but she refused; and says that the only comfort she has now is in watching the waves under which her darling Christie is buried."

A faint shudder passed over Drummond's frame, in spite of himself, at her words.

"By the way, Mr. Brantwell," said Captain Campbell, "where are the Courtneys? They were speaking of going away somewhere when last I was here."

"Yes, they have gone home. Mr. Courtney was in very poor health; and even Mrs. Courtney, poor thing! seemed to have lost most of her high spirits, and was glad to be on the wing again," replied Mrs. Brantwell.

During this short dialogue, Sibyl and Willard were conversing together in low tones.

"And so your resolution is really to go abroad?" said Sibyl, lifting her dark eyes anxiously to his face.

"Yes—but for some months only; and the project gives me pleasure in the thought alone that, in so doing, I will not be separated from you."

"No! and how?" she said, in surprise.

"Then you are not aware that your brother, having completed all his business, and refitted his vessel, is about to take you with him again to England?"

"I was really quite ignorant of that fact."

"Well, so it is. We all start together in three weeks' time, I believe."

A flush of pleased surprise passed over Sibyl's pale face.

"Then, in that case, I shall have an opportunity of accomplishing my long-cherished wish of visiting Italy. I have long and ardently desired to see that beautiful land."

"And after that, fairest Sibyl?"

"I shall return home."

"And what then, beautiful one?"

"Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," quoted Sibyl, with a smile. "Who knows what the future may bring forth?"

"Let me tell you, beautiful Sibyl," said Drummond, in the low, musical tones that had so often thrilled to her inmost heart. "After that may I claim this little hand as mine? Say, fairest Sibyl, may I look forward to our return to claim my bride?"

She lifted her eyes to the handsome face bending over her, so full of perfect love and devotion now; and, like the frank glorious creature she was, she laid her hand in his, and said:

"Yes."

"Why, Sibyl, my dear," broke in the voice of Mrs. Brantwell at this interesting juncture, in tones of deepest dismay, "do you know what Guy says? All three of you are to start off on a wild-geese chase to Europe, instead of settling down and behaving yourselves, as sensible Christians should. It's really quite abominable, and I, for one, have set my face against it; and I am sure, Sibyl, you'd agree with me."

"Really, my dear Mrs. Brantwell," said Sibyl, smiling, "I am afraid I cannot. I wish to go quite as much as Guy."

"You do?" exclaimed the minister's wife. "Well, upon my word, if this is not too provoking! It all comes of having a taste for rambling, and being male and female sailors, the whole of you! I always thought sailors were vagabonds on the face of the earth, without any settled place of abode, and I'm sure of it now. You don't expect to be able to go in three weeks, I should hope?"

"Yes, of course, I do. What's to hinder?" said Sibyl. "I am not a fine lady, you know, and don't require two or three dozen trunks packed before I start. So, Captain Campbell, though you did not do me the honor of consulting me before all your arrangements were made, I shall reserve my wounded pride and indignation to another season, and be ready to go with you at a moment's warning."

Mrs. Brantwell expostulated in vain. Sibyl would go; but promised faithfully to return within nine months, at farthest.

And so, three weeks later, our trio stood on the deck of the Evening Star, "outward bound."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE THUNDERBOLT FALLS.

"They spake not a word,
But, like dumb statues, or breathless stores,
Stared at each other, and looked deadly pale."—SHAKESPEARE

It is not my intention to chronicle the events of that foreign tour. Suffice it to say, it came to an end, at last; and, Captain Guy Campbell, Willard Drummond, and his betrothed stood once more upon the shore of their native land.

There was a joyful meeting that day in the parsonage. Good Mrs. Brantwell, as she again clasped her favorite, Sibyl, in her arms, shed tears of joy.

Those twelve months of absence had greatly improved Sibyl. The rich bloom of perfect health again mantled her cheeks; her magnificent eyes, brilliant with hope and happiness, once more outshone her diamonds. Through all the foreign cities through which she had traveled, her dazzling beauty had created the deepest sensation. Known to be an heiress, beauty, and belle, countless hearts had been laid at her feet; but Sibyl never for an instant, in thought or act, was unfaithful to that first, strong, undying love that was part of her very nature.

And now the period of Willard Drummond's mourning was passed, and they had returned home, to be united at last.

How ardently and truly he loved Sibyl now—far better than he had every one before. How proudly he had exulted in the knowledge that this peerless, queenly girl, at whose feet coronets had been laid, and rejected, was his—his alone; would soon be his bride—his wife. How his heart had swelled with triumph when he beheld the envious looks and jealous glances bestowed upon him, by more than one titled nobleman of other lands. He longed, as the blind long for sight, for the time when this glorious, radiant Sibyl would be his own, undisputed wife, beyond earthly power to separate them. Until that time came, he must live in uncertainty, not knowing whether this prize might not yet slip through his fingers.

That time, so ardently looked forward to, was at hand now. Preparations for the wedding were already commenced on a scale of magnificence that was destined to electrify the community far and near, and which the princely fortunes of the bride and bridegroom could alone justify.

The day was appointed, and invitations were sent out to all the *elite* within fifty miles, to attend the ball, with which it was then customary to conclude a wedding.

Sibyl, with her usual willfulness, would not be married in the house in the evening; it did not seem right, she said. She would be married in the church, in the morning; and, as this was of little consequence to the rest, her wish was immediately acceded to.

On rosy wings sped the time, until the auspicious morning dawned. Brightly and cloudlessly arose the sun, ushering in a day as glorious as ever came out of the heavens. How little did any one dream how darkly and fatally that day was destined to end?

It was arranged that the day following the ceremony the bridal pair should again take their departure for a wedding tour, and everything was prepared accordingly.

Good Mrs. Brantwell, as mistress of the ceremonies, had a very busy time of it for the preceding two weeks. Milliners and dressmakers from the city filled the upper rooms, and cooks and confectioners the lower regions. To her lot it fell to purchase dresses, laces, jewels, etc., for the use of the bride—who, with her characteristic indifference to all such things, would, if left to herself, have committed the unpardonable sin of being married in her simple white robe of India muslin, instead of her splendid silver brocade, frosted with seed-pearls, which the sumptuous taste of that worthy lady had selected.

Among the many guests invited to the "wedding-feast" we may mention our old friend, Mrs. Tom. Poor little Mrs. Tom! Since the loss of little Christie she had never been the same bright, brisk, breezy, chirruping body she had been before, and though still active and bustling as ever, her cheery laugh was far less seldom heard. Mr. Carl Henley, too, was to be present; and made his appearance on the eventful morning in a long blue "swallow-tail," brilliant with brass buttons, his boots and hair shining with lard, and his round, full-moon face wearing a look of sublime beatification, serene in the blissful consciousness of a new suit of clothes and a pair of white gloves, every greasy hair in his head breathing "peace on earth, good will to man.'

Two young girls from Westport were to be bride-maids, and a young Englishman, whom they had met abroad, together with a cousin of Mr. Drummond's were to be groomsmen. Captain Campbell, as her nearest relative, was to give the bride away.

Early in the morning, the first carriages began to arrive, and soon the lower hall and drawing-room were crowded with guests, waiting to accompany the bridal party to church.

In her room, before a full-length mirror, Sibyl Campbell, so soon to be Sibyl Drummond, stood, while half a dozen girls, headed by Mrs. Brantwell, arrayed her for bridal.

Magnificently beautiful she looked as she stood there, her rich robe of sheeny silk floating about her regal form, her queenly brow clasped by a tiara of finest diamonds, her gauzy veil of costliest lace enveloping her like

a cloud of mist—her dark cheeks flushed with excitement, her magnificent eyes outflashing the jewels she wore.

"Beautiful! glorious! radiant!" broke from the lips of her attendants, as they stepped back to survey the effect.

"Yes, beautiful indeed!" mentally exclaimed Mrs. Brantwell, "beautiful beyond compare looks my peerless Sibyl in her bridal robes."

And just then the door was thrown impetuously open, and one of the bride-maids, a vivacious little lady, with twinkling brown eyes, burst in, exclaiming:

"Girls! girls! aren't you ready yet. Oh, my goodness! Sibyl, how splendid you look. But do hurry! That happiest of mortal men, Mr. Willard Drummond, is waiting, with all the rest of the folks—a hundred and fifty if there's one—down stairs. Hurry!"

Thus abjured, like a flock of startled birds, the bower-maidens fled to arrange their own toilet, and Sibyl was alone with Mrs. Brantwell.

"My own precious Sibyl! and am I to lose you at last?" said Mrs. Brantwell, clasping her in her arms, and gazing upon her sparkling face, with eyes of yearning fondness.

"Dear Mrs. Brantwell, my second mother, come what may, let the future bring what it will, you will ever hold the second place in my heart," said Sibyl, dropping her head on the shoulder of her friend.

"And you are happy, *perfectly* happy, my own darling?"

"Oh, yes, perfectly happy, too happy for words to say. Oh, Mrs. Brantwell, my only fear is that such intense joy is too blissful to last."

"And you have perfect trust, perfect faith in him who is so soon to be your husband? Does no doubt still linger amid all this love?"

"None, none! not the slightest, not the faintest. Oh! I wronged him by ever doubting his truth. I could stake my hopes of heaven on his fidelity

now," exclaimed Sibyl, with some of her old fierce impetuosity.

"Thank Heaven for that!" said Mrs. Brantwell, with a sigh of relief. "Oh! Sibyl, dearest, eradicate forever from your heart this fatal dream of jealousy; to doubt one we love is deepest misery."

"Oh! I know it; I know it," said Sibyl, with a shudder, as she recalled the stormy past.

And just then the tripping of light feet approaching the door was heard.

"It is the girls coming back to take you down stairs," said Mrs. Brantwell. "And now, my own, my dearest girl, may Heaven bless you, and grant you all happiness."

"Amen!" solemnly, almost sadly, said Sibyl, as she returned her embrace, and stood waiting the entrance of her bride-maids.

They burst in in a bevy, fluttering round the bride like bright-winged birds, as they shook out their glittering plumage with little, white, jeweled hands, and announced that the bridegroom and his friends were waiting for them in the hall below.

And together the bride and her friends descended the stairs, followed by Mrs. Brantwell, and entered the hall, crowded with guests.

A low murmur of admiration passed through the throng at sight of the radiant bride. And Willard Drummond, handsome, suave, and stately, stepped forward and drew her hand within his arm, and led her to the carriage that was to convey them to the church.

The others followed; and as that sacred edifice was situated but a few yards from the house, they reached it in a short time.

The church, too, was crowded, mostly by strangers, some from places far distant, drawn together by the rumors of the bride's wondrous beauty. So crowded was it that half the bridal party could not find seats, but were obliged to stand.

Mr. Brantwell, in full canonicals, stood, book in hand, awaiting their approach.

They advanced under the admiring eyes of the crowd, and stood before him.

And at that very instant, like an inspiration, flashed across the eyes of Willard Drummond the remembrance of the strange vision he had seen years before. Here it was, all there before him. The crowded church, the bridal party, the clergyman and bride wearing exactly the faces of those he had beheld then.

A thrill of vague terror, he knew not why, shot through his heart. He thought of Christie—lost, murdered Christie—and of that other bridal, which took place at night, in secrecy. But then, lifting his eyes, they fell on the gloriously beautiful face of her who stood before him, and all was forgotten once more but his bride.

The ceremony began, amid a breathless silence, as the vast concourse listened, with the eagerness they always do on such occasions. The questions were put and answered in the usual manner, when a slight tumult at the door broke for the first time the impressive silence.

The clergyman had almost concluded the ceremony, and the bridegroom was just putting the nuptial ring on the finger of the bride, with the words: "With this ring I do thee wed; with all my worldly goods I thee endow, in the name of——"

"*Hold!* I forbid the marriage!" cried a deep, stern voice, that rang through the church.

Every head was turned, every eye was riveted on the speaker, a tall, determined-looking man.

White with vague apprehensions, the bride and bridegroom turned round, while the bride-maids shrieked outright at the interruption.

Mr. Brantwell stood, like one thunderstruck, book in hand.

And the stranger, the cause of all this commotion, walked steadily up the aisle and stood before them.

"Who are you, sir?" was the amazed and angry question from the lips of Captain Campbell, who was the first to recover from his shock of astonishment at this astounding interruption.

"Sheriff Lawless, sir; and it is my painful duty to prevent this marriage."

"By what right?" fiercely demanded the young man, with kindling eyes.

"By a right all-sufficient for the purpose, young man." calmly answered the sheriff. "I have a warrant here for the arrest of——"

"*Whom?*"

"Miss Sibyl Campbell, the bride!"

"Great Heaven! on what charge? You are mad, man."

"On the charge of having, fifteen months ago, assassinated Christina Tomlinson, on Campbell's Isle!"

A wild, terrific shriek, so full of passionate grief that it thrilled through every heart, rang through the house. It was the voice of Mrs. Tom.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE DEVOTION OF LOVE.

"I know not, I ask not,
If guilt's in thy heart;
I but know that I love thee
Whatever thou art."—MOORE

It would be impossible to depict or describe the consternation that reigned now within the church.

Mrs. Tom, in a deadly swoon, was borne from the sacred edifice.

The book had dropped from the hand of the clergyman, and dumb with amazement and incredulity, he stood staring at the official.

Mrs. Brantwell, pale, and almost fainting at so monstrous a charge, made at such a time, and in such a place, hid her shuddering face in her trembling hands.

The bride-maids, like a flock of frightened birds, had clustered together, gazing around with vague, terror-stricken eyes.

And the people, after the first shock of horror and amazement, became mute as the grave, listening, with breathless interest, for the *denouement* of this astounding interruption, with the eager, morbid curiosity a crowd will always listen to anything of the sort.

But the group around the altar; *they* were the focus of all eyes. Captain Guy Campbell, his dark eye blazing, his brow corrugated, his lips white with passion, stood gazing on the sheriff, as if he would spring upon him and rend him limb from limb on the spot, for making so terrible a charge against a sister of his.

That gentleman stood calm, stern, and unmoved, upheld by the consciousness that he was doing his duty, however painful, and keeping his eyes fixed, with something like pity, on the face of the bride.

Willard Drummond, fearing she might faint or fall, had encircled her waist with his arm; and, though his own face was perfectly colorless with horror and indignation, stooped and whispered:

"My bride—my wife—my dearest one, be calm! This monstrous accusation will be explained."

Be calm! There was little need to tell her to be calm. After the first involuntary shock, she stood like an outraged empress before them, her regal form drawn up to its full height, her noble brow expanded, her dark, magnificent eyes blazing with insulted pride and unutterable scorn, her full lips curled with a contempt too profound for words, her whole face and form irradiated with the light of insulted majesty.

There was one instant's death-like pause, broken at last by the voice of Mr. Lawless, saying politely:

"I am very sorry that painful necessity compels me to thus break up the festivities of this day. This charge against the lady may be groundless—I hope it is. But I have a duty to perform, however unpleasant it may be to me, and to all of you."

"On whose charge is my sister arrested for this deed?" said Captain Campbell, in a deep, stern voice.

"On that of Mr. Edgar Courtney, I believe," answered the sheriff.

"Edgar Courtney!" rang from every lip, in tones in which amazement had completely mastered every other feeling. Even Sibyl looked bewildered.

"Yes; and in support of his deposition he has brought to bear such a strong chain of circumstantial evidence, that even in the face of the proof being brought against a young lady so wealthy, high-born, and distinguished as Miss Campbell, it was found necessary to issue a warrant for her immediate apprehension."

"Heaven of heavens! this is maddening! Oh! for the thunderbolt of Heaven to blast that double-dyed perjurer where he stands!" exclaimed Captain Campbell, passionately.

Without heeding this indignant outburst, the sheriff turned to Sibyl and said, courteously;

"Miss Campbell, this duty is exceedingly unpleasant to me; but I regret to say you must go with me now!"

"Where?" said Sibyl, in a tone of such supernatural calmness, that every one was startled.

"Miss Campbell, I am very sorry; but it is my duty to convey you to the county jail, to await your trial."

"The county jail!" exclaimed Sibyl, losing her powerful self-control for the first time during this trying scene; and with a convulsive shudder hiding her face on Willard's shoulder.

He clasped her closer to his side, as if he defied earth and heaven to tear her from him; but still he spoke not a word. Was it the impossibility of the charge? Was it his indignation and horror? or was it this awful confirmation of his first doubts, and the vivid recollection the scene at the astrologer's that held him dumb.

But Captain Campbell, losing all self-control, all remembrance of where he stood, once more passionately and impetuously broke forth:

"To the county jail! So help me Heaven!—never! Never will Sibyl Campbell submit to such a degradation! Sooner will I shoot her dead with my own hand where she stands! Oh, 'tis monstrous!—outrageous!—that any one should dare to accuse a Campbell of such an infernal deed and live!" he exclaimed, clenching his hands and teeth in his impotent, fiery wrath.

"My dear Guy, be calm; remember where you are," interposed Mr. Brantwell, soothingly. "If Mr. Lawless wants bail to any amount, whatever you may name——"

"Parson Brantwell, I should like to oblige you, but you must be aware that I cannot listen to you; unfortunately, the charge is not aailable one. And I trust," added the sheriff, glancing half threateningly, half pityingly at Captain Campbell, "no resistance will be offered me in the discharge of my

solemn duty; for, painful as the announcement is, there is no help for it. The young lady *must* come with me."

"A bride to spend her wedding-day in a prison-cell! Oh, saints in heaven!" shudderingly exclaimed Mrs. Brantwell.

"I am ready," said Sibyl, lifting her pale, beautiful face, and speaking in tones of supernatural calmness. "I will go with you, sir, and there will be no resistance offered. Guy, dearest brother, be calm; this violence will not aid me, and will lower yourself. Mrs. Brantwell, may I trouble you to bring me my mantle from the carriage?"

"Oh, must you go?" exclaimed Mrs. Brantwell, wringing her hands.

"Unfortunately, dear madam, there seems to be no alternative."

"But not in that dress—not in that dress! Sir, may she not return to the parsonage and change her dress?"

"Madam, I am very sorry, but I cannot lose sight of my prisoner."

A circle of white flamed round the eyes of Captain Campbell, and he clenched his hands and groaned in his bitter degradation.

"Then I am quite ready to go. Mrs. Brantwell, dearest friend, farewell for a short time only, I trust. Guy, brother, do not feel this so deeply; in a few days I trust to return to you all again. Willard"—her clear, full voice choked for the first time as she turned to him—"dearest Willard, I must bid you good by."

"Oh, Sibyl! Sibyl! Oh, my wife! do you think I will leave you thus?" he cried, passionately, as, unheeding the many eyes upon him, he strained her to his bosom as if he would have drawn her into his very heart beyond their reach. "Oh, my bride! my beautiful one! never will I leave you—*never!*"

A radiant glance, a look, a smile, rewarded him, while every heart thrilled at his anguished tones.

"Your own, in life or death, in shame, disgrace, and misery—ever your own!" she said, looking up in his face with deep, earnest, undying love.

There was not a dry eye in the church; every one was sobbing—Mrs. Brantwell so convulsively that the sheriff, who was really a kind-hearted man, was deeply distressed.

"Miss Campbell, will you accept my arm?" he said, feeling the necessity of bringing this scene at once to an end. "My carriage is at the door to convey you to——"

"The county jail! Oh, Sibyl! oh, my sister! Would to Heaven you had died before you had seen this day!"

"Brother, brother! be calm. Mr. Lawless, I attend you," said Sibyl, advancing a step, as if to take the arm he offered.

But Willard Drummond intercepted the movement, and drew her arm within his own, saying, with a fierce, threatening glance toward the sheriff:

"I will attend you, Sibyl; I alone have the right. Lead on, sir"—to the sheriff—"we attend your pleasure. No one on earth shall separate me from my bride!"

"Mr. Drummond, the—the ceremony was not finished when the interruption occurred," stammered the minister, looking deeply distressed.

But a scornful smile was Willard Drummond's sole reply, as he clasped the arm he held closer within his own.

"I, too, will go!" cried Captain Campbell. "Sheriff Lawless, your strict sense of duty will not, I trust, prevent your allowing me to accompany my sister to the county jail."

"Captain Campbell is quite welcome to a seat in my carriage," said the officer of the law, with a grave bow, and without heeding his bitter sneer.

"Farewell, Mrs. Brantwell—my more than mother, farewell!" said Sibyl, as the whole party, preceded by the sheriff, advanced down the aisle.

Mrs. Brantwell strove to reply, but her voice was choked. Taking her husband's arm, she followed them out.

The whole assembly arose *en masse*, and started for the door, casting threatening looks toward the sheriff, as though half meditating a rescue on the spot.

A plain, dark-looking coach, with a mounted policeman on either side, stood near the gate.

The sheriff paused when he reached it, and signified that they were to enter. Mr. Drummond handed Sibyl in and took his seat beside her; Captain Campbell, with a stern, gloomy look, followed; and then the sheriff sprang in, closed the door, and gave the order to drive on. Sibyl bent from the carriage window to wave a last adieu to Mrs. Brantwell; and the crowd standing on the church-steps and court-yard caught a momentary glimpse of her pale, beautiful face, with its sad, twilight smile, her dark, proud eyes more scornful than ever in their humiliation. That haunting face, so perfectly colorless, with its bright, jetty ringlets, its floating, mist-like vail, its orange blossoms—could it be the face of a murderess?

The next moment she fell back, the blinds were closed, the driver cracked his whip, the policemen put spurs to their horses, and the sad cavalcade moved rapidly away.

Hushed into the silence of death, the crowd stood breathlessly gazing after it, until the sound of the carriage wheels had died away—the last cloud of dust raised by the horses' feet vanished. Then pale, and awe-struck, they drew a deep breath and looked with tearful eyes into each other's pale faces, wondering if it were not all a dream.

Whispering in low, hushed tones beneath their breath, they separated, and wended their way to their respective homes; and in half an hour the church was as still, silent and deserted as the tomb.

Like wild-fire spread the news; and before night it was not only known to all the county round, but for many a mile distant. The whole community was electrified by a catastrophe so unheard-of. Children quit their play,

women their work, lovers their whispers, and laborers their daily toil, to talk over the astounding arrest. The wealth, the respectability, the youth, the beauty, the sex, the well-known arrogance and pride of the race from which the accused had sprung, all tended to heighten and deepen the breathless interest. And the time and place—the occasion of occasions on which the arrest had taken place—that, more than all, sent a thrill of horror through every heart. Each circumstance of the interview in the church was exaggerated, and people listened and swallowed everything with avidity.

In the parsonage, meantime, a cloud of the deepest gloom had settled over its lately joyous inmates.

Mr. and Mrs. Brantwell, with the three bride-maids and Will Stafford, had immediately, upon the departure of Sibyl, entered their carriage and driven to the minister's house.

And the bride-maids, in great agitation, not to say deep disappointment at losing the ball in the evening, dressed themselves and went immediately home.

Mrs. Brantwell sat weeping in a perfect abandon of grief, in the parlor below, and would not be comforted. Mr. Brantwell and Mr. Stafford, themselves in deep distress, strove to console her in vain.

Poor Will Stafford! it was not without a struggle he had seen Sibyl given up to another; but hiding the sharp, dreary pain at his heart under a gay exterior, he had resolutely determined to be gay, and conquer his ill-starred passion. From the first moment he had seen Willard Drummond, an uneasy consciousness that he had beheld him somewhere before was ever upon him. He thought of the secret marriage he had long ago beheld, and he *thought* Mr. Drummond looked suspiciously like the bridegroom on that occasion; but he "pooh-poohed" the notion as preposterous, and strove to forget it. It was nearly dark when he had beheld that "run-away pair," as he called them; and he could not distinctly see the face of the man—their general appearance was alike, but not sufficiently so to warrant his speaking on the subject; and, of course, it could not have been Mr. Drummond, the betrothed of Sibyl Campbell. So he had hitherto scouted the idea until he

had nearly forgotten it; but now, strange to say, it came back to him more vividly than ever.

While many suspicious thoughts of Willard Drummond, but not one of Sibyl, were passing through his mind, Mrs. Brantwell was still sobbing on the sofa, in passionate grief.

"Now, really, Harriet, this is wrong—this is sinful. You know," said Mr. Brantwell, fidgetting uneasily, "such violent grief is forbidden. We should be resigned to the dispensations of Providence, no matter in what shape they come."

"Oh, Mr. Brantwell, go away! I don't believe this is a dispensation of Providence; it is all the villainy of that miserable wretch, Courtney! And to think we should have kept him here, too. Oh, Sibyl! Sibyl!" concluded Mrs. Brantwell, with a fresh burst of grief.

"My dear madam, let us hope for the best. This absurd, this monstrous, this horrible charge will soon be explained, and Sibyl set at liberty," said Stafford, soothingly.

"Oh, I know all that—I have not the slightest doubt but she will be discharged, soon—very soon! But think of the horrible injustice of this deed! that she, my beautiful, high-minded, proud-spirited Sibyl, should ever set foot within a prison cell, much less be brought there as a prisoner—and on her wedding-day, too! Oh, it is cruel! it is most unjust! I have no words to express the unspeakable wrong it inflicts upon her. That her name should be bandied on every tongue—should be proclaimed as a felon's in all the papers—should be the topic of every tavern far and near! Oh, Heaven! why is this monstrous injustice permitted?" cried Mrs. Brantwell, in still-increasing sorrow and indignation.

"Now, really, Mrs. Brantwell," began the more moderate spouse.

"Mr. Brantwell," sobbed his wife, looking indignantly at him through her tears, "if you can stand there, looking so cool and unmoved, it's no reason why others should be equally heartless. Oh, Mr. Stafford! won't you ride to Westport and learn the issue of this arrest, or I shall die of suspense!"

"Most certainly, madam; I shall go immediately," said Stafford, standing up. "I was about to propose it myself when you spoke."

"You will return as soon as possible?" called Mrs. Brantwell, after him, as he left the room.

"I shall not lose a moment," said the young man, as he ran down stairs, sprang on his horse and dashed furiously toward the town.

As it was impossible with the utmost expedition, for him to return before the next day, Mrs. Brantwell prepared herself for a night of lingering torture—the torture of suspense. To the anxious, affectionate heart of the good old lady, that long, sleepless night seemed endless; and she hailed the sunlight of the next morning with joy, as the precursor of news from Sibyl.

As the morning passed, this anxiety and suspense grew almost unendurable. Unable to sit down for one moment, Mrs. Brantwell paced up and down, wringing her hands, and twisting her fingers, and looking every other moment down the road, whence Stafford must come.

But, with all her anxious watching, the hours passed on; and, it was almost noon before the welcome sound of a rapid gallop met her ear, and brought her eager, palpitating, and trembling, to the door. Yes, it was Stafford, but the hope that had sprung up in her breast, died away at sight of his face. His horse was reeking with foam, his clothes were disordered and travel-stained, his hair disheveled, his face pale and haggard, as if from sleeplessness and sorrow, and his eyes gloomy and excited.

"Oh, Mr. Stafford, what news of Sibyl?" gasped Mrs. Brantwell, faintly.

"Oh, it is just as I feared it would be! Sibyl is fully committed for trial," said Stafford, leaping off his horse, and entering the parlor excitedly.

Mrs. Brantwell, faint and sick, dropped into a chair, and bowed her face in her hands, unable to speak; and her husband took up the inquiry.

"Have you seen Sibyl?"

"Oh, yes; I saw her in her prison cell, behind an iron grating, as if she were some undoubted criminal," replied Stafford, bitterly.

"How does she bear this blow?"

Oh, when one is talking to her, she is calm, and proud, and scornful enough; but, as she lifted her head when I first went in, there was such fixed, utter anguish and despair in her eyes, that I hope I may never see the like again."

"Poor Sibyl! When does this trial take place?"

"Next week. It seems there are not many cases occupying the court now; and hers occurs among the first, at the special request of her friends."

"Have they engaged counsel?"

"Yes, Mr. P——, the best lawyer in the State."

"And her brother and Drummond, how do *they* bear this?"

"Oh, Captain Campbell swears, and threatens, and looks as much like a maniac as any one I ever want to see. Mr. Drummond is calm; but there is something in his very calmness more indicative of grief than all Guy's more violent sorrow. They have engaged lodgings at Westport, and will remain there until after the trial."

"Is there any doubt, any fear, about the issue?"

"None in the least; there *cannot* be, you know. It is impossible, utterly impossible, there can be an instant's doubt about her acquittal. The trial, therefore, will be nothing but a serious farce; but it is the infernal injustice, begging your reverence's pardon, of making Sibyl Campbell a principal actor in it, to stand before the gaze of hundreds in the prisoner's dock, that is so inhuman. Oh, there does not, there *cannot* exist a human being on the face of the earth, so lost to reason as to believe she could be guilty of such a crime."

"On what day next week does the trial take place?" asked Mr. Brantwell.

"It opens next Tuesday, I believe. And Mrs. Brantwell, I have heard that you are to be subpoenaed as a witness."

"Oh, I would have gone in any case," said Mrs. Brantwell, faintly. "My poor Sibyl!" and with another burst of tears her head fell on the table again.

"Really, Mrs. Brantwell, you will make yourself ill by this foolish indulgence of grief," said her husband, uneasily.

"And there is no real necessity for it," said Stafford, feeling it his duty to say something consoling. "Sibyl will most certainly be acquitted."

"Oh, don't talk to me, either of you," said Mrs. Brantwell, petulantly. "You are men, and can't understand how this will darken all Sibyl's future life. I feel, I know she will never recover from it."

There was an embarrassing pause, and then Mr. Brantwell said:

"I will go to Westport the day before the trial comes on, and stay there until Sibyl is discharged, poor girl! I suppose she and Mr. Drummond will immediately sail for Europe until this unhappy affair is forgotten."

"Most likely. And now I must bid you both good-morning!"

"Why! will you not wait for dinner? Where are you going?"

"To Westport. Not to leave it again until this miserable trial is Over. Good-by." And Stafford hurried from the house, and mounting his still reeking horse, rode rapidly away.

CHAPTER XXX.

SIBYL'S DOOM.

"Great Heaven! how could thy vengeance light
So bitterly on one so bright?
How could the hand that gave such charms,
Blast them again in Love's own arms?"—MOORE.

As Stafford had said, a subpoena was served on Mrs. Brantwell, to be present at the great trial about which everybody was talking. That good lady, who had determined already to go, regarded it as a useless ceremony; but Fate seemed determined to deprive her of that melancholy consolation, for two days before the eventful one on which the trial was to take place, poor Mrs. Brantwell, worn out by excitement and constant weeping, was seized with such a violent sick headache, that she was utterly unable to leave her bed. In vain, when the day "big with fate" came, did she attempt to rise. At the first effort she was seized with such a deadly faintness—such a blinding giddiness, that she was instantly forced to go to bed again. And there, half delirious, with her head throbbing and beating like mad, she was forced to lie, while her physician wrote a certificate of her inability to attend, which Mr. Brantwell was to convey to Westport.

How that day passed, and the next, and the next, Mrs. Brantwell never knew. Lying in her darkened chamber, with bandages wet with vinegar bound around her burning forehead, with servants tiptoeing in and out, and speaking in hushed whispers, the time passed as it does in a dream. With her mind as well as her body utterly prostrate, she was spared the suspense concerning the position of Sibyl she must otherwise have suffered.

But on the fourth day, Saturday, though weak and languid, she was able to rise, and, with the assistance of Jenny, descended to the parlor, where, smothered in shawls, she lay rocking back and forth in her large easy chair.

And now, recovered from the first prostration of bodily illness, she thought of the time that had passed, and began to feel all the tortures of doubt and agonizing suspense again. Sibyl's trial must be over by this time, and—*what had been the result?*

So unendurable grew this uncertainty, that she was about to dispatch a messenger to Westport to learn the result of the trial, when the clatter of

horses' hoofs before the door arrested her attention, and the next instant the door was thrown open, and Will Stafford stood before her.

Yes, Will Stafford; but so changed that she almost screamed as she saw him. Worn, haggard, and ghastly; with convulsed brow, white lips, and despairing eyes; with such a look of passionate grief, anguish, and despair that the scream was frozen on her lips; and white, rigid, and speechless, she stood staring, unable to utter a word.

Without speaking, almost without looking at her, he threw himself into a chair, and buried his face in his hands.

Oh! what meant that look, that action, that ominous silence? For one moment the sight seemed leaving Mrs. Brantwell's eyes—the power of life seemed dying out in her heart; but by a mighty effort of her will she resisted the deadly faintness that was creeping over her, and asked, in a voice so low and tremulous, that it was almost inaudible:

"What of Sibyl?"

A groan, that seemed to rend the heart from which it came, burst from the lips of Stafford.

"What of Sibyl?" repeated Mrs. Brantwell, breathing hard, in her effort to be calm.

"Oh! Mrs. Brantwell, do not ask!" exclaimed Stafford, in a stifling voice.

"Sibyl, Sibyl!" were the only words the white, quivering lips could utter.

"Oh! how can I tell her?" cried Stafford, springing up, and wildly beginning to pace the room.

"Sibyl! what of her?" wailed Mrs. Brantwell, pressing her hands to her heart.

"Sibyl is—oh, Heaven? how can I speak the terrible words?" exclaimed the excited young man, pacing up and down like one demented.

"Heavens! will you tell me before I go mad?" cried Mrs. Brantwell, becoming as much excited as himself.

"Then listen—since I must repeat her awful fate! Sibyl has been tried, convicted, and *doomed to die!*"

The look that Mrs. Brantwell's face wore that moment, never left the memory of Will Stafford. There was a sound as of many waters in her ears, a sudden darkness before her eyes, her brain reeled, and her head dropped helplessly on the arm of her chair.

Stafford, in alarm, flew to the bell; but overcoming, with a mighty effort, that deadly inclination to swoon, she lifted up her head, and half raised her hand, in a faint motion to stop him.

"I want nothing; it is over," she said, tremulously. "Sit down before me and tell me all. The worst is over, and I can bear anything now."

"Oh! it was horrible, monstrous, outrageous, this sentence," exclaimed Stafford, with a burst of passionate grief. "I never dreamed for an instant—never did—that she would be condemned. Oh, curse that Courtney! Heaven's malediction rest on him, here and hereafter!" he hissed through his clenched teeth.

"Tell me all! Oh, tell me all!" said Mrs. Brantwell, trying to steady her trembling voice.

"I wish I could! I came for that purpose; but I am going mad, I think," said Stafford, throwing himself into a chair with something like a howl of mingled rage and despair. "*She* told me to come and tell you; nothing else could have made me leave Westport while she lives."

"Was it Sibyl?"

"Yes; Mr. Brantwell could not travel as fast as I could, and will not be here till to-morrow, and I—oh! I rode as if the old demon were at my heels all the way—and I'll never rest easy again till I've put a bullet through Courtney's brain; for, he's the cause of it all, with his diabolical

circumstantial evidence," exclaimed Stafford, with still increasing vehemence.

"Mr. Stafford, do give me the particulars!"

"You know the trial was to commence on Tuesday?"

"Yes."

"Well, as soon as the doors of the court-house were thrown open, the galleries, and staircases, and every corner of the building were filled to suffocation by an eager crowd. I got in among the rest of the rabble, and secured a good place where I could see and hear everything. Owing to some cause or other, the people had to wait a good while; and just as they were getting clamorous and impatient, they saw the carriage making its way slowly through the mass of people that lined and crowded the streets, unable to obtain an entrance into the court-house. Then every one was on tiptoe with expectation to see the prisoner, the fame of whose wealth and beauty, and the strange circumstances attending her arrest, had been blazoned the whole country round. It was with the greatest difficulty that a passage could be forced through the crowd as she entered, dressed in deepest black, closely veiled, and in the custody of the high sheriff. Captain Campbell and Drummond followed closely after, and took their places near her. As she took her seat, you might have heard a pin drop, so intense was the silence; but when, a moment after, she threw back her vail, and her pale, beautiful face, with its dark, proud, scornful eyes, that went wandering for an instant round with contemptuous disdain for the gaping crowd, a low, deep murmur of admiration, surprise, and pity, passed through the vast assemblage of human beings; and the next instant they were profoundly still once more.

"The jury were already impaneled, and the presiding judge, and the State attorney, and Sibyl's counsel, had taken their places, so the trial immediately commenced. When the clerk of the court put the customary question—'Guilty or not guilty'—I wish you had seen the slender form of Sibyl tower aloft, and her glorious eyes flash, and her beautiful lip curl with scorn and disdain, as she answered:

"Not guilty! your honor."

"There is no use in my telling you the State attorney's charge. You'll see it all in the papers, if you have any curiosity on the subject. All I need say is, that it seemed to destroy every favorable impression made on the minds of the jury by the youth, beauty, and sex of the prisoner. He spoke of the pain it gave him to be obliged to make this charge against a woman, whose interesting appearance he saw had already made a deep impression on the minds of all present; but he trusted the gentlemen of the jury would not allow themselves to be carried away by their feelings, for 'appearances were often deceitful;' and he made a long preamble about demons wearing the forms of angels of light, and of the crimes other women, gentle and loving before, had been induced to commit in sudden paroxysms of jealousy—as this crime had been—as he was prepared to prove. He spoke of many cases of women—some of which had come under his own immediate knowledge—of women stabbing themselves, their lovers, their rivals, in fits of jealous passion. He spoke of the well-known jealousy and vindictiveness that had ever characterized the race from which the interesting prisoner at the bar had sprung, and that he would soon show that she had been ever noted—even since childhood—for these same faults. Then he drew a pathetic picture of the victim—her youth, her gentleness, her trusting simplicity—until every woman present was sobbing as if her heart would break. But when he concluded by saying that the murdered girl was the wife of the prisoner's lover—married to him in secret, as he would shortly prove—a thrill ran through every heart."

"His wife!" exclaimed Mrs. Brantwell, looking up in dismay and incredulity.

"Yes, Mrs. Brantwell, his wife; and she was, too," said Stafford, sorrowfully. "When Willard Drummond—who had all this time been standing motionless, his hat drawn over his brow—heard the words, he started, reeled, and turned as deadly white as if he had received a pistol-shot through the heart. Sibyl lifted her wild, black eyes, and reading in that look, that action, the truth of the words, with a long, low cry dropped her face in her hands, with such a look of utter despair, that every heart stood still. Captain Campbell sprang up as if some one had speared him, and would

have throttled Drummond on the spot, I firmly believe, if a policeman had not interfered, and held him back.

"The first witness called was an old Methodist minister, who deposed, on oath, that he had married Willard Drummond—whom he promptly identified—to a young girl called Christina Tomlinson, about a year and a half previously, as nearly as he could then recollect. They were married at night, without attendants; and the bride seemed very much frightened. He concluded by giving a description of her, which exactly tallied with that of little Christie.

"Mrs. Tom was then called, and affirmed that on the night in question, Christie had gone to Westport with Drummond; and when they returned late at night, she found her niece lying senseless in his arms, which circumstance he accounted for by some plausible reason she had now forgotten. Being cross-examined, she affirmed that the deceased and the young man Drummond were always together, after the prisoner left the island; and she, Mrs. Tom, not liking their intimacy, had endeavored to put a stop to it, but in vain. She could not swear positively that her niece and Miss Campbell were bad friends, but she did not think they were on good terms; and her principal reason for ending the intimacy between the deceased and Mr. Drummond, had been the fear of the prisoner's anger, which she knew, when excited, was extremely violent. That on the night of the murder the deceased had appeared out of spirits, and complaining of a headache, had retired early. That when she awoke in the morning she found her gone, and the house-door open, things which had never happened before. That she had no suspicions of the truth, until Miss Campbell came in and told her her niece was murdered. That thereupon they had gone down to the beach together, and she had identified a handkerchief belonging to her niece, marked with her name, deeply clotted with blood. That the prisoner—who had never hitherto appeared to care for Christie—seemed deeply, almost wildly agitated that morning, which had surprised her (the witness) not a little at the time.

"Mrs. Tom was then dismissed, and Captain Campbell was called to take the stand. A low murmur of sympathy ran around as they observed his pale and haggard face; and all listened with breathless interest to the

testimony he reluctantly gave. He said that on the evening of the murder, being on the island, Christie had approached and given him a note, which she directed him to give to his sister. That he had done so; and that Sibyl had appeared violently agitated upon receiving it, and impetuously insisted upon going to the island that night. That he had urged her not to go, but she had insisted; and upon his telling her Carl Henley was going over that evening, she had said she would accompany him; and he had then left the room, and he did not see her again for upward of a fortnight.

"Carl Henley next took the stand, and after the usual oath, stated that on the evening of the murder he had taken Sibyl across to the island. That in the boat she had talked wildly, though he could not recollect what she had said. That she had left him when they had reached the shore, and had run up the rocks, through the storm, in the direction of the lodge. That he had returned to the cottage; and shortly after went to bed, leaving 'Aunt Tom,' as he called her, and Christie down stairs. That about midnight, being awakened by the violence of the storm, he had got up and distinctly heard a cry of 'murder,' though whether it was in Christie's voice or not, he could not say. That a moment after, by the light of a flash of lightning, he had seen a woman flying past, with long black hair streaming behind her, 'jest like her,' he expressed himself, pointing to Sibyl. Being cross-examined, he swore positively to seeing the woman, whom he said he took, at the time, to be Sibyl; and nothing her counsel could say could weaken his testimony in the least.

"There were several other witnesses examined; but though I have forgotten their testimony, it all went to prove that Christie was beloved by everybody who knew her but Sibyl; that she had not an enemy in the world but Sibyl. Among others, came that infernal Courtney, who swore positively that he knew Sibyl to be jealous of Christie; and in proof of which, adduced several circumstances that seemed to have a great deal of weight with the bench; that Sibyl's agitation upon receiving Christie's note was so palpable, that he began to have misgivings on the spot; that when he beheld her, the following day, after coming from the island, she seemed like one deprived of reason, as if 'remorse for some crime' preyed upon her. Oh! I could have strangled the white-livered villain on the spot," said Stafford, grinding his

teeth. "Then the court was adjourned until the following day, and the prisoner removed.

"Next day it was the same. There was little new evidence against Sibyl; but it seemed clear to all that the jury had already made up their minds as to her guilt; and that her youth and beauty only seemed to aggravate her crime.

"Then the defense was taken up; and Mr. P—— made a very good speech, and did all he could to disabuse the minds of the jury, but it was like beating the air. He did all he could, but that was too little to save Sibyl.

"The State attorney rose again, and set aside all P.'s arguments in a cool, contemptuous manner, that carried conviction to the minds of the spectators. And then the judge arose to sum up the evidence and charge the jury. In his mind there seemed not the faintest shadow of a doubt as to the guilt of the prisoner, I cannot remember what he said; but I know, despite his gray hairs, I felt a demoniacal desire to knock him down all the time he was speaking. Then the jury withdrew to deliberate; and during their brief absence the silence of death reigned in that crowded court-room. Every eye was bent upon Sibyl; but after hearing of Willard's marriage she never lifted her head. It was as if the heaviest blow that could possibly befall her had passed, and life or death mattered nothing to her now.

"The jury was not absent ten minutes ere they returned. Their sudden entrance was ominous; but their grave, stern faces were more ominous still. I had to grasp the arm of a man beside whom I stood, for I felt myself trembling in every limb. The jurors all stood erect, and every breath seemed suspended.

"Gentlemen of the jury, have you agreed upon your verdict?' asked the venerable judge.

"We have, your honor,' responded the foreman.

"How say you, then? Is the prisoner at the bar guilty or not guilty of the crime with which she is charged?"

"Guilty!" was the awful response.

"At that word, there rose a cry that thrilled through every heart; and Willard Drummond, like a man possessed of a demon, fled from the house, while the appalled crowd fell back in turn before him. A dreadful silence followed; and then the judge arose, and in a voice that trembled in spite of himself, said:

"'Prisoner, arise, and receive the sentence of the law.'

"Every breath was suspended, every voice was hushed, but the prisoner neither moved nor stirred. She seemed frozen into the attitude in which she had fallen, at the news of Willard Drummond's perfidy.

"Mr. Brantwell, who was standing near, with a face pale with deepest pity, touched her on the shoulder, and said, in a faltering voice:

"'Sibyl, my dearest girl, arise; let me assist you.'

"He took her arm and supported her to her feet; but when she lifted her head, all beheld a face so cold, so white, so rigid, with such frozen eyes and colorless lips, such an awful look of woman's deepest woe, that every face grew pale, and every eye was filled with tears. As for me, I felt as if I were going mad. I heard the judge saying something—to save my soul I could not tell what, until the last awful words met my ears:

"'Prisoner, the sentence of the court is, that you be taken hence to the prison from whence you came, and from thence to the place of execution, and that there you be hanged by the neck until you are dead!'

"I could listen no longer. How I burst from the crowd I know not, but I reached the open air frantic, almost maddened. The crowd poured out after me, and presently the prisoner appeared, between your husband, her brother, and the sheriff.

"I saw no one but Sibyl. Her face wore the same fixed, stony look it had done when she arose—not a muscle had quivered. It was evident she heard not, cared not for the awful doom about to befall her. I broke through the crowd like a madman, until I stood before her.

"Sibyl—Sibyl!" I cried out.

"Something in my tone arrested her, and she looked vacantly at me. She passed her hand across her forehead, as if to clear away a mist, and then said, in a low, dreamy tone:

"Ah, Mr. Stafford, I have a request to make of you.'

"What is it?' I asked, scarcely able to speak.

"Hasten to my dear friend, Mrs. Brantwell, and tell her what has happened; but, tell her not to be sorry for me, for it is better as it is. Guy, I am tired; take me away.'

"She said all this in a strange, weary tone, like one that is bewildered. I saw them help her into a coach, saw it driven away; and then I went to the hotel, feeling—well, it's no use trying now to tell you how I felt. Long before daylight this morning, I started to come here—and that is all."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE BANKRUPT HEART.

Oh, break, break, break! poor bankrupt, break at once,
To prison, soul! Ne'er hope for liberty!"—SHAKESPEARE.

"Every sense

Had been unstrung by pangs intense,
And each frail fiber of her brain
As bow-strings when released by rain,
The erring arrows launch aside—
Sent forth her thoughts all wild and wide."—BYRON.

There was a long pause. Then Mrs. Brantwell raised her head, and asked.

"When do you return to Westport?"

"I cannot go before to-morrow; my horse is unfit for the journey."

"Then I will accompany you."

"But my dear madam——"

"Mr. Stafford, not a word. I will go!"

She spoke in a tone there was no disobeying; so Stafford was forced to assent; and soon after Mrs. Brantwell left the room and sought her own apartment. The light breakfast next morning was untouched by either of them; and as soon as it was over, Mrs. Brantwell hastily threw on her bonnet and shawl, and entered the carriage that stood waiting to convey her to Westport.

Some time before evening they reached the town—now so crowded with strangers that it would have been impossible to have secured lodgings, had not Captain Campbell given up his rooms to the use of Mrs. Brantwell while she should remain.

Too utterly exhausted in her present weak state to visit the prison that night, Mrs. Brantwell immediately retired to her room, and desired the waiter to send Captain Campbell to her.

She scarcely recognized him, so altered had he become in those few days; the old hopeful look was gone, and in its place the darkest, gloomiest despair.

The meeting was a very sad and very silent one. Mrs. Brantwell pressed the hand he extended with deepest pity and warmest sympathy, but said nothing. Her silence was more eloquent than words. At last—

"When did you see Sibyl?" she asked.

"Not since the day of the trial," he answered, moodily.

"No!" she exclaimed, in surprise. "How is that?"

"She would not see me; she would not see any one. I attended her to the cell, and there she bade me go—she would be alone; she insisted on it; she would not even see Mr. Brantwell. I left her, and went the next day, and the next, and the next, but still the same answer was returned; she would see no one. From the moment she left the court-house she had thrown herself upon her bed, and she would not touch the food they offered her; she would not speak one word, only repeating that peremptory demand to be alone."

"My poor, poor Sibyl! And Mr. Drummond, where is he?"

"I know not. When he heard the sentence of the court, he sprang on his horse and dashed away like a madman. May Heaven's heaviest vengeance light on him and that black-hearted traitor, Courtney! for between them they have brought her to this!" And Captain Campbell's face grew absolutely livid with the storm of passion that swept across it.

"My dearest boy, hush! We must forgive our enemies, you know, if we expect to be forgiven.

"Forgive them! Yes! if I ever meet them, I'll send them to another world, with a bullet through their brains, in search of forgiveness!" he fiercely replied.

"Oh, Guy! do not say such dreadful things! You do not mean it, I know; but it is wrong nevertheless."

He only replied with a smile—but such a smile! Mrs. Brantwell turned away with a shudder.

"To-morrow I will visit the prison. I feel sure Sibyl will receive me."

"I hope so; but there is no telling. You can make the effort nevertheless."

"You will accompany me?"

"Oh, certainly. And as you look fatigued now, I will leave you to seek the necessary repose. Good-night."

He was gone with the same dark, rigid look on his face, that made Mrs. Brantwell's heart ache; and she sought her couch with a mind deeply disturbed by the thought of to-morrow's interview.

Next day, immediately after her slender breakfast, Captain Campbell made his appearance in her room. As the prison was but a short distance from the hotel, they were to walk; and drawing her arm within his own, Captain Campbell set out.

The streets were already crowded with people, drawn hither by the news of the great trial, and determined to wait now to see the execution.

Groups were assembled on every corner, discussing in low tones the expected event, and the murder. Every eye was bent on Captain Campbell as he passed; some knowing him to be the brother of the condemned; others supposing him to be her false lover, and the elderly lady on his arm, her mother. These insolent stares were met by such fixed, fierce glances on the part of the young man, that every eye fell, and every one shrank back to let him pass.

They reached the prison, and were admitted by the warden, who glanced at Captain Campbell in the deepest distress.

"We wish to be admitted to my sister's cell, Mr. Dent," said Captain Campbell.

"Yes, sir; but if you please, sir——"

"There—there! I know what you would say," impatiently interrupted the young man. "But my sister will receive this lady. Lead on, sir."

With a deep sigh of compassion, the old man obeyed; and they followed him through a long, gloomy hall, until they reached a door, before which the warden paused.

Fumbling among a large bunch of keys, he produced one which unlocked the door; and stepping back, he flung the door open and signed to them to pass in.

They did so, and paused on the threshold. For there before them was a sight that struck them dumb; that sent the life-blood curdling in horror to their hearts.

Crouching in a corner, and glaring upon them with her wild, vacant black eyes; every trace of color faded from her lips, leaving even the beautiful lips blue and livid; her long hair streaming wildly down her back; her hands held out before her, as if to keep them off, she sat. Well might they stare, while the very life-blood froze in their hearts.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ANOTHER STORM WITHIN AND WITHOUT.

—"Let her rave,
And prophesy ten thousand, thousand horrors
I could join with her now, and bid them come;
They fit the present fury of my soul.
The stings of love and rage are fixed within,
And drive me on to madness."—ROWE.

Loathing the sunlight, hating himself, frantic, maddened, Willard Drummond fled from the courthouse, with the terrific words of the judge searing his heart, burning his brain, scathing his memory, ringing in his ears, like the last awful trump of the mighty arch-angel.

Whither he went, what became of him, he cared not, knew not. Driving his spurs into his horse's Hanks, until the maddened beast fairly flew over the ground, he fled on, and on, and on, with heart on fire, his head in a whirl

—feeling as though a wheel of flame were crashing through it; knowing, feeling conscious of but one thing, that Sibyl was condemned to die.

And through him—through his fault; *that* was the thought that whelmed his soul in anguish and despair. All his treachery, all his falsehood, all his duplicity were known to her now; and dying, she would loathe, hate, and despise him. He could have cursed himself; he could have cursed earth, and heaven, and all mankind in that moment, while the tempests of agony, remorse, despair, and anguish were raging in his soul.

And on, still on, he flew, unheeding the passing hours—unheeding whither he went, until his exhausted and panting horse fell helpless beneath him.

That was the first thing that brought him to his senses. He sprang off the back of the foam-covered and trembling animal, and conscious that his headlong speed and frenzied looks must excite distrust and suspicion, he strove to calm himself, and lead his horse to the nearest inn.

He lifted his head to look about him, and found he had nearly reached N——. Assisting his horse to rise he led him slowly toward an unpretending little farm-house that chanced to be near, and knocked loudly at the door.

The summons was answered by a boy, who stared at Willard with a look of blank dismay.

"I have ridden my horse until, as you perceive, he is unable to proceed any farther. Can he remain here for the night?" he asked, abruptly.

The sound of his voice brought a man to the door, smoking a short, black pipe.

"What is it?" he asked.

"This 'ere man wants to know, if his hoss can stay here to-night, and be took care of," explained the lad.

"Sartin, sartin," responded the man, heartily; "and you, too, sir, if you'll honor us with your company. Johnny, take the gentleman's hoss off to the barn. Walk in, sir—walk in; you look quite as near used up yourself as your beast does. Walk in, and sit down."

Accepting his hospitality with a brief nod, Willard followed him into a large, clean-looking room, where a woman sat knitting, and two girls sat sewing.

The female portion of the establishment got up and dropped him a courtesy, while the old man presented him with a chair. Willard removed his hat from his hot and throbbing brow, and shook back his long, dark, clustering locks, while the girls glanced at him askance, with looks of mingled admiration and fear at his wild and excited appearance.

"Come from the town, I reckon?" said his host, drawing a chair opposite Willard's and resuming his pipe.

A brief "yes," was his sole reply.

"Great doings going on there, I hear; lots of people crowding to it every day."

Another "yes," brief and cold, was his answer.

"Great talk, too, about this trial. You've heard tell of it in course?"

Still another "yes," briefer, sterner, and colder than before, was Willard's answer; but his talkative host was not abashed.

"Very sad affair, I must say," he went on, shaking his head; "and very strange all through. It's wonderful how wimmin will do things when they's in a passion. They say this Miss Campbell went over jest a purpose to kill this other gal, and chucked her body into the sea when she was done."

Here he waited for a reply, but received none; for Willard, with his face shaded by his hand and his falling hair, was thinking, with a bursting heart, of Sibyl, and heard not a word the garrulous old man said.

"This Miss Campbell's beau—what she was going to be married to when she got took up—must be a precious villain. They say he was married to the other young gal on the sly, and nobody ever knowed nothing about it. I'd like to get my hands on him, and give him a good hoss whipping—I vow I would. A little hanging wouldn't hurt him a mite morn'n her!"

At this expose of his feelings, the worthy man again paused for a reply that came not; for Willard Drummond, buried in his own bitter thoughts, was dead to all the world around.

"Yes, there's a great crowd going to town," resumed the old man, thoughtfully, as a light wagon, filled with people, rattled past; "but it ain't no circumstance to what will go to see her hung. I'll go to see that myself; and I'll take the old woman and the girls, too. I've been promising them a treat this long time. S'p'ose you'll be there, too?" he added, determined to get an answer by some means.

But still his strange guest maintained his moody silence, and the old man gave up the effort in despair, and turned the tide of his eloquence upon "Johnny," who entered at this moment, in numberless inquiries concerning the state of the "gentleman's hoss." The girls looked at each other and giggled, and the old woman peered at Willard suspiciously over her spectacles.

A summons to supper was the first thing that aroused him from his reverie; but, with a head giddy, a brain throbbing with tumultuous thoughts, the very sight of food was loathsome to him. Rising to his feet, and standing with difficulty, owing to his strange dizziness, he said:

"As you kindly invited me to remain all night, may I ask to be shown to my room? I do not feel quite well, and I believe I will retire."

The old woman gave her husband a warning glance that revealed plainer than words the danger of having so suspicious a guest in the house; but, the "good, lazy soul," totally regardless of it in his hospitality, exclaimed:

"Sartin, sartin, sir; but won't you take something first? Susan's tea and strawberry short-cake is jest about the tallest sort o' vittals anybody can eat

when they ain't well. Do sit down, sir, and take a little snack."

"Not any, thank you," said Willard, faintly, as his headache grew more intense. "I wish to retire immediately."

"Oh, very well, then!" said the old man, adding, in a distinct whisper, "Gals, you'll have to give your room up to the gentleman. This way, sir, if you please."

Willard followed his hospitable guide up a flight of rickety stairs, into a small and scantily furnished little bed-room, hung round with feminine articles of apparel, and containing a comfortable bed.

"I hope you'll sleep well, sir," said his host, as he ushered him in. "It's a poor place for the like of you, but it's the best we've got."

"It's all I could wish," said Willard, who couldn't have told for the life of him, whether it was sumptuously furnished or otherwise. And then returning his host a good-night, he threw himself on the bed, and strove to forget in sleep the dull, heavy aching of his head and heart.

"A queer chap, that!" said the old man, as he slowly plodded his way down stairs. "Looks as if he had seen trouble lately. Well, this world is full of trouble; nothing but trouble for rich and poor alike, and always will be to the end, I do believe." And with this hopeful and encouraging view of the world in general, he opened the door and entered the bosom of his family.

"Well, now, Jonathan," exclaimed his spouse, in a voice more remarkable for shrillness than sweetness, "I wonders at your harboring every highwayman and sulky stranger you don't know nothing about, in this way. How do you know we won't get our throats cut in cold blood afore morning, with that there dark-looking, silent man in the house? How do you know but he's a robber, or suthin'?"

"I don't believe he's a robber," said Jonathan, quietly, sitting down at the table; "he don't look like that. Seems more like as if he had some heavy trouble or other a-weighing on his mind. Anyway, you wouldn't have me turn away a tired critter from the door, would you, old woman?"

"Well, if he wasn't so suspicious-looking," grumbled the old woman; "but, for to go and sit there all the evening, and never speak one word, is a *leetle* too much."

"People don't talk when they are in trouble, I tell you!" retorted her spouse. "And now I think on't, perhaps he's some friend or other of that poor young girl that's going to be hung. I'm sure, if he is, it's enough to make him silent. Fill my cup, Susan."

"He's real good-looking, anyway," remarked one of the girls, "with the loveliest of black eyes."

"And the sweetest curling hair!" said the other.

"And the whitest teeth—did you notice?" added the first.

"No; but I saw his hands; they *was* white as a lady's!" chimed in the second.

"I don't believe he's a bad man, either; he don't look like it," said the first.

"I declare to massy! if Sary ain't gone and fell in love with him!" exclaimed Johnny, with a chuckle.

"I hain't neither!" said "Sary," angrily, with reddening cheeks.

"Well, there, don't get quarreling about him!" broke in the mother. "The man's going away to-morrow morning; that's one blessing!"

But neither that morrow, nor the next, nor the next did Willard Drummond go; for when morning came, they found him tossing in the delirium of a fever. In dire alarm, a doctor was sent for, who said he was ill from over-excitement of some kind, and was threatened with brain fever; but that with proper care it might be warded off.

Querulous as the good lady of the house might seem outwardly, at heart she was kind and motherly; and all her sympathies were aroused for the sick young stranger. She listened in wonder and pity to his wild ravings, from

which she could easily gather that he was in some way connected with the dire event that was occupying every tongue—how, she could not tell. That he was of a station far superior to their own, they also could see; and with the most tender and unceasing care they watched over him night and day.

But with all their kind nursing, three weeks elapsed before he was able to leave his bed, and another passed before he was strong enough to walk about.

Of Sibyl and the rest he had heard nothing during all this time. All exciting topics they had been forbidden by the doctor to speak of before him; and that, as the one exciting theme of every tongue, in particular. In fact had they been willing, they had very little to tell, for they had few visitors from the outer world to their quiet little cottage.

One evening, as still weak and languid, he sat by the window, watching the sun sink red and fiery behind a dense black cloud, and thinking bitterly how, by the impetuous violence of his own headstrong passions, his own life had been similarly clouded, the lad Johnny came in, with wide-opened eyes and mouth, all aglow with some wonderful news.

"Well, Johnny, boy, what is it?" said his father, who sat, as Willard had first seen him, serenely smoking his pipe.

"Oh, father! I've just seen old Toller, from Westport," said the boy, excitedly.

"Well, lad, what's the news from there?" inquired his father.

Willard, too, looked around with a start.

"Why, he says people are crowding to it now, from every place; that every house is full of people come to see the woman hung."

Willard Drummond's face grew livid, and his brain reeled at the words.

"He says she was raving crazy for awhile, and that delayed it so long; but the doctor's brought her to, and now the execution's going to take place

day after to-morrow."

His mother's warning glance toward Willard came too late. With the look of a madman, he rushed from the house. A horse, the boy had been riding, stood saddled at the gate. He sprang on his back, and striking him a furious blow, dashed off under the first moment's fierce excitement, as he had done before, unheeding, uncaring whither he went.

He saw not, heeded not the coming storm; but one idea filled heart and brain—that of escaping, of flying far away, of never again beholding the scene of so many horrors.

Night was at hand, bearing in its dark, lowering face the storm that all day had been threatening. An oppressive stillness, a burning heat filled the air, and the old trees creaked, groaned, and tossed their long, weird arms with a dreary moaning noise, as though in pain. A hot, gusty wind lifted at intervals the heavy, dark hair off his burning brow, but without cooling it. It rustled the dry leaves till they whirled in a shower around him; but he heeded it not; he would hardly have heeded the wildest hurricane in that moment.

He had reached the forest, and now his course becoming from necessity less rapid, he could look around him and note the change of weather. By the last sickly light of the dying day, he saw a tempest was at hand, and he hailed it with a sort of mad exultation, to think that nature, convulsed by the storm, would be so much more in unison with the storm raging within his own breast.

He gave the frowning face of the sky but one momentary glance, for another and far more terrible sight was ever before his agonized eyes—it was the form, the beautiful form of his worshiped Sibyl, swinging between heaven and earth, convulsed in the agony of that horrible death; exposed to the gaze, to the shouts and derision of the mob; her lovely face darkened and convulsed until death would mercifully put an end to her tortures.

The awful vision seemed driving him mad. With something like the shriek of a maniac, he struck the animal he bestrode a furious blow to drive him on. The horse bounded madly on for a few paces; but at that moment a

vivid sheet of lightning blazed across their path, and he suddenly stopped, reared himself almost upright, and with a snort of fear turned and fled. Faint from recent illness, Willard lost his seat, and was hurled, wounded and bleeding, to the earth.

And now, alone, wounded, and helpless in the vast old woods, the storm was upon him in its might.

It is said that, in the moment that elapses before some sudden and terrible death, all the events of our lives pass with the rapidity of lightning through our minds. So was it now with Willard Drummond. As he lay prostrate, bleeding, and helpless, all the great wrongs he had done, all he had made others suffer, rose before him with a bitterness exceeding that of death. Through him Christie was murdered; through him Sibyl was now to die a felon's ignominious death.

The storm was each moment increasing; and it howled, and shrieked, and tore through the trees, as though it had risen in vengeance against him. He thought of that *other night* of storm and tempest, on which his loving, much-wronged child wife had perished by the steel of the assassin. He thought of Sibyl, alone and doomed, waiting for death in her prison-cell. And then, with startling suddenness, flashed across his mind the strange vision that, years before, he had seen and scoffed at, in a far off land. One by one, three visions had been realized; and now only one—the death on the scaffold—was to come.

The night; the storm; the forest; the wounded man, all were here; and now was death to come, and end all this mortal strife, and close forever the dark drama of his life.

While these thoughts were yet passing through his mind, a sound smote his ear that startled him from the deadly stupor into which he was fast falling. It was no crash of storm, this; no sound of wind and rain among the trees; but the sound of human footsteps flying wildly through the storm. He strove to raise himself and cry out; but his voice was lost in the wild uproar around; and he was about to fall back in despair, when the fugitive from the storm struck against him, and fell over him on the ground.

The shock of the sudden concussion nearly stunned Willard; but the person who had fallen, uttering a sharp ejaculation, was up again in an instant, bending over him.

By the light of the rapid flashes of lightning, he beheld a woman with dark, flowing hair, and wild, maniac eyes—the same startling vision he had twice before seen in Campbell's Isle.

With a shriek that pierced high above the storm, she sprang up, and sped away through the woods with the speed of an arrow shot from a bow.

The unexpected sight of this unearthly-looking visitant was too much for nature, in his present exhausted state, to bear; and falling heavily back, the dark night of insensibility closed around him.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE DEAD ALIVE.

—"Am I already mad?
And does delirium utter such sweet words
Into a dreamer's ear?"—LADY OF LYONS.

In the little forest cottage, the evening preceding that night of storm, Christie stood in the humble doorway, watching the sun go down.

Those weary months have sadly changed our little favorite. The thin, wan face, has grown thinner and wanner than ever; the angel brow paler and more transparent; the dark, loving blue eyes darker, larger, and wearing ever a look of deep, gentle, unchanging melancholy; the fair, golden hair falls like threads of raveled silk around her pearly cheek; the light step is slow and languid; and the hectic crimson spot that each afternoon burns on

those usually colorless cheeks, bespeaks the ravages of that fell destroyer—consumption. Slowly but surely she is passing away, bending her meek head to the stroke of the destroyer, and only sighing for the time when her weary head may find rest at last in some little woodland grave. Little Christie will never live to see the midsummer rose blow.

With a quiet, fervent joy, she thinks of this as she stands in the doorway, the last fiery ray of the red sunlight falling, like a shadow of the glory that awaits her, on her bent head. With those dark, radiant, starry eyes fixed on the fast-coming clouds, her mind strays back to that night of deepest woe—that last night spent in her island home. The coming of every storm recalls it, but never so vividly as it does to-night. All the old tide of her deep, unchanging love for Willard, for her destroyer—so strong and fervent, that time, absence, and the belief in his guilt has no power to change it—swells back to her heart, crowned with blissful memories of the time when she first knew and loved him, until an almost passionate longing to be with him once more, to throw her arms around his neck, to seal her forgiveness on his lips, to feel his heart swelling and throbbing against her own once more, to gaze into those dark eyes again, and heave her last expiring sigh on that loved breast, took possession of her. Then came the bitter recollection that long ere this another must be his bride, and she could never feel the strong, fervent clasp of those dear arms again; and with a grief that death alone could ever still, she hid her face in her hands to keep back her fast falling tears, while her white bosom rose and fell with convulsive sobs. A slow, heavy step, crashed over dried branches around her, and she looked up, to behold the kind, honest face of Uncle Reuben.

"Ah, thee is grieving again. This will never do, little Christie," he said, sorrowfully.

"Oh, I cannot help it! It all comes back so strangely to-night!" said Christie, in a voice full of unshed tears.

"What does, little one?"

"Oh, the past, the past! the sad, beautiful past."

"Thee must forget the past, daughter, and live in the present, and for the future," said Uncle Reuben, laying his hand on her head. "Thee knows what the good book says: 'Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted.'"

"Yes, yes, I know; that promise has often sustained me in my darkest hours. Dear Uncle Reuben, I know I am wicked to murmur, but bear with me a little while until I go where the promise will be fulfilled."

"Oh, thee is sad, to-night, Christie," said Uncle Reuben, forcing a smile, "thee must be cheerful, thee knows. Where is Bertha?"

"She went out more than an hour ago," replied Christie, "to ramble in the woods, according to her usual habit. I hope she will return before the storm rises!"

"The storm will be on us in half an hour," said Uncle Reuben, looking uneasily at the darkened sky; "and, as thee knows, a storm always rouses Bertha into a state of wildness bordering on frenzy, and sends her rambling off in all directions. I had better go and look for her."

"Where is the use, Uncle Reuben?" said Christie, seating herself languidly in her rocking-chair. "You often went in search of her before, and hardly ever found her until she chose to come home herself, you know."

"Yes; but one does not feel so uneasy when searching for her, as sitting here in the house while she is exposed to the storm. However, I'll wait and get the supper, and if she is not here then, I will go and look for her," said Uncle Reuben, as he proceeded to light the fire and hang on the kettle.

The night deepened and darkened, the sky grew blacker and gloomier, the moments waned rapidly, but the maniac Bertha came not.

"Oh, I wish she were here!" anxiously said good Uncle Reuben, opening the door and looking out into the gloom. A wailing gust of wind from the dark forest, followed by a vivid flash of lightning and flood of rain, made him hastily re-enter and close the door.

"And she is exposed to it all!" he exclaimed, in deepest trouble.

"Oh, she will soon come, I know she will," said Christie, hopefully.

But still the moments glided away, the lonesome night lingered and lingered, and the maniac came not.

"I must go and seek for her," said Uncle Reuben, at last, in desperation, as he took down his great-coat and buttoned it on, and started for the door.

But just at that instant it was burst violently open, and the woman Bertha, with streaming hair and dripping garments, her wild, black eyes dilating with terror, stood panting before them.

"Oh, Bertha, where has thee been?" cried Uncle Reuben, in distress and alarm.

"Hush! he is there!" said the maniac, in a terrified whisper. "They killed him and left him in the forest; but I found him! Come, come, come!"

She caught Reuben by the hand, and attempted to draw him with her from the house.

"Who is killed? I don't know what thee means, Bertha," he said, perplexed.

"Come, I tell you—he is there!" she cried, with an impatient stamp of her foot, "out among the trees where they left him. Come!"

And, with the grasp of steel, she caught the surprised Reuben by the arm, and forcibly drew him with her from the house.

Left alone, Christie, somewhat amazed at first, soon forgot the circumstance, and gazing into the expiring coals, listened to the wild ravings of the storm, as it raged through the forest, with that lulling sense of security one falls into when comfortably housed. There were strange pictures in the red, dying embers, to her that night—faces lost to her forever peering out in fitful flame—now Willard's, now the dark, threatening one of handsome Sibyl Campbell, now the brisk, sharp, cheery countenance of

Mrs. Tom, all fading, one after another, to give place once more to Willard's, best loved of all.

The night was wearing on apace—the last glowing ember had faded away in darkness; and, rousing herself from her dreamy reverie, as an unusually violent gust of wind shook the doors and windows, Christie raised her head, wondering uneasily what could have detained Uncle Reuben.

Just as she was beginning to get seriously anxious, the door was impetuously thrown open, and Bertha entered, followed by Uncle Reuben, bearing in his herculean arms the seemingly lifeless form of a man. Christie sprang up, and stood gazing from one to another, in terror.

"There!" said Uncle Reuben, placing the rigid form on the bed in the corner, and wiping the perspiration off his brow, "I had some trouble, strong as I am, in carrying him so far, through all this storm. She led me to the very spot," he said, with a sort of triumph, as he looked at Bertha; "and I found him lying bleeding and senseless on the ground."

"Who is he?" said Christie, for, with the dark hair falling over the blood-clotted face, the features were undistinguishable.

"That, I do not know, but some traveler, I imagine, who has been thrown from his horse, judging from the looks of his wounds. Get me some warm water and a sponge until I wash the blood off his face."

As Christie obeyed, something in the wounded stranger struck her, and with a sudden thrill she leaned against the wall and pressed her hands to her panting heart. Not perceiving her emotion, the man Reuben reverently lifted the dark, heavy masses of hair, and wiped the blood off his pale, handsome face. As if fascinated, Christie's eyes were fixed on those cold, rigid features, every one of which was indelibly imprinted on her heart; her eyes dilating, her lips parted, and breathless; her face deadly pale; her heart beating as tumultuously as though it would break from its prison and force its way to him. With a cry that resounded through the house—a cry that made even the maniac Bertha start in terror, she sprang forward, and clasped the cold form in her arms with a wild and passionate shriek.

"Willard! Willard!" she exclaimed, "Oh, Father in heaven! Willard!"

Transfixed with amazement, Reuben stood gazing upon her, unable to speak, while, with a hysterical laugh, she covered the cold, marble-like face with hot, burning, passionate kisses, still crying out at intervals that loved name.

"Willard! Willard! Willard!"

"So thee knows him, Christie?" said Uncle Reuben, as last, in a voice of intense astonishment.

She looked up, with another hysterical laugh, and then overtaxed nature gave way to a burst of blessed, soothing tears.

"Well, I am surprised!" slowly said Uncle Reuben.

"Oh, Uncle Reuben, he is my husband!" said Christie, in a voice choked with vehement sobs.

"*Thy husband!*" said Uncle Reuben, in a tone that plainly bespoke his fears that Christie had lost her reason.

"Oh! yes, yes, my husband! my long-lost husband! whom I never expected to meet again on this side of the grave. Oh, Uncle Reuben, you did not know I was married, but so it is! I never meant to tell you, but the surprise—the shock—forced it from me. Oh, Uncle Reuben, do not look as if you thought me insane; for indeed, indeed, I speak the truth." And again Christie's voice was lost in sobs, as she bowed her head on the cold breast before her, and thought how warmly and tumultuously it had once throbbed for her.

Uncle Reuben was not one to give way long to any emotion; so, with a look of intense surprise and perplexity, he recalled his scattered faculties, and once more approaching the bed, said, slowly:

"Well, if he *is* thy husband, thee is anxious, no doubt, for his recovery, and had better go away for the present, and let me attend to him and bring

him to."

"Oh, Uncle Reuben, do you think he is dead?" said Christie, in a tone of piercing anguish.

"By no means, little one; he is only in a swoon at present, from which he will shortly recover. And there are no bones broken, either," added Uncle Reuben, after a short examination, "only this ugly cut in his head, which has bled so profusely, and which I must bind up now. We'll have to cut the hair off just round the temple, you see, to get at it. It's Heaven's mercy it wasn't half an inch lower, or he would have been a dead man now."

A convulsive shudder at the bare idea agitated the slender form of Christie; and she lifted the silky waves of dark hair with a fond superstition as they were severed, all matted with blood, from his head.

And thus, while Uncle Reuben sat down to bathe his temple and forehead with water, she took the cold hands in her own burning ones to chafe them, with her eyes still fixed, as if she could never remove them more, on that cold, white, handsome face, as still and fixed as though immovable in death, looking whiter still in contrast with the wet black hair.

"And so thee is a wife, little Christie," said Uncle Reuben, looking thoughtfully and wonderingly upon the two faces before him.

"Oh, yes, yes! forgive me for not telling you before; but it was a secret. No one knew of it; we were married in private."

"Ah, those hidden marriages never come to any good," said Uncle Reuben, as he shook his head and glanced at Bertha, who all this time had been standing at the foot of the bed, gazing with a sort of vague interest and curiosity from one face to the other. "What if her fate had been thine?"

"It has scarcely been more happy," said Christie, without lifting her eyes; "but this moment, to see him once more, to touch his hand, to know I am near him again, almost repays me for all I have suffered. Now, at least, I can die happy, since I have the opportunity of telling him I forgive him all."

"Forgive him! Then he has wronged thee?"

"Hush!" said Christie, turning, if possible, paler than before. "He loved me once, and I wish to forget everything but that. But, Uncle Reuben, are you sure he will recover? I see no signs of it yet," said Christie, in rising alarm.

"I do; even now consciousness is returning," said Uncle Reuben, as a slight movement of the muscles of the face became perceptible.

"Willard! Willard! dearest Willard, look up!" she said, bending anxiously over him.

Was it the startling sound of that well-remembered voice—that voice he imagined forever stilled in death—that awoke him? The large dark eyes slowly opened, wandered wildly around, and the first object on which they rested was Christie.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

EXPLANATIONS.

"Mine after life! What is mine after life?
My day is closed! The gloom of night is come!
A hopeless darkness settles o'er my fate."—JOANNA BAILLIE.

"Willard! Willard! Willard!"

With his own name breathed in his ears by the voice he never expected to hear again; with the small, fair face, the deep blue eyes, and waving golden hair of Christie bending over him, Willard Drummond lay scarcely daring to breathe, unable to speak, gazing with wild, wondering,

incredulous eyes upon the angel-face he had never expected to behold on earth more.

"Willard! Willard! My own Willard! Only say you know me! only speak to me once more before I die!" was the wild cry that sighed in his ear in the tones of that never-to-be-forgotten voice.

He pressed his hands to his forehead, like one in a dream.

"Am I mad?" he said, slowly; "or am I dead, and see Christie again in the world of spirits?"

"Willard! Willard! we both live! Oh, Willard, thank Heaven you were spared the guilt of my death! Oh, Willard! I am not dead; do not, *do not* look at me so wildly!"

"Can this be only the delirium of a dream?" he said, passing his hand over his brow, in the same troubled and bewildered way.

No, it was not a dream! No phantom of the imagination ever could have clasped him with such yearning, clinging arms; ever could have held his head on such a warm, throbbing breast; ever could have looked into his face with such passionate, undying love; ever could have showered upon him such passionate caresses.

He awoke to the reality at last. Springing up in bed where he lay, he gazed upon her as if doubting the evidence of his senses.

"Oh, Willard! Oh, my husband! I am not dead; I was only wounded! I live still to say I forgive you all that is past!"

"Great Heaven! am I sane or mad?" he said, in a low, deep, wondering voice.

She approached, caught both his hands in hers, and kneeling down before him, said:

"Willard, look at me! feel my hands! my face! Listen to my words! see me kneeling before you! and believe I am your own faithful, loving Christie

still!"

"Then *she* may be saved yet!" was his wild cry, as unheeding the slender girl kneeling at his feet, he sprang from the bed, with the one thought of Sibyl ever, ever uppermost in his mind.

"Who, Willard?"

"Sibyl! Sibyl! my wronged Sibyl!"

At the words, at the name, her blissful dream faded away. The past, the dreary, wretched past came back, and Christie's head dropped heavily on the bed.

He was scarcely in his right senses yet, but the action, and, above all, the necessity of haste restored him to himself; and stunned, bewildered, giddy with many emotions, he sank into a chair and strove to collect his thoughts.

"I know not yet whether I am sleeping or waking," he said, incoherently. "Christie—where are you? Come here; let me see you again, that I may know whether all this is not a vision of a disordered brain, that will fade away as many a similar one has done."

She arose, and with a face as perfectly colorless as a snow-wreath, stood before him.

He took her hand, so small, and warm, and transparent that it looked like an infant's; and pushing back the full golden hair off the fine white brow, gazed long and earnestly into the depths of the large blue eyes, now so unspeakably sad, so deeply reproachful. So long did he gaze that Christie's eyes fell at last, and the golden lashes swept her cheek, while the eloquent blood mantled for a moment to her snowy brow.

"Yes, this is Christie—alive still, and yet so long mourned for as dead," he said slowly. "This is strange; this is wonderful. Christie, how comes this to pass? How is it that, after so many months given up for dead, I find you alive still in this forest cottage?"

"Oh, Willard, Willard! can *you* ask, after that dreadful night?" she said, in a tone of unutterable sorrow and reproach.

"That dreadful night? *What* dreadful night, Christie?" he said, looking bewildered.

"Oh, Willard, what a question for you to ask! That you could ever for one instant forget that night of storm and crime!"

"Christie, as Heaven hears me, I know not what you mean. Do you allude to that tempestuous night on which you were supposed to be murdered?"

"Oh, you know I do! You know I do! Oh, Willard, Willard! that *you* should speak of it like this!" she said, in that low tone of saddest reproach.

"Christie, there is some misunderstanding here. Do you mean to say that *I* was with you that night?" he said, vehemently.

She did not reply, but her eyes answered the question.

"Christie, as there is a Heaven above us, I never set foot on the island from the day we parted there after your telling me of your interview with Sibyl!" said Willard, impetuously.

"And the note?" she said, faintly.

"Do you mean the note appointing our meeting on the beach that night of mystery?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, yes!"

"Christie, I sent that note, but I never went—*never*! I swear it by all that is sacred! That very hour I received news that my father was dying, which obliged me to start instantly for home, without even an opportunity of apprising you. Christie, that night I spent fifty miles away from the island."

She gasped for breath, grew deadly pale, and sank into a chair.

"Christie, Christie! do you not believe me?"

She lifted her eyes. There was truth in his face; and, with the wild flash of sudden joy, she cried out:

"I do! I do! I do! Oh, Willard, thank Heaven for this! Thank Heaven that you never raised your hand against my life!"

"Christie!"

"Oh, I do not wonder at your look of horror; but, all those weary months, I thought so. Oh, Willard, dearest, can you ever forgive me for wronging you so?"

"Christie!"

"Forgive me! forgive me! Oh, my husband, forgive me! But on that night, that awful night, I was met on the beach and stabbed by a man."

"Heavens and earth! And you thought it was I?"

"Willard, Willard, forgive me! But oh! what else *could* I think? *You* appointed the meeting. I went, was met there by a tall man, stabbed by him, and left for dead on the shore."

"And you could believe *I* could do such a deed! Oh, Christie, Christie!" he said, with bitter reproach.

"Oh, how could I help it? How could I help it? The thought was maddening: but how could I think otherwise? Say, only say, you forgive me, Willard!"

"I forgive you, Christie; but you have far the most to forgive. What strange, fathomless mystery all this is? Who was the man, Christie?"

"I do not know! I have no idea! Oh, I thought I had not an enemy in the wild world."

"Is there no clew? Is there no means by which you could recognize him again?"

"None! none! you forget the storm; the darkness: the deep darkness of that night."

"True! but heavens! what am I thinking of!" he said, starting up wildly. "Why do I linger an instant here, when it is in my power to save Sibyl from the ignominious death of the halter."

"What!"

As if a mine had exploded beneath her, Christie sprang up, with blanched face, starting eyes, clenched hands, and livid lips, gazing upon him in speechless horror.

"Christie, she was arrested, tried, condemned, and doomed to die, for your murder."

"For mine! Father in heaven!" gasped the almost fainting Christie.

"It may not be too late to save her yet. You must come with me, Christie. Hasten! hasten! Every moment is precious now."

"Oh, this is awful! awful! Oh, Willard, when does this most unnatural sentence take place?"

"The day after to-morrow. With all our speed we will be barely able to reach the spot in time."

"Most horrible!" said Christie, with a convulsive shudder. "How came she ever to be suspected of such a deed?"

"Oh, there was a damning chain of circumstantial evidence, strong enough to convict an angel from above. I have no time to tell you now; on our way I will tell you all. Merciful Heaven! if we should be too late."

"I will go instantly! I will be ready in a moment." said Christie, wildly, as she hurriedly threw on her wrappings.

"But not in this storm, Christie. Does thee not hear how it rages?" anxiously said Uncle Reuben, who all this time had been a silent, wondering listener. "Thee must not venture out to-night."

"Oh, I must! I must! the life of a fellow-creature depends upon it," said Christie, tying on her large mantle with trembling haste.

Willard Drummond paused for a moment in dismay, to listen to the storm howling through the trees, and glance at the frail, fragile little figure before him. But the thought of Sibyl in peril—of that dreadful death—steelled his heart against every other feeling.

"She must be saved, let what will follow," he mentally exclaimed.

"Thee will never be able to make thy way through this storm, Christie," said Reuben, rising in still increasing anxiety; "in thy delicate state of health, too. Listen to the wind and rain."

"Oh! I hear it! I hear it! But though it rained fire from heaven, I should have to go."

"Thee will never survive this night, if thee ventures out," said Uncle Reuben, solemnly.

"What matters it? My life is worthless, so hers is saved," she said, with sorrowful bitterness.

Willard Drummond's heart smote him; and some of the old love revived in his heart that moment for poor Christie.

"Christie, thee will perish with fatigue."

"Oh, no; I'll not. This inward strength will sustain me. I will live, I must live, I shall live, to save Sibyl Campbell. I feel it; an inward voice tells me so."

"Then thee is determined to go?" said Uncle Reuben, sorrowfully.

"I must. Duty calls me. Dear Uncle Reuben, good-by."

"Will thee ever come back, little Christie?" he said, holding the little hand she extended in both his.

"As Heaven wills! I fear not. But—Uncle Reuben—dear, good, Uncle Reuben—if I do not, you will come to see me die?"

"Oh, dearest Christie!" his honest voice choked, and he stopped.

"Good-by, Bertha. Kiss Christie once more."

She put her arms round the neck of the maniac, whose eyes were fixed wistfully on her face. "Going away?" she said, in a tone of vague surprise.

"Yes, dearest friend; and if I never come back, you must not quite forget me."

"Christie! Christie! my wife! my injured, long-suffering wife, do not talk so! I cannot bear it!" said Willard Drummond, passionately; for every word of that sorrowful parting had been like a dagger to his heart.

She came over with the old, trusting love of happier times, when that love first filled her heart, and clasping her hands on his shoulder, she dropped her face on his breast, and softly murmured:

"Dearest Willard! it is better so. I am not afraid to die now, after what I have heard to-night. And—do not be hurt, dearest love—but I have no wish to live. You will be happy with her—with Sibyl; and I—I will pray for you both, and love you both in heaven."

"Oh, Christie! oh, my wife!" he cried, clasping her in his arms, with a passionate cry; "am I only to realize the treasure I have lost when it is too late."

"Not too late, Willard; if it will help to make you a better, a holier man, it is not too late. There are many happy days for you, for Sibyl, for me—yet to come."

"Wretch, wretch, that I have been!" he groaned, in bitter grief. "Why was I doomed to bring misery and death on all who ever loved me?"

"Oh, Willard, hush! You break my heart!" said Christie, lifting her golden head off his breast. "You must not talk in that wild way. And we are losing time staying here, when every second is more precious than untold gold," she added, starting up. "Come, Willard, come."

While she spoke, Uncle Reuben, who had passed out unobserved, re-entered.

"Good-by, once more, Uncle Reuben," said Christie, "we are going."

"Not 'good-by' yet, little Christie. I will go with thee to——"

"But, Uncle Reuben, there is no necessity. I know the way."

"And did thee think, little one, I was going to let thee walk that distance in this pelting storm?" said Uncle Reuben, with a sad, grave smile. "No; it is not quite so bad as that. Thee will ride in the donkey-cart until we reach _____"

"Then you have such a conveyance?" said Willard, eagerly. "Thank Heaven for that! In it you will at least be saved the fatigue of walking, Christie."

"But how can you leave Bertha, Uncle Reuben?"

"I will lock the door, and Bertha will go to bed—will thee not, Bertha?"

The maniac nodded, and still wistfully watched Christie, as though some faint impression that she was going to lose her was forcing its way through her clouded brain.

For the first time, Willard turned his eyes upon her, and gave a violent start, as he recognized the well-known spectral face.

"Who is she?" he asked, in breathless surprise.

In a few brief words, Christie gave him to understand how it had happened he had seen her on the isle.

And then, drawing her arm within his, Willard led her from the house, followed by Uncle Reuben.

Christie took her place in the humble little donkey-cart, and cowered down to avoid the pelting rain.

"Thee had better get in, too, being wounded and weak from loss of blood," said Uncle Reuben to Willard. "I will walk and drive."

"Not at all. Do you imagine I would ride while you walked? I am not so weak; I feel the strength of ten men within me, urging me on."

"That is only excitement, friend; it will not last. Thee had better get in."

But Willard peremptorily refused, and took his place on the other side of the little cart.

Seeing it was in vain to urge him, the old man allowed the animal to start. And Christie raised for a moment her bowed head, to cast one last, sorrowful glance at the little, isolated, forest cottage she was never destined to see again. They turned an abrupt angle, the night and darkness shut it from her view, and with a long, shivering sigh, she bent her head once more on her pale hands.

The night-ride through the forest—with the wind wailing eerily in long, lamentable blasts through the waving arms of the trees, with the rain driving in blinding gusts in their faces, with the pall of an almost Egyptian darkness around, above, and on every hand! That night-ride! sleeping or waking, in after days, alone or in the gayest assembly, it would rise like a haunting vision before the eyes of Willard Drummond; and the little, bowed, shadowy figure crouching silently in a corner of the wagon, would awaken in his heart feelings of undying remorse. That night-ride, through the long, lonesome woods! All the great wrong he had done that little, bowed form, from whose gentle lips no word of reproach ever fell, from whose loving eyes no accusing glance ever flashed, arose in bitter array before him, until he felt as if he could never encounter the gaze of those earnest, soul-lit orbs again—felt, as he walked beside her, as much out of his sphere as a lost soul might feel before the gates of heaven.

Then, by a natural transition, his thoughts were straying out to the future—to Sibyl. She was lost to him now, as much as though she were dead and in her grave. There was a sharp, keen pang piercing through his heart for one moment, at the thought; the next, a more generous feeling filled it, and he felt as if he could even joyfully give her up, to save her from that awful doom. Once Sibyl was saved, his determination was to depart with his little, drooping girl-wife, to some far-off Southern clime—to some sunny village in France, or Italy, where the more genial climate would restore her to health, and where the wretched past would be forever unknown. There, he would endeavor to atone, by his devoted care and attention, for all he had ever made her suffer, and forget Sibyl. But that name, as usual, woke a host of tender, sorrowful memories, and something akin to despair again replaced every other feeling in his tortured mind. Truly, in the keen suffering of that moment, he realized what Divine retribution is.

And so on—still on, through the chill, bleak night, the driving, splashing rain, the sighing, moaning wind, the dark, desolate forest-road, our weary, silent trio wound their lonely way. Not a word was spoken from the moment of starting.

Christie bowed, collapsed, shuddering, cowered in the bottom of the rude cart, her white, thin face hidden in her whiter, thinner hands. Uncle Reuben, urging on the stumbling donkey to his utmost speed, and now and then turning to see that "Little Christie" was safe, or to glance at the tall, dark figure walking opposite. And Willard Drummond, with his hat drawn down over his brows, muffled in his cloak, strode on, with bowed head, too absorbed in his own bitter thoughts to heed the flight of time.

And so the long, silent night lingered and lingered, and the dripping forest-road was passed at last; and they passed, at intervals, gloomy-looking farm-houses, whose inmates were still asleep, and whose only greeting to our weary travelers was the noisy barking of their watchdogs as they passed on.

And so the melancholy journey was continued until morning, wan, cold and gray, lifted its dead, dull face from the mantle of night, and cast a sickly glimmer of light along the wet, slippery path.

"Morning at last," said Uncle Reuben, lifting his head, with a deep sigh of relief. "This has been the longest night I have ever known."

"Yes, morning," said Willard Drummond, looking up bitterly at the dull, leaden sky; "and we so far from Westport yet; Only one day more between her and an ignominious death."

Uncle Reuben looked at him a moment, and then at the bowed form in the cart, with a look of calm reproach.

"Is thee tired, Christie?" he said, approaching her.

She lifted her head, disclosing a face so white and haggard, so worn with fatigue, sleeplessness, and grief, that even Willard started back in sorrow and alarm.

"Oh, little Christie! I knew this journey would kill thee!" said Uncle Reuben, with a groan.

"I feel a little tired, that is all," she said, forcing a wan smile. "Dear friend, do not look at me with such frightened, anxious eyes; it is nothing."

"Thee is deadly pale, Christie."

"I am cold," she said, with a shiver; "nothing more."

"And wet through," said Uncle Reuben, sorrowfully. "We must stop at the first house we meet, and get some dry clothes, and some breakfast."

"No, no; you must not stop; there is no time to lose. Pray, go on," said Christie, in alarm.

"Thee must take time," said Uncle Reuben, firmly, looking straight at Willard. "Thee will hardly live to see Westport, else. Does thee want to die a suicide, Christie?"

"He speaks truly, dearest—we must stop at the nearest farm-house," said Willard, bending over her. "My poor Christie, you do indeed look jaded to death," he added, sorrowfully.

"It is nothing, Willard. If I only reach Westport in time, I care for nothing else."

"But I do, Christie. I want you after that to hurry and get well, and come with me to Italy, to far-off, beautiful Italy, where our lives will be happy as a fairy-tale."

She lifted her large, lustrous blue eyes to his face, with along, steady gaze—the calm, far-seeing gaze of a soul lingering on the verge of eternity. How plainly those mournful eyes said "Too late! too late!" But she did not speak; she only smiled faintly, and then sank wearily back, with her head shrouded in her mantle once more.

The white hands of morning were now fast pushing aside the clouds of night. As they went on they encountered one or two laborers, with spades on their shoulders, going to their daily toil, who stared at them with lackluster eyes, as if they thought them ghosts. At the end of half an hour they reached a comfortable-looking farmhouse, and alighted at the outer gate. Willard lifted Christie out in his arms, while Uncle Reuben, with his whip, kept off the dogs that ran out, barking loudly. The noise brought the farmer himself to the door, who, noticing the drooping form of Christie, and the pale, worn face of her companions, cordially invited them to enter.

There was a bright, cheerful fire blazing on the ample hearth, and a woman bending over it, preparing breakfast. As she placed a chair for Christie, into which the young girl dropped, totally exhausted, Willard drew her aside, and placing his purse in her hands said:

"My good woman, you perceive the young lady's clothes are wet through. Will you be good enough to take her to your room, and furnish her with some dry ones?"

"Yes, sir, I'm sure I'll be glad to help her, poor young thing! I've got some will jest about fit her," said the woman, with a sympathizing look.

Willard whispered a few words in the ear of Christie, who arose and followed the woman from the room, while a girl about Christie's size took charge of the breakfast. Willard seated himself near the fire, and fell once

more into a painful reverie, from which the return of Christie aroused him. He placed a chair for her beside his own, and sinking into it she dropped her weary little head on his shoulder.

Breakfast was soon smoking on the table, and the three wayfarers took seats; but much as they needed food, this errand had effectually taken away their appetites, and it was with the utmost difficulty they could prevail upon Christie even to swallow a cup of coffee.

"Can you furnish me with a horse and wagon to reach N——?" said Willard to their host, as they arose from the table.

"Yes, you can come with me," replied the man. "I'm going there myself in an hour."

"What time will you be in N——?" said Willard, anxiously.

"Little after noon."

"And if we take fresh horses immediately we can reach Westport before morning, can we not?"

"Oh, yes, very easily; travel all night, and you'll be there in the morning. S'pose you're going, with everybody else, to see the woman executed, eh? Lord bless me! what's the matter with her?" said the man, in dismay, as Christie, with a loud, indescribable cry, hid her face in her hands.

"Nothing! nothing!" said Willard, and with a face perfectly colorless. "What time—at what hour, I mean, does this execution take place?"

"Nine in the morning; has to be early on account of the mob. Nobody ever heard tell of such a mass of people as will be there. Most as many as at the Day of Judgment."

"Can you not start right away?"

"No, couldn't before an hour."

"Is there any other conveyance to be hired near?"

"No, there ain't," said the man, shortly; "everybody wants their own to take themselves there. If it's to see her hung you want, you'll be plenty time when I start."

There was no help for it; and Willard and his equally impatient companions were obliged to wait almost two hours before the farmer was ready to start. Then he and his wife mounted on the front seat, and Willard and Christie sat behind, and throwing her arms around his neck, Christie bade Uncle Reuben a last farewell.

"Good-by, little Christie!" he said, sorrowfully, "Good-by, and Heaven bless thee. I will come to see thee some day soon."

And then good Uncle Reuben entered his donkey-cart, and turned his sad face toward the lonesome forest cottage, doubly lonesome now. And Christie, shrinking closer to Willard, laid her tired head on his arm, too weary and exhausted even to weep for the friend she had left.

The farmer, who had no intention of injuring his horse by fast driving, went plodding at a jog-trot onward, in spite of Willard's furious demands to drive fast. Inwardly cursing the lazy beast, he gave up the effort at last, and strove to while away the tedious hours in conversing with Christie.

Slowly and somewhat incoherently he learned from her all the events of that night, and of her after life in the cottage, and her motives for remaining there.

"And you were willing to remain in that isolated place all your life that I might marry Sibyl Campbell, my poor Christie!" he said, with a pang of deepest remorse. "And so you loved me still, even believing me guilty?"

"Oh, Willard! did you think for one moment that I could cease to love you?" she answered, fervently. "It was because I loved you so well that I wished to see you happy with Sibyl."

"My faithful, leal-hearted, unselfish little wife," he groaned, pressing her closer to his side.

"But, Willard, there is one thing I want to know. I want to hear it from your own lips. Answer me truly, as you hope for salvation, *do you love Sibyl Campbell?*"

"Oh, Christie, I do! I do! Better than life, better than my soul's salvation? Better than my hopes of heaven do I love her!" he exclaimed, passionately.

"It is well," she said, folding her hands, with a slight shiver. "Thank Heaven for the boon of death."

"But, Christie, I will forget her; you are my wife. I will go far away, where I will never see her more!" he said, recalled to himself. "By devoting my life to you, I will try to atone for all I have made you suffer, sweet wife."

"It will not be necessary, Willard. Dearest, best Willard, can you not see I am dying?"

"Christie!" he cried out in alarm.

"I mean that my days are numbered; and, Willard, I am happy. I only wish for life long enough to save Sibyl."

Something in her tone checked the words he was going to say, and both relapsed into silence, broken at last by her saying:

"Tell me all that has happened to you and to my friends, since that night."

And then he began, and related all; his father's death; the shock he received on hearing of her murder; of his departure for Europe with the Campbells; of their return and their marriage. At this point he could feel a slight shudder run through the frame of Christie; but when he spoke of the unlooked-for interruption, and of Sibyl's being carried off to prison, and of her condemnation, she trembled so convulsively that he was forced to stop.

"Oh, poor Sibyl!" she said, passionately. "Oh, Willard! her fate was far worse than mine. What is suffering of any kind compared with the shame—the overwhelming disgrace—of that trial, exposed to the merciless eyes of the hundreds? And that I should, in any way, be the cause! Oh, Willard! it is dreadful!"

She wept, so violently that he was alarmed.

"My own dear Christie, be calm," he said, soothingly. "Consider that you are now going to save her life."

Still she wept on, until her overcharged heart was relieved; and then, worn out in mind and body, she fell fast asleep on his shoulder.

Early in the afternoon they reached N——, which they found crowded with strangers on their way to Westport.

Leaving Christie in a hotel, Willard went to seek for a fast horse to take them to town; but, to his dismay, he found that every vehicle in the village was already engaged. Nearly insane with wild impatience, he offered enormous sums for a horse; but as the stern "Impossible!" rose against all his demands, he was forced to return to the hotel in a state bordering on frenzy, and offer the farmer with whom they had come the price of a dozen horses if he would only consent to surrender the wagon to him and let him drive.

Carried away by the young man's distracted words and manner, he at last consented; and causing Christie to be wrapped up in a large, warm shawl to protect her from the night air, he lifted her into the wagon, took his seat beside her, and dashed off at a break-neck pace.

Not a word was spoken, as Willard, urging the animal to its utmost speed, almost flew over the ground. The few remaining hours of daylight passed, and night fell dark and starless. On, still on, he urged the reeking, foaming, panting beast. They were still far from Westport—scarcely more than half way—and the short night would soon be gone. Each time the tired animal would halt, panting for a moment, the vision of Sibyl, in her prison-

cell waiting for death, would rise before him, until, nearly mad with impatience, he would mercilessly lash the poor brute on to greater speed.

But, just as he was beginning to hope that the rate at which they were going would, in two or three hours, bring them to Westport, the animal, completely exhausted, dropped to the ground, unable to proceed another step.

With a furious imprecation, Willard sprang out and strove to assist him to his feet, but in vain. The horse was totally unable even to rise.

For one moment Willard leaned against the wagon, while a feeling of utter despair filled his heart. The distance from Westport—the few intervening hours—the impossibility of procuring another horse—the awful peril of Sibyl, struck a chill, like that of death to his heart.

"All is lost, Christie—all is lost!" he said, in a voice so altered that she scarcely knew it. "The horse is driven to death, and in ten short hours Sibyl dies!"

"Heaven help us!" said Christie, wringing her pale hands. "Willard, we must walk."

"Walk!" he repeated, bitterly. "Before the end of the first mile your fate would be similar to his." And he touched the animal with his foot.

"Try me—try me!" said Christie, springing from her seat. "Heaven will give me strength in this hour. Oh, Willard, hasten!"

With a speed as great as it was unnatural, Christie started forward; and Willard, with a last despairing effort, accompanied her, expecting every moment to see her fictitious strength give way. But no! it was as if a new spirit had entered that slight frame—for as she never could have walked in her days of perfect health and strength, she walked now; never for one moment faltering, until the first dawn of morning grew red in the sky. But with its first blush Willard felt the faint hope that had hitherto buoyed him up die entirely away. Walk as they might, he felt it would be high noon before they could reach Westport.

"It is all useless, Christie," he said, pausing abruptly. "It is no use trying—we can never save her!"

"We will save her—we shall save her!" exclaimed Christie, with a strange kind of exultation. "Hark!" she added, "do you not hear a carriage approaching?"

Even as she spoke, a cloud of dust arose, and the thunder of wheels was heard rapidly approaching.

"Saved!" she cried, joyfully. "Praised be God!"

Willard sprang forward to intercept the driver, and saw a large country wagon nearly filled with people.

"Can you take us to Westport? Our errand is one of life and death!"

Something in Willard's tone startled the man; but after a moment's stare, he replied:

"Yes; jump in."

Lifting Christie in first, he took his seat beside her, and again dashed off.

"Hasten—hasten! for the love of Heaven!" cried Willard, passionately.

"I'll do my best," said the man. "I want to be in time for the execution, anyway."

On they fled. Mile after mile was passed; but, to the excited mind of Willard, they seemed going at a snail's pace. Did the sun ever rise so rapidly any morning before as it did on that? Eight o'clock, and still ten miles from Westport.

"Faster—faster! A thousand—two thousand—three thousand dollars, if we only reach Westport before nine," shouted Willard, almost maddened. "A human life depends on it—I have a reprieve."

"Hooray!" shouted the boy who drove. "If ever Sultan went, he'll have to go it now. Here's my stick; tie your handkerchief on it, to hoist when we get into the town, and they'll stop the execution."

Lashing his horse until the perspiration stood in great beads on his forehead, away they flew, and ten minutes before nine rushed furiously into the town.

The streets were crowded—blocked up with people—a boundless sea of human beings! And near the jail they beheld the scaffold, and a sight which seemed to paralyze the very life in their hearts. For there, with the sheriff and a group of her immediate friends, stood Sibyl Campbell, whiter than the dead, robed for death, cold, still, and rigid.

A deep, awe-struck silence had fallen over the vast crowd—a silence more terrible than the wildest shouts could have been.

Raising the white handkerchief, the boy waved it in the air, shouting, wildly: "A reprieve—a reprieve!" and drove furiously right through the startled throng, heedless of those he trampled down in his way.

The multitude took up the cry, and "A reprieve! a reprieve! a reprieve!" rang out, gathering force as it went, until, from a low, hoarse shout, it rose to a wild, triumphal song that rang to the very heavens.

And on, on, through the waving sea of human beings, they drove, until they reached the scaffold; and then rising to her feet, the thunder-struck spectators beheld the pale, beautiful face of the long-lost Christie.

CHAPTER XXXV.

MEETINGS AND PARTINGS.

"I am not mad; I would to heaven I were,
For then 'tis like I should forget myself.
Oh, if I could, what grief should I forget!"—SHAKESPEARE.

For one moment, so great was the surprise, that every shout was hushed, and the silence of death reigned. The next, a wild, fearful cry, that those who heard would never forget, rang out, and a man, amid the crowd, fell heavily to the ground.

There was a swaying to and fro, as the vast sea of human beings made way for those who raised Edgar Courtney, white and senseless, from the ground—a dark stream of blood oozing from his lips—and a murmur ran round: "He has burst a blood-vessel!" But in another moment he was forgotten, and every eye was riveted on the scaffold; every ear was strained to hear what was passing there.

Sibyl's mind, stunned by the many shocks it had lately received had sunk into a sort of lethargy, from which nothing could arouse her; and now she stared vaguely at Christie, like one in a dream.

But, with a passionate exclamation, Mr. Brantwell sprang forward and caught Christie's hand, exclaiming:

"Saved! saved! Sibyl is saved! Christie lives!"

And then the mob, catching up the words, sent forth shout after shout, until the very air seemed to ring.

"Saved! saved!" repeated Christie, with wild exultation; and then the unnatural strength that had hitherto borne her up gave way, and she sank fainting in the arms of Willard.

"Let us leave this horrible place," said Mr. Brantwell, drawing Sibyl's arm within his own, and leading her away.

"My carriage is near," said a gentleman who stood beside them, "and I beg you to make use of it."

"I shall do so with pleasure. Sir," to the sheriff, "I presume Miss Campbell may now accompany me to the hotel, since she is discovered to be innocent of the crime with which she is charged?"

The sheriff bowed in silence.

"Mr. Drummond, you had better bring this young girl also. You perceive she has fainted," said Mr. Brantwell.

The clergyman, with Sibyl, entered the carriage, followed by Drummond bearing Christie, and then the carriage drove rapidly away toward the hotel.

And the surprised and wondering crowd dispersed, to spread the astonishing news far and wide.

Sibyl, like one in a dream, had allowed herself hitherto to be led passively wherever they willed; but at the entrance of Willard, she started, like one who receives a galvanic shock; her face, a moment before like marble, grew crimson; her wild, black eyes lit fiercely up; and turning to Mr. Brantwell, she haughtily demanded:

"Why is he here? How *dare* he ever enter my presence again?"

"My dear Sibyl, be reasonable," said the minister, delighted that even anger should rouse her from her apathy, "Mr. Drummond has saved your life."

"I would sooner die than owe my life to him!" she said, passionately.

"My dear Sibyl," said the minister, soothingly, as he cast a deprecating glance at Willard, "You mustn't talk like this; it's very wrong, you know."

"Let her speak, Mr. Brantwell; I deserve it all," said Willard, bitterly.

His words, the sound of his voice, wrought a revulsion in her feelings, and she cried out, in a tone of passionate reproach:

"Oh, Willard, Willard! how could you deceive me so? I loved you so much, so much Willard, and yet you deceived me! Oh, it was cruel, it was base, it was treacherous, it was unmanly to trifle with a poor young girl thus!"

"Sibyl, I am a wretch! I dare not ask you to forgive me!" he groaned, in bitterest remorse.

"And she—she is your wife, is she not?" she said, fixing her flaming eyes, on the pale, wan face of Christie.

"She is; but she had no part in deceiving you, Sibyl; all the blame must rest on me. As I deceived you, so did I deceive her, villain that I was," he replied.

"Mr. Drummond, she is dead, I fear," said Mr. Brantwell, looking in alarm at the white, rigid face of Christie.

"No, she has only swooned; she breaths yet."

"Here we are, at the hotel, thank Heaven!" said the minister, as the coach stopped.

A vast crowd had assembled here. For a moment all shrank from passing through it, but there was no help for it.

"My brother is here?" said Sibyl, in a hurried whisper.

"Yes."

"Take me to his room then," she said, passing her arm through that of the clergyman.

"You will take Mrs. Drummond to my apartment," said the minister, kindly; "the waiter will show you where it is. I will join you in a few moments."

Bearing the light form of his still senseless wife in his arms, Willard entered the room and laid her on the bed.

The wife of the host entered with restoratives, but it was long ere the heavy lids were raised from the sad blue eyes.

"My own Christie, you are better now?" said Willard, bending over her.

She smiled faintly, and pressed her hand to her heart.

"Yes, I will soon be better," she said, in a strange tone. "Willard, where is Sibyl?"

"With her brother, dearest."

"Have you told her all?"

"No, Christie, I have explained nothing."

"Send for her, then; for her brother, too, and Mr. Brantwell. I want to tell them all, and get Sibyl's forgiveness before I—"

"Before you—what?"

"Nothing, dearest Willard, Have you sent?"

A servant entered, and the message was delivered.

"But she has nothing to forgive you, Christie; you never wronged her."

"Oh, I did. I did, unintentionally, perhaps, but still I wronged her. Hark! they are coming, Willard."

There was a soft knock at the door. Willard opened it, and Mr. Brantwell, followed by Sibyl and Captain Campbell, entered. The young captain, pale, thin, and haggard, cast a fierce, implacable glance at Willard; but the sight of the frail, spiritual, attenuated form of Christie checked the fierce, passionate words that were already rising to his lips.

A great change was perceptible in Sibyl during these few minutes. The exhortations of the good clergyman had evidently not been without effect;

for her pale, worn face had a calm, subdued look, as if she had at last realized the great danger she had escaped.

"Miss Sibyl—dear Miss Sibyl, can you ever forgive me?" said the sad, sweet voice of Christie, as she held out her hand and looked wistfully, imploringly into Sibyl's face.

"Oh, Christie, I have nothing to forgive you. You were not guilty," said Sibyl, sinking down by the bedside, and hiding her face in Christie's little thin hand.

"Not willfully, but still I wronged you. And there is another—will you not forgive him?"

"Never, so he'p me Heaven!" fiercely exclaimed Sibyl, springing up and casting upon him a glance of fire.

"Sibyl, I am dying! You will not refuse my last request? Oh, Sibyl, in a moment of thoughtless passion he married me; but all the time he loved you best. I can see it all now. He loved you then—he loves you now, better than all the world."

"And you can forgive him for the irreparable wrong he has done you—a deserted home, a blighted life, and an early death? Christie, you are an angel!"

"No, no; only a frail sinner, with so much to be forgiven herself, that she can easily, joyfully forgive that. Sibyl, my hours are numbered. Will you render them miserable by refusing my last request?"

"Oh, Christie, you know not what you ask!"

"Sibyl, do you not love Willard still?"

"Oh, I do—I do! Heaven forgive me, I do!" she said, passionately.

"And he loves you. Willard, come here—take Sibyl's hand. Now, Sibyl, promise when I am gone to be his wife."

There was a fierce struggle in the passionate heart of Sibyl—a last struggle between love and pride, and her burning sense of the great wrong he had done her. With her face bowed, her whole frame quivering, she did not look up—would not speak, until the little hand of Christie fell imploringly on her head.

"Sibyl, I cannot go until you promise me this. Oh, Sibyl, I love you both so much that I would willingly die to make you happy. You love one another still; why should this one fault, committed in a moment of thoughtlessness make your whole future lives miserable? Oh, Sibyl, we have all so much to be forgiven, can you not pardon this?"

Still no reply

"Sibyl, I am dying! if I can forgive the wrong done me, why—oh, why cannot you? Oh, Sibyl, cast out this false pride that will make you wretched all your life, and make my last moments happy by this promise. Oh, Sibyl, dearest Sibyl, consent!"

"Christie, you have conquered." said Sibyl, as she kissed through her fast-falling tears, the pale brow of the dying girl. Then rising, she placed her hand in Willard's, and said, with sad earnestness:

"Willard, we have both erred; let us forget the past. I love you still, and forgive you all."

He did not reply—he could not speak; but he raised the hand she extended to his lips, and turned toward the window.

"Oh, thank Heaven—thank Heaven for this!" cried Christie, exultingly. "Now I can die in peace."

There was a low rap at the door. Captain Campbell opened it, and Laura Courtney, pale, wild and excited, entered.

"Mrs. Courtney! *you* here?" exclaimed Mr. Brantwell, in surprise.

"Oh, Mr. Brantwell, Edgar is dying—the doctor says so; and he is raving and saying the most frightful things. He wants to see Captain Campbell and his sister immediately."

"Me!" said Sibyl. "What can he want with me?"

"Oh, I do not know. He is saying such dreadful things! Come with me," said Mrs. Courtney, catching Sibyl's arm in a wild, terrified way and drawing her from the room.

Mr. Brantwell, Willard, and his dying girl-wife were left alone.

"I want to see Aunt Tom and Carl," said Christie, faintly. "Do you know where they are to be found?"

"They are on the island," said Mr. Brantwell, "and consequently have not heard of your arrival here. I will send a messenger over for them, if you wish."

"Yes, yes!" said Christie, eagerly; "send now—right away."

Mr. Brantwell left the room, and speedily returned to say that a man had gone, and Mrs. Tom and her nephew might be expected in a few hours.

And then the good clergyman came and sat down beside the dying girl, and, taking her hand in his, began talking in a low earnest tone, while Willard, with his head bowed on his hand, sat by the window, absorbed by many conflicting thoughts.

And thus an hour passed; and then Captain Campbell and his sister returned, pale and excited, as if by some strange tidings.

"Mr. Courtney?" said the minister, inquiringly.

"Is dead!" answered Captain Campbell, with a slight shudder.

"Is it possible? How very sudden!" said Mr. Brantwell, in surprise, "What was the matter?"

"He ruptured an artery this morning," replied the young man, beginning to pace the room with rapid strides: "and that, with the shock caused by the unexpected appearance of Christie, caused his death."

"Christie's appearance! How could that shock him?" said the minister, still more surprised.

"He thought her dead—thought himself her murderer, and fancied she had risen from the grave to accuse him," said Captain Campbell, excitedly.

"Thought himself her murderer!" said the minister, still repeating the young man's words, like an echo. "How was that?"

Both Christie and Willard fixed their eyes eagerly on the excited face of the young captain.

"Well, it was he who stabbed her that night on the beach. He has confessed it all," said Captain Campbell.

"He stabbed her!" exclaimed Willard, springing to his feet, while Christie uttered a faint cry; "and why, in the name of Heaven, should he try to murder her? What had she ever done to him?"

"Nothing. He did not mean to injure Christie. He mistook her for his wife."

"Mistook me for his wife!" said Christie, like one in a dream. "And did he want to kill his wife?"

"Yes; horrible as it seems, he wanted to kill her!" said Captain Campbell. "The way of it was this," he said, stopping suddenly in his excited walk, "Courtney was jealous of his wife; he fancied she had gone to keep an appointment with some one on the island"—a slight flush of crimson glowed for an instant on his dark cheek as he spoke—"and he determined to follow her there. He went. In the storm and darkness he met Christie. He thought her his wife, and stabbed her, and left her for dead on the ground. Some apparition that he met terrified him, and he fled from the island—first returning to the spot where he had left Christie; but finding the

body gone, swept away by the tide, as he imagined. He returned the next evening to the parsonage; there he found his wife living, but hearing the rumor of Christie's death, he knew he had stabbed her in his blind fury. He heard, also, that my sister had gone to the island that night, and that a woman resembling her had been seen flying through the storm about the time the deed was committed, and the diabolical project entered his head of having her accused of the murder, and thus freeing himself forever from all possibility of blame. How well he succeeded, we all know; and Sibyl would have died an ignominious death for his crime, had not a retributive Providence sent Christie here at the eleventh hour to save her, and bring his crime to light; but too late to save her from the shame and humiliation of what has passed. May the foul fiend catch his soul for it!"

"Oh, brother! hush!" said Sibyl, laying her hand on his arm. "Remember you speak of the dead!"

"This is monstrous," said Mr. Brantwell, in a tone of horror. "I never dreamt that any man in his senses could have committed such a crime."

"He was not in his senses," said Sibyl, "he was crazed with jealousy."

"Was he not sane when he accused you—the double-dyed perjurer?" exclaimed Captain Campbell, fiercely, "Oh, why does God permit such frightful injustice to go so long unpunished? Where slept His thunderbolts that this demon in human form was not stricken dead where he stood?"

"Guy, my dear boy, be calm," interposed Mr. Brantwell. "God is His own interpreter; and in His own good time has seen fit to save your sister. Let what is past be forgotten—'let by-gones be by-gones.'"

"But Christie has not told us yet how she was saved." said Sibyl; "all that is still involved in mystery."

Faintly, and in broken sentences, for her strength was failing fast, Christie related all that the reader already knows. To explain the presence of Bertha on the island, it was necessary, however painful it might be, to tell her story; and Guy and Sibyl listened in sorrow and amazement.

"Then my father's wife lives yet," said Sibyl, slowly.

"And now I remember, though indistinctly, like a dream, of catching a glimpse of a tall, dark, handsome Woman in the upper rooms of the old lodge, when I was a boy," said Guy, thoughtfully. "It is strange I thought so little of it at the time, for her presence there was singular. What terrible revelations time brings to light! Who would ever suppose my father could have done such a deed?"

"His child, too, may be living yet," said Mr. Brantwell. "How unfortunate that there is no clew to tell what may have been its fate."

Ere any one could reply, a bustle at the door arrested their attention; and, the next moment, Mrs. Tom entered, followed by Carl, and rushing to the bed, clasped Christie in her arms, laughing and crying hysterically.

"My own darling child! my own blessed baby! my dear, darling little Christie!" were her exclamations, between laughing, and crying, and hugging.

"Dear Aunt Tom! dear, good Aunt Tom! Oh, I am so glad, so glad to see you again!" said Christie, throwing her arms round her neck, her wan face flushing with joy.

"And to think that you was married, and I never knowed a word about it! Lor' sakes! an' to be killed, too, and come to life at the nick o' time!" said Mrs. Tom, with another hug, and a laugh, and a fresh burst of tears. "Carl, you great, lazy, idle vagabones, come over here and see Christie, 'stead o' standing there, shiftin' from one foot to another, like you had got into a nest o' young wipers."

Thus adjured, in the sharp, peremptory tone that reminded Christie of other days, Carl advanced and pressed his lips to Christie's cheek as gingerly as though he were afraid of burning himself. Evidently relieved when this was over, he edged off toward the door, and, at the invitation of Sibyl, took a seat, and sat down on the extreme edge of the chair.

And then, when Mrs. Tom had hugged and kissed Christie to her heart's content, and laughed and cried herself into something like composure, her first demand was to Lear all that had happened "sence that there awful night."

And Sibyl, fearing to further agitate Christie, who had now fallen back, completely exhausted, on her pillow, led the bustling little woman over to the window, and seating herself near her, related all.

Mrs. Tom listened with many "lor' sakes'!" and "gracious me's!" and "oh's!" and "ah, Lord's!" until Sibyl began relating the maniac's story. As she proceeded, Mrs. Tom grew violently agitated; and before she could reach the end, the old lady had jumped up, and, pale and trembling, bent over Christie.

"Christie, look here," she said, excitedly, "that there crazy woman had a little child, had she, the time she was walled up in that room?"

"Yes," replied Christie, wonderingly.

"That there little child was left in Campbell's Lodge, with Mark Campbell, was it?" continued Mrs. Tom, more and more agitated.

"Yes, I believe so. Why, Aunt Tom, what's the matter?"

"And they never could find out what became of it after, could they?" again asked Mrs. Tom, sinking into a chair.

"No. Why, what in the world does ail you, Aunt Tom?" said Christie, in still increasing surprise.

"Oh, my Saviour! Oh, my dear Lord! Only to think on it! Christie, that there crazy woman is your mother! You are the little child that was left with Mark Campbell!"

In a moment nearly all present were on their feet, gazing in wonder and amaze on Mrs. Tom, and on each other, as if asking what in the world they were destined to hear next.

Christie, too weak now to betray any emotion, lay still, with her wondering blue eyes fixed on the old woman's face.

"Yes, you needn't stare, all of you; it's jest so," said Mrs. Tom, very much excited; "and the way of it was this: One morning airly, jest as I riz, Mark Campbell came into my cottage with something I took to be a bundle, under his cloak. He opened it, and you may guess the astonishment I was in, when, instead o' a bundle, he laid the sweetest, dearest, puttiest little baby on the table ever I seed. Lor' sakes! I was so completely consternified I hadn't a word to say, but jest stood starin' with my mouth wide open, fust at him and then at the baby that was sleepin' like a sweet little angel. Before I could ask him a single blessed question 'bout it, he sez to me:

"Mrs. Tom, there's a child I want tooken care of. Ef you'll do it, I'll pay you; if you won't——"

"I don't know what he was going to say, for I broke out with the greatest string o' questions just then that ever was, asking him all about the baby; but he only looked fierce, and wouldn't tell me a word.

"If you will take it, Mrs. Tom," sez he, 'you shall be well rewarded for taking care of it; but you must never, while I live, breathe to a living soul that I left it with you. If you do,' sez he, 'it will be all the worse for you.'

"And its mother," sez I; 'Where's she?'

"My conscience! if you had seen him then! His face got like a thunder-cloud, and he said, in a voice that made me tremble—yes, even me, and there ain't many I'd tremble before, thank the Lord:

"Never mention that word again, or I swear I'll blow your brains out as I would a rabbit's!"

"And then he rushed from the house, leaving me more astonished and frightened than ever I had been before in all my born days.

"But I kept the baby, and called it 'Christina,' after a sister I had once (Carl Henley's mother, poor thing! that went and heaved herself away on a

vagabones of a fellow), and kept it till it grew up. Mark Campbell died a little while after, but we never spoke another word about the child; but now I know, arter hearing about the crazy woman, she was its mother."

Aunt Tom paused for breath, and Sibyl, with a great cry, sprang forward and clasped Christie in her arms.

"My sister! my sister! my dear little sister!" she exclaimed, through her fast falling tears. "Oh, Christie! oh, Christie! to discover you are my sister when it is too late!"

With her arms round Sibyl's neck, her golden head lying on her shoulder, Christie said, in a voice, so faint that Sibyl had to stoop down very low to hear her:

"I am going, Sibyl, dear sister Sibyl! Tell Guy, my brother, and Aunt Tom, to come and bid me good-by."

In a voice choked with sobs, Sibyl called them to the bedside, to receive that parting embrace. Guy's eyes were full of tears, and Mrs. Tom's sobs resounded audibly through the room.

"And now, Sibyl, my own, my darling sister, good-by, and Heaven bless you. Hush! do not weep so;" and the little wan arms clasped Sibyl's neck in a last embrace. "Dearest Sibyl, go now and send Willard to me."

Pressing a last kiss on the transparent brow, Sibyl arose, and beckoned Willard to approach.

Calm and tearless, but pale with a grief too intense for tears, he came over. A flush of love and joy lit up the wan face at his approach, her arms—with a last effort—encircled his neck; the golden head dropped on his breast, while the sweet beautiful lips murmured:

"Dear Willard! dearest Willard! good-by! I am going; going to heaven to pray for you and Sibyl. You will try to be very happy, and make her very happy, when I am gone—will you not? Lift me up, Willard, and carry me to the window, I want to see the beautiful sunlight once more."

He lifted the slight little form, and sat down, with her in his arms, beside the window. A bright ray of sunshine flashed in, and lit up with a sort of glory the angel-brow, the golden hair, and the sweet, pale face.

Colder and colder grew the hand in his; lower sank the head on his bosom; fainter and fainter beat the gentle, loving heart. No sound, save the suppressed sobs of Mrs. Tom, broke the stillness of the room.

Suddenly the closed eyes flew open, with a vivid, radiant light; the sweet lips Darted in a smile of ineffable joy; and she half rose from her recumbent posture. The next, she fell back; the blue eyes closed; a slight shiver passed through her frame; and the streaming sunshine fell on the face of the dead.

* * * * *

One year after, there was a wedding—a very quiet, private one—at the little church of N——. And when it was over, Sibyl and Willard entered their plain, dark traveling carriage, and bidding good-by to their friends assembled in the parsonage, set out for Willard's Virginia home—where, in the unclouded sunshine of the future, they soon forgot, or learned to only look back with tender regret, to the sufferings and sorrows of the past.

Christie was not forgotten. The oldest daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Drummond, a gentle, dark-eyed girl, bears her name.

* * * * *

Three months after the marriage of Sibyl, her brother led to the altar Laura Courtney, whose natural vivacity soon overcame the shock she had received by the sudden death of Edgar Courtney, her unloved husband; and three days later, in the good bark "Evening Star," she was dancing over the bright waves of the Atlantic, on her way to Europe with Captain Campbell.

Willard Drummond sent for Uncle Reuben and Bertha, and for several years they resided with him. But when at last the gentle maniac passed in peace away, her faithful cousin bade them farewell, and set out for his boyhood home, to pass his last days under the old roof-tree.

And Aunt Tom, good old Aunt Tom, staid still on the island, which no persuasions could ever induce her to leave, and there brought up Mr. Carl Henley in the way he should go; and employed her whole heart and soul in the, alas! vain labor of curing him of the sin of laziness. If any reader is concerned in knowing the future fate of that interesting young gentleman, I am happy to say, when he arrived at the years of discretion, he made the acquaintance of a strapping, strong-armed, red-cheeked German girl, who fell violently in love with the tallow-candle complexion and tow locks of the fascinating youth. Mr. Henley, after revolving the matter over profoundly in all its bearings, came to the conclusion that he might as well marry her as not, which he accordingly did, in the "fullness of time"—having previously extorted a promise from her to do all the work. Mrs. Tom, who had an invincible antipathy to "furriners," looked with dislike at first on her niece-in-law; but the unvarying good humor of Mrs. Henley, and her willingness to work, soon completely gained the good old lady's affections, and mastered her prejudices.

THE END.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE QUEEN OF
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